

by
GuitarPlayerWorld

Play Your Guitar In 48 Hours Or Less: The Ultimate, Quick-Start Guide For New Guitarists!

Overview

Whether you've struggled to learn guitar in the past, or are completely new to the instrument, I think you'll find the unique approach offered in this guide to be very helpful. Learning your instrument can and should be a rewarding process.

In my experience, the reason most beginning guitarists give up in frustration is because traditional music instruction fails to provide relevant (read: “contemporary”) contexts for putting theory into practice.

While I can't promise you'll become a 'guitar god' overnight, I can promise you that you'll get some entertaining examples of scales and chord progressions as used in popular music.

So, pay close attention to the material and make sure you practice as instructed, and you'll start to sound like a real guitar player in no time!

Cheers,

Paul Gian

<http://www.guitarplayerworld.com>

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Getting Started

There's a good chance that you are wanting to learn guitar in order to play rock, blues, folk or country music -- or maybe even classical or Spanish guitar? In other words, you want to learn your instrument through the same style of music you're most likely to play on it.

Most instructional books for guitar, however, start you off with mind-numbing exercises where you are asked to learn, for example, the first few notes of the open-position scale for the key of C by playing things like “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.”

Boring!

Don't get me wrong, there is a benefit to learning such simple melodies. The well known lullabys, anthems, folk songs and other standards from childhood are second-nature to most of us, and this helps the beginner train the ear to associate notes with their proper names.

However, it is just as reasonable to say that a majority of would-be guitarists have modern melodies (like The Beatles' “Taxman” or Nirvana's “All Apologies”) seared into memory -- and these melodies are equally valid for use in learning your scales and chords!

What You Will Learn

Play Guitar In 48 Hours Or Less is meant to get you started on the road to learning how to play the guitar as quickly as possible. You should expect to have a basic understanding of the concepts and vocabulary used by guitar players by the time you finish reading this quick-start guide.

For instance, you will be able to explain and/or demonstrate the following guitar fundamentals:

- How to tune a guitar to 'Standard' tuning

- How to locate all of the notes across the fretboard
- How to 'warm up'
- Basic music theory and some chords to get you started
- Where to go and what to focus on when you are ready to take your education to the next level!

In other words, you'll learn everything you would learn from a guitar teacher at your very first lesson, assuming you're approaching the instrument for the first time.

The purpose of this guide is to help the absolute beginner. I want to give as solid of a foundation as possible so that your future lessons, wherever you receive them, will go smoothly.

I know you're eager to get started by now, so let's go ahead and dive in to your first lesson!

Guitar 101: Getting Familiar With Your Instrument

The guitar is a very simple instrument consisting of a **body**, **neck** and **headstock**. Both **acoustic** and **electric** guitars are constructed in this fashion, and their differences come down to how the sound from the strings is propagated.

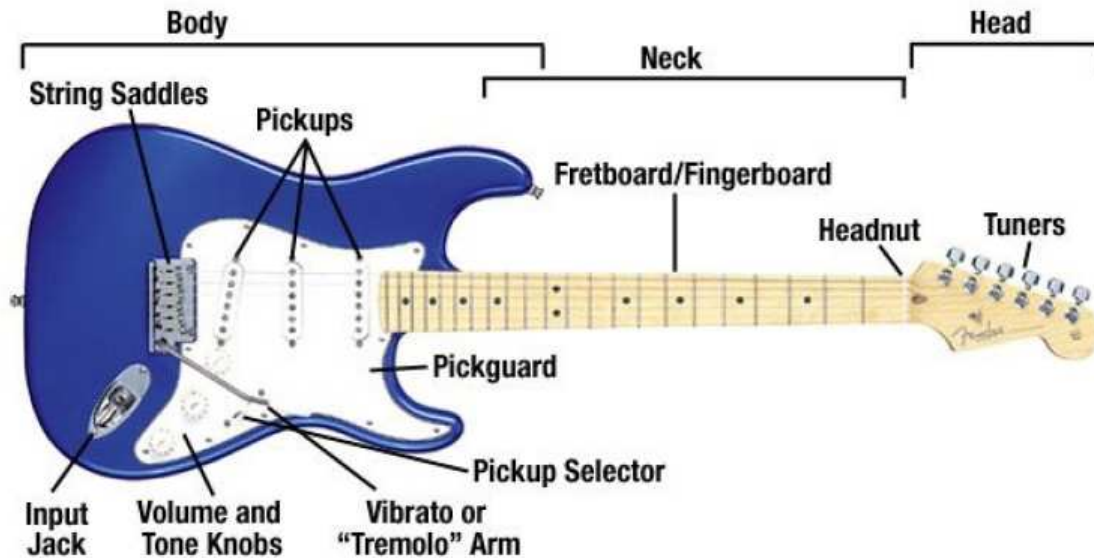
In order to simplify the lessons here, we are going to focus on the **electric guitar**. If you happen to own an acoustic, though, don't worry: all of the music theory remains the same. Acoustic and electric guitars are both tuned in the same fashion and have roughly equal neck lengths.

The main difference is that many acoustic guitars lack the "cut away" body design so common on electric guitars, and this tends to impede your ability to reach notes above the 12th fret.

We are going to focus primarily on notes below the 12th fret, though, so this shouldn't be an issue as far as your ability to follow the lessons.

That said, let's go ahead and look at a diagram of an electric guitar so you can familiarize yourself with the names of all of its parts. The screen shot below shows the basic set up of a **Fender Stratocaster**, one of the most popular rock guitars of all time.

A 'Standard' Electric Guitar



What I would like to draw your attention to is the **Fretboard** and the **Tuners**. We're going to talk about your fretboard, first, and then discuss how to tune your guitar.

The Fretboard

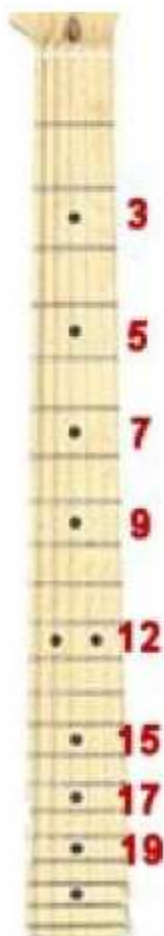
The fretboard of your guitar is where the action occurs. Notice that your garden-variety Strat boasts a fretboard divided up into 22 frets.

I know, it looks as if there are 23 when you count that last little piece at the top, but we exclude that one because any note you play there will be dampened. Try it out.

Your average electric guitar usually has 22 frets, but there are some models with longer necks that reach up to 24 frets. Those extra two frets aren't really important unless your style of music lends to hitting super-high notes.

For example, you may want a longer neck some day if you intend to play a lot of hard rock solos, and want those high, 'stinging' notes for dramatic effect. Otherwise, don't worry too much about it right now.

Also, notice the 'Dot Markers' beginning on the 3rd fret? Those are there as a visual aid to help you see the divisions of the fretboard:



The first thing to understand here is that your fretboard is divided into **two** full **octaves** from bottom to top. An octave, in case you aren't familiar with the term, is a musical scale that runs between a **root note** and its octave or “**unison**”.

For example, if you were to start on the A below middle C and play all of the notes in between until you reach the A above middle C, you will have gone up one, full octave:

A - B - C - C# - D - D# - E - F - F# - G - G# - A

”How is this useful? First, consider the notes sounded by each string when played in the **open position**.

The “open position” means that you are simply striking the string *without holding down the string against any of the frets*. Go ahead and try this right now. Just hit any string you want to by strumming it with your pick or plucking it with your thumb.

If you want, you can rake your pick or thumb across all six strings. So far, so good? O.K.

Let's talk about the notes that you just played.

For a guitar in **standard tuning**, each of the open notes is as follows:

- **6th String: Low E**
- **5th String: A**
- **4th String: D**
- **3rd String: G**
- **2nd String: B**
- **1st String: High E**
-

If you want a handy 'mnemonic' for memorizing these notes, you can think of this phrase:

“Each Additional Day Guitar Becomes Easier.”

E-A-D-G-B-E

Got it?

Now, notice that I referred to the E on the 6thth string as the “low E”, while the note on the 1st string is the “high E”? One thing we need to clear up really quick is which one is which. Many beginners get confused as to which E string is considered the “top/high” one.

When you have your guitar in your lap, and you are looking down on it, *the string closest to you is the LOW 'E', while the one furthest away is the HIGH 'E'*. So, your 6thth string is your “low E”, and your 1stst string is your “high E.”

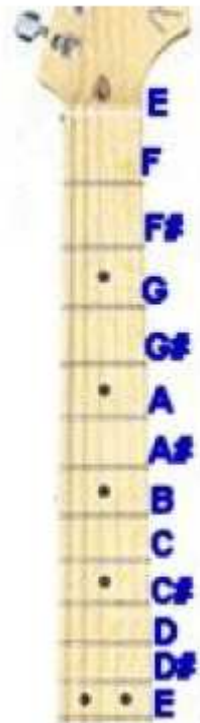
I know it is counter-intuitive, but the “low” and “high” terms in this instance refer to the “register” of the note and not its “relative” position.

Now that we have that cleared up, it will be easier to understand the way your fretboard is laid out. Take a look at those positioning dots again.

Do you notice the fret that has **two dots** instead of just one?



These markers indicate the **12thth Fret**, which also happens to be where the octave completes for each string. So, for example, if you were to strike the high E (1st string) in open position, then make your way up the fretboard by sounding each note up to the 12thth fret, you will complete an octave from E to E:



This pattern holds for every string. Let's say you move over to the 3rd or 'G' string. If you played all the way up the fretboard to the 12thth fret, you would have the following scale:

G-G#-A-A#-B-C-C#-D-D#-E-F-F#-G

The benefit to this is that the notes actually repeat starting at the 12th fret. It's just like being back in the open position.

When you reach 'E' at the 12th fret, for example, you know exactly which note comes at the next fret: an F! Then 'F-sharp', then 'G' and so on until you run out of fretboard.

Just for the sake of clarity, here is one more visual illustration:

E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E
B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B
G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G
D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D
A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A
E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E
0			3		5		7		9			12

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How to Tune Your Guitar

Your guitar, and the music you make on it, will sound best when your guitar is perfectly in tune. Although there are many other possible tunings for a guitar (e.g. 'drop tuning', 'open D', "Hawaiiin", etc..) we are going to focus on "standard tuning."

There are a number of ways to go about tuning your guitar. You can use a piano or keyboard, a tuning fork or an electronic, hand-held tuner.

There are even online guitar tuners like this one:

<http://www.igdb.co.uk/pages/guitar-tuner.htm>

The online guitar tuner allows you to click on a button to play an audio loop of each note to use as a reference.

Try clicking on the button for the low E. You should hear the same note played over and over.

As your reference note plays, begin striking the **6th String (low E)** on your guitar.

If the string is out of tune, you should be able to hear it. The note coming from your guitar may sound "sharp" (higher) or "flat" (lower) than the note coming from your reference.

While holding your guitar in your lap in playing position, reach up and turn the first tuning knob in either a **counter-clockwise direction to raise the pitch**, or a **clockwise position to lower the pitch**.

Keep adjusting as needed until the note from your guitar and the note playing from your reference sound in perfect unison. If you like, you can use the online tuner to tune all six strings.

These sorts of tools can be life-savers if you don't have perfect pitch. I do recommend, however, that you at least attempt to learn how to tune your guitar "by ear." You never know when you might be on stage, and need to do a quick tune-up without the aid of one of these devices.

Getting Your Hands Ready: Warm-Up Exercises And Why They Matter

As dry as this section might sound, I strongly urge you to follow along with these warm-up exercises! No matter how much of a 'hassle' it seems like to warm up before you play, let me assure you that the 'hassle' is worth it.

Your hands are also instruments and affect the quality of sounds you're able to squeeze from your guitar!

Have you ever noticed how two different people can play the same guitar, and each person seems to pull a different 'tone' from it? Have you ever wondered why someone like Eddie Van Halen can pick up a cheap guitar with rusty strings, and still sound fantastic?

It all has to do with your **touch**. Some players have a light touch, others tend to dig in harder. Real magic comes from skillfully doing both.

Any succession of notes - in a solo, for example - can be made far more interesting and emotive when you have control over the *dynamics of soft/hard, quiet/loud, etc.*

Now, in order to have dynamic control while still playing at the speed you want to play at, you must have both **strength** and **flexibility** in your hands and fingers.

The point is to gain utmost control over what's known as your "fine motor movements" - aka, the small movements you make to do things like hold a pen, sew a button...and play guitar.

What gets in the way of the type of control is fatigue and cramping. Both of these handicaps result from a failure to build **strength** and **flexibility**.

The weaker you are, the harder you tend to grip the neck, and your hand seizes up. The tighter your muscles, the harder it is to reach notes just a few frets up from one position to another.

If that's not incentive enough to do these warm-ups, I don't know what is! So, let's go ahead and get started with some hand and finger stretching exercises.

Exercise 1: The Fan Stretch

This exercise is designed to stretch your palm as well as the small muscles between each of your fingers.

1. Lay both hands 'palms down' and resting on a flat surface.

2. 'Fan out' your fingers as far as they'll go until you feel some resistance. Don't try to force them any farther at this point.
3. Relax your fingers back into resting position.
4. Go at an easy, almost gentle pace as you repeat this motion 5 times, one hand at a time, then repeat for **both** hands simultaneously a total of 10 times.

Exercise #2: Palm Stretch

This exercise stretches your palm muscles as well as muscles and tendons running along the underside of your forearm.

1. Grasp the fingers of your left hand by placing the fingers of your right hand flat across them at a 90 degree angle. The thumb on your right hand should 'hook' underneath your left pinky.
2. Slowly and gently press downwards with your right hand until you feel your muscles stretching all the way into your forearm.
3. Repeat this 'stretch and release' procedure 5 times.
4. Repeat this procedure again using your left hand on your right hand.

Exercise #3: Forearm Stretch

This exercise targets the muscles and tendons running along the top of your forearm.

These are the key culprits in carpal tunnel, so you might even want to do this exercise outside of warming up for guitar practice if you type on a computer frequently.

1. Extend your whole arm out in front of you so that it is parallel with the floor.
2. Keep your wrist relaxed and allow your hand to dangle.
3. With your free hand, reach around and gently grasp the top of the other hand.
4. Press in, towards your body, until you feel the muscles in your forearm begin to stretch. Hold this position for a few seconds, then release.
5. Repeat on each arm 5 times.

Exercise #3: Independent Finger Stretches

This exercise is similar in form to the palm stretch, but the goal is to stretch out your tendons a bit more, along with the muscles at the base of your fingers.

1. Rest your left hand in your lap, palm-up.
2. Use the thumb, forefinger and middle finger of your right hand to grasp the 'pinky' finger of your left hand.
3. Gently push downwards until you feel the stretch.
4. Release and move on, repeating the procedure for each finger on your left hand, including your thumb.
5. Repeat the procedure on your right hand.
6. Do these stretches 4 to 6 times on each hand, alternating between left and right (e.g. stretch all fingers on the left, then all fingers on the right, then back to the left).

Once you've completed these warm-ups, you might feel like stretching your whole body! Go for it. It's best to be as relaxed as possible when playing. Shake your hands and arms a little bit, too, to get your circulation going.

Last, but not least, I recommend stretching again after you play. It's just like stretching before and after a good jog or workout. The muscles in your hands and arms benefit from warming-up, and warming 'down', just as much as any other (larger) muscle in your body.

Correct Positioning

If you find that your hands become fatigued even after performing your warm ups, there's a good chance that your technique is to blame.

A little fatigue is normal when building strength in your hands and fingers, but serious cramps point to a problem. Let's start, then, by discussing the correct way to hold the neck when fretting notes.

The main thing you need to pay attention to is where you're resting your thumb. Your thumb should rest gently on the back of the neck, and be centered.

The mistake most new guitarists make is in allowing their thumb to wrap around to the opposite side of the neck.

The reason your thumb should rest on the back of the neck is so that it acts as a support for your hand and fingers while you fret the notes. You should press the strings with your fingertips, such that your fingers are perpendicular to the neck.

Time to Play: Scales & Chords

We've finally arrived at the fun part! You're going to get a quick crash course in some basic music theory, and enough examples to get you playing as soon as possible. Let's go ahead and get started with scales.

Scales: The Building Blocks of Music

A scale is a series of notes which typically spans from the root note to its unison (one octave higher). For example, the following series of notes creates the chromatic scale from A (root) to A (unison): **A-B-C-C#-D-D#-E-F-F#-G-G#-A**.

This scale doesn't sound very 'musical', though, does it?

That's because we need to leave out some notes in order to create the kind of scale our ears are accustomed to from listening to 'western' music -- and by 'western', I'm referring to the music created in Europe and the United States.

The kind of music we're used to listening to (classical, rock, country, folk, blues, etc) relies primarily on the **major** and **minor** scales. These scales follow a formula from which they can be constructed for *any key*.

In order to keep things simplified, we're going to stick to the major scale for now.

Formula for Creating a Major Scale

Whole Step

Whole Step

Half Step

Whole Step

Whole Step

Whole Step

Half Step

So, what do all these whole steps and half steps mean? Take a look at your fretboard again.

Each individual fret represents a **half step**. In other words, if you were to place your finger on any note, then move it up (or down) just one fret, you've moved a half step in terms of "distance" between notes.

Now, if you place your finger on a fret, then move up or down by skipping the fret in between, you've moved position by a whole step.

So, let's say that we want to create the **G Major** scale. Based on our formula, the pattern of notes is as follows: **G-A-B-C-D-E-F#-G**. The first whole step is the interval from G to A, just to be clear.

Also, there is one thing you need to know before going any further:

The distance from B to C and from E to F is ALWAYS a HALF STEP!

There is no such thing as a 'B sharp' or 'E sharp'. All of the 'natural' (not sharp, not flat) notes have an interval of a whole step between them except for the intervals of B to C and E to F.

Keep this fact in mind when you are using the formula to construct scales in other keys, as it will help you determine which notes are **raised** (sharpened) or **lowered** (flattened) within that key.

Name Scale Degrees

In order to learn music theory, you need to memorize some terminology pertaining to the function of each note within the *key* defined by the scale.

Scale degrees describe how each note 'sounds' *relative* to the key.

An 'E' in the key of G Major, for example, suggests a **minor** interval because its position within the scale is **submediant** (also known as the 'relative minor'). However, if you are IN the key of E Major, then your ears will hear that E as a 'resolution' back to the key.

The Named Scale Degrees

- 1st- Tonic or 'key' note
- 2nd- Supertonic
- 3rd- Mediant
- 4th- Subdominant
- 5th- Dominant
- 6th- Submediant
- 7th- Leading Tone
- 8th- Tonic or 'Unison'

Each of these degrees has either a 'major' or 'minor' sounding quality to it depending on whether the key you're in is major or minor. This is because the **intervals** (distance between two notes) are defined differently for the major and minor scales.

For this report, we're focused solely on major scales, so let's look at the quality of the intervals between scale degrees in a major scale:

- 1st- Tonic
- 2nd- Minor 2nd
- 3rd- Minor 3rd
- 4th- Perfect 4th
- 5th- Perfect 5th
- 6th- Minor 6h
- 7th- Major 7th
- 8th- Tonic

This may not make much sense right now, but the value of this information will become clear as we move on to discuss **chords**.

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Chords & Construction

Chords are built from scales. If you want a **C Major** chord, for instance, you must build it from the C Major scale. In fact, all of the available chords for any given key signature can be built from its scale.

Let's use the key of C for our example. What we want to do is find all of the major and minor chords available to us in the key of C. We'll start by looking at our C Major scale:

C Major: C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C

First, let's find C Major. Major chords are built from the root, third and fifth degrees of a scale. In this case, we have **C, E and G** in these positions, so a C Major chord consists of the notes C-E-G played simultaneously.

Now, what about all of the other chords in the key? Just count over in the same fashion, but look at the 'root' as beginning from the next degree up:

Dminor: D-F-A

Eminor: E-G-B

F major: F-A-C

G major: G-B-D

A minor: A-C-E

B diminished: B-D-F

You might wonder how you know which chords are major, minor or diminished. One thing you can count on is that the above pattern holds for every major key. Let's compare the key of C to the key of D for a moment:

C Major: C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C

D Major: D-E-F#-G-A-B-C#-D

The key of D has two sharps (F and C). D-F#-A is a D Major chord.

The rule for minor chords, though, is that you take a Major chord and **flatten its third**. So, if you flatten F# to F, you end up with a D Minor chord. In the key of C Major, there are already no sharps.

In other words, the 'third' is already flattened. That's why you have a D Minor chord in that key. The concept of 'shared notes' versus sharps/flats among keys is behind all of the chord types within a given key, be it Major, Minor or Diminished.

The system for finding the sharps in a key is called **The Cycle of Fifths**, and the system for determining the flats is called **The Cycle of Fourths**. Some people prefer to use the word 'circle' instead of 'cycle' because the keys are diagrammed along a circle.

It's an important concept, but a bit too detailed to go into in this report. You can, however, find a very good explanation of The Cycle of Fifths/Fourths on Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circle_of_fifths

Last, but not least, you can grab a very nice printable chord chart which will show you the exact positions and shapes of the most commonly used chords from a site called 'Chordie':

Printable Chord Chart: <http://www.chordie.com/chords.php>

Chord Progressions: Let's Learn Some Real Songs!

Chord progressions are the sequences of chords that create songs. Your chord progression defines the basic melody of your song. The order of chords in the progression can be used to create (and release) 'tension' by varying levels of dissonance.

Most guitar tabs will give you the named-note chords for a song. Serious, 'theory focused' books will usually describe chord progressions in terms of scale degree, and use Roman numerals in place of regular numbers.

For example, a chord progression of C-G-Am-F-C will be written as I-V-VI-!, which translates to 1-5-6-1 (the scale degrees of the root notes of each chord).

Artist: Metallica:

Song: Nothing Really Matters

Key: G Major

Chord Progression Verse: Em-D-C on first three lines of each verse, then G-B-Em on the last line ('And nothing else matters...')

Chord Progression Chorus: C-A-D-C/A-D-C/A-D-Em

Artist: U2

Song: Sunday Bloody Sunday

Key: D Major

Chord Progression Verse: Bm-D-G *note, this progression is picked rather than strummed, using just the top three notes of each chord, except on G, which is modified as follows: B-D-F#, A-D-F# - G-B-E.

Chord Progression Chorus: Bm-D-G with percussive strumming.

Artist: Nirvana

Song: Smells Like Teen Spirit

Key: E major

Chord Progression Verse: The bass moves the progression using the same notes as the intro/main riff/chorus, while the guitar plays the notes B and E.

Chord Progression Chorus: This is the main riff: E-G-A-C. Instead of strumming full chords, use two-note 'power chords' (intervals of fifths) in the open position: (E/A) - (G/D) - (A/E) - (C/G).

Artist: Bob Dylan

Song: Tangled Up In Blue

Key: A Major

Chord Progression Verse: Intro to verse begins with 2 measures of A-Asus4-Asus4. Main verse is simply A - G for 3 measures, then D on the 4th: A-G/A-G/A-G/D.

Chord Progression Chorus: E-F#m-A-D-E-F#m-A-D-E-G-D-A

Artist: The Killers

Song: Smile Like You Mean It

Key: G Major

Chord Progression Verse: G-Am7-Em/G-Am7-Em/G-Am-Em/G-Am7-Em

Chord Progression Chorus: B-C-G-D.

Where to Go From Here?

Now that you've learned some of the elementary skills and necessary for playing guitar, you can easily dive into a more formal guitar training course with a good degree of confidence. You can teach yourself via online lessons, or hire a teacher, or both. Let's look at the benefits, as well as potential drawbacks, for each case.

Online Classes

The Internet has made it easier than ever to teach yourself guitar. These days you can access a wide variety of material in various formats like downloadable e-books, audio and video.

You can also join membership sites that provide access to the same types of materials right in your browser so you don't take up hard drive space downloading a lot of media. Not only that, but many online teachers are professional musicians who have come up with their own unique approach to teaching guitar.

This might be just what you need if the traditional approach doesn't work for you.

You'll find a lot of different price points for guitar lessons online, but most of them are very affordable. It's rare to see an introductory course priced too far above \$30-\$40 unless the package includes a serious amount of multi-media materials and software.

Best of all, the online courses provide you with 24/7 access to the information so that you can learn and practice on your own schedule.

Hiring a Teacher

Attending in-person lessons with a guitar teacher carries some benefits you might otherwise miss if you take the 'do-it-yourself' route.

One-on-one instruction gives you the opportunity to ask questions in the moment, and receive the answers right away. You'll also have an extra incentive to practice when you know there's someone more advanced than you monitoring your progress.

However, training with a teacher can also be expensive and frustrating. Your instructor sets the pace, and may follow a curriculum that slows your progress.

Doing Both

If you're a fast-learner, you'll inevitably seek out more information and more lessons on your own outside of your formal lessons. For beginners, I'd recommend hiring a teacher and investing in some online materials if you can afford to do both.

The online classes will give you the opportunity for fun, extra-curricular study, while your teacher can provide you with objective feedback and correct any erroneous information you might come across online.

Conclusion

Becoming a great guitar player requires dedication and practice. You've got to put in some sweat and hard work if you're to move past the beginner's stage. However, playing guitar should also be fun. That's really the whole point of learning to play in the first place.

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