

Choosing Your Weapon: “Which guitar should I learn on?”

There are three main types of guitar that you will encounter. They are:



Classical Acoustic



Acoustic



Electric

Chances are that if you have asked someone if you can use their guitar for a while, it would probably be an old classical acoustic guitar or maybe a steel string acoustic.

These guitars are excellent to learn on because electric guitars require things like leads, amps, speakers and power. With acoustic guitars you only need a pick.

The other great thing about acoustic guitars is that you can't turn them up loud. When you are learning it is probably better to play on a guitar that isn't going to be too loud, only loud enough so your ears can hear your errors and your good performances.

If you don't know which types of guitar you want to play on, ask yourself, 'what kind of music do I want to play?'

Pick a song that you like for its guitar sound. Listen to the guitar sounds and only the guitar sounds. Are they clean, soft sounds? Or are they harsh, heavy or distorted? Generally, acoustic guitars are softer and cleaner. Distorted, heavy sounds come from electric guitars that are plugged into amplifiers and effects units. Can you hear individual notes being picked or are the strings being strummed hard? The harder you play, the thicker your strings need to be. You need to know what style you want to play.

OK you have found a style of music that you like. Try and find out what the band video for that song is and watch it. There will probably be a section in there where the band is playing. In this part, look at the guitarist. Is he/she playing on an electric guitar or an acoustic guitar? What brand is it? What style? If you know the exact guitar from the video, you can ask to play on it at your local guitar shop to see if it suits you.

People play guitar for many different reasons. You need to understand what it is that you want to get out of the guitar. To discover your tastes in guitar music, listening to different styles and genres. Ask musicians at music shops about what kind of guitars different bands use, or ask them what kind of amps/effects those artists use to get that sound.

The answers don't have to be exact because they will get you thinking about what you need to buy to achieve the sound you are after.

For more information on achieving different guitar sounds, see our articles on basic guitar effects and guitar manufacturers and guitar models.

Hints for Buying a Second Hand Guitar

Often cheaper than a new guitar and just as ready to rock out, a secondhand guitar could be the perfect addition to your collection or the perfect thing to start you off, but how do you know that your potential purchase isn't a potential dud?

The truth is that some fantastic guitars, while expensive when new, are relatively cheap secondhand. Sometimes you can find a custom or a limited edition guitar that someone is selling quickly for the cash and you can often get a real bargain if you know what you are looking for. It really pays to do the research before thinking about buying a second hand guitar as some sellers will push their price up to cash in, especially if they know they are selling to a beginner who may not know much about guitars.

So, as a beginner who may not know much about guitars, what should you look for when inspecting a secondhand guitar?

Let's just say that you have found a secondhand guitar in the musical instrument section of the weekly classifieds and you are quite keen to go and take a look at it. Below is a list of hints that will help you when inspecting the guitar and talking to the seller:

When talking to the seller, ask them the following:

- The make and model of the guitar – It is best if you can do some research on the guitar model to find out the asking price elsewhere, both new and used, and whether or not other people are experiencing problems with it. You can find reviews for almost any guitar submitted at www.harmony-central.com/Guitar or you can go and ask at your local music store.
- About the condition of the guitar – If they are honest, the seller may tell you about any damage that is undetectable upon rough inspection.
- How long they have had the guitar – If they have had it for a long time, they should have a good knowledge of its history of use, repairs and maintenance etc. If they are not forthcoming with that sort of information, they may be trying to pull one over you.

When inspecting the guitar, check the following:

- The overall condition – Look the guitar over and make note of any obvious damage – guitars often take a bit of wear and tear and if its just small scrapes and scratches then the guitar will probably be fine. Look for rust also , not on the strings, but on the hardware that is holding the strings and the pickups. If there is any rust in these places... run! It's not worth it. What good is a guitar that may fall apart on you in the near future? Trust me – leave it alone.
- The neck of the guitar – the neck is really important. Here are some areas to look at:

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- Make sure that the neck is not warped or out of shape in any way.
- Check the area where the neck joins to the body of the guitar – look for cracks where it may have been broken in the past.
- In the same fashion, check the area where the neck joins the head of the guitar.

- Check the action – Action is a word that describes how close the strings are to the fret board starting at the head of the guitar all the way down to the bridge. It is preferable to have the strings very close to the fret board as to make it easier to press them down (not so close that they are touching of course). If the strings are nice and close to the fret board all the way along, you would say that the guitar has a good action. Pictured right is a guitar with poor action. Notice that the strings sit quite far off the fret board. Guitars with poor action are harder to play and don't sound very good. You can fix the action on your guitar by taking it to a guitar technician, but it will cost you between \$20 and \$50.



- The Intonation of the strings. Intonation is a word that describes the accuracy of each individual note that the guitar can produce on any string. If the intonation is correct, every note on the guitar will be the correct pitch – If it is out, the guitar will be impossible to tune and it will sound horrible. To roughly check the intonation, play the E shape barre chord on each fret of the guitar. As you move towards the bridge of the guitar, you should hear the chord keeping its pitch – if not, the intonation is out and you will need to get a guitar technician to work on the problem.
- If the guitar you are looking at is an electric, you must plug it in and see how it sounds through an amp. Ask the seller if you can play it through your amp and if you don't have one, ask someone if you can borrow theirs. Try the following when testing an electric guitar through an amp:
 - Turn the amp up to a fair volume level and then play with the volume and tone controls by turning them to full and then back to zero. Test the pickup selector by flicking its switch back

and forth. Carefully listen to any sounds that are being made while doing these things. You are looking for scratchy sounds or clicks that might indicate old or worn electrics.

- Strum a single chord and while the chord is ringing start playing with the controls like before, still listening for scratches or clicks or any other nasty sounds. Guitar technicians can fix these problems and most guitars need to be done about once every 5 - 10 years. Just be aware of this fact or you could find yourself spending more money than you first intended.
- Check the sound of the guitar – Before you buy, you want to know that the guitar sounds like it should? Once you have tested the guitar sound, go to a music store and ask to play on a new model of that guitar. If at all possible, use a similar amplifier to the one that you tested the second hand guitar on, and see if you notice any BIG differences. There is a simple rule that I like to follow: If you're not happy with the guitar sound... Don't buy it!

The most important thing to remember when shopping for any guitar is... Don't shop impulsively. A guitar is a major purchase and you want to get the right one. Leave yourself time to go away and think about the purchase. If you have doubts when checking out a guitar, you are probably better to leave it and hold out for something that better suits you.

If you are new to the guitar and a little worried about testing guitar in public – don't worry. It is important to remember that you are not there to showcase your playing ability – you are there to discern whether your proposed buy is a good deal or not so just go for it.

If you are still worried, take an experienced guitarist along with you when you are looking at a possible purchase. See if you can persuade a teacher or a friend – most musicians love to help newbies. Not only will they be able to offer helpful advice – they will be good moral support when it's time to pick up the guitar and test it out in public.