

TECHNIQUE 1

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Introduction

The guitar is without a doubt the most important musical instrument in the development of popular culture within the last 60 years. The guitar has been the primary driving force for the evolution of especially rock and metal-oriented music styles, but contemporary music in general would not have sounded the same without the electric guitar. It is also safe to say that it would be hard to imagine influential artists and bands such as The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, Van Halen and Metallica without the presence of a guitar.

The guitar is a member of the string instrument family, and the origins of instruments of this type can be traced back to Egypt and Turkey 3000 years ago. The first instruments similar in design to the modern guitar, however, are believed to be four-string ukulele type instruments made in Spain in the 15th century. The guitar as we know it today evolved in the 19th century, with the electric guitar coming into its current form in the 1930s. Prior to the '50s, the guitar was considered an irrelevant and unsubstantial instrument and was not taken seriously in established music circles, as it lacked the deep traditions of established and more prestigious instruments like the piano or violin. This was about to change radically, as a new type of music called "rock'n'roll" streamed out of the radios in the mid-'50s. This music was guitar-driven and appealed to a whole new generation of music fans who were completely uninterested in the music of their parents, but hungry for a type of music they could call their own.

The guitar would eventually shape the sound of popular music like no other instrument, and the guitar was elevated to a status which ultimately made it the primary *iconic symbol* of not only contemporary music, but also popular culture itself, and the associated lifestyle of the young and hip "in-crowd." The lifestyle of this new generation was heavily influenced by the deep sociological changes taking place in society, in both Europe and North America in the '50s and '60s, and the counter-culture revolution that followed would eventually break down all the rules in the evolution of popular music. For many adolescent and young adults at the time, the larger-than-life "rock gods" they got to know through this new music represented everything they fantasized about: playing music they loved for thousands of ecstatic fans, living a glitzy and glamorous lifestyle with unlimited access to expandable money, and the possibility to indulge in the infamous myths of "sex, drugs and rock'n'roll." Guitar-driven rock music, with a deeply sexualized image of the rock guitarist, made the guitar an irresistible weapon of choice for not only young people in the '50s and '60', but it has kept the guitar at the very top of the list as the most popular and attractive instrument for young people up until today.

With the plethora of sounds, styles, techniques and approaches commonly utilized on the guitar, the process of mastering the instrument ultimately becomes a monumental task. You can literally spend your entire life honing and perfecting your skills, but in the end, the guitar is an incredibly dynamic instrument, where the entire approach can be customized to completely fit your personal preferences. This, in turn, makes the task of writing a guitar technique book a very challenging endeavor. The intention with this book is *not* to present a "unified theory" on how to become a complete guitarist in all the contemporary styles. The instrument's possibilities are far too complex for this to be achieved in one single book. The goal with this entire book series, however, is to provide you with all of the *fundamental skillsets* regarding contemporary rhythm and lead guitar playing techniques—the most essential skills you will need for a career in today's music industry, regardless of style or genre.

Topics you will be introduced to in this book include:

- Proper fretting hand and picking hand technique
- Diatonic scales
- The 5-pattern system (CAGED)
- Lead guitar techniques
- Soloing strategies
- Basic chord voicings
- Common rhythm guitar approaches
- Technical exercises
- Practice routines

Note that in this book you will find large amounts of information which extend far beyond the mere technical aspect of training and synchronizing your fingers. Perhaps the most important tools in your music-making arsenal are highly developed personal philosophies on how you approach the instrument and the music you want to play. But also keep in mind that a deep understanding of the inner mechanics of how *music actually works* is incredibly important. This knowledge and insight is what will eventually shape your long-term development towards becoming a complete musician. It is recommended that you read the text in this book numerous times, as there will be deeper, secondary layers of information which will be easy to overlook upon the first reading—but this type of information is what will, in the end, enable you to develop a much deeper musical philosophy. A solid, personal musical philosophy may be your most important and valuable tool when you are on a journey towards becoming the musician you have always envisioned.

Los Angeles, 2014
Stig Mathisen, D.M.A.

Chapter 1: Basics of the Guitar

There are three types of guitars commonly used today: nylon-string acoustic guitar, steel-string acoustic guitar and electric guitar.

Ex. 1

Nylon-String Guitar



Nylon-string acoustic guitar is an instrument closely associated with flamenco and classical guitar players, but it is an instrument with a softer sound that lends itself well to many other genres as well, such as pop and Latin music. The instrument is commonly used by fingerstyle players, for both solo performances and for accompaniment purposes. Due to the softer type of strings used, nylon string guitars are often ideal for beginners.

Steel-String Guitar



Steel-string acoustic guitars are commonly used in contemporary genres such as pop, rock and country due to their bright and powerful sound. This is often the favored instrument for strummed accompaniment patterns but is often used for fingerstyle technique as well.

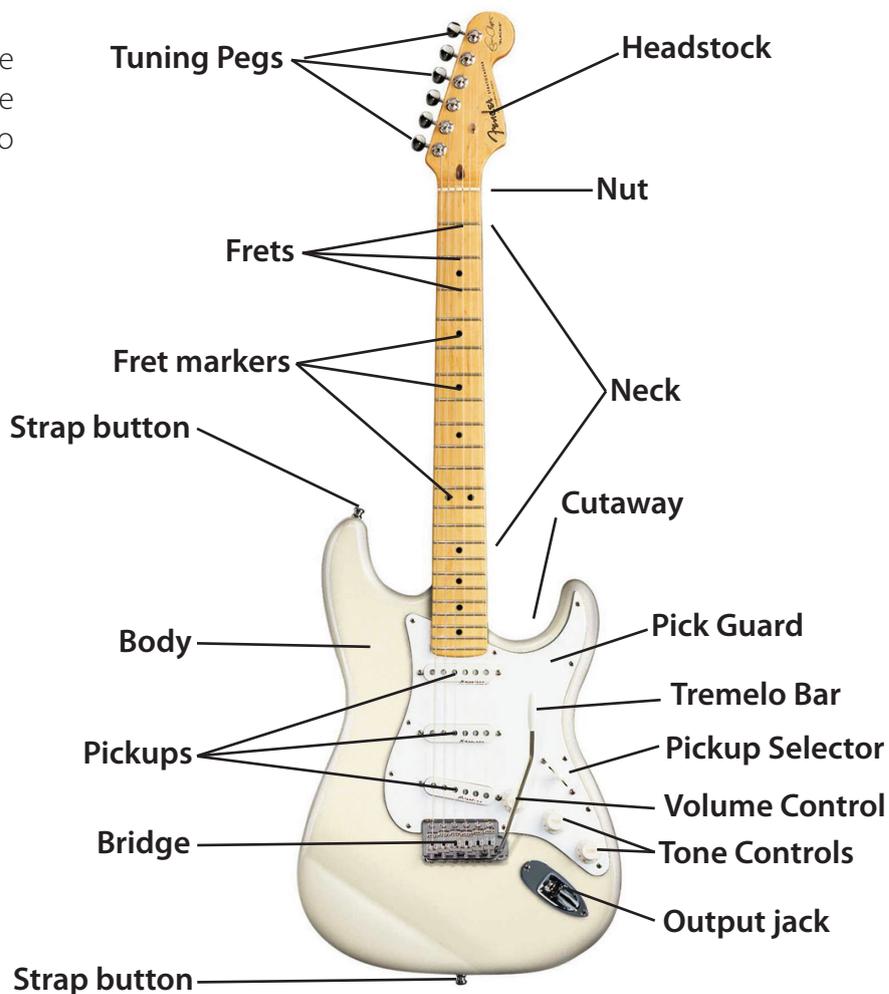
Electric Guitar



The electric guitar is used in all types of contemporary music. It is used for both accompaniment and solo purposes, and is commonly played with both a clean and an overdriven sound.

The basic construction of all three types of guitars is similar, although the electric guitar has more features due to the electronic components involved.

Ex. 1.2 (right)



Chapter 2: Tuning the Guitar

Tuning the guitar is challenging in the beginning, as it will take some time to develop the ability to hear if a string needs to be raised or lowered in pitch. There are usually three ways of tuning the guitar:

1. Using an electronic tuner
2. Tuning to reference pitches
3. Tuning to the guitar itself

Electronic Tuner:

An electronic tuner is a device that detects pitch, and will let you know if a pitch played is sharp or flat. This is often the most accurate way of tuning the guitar, and is one of the most important tools for both live and studio settings. There are numerous types of tuners available on the market. Some will require you to plug into a pedal to be able to tune, while others have built-in microphones and can pick up sound from the instrument or an amp. There are also tuners available that you can clip on the headstock of the guitar. These types of tuners pick up the acoustic vibrations of the instrument rather than the actual sound itself.

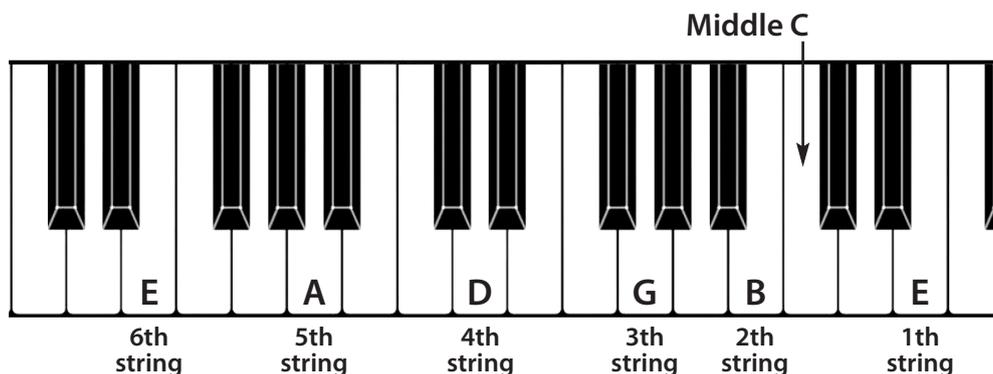
Ex. 1.3



Tuning to a Piano:

You can tune the guitar by using a reference pitch from a variety of sources, but the most common source to use is a piano or a keyboard. By playing the notes on the piano which correspond to the guitar's open strings, you can match the pitches and adjust accordingly:

Ex. 1.4

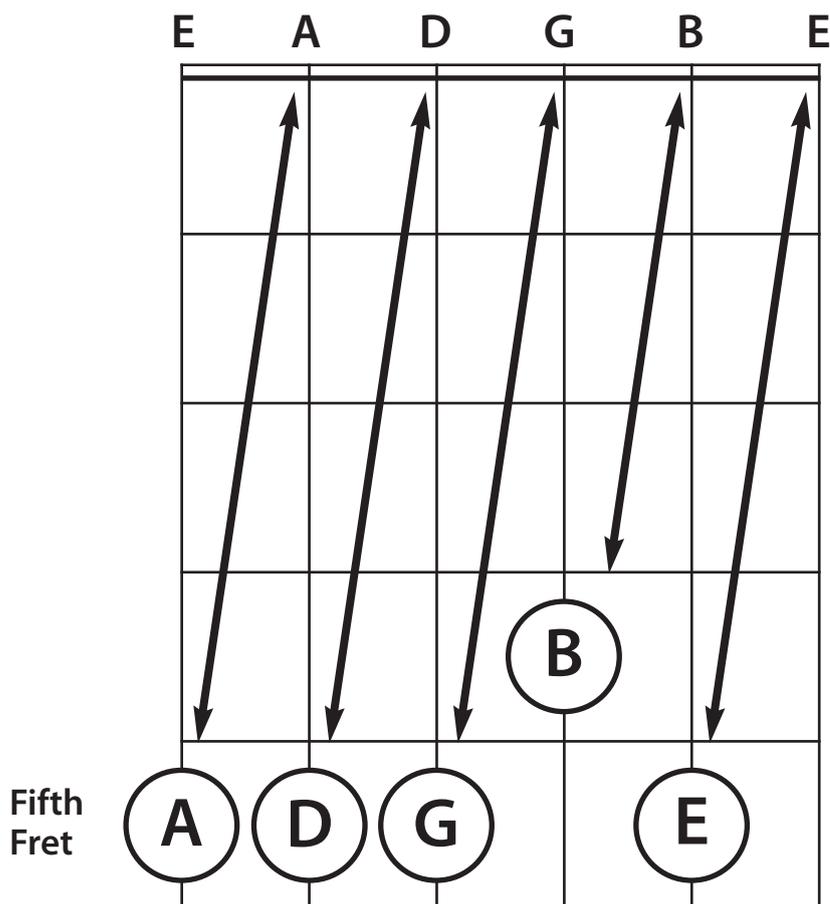


Relative Tuning:

Tuning to the guitar itself (relative tuning) is probably the fastest and most convenient way of tuning the guitar when no electronic tuner is available. Every guitarist should have complete mastery of relative tuning. You will need to have one string in tune on the guitar to begin the process. This could be any string, but the lowest is common to start with. You will then match the string-sets in the following manner.

Ex. 1.5

1. Tune the 6th string to a reference pitch, or assume that this string is tuned correctly.
2. Press down the 6th string in the 5th fret, then match the open 5th string to this pitch.
3. Press down the 5th string in the 5th fret, then match the open 4th string to this pitch.
4. Press down the 4th string in the 5th fret, then match the open 3rd string to this pitch.
5. Press down the 3rd string in the 4th fret, then match the open 2nd string to this pitch.
6. Press down the 2nd string in the 5th fret, then match the open first string to this pitch.



Chapter 3: Basic Guitar Technique

Guitar is played either in a standing position while using a strap to maintain the guitar at a suitable height, or in a sitting position with the guitar in your lap. Proper technique and sitting posture is very important, especially when practicing multiple hours per day over extended periods of time. The main goal is to adjust your sitting posture to minimize tension in your hands, arms, shoulders, neck and back. Once you have a good grasp of the basic guidelines for proper technique, it is advisable to regularly check your sitting posture and technique while practicing in front of a mirror or filming yourself while playing. Taking lessons from an experienced, professional (preferably classical) guitar teacher is also advisable when you are establishing your basic fundamental technique. Remember that if you have an improper sitting and playing technique, it may take several years before any symptoms or injuries actually manifest, so you want to make sure you lay a solid foundation as early as possible. The most common issues among guitarists are repetitive strain injuries, with carpal tunnel syndrome and tendonitis being the most frequent. This is usually the result of repeating the same movements numerous times, and the symptoms will usually manifest in your arms and hands. But lower back and neck problems are also common. Healthy and correct practice habits will go a long way to avoid most medical issues down the line. Keep in mind that, in the most severe cases, an injury can cripple or end an otherwise promising career.

Correct Sitting Technique

When playing guitar in a sitting position there are two approaches: resting the guitar on either your left or your right thigh.

1. Guitar on Left Thigh

Classical guitarists have utilized a sitting technique where you use a footstool to elevate your left leg to a comfortable height; 3-8 inches is most common, but this depends on the height of both the performer and the chair the performer is sitting on. The guitar is then placed on the left thigh with the guitar neck pointing up at an approximate 45-degree angle.

Ex. 1.6



Alternatively, a cushion or a mechanical device is placed in between the guitar and the thigh, replacing the need for a footstool. This elevates the guitar itself rather than the foot, but the placement of the guitar relative to the upper body remains the same.

This sitting technique is predominantly utilized by classical guitarists, but the comfortable angle in the fretting hand and easy access to all areas of neck also makes this sitting position very attractive for all guitarists performing complex and technically challenging music. When done correctly, this sitting