

## Phrase-Length Back-Chaining

If you are not ready for this, no big thing. You can continue using segment practice and pick Phrase-Length Back-Chaining at a later date. The advantages are:

1. You are always ending your practice at musically satisfying pause. (aahh, calming stress relief....nice, like a sip of wine...
2. You will not be stopping in the middle of a phrase and creating a string of conflicting (and un-erasable) sub-conscious "cues" to:
  - a) "stop here!"
  - b) "go back somewhere!",
  - c) "repeat this?!"
  - d) "keep going!"
  - e) "do all of this, quick, (panic!), No! Only two of these! (Panic-Panic!)  
No, wait, only one! Which one should I do? (Panic-panic-panic!)"
  - f) "now relax while you do this (your teacher's words)". Impossible.

Technically speaking, these are called an invalid covert motor routines, and can be highly destructive in some students, especially those who have latent issues from childhood (mistakes are punishable, remember?) or from teachers that didn't use positive reinforcement, only negative reinforcement, which creates feelings of inadequacy when a simple mistake happens. This may cause some unwanted hesitations in performance when performance anxiety scrapes away a layer of poise. Performance practice can 'overwrite' some of this but it's like a thin coat of paint over rotten drywall. And when that performance anxiety "paint scraper" comes out.... So, stopping practice in the middle of phrases can be really bad for performance.

3. Phrase level segmentation creates a string of kinesthetic, visual inner imaging, and aural imaging "cues" that groups the constellations of mechanics into one single managing motor routine.

These cues are redundant, creating a performance-stable phrase/segment. If performance anxiety should "scrape" away one of your "cues", you have others that can carry the weight, like airplanes with redundant, multiple engines. (All of this is documented in the behaviorist and physiologist literature, a convergence from two disparate fields, which makes a strong case for its consideration, in my opinion). It also practices using larger muscle groups (more muscle groups means fewer muscle fibers in each muscle needs to fire, creating grace and less "angular" motion). By now, you have discovered that some chunks of music can almost play themselves and you can retreat to observer/conductor status. This is the ability that "Phrase-Length Back-Chaining" can help create.

The disadvantage of "Phrase-Length Back-Chaining" is that it doesn't practice posture, mechanics or pre-presentation ballistic motion in a concise manner, and is inappropriate for beginners and most intermediate students, around level 2-3 and under. The more time you spend in acquiring mechanics, the more the student becomes to trust their ability to play mechanically correct. You may have heard me call this a "referential technique". Also, to use this approach, the student needs to have self-discipline. This kind of study has to be done when you are not fatigued since when muscles fatigue, other muscles or groups of muscle fiber "pick up the slack". (My, advice for short, twice a day practice sessions, remember?)

Be sure to look at my segment/performance practice guidelines on my site.

Larry McDonald  
[www.larrymcdonaldguitar.com/](http://www.larrymcdonaldguitar.com/)