

Melodic Ear Training Exercises

Ideas For RGT Guitar Tutors To Use With Students

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One of the most common issues guitar tutors have, and one of the sections that some students struggle with in [RGT exams](#), is how to teach aural skills in a fun and engaging manner, that also helps prepare students for their exams.

To help guitar tutors and exam candidates work on aural skills together in a meaningful, yet fun, manner, we've put together this article geared towards students preparing for acoustic guitar, bass guitar, electric guitar and rock RGT exams.

The exercises in this article apply to students of all levels of experiences and grades, so check each one out, then find the ones that apply to your students, as you try out these different ear training games/exercises with your own students.

To begin, let's take a look at a fun game that you can play in your guitar lessons that will help students prepare for the melodic playback section of RGT exams.

The exercises below are not designed to reflect the exact requirements of any specific RGT grade exam, as they are exercises to help the general development of aural skills. Teachers should refer to the relevant RGT exam handbook to see the exact types of aural tests that will occur in each grade exam.

Follow the Leader – Melody

The first variation of this exercise focuses on developing the ability for a student to hear a short melody and immediately play it back on the guitar.

This skill is not only valuable for those students who have to do this exact exercise in an RGT Guitar Exam, but for any student, as hearing a melodic line and replicating it on the guitar will allow them to build a strong connection between their ears, fingers and fretboard that will only pay dividends down the road.

This exercise can be done in a private lesson, with both the student and teacher in the room, and a variation that can be recorded and practised by the student on their own between lessons.

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Both will also have the side-effect of developing relative pitch, especially with the random note exercise, as the student learns to hear one note in relation to the note they just heard played on the guitar, regardless of key centre.

Variation 1 – Random Note Game

Here are the steps to take in order to work on this exercise in a private lesson situation where the student is present in the room with you, as well as tips on how to record the exercise for home study.

1. Sit back to back, or side to side, so that neither you nor the student can see the other person's fretboard.
2. Play one random note on the guitar, stop that note and ask the student to play that note back.
3. After the student finds that note, they play a note and you play it back. Repeat this exercise until the student can find the note every time.
4. Repeat this exercise with 2, 3, 4 or more notes, adding one more note to the line each time the student becomes bored with the current amount of notes. This can be spread out over a number of weeks or even months depending on the age and experience level of the student.
5. Record a series of random notes each week and send the file to the student to practise the same exercise at home between lessons.

Variation 2 – Key Centre Playback

In this variation of the exercise, you pick a key centre to stick to as you play follow the leader with single lines on the guitar. You can use a major key centre, or in the higher grades, explore modal keys and scales such as Mixolydian, Dorian, Harmonic Minor and more.

The goal is to have the student recognize the note, or notes, that you are playing in relation to the key, rather than randomly as was the case in the first variation of this exercise.

Here is this exercise laid out step-by-step.

1. Pick a scale and key to work on, for example C Major.
2. Play a C major chord, or a V-I cadence, to solidify the key centre in the student's ears before the exercise starts.
3. Play one random note from the key centre, have the student play that note back to you.
4. Then the student plays a note from that key and you repeat the note back.
5. Work up from one note to 2, 3, 4 and more as the student becomes accustomed to immediately playing back a note, or notes, from a key centre in this exercise.
6. You can repeat this exercise with arpeggios as well, so using only the notes from a G9 arpeggio for example.
7. Record random notes from a key centre and give the file to the student to use as a practise tool between lessons.

This is a fairly straight forward exercise, but one that can produce quick and meaningful results when it comes to the melodic playback portion of an RGT guitar exam.

As well, approaching melodic playback exercises in this fashion allows a bit of fun and a game-like atmosphere to creep into the ear-training process, something that will encourage the student to explore aural skills further down the road in their development.

Follow the Leader – Chords

We can now take a look at how to use the follow the leader exercise to teach chordal recognition with students as they prepare for the aural skills section of any RGT guitar exam.

There are three variations for this exercise, as there are three common areas to cover depending on which exam you are working on at any given moment with an RGT guitar student, but any of these exercises can be taught to any guitar student in order to enhance their ability to hear chords, progressions and cadences.

Variation 1 – Chord Quality Exercise

This exercise can start out very simple, with just major vs. minor triads as the focus of the exercise, but can progress to much more complex chords such as m7, maj9, m6, m7b5, 7b9, and others, as the student works their way through these changes and through the higher RGT exam grades.

Here is how the exam works using m7 and dom7 chords as an example.

1. Start by picking a bass note to focus on, such as A.
2. Play either Am7 or A7, without the student being able to see your fretboard, and ask them to play the chord back, and name the chord out loud.
3. Then, ask the student to repeat the above two steps and you play and name the chord back for them.
4. Continue this exercise in as many keys and using as many variations on the two chords, such as 5th-string and 6th-string roots, and even inversions if the student is up for it, as you can think of.
5. Record a number of random root-note m7 and 7th chords and give the file to the student to practise with at home between lessons.

Variation 2 – Chords in a Key Exercise

In this exercise, you are now going to introduce the concept of a key centre, as well as a bit of theory as you randomly play chords from a given key and ask the student to name and play those chords back to you.

Again, as was the case with the key centre melodic exercise, this exercise helps the student learn about what chords are found within a given key, how to recognize chord qualities and learn to hear chords related to a root note all at the same time.

Here is the step-by-step approach to take with this exercise.

1. Pick a key, such as A Major.
2. Play the tonic chord to begin with, then play a random chord from the key. To start, you might just use triads, such as A and Bm, but you can move on to 4, 5 and 6-note chords as you enter the higher RGT grades, such as Amaj9 and Bm11 etc.
3. When the student plays back the correct chord, they then play a chord and you play and name the function of that chord.
4. Continue this exercise until it becomes easy, and then expand the chords to include other guitar chord types listed in RGT exams, such as 7ths, 9ths, 11ths and 13ths.
5. You can also move onto minor keys as well, which will have altered dominant chords and other fun sounds to explore in the higher grade levels.
6. Record a number of random chords in a few different keys and give the file to the student to practise with between lessons.

Variation 3 – Cadences

The last variation will work on teaching the student to recognize cadences in their RGT guitar exams. The exercises will be similar to the ones you've already seen, but now you only play perfect, imperfect, plagal and interrupted cadences back and forth.

Here is a step-by-step breakdown of this exercise.

1. Pick a key and call it out, or just begin by playing, depending on the level of the student.
2. Play a four-chord cadence, such as C-F-G-Am for a interrupted cadence, ask the student to play back the chords and name the cadence.
3. When the student has played and named the chords correctly, then ask them to play a cadence of their choice and you play back and name the chords.
4. If the exercise becomes easy, start to add fingerpicking or melodic lines between chords to raise the level of the game a little bit.
5. Record random cadences and give the file to the student to practise with at home between lessons.

As you can see, these three exercises can be a fun way to interact with your students, and work on developing their chordal recognition skills at the same time. Even if your students aren't taking an exam where they need to recognize cadences for example, any student will benefit from spending time in a lesson, or at home, working on these harmonic ear-training exercises.

Follow the Leader – Intervals

The last set of exercises that we'll look at involves using the follow the leader approach to work out interval recognition in the lesson, and later on within an RGT exam situation.

There are two variations to this exercise, both similar to the melodic playback ones you explored earlier in this article, where you play a random series of intervals, and also play follow the leader with intervals within a chosen key centre.

Variation 1 – Random Intervals

Here is the step by step process for working on random interval identification in the teaching studio. You can begin with just two intervals, such as minor and major 2nds, and then introduce new intervals as you build up to being able to play any interval and have the student play back and identify that interval immediately.

1. Pick a set group of intervals, major and minor 3rds for example.
2. Randomly play one or the other from any note on the fretboard. Play it harmonically first, both notes together, and then melodically, one note after the other.
3. Ask the student to play back those notes without seeing your hands, and identify the interval.
4. Then, the student repeats these steps and you playback and name the interval.
5. Once this is easy, add in new intervals such as major 2nds, then minor 2nds etc, until you have covered all the intervals possible in this exercise.
6. Record a number of random intervals for the student to practise with at home between lessons.

Variation 2 – Diatonic Intervals

The next variation of this exercise uses a similar approach but sticks to a given key, major or minor to start and modal after that if you want, as you play follow the leader with intervals.

Here is how this exercise works, step-by-step.

1. Pick a key, A minor for example.
2. Play the keynote and then a second note from the scale, play them together at first then one after the other.
3. Ask the student to name the interval and play it back on the guitar at the same time.
4. Then, have the student play the keynote and a second note from the scale, and you name the interval and play it back.
5. Repeat until all notes in that key have been covered, then switch the key.
6. Record random diatonic intervals within several major and minor keys and give the file for your student to practise with between lessons.

As you can see, using the follow the leader exercise is a great way to interact with your student, bring a sense of fun and a bit of a game approach to aural skills, and improve their ability to hear chords, melodies and intervals all at the same time.

Doing any of these exercises with your students in their lessons, even for a few minutes, will give them a better chance of succeeding during the aural skills section of any RGT exam, so try them out and see what you think.

Do you have any questions about this article or these melodic ear training exercises? Visit the [RGT Facebook Page](#) and share your comments on our wall, we'll be glad to answer as soon as we can.