

Learning to tune a guitar is difficult in the beginning. It is an ear training process that will improve with experience. You are training the ear to match one pitch to another. You are learning to determine whether a string on your guitar is the same, higher or lower than a reference or tuning pitch. The tuning pitch is the pitch or tone you are attempting to match. It can be provided by a tuning fork (E), a piano, another guitar, a record or by the guitar itself.

TUNING TECHNIQUE

Listen to the tuning pitch. Determine whether the string you are tuning is the same, higher or lower than the tuning pitch. If guitar sounds lower, you must tighten the string to raise the pitch. If the guitar sounds higher, loosen the string to lower the pitch. If you are not sure if the string is higher or lower, purposely tune the string lower. It is generally easier to approach the tuning pitch from a lower sound than it is to tune down to a pitch. With your left hand gripping the appropriate tuning key, pluck the string with a pick or the thumb as you slowly turn the tuning key. This enables you to hear the pitch change as you are making adjustments to it. Listen to the tuning pitch again. Repeat this procedure until you are satisfied that you have been able to match the tuning pitch.

Tuning to a Piano

Guitar notation sounds an octave (8 notes) lower than piano notation. So when you tune your guitar to a piano, you must be certain that you are tuning the strings to the correct pitch, fig. 6. Play the tuning pitch on the piano and then attempt to match the open guitar string to it. Begin with the 6th string.

Open Strings: E A D G B E

Guitar notation (written)

Guitar notation (sounds)

Fig. 6

Tuning the Guitar to Itself

The guitar can provide its own tuning pitch. Begin with the 6th string. Either tune it to a tuning pitch provided by some outside source (tuning fork, pitchpipe, piano, record) or estimate the pitch. The pitch of the low E, 6th string usually doesn't vary too much between tunings. Now proceed through the various steps described in fig. 1-5.

fig. 1

Place the 2nd finger on the 5th fret, 6th string.

fig. 2

Match the open 5th string to that pitch.

fig. 3

Place the 2nd finger on the 5th fret, 5th string.

fig. 4

Match the open 4th string to that pitch.

fig. 5

Place the 2nd finger on the 4th fret, 3rd string.

fig. 6

Match the open 2nd string to that pitch.

fig. 7

Place the 2nd finger on the 5th fret, 2nd string.

fig. 8

Match the open 1st string to that pitch.

Electronic Tuners

There are many inexpensive electronic guitar tuners available that will eliminate the tuning problem for you. They have built-in microphones for acoustic guitars and a chord input for electric guitars. They are well worth the investment.