

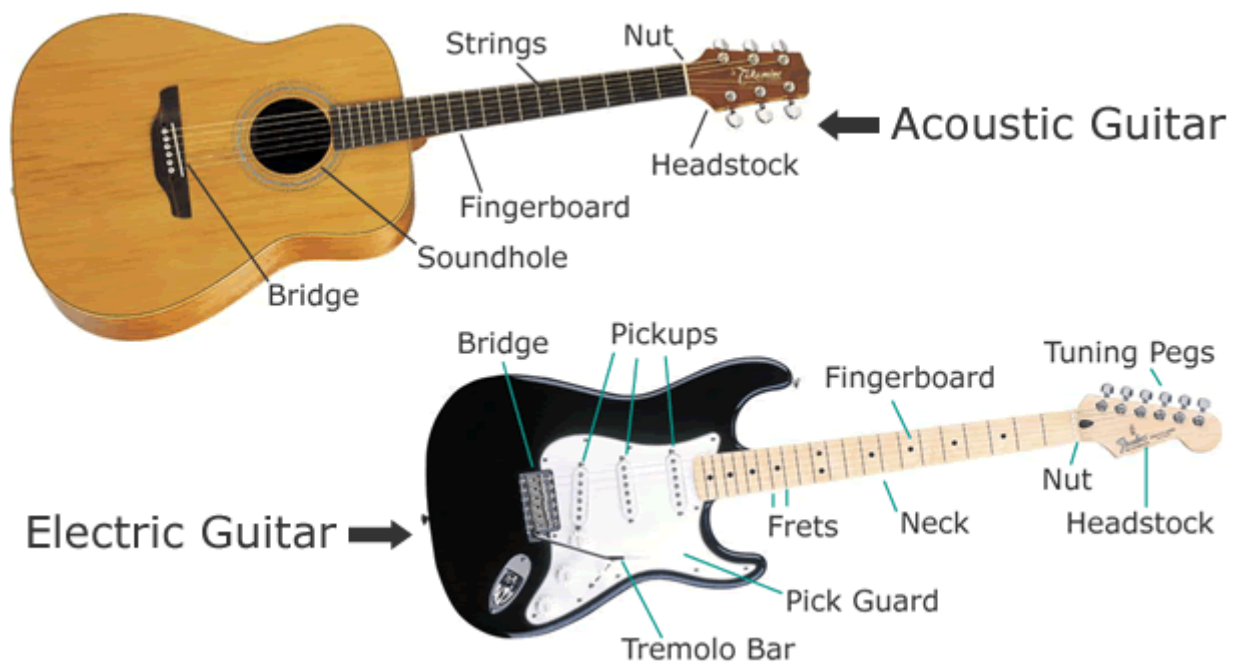
# Guitar Care & Maintenance

## Tips

In order to keep guitars and basses in top shape, we recommend that they be professionally set up and checked out every three months. Since most guitars are made of wood, seasonal climate changes can make some adjustments necessary. Also, normal wear and tear (such as fret wear) can be addressed before it causes any serious problems. In addition to the three month "check up" by a qualified technician, there are some things you should do to maintain your guitar.

Simply wiping your guitar off with a soft untreated cloth will do wonders for the appearance. If you want to use some polish occasionally, don't use furniture polish. It contains substances which can build up on your guitar and eventually affect not only the appearance but also the tone of the instrument. The best type of polish to use is one that is made by a guitar manufacturer and contains no wax (Martin makes a great one).

## Diagrams



## Keeping It Clean

Each time after you play, wipe off the strings with a clean cloth. The dirt and oil left on the strings after playing will oxidize and kill your tone. String oxidation is usually what causes strings to sound "dead." It can also cause premature breakage.

Whether you have an electric, acoustic, or bass guitar, there are parts which can become loose. If you plug your instrument in, the input jack is almost always the first part to need some attention. **BE CAREFUL!** It seems like no big deal to grab a wrench and crank that input jack nut until it tightens up. We cannot tell you how many guitars we have gotten that "just stopped working" after the input jack was tightened. It is very easy to turn the whole jack and tear the wires and, suddenly have no output. Just be gentle when you're turning the nut. Make sure you can see that the whole jack isn't turning. If you can get to the underside of the jack (where the wires are soldered) without too much trouble, take the time to do it. That way, you can hold the jack while tightening the nut. If you can not get to the underside of the jack without a lot of trouble, (most acoustics come to mind) or you find that the jack keeps getting loose - take it to your favorite guitar technician to have it taken care of. Since it's something we do often, we can tighten it up and drop a lock washer on the inside pretty quickly.

## Tightening Stuff

While we are tightening "stuff", let's check the tuning machines. Loose tuning machines can contribute to tuning problems. There are usually mounting screws holding the machines on. These screws are famous for two things: being loose and being stripped. If the screws look loose, take your trusty screwdriver and tighten the screws until they are snug. Do not go any farther. Stripped screws are a result of over tightening and dealing with them is a more involved process. A lot of tuning machines have a "bushing" on the top. If it looks like a nut, that means it is helping to secure the tuner. It is much easier to take care of this one when restringing. If there is a screw holding the button on the peg, make sure this one is snug as well.

## Strings and Things

Changing strings is the most common maintenance procedure guitar players perform. Let's start with the basics: How often? It depends on a lot of things. Our advice for the majority of players is to change the strings at least once a month. If you are performing on a regular basis or playing a lot, it should be more often. To heavy players, we recommend as often as you can afford it. Some people who are playing three and four times a week change their strings that often!

A common misconception is that if you don't play the strings don't wear. Unfortunately, even if you didn't play your guitar for a month after a restring, chances are those strings will still sound "dead." It has to do with the metal oxidizing, which starts as soon as the strings are removed from the package.

Next point: What kind of strings? If you have a nylon string guitar, replace the strings with nylon. Steel string guitars are braced differently and the extra tension of steel strings can literally tear a nylon string guitar apart. If you have a steel string guitar, you have a few more choices. The most common are bronze, phosphor bronze (a bit brighter), or silk and steel (we recommend these for older/cheaper models as the tension is lower and they can make a "tough to play" guitar a bit easier). The only way to find which strings are the ones for you is to try out some different brands. The string gauge refers to the thickness of the strings. A light gauge set of strings will be easier to press down than a medium set. However, the medium set will give you more volume and better tone. If you decide to change string gauge, keep in mind that the tension on the guitar will be different and may require a few adjustments.

## Changing the Strings

Unless you have an electric guitar with a locking tremolo system\* (such as a Floyd Rose), you can remove all six strings at once. On a steel string acoustic, remove the bridge pins (the six pins

in the bridge holding the strings in. Remove the strings. This is a good time to check the tuning machines. Make sure everything is nice & snug. Also, you may want to clean up the fingerboard. Use a piece of 0-0-0-0 steel wool (ask for four-oh steel wool at the hardware store). Rub over the length of the fingerboard - always with the grain. This should remove the "crud" (technical term for built up dirt & oil) and also shine up your frets. If you see small flat spots or pits where the strings pass over the frets, take it to a tech to have it checked for fret wear. Use something like Number One's Guitar Honey to treat the fingerboard. Put the ball end of the string in the hole in the bridge and put the pin back in with the slot facing toward the headstock. Push it down into the bridge. Take the other end of the string through the hole in the tuning machine, around the post and under the part of the string which is parallel to the fingerboard. Leave yourself a little slack and turn the tuning machine so that the first full wind of the string on the post goes over the short end of the string. This is a lot easier than it sounds once you see it. If you have trouble, stop in Music Showcase and we can show you. What we're doing is "locking" the string on itself so that it is less likely to slip. Tune that string up to pitch. If the bridge pin starts to come out of the bridge, push it back in. Once the little ball on the end gets secure, the pin should stop moving. Repeat the process five more times and you should be set to go. If you have tuning machines which are slotted with a hole in the middle, just put the end of the string in the hole & wind it around the post so that the string comes off the bottom of the "wraps." This is common on basses and it is important to use enough winds so the string goes through the nut (slotted piece at the top of the fingerboard) at an angle or else the string will rattle. Most electric guitars have one of two types of bridges (neither one has bridge pins). The first type is called "top loading" The string simply feeds through the back of the bridge. The other type "back loading," means that the string feeds through the back of the guitar. If there is a back plate on the guitar that the strings go through, take it off when you are restringing - it's a lot easier.

\*If you have a locking tremolo bridge, use the allen wrench that came with it to loosen the bolt at the back of the saddle (six pieces that the strings are locked into) and remove the old string. Use a set of wire cutters to cut the ball off the string. Now feed that end into the saddle and tighten with the Allen wrench. At the top of the fingerboard, you will have a locking nut. There should be another Allen wrench to loosen the bolts. The rest is pretty much the same. It's very important to use the same gauge strings and to only one string at a time (tuning the guitar to pitch after each string) because the "floating" bridge is very sensitive to tension changes.

## **Manufacturer's Warranties**

Manufacturer's warranties cover only manufacturer's defects for the time period stated. Unfortunately, none of them cover maintenance procedures. Please ask for a copy of the warranty and read it carefully when purchasing a guitar (or anything for that matter.) If you are not sure if a problem with your guitar is a defect or a "normal wear" situation, ask the technician when you bring in your instrument.