Approach Notes and Enclosures for Jazz Guitar Guide

As a student of Jazz guitar, learning how to improvise can involve listening as well as learning licks, solos, and transcriptions. The process of emulating Jazz greats through playing their solos is absolutely worth the effort.

However, in addition to learning lines and licks, it’s invaluable for a learner of Jazz to practice any overarching soloing techniques that can be identified from solo to solo.

Jazz musicians often pull from a toolbox of soloing techniques and licks in order to put together a solo. Learning a lick is one thing, but learning the approach or technique behind the lick can provide endless opportunities for creative Jazz solo construction. It’s kind of like the old proverb…

*Teach someone a lick, they solo for a day; teach them a soloing approach, they solo for life.*

Well, it was either that or something to do with fish…Either way, I think you’re getting the idea.

The techniques that you’ll cover in this lesson, which are common amongst the greatest players in Jazz history, will allow you to expand your soloing vocabulary and strengthen your relationship with harmony and improvisation.

With these techniques you’ll find yourself creating lines that could be taken right out of a Joe Pass or Charlie Parker solo, without knowing a thing about either player.

So, what are these great methods for developing your improvisational ability?
Approach notes

Enclosures (also known as Encapsulations)

The three above terms all focus around the same concept: they refer to the concept of **highlighting specific chord tones** in your playing by using a specific sequence of chromatic and diatonic notes.

This guide will allow you to understand and apply these powerful soloing techniques to your playing in a methodical and **step-by-step fashion**.

At any point in the guide you can jump to the last section where you’ll walk through the **process of creating a solo** over the popular tune, Rhythm Changes using the material you’ll learn here.

*Just getting started in Jazz Guitar? Pick up a free copy of my 64-page eBook, The Jazz Guitar Primer, here and start learning now.*

Approaching and Enclosing Chord Tones
A true staple in the Jazz improvisation world is the **approach note technique**. It is a technique that has been used by all of the greatest Jazz improvisers of the 20th century.

Working with the approach note and enclosure technique greatly increases awareness of **arpeggios**, the fretboard, and the sounds of each chord as it forces us to focus on **chord tones** other than the **root**.

The soloing methods you'll learn throughout the guide are easy, yet meaningful ways to incorporate powerful Jazz-sounding **chromaticism** into your playing. In addition to adding a **chromatic** sound to your **improvising**, the approach note technique will also bring out the **harmonic content** of the tune.

Being able to solo over a tune in way that allows the listener to hear the chord changes is a highly sought-after ability amongst developing Jazz musicians.

Before jumping into the first exercises, familiarize yourself with the term **target tone**. You’ll see the term target tone pop up throughout this guide and it refers to a specific chord tone of focus in the solo, or lick (ie: the **root**, **third**, **fifth** or **seventh** of the chord you’re improvising over).

You’ll use the target tone as the basis for your approach notes and encapsulations.

This guide will focus on building the approach note and enclosure technique over a **II – V – I progression in C major** (Dm7 – G7 – Cmaj7). For each exercise, you’ll be focusing on a particular **target tone** to apply the approach notes to.

In order to be as thorough as possible, you’ll start by applying the given approach to the chord root of each note in the II – V – I progression, followed by the 3rd, 5th and 7th.

The reason the you’ll work through every chord tone is so that you can familiarize yourself with the **sound and flavor** of each note in the II – V – I progression. Focusing on every chord tone will also open up a huge opportunity for easily **building and accessing new solo ideas**.
Single Chromatic Approach Note

The **single chromatic approach** involves playing a single note a half-step away from a given chord tone, like the root, followed by the root. As you can imagine, this...
approach can either come from a chromatic note higher than the chord tone or a note lower.

So, if you’re approaching the chord root of a Cm7 chord (C), then the single chromatic approach would require you to approach the target tone of C from either a B (1 chromatic note below) or a Db (one chromatic note above).

Can you approach a note from above and below at the same time? Yes! However, approaching a note from above and below at the same time is an enclosure technique, which you’ll learn about after a few more steps.

The video above illustrates the playing of the two examples below, first the chord root approach, followed by the chord 3rd approach.

**Chord root Approach:**

As you can see in the example below, the target tone is the root note of the given chord (D for Dm7, G for G7, etc...) and the approach note is one chromatic note below the target tone.
Chord 3rd Approach:

The same chromatic approach is applied for the chord 3rd example below as well, but this time instead of the chord root, you’ll be playing the chord 3rd (F for Dm7, B for G7, etc...).

This video demonstrates the next two excerpts, which you can find below. Instead of playing over the chord root and 3rd, this time you’ll play over the chord 5th and 7th.
Get familiar with the sound of each chord tone by playing through the examples a number of times. Knowing how each chord tone sounds and how to access it on the fretboard is a recipe for success in Jazz improvisation.

Chord 5th Approach:

As you continue with the single chromatic approach, you’ll be playing the approach note 1 semi-tone (1 fret) below the target tone (in this case the chord 5th).

Chord 7th Approach:

To complete your study of the single chromatic approach, play through the example below. The chord 7th is a particularly important chord tone to familiarize yourself with when learning how to improvise. The chord 7th adds distinct color to any given 7th chord and harmonic depth to your solo.
Practice Suggestions

Here are a few practice suggestions to aid you as you progress through this guide.

1) Practice slowly

2) Focus on tone and rhythmic accuracy

3) Play each example in every area of the guitar. Eg. if the first note you are targeting is a C on the A-string, make sure you play the exercise beginning from all C’s on the guitar (when possible).

4) Work out how to play the exercise, when possible, on a single string.

5) Play each example in every key

6) Take the exercise through as many tunes as possible. The end of the guide will provide instruction and examples on playing the
technique through tunes using Rhythm Changes as an example.

Single Diatonic Approach Note

The **single diatonic approach** is very similar to the previous chromatic approach. The only difference here is that instead of approaching the target tone chromatically, you’re approaching the target tone from the closest **diatonic note**.

The term diatonic refers to the notes within a given key.

In C major you have the following notes: **C, D, E, F, G, A, and B**. If your target tone is F, a diatonic approach from above or below F would be accomplished by playing either the **E or G respectively** (both notes that fall within the key of C).

Because the major key has two pairs of notes that are only a semi-tone apart (in C major this is B and C, and E and F), it’s possible to have a diatonic approach that is also **chromatic**!

The video above shows the two examples below played one after the other, starting with the chord root approach and ending with the chord 3rd approach.
**Chord Root Approach:**

Here you can see the diatonic approach notes approaching the **target tones**. As the example is in the key of C, C approaches the D root in the first bar, followed by F approaching the G root in the second bar and finally the B approaching the C root in the third bar.

![Chord Root Approach Diagram](image)

**Chord 3rd Approach:**

The chord 3rd approach uses the same diatonic approach concept as in the previous chord root approach example.

E approaches the chord 3rd of Dm7 (F) in bar one.

A approaches the chord 3rd of G7 (B) in bar two.

D approaches the chord 3rd of Cmaj7 (D) in bar three.
This video shows the next two excerpts for the chord 5th and 7th diatonic approach. Use the video as a reference when playing through the next two exercises.

**Chord 5th Approach:**

Here the chord 5th of each chord in the II-V-I progression is approached diatonically from the **next lowest note**. Play through and hear how it compares to the other chord tones you’ve played over. Can you hear the changes from the chord 5th alone?
Chord 7th Approach:

To complete your diatonic study, here is the chord 7th diatonically approached from below.

Double Chromatic Approach Notes

After playing through the single chromatic approach, you can make things even more interesting by doubling the number of chromatic approach notes to 2. Using two chromatic approach notes consecutively gives you a longer line and can help you
connect phrases in your soloing.

If your target tone is C, it can be approached by two chromatic notes from either **above** or **below**. If the C is approached from 2 lower chromatic notes the result would be A# and B approaching C. Conversely, you can approach the C from 2 higher chromatic notes, the approach notes themselves being D and Db.

Although this section of the guide focuses on approaching chromatic notes from below, feel free to **experiment** with approaching the target tone from above after playing through each excerpt.

Play through the examples below to get comfortable with the double chromatic approach on the guitar.

The video here demonstrates the two examples below played one after another. Listen to how the line is extended when two chromatic notes are used to approach the target tone.

**Chord Root Approach:**

Suddenly, a chord root can be used in a solo without running the risk of sounding too ‘**inside**’. When you start featuring more chromatic material in your solos, playing root notes creates a desirable **tension and release** balance.
Chord 3rd Approach:

Moving on, you can also apply the double chromatic approach to the chord 3rd. The sound here is a bit different than with the root, but equally as interesting and useful in an improvisational context.
Use the video above as a reference when playing through the next double chromatic approach examples. This time you’ll be targeting the chord 5th and 7th of each chord. **Listen** for the differences in the following examples and the chord 3rd and root note examples you just played through.

**Chord 5th Approach:**

In this exercise the chord 5th is targeted in each chord in the II – V – I progression. Chromatic approach notes are an easy way to get a more outside sound when playing the chord 5th of a given chord. On its own, the chord 5th doesn’t have much flavor to it. However, when the 5th is combined with **chromaticism**, a number of unique sounds instantly become available.

![Chord 5th Approach Example]

**Chord 7th Approach:**

![Chord 7th Approach Example]
The double chromatic approach to the chord 7th is one of the more dissonant sounding approaches. The 7th itself can be heard as having a great deal of tension relative to the root note, and when additional chromatic pitches are thrown in the mix, you’ll find some “outside” sounds you may have been looking for.

### Double Diatonic Approach Notes

The **double diatonic approach** follows the same logic as the double chromatic approach, but instead of using chromatic notes exclusively, diatonic notes are played. When approaching a chord tone, the double diatonic approach actually results in the playing of 2 chord tones.

Hitting more chord tones in a solo can bring out the **chord changes**. Because the double diatonic approach happens to require the playing of 2 chord tones, it’s an excellent tool that can help you express the chord changes in your solo.

As you progress through each exercise, you’ll see how multiple chord tones are played when applying the double diatonic approach.
The video above shows the next two exercises featuring the double diatonic approach of the chord root followed by the chord 3rd of a II-V-I progression.

**Chord Root Approach:**

As mentioned earlier, when approaching the chord root 2 diatonic notes from below, you’ll end up with **two chord tones** (root and 7th).

This approach can be seen as starting from the 13th of each chord (an extension rather then the core R-3-5-7 notes of each chord) as B is the 13th of Dm7, E is the 13th of G7 and A is the 13th of Cmaj7.

![Chord Root Approach Diagram]

**Chord 3rd Approach:**
When using the double chromatic approach with the chord 3rd, you’ll always end up with the **chord root** as your first approach note.

F is the 3rd of Dm7, and 2 diatonic notes below F is D (root).

B is the 3rd of G7, and 2 diatonic notes below B is G (root).

E is the 3rd of Cmaj7, and 2 diatonic notes below E is C (root).

The video here is a performance of the next 2 exercises below. In the video the chord 5th example is played followed the chord 7th.

**Chord 5th Approach:**
When approaching the chord 5th of a given chord from 2 diatonic notes below, you’ll get the **chord 3rd** as one of the approach notes.

A is the 5th of Dm7, and 2 diatonic notes below A is F (3rd).

D is the 5th of G7, and 2 diatonic notes below D is B (3rd).

G is the 5th of Cmaj7, and 2 diatonic notes below G is E (3rd).

**Chord 7th Approach:**

Lastly, when the chord 7th is approached 2 diatonic notes from below, you will again end up playing an additional chord tone. This time, you’ll end up playing the **chord 5th** as one of the approach notes and the 7th as the target tone.

C is the 7th of Dm7, and 2 diatonic notes below C is A (5th).

F is the 7th of G7, and 2 diatonic notes below F is D (5th).

B is the 7th of Cmaj7, and 2 diatonic notes below B is G (5th).
Diatonic Enclosure

After working through different chord tone approaches that originate from a single direction, it’s time to find out what happens when a target tone is approached from both directions.

The term **enclosure** is used when a chord tone is approached from both above and below. The approach notes of the enclosure aren’t played at the same time, they are played consecutively.

So, a target tone can be enclosed by a lower note followed by a higher note, or a higher note followed by a lower note. As an example, using C as a target tone requires D and B to be played one after another to create an enclosure (playing B before D is also possible).

This section of the guide will focus on diatonic enclosures that start with the **higher note first**. For each exercise you play through, reverse the order of the approach notes to explore even more possibilities for soloing.
This video will give you an aural and visual reference for the following diatonic chord root and 3rd enclosure exercises. You can also refer to the video if you need more information on fingering.

**Chord Root Enclosure:**

Here the chord root is enclosed by 2 diatonic notes, starting with a note higher than the root, then the note lower. Using the diatonic enclosure on the root will always give you the 9th and 7th of the chord you’re playing over.

![Dm7 (ii) G7 (V) Cmaj7 (I)](image)

**Chord 3rd Enclosure:**

Next, the chord 3rd is enclosed using the same diatonic enclosure. After playing through this example, work on playing the enclosure in reverse.
To reverse the enclosure you’ll play the lower approach note followed by the higher approach note. So, for Dm7, you’ll play E followed by G and finally F.

The video above will help you navigate through the next two exercises. The video plays the chord 5th enclosure followed by the chord 7th enclosure.

**Chord 5th Enclosure:**

In this exercise, you’ll enclose the **chord 5th** by using 2 diatonic notes. Don’t forget to reverse the approach notes of the enclosure after playing through the example.
Chord 7th Enclosure:

When the chord 7th is enclosed by 2 diatonic notes, you end up with an additional chord tone. Because the chord 7th is enclosed with a note 1 diatonic note from above, you’ll end up playing the root as well.

Diatonic-Chromatic Enclosure
(diatonic above, chromatic below)

As you may have already guessed, the diatonic-chromatic enclosure is a
combination between the diatonic and chromatic enclosure. This enclosure is one of the most frequently used enclosures in Jazz guitar improvisation.

This section of the guide will run through 4 examples of the diatonic-chromatic enclosure on the root, 3rd, 5th and 7th of each chord in the II-V-I progression.

Using a diatonic note and a chromatic note gives this enclosure a unique and balanced sound. Play through each example to get a feel for the diatonic-chromatic enclosures; they’re an important tool to have for Jazz improvisation.

The video above will play through the chord root exercise, followed by the chord 3rd exercise. If you have any questions about the fingering or the sound of the exercises, use it as a reference.

**Chord Root Enclosure:**

When using the diatonic-chromatic enclosure on the root note of a 7th chord that has a flattened 7th (like Dm7, and G7), you end up with a **crunchier sound**.

Because the diatonic chromatic enclosure requires that you approach the root note from a diatonic note above, and a chromatic note below, you end up with a raised 7th on m7 and 7 chord qualities. For example:

D (root of Dm7) is approached by E and C# (raised 7th relative to the C natural that is
found in a Dm7 chord). The C# provides a desirable amount of tension before resolving to the root.

The G (root of G7) is approached by A and F# (another raised 7th). Again, the F# provides an interesting tension and release line.

So, the next time you’re improvising over a tune, try to think outside of the chord tones contained within each chord; one approach to this is to apply the diatonic-chromatic enclosure.

Chord 3rd Enclosure:

Continue on by playing the diatonic-chromatic enclosure over the 3rd of each chord in the II-V-I progression.
Before moving on to the last approach technique, check out the video above, which illustrates the next 2 diatonic-chromatic enclosures played over the chord 5th and 7th of each chord in the II-V-I progression.

**Chord 5th Enclosure:**

Using a chromatic approach note from below the 5th brings out the #11 in any chord.

From the 5th of Dm7 (A), the enclosure consists of B and G# (#11).

From the 5th of G7 (D), the enclosure consists of E and C# (#11).

From the 5th of Cmaj7 (G), the enclosure consists of A nd F# (#11).

It’s important to remember that enclosures and extensions act more as passing tones. Their function is to add tension and movement to a line, rather than bring out the flavor of a particular chord extension, like the #11. If you really want to bring out the sound of a #11 chord, you could hold on to the #11, rather than resolve it to the 5th.
You could also experiment with using enclosures with extensions, in which case the #11 would be your **target tone**.

**Chord 7th Enclosure:**

The last of the chord tones in the II-V-I progression are the **7ths**. Using the diatonic-chromatic enclosure over the 7th will always give you the root note of the given chord tone, a note one semi-tone lower and of course, the root.
Last but not least, the chromatic enclosure. In order to perform the chromatic enclosure, all that is necessary is that you play a chromatic note above and below the target tone. It’s the easiest of the enclosures to perform, but the trickiest to handle musically.

As the chromatic enclosure demands that you play 2 nonconsecutive chromatic notes, the sound can get ‘outside’ sounding really quick. Take the time to really listen to the chromatic approach of each chord tone, noting which examples you enjoy the most, so that you may apply it to your vocabulary.

The video above is a play-through of the next two exercises covering the chord root and 3rd enclosures.
**Chord Root Enclosure:**

When enclosing the root note using only chromatic enclosures, you’ll always get the crunchy sounding **b9** and **7th** of the chord you’re approaching. In some situations this denser approach can work wonders.

![Chord Root Enclosure Diagram](image)

**Chord 3rd Enclosure:**

Next is the chord 3rd enclosure using chromatic notes from above and below.

![Chord 3rd Enclosure Diagram](image)
This last video before the chord solos shows the next two examples of the chromatic enclosure on the chord 5th and 7th of each chord in the II-V-I progression. In the video, the chord 5th enclosure is played first, followed by the chord 7th.

**Chord 5th Enclosure:**

Using the chromatic enclosure on the chord 5th will always give you both the #5 and b5 of the chord you’re approaching.

**Chord 7th Enclosure:**

Lastly listen carefully and work through the chromatic enclosure of the chord 7th before moving on to the *Rhythm Changes study.*
Building a Solo over Rhythm Changes

Rhythm Changes is considered as a tricky tune to improvise over. The A-sections contain 2 chords per bar, and the tune itself is up-tempo.

With so little time to play over a single chord, using approach notes and enclosures will allow you to get the flavor of each passing chord in your solo.

The approach notes themselves add movement and tension to the solo, while the target tone brings resolution and a sense of harmony.

As you’ve seen earlier in the lesson, the approach notes and target tones take up as few beats as 2 eighth notes (the approach note(s) and the target tone), making them a perfect candidate for the fast-paced Rhythm Changes.

When first applying the approach note technique over Rhythm Changes, focus on one chord tone at a time.

Do this until that chord tone (whether it be the 3rd, 5th or 7th) comes as quickly to mind as the root of the chord when the chord comes up.

The approach note technique can also be practiced away from the guitar! After memorizing the chord changes to a tune, practice saying the chord changes in your head (or out loud) followed by the chord tone you’re practicing.
If you’re focusing on approaching the **chord third** through the A-section to Rhythm Changes, recite something like this:

Bb maj 7 – chord 3rd is D

Gm7 – chord 3rd is Bb

Cm7 – chord 3rd is Eb

F7 – chord 3rd is A

Bbmaj7 – chord 3rd is D

Gm7 – chord 3rd is Bb

Cm7 – chord 3rd is Eb

F7 – chord 3rd is A

And so on...
After identifying the chord tone you wish to focus on, decide on an approach. In the following exercises you’ll approach the chord 3rd diatonically from above and chromatically from below.

Here are the 4 steps you’ll follow to create a Rhythm Changes solo using enclosures and approach notes:

Step 1: Identify and Play Target Tone

Step 2: Apply Enclosure to Target Tone

Step 3: Eighth Note Study

Step 4: Rhythm and Variation

Step 1: Identify and Play Target Tone

In this exercise, the chord third is the target note. Try to play through the whole tune like the example below in each position of the guitar (after you’ve completed the below example).

You can use the video above as a reference for the sound while you maneuver to different areas of the guitar.

As in the example below, try to keep your playing limited to a single position while exploring other areas of the guitar.
Playing strictly within the boundaries of each octave (or scale shape) on the guitar, will ensure you don’t have any holes in your perception of the fretboard.

Step 2: Apply Enclosure to Target Tone

Now that you’ve created a foundation for yourself in identifying the 3rd of each chord in Rhythm Changes, you’ll apply the enclosures to the target tone (3rd).

Using only chromatic-diatonic enclosures, you’ll play through the example below, which will create lines that can stand on their own in a real musical situation (granted, you wouldn’t play a whole chorus of solo using the same enclosure of the 3rd, but in
Step 3: Eighth Note Study

Now, for step 3, apply additional **chord tones**, between each enclosure.

All of the notes are identical to Step 2, with the addition of an **extra eighth note** (highlighted in blue). The additional note in this case is another **chord tone**. The next step would be to experiment with other diatonic or chromatic notes.
Within this study are a number of different solo ideas that you can recreate in part or note-for-note using steps 1 through 3. Not only do these steps apply to Rhythm Changes, but any set of Jazz chord changes.

Below is the same example as above, but without any notes highlighted (much easier to read this way!).
At step 4, you’ll apply some of the most important elements of music – rhythm and variation. To help create harmonic variation, the second half of the exert involves approaching chord roots.

The notes highlighted in red indicate the approach notes. You’ll notice that a few different approach note techniques and enclosures have been used. See if you can identify the different approach note techniques from the material found earlier in this guide.

Notes highlighted in blue are additional chord tones (that have not been approached) added to complete the solo.
Rhythmically, I have included **triplets** and placed important **chord tones** (eg. chord **root** and **3rd**) on off beats.

These small rhythmic variations make all the difference in the creation of great Jazz solos. As the solo below is only a sample of what could be done with approach notes and enclosures.

I suggest that after you learn this solo, you work towards creating your own solos with similar variations.

Be sure to work back through steps 1 to 4 in order to create more solo material.

The music below is again the same as above, it is included for easy reading purposes!
Have any questions about Jazz guitar, or any comments on the lessons?

I love to hear from you, so please feel free to leave a comment below or shoot me an e-mail from the contact page here.

Happy practicing!