

# LESSON 1 INTRODUCTION AND BASICS

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.

## AUDIO CD

An audio CD for the lessons is available. It is intended to help you learn the songs to help learn guitar. The tracks on the CD include:

Trk 01 Tuning	Transposed Song
Key of D	Trk 30 When Saints Go Marching In (From Transposing Chapter)
Trk 02 Skip To My Lou	Easy Tab Melodies
Trk 03 Down In The Valley	Trk 31 Shortnin Bread
Trk 04 On Top Of Old Smokey	Trk 32 Rock Run
Trk 05 Michael Row The Boat Ashore	Trk 33 Honky Tonk
Trk 06 O Suzanna	Strums
Key of G	Trk 34 Strum TP
Trk 07 Blowing In The Wind	Trk 35 Strum TPP
Trk 08 This Land Is Your Land	Trk 36 Strum TDU TDU
Trk 09 Where Have All Flowers Gone	Trk 37 Strum TDUDU TDUDU
Trk 10 Battle Hymn Of The Republic	Trk 38 Strum T D TUDU
Trk 11 Yellow Rose Of Texas	Trk 39 Strum T T1 T2T1
Trk 12 Country Roads	Bass Runs
Trk 13 I've Been Workin On Railroad	Trk 40 Bass Runs in D
Key of A	Trk 41 Bass Runs in G
Trk 14 Tom Dooley	Trk 42 Bass Runs in C
Trk 15 Whole World In His Hand	Trk 43 Bass Runs in A
Trk 16 Rock My Soul	Trk 44 Bass Runs In E
Key of C	Flatpicking Songs
Trk 17 You Are My Sunshine	Trk 45 You Are My Sunshine
Trk 18 Red River Valley	Trk 46 I Walk The Line
Key of E	Trk 47 Wildwood Flower
Trk 19 Edelweis	Fingerpicking Songs
Trk 20 Amazing Grace	Trk 48 Freight Train I
Trk 21 Riddle Song	Trk 49 Freight Train II
Trk 22 Crawdad Song	Trk 50 Soulcake
Key of Am	Trk 51 Sugar Babe
Trk 23 House Of Rising Sun	Trk 52 Silent Night
Trk 24 Scarborough Fair	Trk 53 Good King Wenceslas
Trk 25 Sounds Of Silence	Trk 54 Steff's Reel
Key of Dm	Trk 55 Fennario
Trk 26 El Condor Pasa	Trk 56 Railroad Bill
Trk 27 Sunrise Sunset	Trk 57 Malaguena
Key of Em	Trk 58 Will Circle Be Unbroken
Trk 28 Poor Wayfaring Stranger	Trk 59 Portland Town
Trk 29 When Johnny Comes Marching	

## SONG FILE CD

A CD is available with more songs and other information. The CD is formatted to be viewed in an internet browser such as Internet Explorer, Netscape or Mozilla. When you open the CD, click on index.html and you will see:

=====  
Note: All links except OLGA below take you to files on this CD.  
=====

[Click here] The Greatest Guitar Course in the World (Notes and mp3 songs)  
[Click here] Words to songs from class (no chords)  
=====

### Song Files

[Click here] Large list of Songs with chords - about 300 songs  
[Click here] Very large list of Songs - words only - about 7000 songs  
[Click here] Songs with Tablature  
[Click here] Mississippi John Hurt Tab (one file)  
[Click here] Wedding Songs  
[Click here] Foreign Songs  
[Click here] Christmas Songs (Foreign)  
[Click here] Christmas Songs  
[Click here] Christmas Carols with Chords (one file)  
[Click here] Christmas Songs with Tablature  
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### Song books

[Click here] Beatles Complete Songbook  
[Click here] Vol 1 Country Music Lyrics Vol 1 With Chords  
[Click here] Vol 2 Country Music Lyrics Vol 2 With Chords  
[Click here] Vol 3 Spiritual Songs  
[Click here] Vol 4 Christmas Songs  
[Click here] Vol 5 Childrens Songs  
[Click here] Vol 6 Older Popular Songs  
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[Click here] Olga (The On-Line Guitar Archive)]  
(need to be connected to internet for this link)  
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[Click here] Web Links to Music Resources  
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On Google you can search for:

"tablature song\_title" or  
"chords song\_title" or  
"lyrics song\_title"  
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### Buying a Guitar

[Click here for text version of first article]  
[Click here for pdf version of first article]  
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### Lessons

[Click here for "Guitar By Ear (For Mathematicians and Physicists)"]  
[Click here for "Guitar Strap And Dent Repair"]  
[Click here for "Music Theory Summary"]  
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### Large chord chart

[Click here for multiple screen version]  
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[Click here] Finger Picking practice patterns  
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[Click here] Song list notated for Flat and fingerpicking  
[Click here] Some info on wedding songs  
[Click here] Foreign phrases  
[Click here] Other Music Information  
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## 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 - (pg 9-2 - strum 11 - Arpeggios)
5. Lesson 9 - (pg 9-3 - strum 7 - "Travis" or "Cotten" Picking)
6. Lesson 10 - (pgs 10-1, 10-2, 10-3 - Bass runs in D)
7. Read Lesson 8 - Tablature notation  
Lesson 8 Songs - one of pgs. 8-8, 8-9, 8-10
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 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.

## 2. Use an electronic tuner

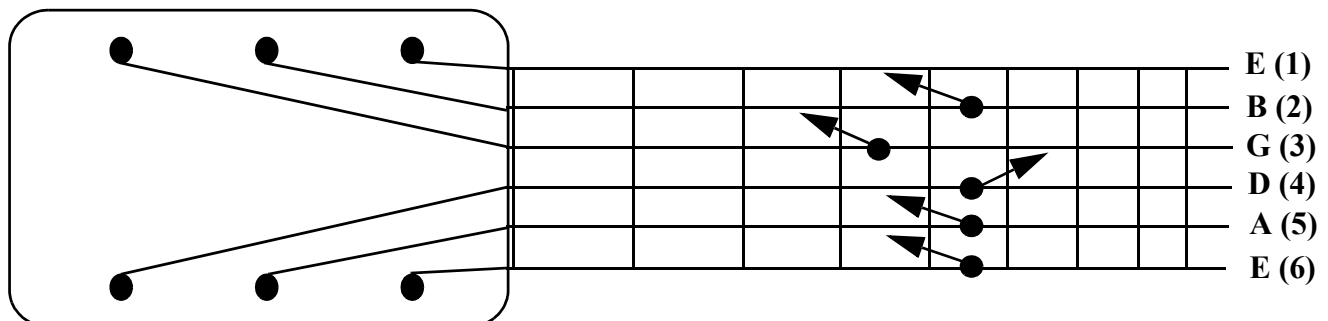
Electronic tuners are very popular and are handy when you are in a noisy environment, or are having difficulty hearing your instrument well enough to determine the correct pitch. They usually allow you to select the note you are tuning to, and indicate that you are in tune with a needle or indicator. 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. Newer electronic tuners are smaller than the one shown.



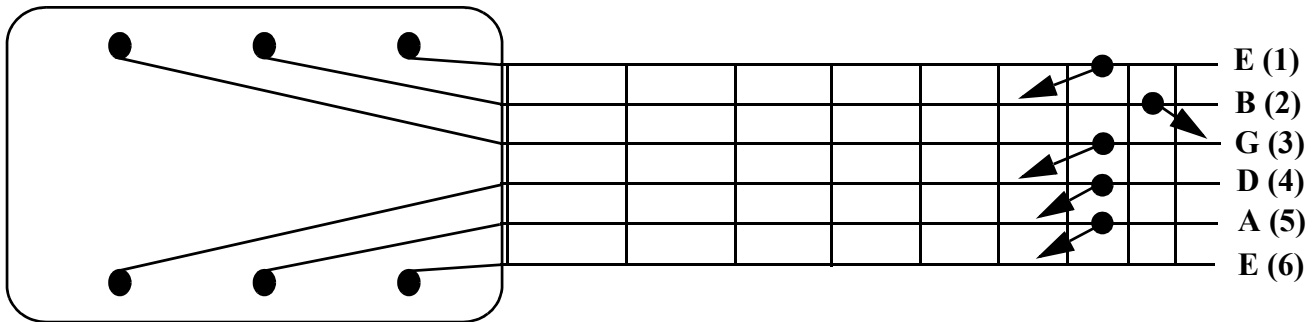
## 3. Tune the guitar relative to itself (first way)

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



#### 4. Tune the guitar relative to itself (second way)

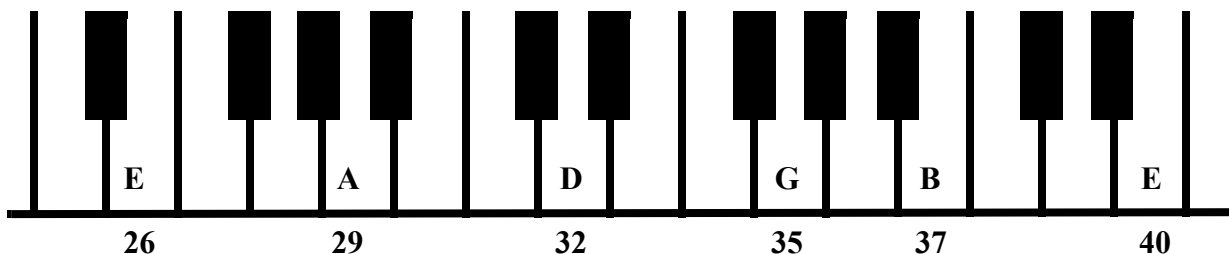
- a) Tune the first string until it sounds ok (don't tighten too much)
- b) Hold 1-st string at 7-th fret, tune 2-nd string one octave below 1-st
- c) Hold 2-nd string at 8-th fret, tune 3-rd string one octave below 2-nd
- d) Hold 3-rd string at 7-th fret, tune 4-th string one octave below 3-rd
- e)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

#### 5. 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	"	"	"	"

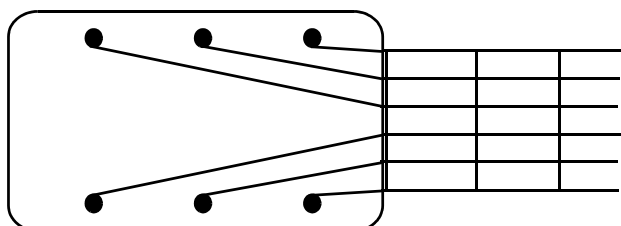


#### 6. Use a tuning fork

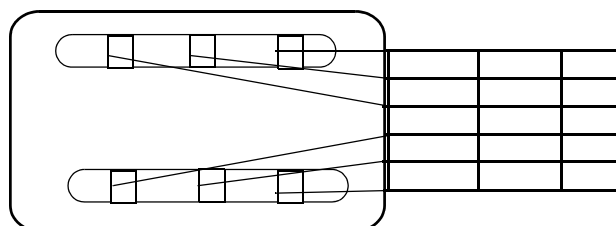
You can purchase a tuning fork that is tuned to middle E. If you strike the tuning fork on a surface, you can tune string one (thinnest) to the pitch you hear. Then tune the other strings using relative tuning (3 or 4 above).

## RE-STRINGING A GUITAR

When you re-string a guitar, the strings should be wound on the tuning pegs (cylinders) in a standard way. For a steel stringed guitar, the strings should be on the inside of the pegs, as shown in the diagram below. For a classical guitar, the strings 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.



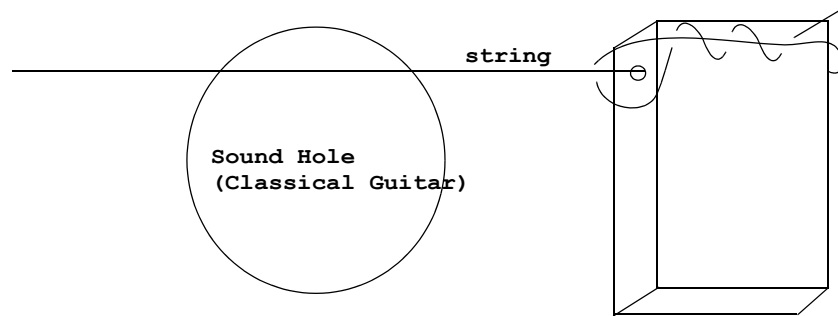
Steel String Guitar



Classical Guitar

At the other end, the strings attach to the body of the guitar below the sound hole. For a steel string guitar there is a peg for each string. You pull out the peg and put the end of the string into the peg hole. Steel guitar strings have a very small metal "donut" at this end. Then you put the peg back into the hole, with the string in the groove in the peg.

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 these strings, you insert the string into a hole on the bridge, and pull a length through. Then you wrap the string around itself two or three times.



## GUITAR POSITION

Normally, the guitar strap should be worn. The guitar should rest on your abdomen, such that it is in the same position whether you are sitting or standing. The neck should be at a 45 degree angle up. See the first picture below. If you do not have a strap, or prefer not to use it, you can hold it as shown in the second picture below.



## LEFT HAND POSITION

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

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



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
  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.

In all cases, the left hand wrist should be straight. Many with bad thumb habits tend to rest their palms against the back of the neck. Avoid this! Also, many who use the "good" thumb position tend to jut their 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 with the bone to your pinky against the neck 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-----|
  1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 <-- Left Hand Finger
  
```

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!)

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 wrist position is a matter of your health. If you practice a lot, especially with any speed, and you have a bent wrist, your tendons and carpal nerves are obstructed and you run a greater risk of repetitive strain injuries.

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-----|
    4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 <-- Left Hand Finger
```

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.

- 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)

- Finger placement. (close to the neck)

RELAX:       PLAY SLOW ENOUGH TO DO EVERYTHING PERFECTLY  
PATIENCE PATIENCE PATIENCE

## RIGHT HAND POSITION

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.

One common mistake: do not try to adjust pick position by angling the wrist differently. That is unnecessary. The wrist should stay straight. All pick adjustments can be made by placing it at a different point on the fingertip.

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-----|
  1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 <-- Finger
  d u d u d u d u d u d u d u d u d u d u
      d = Downstroke, u = upstroke
```