

Guitar Orange Award: Choose some good *dynamics* for my piece

To sign off this skill, you don't need to learn a specific piece of music. Instead, you can use material you already know.

Before we start, please check that you can already tick off "Understand and can play *f* and *p*". You might not have covered this Orange Award skill yet, which is fine – you don't have to go through the skills in order – but it will help a lot with this one, so please ensure that you have done that one first.

Step 1: Dig out an old music book or a bunch of songs that you have previously learned. Ideally these will be songs that you can largely remember, but you no longer find challenging: you want a bank of pieces that you can play with ease.

Step 2: Listen to your favourite songs, and consider how the composers have used dynamics. Some songs, such as R.E.M.'s *Night Swimming*, are *piano* throughout; others like *Teenage Kicks* by The Undertones are *forte*. Many songs mix different dynamics – *Eleanor* by The Turtles and *Ironic* by Alanis Morissette both have *piano* verses and *forte* choruses. If possible, listen to songs with your guitar tutor or a musical friend and discuss the use of dynamics.

Step 3: Try to think what these songs would sound like with different dynamics. If *Teenage Kicks* was played and sung *piano* instead, what effect would this have? Would it make the song more effective, or less? You don't have to get inside the head of the songwriter and try to explain why they chose those dynamics – just consider whether you agree with the musical decisions they made.

Step 4: Look through the material you found in step 1. Try to find pieces that you think ought to be played *piano*, and others that you think would sound best played *forte* (or, even, pieces that sound like they should switch, like *Ironic* and *Eleanor*). If no ideas are coming to you and you can't think what dynamics will work with what songs, then experiment: pick a song, play it *piano*, then *forte*, and see if one version sounds better to you.

Practise three or four pieces you've chosen with the dynamics that you think are appropriate for each.

Crucially: it doesn't matter if everyone else agrees with you. The idea here is for you to make musical decisions, so as long as you have given the dynamics of a piece some consideration and have made a choice that you are happy with, that is enough. If another musician would have done things differently, that's probably down to personal taste, and is just as valid as them liking *Stormzy* more than *The Beatles* or vice-versa.