

# LEARNING TO PLAY THE GUITAR



An Absolute Beginner's Guide  
Anthony Pell BA (Mus)



Including

**13 SONGS • 74 AUDIO SAMPLES • 30 VIDEOS**

**Learning To Play The Guitar – An Absolute Beginner's Guide**

**By Anthony Pell**

<http://www.learningtoplaytheguitar.net>

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# INTRODUCTION

This book is written for absolute beginners wanting to learn the basics of playing the guitar. By the end of the book you should be able to play many songs using a range of skills required to play the guitar. If you've always wanted to learn to play the guitar but didn't know where to start this is the book for you.

The book is divided into 21 lessons covering a range of guitar techniques to get you playing. The best way to use this book is to work on one lesson a week or until you have mastered the lesson's exercises and songs before moving onto the next lesson. You may find that that some lessons require more time or you may move faster through some lessons than others. This all depends on how much you practice.

Here is an overview of what the lessons in the book cover.

## **The Guitar, Practicing & Picking – Lessons 1- 3**

This is all about learning the parts of the guitar, essential accessories and practice tools. You will also learn how to hold the guitar, finger numbers, how to hold a guitar pick and practice with picking exercises. To improve and maintain your guitar skills regular practice is essential so practice tips are included here.

## **Chords & Strumming – Lessons 4-10**

You will learn the main chords used in thousands of songs, how to change between them and strumming patterns to suit a range of music styles including rock, pop, folk, blues and country.

## **Arpeggios – Lessons 11-12**

Arpeggios are simply chords played one note at a time. A famous example of this technique on guitar is the start to Led Zeppelins "Stairway to Heaven". Arpeggios can make simple chords sound more interesting and they sound great in slow songs and ballads.

## **Scales – Lessons 13-17**

Single note / lead guitar playing will also be looked at with an introduction to scales and how they're used to play melodies and guitar solos.

## **Blues & Rock n Roll – Lessons 18-20**

All the previously covered skills will come together as you are introduced to the blues which is the foundation for rock n roll, jazz, soul and rhythm and blues music. The blues is also great fun for jamming with other guitarists and musicians and is an essential style to learn for any aspiring guitarist.

## **Improvising – Lesson 21**

Tips to improvise are given here with all the songs used in the book listed with their matching scales and links to their backing tracks to practice with.

## **Mp3 Audio Samples & Video Lessons**

To help you learn to play the guitar the book features many photos, diagrams, exercises and songs.

The exercises and songs also include links to mp3 audio samples so you can hear what they sound

like as you progress through the book. There are also numerous video lessons that compliment the lessons in the book. Look out for the **Mp3 Track** and **Video** icons and links to these audio and video files.

For those of you reading this on an eReader such as a Kindle you may have to use a PC or Mac to download the audio files and view the video lessons. These can be all found here –

<http://www.learningtoplaytheguitar.net/audio-samples/>



Audio Sample  
Icon



Video Lesson  
Icon

Thank you for downloading this book. I hope that you find this book to be helpful in learning how to play the guitar. Please rate and review this book on Amazon.

<http://www.learningtoplaytheguitar.net/book-review/>

So let's start learning to play the guitar!

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# LESSON 1 – THE GUITAR

Parts of the Guitar - Main Types Of Guitar - Guitar Accessories & Practice Tools - Holding The Guitar – The Notes Of Music - Tuning - Finger Numbers - Holding The Pick

## Parts Of The Guitar

Before we start playing it's a good to get familiar with the parts of the guitar. While there are differences between various types of guitars all have the same main parts. The picture below is of a steel string acoustic guitar.



## Main Types of Guitar

There are 3 main types of guitar, nylon string acoustic (classical), steel string acoustic and the electric guitar. Each has their own pros and cons and differences in tone that makes them suit different styles of music.

## **Nylon String Acoustic Guitars**



The nylon string or classical guitar is traditionally used in classical, flamenco and folk music. The sound of this guitar is much more mellow and rounded than a steel string acoustic and tends to sound better played with the finger tips verses being played with a pick.

The advantage for beginners is that the nylon string guitar is much easier on the fingertips than steel strings because nylon is a much softer material than steel. Also the cost of a reasonable quality nylon string acoustic guitar is fairly cheap and is often less than an equivalent quality steel string guitar.

## **Steel String Acoustic Guitars**



Steel string acoustic guitars are more often used in rock, country, blues and also in folk music. The sound of this guitar is much brighter and louder than a nylon string acoustic and generally is more suited to strumming chords or playing with a guitar pick than the nylon string guitar.

One disadvantage for beginners with the steel string guitar is that it's tougher on the fingers with the steel strings being much less forgiving on beginner's fingertips than nylon strings.

It can take a few weeks of daily practice to develop calluses on your finger tips to help reduce the initial pain of playing a steel string acoustic. Also, the cost of a reasonable quality steel string acoustic guitar is usually more than an equivalent quality nylon string guitar.



## Electric Guitars



Electric guitars work through the vibrations of the steel strings being transmitted to the pickups on the instrument then onto a guitar amplifier creating the sound. This allows for electric guitars to be very loud with their volume only being limited by the power or size of the amp.

Electric guitars and amps often use effects like distortion for longer sustain (longer sounding notes). Guitarists like Jimi Hendrix revolutionised the sound of the electric guitar by using distortion at high volumes to create sustain that allowed him to play long notes that simply cannot be played on an acoustic guitar.

Electric guitars are easier to play than steel string acoustics as the string gauge (thickness) is smaller. It allows guitarists in guitar solos to bend the strings easier which is essential for playing blues and most modern rock guitar.

## GUITAR ACCESSORIES AND PRACTICE TOOLS

### Guitar Pick

The guitar pick is also called a plectrum. These help you to strum chords and play individual notes louder and faster than with just using your fingers. It's best to use a hard pick around 1mm thick. Paper thin picks are OK for lightly strumming chords but are too floppy for playing individual strings accurately when playing melodies and arpeggios.



### Electronic Tuner

An electronic guitar tuner will help you to easily tune the strings of the guitar to the correct notes. The tuner will show a needle that will be placed in the middle when the string is in tune. Some tuners have a microphone to pick up the sound of the note while other clip-on guitar tuners attach to the guitar headstock and pick up the vibration of the string when it's plucked.



## Guitar Strap

A strap enables you to play the guitar standing up by connecting to strap pins or buttons on the guitar body.



## Foot Stool

This is used when sitting to raise the leg holding the guitar body when playing in a sitting position.



## Capo

A capo enables you to play in different **keys** ([See Lesson 14 – Scales – Key Signatures](#)) using easier open string chords and avoiding the more difficult bar chords. They work by being clamped on the fret board to create a temporary nut changing the tuning of the guitar. ([See Lesson 9 – Chords & Strumming – Using a Capo](#))



## Metronome

This practice tool creates a steady beat or click to play with. There are many types from the old pendulum ones to electronic and software versions. Software metronomes are quite popular as they're often free and can be downloaded from the Internet onto your PC. They are also many free metronome apps for smartphones and tablets too. Further details on how to use a metronome will be explained in the ([See Lesson 3 - Picking – Using A Metronome](#))



This tuner includes a metronome function which is highlighted in the red squares showing that this metronome is set to play at 120 beats per minute (BPM).

For a list of free software and smartphone app metronomes check out the following article <http://www.learningtoplaytheguitar.net/best-drum-machines-metronomes-guitar-practice/>

## Drum Machine

A drum machine is similar to a metronome as it is also a time keeping device used for practice. However a drum machine can play a variety of drum beats and rhythms for rock, blues, jazz, funk etc. In comparison to a metronome they make practice more fun as it can be like playing with a real drummer.

There are two main types of drum machine - hardware and software. The hardware versions are a device that you plug into a guitar amp, stereo or PA system. A software drum machine can be installed on a PC or again there are many free or cheap drum machine apps for smartphones and tablets.

When using a drum machine or metronome ensure that they're loud enough to be heard over your guitar so you don't lose the beat.



For a list of recommended free / cheap software and smartphone app drum machines check out the following article <http://www.learningtoplaytheguitar.net/best-drum-machines-metronomes-guitar-practice/>

## The Notes Of Music

So far we have looked at the guitar and the accessories used to play and practice the instrument. Now it's time to look at music itself and how it works.

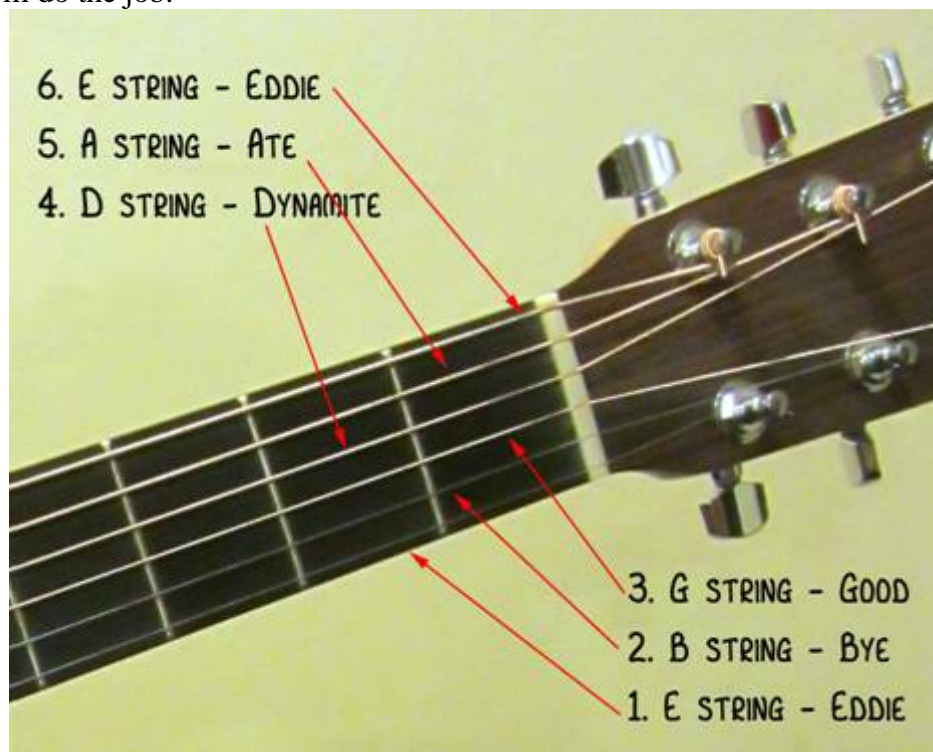
The music alphabet consists of the notes A B C D E F G which then simply repeat starting again at the A note as you go higher in pitch. These notes are the same for all instruments in western music so if you are playing an A note on the guitar it will sound the same pitch on the piano, violin and many other instruments.

The 6 strings of the guitar are tuned to 6 different notes with the lowest in pitch (thickest and closest to the ceiling) being the 6th string and the highest in pitch (thinnest and closest to the floor) being the 1st string. This can be a bit confusing as what is known as the top or high E string is actually the string closest to the floor!

The trick to learning and remembering the string notes is this:

6.Eddy 5.Ate 4.Dynamite 3.Good 2.Bye 1.Eddy

This is called “standard” tuning. There are many other ways of tuning the guitar but for most songs this tuning will do the job.



## Tuning The Guitar

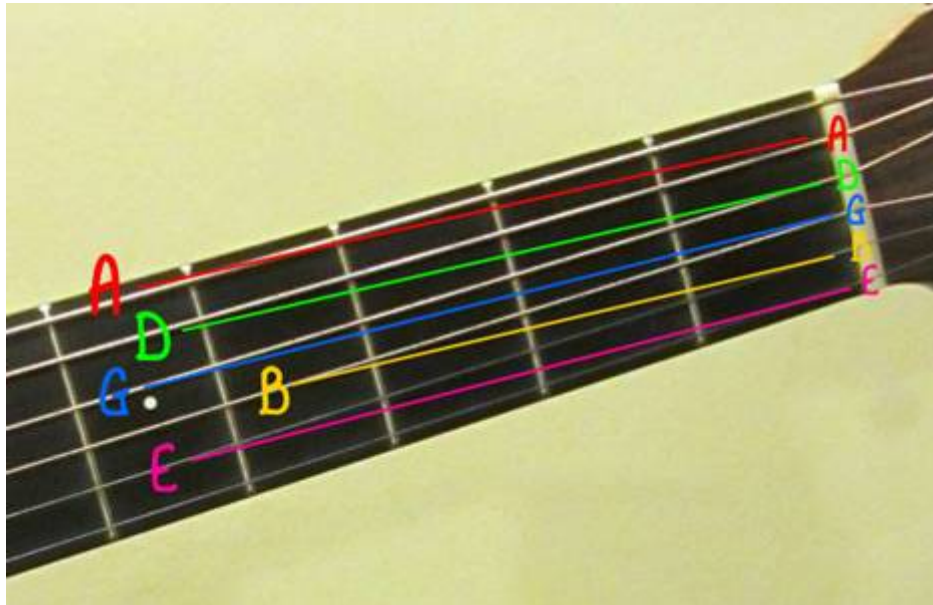
Now that we know what notes the strings should be tuned to we can tune the guitar. It is highly recommended to get an electronic guitar tuner.

When using the electronic tuner pluck the open string and let it ring out for as long as possible for the tuner to work out what the note is. Once you can see the needle being displayed on the tuner tighten or loosen the string as required until the needle is in the middle of the display. Also make sure that you're tuning to the correct note for the string as it's easy to tune a G string to G# (one note up from G) if you're not reading the display on the tuner correctly.





You can also tune the guitar using just your ear. This is done by tuning one string to another. The 5th fret note on the 6th (low thick E string) is A which is the same pitch as the open 5th string. Use the diagram below to see where these notes are on the strings to tune them with each other.



Tuning by ear can be difficult for beginners as it can take time to develop aural skills to determine when you are in tune and also importantly how far out of tune you are and whether you need to go up or down in pitch to make the two strings match. The video lesson below shows how this is done. However for beginners it is recommended to use an electronic tuner to be sure that you are in tune.

Also if you are tuning your guitar to the 6<sup>th</sup> string by ear you can get into trouble when playing with other musicians as the 6<sup>th</sup> string may not always be exactly tuned to E.



### [Tuning Video Lesson](#)

Watch the video lesson of how to tune the guitar using an electronic tuner and by ear.



## Guitar Tab

Guitar Tab (short for Tablature) is a music reading system for guitar showing guitarists which fret and string to place their fingers on to play a chord shape or melody.

The six lines are the strings of the guitar with the top line being the 1st string (the thin one near the floor). The numbers represent the fret numbers. For example 0 means the open position on the string and 1 means the 1st fret. Be careful not to confuse these fret numbers with finger numbers.



Guitar Tab is a great system to quickly learn where to place your fingers on the fret board and is widely used by guitarists. However this is not a substitute for regular music notation. Music notation is the language of music used by musicians playing all types of instruments. For example if you gave guitar tab to a piano player they wouldn't be able to read or play it. If you want to communicate well with other musicians you ultimately need to read music.

Guitar Tab is also missing vital rhythm information telling you when to exactly play notes and how long they should be played for. Guitar Tab helps with establishing the best fret board position when used with standard music notation. Learning music notation is beyond the scope of this book but it is recommended as the next step in developing your playing and knowledge of music.

## Holding and Positioning The Guitar

When holding the guitar ensure that you're sitting in an upright position with your shoulders even and relaxed. It is best if the guitar neck is slightly raised. Some players like to use a foot stool to raise the leg that the guitar body is sitting on. There are two ways a foot stool can be used. One is to place the guitar on the left (neck side) which is known as the classical position used by classical guitarists and the other is the contemporary position with the guitar on the right (body) leg.



Classical



Contemporary

The other alternative is to play standing using a strap to hold the guitar in place. Strap height can vary from player to player. However it is best to ensure that the guitar is not so low that it makes strumming and holding your left (fretting) hand under the neck too difficult. As a general rule a good height is anywhere from your waist to your chest.



## Positioning The Fretting Hand

The next position to be aware of is the placement of the left (fretting) hand. Make sure that the wrist is relatively straight and the thumb is pointing upwards either behind the neck or over the top. For certain chords the thumb behind the neck will be required while for other chords it is OK for

the thumb to go over the top. Just ensure that the thumb does not point sideways towards the headstock as this will limit the movement of your fingers and lead to bad playing habits causing problems in the long run.



Bad Thumb

Good Thumb

Good Thumb

## Finger Numbers

On the left (neck or fretting hand) the finger numbers are as shown in the diagram. These numbers will be used in chord diagrams and other exercises later in this book.



## Holding The Guitar Pick

The final piece of the puzzle is holding the guitar pick. To do this first make a fist shape with your right (picking) hand. Then relax the fingers in the fist slightly placing the pick on top of the first joint of the forefinger. The thumb is then lowered on top of pick with a firm grip.



Apart from learning how to hold the guitar properly there are a few other essentials to go over before we begin playing music on the guitar.

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