

# Developing Music Vocabulary

**What is music vocabulary?** Music vocabulary is the ability to not only hear a sound and be able to play it back, but to also know how it works in the context of a song, riff or solo.

**I can already play riffs by reading tabs and learning by ear, why do I need to learn this?** Learning music vocabulary is the same as learning a new language(except a lot more fun, right?!). Vocabulary is what we use to communicate with other musicians. The type of notes we play are like the words we speak. If we are learning Spanish, French, or Russian, it takes a lot of hard work and dedication. Learning music is no different. We could be the person who knows how to say "hello" or "goodbye" in ten different languages and nothing else, or we can learn as much as we can in one area and work on being fluent. Imagine this:

Steve Vai is looking for a new guitarist for his upcoming tour. You have practiced like crazy and learned all of his tunes note for note. You used tab books and figured every lick out by ear. One day you get a call and it is Steve Vai on the phone asking you to come audition for him. You show up and play all the songs he asks you to perfectly. Then he says,"let's have a jam in the Lydian mode." You ask yourself,"What is the Lydian mode?!" Unable to figure it out, the audition ends and you don't get the gig.

Being able to play the guitar is one thing, but being able to communicate ideas is another. Every little bit you learn helps develop your music vocabulary further. Here are some quotes by players that discuss the importance of music vocab:

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Steve Vai on Learning Jimi Hendrix songs(Guitar Player Magazine, May 1990):

Joe Gore: [Sisters] is an obvious tribute to Hendrix' Harmonic Vocabulary.

Steve Vai: Learning Hendrix songs was the basis of my chordal vocabulary when I was young.

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Guitar Virtuoso Al Di Meola from Guitar Player Magazine Interview:

One thing I learned a long time ago was my fretboard, in terms of all the scale and all the positions. You have to learn it- there are no two ways about it. I shift between positions so easily now that I don't really have to think about them much.

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To play without thinking. That should be one of our ultimate goals as a musician. You might be asking, "then why are you making me do all this thinking now!?" There is an old saying I have heard many times over the years: Learn as much as you can, and then forget everything. What does that mean? When you can speak a language fluently, you don't really think about it. You know the words that you are saying and can express what you want to. It becomes second nature. All of the notes, scales, chords, riffs, etc., become a part of your vocabulary and you can execute them when you want. This is a challenge, and the only way to learn it is to go for it. So let's begin.