



Presents

The Ultimate Guitar Buying Guide





MAKE GUITAR MUSIC'S GUITAR BUYING GUIDE

By

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Acoustic or Electric?

So you're ready to play guitar. Whether you're looking for a guitar for beginners, or you're looking to get back into guitar playing, the first buying decision is – acoustic or electric?

What style of music do you most want to play? If you're yearning to play rock, metal or Chicago blues, you'll want to buy an electric guitar. If you aim to play folk, bluegrass or Delta blues, you'll want to buy an acoustic guitar.

Like most guitar players I know, you probably want to play a variety of music. That's common many guitarists eventually own at least one acoustic and one electric guitar.

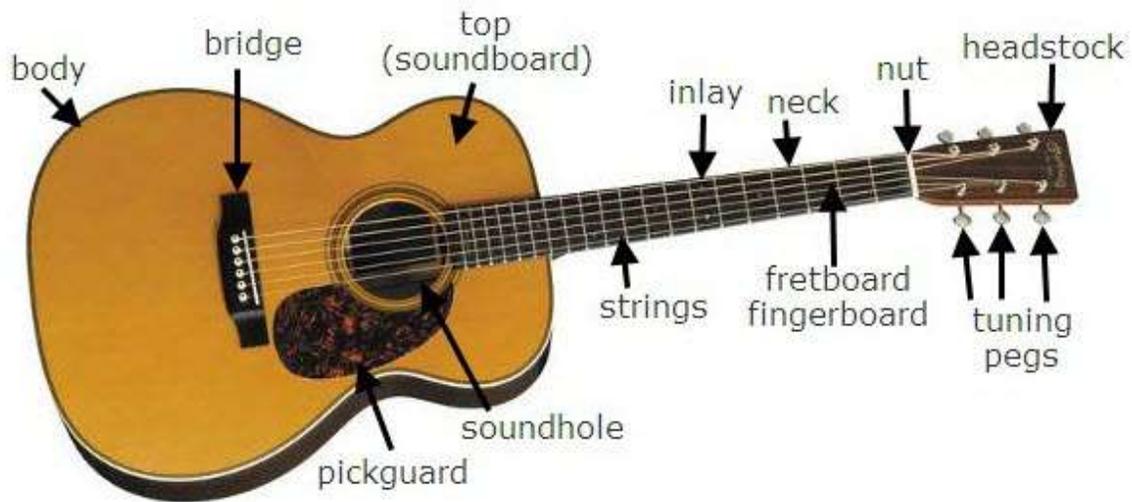
Differences Between Acoustic and Electric Guitars

The acoustic guitar and electric guitar may look (and sound) completely different, but from a playing perspective they're the same. Both have a neck, body, and headstock with six strings attached. The main difference is this: An acoustic guitar is loud enough to be played without an amplifier. An electric guitar needs to be plugged into an amplifier to be played at a comparable volume.

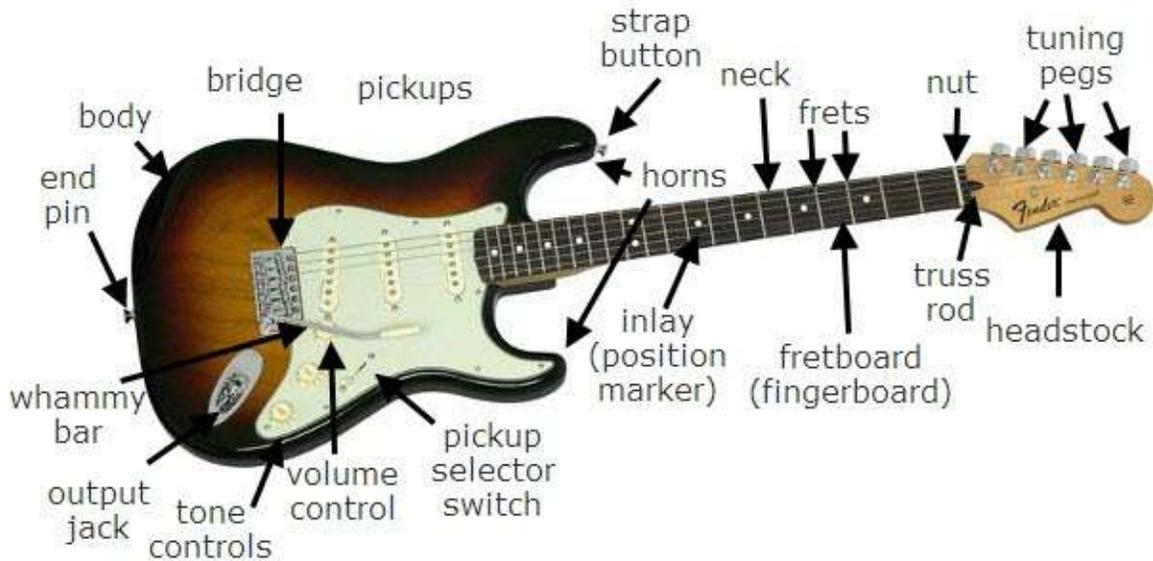
The Parts of a Guitar

The basic parts of the acoustic guitar and the electric guitar are identical. But, the electric guitar has some additional gadgets.

The Parts of an Acoustic Guitar



The Parts of an Electric Guitar



Glossary of guitar parts

Back: For acoustics, only, the back of the guitar holds the sides in place. Higher-quality acoustic guitars will specify woods used in construction. For example: Top: Sitka Spruce. back/sides: Sapele.

Bridge: On acoustic guitars, this is the wooden plate that holds the saddle. On electric guitars, this is the metal piece that anchors the strings to the guitar's body.

Bridge pins (acoustic): Plastic pins that hold the strings into the bridge.

Body (acoustic): The sound chamber that projects the sound and produces the guitar's tone.

Body (electric): Contains the electronics and the bridge assembly.

End pin: The metal or plastic post where you attach one end of the guitar strap.

Fretboard: A wooden layer, on top of the neck, where the fret wires are embedded. Also known as a **fingerboard**.

Frets: the metal wires embedded in the fretboard.

Headstock: The wooden piece at the top of the neck where the tuning pegs are mounted.

Horns (electric): The hornlike shape created by "cutaways" in the guitar body. The cutaways allow access to the higher frets.

Inlays: Also known as position markers, inlays are positioned on the fretboard to serve as a visual reference, helpful in locating specific frets.

Nut: The plastic or bone strip at the top of the neck, just below the headstock.

Neck: The "backbone" of the guitar attaches the headstock to the body, and supports the fretboard.

Output jack (electric): The guitar's electrical output, where you plug in the cable from the amplifier.

Pickguard: A protective layer (usually plastic) mounted to the guitar's surface to protect it from pick scratches.

Pickup selector (electric): The switch that allows you to select the pickup or pickup combination.

Pickups (electric): These are bar-shaped magnets that "pick up" the vibrations of the metal strings to create the electrical signal that gets amplified into music. You can think of pickups as microphones for the vibrating strings.

Saddle (acoustic): This is a piece of bone, plastic, or Tusq that sits in the bridge. The strings pass over, and contact the saddle.

Sides (acoustic): Curved strips of wood that connect the top and back of the acoustic guitar. Higher-quality acoustic guitars will specify woods used in construction. For example: *Top: Sitka Spruce. back/sides: Sapele.*

Soundhole (acoustic): An opening on the top of the guitar to project the sound. This is usually circular or oval. Some archtop guitars have "F" holes like those found on violins and cellos.

Strap button: A metal or plastic post (like the end pin) where you attach your guitar strap. Some acoustic guitars don't have this button. In that case, you can tie the end of the strap to the headstock.

Strings: The steel, bronze, or nylon strings that run from the bridge to the headstock. This is where the music gets made.

String tree (electric): A metal hook, attached to the headstock of some guitars. It creates a downward angle for the specific strings allowing for better contact at the nut.

Top (acoustic): Also called the soundboard. Higher-quality acoustic guitars will specify woods used in construction. For example: *Top: Sitka Spruce. Back/Sides: Sapele.*

Truss rod: A metal rod that fits into the neck and provides structural support. You can't see the truss rod, but you may see a plastic plate on the headstock, adjacent to the nut. This allows access to the truss rod for neck alignment adjustments. Some acoustic guitars access the truss rod through the soundhole.

Tuning pegs: Also called tuning machines, tuning keys, tuners, or machine heads. They're used to adjust the string tension to proper pitch.

Volume/tone controls (electric): Control knobs to adjust volume and tone of the pickups.

Whammy bar (electric): Also called a tremelo bar, the whammy bar attaches to the bridge. Pushing the bar in and out causes the bridge to wobble, changing the pitch of the strings.

Glossary of Guitar-Buying Terms

If you're buying your first guitar, it will help to know the terms used in specifications and used by guitar salespeople. Here are some common terms to describe characteristics of acoustic guitars and/or electric guitars.

Abalone – The hard shiny material used for decoration and ornamentation on acoustic guitars such fretboard and headstock inlays. The material is from the internal lining of the giant sea snail's shell. This is similar to *mother of pearl*.

Action – The distance between the frets and the strings of an acoustic guitar. High action would mean a greater distance than a low action.

Attack – This describes the time it takes for a note, when struck, to go from silence to its maximum volume.

Binding – Strips, typically wood or plastic, used to edge the acoustic guitar's body, neck or headstock. Used to both strengthen and enhance the guitar's look.

Bolt-on neck – A guitar neck that is attached to the body with bolts. This is typical for solid-body electric guitars, such as Fender Strats and Teles.

Bookmatching – is when the wood used for the top and back of a guitar is cut down the middle and the two pieces are joined at the center so that the grain pattern matches.

Bout – If you consider the narrow part of the guitar body the "waist" the bouts are the curved areas below and above the waist. The curves above the waist are the upper bout; those below, the lower bout.

Bracing – An acoustic guitar top's an internal, wooden support structure that gives the instrument structural integrity.

Bridge – A piece of flat wood placed below the soundhole and used to anchor the strings to the soundboard.

Bridge pins – These pins fit into the holes in the bridge where the strings get anchored into place. Usually made of plastic or ebony.

Cutaway – This is a guitar body style where there is an opening (cutaway) in the guitar's upper bout to allow the player to reach frets higher up the neck.

Decay – The time it takes for a plucked note to go from maximum volume back to silence.

Dreadnought – A large-body acoustic guitar.

Fingerboard/Fretboard – This is usually a thin piece of wood that is glued onto the neck. The thin metal strips called frets are fixed into the fingerboard/fretboard.

Finish – The final coating applied to the acoustic guitar wood.

Frets –The thin metal strips set into the fretboard.

Fret markers – Usually dot or other decorative inlays placed into the fretboard to serve as a visual reference of the fret number, or playing position.

Headstock – The uppermost piece of the guitar's neck where the tuning machines are attached.

Heel –The lowest point of the neck, where it attaches to the guitar's body.

Intonation – means that if you play a note on the open string, for example an E note, the note at the 12th fret should be the E note one octave higher. If the notes are not harmonically the same, the guitar's intonation needs adjusted. This could involve adjusting the neck or possibly the bridge.

Laminated wood – also called *veneered* by gluing several thin strips of wood together to create a piece of wood sometimes used for tops and backs of acoustic guitars. Laminated woods are less expensive than solid woods.

Luthier – is someone who makes and/or repairs stringed instruments.

Mother of Pearl – Like Abalone, the shiny interior of certain mollusk shells. Used for inlays and other decorative enhancements.

Nut – Located at the top of the fretboard before the headstock, the nut serves to evenly space the strings as they approach the tuners and transfer vibrations to the neck of the guitar.

Pearloid – A synthetic alternative to mother-of-pearl or Abalone.

Pick (Plectrum) – A thin piece of plastic or shell to strum or pluck the guitar strings.

Pickguard – A thin layer of plastic below the strings to protect the guitar top from pick scratches that could occur when picking or strumming the strings.

Pickup – On electric guitars the the electronic device that senses (picks up) the vibrations of the strings and converts it to an electrical signal for amplification.

Piezo pickup – A crystalline structure usually placed under the saddle of an acoustic/electric guitar. The Piezo pickup senses changes in compression and converts them into electrical signals.

Rosette – A decorative inlay around an acoustic guitar's soundhole.

Saddle (bridge nut) – On an acoustic guitar, the saddle spaces the strings at the bridge and, with the bridge, transfers string vibration to the guitar top.

Scale – The total length of the string from bridge to nut.

Soundhole – The hole in an acoustic guitar's top that enhances sound projection.

Truss rod – An internal, metal rod that runs the length of the neck. Technicians may need to to adjust the curve of the neck via the truss rod to accommodate different string gauges, or to adjust for intonation problems.

Waist – The narrow portion of an acoustic guitar's body.

Buying an Acoustic Guitar

To find your best acoustic guitar, you'll need to decide if you want a steel-string or a nylon-string guitar. Do you plan on playing your acoustic guitar in a band? You may want to consider an acoustic-electric guitar.



Steel-String, Nylon-String and Acoustic-Electric Guitars

Buying the Right Acoustic Guitar

There are three types of acoustic guitar:

- ◆ Steel-string acoustic guitar
- ◆ Nylon-string or classical guitar
- ◆ Acoustic-electric guitar

Buying a Steel-String Acoustic Guitar

This is the most popular acoustic guitar. The steel-string guitar is played in virtually all styles of music including: country, blues, folk, bluegrass, and rock.

Listen to what [Jimmy Page](#) can do with an acoustic guitar on "The Rain Song." [Watch it on YouTube.](#)



Buying a Nylon-String or Classical Guitar

The sound of the nylon string, or classical guitar is softer and more mellow than the steel-string guitar. Besides classical music, you'll hear nylon-string guitars in flamenco, bossa nova, and jazz.

Flamenco guitarist [Paco de Lucia](#) plays "Entre dos Aguas" on his nylon-string guitar. [Watch it on YouTube.](#)



Buying an Acoustic-Electric Guitar

The acoustic-electric guitar is essentially an acoustic guitar. However, it has a built in pickup that lets you amplify the acoustic sound. Both nylon-string and steel-string guitars are available as acoustic-electric guitars.

It's important to know that the acoustic-electric guitar is not a substitute for an electric guitar. An amplified acoustic-electric guitar is designed to sound like an acoustic guitar, but loud enough to be heard in a bar band, or even in an arena.

If you're planning on playing in a band, or onstage, you'll want to consider an acoustic-electric guitar. The alternative is to use a microphone and amplifier to amplify your acoustic guitar. Note that Paco de Lucia, in the video (above) is not playing an acoustic-electric guitar, thus the guitar needed to be mic'ed.

[Eric Clapton](#) performs "Tears in Heaven" on an acoustic-electric guitar. [Watch it on YouTube.](#)



Buying a Steel-String Acoustic Guitar

Steel-string acoustic guitars fit into virtually any style of acoustic music from folk to rock. If you're into acoustic blues, bluegrass, rock or country, the steel-string acoustic is the guitar to buy.

Steel-string acoustic guitars come in a variety of standard sizes from small-bodied "parlor" guitars to large-bodied dreadnought guitars. Typically the larger the guitar body, the louder the volume. Consider your height and your hand size when choosing a guitar. If you're under five-feet-four-inches tall, a dreadnought guitar may be uncomfortable.



Most guitar makers feature models priced in the \$400 to \$1,200 range. Some makers also produce the higher-end models. Others choose to produce an affordable line of guitars for the beginners.

Popular High-End Acoustic Guitars

Popular high-end acoustic guitar brands (with models over \$1,500) include Martin, Gibson, Guild, Taylor and Collings. High-end guitars are made from select, solid woods (as opposed to laminated woods), and are often handcrafted.

The great, Beatles' guitarist [George Harrison](#) plays "Here Comes the Son" on a steel-string acoustic-electric guitar. [Watch it on YouTube](#).



Popular Affordable Brands of Acoustic Guitars

Popular lower-end guitar brands (starting from \$200-\$300) include: Takamine, Washburn, Yamaha, Ibanez, Fender, Epiphone and Seagull. You can find excellent, playable steel string guitars without spending a fortune. Lower end guitars will likely be made of laminate-wood tops, which may not have the rich dynamics of solid-wood, but are perfectly adequate for most guitar players.

Examples include (links to details):

- ♦ [Seagull S6](#)
- ♦ [Yamaha FG700S](#)
- ♦ [Fender DG-8S value pack](#)

Acoustic Guitar Pricing Considerations

Pricing factors for acoustic guitars include the types of wood used. Is the guitar top solid wood or veneer? Hand-crafted parts will also drive up the price, as will fancy fretboard inlays, and bindings. The quality of the tuning pegs (hardware) will also be a cost factor.

Steel-string acoustic guitar players include:

- ♦ [Bob Dylan](#)
- ♦ [Taylor Swift](#)
- ♦ [Jack Johnson](#)
- ♦ [Tracy Chapman](#)
- ♦ [Tommy Emmanuel](#)

Buying a Nylon-String Acoustic Guitar

The nylon-string acoustic guitar is also known as a "classical guitar" since it's used in the classical guitar repertoire. But, it is also heard in a variety of other styles including folk, jazz, and Latin. So, I will use the more generic term of "nylon-string acoustic guitar."

If you're a beginner interested in learning fingerstyle guitar, I'd suggest going the nylon-string route. But if I were planning on using a pick for strumming and picking, I'd suggest a steel-string guitar.

Not Just For Classical Guitar

While the nylon-string guitar is designed for playing fingerstyle, nothing says you can't use a pick (or plectrum). Watch [Willie Nelson](#) use his fingers and a pick on his well-worn nylon-string Martin guitar. [Watch it on YouTube](#).



A Good Beginner's Guitar

Some guitar teachers feel nylon-string guitars make good beginners' instruments. The nylon strings are easier to fret and gentler on the fretting fingers than are steel-string acoustics. For fingerstyle playing, the nylon strings are much easier on the plucking fingers than steel strings.

[John Williams](#) plays classical-style nylon string guitar on Bach's "Prelude from Lute Suite 4. [Watch it on YouTube.](#)



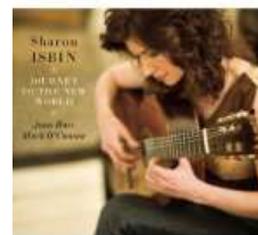
Because classical music is played fingerstyle, the neck of the nylon-string guitar is wider. The extra space between strings makes it easier to play fingerstyle. But that also makes it a bit harder to fret chords, especially for folks with smaller hands. If you're looking to get a small person started on nylon-string guitar, you can find student-model classical guitars at 3/4 scale size and smaller.

Some popular classical guitars include (links to detailed information):

- ✦ [Yamaha CG101A](#)
- ✦ [Cordoba C5](#)
- ✦ [Yamaha C40 package](#)
- ✦ [Giannini GWNC1 Sevilha](#)

Nylon-string acoustic guitar players include (links to artist pages):

- ✦ [Willie Nelson](#)
- ✦ [Andres Segovia](#)
- ✦ [Earl Klugh](#)
- ✦ [Sharon Isbin](#)
- ✦ [Muriel Anderson](#)



Buying an Acoustic-Electric Guitar

If you plan to play acoustic guitar in a band, or on stage, you may want an acoustic-electric guitar. This is an acoustic guitar that comes equipped with a built-in microphone or pickup. Acoustic-electric guitars can be played acoustically, but they're really designed to be played through an amp.

Besides the built-in pickup, acoustic-electric guitars have a panel with controls for volume and tone (treble, bass, middle). Acoustic-electric guitars often feature a "cutaway" body style, an opening at the guitar's lower shoulder to allow you access to the higher-note frets.



Other Acoustic-Electric Guitar Factors

Some things to consider before deciding on an acoustic-electric:

1. The body size is usually smaller than standard acoustic guitars.
2. Being designed for amplification, the string gauges and general setup can make these guitars easier to play than standard acoustic guitars. This also means the guitar is not particularly loud when played unamplified.

[Eric Clapton](#) and [John Mayer](#) perform an acoustic-electric duet of "Broken Hearted." Watch it on YouTube.



Typically, beginners would not need an acoustic-electric as a first guitar. But, if you plan on performing or playing in a band, here are some popular acoustic-electric guitars that you could grow into (links to details):

- ♦ [Takamine G Series EG340SC cutaway](#) dreadnought
- ♦ [Oscar Schmidt](#) dreadnought
- ♦ [Jasmine by Takamine ES31C](#)
- ♦ [Epiphone PR-4E](#) pack
- ♦ [Yamaha F Series FX325 Dreadnought Acoustic Electric Guitar, Natural](#)
- ♦ [Taylor Guitars 114ce grand auditorium](#)

Acoustic-electric players include most guitarists who play an acoustic guitar live, on stage, such as...

- ♦ [Al Di Meola](#)
- ♦ [James Taylor](#)
- ♦ [Martin Simpson](#)
- ♦ [Michael Hedges](#)
- ♦ [Leo Kottke](#)

Buying an Electric Guitar

There are four basic types of electric guitar.

- ♦ Solid-Body Guitar
- ♦ Hollow-Body Guitar
- ♦ Semi-Hollow Body Guitar
- ♦ Chambered Body Guitar



Solid-Body, Hollow-Body, Semi-Hollow and Chambered Electric Guitars

Solid-Body Electric Guitars

The solid-body guitar is the most popular electric guitar. The guitar's body is made from solid block of wood and has these characteristics:

- ♦ The guitar is virtually silent when played unamplified.
- ♦ The solid body allows the plucked string to vibrate longer than it would on a hollow body guitar. This characteristic is known as *sustain*.
- ♦ The solid body resists feedback, which is important when playing loud.
- ♦ Solid-body guitars are heavier than hollow body guitars.

While solid-body guitars can be heard in all styles of music, their bread and butter has got to be rock 'n' roll music. Hear one of the best, [Jimi Hendrix](#), play "Purple Haze" on his [Fender Stratocaster](#). [Watch the YouTube video](#).



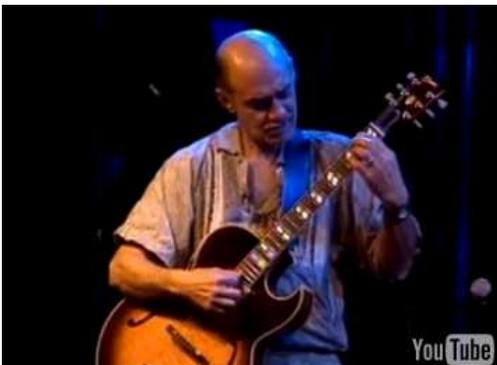
Hollow-Body Electric Guitars

The hollow-body electric guitar is designed to be played through an amplifier. But the guitar's hollow body (like an acoustic) allows the guitar to be played unamplified. Played without an amp, you can hear the guitar, but at a lower volume than a standard acoustic guitar.

The hollow-body guitar has these characteristics:

- ◆ The guitar can be heard at low volumes when played unamplified.
- ◆ The hollow body gives the guitar a more mellow, electric sound, as favored by many jazz guitarists.
- ◆ The hollow body is prone to feedback, so it is usually played in "quieter" styles of music like country, blues, and jazz. But, you will see some rock guitarists playing hollow bodies at high volumes, particular players of vintage rock and rockabilly.
- ◆ Hollow-body guitars are lighter than solid body guitars.

Listen to the incomparable jazz tone of [Joe Pass](#) and his [Gibson ES-137](#) guitar on "All the Things You Are." [Watch the YouTube video](#).



Semi-Hollow Body Electric Guitars

Semi-hollow guitars like the [Gibson ES-335](#) and the [Epiphone Dot](#) are closer to solid-body guitars than are archtops. Unamplified, you could hear yourself playing, but would barely be heard from across the room. Characteristics include:

- ◆ A solid block of wood that runs the length and depth of the body.
- ◆ Not as thick (between the guitar's top and the guitar's back) as archtops.
- ◆ The center block reduces feedback at high volumes.

These guitars are highly versatile and can be heard in virtually all styles of music from hard rock to mellow jazz. Watch [Dave Grohl](#) of [Foo Fighters](#) rock out on "Best of You" with his Gibson ES-335 guitar. [Watch the YouTube video.](#)



Chambered Electric Guitars

Chambered guitars like the [Fender Thinline](#), start as solid-body guitars with chambers routed out of sections of the guitar. Of all the various hollow-body guitars, these are the closest to being a solid body guitar. Chambered guitars are:

- ◆ A bit lighter than solid-body guitars.
- ◆ Unlike a solid-body, you could practice unamplified and still hear the notes from a chambered guitar.
- ◆ There is enough mass in the guitar's body to resist feedback at high volumes.

Being similar to solid-body guitars, you could play virtually any style of music with a chambered guitar. However, you don't see a lot of guitarists playing chambered-body guitars. A chambered-body guitar might be a good choice for someone who finds solid-body guitars uncomfortably heavy.

[Merle Haggard](#) plays a modified Fender Thinline, with a laminated top without the usual F hole. Hear him on "Mama Tried." [Watch the YouTube video.](#)



Buying a Solid-Body Electric Guitar

The solid body is the most popular electric guitar. The guitar's body is made from solid wood and has these characteristics:

PIC OF Tele, Strat, LP

- ◆ The guitar is virtually silent when played unamplified.
- ◆ The solid body allows the plucked string to vibrate longer than it would on a hollow body guitar. This characteristic is known as *sustain*.
- ◆ The solid body resists feedback, which is important when playing loud.
- ◆ Solid-body guitars are heavier than hollow-body guitars.

The most easily-recognized solid body guitars are the Fender Telecaster, Fender Stratocaster and the Gibson Les Paul.

Fender Telecaster

The [Fender Telecaster](#) may be the hardest-working solid-body in show business. The Tele (rhymes with "belly") was the first mass-produced solid-body electric guitar. It's a picture of simplicity: two single-coil pickups, a selector switch, and one tone and one volume control.

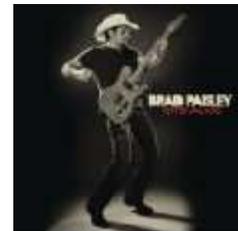
The Telecaster is a favorite of country players. But, you'll find Telecaster players in all styles of music. The one area where you don't see a lot of Teles, is among jazz players. However [Ed Bickert](#), [Bill Frisell](#) and [Mike Stern](#) have made some great jazz music with their Teles.

[Bruce Springsteen](#) plays his signature Telecaster at a recording session of [Warren Zevon's](#) "Disorder in the House." [Watch the YouTube video.](#)



Telecaster players include:

- ✦ [Bob Dylan](#)
- ✦ [Brad Paisley](#)
- ✦ [Keith Richards](#)
- ✦ [James Burton](#)
- ✦ [John 5](#)



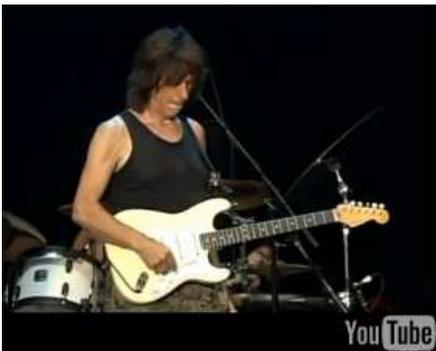
Stratocaster-Style Guitars

The popular [Fender Stratocaster](#) defines a "Strat" style of guitar that has these features:

- ✦ A double-cutaway body design that allows easy access to the high-pitched frets.
- ✦ Three single-coil pickups.
- ✦ A bridge that accommodates a whammy bar.

Strat-style guitars are heard in rock, blues, R&B, country, surf, and any other electrified genre you can think. However, there is one exception. You seldom see Strat-style guitars used by jazz players.

[Jeff Beck](#) can do just about anything with his Stratocaster on "Goodbye Porkpie Hat/Brush With the Blues." [Watch the YouTube video.](#)



Fender produces a line of Stratocasters that range in price from \$600 to \$3,000. Prices vary based on woods used in the body, woods used in the neck, electronics, and hardware.

Note: Fender's Squier brand offers a variety of lower-cost guitars including the [Squier Telecaster](#) and [Squier Stratocaster](#). Squier guitar prices start at the \$200 range. Other guitar manufacturers offering Strat-style guitars include: Ibanez, Jackson, Charvel, and Kramer.

Stratocaster Guitar Players include:

- ♦ [Jimi Hendrix](#)
- ♦ [Eric Clapton](#)
- ♦ [Stevie Ray Vaughan](#)
- ♦ [Bonnie Raitt](#)
- ♦ [John Mayer](#)



Gibson Les Paul Guitar – Twin Humbuckers

The [Gibson Les Paul](#) features a thick, heavy single-cutaway style with two humbucker pickups. This produces a thick, chunky sound popular among rock, blues, and contemporary jazz styles. It doesn't have the high-end brightness popular in country music styles.

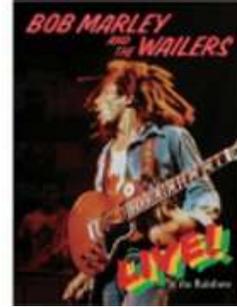
[Slash](#) plays his Les Paul on the classic Guns 'n' Roses tune, "Sweet Child of Mine." [Watch the YouTube video.](#)



Les Pauls and other, similar twin-humbucking guitars are typically pricier than Strat-style or Telecaster-style solid bodies. Gibson Les Pauls with two, humbuckers start at \$800 and on up to \$25,000 for custom-shop models. Gibson's Epiphone brand offers lower-priced models of Gibson guitars. The [Epiphone Les Paul](#) starts at around \$500.

Les Paul Players include:

- ◆ [Les Paul](#), the guitar's inventor
- ◆ [Slash](#)
- ◆ [Jimmy Page](#)
- ◆ [Zakk Wylde](#)
- ◆ [Duane Allman](#)
- ◆ [Bob Marley](#)



Note: Gibson has a [Les Paul Junior](#) guitar that looks like a standard Les Paul. This guitar has one pickup at the bridge position. As with many Gibson model guitars, there is a lower-priced [Epiphone Les Paul Junior](#).

A couple of noted Les Paul Junior players are:

- ◆ [John Lennon](#)
- ◆ [Billie Joe Armstrong](#) of Green Day
- ◆ [Alejandro Escovedo](#)



Buying a Hollow-Body Electric Guitar

The hollow-body electric guitar, or archtop guitar, is designed to be played through an amplifier. But the guitar's hollow body (like an acoustic) allows the guitar to be played unamplified, but at a lower volume than a standard acoustic guitar.

The hollow-body electric guitar has these characteristics:

- ◆ The guitar can be heard at low volumes when played unamplified.
- ◆ The hollow body gives the guitar a more mellow, electric sound, a favorite of jazz guitarists.
- ◆ The hollow body is more prone to feedback and is usually played in "quieter" styles of music like country, blues, and jazz. But, you will see some rock guitarists playing hollow bodies at high volumes.
- ◆ Hollow-body guitars are lighter than solid body guitars.

Most hollow-body electrics look something like the Gibson L5. These guitars are often referred to as "Jazz Boxes" or "Archtops" as the top surface of the guitar is not flat, but instead bowed, or arched.



Watch [Wes Montgomery](#) play "West Coast Blues" on his L5. [Watch the YouTube video.](#)



Affordable Electric Archtop Guitars

Gibson's archtop guitars are very expensive. A new Gibson L5 starts at around \$8,500. But Epiphone and other makers offer affordable electric archtops starting around \$500. These include:

- ♦ [Epiphone Joe Pass Emperor](#)
- ♦ [Epiphone ES-175 Archtop](#)
- ♦ [Epiphone Emperor](#)

Acoustic Archtop Guitars

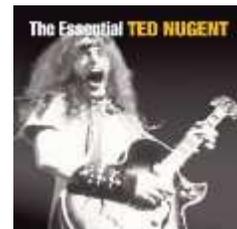
The archtop started life as an acoustic guitar. Pickups and electronics were added turning it into an electric guitar. The guitar tops were made a bit thicker to support the electronics, which made electric archtop less desirable as an acoustic.

However, if you're looking for a jazzy sounding acoustic guitar, you can buy archtops built without electronics. These guitars, have fine acoustic properties. Some affordable acoustic archtops include:

- ♦ [Godin 5th Avenue](#)
- ♦ [Gretsch G100 Synchronatic](#)
- ♦ [The Loar F-Hole Archtop](#)

Archtop players include:

- ♦ [Chet Atkins](#)
- ♦ [George Harrison](#)
- ♦ [Jack White](#)
- ♦ [Wes Montgomery](#)
- ♦ [Ted Nugent](#)



Buying a Semi-Hollow Body Electric Guitar

Semi-hollow guitars like the [Gibson ES-335](#) and the [Epiphone Dot](#) are closer to solid-body guitars than are hollow-body archtops. Unamplified, you could hear yourself playing, but would barely be heard across the room. Characteristics include:

- ♦ A solid block of wood that runs the length and depth of the body.
- ♦ Not as thick (between the guitar's top and the guitar's back) as archtops.
- ♦ The center block reduces feedback at high volumes.

[B.B. King](#) plays, "The Thrill is Gone" on Lucille, his custom, Gibson ES-335. [Watch the YouTube video.](#)



A Highly Versatile Electric Guitar

A semi-hollow guitar is highly versatile and can be heard in virtually all styles of music including jazz, blues, country and pop. The Gibson ES-355 was prominent in rock 'n' roll history as Chuck Berry's guitar of choice. While Gibson's ES-355 is a pricey guitar, Epiphone's version of the ES-355, the [Epiphone Dot](#), is an affordable semi-hollow guitar.

Other affordable semi-hollow guitars include:

- ♦ [Epiphone Sheraton II](#)
- ♦ [Hagstrom Viking IIP](#)
- ♦ [Hofner CT Club](#)

ES-355/Semi-Hollow Players include:

- ♦ [B.B. King](#)
- ♦ [Chuck Berry](#)
- ♦ [Dave Grohl](#)
- ♦ [Larry Carlton](#)
- ♦ [Alex Lifeson](#)



Buying a Chambered-Body Electric Guitar

The chambered-body guitar is essentially a solid-body guitar with hollow chambers carved out of the solid body. Many traditional solid-body guitars have spun-off chambered versions built for lighter weight and greater resonance.

A Solid-Body Guitar in a Lighter Package

A chambered guitar would be a good choice for a player who wants the characteristics of a solid-body guitar in a lighter package. A popular chambered guitar is the [Fender Thinline](#). It's basically a [Telecaster](#) body with hollowed chambers.

[Dierks Bentley](#) plays a Fender Thinline in his "Feel That Fire" video. [Watch it on YouTube.](#)

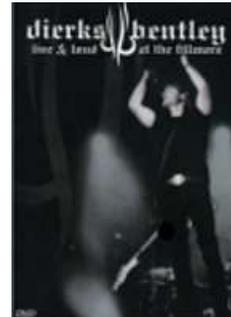


Fender also offers a budget-priced [Squier Thinline](#). Other chambered-body guitars include:

- ✦ [Epiphone Les Paul Ultra](#)
- ✦ [Godin Radiator](#)
- ✦ [Gibson Les Paul Studio](#)

Chambered guitar players:

- ✦ [Merle Haggard](#)
- ✦ [Dierks Bentley](#)
- ✦ [Jim Adkins](#)
- ✦ [James Valentine](#) of Maroon 5

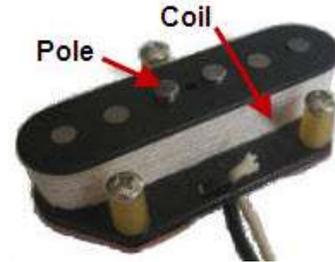


What You Need to Know About Electric Guitar Pickups

There are two basic types of electric guitar pickups: magnetic and piezoelectric. Piezo pickups work with all kinds of strings (steel, nylon, or gut). Magnetic guitar pickups only work with steel strings. As for magnetic pickups, there are two varieties: Single coil, and humbucker.

How Magnetic Guitar Pickups Work

A magnetic pickup consists of a magnet (pole) with a wire coil wrapped around it. When the metallic guitar string vibrates directly over the pole, it changes the magnetic flux of the magnet. This induces voltage in the coil around the magnet. The induced voltage oscillates in unison with string vibrations. That's how the guitar pickup translates the mechanical string vibration into voltage oscillation which can be transmitted through wire to the amplifier.



The pickup assembly that's visible under the guitar strings is a casing holding a series of magnetic poles – usually one per string. This series is connected to a master magnet that has another coil wrapped around it. On some pickups you can see the tops of the metallic poles, else they may be covered by a metal or plastic casing.

Single-Coil Guitar Pickups

Single-coil guitar pickups consist of a series of poles in a single row, one for each string. These pickups produce a bright, cutting tone rich in higher harmonics. Typically single coils have that "twang" that's heard in blues, country, and vintage rock, but not heard so much in heavier rock.

Sometimes single-coil pickups will produce an audible, 60-cycle hum when the guitar is in the presence of other electrical fields such as fluorescent lights and nearby transformers. One solution to this hum problem was the humbucker pickup.

Guitars With Single-Coil Pickups

Some popular single-coil guitars include:

- ♦ [Fender Stratocaster](#) and [Squier Stratocaster](#)
- ♦ [Fender Telecaster](#) and [Squier Telecaster](#)
- ♦ [Gibson Les Paul Junior](#) with P-90 single-coil pickup
- ♦ [Epiphone Les Paul Special](#) with P90 pickups

Humbucker Guitar Pickups

Humbucker pickups have two coils wrapped opposite from each other to cancel the 60-cycle hum. Humbuckers deliver a smoother, rounder tone. Humbuckers tend to generate more sustain than single-coils but with less note definition and high end. Some humbuckers are available with a coil-



tapping control, that lets you use only a single coil in the pickup, thus generating the characteristic single-coil sound.

Guitars with Humbucker Pickups

Popular guitars with humbucker pickups:

- ♦ [Gibson Les Paul](#) and [Epiphone Les Paul](#)
- ♦ [Gibson ES-335](#) and [Epiphone Dot](#)
- ♦ [Gibson SG Special](#) and [Epiphone SG](#)

Guitars with Humbucker and Single-Coil Pickup Combinations

Many guitar makers offer hybrid guitars with a combination of single-coil and humbucker pickups. Some models include (Inks to Amazon description):

- ♦ [Squier Affinity Stratocaster](#)
- ♦ [Fender Classic Series '72 Telecaster](#)
- ♦ [Fender Stratocaster HSS](#)

Piezoelectric Guitar Pickups

On electric guitars piezos are typically individual elements incorporated in the string saddle. Piezos are made of a non-magnetic crystalline material that generates a weak signal when compressed. This signal must go to a preamplifier, which is usually built into the guitar. Once preamplified, the signal can be sent to an external amplifier. Some guitars with piezos feature a 13-pin output for synthesizer guitars. Otherwise, the piezo tone is used to approximate the sound of an acoustic guitar.

Guitars with piezoelectric pickups

Guitars with piezo pickups include (Inks to Amazon description):

- ♦ [Fender Acoustasonic Telecaster](#)
- ♦ [Music Man Albert Lee MM90](#)
- ♦ [Parker P-Series](#)

Guitar Wiring

Multiple pickups allow you to select options for a variety of different guitar tones. Pickups at the bridge will sample string vibrations where they have the least range of motion. This produces a biting sound with accentuated treble. Pickups located closer to the neck have more midrange and bass tones. Switches on the guitar let you activate an individual pickup, or a combination of pickups to produce different overall tones.



Stratocaster Pickups, Wiring and Controls

While there are many different wiring schemes, the most common are the five-position for three pickups, and the three-position for two pickups.

Five-position Stratocaster for three pickups

Strats feature a five-position blade switch to control the guitar's three, single-coil pickups:

- ◆ First position – activates the neck pickup.
- ◆ Second position – activates neck and middle pickups.
- ◆ Third position – activates the middle pickup.
- ◆ Fourth position – activates the middle and bridge pickups.
- ◆ Fifth position – activates the bridge pickup.

The Stratocaster also has a master volume control and two tone knobs that allow you to add or subtract treble tones. The front tone knob controls the neck pickup and the rear tone knob controls both the bridge and middle pickups.

Three-position Gibson Les Paul, SG and ES-335 for two pickups

Many of Gibson's guitars with two humbuckers have a three-position toggle switch that lets you active neck only, bridge only, or both pickups.

Each pickup typically has its own independent volume control and tone control.

What You Need to Know About Electric Guitar Bridges

The bridge is that part on the guitar's body that the strings contact before they terminate at the body or tailpiece. Electric guitar bridges serve two functions:

1. String intonation. Most electric guitar bridges have a mechanism for adjusting the string lengths to compensate for slight differences between strings (gauge, materials, etc.). This assures that all strings can be in tune when fretted at the highest frets.
2. Whammy bar. Many electric guitars come with a whammy bar. The whammy bar lets you add vibrato to your playing. The vibrato effect is created by using the pushing and pulling the bar to rock the bridge back and forth, and so bend the strings to alter their pitch.

Note: The whammy bar is referred to incorrectly as a tremolo bar. Tremolo means a repeating variation in volume, not pitch. But, this term has been used so long that it's become common terminology.

Check out this excerpt from a [whammy bar lesson DVD by MJS on YouTube](#):



Guitar Bridges

There are a variety of bridge and string-termination types, these are some of the most common types:

- ♦ Tune-o-Matic bridge
- ♦ Two-point rocking tremolo
- ♦ Six-point rocking tremolo
- ♦ Locking vibrato
- ♦ Stop-bar tailpiece

- ◆ Wraparound stop-bar tailpiece
- ◆ Bigsby
- ◆ Brass barrel saddles

Tune-o-matic bridge

Gibson introduced the Tune-o-matic (TOM) bridge on the 1954 Gibson Les Paul Custom guitar. The TOM has been refined over the years and represents a very common bridge design that allows for individual intonation of strings and overall adjustment of string heights.



Tune-o-Matic Bridge

Two-Point Rocking Tremolo

The two-point rocking trem, or fulcrum vibrato, features individual string saddles that are adjustable for intonation and height. These saddles are mounted on the bridge which rocks on two bolts in the top of the guitar. The bridge has a broad, perpendicular plate that extends through the body of the guitar. This free-floating plate is attached to the inside of the guitar by stretch springs that match the exact tension of the strings. Locking tuners, which clamp down on the string are often used with this type of vibrato for more stability.

Six-Point Rocking Tremolo

The six-point rocking trem was designed in the 1950s by Fender, and is the original rocking vibrato bridge. It is through-body, spring-loaded, and provides individual string intonation and height adjustment, just like the two-point trem. This bridge is found on vintage and lower-end guitars.

Locking Vibrato

The locking vibrato is essentially the same as the two-point rocking tremelo. The difference is that the locking vibrato clamps down on the strings and works in tandem with clamps that lock down the strings at the nut. This design accommodates more extreme bends with the whammy bar.

Stop-Bar Tailpiece

A stop-bar bridge (also called a stoptail) is used on both solid body and archtop electric guitars. Stop-bars do not accommodate whammy bars.



Stop-Bar Bridge

This bridge consists of two parts:

1. An adjustable fixed bridge piece, such as a Tune-o-matic.
2. A separate stop-bar tailpiece.

The stop-bar tailpiece is a bar-shaped metal piece commonly made of metal alloy or zinc. The string ends are held in place (they "stop") inside the bar. The bar mounts to the guitar's top with sturdy, threaded-metal studs screwed into threaded sleeves embedded into the guitar's body of the guitar. This style possibly provides the greatest resonance due to the direct leverage exerted on the top by the strings at the bridge and stop bar.

Bigsby Vibrato Tailpiece

The Bigsby vibrato tailpiece, Bigsby for short, was the first successful design of what is now called a whammy bar. Bigsby is a specific brand of spring-loaded vibrato that appears on many vintage and vintage-style guitars.



Bigsby

The Bigsby does not have the same range of motion of the other styles of whammy bars. It is, though, highly controllable within its shorter range of motion and requires less hand pressure. The Bigsby is favored by musicians who use slow, subtle or extended bends.

What You Need to Know About Electric Guitar Woods

Unlike acoustic guitars, the type of wood used in an electric guitar will not directly affect the guitar's acoustics. The sound of an electric guitar with magnetic pickups comes solely from the interaction of the strings with the pickups.

However, characteristics of the wood will affect how long the string vibrates (sustains) and the shape of the string's motion. A resonant wood will also allow the pickup to move. These factors combined with the guitar's general construction will have significant impact on the electric guitar's tone.

Woods Used for Electric Guitars

The following woods are commonly used in construction of electric guitars:

Maple is the wood of choice for guitar tops. Maple is a dense, hard and heavy wood that often displays brilliant figurings. It's a favorite wood for a veneer or laminate top on solid-body guitars. Maple is also used for the tops of some <http://www.makeguitarmusic.com/?p=32> target="_new">archtop guitars, where it is often laminated. Maple's hardness brings out the trebles in a guitar's sound. It's sometimes used for fretboards where it adds definition to the sound.

Mahogany is very dense and strong, but not particularly hard. A mahogany neck and back is a common combination on short-scale guitars with maple tops such as Gibson's [Les Paul](#). Mahogany emphasizes midrange and bass tones, creating a mellower guitar sound. Mahogany is a resonant wood which enhances a guitar's sustain. Mahogany-topped guitars have a tone that is well suited to country blues playing. Mahogany necks tend to create a warmer tonal range.

Rosewood is commonly used for electric guitar fretboards. It is very dense and hard. It ranges in color from almost black to variegated brown and blond.

Brazilian rosewood is known for its high sound velocity and its broad range of overtones. Brazilian rosewood is strong and in the bottom end and has an overall darkness of tone. Strong mids and highs also contribute a richness of tone to the upper registers. Rosewood guitars have a pronounced reverberant-like tone quality, caused by audible delays in the onset of certain harmonics. When used for necks, Brazilian rosewood adds sparkle and ring.

Indian rosewood is known for high sound velocity and a broad range of overtones, strength and complexity in the bottom end and an overall darkness of tone in the rest of the range. Strong mids and highs also contribute a richness of tone to the upper registers. Indian rosewood has a thicker, more midrange overall coloration. When used for necks, Indian rosewood can help fatten up the midrange.

Ebony is a very hard, dense wood that is ideal for fretboards. It imparts a smooth feel to the fretboard and is often entirely black.

Ash is commonly used for the bodies of solid-body guitars. It is harder than mahogany and very resonant. Ash imparts a ringing sustain and bright tone with a well-formed midrange. Ash is a blonde wood that is often used on models with natural, wood finishes.

Alder is much like ash. It is lightweight and highly resonant. But it's not as pretty as ash, so it costs less. Alder may be the most common body wood on solid-body guitars. It is generally light tan in color, and will typically be finished with an opaque color.

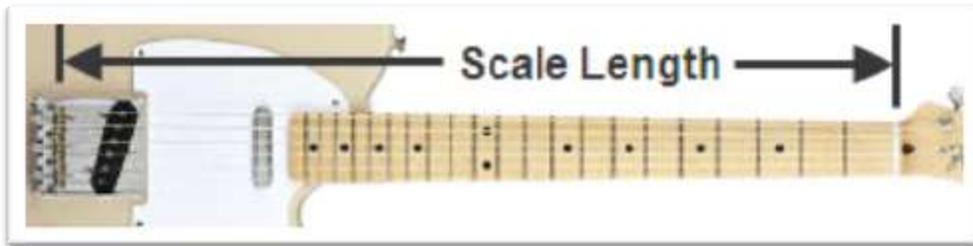
Agathis is becoming a popular for the bodies of affordable solid-body guitars. The wood is similar to alder in appearance and tonal characteristics, though not quite as resonant.

Nato is becoming a popular and less-expensive replacement wood for mahogany. It is very strong, has a warm resonance and is often used in the necks of less-expensive electric guitars.

What You Need to Know About Electric Guitar Scale Lengths

The guitar's scale length is the distance between the bridge and the nut. It's not often considered when buying a guitar, but scale length affects two aspects of the guitar:

1. The longer the scale length, the more distance between the fret wires.
2. The longer the scale length, the higher the string tension. The longer the scale, the more tension is needed to bring the string to proper pitch.



Standard-sized guitars typically come with scale lengths between 23 inches to 25.5 inches. Gibson's Les Pauls, SGs and Flying Vs have a 24.75-inch scale length. Fender Stratocasters and Telecasters have a 25.5-inch scale length.

Characteristics of Shorter Scale Guitars

Gibson Les Pauls, SGs and Flying Vs have a 24.75-inch scale length, and would fall into the "shorter scale" category. Shorter scale guitars have the following characteristics:

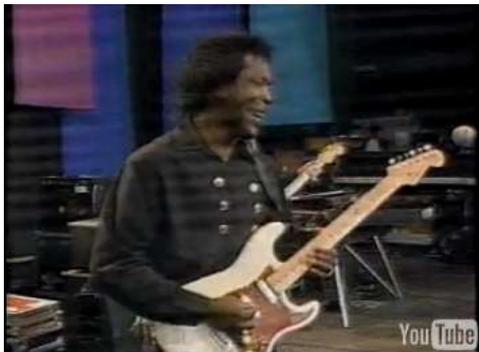
- ♦ Less tension allows for heavier gauge strings. This means a less-treble sound, and added bass response.
- ♦ Less tension makes it easier to fret the strings.
- ♦ More compact fret spacing makes for easier chord shaping and rhythm playing. Finger-busting chords, won't require as much of a stretch.
- ♦ Looser strings are easier for bending and vibrato effects.

Characteristics of Longer Scale Guitars

Fender Stratocasters and Telecasters with 25.5-inch scale lengths would fall in the "longer scale" category. Longer scale guitars have the following characteristics:

- ♦ Higher tension produces a brighter, more "twangy" sound.
- ♦ Higher tension makes fretting the strings a bit harder. So, most players use light-gauge strings.
- ♦ Wider frets are advantageous to single-note lead playing. More room means you won't be tripping over your own fingers as much.

While it's helpful to be aware of a guitar's scale length, don't let it totally dictate your decision. The differences are relatively minor. A longer scale guitar with light strings is not going to be significantly harder to fret than a shorter scale guitar. And while shorter-scale guitars make for easier string bending, it doesn't stop [Buddy Guy](#) from bending the blues with his Stratocaster on "Sweet Home Chicago." [Watch the video on YouTube.](#)



What You Need to Know About Electric Guitar Neck Attachments

Electric guitar makers have three methods of attaching the neck to the body:

- ◆ Bolt-on neck
- ◆ Set neck
- ◆ Neck-through body

Bolt-On Guitar Necks

Bolt-on necks are attached into a fitted slot in the body with three or four wood screws. Since screw heads could damage the wood and could put extra stress on it, typically a rectangular metal plate or a pair of metal plates secures the joint and redistributes the screw pressure evenly. The bolt-on neck was a crucial development for the electric guitar. It greatly reduced production costs and made electric guitars affordable.

Advantages of a bolt-on neck

- ◆ Easy to adjust, repair and replace with less skilled labor than is required for the other neck types.
- ◆ Some necks are available as "Fender four-bolt standard" allowing you to attach a different neck to your guitar (e.g. a Stratocaster neck to a Telecaster body).
- ◆ Some bolt on necks include an adjustment screw that allows for an easy adjustment of neck to body angle.
- ◆ Some suggest that no glue allows for better wood-to-wood contact and thus better resonance.

One disadvantage: Some feel that the metal plate impairs access to the higher frets.

Many guitar makers, including Fender, Music Man, and Ibanez use bolt on necks.

Set Guitar Necks

A set neck is glued into the body and sometimes has an extension (the tenon) which extends past the fretboard and deeper into the body. Gibson uses this type of neck.



Advantages of set neck:

- ◆ Typically, a set neck provides a stronger body-to-neck connection than a bolt-on neck. However most luthiers agree that a well-executed bolt-on neck joint is equally as strong.
- ◆ The neck-to-body connection is smoother than the bolt-on, and makes for more comfortable playing at the upper frets.

Disadvantages of a set neck:

- ♦ The set-neck process is more expensive, adding to the overall price of the guitar.
- ♦ Set necks are more difficult and expensive to adjust, repair and replace.

Neck Through Body Guitars

The neck-through method of solid-body guitar construction involves extending a single piece of wood, that's used for the neck, through the entire length of the guitar. The excess wood that is not part of the neck makes up the the core of the guitar's body. The strings, fretboard, pickups and bridge are all mounted on this single piece of wood. To fill out the guitar body, "ears" or "wings" are glued or laminated to the single neck-through piece.



Neck-through guitars are significantly harder to mass-produce than bolt-on or set-in guitars. The Gibson Firebird is an example of a neck-through guitar.

Advantages of neck-through guitars:

- ♦ The construction allows easier access to upper frets, because there is no need for a heel.
- ♦ These guitars are touted to provide greater sustain and stay in tune longer.
- ♦ Neck-through provides excellent stability and reaction to string tension and pressure.
- ♦ Neck through guitars are often more sturdy than comparable bolt-on and set neck guitars.

The disadvantage of a neck-through guitar is that neck repairs are usually expensive and tedious.

Buying an Electric Guitar Amplifier

If you play electric guitar, there are two categories for guitar amplifiers: practice amps and performance amps. The biggest difference is size, wattage and cost.

Practice amplifiers are around six to 10 watts, and include features found on performance amps. With guitar amplifiers, it's the power that drives up the price, not features. Power is expensive. It requires heavy-duty transformers, speakers and cabinetry. If you'll be jamming in a garage or basement band, 15 to 20 watts should be loud enough for a performance amp. A six to 10-watt practice amp will be plenty for practicing and playing along with you stereo.

Buying a Practice Guitar Amplifier

A practice guitar amplifier is not just an inexpensive performance amp. Even a gigging pro may want a practice amp because:

- ◆ It's small and easy to move around.
- ◆ You can sculpt a high-volume distorted sound, but at low volume.
- ◆ Many practice amps accommodate headphones for practicing in silent mode.

Brand-name practice amplifiers run as low as \$75 and include performance-amp features such as tone controls, and effects such as reverb and tremelo. Here are some things to look for in a practice guitar amplifier:

- ◆ Multiple-gain stages: Gain refers to the amp's loudness power and your capacity to shape a distorted sound. With high gain, you can get distortion at relatively low volumes. With low gain, you get a clean sound (no distortion).
- ◆ Three-band EQ: Equalization (EQ) provides tone controls for bass, mid, and high frequencies. Another tool to shape your overall sound.
- ◆ Built-in reverb: Reverb is an echo effect that produces a sound like you were playing in a canyon.
- ◆ Channel switching with a foot switch: Channel switching allows you to have two settings, for example one for a clean sound and one for a distorted sound. If you're playing a tune that requires going immediately from clean to distorted, you just step on the foot switch. Less expensive amps have a toggle switch near the volume controls, you need to stop playing to make the switch. If this is not important to you, there's no need to pay extra for this feature. You can get the same effect with a distortion pedal. (See Buying electric guitar effects.)
- ◆ Headphone jack: A headphone jack will silence the speakers and let you hear the full-treated amp sound through headphones. This is handy for late night practice sessions.



Some popular practice amps are (Inks to Amazon description):

- ◆ [Marshall MG10CD](#)
- ◆ [Fender Frontman](#)
- ◆ [VOX V9106 Pathfinder](#)

Headphone Amps

You can also get a miniaturized guitar amp, about the size of a digital camera, for headphones-only practice. These amps usually come with a belt clip and are battery powered. They offer distortion, EQ, reverb and other sound features. These are ideal for situations where you want to practice in private without breaking out your practice amp.

Buying a Performance Guitar Amplifier

When you're ready to get louder, you'll need a performance amp. There are many makes, models and sizes to choose from. The type you want will depend on the sound you're after. Talk to other guitarists, read guitar magazines, and listen to CDs. Find out what amps some of the artists you listen to are using.

A performance amp is more powerful than a practice amp, but this doesn't mean that it's only a louder amp. More power will deliver a cleaner sound at higher volumes. If a practice amp is distorting at a particular volume, a performance amp, at the same volume will remain clean.

If you're planning on playing in a five-piece bar band a 50-watt amp should be more than sufficient. If you'll be playing larger venues, or at loud levels – like heavy metal – you'll want 100 watts. Most 100-watt amps can operate at 50-watts. This lets you to play with distortion at lower volume.



Buying a Guitar Amp: Tubes or No Tubes?

Until the 1960s, all guitar amplifiers used glass tubes (or *valves* in the U.K.). The tubes were considered bulky, and fragile, and they got hot. With the advent of solid-state circuitry it seemed that the tube amplifier would become obsolete. Not so. Many guitar amplifiers, particularly higher-priced ones, still use tubes. Many guitar players favor the tube amps' warmer, less brittle sound.



Consider that tube amplifiers are more expensive than solid state. They are a bit more fragile and are bulkier and heavier than a comparable solid-state amplifier. If hear your favorite rock star singing the praises of a particular tube amp keep in mind, he's a well-paid professional, he has technicians to service his equipment, and he has roadies to haul his heavy amps.

A couple of the many popular performance amps are:

- ♦ [Marshall JMD1 50W 1x12](#)
- ♦ [Fender Vintage '65 Twin Reverb](#)
- ♦ [Line 6 Spider Valve 40-watt 1x12 Amp](#)

Buying an Acoustic-Electric Guitar Amp

If you will be performing with an acoustic-electric guitar you will need an amplifier. You do not want to use an electric guitar amplifier. You need an amplifier specifically designed for acoustic guitars. The acoustic guitar amp is designed to recreate the pure sound of the acoustic guitar without distortion and feedback.

As with electric guitar amplifiers, the price goes up as the power goes up. The size of the amp you need will depend on how loud you need to be. If you play coffeehouses and restaurants you can get by with 50-60 watts.

If you're playing in a band with electric instruments and drums, may need 100 watts.

Finding a Music Store With Guitars for Sale

The ideal place to buy a guitar is at a local music store or guitar shop. This ideal music store will have a good selection of guitars for sale, at a fair price, with a knowledgeable sales staff, and an on-site guitar technician. Depending on where you live, you might just find such a music store.

First-time buyers should be able to find a good, name-brand guitar at a local music store. However, if you've got your heart set on an uncommon guitar or a specific make and model, you may need to drive to a major metro area or consider buying your guitar online.

Check out Your Local Guitar Stores

You may feel a bit intimidated going into a music shop for the first time, to shop for a guitar. That's not unusual. These tips will help you get on with the guitar-buying quest.

- ♦ Ask guitar-playing friends to recommend local shops, and which shops to avoid. (This may eliminate the need for the rest of the steps on this list.)
- ♦ Use the Web or Yellow Pages and compile a list of all the guitar shops in your area.
- ♦ Visit each store's website. Note which guitar brands they carry. Look for any sort of specialty shops. A store that deals exclusively in acoustic, string instruments may be a good place to shop for an acoustic guitar.
- ♦ Do an Internet search on each of the prospective guitar shops. You're looking for any websites such as CitySearch or Merchant Circle that might include customer feedback.

Narrow the list down to a handful, and get ready for your first visit. On this visit, you'll just be browsing.

Your First Visit to the Music Store, Just Browsing

You have a list of music stores with guitars for sale, it's time to pick one and pay a visit. You'll just be browsing, so leave the credit card at home. Try to take along a guitar-playing friend. And, if you haven't read the previous sections of this guitar buying guide < go back and read the pertinent sections.

Before you decide on your guitar and spend your money, you will want to visit a couple of music stores. Take a pad and pen for jotting general notes.

Before Buying Your Guitar: At the Music Store

- ♦ Be prepared to answer the seller's questions about the type of guitar you're looking for, your preferred style of music, how long you've been playing, and your price range.
- ♦ Make it clear that you're just looking. Don't get pressured into a buying decision on your first visit. (Leave the credit card at home.)
- ♦ Once the seller leaves you on your own, look at all of the guitars in the store. If there are five guitars of the same make/model, look at all five.
- ♦ Try as many guitars as possible, in all price ranges. Get an idea of the differences between low-end guitars and high-end guitars.
- ♦ Jot down the make/model/price of the guitars you tried out. Include any comments or initial impressions.
- ♦ Keep an open mind. Which guitar can you see yourself making music with? Don't fall in love with a guitar because it's the only available in your favorite color. Your ultimate goal is to start making some guitar music.

After the Visit

Back home, take some time ponder your visits. Check your notes. Check out the make/model online. Visit some reputable online sellers like [Musician's Friend](#) or [Music 123](#). How do the online prices compare with the music store's? What are the reader comments like?

Note: Expect the online retailers to offer a lower price. If the price is significantly lower, use that figure in negotiating with your local guitar shop.

How to Try Out a Guitar

After you've done some browsing, you should have a couple of final candidates to try out.

Before Buying Your Guitar, Consider...

- ♦ **Appearance** – Give the guitar a close inspection from top to bottom. Look for dings, nicks, and scratches. Inspect the hardware, do you notice any tarnishing or discoloration? Is the guitar's color and design something you can see yourself with five or ten years from now?
- ♦ **Neck Attachment** – If your guitar has a bolt on neck, like a [Telecaster](#) or a [Stratocaster](#), make sure it's tight and secure. If the guitar has a set neck like most acoustics and Gibson-style guitars, inspect the joint area. Look for cracks or gaps in the seams. If the guitar has bindings, inspect all along the binding and check for gaps.
- ♦ **Neck Angle** – Make sure the neck is straight. Prop the guitar upright on the floor and sight down along the neck. Focus on the area between the fretboard and the strings. The lines of the strings should be even. The frets and the edges of the fretboard should be straight and even. If the neck looks like a roller coaster track, put that guitar back.
- ♦ **Tuners** – Check to make sure the tuning pegs are attached securely to the headstock. Loosen each string to make it sound flat. Then tune it back up to pitch.

Try Your Guitar Before You Buy Your Guitar

Intonation – Good intonation means that the guitar is in tune all the way up the neck. You can test this with harmonics. See [How to tune your guitar](#) to learn how to play harmonics. Start at the high E string and play a harmonic at the 12th fret. Then fret the high E string at the 12th fret and play the note again. The two notes should be exactly the same. Repeat this for each string. You can also check intonation with an electronic tuner. If the intonation is slightly off on an electric guitar, it can probably be corrected at adjustable bridge. If intonation is off on an acoustic guitar, would likely require a neck adjustment. However, don't buy the guitar until the guitar store fixes the intonation.

Electronics – Plug in an electric guitar and test the volume and tone controls. Test the pickup selector switch in each position. Check for consistent volume for each string in all the pickup configurations. Pluck each string with the same force (or attack), the volume of each string should be close for all six strings. Some pickups have adjustable poles which give you some control over volume. If in doubt ask a salesperson.

Buying Your Guitar – Closing the Deal

When you're ready buy, be prepared to do some wheeling and dealing. Find out what your guitar costs at a reputable online dealer. Since most guitar sellers work on a commission, he may be willing to cut out some of his commission to give you a better price. It doesn't hurt to ask.

Buying Your Guitar: Getting the Best Price

Let the salesperson know that you can get this guitar at MusiciansFriend.com for \$300. Ask, "Can you beat that price?" Maybe she can, maybe she can't. If not, ask if she'd be willing to throw in some valuable accessories, that you'd need buy anyway: a case or gig bag, strap, strings, electronic tuner, or a beginner's DVD course.

Note: Realize that online music stores can sell guitars at a lower price than mortar-and-brick music stores. So, don't discount the value of the services provided by your local shop. Especially the fact that you can try out a variety of guitars, and ask questions. The local shop can also make any needed adjustments before you buy.

Buying a Guitar Online

Ideally you'll be able to buy your guitar at a local music store. But that's not always possible. For a variety of reasons, you may want to buy your guitar online. The good news is, there are a number of reputable online music stores that sell guitars. According to *Music Trades*, in 2009 hundreds of thousands of new guitars were purchased worldwide from online retailers.

Buying Your Dream Guitar Online

Follow these guidelines when buying your guitar online.

- ♦ Buy from a reputable guitar retailer. A reputable retailer can be an online music store like [Musician's Friend](#), a national mortar-and-bricks chain store like [Guitar Center](#), or a one-location mortar-and-bricks music store like [Elderly Instruments](#) in Lansing, Michigan. (See the section below, "Is this guitar seller reputable?" You can even buy guitars at [Amazon.com](#).)
- ♦ Verify a minimum 30-day money-back guarantee. Most state laws require online retailers to offer a minimum, 30-day return policy. If the retailer's site states a less-than 30-day return, I'd find another retailer.
- ♦ Find the phone number. Most online retailers will have a phone number. If you're making a major purchase, give the number a call. Who are you talking to? Is it a call center? Or is it someone at the actual store location, or shipping location?
- ♦ Pay with a credit card. If anything goes wrong and there's a charges dispute, you can possibly get the credit card charges reversed. Such disputes will be harder to resolve if the money has already been taken out of your account. (This should not be a factor if you follow the first tip.)
- ♦ Save the packing materials. Carefully unpack your guitar and keep the box and shipping materials intact until you're sure everything is OK and you won't be sending the guitar back for whatever reason.

- ♦ Factor in the price of a setup. When buying a guitar sight unseen, I'd factor in the cost of a guitar set-up. Perfectly good guitars that are unplayable can play like a dream after a set up. This typically includes minor adjustments to the neck, bridge, nut and frets. Setting up an acoustic guitar is more involved than setting up an electric guitar, so expect to pay more. Call a local shop and find out the cost of a new-guitar set up. (My local music store set up my electric guitar for \$30 plus the price of the new strings.)

Buy Your Guitar From a Reputable Vendor

If you're buying your first guitar, you may not recognize some of the name-brand retailers. Here are some ways to determine an online seller's reputation.

Is the site popular? Check the seller's site at [Alexa](#). Never heard of MusiciansFriend.com? At Alexa, type *musiciansfriend.com* into the search box and hit *Enter*. Click *Get Details* and you'll see the site's current traffic rank and, in some cases, customer reviews and when the site went online.

Who is this retailer, how long have they been online? It's important to know who you're buying from and how long they've been around. If an Alexa search didn't provide how long the retailer has been online, go to [Internic Whois](#) and enter the *domain name* (e.g., MusiciansFriend.com).

Note: While a site with high traffic suggests a reputable retailer, the converse is not true. There are some excellent, small music stores that sell guitars online, but won't show up as major online retailers. The more important number is the number of years online.

