

Chord Primer for Guitar

By Thom Gustafson



Northwest School of Guitar

1308 South Third Street
Mount Vernon, WA 98273
(360) 336-2547
www.schoolofguitar.com

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Introduction

One of the best ways to develop basic musical skills is performing solo or group vocal music with guitar accompaniment. Senses of pitch, rhythm, and harmony can all be improved dramatically if a person learns to smoothly make chord changes while singing.

To my thinking as a guitar teacher, a beginner's chord book should start with a smooth, graduated study of basic open chords. Songs must be selected which fit into the overall plan of learning and are widely known by today's students.

After mastering open chords, the serious guitar student should learn to play bar chords and other moveable chord forms. This enables the student to play songs in every key.

I have also included transposition and capoing guides to help the guitarist perform music in the key most suitable for their guitar and/or vocal abilities.

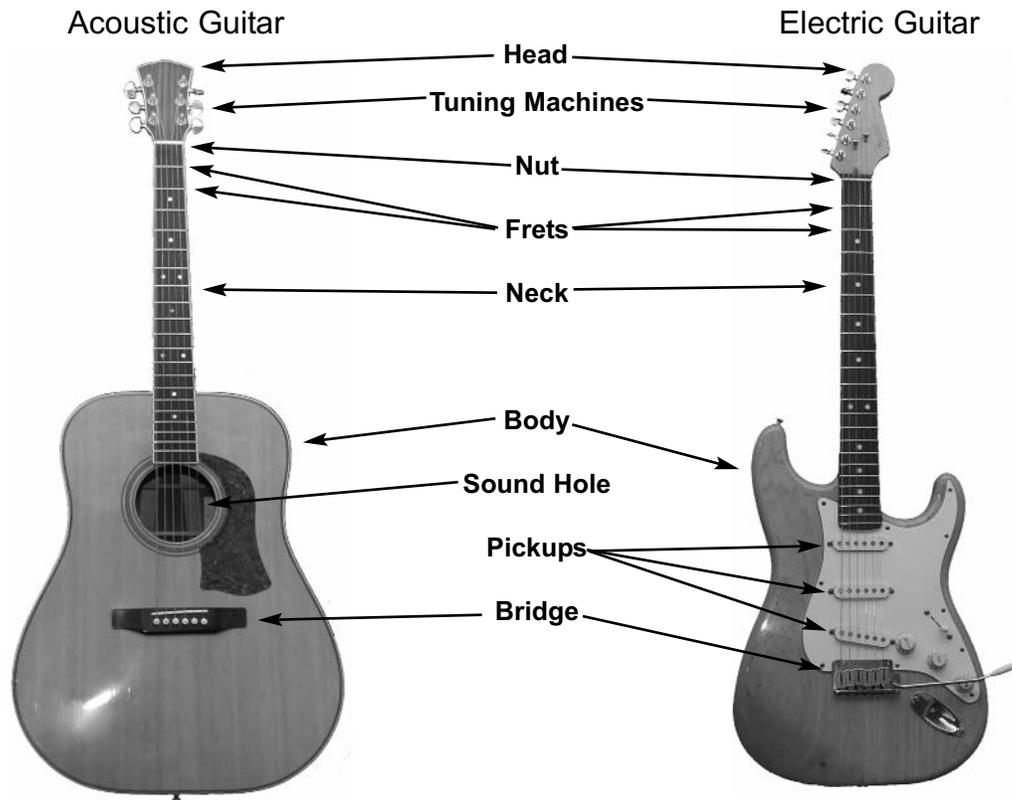
This work is not intended as a sole source of guitar instruction. I assume that a serious guitar student is also learning to read and play from musical notation. Hence no explanations of such things as bar lines, measures, time signatures, and guitar note locations are included.

I dedicate this work to my wife Bobbi whose love of music and understanding has helped my career as a musician and guitar instructor immeasurably.

Happy strumming!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thom Gustafson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'T' at the beginning.

Parts of the Guitar



Gripping The Pick



Although many different and successful methods are used to hold a pick, it is good to use the most common as a starting point. Grip the pick firmly, but no more firmly than is necessary, between the thumb and the slightly curled index finger. The remaining fingers of the picking hand may lightly curl behind the index finger as shown.

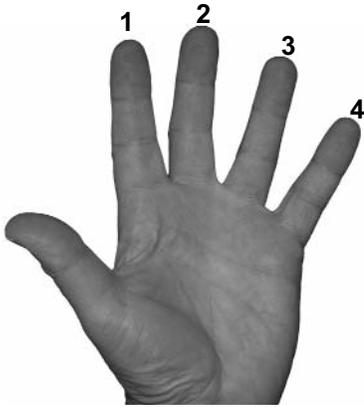
Left Hand Positioning



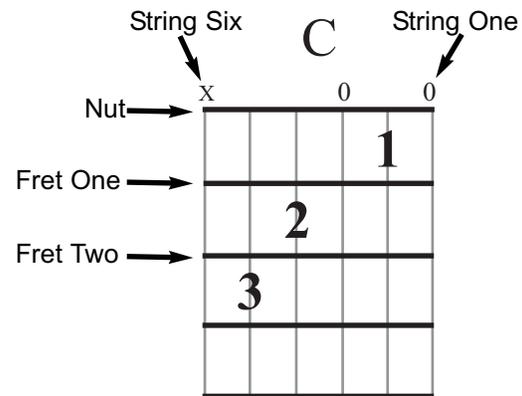
The left hand is positioned with the thumb at or near the back of the neck. The fingers arch gracefully over the fretboard. The left hand does not support the neck of the guitar. The guitar is instead supported when standing by a strap and when seated by being held/balanced between a leg and the right arm. The right leg is usually used to support acoustic or electric guitars and the left leg for classical (nylon strung) guitars.

Reading Chord Diagrams

Left Hand Fingering



Chord Diagram



0=Open string included in the chord.
x=String to be excluded from the chord.

1. Place the thumb on the back of the neck between frets one and two. Thumb placement with larger hands is usually closer to fret one. Thumb placement with smaller hands is usually closer to fret two.
2. Arch the fingers around the fretboard and lightly place the tips of the fingers needed for each chord on the correct string and directly behind the fret. Do not allow any joint of any finger to straighten (or collapse) unless the same finger is playing more than one string. The fingertips should be as perpendicular to the fretboard as possible when fretting strings. Only the thumb and fingertips should be in contact with the neck.
3. Apply equal pressure to those fingers being used for each chord. Do not squeeze with the thumb.
4. Strum the chord, then pick each string individually. Dead or buzzing strings can be caused by finger placement either too far from the fret or on top of the fret or by the side of another finger touching it.

Getting Started

Each *system* of music consists of two lines, one for strumming and changing chords and one for actually playing the melody. The melody line is intended for another instrumentalist to play while the student is strumming chords. An asterisk (*) is used to show which beat the melody begins on. Below are examples:

C

Choose your part-ner

Melody begins on first strum

G

In a

Melody begins on third strum

D

He's got the

Melody begins between strums three and four

If a melody does not begin on the first strum and has more than one verse, an asterisk might be used in the last measure to show which strum the next verse begins on. The top of the next page shows two examples:

G

knee. (2.I)

Next verse begins on fourth strum

G

tine. (2.Light she)

Next verse begins on third strum

Endings

Songs with more than one verse have no specific ending shown. The student should end the song with a final strum on a beat that seems appropriate.

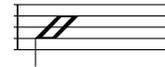
Most of the songs with only one verse shown end with a held chord. Below are examples of strums lasting more than one beat:



Whole Note Strum
Four Beats



Dotted-Half Note Strum
Three Beats



Half Note Strum
Two Beats

Tuning The Guitar

You may tune the guitar to a keyboard instrument in the manner shown below. Music written for the guitar sounds one octave below the actual or *concert* pitch.

String: ⑥ ⑤ ④ ③ ② ①

Another Tuning Method

1. Tune string one to E above middle C using another instrument, pitch pipe or tuning fork.
2. Tune string two, fret five in unison with the open first string.
3. Tune string three, fret four in unison with the open second string.
4. Tune string four, fret five in unison with the open third string.
5. Tune string five, fret five in unison with the open fourth string.
6. Tune string six, fret five in unison with the open fifth string.