

**Lesson Title:** The Physical Elements of Playing Guitar

**Objective:** Students will have a basic understanding of the physical motions, terminology, postures, and sensations of playing the guitar with proper technique.

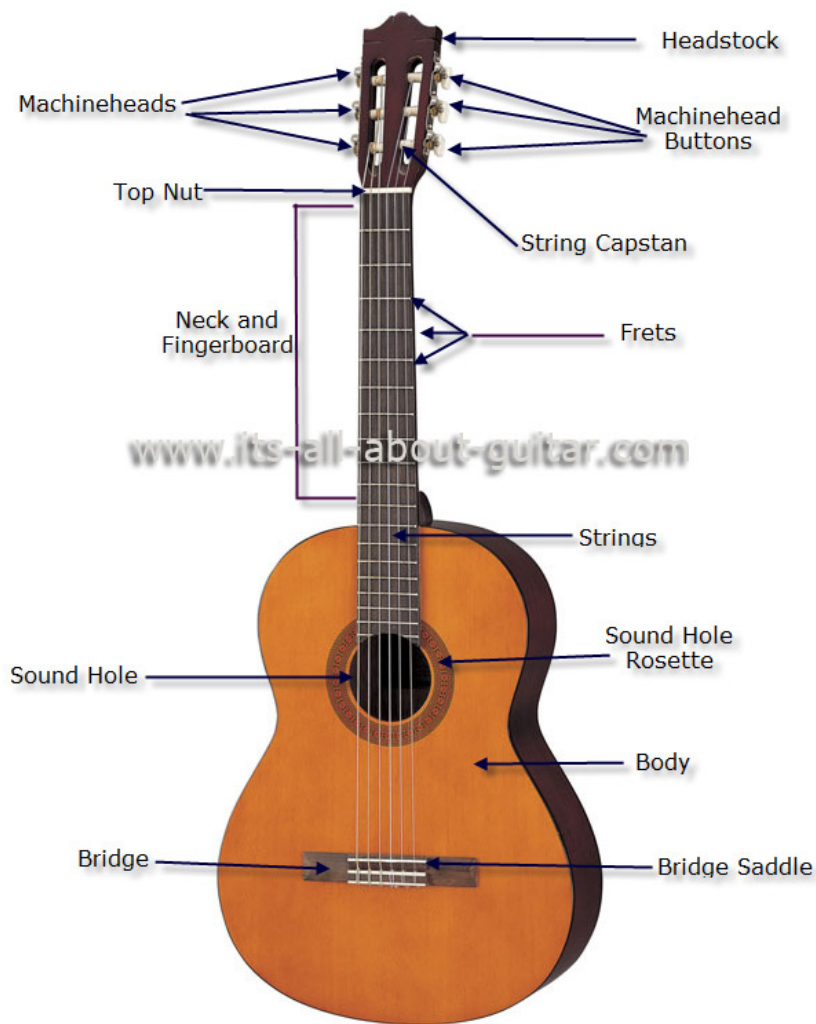
**Materials/Equipment:** Chair, Guitar, Student, footstool/guitar support (optional, but recommended)

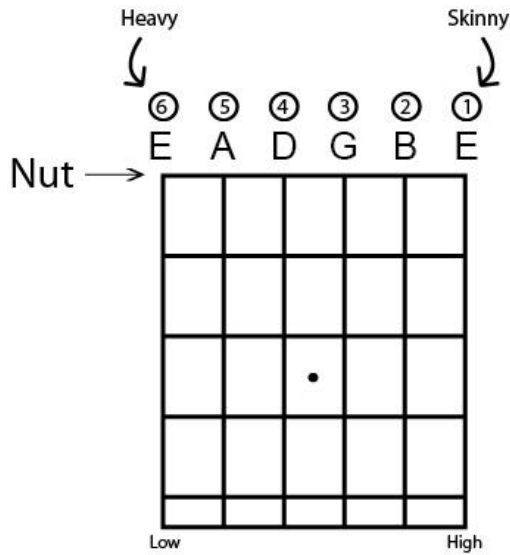
**Duration:** This Activity should take 45-60 minutes.

**Prior Knowledge/Skills:** None besides openness to learning.

**Procedure:**

1. Observe and begin to internalize the names of the components of the guitar. Most importantly the string names.





2. Sit down in the chair, with a comfortable and supported posture. Place your feet about shoulder width apart. Let your arms hang down to your side and release absolutely all tension in your body. Take a few deep breaths and really relax the tension out of yourself. Slowly bring your left arm up at an approximately 90 degree angle with your wrist facing you. Bend your right arm at the elbow and bring it into your torso area once again facing your body. This is generally the position one wants to be in while playing guitar.



3. Now I will place the guitar in the student's lap, and the student will mimic the position from before without the guitar. Place the guitar neck at a proper height as to where your left hand naturally places itself while bent up. Place your right hand on the strings near the sound hole. They key to

a successful guitar posture is the absence of tension, which more often than not originates in the neck, and upper arm due to poor positioning of the instrument.



4. Take the right hand and simply strum the strings with your thumb using a slight downward pressure into the soundhole of the guitar. Experiment with placement of your hand in relation to the soundhole. Experiment with the angle and amount of pressure your thumb attacks the strings with. Every player has different hands and physical attributes that contribute to discovering the most effective technique for *that specific* player.

**Adaptions:** Using a footstool or guitar support for shorter players or with strange physical makeups can offer an instant solution to some of these position problems.

**WRONG!!**



**RIGHT!!!**



**Feedback/Evaluation:** Award the successful student with something to play!  
Start with simple open-string strumming patterns. The next lesson will specific left hand technique, followed by right hand which will give the student the ability to start playing music, which will keep them motivated.

	8-10	5-7	2-4	0-1
Upper body	Neck, Shoulders, and upper back are all relaxed and free of tension.	Neck, Shoulders, and upper back are in mostly good positions, tension sets in rarely while playing	Neck, Shoulders, and upper back are sometimes in good position; tension is prevalent for the majority of the playing.	Neck, Shoulders, and upper back stay in a tense state. They rarely relax while playing

Lower Body	Legs and feet are relaxed and provide excellent support for the guitar while playing	Legs and feet are mostly relaxed and provide ample support for the guitar while playing	Legs and feet are sometimes relaxed, causes problems with the level of the guitar while playing.	Legs and feet are not relaxed and cause serious problems with posture while playing.
Arms	Both arms and hands are fully relaxed and at optimum levels in relation to the guitar. They do not have to reach anywhere causing unwanted tension.	Both arms and hands are mostly relaxed, may tense up at occasionally while playing.	Both arms and hands are sometimes relaxed, tension can set in often in upper arms and hands while playing	Both arms and hands are generally unrelaxed and reaching to strange levels to play the guitar.
Back	The back is not slouched or crooked at all, but straight and relaxed allowing good breath and posture while playing.	The back is in mostly good positions while playing, with the occasional slouch or tense moment.	The back struggles to stay straight and relaxed, causing short breaths and uneven levels for the arms and shoulders.	The back stays in a slouched, or tense state causing problems throughout the entire body while playing.

**National Standards:**

2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

**Lesson Title:** Right Hand Technique (Finger style)

**Objective:** Students will gain a basic understanding of the proper motions, terminology, and ideologies that make the technique of the right hand (or left hand for left handed guitarists) of playing finger style guitar.

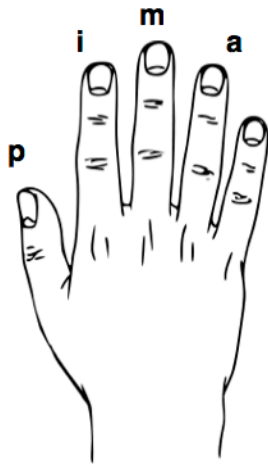
**Materials/Equipment:** Chair, guitar, mirror (or computer screen with camera), metronome, OPTIONAL: fingernail file, longer nails on right hand thumb, index, middle, and ring finger, fine 300 or 500m filing sand paper, recording software (garageband, mixcraft etc)

**Duration:** 45-60 minutes

**Prior Knowledge/Skills:** Proper position and posture of the guitar

**Procedure:**

1. Observe and internalize the terms used for the right hand when discussing the guitar. It goes as follows: P for thumb, I for index, M for middle, and A for annular (ring finger) , the pinky which is rarely used except in flamenco styles is known as C.



2. While using proper posture to hold the guitar, place your right hand in playing position, don't worry about the left hand for now.
3. To start just use one finger at a time. Begin with I. Place your finger resting on the high E string and using an inward pressure, depress the string and

- follow through allowing your finger to rest on the adjacent B string. The motion should occur from the top knuckle of your finger, allowing you to use the entirety of your finger to create more sound. This type of stroke is known as a Rest Stroke or *Apoyando*. As soon as you finish your stroke into the adjacent string release the tension you built up in your finger to complete this action. Apply this concept to your P, M and A fingers. The thumb uses the same concept but from the opposite angle.
4. Now try the same placement of your I finger on the high e string and pluck the string but don't allow your finger to touch the b string. This motion calls for a more parallel stroke. Imagine your finger gliding across and through the string rather perpendicularly. This stroke is called a Free Stroke, or *Tirando*.
  5. Now try simple alternations of I and M on the same string. The key to alternation is the relaxation and synchronization of your two fingers at work, As the I finger comes through the string the M finger needs to be getting ready and placed directly over the string to play next. Imagine your legs walking or a pair of scissors, when one partner moves the other is always moving as well. Apply this both Rest and free stroke.
  6. Now try simple multiple finger patterns using P I M A. Using all free strokes, pluck the low e string with P, the g string with I, the b string m, and the high E with A. Do this simultaneously and sequentially one after the other P, I M, A. Once again always employ relaxation as soon as your finger completes its motion.
  7. Play in front of a mirror or screen and observe your hand from different angles. Make sure your entire body is still in a proper, relaxed position.
  8. Now set a metronome to 80 bpm. Play with just one finger on every other click. A good way to start to remember to relax is to relax on the second click and get your finger ready by the next click. Apply this metronomic practice to all the techniques learned in this lesson.

### **Adaptions:**

#### **1. Playing with Nails**

Most Classical and finger style players grow out their nails on their right hand and actually play with them in order to get more volume and tone variety. This involves a very specific shaping and filing to get a good tone from the instrument. There are many philosophies when it comes to shaping nails. I employ a curved ramp as shown in the second picture of the diagram. Depending on the student's particular nails, I have also seen success with the first more rounded approach. After the nails are properly shaped, they need to be sanded with a fine grit 300 or 500m sand paper in order to smooth out any cuts or cracks in the nail that may still be there. The nail needs to be smooth as glass to get a good sound.

Fig. 7. Rounded Nail Shape  
(viewing the *i* finger, from back of the hand).

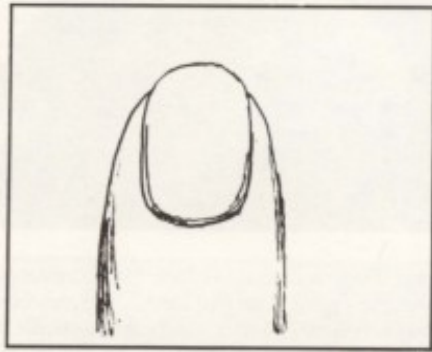
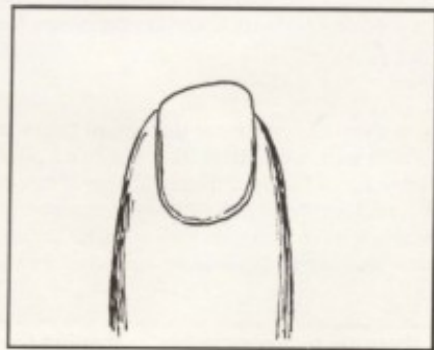


Fig. 8. Angled Nail Shape.



## 2. Record yourself!

After you get the hang of the right hand techniques, record yourself playing to the metronome. You'll be surprised what you hear when you listen back!

**Feedback/Evaluation:** Evaluate and congratulate the successful student and get the excited for left hand to bring it all together.

	8-10	5-7	2-4	0-1
Rest Stroke	The rest stroke motion is fluid and relaxation occurs instantly after the completed motion	The rest stroke motion is mostly fluid, the finger may take a moment to relax after.	The rest stroke motion isn't very fluid, the motion may come from the second knuckle, or at an desirable angle. Relaxation takes too long after the stroke.	The rest stroke motion isn't fluid, the motion comes from the wrong part of the finger at an incorrect angle. This will produce a bad and quiet sound.
Free stroke	The free stroke motion is fluid and relaxation occurs instantly after completed motion.	The free stroke motion is mostly fluid and relaxation occurs a moment after the motion ends.	The free stroke motion is not very fluid and comes from the wrong part of finger, relaxation is too slow.	The free stroke motion isn't fluid, the motion comes from the wrong part of the finger at an incorrect angle. This will. The student does not relax
Sound	Sound is round, clear, and loud.	Sound is mostly clear, and round, strings may buzz against nails or fingers occasionally.	Sound is rather weak and thin. The student needs to change the angle of attack and the motion of the finger to improve.	The student cannot achieve a good sound. Thin, lacking definition and volume. The student needs to rework how he or she approaches the right hand

**National Standards:**

**2.** Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

**Lesson Title:** Left hand technique

**Objective:** Students will gain a basic understanding of the proper motions, terminology, and ideologies that make the technique of the left hand (or right hand for left handed guitarists) of playing guitar.

**Materials/Equipment:** Chair, guitar, mirror (or computer screen with camera), metronome.

**Duration:** 45-60 minutes

**Prior Knowledge/Skills:** Proper position and posture and right hand technique of the guitar.

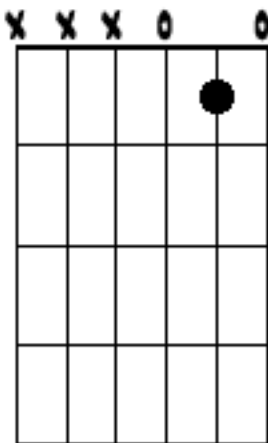
**Procedure:**

1. Observe and internalize the terms used for the left hand when discussing the guitar. 1 refers the index finger, 2 refers to the middle finger, 3 refers to the ring finger, and 4 refers to the pinky. The fret board works very intuitively. First position refers to the index finger at the first fret; second position refers to the index at the second fret and so on.
2. Now place the left hand up the Fifth position (index at fifth fret) on the G string. Fret the string so that the index is directly against the fret starting the sixth position as seen in the picture. Use the fingertip, not the fleshy part of your finger. Keep the other fingers over the strings, not flopping away but in close quarters. Drop the thumb so it is more or less behind the index finger in the middle of the neck. Use the weight of your arm to help you fret; try not to squeeze with your thumb, instead let your arm provide a gravitational pull to give you the strength you need.

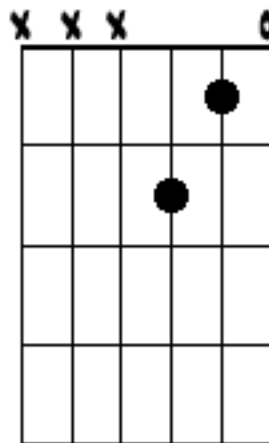


3. Now play a rest stroke on the g string and listen for any buzzes. If there are buzzes, the problem is usually because the student is fretting more in the middle of space between the frets. It can sometimes be a lack of pressure but not usually. Once the student has achieved this with the index finger, move on the rest of the fingers in fifth position.
4. After the student has felt the sensation of controlling the pitch of the guitar have the student play a four note chromatic scale starting at the fifth position on the g string. Make sure the student relaxes the finger as soon as the adjacent finger plays in a similar fashion as the right hand fingers relax after they have finished their action. Imagine the passing of a baton from finger to finger. The baton being the tension engaged; when there is no tension there is relaxation. Have the student play to a metronome at 80 bpm, every two clicks.
5. Now give the student simple one and two finger chords to give them the ability to make some actual music. Start with simple C, A minor, E minor and G chords in the positions seen below. Give them the freedom to mess with progression and make their own. All these chords will work in whatever order the student will play them in.

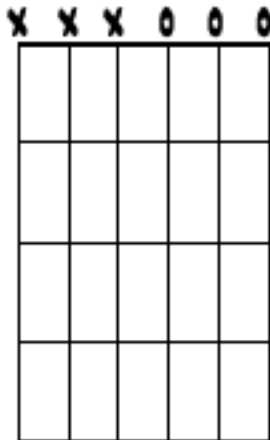
**C Major**



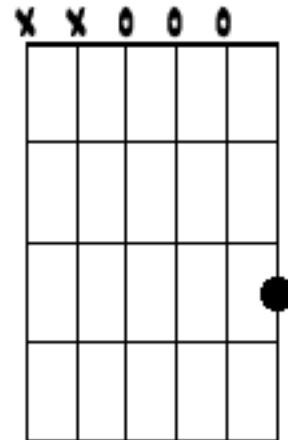
**A Minor**



### E Minor



### G Major



### Adaptions: Play with the Student

1. If the student gets a handle on these chords and can play them to a metronome in time, Play a melody or improvise a line over it! The student will love being involved in actual music making and playing with instructor will be very motivating for the student.

**Feedback/Evaluation:** After the successful student can handle all these techniques, prepare them to get ready to read music for the guitar in the next lesson. Introduction to simple music theory and harmony is to come in to next few lessons as well.

	8-10	5-7	2-4	0-1
Scale work	The fingers engage and release appropriately and clearly with no buzzes.	The fingers engage release properly a majority of the time, but may buzz or cut off occasionally.	The fingers are not really synchronized and need to relax. The fingers may play in the wrong place on the fret board causing buzzing	The fingers stay tense and unsynchronized. They buzz most of the time due to poor positioning.
Chordal work	All fingers being used	All fingers being used	The fingers being used	The student needs to go back

	are properly positioned while the others a close by and relaxed.	are mostly positioned correctly. Slight buzzing may occur occasionally.	are in improper positions and the other fingers are tense or flailing away.	to scale work to achieve proper technique for the fingers individually, then move on to chordal work.
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**National Standards:**

- 2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
- 4. Composing and arranging music within specific guidelines.
- 7. Evaluating Music and music performances.