

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

3/4-Size Guitar

A smaller than normal guitar with shorter strings and less space between frets.

Action

A term referring to the height of the strings above the frets and fret board.

Acoustic

The characteristics of an environment that effect its ability to transmit sound.

Acrylic

A paint that is used on guitar finishes.

Action

In the context of guitar, the action is the distance between the strings and the fret board. However, it generally refers to the force required to produce a note on an instrument. A lower action usually makes the guitar easier play but produces less sustain.

Active

Refers to circuitry that alters a signal before it reaches its destination. Active electronics can be used in pickups and preamplifiers.

Active Pickups

Pickups that use electricity to boost the signal being sent to the amplifier, they require a battery that is located in a control cavity on back of the guitar.

Altered and Open Tunings

The result of changing the tuning of one or more strings from standard EADGBE.

Alternate Picking

Picking in alternate directions (down-up-down-up).

Arpeggio

A broken chord, usually played evenly low to high and back again.

Arrangement

The setting of an original or standard tune for a given solo instrument or group of instruments

Amp Rack

A metal frame that is used to mount amplifiers for use in large stage performances.

Amp or Amplifier

A device that increases the strength of the electrical signal coming from the guitars pickups. (Stronger signal, louder Sound) There are two main types of amplifiers: the combo amp (combinations amplifier) and the amplifier stack.

Axe

A slang word for guitar. The word guitar is derived from the Spanish word guitarra. It is a stringed instrument that traditionally has 6 strings (although there are such things as 7, 8 and 12 string guitars) and can be plucked or strummed. Guitars can be acoustic, semi-acoustic or electric.

Acoustics and semi-acoustics consist of a hollow body. Semi-acoustics and electrics are played with amplifiers via pickups.

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Ball End

The metal stopper found on the end of guitar strings used to anchor the string to the bridge.

Bass Clef

Also known as the F clef as its symbol has two dots, between which, is a line on the staff that represents the note F. Written guitar music does not require a bass clef as guitars only have a maximum of a four octave range which can be covered by the treble clef.

Bass Note

The lowest note in a chord.

Bar

A unit of time in music, commonly consisting of four beats. Represented by a vertical line on tablature or the staff.

Barre Chord

From the French term *barré*. The technique of placing the left hand index finger over two to six strings in the fingering of a chord. The great advantage of using barre chords is that they are "moveable shapes" that can be applied at practically any fret.

Beat

A unit of time, determined by the tempo of a piece of music, which is used to measure the duration of a note. A tempo of 60bpm would infer that the each beat is one second long. A beat is an average note duration that other note duration symbols are based around.

The underlying rhythm of a piece of music determined by the tempo.

Bending

The act of pushing or pulling a string sideways across the a fret to raise the pitch of a note by a half to full tone or more. Used extensively in rock and blues playing as well as in jazz.

Bigsby

A vibrato system developed by Paul Bigsby. The term is also used to describe vibrato systems that work on the same principle.

Body

The main section of the guitar, on which the neck and bridge are attached. In acoustic guitars the hollow body acts as a resonator for the sound. Electric guitars use electronic amplification and therefore have less need for the hollow body, although the body still has an effect on the timbre of the instrument.

Bolt-on Neck

A guitar neck that is secured to the body of the guitar by screws (not bolts, ironically) and a metal plate. Found on solid body guitars.

Bridge

The metal or wooden component on the front of the body that holds the strings in place. The tension of the strings is usually altered at the head of the guitar by the machine heads. Bridges contain one saddle for each string, on which the strings are held in place. The position of these saddles can sometimes be altered to adjust the intonation.

A passage of music that connects two sections of a composition.

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Bridge Pins

Used on flat top acoustic guitars. They consist of plastic pegs that are placed into the holes of the bridge to hold the strings in place.

Bridge Plate

A flat surface made of metal (on electric guitars) or wood (on acoustic guitars) that the components of the bridge are attached.

CAGE Theory

A system of identifying patterns of notes on the fretboard by using a repeating sequence of chords (C, A, G, E and D major).

Capo

A mechanical barre that attaches to the neck of a guitar by means of a string, spring, elastic or nylon band, or a lever and thumbscrew arrangement. The capo can be used to raise the key of a song to suit a vocalist as well as to lower the action and shorten the string length.

Chicken Picking

A type of hybrid picking that is supposed to resemble the cluck and squawk of a chicken. A picking hand finger is used to mute a string whilst the plectrum plucks, therefore creating a percussive 'cluck'. The squawk is created when a picking hand finger plucks the string and lets it 'twang' back against the fret board.

Chord

Three or more notes sounded simultaneously. When two notes are played at a time it is known as a dyad.

Chord Progression

A group of chords that are played in order. Commonly constructed with chords that are related to each other via the scales that they are based on. Chord progressions are designed to create a cycle of music that can repeat or lead into other sections of music.

Chorus

The portion of a song lyric or melody that is repeated, often with other voices joining in. In jazz improvisation, however, "playing a chorus" would mean taking a turn improvising over the tune's chords progression.

A guitar effect that creates a calm, shimmering sound. The chorus effect is created by combining the regular signal with one that has been delayed and raised in pitch.

Chromatic Scale

A twelve note scale consisting of all the notes from A to G#. The fretboard of a guitar has a chromatic layout with each fret representing an increment of one semitone.

Clean

An unaltered and natural quality of sound. Achieved by not using any distortion or other guitar effects.

Clef

A symbol placed on a staff to indicate what pitch each line represents.

Closed Voicing

The term "voicing" refers to the vertical arrangement of the notes of a given chord. "Closed

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voicing" places the member notes as close together as possible, no matter the inversion as opposed to "open voicing" which spreads the member notes of the chord at larger intervals.

Coil

The wire component of a pickup that is wrapped around the bobbin.

Compression

The act of controlling the signal level and counteracting any sudden fluctuations, bringing a neater sound and adding sustain.

Crossover

A piece of circuitry found in amplifiers that divides a signal into separate frequency ranges.

Cutaway

A concave area generally in the upper right bout of a normal right-hand guitar that allows the player easier access to the high frets.

Dampening

Restricting the volume or intensity of musical sound. The term can be used to refer to muting.

Delay

A guitar effect that stops the sound for a set period of time, creating an echo-like effect. Can be used to add depth to a sound.

Distortion

A guitar effect in which gain (an increase in power of a signal) is used to create a dirty and fuzzy sound. There are many forms of distortion, used in various styles of music.

Synonymous with: gain, overdrive, or fuzz.

Dropped-D Tuning

The practice of lowering the sixth string (E) by a whole tone, one octave lower than the fourth string.

Dominant

The dominant note can be found on any diatonic scale. It lies a perfect fifth above the tonic.

Dot Markers

Fret markers that are in the form of little circles. They are the most common fret markers and they are usually found on the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 15th, 17th, and 19th frets and a double dot is usually found on the 12th fret.

Double Chorus

A pair of strings aligned closely to one another enabling both to be sounded with one pluck. A standard 12-string guitar has six double courses of strings.

Double Locking System

A type of tremolo system patented by Floyd Rose that involves a flexible floating bridge that responds smoothly to the vibrato bar. It is sometimes called the 'double-locking' system because the strings are locked at the bridge and the nut using nut locks. Every time you alter the tension on any of the strings the floating bridge moves and puts the other strings out of tune. This leaves you having to tune your guitar twice before attaching the nut locks, making tuning difficult.

Synonymous With: Floyd Rose tremolo system, Floyd Rose vibrato system, double-locking vibrato system, locking vibrato system, locking tremolo system

Dreadnaught

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A model of acoustic guitar that is larger than normal and produces more volume and bass than an ordinary acoustic. Originally used to describe models of guitar designed by Frank Martin and Harry Hunt.

Electric Guitar

A guitar that relies on electrical amplification instead of the natural resonance of the instrument. Because there is no need for the resonance of the body, electrical guitars commonly have a solid body instead of a hollow body.

Electric Tuner

A device that displays the pitch of a note to allow accurate tuning. Electric tuners are typically battery powered but can be incorporated into mains-powered effects units.

Electric-Acoustic Guitar

An acoustic guitar that has a pickup mounted in the sound hole.

Feedback

A high pitch sound created by the amplification of a guitars own sound. It is the result of putting the guitar to close to the amp.

Finger Numbering

Used for the fretting hand. Each finger is assigned a number from 1-4. 1 = index finger 2 = middle finger 3 = ring finger 4 = little finger T = thumb

Finger Picks

Banjo-style picks that finger style guitarists use when playing steel-string instruments.

Finger Style

Playing with the fingernails or fingertips with or without fingerpicks as opposed to playing with a flat pick.

Fingering

Applying the pressure on the strings at a certain fret in order to sound a note.

Fixed Bridge

A bridge that stays static but can move when the vibrato system is used.

Flat Pick

A triangular or teardrop-shaped piece of nylon or plastic used to pluck or strum guitar strings. Flat picks are available in a large variety of shapes, sizes, and thickness.

Floating Bridge

A bridge used in the Floyd Rose locking tremolo system that can move in accordance with the tension of the strings (as opposed to a static bridge). It enables an easy and accurate vibrato system but makes tuning more difficult.

Footstool

A small adjustable stool used to raise the height of the guitar.

Footswitch

A pedal that you step on to activate electrical devices/settings. They are used with amps and effects units to enable you to operate them whilst standing up.

Frequency

Acoustical frequency is the number of sound vibrations per second, measured in Hertz (Hz). Frequency represents the pitch of sound, 440Hz is concert pitch

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Fret

The space on the fretboard between each fret bar. Each numbered from the nut upward, starting on fret one. Open strings are referred to as fret 0. Sometimes used as another term for fret bar.

Fret Bars

The strips of metal found along the fingerboard. The space immediately behind the fret bar is used for fretting (not directly over the bar). Fret bars are placed at set intervals to divide the string into pitches. The frets get closer together as you ascend the fret board; this is because every time you halve the length you raise the pitch by an octave. Fret 12 divides the string in half (raising the pitch by an octave) and fret 24 divides the string into a quarter (raising the pitch by another octave).

Fret Markers

Inlays that are usually found at the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 12th, 15th, 17th, 19th and 21st frets and provide an easy way of tracking down the fret you are looking for.

Fret Board

The long thin strip of dark hardwood (rosewood or ebony for example) on the surface of the neck, on which the fret bars are placed.

Frets

The spaces on the fretboard between each fret bar. Each numbered from the nut upward, starting on fret one. Open strings are referred to as fret 0. Sometimes used as another term for fret bars.

Gain

The amount of increase in power a signal is exposed to. Determines the amount of distortion and sustain.

Gauge

Refers to the thickness of guitar strings. It can alter sustain, tone and flexibility. Light gauges are easier for bending whilst heavier gauges are better for volume and sustain. Light: 0.010 to 0.047 Medium-light: 0.011 to 0.052 Medium: 0.012 to 0.056 Heavy: 0.013 to 0.062

Ghost Bend

A bend is made before the string is plucked and usually released to create a drop in pitch.

Ghost Note

A note that is physically acted upon but is not heard. For example the starting note before a string bend is performed.

A note that has been muted to the point it has no discernible pitch. In the context of guitar music this would be a mute performed with the fretting hand, as palm muted notes still have a distinctive pitch.

Gig Bag

A case designed to hold a guitar for transportation. Gig bags can be padded and fitted with shoulder straps depending on the quality. A good gig bag should have extra padding around the edges (where most of the bumps and scrapes occur).

Guitar

The word guitar is derived from the Spanish word guitarra. It is a stringed instrument that traditionally has 6 strings (although there are such things as 7, 8 and 12 string guitars) and can be plucked or strummed. Guitars can be acoustic, semi-acoustic or electric. Acoustics and semi-acoustics consist of a hollow body. Semi-acoustics and electrics are played with amplifiers via pickups.

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Half Step

The difference in pitch between two adjacent frets; equal to the distance in pitch between two adjacent notes on the chromatic scale.

Hammer-on

A note sounded literally by "hammering" down with a left hand finger, often performed in conjunction with a note first plucked by the right hand on the same string.

Harmonics

Chime-like sounds achieved in two ways: 1) *natural harmonics* - by touching a string at any equidistant division of the string length (typically 5th, 7th, and 12th fret), directly above the fret with left hand, and striking hard with the right-hand fingers or pick near the bridge where there is more string resistance; or 2) *artificial harmonics* - touching a string with the index finger of the right hand twelve frets higher than any fretted note and plucking the string with either the thumb or third finger of the right hand.

Headstock

The section of the guitar attached to the top of the neck. Used to hold the machineheads.

Synonymous With: Peghead

Humbucker

A type of pickup consisting of two electromagnetic coils of opposite polarity. Specially designed to reduce interference from other electronics that can cause a hum.

Synonymous With: humbucking pickup

Inlays

Pictorial designs that are usually found on the fretboard and used as fret markers. Inlays can be made of materials like abalone that are embedded in the surface of the wood.

Inside Picking

Where alternate picking is used on two strings, the lower of the two being picked with upstrokes and the higher being picked with downstrokes.

Interval

The distance between two notes.

Intonation

The ability of a guitar to be in tune with itself. The 12th fret and the harmonic at the 12th fret should yield the same note. If the guitar is not in tune with itself then the intonation is said to be out.

Inversion

Structuring a chord with a note other than the root as the lowest note.

Lead guitar

The part played by a guitar soloist in a rock band

Legato

A style of music with a smooth and unbroken flow. In the context of guitar music legato is achieved by techniques that avoid the need to pluck the strings, such as slurs (hammer-ons and pull-offs) and slides.

Locking Nut

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A type of nut that is found on guitars with a locking tremolo system. It consists of a strip of metal that hold the tension of the strings via small metal plates that can be screwed into place.

Machineheads

The metal attachments to the headstock which twist to adjust the tension in the strings, enabling you to attach and retune strings

Major Scale

A diatonic scale that consists of 7 notes. The scale can be divided into two tetrachords (if you include the octave note). In western music, all chords are named according to how the notes would fit into the major scale. Scale theory also uses the major scale as a template.

Metronome

A device that produces a constant pulse in order to keep track of rhythm. Most electronic metronomes can accent the first beat of each bar, enabling you to stay within a set time signature.

Modulate

To change keys within a piece of music .

Moveable Chord

Any chord shape that uses no open strings. These chords can be played in various positions of the fret board producing the same chord but in a different key. Barre chords are a common example of moveable chords.

Mute

To cut sound. Often refers to a fret hand mute but can be used to indicate a palm mute.

Neck

The wooden stem that extends from the main body of the guitar and supports the headstock. The fretboard is found on the surface of the neck.

Nut

The component separating the fret board from the headstock. It keeps the strings in their correct position.

Nut Locks

The screws and metal plates that are used on a locking nut. There are three small metal plates (one for each pair of strings) that are screwed in place.

Octave Pedal

A foot operated guitar effect that combines what you are playing with a note an octave higher.

Open voicing

A manner of chord construction in which the member notes are broadly separated. See *closed voicing* above.

Outside Picking

Where alternate picking is used on two strings, the lower of the two being picked with downstrokes and the higher string being picked with upstrokes.

Overdrive

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Achieved by a gain setting that is deliberately too high. A signal overload is produced and enhances or creates distortion. Overdrive can be produced by greatly increasing volume, even in a clean channel.

Overdub

To record a section of music that overlaps a pre-recorded piece of music.

Palm Muting

A technique that involves resting the picking hand on the strings (near the bridge) to cut off any resonance, creating a percussive sound. Used mainly in various forms of rock music.

Passive Pickups

Pickups that convert the direct sound to an electrical signal without the signal being enhanced, as opposed to active pickups.

Pedal

A piece of equipment used to activate guitar effects via a foot operated switch. Pedals can have built in effects (wah pedals, distortion pedals etc.) or be linked to a separate effects unit.

Pentatonic scale

A five-tone scale used often in rock.

Pick

Small, thin object used for plucking or strumming the strings.
The sounding of a guitar string with a plectrum or finger.

Picking

Plucking or producing a sound on the guitar in general, either with the fingers or a flat pick.
Sometimes refers to playing a single-note melody line.

Pick Guard

Plastic or metal flat cover that protects the guitars finish from scratches. Pick guards are attached to the body of the guitar just below the pickups.

Pickups

Electromagnets that are located on the front of the body. They produce a magnetic field that is disturbed by vibrations in the air (caused by the strings) which in turn alters the signal that is sent through a cable to the amp. The amp then receives the signal and amplifies it. There are two types of pickup: single coil pickups and humbuckers.

P I M A

Letters derived from the Spanish names for the fingers of the right hand: *pulgar* (thumb), *indice* (index), *medio* (middle), and *anular* (ring). Used to indicate fingering.

Pitch

The frequency of a note (how high or low it sounds). The A directly above middle C is 440 Hz.
This is called concert pitch.

Plectrum

Another name for a flat pick.

Positions

A reference to placement of the left hand index finger at various frets.

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Power Chord

A chord consisting of the first (root), fifth and eighth degree (octave) of the scale. Power chords are typically used in playing rock music.

Pull-Off

The opposite of a hammer-on. Performed by plucking a note with a finger on a higher note and pulling parallel to the fret to sound a lower note on the same string.

Rake

A technique where the pick is firmly dragged across the strings. Can be done to provide emphasis on the highest note and can sometimes contain muted strings. A similar technique to arpeggiated chords.

Relative Tuning

Where one string on a guitar is used to tune all the others by comparison. The fifth fret trick is a common method of relative tuning.

Riff

A repeated sequence of notes, most common in rock and pop.

Root

The note from which a scale or chord is based. The first note of a scale or chord.

Rhythm Guitar

Rhythmic strumming of chord backup for a lead player, singer, or ensemble.

Saddle

A component of the bridge that has a groove to hold the strings in place.

Scale

An ascending sequence of notes that lie within an octave.

Setup

The adjustment of the action of a guitar for optimal playing characteristics.

Slide

A plastic or glass tube placed over the third or fourth finger of the left hand and used to play "slide" or glissando effects in rock and blues and other forms of traditional music.

Shape

A pattern of notes on the fretboard that can be moved up and down into various keys. This could include chord shapes and scale shapes.

Signal

An electrical current sent from the pickups to an output. The signal represents changes in the surrounding air pressure.

Signal Chain

The sequence of signals from pickups through effects units, preamplifiers, amplifiers and all the other devices that may carry a signal from the guitar to the final output.

Single Coil Pickup

A pickup consisting of one coil around a magnet.

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Slap

The striking of a string by the thumb. The strike is made by a flick of the wrist and forms the basis of slap bass but can be done on an electric guitar.

Slur

A form of legato in which hammer-ons and pull-offs are used to move smoothly between a series of notes.

Solid Body

A guitar body that does not use hollow cavities to resonate sound (electric guitars). Acoustic guitars never have solid bodies.

Sound Hole

The hole in an acoustic guitar that allows sound to resonate within the hollow body.

Staccato

Cutting a note short to give a percussive effect.

Standard Tuning

The guitar is generally tuned EADGBE low to high.

Static Bridge

A bridge that does not move (has no vibrato system). As opposed to a floating bridge.

Stomp Box

A type of pedal that has its own built in effects (distortion for example) that can be turned on and off by stomping on the switch. Enables effects to be activated easily whilst standing up.

String Winder

A swivel device with a handle with a fixture that fits over the tuning keys.

Strumming

Performed with a pick or the fingers. Generally consists of brushing across 2-6 strings in a rhythmic up and down fashion appropriate to the tune being played.

Suspended Chord

A chord based on the major triad, but with the third replaced with the major second or perfect fourth, known as suspended second and suspended fourth chords.

Sweep Picking

Picking single notes with the fluid motion of a strum whilst sounding like a single-note line. This is achieved by using a series of down- or upstrokes to pick single notes on consecutive strings.

Tablature or Tab

A system of writing music for fretted instruments whereby a number or letter appears on lines representing the strings, indicating the fret to be played.

Transcription

To write a solo, note for note, off of a recording.

Transpose

To change the key of a piece of music by a specific interval.

Travis Picking

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A style where quarter notes are plucked with a plectrum and fingers pluck the other strings. Used in country music.

Treble Clef

A symbol that wraps around the second lowest line of a musical staff. The symbol is also known as the G clef as it dictates the note that the line represents.

Tremolo

A technique performed with either a very rapid down-up movement of the pick or a pami plucking of the fingers.

Tremolo Bar

The removable metal bar that can be attached to the bridge. The bar is depressed to cause a drop in pitch and raised to cause a jump up in pitch. Also can be used for vibrato.

Tremolo Picking

A technique where a note is picked as rapidly as possible for a set duration of time. A tremolo picked note is notated as normal but with three diagonal lines below the number on the tab.

Triad

A three-note chord.

Truss Rod Cover

Thin plate that covers the entrance to the truss rod. Usually located just above the nut.

Tuner

An electronic tuning device.

Vibrato

To vibrate by slightly altering a pitch higher and lower.

Voicing

The arrangement of the member notes of a chord, or placement of the melody or bass line within a harmonic progression.

Whammy Bar

The removable metal bar that can be attached to the bridge. The bar is depressed to cause a drop in pitch and raised to cause a jump up in pitch. Also can be used for vibrato.