

When cousin Tim came over this Christmas ('06) he asked me for a few tips to get him going on the guitar, but Christmas being Christmas the time flew by and we never got round to it. So as promised, here is a beginner's lesson. Thinking about it, most of my stuff is aimed at people who can play or have some experience, so here is;

'A Beginners Guide to the playing the Guitar'.

Firstly, the strings point towards the audience (couldn't resist that one), and contrary to legend, you dont play it with your teeth like Jimi Hendrix did.

You'll have to be in tune first, if you have a piano the notes for each string are these;



| | | | | | | |
|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Note ... | E | A | D | G | B | E |
| String.. | 6th | 5th | 4th | 3rd | 2nd | 1st |

If you dont have a piano buy a guitar tuner, much easier.

No 1. The right hand strums the strings, usually with a guitar pick or plectrum but for now your thumb will do. Dont copy what you see on TV, the right arm shouldn't go up and down, it should be just a wrist movement. Put your right hand above the strings and raise your right wrist a little, then you can turn you forearm as if you were winding up a clock or turning a key, that will make your right hand strum the strings up and down.

We'll leave the right hand there, just stumming up and down, one strum as your thumb goes downward and one strum as it catches the strings upward, on its return. Simple.

No 2. Now comes the nice bit. You'll need to hold down some chords to make the thing sound nice. I won't labour any music theory here as you are just beginning, and anyway, you can always get my book, 'The Guitar, My Way' if you really want to get serious. Suffice to say that harmony comes in families of chords, and they are grouped together because they sound nice, that's all there is to it.

Let's try a few, here are the basic chords for the key of G major, just copy the pictures, the first string (the thin one) is one the right;



In songs these chords are usually played in a certain order but for now you can just bang around on them, you can't really make a mistake. This is because they are so closely related.

In written music form a chord sequence may look like this;



The dash's after each chord denote the strums, that is; the name of the chord then, strum, strum, strum. Those are the four beats of the bar.

The / sign with a dot above and below means repeat the previous bar.

So far you have you right hand strumming up and down in tempo (in time) and you are practicing changing chords. The trick to changing chords quickly is to start your move to the next chord early. That way you get there on time, that is the first beat of the next bar with the new chord. For example, when you have to change from G to C, treat the last bar of G as having only three beats, use the fourth beat to change to C, that way you arrive at the next chord (of C) on time, then the whole song will hold itself together.

That goes for all chord changes, **START OUT EARLY** to arrive on time. And as you practice and play more songs, and gain experience, the gap between the chords will get shorter.

To complete this family of chords we have to include the 'relative minor' chords. Every major chord has relative minor (they sound the same only sadder).



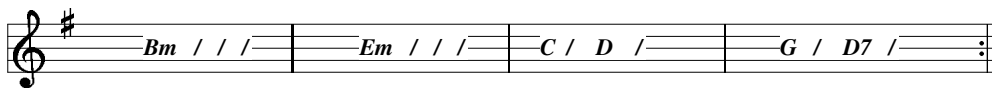
E minor is the relative minor of G; A minor of C; and B minor of D.

Your first real challenge is playing the chord of B minor. It is a 'Barre' chord. (Not to be confused with the musical 'bar', that is the distance between two verticle lines on the music stave).

The Barre chord is where your first finger left hand stretches across all of the strings. This makes an artificial end to the fretboard. Then with your other fingers you create a new chord. To my mind, if you can do this

correctly, you can become a good player. I must add that many beginners give up at this point. The reason for this is quite simple, they don't bring their left wrist far enough around the back of the guitar neck to make their first finger dead straight, then they think the 'dreaded barre chord' is impossible, the secret is where your thumb is.

Finally, here is a chord sequence for you to practice. It's not any particular song but it may sound like quite a few because the chords are all related, and they do all go in the right direction.



Notice that there can be more than one chord per bar. In this case there are two beats or strums of each.

Your next job is to get some song books, people like, The Beatles or Bob Dylan are good. In fact anyone whose music you are familiar with, that's so that if you make a mistake you'll know it, and just keep ploughing on with the chords. Pretty soon you'll be amazing yourself and your friends.

Remember, this is just the start. There are eleven other major keys so you have a lot of practice to do.

Keep playing, and above all, enjoy it.