

These Two Things Separate the Experts from the Amateurs

By Nicholas Anderson

If you're serious about playing guitar, and since you're reading this I assume you are, you probably spend a lot of time practicing. I don't mean a few hours a week, I mean a few hours a day. Like many guitar players, you may be frustrated with your lack of progress and think that you just don't have the talent other people have or that you'll never be a great guitarist. You may wonder why some people seem to excel while you continue to be stuck where you are. You may wonder, what is it that sets them apart from me? What do they do differently? Is there something I can do to improve my practicing so that I achieve more? Well, keep reading.

A recent study done at City University looked at two groups of basketball players. One group were expert free throw shooters while the other was, well, pretty bad. The researchers wanted to know what made one group excel and the other fail. They found two main characteristics of their practicing that can be applied directly and immediately to you in your practice sessions.

First, the experts set specific goals. For instance, instead of practicing with the goal to improve, they practiced with the goal to make 10 of 10 free throws. The group of poor free throw shooters did not set specific goals. They just "tried to get better" without being specific. Second, the experts, when they failed, identified specific problems or reasons why they missed their free throws, such as failing to bend their knees. The other group did not do this at all - they just assumed they weren't concentrating or used other generalities about why they did not succeed. I think it is pretty obvious how this can be applied to your practice sessions.

Next time you sit down to practice, write down one or two or three very specific goals for that session and work on those goals. When you make a mistake, don't talk down to yourself. Instead, ask yourself what caused the mistake? Ask why and how you made the mistake. Diagnose the problem and try to find a cure. Stop "trying harder" and start isolating the problems so that you can solve them. This will go a long way toward helping you reach your guitar playing goals and save you a lot of wasted and unfruitful practice time.