

# Damien Riley's Blog

Blog of a freelance writer, online diarist, podcaster, & film critic in California

## Want to be Good? Watch the Greats

I remember when I first started blogging around 1996, I didn't have a clue what it was and in fact, I didn't even call it "blogging." I called it making a homepage. I discovered this on a free service popular at the time called "Geocities." As with all my pursuits, I learned by looking at the greats.

I got comfortable with it by checking out popular sites on the network. Some had graphics we now call "animated gifs." Others used a rudimentary form of HTML and css to create stunning layouts. The more I looked around the more I realized there was a lot going on here and I wanted to learn more. This continued in 2005 when I started my first WordPress blog. I saw more and more things I wanted to do and I studied how bloggers were doing it. That is, I studied the work of those who had already been doing it.

I've always believed I had something to learn and I think that's what's made me fairly successful. I remember after I had learned the chords of the guitar, I heard soloing in music. I wondered what strange gift it would take to make the guitar sing like that. I had no knowledge of single notes on the fret board, well ... very little, but I would do little things within my comfort zone like hammer-ons within chords. I liked how it sounded but it didn't approach some of the melodious stuff my music heroes were doing. I would sit with REM and Alarm albums for hours, even days sometimes studying the way Peter Buck and Dave Sharp put chords together and more importantly, what they did in between the chord changes. That was soloing and I would later become fairly proficient at it, at least within the rock and folk style that I played.

Some people reading this know I teach. I'm proficient at it. By that, I mean I've been doing it 17 years and I know how to deliver a lesson that is crafted to have 70% mastery in the learners. I can whittle the job down to that being valuable. There are of course many roads to Rome. I have collected quite a few of them and use them weekly. But there was a time when I was having trouble getting to my learners. I went and studied at the feet of some of the best teachers on Earth, in my opinion anyway. I wasn't excited to all the time. I remember learning a method called "EDI" virtually against my will. After sitting with the founders of it and practicing it a few months, I knew I had a method of teaching in my bag of tricks that would serve me my entire career. It certainly has done that so far. I'm so glad I didn't stop my learning because of my pride.

In all my endeavors, I seem to be able to notice what could be improved on in other's work. Yes, you might say I am a bit critical. Heck, I'm a self labeled Blog Film Critic and lately that's one of my favorite pastimes. I started learning by looking at Ebert's work and have hopefully branched off into some coherent, informative work of my own. If it moves people, that's great too but I don't think there's a science to that. I'm starting to think the emotional part of writing must come mostly from the reader not the blogger. Still, it helps if you put something out there to like or dislike. In this job of film criticism, it can be tough when you think no one's out there. If you don't write though, you can rest assured no one is.

So, in my teacher way, I wish to leave a part of my legacy in giving this advice: look at what the older folks are doing. I don't necessarily mean old in age but old in a discipline or craft. Don't be so fast to make your own style, it will come in time.

Instead, force yourself to look at what's been working for years and what you think looks cool. After that you can amalgamate the good traditional stuff into a style all your own. But most of all, follow your passion and don't give up until you are done! Right now, movie reviews is my passion, I'm also publishing a podcast every week on the topic. I know after that there'll be another. That is what it means to be proficient and even advanced.

If you're new here, you may want to subscribe to my [RSS feed](#). Thanks for visiting!

## 4 thoughts on “Want to be Good? Watch the Greats”

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 [erhynireh](#)

October 3, 2016 at 12:11 pm

Thank you for the wonderful advice. Have a nice day!

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 [Damien Riley](#)

October 3, 2016 at 1:15 pm

You're welcome, same to you!

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 [clara Meierdierks](#)

October 5, 2016 at 3:19 am

Amazing ! candid advice , thanks.

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 [Damien Riley](#) 

October 5, 2016 at 5:40 am

You're very welcome 😊 Enjoy the day 😊