

Kevin Downing

## CLAPS Formula

**P**lenty of guitar players I come across complain about not being able to get ahead in their playing abilities, or wonder what it is that has been holding them back for years, so I have put together some ideas and called them the CLAPS Formula. These five ideas are certainly not the only things that can hold a guitarist, but I consider them the main ones. They are also not in any order of importance as I saw they spelt a word once I had them written down...

CLAPS is an acronym for comparisons, little at a time, attitude, patience, and self-limiting beliefs.

**Comparisons** – Don't compare yourself to others. Compare yourself to yourself only.

Aspiring players often begin comparing themselves to their guitar heroes after having been playing only a few years, only to come to the inevitable realisation that they are nowhere near that level of expertise. This often leads to frustration setting in.

Guitar playing is a physical skill. Learning

about music related subjects – theory, ear training etc., are mental skills, and improvising and composition are creative skills. Three separate skill areas you need to get to grips with, which can take a while, so you need to be very patient. The best person you can compare yourself to is yourself. You can do this by measuring your progress as you get along the track.

**Little bits at a time** – Learning in small steps at a time is best.

Many learners want to take on too much at once. For example they might have a four bar lick they are learning and try to master the whole four bars at once – when they should instead break it down into one bar sections, and get them down pat before putting the four bars together.

Or they might have some tricky strums to do, but instead of breaking the strumming down to one chord first and then introducing the chord changes, try to do it all at once.

Too many are searching YouTube for shiny objects that will lead them down the garden path and end up nowhere near where they want to go. In the quest to get ahead quickly they miss out the fundamentals and try to play through things that are way beyond their abilities. You need to ask yourself, 'Is this over my head,' or, 'Is this the correct order in which I should be learning things?'

**Attitude** – Your attitude determines your altitude.

A positive attitude will get you a long way in the music business. You need to leave your ego at home and learn to work as a team, as everything we do in music is teamwork, whether you realise it or not. Going to music lessons, jamming, or being in band is all teamwork and no one wants to work with people who have inflated egos or are difficult to work with.

Ask yourself, 'How can I improve my attitude?' And get to improving it.

**Patience** – Everybody overestimates their ability to do something and underestimates the time it takes to do it.

Yes, it is surprising how the general population have little patience for anything these days. Since the advent of cellphones, and all accessories connected with the internet, people have this attitude of wanting stuff immediately. Things like sport, art skills, etc., take time to develop and you cannot rush them. We have to develop muscle

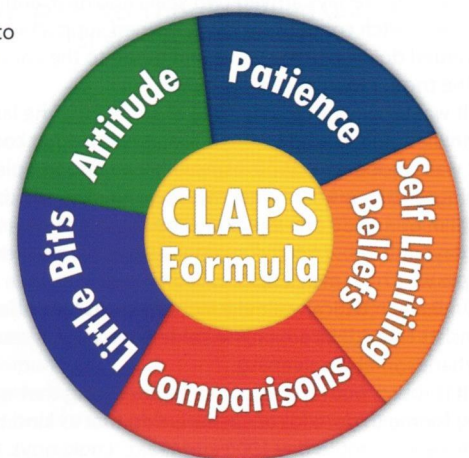
memory for things we are practising or playing, memorise songs, ear training, etc., this all takes time. It takes longer than you think, but doesn't take forever.

Ask yourself, 'Have I set realistic goals myself, or are they unrealistic?'

**Self-limiting beliefs** – You have to believe in yourself and that you can do it with a bit of practise and perseverance.

Learners often exhibit self-esteem problems in that they put themselves down with negative opinions and beliefs about themselves. In most cases that is not how the outside world sees you, or values you.

Everybody has something, large or small,



to contribute to a jam session, band, or songwriting team. Never put yourself down. If those little gremlins in your head keep appearing with negative thoughts it would pay to get professional help.

It's only natural for people to experience shifting levels of self-confidence, but big swings in confidence will affect your practising and performances. Again, ask yourself if you have any self-limiting beliefs. If so, how can you overcome them?

If you give the CLAPS formula some thought and begin to implement the strategies you will see some serious progress not only in your playing ability but also in the quality of people you get to play with.

*Kevin Downing is a professional guitarist and published author. His contact details and many other articles are on his website at [www.guitar.co.nz](http://www.guitar.co.nz)*



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