

When Buying a New or Used Guitar . . .

- Look for damage and neglect. A cracked bridge or separated saddle, bent or stiff tuners (tuning machines), and rust on metal components and screws, are all potential warning signs.
- Make sure the neck is straight and that the strings run fairly parallel to, and not too high off, the fretboard by sighting down the neck. Be sure the neck is securely attached to the body.
- With acoustic and hollow body guitars, closely examine the seams, where the front and back panels attach to the sides, to see if there are any separations.
- Connect electric guitars to an amp and rotate each control knob, move all switches, and wiggle the instrument cord where it inserts into the guitar to make sure there's no static or hum.
- If you're buying an electric guitar, remember you'll need a decent amp and good quality instrument cord. A 10- or 15-watt practice amp is a good starter, and relatively inexpensive.
- On any guitar, listen for "fret buzz". When you firmly press each string down between the frets and pluck it, the note should be clear and sustained, without any buzzing sound.
- Purchase an additional set of good quality strings. For electric and steel string guitars, initially choose a medium gauge set. When you break a string, **REPLACE THE ENTIRE SET.**
- Ask the seller (private seller or dealer) whether you can return or trade the guitar, within a reasonable time period, if you experience any playability issues.
- Consider purchasing a guitar case or gig bag (if not included) to safely transport and store your guitar in. Hard shell and thick foam padded cases offer the best protection.

A beginner's guide to

Choosing a Guitar

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Guide
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MUSIC GEAR AND ACCESSORIES

The Basics

Choosing the right guitar is especially important if you're just starting out. Your first decision is whether to begin with an acoustic or an electric – playing styles differ between the two.

When shopping for any guitar, two key factors to consider are the *Overall Quality* (also called “playability”) and *Personal Fit*. If either of these are lacking, you can quickly lose all interest in playing.

Overall Quality refers to how well a guitar is constructed. Poorly made guitars are often difficult to play, hard to keep in tune, and typically have poor sound characteristics. Finding a good quality guitar doesn't mean you have to spend a lot of money though.

Personal Fit is simply the way a guitar feels to you. Guitars come in all shapes, styles, and sizes because guitarists do too. It's true that an expensive, high-end guitar will be made from superior materials and built to exacting standards, but that's no guarantee that it will be a satisfying match for you.

Before purchasing a guitar, new or used, try it out. Even if you've never played a guitar, you can still get a good sense of the tone it produces and how it feels. Hold the guitar in your lap – does it feel too big or too small? Can you curve your fingers around the neck and press each string down between the frets? When you gently strum it, do you like the sound it produces? If possible, bring along someone who's familiar with the type of guitar you're looking at to get their thoughts about how it's made and how it plays.

Buying a guitar can become an investment in your future. Many accomplished guitarists have fond memories of that first guitar that got them hooked. More often than not, it was a basic, relatively inexpensive guitar that “*felt just right*”.

Also, be aware that strings, regardless of your guitar type, have a huge impact on the tone quality. A fresh set of good quality strings will dramatically improve the sound of any guitar. Experiment with different string gauges and materials to find what suits you best.

Electric Guitars

Electric guitars are meant to be played through an amplifier and are usually a featured lead instrument. Electric guitars (and electric guitar players) don't much like being in the background.

Although there are many configurations, most electric guitars have volume, tone, and pickup controls directly on the guitar so the sound can be adjusted from the guitar. The sound can be further shaped by using effects pedals and devices to achieve an almost unlimited variety of unique sound variations.

Acoustic Guitars

Acoustic guitars don't require additional equipment. Since the sound is natural, (not amplified, shaped, or distorted), you can't dramatically alter it like you can with an electric guitar. The two most common styles of acoustic guitars are *Classical* guitars and *Steel string guitars*.

Classical guitars are often used for playing folk, Spanish-style, and other music genres. Beginning guitar players often find classical guitars to be a good starter instrument for a couple of reasons. First, the neck on a classical guitar is wider allowing the strings to be spaced further apart. This is especially nice when you're learning to form chords. Second, the strings are made of nylon (or at least the three highest strings are), which makes conditioning your fingers less painful when you're starting out (As you continue to play, your fingertips will gradually become calloused and less sensitive). Nylon strings have a more subdued, or mellow, sound than metal strings.

Steel string guitars are louder and have a brighter sound (or ring) to them than classical guitars. Steel string guitars are used in nearly every music genre. If a transducer is added to an acoustic guitar (either by the manufacturer or by an individual) it's then referred to as an acoustic / electric guitar. This allows the natural sound to be directly amplified without the need for an extra microphone.