


REPERTOIRE

**EMMANUEL SOWICZ**  
**MUSICAL GRAMMAR**



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*"MUSIC IS UNSPOKEN ORATORY, WITH THE ABILITY TO STIR AN AUDIENCE'S PASSIONS AND MOVE THEM."*

## LESSON DESCRIPTION

While there are virtually no rules when it comes to making music, there are many customs that have become standard to Western Classical Music. Identifying and practicing these customs will help you decide how to interpret a piece of music with no markings made by a composer, and allow you to communicate more effectively to an audience. Emmanuel Sowicz identifies a number of basic rules of "musical grammar" and groups them into five general categories. Just as a writer or speaker learns the rules of a language to clearly communicate to others, musicians should study the rules of their language to clearly and effectively express a piece of music. Music is, in this way, discourse, that allows people to communicate and develop one another's ideas. In this lesson, Emmanuel dives deep into the logic behind this grammar, and uses many examples from the world's greatest classical guitar composers to develop his ideas. From the physics of harmony and dissonance, to the aesthetic of texture and melody, this lesson covers huge ground in great detail. Finally, Emmanuel breaks down the process of deducing all this information from a score, using a piece by Sor as an example. Hopefully you find this lesson to be a tremendous help as you develop your musicianship and your technique!



# ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Emmanuel Sowicz, born in 1992, is a British and Chilean guitarist who combines his passion for the guitar's traditional repertoire with a keen interest in new music and the art of transcription.

In 2014 he won First Prize at the II SMBA International Guitar Competition in Buenos Aires, and in 2017 he was awarded First Prize and the Audience Award at the XLIV Dr. Luis Sigall International Music Competition in Viña del Mar. Emmanuel Sowicz is a Savarez Artist and performs on a 2001 Matthias Dammann guitar kindly loaned to him by David Russell.

## OUTLINE

1. Introduction
2. Music as Discourse
3. Musical Taste
4. Phrasing
5. Articulation and Rhythm
6. Texture and Melody
7. Harmony
8. Appoggiatura
9. Virtual Harmony
10. Reading a Score
11. Conclusion

# INTRODUCTION



In this lesson, Emmanuel Sowicz will go through some fundamental elements of musical interpretation, or ‘musical grammar’, that define Western Classical Music. In a sense, it’s a ‘Five Tips to Improve Your Musicality’ course drawn from an analysis of common performance situations, such as what to do with dissonance, tension, or when to play notes legato. It’s quite impractical to isolate every element of a piece, but Emmanuel has chosen five topics out of the world of musical expression.



These five topics will be, Phrasing, Articulation and Rhythm, Musical Texture and Melody (Vertical Interpretation), Harmony and Stress (Horizontal Interpretation), and How to Read a Score.

It may seem strange that *grammar* would have anything to do with a musical performance. However, the analogy between music and language is anything but new, as evidenced by the saying “music is a universal language”. If the purpose of language is to communicate, you should ask yourself as a performer how to make musical communication more effective. This will function as the very definition of grammar in this lesson: the set of notions about the correct use of language for effective communication. Put simply, it’s not about *what* you say, but *how* you say it.



# MUSIC AS DISCOURSE



Throughout history, music has been strongly connected to political events and civil discourse. The ability of citizens to speak in front of their peers, also called oratory, is a central element of democracy. Citizens practice oratory to speak their own opinions, challenge those of others, and ultimately earn the public's support. Music has served the purpose of extending what a citizen is able to convey to the general public. Musicians, as orators, must also work to perfect their craft.



Classical music, such as that of Haydn, Mozart, Sor, and Giuliani, is known for its eloquence and clarity, so it will be the focus of the topics in this lesson.



# MUSICAL TASTE



Just as everybody has their own unique style of speaking and writing, many elements in music are simply up to personal taste. However, there are certain customs used universally that allow musicians to communicate effectively.



When we speak, we know how to communicate our intent by stressing certain syllables, and we do so *unconsciously* as we have learned to do since childhood.



Many of us, however, haven't had the same level of saturation with classical music as with our native spoken language, so some focus on this "grammar" is necessary. It should be made clear that studying musical grammar should in no way inhibit your freedom and creativity. Rather, it should make you aware of how to achieve the most expression possible with any repertoire you're working on. With all this in mind, let's begin with the first topic!



# PHRASING



“The ear should be able to clearly follow one idea in its entirety!”

Phrasing refers to the grouping of notes into well-defined structures of meaning. The notes we emphasize can either clarify or obscure the meaning of what is to be conveyed. *Emphasis* is the key element for effective phrasing. Ask yourself which note you are moving towards, and then what can be done with your technique to make that note sound important (crescendo, use of colors, rubato, etc.)

Guitar repertoire is somewhat unique, in that composers often choose not to write any phrase markings in their scores. For this reason, it’s very often that guitarists have more challenges with phrasing than other instrumentalists.





When studying a score for the first time, make it your first goal to realize the delineations, or how the composer organized the phrases. Where does one idea begin, and one end? Often the composer will write pauses within the music to make these separations clear. Emmanuel performs the first part of Sor's Study No. 17, Op. 29.

Alf. moderato.

STUDIO 17.

While the phrases are clear in the first few measures, there's nothing written in bars 16-24 that identifies where one phrase ends and another begins. However, the musical idea that begins on the pickup to measure seventeen ends in the second beat of measure twenty. G, the last note of this phrase, should not be accentuated. Shorten the articulation of the G by cutting it with your right hand. Cutting it will keep it separated from the C that comes next.

In measure twenty-four, the question arises of whether the first chord is part of the previous phrase or a part of the next phrase. This situation is called *phrase elision*, where the chord serves as both the ending of one phrase and the beginning of a new one. As a result, the performer must decide whether to play this chord loud or soft. For this piece, a diminuendo is better suited.





Just as we all stress the most important points in a sentence when we speak, decide which notes will be emphasized once the phrases are defined. Whether the important note is determined by a higher pitch or a tense harmony, it's important to be very clear and deliberate about your decision while you play.

Usually, as in measures 16-20 of Sor's Study No. 17, ascending notes get a slight crescendo, and descending notes a slight decrescendo. While there are often alternative ways of phrasing a passage like this, it's important that the phrasing respects what was originally written. Avoid decisions that are based solely on mechanical reasons (easy fingerings), or that cut phrases off in illogical places.

## **KEY TAKEAWAY**

Phrasing is all about where a musical idea begins and ends, as well as which note gets the most emphasis. With a phrase elision, decide whether to give it more energy or to soften it. Finally, always refer back to the composer's original intent as often as possible.

# ARTICULATION AND RHYTHM



The second installment will begin with articulation. Articulation involves clarifying the musical discourse by creating emphasis and silence, but with individual notes, a smaller scale than phrasing. Lyrical lines, or those designed to mimic a human voice, will usually be played legato, or very connected, and smooth. More rhythmic lines will gain character from being articulated, or separated.

Similarly, small intervals are most often connected, while large leaps are often staccato or slightly detached. This is demonstrated in the example below.



For an example in the repertoire, look at the first line of Sor's Study No. 8, from Op. 6. Each of the three voices in this piece move in small steps, as if imitating human voices in a choir. Just as the human voice sings legato within a melody, strive to achieve the same level of smoothness on the guitar.



The first few bars of Sor's Etude No. 4, a primarily rhythmical piece, can be articulated according to the distance between its intervals.



The chromatic line in the third measure should be played primarily legato, as if to glue the notes together. This gives some contrast to an otherwise articulated piece, and follows the aforementioned rule of basing the articulation on the *size* of intervals. Smaller intervals, such as chromatics, should be more smooth than wide leaps.

Further on in this etude, Emmanuel slurs the D-flat to the C in measure eleven, and plays the other three notes in the measure staccato. Since these markings were not written by Sor, they are not essential. However, they do make the music more effective. If you ever find a good musical reason to do something, whether it's adding or removing a marking, feel free to do so!

## KEY TAKEAWAY

You don't have to follow every instruction in a score, or the lack thereof. Just because there isn't a slur written, you shouldn't play everything detached. Similarly, you are not obligated to play every slur that is written.

For another good example of articulation, look at Giuliani's Rossiniana, No. 1, page 6. The strong rhythmic qualities here suggest that a detached articulation should be used. This gives the music a lot more energy and character.



Next, look at the ninth page, sixth line (*pictured above*). In this example of a syncopated phrase, the eighth notes are meant to be played short, while the quarter notes, are meant to be long. This is so that the quarter note, the note tied over the beat, is given emphasis, clarifying the effect of syncopation.

These are many of the common practices used to give more life to music with articulation and rhythm. Hopefully you find success using them with the pieces you are practicing!





# TEXTURE AND MELODY



For the third topic, let's dive into some thoughts on texture and melody, the vertical side of things. A special quality of the guitar is its ability to play polyphonically, or multiple notes and melodies at once. Most music with several voices will require balance, where one voice is more important than the others, and played louder as a result.

A melody does not always have to be the highest note in a texture. It can often be in the bass voice, or in the middle of a texture. It should always be given the spotlight, regardless of location.

For example, in the opening bars of Carcassi's Study No. 6 Op. 60, the melody is in the top voice.



Since the sound of the guitar naturally decays once a note is struck, take extra care to balance the two voices so that the moving line on bottom is softer than the half-note melody. However, in measures nine through sixteen, the reverse is true; the melody is in the bass, and the accompaniment on top.





In Regondi's Etude No. 4, the accompaniment in the lower part contains three notes, while the melody is only one voice. Be sure the lower voices don't overpower the melody, and that it has room to sing!

Finally, the melody can sometimes be a bit hidden in the writing, as in Giuliani's Progressive Etude No. 15, Op. 51.

A musical score for two staves. The first staff is numbered 15 and the second is numbered 20. Both staves are in treble clef. The first staff contains a melody of eighth notes with some rests, and a bass line of quarter notes. The second staff contains a more complex melody with many sixteenth notes and a bass line of quarter notes. The notation is clear and legible.

If measures sixteen through twenty are played objectively, without any expression or indication of phrasing, the melody isn't exactly clear. After a closer look, one will notice a technique called *implied polyphony*. While there is only one pitch sounding at a time, certain notes poke out and leave the impression of their own melody.

The job of the performer is to extract the melody out and treat it independently. In the example above, the implied melody is circled. Together with the other notes, there is now the illusion of polyphony, or multiple simultaneous voices.

To make these notes more special, accent them and shorten the repeated notes. If the top line spells the melody G, G, F, *shorten* the first G, and make the second G long. Do the same each time this shape repeats. Emmanuel uses his *a* finger for the two repeated notes, and anticipates the second note ever so slightly to achieve the desired effect.



Lastly, the leaps in the bass should be brought out by shortening the first note. For example, from B to F in measure 18, shorten the B just before the F. This makes the entrance of the F very clear.

You'll have noticed that this last example starts to combine several aspects of musical interpretation at the same time. This is true in a great deal of repertoire.

A large number of small decisions tend to come together and enrich the music greatly, hopefully making the performance more pleasing for your audience!



# HARMONY



“Don’t stress that release!”

The fourth topic tackles the one element that is perhaps most defining of tonal music, and that is harmony, as well as the pattern of stress and release that it creates.

Harmony is the organization of simultaneously sounded notes, both in chords and polyphony, as well as the development of systems of scales based on physical laws. To understand this definition, let’s look at the ideas of consonance and dissonance, their importance in musical discourse, and their physical origin.



If you’ve ever taken a physics class, you may have studied vibrating strings, such as that in a vibrating string. A plucked string will vibrate not only in its full length, but also at  $\frac{1}{2}$  of its length,  $\frac{1}{3}$  of its length,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{5}$ , and so on. It will vibrate at every fraction of its length to infinity, but at increasingly weaker volumes.



While Emmanuel demonstrates these harmonics by shortening the string on guitar, all of these sounds are in fact present by playing a simple open string, just in varying degrees. With your own guitar, play a harmonic and then listen for the same pitch when you play the open string!

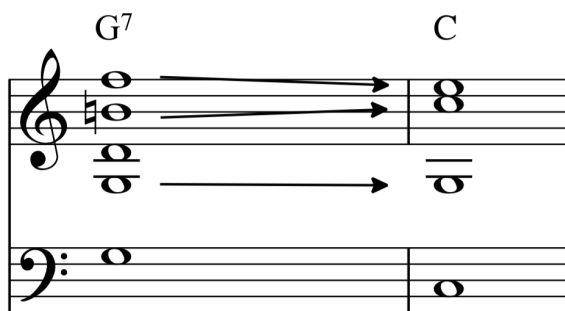
root octave fifth fourth major third minor third minor third

Consonance can be easily defined as the intervals produced within notes of the harmonic series. The intervals that result from these pitches give us the octave, the fifth, the major third, and, in between these, the fourth, minor third, and major and minor sixth. The next interval to appear, the minor 7th, is sometimes a consonance, but to follow in the tradition of Western Classical music we will define it as a dissonance.



Dissonance, therefore, is simply defined as anything that is not a consonance. This includes seconds, augmented fourths or diminished fifths, and sevenths.

There are chords that don't contain these intervals, but that are still considered dissonant, such as augmented chords and diminished chords. The use of both consonance and dissonance allows music to intensify and relax- to have a dramatic curve. Performers must be aware of these patterns to add meaning to the music.



As an example, take the motion from a G dominant seventh chord to C major. In the G-seventh chord, the notes B and F together form a diminished fifth, creating a dissonance inside an

otherwise consonant chord. The C major chord, on the other hand, is all consonance. While moving from G7 to C major, play the G7 with greater emphasis.

## KEY TAKEAWAY

Harmony is the movement from consonance to dissonance, as dictated by the natural occurrence of intervals in the harmonic series. Dissonant chords are played with more emphasis than consonant chords.

In a similar way, diminished and augmented chords will also carry a greater amount of tension. Many professional players even fall short of analyzing the harmonic content deeply enough to bring out all the appropriate tensions!

Let's look at Sor's Study No. 17 again, this time in measure 45.



At the end of measure 45, an augmented chord leads into a major chord in measure 46. Notice how the B moves up to C, the D-sharp to E, and the G stays the same.

Measure 46 is also another example of *elision*, or a situation where this C major chord can function as both the last chord of the last phrase or the first chord of a new phrase. To create the right sense of direction, this chord should be louder than the surrounding notes.



# APPOGGIATURA



Next, let's look at a very common musical device called an *appoggiatura*. Appoggiaturas are dissonant notes which don't belong to the current harmony, but usually resolve to consonant ones by means of descending stepwise movement.

For example, a C major chord could be played with an F instead of an E, and resolve to E after some time has passed. This F would function as an appoggiatura into E.

The word itself, "appoggiatura" comes from an Italian word meaning "leaning". Given this information and knowledge of how to treat dissonances, it is logical to *lean* on the appoggiatura. Give it slightly more emphasis to clarify the tension that has been created.

It's critical to have a working knowledge of harmony to spot appoggiaturas. In the Classical period, appoggiaturas were often notated as grace notes, but they are very often hidden in scores with no way of spotting them other than being aware of the harmony.



Let's look next at Carcassi's Study No. 16. This piece is in F major, beginning with a tonic harmony. The second measure moves to the dominant harmony (C seventh), but with the seventh, B-flat in the bass.



**Nº 16.** *Andante.*

Additionally, there's an F in the top voice, which functions as an appoggiatura, and resolves down to E, the third of the chord. Carcassi was very thorough in writing diminuendos at every appoggiatura in this study, reinforcing the common practice of leaning on the tension and backing down on the resolution. Doing the opposite, or playing a crescendo on the appoggiatura, is one of the most common grammatical mistakes that guitarists make!

Appoggiaturas should always be connected to their resolution, as well, and this often requires some creative fingerings. For example, in the opening measures of Carcassi's Study No. 24, the C-sharp in the first measure resolves to a B in the second measure. Essentially, this is an appoggiatura within a line, so the two notes must be connected. A beginning guitarist will most likely finger this in a way that keeps the hand in one position. This is comfortable, but it creates a break just before the B.

**Nº 24.** *And<sup>no</sup> con espressione.*

To fix this, the finger that plays the C-sharp must not be needed for any notes in the following chord. The most comfortable option is to use the fourth finger for the C-sharp, freeing up the other three fingers to play the B dominant chord on the next beat. This keeps the phrase nice and connected.



Finally, work backwards to figure out where your fingers should start in order to end up in the right place. Emmanuel begins with his first finger, and shifts up at the first C-sharp, creating a nice portamento and enhancing the feeling of legato. This interpretation is far more musical than the original one, and keeps the emphasis on the dominant chord.

## VIRTUAL HARMONY



In some cases, the dominating harmony of a particular phrase will be implied, perhaps since many notes of the chord are missing. In this case, it's still important to understand what harmony is being stated, and emphasize notes that are dissonant. This kind of implied harmony is also called *virtual harmony*. Let's look at an example of this contained in Sor's Lesson No. 21, Op. 31.

21. **Andantino cantabile.**

Notice the fourth measure, where the second beat contains a B-flat and a D-natural. Since this harmony is sustained for longer, it's implied that B-flat major is the dominating harmony in this bar. As a result, the E and C on the first beat are, in fact, appoggiaturas. With this in mind, it becomes important to emphasize this first beat. Appoggiaturas can be present no matter how many notes are in the two chords. In measure 18 of Sor's Lesson No. 11, the first chord is diminished, leading to a major. Two notes move down by step (E to D and G to F).



Be sure to play the dissonant chord stronger, and the major chord with a sigh of release, perhaps with a slight pause before playing the next chord. In this case, the next chord is a B diminished, resolving to an F major with a C in the bass. In both of the cases, the chords contain several appoggiaturas that resolve into a consonant chord. Harmony has been the longest segment out of the five, but it is a result of the frequency with which guitarists overlook the importance of harmony, stress, and release. These simple concepts will be highly effective at bringing eloquence to your playing, so spend time getting into these habits!

## KEY TAKEAWAY

Appoggiaturas are notes, often in dissonant chords, that resolve to a consonant chord, usually by a descending step. The appoggiatura should always be emphasized, and the following resolution should be a bit softer, since it is where the release finally comes.

# READING A SCORE



To round off the course, let's look at how to read a score and interpret everything that this lesson has covered so far. There is a lot of detective work needed to create a dramatic story out of a simple score. While single pieces of grammar are quite simple to understand and perform, there are usually many of them happening simultaneously in a real piece of music, and this can make it very difficult to organize a conceptual approach to interpretation. For this course, Emmanuel will show how to break down a piece of complex musical discourse into smaller components that each contribute to an engaging performance.

Sor's Lesson No. 13, Op. 31 is a superb example of all four of the discussed topics coming together.

Ferd. Sor, *oeuv. 31.Cahier II.*

13. *Andante.*

The image shows a musical score for Sor's Lesson No. 13, Op. 31, marked 'Andante'. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a 3/4 time signature, and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music is written in a style characteristic of Sor's guitar lessons, featuring a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 below the notes. Dynamics such as 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte) are used. The second staff continues the piece, showing a change in key signature to two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and further complex rhythmic patterns. The score is numbered '13.' on the left.



Let's look at the balance in the first line. Make sure the top line, the melody, has enough emphasis to be clearly recognized as the melody. The diatonic sixth below is a supporting voice, so it deserves some importance, but a bit less than the melody. The bass should be much softer than both voices.

Next, think about the articulation. Since the intervals are mostly small, the piece is slow, and the rhythms are simple and repetitive, legato seems like the most musical choice for this section. Play as smoothly as possible with the right hand.



In regards to phrasing, musical sense will show that the first phrase ends at the end of the fourth measure, and the next one begins in the fifth measure. Over the next two lines, the phrases seem to fall into pretty equal chunks of four bars each.

Once the phrases are delineated, choose the emphasis of the phrases. Each phrase will have one chord that receives the most emphasis. In the first phrase, this is the dominant chord in measure three. Using knowledge of harmony, notice that the downbeat of measure four is still a dissonance, and so should be played loudly.

Finally, the last beat of measure four should be soft, since it is the consonant resolution.

This interpretation will inform Emmanuel's fingerings. Notice how he keeps his third finger down on the C and drags the other two to make the double appoggiatura even more clear.

Continuing, there is another double appoggiatura in the sixth bar (first beat), and a grace note in measure seven that signals an important chord. Emphasize both of these.

In the eighth bar, the C and E form another double appoggiatura into the G major chord at the end of the phrase. Don't forget to keep the G on the second beat soft.



In measure eighteen, the top line is less interesting than the middle voice. Since this phrase begins in measure seventeen, bring out the middle voice from there until the end of the focus shifts to the top voice in twenty-one. Here, the D-sharp in the top voice creates an augmented chord, a sharp dissonance drawing our attention.

Finally, the D-sharp in measure twenty-two resolves to the note E by use of an appoggiatura. Always play a crescendo into the tension and a decrescendo out of the tension. As the phrase finally ends, in the beginning of measure twenty-four, return to the softest dynamic.

# CONCLUSION



A performer's job is to create meaningful and compelling performances, regardless of the simplicity of the piece. Often, the simplest of phrases can have the deepest effect on an audience, but it takes effort and diligence to maximize each piece's expressive potential. The advice in this course is applicable regardless of the level of piece you are playing. In addition, no matter your level of ability, application of these concepts will aid in bringing your playing to the next level.

“Endeavor to play easy pieces well, and with elegance.  
For that is better than playing difficult places badly”.  
-Robert Schumann

This saying is perhaps the very reason one should study musical grammar, since it reduces a performance down to the smallest elements that make it captivating, expressive, and clear to an audience. We hope you have enjoyed this course! Best of luck on your journey!



# RESOURCES



## **Lesson On Phrasing by Tilman Hoppstock**

For another take on phrasing, check out this great lesson by Tilman Hoppstock, where he explores how to take a personalized approach to phrasing by experimenting with musical lines.

## **Emmanuel Sowicz on Sonata K.333 by Scarlatti**

Interested in hearing more by Emmanuel? Check out his detailed look into the many layers of expression and technique with a lesson on this “sparkling and light” piece, full of tips for more challenging fingering techniques.





# NOTES



A series of horizontal lines for writing notes, consisting of 17 evenly spaced lines.

