

THE GUITAR

Here you will learn about the guitar and its different parts so you are familiar with these names when we are talking about the guitar throughout the book.

Remember that the guitar is a musical instrument and most everything on the guitar is described by how it sounds rather than by how it is physically placed.

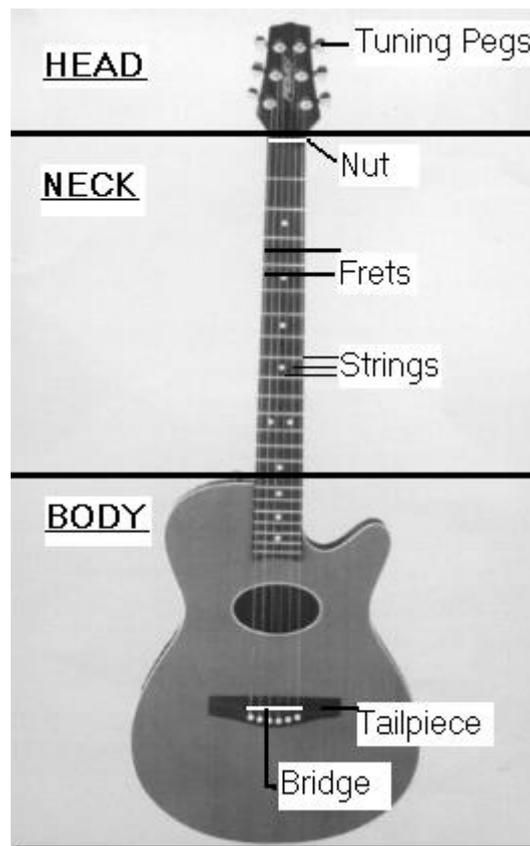
GUITAR SHAPE AND TYPES

All guitars are basically the same shape, with the same parts.

Of course there are many shapes and sizes that vary from this basic shape. Some guitars don't even have a head, though these are very rare!

This diagram shows the three main sections of any guitar - the body, neck and head with some of their individual parts.

The two main types of guitars are the acoustic and electric guitar.



There are two things that you **must** know about the guitar.

The Strings

Firstly you must understand how guitarists talk about the strings.

Just a reminder that the strings are named by how they sound rather than how they are physically placed.

Because the thinnest string has the highest sound it is called the top string or high string. This string is also numbered 1.

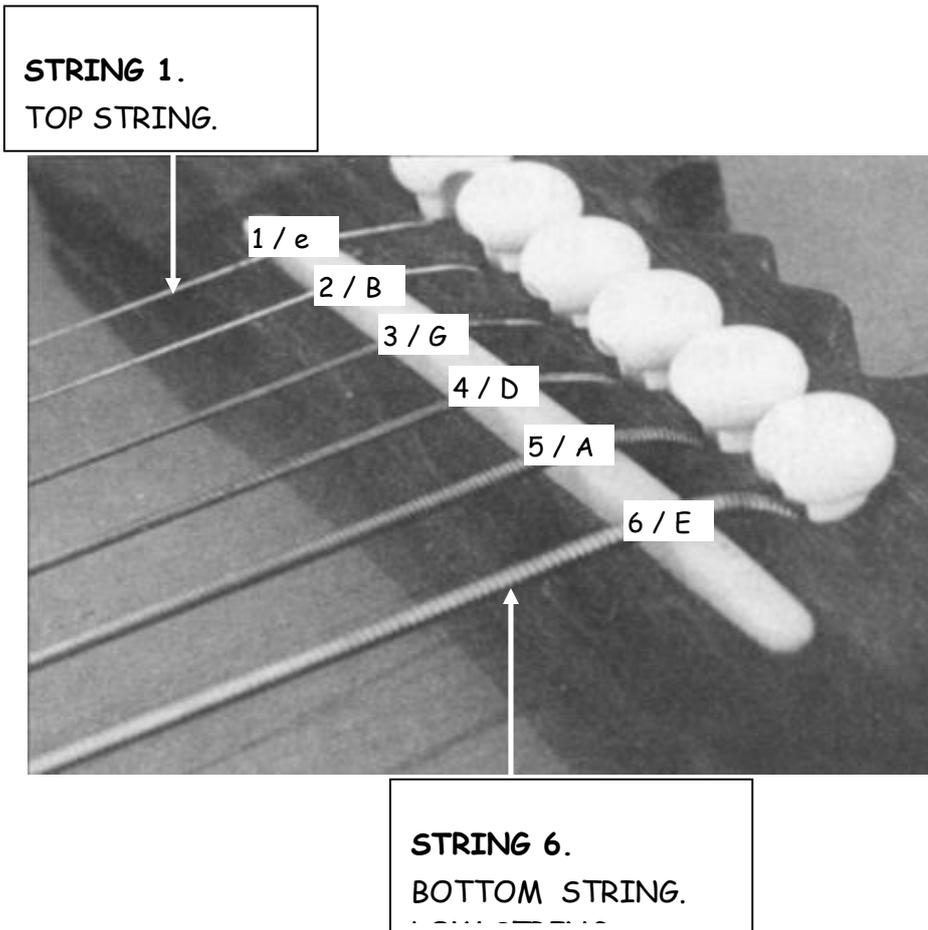
As the thickest string has the lowest sound it is

called the bottom string or low string. This low string is numbered 6.

The strings in between are numbered from 2 to 5. So all the strings are numbered 1 to 6 - from the highest to the lowest.

Often strings 1, 2 and 3 are altogether called the high strings, while the strings 4, 5 and 6 are called the low strings.

Each string also has a musical name -



The Frets

The part of the neck where you place your chord hand fingers to play is called the fingerboard or fretboard.

When you look at the fingerboard on the guitar you will see that there are pieces of metal all the way along. These pieces of metal are called fret wires. In between each of these fret wires is called a fret. You put your fingers in these frets when you play the guitar.

The fret closest to the head of the guitar is fret number 1. The fret numbers get higher as you move towards the body of the guitar. As you move towards the body you'll notice that the

sound gets higher. Because the sounds get higher this is called going up the guitar. Of course when you move towards the head it is called going down the guitar.

When you play the guitar with no fingers on this is called the zero fret or the open fret.

Notice that in the same fret you could put a finger on each of the strings e.g. you can play fret 1 on string 1, fret 1 on string 2, fret 1 on string 3, fret 1 on string 4, fret 1 on string 5 and fret 1 on string 6.



Detailed Diagrams

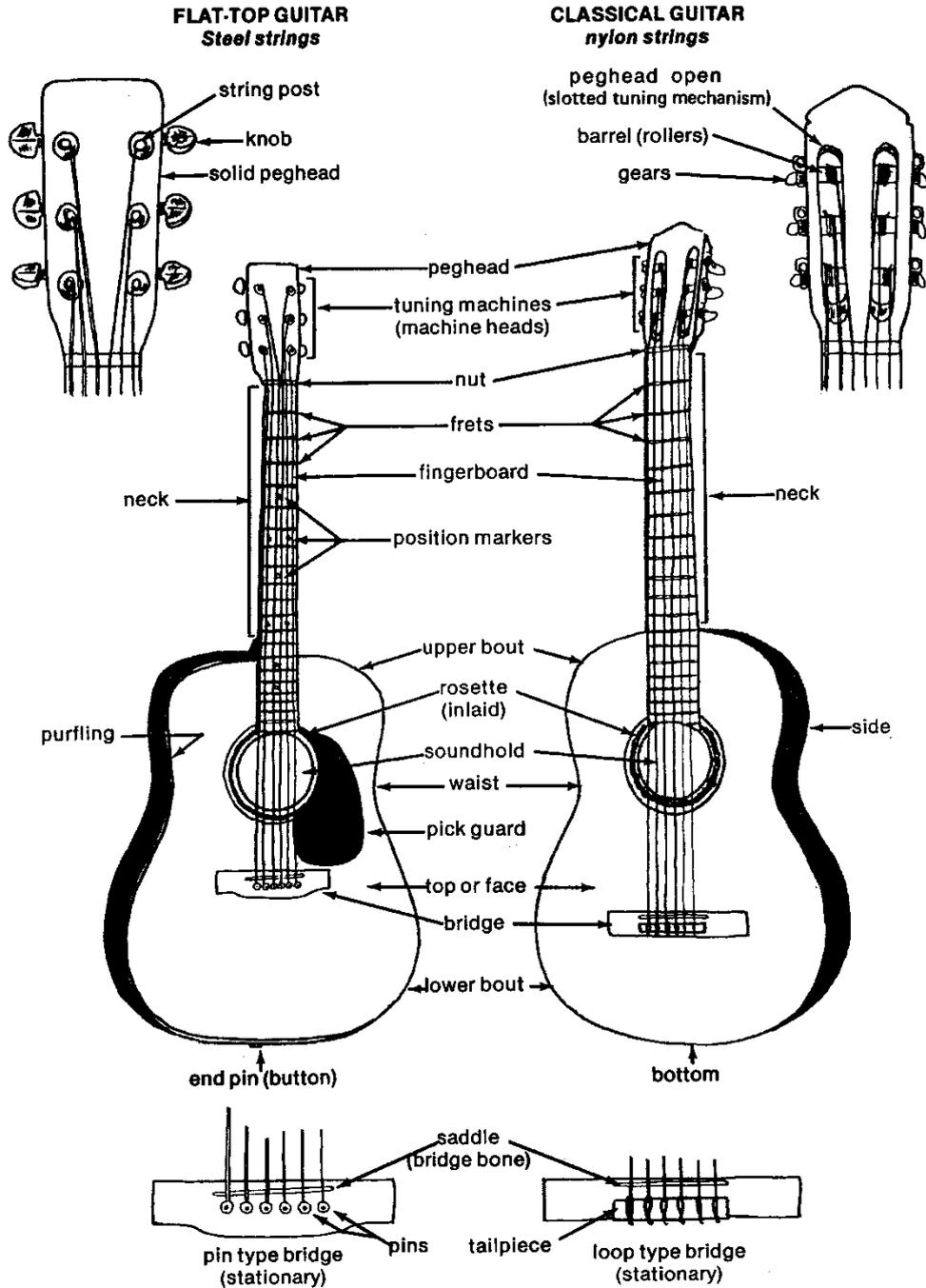
Acoustic Guitars

These diagrams are only here for interest sake - just so you can put a name to all the parts on a guitar. One day you might need to know where the end pin is.

have a hollow body to make the sound louder.

Acoustic guitars are good for taking away with you to play as you don't need any other pieces of equipment to be heard.

Acoustic guitars are the wooden guitars that



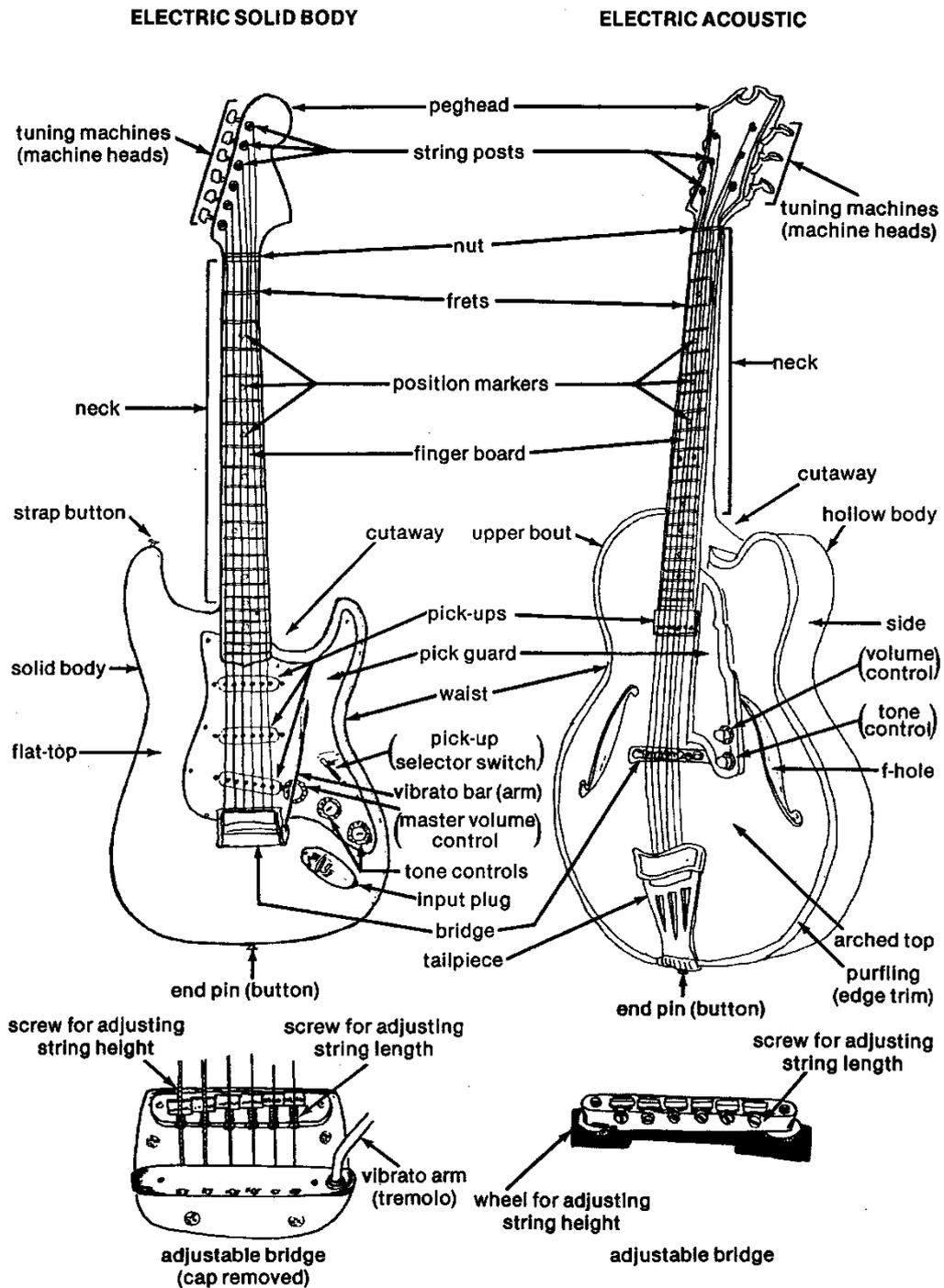
Electric Guitars

When you need to be louder you can use electric guitars. These are plugged into amplifiers which increase the volume of the guitar to whatever loudness you need.

need an amplifier to make them loud.

Electric guitars are still loud enough though to practice and play on without an amp.

Much the same as you do with CD players - they



CARING FOR YOUR GUITAR

Here are some simple hints for the care of your guitar.

1. Although guitars are quite robust they can sometimes be easily broken. If they fall and hit the ground at the wrong angle then the head will snap off just like a twig.

Never leave your guitar resting against a wall, furniture or your amp. Guitars can easily slide over and crash to the floor. This could easily snap the head off.

Try to lean the guitar into a corner of a wall where it can't slide anywhere. You might also purchase a guitar stand that will help keep it safe.

When you have to transport your guitar the most sensible piece of equipment to guard against physical and/or environmental damage is the HARD case. They are made of wood, plastic or metal and provide great protection. Hard cases are expensive but are worth it in the long run.

If you cannot afford a hard case then buy a padded plastic or leather bag. They will provide quite a deal of protection.

It's a good idea to leave the guitar out of its case at home so you'll find it easier to pick it up and start playing. Sometimes opening the case is just too much effort.

2. Guitars are sensitive to heat. This is

especially true for acoustic guitars which are held together by glue - there are no structural screws or nails holding the guitar together.

So if your guitar gets hot enough the glue will start to melt and things will start to come apart. Things like the binding around the edge of the body or even the bridge can peel clean off.

So it's important to never leave your guitar in the car where the sun can turn it into a hot box.

3. Try to keep the guitar clean. All the woodwork needs is a clean cloth to rub it down.

4. Strings require cleaning as well. While you are playing deposits of finger grime, sweat and acid are added to your strings.

Not only will this rust your strings, but if the grime is left to build up then it will eat into your fret board. Also as you play the rusted strings will scratch the finish of your fret board.

Wash your hands before you play and clean the strings after you play.

5. Fingerboards that aren't sealed will need to be oiled to keep the timber in good condition. Use something like "Lemoil" which is designed for this purpose.

HAND AND FINGER POSITIONS

1. Holding the Guitar.

Most of the time you will be practicing sitting down so lets look at some helpful hints about sitting and playing.

Of course try to sit comfortably. Sit up reasonably straight so as not to get a sore back too quickly.

Firstly rest the body of the guitar on the same leg as what "handed" guitarist you are e.g. if you are right handed then rest the guitar on your right leg.

Use the curved part of the body of the guitar

to rest on your leg. This will stop the guitar from sliding sideways off your leg.

You will also need to stop the guitar from sliding off your leg towards the floor. Do this by raising your knee so that it is higher than your hip. Now the guitar will slide into your body. You can raise your knee by putting your feet on some sort of stool on the floor e.g. telephone book or a box. Many people cross their main leg over their other leg to get the knee higher.

Tilt the guitar back towards your body a little so that it easy to see what you are doing.

Both of these photos show the guitar on a raised leg so that the guitar will slide back into the body - it won't slide off the leg and become a nuisance.



2. Strumming Hand.

Your strumming hand is the one that strikes the strings to make them ring. When you hit the strings with this hand it is called a strum or strumming. You can strum the strings with your thumb, a finger or a pick. Another name for a pick is a plectrum.

The hand that you strum with is what type of guitarist you are called. Right hand strummers are called right hand guitarists. Left hand strummers are called left hand guitarists.

Here are some pointers on how to set up your strumming hand and arm.

Make sure that both your shoulder and arm are relaxed and comfortable.

Set up your shoulder and arm so that your hand will sit on top of the strings near the sound hole or pick ups naturally. Your wrist should be

around the sixth string.

You shouldn't have to stretch your hand back up or stretch your hand down to reach the strings.

Normally if you rest the top of your forearm on the top of the guitar your arm will be in the right place.

Some guitar players like to rest their little finger on the guitar to help keep their strumming hand steady. Other guitar players feel comfortable leaving their strumming hand hanging in mid air. You should try both ways and find which suits you the best.

In the beginning use your thumb to actually hit the strings. Later you will learn how to use the pick.

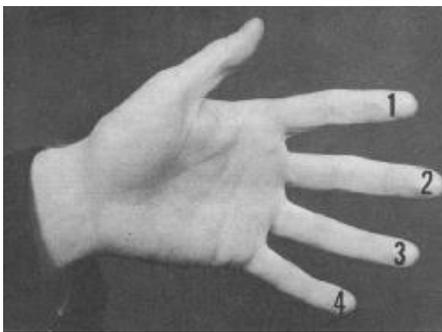


3. Chord Hand.

The hand is of course the other hand to your strumming hand. You put the fingers of this hand on the neck to build chords.

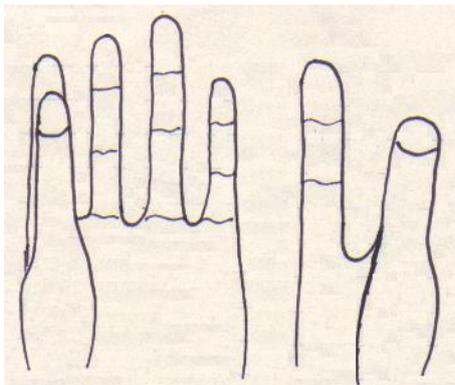
So you know which fingers of the chord hand are being talked about each is given a number.

The pointer is finger 1, your middle finger is finger 2, the ring finger is finger 3 and your little finger is finger 4. The thumb isn't usually used to play but when it is needed the symbol 't' is used.



Again you should have your whole arm relaxed and comfortable. Let the top half of your arm hang down from your shoulder, and then bring the bottom half of your arm up so your hand reaches the neck of the guitar. Do not rest your elbow on your leg, a table or have it tucked into your side.

Form a U shape with your hand. The thumb should be in about line with finger 1 or the gap between fingers 1 and 2. Then place the neck of the guitar into this U shape. Be sure not to let the neck rest heavily in your hand, but it should be supported by a slight touch on your palm close to the first finger.



This is the general shape you must keep but there is plenty of room for variation. Firstly you can vary the basic shape to suit what you're playing at the time. Also you can vary the basic shape to suit your individual comfort. You can see the U shape here of the chord hand.



The thumb should be reasonably straight all the time. It doesn't have to be perfectly straight - just reasonably straight. Sometimes it will lean a little more towards the neck or it will lean a little more towards the body of the guitar, but it should always be standing up.

Though the thumb should maintain this upright position it may move from being right around the back of the neck to popping over the top of the neck.

Thumb around the back.



Thumb poking over the top.



Both positions are used in rock guitar playing. If you watch guitarists as they play you'll notice that they change the shape of their hand to make playing different parts of a song easier. You have to experiment with the position of your thumb and the shape of your hand as you are playing. Find the best shape for the things you are playing at the time, but always within the basic framework.

So that you have the full length of your fingers to play with make sure to keep your knuckles around the front of the guitar. Don't hide any part of your fingers under or around the back of the neck.

Your fingers should now be able to curl around the front of the fret board and hit the strings in a hammer like action. Use only the tips of your fingers.

Though we say that you should use the tips of your fingers there are many ways of doing this. (In the same way that the thumb will vary its shape and position to suit what you're playing.)

There are two angles to think about. The first of which is the angle of up and down towards the ceiling or floor. The second angle is leaning forward or backwards towards the body or head of the guitar.

The up and down angle.

The basic angle is to have the first joint of your fingers standing quite straight.

Other times your fingers will lean over more towards the ceiling i.e. your knuckle will be further over than the tip of your finger.

This is very common for finger two. By leaning finger two over there will be enough room for fingers one and three to get on properly.

The fingers can also lean more towards the floor.

See here how finger two is quite straight into the guitar.



Now finger 2 is leaning up and over towards the ceiling.



This example shows the D chord. Fingers 1 and 2 are quite straight but finger 2 is leaning right up and over.



The forward and backward angle.

The basic angle is to have your fingers leaning back just a little towards the neck of the guitar like in the picture here.



Other times the fingers will be quite straight like the pic on the left.



In all of these options the finger is on its tip, but finding the correct position for what you are playing.

