Are you looking to improve your tennis serve, guitar riff, golf swing, drawing technique, or anything else that involves motor skills?

You may get better twice as quickly if you switch up your practice a little, research suggests.

To learn and improve our motor techniques—like playing a sport or musical instrument—we repeat the action over and over. That’s how we cultivate “muscle memory.” To get good at these skills sooner, we can introduce small variations into our practice, according to a recent study. Those subtle variations—like slightly adjusting the size or weight of the baseball bat or soccer ball—strengthen and consolidate the memory as it forms, researchers say.

Don’t go wild. The variations should be slight. If your primary goal is improving your squash racket swing, water polo probably won’t help. (Water polo is fun, though. Do it anyway.)

“What we found is if you practice a slightly modified version of a task you want to master, you actually learn more and faster than if you just keep practicing the exact same thing multiple times in a row.”

—Dr. Pablo Celnik, professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation, neurology, and neuroscience, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Maryland