

# The 3-Note Solo Exercise

A harmonic thinking drill for intermediate guitarists

KEY OF A

12-Bar Blues

60-80 BPM

Most guitarists improve their technique but never improve their *musical thinking*. This exercise fixes that. By limiting yourself to exactly three notes per chord, you're forced to choose intentionally — and intention is the difference between a solo that sounds musical and one that sounds random.

**The rule:** Over each chord in the progression, you may only play the three notes listed. No other notes. Work slowly. Every note must land with purpose.

## YOUR THREE NOTE SETS

A7

I CHORD — HOME

A

C#

E

Root
Major 3rd
5th

YOUR 3 TARGET NOTES

D7

IV CHORD — MOVE

D

F#

A

Root
Major 3rd
5th

YOUR 3 TARGET NOTES

E7

V CHORD — TENSION

E

G#

B

Root
Major 3rd
5th

YOUR 3 TARGET NOTES

NOTE ROLE KEY:



Root — Home base. Most stable landing point.



3rd — Defines major/minor colour of the chord.



5th — Open

## THE FULL 12-BAR PROGRESSION

### 12-BAR PROGRESSION MAP

Each bar = 4 beats

BAR 1  
**A7**  
A C# E

BAR 2  
**A7**  
A C# E

BAR 3  
**A7**  
A C# E

BAR 4  
**A7**  
A C# E

BAR 5  
**D7**  
D F# A

BAR 6  
**D7**  
D F# A

BAR 7  
**A7**  
A C# E

BAR 8  
**A7**  
A C# E

BAR 9  
**E7**  
E G# B

BAR 10  
**D7**  
D F# A

BAR 11  
**A7**  
A C# E

BAR 12  
**E7**  
E G# B

**A7** = A C# E G  
A C# E G

**D7** = D F# A C

**E7** = E G# B D

**Quick read:** Bars 1-4 stay on A7. Bars 5-6 move to D7 (this is your first target note moment — land on D, F#, or A). Bar 9 hits E7 — your tension chord. Bar 12 returns to E7 as a turnaround, pulling back to the top.

## COMPLETE NOTE CHART — ALL 12 BARS

Bar	Chord	Root	3rd	5th	7th	Your 3 Notes	Transition Tip
1	A7	A	C#	E	G	A C# E	— Start here. Feel 'home'.
2	A7	A	C#	E	G	A C# E	Explore rhythm and space.
3	A7	A	C#	E	G	A C# E	Try ending a phrase on E.
4	A7	A	C#	E	G	A C# E	Prepare: D7 is coming.
5	D7	D	F#	A	C	D F# A	Land on A (shared with A7).

6	<b>D7</b>	D	F#	A	C	D	F#	A	Land on D — strong move.
7	<b>A7</b>	A	C#	E	G	A	C#	E	Return to home feeling.
8	<b>A7</b>	A	C#	E	G	A	C#	E	Build toward the V chord.
9	<b>E7</b>	E	G#	B	D	E	G#	B	Most tension. Land on E.
10	<b>D7</b>	D	F#	A	C	D	F#	A	Release tension. F# works.
11	<b>A7</b>	A	C#	E	G	A	C#	E	Resolution. Back home.
12	<b>E7</b>	E	G#	B	D	E	G#	B	Turnaround — loop again.

## STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICE PROTOCOL

1

### Set Your Tempo

60 BPM on a metronome or slow blues backing track. Speed is the enemy here — slower means more thinking, which is the point.

2

### Say the Notes Before You Play

Before bar 5 hits, say out loud: 'D7 — D, F#, A.' Do this for every chord change until it's automatic.

3

### One Phrase Per Chord

Play a simple 3–4 note phrase over each chord, landing on your target note on beat 1 or beat 3. No licks. No patterns.

4

### Track the Changes

When bar 5 arrives, you must be on a D, F#, or A. When bar 9 arrives, land on E, G#, or B. Non-negotiable.

5

### Add Rhythm and Space

Once you can hit the changes cleanly, start shaping your phrases. Leave silence. Repeat a motif. End with intention.

6

### Increase Tempo Gradually

Only increase tempo when you can hit every chord change without thinking. Target: 80, 90, 100 BPM over 2–3 weeks.

#### COMMON MISTAKES

- Playing extra notes 'just quickly' — don't. Three notes only.
- Staying on one note the whole bar — move through all three.
- Ignoring the chord change — the chord change IS the exercise.
- Practicing too fast — slow down until every note is a choice.
- Not leaving space — silence is part of the exercise.

#### PROGRESSION VARIATIONS

- **Week 1:** Root only. One note per chord. Just land.
- **Week 2:** Root + 3rd. Two choices. Feel the colour change.
- **Week 3:** Full 3 notes. Connect them with passing tones.
- **Week 4:** Add the 7th. Four notes now — you've earned it.
- **Beyond:** Try other keys: E, G, D. Same system, new sounds.

PRACTICE LOG

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Date	Tempo (BPM)	Chord Changes Clean?	Notes / Observations

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***"The goal is not to play all your notes. The goal is to play the right note at the right moment."***

The Authority Guitar Method - T.C.S. System Worksheet - Part of the Stop Playing Shapes eBook Series