

GUITAR GUIDE

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Learning a new instrument is exciting, rewarding and at times challenging for all beginners, however, we understand that there is pressure on the parent as well. Which is the right instrument to buy for home practice? What do they need for their lessons? What do you need to do to support this venture? This short guide has been written from our list of FAQs and will hopefully answer any questions you might have. If you need any more information, you can get in touch any time via e-mail or phone and we will be happy to help.

Books

The book required will depend on the type of guitar your child would like to learn, see the "Acoustic or Electric" section for advice. Your child will be learning from one of the following books, to begin with:

[Rockschool Guitar – Debut](#)

OR

[Rock School Acoustic Guitar – Debut](#)

Please discuss the recommended syllabus with your child's teacher before purchasing a book.

Choosing the Right Guitar

There are many different brands and styles to choose from and it can quickly get confusing. We've outlined some of the options below, to help with your decision. Whilst purchasing an instrument can be a large financial commitment, it is important to note that quality is an important consideration when choosing a guitar. Try to go for best value for money over the cheapest available option.

Acoustic or Electric?

The decision between acoustic and electric is usually one of personal preference, what style of music does your child want to learn? Do they want to strum songs like Ed Sheeran, or play heavy riffs and solos like the Foo Fighters? Have a listen to the songs listed in the debut grades above if you are unsure. Your child's enjoyment and engagement with the songs they are learning should be the highest consideration, but below we have compiled some other pros and cons to consider.

Acoustic

Pros

- No amplification needed, fewer accessories, easier to pick up and play,
- Unmistakeable acoustic sound, which cannot be replicated on an electric.

Cons

- tougher/heavier gauge strings which are harder to push down,
- fewer tonal options (different sounds and effects)
- cannot adjust volume, practice at home may be louder than electric guitar practice using headphones.

Electric

Pros

- wider variety of shapes, sizes, and features,
- strings tend to be lighter and easier on the fingers,
- more options for tonal adjustments,
- can be plugged into headphones, good for quiet practice at home.

Cons

- additional equipment costs - requires an amplifier or headphones.

It is possible to buy Electro-Acoustic guitars that combine some of the features above, giving you the acoustic sound, with the ability to plug in and amplify the sound further, this can give you the best of both worlds, but stylistically would still fall more into the "acoustic" category.

Guitar Size

While your child is developing and growing it is recommended to get the right guitar for their size. When purchasing or hiring a guitar you can choose any type of guitar in the following sizes:

- Up to the age of twelve we recommend a 3/4 size acoustic or electric guitar (electric will also require an amplifier and necessary leads).
- For students aged twelve and above we recommend a full-size acoustic or electric of your choosing based on budget.

New or used?

A new, entry-level guitar is often the best way to go in terms of value for money without unwanted surprises. These can also be purchased in 'starter packs' which often include the basic necessities such as a strap, spare strings, picks, a small amplifier (if electric) etc.. New entry-level guitars start from around £100-120 whilst second-hand guitars can be found for around £60. However, if purchasing a second-hand or pre-owned guitar you should be wary of the condition of the instrument. Occasionally instruments may be sold with potentially unfixable problems which are unseen to the untrained eye. You can find good beginner guitars on sites such as Amazon and Argos, but you may wish to seek out local instrument stores too; local shops can offer try-before-buy as well as reassurance from the merchant's expertise.

Other Equipment

Many beginner guitars will come in a pack with everything below included, however if you buy the guitar on its own, you should also consider purchasing the following:

- Case
- Strap
- Plectrums (sometimes called picks)
- Tuner
- Metronome

And for electric guitar only:

- Amplifier (for use at home, we have amplifiers available to plug into during lessons at school)
- Headphones

Maintenance

Aside from keeping the guitar in tune (which should be done every time it is played) and changing the strings, guitars are pretty resilient, and if well looked after they require little maintenance. It is always best to keep your guitar in conditions of low humidity and away from locations of drastic temperature fluctuation - such as radiators, conservatories, sheds etc. Any heavy maintenance should be carried out by an experienced luthier (stringed instrument repairer). If required, your guitar instructor should be able to help you identify any significant issues your instrument may have.

Changing the Strings

This depends a lot on how often you practise/play. Strings will last a long time but, if used regularly will quickly lose their sheen and brightness of the sound. One recommended way to tell would be to look at the thin B and E strings. Do they still shine or are they dull in appearance? The sound can be a big giveaway too. Are all of the strings dull in sound? It's advisable to go by these guidelines:

- Practise and play every day - Change every 3 weeks
- Practise and play often - Change every 4-6 weeks
- Practise and play once in a while - Change every 2-3 months

Strings are graded by their "gauge" (thickness) with the thinnest being the (E) string. For electric, the standard lightest gauge is 'nines'. For acoustic, it's 'elevens', but 'tens' are also available and are usually labelled as "extra lights". The lower the number, the lighter and thinner the string. Naturally, lighter strings are easier to play, but the more experienced player may sometimes opt for heavier strings as they have a bolder tone and resonate with the body of the instrument more. It's all about preference, but generally, beginners will want as light a gauge as possible for ease of play. You can always ask your instructor for advice on string choices.