

# Improvising Over Chord Changes

## Areas for Winds to Focus On

### 1. Chord Tone Mastery (Arpeggios)

- Practice arpeggios through full range of your instrument — both ascending and descending.
- Focus on clean articulation and even tone through register shifts.
- Use guide-tone lines (3rds & 7ths) to clearly define the harmony, especially through ii–V–I progressions.

### 2. Scales and Modes

- Learn scales for each chord type (major, minor, dominant, diminished) and practice them in all keys.
- Play patterns and scale fragments rather than running full scales.
- Work on finger–tongue coordination to make modal shifts smooth.

### 3. Voice Leading and Smooth Transitions

- Connect chords by half-step or whole-step movement between chord tones (e.g., 7 → 3).
- Practice short progressions (ii–V–I) in all 12 keys.
- Sing the guide tones before playing them — this locks in your ear and helps internalize the motion.

### 4. Ear Training and Melodic Awareness

- Practice singing what you play and playing what you sing.
- Transcribe horn players (e.g., Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, J.J. Johnson, Cannonball Adderley) — emulate their phrasing and note choice.
- Use backing tracks or drones to train your ear to hear tension and resolution.

### 5. Rhythm and Phrasing

- Think in short musical sentences (motifs) rather than long note streams.
- Practice improvising with rhythm only (no pitch) to strengthen time feel.
- Work on articulation variety — legato, staccato, ghosted.



### 6. Understanding the Progression

- Memorize common progressions (e.g., blues, rhythm changes, ii–V–I).
- Learn to hear and anticipate chord shifts without relying on a chart.
- Play through changes slowly, focusing on hitting the right color tones (3rds, 7ths, 9ths).



### 7. Motivic Development

- Take a short motif and develop it across chord changes — transpose, invert, rhythmically alter it.
- This keeps solos cohesive and melodic rather than scale-based.

### 8. Listening and Vocabulary

- Transcribe solos (not just from your instrument) — each offers phrasing lessons:
  - Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Freddie Hubbard, Coleman Hawkins, JJ Johnson, Clifford Brown
- Analyze how they outline chords and shape phrases rhythmically.

### 9. Technical Facility and Air Support

- Keep your air steady and relaxed, especially when improvising in upper registers.
- Practice long tones and lip flexibility (brass) or overtone exercises (sax) to maintain tone control while navigating changes.
- Slow, controlled improvisation helps keep tone and articulation consistent.