



ROADMAP TO **MASTERY**

COMPANION WORKBOOK

Diagnose. Realign. Break Through.

by Troy Stetina

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Published by Stetina Productions

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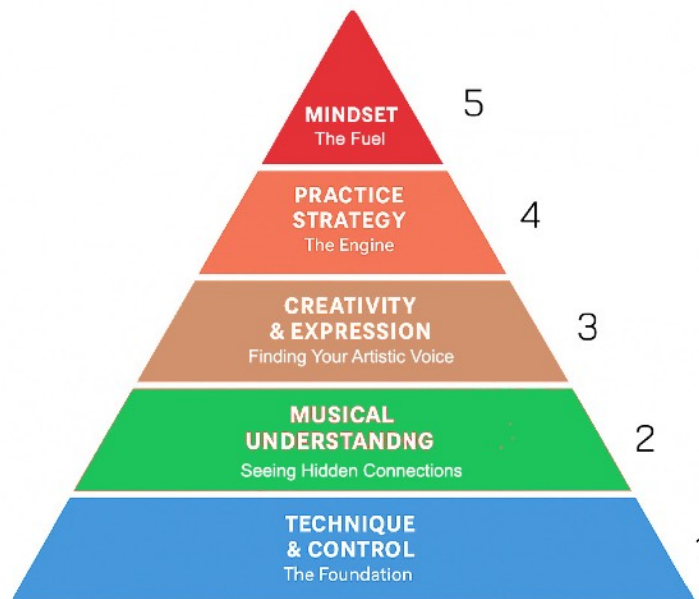
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ABOUT THE COMPANION WORKBOOK

This workbook is designed to be used along with the book, *Roadmap to Mastery: Breaking Through Intermediate Guitar Plateaus*. There, I presented a framework—the Five Dimensions of guitar development:

THE 5 DIMENSIONS OF THE INTERMEDIATE GUITAR PLATEAU

A diagnostic roadmap for breaking through to advanced playing



In the book, I explain why plateaus occur, how imbalances form, and how progress resumes when those dimensions are brought back into alignment.

This workbook is not additional theory. It is a tool for application.

Mastery is not accidental. It is structured.

This workbook is your structure.

— *Troy Stetina*

Roadmap to Mastery: Breaking Through Intermediate Guitar Plateaus

Available in print and Kindle editions:

Print: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0GMWVGNZD>

Kindle: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0GHZJMCGY>

How to Use the Workbook

This workbook is your implementation tool. It guides you through three stages: Diagnose, Realign, Break Through.

This is followed by a bonus section for teachers who would like to use the workbook materials with students.

1. Diagnose

You will assess your current development across the Five Dimensions and identify likely areas of imbalance.

2. Realign

You will isolate the weakest links and design specific corrective actions.

3. Break Through

You will implement a structured reset plan, measure outcomes, and reassess your progress.

The goal is simple: **To move from insight to action.**

While reading clarifies, and writing commits, momentum *transforms*.

Roadmap to Mastery is about transforming your playing. (And if you happen to be a teacher as well, the playing of your students.)

If You Haven't Yet Read the Book

This workbook is built upon the framework presented in *Roadmap to Mastery: Breaking Through Intermediate Guitar Plateaus*.

While many of the exercises here can be useful on their own, the deeper understanding of how the Five Dimensions interact—and why imbalance causes plateaus—is developed in the full text.

If you find the diagnostic and reset process presented here to be helpful, your benefit will be significantly enhanced by exploring the book itself.

DIAGNOSE

Plateaus rarely arise because of a lack of effort. More often, they occur because one dimension of development has drifted out of alignment with the others. That is, there is one bottleneck in particular that has impaired progress. When we can identify clearly where the block lies, we can take steps to correct it.

This section will help you identify where such imbalances may lie.

Self-Assessment Checklist

Grab a notebook (or use a Notes app on your phone) and simply rate yourself on a scale of 1–10 for each of the Five Dimensions.

Don't overthink it. This is not a scientific measurement. It's just a snapshot of how you feel about things right now. Take your first impression and go with it.

1 = severely underdeveloped relative to your goals.

10 = strong, consistent progress with clarity

How well do you feel you are progressing in each area, generally speaking?

<u>Area</u>	<u>Present Score</u>
Technique:	_____
Musical Understanding	_____
Creativity	_____
Practice Strategy	_____
Mindset	_____

We are not looking for precision at this point. We just want to clarify the basic pattern here. Simply by putting your ratings down the page, you begin to get your situation out of your head so it can be evaluated more objectively.

Getting the facts is always the first step. And the “facts” in this case are a somewhat subjective issue, because it's a comparison between where you want to be and where you feel you currently are.

Reflection

Now let's go deeper. For each Dimension, consider the following questions honestly. No one else will see this. Again, don't overthink. Go with the first response that comes to mind.

1. *Technique Barriers*

If your frustration is physical rather than conceptual, Technique may be your bottleneck. If so, identify the worst offending aspect(s) of Technique and target them for focused improvement.

- Am I avoiding passages that expose my weakness?
- How well can I listen to what I play *as I'm playing*?
- Do I routinely hear unwanted noise (improper damping) as I play?
- Do my bends and vibrato sound strong and reliable?
- Does my fretting hand feel relaxed? Hammers and Pulls under control?
- Is my feel for pulse easy and automatic or could it use improvement?
- Do I struggle with speed on riffs or licks?
- Do I feel physically tense as I play (particularly challenging phrases)?

2. *Musical Understanding*

If you can play it but can't explain it, understanding is lagging. And if your ear isn't connected to the structures or the fretboard, ear training is lagging.

- Can I explain what I'm playing? (Key, scale steps, intervallic structure, etc.)
- Do I rely on shapes without context?
- Do I understand why certain notes work over certain chords? (Chord tones)
- Could I teach this concept to someone else?
- How well developed is my ear? Can I identify scale steps in a melody by ear?
- Can I identify chord types as well as progressions by ear?
- Can I hear a melody in my "inner ear" and map it to the fretboard accurately?

3. Creative Expression

If your playing feels repetitive or overly imitative, Creativity may need attention.

- Do I have trouble generating original ideas?
- Do I tend to look for *where to go* rather than listening during improvisation?
- Do I experiment *outside* of my comfort zone?
- Can I feel where subsequent phrases begin (big time) without thinking about it specifically?
- Can I suspend my sense of pulse and come out of the phrase on my feet by feel? Or, do I over-rely on this and the limitation is with my ability drop notes in time rhythmically?
- Can I build on a rhythmic motif easily and improvise variations on it?
- Can I identify a song's form without getting trapped in the song itself?
- Can I identify a song's energy dynamics and notice the specific elements that cause those dynamic changes I'm hearing?
- Do I have trouble arranging full songs?
- Do I freeze on stage or when recording?
- Do I experience playing live primarily as an opportunity to "give" or "get"?
- Do I feel that I *know* my own artistic center? Or is it still a mystery?

4. Practice Strategies

If effort is high and consistent but your results are inconsistent, your Practice Strategies may be misaligned or incomplete.

- Do I practice habitually—following a rote routine—or do I practice intentionally, knowing exactly what I'm trying to improve?
- How is my balance between maintenance and breaking new ground. Is it serving my current needs and aspirations, or should it be adjusted?
- Am I applying the Head-On approach effectively? (All *three* stages.)
- Am I fighting against speed barriers? If so, am I blending the Bottom-Up approach with the Top-Out approach?

- When using Breakdown/Reassembly examples (Speed Mechanics), am I aware of the motions each given example is building, rather than just playing the notes?
- Am I struggling with material that is overly difficult for me? Do I have enough material to practice that is both a moderate challenge *and* interesting/inspiring?
- Can I identify the specific “threads” (sub skills) of guitar technique that I want to improve and can I see where those pieces fit into the big picture?

5. Mindset

If emotional responses are dictating your behavior, Mindset may be limiting growth.

- Do I interpret frustration as feedback or failure?
- Do I compare myself to others constantly? Occasionally? Never?
- Do I imagine my plateaus as permanent?
- Do I attach identity to performance outcomes?
- Does my current mental conditioning (habitual thoughts) tend to support myself and my goals?
- Have I tried any form of gratitude practice and if so, how did it change my outlook?
- Have I tried to use generative questions, particularly when facing a disappointment or setback?
- Can I clearly separate my vision, or direction, from my goals?
- Am I setting measurable goals?
- Am I flexible enough to set new goals as I gain feedback from both my successes and failures in regard to hitting my previous goals?
- Am I keeping my goals focused on things I can control, rather than outcome?
- Am I balancing success in regard to both internals and externals?
- Can I properly see how where I am at the moment is a part of the spiral learning path I’m on?

Identify Your Weakest Links

After going over the reflection questions, you may want to alter your initial ratings. You may also have some insight as to exactly what portion within that general area needs your attention and focus.

Now circle the two lowest-scoring Dimensions.

This is your *Imbalance Hypothesis*. It's not a verdict. It's your working theory.

The idea is that when growth slows or stalls altogether, it is likely because one or two Dimensions have fallen out of proportion with the others.

And that's good news.

It means the problem has been identified—and can now be corrected.

The next step is *Realignment*...

REALIGN

The Imbalance Correction Worksheet

Let's focus on your lowest-scoring Dimension first. Then, repeat on your second lowest area.

For each, answer the following questions:

1. What specific weakness is showing up?

Be concrete, not general.

Instead of writing a blanket statement like *my technique isn't great*, maybe it's something like this: "Alternate picking is tense above 122 BPM."

Or, instead of *my creativity is weak*, try: "I rely on the same pentatonic patterns in every solo."

Clarity creates leverage.

Go back to your reflection questions and see if you can identify the *specific* weaknesses.

Now write them down.

Note: don't write more than four, however. We want to hit the weakest links. Also, while any skill could continue to be improved and perfected, keep in mind that those we are identifying for improvement here are weak *relative* to our other skills.

2. What specific behavior is reinforcing this?

Plateaus are generally sustained by our own habits. For example, we might be:

- Avoiding difficult passages
- Playing the same music over and over with the same errors
- Practicing without a tempo goal
- Repeating comfortable material

- Stopping when frustration appears
- Playing instead of studying harmony and theory
- Always defaulting to tabs instead of listening and learning by ear

What is your “go to” habit pattern. This is undoubtedly creating the results you are experiencing.

Are you too scattered? Double down by implementing more structure. Or are you too regimented? Allow more freedom to experiment.

3. What specific daily or weekly action will address this weakness?

Make this small and measurable. For example:

- 10 minutes daily playing slow alternate picking lines, relaxed to build better flow and momentum (base)
- Write one original phrase per practice session (riff or lick)
- Analyze one chord progression per week
- Log tempo progress every Friday
- Learn a new song each week
- Spend 15 minutes on ear training before technique drills
- Alternate between Bottom-Up and Top-Out practice for a given set of mechanics for 10 minutes

Do not attempt to fix everything! We correct one imbalance at a time.

Practice is an art. We are learning to watch ourselves, noticing what needs improvement, what’s working, and what’s not working. And we keep shifting our attention in different ways until we get the results we are after.

Success is a matter of persistence, trial and error, and careful watchfulness.

BREAK THROUGH

Of course, diagnosis without action changes very little. So next, we turn those insights into structured forward motion.

The 30-Day Reset Plan

Print out the 30 Day Worksheet page that follows.

Choose one primary Dimension and one secondary Dimension to focus on for each week. Write it in the Focus column (both top level and subheading). For example:

- Technique / string damping
- Musical Understanding / ear training
- Creative Expression / arrangement
- Practice Strategies / apply Top-Out
- Mindset / generative questions

Next:

- Select a specific set of examples you will work on to that end
- Write down your time commitment (and schedule it in advance)

At the end of each week, record what improved and how? Write it in the last column.

Examples:

If Technique / synchronization was your focus, maybe the result was, *raised passage from 80% to 90% tempo with relaxed execution.*

If Mindset / positivity was your focus, maybe the result was, *caught negative self-talk 5 times and redirected to process-based thinking.*

For some reason, writing these sorts of things down on paper seems to make our successes more real, more tangible.

Writing it down puts it in black and white—it becomes more real, concrete.

Then celebrate your win! That “celebration” doesn’t need to involve other people, cake, or alcohol—or any other common cultural ideas. What we want here is simply to take a moment to acknowledge to ourselves that *we did it*. That’s where the gold lies.

Reassess / Retarget

At the end of each 30 day period, it's time to reassess.

Look over the previous sheet you filled out and ask:

- What specific progress did you make?
- Was that progress as strong as you had hoped for?
- In what areas was your progress less than your expectations?
- Why do you think so? Can you alter your strategy for better results?
- Was your progress better than you anticipated in any area?
- What can you learn from this?

Next, go back to *Diagnose* and re-score yourself. Run through the same reflection questions again.

Notice what has changed.

Maybe it's still largely the same, but you are at a next level in regard to those "threads." This progress is important to see—again, in black and white.

You may continue with those same primary and secondary dimensions to take them up to the next level. Or you may find that now that an area has been improved, there is a new "weakest link" in your skill set. Pivot and work on that for the next 30 Days.

As you move forward like this, you will be constantly learning to watch your own progress. This is key to the art of practice.

And as you move ahead you'll be taking into consideration everything you have learned from your previous efforts.

This is the magic formula for success!

The 30-Day Plan Worksheet

(Print this page)

	Week	Focus	Specific Drill / Activity	Time Commitment	Outcome Metric
Primary Dimension	1				
Secondary Dimension	1				
Primary Dimension	2				
Secondary Dimension	2				
Primary Dimension	3				
Secondary Dimension	3				
Primary Dimension	4				
Secondary Dimension	4				

Teacher Resource (Bonus Layer)

Student Diagnostic Process

Ask your student to rate themselves in each of the Five Dimensions (Diagnosis).

In early learning stages, you may not need to drill into the details of the various subheading levels presented in *Roadmap to Mastery*.

Just focus at the top level evaluation of the Five Dimensions of the pyramid at first. This keeps things simple. And even the simplified framework can be beneficial for beginner and early intermediate-level players.

The key factor will be the introduction of the ideas. Many of the concepts will be new and take some time to sink in. But simply presenting it to the student will cause them to begin thinking in terms of these various factors, and this will often be enough to begin resolving some issues.

Then, after the student rates themselves, compare:

- Student perception
- Teacher observation

Discuss the discrepancies.

Most students will universally misdiagnose their own plateau.

This framework gives you a neutral structure for conversation, shifting the focus from:

“I’m not talented enough.”

To:

“This Dimension needs strengthening.”

And it puts you and the student on the same page.

After some time with this approach, begin to gradually ask the deeper reflection questions, as appropriate to the student’s level.

And over time, this diagnostic language becomes part of the student’s internal dialogue.

Student Self-Evaluation

(Simplified)

<u>Area</u>	<u>Present Score</u>
Technique:	_____
Musical Understanding	_____
Creativity	_____
Practice Strategy	_____
Mindset	_____