

SO YOU'VE DECIDED TO PLAY GUITAR

by Dago Garcia

HEY!

I'm Dago Garcia, and I've been playing guitar for over 20 years. By no means do I believe I am the ultimate expert in everything guitar, but I have a passion for the instrument and a desire to see people become the best versions of themselves. I'm writing this because I had a thought in traffic about how awesome it would have been if someone wrote a simple, easy-to-follow guide to getting started when I was a kid. I did a lot of guessing, breaking, and reading trying to find the answers. At the end of the day, this isn't supposed to quell your curiosity or discourage you from finding your own answers. I want this to encourage you and make you feel like someone is in your corner, cheering you on.

THANK YOU

I want to thank my wife who was like, “Yeah, that sounds like a great idea.” She’s been a big reason why I rediscovered my love for the instrument in my 30s after spending some time away. Big thanks to my best friends Tim and Jason for being the best music partners I could ask for during a time where I was developing as a musician. Finally, big thanks to all my guitar heroes from Jim Hall to Randy Rhoades. This is for the next generation of players, maybe. Special thanks to Elise Cimino and Jeremy Blake for editing this booklet.

If you want to thank me for writing this booklet, please make a donation towards my guitar habit via Venmo

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Here are some terms you'll run into along your guitar journey.

Action - space between your strings and the fretboard

Arpeggios - notes of a chord played individually

Beats per minute - tempo is measured in how many beats or pulses occur in one minute

Bends - technique of bending a note to a different pitch while fretted

Bridge - metal hardware on the body of the guitar where strings are passed through and guided to the headstock

Capo - a device that allows you to easily change the key of your guitar by holding down strings across the fretboard on your desired fret

Effects pedal - a device that alters your guitar signal before sending the signal to your amplifier

Fret - a piece of metal slotted into the fret board placed at the point of a specific note value

Fretboard - front part of the neck where frets are placed and notes are played

Headstock - the end of the guitar neck that houses the guitar's tuning mechanisms

Intonation - the precision of your guitar's fretted notes to their actual value. Is that A you're playing actually an A or slightly sharp/flat?

Metronome - a device that produces a click at a specific tempo while. These are a helpful tool when working on timing.

Nomenclature - a chord's name

Nut - Piece of plastic, bone, or synthetic bone that guides the strings through the headstock and into the tuner pegs

Pickup - magnets in electric guitars that pick up the frequencies of string vibrations

Saddle - holds the strings in place at the bridge. Can be adjusted for height and string tension.

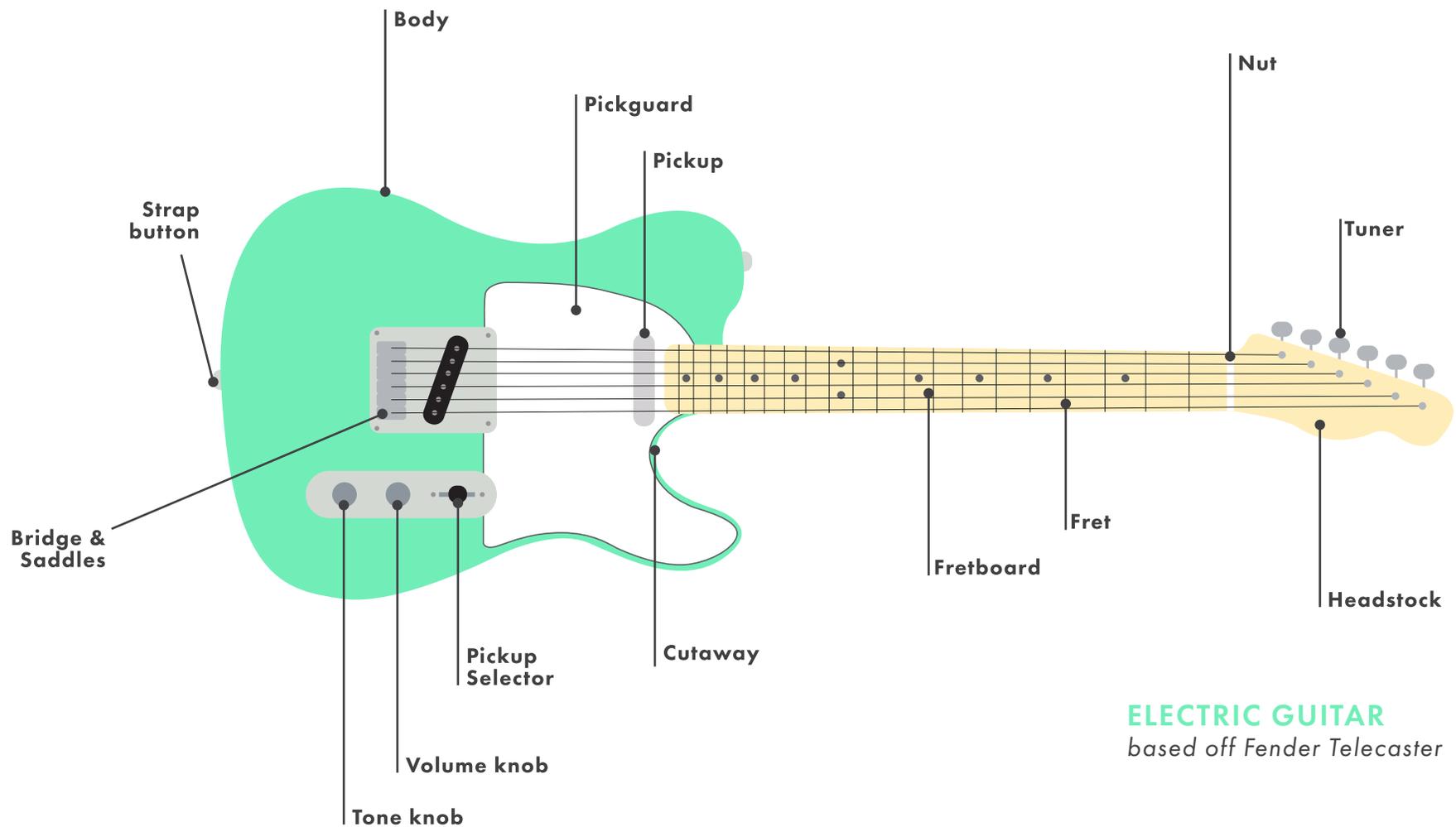
String gauge - the thickness of a guitar's strings

Sustain - when you hit a note how long it rings out

Tone - the feel and vibe of your guitar's signal

Wattage - an amplifier's output

WHAT'S THAT CALLED?



ELECTRIC GUITAR
based off Fender Telecaster

PICKING A GUITAR

It needs to feel good in your hands. Flat out, you'll know when you pick it up. But, that's not really helpful right now. Let's talk about types of guitars.

Types of guitars

Acoustic guitars

Acoustic guitars don't need amplification. They tend to be tougher to play because they often lack the ability to adjust string height and have girther strings than electric guitars. Acoustic guitars are great for beginners who don't mind a challenge and don't want to drop money on all the accessories for...

Electric guitars

Electric guitars have been around for almost 100 years. In that time, because of advances in technology

and taste, there is an electric guitar for every occasion. Inside these guitars are a series of electronics and circuits connected to pickups. These pickups are magnets that pick up the vibrations of your strings. That signal is sent out to an amplifier or your pedalboard through the guitar's input via an instrument cable.

Pretty cool, huh?

The electric guitar's allure lies in the different styles and combinations you can find. Acoustic guitars get diverse with different body shapes and cutaway options for access to higher strings. However, electric guitars have saddles that adjust string tension and height, easy ways to adjust intonation, different style pickups and woods that affect tone and sustain.

What you need to know

Does it feel right in your hands? While learning and growing as a musician, nothing is more discouraging and frustrating than using a piece of equipment that isn't right for you. And remember, the price of your guitar or gear isn't going to make you a great guitarist—practice and dedication will. Here's what to look for:

Body

Does the guitar sit in your lap comfortably? Honestly, you're supposed to practice standing up, but if you just want to strum around sitting down, nothing is worse than a guitar slipping out from under you.

Neck width and style

There's all kinds of neck styles, widths, materials, and finishes. What's most important is that your hand feels comfortable on the neck and you can reach all the notes on the fretboard comfortably. Remember, you're

not going to be playing chords across six frets just yet. How does it feel when you play the lighter gauge strings? How does it feel when you really have to apply the pressure to play chords?

Action

If you really like the neck of the guitar you've found but don't like the height of the strings, an electric guitar will most likely have saddles that you can adjust the height of to give you the desired separation of string to fret.

If you're new to the guitar, have a professional or experienced guitarist help you adjust your string height.

Guitar buying tip

If you are buying from a retailer or boutique shop, ask if the guitar has been set up by a professional. If not, see if they'll do it for free or a reduced price. You are buying a guitar from them after all. If you're just starting out, I would avoid setting up your own guitar.

PICKING AN AMP

You decided on an electric guitar. I see you have impeccable taste. You'll need something to plug that sucker into. Here are your choices:

Tube amp

I'm not going to get into the complexity of how this works. But, tube amps are the preferred piece of equipment for most guitarists. They offer warm tones and authentic sounds that other types of amps and gear have tried to replicate for years. There's nothing like the real thing. However, tube amps can be more expensive and require more maintenance in the long run. Tube amps are a commitment.

Solid state amp

Solid state amps are more affordable and have gotten much better over the years. However, the pitfalls are that you'll never get that genuine tube tone out of it. If you are just starting out, a small, low-wattage solid state amp is going to be perfect. It doesn't get too loud, and it's not that big of an investment. Many have built-in reverb and "dirty" channels that give you enough distortion or drive to get you going.

GUITAR EFFECTS

If you're just starting out, I don't think effects are a path you'll want to go down until you're comfortable with fretting notes on your instrument and playing chords. Nothing worse than turning on a delay pedal and hitting a dozen dead notes that just repeat for eternity.

Types of effects

Here's a quick rundown of what typical effects you'll find:

Volume pedal

A pedal that lowers and increases the signal from your guitar to your other pedals or amp.

Distortion/Overdrive/Fuzz

I'll definitely get criticism for putting all of these together. Each have a different approach to the same desired result, which is to give your guitar signal crunch and grit to cut through the mix and create sustain.

Delay

This repeats your guitar's signal at different frequencies

Reverb/Echo

This gives your guitar signal the effect that you're in a big room or auditorium.

Wah

It goes bow-chikka-wow-wow-chikka-wow-wow

Tremolo/Vibrato

Another set that is different but achieves a similar goal. These effects modulation your signal. They give movement and rhythm to your notes.

What to get started with

If someone asked me what I would get tomorrow if I had to build a pedal board quickly, I would get:

- tuner;
- overdrive or distortion pedal;
- delay; and
- if your amp doesn't have a reverb effect built in, a reverb or echo pedal.

The order your put your pedals in matters as well. There's no right answer, but this is an order that gets you straightforward results.



HOW DO I START LEARNING?

Tuning your guitar

Tuning is everything! There are several ways and techniques to tune your guitar in a pinch. You can look those up. The most sure fire way is using a clip-on, plug-in, or pedal tuner. Make sure it's set to 440Hz.

Here is the standard tuning for a guitar.

(Thickest to thinnest)

6th stringE

5th string A

4th string D

3rd string.....G

2nd string B

1st stringE

STRINGS

Changing your strings is an important part of life with your guitar. Find a friend or YouTube tutorials to walk you through changing your strings. When it comes to buying strings, there's no right answer on brand and gauge. You will have to try them out.

Lighter gauges like .9 and .10 are easier on your fingers and give you a bright tone.

Heavier gauges like .11, .12, and .13 give you some heft to your tone, but they can wear your fingers down.

Understanding the power of the guitar

Rhythm

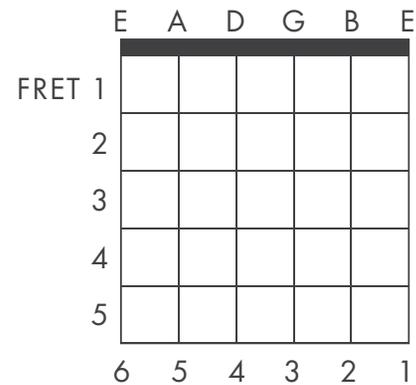
Rhythm guitar lays the rhythmic and tonal foundation for songs. Chords play an important part in creating harmony, movement, and tension in music. Great rhythm playing is as important as lead guitar lines and solos.

Lead

Lead guitar is built on melody, harmony, and timing. Busy lead guitar parts can be breathtaking, but picking your moments and letting a song or chord progression breathe is a talent. Lead guitar lines are meant to support the musical destination of a song.

Chord diagrams

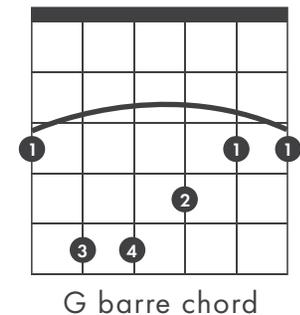
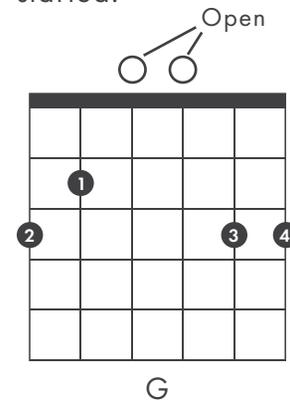
Chord diagrams are going to be your best friend for years. These diagrams explain where your fingers go to create specific chords.



Fingers are also assigned numbers.

- 1 - Index
- 2 - Middle
- 3 - Ring
- 4 - Pinkie
- T - Thumb

Here are a couple of chord diagrams to get you started.



Reading chord chart

Chord charts are a quick way to convey a song's structure to a musician. Usually, a song's lyrics will accompany a chord chart in order for the musician to follow along. Strumming rhythm and timing is often not explained. That's where your natural rhythm and musicianship come in.

"Every Rose Has Its Thorn" by Poison

G

Cadd9

Every rose has its thorn.

G

Cadd9

Just like every night has its dawn.

G

D

C

G

Just like every cowboy sings a sad, sad song.

G

C

Every rose has its thorn.

Switching from chord to chord is going to be hard at first, but keep a positive mindset. Every day you are getting a little better.

Tablature

Tablature (tabs) have been a helpful tool for guitarists for decades. These charts individualize each string and show you what frets you need to play in order.

Rhythm is often not provided, but specific techniques are designated like:

- hammer-on (h)
- pull-off (p)
- slide (s, /, \),
- vibrato (~)

Listen along to Led Zeppelin's "The Ocean" with your tab open for rhythm and tone.

```
e _____  
B _____  
G _____  
D - 5 h 7 - 5 h 7 - 5 _____ 5 _____ 7 - 7 -  
A _____ 7 - 5 h 7 - 5 h 7 - 4 - 5 -  
E _____ 8 _____
```

PRACTICE TIPS

Ear training

Radio trick

Growing up, I would turn on the radio and play along with everything I would hear. I would try to figure out the chord progression by finding the root notes to chords along the low-E and A strings. Then, I would try to solo over the progression. I would do this for hours trying to improve my ear.

TV/movie trick

This trick I learned in high school as well. Turn on your TV and flip it to any channel. Try to match the mood of the characters on screen with what you're playing. This will be difficult to begin with, but mood and tone are almost as important as what you're playing. Soft and gentle vs. tough and attacking playing make a world of difference.

Technique training

Spider

The purpose of this exercise is to get your hands moving across the fretboard with more ease and precision. The spider technique in the tab below is a big help. For an added challenge, leave your fingers on the fretted note until it's time to play the same fret on the string above it.

```
e ————— 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 —  
B ————— 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 —  
G ————— 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 —  
D ————— 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 —  
A ————— 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 —  
E — 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 —————
```

Strumming patterns

This might be one of the hardest things to get down at the beginning. My biggest piece of advice is listen to your favorite songs, mute the strings of the guitar with your fretting hand and with a pick or your thumb, match the rhythm of the song with your strumming hand. It's going to sound like a lot of scratching, but the rhythm will eventually sync up. From there, add chords and whatever else you see fit.

Sometimes, guitar guides can be useful and plot out strumming patterns for its readers. Here are some useful symbols to remember for the future:

Downstroke 

Upstroke 

Mute 

PRACTICE

These aren't the only techniques or drills to get you where you want to be. There are plenty more you can find online or through courses. BUT! The only way to get better early on is to keep practicing, which can feel boring and frustrating. Find what you love about playing guitar and chase that feeling. It'll pay off in the end.

Two quick tips:

- Place your guitar in a higher traffic area. Don't put it in a closet or in a room you do not enter frequently. You'll forget about it.
- Play at least 5 minutes a day. A song. A scale. An arpeggio. Anything. Something is better than nothing.

BASICS TO LEARN

Scales

C Major Scale

e ————— 7 - 8 —

B ————— 8 - 10 —

G ————— 7 - 9 - 10 —

D ————— 7 - 9 - 10 —

A ————— 7 - 8 - 10 —

E — 8 - 10 —

The major scale is the basis for almost all modern Western music. Even the minor scale is just a variance of the major scale. This is the granddaddy of them all. Learn it well before moving on to minor scales or any other modes. This is home. The most important

takeaway from this tab should be that each scale note is called a degree. Each degree has a cute little name assigned to it. This will come in handy when learning modes and chord progressions in the future.

<i>scale degree</i>	I	ii	iii	IV	V	iv	vii ^o
<i>note value</i>	C	D	E	F	G	A	B
<i>chord value</i>	major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
<i>degree name</i>	tonic	supertonic	mediant	subdominant	dominant	submediant	leading one

A warning about getting too deep

I have gone down the path of becoming obsessed with where scales or modes go and what they're supposed to do. Before you do that, because it can be really alluring, remember that at the end of the day, theory, scales and chord names are all there to give you an idea of what you're hearing. It is not a rule book for what is right or wrong when it comes to creating. If you play the "wrong" note enough times it becomes music.

Learning lead line difficulties and solutions

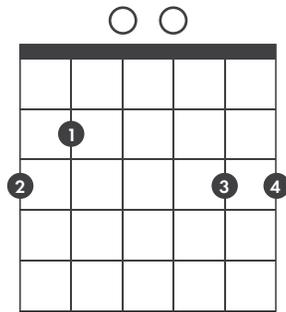
You'll want to start learning solos pretty quickly. My advice, again, is to be patient. Also, pay special attention to the patterns and runs you keep seeing in tablatures. Rock and pop music are often built on the major scale (sometimes mixolydian or aeolian). Practice those little patterns individually. They'll come in handy when learning other tunes or making stuff on your own.

Chords

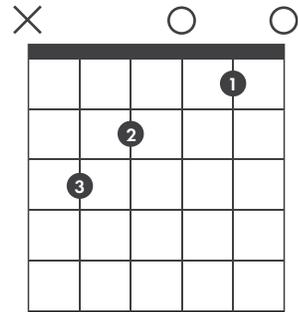
Open chords

Learning all of these open chords is really crucial.

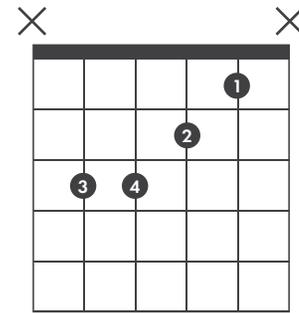
Campfire fodder.



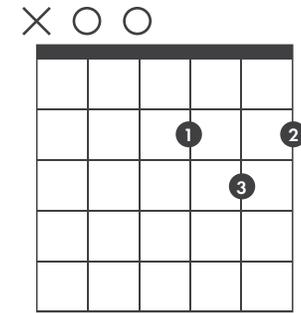
G



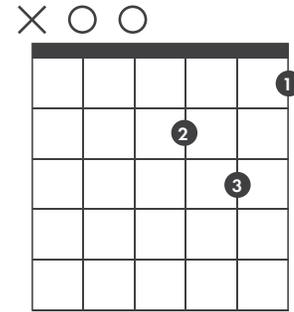
C



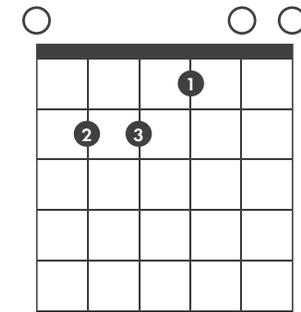
F



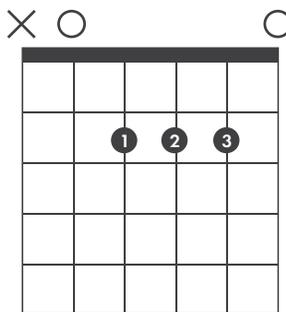
D



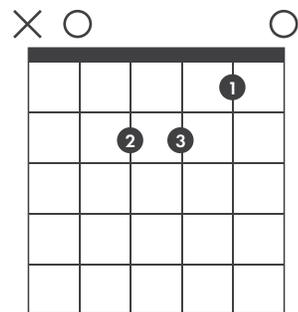
D minor



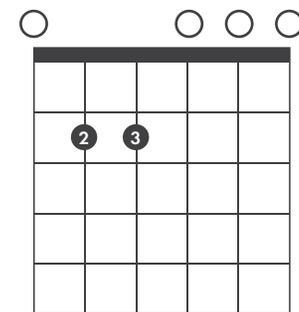
E



A



A minor

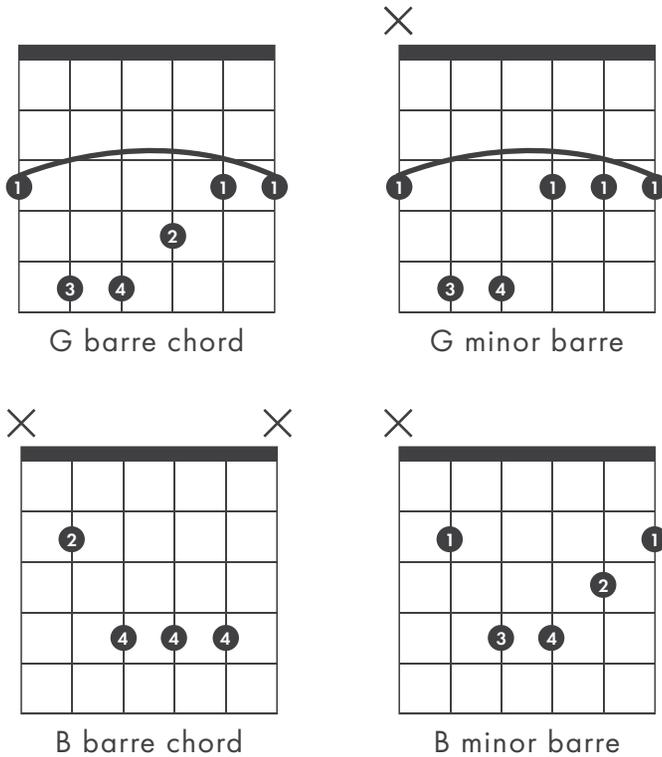


E minor

Barre chords

Learning barre chords opens up other keys, techniques, and musical expression.

The curved line in the diagram means you lay your finger across every string on that fret.

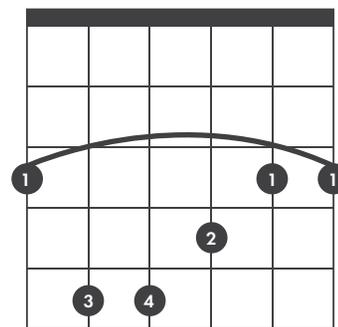


Major vs. minor

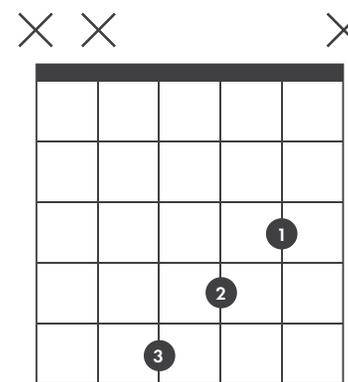
As you can tell, there isn't much difference between major and minor barre chords. Although the difference is minor (hardy har har), the moods are completely different. Play around with the sounds and see what you like best.

Barre chord difficulties and solutions

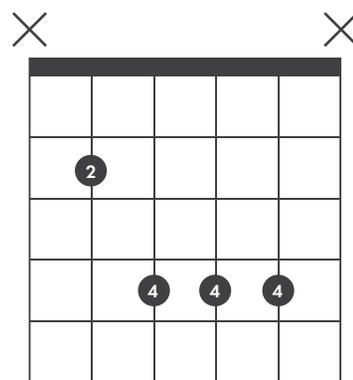
Barre chords are a big hurdle for guitarists to get over. Sometimes your hands just aren't strong enough. You haven't built that stamina. Early on in my learning, I began to deconstruct the chords to make them playable. Instead of playing a G barre chord, I would play a G triad. Same for the A barre chords. Take some time and deconstruct your favorite chords on the fretboard and see what tones or moods you can build. Nomenclature later. Playing music now.



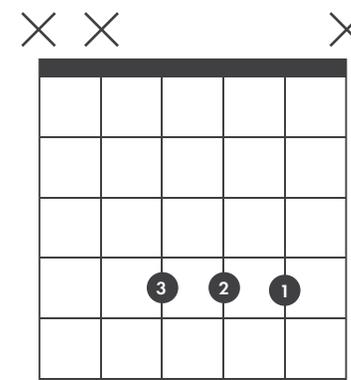
G barre chord



G major triad



B barre chord



B major triad

I hope this little manual has given you some insight in what awaits you in your guitar journey. Each one of these pages could have entire books written about them. There's a lot of information out there, and it might be difficult to find what you're looking for. Here are some resources and YouTube channels that can come in handy.*

Books

Teach Yourself to Play Guitar: A Quick and Easy Introduction for Beginners
by David M. Brewster

The Only Guitar Book You'll Ever Need: From Tuning Your Instrument and Learning Chords to Reading Music and Writing Songs, Everything You Need to Play like the Best
by Marc Schonbrun, Ernie Jackson

YouTube Channels

Music is Win (*Novice - Intermediate*)
Paul Davids (*Novice - Intermediate*)
TomoFujitaMusic (*Novice - Expert*)
Rick Beato (*Novice - Intermediate*)
The-Art-of-Guitar (*Novice - Intermediate*)
Jens Larsen (*Expert*)

Phone Apps

Fender Play (*Paid | Guitar lessons for all levels*)
Guitar Tuna (*Free | Tuning app*)
Soundbrenner (*Free | Metronome app*)
GuitarToolkit (*Paid | Tuner, metronome, chords, and scales*)

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