

## Being Articulate

It's always a bit uncomfortable listening to a public speaker who trips over words or uses them incorrectly. Still, I'd rather put up with the fumbling as long as the topic is a good one, rather than listen to smooth words about nothing special. OK, back to the word-tripping – there's a comparison for improvisation. Tripping over notes, or more especially articulations, can be an idea-stopper.

## More Smooth than Substantial

Classical players who are new to jazz sometimes have technique and articulation skills that outpace their other improvisation skills. Still, it's a good foundation to have – when the ideas and vision catch up with the technique, they are in pretty good shape! Another case of more smooth than substantial is the player who always plays cleanly because he has nothing creative to say. But it is certainly possible to be articulate and creative at the same time. Whether you are articulate or not, it produces a “domino effect” in your improvisation.

## The Domino Effect: Weak Articulation Skills

If your articulation skills are weak, here are some of the effects that will have on your solos:

- The faster you play, the more ragged it gets. Missed articulations and missed notes cause you all sorts of problems in phrases.
- You're stuck with basic ideas and shapes, because the more unusual ones are too difficult to play. Wide intervals are a challenge, and so are complicated rhythms.
- Many of the nuances of expression are lost, because the articulations and technique aren't reliable enough to carry them out. This has the effect of deadening the senses towards hearing or seeing those nuances in the first place.

## The Domino Effect: Strong Articulation Skills

If your articulation skills are strong, here are some of the effects that has on your solos:

- You can handle faster tempos and tunes. As you do, you spend less time fighting your instrument and more time seeing the shapes you want to follow and execute. The relationship between eyes, ears, and fingers gets stronger.
- Expression and effects become a vital part of your playing. These elements are crowded out by articulation problems but enabled by articulation strength.
- Rhythms become that much stronger. You can explore triplet variations, displacement, and rubato with confidence and creativity.

Spend the time you need to unlock steady and reliable skill with articulations. It can be a gateway to helping your other improvisation skills open up.