

Lesson I

The parts of the guitar

Selecting a guitar

Basic techniques

Strumming

Chord diagrams

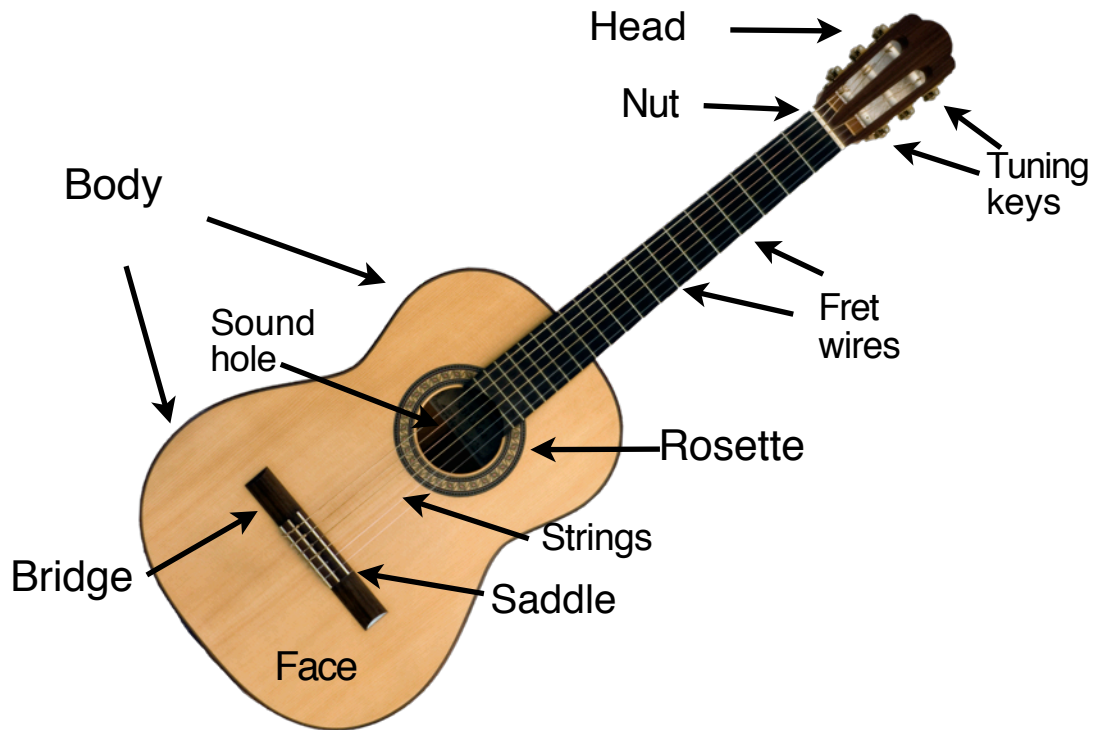
D and A7 chords

D and A7 chord studies

Review of Lesson I

A. The Parts of the Guitar

It is important for the student to be familiar with the parts of the guitar since we will refer to them throughout this course.

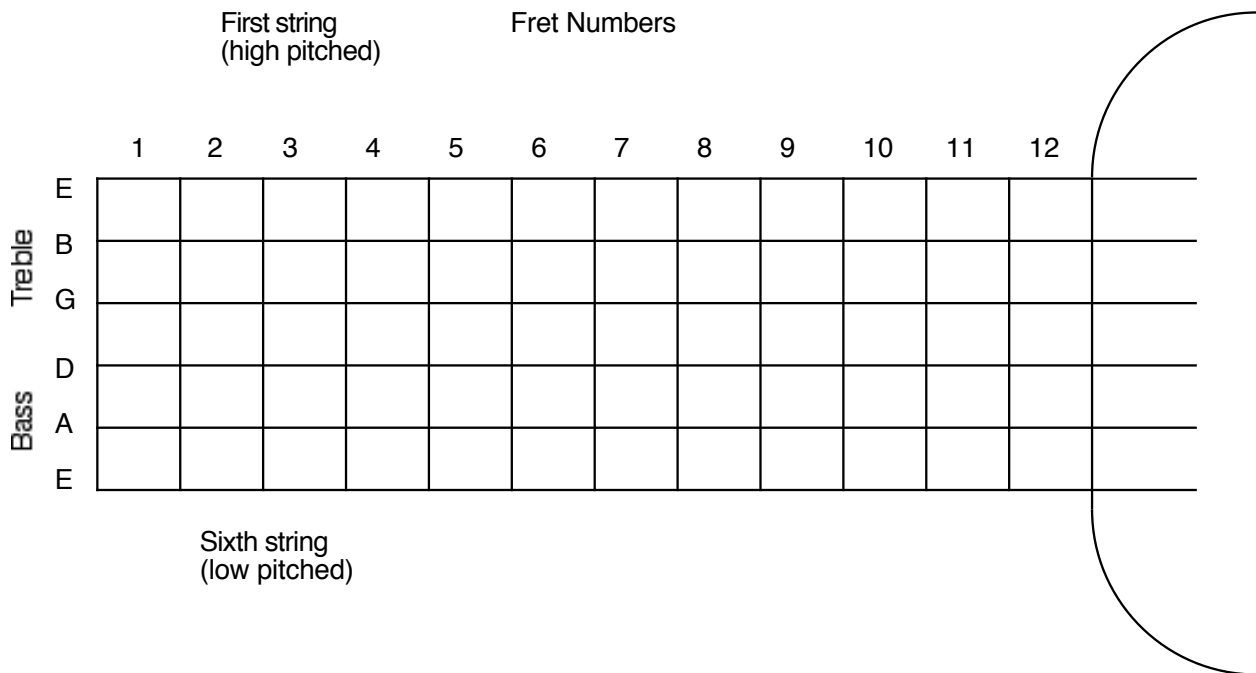


B. Selecting a Guitar

A nylon string guitar is recommended for the beginner, since the strings are easier to press down. Also, there is more space between the strings, which facilitates increased accuracy. However, a steel string guitar or electric guitar will work fine for learning.

C. Fret and String Numbers; String Names

This is a fingerboard diagram. It is a picture of the frets and strings of the guitar. At this point you should memorize the names of the open strings: E, B, G, D, A, E. The high-pitched string (high sounding) is the first string; the low-pitched one is the sixth string.



The first, second, and third strings are called the **treble** strings. The fourth, fifth, and sixth strings are called the **bass** strings.

D. Holding the Guitar; Sitting Position(s)

The way you hold a guitar largely depends on what style of music you would like to play.

Classical guitarists prefer to hold the guitar on the left leg, while most players of other guitar styles put the guitar on the right leg.

The important thing to be aware of when choosing a sitting position is your posture. Try not to lean over the guitar too much because it is very hard on your back. It is much better to raise the guitar to you and maintain a good posture while playing.



One way to elevate the guitar is to raise the leg that supports it. You can do this by using a footrest (or footstool). These devices adjust to different levels to accommodate different chair heights. They make playing more comfortable and allow you to maintain a good posture while practicing. Contact your local music supplier for one.



When sitting on the couch practicing at home, I simply put a small pillow on my lap and put the guitar on the pillow. This enables me to keep both feet on the ground and keeps my hips even, which is more comfortable for my back.

Suggestions for sitting positions:

Choose a comfortable chair without arms. As you sit in the chair, scoot up to the front half of the seat and put your feet flat on the ground. If you are in the correct sized chair, your hips and knees will be at about the same height from the floor. If using a footstool, raise your **right foot** onto the footstool and put the curve of the guitar on your right leg.



If you want to sit in the classical guitar style, raise your **left foot** onto the footstool and put the curve of the guitar on your left leg.



E. How to Play Different Pitches on the Strings

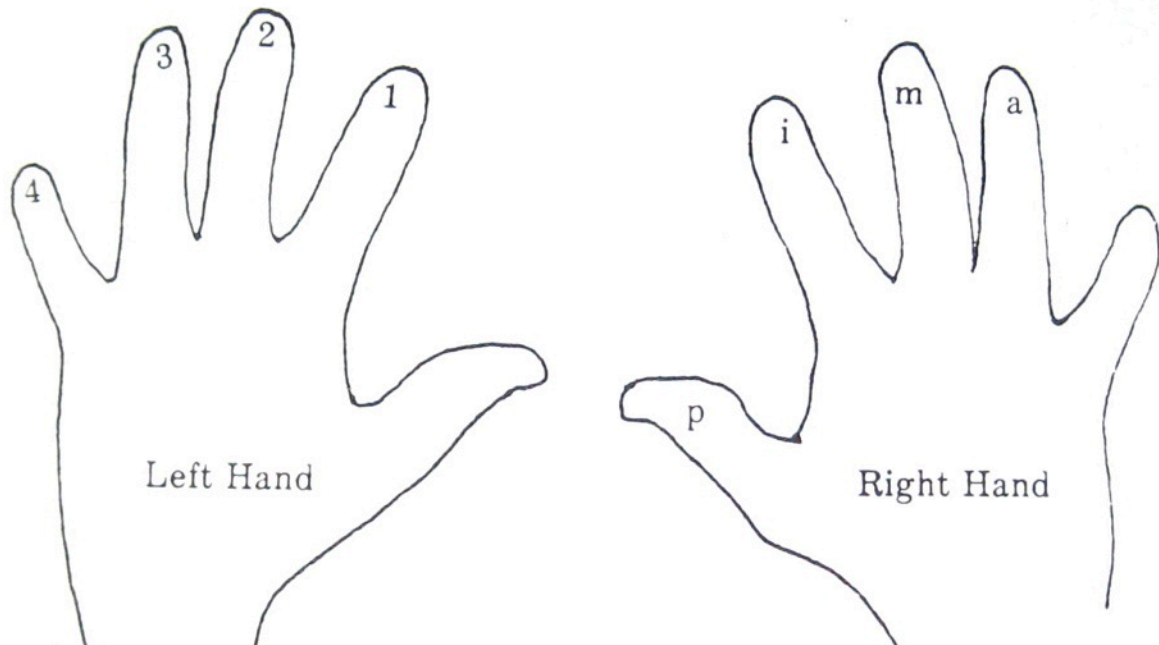
Pitch: *The high or low sound of a tone (note).*

Different pitches are produced on the guitar by pressing any string against the fret spaces (the spaces between the metal fret wires) with one or more of your left hand fingers and plucking that string with one of your right hand fingers or your thumb. The strings should be pressed just to the left of the metal fret wire to produce a pure sound. If not pressed hard enough, the string will “buzz” when you pluck it. You will notice that when you play the frets closer to the body of the guitar, the pitches get higher; as you go away from the body, toward the head of the guitar, the pitches are lower.



F. Labels of Right and Left Hand Fingers

Memorize these labels of the right and left hand fingers. They are different from finger labels used for other instruments.



G. Guidelines for Hand Positions

Left Hand Position:

- Your left elbow should stay within a range of about seven or eight inches from the side of your body.
- Your wrist should be in line with your forearm – not bent too far forward.
- Your thumb should be placed behind the neck and opposite your first finger or between your first and second fingers. It should be low enough behind the neck that the tip does not show from the front view.
- Your left hand should **not** support the guitar neck. (It needs to be free to move up and down the neck of the guitar.)
- Your left hand knuckles should be parallel to the neck of the guitar (especially your fourth finger knuckle).



Right Hand Position:

- Your right hand should extend somewhat straight from your forearm. A slight bend is acceptable, but do not try to force it to a ninety-degree angle.
- Your right forearm should support the guitar.
- Your right hand thumb should be outside of your hand (not underneath your fingers).



- Never rest any part of your right hand on the face of the guitar (especially your little finger).



H. Strumming

Strum: *To brush your thumb or another part of your hand across all six (or less) strings in one quick movement.*

Strumming the strings of the guitar is the most basic approach to playing the instrument. It is a way of using the guitar as a rhythm instrument as opposed to a melodic one. Strumming is mostly used for accompanying yourself while singing.

Simple strums:

Here are three strumming styles and three combinations. Experiment with each of them using the open strings of the guitar.

1. Downward strum – Brush your right hand thumb downward across the strings toward the floor.
2. Upward strum – Brush your first finger upward across the strings toward the ceiling.
3. Downward strum – Strike the strings downward toward the floor using the back of your fingernails (or just the “i” fingernail).

Combination strums:

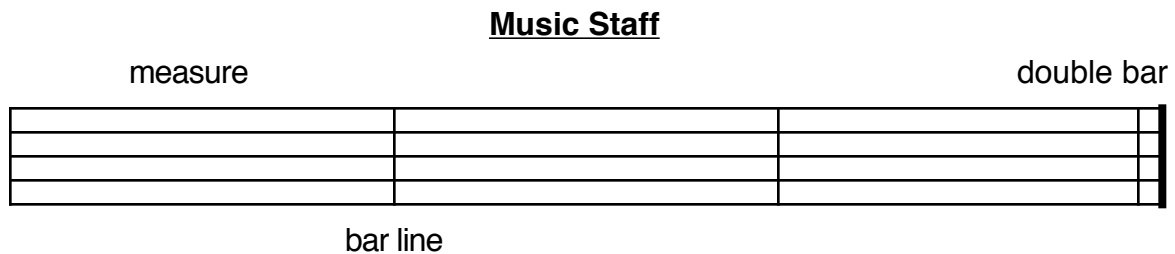
1. Down with the thumb – up with the “i” finger.
2. Down with the back of the nails – up with the “i” finger.
3. Down with the “i” fingernail – up with the “i” finger.

There is no “correct way” to strum. Many people develop a style they are comfortable with and use that technique all the time. The most important thing in strumming is to keep a steady beat.

I. Divisions of Written Music

Even though we will not be reading notes on a musical staff in the first section of this course, you will encounter written music when you buy sheet music from a music store. Therefore, it is important to be familiar with some of the basic elements of written music.

Music notes are written on a **staff** made up of five horizontal lines and four spaces. The staff is divided into sections called **measures** by vertical lines called **bar lines**. A **double bar line** indicates the end of a piece of music.



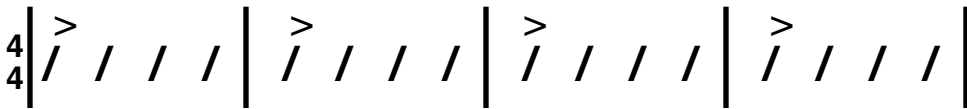
J. Time Signatures

At the beginning of a piece of music, you will find a **time signature** (two numbers in the form of a fraction). For now we will only be concerned with the top number. The top number in a time signature tells you how many beats are in a measure. A **beat** is the underlying pulse in a piece of music (which you often find yourself tapping your foot to without realizing it).

In the following exercises, we will strum the guitar once for each **beat**.

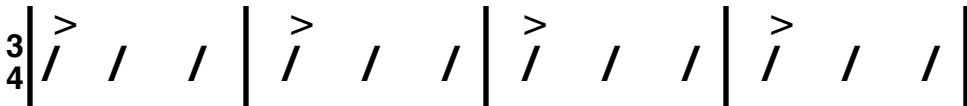
Since we are only concerned with the top number for now, $\frac{4}{4}$ will mean four strums per measure and $\frac{3}{4}$ will mean three strums per measure. It is important to keep track of the beat at all times, so you should tap your foot once for each beat that you strum in each measure.

Example A: Tap your foot four times at a steady pace, and then bush your thumb downward across all the open strings for each diagonal line. There is a natural accent on the first beat of each measure, so it's a good idea to bring that out. It will help you keep the beat as you play.



Example B:

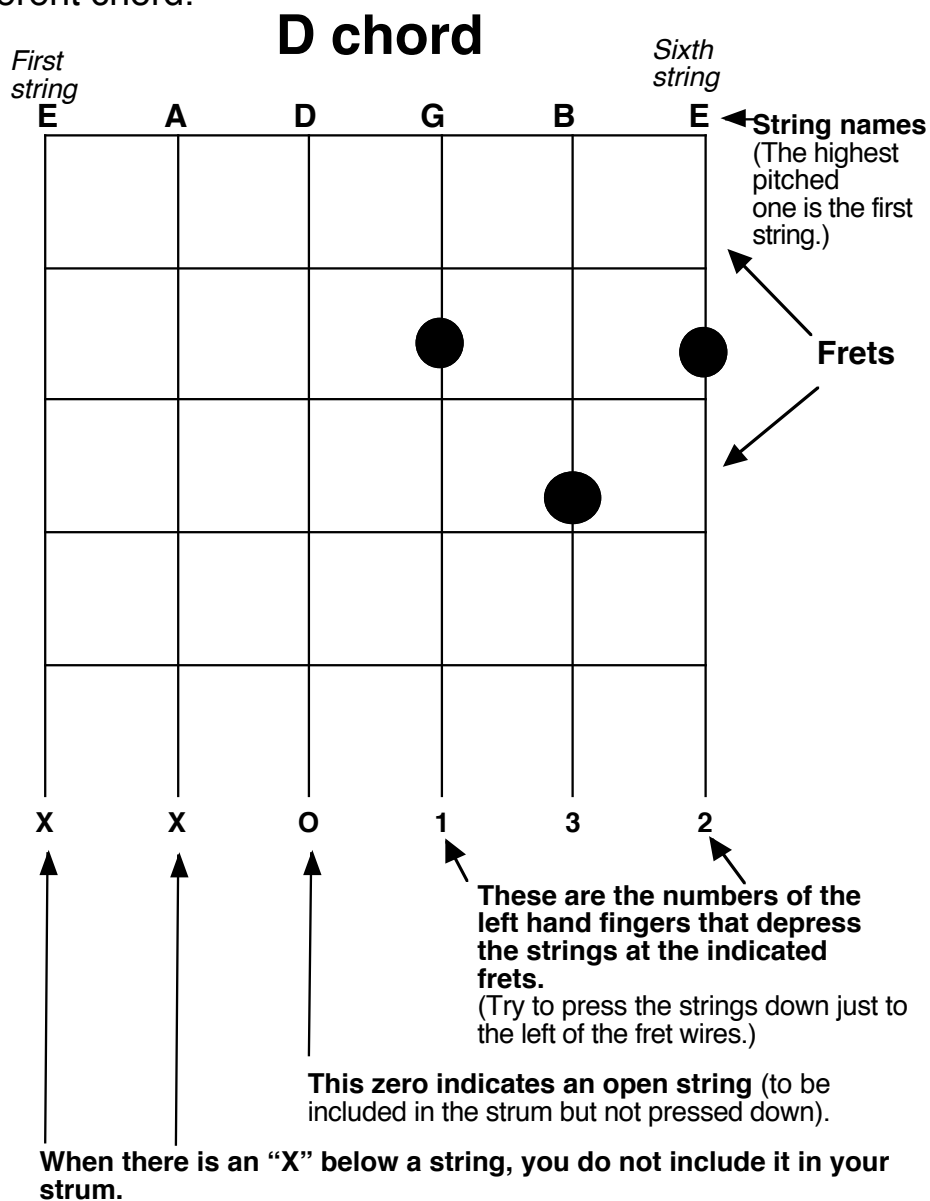
Take note of the time signature



K. Explanation of Chord Diagrams

Guitar chord diagrams are vertical pictures of the lower end of the fingerboard (toward the head of the guitar).

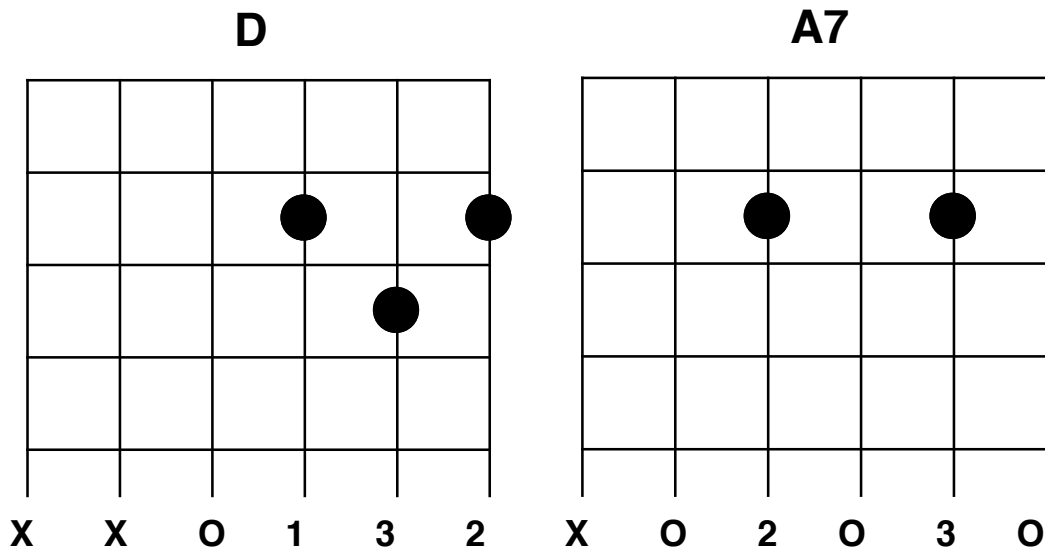
On the guitar, a **chord** is usually a combination of four or more notes played at the same time. Some of these notes may be open strings while other strings are pressed down with the left hand fingers. The great thing about playing guitar chords is that you do not have to know the names of the individual notes contained in each chord. This is because guitar chords are often shown as diagrams. These diagrams are pictures of the strings and frets that show you where to put your left hand fingers on the guitar for each different chord.



L. Two Chords: D and A7

The first two chords of this course are D major and A7. These are commonly used chords that will allow you to play and sing many songs. Notice on the chord diagrams that I have indicated not to play the fifth and sixth strings when strumming the D chord, nor the sixth string when playing the A7 chord. If you accidentally hit these x'd strings while playing, don't worry too much. As time goes on you will develop improved accuracy in your strumming.

Practice these chords often until you have them memorized. Practice in front of a mirror to monitor your left hand placement.



Practice note: The most difficult part of playing chords as a beginner is not learning the chords themselves. The difficulty is in switching from chord to chord without missing a beat. The D chord, for instance, is not difficult once you have your fingers down. It does become difficult, however, when you have to shift to the A7 chord. Therefore, most of your practice of these chords should focus on *shifting* from D to A7 and back to D.

One efficient way to practice these chords is to move from D to A7 and back without strumming (left hand movement only). You can even do this exercise while watching television. A half hour TV show could provide a good block of practice time for shifting chords. (You can strum during the commercials.)

M. Moving from Chord to Chord

The following two methods will enable you to play the D and A7 chords more quickly and efficiently. *Method One* is for complete beginners, and *Method Two* is for players with more experience.

Method One:

When moving from D to A7, you will notice a common finger used on the same string in each chord. This is called a **guide finger**. Method One takes advantage of the guide finger (in this case, the third finger). This helps you shift more effectively from chord to chord.

When changing from the D chord to the A7 chord:

1. Take fingers one and two off the strings but keep contact with the third.
2. Slide your third finger back a fret (to the second fret).
3. Put your second finger down on the fourth string, second fret.

When changing back to the D chord (from the A7 chord):

1. Take your second finger off the fourth string.
2. Slide your third finger up a fret (to the third fret).
3. Place your first and second fingers on the third and first strings.

Practice the D and A7 chords keeping these steps in mind. Your eventual goal is to turn all three steps into one fluid movement.

Method Two:

To move quickly from chord to chord, which is your ultimate goal, you must be very efficient in your movements. Advanced guitarists use any opportunity to make every movement count. This is very evident in chord shifting. The average player will only be aware of the fingers touching the strings. However, what happens when the fingers are off the strings is just as important.

An advanced guitarist does not merely lift his/her fingers off a chord. When lifting, he/she immediately **forms the shape of the new chord in the air** and moves to the next chord with the fingers already in position. When arriving to the next chord, all the fingers are put down at the same time. This is a very advanced technique, so don't expect to be able to do this too soon. It requires a lot of control in the left hand. However, if you know your eventual goal, you are more likely to achieve it (through practice).

When changing from the D chord to the A7 chord:

1. Begin by holding the D chord.
2. Lift all your left hand fingers off the strings.
3. Form the A7 chord position above the strings (in the air) without touching any of the strings. (Hover above the strings with the chord formation.)
4. Put down all the fingers at once (without shifting back and forth to make small adjustments).
5. Reverse this process to return to the D chord.

N. D and A7 Chord Studies (exercises)

Tap your foot four times at a steady pace and begin strumming the D chord. Strum once for each diagonal line. When the chord changes, try not to slow down or skip a beat.

The first four lines are in $\frac{4}{4}$ time; the next four are in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. Use downward strums.

D and A7 chord study one:

D 2 3 4 | D 2 3 4 | A7 2 3 4 | A7 2 3 4 |

D | A7 | D | A7 |

D | A7 | D A7 | D |

A7 | A7 | D A7 | D ||

D and A7 chord study two:

3/4

D	2	3	A7	2	3	D	2	3	A7	2	3	
	/	/	/		/	/	/		/	/	/	
A7			D		A7	D		A7	D			
	/	/	/		/	/	/		/	/	/	
D		A7	D		A7	D		A7	D			
	/	/	/		/	/	/		/	/	/	
A7			D			D	A7	D	D	A7	D	
	/	/	/		/	/	/		/	/	/	

O. Two Folk Songs

The following songs were chosen because they use only two chords and serve as clear examples of how chords fit into songs. In *Clementine*, begin strumming the D chord on the word **cavern**. Strum once for each beat. Change to the A7 chord on the word **mine** but do not skip a beat when shifting. Remember to tap your foot and set a steady tempo (pace) before you begin strumming. For now, it would be best to use a simple downward strumming style.

Clementine

$\frac{3}{4}$ | / / / | / / / | / / / | / / / | / / / | / / / |

In a ca - vern, in a can - yon, ex - ca - va - ting for a mine, dwelt a mi - ner, for - ty

D A7 D

| / / / | / / / | / / / | / / / | / / / | / / / |

nin - er, and his daugh - ter Clemen - ine. — Oh my dar - ling, oh my dar - ling, oh my dar - ling Clemen -

A7 D A7 D

| / / / | / / / | / / / | / / / | / / / ||

tine, — you are lost and gone for - e - ver dread - ful sor - ry Clemen - tine. —

Skip to My Lou

D A7

$\frac{4}{4}$ / / / / | / / / / | / / / / | / / / / |

Flies in the buttermilk, shoo, fly, shoo! Flies in the buttermilk, shoo, fly, shoo!

D A7 D

/ / / / | / / / / | / / / / | / / / / |

Flies in the buttermilk, shoo, fly, shoo! Skip to my Lou my dar - ling.

D A7

/ / / / | / / / / | / / / / | / / / / |

Lou, — Lou, — skip to my Lou, Lou, — Lou, — skip to my Lou, —

D A7 D

/ / / / | / / / / | / / / / | / / / / ||

Lou, — Lou, — skip to my Lou, — skip to my Lou my dar - ling.

P. Review of Lesson I

The following is the most important information to remember from Lesson I. Review the chapter if you do not know the answers to some of these questions.

1. Name eight parts of the guitar.

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| a. _____ | b. _____ |
| c. _____ | d. _____ |
| e. _____ | f. _____ |
| g. _____ | h. _____ |

2. Name the open strings: _____, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____

3. Name the labels of the right and left hand fingers:

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>left hand</i>			<i>right hand</i>			

4. The vertical lines that divide the staff into sections are called

_____.

5. The spaces between the vertical lines on the staff are called

_____.

6. The two numbers in the form of a fraction located at the beginning of a piece of music are called _____.

7. What does an X below a chord diagram mean?

8. The first three strings (high pitched) are called the _____ strings.

9. The last three strings are called the _____ strings.

10.

- a. Place the dots on the correct frets and strings for the following chords.
- b. Write the finger numbers used to press down these notes underneath the chords. (Be sure to write zeros for the open strings, since these notes are also part of the chords.)

D

A7
