

MyGuitarLessons

Buying a guitar with My Guitar Lessons.

So you've decided you want to play the guitar - good choice! The most important thing at this stage is to make sure you get a good one, and a good one doesn't mean spending a fortune. Something that's horrible to see is when someone gets excited about learning the guitar, gets a guitar that sucks and then loses interest because it's "too hard" or they "can't make it sound good". If it's a poor quality guitar, it might sound awful and be difficult to play - things like the quality of the neck, the bridge and the frets can all make a huge difference, and if it feels horrible to play it won't be a lot of fun! Make sure you read this guide properly before you go hunting for your first guitar.

Decide What Sort Of Guitar You Want To Play

Who are your favourite guitarists? What are your favourite styles of music? Who have you heard play and thought "wow that's cool! I wanna do that" - and what guitar did that guitarist play? If you want to play acoustic, get an acoustic. A Flying V will not do the same thing! But likewise if you want to sound like Pantera, it's clearly obvious that it's not done on a classical guitar. If someone you know has a guitar you like, talk them into letting you try it out and see what you think of it - and read through this website so that you know what you're talking about! Check out "Getting A Good Guitar Sound" so that you know what sorta things are going to give you the sound you're after. Here's a bunch of different types of guitar, and what they're good for!

Acoustic Guitar



Don't confuse this with a classical guitar - while they're both commonly referred to as "acoustic", a classical guitar has nylon strings and is suited almost exclusively for classical music. An acoustic guitar has steel strings, a scratch plate (that plastic thing stuck underneath the sound hole - it's called a scratch plate because it stops you scratching the body of the guitar with the pick) and might have a cutaway - a design in the body of the guitar where a part of the curve is cut out where it meets the neck to

allow your fingers to get higher up the fretboard. The neck on an acoustic guitar is also not as wide as that of a classical guitar, and meets the body at the 14th fret, rather than at the 12th.

An acoustic guitar is designed for use without an amplifier, and underneath the strings you'll see a hole leading into a hollow body. It is this hole that allows the sound from the strings to bounce around, amplifying the sound and therefore removing the need for an amp. So just the guitar alone might be suitable for playing a small gig - but if you're playing somewhere a little bigger you might want to "mic up" the guitar by placing a microphone in front of the sound hole, or use a pickup designed for an acoustic guitar. But the next guitar on the list is more common and might be of more interest to you.

Electro-Acoustic Guitar



An electro-acoustic does everything an acoustic guitar does - but it also has an input for a jack lead to plug it into an amp, or a PA system. Something that's now pretty standard on electro-acoustics is an EQ control built into the guitar too - so you can fiddle with the sound once it's plugged in to get it just the way you want it. It uses pickups that are specifically designed for an acoustic guitar - but don't let the "electro" part of its title confuse you - this is an acoustic guitar. Not an electric guitar. It just happens to be an acoustic guitar that you can plug into an amp to make it louder when you need to.

Electric Guitar



Do I really need to explain what an electric guitar is? Here we go anyway - the electric guitar is the classic musical instrument made legendary through, well, pretty much every type of music. Different to acoustic/classical style guitars, the electric guitar is designed specifically for use with an amplifier. The amplifier is an absolutely 100% essential piece of kit with an electric guitar, and along with the pickups are absolutely crucial to the sound that the guitar produces. The strings on an electric guitar are thinner than those on an acoustic, the neck is thinner and with added gadgets like tremeloes (also know as whammy bars), effects pedals, pickup switch selectors etc a wide variety of sounds can be produced on an electric guitar that would be impossible on any other type. Often referred to as a "solid body"...because the body is solid! You won't find soundholes or anything like that in an electric guitar.

Twelve String Guitars



A twelve-string guitar is essentially a rhythm guitar. It is played just like a regular six string guitar, but every string on the neck has another, thinner string paired with it and tuned an octave higher. This effectively makes it sound pretty much like two guitars at once, which makes for a very full sound but makes the guitar a little limited too - if you try to do anything other than rhythm playing you're going to have problems. The extra strings make it harder to press notes down which means chord fingerings etc become

more tiring on your fretting hand, and any sort of lead playing might become a nightmare - string bending, for example, may require a herculean effort - and they also tend to be expensive. You can buy a 12-string electric guitar, but the majority of 12-string guitars are acoustic.

Classical Guitars



Similar to an acoustic guitar, but not to be confused with one. A classical guitar is often referred to as a "Spanish Guitar", as modern classical guitars are widely regarded to be influenced by the designs of 19th century guitar-maker Antonio Torres Jurado. It is played with fingers and thumb (not with a pick), has a wider neck than an acoustic, and is strung up with nylon strings. Electro-classical guitars can be found, but as a standard rule a classical guitar cannot be amplified without using microphones. As its name suggests, it is designed for classical music though due to the warm sound of the nylon strings they are also used by players in other styles, such as folk, jazz or flamenco music. The fretboard meets the body of the guitar at 12th fret (an acoustic meets it at 14th) and a classical guitar has a very unique sound.

Resonator Guitars



To be fair, a resonator guitar is fairly weird. Some people refer to them as "Dobros",

having been invented by the Dopyera Brothers in the 1920s as a guitar that would be loud enough to be heard over orchestra instruments at vaudeville shows. They're kinda like acoustic guitars, except they have a bunch of aluminium cones under the bridge of the guitar which work like a speaker, making the guitar 3-4 times louder than a regular acoustic. You can't miss them when you see them - they have two sound holes (but in a different place to where you're used to seeing them - usually either side of where the fretboard ends on the body of the guitar), tend to be largely metallic to look at and have an unmistakable style.

They're used widely in bluegrass and blues music, are often played with a slide, often in open tunings and often with a mega-high action as a "lap steel guitar" ... where the guitar is played lying down, with a slide, with the fretboard facing you as a keyboard would. Square-necked resonator models are designed specifically for this. Round necked ones can be played in either position, though you'd probably want to decide beforehand how you intend to play it, as the action will be drastically different either way - a VERY high action (half an inch or more) for lap-steel playing would be seen as normal, or much lower if you're playing it in regular position.

Double-Neck Guitar



Depending on how you look at it, you'll either look really cool or really, really lame playing a double neck guitar unless you're already a famous guitar legend. And even then, it's still weird! You almost certainly wouldn't want one as your first guitar. It's simply a guitar with two necks - and usually, one's a 12-string neck and the other is a regular six-string. However, other variations are of course available - why not have a six-string neck and a fretless, a 12-string and a 7-string, or a six-string and a bass? There is a reason they were invented though, and it's not just to look "cool".

Early recording technology relied on 4-track technology, which meant that to get a fuller sound bands with two guitar players would have them both play at the same time, onto the same track. The invention of 8-track technology meant that bands with one guitar player could get in on the action too and make the recordings a little more interesting - for example, sticking a 12-string guitar into the mix playing rhythm and then busting out the solo on a 6-string...which was pretty impressive recording at the time. This of course brought up the problem of how they were gonna pull this off live without switching guitars halfway through a song, and so somebody came up with the idea of sticking both necks onto one instrument. Changing the strings on it and making sure it's constantly in

tune will get very old, very fast, and they tend to be very expensive.

Seven-String Guitars



These tend to be seen as a fairly new thing but they're not at all - seven-string guitars were being used in jazz music in the 1930s, seven-string classical guitars were common in the late 1700s and as far back as the Baroque period guitars with ten or more strings were commonplace.

The first solid-body 7-string electric guitar was patented in 1985, and was used mainly by a bunch of shred players on some fairly experimental recordings. More recently 7-string guitars have become more common since the explosion of nu-metal in the 1990s - bands like Korn and Fear Factory made a lot of use of 7-strings, typically with the extra string added to the bottom of the guitar, drop tuned (in standard tuning, the extra string would be a low B), leading the way for all sorts of sludge-riffing and headbanging lunacy.

An advantage of a seven-string guitar would be of most use in heavy metal - in that you can have a mega-heavy drop tuned guitar riff without having to tune the rest of the guitar down with it - you could play a bowel-rumbling riff in low A, for example, and still have the rest of the guitar in standard tuning for soloing.

FACT: It wasn't until after 1800 that six-string guitars were considered normal.

Decide How Much You Want To Spend

Getting a good guitar, contrary to popular belief does not mean spending a fortune. There are a lot of "entry-level" guitars (an entry-level guitar is the basically where it can be classed as a "proper" guitar - not a kids' one or a cheesy beginners' model) that'll sound great and be a joy to play. So decide how much you want to spend before you go off down to the guitar shop and get talked into spending more by a guitar salesman on commission.

The whole aim of the game here is to get a guitar that feels good under your fingers, is easy to play, and produces a good sound. As long as it does that, it's a good guitar - and it doesn't matter if you've got a five-grand guitar if you can't play it properly! Remember that Steve Vai playing a cheap guitar will sound cool, but someone with no ability playing a top-of-the-line-worth-a-fortune guitar will still sound awful. You can get a good entry-level guitar brand new for around £200. If this is your first guitar, don't go over

that budget. You could even get a good second hand one that was originally worth more for the same money - and there's nothing wrong with a second-hand guitar if you get a good one. Don't let some salesman in the store talk you into spending more - he's after the cut that he'll get if you're silly enough to hand over extra money.

Try Out Everything In Your Budget That The Store Has To Offer

Take a friend who plays guitar with you too - because they'll inevitably have a better idea of what to look out for than you will. Get your friend to try out the guitars too - if he has more experience playing guitar than you do he will know the difference between a guitar that feels good to play and one that doesn't. And here's something that's absolutely crucial...

ALWAYS TRY OUT THE GUITAR BEFORE YOU BUY IT !!!

Don't even think about buying a guitar if you haven't played it yet. That also means don't go on ebay, find one that looks cool at a bargain price and have it sent to you. That's just stupid! It's absolutely vital that you find a guitar that sounds, feels and looks cool for you and there's no way to do that without trying it out first.

When You're Trying Out Guitars In The Store, Make Sure They're All Tuned The Same

Normally, guitars in a guitar shop will be tuned to standard tuning (top string to bottom string - EBGDAE). Make sure that all the guitars you try out are in the same tuning - this means they'll all have the same string tension, and you'll also be able to properly compare the differences between the sounds. If the strings are tight on one guitar and loose on the next, you can't compare how different they feel on the neck or how bright they sound.

Plug It Into An Amp On A CLEAN Sound

Here's a mistake that people make - you get the guy to hand you the guitar, stick it into an amp in the store that isn't yours and whack the gain up to 10. Why would you do that? The sound you're hearing is the amp, not the guitar! When you're trying out guitars, take ALL of the effects OFF the amp. What you want to hear is the cleanest, most completely unmodified tone you possibly can, as that's the sound that's coming from the guitar. Listen for any humming/buzzing noises, and listen to the quality of the sound itself. It should be nice and bright and powerful - and it shouldn't be a great effort to get the notes to ring out on the guitar. Play high up the neck and low down - play barre chords. Don't take the opportunity to show off the coolest licks you know - what we want to hear here is the quality of the guitar. Listen for any fret buzzing/dead notes. Bend a few notes higher up and make sure the sound stays clear - if you can hear some notes being "choked out" it might mean you need the frets seeing to - and for the money we're spending this is more bother than you should be dealing with.