

## Why We Should Eliminate “Shoulds” From Our Vocabulary

### Description

“I should practice more.”

“I should be able to memorize this faster.”

“I should be able to play this better by now.”

“I should eat more fresh veggies.”

Sound familiar?

The word “should” is a common fixture in our daily vocabulary. But it’s a word that does more harm than good. And one that I think should (oops!) be eliminated from our vocabulary.

What’s the big deal?

On one hand “should” *is* just a word, and as my first grade teacher always said, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.”

Except that the whole sticks and stones premise is a bunch of baloney if you ask me. Words can absolutely hurt, and often cut deeper than any stick or stone ever could.

Um...so how is it that the word “should” is holding us back?

## The problem with shoulds

### Problem #1: Our inner child

Do you remember how it felt when your parents sat you down for a lecture and told you all the things they thought you should be doing differently? Mmm...good times, right?

Does it feel any different when you lecture yourself?

When you say “I really should practice more scales,” does this make you feel more enthusiastic about playing scales? More determined to follow through?

Or does your inner child start dragging its feet?

“Shoulds” feel like a bit of a guilt trip, and when we feel our guilt buttons being pushed, we get resentful,

willful, or discouraged. These are not emotional states conducive to continuing down the path of mastery.

## Problem #2: Problems vs. solutions

The other problem is that when we dwell on our shortcomings and failings, we're less likely to look for and identify solutions and next steps.

Focus on how you should be practicing scales more diligently, and the dialogue spirals downhill pretty quickly. "I should be practicing more scales" leads to "Man, I lack discipline" which leads to "What's wrong with me?" which leads to "Maybe I don't have what it takes...why do I even bother...I should just quit now..." and pretty soon we're sitting on the couch watching reruns of *The Office*, and eating a 6-pack of [Skinny Cow ice cream sandwiches](#) (which are by no means good for you, but still awesome, I say).

## Take action

Replace your shoulds with a word or phrase that is more future-solution-focused. Personally, I like the phrase: "Next time, I will..."

For instance, "Next time, I will...try doing 5 minutes of scales before I do anything else" or "This afternoon I will spend 20 minutes googling for ideas that might make scales more interesting and challenging in a motivating way."

You may very well find this to be a helpful tactic in non-music areas of life too. From parenting happier kids, to working out more consistently, to perfecting your top-secret banana-chocolate-chip waffle recipe, the phrase "next time, I will..." can help keep us relentlessly solution-focused.

**Question:** What are *your* most frequently recurring shoulds? And how could you reword them, [transmogrifying](#) these shoulds into solution-focused next actions instead of mini guilt trips? Leave a comment below...I'm curious.

*Photo credit:* [Jose Juan Castellano](#)

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