



GUITAR  
101!!!

**A beginner's guide  
to guitar!**

# **Guitar 101!!!**

**A beginner's guide to guitar!**

**By**

**James “Metal Jim” Donahue**



**2024**

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## About the author

James “Metal Jim” Donahue is a guitarist hailing from Massachusetts. Having played guitar since the age of thirteen, he has studied music independently, played and toured in music acts, and taught for over fifteen years.



## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my parents, Frank and Dellis Donahue, for letting me enjoy the gift of learning and playing guitar. Life can be tough, but music and the guitar helped me overcome those tough times.

A big thanks to my original guitar teacher, Andy Frazier. Thank you for your incredible patience and for teaching me how to play guitar. Inspiring me to listen to the greats like Eddie Van Halen, Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, and more. I'm glad that I can not only call you my teacher but also my friend.

To all the guitarists and musicians who have inspired me to play. Randy Rhoads, Yngwie Malmsteen, Dimebag Darrell, Steve Vai, Eddie Van Halen, Joe Satriani, Richie Blackmore, Zakk Wylde...if I were to list more, this book would be pages more of names!

And to all the other teachers I have taken lessons from, to all the players I have asked for advice and expertise, and to all the musicians for giving me and sharing their knowledge.

# YOU ROCK!!!



## Foreword

Hello and welcome!

So you've decided to play and study guitar? That's great. Learning an instrument can be great for your mental health, boost confidence, increase memory capacity, teach you a valuable skill, and many other advantages.

But practicing and learning guitar, or any instrument, takes dedication, time, patience, concentration, and more. Many students quit after a short time as they don't get the results they want in a short time. Stop and think about all the guitar players, musicians, bands, and such who you know of who are famous. How many hours did you think it took Yngwie Malmsteen to develop his speed on the guitar? How many times did Freddie Mercury doubt himself about his singing and songwriting? How many rejections did bands like Metallica get before they were signed? How many times did Bruce Dickinson get booed on stage? There are so many how, what, why, and more.

Quick story from me. We have all listened to music since we were born. Our parents would play music or sing to us to soothe us. Music is a natural part of us. What made me want to pick up the guitar? One night, when I was ten or eleven years old, my father and I watched the movie "Under Siege." There is one scene where the battleship guns down a fighter plane, and the song "Voodoo Chile" starts to play. I was in awe of the song, awe of the guitar. My father looked over at me and said, "You like that?". "What is that?" I replied. "It's Jimi Hendrix." From that moment, I wanted to play guitar. I didn't start till a couple of years later, but I look back at that moment when I wanted to play guitar.

So, ask yourself if you want to play and why? Are you dedicated and can put the work and effort into it? If you can, put the time into it. Ask yourself and think why you want to play.

I can tell you that it does pay off if you do!



## The Guitar!!!

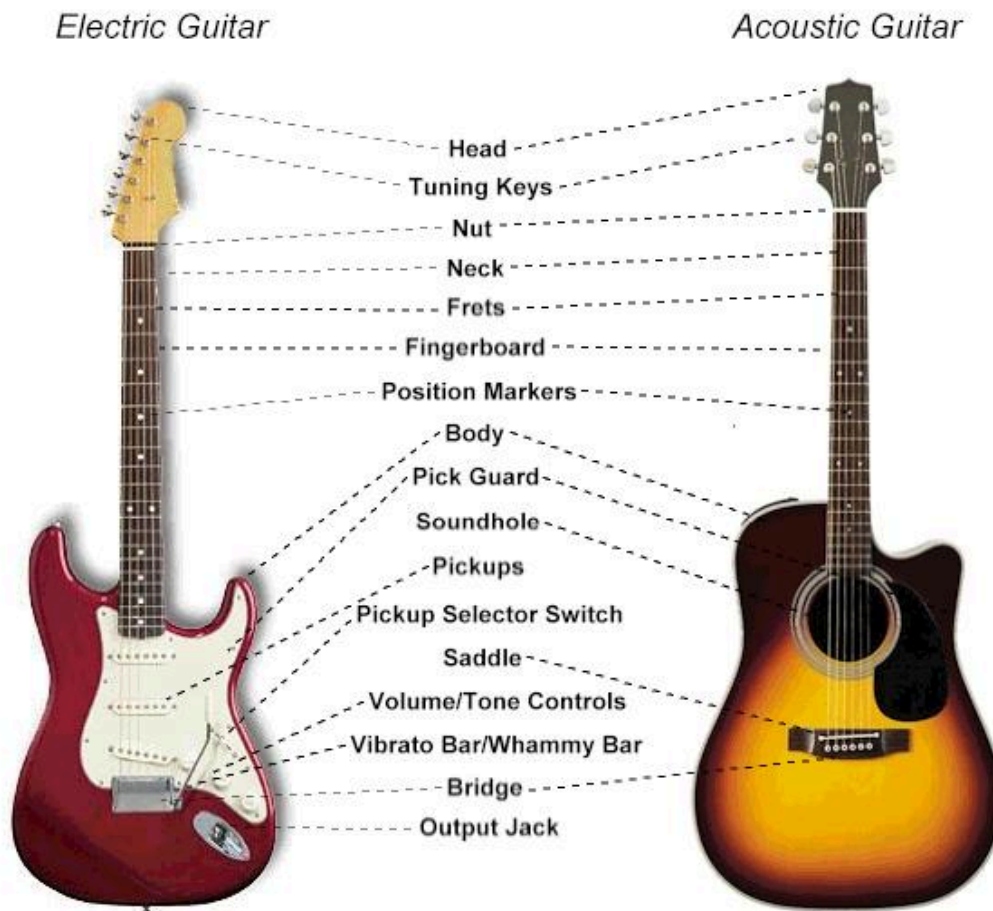
BEHOLD...the GUITAR!!!

You've got one.

Now what?

What are all the parts?

Here is the anatomy of an electric and an acoustic guitar:



Go online and you will find other guitars that are different. They have different styles, shapes, and sizes, and they can have other features like humbucker pickups, locking tremolo bridges, and more.

The key parts are that you hit the strings with a pick or your fingers. You put your other hand over the frets to make different sounds.

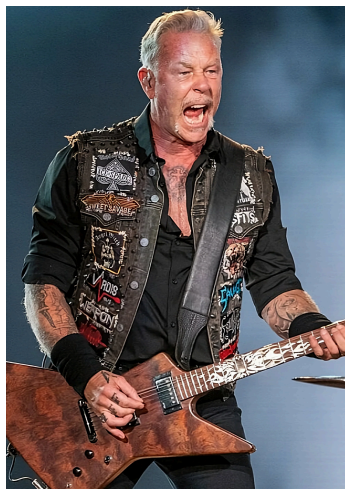
## **Holding the pick, picking, and strumming**

I use a variety of picks, depending on what I am playing. Try various picks and get a feel for what you like that suits you as a player.

When I am playing, I have the pick in between my thumb and first finger. When I am playing single notes like a solo, I have the tip of the pick pointed to the strings, and I keep the tip of the pick as close to the strings as possible, so it will make it easier for me to play the guitar. I have my wrist relaxed and close to the bridge of the guitar, so it is near the strings. Hold the pick firmly, but not too tightly.

When I am strumming to, let's say, a song that has chords, I'm a little more relaxed. I'm using more of my arm and going up and down, hitting the strings.

Play and practice with picking and strumming to get a feel for how it sounds and what you like.



**“If you’re playing, that’s the most important thing.” ~James Hetfield**



## Proper stance and holding the Guitar

Everyone has a particular way of holding the guitar, but I suggest the instructions below:

1. Rest the guitar on your right leg.

I recommend you sit the acoustic or electric guitar on your right leg. Resting the guitar on your left leg is more like a classical approach. It can bring some benefits, but only for some beginners.

2. Use your right arm to stabilize the guitar.

If you're playing an acoustic guitar, you should have your arm resting on it. If you have an electric guitar, your arm will come slightly over the top of it. Let it rest on the front of the instrument.

Tip: You don't want the weight of your whole arm on your shoulder while you're playing. Get comfortable and make sure your strumming arm feels relaxed. Strumming is a bit tricky, and these small details will help you out in the future.

3. Don't use your fretting hand to hold up the guitar.

Your fretting hand must be there just to press the strings! Make sure your guitar is stable without using your fretting hand.

You should be able to move your hand up and down the neck quickly!

4. Don't lean the guitar back towards you.

Leaning the guitar towards you is a natural movement for beginners, but it's a bad habit. Doing this makes you work harder to bring your wrist around the neck. It causes unnecessary tension in your hand, which you should avoid at all costs.

5. Be aware of your posture.

Finally, try not to lean your body over too much. When you're playing, the natural tendency is to hunch over to check out what your hands are doing. It can happen sometimes, but be aware of it and make an effort to stay as upright as possible while playing.



## Strings on the Guitar

There are 6 strings on the guitar. From top to bottom:

Low E - 6th string

A - 5th string

D - 4th string

G - 3rd string

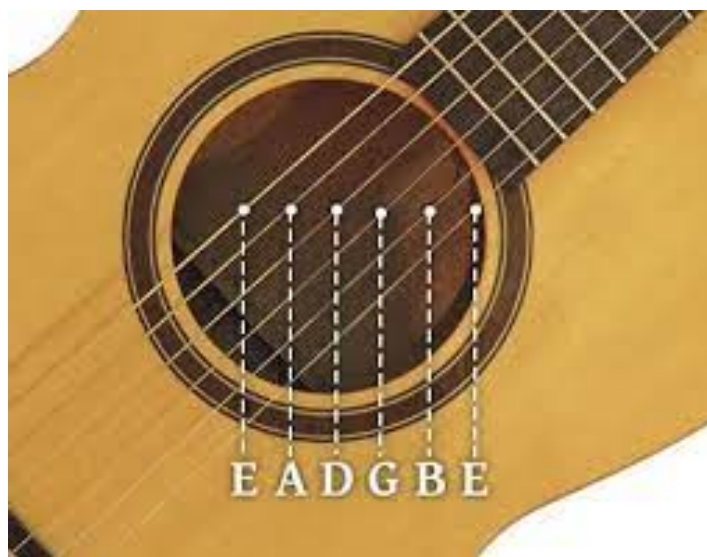
B - 2nd string

High E - 1st string

## String names

<b>e</b> Ears	1st	
<b>B</b> Big	2nd	
<b>G</b> Grow	3rd	
<b>D</b> Donkeys	4th	
<b>A</b> And	5th	
<b>E</b> Elephants	6th	

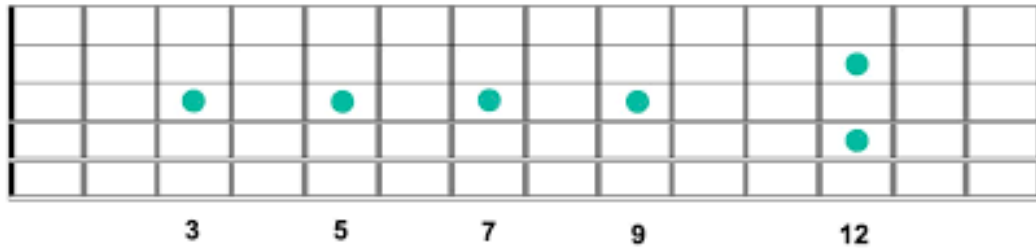
Note that there are 2 Es: low E and high E.



## The Fretboard

On the neck of the guitar is the fretboard. That is where you will place your fretting hand. When you play the frets, you don't put your finger(s) on the fret wire but in between them on the fret itself. That will make different sound notes from the string or strings you are playing. Press your fingers down on the strings on the fretboard, but not too tight.

Each one of the frets will have numbers but also names. Starting from the string of where you are, there are different note names from the musical alphabet.



## Musical Alphabet

There is the alphabet, but there is also the musical alphabet.

12 musical tones.

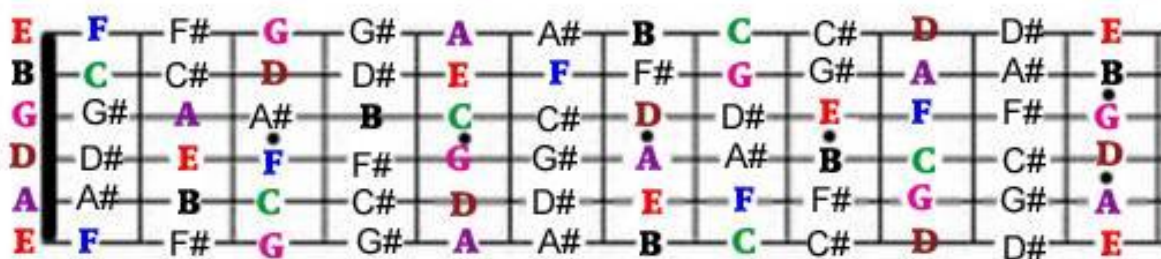
It starts with A and goes to G#. And what are those # and b symbols? Those are sharps and flats. Sharps and flats appear on all the notes except for between B and C and E and F.

A to A# is a half step. You're moving from one note to the next.

A to B is a full step. You're going over one note.



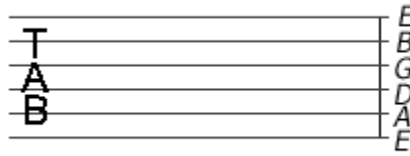
## Guitar Fretboard





## Reading Guitar Tablature

Guitar tablature is the simplest form of reading music or doing exercises on the guitar. The first line, the top line, is high E, and the bottom line is low E. The order of the strings on the guitar tablature is as follows:



If you pick up your guitar and place it in front of you like you were going to play it, rest it on your lap. If you are a right-handed player, make sure the headstock is pointed to the left; if you are a left-handed player, make sure your headstock is pointed to the right. Look at the guitar on your lap; that is how guitar tablature is written. It will show what string, strings, and fret or frets you will play.

Above each of the guitar tabs are circled numbers that represent which fretting fingers you would be using:

- ① = use your 1st fretting finger
- ② = use your 2nd fretting finger
- ③ = use your 3rd fretting finger
- ④ = use your 4th fretting finger

Also, above each of the guitar tabs are marks:

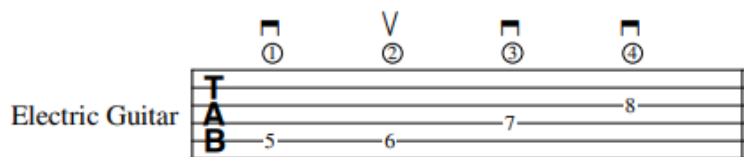
▮ = Downstroke

∨ = Upstroke

The downstroke means that you will pick the note of the string down.

The upstroke means that you will pick the note of the string up.

And the number or numbers on each string or strings means which fret or frets you will be fretting to pick.

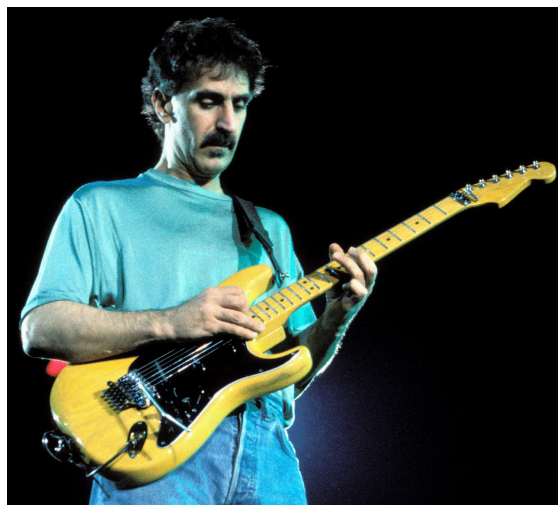
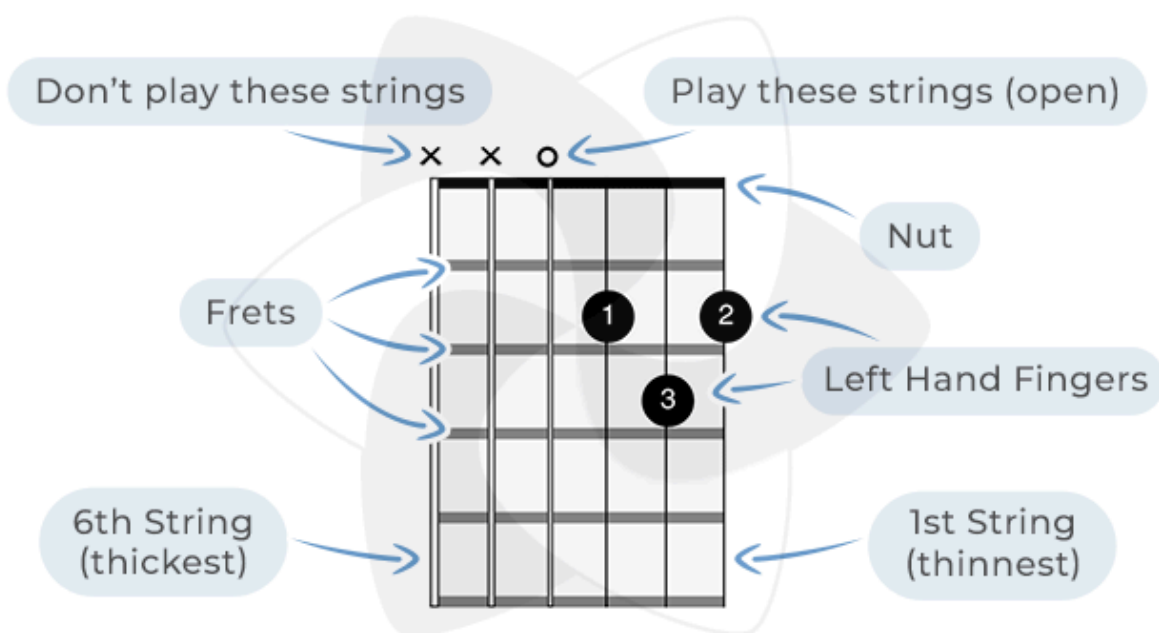


## How to read Guitar chord charts

Reading guitar chord charts can be a bit tricky at first, but once you see them and understand them, you will know how to play them.

Below, we have a chord. The strings go from left to right: low E, A, D, G, B, and high E. The black dots with numbers will represent which frets you place your fretting fingers on. The numbers on the bottom mean which fingers you will use. At the top, there will be the chord name, and there will also be an indication of some strings you will play that are open with an O, or if you don't play them, there will be an X.

## READING CHORD BOXES



**"Shut up and play your guitar! ~Frank Zappa**

## Practicing

When I was young and before I got a job and other things like bills, rent, and more, I was so into guitar, that all I did was practice, but as you get older, it can be hard to find time to practice. You have a guitar and want to practice, but time is not on your side. Sometimes, the last thing you want to do after a long day is practice.

But if you still want to practice and learn, time things out. Make time during a specific part of the day when you are free from work, school, a significant other, and more. You don't have to dedicate hours to practicing, but a small block of time where you focus on specific exercises. Let me give you an example:

At 8 pm, after I have put the kids to bed and my wife is going to read, I will dedicate 20 minutes to practicing guitar. But now, taking it a step further, what will you practice?

### 20 minutes of practice

Warming up chromatic scale starting at the 5th fret - 3 minutes

Diatonic scale shapes in A minor - 7 minutes

Speed licks starting on the 5th fret - 5 minutes

2 string, 3 note arpeggio - 5 minutes



Map and write down how much time and what exercises you will practice. There are a lot of templates online for forms where you can write down what you want to practice, and such.

Be sure that when you practice, you are explicitly working on the exercises you want done and not just noodling around.

Find the time to practice if you want, and think of it as working out at the gym; even if you only work out for a small amount of time, you still work out. You still practiced!



## Tuning

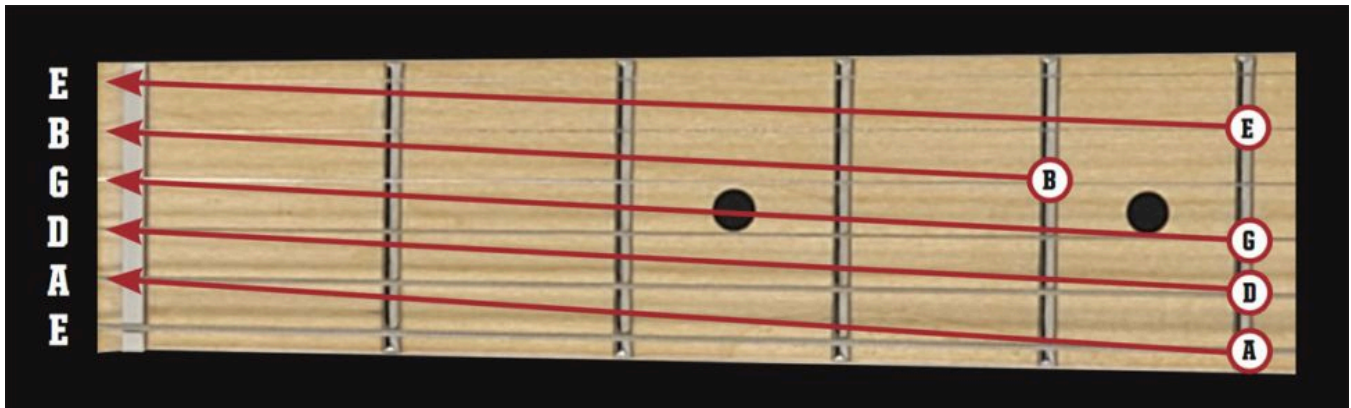
Tuning the guitar to the correct standard tuning is very important. Always keep your guitar in tune if you are practicing, as you want to hear the notes you are playing. And you may not know it, but your ears and mind are getting accustomed to the notes you are playing.

When tuning a guitar, take it slow, so you do not snap off a string. I like to tune with the tuning peg and go back and forth with winding, tuning it so the strength of the string stays intact. I suggest you go on YouTube and search for how to tune a guitar to get a better handle on how to tune.

You can buy an affordable, helpful tuner online or at a music shop without going broke. You can also download an app on your phone. There is an excellent variety of tuners, but be sure to research first.

### Tuning manually

You can also tune your guitar without a tuner, so it's in tune with itself. To tune the fifth (A) string, play the 5th fret of the sixth and open fifth strings. These two notes should sound the same. Repeat this process for every string except the second (B) string, where you should tune to the 4th fret of the third (G) string.



## Keeping in time

Keeping time with what you are playing or practicing is a vital tool, as this helps you build up the sense of timing in music.

Now, to start, simply tap your foot. You do it as is when you listen to music, or you might nod your head in a rhythmic pattern.


Another tool you can use is the metronome. Many students dread it as the constant clicking, back and forth, can get to you. Yeah...I get it...it gets annoying quickly! But it is vital, as this will help you build up timing and coordination.

I advise my beginner students to tap with their feet and use the metronome when they start to advance.

Another tool I use is a metronome drum beat. There are apps out there, but you can also go to YouTube to find videos of a drumbeat at a specific BPM.

Remember, timing is everything!




















### Time Signature



**Top Number**  
How many beats in each bar

**Bottom Number**  
What type of beats they are

### Note Values

Whole note		Semibreve 4 beats
Half note	 	Minim 2 beats
Quarter note	   	Crotchet 1 beat
Eighth note	   	Quaver $\frac{1}{2}$ beat
Sixteenth notes	       	Semiquaver $\frac{1}{4}$ beat

## Starting up, Warming up

You have your guitar. Let's play! Have your pick in your picking hand and fingers, and your fretting hand on the fretboard. What are we going to play? We are going to play the opening theme to "JAWS"!

Have your pick and picking hand close to the low E, the top string. Have your fretting hand and 1st finger close to the 1st fret of the low E string. Pick the open low E and then place your 1st finger on the 1st fret of the low E and pick that. Start slow and then build up to a faster pace. Practice this exercise slowly and be precise with the picking and fretting.

## "JAWS"

Electric Guitar

5

El. Guit.



**"The only thing holding you back is how you think." ~ Steve Vai**

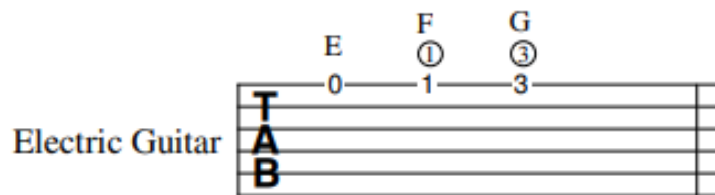


## String by String

Now that you have warmed up, let's practice with some exercises. We will practice and play exercises, string by string, starting on the high E string. We will begin on the high E string and go through each string up to the low E string. We will also focus on specific notes of each string, which you will build up to a scale in the end.

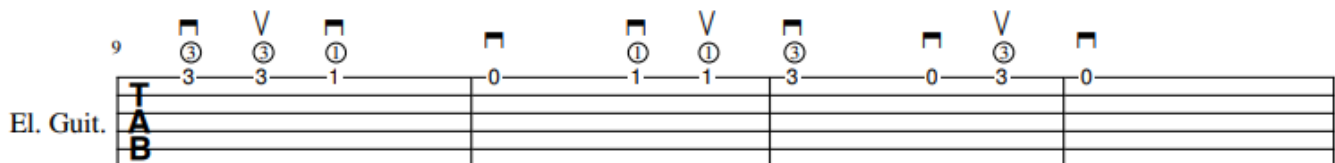
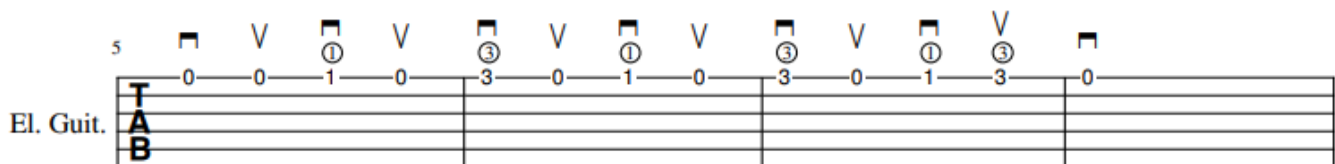
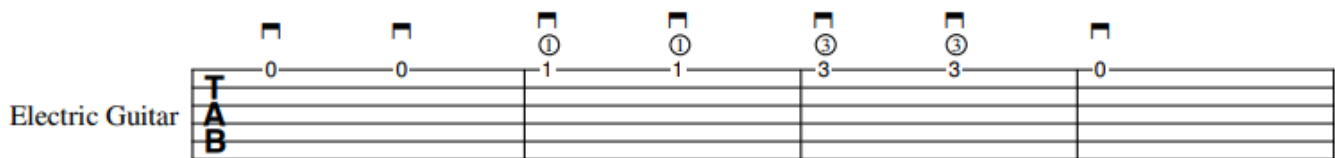
### High E string

On the high E string, the notes to focus on are E (open high E string), F (1st fret of the high E string), and G (3rd fret of the high E string).



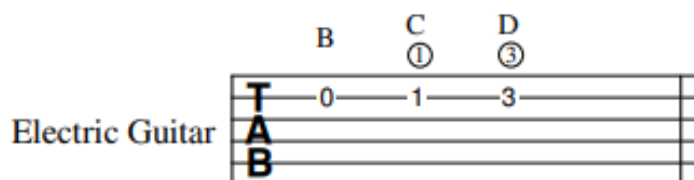
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### High E string



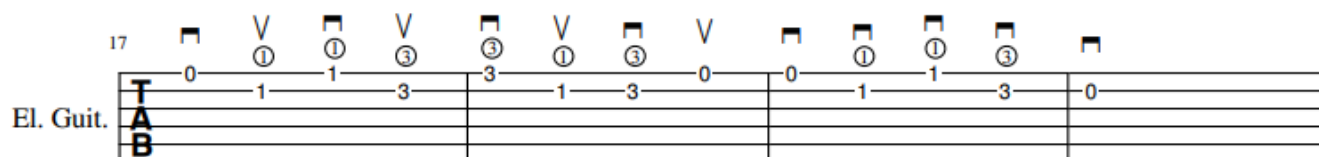
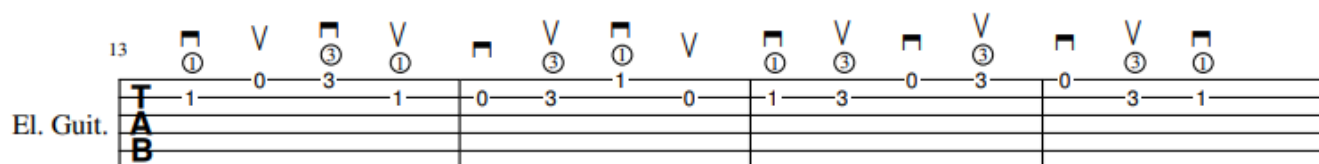
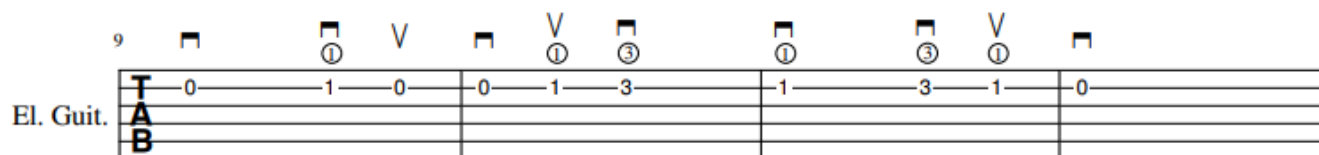
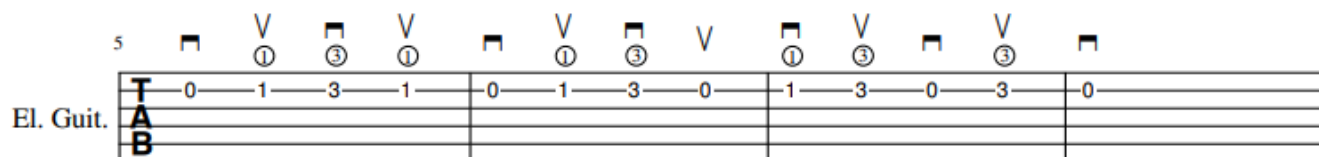
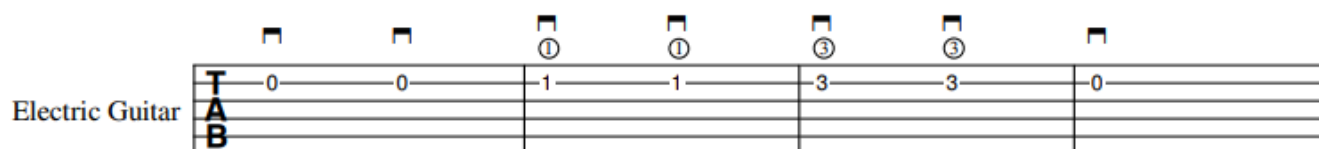
## B string

On the B string, the notes to focus on are B (open B string), C (1st fret of the B string), and D (3rd fret of the B string).



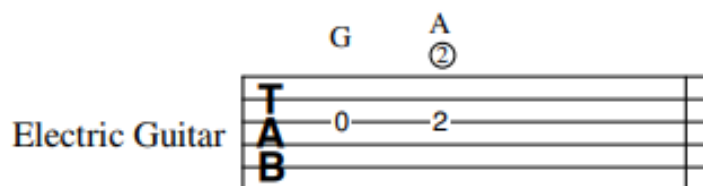
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## B string



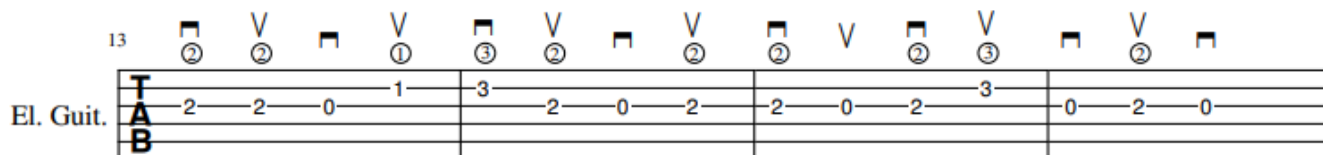
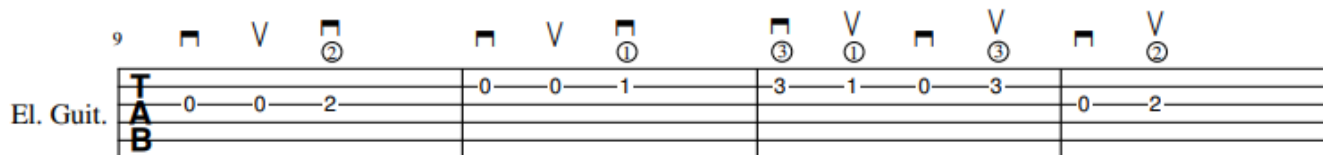
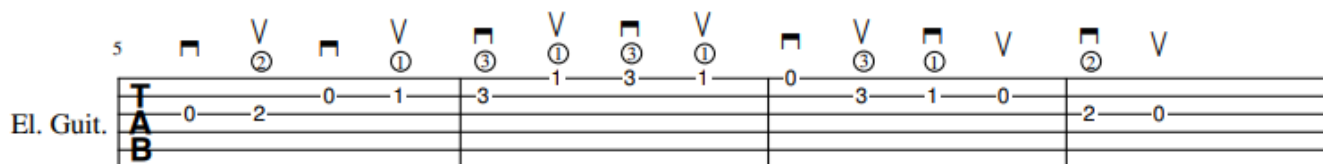
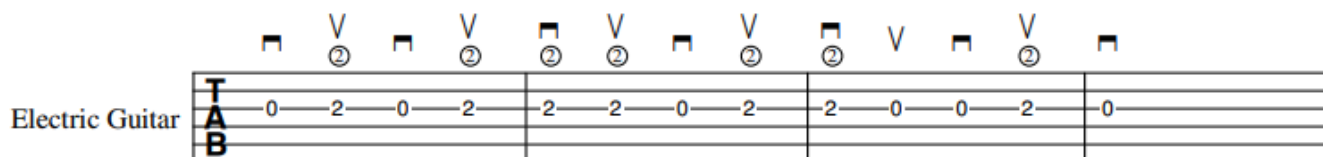
## G string

On the G string, the notes to focus on are G (open G string) and A (2nd fret of the G string).



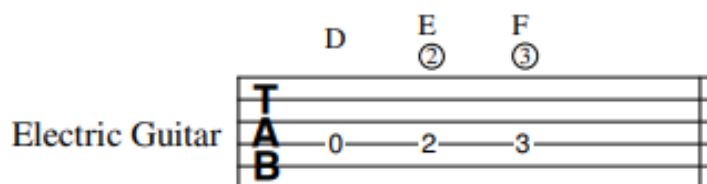
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## G string



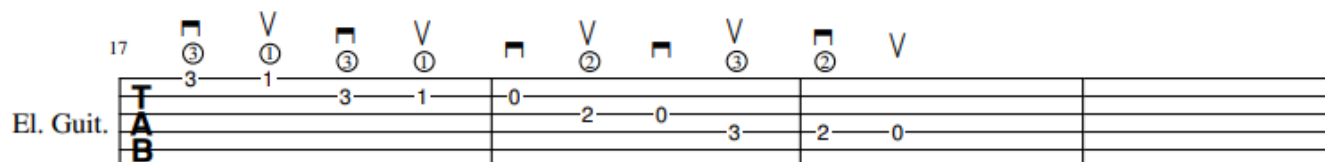
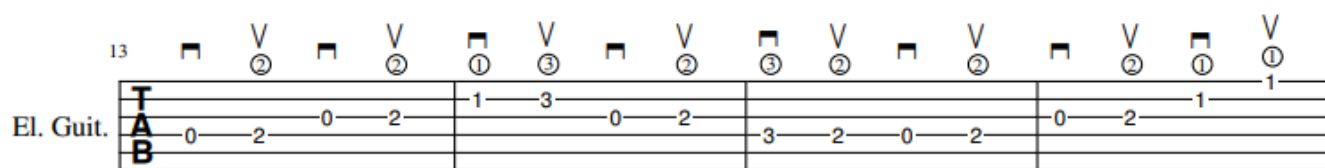
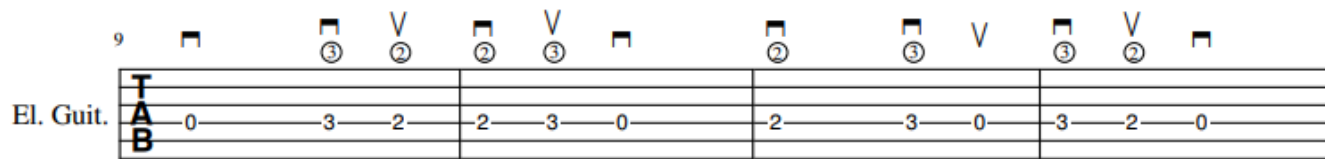
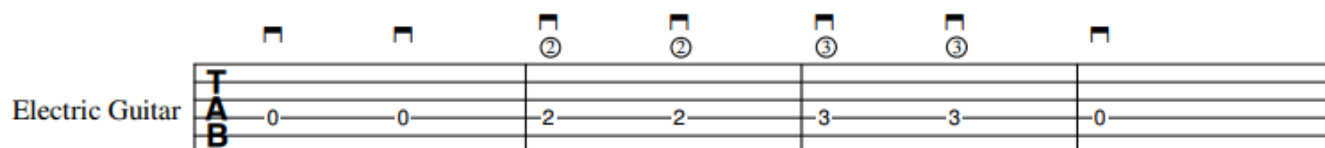
## D string

The notes to focus on the D string are D (open D string), E (2nd fret of the D string), and F (3rd fret of the D string).



×

## D string



## A string

On the A string, the notes to focus on are A (open A string), B (2nd fret of the A string), and C (3rd fret of the A string).

A      B      C  
         ②      ③

Electric Guitar

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## A string

Electric Guitar

5 El. Guit.

9 El. Guit.

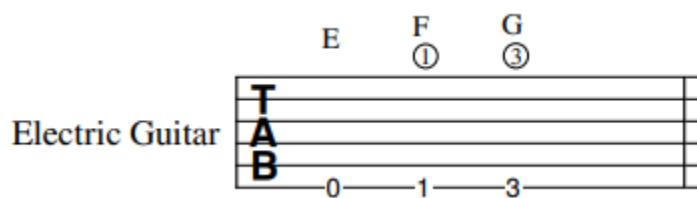
13 El. Guit.

17 El. Guit.



## Low E string

On the low E string, the notes to focus on are E (open low E string), F (1st fret of the low E string), and G (3rd fret of the low E string).



×

## Low E string

Electric Guitar

A diagram of the low E string on an electric guitar. The string is represented by a horizontal line with five frets marked. Above the line, the notes E, F, and G are indicated. E is at the open string (0), F is at the 1st fret (1), and G is at the 3rd fret (3). The letters T, A, and B are written vertically on the left side of the string, corresponding to the frets 0, 1, and 3 respectively.

5

El. Guit.

A diagram of the low E string on an electric guitar. The string is represented by a horizontal line with five frets marked. Above the line, the notes E, F, and G are indicated. E is at the open string (0), F is at the 1st fret (1), and G is at the 3rd fret (3). The letters T, A, and B are written vertically on the left side of the string, corresponding to the frets 0, 1, and 3 respectively.

9

El. Guit.

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17

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## C Major scale

Now that you have gone through all the notes on each string, practice all the notes on all the strings by playing the C Major scale.

×

## C Major scale

Electric Guitar

The image shows a guitar tablature for the C Major scale. Above the six strings (T, A, B), the notes of the scale are written with their corresponding fret numbers and fingering: C (1), D (3), E (2), F (3), G (2), A (2), B (1), C (3), D (1), E (3), F (1), G (3), A (2), B (3), C (2), D (3), E (2), F (3), G (1), A (3), B (2), C (1). The tablature itself shows the fret numbers for each string: T (0-1-3), A (0-2-3), B (0-1-3). The scale is written in a way that it can be played in either ascending or descending order.



**“Rock stars come and go. Musicians play until they die.”**

**~Eddie Van Halen**

## Techniques

There are many different techniques that you can apply to your guitar playing besides picking the notes. Below are a series of techniques and exercises to improve your playing.

### Palm Mute

Palm muting is when you place your picking hand over the bridge and lightly dampen the string or strings with your palm so they have a slightly muted sound.

Electric Guitar

Electric Guitar

P.M. -----|

P.M. -----|

P.M. -----|

### Muffled Strings

Muffled strings are when you place your finger or fingers of your fretting hand over the strings, and when you pick or strum, they give out a muffled sound. Don't press your finger or fingers over the strings onto the fretboard; only over the strings.

Electric Guitar

Electric Guitar

P.M. -----|

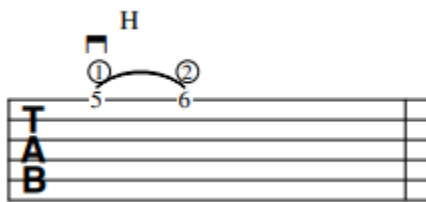
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P.M. -----|

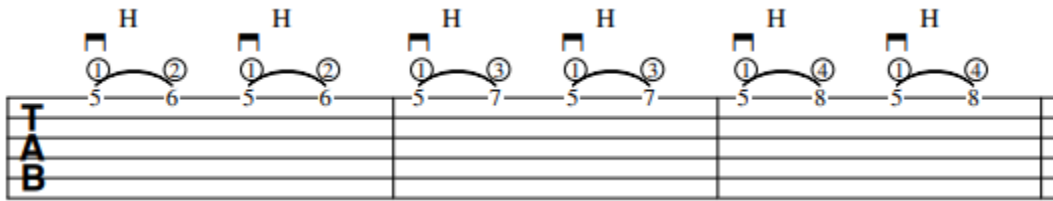
## Hammer-On

Hammer on is when you pluck a string and quickly press down a fret on the exact string while it still sounds.

Electric Guitar



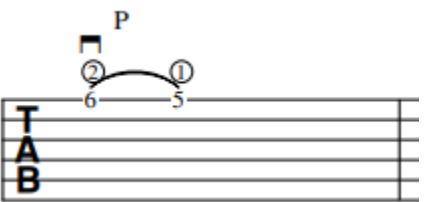
Electric Guitar



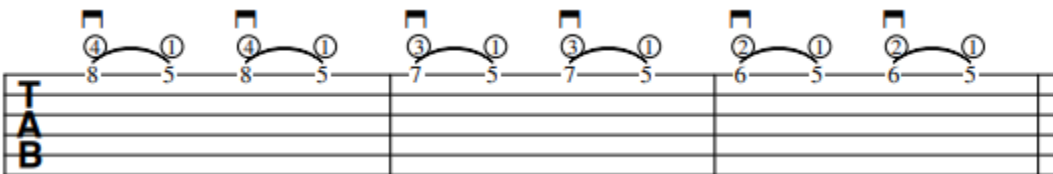
## Pull Off

Pull off is when you pluck a string and a note with one of your fingers and pull off to another note.

Electric Guitar



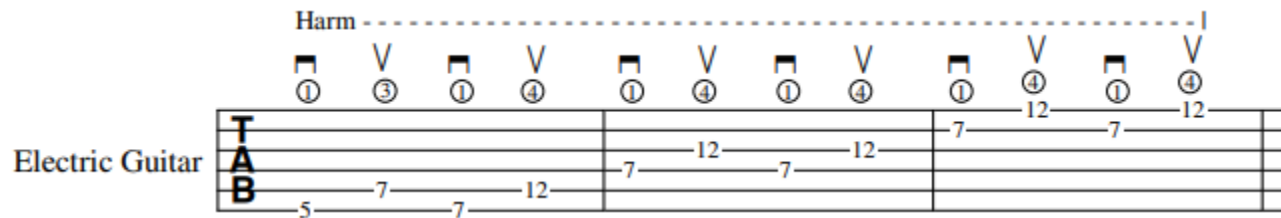
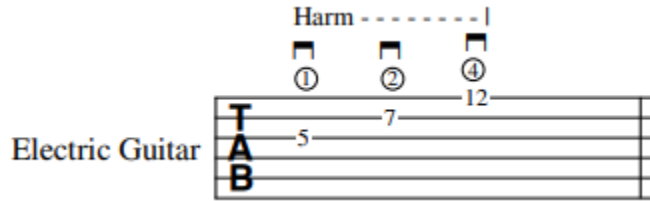
Electric Guitar



**“The way I look at it, you can always get better.” ~Zakk Wylde**

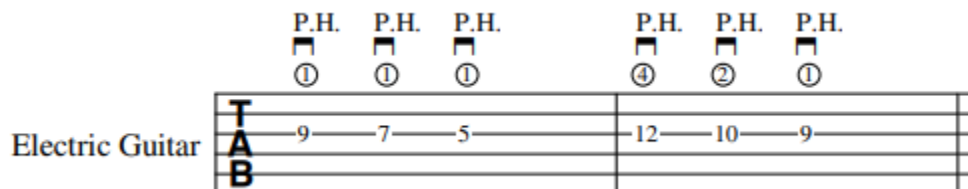
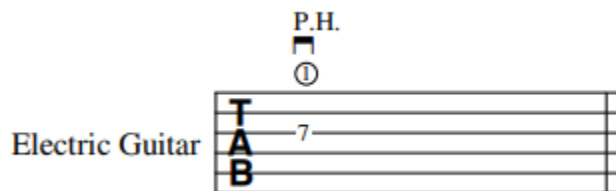
## Harmonics

Harmonics are when you place your fretting hand lightly over the string or strings; you pick the note or notes, and a harmonic sound is produced. You can get natural harmonics on the 5th, 7th, and 12th frets.



## Pinch Harmonic

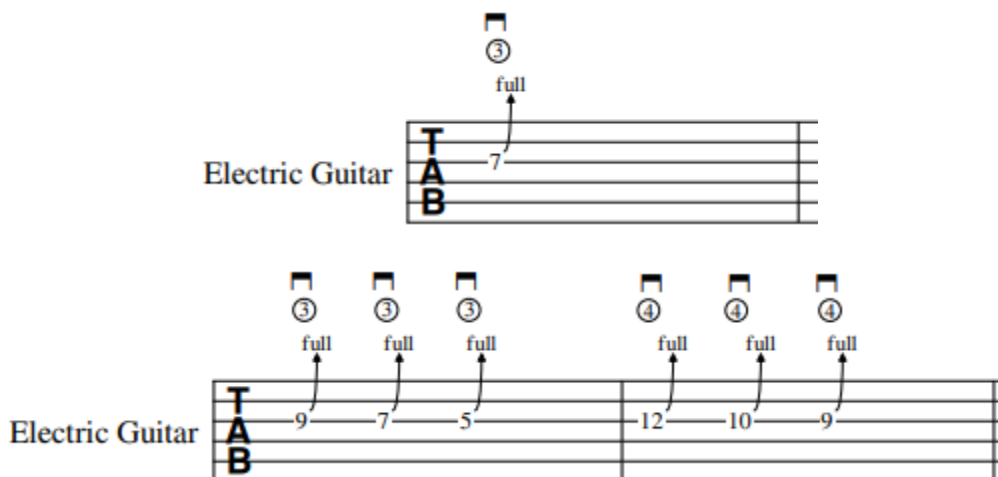
Pinch harmonics are when you play a note, but you also dampen the pick with your thumb and get a squeal sound from your guitar.





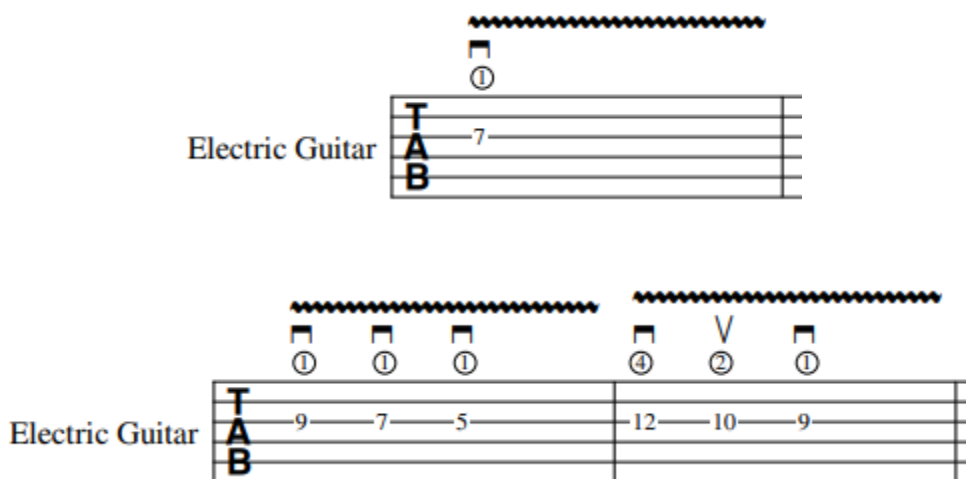
## Bending

Bending is when you pick a note and bend the string with one of your fretting fingers. You can bend up to the ceiling or down to the floor. I recommend that you bend toward the floor when you bend with the 1st finger of your fretting hand. When bending with your other fingers, use the ones before for support to bend. An example would be if you are bending a note with the 3rd finger of your fretting hand, have your 1st and 2nd fingers on the fretboard behind your 3rd finger to support bending the note and string.



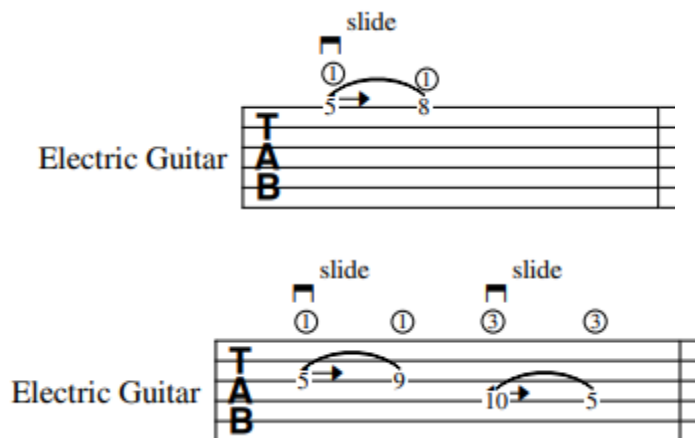
## Vibrato

Vibrato is when you pick the note and bend the string up or down with a bit of pressure, and then back to its original position. It's almost like you are wiggling the string.



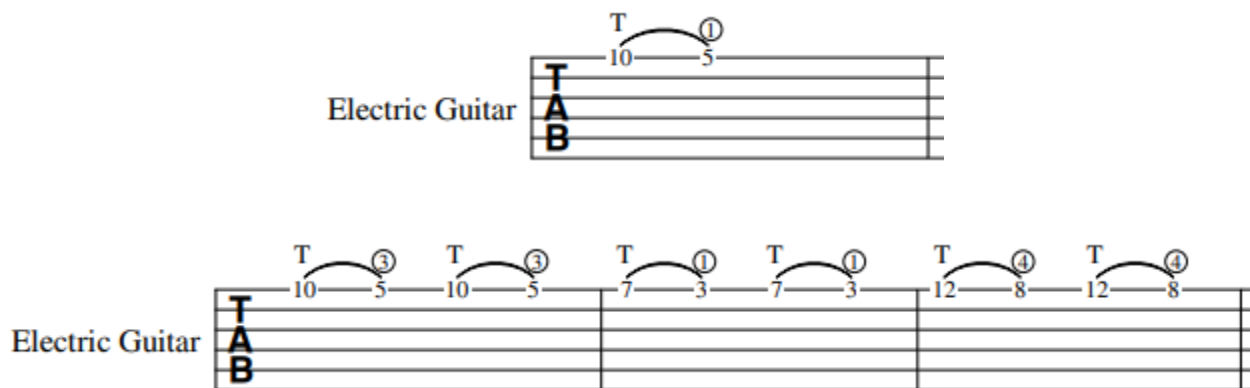
## Sliding

Sliding is when you pick a note with your fretting finger and then slide up or down the string while your finger is still on the fretboard.



## Tapping

Tapping is when you use both your hands and fingers on the fretboard. With one of your fingers in your picking hand, you will hammer down on a note on the fretboard and pull it off. With your fretting hand, you can do a variety of techniques like hammer-ons, pull-offs, bends, and more. When you tap, pull off towards the floor.



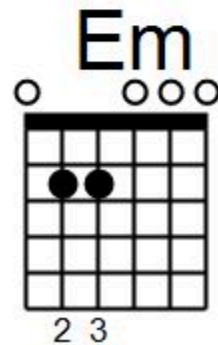
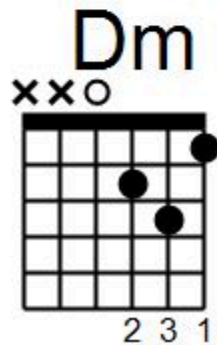
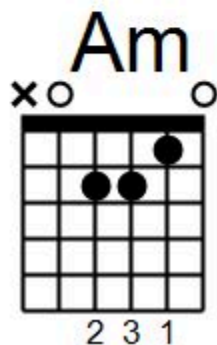
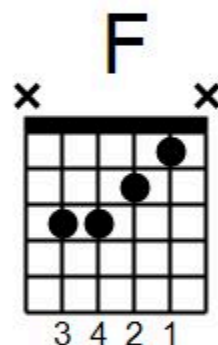
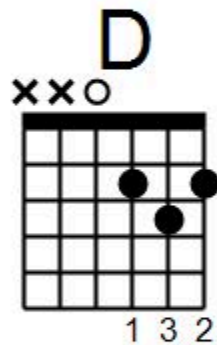
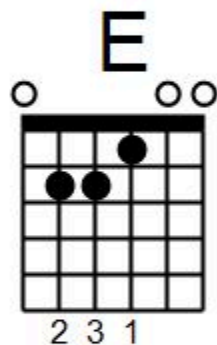
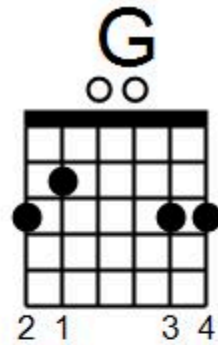
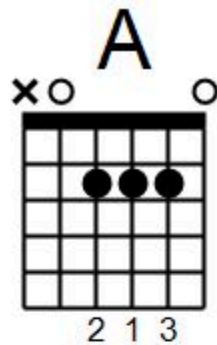
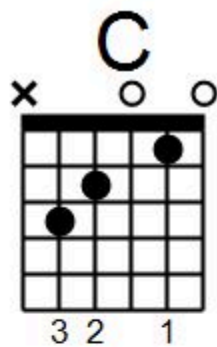
Now that you have learned the techniques and played the exercises mix them up! Tap and hammer on some notes. Slide and pull off to another note. Pinch harmonic and bend the same note. If you need further help playing these techniques, go to YouTube, where plenty of players show you how to perform them.

## Guitar Chords

Guitar chords are a series of notes on the guitar, all played together at once.

My first introduction to chords is what my first teacher referred to as "cowboy chords." Chords that were around the nut of the guitar. Open chords like A, C, G, and more. He called them "cowboy chords," as if you watch the old western movies in black and white, there is someone in the background playing the guitar, and they are playing those chords.

When I started to learn how to play and strum them, I would slowly form the chord, strumming it once, letting it ring for a specific time out, and then moving on and playing the next. Here are the chords you should start with:



## Playing chords, one note at a time

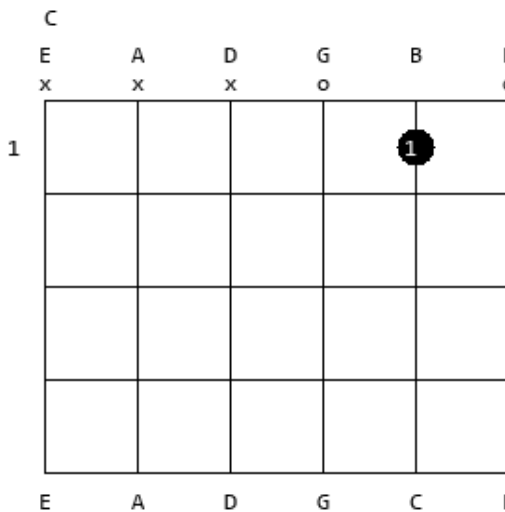
I went into playing chords as they are, but you can also build your way up to them. Let me give you an example:

We have a C chord, but you need help playing all the notes. Start with this. Start with your 1st finger on the 1st fret of the B string. When you go to strum, play the G, B, and high E strings, where you put your 1st finger to form the start of a C chord.

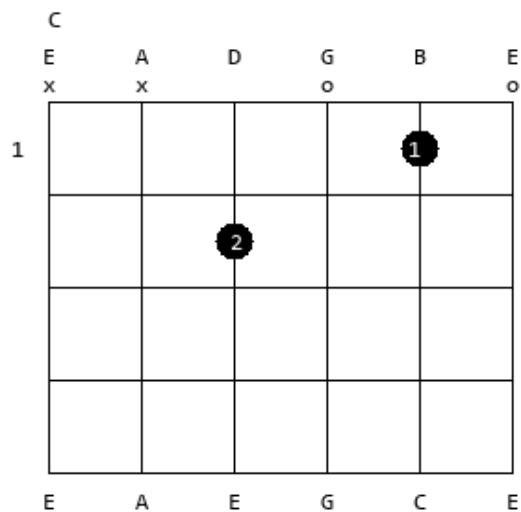
Once you feel comfortable, move on to the following chord note, where you will put the next finger on the fretboard. You will take your 2nd finger and place it on the 2nd fret of the D string. Now play the D, G, B, and high E strings with that.

And with that, you are almost home. Place your 3rd finger on the 3rd fret of the A string and play the full C chord.

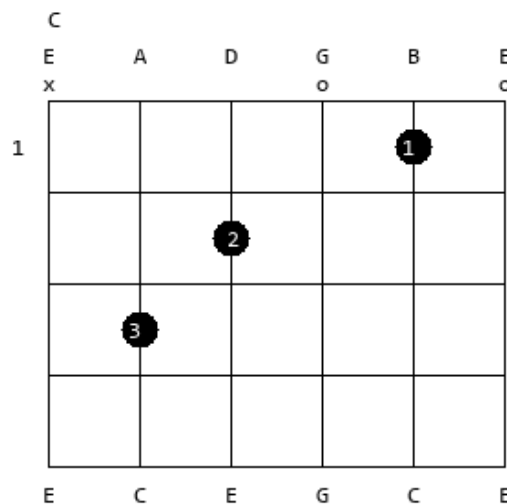
1. Start here:



2. Then here:



3. And then play the full C chord:



Apply this with chords you struggle with and build your way up to them.

## Chord strumming

The exercises below help with playing chords and moving from one chord to the next.

Start with a C chord. You will play it on the 1st beat, let it ring out for three beats, and then return on the 1st beat of the next measure, where you will play the C chord again.

The following exercise is to go from one chord to the next. Start with a C chord on the 1st beat, let it ring out for three beats, and then play a D chord on the 1st beat of the next measure. When you get to the D chord, play it on the 1st beat, let it ring out for three beats, and then return to the C.

Electric Guitar

**C**

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

let ring -----|

let ring -----|

Electric Guitar

**C** **D**

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

let ring -----|

let ring -----|

Repeat these exercises with different chords and change the timing, like playing a chord on the 1st beat, letting it ring out on the 2nd beat, then playing a different chord on the 3rd beat, and letting it ring out on the 4th beat and then repeat.

Electric Guitar

**C** **Am** **D** **E**

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

let ring -----|

let ring -----|



## Power Chords

The root five-power chord! This is the most popular and played chord in rock, punk, metal, and more. You hear them a lot in music.

A root five power chord is the root, fifth, and octave. You are playing the first, fifth, and then the octave of a scale. An example would be:

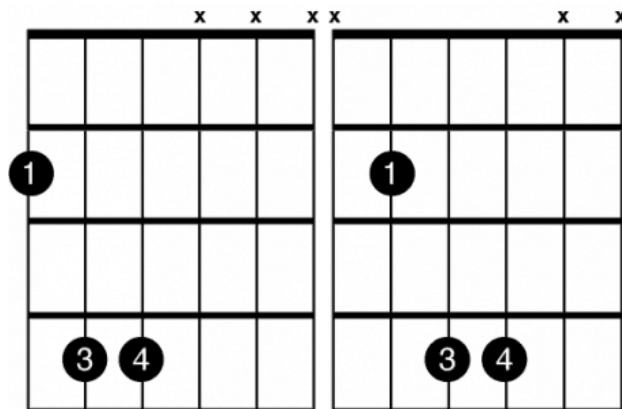
A5 power chord

1st note A

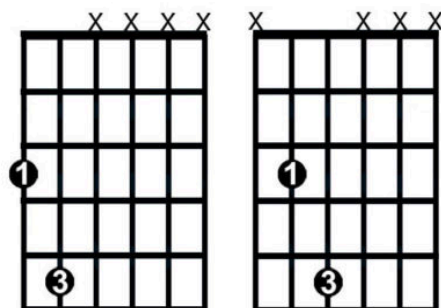
5th note from A is E

And the octave is A

The great thing about the power chord is that it is the same shape when the root is on the low E and A strings. Let's return to the A5 power chord on the low E string. Place your 1st finger on the 5th fret of the low E string, then with your 3rd finger, place it on the 7th fret of the A string, and with your 4th finger, place it on the 7th fret of the D string. Some players will use their 3rd finger to play both notes instead of their 3rd and 4th fingers. I will only tell you how to play it if you are playing it correctly and can hear it.



Some players like Tony Iommi of Black Sabbath don't play the full shape. He will play the 1st and 5th and leave out the octave. But I suggest playing the full shape so your fingers can get accustomed to it.



I have an exercise on one of the most infamous songs ever that all beginners play to learn power chords...Yes!..."Smoke on the Water" by Deep Purple. Practice and play this slowly to get the chords and the timing down, then play along to the song. If you are having trouble, start by playing with your 1st and 3rd fingers on the root and fifth, and then build up to the whole chord.

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## "Smoke on the Water"

by Deep Purple

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Another power chord lesson from the Ramones is "Blitzkrieg Bop." I suggest practicing this with all down strokes.

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## "Blitzkrieg Bop"

by the Ramones

	A5	D5	E5	x3	A5	D5	A5																																
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**"When you're around someone good, your standards are raised."**

**~Ritchie Blackmore**

## **CLOSING**

Thank you for choosing this book; I hope it helps you play. One of the best rewards of being a teacher is when the students I have taught do well in their playing, from beginners to intermediate to advanced.

That is all for exercise in this book, but now, keep learning online and using other resources, lessons, and more. Play around with these exercise ideas using what frets you want to pick with what strings and notes. You can come up with a lot of great exercises. There are no rules, and if there are, break them!

**HAVE FUN, AND KEEP PLAYING!!!**



Visit my website for lessons, music, and more at  
[www.metaljimrocks.com](http://www.metaljimrocks.com)