



## **“Absolute” Beginner Guitar Workbook**

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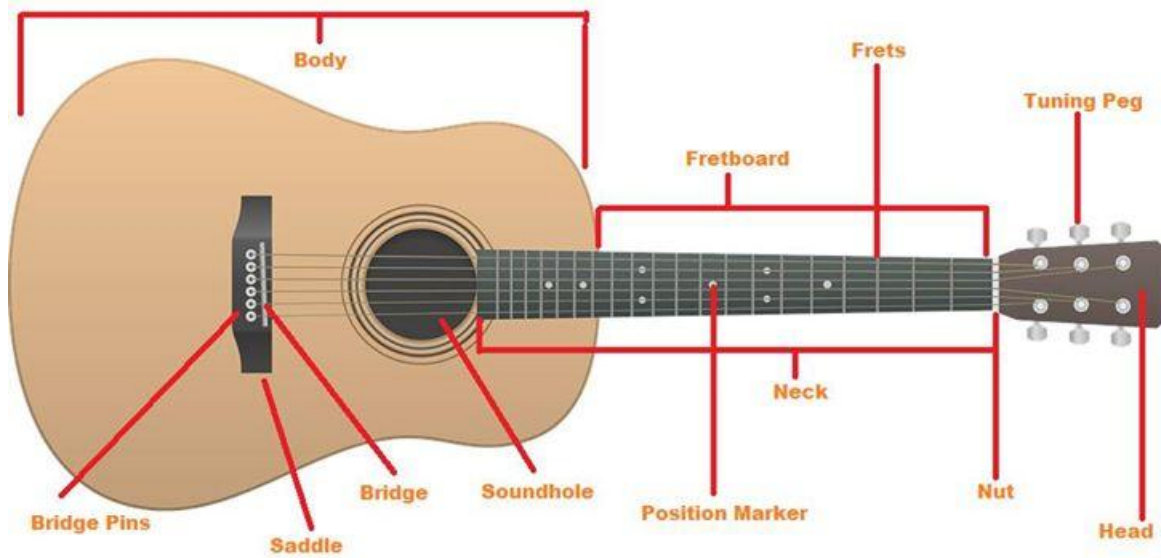
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# Introduction

This booklet is a guide to learning the very basics of guitar playing. From these first little steps, you are embarking on a musical journey that (with a little time and effort) will be immensely rewarding. The study of a musical instrument engages all parts of the mind and helps to develop a focus and centering of body and soul.

In all studies, there will be some plateaus. Everyone learns at different rates. As you struggle with something; take heart, everyone before you has been there and overcome it. There will also be great rewards. Take the game of Golf. No one stands up to the tee for the first time and strikes a ball right down the fairway. There are a lot of lost balls in the woods before that magical moment when the ball sails straight and sweet down the middle. So too with the study of guitar. There will be a lot of flat, dud notes and chords and suddenly one will ring out true and strong. Be encouraged by these moments to go on. With time and perseverance, there will be less and less “balls lost in the woods”.

# The Parts of the Guitar



An acoustic guitar projects sound from its vibrating strings through the air. The hollow body and soundhole amplify the sound that the audience will hear. There are many different styles/shapes of guitar bodies and soundholes. They all serve to produce that unique sound that the player is looking for.

On an acoustic guitar, the metal strings are stretched between the nut on the head and the bridge on the saddle, tensioned by the tuning pegs (also known as tuners or tuning machines). As acoustic guitars are built mostly of wood, temperature and humidity will cause the wood to expand or contract. This will result in your guitar “going out of tune”.

On the neck of the guitar is the Fretboard. It holds those little wire bars called frets. The frets are used to establish the notes for each of the strings. You will notice that at the top, they are far apart and as they get nearer to the body, they get closer together. To play a note, you will press a fingertip in the space between the frets and pluck the string. Try it. Now move closer towards the body and try again. Notice that the sound is higher in pitch. When a note gets higher, the sound wave gets shorter, thus the frets get closer together.

On the face and the topside of the fretboard are markers. These are used as quick references so that you (and the audience) can see the notes/chords you are playing. Midway between the nut and bridge saddle, you will find two markers. This identifies where a note is now an “octave” higher. Don’t get hung up on the word ‘octave’. You’ll see this in a little later section.

# Stringing the Acoustic Guitar

Sooner or later, you'll have to change the strings on your guitar. For most beginners, a set of strings will last a year before they need changing. As you develop an ear for the guitar, you may notice that the guitar doesn't sound as "bright" as it first did. This is caused by a build-up of tarnish, dirt and oils on the surface of the strings and in between the windings. Restringing is not a difficult task but one that can be daunting for your first time. Here are some pointers on re-stringing your guitar.

## 1. Removing the old strings:

The string is mechanically held by the tuner on the head and the bridge pin on the bridge. Pluck a string and then turn the tuner. You should hear the note go lower. If you don't, turn the other way. Keep turning that way until the string becomes very loose.

The bridge pin is used to aid in anchoring the string to the bridge plate inside the body of the guitar. At any local guitar shop, you will find an inexpensive pegwinder that looks something like this:



There are three parts to this one shown. The flattened lozenge shape part will fit over the tuner and help you quickly loosen or tighten the string. The handle is the other end. On the lozenge end, notice a notch. This notch will fit under the bridge pin and aid you in levering it out (once the string is loosened). Be careful when doing so, the tool may scratch the

bridge a little. Pull the pin out and then the loose string should wiggle out of the hole.

## 2. Clean the guitar:

Once you have removed all of the strings, now is the time to give the guitar a cleaning. Just give the guitar a good wipe with a dust-free polishing cloth. NEVER use anything like Pledge, Pine sol or Windex. It likely will damage the finish on the guitar. There are products out there for polishing the guitar. To clean off any build-up on the body, a damp cloth or, at the worst, white distilled vinegar.

Eventually, you will notice an accumulation of grime on the fretboard from dirt and oils off your fingers. You could gently sand that off with OOOO steel wool. Never use anything more abrasive.

Local guitar shops will have guitar-cleaning kits that contain everything you need. Or whenever in doubt, bring the guitar in and have someone look at it.

## 3. Putting on new strings:

A new set of strings will make any guitar sound like a million bucks. Some professionals have their guitars restrung before every show. Luckily, they have roadies. Which type of strings you use, well, that comes down to trying a lot of different ones until you find something you like. Generally, start with a light gauge of strings. As you progress and develop your own style and sound, you may choose to go to heavier strings. Heavy strings are louder, have extra body and sustain, and better low-end tone. However, be careful, heavier strings mean a lot more tension and the guitar may not be built to handle it. It could pull the bridge right off the soundboard.

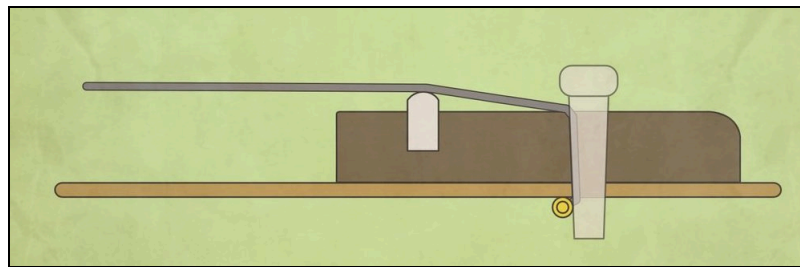
When you unwrap a new set of strings, you will see a couple of things. There are two types of string; the plain bare metal B and e string and the rest have wire wrapped (wound) around the string. Wrapping the string allows the string to still be flexible while producing a lower pitch. Just imagine how stiff the E string would be if it wasn't wound and was a solid wire. The other thing to notice is that the two ends of a string are different. One end has a little barrel (called a ball) and the other is bare metal. Each string is specifically made to go in one place. They can be in

their own package or they may be colour coded with a legend on the packaging. That being said, they pretty much go on the same way.

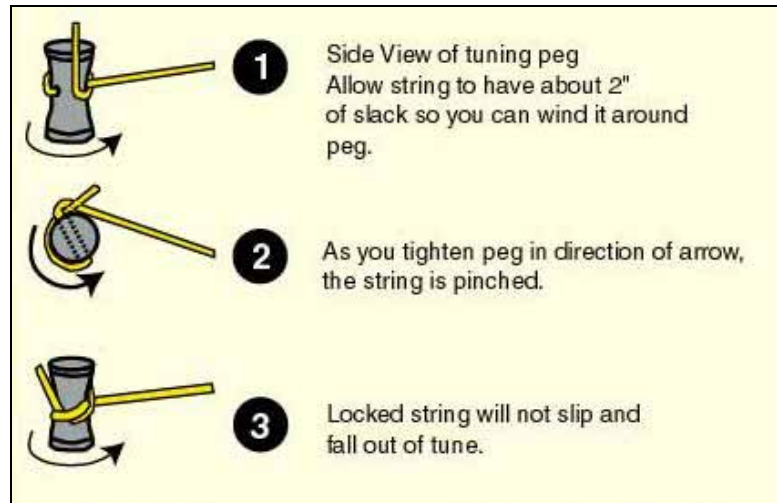
Firstly, put a slight kink on the ball end, as shown:



Then slide the ball end down the appropriate hole in the bridge with the kink facing the head of the guitar. The ball is intended to anchor on the bridge plate inside the guitar. Then slide a bridge pin down, pushing firmly until it is seated. While holding the pin with a fingertip, give the string a firm pull to bring the ball in contact with the plate.



The other end of the string will be pushed through a hole in the appropriate tuner. The tuners usually are divided into three-aside or six on one side. Depending on which side of the head the string is on, bring the running end of the string around counter-clockwise for left side or clockwise for right side. Pass the running end under the string and bend it up away from the face of the head. Now when you tighten the string, it will be clinched on and not slip as tension comes on.



As a rule of thumb, for wound strings, allow 2 inches of slack for winding and for the plain strings, allow 3 inches. Plain strings have a better tendency to slip or break.

#### 4. Tuning up:

With the new strings on, now it's time to tune up! There are a lot of tuners out on the market for you to choose from. There are also tuner apps that can be downloaded for smart phones. Whatever you choose, they will all do the same thing; tune your guitar against an accepted standard. This way you will be in tune with the rest of the group. The Snark shown is an example of a tuner that clamps onto the head and senses the vibration of the string when plucked.



For the guitar, the accepted standard tuning is (from the top string down) E, A, D, G, B, e. As you progress, you will discover alternate tunings that will expose you to other possibilities for the guitar. But first, baby steps.

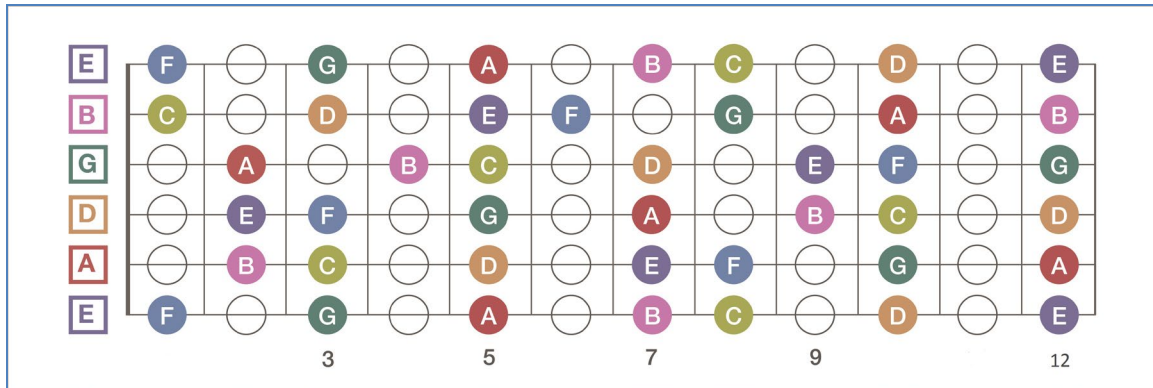


If we use the Snark as the tuner, pick the top E string. The tuner screen will display the note that it senses and if the string is flat (to the left/red) or sharp (to the right/yellow) of that note. As always, green is good. Tighten the string until the screen displays E in the green. Then proceed to tighten the remaining strings to their appropriate note. When you have finished, go back and check tuning again. It is usual for the top strings to be flat. Realize that as you are tightening these steel strings, the tension is bending the soundboard slightly. This is normal, the guitar is built to take normal tensions. But don't over tighten the strings. Once you have retuned the strings, you are set to go.

Tuning is the first thing every guitarist will do as soon as the guitar comes out of the case. That way, when it's time to play, everyone is good to go.

With a new set of strings, it will take time for them to settle in to their designed tension. Don't be surprised if after a little while, you check them and they've fallen flat slightly. Just retune. Now that you've tuned your new strings up, you can cut the excess off with wire cutters.

# The Fretboard



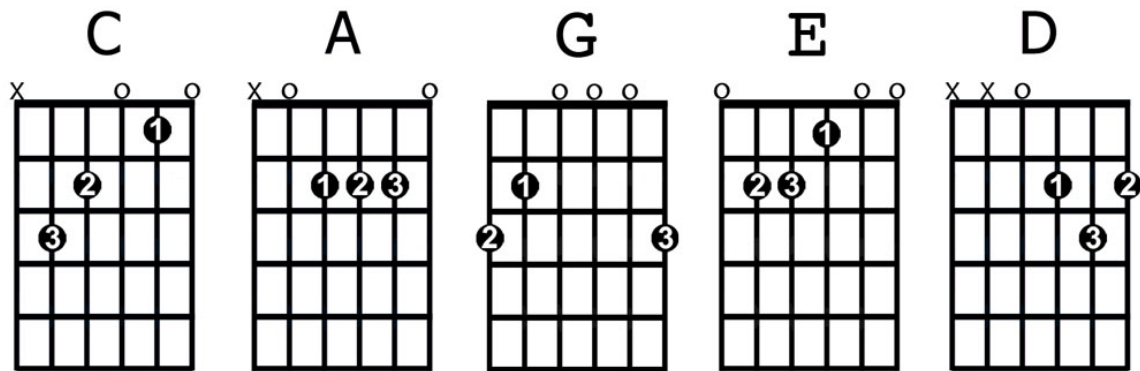
In the diagram above, you can see the frets are numbered from 1 to 12. Above the 12<sup>th</sup> fret, the numbers still increase but the notes repeat the same pattern (remember an octave up). The nut on the guitar head is represented as the bold vertical line between the E and F. Sometime, you may hear it referred as zero. The bottom line represents the top string of your guitar. And the top line represents the bottom string. Notice this fretboard shows the EADGBe tuning.

All of the natural notes on the fretboard are laid out in the diagram. The term natural originates from the piano and the white keys on the keyboard. The black keys are either flat or sharps. On the guitar fretboard, look at the space between the first F and G. Realistically, that note is the F sharp or the G flat. They are the same thing. For our purposes, this would be called F sharp. You will see it written as F#. It is not normally called G flat (Gb). However, the space between G and A is usually called Ab not G#.

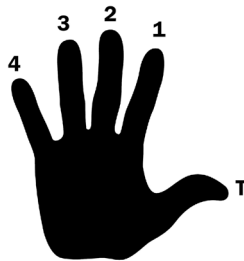
In Western music, there is no step between the E and F or the B and C. Everywhere else you can see there are two frets between notes. We won't dig into music theory here at this time. Just remember, no step between E and F or B and C.

# Beginner Chords (the first challenges)

Now, we'll move onto forming your first chords. We're going to start with Major and Minor chords in the open (or first) position. A chord is made up from a triad (group of three) notes that sound good together. The chord is identified by its "Root" note. If you look back at the fretboard, you will see that the first string played on the left will be root note. Example: C major chord; on the A string, the third fret is a C natural.



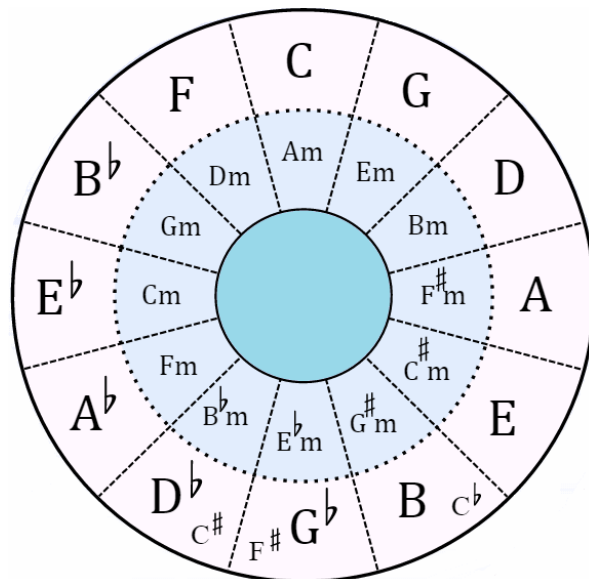
Above are some of the Major chords. These are the basic building blocks for all others. This type of graphic is very commonly used to depict a chord. From left to right, the strings are 'E A D G B e'. The bold top line represents the nut. Frets count down from it. An 'X' above a string means it is not strummed in that chord. An 'O' means that the string is open (not fretted) and played in that chord. The black circles with numbers represent which finger to use.



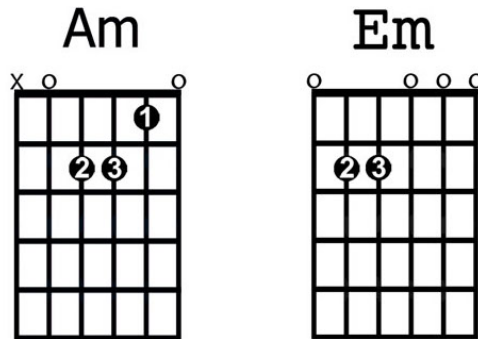
When making a chord, use the very tips of your fingers to press the string firmly down to the fretboard. Press your thumb to the back of the neck. You may find that your fingernails need to be trimmed down to play properly. It is useful to arch your wrist to aid in using fingertips. At first, you will develop some hand cramping as this is a new experience for your hand. You may want to begin some simple exercises to promote strength and flexibility. Even squeezing a tennis ball will help. Squeeze with one finger at a time. You will also develop little furrows in your fingers. These are the beginning of the oh-so important calluses that every guitar player must have.

With your pick, slowly pluck each string downwards. You want to hear a note ring out pure. If there is a muted note or thud, one of your fingers is interfering with the string. Reposition your hand and try again. Fear not, this is the first challenge everyone faces. Persevere.

Once you can slowly play down the strings with a pure ringing tone, strum the chord quicker. A major chord will have a bright sound. Again, you don't want any thuds. From here, after you have mastered each chords individually, begin to slowly move from one chord to another. This is the second challenge. Being able to move from a G major chord to a C major chord, etc. You are still looking for the pure ringing tone. Do not rush the chord changes or strumming. Slowly first, then as confidence builds, increase the changes slightly.



This wheel-type diagram is called the 'Circle of Fifths'. It shows the relationship between the twelve tones of the chromatic scale. At this point, we have only been looking at the first five clockwise from the C major (outside wheel). The inner wheel shows the Minor chord that is directly related to a Major chord.



Here are the first two minor chords for you to learn. As I said before, this graphic shows strings not to be played, open strings to be played and the fingering for the chord. When you learn these, notice that they have a darker sounding tone than the Majors. With these two Minor and the Major chords, you will be able to play along with a lot of familiar pop/rock and blues songs. You can easily download a chord chart that will show you all of the chords you could ever want to know.

As you progress, there will come a time when you only have to think about a chord and the fingers automatically fall to the proper place on the fretboard. This is called Muscle Memory wherein you can separate mind and body. It helps you get quicker with your chord changes. Your brain no longer has to concentrate on driving the fingers to form a chord. It will free your brain up for others things, like singing (if so inclined).

## Final Thoughts

Now you have the basics covered to begin your musical journey on the guitar. With the material we've looked at in the guide and some time and effort, you'll be well on your way. As I've said before; persevere. The struggles you will encounter, every guitarist has had to struggle through too. Once you can change between chords easier, seek out local jams or friends to practice with. Get a floor stand or wall hanger for your guitar. A guitar left in its case, never gets played.

And finally, practice, practice, practice. Not one player has ever picked up a guitar for the very first time and been able to play like Eddie Van Halen, Tommy Emmanuel or Stevie Ray Vaughn. Even great guitarist had to practice continually to get to where they are. If you want to master the guitar, it will take 10,000 hours of practice. But commit to at least thirty minutes practice every day and you will see rewarding results. Not every practice will go smooth. There will be days when you can't play anything right. But think back to my golf analogy. There will be days when you can play everything right. Those are the days that encourage, that validate what you are doing.

Playing the guitar will give you another voice. One to express yourself in ways you weren't able to before. At first, it'll be simply a way of talking to yourself. But once your skill develops, it'll be a way of projecting yourself out to others. There will be (for want of a better word) zen-like moments where body and soul are at peace.