



## Effects Pedals with My Guitar Lessons

My Guitar Lessons knows that's an effects pedal, put in the simplest terms, is an effects unit contained within a metal box that is usually operated by a switch that you press with your foot - hence why they are often referred to as 'stomp boxes'. They work by altering the input signal from your guitar and adding effects before the signal is passed to the amplifier.

Usually, the input is on the right (this is where your guitar lead is gonna plug in) and the output is on the left (this is where a second lead will go from the pedal to the amp). Bear in mind though, that if you own more than one effects pedal you can use them in a chain - for example, your guitar plugs into the first pedal, then a lead runs from the output on that pedal to the input on the next pedal, another lead would run from that output to the input of the next pedal, then a lead would run from the output of that one into the amp...and so on. You may also find that with the right effects pedals, if you've never used them before, your guitar playing will suddenly sound much improved! It's amazing the difference a good sound can make - if you're trying to emulate any particular guitarist and you've just started out, it's important to remember that a pro guitarist inevitably has a much better tone than the cheap amp in your bedroom does. And tone is everything in guitar playing.

A standard effects pedal would have two settings - on (usually a light will light up on the pedal to show you it's on), and a bypass setting. Set to a bypass setting, the signal runs from your guitar through the pedal absolutely unaffected, which will give you a (usually fairly jangly) clean sound. This means that should you be using other effects pedals and/or any effects on an amplifier, any number of settings combinations will be possible by having certain ones on and certain ones on bypass. For example, if you have a distortion pedal and a wah pedal connected, if they're both on, you'd have a distortion-wah sound. Click the wah to bypass; now you only have a distortion sound. Click the wah on and the distortion to bypass, and you'd have a funky, clean wah sound. You get the idea...

Here's a quick run down of the most basic types of effects pedals, what sort of sound you may be going for when you're using them, and a few examples of where you can hear that sort of sound at work!

### **Reverb Pedal**

A reverb pedal may well be one of the first on your list, though you may also notice that a decent amp will have a more than adequate reverb function. What a reverb pedal basically does is simulate the sound of playing in a large empty room - so with your reverb pedal on, rather than have that jangly twangy clean sound you'll suddenly sound like you're playing a giant church hall with nobody in it! This sound should be much more pleasing on the ear than a twangy clean sound straight out of your amp. Again though, before you go out and buy one, realise that if you have a decent amp it probably has a reverb setting that does it anyway. This pedal is not to be confused with the next one on our list.

## Chorus Pedal



A chorus pedal works by copying the sound, adding some delay to it and playing it again with your original signal - this leads to a very warm, full, echoey sound, almost as if there are many guitars playing at once. Fiddling about with the settings will enable you to have either a mild echo to what you're playing just to pad out the sound and get rid of the nastiness of a purely clean twangy, treble sound, or end up with a crazy delay that echoes everything you're playing like you're in a giant cave. Somewhere in the middle, however, is usually where you're aiming for! If you've never used one of these pedals before, you'll probably notice that whatever you were playing/picking/strumming before suddenly sounds a lot better! Even small mistakes may suddenly become unnoticeable if they're masked slightly by an echo.

## Overdrive/Distortion Pedal



Don't be fooled into thinking that they're both the same, coz they're not! In the most idiot-proof terms, imagine the sound you'll get from an overdrive pedal to be like the opening riff from The Kinks "You Really Got Me". The original - not any cover version. Now imagine a distortion pedal to give you a modern distortion sound a la Motley Crue's "Dr Feelgood", Ozzy Osbourne's "Let Me Hear You Scream" or Lamb of God's "Redneck".

Overdrive and distortion pedals work by breaking up the signal coming in from the guitar, an effect which guitar nerds may refer to as "clipping". This leads to a more distorted signal, depending on the amount of "clipping" that's going on.

Let's start with the overdrive pedal. Anybody using an overdrive pedal has one of two intentions - the pedal is either used to provide a gain boost to push a tube amp into distorting, or simply used to mimic the sound of a slightly overdriven tube amp. In the first instance an overdrive pedal could be used, for example, as a gain boost for when you get to your guitar solo. You don't necessarily want a super-distorted sound when you're playing the verse, but you want that solo to ring nicely and cut through when you get to it, so you have an overdriven sound on the amp, then stomp the pedal on, adding more gain for a distorted solo sound. Bear in mind though, you're probably gonna want the volume boosting for your solo too.

In the second instance, you could use the pedal entirely by itself (no effects used on the amp) to get a cool, crunchy, often vintage, sound. Again, it's worth bearing in mind that if you have a decent amp and this is what you're going for, you may well be able to do exactly the same thing using only the gain controls and settings on the amp.

**NOTE:** - If you're planning to use an overdrive pedal for your main tone - i.e. it's going to

be on all the time when you're playing - make sure you get it with a mains power adapter. It'll save you a fortune in no time, with all that money you'd otherwise have to shell out replacing batteries.

Distortion pedals are much the same idea, but rather than alter your signal, they make no apologies for changing it completely. The idea with a distortion pedal is to be able to get the super-high gain sound of, say, a Mesa Boogie Triple Rectifier amp, and in turn have a sound ideal for high-gain styles of music, such as heavy metal. The tone control will help to raise or lower mid-range frequency and fiddling with the pedal controls will allow you to create tones suitable for any style of classic rock right through to the most extreme metal. All that extra distortion makes for a good solo sound too - particularly if you're into your shred guitar playing.

But before you run out and buy a distortion pedal - ask yourself this: "Can I get a good rhythm sound out of my amp alone?" If the answer to this is "yes", you may have no need for a distortion pedal. Get a good sound out of your amp (don't confuse that with "super-distorted" - I don't care how "heavy" you want to sound, 10/10 gain all the time is not necessarily the way to achieve it), and you may find an overdrive pedal is more than adequate to stomp on for your guitar solos/technical bits that require more of a distorted tone. Lots of rock/metal players seem to subscribe to the "the more gain, the better" idea and seem unable to tell that their guitar just sounds like a distorted noise.

## Wah-Wah Pedal



Ever since Jimi Hendrix arrived on the scene this has become a vital piece of kit for many electric guitarists. A wah-wah pedal (usually just referred to as a "wah pedal") looks different to any other pedal on this list, because it works in a totally different way. Rather than just stomping it on and forgetting about it, the wah pedal is to be controlled by you as you're playing, by rocking your foot backwards and forwards. Stomp it on then rock it back, and it makes a bassy sound. Rock it forwards and it makes a treble sound. Rocking between the two at the right rhythm to your playing is what gives it its characteristic "wah sound"...and may take a little practice at first. Stomp it again to get the bypass setting.

Alternatively, these pedals are also very popular within funk music, and would be used with a clean amp setting to give a very, er, "funky" sound. Extra effects can be achieved by rocking the pedal to a certain position and leaving it there (I've heard this referred to as "using the wah as a filter").

**NOTE:** Some models of wah pedal have an LED light that show when it's on. This might not seem like a big deal, but if you're jamming with a band/playing a gig and can't necessarily hear 100% of your tone, it's very easy to stomp the wah pedal on, play what you wanted to, then fail to stomp it off properly. You might not hear this from the stage, but if you're miked up through a PA system the crowd will hear the change in your rhythm tone as the wah is unintentionally left "on as a filter". The added treble might make you feed back too. Also, should this happen, you may stomp the pedal back "on" again for your solo or whatever, only to find that you've actually stomped it OFF and fail

to get the tone you were going for. If you're rocking a wah pedal with no wah sound coming out you'll look like a bit of a douche - and it's pretty lame to be playing a gig and be uncertain as to whether your wah is on or not! My advice, personally, would be to get a wah pedal with an LED light on it. Sounds dumb, but you may well wish you'd listened to me if you don't! A SWITCHLESS wah is also available (though it may be more expensive) and is only activated when your foot is on it - otherwise it's constantly in bypass mode. Stick your foot on it and it's wah-tastic. Take your foot off it, and it turns itself back to bypass mode. This sidesteps the issue of not knowing whether it's on or not and may also be something you want to look into.

## Fuzz Pedals



Basically, it's an overdrive pedal. It's just a vintage one. The most famous from this lot would be an "Arbiter Fuzz Face" pedal which was used by Jimi Hendrix and since has been seen as the ultimate in its category. Depending on the sound you're trying to get - and especially if you want to sound retro, and you're not particularly interested in super-high gain heavy metal sounds, it may be worth looking at a fuzz pedal.

It's very important that you try out a bunch of these before deciding on one - the standard of fuzz pedals may vary wildly depending on the quality of the resistors inside them. Back in the day, it would appear that sorting out good quality resistors from lousy ones was more trouble than the manufacturers could be bothered with, and as a result two pedals of the same model, by the same company, may be worlds apart in terms of quality.

## Floor Tuner



This is usually overlooked when people talk about stomp boxes, but it will quickly prove itself to be absolutely vital when you're playing live shows. The heat from the lights, and anything else producing heat in the venue - will have a drastic effect on the tuning of your guitar and as a result it's essential to make sure you stay in tune all the way through the show! Your physics teacher at school will have pointed out that as things cool down, they contract, and as they warm up, they expand. As a result, as your guitar strings heat up they will lower in pitch, and if you tune it up in a warm room, then play a freezing gig, your guitar strings are going to become sharper than you want them to be!

Like any other pedal, a floor tuner is going to be stomped on to tune up, and then stomped off again (onto bypass mode) for when you're playing. The distinct advantage to having one of these is that you can place it in your line of effects pedals, and no sound comes out of the amp when it's ON - so you can tune up without unplugging your guitar,

or having everyone else hear you tuning and sounding like an amateur. Just wait for an "in-between songs" moment, and off you go.

**NOTE:** DO NOT be one of those guitarists that insists he can "tune by ear" and therefore doesn't need a tuner. It really doesn't get much more amateur than that - and ALL pro guitar players are using an electronic tuner. Hearing some one "tuning" while on stage not only looks ridiculous, it sounds dreadful and completely unprofessional and even if you DID manage to tune the guitar so that it sounds OK, it's inevitably out of pitch with the bass. And the rhythm guitar. And the keyboard. THE WHOLE BAND needs to be in tune with each other or it will sound dreadful - so get an electronic tuner and stop subjecting us to this torture!

## Graphic EQ / Equaliser Pedal



An equaliser pedal isn't really an effects pedal. It's basically a tone control that can sit in amongst your chain of guitar pedals if you find you're losing treble/bass/whatever due to the effects you're using. They have slides to change its settings rather than knobs, and were mainly popular in the 70s/80s, arguably because a lot of amps made at the time sucked and required a load of tweaking to make them sound decent. If your amp isn't cutting it, you can use an EQ pedal to custom-tone your amp depending on, say, the size and shape of the venue you may be playing tonight - or just adding more treble to allow your solo to cut through.

Honestly, if your amp is decent, you don't need an EQ pedal. Most of the times when it seems justified are during acoustic guitar gigs - when the player feels that the in-built EQ on the guitar isn't good enough (an acoustic guitar is usually going straight into the PA with no effects added, so getting the right tone is very important). The modern electric guitarist with a decent guitar, decent amp and a daisy-chain of effects pedals almost certainly doesn't need one.