## How to Best Use Technology while Practicing
by Dennis Winge

In today's world there are so many apps and devices coming out virtually every day that it would be impossible to write a definitive guide to all the best technology available to help you practice more efficiently.  However, a bit of guidance on how to best use certain types of currently available hardware or software can be used as food for thought for creatively applying these concepts to your own particular situation.  By technology we are specifically referring to things that can help you practice more efficiently and creatively.


## I.  Slowing Down a Song

Software that allows you to preserve the pitch but slow down a song (like Audacity for example) are free and have been in use for many years.  So are you taking advantage of it?  Have you tried slowing down your favorite song to a) accurately transcribe it or b) play along with it?

Going one step further, there is also a way to change the speed of YouTube videos without changing the pitch.  Click settings, click speed, choose your speed.  (See below.)  Also, if you right click on the image, you can choose "loop" if you want to play multiple times without manually restarting.



The Dead South - In Hell I'll Be In Good Company [Official Music Video]
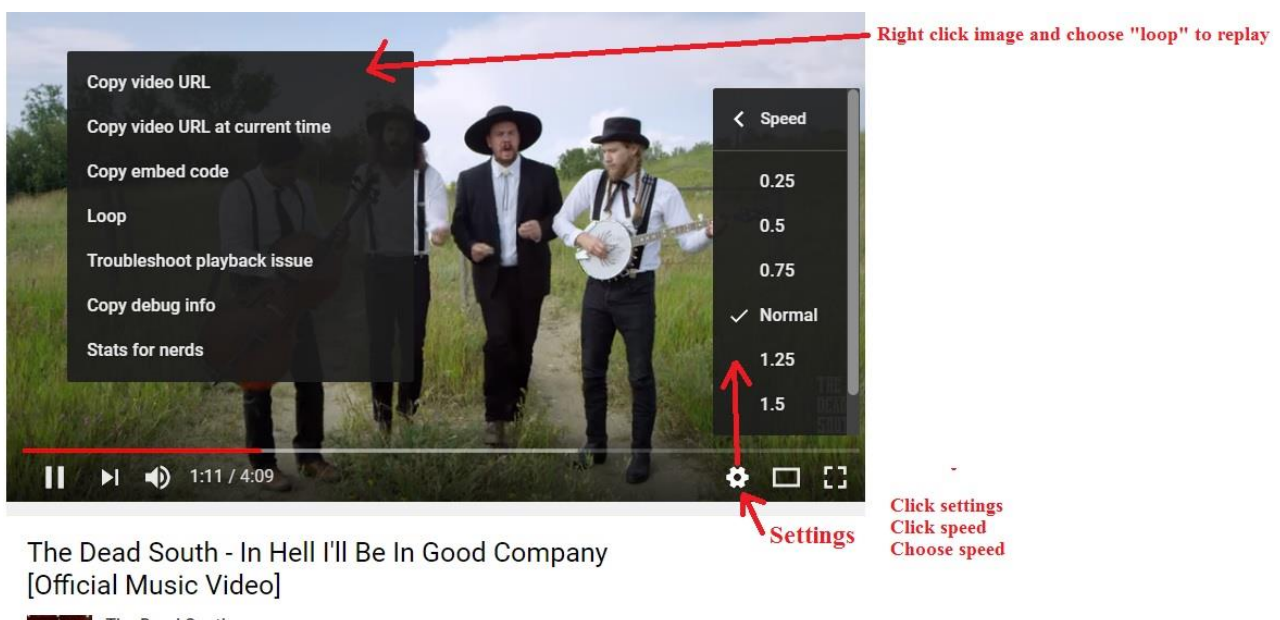

## II.  Loopers

Loopers are devices whereby you record your guitar and mark the start and end point with a foot-pedal and the device plays it back over and over.  The original ones were the Digitech JamMan and the Boss Loop Station. These can be very useful while practicing either a) a section of a tune you need to play along with b) soloing over a certain chord progression c) practicing in an unusual time signature or countless other ways.

Nowadays, devices can even generate a bass and drum line based on the chords & rhythm you play, like the Digitech Trio.  The newer ones even let you add a loop of rhythm

guitar on top of that!  In using such devices, it instantly gives you feedback on things like a) how clean and well-articulated are your chords?  b) how is your rhythm?  c) can you now play along with and keep your place in the loop you've just created?

## III. Backing Track Generators

A backing track generator is a program where you can type in chord names and then choose a style and the software makes an instant backing track that you can loop for hours if you want to.  The classic example is the program Band-in-a-Box.  And there is also an app for Apple users called Backing Track where you pay something like $2 per style.  Needless to say these can be quite a great tool for jamming on your own.  You can change the tempo, key, instrumentation, style etc. all virtually instantaneously.

## IV. Don't Rely On Technology

Despite all the benefits of technology, if you want to really grow as a musician, don't rely on it solely.  There's an old saying in jazz (which applies to all genres of music now) – "If you can't swing on your own, you can't swing at all."  To get an idea of what this means, try to record yourself jamming without a backing track one day.  Don't listen to it until the following week, when you won't remember what you played.  It will reveal whether you have become dependent on jam tracks to sound good.

If using a looper to solo over, keep in mind it would be better if you recorded yourself playing the same progression over and over rather than the doing it only once and let the looper feed it back to you thereafter.  Playing rhythm on a tune has many advantages like a) you'll really memorize the song playing it over and over; b) you get to hear yourself from the point of view of the soloist afterwards; c) you can experiment with different voicings, etc.

And remember, no device can ever take the place of playing with other musicians.  No jam box is going to be able to vary the dynamics, the harmonic and rhythmic backdrop, the timber, or to explore motivic development etc.  So jam with other people as much as possible.

All that being said, using technology can make your practicing a lot more fun and immediately rewarding.  So take advantage of the many gadgets and apps out there and improve your musicianship while making great music!