

LESSON 1 INTRODUCTION AND BASICS

You can find these lessons on my website. There are individual files for each chapter, and audio recordings of most songs.

<http://www.voith-usa.com/Guitar/index.html>

Learning to play the guitar is a lot of fun. The reason for this is that you can learn some simple skills and be playing guitar in a very short time (one lesson). In addition, you can progress at your own rate by learning other simple skills and building on what you already know. Many of the skills are "mechanical" or repetitive patterns which when practiced become automatic. However, the practicing is the kind of hard work which is fun because you see (hear) yourself progressing and adding to your set of skills, and you can always fall back on known skills when you just want to play. You do not need to have rigid goals which cause you to "strain" at playing guitar. You have a lifetime to learn. The important thing is to pick up and play your guitar even if for only ten minutes a day.

Some of the skills you will learn are:

- A) **CHORDS**: Simple left hand finger positions on guitar strings.
- B) **STRUMS**: Repetitive right hand patterns for playing guitar strings.
- C) **BASS RUNS**: Individual notes played between chord changes.

You will build on these three basic skills to allow:

- A) **ACCOMPANIMENT** of songs.
- B) **FLAT PICK STYLE**, which is a style in which the notes of the song are played with the thumb on the bass or lower pitched strings, while adding chord strums in between notes.
- C) **FINGERPICKING STYLE**, which is a style in which the index and middle (and sometimes ring) fingers play the melody on the treble (higher pitched) strings, while the thumb plays a constant beat on the bass strings.

You will **NOT BE TAUGHT TO READ MUSIC** in this book. However, a notation will be introduced to show patterns, including right hand strums and left hand positions. The intent is not that you will learn to play an unknown song by sight from the notation, but to show you how the song is played. This will allow you to try it section by section until you don't need the notes anymore.

NOTE: In this book, the fingers are referred to using numbers and letters:

T(Thumb), 1 or I (Index), 2 or M (Middle), 3 or R (Ring), 4 or L (Little).

If you study piano, note that this is **DIFFERENT** from numbering used there.

TYPICAL PROGRESSION THROUGH THE CLASS

The following represents a possible way to use this book. It is not the only way. You can jump around as you see fit to facilitate your learning.

1. Read Lesson 1 - Introduction, Tuning, etc.
Lesson 2 - (key of D)
2. Lesson 3 - (simple strums)
Lesson 4 - (key of G)
3. Lesson 5 - (key of C)
Read Lesson 7 - Transposing
4. Lesson 9 - (strum 11 - Arpeggios)
5. Lesson 9 - (strum 7 - "Travis" or "Cotten" Picking)
6. Lesson 10 - (Bass runs in D)
7. Read Lesson 8 - Tablature notation
Lesson 8 Songs - one or two
8. Review - go back and look at old lessons
9. More - go back and pick up skipped stuff
- read Appendices A, B
- Melody picking - Lessons 11, 12

TUNING

When you tune a string of the guitar, you should continuously pluck the string you are tuning as you turn the tuning peg. This way, you will hear the sound as you tune and will be less likely to tighten the string too much and break it. It is usually a good idea to tune "up to pitch". In other words, it is best to start with the string a little low in pitch and tune it up to pitch. This will tend to give the string maximum tension. On the other hand, lowering a string to pitch will not assure this maximum tension and the string will most likely slip a little bit causing it to go flat.

Until you get good at tuning, a good exercise is to loosen a string until it is obvious that the pitch is too low, then slowly tighten the string (plucking it as you tighten) until it comes "up to pitch". If you tune the string too high simply lower it and try again. Be aware, though, that when strings are new they will continue to stretch for the first few hours causing them to loosen and go flat. After a time, they will reach their optimum tension and will stay in tune for a longer period of time.

There are several ways to tune a guitar.

1. Use a [smartphone App](#)
 - panotuner
 - GuitarTuna (may require a fee)
2. Use a [guitar pitch pipe](#) (it has six notes, one per string). When you blow on a note, blow easily, or it may not sound properly. This is especially true of the D note.

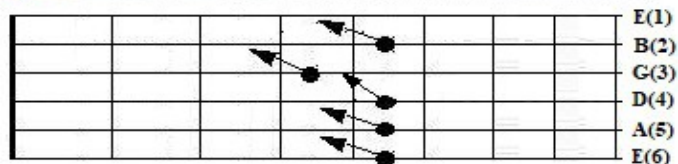
3. Use an **electronic tuner**. Electronic tuners are very popular and are handy when you are in a noisy environment, or are having difficulty hearing your instrument well enough to determine the correct pitch. They usually automatically detect the note you are tuning to. Some allow you to select the note you are tuning to, and indicate that you are in tune with a needle or indicator. You might call this "tuning by sight". However, it is always best to double check using a method that requires you to use your ear. You will never develop an "ear" if you consistently rely on electronic guitar tuners. Tuning by "ear" is a time honored "art". Tuning by "sight" is merely convenient.

Below is a picture of a pitch pipe and an electronic tuner. The electronic tuner attaches to the head of the guitar as shown.



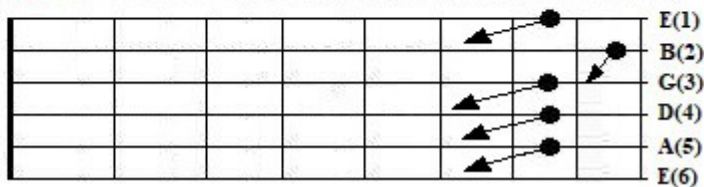
4. Tune the guitar **relative to itself** (first way)

- Tune the sixth string until it sounds ok (don't tighten too much)
- Hold 6-th string at 5-th fret, tune 5-th string to 6-th
- Hold 5-th string at 5-th fret, tune 4-th string to 5-th
- Hold 4-th string at 5-th fret, tune 3-rd string to 4-th
- Hold 3-rd string at 4-th fret, tune 2-nd string to 3-rd
- Hold 2-nd string at 5-th fret, tune 1-st string to 2-nd



5. Tune the guitar **relative to itself** (second way)

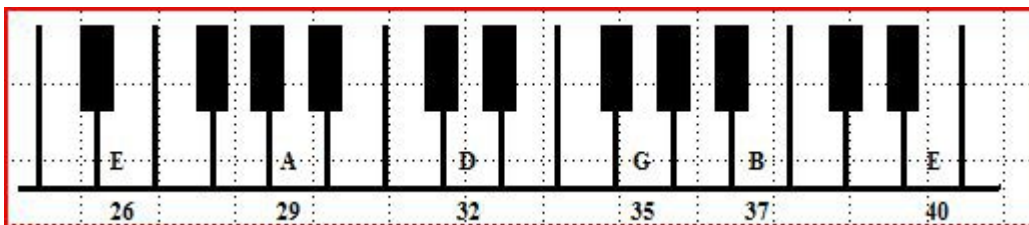
- a) Tune the first string until it sounds ok (don't tighten too much)
- b) Hold 1-st string at 7-th fret, tune 2-nd string one octave below 1-st
- c) Hold 2-nd string at 8-th fret, tune 3-rd string one octave below 2-nd
- d) Hold 3-rd string at 7-th fret, tune 4-th string one octave below 3-rd
- e) Hold 4-th string at 7-th fret, tune 5-th string one octave below 4-th
- f) Hold 5-th string at 7-th fret, tune 6-th string one octave below 5-th



To help with the above, listen for "beats" indicating need to tune. When you play two strings which should be in tune, (for instance, d above), if the strings are not in tune, you should be able to hear "beats", or a "louder-softer-louder-softer-....louder-softer" pattern. As you tune the one string to the other, the "beats" smooth out.

6. Tune to a **piano**

E	1	40-th white key from left
B	2	37-th " " " "
G	3	35-th " " " "
D	4	32-nd " " " "
A	5	29-th " " " "
E	6	26-th " " " "



RE-STRINGING A GUITAR

When restringing the guitar, you first attach the strings to the bridge of the guitar. In addition, if changing strings already on the guitar, usually do one string at a time. Put on a string, and tighten it up, then do the next string. Here is an excellent video (mentioned above) on stringing steel string guitars: <https://youtu.be/QmzNnzulzLI> Below is a summary of this video (steel string guitar)

At the bridge end, the strings attach to the body of the guitar below the sound hole.



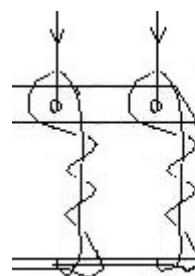
Steel String Guitar

Classical Guitar

For a steel string guitar there is a peg for each string. You need to pull out the peg. There is a "string winder" tool that is useful for winding and unwinding strings. The tool has a **notch that helps pull out the pegs**. If you don't have this tool, you could use a pair of pliers to pull out the peg. Be careful; you could break the peg. Pull straight out to avoid snapping the peg. You could also use a coin against the peg. You could also reach through the sound hole (all strings off) and push the pegs out from inside. After this, you put the end of the string (donut end) into the peg hole. The peg has a groove that should face the sound hole. The string fits in the groove. then push the peg in all the way, then pull the string tight.



Classical strings do not have the "donut" on the end. You should not use steel strings on a classical guitar. They can cause too much tension and damage the guitar. Classical strings are made of nylon or gut. Note that the thicker classical strings do have a metal wrapping around them. For the classical guitar strings, you insert the string into a hole on the bridge, and pull a length through. Then you bring that short length back up to the entrance hole and wrap the string around itself two or three times, and finally thread the end of the string back through the bottom loop of the current and the next string.



Classical Strings

String down through hole, then back up, and wrap around to bottom, then thread the extra string through the loops of current and next string.

After attaching a string to the bridge, the other end attaches to the tuning peg on the "headstock" of the guitar. Strings are wound on the tuning pegs in a standard way. For a steel string guitar, the strings should be on the inside of the pegs, as shown in the picture below. For a classical guitar, the strings should go over the top of the cylinder as shown below. When strung like this, you will become used to which direction to turn the tuning peg to tighten versus loosen a string.

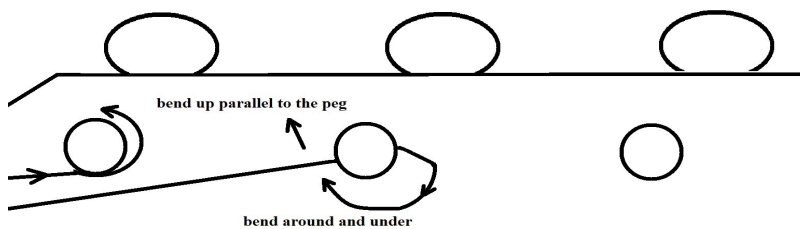


Steel String Guitar



Classical Guitar

On a steel string guitar, first use the winder knobs to line up the holes in the tuning pegs so that the holes are open left to right when looking at the above picture. This makes it easier to thread each string through the hole. Now back out about 2 inches of string from the hole. Next, wrap the rest of the string to the inside of the neck, and then back under the string on the other side of the peg. Pull the string tight (do not pull string back out of the peg hole). Now bend the string up, and start winding the string tight, while holding the string down to the peg and keeping slack out at the peg. Be sure you wind so that the string goes around the peg from the inside, as shown above. Be sure that each new winding around the peg **goes under the previous winding**. Wind until the slack in the string is taken up, and the string sounds a tone. You can use the "string winder" pictured above to quicken the winding. You can tune all the strings later after they are all on.



Here is an excellent video (mentioned above) on stringing steel string guitars

<https://youtu.be/QmzNnzu1zLI>

For a classical guitar, first use the winder knobs to line up the holes in the tuning cylinders so that the holes face up. This makes it easier to thread each string through the hole. Now back out about 2 inches of string from the hole. Start winding the string tight. Be sure that the string goes over the cylinder, then around from underneath. Be sure that the extra slack goes under the new windings as you wind. As with steel string guitars, hold the string tight at the peg, and keep slack out at the tuning cylinder. Again, wind until the slack in the string is taken up, and the string sounds a tone. You can use the "string winder" pictured above to quicken the winding. You can tune all the strings later after they are all on.

GUITAR POSITION (LEFT HAND)

Exercise: Place your fingers on the top (thinnest) string:

```

E|-1-2-3-4-----| <-- Fret
B|-----|
G|-----|
D|-----|
A|-----|
E|-----|
  I M R L (1 2 3 4) <--- Finger

```

In this position, the tip of your thumb should be behind the top E string, directly behind your fingers. The fingers should come down straight and not mute the strings next to the ones that they are actually fretting (see the next picture).



With the thumb low, the average full sized person can reach across eight frets. With the thumb high, the average person can barely span four frets.

Exercise: Place your fingers on the bottom string (thickest, string 6) as shown below. As before, the fingers should come straight down on the strings and the strings should be touched with the tip of the fingers.

```

E|-----|
B|-----|
G|-----|
D|-----|
A|-----|
E|-1-2-3-4-----| <-- FRET
  I M R L (1 2 3 4) <--- Finger

```

With your fingers in this position, the TIP of your thumb should be touching the midline of the neck; that is, behind the G string. Most people tend to have the thumb peeking up over the top. Also, most people tend to squeeze much too tightly, grinding in with the knuckle of their thumb.

The left hand wrist should be straight. Do not rest your palm against the back of the neck. Also, do not jut your wrist forward. You should be able to place a straight edge from the back of your forearm to any of your last knuckles.

The palm of the left hand should be parallel to the underside of the neck. A way to exercise this is to place the bone to the pinky AGAINST the underside of the neck. Understand that this is an EXAGGERATION so that one may get used to how it feels when the palm is parallel to the neck. Play this way only while you practice until the awkwardness is gone.

Ascending Exercise:

```
E|-----1-2-3-4-| <-- Fret
B|-----1-2-3-4-----|
G|-----1-2-3-4-----|
D|-----1-2-3-4-----|
A|-----1-2-3-4-----|
E|-1-2-3-4-----|
```

```
  I M R L I M R L I M R L I M R L I M R L I M R L <-- Left Hand Finger
(1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4)
```

Make sure that you assign 1 finger per fret. Continue this pattern up the neck until you can't get clean notes out anymore. As you do this, do not stray from this checklist:

Guitar Position

- Left Hand: Thumb Position (midline [G string] to edge.)
- Thumb Pressure (NONE! PERIOD!)
- Wrist. (Straight as a ruler, palm away from the neck)
- (parallel to the underside of the neck)

If this continues to be a problem, take a couple of passes of this exercise without your thumb touching at all. This will give you an idea of exactly how little pressure it takes. Then put your thumb back down WITH NO MORE PRESSURE. It is just there as a guide. Low thumb pressure reduces strain on certain muscles and tendons. It will also increase your endurance dramatically.

The following is a descending exercise.

```
E|--5-4-3-2-----| <-- Fret
B|-----5-4-3-2-----|
G|-----5-4-3-2-----|
D|-----5-4-3-2-----|
A|-----5-4-3-2-----|
E|-----5-4-3-2-----|

  L R M I L R M I L R M I L R M I L R M I L R M I <-- Left Hand Finger
(4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1)
```


In these exercises, all of your fingers should be less than an inch from the neck, but if you concentrate on your pinky, that should take care of them all. It places less of a burden on your pinky when your palm is parallel to the neck. It also makes it easier to keep your pinky close to the strings. If there is less of a distance for your pinky to travel to fret a note, then you can ultimately achieve higher speed because of the travel time. Not only that, it is easier to coordinate your picking with your left hand because there is less margin for error.

RELAX: Play slow enough to do everything perfectly.
Patience patience patience.

GUITAR POSITION (RIGHT HAND)

If you hold the guitar as described earlier in "Guitar Position", your right forearm should make an angle of about 160 degrees with the strings. That is as it should be. Furthermore, one could even position one's forearm so that it is parallel to those strings, extending from them. The thing to avoid is having the guitar low, with your right forearm perpendicular to the strings. Some guitarists do hold the guitar this way, and it may seem cool but it will make it harder to play.

In general, keep the shoulders relaxed, the elbows loose and "open," and the wrists relatively straight. Bending the right wrist puts additional strain on the tendons. The elbow should be in a position that allows the right forearm to work as a unit from knuckle to elbow.

If you are using a pick, only a very small portion of the pick should extend: a millimeter or less. The flat of the pick should be parallel to the strings, and the pick itself should be perpendicular to the guitar.

If you are using a pick, you should use alternate picking. Alternate picking is the alternation of downstrokes with upstrokes. Use it!

Do the following exercise:

```

E|-----1-2-3-4--|  <-- Fret
B|-----1-2-3-4-----|
G|-----1-2-3-4-----|
D|-----1-2-3-4-----|
A|-----1-2-3-4-----|
E|-1-2-3-4-----|
  I M R L I M R L I M R L I M R L I M R L I M R L <-- Finger
(1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4)
  d u d u d u d u d u d u d u d u d u d u d u d u
      d = Downstroke, u = upstroke

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