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Guitar Made Easy

By Louise Slavnic

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About the Author



Louise Slavnic is the holder of a *Diploma of Teaching* [Primary – Australian Catholic University] and *Bachelor of Education* [Primary – Australian Catholic University]. She has a passion for helping people of all ages reach their goals, and realize their potential in all parts of life. Louise learned to play the guitar at 8 years of age. Now with over 20 years playing the guitar, teaching children and adults to play guitar as a hobby, Louise has combined her educational skills and practical experiences to develop the ***Guitar Made Easy*** video/workbook program. Remember her words of encouragement: “*You’ll always be glad you can play.*”

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This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. The information herein is based upon the author/publishers’ experience and opinion only. The author/publisher is not engaged in professional guitar tuition services. If expert assistance is required, the services of a professional tutor should be sought. Many variables affect individual results.



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Part 1

1a) Holding the Guitar

When learning to play the guitar it is important to realize that personal style will develop later, and that you should not assume that you will be as accomplished as those you have seen playing guitar in various bands of sorts (as above illustration shows).

As previously mentioned, a strap may be used to provide security (some players do not like the risk of the guitar slipping while they play) whilst sitting or to allow playing to occur whilst standing up. Again please be aware that this is a personal thing and you will develop your own style as you practice more you will discover what is comfortable.

Beginner's Tips

Some beginners are very aware of how they are holding the guitar and this can cause undue strain on the body as it is tensed with the anxiety of correct position. The most important thing about playing the guitar is to enjoy it, to have fun. So before we even go in to the details of correct position, grip and strumming action, let's remember that we are doing this in order to acquire a skill that will bring us great enjoyment all of our lives (and joy to others!).

Naturally some people become more proficient at playing the guitar than others, and learn very quickly (natural talent one could say). This is not to say that those who take longer do not enjoy it. Remember, whilst some may not have natural ability, they can still become (very) good guitar players, depending on their

desire. Often those who have to work harder become better simply because their commitment is stronger.

How to Hold Your Guitar

1. For starters you should always play sitting down. Make sure it is not a chair with armrests as you may knock the guitar against them. Although you will probably be leaning forward to see music, it is best to sit where there is no danger of the guitar being knocked against anything. Choose a lounge or table chair that is the right height for you to place music or instructions on a table in front of you. Try not to use a table that is too low as you will find yourself leaning forward too much and becoming uncomfortable very quickly. Plus you will lose your spot on the music/instructions you are referring to as you are looking too far down.

Obviously a music stand is ideal or a book stand for use on a table. However these items are not always easy to come by at a reasonable price, but do keep your eyes out in second hand stores, used goods in newspapers and garage sales etc. Some people sit on a cushion on the floor! It is up to you how you develop and practice your style.

Be comfortable, keep the guitar out of danger and be able to see music/instructions clearly.

2. Do not be nervous, simply relax – take things easy and you will learn with confidence and enjoyment. Once seated appropriately, make sure the strap is either removed or not touching any of the strings. If you are using a strap, place it around your neck and shoulders and allow the guitar to sit naturally.

Legs may be crossed or uncrossed, whatever is comfortable. The lower curved part of the guitar body rests on the right thigh (or left if you are left handed*). The guitar is lightly supported by the right (*) arm by placing the hand over the sound hole thereby bending the elbow approximately at the highest point of the wide part of the guitar body and keeping the wrist slightly arched.

3. The neck of the guitar points slightly upward and using your left hand (or right if you are left handed), nestle the neck in the hollow between your thumb and forefinger – at the top of the neck. Curve your fingers in slightly.
4. Your left (or right) elbow which is holding the neck should be about 15cm away from your corresponding side.

This position may feel awkward now, but sooner than you think it will be as natural as getting comfortable to start driving a car. Remember not to be too over conscious of the positioning as you will prevent your own comfort and cause nervousness, thereby affecting your actual playing.

Holding the guitar correctly makes it easier for you to play and you will soon find out why it is held the way it is suggested here.

IMPORTANT: When playing, the hand around the neck of the guitar is not to hold any weight of the instrument. This must be on your thigh. The left (or right) hand is kept free of weight so it can move quickly along the fret board playing chords or strings.

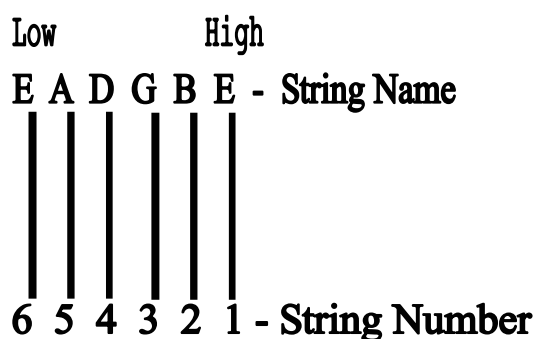
You will also find that you arms will become sore from being held in these positions as you are not used to using them in this capacity. The arm over the top of the guitar and the wrist playing chords will be the most noticeable. Do not be concerned as just like learning any new skill, time is needed for the body to adjust/strengthen.

1b) Tuning Methods

1. Piano/Keyboard
2. Pitch Pipe
3. Tuning Machine
4. Using 6th String

1. Piano/Keyboard

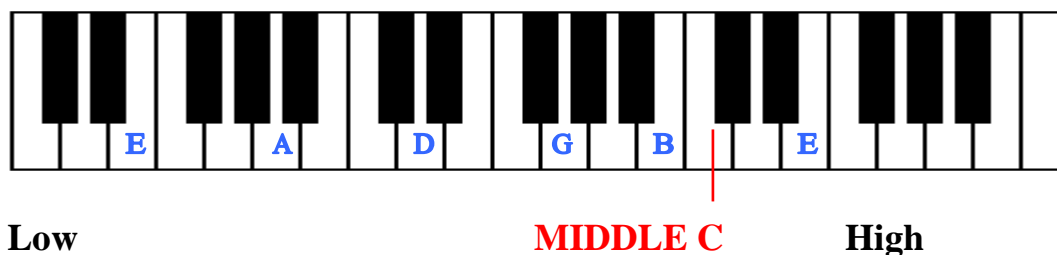
As you can see from the illustration, each string has a name that matches a note on a piano or keyboard. Unless you also happen to know how to play a piano



and have one handy, this method is not really useful. However, if you do have one around that is perhaps used by others but is available to you, you can always learn where these notes are. To do this please note:

You tune a guitar from a piano/keyboard from MIDDLE C. This note is found just below the two black keys near the center of the piano where the maker's name usually appears. If you are using a keyboard, sometimes the names of the

notes are written above the keys. Middle C will of course be the 'C' that is closest to the middle.



To start from the top of the guitar, note that the 6th or top string, is low 'E' and therefore you must sound the 'E' on the keyboard that is low (as illustrated).

Once you sound the low 'E' note on the piano, sound the top string (being sure that the string is 'open'), move the tuning key that is attached to it until the sounds match. If you do not have an ear for it to start, do not worry, with practice you will become better. However if after 3 months of tuning and playing you still have trouble matching the sounds, then a tuning machine may be best for you.

After doing the low 'E', move on to A, D, G, B and finally high 'E' which is on the other side of middle 'C' matching the sound of the note to the sound of the guitar string.

2. Pitch Pipe

A *Pitch Pipe* consists of 6 small tubes which operate on the mouth organ principle. It is small and much handier to check that your guitar is tuned when you are not at home. It is designed so that the top 3 (6th, 5th, and 4th strings – Low 'E', A and D) are protruding on one side, and the last three (3rd, 2nd and 1st – G, B and high 'E') are on the other side.

Applying the same principle as tuning a guitar using a piano/keyboard, sound the low 'E', then sound the low 'E' (open string) on the guitar and turn the attached tuning key either up or down until the sounds match. Then move on to A, D, G, B and high 'E'.

3. Tuning Machine



Obviously for the development of your musical ear (the ability to detect a pitch), using a piano or tuning pipe is better. However many guitarists who simply play for pleasure for themselves or small groups are happy with being able to carry around one of these machines and tune their guitar quickly with minimal fuss.

The way it works is you simply tell the machine [by selecting the name of the string on the machine with the switch] which string you are tuning and either have it on your knee or a small table in front of you where the machine can detect the sound. (Make sure it is turned on before use and off when you are finished, keep batteries fresh by storing the machine inside the case with your guitar which you naturally keep in a cool, dry place).

Start as usual with the top string (6th or low 'E'), sound the string (open) and the needle will move informing you of the pitch of the string. There is a definite middle where you want the needle to be pointing that indicates that the string is in tune. If the needle goes above the middle point, it is too high and must be lowered using the appropriate tuning key. If the needle stays below the middle point, it is too low and the string must be made higher.

It is important to remember that you once a string is tuned and you move on to the next string that you make sure that you have moved the appropriate switch to match the string you are tuning!!!

4. Using 6th String

General Info About 6th String Tuning

Once you master this method you can use just about any instrument to provide you with the low 'E' top (6th) string sound, and then you can do the rest yourself. It is also the best method for tuning when there is no other in tune instrument around. Of course when you use the top string to begin tuning, it may not be at the correct pitch. However you can still tune the guitar so that you can practice or play for pleasure.

As mentioned, any instrument that is tuned can provide you with the starting point, low 'E'. Another guitar player may be present that has already tuned their guitar. You can simply tune your top string to theirs by listening to their OPEN top string and you match the pitch of your guitar to it by turning the tuning key up or down. The more you tune your guitar the better you will be able to hear the pitch and therefore whether you need to go up or down. A handy instrument is the recorder as it is quite compact and a lot of people have one. You need an in tune instrument to start so that your instrument matches the pitch of all the other instruments you may be playing with. Remember, for your own personal use, you can still use this method to tune your guitar but it may not be at the correct pitch.

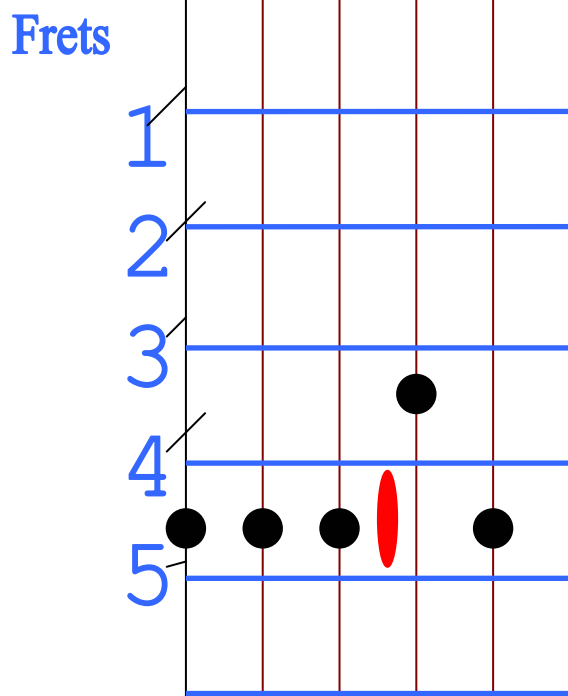
Personal experience has led me to believe that once new string has stretched, the top 2 strings (6th and 5th – low 'E' and 'A') generally stay in tune quite well (with the proper care). It is usually the other four strings that slip out of tune and especially the last two (2nd and 1st – 'B' and high 'E'). So when you have mastered this method, tuning your guitar is simple, quick and easy and most of the time, close to the correct pitch. You will notice most accomplished guitarists use this method for tuning.

How to Tune a Guitar with the 6th String Method

Frets* 1-6

The 5th fret is where 6th string tuning begins and is usually marked with the first position dot between the 4th and 3rd strings (D and G). The 6th String (low 'E')

Notes	E	A	D	G	B	E
Strings	6	5	4	3	2	1



Summary of 6th String Tuning

The black dots in the diagram above depict that a finger is placed firmly in that spot in order to tune the string directly below it.

As previously mentioned, the top or 6th string (low 'E') must first be tuned to a musical instrument matching the note low 'E' note sound before this tuning procedure commences. Remember to play the string OPEN when tuning it to the instrument available.

Once the 6th string is tuned correctly, the rest of the strings can be tuned accordingly.

- Pressing on the 6th string in the 5th fret gives the sound for the OPEN 5th string. So press in this position, sound the string, then sound the 5th string.

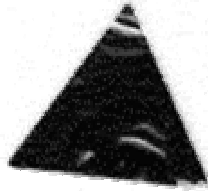
Move the according tuning key (5th string) until the 5th string matches the sound of the pressed 6th string.

- Move your finger to the 5th string in the 5th fret and press, sound the string and this gives the sound for the OPEN 4th string. Move the according tuning key (4th string) until the 4th string matches the sound of the pressed 5th string.
- Move your finger to the 4th string in the 5th fret and press, sound the string and this gives the sound for the OPEN 3rd string. Move the according tuning key (3rd string) until the 3rd string matches the sound of the pressed 4th string.
- Move your finger to the 3rd string ***in the 4th fret*** and press, sound the string and this gives the sound for the OPEN 2nd string. Move the according tuning key (2nd string) until the 2nd string matches the sound of the pressed 3rd string.
- Move your finger to the 2nd string in the 5th fret and press, sound the string and this gives the sound for the OPEN 1st string. Move the according tuning key (1st string) until the 1st string matches the sound of the pressed 2nd string.

1c) Strumming and using a Plectrum



Common



Triangle



Brazilian



Thumb Pick

Sounding the Strings

As shown above, there are a few varieties of the sounding device used by guitarists called a PLECTRUM. It should also be noted that such plectrums come in different thicknesses: heavy/medium/soft – like a toothbrush. This is to suit the personal style of the guitarists. Everyone has a different style as well as taste – so plectrums also come in varying designs/patterns to suit personal taste. There are also different textures available like the Brazilian Stone shown above. Some guitarists have their own names printed on them and an individual pattern (Metallica etc.) as playing the guitar is such a big part of their lives, they encompass their own personality into the playing of it.

Using the plectrum, the bare thumb or a thumb pick, is entirely personal. However, when learning to play, it is usually best to get used to sounding the strings using the bare thumb, and develop a personal style as you practice and become more comfortable.

However, (particularly on a steel stringed guitar) using the thumb to start may give you blister if you overdo it, it is still the best way to kick off your guitar playing career.

THUMB PICK

A thumb pick is specially shaped to fit around the thumb and must be carefully selected for the individual. If it is too tight it will cause discomfort and affect your playing. If it is too loose it will move too easily causing your playing to be interrupted. It should fit snugly over the thumbnail generally, but some guitarists have it further down the thumb. As already pointed out, it is a personal thing.

PLECTRUM

All other plectrums should be selected on the size and texture first and then the thickness to suit the individual player. The plectrum is held between the fleshy part of the thumb and the first joint of the forefinger.

Hold the plectrum just firmly enough for control. Avoid a tight grip as it will tire your hand. A firm grip is all that is needed while still keeping the hand and wrist



relaxed and flexible. If held too loosely or too turned, it will not strum correctly giving a vibrating or scratchy sound instead of clear and melodious.

Hold the plectrum as shown here – the top part of the plectrum covered with about 1 to 1.5 cm showing below the thumb. When using the plectrum, only the tip of the plectrum makes contact (same applies to thumb pick) with the strings.



Some players curl their fingers in to the palm as they play. Others rest the three fingers on the scratch plate or further down – all dependant on personal style and comfort.

How to Strum

Until you become accustomed to playing and gain confidence, use your bare thumb to strum until you are ready to use a correct rhythmic strum. Once you do start to use a plectrum, allow yourself a week or so to get used to the rhythmic strum as well as gripping the plectrum.

Strumming is usually a movement of the hand and wrist only. Using the entire weight of the forearm makes things awkward and tiresome.

To get the feel of things, while simply resting the neck of the guitar in the cup between thumb and index finger, strum across all of the strings. Using the thumb (nothing else to touch strings), start from the 6th string and sound each string in turn until you reach the 1st string. One string at a time being sure to sound each string gently but enough to obtain sound. If the string vibrates you have strummed it too hard.

The part of the thumb making contact should be the inner part closest to the guitar, just below the thumbnail. Strum slowly with reasonable firmness across all strings in turn, keeping your wrist relaxed. After about 20 attempts you should be able to strum all strings with one strum instead of slow one at a time motion.

For now, the sound coming from the guitar is not particularly musical, but so long as the guitar is in tune, the sound will resemble a pleasant sound.

FOR BEST RESULTS

Do not “dig” your thumb in to the strings or try to “push” it across them. Allow the thumb to pivot freely with the wrist and in this way, the strum is actually achieved by a downward movement of the thumb, assisted by the bending of the wrist. Practice until a smooth strum over all 6 strings is achieved. Keep the hand relaxed.

Beginner's Creed

- ✓ **HOLD**
- ✓ **TUNE**
- ✓ **STRUM (gentle)**
- ✓ **FOUNDATION FOR STRUMMING STYLE**
- ✓ **BE COMFORTABLE**
- ✓ **HAVE FUN**

You will know when you are ready for the *Chord Structure* section when:

- holding the guitar is comfortable
- tuning is becoming easier and more natural
- strumming is becoming smoother

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