

Tutorial 1G: Developing with Motifs and Phrases



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

1. Create motifs for improvisation
2. Vary motifs by degree
3. Create solid phrases
4. End phrases accurately

Enjoy the learning ~ see you at sunset ...

Other Level 1 Tutorials

- 1A: Virtual Practice
- 1B: Chords and Scales
- 1C: Melodic Color
- 1D: Rhythmic Variety
- 1E: Flexible Scale Levels
- 1F: Using Expression
- 1J: Chords, Keys, Progressions

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- When you strengthen your development skills, a whole new world of ideas comes within your grasp – you begin to see what's possible in your solos. Later on you'll learn how to use development tools; now, get a strong foundation.

About Development

A) What is development?

*It's the art of creating and varying *motifs* (short musical ideas) so your solos build logically and emotionally.

*Development is surprisingly similar between jazz and classical styles. Once you learn the tools, apply them thoughtfully and creatively, but don't overuse them.

B) Is development really that important?

*Developing musical ideas is at the heart of almost every kind of music. Unfortunately, some soloists think that because improvisation offers so much freedom, development is too limiting or doesn't really matter.

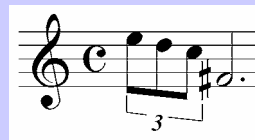
*Too many jazz soloists are technique-strong and development-weak. To be a complete jazz soloist, you must know how to effectively develop motifs and phrases in solos.

*Unless your solo is only a few bars long, there's always time to develop ideas. With practice, development will help you play *fewer notes* that make *more sense*, a plus for any listener.

Part 1 – Creating Motifs

A) What are motifs?

*A motif is a short musical idea that can serve as a starting point for melodies and development.



B) How do I use them effectively?

*By using flexible scales with alternate rhythms and skips, you've already created motifs. Now it's a process of isolating them and developing them. When you create a motif, remember these points:

- 1 Accurately hear the first pitch of your motif before you play it; then place the note securely in the rhythmic spot where you want it to be.
- 2 Select the pitches and rhythm for your motif.

2

3 Keep your first motifs somewhat simple. Later, you can join motifs together to create phrases or play longer and more complex motifs.

4 Emphasize color tones and interesting rhythms.

5 A great source for motifs is a jazz tune melody. You can adapt or copy the last motif of the tune melody and use it as the first motif in your solo. You can also use any interesting motif in the tune melody anywhere in your solo. The motifs you borrow can be varied and developed.

- **TRY IT** – Basic: Write down a simple motif and play it. Find a motif in printed music and play it. Medium: Play a simple motif and write it down. Challenge: Find an interesting motif in a recorded piece, write it and play it.



Part 2 – Varying Motifs

A) How much should I vary motifs?

*Too much repetition of a motif sounds boring, but playing too many different motifs too soon can confuse the listener.

(Part 2 – Varying Motifs)

*Getting a good balance between repetition and contrast is the key. Many players avoid any kind of repetition, thinking that more variety is more interest. That's the wrong answer: they throw away good motifs after playing them just once. Instead, try different degrees of variation, each with its own advantages.



B) What are the basic degrees of variation?

- 1) *Repetition (no variation)* is best when the motif has strong interest, such as color tones or offbeat rhythms. One or two repetitions is fine; occasionally you can build energy with many repetitions.
- 2) *Slight variation* is subtle, gradual development. While slight variation may not seem like an interesting concept, it's actually very powerful when used well. Most soloists neglect slight variation in favor of more variation.
- 3) *More variation* creates more melodic variety and develops the motif somewhat faster. This technique dominates some players' development; use it carefully.
- 4) *Complete variation* (starting a new motif). This gives you a fresh start for a new motif and development. This is like starting a new paragraph of musical thought.

- ▶ **TRY IT – Basic:** Write 2 motifs, then vary the first one.
- Medium: Play 2 motifs and vary the first one.
- Challenge: Play 3 motifs and vary the first one.

Part 3 – Creating Phrases

A) How do phrases fit into my solos? MORE

*Music phrases are like phrases or sentences in writing. When you construct intelligent phrases in your solo, you tell a musical story; the phrases lend organization. This helps you avoid wandering around musically, and it gives you some guideposts to work with in building your solo. It also helps your listeners follow where your solo is going.

B) What types of phrases are there?

*A single, long motif

**Similar, separate motifs*, with a short rest after each



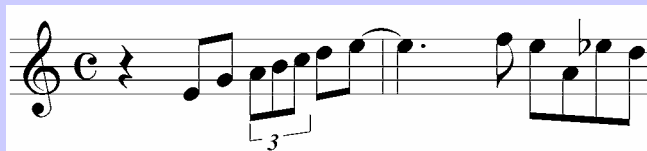
*A group of *joined motifs*; each end on a longer note:



- ▶ **TRY IT –** Same as the Try It for Item D; add a few ties to triplets and a few triplet rests.

C) How can I connect motifs into phrases?

*Begin the next motif on a note that's on or near the ending note of the first motif. The ending and beginning notes "dovetail" together.



*Start the 2nd motif an *octave, seventh, or ninth* above or below the end of the first one. An octave sounds a lot like starting on the same note; a ninth sounds like an octave plus a step.

*Try ending with a staccato note, or a longer note with expression (vibrato, etc.), or a well-defined rhythm. Your last note should be as secure in pitch and rhythm as your first note.

*Try to vary *where* in the bar you end the phrase.

*End before you're forced to end. Don't end a phrase just because you're out of breath, energy, or ideas; end when the music says it should end.

*The worst habit is ending each motif near a barline and starting the next motif right away:



Instead, vary where you end your motifs:



C) How do I eliminate phrase barriers?

Problem 1: I keep stopping at new barlines.

Solution: Play *through* barlines. Stop just after beat 1 or in the middle of a bar, not only at the end of a bar.

Problem 2: A chord symbol changes while I'm in the middle of a phrase.

Solution: You'll learn about how to connect between chord symbols in Chapter 3B: *Melodic Connections*. The contours and rhythms of your phrase shouldn't be controlled by the chords; the chords should naturally fit into your phrases.

Problem 3: I can play complex ideas in easy keys, but I have to play simple ideas in the harder keys.

Solution: Spend extra time on scales and arpeggios in the more difficult keys. Try developing a simple idea (fewer/slower notes) from easy chords to harder chords. Ideas can get prematurely complicated in easy keys.


Problem 4: I run out of breath or make a mistake.

Solution: Shorten some motifs. Horn players can work on breath control to play longer phrases. If you make a mistake, don't just stop; maybe you can use the "wrong" note as part of your next idea.

That's all for Tutorial 1G!

Next is the Quiz –to start, go to the next page.

QUIZ - 1G: Developing with Motifs and Phrases

Click on the letter for the best answer for each question. You'll hear a C Major arpeggio if you're right. If you miss 2 or less, you pass the Tutorial!
Or, click **Back**  to review the Tutorial before taking the Quiz.

1) Development helps you:

- A) play more notes per bar
- B) play fewer notes that mean more
- C) rely on what you have already learned
- D) read chords faster

2) A good source for motifs is:

- A) expression
- B) flexible scales
- C) development
- D) color tones

3) A good interval for connecting two motifs is a:

- A) 9th
- B) 4th
- C) 5th
- D) 3rd

4) The easiest part of a motif to remember is the:

- A) beginning
- B) middle
- C) end
- D) highest note

5) Which is not a good way to end most phrases?

- A) at the barline
- B) with a long, expressive note
- C) visualizing the end in advance
- D) these are all good

6) Which is generally not thought of as a phrase?

- A) a single short motif
- B) a single long motif
- C) similar but separate motifs
- D) a group of joined motifs

7) If you make a mistake in a phrase, what's the best option?

- A) try to use the mistake in an idea
- B) start over
- C) never try that idea again
- D) go back to safer ideas

8) Phrases are like:

- A) words
- B) sentences
- C) chapters
- D) punctuation



Sunset, Pacific Ocean
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