

## Eyes, Ears and Fingers

Ah, the comforts of home! When you play an idea often enough, it gets comfortable under your fingers and in your memory. Now comfortable ideas are not bad, but that's when it's too easy to set the "cruise control" and play what comes naturally. Soon, the fingers rule the ears, and creative thinking is shut down for the most part. This is basically the opposite from what should be happening as you improvise. This tendency is especially common in double-time and up-tempo playing, where sometimes we want that comfort zone at the expense of creativity.

### Who's in Charge?

Let's get the management chain straight here:

1. *The eyes rule the ears.* You need to see it in your mind's eye before you hear it. Clear vision should lead to accurate hearing.
2. *The ears rule the fingers.* When you hear it, let your technique do the work of playing what you hear.
3. *The fingers rule the instrument.* Keep disciplined in your sound and technique so your ideas don't crash due to poor execution.

When you follow that chain, information gets channeled the right way so it can do you the most good in the least time.

### Use the Flexible Scale Practice Levels

A good way to start off in the right direction is to use the seven flexible scale practice levels in Chapter 1E. This gets you out of the habit of "sine wave" (monotonous up-and-down) melodies, and it boosts your vision skills.

### Little Fixes: Out of the Rut

A simple way to get out of ruts and see and hear new ideas is to use "little fixes." The concept is to force your eyes, ears, and fingers to go in new directions. Here's how little fixes work:

1. Hum and finger a phrase that's easy for you.
2. Repeat the phrase until you're sure you've heard and fingered it just right.
3. Go back and change one or two notes, intervals, or rhythms in the phrase, while still keeping the phrase solid and interesting.
4. Try to figure out why you didn't use the altered notes in the first place. Do they represent a blind spot for your vision, ears, or fingers?
5. Repeat the steps above and try to push yourself out of the comfort zone as you create each new phrase. If you make mistakes, stop and figure out what happened; if necessary, work on difficult intervals or rhythms until they feel more natural.