

THE GREAT

# Pursuit of Tone





The ideal guitar tone is out there somewhere.



All it will take is one more pedal, different pickups, a new guitar, more software, a mic or two, a better amp... The list can go on and on! Attaining that elusive tone that makes you feel and sound great is one of the most fun and rewarding parts about playing the electric guitar, but it can also be *really* frustrating. Many guitar players are quick to buy the latest tone machine or box full of pedals, but when it comes to playing or capturing that *sound* they hear on their favorite recordings, they get stuck. You have heard it said that real tone is in the fingers -- That **real guitar players can take any old rig and make it sound amazing**. While there is definite truth to this and one should never forsake playing finesse, phrasing and practicing for gear acquisition, understanding how to properly set up your signal chain and use effects is a huge part of being a *real* guitar player!

Knowing how to use the right tools will help you make better music no matter what your skill level is. Having a command over your sound is a delicate balance between having the right options available, and understanding your goals in your playing. You want to start simple, build from a solid base, keep things lean and put your gear to work with a clear intent.

So let us keep things super simple initially and deal with your guitar and your amp. Before we move on, I'd like to personally invite you to my "*Tone and Signal Chain*" live course beginning just after the new year! [Check it out on JamPlay.com](https://www.jamplay.com).



## Your Bare-Bones Tone

Before you dig into building your effects chain, it is important that you are completely comfortable with your bare-bones clean sound. Take your favorite guitar and your amp and really dig into how they respond together. **Do not use any outside drive.** Stick to the clean channel on your amp for now. Play some rhythm... some lead... play in different pickup positions. Dig into the sound. Play softly. Turn up the amp and make notes on how the 'feel' and interaction changes slightly. Turn it way down and put your ear next to the speaker. Become completely immersed in how that basic sound works, feels and makes you play. If you don't have a physical amp, set up your multi-effects floorboard or your software with the equivalent flow.

Get rid of all the effects or boxes and make it as simple as you possibly can.

There will certainly be some ways of playing that don't jive with this bare bones tone, but the point of starting here is that you get completely comfortable with the minimum needed to make sound and spend some time with it, and then build on top of this! It's easy, especially with multi-effect units to start with a complex patch and then work backwards from there. Then you miss out on the important experience of building your tone from the ground up! The more acquainted you are with each step in the tone building process, the better sounding and better feeling your built 'go-to' sounds will be.

## Adding Some Drive

You can add drive by switching channels on your amp, or by using a pedal. There are many levels and flavors of drive with very different sounds capable of fitting in different use cases. Start by using a *moderate amount* of whatever you decide to add. Get nice and comfy with it just like you did your basic clean sound. Depending on where or how you add your drive, (amp or with a pedal) you will have some considerations as you move forward with adding additional effects. If you are using even a moderate amount of drive from your amp, you will want to make sure that you are utilizing the effects loop on your amp to add effects like delay, chorus and reverb. (More on that soon).



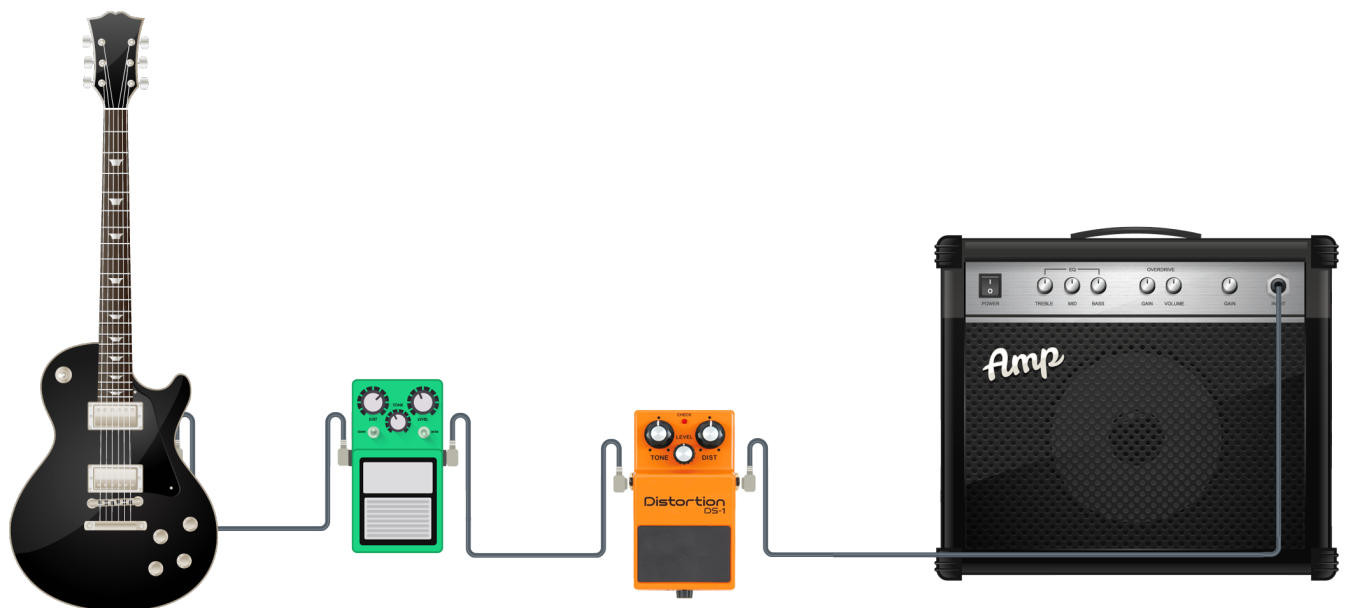
## Gain Stacking

One of the coolest ways to create unique and purposeful overdrive and distortion sounds is through gain stacking. This involves strategically chaining multiple pedals or gain sources together in a specific order.

The best way to begin is think of your pedals or distortion sources in a “cleanest to dirtiest” order. Try putting your cleaner sounding overdrive pedal in front of your distortion pedal. Use each with moderate settings and experiment with the kinds of sounds you can get. Maybe you have a ‘boost’ pedal, a compressor pedal, an overdrive pedal, and a nice sounding distortion on your amp. Using all of these together is perfectly fine and can be very musical if dialed in using moderation.

The key is that all of them are going to need to be tweaked with the other pedals in mind.

The subtle use of an overdrive pedal between your guitar and an already distorted amp can be the key to scratching that *“I need just a little bit more gain”* itch that so many who use high gain sounds need. At the same time, using a dirty boost pedal in front of an overdrive with a clean amp sound can provide a much deeper and richer tone than using just one of the pedals with higher gain settings. You will find that you have much more control of how much you can ‘dig in’ when you start chaining multiple gain sources together!







## The Purpose of an Effects Loop

There are a lot of amps out there that do not have an effects loop, and a similar number of guitarists that don't bother with the ones they have. For most, daisy chaining all the effects before the amp input can sound just fine.

The '*gotcha*' comes when you start using the drive channel on your amp.

As long as your amp is running mostly clean, all the effects used prior to your amp input will sound like they are supposed to sound. As soon as you crank up the gain on your amp, those reverbs, chorus effects and delay repeats start to get *really messy*. The beauty of an effects loop is that it allows you to **isolate the drive channel on your amp** and get the most of time and pitch based effects while doing so.

If you are using the 'gain' channel on your amp, put any time or pitch based effects in the effects loop and you will be amazed at how clear they sound!

The other great thing about effects loops is that they help mitigate the 'tone suck' issue that many players start to experience when chaining too many pedals together before their guitar actually hits the amp input. Putting your dynamics pedals like EQs, wahs, compressors, overdrives, and distortions between your guitar and your amp input, and then putting your delays, reverbs and modulation effects in your loop will help you maximize your levels and get the most out of each individual effect in the chain.



## The Signal Chain

Understanding gain stacking and the use of an effects loop already sheds a good deal of light on general signal chain, but it is nice to have an understanding of typical starting points in the chain for each type of effect. Here is a general diagram that will help you with placing just about any new sound you want to incorporate into your chain:





Volume pedals are neat.

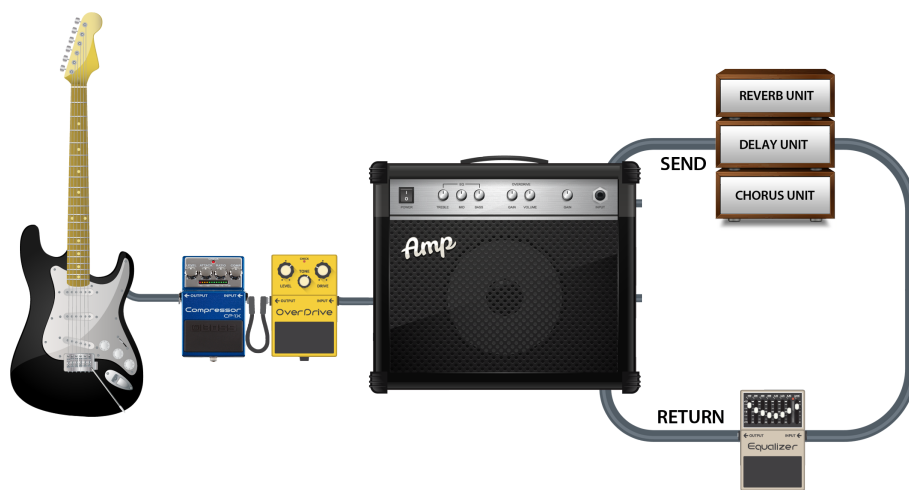
**A volume pedal before your drive** will function sort of like your guitar knobs, allowing you to temper your guitar input and therefore your drive signal or breakup.

**If you the volume pedal after your drive**, but before your delay and reverb, you will be able to decrease the entire dynamic chain, which also works really well. In this placement, you will still get delay trails and reverb decay even after you step on the volume pedal, but your signal remains consistent through your dynamics. This preserves the gain staging you may want. You can also experiment with putting it last in the effects loop so that it is a true master volume control.

EQ modules or pedals are similar to volume pedals. They can really go anywhere for different reasons or purposes.

**Put it before your drive** and right after your guitar input to shape the sound coming out of your pickups. **Put it after your drive** or first in the effects loop to shape your distortion sound with precision. Try using two if you can, and experiment!

Many multi-effect units will allow you to daisy chain pedals however you wish either before or after your drive or amp. Some of them also allow for a “semi-parallel” effects unit. The way we’ve been discussing effects so far is in a chaining or “in series” fashion... one after another. Some boxes will allow for the simultaneous feeding of several effects at once.



Using chains like this is great for super wet or thick delay sounds. It also works well with deep modulation effects.



## Let What You Play Determine Your Needs

When designing a pedalboard, or building patches, let your playing create necessities for a particular effect. This may sound obvious, but don't let your desire to use effects get in the way of your playing. Effects should support your playing! Need a layered, swell sound? Make sure you play slowly and leave a lot of space, and then design an effect chain that works with that playing. Wanna play a U2-like repetitive delay line? Learn or create a line that leaves space for that delay effect to do its job. The proper use of effects will affect the kind of playing you do, and the kind of playing you choose to do will affect the choices you make when creating sounds. Make sure you always have this close-knit relationship in mind!

## Get To Know Each Effect

One of the fun things about getting a new pedal or diving into a new effect is that you can be inspired to try new things based on what that effect can do. Make sure that you understand the range of each knob or parameter on each of your primary effects. Take things to extremes for a while when you're in discovery mode and this will set you up for dialing things in 'just so' when you go to build that right patch for the right situation. Experimentation will lead to creation!

## Now the Fun Stuff.

And now for the good stuff! Below are **ten different effects chains** that represent typical starting points for some of the most revered sounds in guitar music history. The goal here is to build some of these chains, and then experiment with the 'dialing in' process. Tweak the ranges and settings for each pedal while using these rigs as toolsets to work with. Some include conventional effect placement and some intentionally use certain effects in weird places in the chain to achieve a slightly 'off the wall' result. Have fun digging in!





## Classic SRV Blues Chain

Two different mild drive sources stacked together to create a perfect balance of aggression and clarity.

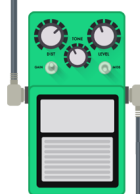
### Single Coil Pickup Configuration Guitar

Use the neck pickup, with knobs all the way up.



### Wah

Use the Wah for leads.



### Classic Overdrive Pedal

Start with the following:

Tone at 1 o'clock

Drive at 2 o'clock

Level at 3 o'clock



### Clean AMP with Spring Reverb

Turned up to get some natural breakup. All EQ knobs at noon. You could also use a dirty channel and try to make it clean enough so that when you strum softly it sounds totally clean, but when you pick or strum hard it breaks up a bit -- Reverb should be sensed, not heard as Reverb)

## Spanky Clean With Breakup

The goal here is to make whatever guitar you have sound a bit punchier with a bit more mid range.



Guitar  
All knobs up



Clean Boost  
Level at 1-3 o'clock



EQ Pedal  
Mid Boost - Boost 800hz by 3db



Clean Amp





## Full Modern Rock Rhythm

Well defined and beefy rhythms will be experienced with this setup.

### Humbucking Guitar

Start on the Bridge Pickup

### Clean Boost Pedal

Level at 2 o'clock

### Classic Green Overdrive

Tone at 12 o'clock

Drive at 9 o'clock

Level between 3 and 4 o'clock

### Drive AMP

Start with the gain around 1 o'clock, Bass at 1 o'clock, Mid at 3 o'clock, Treble at NOON, Presence at 1 o'clock



## Virtuoso High Gain Lead (No Loop)

Sustain and depth while maintaining responsiveness are the goals here.

### Humbucking Guitar

Start with either the bridge or neck positions.



#### Wah

Engage for lead passages, don't tune your tone with it on!



#### Overdrive

Tone at 3 o'clock.  
Drive between 8 and 9 o'clock.  
Level at 3 o'clock.



#### Distortion

Tone at 8 o'clock  
(almost all the way down)  
Drive at 4 o'clock.  
(almost all the way up)  
Level at 1 o'clock.



#### Delay

Time at 10 o'clock  
(or around 300ms).  
Feedback at 10 o'clock or 20 %.  
Mix/Level at noon  
or 40-50 percent.



#### Reverb

Hall setting,  
2ms – 4ms.  
Tone at noon.

### Clean Amp

On the clean channel. Bass at 11 o'clock. Mid at 3 o'clock. Treble at 1 o'clock. Presence at 1 o'clock







## Virtuoso High Gain Lead (With Loop)

Using a distortion pedal as more of a 'boost' this time. This routing allows for slightly greater articulation and tone separation because of the FX loop.

### Humbucking Guitar

Start with either the bridge or neck positions.



#### Wah

Engage for lead passages, don't tune your tone with it on!



#### Distortion

Tone at 8 o'clock  
(almost all the way down).  
Drive at 11 o'clock.  
Level at 3 o'clock.



#### Drive Amp

Gain at 3 o'clock.  
Bass at 11 o'clock.  
Mid at 2 o'clock.  
Treble at 1 o'clock.  
Presence at 2 o'clock.

FX SEND

FX RETURN



#### Chorus

Take it or leave it for added texture.  
Intensity at 10 o'clock.  
Width at noon.  
Rate at 9 o'clock.



#### Reverb

Hall setting.  
2ms – 4ms.  
Tone at noon.



#### Delay

Time at 10 o'clock  
(or around 300ms).  
Feedback at 10 o'clock or 20%.  
Mix/Level at noon  
or 40%-50%.



# Channeling Inner Rage

Get single coil throatiness with a firm punch that begs to be riffed with!

## Single Coil Guitar

Neck for more throat, bridge for more punch.

**Wah**  
Kick in for leads and rhythmic scratching.

**Whammy**  
Set so pedal increases pitch by 1 octave.

**Drive Amp**  
Gain at 1 o'clock.  
Bass at 1 o'clock.  
Mid at 11 o'clock.  
Treble at 1 o'clock.  
Presence at 1 o'clock.

**Volume**  
In FX loop so it changed loudness and not gain.

**EQ**  
With Volume & Mid Boost.  
Boost 800hz 1-2db.

**Phaser**  
Use for certain lines.  
Intensity at 11 o'clock.  
Speed at 9 o'clock.

**Digital Delay**  
Time at 1 o'clock.  
(or around 600m)  
Feedback at 11 o'clock or 35%.  
Mix/Level at noon or 40%-50%.

# You Too Can Sound Like This

Get the chime and rhythmic, layered sound of U2's The Edge (for best results, practice with a drum machine or click track).



## Single Coil Guitar

Pickup selector in "Quack Position" (#2, one removed from the bridge position)



## Overdrive

Everything at NOON



## Time/Tempo Delay

Start with BPM at quarter note = 90, Set divisions to  $\frac{1}{8}$  Dotted, Feedback set so 2 repeats are heard clearly, Mix 50-60 percent or NOON - 1 o'clock



## Clean AMP wth Reverb

Using a touch of amp gain for a small amount of breakup will smooth things a bit. Adjust Reverb to taste.



## Messy, Blurry Delay Noise

Intentionally lacking definition, this sound creates ambiguity and tension within other more articulate layers.

### Guitar

Bridge pickup, roll back the tone to 6.

### Analog Delay

Repeat at 2 o'clock.

Rate at 1 o'clock.

Intensity at noon.

### Orange Distortion

Tone at 9 o'clock.

Drive at noon.

Level at 2 o'clock.

### Drive AMP

Gain at 1 o'clock.

Bass at 11 o'clock.

Mid at 11 o'clock.

Treble at 1 o'clock.

Presence at 1 o'clock





## Gain Changing Tremolo

Often times, tremolo is placed where it affects the level or overall volume. Here, you will get a base clean sound and added gain with the tremolo pulse.

### Guitar

For best initial effect, use the Bridge pickup.

### Clean Boost

Level at 2 o'clock.

### Tremolo

Intensity at 2 o'clock with Shape at noon.  
Speed 11 o'clock. Volume at 1 o'clock.

### Green Overdrive

Tone at noon.  
Drive at 9 o'clock.  
Level at 2 o'clock.

### Drive AMP

Gain at noon.  
Bass at 11 o'clock.  
Mid at noon.  
Treble at 1 o'clock.  
Presence at 1 o'clock.



## Broken Up Flange Feel

You'll get that 'big hair' high gain vibe that works well over a dry rhythm sound.

### Guitar

Humbucker in the Bridge position.

### Flanger

Rate at 9 o'clock.

Mix at 3 o'clock.

Depth at 2 o'clock.

### Orange Distortion

Tone at 9 o'clock.

Drive at noon.

Level at 2 o'clock.



### Drive AMP

Gain at 2 o'clock

Bass at 2 o'clock

Mid at 10 o'clock

Treble at 1 o'clock

Presence at 1 o'clock





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# Holiday Sale

Our Holiday Sale is right around the corner, and the gifts will keep on coming! We are scrambling to put together our beloved 10 Year Anniversary video and information for you to enjoy... coming on Tuesday! Stay tuned for more.

Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>

**10 Year JamPlay Anniversary Celebration**

Friday, December 16<sup>th</sup>

**JamPlay Holiday Sale Released**

Tuesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>

**2016 Guitar Buyers Guide Released**

Monday, December 26<sup>th</sup>

**2016 Live Guitar Giveaway Event**

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