

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

ABOUT THIS METHOD

These lessons will give you a step-by-step approach to the basic techniques of playing the classical guitar and present in a practical way certain fundamentals, such as music reading and harmony, that any novice guitarist needs to learn. Keep in mind that these beginning stages of your playing are most important, as they lay the groundwork of your future success in music. It is recommended that you carefully practice each section of this book in its presented order, as one technique or concept will lead into the next. Listening to the included audio tracks will give you a clear idea of how each exercise or song should sound, which will in turn help teach your ear to teach your fingers. Finally, while this method will present the essential concepts that a beginning guitarist must have, it is advisable to seek the help of a well-trained, experienced teacher who will be able to guide you through your individual learning situations.

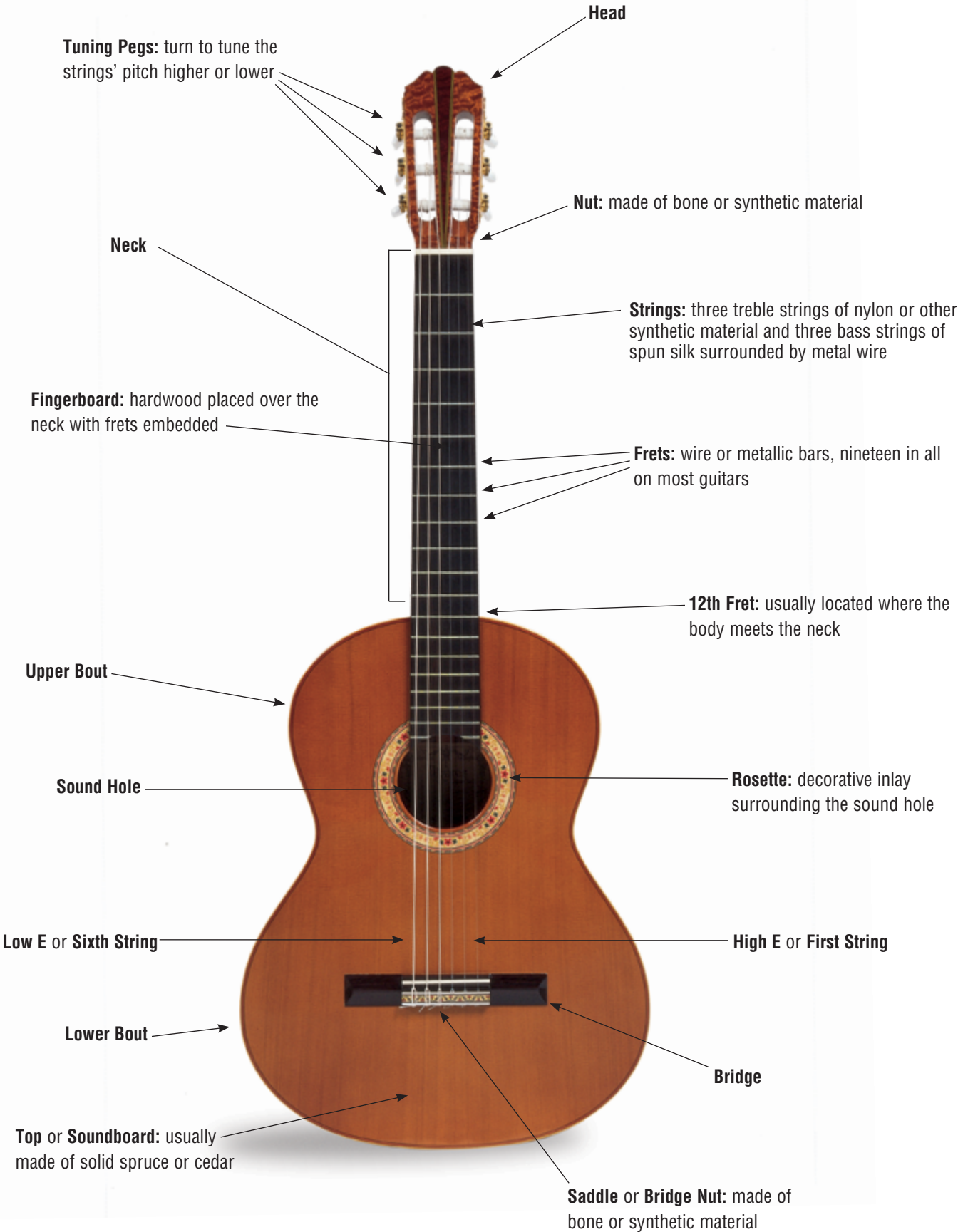
WHAT IS CLASSICAL GUITAR?

Learning to play the classical guitar does not necessarily mean playing “classical” music. It does mean learning to play the guitar in the classical tradition that has been developed for centuries and continues to evolve. As a classical guitar student you will learn to play solo guitar music with melody and accompaniment simultaneously, just as a solo pianist would play. You will learn the techniques to play simple accompaniment parts or more complex music with two, three, or four distinct melodies or parts at the same time, allowing you to play the music of the great master composers, as well as many other styles. It is the approach, not the music, which makes one a classical guitarist. Most exciting about studying the classical guitar is that you are using the methods and techniques that have been refined over the centuries by some of the greatest guitarists who have ever lived.

DO I NEED A CLASSICAL GUITAR?

While you can begin to learn the classical guitar with a steel-string acoustic instrument, a beginner will find the traditional classical guitar easier to play. The nylon strings can be pressed with less effort, and the extra space between the strings gives both hands a little more room to maneuver. Classical guitars are made to play more intricate music. They have a smaller body and are more sensitive to the varieties of color, dynamics, and tone, which you will want to include in your playing.

CLASSICAL GUITAR ANATOMY



SITTING POSITION

The sitting position is very important. It allows your hands to work freely and your guitar to remain stable. Beginning guitarists must always strive for a proper, balanced sitting position. Keep in mind that it is nearly impossible to develop a good technique without it.

You will need either a straight-back chair with no arms or a bench. The seat should be flat and horizontal to the ground. You will also need a footstool that can be adjusted between four and eight inches in height depending on your physique. Instead of a footstool, some guitarists use a cushion or another device which props up the guitar on their left leg; however, for beginning guitarists, it is probably most convenient to work with a footstool.



What to Watch for

- Relaxed shoulders
- The head of the guitar should be about eye level—your footstool will help elevate this to the proper level
- Relaxed left elbow hanging naturally from the neck; rest your right forearm on the guitar allowing the right hand to fall naturally over the sound hole
- Left foot on footstool

This is a lot to remember at first. **The important thing is to be relaxed.** Review the preceding illustrations frequently as you progress with your playing. You may find yourself unknowingly changing some of these basic concepts as time goes by.

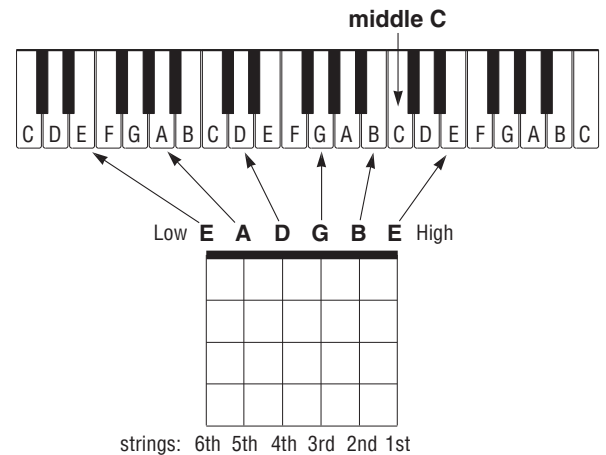
Because every person's body is different, every guitarist will have some variation in his or her sitting position. It takes a little thought and patience to find what works best for you.

TUNING

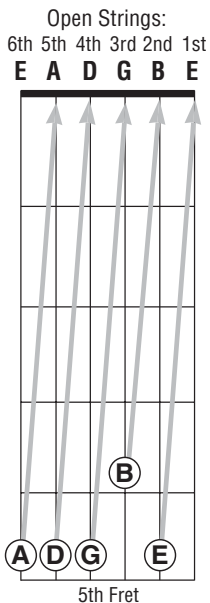
The tension of each string on your guitar needs to be adjusted properly so that they sound at the correct pitch when played. Tuning quickly and accurately is a skill that may take a while to learn. So while you are mastering this skill, consider using a battery-operated electronic tuner. They are a small investment and will save you a lot of time and frustration in the early stages of learning. The electronic tuner will hear each string as you play it and indicate whether the pitch should be raised or lowered. However, it is a good idea to practice your *relative tuning* as described below a little bit every day before you turn to the tuner. This will help develop your ear and your ability to tune without the tuner.

RELATIVE TUNING

With relative tuning you will tune each string in relation to each other. Your guitar will then be in tune with itself, which is fine for playing and practicing, however you will not necessarily be in tune with the universally-accepted musical pitch, which is fixed at A440 (meaning that the A note will vibrate at 440 vibrations per second). So before you start relative tuning, it is a good idea to match at least one string to the universal standard. Do this by tuning your low E to the correct pitch obtained from an electronic tuner, pitch pipe, tuning fork, keyboard, or the tuning track on the CD which comes with this method. The keyboard notes for all the open strings are illustrated here.



Assuming that your low E string is in tune, follow these steps:



1. Depress the low E string behind the 5th fret as shown in the adjacent diagram. Play and listen to this pitch, which is the note A. Adjust the open A or 5th string higher or lower as needed until it sounds the same (or in unison) with the fretted A on the 6th string.
2. Depress the A string behind the 5th fret as shown. Play and listen to this pitch, which is the note D. Adjust the open D (4th) string higher or lower as needed until it is in unison with the fretted D on the 5th string.
3. Repeat the same process, tuning the open G (3rd) string to match the fretted G on the 4th string, 5th fret.
4. Tuning the B (2nd) string is different from the others. Depress the G (3rd) string at the 4th fret; tune the open B string to this note.
5. Depress the B string at the 5th fret as with the others. This is the note E, to which you tune your open high E (1st) string.
6. Double check. Most guitarists go back and repeat this entire process to make any fine adjustments.

TUNING TIP

When tuning, play the fretted string, listen carefully and memorize the pitch, then position your left hand on the tuning mechanism and play the string that is to be adjusted while you raise or lower its pitch. As your ear becomes more sensitive and your touch more skillful, you will be able to tune more accurately and quickly.

USING THE TUNING TRACK

Another option for tuning is to use the tuning track. Each string, beginning from the sixth (or low E string) to the first string (or high E string) is played on the track. Listen carefully as each string is played twice and adjust your strings to match the pitch.

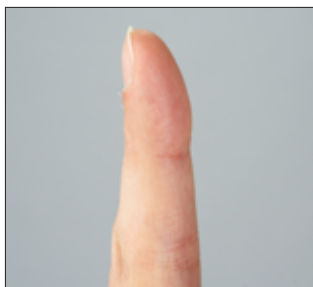


USE OF THE FINGERNAILS

While nearly all advanced players use the fingernails of the right hand to produce the sound, it is recommended for the first few months of learning the guitar that you use the flesh of your fingertip and keep your nails short. This will allow you to get a good feel of the string sliding off the fingertip in a controlled manner without getting snagged or caught on the nail. When you feel secure with the skill that your right hand has developed, you may consider using the nails. Correct use of the nails will create more brilliance, volume, speed, and clarity in your playing.

Every guitarist has differently-shaped hands and nails, so describing the best way for any individual player to shape his or her nails is not realistic; however, below are some of the basic concepts for grooming and use of the nails.

Grooming



Basic Nail Shape

The nails should basically follow the contour of your finger and thumb tips, extending about one-sixteenth of an inch beyond your fingertips.

Use a fine grade emery board or 500 grit sanding paper to smooth out any irregularities. All the edges, top, and underneath must be smooth.

Placement on the String

In the correctly-placed contact point the nail and the flesh of your fingertip touch the string together on the left side of your fingertip. As your finger pushes through the string, the nail will slide through the string toward the center and release.



Finger Contact Point

Thumb Contact Point and Release Point



Thumb Contact Point

The thumb will start its placement closer to the center of the nail or tip and slide off the nail further to the left side.

Take care with both the fingers and thumb to avoid catching or hooking the nail. Keep an ear out for any unpleasant, tinny sounds or raspiness. If this occurs try to reshape or smooth out the offending area of the nail. Finding the exact shape and routine of caring for your right-hand nails will take some experimentation and patience.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR GUITAR

You should expect that your guitar will last to give you years of musical service, but of course certain precautions need to be taken with any valued instrument. The number one cause of major damage to a solid wood instrument is too little humidity. Be sure to keep your guitar in an environment that stays above a humidity level of 35%. If the humidity falls below this level for a few days the wood will begin to shrink, and your guitar will be in danger of cracking. If you live in an arid environment use a guitar humidifier (they can be purchased inexpensively at most music stores) or take steps to control your humidity at the room or house level. Too much humidity is not good for your guitar either. This will swell the wood and could also have an adverse effect on the glues in your guitar. Less-expensive guitars that are constructed with mostly laminated woods are far less affected by these humidity changes.

Select a sturdy case for your guitar. The hardshell cases offer much greater protection for your instrument than the softcover cases or gig bags. You will also find that there will be substantially less wear and tear on your guitar when taking it in and out of its case with the hardshell case. Most importantly, keep it inside the case when not in use.

Most guitars have a fairly durable finish which will polish up nicely with just a slightly damp soft cloth; a light commercial polish will help as well.

To insure that your strings last for their maximum lifespan, it is recommended that you always play with clean hands and wipe your strings after playing with a damp, lint-free cloth. This will keep your bass strings free of dirt, debris, and perspiration.

CHANGING STRINGS ON YOUR CLASSICAL GUITAR

When to change strings is really a matter of personal opinion, however after about a month of practicing steadily for an hour or so a day, a fresh set of strings will really perk up the sound of your guitar. Changing your strings for the first time can be an adventure, but an important and unavoidable skill to master.

Be certain to buy the correct strings for your instrument! Classical guitars must have nylon or classical strings and acoustic steel-string guitars need steel strings. If in doubt, **ask an expert**. Most music stores offer many different types of strings and brands, and the options may confuse even a store clerk.

You will want to remove and then replace one string at a time. This procedure will keep the tension on the neck, bridge, and soundboard more constant and be a less traumatic experience for your guitar. You can also use the attached strings as reference for the changing procedure.

Turn the tuning peg clockwise to completely loosen the string, then detach it on both ends. Thread the new string through the bridge hole leaving enough length (about 1 1/2 inches) to wrap the string around itself as shown in the accompanying photos. Bass strings will have one loop as shown. Treble strings should be looped twice to avoid slippage. Be sure the last loop is lying snugly on the backside of the bridge rather than on top.



Bridge First Loop



Bridge Second Loop (for treble strings)



Bridge Final

Pull the string a bit to put some tension on the loop and thread the other end of the string through the appropriate roller of the machine heads. Loop the string around itself two times.

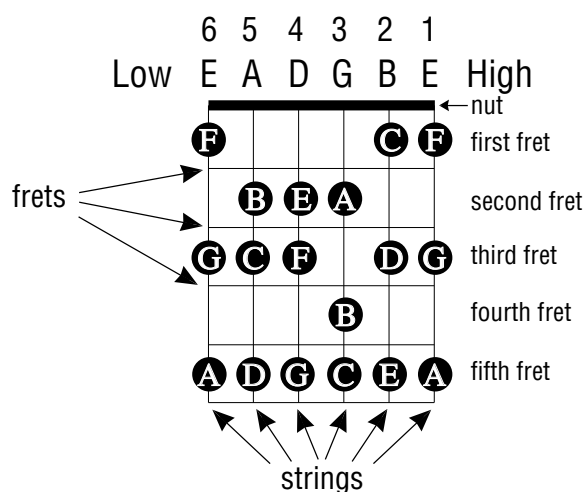
Keep a little tension on the string as you wind it (counter-clockwise) tight enough to be secure.



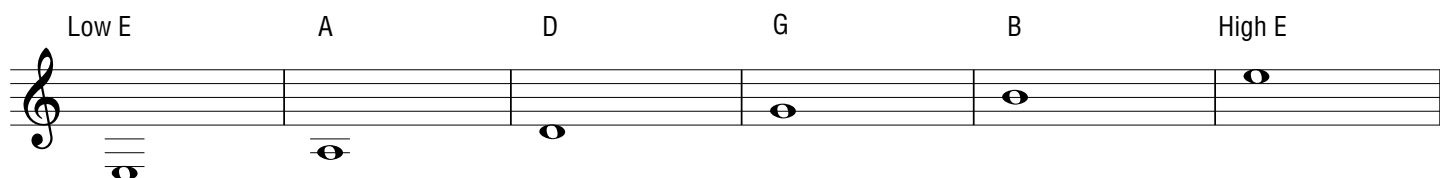
Headstock Loop

GUIDE TO STRINGS AND NOTES

Strings are referred to by letter name or by number: E-A-D-G-B-E, or 6-5-4-3-2-1. Notes use the alphabet from A to G. Notice in the diagram that from E to F and from B to C is only a one-fret distance. These are the natural half steps. The other notes are divided by natural whole steps.



Here we see all the open-string notes as they appear on the staff.



Finally, here are all the natural notes available on the guitar in open position, with the addition of the high A on the fifth fret of string 1.

