

Mr. GEARHEAD™ presents...

Distortion Mysteries Revealed!

In the early days of amplified music, distortion was usually considered a "no-no." Simply amplifying (making louder) the sound of an instrument (like an acoustic guitar) is what musicians were initially after. However, many Blues, Country, and finally Rock-n-Roll guitarists discovered that by turning their tube amps up high, they could create a rich, sustaining distortion sound-- not unlike that of a raspy saxophone solo, which was popular in those days. In the 1960's, the first commercially available "fuzz boxes" made it easier to simulate the "sound effect" of an overworked amp or torn speaker.

These days, a distorted guitar tone is no longer considered an "effect." Rather, it's the basic definition of what "lead guitar" sounds like.



The good old fashioned way... everything on 10!

Common ways of getting a distorted guitar sound are:

1. Turning the volume of the amplifier (particularly a tube amp) up to the point of overload. (An added benefit of this approach: Turn your guitar down, and the distortion "cleans up.")



Crank up a tube amp and control it from the guitar.



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2. Setting the Preamp Gain control **high** and the Master Volume control **low** on amps so-equipped (Conversely, setting Preamp Gain **low** and Master Volume **high** will result in a "cleaner" sound.) This more modern type of amp will often have two (or more) "channels" so you can quickly switch between the two sounds.



Multiple channels allow you to switch from clean to dirty.

3. Inserting a Distortion, Overdrive, or Fuzz box in the signal chain (between guitar and amp).

Once you've begun developing your personal guitar sound, here are a few things to keep in mind to help you refine it:

Musical style or situation: While your first inclination may be to turn the "gain" knob all the way up, most players use less distortion than you'd think. Especially when recording!



Don't let a poor quality cable compromise your tone.

The amp's Tone or EQ controls: Most amplifiers have at least a **Bass**, **Midrange**, and **Treble** control. When setting your tone controls, here's a good place to start:

Set all the tone controls halfway up at first. Then, for "Metal" distortion rhythm--try the **Treble** and **Bass** controls way up, with little or no **Midrange**. ...Sounds *huge*, especially when played by itself. On the other hand, lead guitar (especially in Blues or Classic rock) will need to have plenty of **mids** dialed in. This will give single notes the "punch" to compete with bass and drums.

The tonal character of your particular guitar: Single-coil pickups tend to sound brighter than most double-coils ("Humbuckers"); Heavy strings or detuned strings sound bassier than light gauge strings tuned to standard pitch. Maple or Ebony in the fingerboard, or a Maple-topped body may add brightness to your guitar's fundamental voice. Set the amp's Treble control accordingly, and re-set it when you change guitars. Don't be afraid to have some of the amp's controls "off" or "full on" if necessary.

Everything you hook up can affect your tone. An old cheap guitar cord or a vintage effect pedal will probably "roll off" highs, while a new high tech cord may sound very bright--maybe *too* bright!

Every room sounds different. If you've got a small amp that sounds perfect in your carpeted bedroom, don't be shocked when it sounds totally different out in the garage! Room materials like cement, linoleum, tile, and glass will accentuate the brightness of your tone, while carpet, draperies, upholstery, and a *group of people* will make it sound "darker." Maybe you'll want to add reverb or delay, and more treble.

Finally, remember: One person's "warm" is another's "muddy" when you are talking *distortion*! Use your ears!



Even a small amp can sound huge in a small room.

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