

First Lesson

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Introduction

What I have found is that there is so much to cover in the first lesson it would be best to have the information prepared ahead of time.... So, here we go !

First off, a little information about me. I have been playing guitar since 1970, taking a few years “off” to raise children. I have been teaching since February of 2005. I believe that all students are unique. Our lesson plan will not be ‘prescribed’. I will strive to tailor your lessons to your interests. I want to teach you what you want to learn, rather than what I would like to teach you.

If you ever are in a hurry to get to a lesson and cannot bring your guitar, please do not feel you have to cancel the lesson. Students are welcome to play my guitar and I will borrow one from the store.

Students are encouraged to bring in music that they want to learn. We can learn from CD or find it on the internet.

Whether or not we use particular instruction books on our journey, we will be writing things down. Please keep our writings and bring them with you to lessons. We will use these to see what we have covered and to gauge progress. I typically do not make copies so please do your best not to lose them!

If you have questions during the week, feel free to call so we can try to get your questions answered before your next lesson.

Lessons are always in the same studio. We strive to start on time and end on time.

The policy for Make up lessons is covered in the student agreement. PLEASE CALL me directly (865.300.3648) ahead of time if you are not able to attend a lesson. **If you miss two lessons without calling, your time slot will be replaced with another student.**

So, let’s get started.....

Basic Care of the Guitar

Treat your guitar with respect. Remember that it is a wooden instrument and needs to be taken care of as such. Don’t allow it to get too cold – never below freezing. Likewise, never allow it to get too hot – i.e. leaving it in a locked car during the heat of summer. Be careful around liquids – Wood does not mix well with liquid. If something gets spilled on the guitar, wipe it off quickly and completely. Do not leave your guitar outside unprotected from the elements.

Keep the guitar clean. Wipe off the strings with a non-abrasive cloth after playing to remove the oil & sweat. This will make your strings last longer. Change your strings when they begin to sound ‘dull’. Maybe even polish the guitar as needed using a good quality guitar polish.

It is a good idea to always put the guitar back in its’ case when not using it or, better yet, place it in a sturdy guitar stand or hang it on a high-quality guitar hanger, for easy retrieval the next time you want to play it. Respect your guitar for what it is – a beautiful musical instrument.

The Process of Playing

As with any musical instrument it is important to enjoy the process of playing. It does not matter how good you are, it does matter that you enjoy playing, that you enjoy discovering new sounds and new ideas with your instrument. That you enjoy hearing the sound of it. I always ask new students why they want to learn guitar. The best answer I have received to date came from a 7-year-old student who said, "I like the way it sounds". Learning to play any instrument arguably involves the following elements:

1. Physical agility
2. Muscle Memory
3. Musical Memory
4. Talent
5. Intellect
6. Knowledge
7. Passion
8. Emotion

It is a combination of these factors that leads us to find our own voice on any instrument. Note that elements 1-3 above can only be arrived by practicing – the process of repetition. The more that your muscle and musical memories take over, the more you can sit back and listen – enjoy the fruits of your labor – and, as my 7-year-old student referred to – ‘enjoy the way it sounds’.

Tools of the Trade

Along with your guitar and a basic desire to learn, a guitar student should have, or have access to, the following items:

Tuner
Metronome
Folder or binder (or bookshelf) for learning materials
Music Stand
A good practice space
Comfortable armless chair or stool
CD player or other way to listen to music
Guitar polish and soft cloth
Capo

Important Parts of the Guitar

Body – the sound of the guitar resonates through the body and emanates through the ‘sound hole’ on acoustic guitars. On electric guitars, the sound of the strings is converted to electrical energy by the “pickups” and then routed to an amplifier, typically via a cord.

Strings – should be a light gauge for the beginning student

Tuning pegs – located on the ‘headstock’

Frets – on the ‘fretboard’

Nut – located at the top of the fretboard

Bridge – located at the other end of the strings from the nut. “open” strings vibrate between the bridge and the nut. “Fretted” notes vibrate in between the crown of the fret and the bridge.

These are the parts of the guitar involved in playing in tune. Which brings us to our first hands on lesson – Tuning

Tuning

The pitches of the open strings in standard tuning are:

String #	Pitch	Location
6	E	
5	A –	fifth fret on E
4	D -	fifth fret on A
3	G -	fifth fret on D
2	B –	<u>fourth</u> fret on G
1	E -	fifth fret on B

Tuning is accomplished by turning the appropriate tuning peg. Increasing the tension on the string raises the pitch of the open string, decreasing the tension lowers the pitch. If you do not have a tuner you will have to get a note from somewhere to get started. A keyboard, a pitch pipe, a tuning fork, a piano (assuming it is in tune) or an on-line source such as metronomeonline.com. Several instruction books now come with CDs and/or DVDs that provide notes to tune to as well.

Tuning may not be easy at first, but as with all aspects of playing it gets easier with practice. Listen closely to hear whether the string you are tuning to is higher, lower, or the same pitch as the string you are tuning. If it is the same, then the string is in tune.

If it is lower, then pick the open string and string you are tuning to. While they are both ringing out increase the tension until the notes are the same.

If it is higher then pick the open string and string you are tuning to. While they are both ringing out decrease the tension until the note is just slightly lower than the string you are tuning to, then increase the tension until they are the same.

Fretting Your First Note

Sit up straight and let the arch of the guitar rest on your right leg. The fretboard should be parallel with your upper body. For younger students, having a stool underneath the right foot can be very helpful. When first starting to play you may have to look over the guitar to see the frets. Go ahead and do this. Do not slouch the bottom of the guitar away from you to make it easier to see the frets. This results in bad posture and unnecessary strain on your wrist. Good posture is essential to good playing.

The positions for your thumb on your left hand are either 1) slightly over the neck or 2) ball of thumb in the middle of the neck, or somewhere in between. When fretting the knuckles of your left hand should be bent so that the tip of your finger comes ‘straight down’ on the string. The tip of your finger should also be just behind the fret to obtain the best tone.

NOTE: For Guitar the fingers on your left hand are numbered T (Thumb) and then 1-4 (index through pinky).

Try fretting the first note on the high E string (this pitch is F) with your left hand. Pick the note to listen to it. When fretting correctly the note should ring clearly. If the note buzzes or otherwise does not ring clearly then check for the following:

1. Are you pressing down with your left finger hard enough ?
2. Is your finger 'right behind' the fret ?

Once you are successful repeat the following pattern:

Open string – first fret, Open String – first fret

The image shows a musical exercise for guitar. It consists of a treble clef staff in 4/4 time, followed by a fretboard diagram. The staff contains a sequence of notes: open string, first fret, open string, first fret, and so on. The fretboard diagram shows strings labeled T, A, and B, with fret numbers 0 and 1 indicated for the first fret position.

Before repeating this exercise on all strings, let's talk about right hand technique.

Basic Right-Hand Technique

Here you have some decisions to make. There are several ways you can pick the strings with your right hand:

1. With your fingers
2. With a flat pick
3. With a thumb pick and finger picks

Which begs the question – why not do it all?

If you play a classical (nylon string) guitar then you will want to use your fingers primarily as the guitar is designed to be played this way. Use a pick for effect.

If you play a steel string guitar, I highly recommend you learn to play with both pick and fingers. Once you have facility with your fingers you can try a thumbpick and even fingerpicks (as are typically used to play the banjo).

Whatever method(s) you choose remember some right-hand basic rules:

1. Keep motion to a minimum.
2. Keep your right arm anchored in a comfortable position.
3. Do not move your right arm to pick notes. All motion should come from the wrist down.
4. Pick the strings lightly always striving for good tone.

Holding a Flat Pick

The flat pick should be gripped in between the thumb and index finger. The tip of the pick should not extend far from the tip of your index finger. Keep it in close to allow good control. When picking across multiple strings roll your right wrist rather than moving your right arm up and down. The right arm is too blunt an object to be involved in picking.

Grip the pick just hard enough to keep it from falling out of your fingers but not so hard that you tense up. Your arms need to be as relaxed as possible when you play guitar.

Try this exercise to illustrate this point. Hold your pick as described previously (relaxed). Now what the muscles in your right arm while squeezing the pick as hard as possible. Feel your muscles tighten up? They will tighten all the way to the bicep and beyond. You cannot play guitar like this. Stay relaxed!!

Flat picking involves combing upstrokes and downstrokes. Now try the previous exercise, alternating the open string and fretting with the first finger on all strings alternating upstrokes and downstrokes:

0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1

Once you are comfortable with this, lets involves the second, third and fourth frets which should be played with your second, third, and fourth fingers respectively. Note that by using this fingering you will not have to move your hand up or down the neck (referred to in guitar lingo and shifting positions). Try the following exercise one string at a time, then combine all strings as follows:

0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 4

Play all of these exercises SLOWLY. Focus on getting the notes to ring clearly. Remember to exercise good posture.

ENJOY!