

Musically Inclined Guitar Studio

Tips For Happy Pickin'

So you've decided to embark on a new journey of learning the guitar, congratulations! Here are a few tips and tricks to help you make the most of your playing.

1. Posture



Image Credit: fingerstyleguitar.rocks

Its so important to maintain good posture when playing. Sitting up straight , keeping our shoulders loose, and holding the guitar properly are going to make guitar playing that much more enjoyable. Also don't forget to breathe!

2. The Beginner Basics.

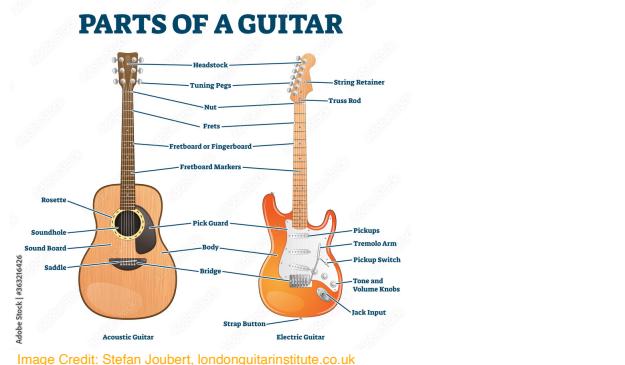


Image Credit: Stefan Joubert, londonmusicinstitute.co.uk

Your brand new to the guitar, so where do you start? Its important to take the time and learn the very basics of guitar before jumping right into playing. We need to first learn the parts of the guitar and how they all function because we are going to be referencing these terms as we go about learning the guitar. We want to start with good habits and playing technique right from the beginning so we don't have to change things later on down the road. Its a lot like learning to drive.

3. The 'Pick' or 'Plectrum' - How to hold it properly, thickness & sizes.



Image Credit: Luke Winter, midlifeguitar.com



Image Credit: yourguitaracademy.com



Image Credit: ploutone.com

This image on the upper left shows you the right way to hold the pick. Our wrist and thumb position is important here, our wrist and thumb should be relaxed. We also want to be sure we don't grip the pick too tightly. Beginner players should try to have about 1 cm of the pick showing to the **side** of your thumb, **not** the front of the thumb. Ideally you want a little bit of the pick showing past the side of your thumb and to hold the pick at a 45 degree angle towards the guitar strings. We are looking for more the side of the pick strumming or picking the strings than the pointed end. Think of it like "brushing" the strings instead of aggressively plucking them. This will make for smoother picking and strumming and stop our pick from getting stuck in between the strings or worse - dropping it inside our guitar..

Thickness of Pick

You may be wondering what thickness of pick is right for you as a beginner to start with. Pick thickness is measured in millimetres. The higher the number the thicker the pick is. *Refer to the second image to the upper right for a guide to pick thickness.*

For beginners I would recommend a thin pick (0.45-0.70mm) to start, it should be bendable and easy to hold. These are great for learning to strum and they are not too thick. As you progress you will find a thin pick is great for strumming but its too soft and light for picking the strings. So its good to have a second medium sized pick of (.60 - .88mm) thickness to give you more playing options as you progress in your playing. Its always good to have a few extra picks.

Size of pick

There are different sizes, materials and shapes of picks, however its easier to put them into categories of small medium and large. If your a smaller child a **Small Sized pick** would be best for you. The **Medium Sized Pick** is the "standard" size and what I would recommend for most beginners to start with. **Large Sized Picks** are more durable and for experienced levels of playing

4. Tuning, Guitar maintenance and other tips



Image Credit: drwah.com



Image Credit: dreamstime.com

One of the most important aspects of playing the guitar is **keeping your guitar in tune**. The easiest way to do this is to purchase a guitar tuner. These usually go for about \$25. Clip it to the end of your guitar (when your tuning) make sure its set to **440Hz** (*the frequency we set the instrument to*) and it will help you tune each string to the right note.

For playing in **Standard Tuning** the notes of the 6 guitar strings on a guitar in order from low to high are **EADGBE**. (*Low will be closest to us on the neck/fretboard and high will be furthest away from us on the neck/fretboard*) So to tune our guitar we need to first know these 4 steps.

(a) Make sure as we go through each string that the strings note is in tune on our guitar tuner.

(b) On the end of our guitar (*called the head/headstock*) are 6 tuning pegs. The numbers correspond with the strings. So the **Low E string** (*thickest string*) is our #1 tuning peg, **A string** is #2 tuning peg, **D string** is #3 tuning peg, **G string** is #4 (*#4 tuning peg will be directly across the (#3 tuning peg) D string on the headstock*), **B string** is #5 tuning peg and finally the **High E string** is #6 tuning peg. (*A great way to navigate from #1 tuning peg to #6 is to make a DOOR shape. Start at the bottom left side of our door (#1 tuning peg) go up in a straight line (to #3 tuning peg), cut across to the right (to #4 tuning peg) and come back down in a straight line (to #6 tuning peg)*)

(c) We have to turn these pegs clockwise or anti clockwise to adjust the pitch (*or sound*) of the string. Turning the pegs clockwise will loosen the string (*flattens the note*) and turning the pegs anticlockwise tightens the string (*sharpens the note*). Remember that sometimes our guitar may only be a “little bit out of tune” this means we only have to adjust the tuning pegs slightly to get our guitar in tune.

(d) Each tuner is a bit different but most will show the note we are tuning to with **three different coloured lines** to determine if the note is either flat, in tune, or sharp. **Red, yellow, and Green.** **Red line** (means we are too flat), **Yellow line** (means we are too sharp) **Green line** (Means the note for the string we are tuning is in tune). Once all 6 notes for our 6 strings are in the Green (in tune) we are ready to play!

Tuning by ear/The 5th Fret Tuning Method

Another way you can tune your instrument **without a tuner** is to “tune by ear” This is also called the “5th fret method.”

Once we get our (#1) **low E string** in tune (*by means of a tuner, tuning app or an in tune piano/In tune guitar*) - we can use the **5th fret** of the **Low E string** to get our next string the (#2) **A string** in tune. (*This is because the 5th fret on the Low E string is an A note.*)

Use your ear to listen to the note plucked on the low (#1) **E string** of the 5th fret and match the tone to the open (#2) **A string**, adjusting the A string (#2) tuning nob accordingly. We do this for all the rest of the strings up to the (#4) **G string**. Once we get to the G string we need to pick the **4th fret** of the G string to tune to our **B string (#5)**. To tune to our **High E string (#6)** we go back to the fifth fret of the **B string**. Once you’ve gone through all 6 strings you will be in tune. Remember to make sure your **adjusting the tuning nobs for the appropriate strings** or you will have a frustrating time tuning your instrument!

Changing the strings/Cleaning/Guitar Care

As you are now officially a guitar player there are some responsibilities that come with that title. Taking care of your instrument is paramount. You want it to last for many many years to come. There are a few ways you can do this.

- Keep your guitar in a case. Either soft shell or hard shell case. Hard shell is your best bet as it will protect the instrument better if it falls or is bumped into something.
- Change the guitar’s strings every 2-4 months **OR** when the sound from the strings of your guitar is more muffled, they are harder to press down than usual, and leave a black residue on your fingers after playing. You can either learn how to change the strings yourself and save a bit of money or take it into a guitar shop and have them do it for you. (If you’re younger have a parent or guardian help you with this)

- If you choose to restring your guitar yourself you will need the following:
 - A new set of strings (Between \$10-\$20 depending on brand) ***For beginners I recommend a light Gauge .012-.053 as these are light and easier to play than heavy Gauge strings*** This is ultimately your choice but I would talk to a guitar shop worker about what strings are best for you and your playing level and go from there.
 - A pair of cutters,
 - A table,
 - A Neck rest (\$20-30) or something to rest the neck on to lift it up to make it easier when your restringing.

Trimming our fingernails

- Simple as it sounds. Keep your fingernails trimmed, especially the left hand (*if you are a left handed player then the right hand*). It will help your playing and allow the pads of your fingers to sit well on the strings and keep those pesky nails out of the way of your fretting hand :)
- If you prefer more of a finger style type of playing its good to keep the fingernails on your **Right hand** a little bit longer for being able to pick the strings using your fingernails instead of a pick. However this is only for the right hand (**strumming/picking hand**)