



URBAN BEAT

MUSIC SCHOOL

Guitar FAQ

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1. When is a good time for my child to begin guitar lessons?

While children can start learning guitar from as young as 6yo, this is highly dependent on the development of their fine-motor skills, and their ability to concentrate for 30 minutes on a single activity for lessons. In my experience, I have had much more success and noticeable improvement with children who start learning the year that they turn 8yo.

Otherwise, any time is a good time to start!

2. What is the difference between the different kinds of guitars?

There are mainly classical, acoustic, and electric guitars:

- Classical guitars have nylon strings which give a gentler sound and feel lighter to touch. They usually have slightly smaller bodies and wider necks.



- Acoustic guitars have steel strings which give a more brilliant sound and are heavier to touch. They usually have slightly bigger bodies and narrower necks.



- Electric guitars have steel strings which are light to touch, and usually have both slimmer necks and bodies. They generate their sound via electromagnetism and require an amplifier to shape their sound.



3. Which guitar is right for my child?

In addition to guitars coming in different types, they also come in different sizes: mainly full size, half size, and three-quarter size.

Every child is different, but here is a general guide to what is usually suitable:

- Half size under 8yo
- Three-quarter 8 - 12yo
- Full size 12yo and up

However, if you are able to, the best thing to do is to sit your child behind a couple different sized guitars and see what is most comfortable for them.

Classical, acoustic, and electric guitars are all suitable to begin learning on. However, classical and acoustic guitars can be a more affordable purchase since they do not require an amplifier as well.



4. Are there any peripherals besides the guitar itself?

Yes.

A suitable bag or case is invaluable to offer the guitar protection from dings, scratches, and the elements. They also provide an easy way to carry the instrument, and have convenient storage space for other items. A soft bag with padding is usually sufficient for local use and transportation. There are soft bags which have no padding - please avoid these. Please ensure that your child knows that just because an instrument is in a bag or case, it is not impervious to falls or breaks and should still be treated with care. Please do not stack other items on top of it, or lean it precariously against another object.



While the guitar can be plucked with fingers, many songs use picks (plectrums) for strumming. Picks come in many shapes, sizes, thicknesses, and materials. As your child progresses in their guitar journey, they will discover their own preferences. As a starting point I recommend Jim Dunlop 0.60mm or 0.73mm nylon picks, and the red or white Sharkfin picks. Picks also have a reputation for falling into the void, so don't just buy one - buy a few!

A capo is a clamp that hold the strings in a higher hand position. This allows you to play in higher keys, but use the same basic finger shapes. Not every song requires a capo, but they are a lot of fun to use! I recommend the kind which resembles a giant clothing peg!



If you do not wish to buy a capo from the start of your child's guitar journey, I do carry extra capos that they may use during lessons. If we do use a capo during a lesson, the same left-hand techniques can be practiced in the first position of the guitar at home (it will just sound lower). Having their own capo can always become something that your child works towards!



You can buy an instrument tuner, but it is not necessary since there are many free apps that you can download which work just as well. I recommend GuitarTuna which can be found in the app store on iOS and Android.



If you do wish to buy a separate tuner, I recommend a clip-on tuner. They clip onto the guitar's headstock and work on vibration, allowing you to tune in peace regardless of any external noise.

If your guitar already has a strap fitting, straps are usually sold separately. Electric guitars should have strap fittings already, acoustic and classical guitars don't always. We usually sit with our guitars during lessons and when practicing - so if your guitar does not come with a strap fitting, don't feel that you have to get one!



5. When should I restring my guitar?

Strings wear dependant on how often the guitar is played, and the acidity of the player's hands. Strings can also wear unevenly across their length depending on where one plays the most. Wiping the strings down with a microfibre cloth after playing will prolong the life of the strings.



You can tell when it is time to change the strings when they lose their original lustre and begin to discolour. If they've started to accumulate gunk and turned brown, black...or green - it's time for a change!

On a classical guitar, the wear is most apparent on the 3 metal-wound bass strings (the 3 treble strings are plain nylon). The wear on acoustic and electric guitars is apparent across all the strings.



Apart from old strings feeling icky to play, they also sound dull. However, since strings wear out gradually over time we are not always perceptive to how drastically the sound has changed. New strings can feel like the guitar has been brought back to life!

6. How do I restring a guitar?

Restringing a guitar is easy to learn! Below are easy to follow videos of how to restring a classical and acoustic guitar. Don't forget to slack off the strings before removing them!



- Classical
 - short video with nice enlarged version of how to tie the bridge knots
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Cw84_0KHTI
 - longer video, but everything is done slowly and clearly at both at bridge and headstock
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGO30uYilaY>

- Acoustic
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXaMn4jkkDM>

Electric guitars can have a wide variety of hardware more so than acoustic or classical guitars, so the method of restringing depends on what particular hardware your guitar has. Having said that, below are restringing videos of two common hardware types.



- Hard-tail bridge (Les Paul style)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAQcAIAeKU>

- Vibrato bridge (Stratocaster style)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CtqfHmssx8>

If you do not want to restring the guitar yourself, music shops do have staff which can do it for you!

7. What guitar strings should I get?

Guitar strings have a wide variety of brands and specifications across numerous price points. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the many offerings! Here are my recommendations of strings that are both affordable and good quality:

- Classical
 - D'Addario Student, silver-plated, normal tension
 - Ernie Ball Palla, silver-plated, normal tension
- Acoustic
 - D'Addario 80/20 Bronze, light or extra light gauge
 - Ernie Ball Earthwood 80/20 Bronze, light or extra light gauge
- Electric
 - Rotosound Roto Orange (9-46) or Roto Yellow (10-46)
 - Ernie Ball Super Slinky (9-42) or Regular Slinky (10-46)



If you are taking your guitar to a technician for a general setup, ask for their recommendation of which string gauge you should use on your guitar. Each guitar is different, and it is important to balance both the string gauge (thickness) and action (string height) for the best playing experience on your instrument.

If you have a half or three-quarter sized guitar, it is better to use thicker strings since they are not being pulled as tightly as they would be on a full sized guitar.

*The numbers you see on a string pack (eg 10-46) are the gauge (thickness) of the strings; the lowest number being the thinnest ("lightest") string, and the highest number being the thickest ("heaviest") string in the set. People often identify sets by the lightest string in the set (eg "a pack of 10's"). String thickness is measured across their diameter by 1/1000th of an inch (eg a 10-gauge string is 0.010 inches in diameter).

8. My guitar has become difficult to play!

Over time the strings do drift further away from the fingerboard making the instrument difficult to play. Guitars are made from wood, so it's only natural that temperature and humidity affect it in small ways over time. To counteract this, the neck bow can be adjusted by changing the truss rod tension by turning the Allen key. If you are not comfortable with doing that yourself, I recommend taking the guitar to a technician for a general setup.



During a general setup, the guitar tech should do what is necessary to make the guitar as easy to play as possible. This may include, but is not limited to

- Restringing
- Fret polishing / fingerboard cleaning
- Action (string height) adjustments
- Truss rod adjustments
- Saddle/nut adjustments

It is best to have a short conversation with the tech about what you would like improved on your guitar. They often give their first impression of the instrument, and what they can do to fulfil your request. This is also helpful as it gives you an estimate of their labour cost, if they need to add any other charges (eg new strings, replacing a part etc), and how quickly they will be able to work on your guitar. As they inspect the guitar more closely, they may find additional things that require attention - or they may not! The tech should be in contact if anything such thing arises, or even if they want to double-check on any preferences you may have.

Music shops often have their own guitar techs either in-house or at a central warehouse, and there are also others who work independently. Here are the details of some reputable techs:

West Coast

David Boon

083 664 8891

dawieffz@gmail.com

Muizenberg

Francois Traut

072 878 1259

info@trautguitarworx.co.za

Parrow

Foster van der Merwe

021 939 5259

info@fosterguitarworks.com

Salt River

The Gear Junkie

021 447 0269

info@thegearjunkie.co.za

The Gear Junkie is also a used music instrument shop. There are often deals to be had - check out their website <http://www.thegearjunkie.co.za> if you are looking for any musical equipment!