

**How to Play the Guitar by Ear
Six One-Hour Lessons**

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Websites (for lyrics and other information):
<http://www.foundationwebsite.org/guitaroptions.htm> or
<http://www.foundation.bw/guitaroptions.htm> .

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Course Objective: To learn to play (on guitar) and sing any popular song, in any key, by ear.

Course Syllabus

Hour 1 topics: About the guitar (types of guitars; tuning methods; straps); major chords (finger positions); thumb position and use; practice chords.

Hour 2 topics: Practice chords. Chord combinations in popular songs (musical keys; circle of fifths; one-chord song; two-chord songs; three-chord songs; four-chord songs); strum patterns; time signatures; use of the pick (plectrum); how to sing and play at the same time.

Hour 3 topics: Practice songs (two- and three-chord songs). Seventh chords.

Hour 4 topics: Practice seventh chords. Four-chord songs.

Hour 5 topics: Practice four-chord songs. Minor chords. Five-chord songs.

Hour 6 topics: Practice minor-chord songs. Miscellaneous topics (barre chord patterns; straps; capo; restringing; knicks and scratches).

Lyrics for all referenced songs are posted at websites
<http://www.foundationwebsite.org/guitaroptions.htm> and
<http://www.foundation.bw/guitaroptions.htm> .

Hour 1: Major Chords (and one 7th): Standard Fingerings (my recommendations)

Fingers are numbered as T: thumb; 1: index; 2: middle; 3: ring; 4: little.

Strings are numbered from lightest (1) to heaviest (6).

A chord is a combination of tones (“notes”).

A

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|4-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|3-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

B7

```
1E|-----|4-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|3-----|-----|-----|
4D|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----X (do not play)
```

C

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|-----|4-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|3-----|-----|
```

D

```
1E|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|-----|3-----|-----|
3G|-----|1-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----X
```

E

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|3-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

F

```
1E|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|1-----|2-----|-----|-----|
4D|1-----|-----|4-----|-----|
5A|1-----|-----|3-----|-----|
6E|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

G

```
1E|-----|-----|4-----|-----|
2B|-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|3-----|-----|
```

For next session, practice all chords, but learn to play A, D, and E well.

Hour 2: Chord Sequences in Popular Songs

Chord notation:

“Absolute” notation: A, B, C, D, E, F, G.

“Relative” notation: I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, where I denotes any chord from A to G, and II, III, ... denote successive chords from that starting point (after G, start over again with A). Simple songs will be specified using relative notation; complex songs will be specified using absolute notation.

A song is a sequence of chords, e.g., I-IV-V-I, or I-V-II-V-I. The starting point of the song is (usually) the “key” of the song. If the key is G, then the sequence I-IV-V-I stands for G-C-D-G. If the key is C, then this sequence stands for C-F-G-C. If the key is A, the sequence is A-D-E-A. The easiest keys for the guitar (when chording) are A, C, D, E and G. When singing, play the song in the key that best matches your vocal range. When playing with others who use music, use the key of their music (use capo for keys other than A, C, D, E, and G). The chords in most (major-key) popular songs are I, IV and V, and sometimes II. (This means that the chord selections in most popular songs are ADE, CFG, DGA, EAB, and GCD.) (The chords are usually nearby chords of the “circle of fifths”: F-C-G-D-A-E-B-Gf-Df-Af-Ef-Bf-F.) Use the chords that sound right (unless you are “tone-deaf” you can learn to do this; if you can “carry a tune,” you can learn to do this).

Examples of songs:

One-chord song: Don’t Let Go (I, e.g., A or G).

Two-chord songs: Jambalaya (I-V-I (e.g., A-E-A)); Do What You Do Do Well (I-V-I); You’re the Only World I Know (I-V-I); That’s What Makes the Jukebox Play (I-V-I); I Got You (I-V-I); Rainy Day Woman(I-V-I).

Three-chord songs: Jamaica Farewell (I-IV-V-I); Blue Christmas (I-V-I-IV-V-I); Music, Music, Music (I-V-I; IV-I-V-I); Storms Never Last (I-IV-V-I); Gotta Travel On (I-IV-I-IV-V-I); Me and Bobby McGee (I-V-I-IV-I-V-I; IV-I-V-I-IV-I-V-I); Oh Baby Mine (I-V-I-V-I;IV-I-IV-I-V); On the Road Again (I-V-IV-V-I); Amazing Grace (I-IV-I-V-I-IV-I-V-I); One Day at a Time (I-V-I-IV-I-V-I;IV-I-V-I); Rivers of Babylon (I-V-I; I-IV-I-V-I); Back Home Again (I-IV-V-I;IV-V-I-IV-V-I); I Still Miss Someone (I-IV-V-IV-V-I; IV-V-I);.

Time signatures: (2/4; 4/4; ¾).

Strum, pick (plectrum) and finger-picking (arpeggio). Strum patterns: alternate bass; calypso.

How to sing and play at the same time: learn to play the song well; hum as you play, then sing. At home, use printed lyrics. When performing before others, memorize the lyrics for as many songs as you can. Chords are the “harmony” (accompaniment), not the melody (“tune”), of a song. To play a song by ear, you must know the song’s melody (i.e., a list of the chords is of no use if you don’t know the melody).

For each two- or three-chord song that you practice, learn to play it in all keys A, C, D, E, and G (even though for some of the keys the notes will extend beyond your vocal range).

Hour 3: Practice Two- and Three-Chord Songs; Seventh Chords

Seventh chords add “richness” to a song. They replace some of the major chords. They are often the penultimate chord of a sequence.

A7

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|4-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

B7

```
1E|-----|4-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|3-----|-----|-----|
4D|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|X
```

C7

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|-----|4-----|-----|
4D|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|-----|3-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

D7

```
1E|-----|3-----|-----|-----|
2B|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|X
```

E7

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

F7

```
1E|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|1-----|2-----|-----|-----|
4D|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|1-----|3-----|-----|-----|
6E|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

G7

```
1E|1-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|2-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|3-----|-----|-----|
```

Examples: Have You Ever Been Lonely (I-IV-I-V-I; I7-IV-I-V-II7-V; IV-I-V-I; IV-I-V-I);
Paper Roses (I-V7-I-I7-IV-V7-I;IV-V7-I-IIm-V7-I; IV-V7-IIm-V7-I).

Hour 4: Practice Seventh Chords; Four-Chord Songs

Songs with strong seventh chords: Margaritaville (I-V-I-I7; IV-V-I-I7; IV-V-I-I7; IV-V-I-IV-V-IV-I); Winchester Cathedral (G-D7-G-D7-G; G7-C-A7-D7; G-D7-G)

Four-chord songs. Bumming Around (I-V-I; IV-I-II-V-I); Bouquet of Roses (I-IV-I-V-I; IV-I-II-V); Room Full of Roses (I-V-I; IV-I-II-V); Save the Last Dance for Me (I-V-I-IV-I-V-I; V-I-V-I); It Is No Secret (I-IV-I-V-I; I-IV-V-II-V); Half as Much (I-V-I-IV-II-V; I-V-I-IV-V-I).

Bridges. San Antonio Rose (I-IV-V-I; II-VI-II-IV-II)

Key changes. Knock Three Times (e.g., D to E) (I-V-I; IV-I-V-I)

Hour 5: Practice Four-Chord Songs; Minor Chords; Five-Chord Songs;

Am (usually occurs in key of C)

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

Bm (rare)

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

Cm (rare)

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

Dm (occasional)

```
1E|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|X
```

Em (usually occurs in key of G)

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

Fm (rare)

```
1E|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-1-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

Gm (rare)

```
1E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
2B|-----|-----|-----|-----|
3G|-----|-----|-----|-----|
4D|-----|-----|-----|-----|
5A|-----|-----|-----|-----|
6E|-----|-----|-----|-----|
```

For the guitar, it is easiest to play songs with Am (key of Am or C) or Em (key of Em or G).

Exemplar songs (absolute chords specified – memorize complicated (many-chord) songs in only one key): I Guess it Doesn't Matter Anymore (C-G-C-G-C; Am-D-G); Teddy Bears' Picnic (Am-C-G-C-F-G-C; C-G-C-F-C-G-C); Summertime (Am-E-Am-Dm-Am-E-Am-E-Am-C-Am-E-Am); The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down (Am-F-Am-F-Am; C-Am-C-Am-C-Am-G; Am-C-Am-C-Am-Dm-F); Ghost Riders (Am-C-Am-F-Am-F-Am); Pick the Wildwood Flower (D-G-E7-A-Am-G-D-A-D); Mountain of Love (A-D-A-E7-D-A-E7-A; D-Dfm-D-E-D-Dfm-D-E); Song Sung Blue (G-D-D7-G-G7-C-D-G-Am-D7); Blue Bayou (E-B7-E-B7-E-B7-E-A-Am-E-B7-E). If your vocal range does not correspond to the specified chordings, then transpose to a suitable key, or use a capo.

Hour 6: Practice Minor-Chord Songs; Miscellaneous Topics

Practice: Summertime (Am-E-Am-Dm-Am-E-Am-E-Am-C-Am-E-Am); Teddy Bears' Picnic (Am-C-G-C-F-G-C; C-G-C-F-C-G-C).

Miscellaneous topics:

Straps. Classical guitars do not have strap posts (pins). Use a "classical guitar strap" (goes from your neck under the guitar and hooks to the sound hole).

Barre chords. Useful for flamenco songs, e.g., Malagueña.

Using the capo. Two uses: (1) to play a complex song that you know in a particular key in a different key; and (2) to match keys not common to guitar, such as F, B-flat, E-flat, A-flat (e.g., when accompanying a clarinetist who knows a song only in the key of B-flat).

Restringing

Knicks and scratches

What to look for in buying a guitar