

THE ADAPTABLE MUSICIAN'S FRAMEWORK

Sprint 1

Mini Textbook

Everything you need to know before you practice

MUSICAL OS — PLOGGER METHOD

Chapters 1–3: The Three Stages of Learning · The Three Causes of Error ·
Beginning Keyboard Visualization

MELODY CHAMBER

Why notes feel the way they do · Zone 1 — Stable Notes · Major vs. Minor Quality

HARMONY CHAMBER + ANCHOR SONG

Your first harmonic universe · "Ain't No Sunshine" — chord and melody analysis

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What this textbook is for

This is your *knowledge layer* for Sprint 1. Read it before you start Week 1 and refer back to any section whenever you want to understand the *why* behind an exercise in your practice plan.

The practice plan tells you **what to do**. This textbook tells you **why it works** — and why it matters for your playing.

How the color system works

 **TEAL** = Musical OS (Plogger)

 **BLUE** = Melody Chamber

 **AMBER** = Harmony Chamber

 **RUST** = Rhythm Chamber

 **GREEN** = Voicings Chamber

 **PURPLE** = The Synthesizer

Before we get to a single chord, scale, or song, you need the most important tool in this entire system: a map of how learning actually works. The Ploger Method begins here — and everything else in the AMF builds on this foundation.

Every skill you will ever practice — a fingerpicking pattern, a chord change, a new scale — passes through exactly three stages. The failure to recognize which stage you're in, and to try to skip stages, is the single most common cause of stalled musical development.

STAGE 1 — ROUGHING IN

Mental state: Exploration. First contact. You are making the shape of the skill, not perfecting it.

Think of a sculptor roughing out a block of stone — you establish where the nose goes before you carve the fine detail. Errors are expected. Stopping to correct every error during Stage 1 is one of the most damaging things you can do to your learning. It creates anxiety, slows acquisition, and can form permanent inhibitions.

The rule: Keep moving. Do not stop at errors. The goal is contact with the territory, not mastery of it.

STAGE 2 — PERFECTING

Mental state: Precision. Now you isolate problems and remove them one by one.

You slow down deliberately. You identify exactly where an error occurs (not approximately — precisely which note, which finger, which transition). You correct it, test it, and solidify it. This is where most of practice time lives — and it is where most people get stuck. *Being able to do something slowly and carefully is not fluency.* It is still Stage 2.

The trap: Staying in Stage 2 indefinitely. Comfortable slow playing feels like progress but produces no forward motion toward real musicianship.

STAGE 3 — ACHIEVING FLUENCY

Mental state: Automaticity. The skill is available at full speed without conscious attention.

The brain has transferred the skill from executive (conscious) processing to procedural (automatic) processing. You can now combine this skill with others — because you can read, finger, listen, and feel the time simultaneously when none of those sub-skills are demanding your attention.

The key law: A skill must be fluent before it can serve musical expression. Until fluency, the skill is consuming attention that should be going toward music.

APPLY THIS IMMEDIATELY

Before every exercise in your practice plan, ask: "*What stage am I in right now?*" Label it. This single habit will transform how you practice, because each stage requires a completely different mental state — and you cannot be in two stages at once.

In this textbook, every concept will be labeled with the stage at which you're likely to encounter it in Sprint 1. In the practice plan, every exercise will be labeled S1, S2, or S3.

The Three Stages tell you *where* you are in learning. The Three Causes of Error tell you *why* a specific error is happening — and therefore exactly how to fix it. This is one of the most sophisticated ideas in music pedagogy, and it is almost entirely absent from standard music education.

The critical insight: Different causes require different remedies. "Practice it again slowly" is only the right answer for one of three causes. If you apply it to the wrong cause, you will practice for hours without fixing the problem.

Cause 1: Reaction

What it is: Your processing speed is slower than the music's speed. The skill has not reached fluency (Stage 3). The information arrives faster than your brain can handle it.

How to identify it: Errors cluster at complex moments. You feel "late." The fast passages are the problem, not the slow ones.

The fix: Return to Stage 2/3 practice on the specific under-fluent sub-skill. Slow practice IS the correct remedy here — because this is a speed/fluency problem.

Cause 2: Anticipation

What it is: Your attention is already on a future event — a difficult chord coming up, a high note — while your hands are executing the present event. Because attention has left the present, execution of the present suffers.

How to identify it: Errors cluster *just before* difficult passages, not at them. You "knew" the mistake was coming before it happened.

The fix: Narrow-focus practice — be fully present, note by note. Practicing slowly does *not* fix Anticipation. You can anticipate slowly just as easily as quickly.

Cause 3: Looking Back

What it is: You make an error, and your attention returns to it — even a fraction of a second later. The moment attention goes backward, the next events are missed, causing further errors. This is the "unraveling" phenomenon.

How to identify it: One small error leads to a cascade. You say "I knew I was going to mess up from that point on."

The fix: Train playing-through-errors as a separate skill. The past event is gone. The only recoverable moment is the present one. This must be practiced deliberately — it will not happen on its own.

THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT TAKEAWAY FROM CH.2

"Practicing slowly" only addresses Reaction errors. It does nothing for Anticipation or Looking Back. A student who can identify the cause of their own errors has gained something more valuable than any technical correction.

The piano keyboard is not just an instrument. In this system, it is your **universal reference map** for all pitch relationships — regardless of whether your primary instrument is piano or guitar. Every interval, every chord, every scale becomes spatially clear on the keyboard. Your goal in this system is to have a vivid, instant mental image of the keyboard available at all times — eyes closed, mid-improvisation, while listening to a recording.

We begin with the most fundamental skill: knowing where every note is, instantly.

The Black-Key Landmark Method

There are two groups of black keys that repeat across the keyboard. These groups are your navigation anchors — everything else is located relative to them.

THE GROUP OF TWO BLACK KEYS

- **C** is immediately to the **left** of this group
- **D** is **between** the two black keys
- **E** is immediately to the **right**

Memory: *C comes before the pair*

THE GROUP OF THREE BLACK KEYS

- **F** is immediately to the **left** of this group
- **G, A** fill the two gaps within the group
- **B** is immediately to the **right**

Memory: *F comes before the trio*

Fixed-Do Solfège

This system uses **fixed-do** solfège throughout. This means the syllables always refer to the same pitch class — they are not relative to a key.

SYLLABLE	DOH	RE	MI	FA	SOL	LA	SI
Note	C	D	E	F	G	A	B

When you sing or speak a note name in this system, you use the solfège syllable. Not "A" — but "la." This trains your ear to connect the syllable with the pitch class directly.

Sprint 1 Mastery Target

WEEK 1 TARGET — STAGE 1

Know the landmark rule for C and F. Can locate them on the keyboard with prompting.

WEEK 2 TARGET — STAGE 2

Name all 7 natural notes (C D E F G A B) by their group relationship. Eyes open.

SPRINT EXIT TARGET — STAGE 3

Name any natural note instantly, eyes closed.
Find any pitch on the keyboard without looking.

WHY GUITAR PLAYERS DO THIS TOO

The keyboard is your mental model of pitch space — not a piano skill. When you hear an interval, you're visualizing it on the keyboard. When you improvise on guitar, the most fluent players are mentally tracking the keyboard while their hands work the fretboard. Building this map now means every other system (zones, di-chords, heptachords) has a physical spatial home.

Every note you play over a chord has a specific emotional quality — not by convention, not by culture, but by physics. This is the foundational insight of the Melody Chamber: the emotional character of a note is not arbitrary. It comes from the acoustic relationship between that note and the chord underneath it.

The Stability Ladder

Think of the notes in any key arranged on a ladder from most stable to most tense. Not all notes feel equal. Some feel like *home*. Some feel like they're *reaching*. Some feel like they *must move*.

Zone 1 — The Sweet Notes

Notes: 1 (tonic), 3 (third), 5 (fifth)

In A minor: **A, C, E**

These are the chord tones — the notes that make up the Am chord itself. When you land on one of these notes over Am, you are home. The melody is resting. This is your Zone 1 — stable, resolved, sweet.

In Ain't No Sunshine: the melody rests on **A** and **E** at phrase endings. That landing is Zone 1 doing its job.

The Other Zones (Coming in Sprint 2–3)

Zone 2 (Bitter): scale degrees 7 and 2 — mild tension, close to home

Zone 3 (Tense): scale degree 4 — active tension, wants to move

Zone 4 (Wildcard): scale degree 6 — context-dependent

For Sprint 1 we focus on Zone 1. Mastering "home" is the prerequisite for understanding everything else.

Major vs. Minor — The Acoustic Reality

This is one of the most important things in this entire textbook. The reason a major chord sounds *open and bright* and a minor chord sounds *closed and poignant* is not a cultural convention. It is acoustic physics.

Every pitch produces a natural stack of overtones — frequencies that ring above the fundamental. The most important of these are: the **octave**, the **perfect fifth**, and the **major third**. These three notes appear naturally, without any human decision, in the overtone series of any vibrating string or column of air.

A MAJOR CHORD

The third above the root is a **major third** — 4 semitones. This interval is present in the overtone series of the root note. The chord is acoustically *telling the truth about the physics of the root*. It sounds open, expanding, "alkaline." The root is confirmed and extended.

A MINOR CHORD

The third above the root is a **minor third** — 3 semitones. This interval does *not* appear in the natural overtone series. The chord is acoustically *contradicting the physics of the root*. It sounds closed, contracting, "acidic" — the minor quality is the sound of that contradiction. Poignant, vulnerable, tense.

THE PRACTICE IMPLICATION

When you play Am today and hear that closed, poignant quality — you are hearing the acoustic physics of a non-harmonic third. Your job over the coming months is to make that hearing conscious, fluent, and immediate. Not "Am sounds sad." But: "I hear the 3-semitone interval over the root, and I feel its contraction."

Every song exists within a **harmonic universe** — a collection of notes and chords that the listener experiences as belonging together. Your ear learned to recognize these universes long before you ever studied music. Sprint 1 gives you the tools to understand what your ear has always known.

A Minor — The Universe of Ain't No Sunshine

The song lives in **A natural minor** (A Aeolian) — a seven-note collection centered on A. The ear hears A as home. Every other note is understood in relation to that home.

The notes of A minor: **A · B · C · D · E · F · G**

The chords naturally built from those notes include Am, Bm°, C, Dm, Em, F, and G. But Ain't No Sunshine uses just a few of them:

Am

A · C · E
Home chord · i

Em

E · G · B
Moving away · v

G

G · B · D
Breath of major · VII

E7

E · G# · B · D
Pulls home hard · V7

NOTICE THE E7

The G# in E7 is not in the A minor scale — it's a *raised note*, borrowed from harmonic minor. This single note creates a strong pull back to Am. When you hear that E7 → Am movement in the song, you're hearing centuries of harmonic practice distilled into one gesture: the leading tone pulling home.

The Emotional Arc of the Progression

Ain't No Sunshine moves through its chords in a way that creates a specific emotional shape. Understanding this shape is the beginning of harmonic literacy.

CHORD	FUNCTION	EMOTIONAL QUALITY
Am (3 bars)	Home	Settled, resigned, heavy — the weight of longing
Em	Movement	Slightly unsettled — same quality (minor), but a step away from home
G	Breath	A flash of major brightness — brief, bittersweet relief
Am	Return	Back home — but now the return feels heavier for having left

The song's harmonic genius is in its *restraint*. Three chords. The progression repeats. And the weight accumulates with each pass — partly because of the lyric, but also because the harmony itself creates the feeling of circling without resolution.

Song Overview

Artist	Bill Withers
Released	1971
Key	A minor (A Aeolian, with harmonic minor inflection)
Tempo	~97 BPM
Form	Intro / Verse / "I know" section / Verse / Outro
Primary chords	Am – Em – G – Am

Chord Structure — The Verse

The verse repeats a simple four-bar pattern with variations:

Am	Em	
<i>"Ain't no sunshine when she's gone"</i>		
Am		
<i>"It's not warm when she's away"</i>		
Am	G	Am
<i>"Ain't no sunshine when she's gone"</i>		
Em	Am	
<i>"And she's always gone too long, anytime she goes away"</i>		

Melody Analysis — Zone Mapping

The melody of Ain't No Sunshine is primarily Zone 1 (stable chord tones) at phrase endings, with Zone 2 notes creating the reaching quality in the middle of phrases. This is the Tiny Tension Arc at work — the melody moves away from home (Zone 2) and returns (Zone 1).

PHRASE ENDINGS (ZONE 1 — HOME)

The melody frequently lands on **A** (the tonic — home) or **E** (the fifth — open but stable). These landings create the resigned, settled quality of the

MID-PHRASE MOTION (ZONE 2 — REACHING)

The melody reaches up to **G** and **B** within phrases — notes that are slightly unstable, that carry longing. These notes make the phrase feel like it's

song. Notice: the song doesn't fight. It keeps coming home.

searching before it settles. The yearning is built into the pitch choices.

What to Listen For — Your Assignment

Before you play a single note of this song, listen to it three times this week with different intentions:

- 1 Listen for the minor quality.** Feel the closed, poignant character of every Am chord. Notice how it's different from the brief G major — that single bar of major feels like a window opening.
- 2 Listen for where the melody lands.** When a phrase ends, notice the feeling — settled (Zone 1) or open (still reaching). Try to feel the difference without knowing the note names yet.
- 3 Listen for the "I know" section.** This is a pure Am vamp — just one chord, repeated, while the lyrics pile up. Notice how the harmony creates stasis — the chord isn't going anywhere, and neither is the narrator.

The Rhythm Chamber has two tools that work together — and in this system, they're always used together. One names the rhythm. The other places it in the groove. Neither is complete without the other.

Tool 1: Longy Rhythms (Plogger Ch.4)

Answers: "What rhythm is this?"

A syllabic system where every note gets a spoken syllable that sounds *exactly* when it occurs. Speak *ta* and the note is on the beat. Speak *ta-te* and you've divided the beat in two. The syllable IS the rhythm — in real time.

Level: Notation / perception. Tells you what is written or heard.

Tool 2: The Rhythm Code (Tamas Bodzsar)

Answers: "Does this rhythm groove?"

A groove-placement system based on a fundamental insight: *rhythm is starting points, not duration values*. Where a note begins on the 8-position grid determines whether it sits naturally or creates rhythmic tension.

Level: Feel / groove. Tells you what it sounds like against the pulse.

The Binary Grid — Your Groove Map

In 4/4 time, every measure can be divided into **8 equal positions** (each position = one 8th note). Every note you play begins on one of these 8 positions. Where it begins — not how long it lasts — is what defines the rhythm.



Positions 1, 3, 5, 7 = the beats (ta syllables). Positions 2, 4, 6, 8 = the "ands" (te syllables). A note starting on position 1 feels grounded. A note starting on position 2 feels lifted. *Same pitch, completely different feeling* — because of where it starts.

Stops + Anticipations — Sprint 1 Intro

STOPS

The **last note before a rest**. The stop is the most important note in any rhythmic phrase — it defines where the phrase lands. A strong stop creates punctuation. A weak stop creates ambiguity.

In Ain't No Sunshine: "gone—" is a stop. The word lands and rests. That landing is intentional and musical.

ANTICIPATIONS

A note that starts **one 8th note early** — on position 8 instead of position 1. Instead of landing on the beat, you arrive just before it. This creates the "push" feeling that makes music feel alive and forward-moving rather than mechanical.

Most popular music uses anticipations constantly. When a chord change "feels" exciting, it's often because it arrived 1/8 note early.

The Combined Lens — How to Use Both Tools Together

Take any rhythmic pattern and read it with both tools simultaneously:

- 1 **Longy speaks it:** "ta · ta-te · ta · ta" — now you know what rhythmic values are present
- 2 **Rhythm Code places it:** "note starts pos 1 · note starts pos 3, note starts pos 4 · note starts pos 5 · note starts pos 7" — now you know where each note lives in the groove
- 3 **Ask:** Where is the stop? Is there an anticipation? Do any notes start on the "and" positions (2, 4, 6, 8)?
- 4 **Play it:** Every note lands exactly where the grid says it should — not from reading notation, but from internalizing the position.

Sprint 1 — Quick Reference Card

The Musical OS (Plogger)

Three Stages:

S1 = Roughing In (explore, don't stop at errors)

S2 = Perfecting (slow, isolate, remove errors)

S3 = Fluency (automatic, at tempo)

Three Causes of Error:

Reaction = too fast (fluency problem)

Anticipation = attention on future event

Looking Back = attention on past error

Keyboard Visualization

Two black keys: C (left) · D (middle) · E (right)

Three black keys: F (left) · G, A (middle) · B (right)

Fixed-do solfège:

doh=C · re=D · mi=E · fa=F · sol=G · la=A · si=B

Melody Chamber

Zone 1 (Sweet/Stable): degrees 1, 3, 5 = chord tones

In A minor: A, C, E

Major vs. Minor:

Major 3rd (4 semitones) = in overtone series = *open, alkaline*

Minor 3rd (3 semitones) = NOT in series = *closed, acidic*

Hear before you play. Every note.

Harmony Chamber

Ain't No Sunshine chords:

Am (i) · Em (v) · G (VII) · E7 (V7 — harmonic minor)

Chord qualities:

Am · Em = minor (closed, acidic [3/7] quality)

G = major (open, alkaline [4/7] quality)

E7 = dominant 7th (tension wants to resolve to Am)

Rhythm Chamber — Two Tools, Used Together

Longy Rhythms (Plogger Ch.4) — "What is it?"

ta = quarter · ta-te = two eighths · ta-fe-te-fe = four sixteenths

Speak syllables exactly when each note sounds.

Rhythm Code — "Where does it sit?"

8 positions per measure (pos 1=beat 1, pos 2="and" of 1, etc.)

Stop = last note before rest · Anticipation = starts on pos 8 (1/8 early)

Combined drill: Speak Longy syllables → identify grid position → find the stop → ask: is there an anticipation?

Sprint 1 Milestones

BY WEEK 2

BY WEEK 3

SPRINT EXIT

Know all keyboard landmarks by name. Play Am progression on both instruments.

Distinguish major vs. minor by ear instantly. Zone 1 notes fluent in A minor.

Ain't No Sunshine complete on both instruments. Keyboard visualization fluent.

The North Star

Everything in this system — every exercise, every concept, every sprint — is working toward one thing: **the framework disappears**. The theory becomes invisible because it has become instinct. You will know you're getting there when you stop thinking in systems and start thinking in music.