

Transcription 101

A Guide to Transforming Your Playing

One of the most important tools available to the jazz musician is that of transcribing, or in simpler words, learning pieces of music by ear. Transcription is THE ONLY SHORTCUT to developing your ears and to understanding and creating your own musical vocabulary. Through this easy process, you'll be able to learn how to create phrases, play with a solid time feel, and develop YOUR unique and individual sound through recreating the sounds of those musicians that you love.

There are some tools that you can use to help you along in the process but truly the only tools you need are your ears, a recording you love, and your instrument. Apps such as Transcribe as well as playback speed controls on YouTube have helped make this process even easier as they allow you to slow the recordings down to a speed that helps you hear the phrase until you can play it, all without changing the original key.

If you've never done any type of work like this before it may seem daunting, but don't worry because the benefits of going through the process will help you grow by leaps and bounds in a short period of time. You can transform how you play and hear music by this process, that's truly how powerful it is.

Below is a step by step guide to begin, I would recommend you make transcription a part of your everyday practice. 15-30 minutes a day is all it really takes and over the course of a few weeks you'll have the whole solo under your fingers.

1. **Find a recording that you like and want to learn.** In this case, it will be a solo, but the process just as easily works with any song that you'd like to learn. *Remember: if you really enjoy what an artist is playing and it sticks out to you as a way that you'd like to play/solo, that's an indication that it wants to be a part of your musical identity, Learn It.*
2. **Find the link on YouTube, or import the song to the application Transcribe if you're using that app.** I would recommend creating a spotify or apple music playlist of solos that are of interest to you, call it your inspiration list. Transcribe allows you to connect with your spotify or apple accounts so the playlists will just show up, making the process a little more seamless.
3. **Listen to the recording as much as possible to get it in your ears away from the instrument.** I would recommend in between listens giving yourself 30-60 seconds to let your ears soak in what you listened to, the more you listen the more streamlined the later steps become. The

transcribe app will also allow you to adjust the beginning and end of the playback, this helps you loop either a phrase, a chorus, or even the whole solo.

4. **Sing along with the recording.** Singing along is an important part of this process and helps you to develop a more physical understanding of the solo. *Remember: If you can sing it, you can play it.*
5. **Learn the solo one phrase at a time with your instrument in hand.** Sing the phrase and figure out to the best of your ability the notes that were played. With this part you can either **memorize the phrase as you go and/or write it out.** This is the part where you're learning the actual notes that were played. **If the solo is fast and you need to slow it down, do that. Go to the settings in YouTube and change the playback speed. In Transcribe you'll be able to do it easily by sliding the playback speed back as much as you need.** Take your time with this step and only move on to the next phrase when you feel you fully have the previous one down.
6. **Play along what you learned with the recording and pay attention to dynamics, articulation and phrasing.** Be mindful of how the phrase is being played. Is it legato? How does it sit within the rhythm section? Are any notes longer or shorter than others? **Ask yourself, How closely to the original recording am I sounding?**
7. **Repeat steps 4-6 until you've put together the entirety of the solo or you've reached the amount you wanted to accomplish for that practice session.** If you slowed the solo down, slowly work it up to the speed of the original recording. *Remember: this process can take some time, Don't Cram! Allow yourself to piece the solo together and to learn it in smaller, more manageable chunks daily.* Taking a new 4-8 bar segment per practice session while reviewing the previous day's work will help internalize what you've already learned and make the whole process fun and less daunting.