

Guitar primer – 17 essential points to remember *-written by David Taub*

1. Always start with a warm up to get your fingers, wrist, and picking hand warm and loose. If you have come in from the cold, warm up your hands with warm water. Also do the finger stretches and warm ups that I have discussed – they really help.
2. Wash and thoroughly dry your hands before picking up the guitar. It will keep oily residues and dirt off the fingerboard and your hands will be clean to pick and finger notes.
3. Keep the fingernails on your fret hand short. If not your nails will interfere with the fretting of notes on the fingerboard. If you press straight down with one finger on a solid surface, like a tabletop, and you feel the nail hitting the table before your fingertip, your nails are too long and will need to be cut.
4. Keep your guitar neck and fret board clean. Wipe it down after playing – this keeps the neck clean and prolongs string life.
5. A small degree of fingertip soreness and wrist discomfort is normal for the beginning guitarist. This will get less and less and eventually disappear. But if you feel big pain in the wrist or arm, STOP. Check that you are utilizing proper technique. Check that your fret hand is always close to the fret board, fingers not flying out of position, wrist is down, fingers cupped and on your fingertips when fretting notes and chords. Ensure your thumb does not slide out of position.
6. Big pain is your bodies' way of telling you something may be wrong. Give it a little rest and go back to it later and make sure you always use the proper techniques.
7. Many of the concepts and applications we are going to study may take a little while to master. Even the fingering of certain chords can take quite some time to master. This is normal so please do not get discouraged. Remember, YOU CAN DO IT! It takes time to get your fingers, tendons, and muscles used to bending in the way that is necessary to play guitar. Take your time, be patient and it will come – I guarantee it!
8. Playing slow and in time is ALWAYS better than playing fast and sloppy. Always master a concept at slow speeds before trying to play it faster. Speed will come in time.
9. Practice the right things. One of the most important things you need when learning guitar is STRUCTURE. You just can't be practicing any old thing. Follow the practice regimens and routines that I have set up and you will be rocking out in no time.
10. You don't necessarily have to set aside one or two hour chunks of time to play each day. I find a few 15 or 20-minute blocks of time throughout the day works real well. Or if you have a spare ten minutes pick up the guitar and practice. You will be amazed how all those ten-minute sessions really add up. Don't think that you HAVE to have an hour block for practice to have value.
11. For the most part keep your thumb anchored firmly on the back of the guitar neck about even with your second finger or between your first and second fingers, (except when needed to mute strings – a very important concept to playing chords and notes cleanly that we will study later).
12. Eventually you want to try and always memorize the notes that make up a chord or a scale, not just the fingering or shapes. It will make you a much better guitarist in the long run and you will be able to speak "the language" of music when conversing with other musicians, writing songs, playing with your friends, or in a band situation.
13. Always try to utilize the proper fingering when playing chords or single notes. This will assist you greatly as you move onto advanced concepts and lead guitar playing.
14. Whether you are picking notes individually or playing chords make sure the volume of your down strokes and up-strokes are equal. You don't want nice crisp down-strokes and then wimpy upstrokes.
15. Develop your ear – I say that often as I feel it is one of the most important things you can do as a guitarist.
16. A little theory is a good thing – learning some will move your playing forward faster and you will be able to see better how all the musical concepts overlap and can be connected. I think it gives a guitar player a lot more vision and I think it's important to know some theory and how to apply it on the instrument.
17. HAVE FUN AND STAY POSITIVE – practice does not have to be drudgery!