

Buying Your First Guitar

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Learning to play the guitar can be a very exciting time. However, you can quickly feel confused and overwhelmed when it comes to buying your first guitar. Now more than ever, guitar players are barraged with a myriad of choices of guitars for every age, size and pocketbook. The downside is feeling a bit lost among the labyrinth of choices.

The most important decision in buying your guitar is where you will get it from. Big box mega warehouses, online shops and local music stores all offer very similar looking products. Which is the best choice? Where will you find the highest quality and the lowest price?

The best advice you can get is to avoid the big stores like Target and Wal-Mart. These stores try to carry EVERYTHING, and the quality of product is questionable at best. Most of these guitars are poorly made, do not stay in tune, and are uncomfortable to play. In fact, you are better off buying the cheapest guitar at a local music store than the priciest guitar at the big box store.

A website might grab your attention, too. Most people interested in guitar always seem to end up on their mailing lists for colorful catalogs and low prices. And while that may seem like the best idea, keep in mind that you won't be able to try out your online guitar, or have it serviced and maintained through their website.

The logical and best sense is to buy local the first time you decide to buy a guitar. Local music stores specialize in local musicians. They have a knowledgeable staff and are there to help. Think of them as your guitar guide. They will help you cut through the jungle-sized pile of guitars to help you find what's best for you.

So, you are at the music store. Rows of shiny new guitars in every color and style await your anxious fingertips. Don't be afraid to ask for some help. That is what the staff is there for. Explain that you are looking for your first guitar and give them your budget. They will ask you important questions. Such as...

- **“Do you want an acoustic or an electric?”** This will probably be the most important question you will be asked. Both have their benefits and disadvantages, which will be discussed here.

ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Benefits: Needs no amplifier. Very portable. You can take with you to the beach, a campfire, the park or a friend's house.

Disadvantages: These guitars are big and bulky, causing some initial discomfort. The strings are a bit thicker to make the guitar sound louder. This also makes your fingers hurt in the beginning, since you will have to push down harder to get a good sound.

ELECTRIC GUITAR

Benefits: its smaller body and neck allow for more initial comfortable playing. Strings are also thinner, making it easier to press down with your fingers. Amplified, it is very versatile sounding. You can add many effects too.

Disadvantages: Requires a source of power (electricity, batteries) to get sound. Not as easily portable when you are forced to use electricity.

O.K. You've made your decision on what kind of guitar type... now what? Sit down and try a couple of guitar out. Strum them, even if you do not know how to play. Use your senses. (Just don't taste it. You'll get some looks) Do you like how it looks? Does it feel comfortable when it's in your hands? Don't be shy. Try several and mentally take notes on what you like. There typically are not "good" guitars or "bad" guitars, just *different* guitars.

If you narrowed your search down to one or two, ask some questions. Is it new? What kind of warranty does it have? Does the store offer any additional services with the sale, such as periodical maintenance and adjustments? Does it come with a case?

At the point you have decided you want to take that special guitar home, you should ask more questions concerning the price. Yes, you can get it for less. If the store will not go down on their price, ask them to include extra items to spice up the sale, such as picks, cables, strings, stands, straps, cords, books, etc. for the same price. Get the most for your money, and don't be afraid to ask for the discount.

If the whole shopping thing is too scary or overwhelming, invite a friend who plays guitar to come along with you. They will be an invaluable asset. They will be able to answer some of your questions before your visit, and may get you to think of other important question you might of not otherwise though of. Plus, they will be flattered you asked them. They may even help you clarify what you want and even get you a better deal.

Purchasing your first guitar doesn't have to be scary pr impossible. Just do some research (like you are doing now) and educate yourself on what's available. Don't forget to have fun. That is what playing guitar is all about. When you put the right guitar in your hands, you will know you have found the one that is coming home with you. Say hello to your new lil' friend!