

# Order Of Effects Pedals – A Basic Guide

Guitar effects pedals are the cornerstone of modern guitar tone. No matter which genre of music you are playing, you can still benefit from effects pedals given that you are using an electric guitar. With that said, the order in which you arrange your effects pedals is important. For many, this issue is a very personal one.

However, there are still some guidelines and unwritten rules that you don't necessarily need to stick to completely, but will get you on the right track. Today we are going to take a look at those and talk a bit about what makes a solid signal chain.

## Basic Order Of Effects Pedals



Different variations of pedal placement in your signal chain

will give you different results. Finding something that works for you takes a fair bit of experimentation. However, if you are new to this, it is highly recommended that you stick to the basic order that is guaranteed to eliminate any conflict between pedals.

## **1. Tuners**

If you are using a tuner pedal, it should always be the very first link in your signal chain. The reasoning for this is simple. A tuner pedal will give you the best results if the signal being fed to it is raw and clean. If you decide to put various modulation pedals between the guitar and the tuner, chances are that the readings will be all over the place. So, tuner goes first.

## **2. Wah**

The traditional way of positioning the wah pedal in a signal chain is before the overdrive/distortion, which usually means right at the very beginning. Now, this is just how it was done for a long time. You will see guitar players putting wahs and similar effects like phasers, after the distortion.

That works as well. However, when you place these pedals before, you will get a much cleaner and more proven wah effect. Some pedals work better with each other, some don't. Placing a way before distortion is the best way to minimize any risk of conflict.

## **3. Compression**

One more thing that you can insert before the overdrive/distortion are your compressors. Not a lot of guitar players use compressors in general, but if you are among those who do, this is where you'd want it to be. The reason for this is due to the nature of compressors. These pedals are designed

to shave off certain frequencies, and that is much easier to do if the signal is not infused with distortion. With that said, compressors might work after overdrive/distortion. It depends on the pedal.

## 4. Distortions and Overdrives



Next come your gain pedals. That means dist boxes, overdrives, fuzz pedals and similar. Keeping this group of effect closer to the source of the signal is always a good thing to do. Everything that comes afterward will have an easier job at processing the already distorted signal. On the other hand, if you go against the grain and place a distortion at the very end of your signal chain, chances are you'll get a whole bunch of chaos.

## 5. Modulation Effects

After you have dealt with your overdrives, wahs and compressors, it is time to insert some modulation to your signal chain. These can be anything from flangers, chorus pedals and similar. Since these pedals alter the very nature of the signal, it is a good practice to feed them an already gain boosted and distorted line. Just keep in mind that it all comes down to the specific pedal you are using. However,

placing them at this part of the signal chain should work almost every single time.

## **6. Temporal Pedals**

Temporal pedals are the ones that affect the timing of your signal. In other words, we are talking about delays, reverbs and echoes. Everything we have talked about so far can handle a bit of variation, but temporal pedals should always be at the very end of the signal chain.

Since they usually copy the signal and paste it with some delay in order to produce their effect, you need to be very careful. Supplying temporal pedals with an already formed signal keeps things simple and clean. Putting a delay at the very beginning of your chain, on the other hand, is asking for trouble.

## **Disclaimer**

One thing you need to remember about building a signal chain with more than a few effects pedals, is that nothing is set in stone. What we have shown you today is just a recommended basic layout. This whole thing can be done in many different ways. Just take a look at pedalboards belonging to any popular guitar player and you will see a whole bunch of variations. Our goal was to give you a solid starting point, a good foundation that you can easily build upon.

When you start building your pedalboard, take things slow. Add pedals one at a time. This way you can learn the full scope of that pedal's capability and see how it behaves in specific locations in the chain. Over time, you will build a much more profound understanding of how this whole thing works. It takes time, but that is the only real way to learn the ropes properly. Also, expect your chain to change, maybe even significantly over time.

# Conclusion

Getting into effects pedals is every bit as complicated as it is exciting. However, it doesn't have to be too hard on you if you take things slow. There are many schools of thought regarding how a signal chain should look. The only issue here is that pedalboards are a very personal thing for each individual guitar player.

The one we have talked about above is the most neutral one you can use. Start with that and then change things as you see fit. Maybe you will find that this particular order of effects pedals works for you, or maybe you will end up with something completely different. Experiment, try new things and see how it goes.