



Playing along to your favorite songs is a great way to get practice and improve. However, as you progress, the time will soon come when you will need to actually “learn” a song and be able to play it accurately like the recording to the best of your ability.

Maybe you want to learn it for your own benefit or perhaps you need to learn it for a performance. Regardless, when learning a song “note for note” it requires more focus and attention to detail. Like anything, at first it might be challenging, but the more you work at it, the more your skills will improve.

Careful Listening

Learning a song accurately is largely about LISTENING very carefully and paying specific attention to aspects of the music rather than just listening for fun. Being able to identify what each drum sounds like is a vital part of this process.

Help Is Available

I highly recommend at least TRYING your best to learn it “by ear” so that you can improve each time. If you get stuck, and you probably will, don’t forget that there are several resources available to you that can help. YouTube is an endless resource and most likely someone has made a video breaking down the parts of the song you are trying to learn. You could also look on the Internet for help or even ask your drum instructor if you have one.

Key Things To Pay Attention To When Listening:

- What type of beat is being played in each section?
- Which drums are being used in the beats?
- How long is each section of the song?
- What is the pulse, what is the count?
- Is the snare on “2” and “4” or something else?
- Is the right hand playing the hi-hat or ride?
- What is the kick pattern?
- Does the song have a specific “feel?” Is there a groove or swing?
- Pay attention to the dynamics of each section. Is it loud and energetic, or softer and calm?



Helpful Advice And Tips For Success:

- Identify the pulse and count (time signature). Once you find the count, then you will have a good idea what type of beats will fit the song.
- Listen to the song at least twice each day. Use headphones/earbuds or a good speaker system (not your phone speakers, if possible).
- If possible, give yourself a week, this gives you time to listen a few times each day and figure things out.
- If needed, you may simplify the beats if you find them too difficult at first. You don't always have to play the exact beat note-for-note in order to still play the song with other musicians.
- As you listen to the song, don't just casually listen -- focus on the drums. Imagine what you would play in each section.
- Learn where each song section moves into the next; learn to EXPECT it. If the changes catch you by surprise, then you haven't learned the song well enough yet -- KEEP LISTENING!
- The ultimate goal is to be able to sit and run the whole song in your head, away from the drums, without the song playing.
- This all takes time, but keep at it. YOU WILL GET THERE!