

# Tutorial 1F: Using Expression



Welcome! In this tutorial you'll learn how to:

1. Learn the role and range of expression
2. Use **SHAPE** for expression
3. Vary dynamics effectively
4. Vary accents and articulations effectively

Enjoy the learning!

Other Level 1 Tutorials

- 1A: Virtual Practice
- 1B: Chords and Scales
- 1D: Rhythmic Variety
- 1E: Flexible Scale Levels
- 1F: Using Expression
- 1G: Develop Motifs/Phrases
- 1J: Chords, Keys, Progressions

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- Expression is a wonderful but often neglected aspect of improvisation. So many players focus so intently on technique that they miss the expressiveness that their solos really need. SHAPE can help you get there!

## Part 1 – Role and Range of Expression

### A) What's the role of expression?



\**Emotion* is the subjective fire that triggers expression; *expression* is how you translate the emotion into musical elements.

\*You can treat the *basic elements* of expression objectively. For example, you can identify dynamics, accents, and articulations in solos. What's important is to recognize and use expression to enhance your solos.

\*Most improvisers get so caught up searching for the next pitches that they don't *express* the pitches they're playing. Slow your ideas down enough so you can see them well and express them well.

### B) What's the range of expression?

1) *Subtle and occasional* – With the right spices in the right amounts, the meal can taste much better. In a solo, expression shouldn't be overdone or it will lose its flavor. Slower tunes allow more subtle and more frequent expression, while faster tunes need more dramatic but less frequent expression. Silence helps expression stand out more.

2) *Varied* – Use a wider range of accents and articulations, from gentle to strong. Watch the overall dynamics in your band. You can help others get louder or softer by the solo ideas you play. With softer dynamics you open a wider range of expression; with louder dynamics, the subtler effects are lost.

3) *Well-timed* – *When* you use expression is almost as important as the kind of expression you use. There are many timing possibilities; your task is to select the right kind of expression at just the right moment. Sometimes you can add expression to a note or two that are isolated before and after by longer rests. This makes the expression really stand out. Be sure you have something effective to say, and don't overuse this approach.

## Part 2 – SHAPE and Expression

SHAPE (See, Hear And Play Expressively) is the key to unlocking good expression. When you can see your musical shapes unfolding, with confidence in your sound and technique, you can reliably choose the best notes for expression. Expression can make the notes prettier, rougher, stronger, fainter, or unusual in some way.

## 2

\*So you can polish and paint notes, or scratch them up, or hammer or squish them – whatever comes to mind that makes the idea better, as long as it's not overdone.

### B) How else does SHAPE fit in with expression?

- Prettier = vibrato, trills, (see Chapter 2E: *Embellishments*), color notes held longer
- Rougher = harsher attacks, flatter or sharper pitch
- Stronger or fainter = louder or softer (or half-sounds)
- Unusual = special effects (see Chapter 4C: *Special Effects*)

## Part 3 – Using Dynamics

### A) How do I get out of the dynamics rut?

\*Crescendo or decrescendo as you hold a pitch or repeat a pitch several times.

\*Play whisper-soft. Balance with the rhythm section and pause before the soft passage.

\*Insert occasional louder, accented notes in the middle of a softer passage.

\*Use “terraced” dynamics: play a musical idea softly then repeat it louder, or vice versa.

- ▶ **TRY IT** – On a flexible scale, crescendo as you go down and decrescendo as you go up. Then crescendo or decrescendo as you hold or repeat a pitch in the scale. Then play suddenly softer, or insert a few accented notes in a softer passage.

## Part 4 – Using Accents & Articulations

Accents and articulations are often neglected or poorly handled in expression. If your solos have little variety in accents or articulation, you're probably just searching for “newer and better” pitches to play.

### A) What are some common problems with using accents and articulations?

*Problem 1:* It's hard enough *choosing* pitches without worrying about accents & articulations.

*Solution:* Choose fewer pitches and express them better so the listener enjoys them more.

*Problem 2:* I can't use accents or articulations when pitches and rhythms aren't locking in.

### 3

*Solution:* Practice scales and intervals in *all* keys; practice offbeat rhythms in all styles.

*Problem 3:* At medium or fast speeds, notes crack when I use articulations or accents.

*Solution:* Improve your sound production, technique, and articulation ability on your instrument. Also, work on your ear training so you can accurately hear and sing the notes you're trying to play.

#### **B)** What are some tips for using accents?

\*Practice a wide variety of accents, from “ghosted” (lightly played) notes to very strong accents.

\*Randomly accent a repeated pitch for several bars.

\*While repeating a group of notes, accent one or two notes strongly, or vary which notes are accented.

- ▶ **TRY IT** – On a flexible scale, “ghost” some notes. Then randomly accent some notes. Then do both things in a flexible scale.

#### **C)** What are some tips for using articulations?

\*Play occasional notes staccato. Chapter 2C: *Swing Rhythms* explains more about articulations in the swing style.

\*Adjust the length of any staccato note, from very short to almost full value. These variations are subtle but important.

\*Vary between slurs (smooth) and attacks.

- ▶ **TRY IT** – On any flexible scale, select one or two notes per bar to play staccato. Then see how many ways you can articulate the notes.

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That's all for Tutorial 1F!

There is no Quiz for this Tutorial.



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