

Playing Guitar: A Beginner's Guide

by Darrin Koltow
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Acknowledgements

This ebook is more than just one person wanting to help others play guitar more effectively. The inspiration and knowledge gained from other resources has helped make this ebook helpful for you. One of those resources is GuitarNoise.com. GuitarNoise.com has lessons for guitarists of every skill level, covering many, many aspects of playing guitar. This includes advice on careers, "Scary Stories," detailed lessons on playing popular songs, songwriting, forums and much more. It's hard to imagine a guitarist who would not benefit from GuitarNoise.com materials. Visit them often, at www.GuitarNoise.com.



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The articles on MaximumMusician.com can help you. You can learn to Play by Ear at www.MaximumMusician.com/PlayGuitarByEarIntro.htm. Learn All About Chords at www.MaximumMusician.com/ChordsIntro.htm. Other articles help you turn scales and chords into music, and sort through the glut of guitar info on the web.

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[Blues Grooves for Beginners and Beyond](#)

Downloadable eGuide

© 2003 Darrin Koltow Eguide for Windows 95, 98, 2000, NT, Macintosh in WinZipped PDF format

Blues Grooves for Beginners and Beyond shows you how to play blues shuffles, boogies, riffs and progressions. Playing blues rhythms is one of the easiest, quickest ways of getting great sounds from your guitar. This guide shows you how to get those sounds.

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www.MaximumMusician.com/BluesGroovesRhythmGuitareBook.htm

Introduction

This book is for all beginning guitarists, especially those who don't yet believe they can play the guitar.

It was written because beginning guitarists need guidance. They need to know which chords and concepts to begin with, and which ones to ignore. There's a lot of information available today to the beginning guitarist. In fact, there's too much information: it's easy to become overwhelmed with all the different exercises and songs to play. This book cuts through the clutter to get you started playing songs as quickly as possible. It also gives you tips on where to go for more information.

I believe the most important things about playing guitar are to have fun and to grow as a musician. When you can do these things, I believe you also grow as a person, no matter what style of music you want to play.

About the Author

Hi, I'm Darrin Koltow. I've been playing guitar since 1985. I've studied music theory and history at Rutgers College, and guitar with a number of teachers, including Bill Hart, who has taught at the Atlanta Institute of Music. I've also studied the strategies for success and motivation from other disciplines and adapted them to musicianship. I'm now applying this training to my mission: to be the best player I can be, to enjoy the journey to becoming such a player, and to help others achieve their musical goals. Contact me at www.MaximumMusician.com/feedbacksk.htm

Practicing

Here are a few notes about how to approach practicing with the best frame of mind. First, don't hurt yourself, especially when you're just starting. You may be 100% motivated to learn, but you won't learn anything if you damage your hand from overplaying. It's easy to do that when you start, because your hands simply haven't built up the muscles they need to play yet. This is more of a problem with acoustic steel string guitarists than electric guitarists, because steel string guitars are generally harder to play. Give it a little time; the hand strength will come.

You'll want to get some essential tools besides the guitar. Get a metronome, and a journal. The metronome helps you play in time, but does more than just that. It forces you to play music, and not rambling notes and chords. Keeping time with the metronome **makes you push yourself beyond your comfort zone**, so you can grow as a player.

You say you're not a writer. That's okay, but **get a journal** anyway, and use it to write down how well you think you're doing. You don't need to write in it every day. But when you've spent three weeks working on a song or scale or arpeggio exercise, write down how it felt to complete it. Also, write down the things you can't yet do. A year from now, you'll look at what you wrote, and feel great pride at how far you've come.

Good attitude is crucial to your sense of achievement. Putting yourself down because you can't yet make a particular chord shape is not nearly as helpful to you as moving on to another chord shape, or reviewing the chords you do know. The technique will come, trust me. Stay motivated by writing your goals down, and rewriting them regularly. Read how others grew from having no skill, to being *players*.

Play for others, maybe a little before you believe you're ready. Smooth your playing on a song or two, and play them for someone. You'll get a whole new perspective on your playing, and what you need to work on. Besides that, any compliments you get will motivate you in a powerful way.

How to Hold the Guitar

Remember to breathe. It's easy for your body to get tense when you do something as awkward as playing guitar for the first time. This tenseness builds up without your even realizing it. Take a break every so often, and just breathe.

Even if you do everything right, playing might seem uncomfortable at first. **It should not be painful, though.** If you sense any pain at any time, stop immediately. Before long, your desire to play will make **not** holding the guitar feel uncomfortable.

Choose a chair or seat with the right height. You'll know it's the right height because, when you sit, your thigh will be angled just slightly upward. Some players pick any chair and raise their guitar knee by putting their guitar foot on a stool or stack of phone books. The point is to raise the guitar high enough so your hand can get to the frets. It gets real tiring to play by putting your guitar foot on tiptoe all the time. It also gets tiring when you hunch your entire upper body over so you can see the frets.

If you're right-handed, put the guitar on your right knee. Note: classical guitarists would use their left knee. It's tempting to tilt the guitar so you can see the frets, but don't do it. Keep the guitar straight. The neck of the guitar should be angled slightly upward as it extends away from your body.

Now for the fretting hand. Practice making what I call "the claw" with your left hand. This means putting your left thumb halfway between the bottom of the guitar's neck, and the top of the neck. It's tempting to grab the guitar like you were grabbing a hammer, with the thumb wrapping over the top, but you won't be able to hit all the notes that way. To make the claw, keep the thumb at that halfway point on the neck, and crook your wrist as if you were trying to make your finger tips hook over the top of the neck.

If all of this seems too complicated, go for these simplified instructions: look at pictures of how other guitarists hold their guitar, and do what feels comfortable for you. By the way, some great guitarists, such as Jeff Healy, hold their guitar flat on their lap.

Tablature and Chord Diagrams

Tablature

Tablature is a way of expressing music on paper. A page of tablature tells you what notes to play to make the song happen. Standard music notation is another way of communicating songs on paper. Classical musicians usually have to know this kind of notation. We'll stick to the basics and just describe tablature in this section. You can read an intro to standard notation in the Appendix.

Let's look at a piece of tablature:

Play one after the other.

Play at the same time.

str. 1	0	1	0	(rest)	0	1	0
str. 2							(rest...)
str. 3							
str. 4							
str. 5							
str. 6							

Tablature One

Standard notation

(Notice that the standard notation is included here, just in case you're interested in how it matches with the tablature.)

Look at figure Tablature One. Each of the long lines going from left to right represents a guitar string. The top line is the high E string (the thinnest string), the next line down is the B string, and so on. The numbers represent frets that you play, not the fingers you use.

The first group of notes is played one at a time. The second group of notes shows the notes stacked on top of each other, which means you play them at the same time. This group of notes played together is called a *chord*. The first group of notes is called an *arpeggio*. Think of arpeggios as a busted up chord.

The numbers tell you which frets to press. A "0" means you play the string open, or unfretted.

Some tablature, or "tab" for short, also tells you which fingers to use. Keep an eye out for finger indicators in the tabs shown in this book. Knowing which fingers to use is important to prevent confusion.

There's not much else to learning tablature. You can learn more about it through these resources:

Resources

OLGA, the On-Line Guitar Archive. OLGA (www.olga.net/) is a library of files, including those for tab, that shows you how to play songs on guitar.

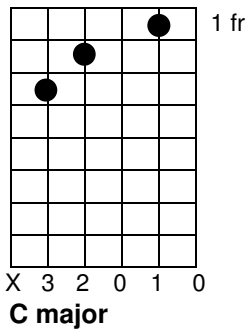
How to Read and Write Tab, www.olga.net/faq/tabling.php

Newsgroups: rec.music.makers.guitar.tablature and alt.guitar.tab.

Free software: Tablature 2.1 is a set of tools that allows easy publication and playback of bass and guitar tablature. Available at download.com.

Chord Diagrams

Chord diagrams are used to show you where to put your fingers to make chords. Let's take a look at a chord diagram.



The "1 fr" means the first fret. **The numbers at the bottom tell you which fingers to use**, not which frets to play. The vertical lines represent the strings, and the horizontal lines separate the frets. You can probably guess that the circles tell you where to put your fingers. Zero (0) means you don't use a finger; let the string ring open.

Where would you see a figure like this? A lot of sheet music in standard (not tablature) notation will have chord diagrams like this one above the music. So, even though you might not be able to read standard notation, you can still read the chord diagrams, and play along on the song.

Chord diagrams with sheet music

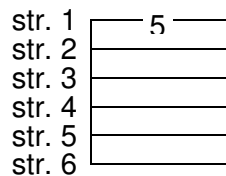
Resources

How to Read Chord Diagrams: www.daddydoodle.com/chordex.html. This site also covers other topics for beginners, such as How to Hold a Guitar Pick, How to String a Guitar and How to Tune a Guitar.

Tuning

Just like the other aspects of learning the guitar, tuning is something you'll get better at the more you do it. The first time you tune, it may be difficult to separate in-tune pitches from those out of tune. Electronic tuners are available to help with this, but all you need to start is a set of pitch pipes, or some other source that can emit the pitch called "Concert A." You can even use your computer to output this pitch, if you have the right software.

Let's tune. Once you have your Concert A source, turn it on or do what you need to do to make it sound. Holding your guitar as though you were playing it, press your finger onto the fifth fret of the first string. (The first string is the thinnest one.) You don't need to press too hard.

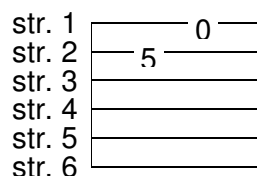


Tuning the First String

With your other hand, pluck the first string. If the note won't sound, move your fretting finger a bit closer to toward the soundhole, while still staying on the fifth fret.

Compare the pitch from your tuner with the note you played. If they sound different, adjust the first string's tuning knob until the notes sound the same. It's best to watch carefully as someone else does this, for the first couple of times. Your ear can trick you when you're just starting, and make you think a certain pitch sounds like another pitch. Singing the pitch will help you here.

Let's tune the second string. Play the note on string 2, fret 5. Then play the string 1 "open," which means without any fretting fingers on it. If the two pitches sound different, adjust the tuning peg for string 2 until the pitches are equal.



Tuning the Second String

Let's tune string three. By now, you might think this step is the same as for tuning string 2. The process is similar, but with one important difference. Instead of playing string 3, fret 5, play string 3, fret 4. While that note is still ringing, play string 2 open. Adjust string 3's tuning peg until the pitches match.

str. 1	
str. 2	0
str. 3	4
str. 4	
str. 5	
str. 6	

Tuning the Third String

String 4 returns us to the original procedure: play string 4, fret 5, and adjust the tuning peg until the pitch matches string 3 open.

Continue this procedure for strings 5 and 6. To check your work, play the open string 6 and the open string 1. Although they have different pitches, they're both E notes. If you play both of these strings at the same time and they're tuned properly, they should sound as if you were playing one string.

More help on tuning is available here:

Resources

How to Tune the Guitar: www.daddydoodle.com/chordex.html

The First Song

The Song

As promised in the introduction, we covered just the basics needed to begin playing a song. Now, let's play the song!

Here's some tablature for a common chord progression that many popular songs are based on. Once you feel a little comfortable with it, you may begin to hear some of these songs pop into your head.

A note on strumming: at this point, do whatever feels natural. However, the song will sound best if you just play the first three strings. Focus on keeping a steady rhythm. You don't even have to use a pick. Your fingers or thumb can strum. If you can't get all the notes to sound this time, don't worry. Practice and desire will work that out.

	C maj		A min		F maj		G7									
str. 1	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	1	
str. 2	1	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	0	—	0	
str. 3	0	—	0	—	2	—	2	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	
str. 4																
str. 5																
str. 6																

This double line means "repeat."

Avoid playing these three strings.

Here's the standard notation version of this tune:



You can skip this next part if you want. It tells you a bit more about what you were playing. Reading this part isn't as much fun as playing, but it can help you understand how to have more fun playing.

How the Song Works (Basic Music Theory)

What you played is known as a I-vi-IV-V-I progression in the key of C major. Just what does that mean?

There is one major scale, and twelve keys you can play it in, including C major. The major scale has seven different notes in it. You can make a chord from each one of those notes. Each chord is given a Roman numeral based on where it falls in the scale. Here are those numerals for the chords in C major:

I	ii	iii	IV	V ⁷	vi	vii ^o
C	D	E	F	G	A	B

The chord built on C is the I chord. The chord built on D is the ii chord. The rest of the chords are named in the same way. The song you played used only four of the seven chords in C major, and that's all it needed to sound good. (See the Appendix for more about the major scale.)

Notice that some of the numerals in the figure are in upper case, and some are lower case. The *quality* of the chord determines the case. Chord quality doesn't mean how good or valuable the chord is, but how it feels. The major scale has four different qualities: major, minor, dominant and half-diminished. The major chords, I and IV, are indicated with upper case letters, the minor chords, ii, iii, and vi, with lower case. In general, major chords sound happy and restful. Minor chords sound sad or ominous or dark, and dominant chords sound bluesy, unstable, and happy in an anxious way. Half-diminished chords sound like an even more anxious version of dominant chords.

The way you mix these different chords and chord qualities gives a song character and flavor. The more you know about how to mix them, and the more songs you can play by heart, the better you will be as a musician.

Resources

www.GuitarNoise.com: simply one of the best sites for beginners. Huge volume of articles, and catchy beginner's songs with precise instructions for playing them.

OLGA song archive: www.olga.net

Basic Chords

Here is a song similar to the first one you played. It shows more chords that you will use often when you first start learning songs. This song is in G major. For another view of the chords in this song, turn to the Appendix and look at the chords for G major.

	G mai	E min	C mai	D7
str. 1	3 — 3	0 — 0	0 — 0	2 — 2
str. 2	0 — 0	0 — 0	1 — 1	1 — 1
str. 3	0 — 0	0 — 0	0 — 0	2 — 2
str. 4	0 — 0	2 — 2	2 — 2	0 — 0
str. 5	2 — 2	2 — 2	3 — 3	0 — 0
str. 6	3 — 3	0 — 0	X — X	X — X

Here's the standard notation version of this tune:



Practice this song to get familiar with the chords.

Resources

Dan Smith's home page (www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~desmith/guitar) has many basic chords to learn, and explains where to use them.

Cyberfret.com has many basic chords with helpful diagrams.

(www.cyberfret.com/chords/index.php)

Guitar Chords Crash Course (free software). Available at download.com

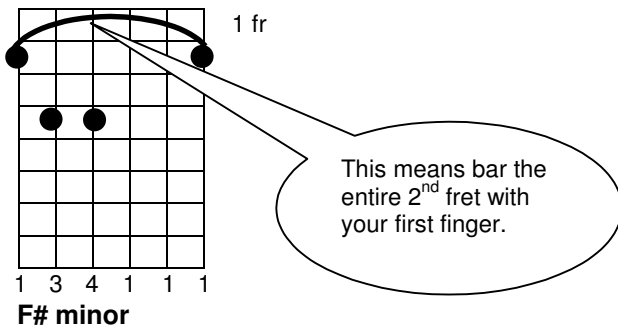
Barre Chords

We're going to use our I-vi-IV-V-I song to introduce some new chords that are a bit different from the chords in C and G major. These new chords introduce you to movable chords, which means you can move chords to different places on the fretboard.

Minor, Root on String 6

These new chords are called barre chords. How do you form barre chords? Before we go into that, keep in mind a couple of points: you may not get all the notes to sound when you first start making these shapes. Your hand may become tired easily. To minimize this, keep your thumb planted dead center in the back of the neck, between the bottom edge of the fretboard and top edge. This will give your hand the strength it needs to make the barre chord shape.

Let's make the shape for the F# minor barre chord, which is in the key of A major. This is what you're aiming for:



Lay your index finger across the second fret, and pluck each note separately to test its sound. Remember, it's okay if not all notes sound at first.

The shape isn't done quite yet. Add these two fingers. Add your third/ring finger, and your fourth finger as shown in the figure. Now strum this chord. Experiment with small adjustments to your hand until all notes sound.

What you just played was a minor barre with the chord's *root* on string 6. The root is the bottom most note of the chord. The F# minor chord lets us play our song in A. Here it is:

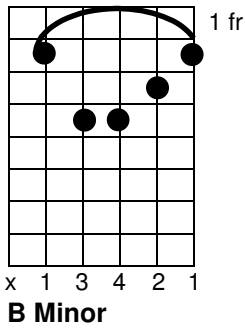
	A mai	F# min	D mai	E7
str. 1	0 — 0	2 — 2	2 — 2	0 — 0
str. 2	2 — 2	2 — 2	3 — 3	3 — 3
str. 3	2 — 2	2 — 2	2 — 2	1 — 1
str. 4	2 — 2	4 — 4	0 — 0	0 — 0
str. 5	0 — 0	4 — 4	0 — 0	2 — 2
str. 6	X — X	2 — 2	x — x	0 — 0



Here is the standard notation version of this tune:

Minor, Root on String 5

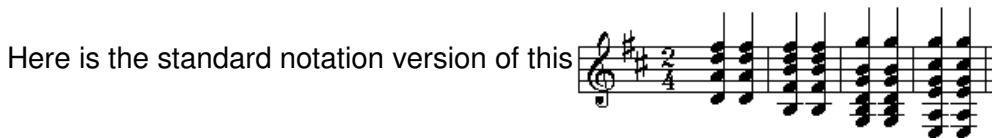
Here's another barre chord. This one's root is on string 5.



This one is formed almost like the F# minor, except you don't need to fret the bottom E string for the B minor. Practice the B minor barre form until you can hear most of the notes.

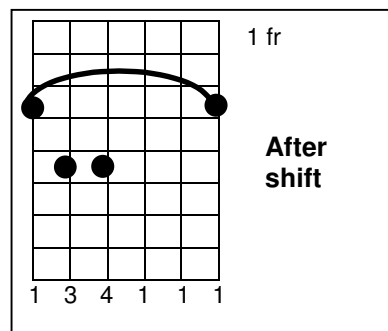
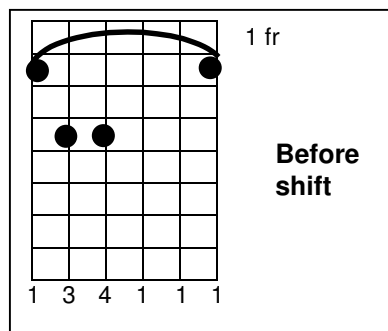
We can now play a song in D major.

	D mai	B min	G mai	A7
str. 1	2 — 2	2 — 2	3 — 3	3 — 3
str. 2	3 — 3	3 — 3	0 — 0	2 — 2
str. 3	2 — 2	4 — 4	0 — 0	0 — 0
str. 4	0 — 0	4 — 4	0 — 0	2 — 2
str. 5	0 — 0	2 — 2	2 — 2	0 — 0
str. 6	X — X	x — x	3 — 3	0 — 0



Here's the attractive feature about barre chords: Unlike the G, C and other open position chords you've learned, these barre chords can be played anywhere on the fretboard. Take your time now and try this. **Stop when your hand gets tired.** Make the F# minor shape. Now, slide that entire shape up one fret (away from the tuning pegs). Use this figure to help you work this out:

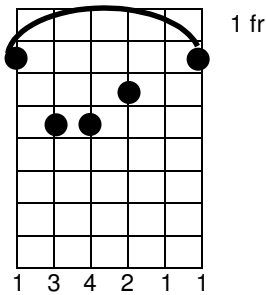
Figure F# Minor to G Minor



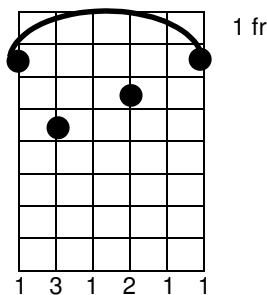
When you've completed the shift, you still have the same chord shape, but now the chord is a G minor chord, not an F# minor chord. If you were to go up one more fret, you'd get an Ab or G# minor chord. If you were to make this same shape with your first finger barred on the eighth fret, you would have a C minor chord.

Let's introduce the remaining basic barre chords.

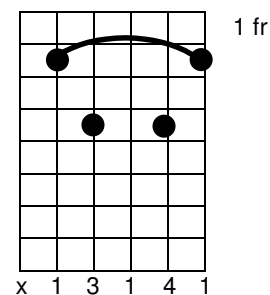
Major, Root on String 6



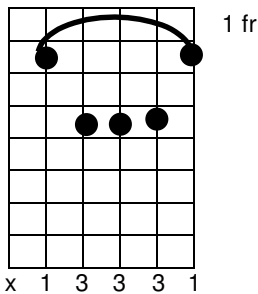
Dominant 7, Root on String 6



Dominant 7, Root on String 5

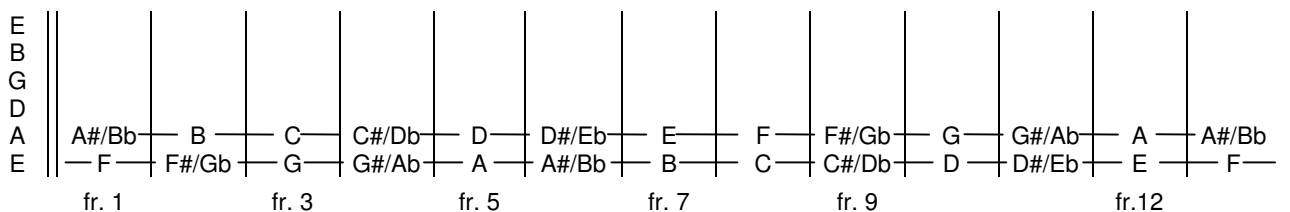


Major, Root on String 5



Bear in mind to take those frequent breaks when you're working on the string 5 major form. It's almost like you have a "mini-barre," with your 3rd finger covering three notes. For extra credit, adjust your third finger so that the note on the first string sounds.

Before we start using barre chords in our song, let's notice the note names on strings 5 and 6.



Notes on Strings 5 and 6

Knowing the notes on strings 5 and 6 will help you figure out where to play barre chords. For example, here's how you locate where to play a B7 chord on string 5: Use the diagram above to find the B on string 5. It's on the second fret. You search the barre chord diagrams for this one: "Dominant 7, root on string 5." You make that chord shape, making sure your first finger barre is at the second fret.

Let's play a song with no open chords, just barre chords. Here it is in A major.

A Major with Barre Chords Only

Let's do one last song to make use of that dominant 7 barre with root on string 6. This tune is in D major.

	D mai	B min	G mai	A7
str. 1	5 — 5	2 — 2	3 — 3	5 — 5
str. 2	7 — 7	3 — 3	3 — 3	5 — 5
str. 3	7 — 7	4 — 4	4 — 4	6 — 6
str. 4	7 — 7	4 — 4	5 — 5	5 — 5
str. 5	5 — 5	2 — 2	5 — 5	7 — 7
str. 6	x — x	x — x	3 — 3	5 — 5

Now that you know the basic barre chord forms, **you can now play in any key.** For example, if you wanted to play the I-vi-IV-V-I song in B major after playing it in A major, you only need to move each of the chords in A major up two frets. That shows how important barre chords are. Once you can make chord changes among the barre chords smoothly, you'll no longer be trapped into using just the open chord forms presented earlier. In other words, you're significantly closer to being a skilled guitarist.

Resources

Dansm's Guide to Barre Chords

www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~desmith/guitar/chguide/barre.htm

The Right Hand

Strumming

Up until now, we haven't paid attention to the right hand. When you played songs in this book, you worked out for yourself what the right hand was supposed to be doing. We're going to pay closer attention to the right hand in this section, by showing you some different strumming and picking patterns.

When you do these exercises, it might be helpful to hold the pick just at its edge, between your thumb and your forefinger, with your whole hand making a loose fist. You don't need to make the fist tight, or put a lot of pressure on the pick. The pointy end of the pick should be free to wobble up and down a bit.

Here's the most basic strumming pattern. It's a series of all downstrokes, no upstrokes. The downstrokes are shown with a down arrow.

G mai

str. 1	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3
str. 2	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
str. 3	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
str. 4	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
str. 5	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2
str. 6	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

Here's another strumming pattern. It alternates downstrokes with upstrokes. The upstrokes are shown with an up arrow. Note: play the same chords on the upstrokes, even though they're not illustrated in the tablature.

G mai

str. 1	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3
str. 2	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
str. 3	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
str. 4	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—	0
str. 5	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2
str. 6	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3	—	3

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

You may see possibilities for mixing up the pattern even more, with different combinations of up and downstrokes. Experiment and have fun.

Resources

Chord Strumming 101 from Cyberfret.com
www.cyberfret.com/techniques/strumming/101/index.php

Melody: Alternate Picking

Let's take a break from strumming chords, and learn an important tool for playing single, melodic notes. This will be an important skill when we begin improvising.

We're going to learn a picking technique called alternating picking, and we're going to apply this technique to a scale that's heard in most forms of popular music: the pentatonic scale.

Here's a melodic line to play that uses alternating picking with the pentatonic scale. To play this correctly, follow the up and downstroke markings on the tablature. It will feel difficult at first to continue alternating your strokes when you move from one string to another, but you'll get the hang of it with practice.

Fingering note: play this scale with your first finger on fret 5 and your pinky (finger 4) on fret 8.

str. 1			5 — 5 — 8
str. 2		5 — 8	8
str. 3	5 — 7 — 5	5 — 7	
str. 4	5 — 7		
str. 5	5 — 7		
str. 6	8		

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑
 "One and Two and One and Two and One and Two and One and Two and"

str. 1	8 — 5		
str. 2	8 — 5		
str. 3	7 — 5 — 5	5 — 5	
str. 4	7	7 — 5	
str. 5		7	5
str. 6			8 — 5 — 8

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑
 "One and Two and One and Two and One and Two and One and Two and"

The pentatonic scale is based on the major scale, which you can learn more about in the Appendix. It has the same notes as the major scale, except for two of them: the fourth and the seventh.

Continue to review this run every so often. It will come in handy when we introduce improvising.

Resources

Guitar Picking Technique from Chris Smith:
www.indiana.edu/~smithcj/cisnet34.html

Chords: Bass Note Picking

We have a new version of the I-vi-IV-V-I song that uses Bass Note Picking. Play this song, giving special attention to what's happening on strings 5 and 6. When you play this with feeling, it's almost as if two different instruments are playing.

	C maj		A min		F maj		G7	
str. 1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0
str. 2	1	0	1	2	1	2	0	0
str. 3	0	2	2	2	2	3	0	0
str. 4	2	x	2	x	3	x	0	2
str. 5	3	x	0	x	3	x	3	x
str. 6	x	x	x	x	1	x	3	x

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
 "One and Two and Three and Four and"

Bass Picking

Practice smoothing the Bass Picking song out before you try this one, which introduces alternating bass picking.

	C maj		A min		F maj		G7	
str. 1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
str. 2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
str. 3	0	0	2	2	2	2	0	0
str. 4	2	2	2	2	3	3	0	0
str. 5	3	x	0	x	x	3	x	2
str. 6	x	3	x	0	1	x	3	x

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
 "One and Two and One and Two and One and Two and One and Two and"

Alternating Bass Picking

Improvising

There's nothing magical about improvising, except the great feeling you get when you hit the right notes. In this section we show you how to hit those notes.

Here are the steps we're going to approach improvising with:

- Record yourself playing chord changes.
- Play back the recording, while you play the pentatonic scale over it.
- Play with the pentatonic scale: pick any notes from the scale you want.
- Change to a minor pentatonic scale to add a blues feeling.

Before you begin doing these steps, you'll want to practice this set of chord changes until you're fairly smooth at it. In fact, using a metronome while you practice would be helpful to you. Here are the chord changes you'll improvise over. Play these changes slowly, with a blues feeling.

	C 7				F7				C7							
str. 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
str. 2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
str. 3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
str. 4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
str. 5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
str. 6	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1	1	1	1	x	x	x	x

	G7				C 7			
str. 1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
str. 2	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
str. 3	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	3
str. 4	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2
str. 5	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
str. 6	3	3	3	3	x	x	x	x

Blues Changes

Once you can play this piece with a metronome, it's time for you to become just as comfortable with the pentatonic scale. We'll use the same scale pattern used in the section Alternate Picking. The tablature is included again here for your convenience. Practice the scale until you can play it with a metronome.

str. 1				5 — 8 — 5
str. 2			5 — 8	8
str. 3		5 — 7 — 5	5 — 7	
str. 4		5 — 7		
str. 5	5 — 7			
str. 6	8			

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑
 “One and Two and One and Two and One and Two and One and Two and”

str. 1	8 — 5			
str. 2	8 — 5			
str. 3		7 — 5	5 — 5	
str. 4		7	7 — 5	
str. 5			7 — 5	
str. 6				8 — 5 — 8

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑
 “One and Two and One and Two and One and Two and One and Two and”

Pentatonic Scale

Once you can play the pentatonic scale with confidence, it's time to record the changes and play over them. Using a tape recorder, computer, or some other device that lets you record and play back several minutes of music, record the chord changes.

Now for the fun. Once you're satisfied with the recording, rewind it, or do what you need to do to begin playing it from the beginning. Play the recording, and play the pentatonic scale.

How does it sound? If it sounds a little stiff to you, it's time to play with the scale a bit. Rewind the recording, and begin playing it again. This time, instead of playing a strict up and down pentatonic scale, play whatever pentatonic notes you want.

Continue doing this, finding new ways to play the pentatonic scale. To improvise truly means to *play*. Let yourself have fun. Alternate the melodic patterns you use. Re-record the chord changes with a different rhythm. There are endless ways of getting the music to sound better than before.

When you take a break from your experiments, try this new variation: Play exactly the same pentatonic scale, except move it up the neck by exactly three frets so that your first finger is on the eighth fret instead of the fifth.

In this new position, continue playing over the changes. How does it sound? Welcome to playing the Blues.

Resources

- Book: **Creativity in Improvisation**, by Chris Azzara.
- Marc Sabatella's **Jazz Improvisation Primer** at www.outsideshore.com
- Aebersold's play along CDs: www.jazzbooks.com/playalongs/greatstarts/Default.htm

Closing Note

Dear Fellow Guitarist:

Thank you for reading this ebook. I hope you enjoyed it and learned something from it. Maybe the most important thing is that it has given you fuel to pursue more guitar goals. If that's true, I'd like to hear about it. Also, if there's something you don't see in this book that you'd like to see, let me know that, too. I want to know about any musical successes that this book has helped you achieve. This information gives me fuel to write more, write better, and to become a better guitarist myself.

For more support in achieving your musical goals, read the articles posted on the Maximum Musician web site, at www.MaximumMusician.com. Thank you again for reading Playing Guitar: A Beginner's Guide. Keep playing and learning, and discovering new paths to musical fulfillment.

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Appendix

The Major Scale

The major scale is the basic building block of Western music. This section contains tablature to show you where to play the major scale on the guitar.

Like the barre chords, these major scale forms are movable. In other words, you can move them from one place on the fretboard to another, and the pattern stays the same. For example, if you wanted to play a D major scale instead of a C major scale, shift a pattern up two frets, so its root note is D instead of C. Use the section called Notes on the Fretboard in this Appendix if you're having trouble identifying starting notes for the scale patterns.

Major Scale Pattern 1: E Major

Here's the first pattern for the major scale. Figuring out which finger to use for which note is generally pretty easy once you apply this one guideline: one finger goes to one fret. For example, in the following tab, the pinky will play notes only on the 7th fret, for any string. The third finger will play notes on the sixth fret for any string, and so on. To help you understand this, numbers are placed under the first few bars of each scale pattern, to show you which finger to use.

7 5 4
 T 7 5 4 4 5 5 4 6 4
 A 6 7 6 4 6 7
 B 6 7

Fingering: 4 2 1 4 2 1 3 1 2

T 4 5 5
 A 4 6 4 6 7
 B 7 6 4 7 5 4 5 7 7 7

Major Scale Pattern 2: D Major

Here's the second pattern for the major scale. Watch out for the first finger stretch to the 3rd fret on the high E string. Don't move your hand when you do this stretch. Merely stretch your finger. It might seem unnatural at first, but you'll grow into it.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the D Major scale. Each system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a guitar tablature staff below it. The first system shows the first half of the scale, and the second system shows the second half. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 on the strings.

System 1:

- Treble clef staff: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (half).
- Tablature staff:
 - T: 7 5 3
 - A: 7 5 7 6 7 7 7 6 4
 - B: 7 5 4 7 5 5

System 2:

- Treble clef staff: D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F#5 (quarter), G5 (quarter), A5 (quarter), B5 (quarter), C6 (quarter), D6 (half).
- Tablature staff:
 - T: 4 6 7 7
 - A: 4 5 7 4 5 7
 - B: 5 4 7 5 3 5 7 4 5 5 7

Fingering for Major Scale Pattern 2

Major Scale Pattern 3: C Major

AS with the previous scale pattern, this one involves a stretch. This time, the stretch is by the pinky (finger 4) and it's on the D string. As before, stretch your finger, but don't move your hand.

8 7 5
 8 6 5
 7 5
 5
 5
 9 7 5
 8 7 5
 8 8

Fingering: 4 3 1 4 2 1 3 1 1 1 4 2 1 4 3 1 4 4

5
 5
 5 7 9
 5 5
 8 7 5 7 8 5 7 5 8 8 5 7 8 5 7 9 5 5

Scales, caged 3
 Fingering for Major Scale Pattern 3

Major Scale Pattern 4: A Major

The first part of the A Major scale pattern is shown in a treble clef staff with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The notes are A4, B4, C#5, D5, E5, F#5, G#5, and A5. Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram for strings T, A, and B. The fret numbers are: T (7, 5, 4), A (7, 5, 7, 6, 4), and B (7, 7, 6, 4, 7, 5, 4, 7, 4, 5).

Fingering: 4 2 1 4 2 4 3 1 4

The second part of the A Major scale pattern continues in a treble clef staff with a key signature of two sharps. The notes are A5, B5, C#6, D6, E6, F#6, G#6, and A6. Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram for strings T, A, and B. The fret numbers are: T (4, 5), A (4, 6, 7, 4, 6, 7, 5, 7, 4, 5), and B (5, 7, 4, 5, 7, 7).

Major Scale Pattern 5: G Major

This pattern has another stretch -- two, actually. They're both pinky stretches. One is on the D string, and other is on the A string.

8 7 5
 T 8 7 5 7 8 8 8 7 5
 A 7 5 9 7 5 5
 B

Fingering: 4 3 1 4 3 1 3 4 4

T 5 7 8 8
 A 5 5 7 9 5 7 5 7 8 8
 B 9 7 5 8 7 5 7

Resources

Modern Method for Guitar, volumes 1, 2 and 3 by William Leavitt

Scale primer from Cyberfret: www.cyberfret.com/scales

Lesson on Major Scales from Gary Ewer's Easy Music Theory:

www.musictheory.halifax.ns.ca/8major_scales.html

Playing by Ear

I was tempted to put this chapter in the main body of the book, except that the major scales are covered in the Appendix, and playing by ear depends on you knowing the major scale. So, before you tackle this chapter, work through at least one major scale form in the Appendix.

In this section you're going to learn to play simple melodies by ear. There's a lot of mystique surrounding this ability, but almost anyone can learn how to do it, just as most everyone can learn how to speak.

First of all, you may want to know how playing by ear helps you. What's the purpose of playing by ear? First and foremost, it just feels good when you can hear a piece of music and play it back. You feel like you are truly connecting with Music itself, and that time slips away. Also, playing by ear helps you correct mistakes and memory problems when you go to play a tune. For example, after playing through a new song a couple of times, your hands might not feel they totally understand the song. But your "ear" may understand it perfectly. When that happens, your playing smooths out the hitches and hesitations your hand has.

Those are just some of the reasons to play by ear. Now, let's figure out what to play. Chances are, you know dozens and dozens of songs already. You know pop tunes from the radio and TV. You know nursery rhymes, and maybe some hymns from church or the synagogue. And you likely also know some tunes for certain holidays. Christmas songs are especially good for learning how to play by ear, because so many people know them so well. I want you to have the freedom to choose any song you want, but I also want to ensure you choose a song with an easy melody. For that reason, I recommend you choose one of the following Christmas songs:

- Silent night
- O Christmas Tree
- Rudolf the red-nosed reindeer
- Jingle Bells
- God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen (Comfort and Joy)
- The First Noel
- Joy to the World

Also, Amazing Grace

This list will give you a good start with some simple melodies. Choose one of the songs, and let's learn to play it by ear.

There's a long version and short version to explain how to pick out the melody. I recommend starting with the short version first. It's lacking in the details of how to find the melody, but your determination will supply you with those details. The longer version is the same basic procedure, but contains more detail. If you have a hard time following either version, consult the resources listed at the end of this section.

The Short Version

Sing the melody, and search one of the major scale forms until you hit a correct note. Do this for all the notes in the song.

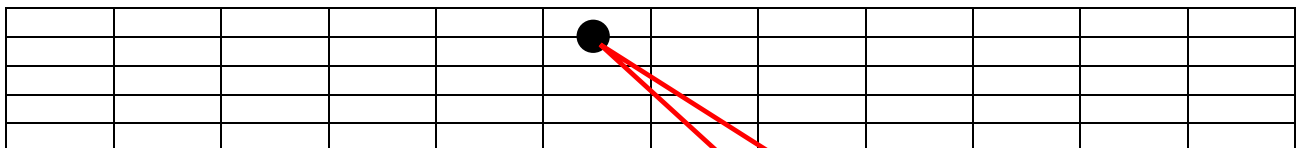
The Long Version

Once you've chosen a song and your guitar is in tune, the next thing to do is sing.

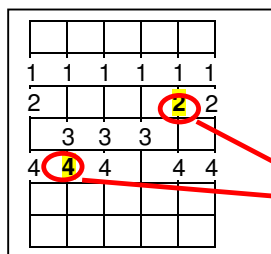
- Sing the song several times to get familiar with it. Sing it slowly.
- Slow down your singing even further. But, make sure you can still detect the melody.
- Choose a note that sounds like the most final or restful or stationary note. This may be a note that sustains for a moment, without other notes to follow it. Here's an example of the most restful note, from Joy to the World. I sing the first phrase slowly: "Joy to the World, the Lord is Come." I hear that last word, "Come," as the most restful note. I choose that as the key.

It's important to correctly identify the key. If you don't, you may not have much success with this procedure. The key note is not necessarily the first or last note of a song, though it is sometimes. Here's another example of a key note: in the Christmas tune "Silent Night," the note that you sing "peace" on - "...sleep in heavenly peace" - is the key note. Sing this tune and notice how that note is the most restful or final.

- Find this key note on the guitar. Keep choosing notes until you find it.
- Match up a major scale form with this note. This means you use the key note to find one of the major scale forms. See the figures below.
- Next, sing the note that comes before the key note.
- Is it higher or lower than the key note? I play notes from the scale pattern until I find it.
- Once I've found it, I now have two notes. I find the third from the last note in the same way. I ask, "Does it sound higher or lower than the second to last note?" I play notes from the scale pattern until I find it.
- Continue this process until you've found all the notes in the melody



**Locate the note on the fretboard
Major Scale Pattern 1**



Roots on strings 2 and 5

I find the root here, string 2

There are some variations and details on this process that may make things easier for you. Instead of working backward through the notes, you can work forward through the notes, one after the other. Also, you want to constantly be using your voice to test the notes you find. It's much easier to play by ear when you sing as well as listen. Last, constant repetition of the notes you learn is important. Play what you know over and over.

Resources

Playing by Ear, from MaximumMusician.com:

www.maximummusician.com/PlayGuitarByEarIntro.htm

Figuring out songs by ear, by Ron Lukiv. web.cuuq.ab.ca/~lukivr/Ear.html

Introduction to Reading Music

You don't need to learn how to read standard music notation to play guitar. In fact, many guitarists can't read music. They rely on other forms of notation, and they also learn songs by ear. If you do want to read music, start on this page. What follows is a crash course in standard notation.

Here's how to count the rhythm of a simple piece:

"One Two Three Four One & Two & Three Four"

How long does each note last?

One **whole note** equals 2 **half notes** equals 4 **quarter notes** equals 8 **eighth notes**:

Where are the notes on the guitar?

C1 D1 E1 F1 G1 A1 B1 C2 D2 E2 F2 E2

E2	F2	G2
B1	C2	D2
G1	A1	F1
D1	E1	C1
Fr. 1	Fr. 3	

Frets 1 through 3

Note: For many notes, there is more than one place to play the note. For example C1 is found in these places:

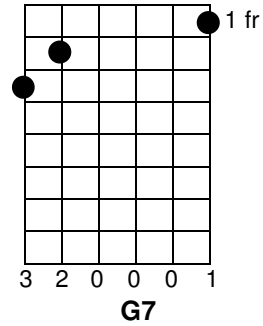
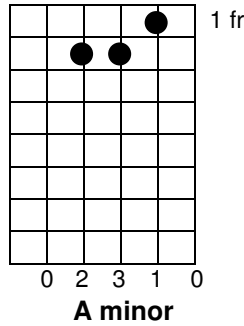
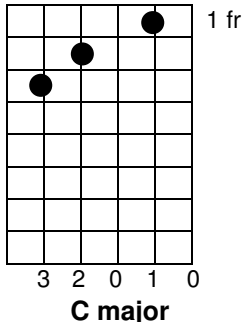
- fret 3, string 5
- fret 8, string 6

Learn more about reading standard notation at The Introduction to Reading Music, at www.datadragon.com/education/reading, is an effective primer. Learn treble and bass clefs, how to count rhythms, types of rests, and other elements of standard notation.

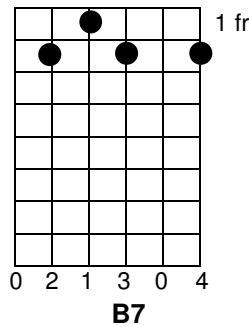
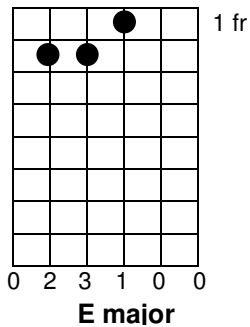
Common open Position Chords

Here are chords for the keys C, E, A, G, D and F. I recommend learning these after you learn the I-vi-IV-V-I song earlier in the book. If you don't, learning these chords by themselves may not make much sense to you.

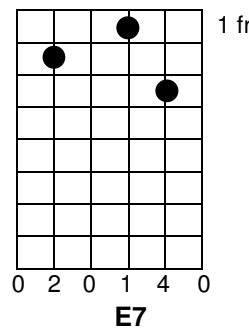
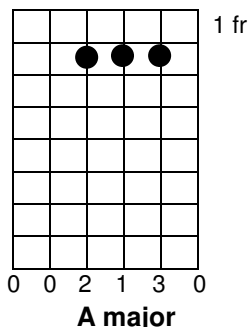
Chords for C Major



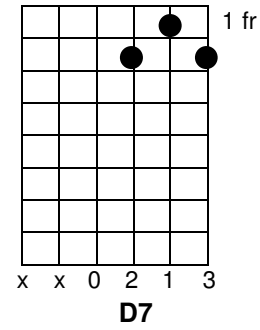
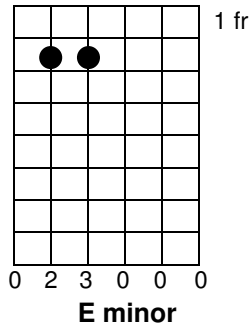
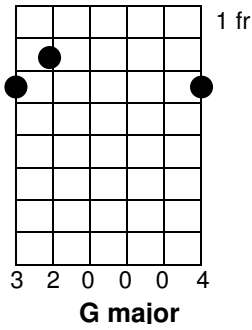
Chords for E Major



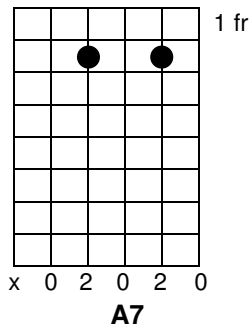
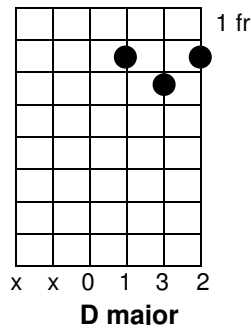
Chords for A Major



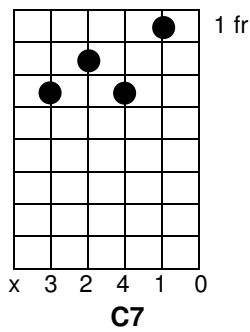
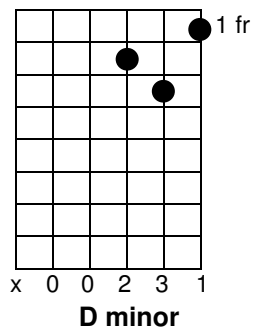
Chords for G Major



Chords for D Major



Chords for F Major



Resources

All About Chords: www.MaximumMusician.com/ChordsIntro.htm

GuitarNoise.com on open position chords:

www.guitarnoise.com/columns/beginner1.html

Chord dictionary with sound files: hatbox.lib.virginia.edu/text/gtrchord

Notes on the Fretboard

E	—F—	F#/Gb	—G—	G#/Ab	—A—	A#/Bb	—B—	C	C#/Db	—D—	D#/Eb	—E—	F—
B	—C—	C#/Db	—D—	D#/Eb	—E—	F—	F#/Gb	—G—	G#/Ab	—A—	A#/Bb	—B—	C—
G	G#/Ab	—A—	A#/Bb	—B—	C	C#/Db	—D—	D#/Eb	—E—	F—	F#/Gb	—G—	G#/Ab
D	D#/Eb	—E—	F—	F#/Gb	—G—	G#/Ab	—A—	A#/Bb	—B—	C	C#/Db	—D—	D#/Eb
A	A#/Bb	—B—	C	C#/Db	—D—	D#/Eb	—E—	F—	F#/Gb	—G—	G#/Ab	—A—	A#/Bb
E	—F—	F#/Gb	—G—	G#/Ab	—A—	A#/Bb	—B—	C	C#/Db	—D—	D#/Eb	—E—	F—
	fr. 1		fr. 3		fr. 5		fr. 7		fr. 9		fr. 12		

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The Next Step

Congratulations on completing *Playing Guitar: a Beginner's Guide*. I hope this book has helped you begin to make the sounds you want to make, and has helped you build your skills as a musician and guitarist.

The next step in growing as a player is to get **more free music tips**. Where to get 'em? www.MaximumMusician.com, your source for turning practicing into playing, scales into music, and frogs into princes.

The articles on MaximumMusician.com show you which sites, newsgroups, discussion lists and other web resources are the best for learning to play guitar. And they show you how to make practicing those isolated chords and scales **fun**.

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