

# Improvising Theory

There are many theories about how to improvise, but here are some general guidelines to keep in mind when you're creating your killer solo:

**Build your vocabulary**—You should know what your solo is going to sound like before you play it. You should never be surprised by how good or bad your solo sounded, and you should never be guessing at notes, hoping it doesn't sound horrible. The goal is to be able to express anything you want to "say" on your instrument. You do that by becoming very familiar with small musical "phrases" until you have a huge "vocabulary" at your disposal.

**Keep it simple**—Beginning and intermediate musicians try to play very complicated solos to prove how good they are. Those people aren't expressing themselves, they're just using the biggest vocabulary they know.

**Sing everything you play**—if you mess up and it sounds good, add it to your vocabulary so you can say that on purpose. A lot of great licks started out as mistakes.

**Play everything you sing**—if you've got an idea in your head or you hear it on the radio, spend the time to make it a part of your vocabulary

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**Keep adding**—your vocabulary will grow for the rest of your life. "Knowing how to play" your instrument is a sliding scale, not a point you'll reach.

Most importantly: **transcribe and steal**. Other people have great, huge vocabularies. Play their music *note-for-note*. Then throw away the phrases you don't care for and keep the ones you like. You won't know which ones are which until you learn to play them.

**Save the best for last**—don't start your solo with your best ideas. Pace yourself...you always want the audience to wish you would keep playing.