

Beginner's Guide

This guide is designed to answer typical questions people have when starting out playing guitar. Beginning to learn guitar is an incredibly exciting journey, you will have many questions to begin with. There is a bewildering wealth of information available printed and online, so this guide is to help you with some of the basics to ensure that you start off in the right way.



What sort of guitar to buy?



Where from?



Anything else I will need?



Practice

Electric vs Acoustic?

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Steel strung acoustic</p>  | <p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is an abundance of cheap models• No need for any other equipment eg. Amplifiers• Great for fingerpicking• Steel string acoustics have a nice and bright sound (more so than a nylon strung guitar). <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Harder to play lead guitar on (guitar solos)• Strings are slightly tougher on the fingers than electric guitar strings. You therefore have to apply more pressure to sound a note than on an electric guitar |
| <p>Nylon strung acoustic</p>  | <p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Again, there are plenty of cheap models available• Strings are soft on the fingers and require less pressure than a steel strung guitar• Good for fingerpicking/classical• No need for any other equipment <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• These guitars have quite a mellow tone, on cheaper examples this could be described as 'dull'!• They have quite a wide neck to get your hands around• Changing the strings on a nylon guitar is a bit fiddly |
| <p>Electric Guitar</p>  | <p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less pressure is required to play notes, meaning it is easier than an acoustic guitar.• Neck is often narrow, which for some people makes it easier to play• Work better for guitar solos than acoustic. <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You will need some additional equipment (a lead, amplifier and strap)• Depending on what you buy, can be a bit more expensive than starting on acoustic.• You may find it hard to play acoustic if you start on an electric as you won't be used to the required pressure needed to play notes. |

Where From?

Guitar
shop

Internet

Charity
Shop

Second
hand

1. **Guitar Shop:** this should be your first choice. Why? Go to the right guitar shop and they will make sure you leave with something suitable for your needs. Much like people, guitars come in different shapes and sizes. You need something that will be comfortable to hold, not too big, not too small. This is critical when buying a child's guitar where $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ sized instruments are available. In a shop ask staff to demonstrate the guitar so you can hear what it sounds like.
2. **Internet:** you might be able to get a good deal, but as said in point one, you need to hold an instrument to see if it is a good size for you. If there aren't many shops in your area then most retailers will allow you to send a guitar back if you are unhappy once it has arrived, I would check before you buy though.
3. **Charity shop:** Sue Ryder often stocks nylon strung guitars, this is a good option for young children where you'd like to see if they take to it before buying something more expensive.
4. **Second hand:** Whether Ebay or Gumtree, you might get a bargain, but do your research!

What accessories do I need?

In addition to your guitar, there are a few things that you will need. I have split them up into essential and optional.

Essential:



Tuner



Plectrums



Spare set of strings



Guitar case
(soft or hard)

In terms of a tuner, you can get one that clips onto the guitar or one like in the picture above. Although a bit more expensive than most tuners, I would recommend the BOSS TU-80. I've had mine for 15 years, it's reliable and the batteries last for ages. As for plectrums they come in different colours and sizes. Buy a selection of thicknesses to start to see which you prefer.

Optional:



Capo



Stringwinder



Metronome



Guitar strap

Others:

- A guitar stand
- Lemon oil for the neck (depending on the type of wood)
- Music stand
- String cutters for when changing strings

Practice

As well as learning new chords and songs, practicing is a skill that you will need to develop. Here is some guidance:

- Practice little and often. Regular practice is the most important thing. A lot of beginning guitar is linked to muscle memory and developing flexibility and strength in your fingers. This will only come through regular practice. Regular practice will also help you remember pieces and chord shapes.
- 20-30 minutes is an ideal amount of time for practice, but using a spare 5 minutes here or there can help too.
- Have a clear aim/goal for your practice and divide up your practice time. If you are playing for 30 minutes you might do the following:
 - 0-5 min Warm up exercises
 - 5-10min Scales
 - 10-20 working on chord changes
 - 20-30 working on a song
- Learning anything new can be frustrating, but it is how you deal with frustration that counts. Rather than being self critical, be objective and take a problem solving approach. So instead of: 'I'm rubbish at this' , say: 'Why isn't that chord sounding clear?'. There will be some aspects of the guitar that will come to you quickly, enjoy those moments, other aspects will take longer and you just have to accept that and enjoy the learning process. Recording yourself and listening further down the line can be a helpful way to see how much progress you have made.