

Choosing Your First Guitar



You've decided to buy your first guitar, or perhaps you are buying one for someone else, and you have no clue where to begin. With the right information you can get an instrument that will make learning the most enjoyable experience possible.

AFFORDABILITY VS. PLAYABILITY

Price is often a major issue when looking for a first guitar. What if you don't stick with it? Will the guitar turn into a dust collector? Due to these worries many people look for either used guitars or the most inexpensive new guitar possible. Great deals can often be found on used guitars and most shops carry guitars that are very easy on the wallet. Unfortunately the low cost of many of these options may be the only positive, you may in fact be making things much more difficult for the future guitar player. Let us explain:

Used Guitars – You can find a great deal on a used guitar if you're lucky and know what to look for. The catch is exactly that, you have to know what you are looking at. Small issues with the neck, or action (Action is the distance of the strings from the frets beneath them) on a guitar can make it very difficult to play, cause the guitar to play out of tune, cost money to repair or even make the guitar completely unplayable. Since many of the issues are hard to see to the untrained eye, it is hard to teach the inexperienced what to look for. If you know a trustworthy guitar player, more experienced than yourself, it would be a good idea to have them check out any used instrument you consider purchasing. It is strongly recommended against buying a guitar with no strings, or missing parts, since some problems cannot be seen unless the guitar is set up to play.

Budget Guitars – Various inexpensive guitars can be purchased at your local store and even from the occasional infomercial on television. Many of these guitars are built to look very much like a guitar, but are constructed with low price in mind and very little thought towards playability. Sometimes with some work from a good guitar tech, these guitars can be made to play decently. Make sure things like action, intonation and truss rod adjustment, which are very crucial for a guitar to play right, are adjusted correctly. Depending on the price of repairs and setup at your local store it may be worth it to

spend a little extra on a guitar that is properly built. There are many manufacturers that make a decent beginner guitar. Make sure that the guitar has been set up, not all shops will give an entry level guitar the attention that they need. Inexpensive guitars often require the most adjustment to play properly. If the store won't set it up for free make sure you know how much the charge of set up will be. Any good guitar shop should set up the guitars they sell, especially entry level guitars! Encouraging people to play can only help the industry grow!

ACOUSTIC VS. ELECTRIC

Usually we recommend beginning with acoustic guitar. More focus can be given to learning the fundamentals of playing, rather than messing with all of the knobs and switches you find on an electric guitar and amplifier. The thicker strings and higher action on an acoustic, although difficult to press in the beginning, will help build finger strength and callus more quickly. Starting out with the thinner strings and low action of an electric guitar may also cause difficulty when attempting to switch to an acoustic in the future. If light gauge acoustic strings (the size usually found on a new guitar) are just too thick for you to play, extra light or silk and steel strings can be used. We commonly start small children off with silk and steels, make a switch to extra light, and then finally to light gauge strings as their hands gain the strength.

On the other hand do not forget about the excitement factor of the electric guitar, some folks may just be more interested in the electric guitar. If that interest translates into playing guitar longer or more often, it will make a difference in learning how to play the instrument. Being amplified can also help you hear your mistakes, unless drenched in distortion, forcing you to pay more attention. Plus the joy of hitting a nice distorted power chord for the first time is an experience that all should enjoy!

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