

Playing and singing at the same time

You can only think about one thing at the same time, and so in order to be able to play chords (which has a number of different processes: the left hand needs to change, the right hand needs to keep a steady strumming pattern, and you need to recall the sequence), all the playing aspect has to be sufficiently well known to be automatic.

1. Get really familiar with the song. Listen to it in a new way – not in the way you usually listen to music. Listen to everything about it-notice more deeply what's going on-dynamics, emphasis, how long each part is, you can count it out.
2. Learn the guitar part, strip it back, keep it simple. Extract any challenging bits and work on them separately.
3. Play the guitar part while talking! If you can play the guitar part automatically while talking to yourself or a friend. If so, you're ready to add singing.
4. Now listen back to the song for the singing and drill down into all the detail you can in terms of volume, dynamics, range, intensity etc.
5. Some people suggest writing out the lyrics-because that really reinforces the structure of the song and listening.
6. Work on the singing separately.
7. Make sure you know what syllable the chords change on. You can annotate the lyrics to be sure you know where the chord changes happen in relation to the beat.
8. Now strum downstrokes on the beat with a muted guitar, do it along with the original recording and sing along. This is the first part of automation.
9. Now play the chords four strums per bar and sing along, or speak the lyrics aloud in the correct rhythm (if this is harder than simply singing them, stick with singing them).
10. Now combine whatever the rhythm of the song is with the chords. Voila!

It's also a great idea to get very clear on exactly which rhythmic subdivision each rhythm hit of vocal note lands on. Slow it down so that your brain has a chance to process exactly where in the bar each bit of activity is happening, especially if there is syncopation.