

# Learning Guitar:

Generalized Curriculum, Stages of Learning,  
and What To Expect When Studying Guitar.

I've worked for years at building a solid curriculum for guitar students of all ages and levels, with two primary goals:

- To teach all the skills required to play every type of mainstream music in a structured and academically sound way.
- To teach in a way that's fun and motivating at every stage of learning, and satisfying for students of all ages, levels, and musical interests. I specifically avoid the character and content typical of traditional academic approaches.

I work hard at maintaining a casual character and a fun atmosphere in lessons, but I'm very serious about what I do. I've put this document together for parents of young students and for adult students who are interested in understanding the structure of the learning process and the approach that I've crafted over two decades of professional instruction and performance. I want it to be clear that there's a well designed method behind my teaching approach, based on years of real performance experience and just as many years of academic and "real world" teaching experience. The way I teach has been tested and refined by many thousands of hours in lessons with countless beginner through advanced students. 19 years ago I gave my first professional private lessons. 10 years ago I wrote a complete curriculum for one of the most highly recognized University music schools. In the decade since, I've continued to teach thousands of people to play guitar, and I've seen young children and adults become professional musicians, and many more become active hobbyists and performers in their communities, churches, families, and social groups. This method works, and has been the most enjoyable and effective way I've found to teach students how to play guitar, regardless of stylistic interest, age, and skill level.

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## **Fundamental Materials:**

During the first stages of learning, the primary goal is to build technical ability and to create a foundation of useful fundamental musical skills, both physical and conceptual.

Learning to produce single notes with a solid tone is the first goal to tackle. Learning to press down on the strings with the left hand, and coordinating plucking movements in the right hand is the most basic hurdle to cross. Getting each of the fingers in the left hand to be comfortable pressing down on the strings, using a pick and/or fingers to pluck correct strings in the right hand, and coordinating the two hands to do those things in a synchronized way can take several weeks for a beginning student. Learning to perform those basic movements quickly enough to maintain a beat, and developing the physical dexterity, coordination, concentration, and habitual skills required to play notes with enough facility that they're perceived as "musical", can take several months. Becoming familiar with the two main types of notation used by guitarists (tab and chord diagrams) is another fundamental topic typically covered during the initial phases of learning. Learning how tune the guitar, either with a tuner or by finding equivalent notes on the instrument is also important during the first stage of learning.

Learning how all of the common and essential techniques are performed and notated is typically covered during the first 6-12 months. Here's a complete list of techniques and skills I cover during that period:

- Alternate picking with the pick and fingers in the right hand (the use of up and down strokes with the pick, and alternate fingers when playing fingerstyle).
- Using each of the fingers in the left hand individually to play melodies, and getting used to "1 finger per fret" fingerings - stretching the fingers so they can reach between adjacent frets.
- Playing notes simultaneously - forming chord shapes and double stop shapes in the left hand (3rds, 6ths, 10ths, etc.), plucking two or more strings with the pick and right hand fingers (double stops, chords, and melody/bass techniques).
- Playing power chords (movable E, A, and D shapes and open E, A, D, G, and C shapes), and memorizing all of the common open chord shapes (G, C, D, A, E, F, Am, Em, Dm, A7, E7, D7, G7).
- Learning to perform common strumming patterns with a beat.
- Playing arpeggio patterns and performing cross string picking with the right hand (knowing common repetitive fingerpicking and cross string picking patterns, and recognizing/using "inside" picking with the pick).
- Performing hammer-ons and pull-offs
- Understanding how bar chords work, and how they're notated. Developing the strength and coordination to perform bars, and understanding the concepts required to use movable shapes.
- Learning to name all the notes on the guitar - understanding the order of notes, sharp and flat names, finding equivalent notes, and octaves.
- Becoming familiar with common alternate tunings (especially power chords in dropped D tuning, and recognizing slack tuning).
- Becoming familiar with the basic pentatonic fingerings (1st box and slide extensions), and learning to perform the basic lead techniques: bends, slides, finger rolls (using quick bars with each of the fingers to play melodic patterns), etc.
- Learning about common song form - understanding how verses, choruses, intros, bridges, solos, etc., go together to form complete songs. Learning to play twelve bar blues rhythm patterns in several different ways, knowing several common intros/turnarounds, and being able to play the most common pentatonic licks over the blues and other progressions (both major and minor positions).
- Knowing which chords go together to form songs (understanding roman numeral theory and keys).
- Knowing how to read basic music notation (at least well enough to pick out vocal melodies in the first position).
- Playing Harmonics - Open, Octave, Pinch, and Tapped
- Tapping (for those interested in heavy rock and metal music)
- Using a capo.
- Knowing how to practice effectively.
- Knowing how to use amp, instrument, and effect settings (distortion, reverb, delay, etc.) to create the most common electric guitar sounds.
- Understanding how overdubbed parts fit together on an album and in a band situation.

The above skills are those which are most used by guitarists, regardless of musical style. When students have learned to do the above things with facility and fluency, they can effectively "play guitar". Most students will take 1-2 years to internalize and become fluent in all the above techniques and skills. An extraordinary student with natural facility, lots of drive, and lots of regular daily practice may be able to tackle the above skills within 6 months – but that's really unusual (perhaps 1 out of a thousand dedicated students may accomplish this). It takes time! Typically, it takes several weeks for new topics and techniques to become familiar, and several months for habits to become deeply ingrained. The rate at which habitual skills are created is directly related to the amount of repetitive practice performed. To

build habits, musical skills *have to be* repeated – that's true regardless of innate ability. My focus as a teacher has always been to make the musical materials relevant and enjoyable, and the approach fun and rewarding, so that motivation develops naturally. If the material is enjoyable, students will want to practice, and will look forward to learning new music. This is true regardless of skill level, stylistic interest, and age.

By the time the core skills are learned, a student is able to recognize and perform all the most important and commonly used materials in songs and pieces, and should be able to play a variety of songs and solo pieces all the way through in rhythm. Those skills should be clearly understood and used in music that includes:

- Strummed, arpeggiated, and fingerpicked open chords, bar chords, and power chords.
- Melody and lead techniques, especially as used in pentatonic scale solos: slides, bends, double stops, harmonics.
- Ad hoc accompaniments to songs using chord charts.
- Blues “jams” and improvisations with common chord progressions.
- Bass/melody and chord/melody arrangements.

By the time the above skills are in place, students are also able to read relevant notation and easily learn new songs that contain all the above skills.

#### Some Important Notes:

The most common and effective way to build and ingrain skills is to introduce each new technique with a piece of music, and then to work through increasingly complex and difficult examples in each of the categories. Most students need to learn a large number of similar musical examples before each technique becomes natural and easy to perform. The learning curve for many of the techniques can typically last several months (especially with initial skills, and with techniques such as bars and bends that require lots of physical development). Because the learning curve for a variety of techniques is long, and because students are typically introduced to a variety of techniques at the initial stages (to provide an overall understanding of the instrument, and to maintain interest), the first 6-12 months typically show relatively little fluency, and this is the period during which students are most likely to become frustrated and give up. It's important to be aware that the core skills tend to plateau very quickly after the initial phases of learning, and once they are ingrained, the process of learning guitar becomes much more enjoyable. Along the way, a well selected curriculum of accessible and playable musical examples in each category provides motivation and musical satisfaction, showing interested students that the "light at the end of the tunnel" isn't far off.

By the end of this phase of learning, students will have played through several hundred musical examples, and most students will retain a small-medium sized repertoire of favorite songs and pieces that they can perform comfortably by memory. Many musical examples will be forgotten, but the cumulative effect of learning will remain as general technical ability to perform all common skills, and cognitive ability to recognize common musical elements in music, along with the ability to assimilate new music quickly and easily. That's the desired result – for music to be understandable and easy to play!

For young students, recitals help immeasurably during every stage of learning because they present a goal-oriented way of focusing attention on performance skills, repertoire acquisition, practice habits,

rhythmic discipline, and a general awareness of music as a performance art. Adult students also grow from every sort of performance experience - performance outlets put learned skills to use in a disciplined and satisfying way – that's a primary reason to learn how to play music in the first place – because it's interesting, fun and satisfying! On a practical level, even playing a tune for family and friends can offer perspective about abilities that have been gained and skills that need improvement – performing (and even the anticipation of performing) sheds light on those abilities and deficiencies in a way that's virtually impossible to emulate in other ways..

Preparing recordings is another fundamentally productive activity for students. Recording offers a unique critical perspective concerning performance skills and rhythm, and provides an indelible and concretely rewarding experience for new performers. Recordings provide a snapshot of musical skills that will not be forgotten – they'll be cherished and studied for years.

#### A Note About Music Notation, Tablature, and Other Unique Issues Associated With Learning Guitar:

The most common question by concerned parents and by adult students who are familiar with other instruments is: "Shouldn't we be starting with musical notation and how to read notes?". Most experienced guitar instructors who are interested in providing a useful and enjoyable skill set to their students answer that question with a resounding "no". The guitar works differently than other instruments in several key ways. First, the layout of the instrument allows for a type of notation called "tablature" (tab). Tab notation is as old and accepted a form of notation as music notation, and it is as well entrenched in the experience of every guitarist as music notation is in the experience of other instrumentalists. Music notation is important for guitarists to learn, because it allows for the reading of vocal melodies and music written for other instruments. When it comes to learning to play the instrument, however, it's a very awkward, confusing, and ineffective system. On other instruments, each note is typically found in one unique place - "middle C" on a piano refers to a specific spot on the instrument. This isn't true with the guitar. Middle C, and every other individual note, can be found at many duplicate places on the fretboard (this enables the instrument to play chords and to finger melodies within a small region of the fretboard). What that means is that, unlike with other instruments, a note in musical notation doesn't tell guitarists how to perform a specific action on the instrument. Tab notation does, and because of that, it provides a much more effective means of notating how the fingers should move on the instrument. In addition, tab can be learned quickly - a beginning guitar student can learn to read tablature in one lesson. Learning to read the notes on the guitar typically takes the average beginning student 6 months to a year. Because of this, the learning curve to play even the most simple and common pieces of music in standard musical notation on the guitar is grudgingly long, and most students forced to take that route become bored and quit playing before they ever learn to play anything interesting - and well before they learn any of the common useful skills. Beyond that, reading "music" (standard notation) is simply not necessary for guitarists. Tablature is the most effective and commonly taught method of notation, and is therefore the most commonly published form of notation. Every major publication for guitar, including all reputable modern books, magazines, and Internet publications are published in tab format. Many of those publications include music notation for those who want it, but it's typically not used by the average guitarist.

Many adults who have learned to play other instruments in the traditional way (by learning to read standard notation) find it surprising and even hard to accept that the concept of learning "tab" is a serious and formalized approach to learning the instrument. It is a well accepted, academically sound, and refined method - if you have concerns as a student or parent that tablature will not provide a solid and complete method of learning the instrument, then learning the core skills through music notation is still

possible, but you should be aware that it will take much longer, and that most students who take that path typically get bored, frustrated, confused, and eventually give up before learning how to play.

One other important difference in learning "general" guitar, is that its skill sets are mutually exclusive and categorically separate in a way that's generally not true with other instruments. The primary goal in learning piano, for example, is to learn to read music, and to continually progress through increasingly complex musical examples. This isn't necessarily true with the guitar. It's possible to become proficient at playing advanced classical fingerstyle pieces, for example, without developing even the most basic technical skills required to play power chord rock music (that music uses a pick in the right hand and bend techniques in the left hand). The two make use of mutually exclusive techniques. Developing left hand bar chord technique and complex right hand fingerpicking technique will do nothing to improve techniques used to play blues lead guitar, and *visa versa*. The basic skill sets represent unique and isolated categories of learning, even at the most basic technical level. Because of that, they are *not* necessarily progressive. Each skill set can be taught in a progressive way, but they need to be learned individually - developing one skill set does not necessarily help improve another skill set. This makes the learning process, especially at the beginning levels, slightly different than it is for other instruments. Students will typically be introduced to a variety of skills, so that they can play those skills in "real" music. The learning curve tends to be significantly longer than it is with other instruments – many unique technical skills need to become fluent in order to play mainstream music. A good curriculum for guitar is one that masks that learning curve and provides satisfying musical examples which are easy enough to master throughout the learning process.

One final point concerns the role of the guitar in "real" music - how it's used in various musical settings. The guitar's design enables it to play chords, arpeggios, and unaccompanied melodies easily. It does *not*, however, accelerate at allowing those things to be done simultaneously. Many students get to a point where they've learned many of the basic skills, but feel they don't have a unified understanding of the instrument, or they feel that they can't just sit down and play enough solo pieces straight through in a way that sounds interesting to a casual listener. That stems largely from the fact that the guitar is not primarily used to sit down and play pieces of music all by itself. Even at the highest level of skill, the guitar is used to play along with other people. Whether it's used to accompany a voice, to play rhythm parts in a band, to jam instrumentally with other musicians, or to play lead solos in a song, the guitar typically is used in situations where other musicians are supporting and complimenting the sound. That doesn't mean that the music it creates is simple – it just means that most guitar music is meant to fit together with other parts – just like instruments in an orchestra. At some point, most guitarists realize that the licks and parts they've been learning, which didn't sound complete on their own, are actually the parts they set out to learn. Many parents get concerned that their children are playing rhythm licks, background parts, and lead solos which don't support themselves on their own. It's crucial to realize that in the majority situations where guitar is played, that's what guitarists do! The guitar parts that make up music that you're familiar with, and which sound beautiful and complex to you, are for the most part not meant to stand on their own. Those parts *are* what you hear in the music played by guitarists, and they require the other parts to sound complete: either a singer singing the song, the band playing along to the rhythm guitar part, or the accompaniment supporting the lead guitar solo. The guitar is not set up in the same way as piano, and it cannot play chord-melody and contrapuntal parts with the same ease. It is possible to play music that is just as complex as the most intricate and textured piano pieces, but most of that type of composition and arrangement is done specifically in the classical and jazz styles. And the existing repertoire of such music is much smaller than that of the piano. Furthermore, those existing pieces are much more difficult to play than comparable pieces on the piano, and they don't help develop universally useful skills. Many are based on gimmicks and "guitaristic" techniques, which can't be extended as compositional techniques or applied to general melody/chord arrangement as they are on the

piano. Learning standalone solo arrangements is an important and gratifying skill, but it's only a small part of guitar playing – the role of the guitar is more similar to the role of symphonic instruments used in orchestras and bands – not every instrument gets to play the melody all the time, but all the parts need to be in the arrangement for the music to sound interesting. It's important to be aware that a cohesive, complete, and functional understanding of the guitar involves more than just playing solo pieces – knowing how to use it in a band context, with voice, and with other instruments is just as important, even if it's not as impressive when practiced and heard outside that context.

With all that said, several decades of experience in teaching and performing have yielded repetitive requests for specific pieces of music. Certain musical examples have proven to be accessible and effective at teaching all of the fundamental skills, and certain musical evergreens have emerged as examples that are satisfying to perform, possible to play, and effective at teaching useful skills. Below is a list of examples used by thousands of students with a typical set of cultural influences and normal exposure to mainstream music in our culture. The examples are listed with reference to categorical technical skills they encompass.

ACDC - Back In Black  
ACDC - You Shook Me All Night Long  
Aerosmith - Walk This Way  
Alice In Chains - Them Bones  
Alice In Chains - Rooster  
Alice In Chains - Man In A Box  
Alice in Chains - Would(1)  
Amazing\_Grace\_Bass  
Arlo Guthrie - Alice's Restaurant  
Avril lavigne - Sk8ter Boi  
Bachman Turner Overdrive - You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet  
Bad Company - Feel Like Making Love  
Beatles - Come Together  
Beatles - Day Tripper  
Beatles - Blackbird  
Black Sabbath - Iron Man  
Bob Dylan - Blowing in the Wind  
Bob Marley - Redemption Song  
Bob Seager - That Old Time Rock And Roll  
Bon Jovi - Wanted Dead Or Alive  
Boston - Rock And Roll Band  
Boston - More Than A Feeling  
Buddy Holly - That'll Be The Day  
Carlos Santana & Matchbox20 - Smooth  
Chicago - 25 or 6 to 4  
Chuck Berry - Johnny B. Goode  
Collective Soul - December  
Counting Crows - Mr. Jones  
Cream - Sunshine Of Your Love  
Creations  
Credence Clearwater Revival - Bad Moon Rising  
Creed - With Arms Wide Open

Creed - One Last Breath  
Credence Clearwater Revival - Suzie Q  
Dave Matthews Band - Crash Into Me  
Dave Matthews Band - Satellite  
Dave Mathews Band - Ants Go Marching  
Deep Purple - Smoke On The Water  
Dick Dale - Miserlou  
Dire Straits - Sultans of Swing  
Doobie Brothers - Long Train Running  
Dropped\_D\_Heavy  
Duane Eddy - Peter Gunn  
Eagles - Hotel California  
Eric Clapton - Layla  
Eric Clapton-Tears In Heaven  
Eric Clapton - Lay Down Sally  
Eric Clapton - Wonderful Tonight  
Extreme - More Than Words  
Fuel - Bad Day  
Fuel - Falls On Me  
Fuel - Hemorrhage (In My Hands)  
Garth Brooks - I've Got Friends in Low Places  
Good Charlotte - Lifestyles Of The Rich And The Famous  
Greenday - Basket Case  
Green Day - Time of Your Life  
Green Day - American Idiot - 04 - Boulevard Of Broken Dreams  
Green Day - Brain Stew  
Green Day - When I Come Around  
Guess Who - American Woman  
Guns N' Roses - Sweet Child O' Mine  
Guns N Roses - Paradise City  
Heartbreaker - Led Zeppelin  
Incubus - Drive  
James Taylor - Fire and Rain  
Jewel - Who Will Save Your Soul  
Jewel - You Were Meant For Me  
Jim Croce - Time in a Bottle  
Jimi Hendrix - Purple Haze  
Jimi Hendrix - Star Spangled Banner  
Jimi Hendrix - All Along The Watchtower  
Jimi Hendrix - Hey Joe  
Jimi Hendrix - Little Wing  
Jimi Hendrix - Red House  
Jimi Hendrix - Voodoo Chile  
Jimi Hendrix - Foxy Lady  
Jimmy Buffett- Margaritaville  
John Cougar Mellencamp - Jack and Dianne  
John Mayer - Why Georgia  
Kansas - Dust in the Wind  
Kansas - Carry On My Wayward Son

Kenny Wayne Shepherd - Blue on Black  
Kingsmen - Louie Louie  
Kinks - You Really Got Me  
Kiss - I Wanna Rock and Roll All Night  
Led Zeppelin - Stairway to Heaven  
Led Zeppelin - Over The Hills And Far Away  
Led Zeppelin - Black Dog  
Led Zeppelin - Babe I'm Gonna Leave You  
Led Zeppelin - Kashmir  
Led Zeppelin- Whole Lotta Love  
Lenny Cravitz Are You Gonna Go My Way  
Lenny Kravitz - Fly Away  
Lynyrd Skynyrd - Sweet Home Alabama  
Lynyrd Skynyrd - Free bird  
Malaguena  
Metallica - Enter Sandman  
Metallica - One  
Metallica - Fade To Black  
Metallica - Nothing Else Matters  
Mr. Big - I'm The One Who Wants To Be With You  
Nickelback - Someday  
Nickelback - This Is How You Remind Me  
Nirvana - Smells Like Teen Spirit  
Nirvana- Come As You Are  
Nirvana - About A Girl  
Nirvana - Lithium  
Nirvana - Heart Shaped Box  
No Doubt - Don't Speak  
No Doubt - I'm just A Girl  
Oasis - Wonder wall  
Ozzy Osbourne - Crazy Train  
Paranoid  
Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel - The Boxer  
Pearl Jam - Jeremy  
Pearl Jam - Even Flow  
Pearl Jam - Last Kiss  
Pearl Jam - Alive  
Pearl Jam - Better Man  
Pearl Jam - Daughter  
Pink Floyd - Money  
Pink Floyd - Another Brick In the Wall  
Pink Floyd - Time  
Pink Floyd - Wish You Were Here  
Pink Floyd - Comfortably Numb  
Puddle Of Mudd - Blurry  
Puddle Of Mudd - She Hates Me  
Puddle Of Mudd - Control  
Queen - Bohemian Rhapsody  
Queensryche - Silent Lucidity

Red Hot Chili Peppers - Under the Bridge  
Ritchie Valens - La Bamba  
Roy Orbison - Pretty Woman  
Rush - The Spirit of the Radio  
Rush - Tom Sawyer  
Santana - Black magic woman  
Santo and Johnny - Sleepwalk  
Seether - Broken  
Semisonic - Closing Time  
Simple Blues  
Soundgarden - Black Hole Sun  
Stephenwolf - Magic Carpet Ride  
Stevie Ray Vaughan - Pride And Joy  
Stevie Ray Vaughn - The Sky is Crying  
Stevie Ray Vaughn - Mary Had a Little Lamb  
Sting - Roxanne  
Sugar Ray - Someday  
Sugar Ray - Every Morning  
Sugar Ray - When Its Over  
Sum 41 - Fat lip  
Surfaris - Wipe Out  
System of a Down - Chop Suey  
Ted Nugent - Cat Scratch Fever  
The Animals - House of the Rising Sun  
The Police - Every Breath You Take  
The Simpsons TV theme  
The Troggs - Wild Thing  
The White Stripes - 7 Nation Army  
The Who - Behind Blue Eyes  
The Who - Tommy - Pinball Wizard  
Three Doors Down - Here Without You  
Tonic - If You Could Only See  
Van Halen - Eruption  
Van Halen - Hot For Teacher  
Van Halen - Panama  
Van Halen - Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love  
Van Halen - Running With The Devil  
Van Morrison - Brown Eyed Girl  
Ventures - Walk Don't Run  
Yes - Roundabout  
ZZ Top – Tush

Absolute Beginner Pieces and Children's Tunes (several of these are listed above, but are played in simplified arrangements by beginning students):

Twelve Bar Blues (simple arrangement)  
Stairway to Heaven (simple arrangement)  
Back In Black (simple arrangement)

Smoke on the Water (main lick)  
Iron Man (main theme)  
The Simpsons Theme  
The Star Spangled Banner  
Wipe Out (open string arrangement)  
Malaguena  
Greensleeves  
Day Tripper  
Sunshine of Your Love  
Walk This Way  
Crazy Train  
Heartbreaker  
I Can't Get No Satisfaction  
Black Dog  
Boulevard of Broken Dreams  
Good Riddance (The Time of Your Life)  
Basket Case  
American Idiot  
December  
Lose Yourself  
Redemption Song  
Brown Eyed Girl  
Wonderful Tonight  
Pretty Woman  
Dust In the Wind  
Cat Scratch Fever  
Sweet Home Alabama  
Generic Chord Progressions and Strumming Patterns  
Generic 12 Bar Blues Patterns and Intros  
Generic Dropped D Power Chords  
Happy Birthday  
Amazing Grace  
The Pink Panther Theme  
James Bond Theme  
Jeopardy Theme  
Chopsticks  
Silent Night  
Jingle Bells  
Row Row Row Your Boat  
Oh When the Saints Go Marching In  
Mary Had a Little Lamb (The Alphabet Song)  
Aura Lee (Love Me Tender)  
I Love You / This Old Man (The Barney Song)

Advanced Pieces and Solos:

Black Magic Reb-Beach Guitars That Rule The World  
Blues Dues Joe-Pass Joe Pass Live

Blues in G Joe-Pass Joe Pass Live  
Buzz Nick-Antonaccio  
Cathedral Eddie-Van-Halen Diver Down  
Cliffs of Dover Eric-Johnson Ah Via Musicom  
Country Boy Solo Albert-Lee  
Do You Feel Like We Do Peter-Frampton Frampton Comes Alive  
Eruption Eddie-Van-Halen Van Halen I  
Far Beyond The Sun Yngwie-Malmsteen The Yngwie Malmsteen Co  
Feels So Good  
Flight Of The Bumblebee Alexander-Gluklikh The Guitarists C  
Flight of the Wounded BumbleBee Nuno-Bettencourt Extreme II  
Flying in a Blue Dream Joe-Satriani  
Fundance Stanley-Jordan Magic Touch  
Fun Ranch Boogie Albert-Lee  
Jack Butler's Dual Steve-Vai Crossroads-(movie)  
Lenny Stevie-Ray-Vaughn Texas Flood  
Little Wing Stevie-Ray-Vaughan The Sky Is Crying  
Man In the Mirror Tuck-Andress Reckless Precision  
Mediterranean Sundance Al-DiMeola John-McLaughlin Paco-DeL  
Mutha Don't Wanna Go To School Today Nuno-Bettencourt Extreme  
Niccolo Paganini Violin Capriccio No. 5 Eliot-Fisk  
Partita 3 Allegro Assai J.S.-Bach Jasha Heifetz  
Silent Night Stanley-Jordan Standards  
Sketches In The Sun Steve-Howe GTR  
Spanish Fly Eddie-Van-Halen Van Halen II  
Standards Stanley-Jordan  
Steve Lukather Los-Lobotomys Live  
The Flight of the Bumblebee Nicolai-Rimsky-Korsakov Speed M  
The Star Spangled Banner Jimi-Hendrix The Ultimate Experience  
Tiger Rag Albert-Lee  
Violin Partita 3 Allegro Assai and Partita 2 Gigue J.S.-Bach

Classical/Solo Acoustic:

Malaguena - Anonymous  
Freight Train  
Yankee Doodle/Dixie  
Study in Am - Dionisio Aguado  
Romanza - Anonymous  
Italiana - Anonymous  
Frere Jacques Contrapuntal Round  
Canarios - Gaspar Sanz  
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring  
Bourree from the Lute Suite in Em - J.S. Bach  
Prelude #1 from The Welltempered Clavier - J.S. Bach  
Prelude in G, from Cello Suite #1 - J.S. Bach  
Prelude in D, from Cello Suite #6 - J.S. Bach  
Gavotte in E from Cello Suite #6 (originally in D major) - J.S. Bach

Gigue in Dm, Partita #2 - J.S. Bach (arranged as an alternate picking/string skipping study)  
Etude #1 - Villa Lobos  
Etude #2 - Villa Lobos (arranged as a sweep picking study)  
Sakura - Yoquihiro Yokuh  
Leyenda - Isaac Albeniz  
Homage a Tarrega - Garrotin and Soleares - Joaquin Turina  
Flight of the Bumblebee - (arranged as an alternate picking study)  
Sunburst - Andrew York  
Allison - Nick Antonaccio

Standards/Jazz:

The Girl From Ipanema - Antonio Carlos Jobim  
All the Things You Are  
The Shadow of Your Smile  
Satin Doll  
Autumn Leaves  
Black Orpheus  
Body and Soul  
God Bless The Child  
My Romance  
How High the Moon  
Speak Low  
Lover Man, Oh Where Can You Be  
The Maple Leaf Rag - Scott Joplin  
The Entertainer - Scott Joplin

The above songs and pieces constitute a very complete curriculum for guitar students, but any other examples can be substituted. My main goal is to provide students with music that will motivate them to continue learning, and teach them to play along the way. My basic approach has always been to categorize any given musical example in terms of technical content and to work through examples in progressive order, from easiest to most difficult. This builds each of the skill sets from simple to most complex, and allows for a flexible curriculum in terms of specific examples. This approach provides students with material that is most enjoyable, familiar, and satisfying to play, and therefore provides the greatest motivation. It also ensures that the skills being taught are relevant to the music that each individual student wants to learn.

If you're a parent of a young child, please understand that my approach to teaching and my personal style in lessons is nothing like the formal content of this document. Anyone who's taken lessons with me knows that my character is overwhelmingly relaxed and that I like to have fun and be silly and entertaining around children. To those who take private lessons, my style comes across as resoundingly nonacademic. I do work hard at maintaining a casual, accessible, and fun environment, and I just like to see people enjoy what they play, and continue to learn guitar – that's the only way I've ever been able to create a genuine interest in guitar. I've played in rock bands and other mainstream music situations for years, and that's appealing to children and teenagers. It's also had an indelible impact on my genuine lifestyle and character. Being a professional musician allows for a fun and creative lifestyle. Many parents only get to see the casual character and fun interaction that I maintain with students. This document was written for those who may misinterpret that character as careless. Please be sure to ask me if you have any questions about learning guitar, practicing, or the course of study that I've laid out!

Below is a list of advanced skills that I teach in the same way as beginning-intermediate skills (by using concrete examples in existing pieces of music, many of which can be chosen by the student):

Advanced skills include:

- Playing and creating chord melody arrangements - how chords and melodies are combined to create solo guitar pieces.
  - Contrapuntal music - playing two or more unique melodic parts at the same time.
  - Fast techniques - sweep picking, tremolo, rapid fire hammer-on and pull-off patterns, complex tapping patterns, delay doubling, and string skipped arpeggios.
  - Playing slide guitar.
  - Improvisation and composition skills - this is huge area of interest for many guitarists. Many of the styles and situations common to mainstream guitar playing involve improvised rhythm and lead guitar skills. Being able to accompany singers with improvised accompaniments based on chord charts, playing improvised chord and lick rhythm parts in a band, taking an improvised lead guitar solo - all are common skills required by guitarists, and many of those skills provide enormous musical satisfaction to advanced performers. Playing extended and altered chords, knowing how to perform chord substitutions and varied voicings, knowing chord scale relationships (pentatonics and others) and playing around chord shapes to create lead lines are commonly used skills and important knowledge that can be put to functional use by advanced guitarists. Knowing how to use melodic motive patterns, contour patterns, and other advanced techniques (complex bends, etc.) are also fundamental to building improvisational and compositional skill. This is a major area of study not just in improvisation, but also in understanding existing pieces of music for guitar - many of which were initially improvised themselves.
  - Specialized stylistic studies: Every style makes use of specialized skills. Flat picking blue grass tunes is different than playing funk rhythms, which requires different skills than playing heavy metal solos, which requires a different skill set than that used to create solo jazz chord-melody arrangements, which is different than playing classical guitar pieces. Every style is born from a rich variety of skills, and a depth of experience is required to perform ANY style well. Because music is a subjective art, beauty truly is in the eye of the beholder. One or two related styles of music may be all that a student really wants to learn. There are talented, intelligent, and capable human beings who dedicate their lives to every single style of music imaginable. Most worldly musical scholars realize that every style of modern popular music encompasses an enormous scope and range of talent. Popular music now can be studied with the same depth and serious dedication with which art music was studied in decades and centuries past. After a fundamental skill set is learned, the learning of styles typically comes from mastering the core tunes and musical examples that are well known in each style (i.e., if you want to get to become a great country guitarist, you need to learn all the best known songs and solos by the best country guitarists). Studying one area of stylistic content, or even the music of a single favorite player for an extended period of time is a rich source of musical growth for advanced students.
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- Music Theory Synopsis:

NOTES ON THE GUITAR:

	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
6th string:	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E
5th string:	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A
4th string:	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D
3rd string:	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G
2nd string:	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B
1st string:	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B	C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E

CAGED SHAPES:            The numbers are called "INTERVALS"            (9=2, 11=4, 13=6)

C	A	G	E	D	
3 6 2 5 7 3	5 1 4   2 5	6 2 5 1 3 6	1 4     5 1	2 5 1 4 6 2	
4       1 4	7	4	7 3		
7 3 6	6 2 5 1 3 6	7 3 6 2   7	2 5 1 4 6 2	3 6 2 5 7 3	
5 1 4   2 5	4	1 4     5 1		4       1 4	
	7 3 6     7	7	3 6 2   7 3	7 3	
middle on 1	bar on 1	middle on 1	bar on 1	bar on 1	<-fingers
					362573 C
					4   14
					736
					514 25 A
					7
					625136 G
					4
					7362 7
					14  51 E
					73
					251462 D
					362573 C

SCALES:

Major: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Minor Pentatonic: 1 b3 4 5 b7	Blues: 1 b3 4 b5 5 b7	Major Pentatonic: 1 2 3 5 6		 \
Mixolydian: 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7	Dorian: 1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7	Lydian: 1 2 3 #4 5 6 7	Locrian: 1 b2 b3 4 b5 b6 b7		(start over)
Natural Minor (Aeolian): 1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7	Harmonic Minor: 1 2 b3 4 5 b6 7	Melodic Minor: 1 2 b3 4 5 6 7 (ascend) 1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 (descend)			
Bebop Dominant: 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 7	Bebop Major: 1 2 3 4 5 #5 6 7	Bebop Minor: 1 2 b3 3 4 5 6 7			
Diminished: 1 2 b3 4 b5 b6 6 7	Whole Tone: 1 2 3 #4 #5 b7	Lydian Dominant: 1 2 3 #4 5 6 b7			
Chromatic (every possible note): 1 b2 2 b3 3 4 b5 5 b6 6 b7 7					

CHORDS:

Major Triad 1 3 5	Minor Triad 1 b3 5	Power Chord ("5 chord") 1 5
Major 7 <sup>th</sup> (maj7, M7) 1 3 (5) 7	Minor 7 <sup>th</sup> (b3, b7) (min7, m7, -7) 1 b3 (5) b7	Dominant 7 <sup>th</sup> (b7) (no maj or min label) 1 3 (5) b7
Half Diminished (m7b5, min7(b5), -7(-5), o7) 1 b3 b5 b7		Diminished (dim7, o7) 1 b3 b5 (6 - also called bb7)

Extended Chords - 7th chords with added 9, 11, 13 intervals (9=2, 11=4, 13=6). ONLY the highest extension is needed.

Altered Chords: chords with a sharpened or flatted intervals (i.e., #5 or b5, and/or #9 or b9). Notated by parentheses after a chord label, i.e., G7(b5). Flats are often indicated by minus signs ("-"), and sharps by plus signs (""). Also, min(maj7) = 1 b3 5 7 (instead of b7).

Suspended Chords: "sus" means replace the 3 interval with either a 2 or 4, as indicated. If no number is given (2 or 4), then sus means "4". For example, Csus4 = 1 4 5, C7sus = 1 4 5 b7.

"Add" Chords: triads (major and minor) with one or more added intervals (6 and/or 9). The difference between add chords and extended chords is that add chords do not contain a 7. All notes are required in add chords. For example, Cadd9 = 1 3 5 9, Cadd6 (C6) = 1 3 5 6, C6/9 = 1 3 5 6 9, C-add9 = 1 b3 5 9

"Slash" Chords: put the note after the slash in the bass (the lowest note). C/B = 1 3 5, "B" in bass.

E7(b9)   Am9   Am7/D D7(b9#5)   Gmaj7 Am7   Bbdim7 Bm(b6)   Gm7   Db7(#5) C7(b9#5)
Fmaj7 Bb7    F6/9   Fm Fm(maj7)   Dm7(b5) G7(b9b5)   Cmaj7 Dm7   Em7 Am7   D7(-9+5)
G9sus4 G9   F#o7 Fm7    Em7 Eb7sus4   Dm7 Dbmaj7   Cmaj9(#11)

ROMAN NUMERAL CHORD PROGRESSIONS - Large roman numerals are Major. Small roman numerals are minor. Large roman numerals with a 7 are Dominant 7th. The numbers refer to notes of the major scale (i.e., CAGED shapes - in C, I=C major, ii=D minor, V7=G7). All other chord types can be labeled by roman numerals. Just combine the chord type with the roman numeral root note. The roman numeral simply takes the place of the letter name in the chord. In the key of C, Imaj9=Cmaj9, ii7=Dm7, V13=G dominant 13th, VIImin7(b5)=B half diminished, Imaj7#11=Cmaj7#11 etc.

DIATONIC:

I ii iii IV V(7) vi (V can be either major or 7th)

I IV I V  
I vi IV V7  
I iii IV V  
vi IV ii V  
I V IV V  
I IV I V  
I ii iii IV V  
I iii vi ii V

BORROWED CHORDS - flats mean move the chords down 1 fret:

bVII bIII bVI (bV bII)

I bVII IV IV  
I IV bVII V7  
I bVII bIII I  
I ii bIII I  
I bVI bVII I  
I bIII IV bVI bVII  
I bII I bV I bII bVII I

SECONDARY DOMINANTS: Each of these chords can also be seen as major.

I7 II7 III7 VI7 VII7

I I7 IV iv ( <- iv is one "other borrowed chords" below )  
I III7 vi IV  
I ii III7 IV  
I vi II7 V7  
I VII7 iii III7 vi VI7 II7 IV  
I VI7 II7 V7  
I iii II7 IV  
I IV II7 V7 III7 vi IV iv

BLUES:

I7 (one of the secondary dominants) IV7 V7 (one of the diatonics)

I7 IV7 I7 I7 IV7 IV7 I7 I7 V7 IV7 I7 V7  
I7 IV I I7 IV #IVdim7 I ii iii bIII ii V7 I

MINOR CHORD PROGRESSIONS:

(just start on vi, and use chords from the other categories):

vi V7 IV III7  
vi IV ii V  
vi ii V I IV VII7 iii III7  
vi iii ii III7

OTHER BORROWED CHORDS:

iv (typically used in a IV iv I progression)  
v (typically used in a v I7 progression)  
i (typically becomes vi in a new key), bii, biii, bvi, bvii, vii

I iii IV iv  
I IV v IV  
I IV v I7 IV iv  
I IV II7 V7 III7 vi IV iv i (vi becomes i in old key) -> i  
(i becomes vi in new key) -> vi ii V I IV bVII III7 vi

## CHORD-SCALE RELATIONSHIPS:

### Pentatonics:

1) Over I(7) IV(7) V(7) bVII bIII and bVI chords --> play the minor pentatonic or blues scale in the same key.

Ex.) Over I bVII IV bIII in the key of A (A G D C) -->  
Play A minor pentatonic or A blues.

2) Over I(7) IV(7) V(7) ii iii and vi chords --> play the major pentatonic scale in the same key.

Ex.) Over I iii IV V7 vi ii IV I in the key of A (A C#m D E7 F#m Bm D A) -->  
Play A major pentatonic.

Minor pentatonic and blues scales sound bluesy, and create a heavy rock sound. Major pentatonic scales sound "sweeter" and create a more pastoral, country feel.

### Playing Over Individual Chords in a Progression:

3) Over any chord progression diatonic to a single scale (i.e., all the notes in the chords come from a single scale) --> play the scale to which the chords are diatonic.

Ex.) Over I iii IV V7 vi ii IV I in the key of A (A C#m D E7 F#m Bm D A - all notes come from the A Major scale) -->  
Play the A Major scale.

4) Over any single major chord, play major pentatonic with the same root note.

Ex.) Over G C D chords -->  
Play G major pentatonic, C major pentatonic, and D major pentatonic respectively.

5) Over any single minor chord, play minor pentatonic with the same root note.

Ex.) Over Em Am Bm chords -->  
Play E minor pentatonic, A minor pentatonic, and B minor pentatonic respectively.

6) Over any dominant 7<sup>th</sup> (9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>), play major pentatonic with the same root note - and add b7

Ex.) Over A7 D7 E7 chords -->  
Play A major pentatonic (add the note "G"), D major pentatonic (add the note "C"), and E major pentatonic (add the note "D").

7) Over any half diminished chord (m7b5), play the blues scale with the same root note (avoid the 5<sup>th</sup> interval).

Ex.) Over Bm7(b5) -->  
Play B blues, and avoid the "F#" note.

8) Over any diminished chord, play diminished scale with the same root note.

Ex.) Over Bm7(b5) -->  
Play B blues, and avoid the "F#" note.

9) Over any single chord, you can play the intervals that make up the chord. In general, you can also extend any chord with the 9, 11, and 13 (2, 4, and 6) intervals to create passing tones. Often, the 6 needs to be flatted (especially in minor chords), the 4 needs to be sharped (especially in major chords), and the 9 needs to be flatted or sharped (especially in dominant chords).

Ex.) Over C major (maj7th, maj 9th, etc.) -->  
Play 1 3 5 7 9 11 (or #11) 13 ( 1 2 3 4 (or #4) 5 6 7 )

Ex.) Over A minor (min7th, min 9th, etc.) -->  
Play 1 b3 5 b7 9 11 13 (or b13) ( 1 2 b3 4 5 6 (or b6) b7 )

Ex.) Over E7 (9, 13th, etc.) -->  
Play 1 3 5 b7 9 11 13 ( 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7 )

Ex.) Over Cmajor9(#11) -->  
Play 1 3 5 7 9 #11 13 ( 1 2 3 #4 5 6 7 ) - indicated by the chord symbol

Ex.) Over E7(#5b9) -->  
Play 1 3 #5 b7 b9 11 13 ( 1 b2 3 4 #5 6 b7 ) - indicated by the chord symbol

Ex.) Over Bm7(b5) -->  
Play 1 b3 b5 b7 9 1 13 ( 1 2 b3 4 b5 6 b7 ) - indicated by the chord symbol

Advanced skills typically encompass a more creative and conceptual understanding of “how music works”. Understanding applied music theory is an important part of the process. A general understanding of harmony – how chords, chord progressions, and scales produce groups of notes that fit together “harmoniously” – is basic to understanding every type of music. Learning fingering patterns for chords and scales on the guitar is a big part of developing advanced skills. Learning all of the notes on the instrument is another fundamental building block. A great deal of that process happens during the first stages of learning, because those fingering patterns and notes actually make up the music which students learn. That knowledge must be filled out, made complete, and explained so that an understanding of where the shapes, patterns and harmonic structures come from, how they fit together, and how they can be applied in various situations can be developed. In this way, a general understanding of “everything that will be seen on the instrument” can be ingrained, so that when new music is learned, it will fit into a framework of understanding and order. This makes learning new material familiar and fluent. More importantly, it opens the door to creative understanding, and it makes everything a student learns useful as material fodder for creative performance, composition, and improvisation.

When a basic foundation of theoretical understanding has been laid and put to use on the instrument, and a technical level has been achieved that allows for functional and proficient performance, learning becomes more analytical – pieces can be acquired more quickly, sorted out and understood in terms of theoretic and harmonic patterns, and organized into a repository of musical ideas, concepts, and examples that furthers a deep understanding of the instrument. Elements of musical style become apparent, and common musical patterns/cliches become recognized and ingrained. The idea of identifying common sounds and “playing what you hear” becomes a matter of habitual recollection and association. Everything a student hears, plays, and learns can be put into an organized framework that makes up an understanding of how musical notes, techniques, and patterns fits together.

When that point has been reached, students have become fluent and diversely capable musicians. Experimentation and creative application of existing musical materials can be practiced in an organized way. Composition and improvisation skills can be easily developed through practice and performance. Ad hock performance with other musicians is an easily acquired and perfected skill – because all of the known materials and expected patterns are internalized. Technique and tasteful performance skills (i.e., “musicality”) continue to improve all along the way.

Every step along the way provides its own rewards. Learning how to perform a favorite tune or musical sound for the first time can be exciting. Performing for an audience for the first time can be exhilarating, and completely addictive. Improvising a solo for the first time at a spontaneous jam session can be fun and socially rewarding. Recording albums and performing concerts for an engaged and appreciative audience can be the most gratifying and invigorating experience available in life. Developing a musical style of your own is a lifelong, ever changing and evolving process that provides satisfaction in a way offered by few other endeavors. The materials that need to be learned to achieve that end are not endless, however. This curriculum is put together to guide students through the process of learning all the necessary skills and knowledge in a way that's organized and full of musical examples and technical materials required to fulfill those objectives step by step.

When you reach plateaus in your learning process, or when you become frustrated at any stage of learning, please reread this curriculum to reorient your goals and to see where you stand in terms of the overall process of “learning guitar”. It should help to provide a clear line of sight to the light at the end of the tunnel, and some perspective about how to get there.