

## Lesson 4: Practicing Improvisation

Featuring Leo Blanco, professor at Berklee College of Music

Welcome to video number 4. We've already talked about practice time, technique, approaching your repertoire and using different technology such as play alongs. After seeing this video you should be able to define improvisation and be able to improvise during an 8 bar solo section. So, what is improvisation? I define it as the art of composing instantaneously, based on melody, harmony, and structure of a song. There are some genres of music where improvisation has a crucial role like in jazz, one of the examples to keep in mind is Miles Davis' So What or Autumn Leaves which are jazz standards. There are other contemporary performers which also use improvisation in the performance such as snarky puppy, tower of power, and others. There are other styles of improvisation you might not consider when you think of improv styles such as freestyle rapping. In this video we will provide some common techniques that will be applicable to different styles of music.

Okay, we're working on a piece of music where you will need to improvise for 8 bars, the first thing we'll need to do is get familiar with the piece of music. You can go to the local library and get the music sheet or you can go online for different resources like youtube, spotify, etc. The most important thing for improvisation is that you get familiar with the harmony, also learn the melody and be familiar with the form structure. If any of these topics sound unfamiliar or new to you, you should go to the PULSE resources to learn more about it. Let's go back to those 8 bars of improvisation. Improvisation is not anarchy, you cannot play whatever you want. Remember that improv is the art of composing instantaneously so this is the opportunity to speak or say something through the piano. Let's talk about different techniques for improvisation. I'm going to talk about chord notes today, the idea is to only use the notes in the present chord in your improvisation. Previously I recorded rhythm changes that I uploaded into the Casio Grad Hybrid through a usb. So before I start actually playing let me talk a little about it. So the rhythm changes are in Bb and the first four chords are Bbmaj7 - G7 - Cmin - F to keep it simple I am going to improvise using only tetrachords, which is the root, the third, the fifth, and the seventh of each chord.

It may seem simple, but it's quite challenging to limit yourself and only play chord notes. One very powerful tool that many people overlook is repetitions of notes, when you repeat you create melodies and new rhythms. So I'm going to do a second demonstration showing you the value of repeating notes within the exercise, which also gives you time to think about what you're going to play next.

This is just an example, you may think it's boring take a note and then try to improve it. Always listen back to your examples it's a great tool to improve. Or let's say you want to extend your limitations into improvisation so now based on chord notes I am going to play approaching notes along with the chord notes. For example if you have Bbmaj7 (Bb - D - F - A) I am going to make chromatic approaches, which are semitones approaching into those chord notes. You will see how you expand the possibilities so much in this section.

There are so many different techniques for improvisation, one important of this is the value of limitations. By imposing limitations you constrain yourself to fewer notes, but you become more conscious while playing and can slowly expand your possibilities.

So I hope you had fun with this improvisation section of the video. We just touched the surface of it though, there are so many more possibilities and I would recommend you visit the Berklee PULSE website which has valuable tools to improve with and learn about other techniques of improvisation. For our next and final video, we're going to talk about the mental game, how to assess your goals and how to find your own voice in music.