

A stylized illustration of a guitar, rendered in shades of blue and black. The guitar is positioned vertically on the left side of the cover. The body is a solid blue shape, and the neck is a black shape extending upwards. Six orange lines represent the strings, running from the bridge at the bottom to the top of the frame. A black circle represents the sound hole. A black bridge is visible at the bottom of the guitar body. The background is a solid blue color with a black diagonal shape on the left side.

A Guitar Player's Guide to Music Theory

by Charlotte Adams

A Simple Approach
to Understanding & Using
Essential Musical Concepts

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—❖ Introduction ❖—

This is a book for guitar players who want to acquire tools that will allow them to break out of musical ruts, to communicate clearly with other musicians, and to deepen their knowledge of the instrument. It is for guitar players who want to increase their ability to comprehend, absorb, and effectively use the wealth of information available in instructional books and on the Internet. It is also a book for guitarists who lead normal lives and don't have the time, money, or possibly even the desire to invest in a four-year degree at a music school.

Using this manual and workbook, you can proceed at your own pace. There are no tests, no deadlines, and no finish line. Over the course of thirty-five plus years of teaching, I have encountered countless confused and frustrated students who are the victims of “too much, too fast”. Cramming a lot of information into a set period of time may be a good way to get a degree, but it's hardly a good way to have a command of useful tools. Instead, I preach, “Learn a little, use it a lot.”

A Guitar Player's Guide to Music Theory is based on that practical and tested learning philosophy. Through a relaxed and steady course of study, you will acquire relevant information in a painless, organic way – building bit by comprehensible bit, from the ground up – that will allow you to have a command of the musical language and an unlimited capacity for expansion as a guitarist. There is not an overwhelming amount of information to digest and I have not included advanced concepts, as it is my personal experience that anything beyond the scope of this book is within easy reach, once the basics are truly understood. That true understanding comes from using those basics in your everyday musical world.

Before you begin, take a few minutes to ponder the following points.

- Learning music theory is like constructing a puzzle. You will become frustrated if you try to completely understand each isolated piece. Instead, get a feel for one piece, then grab another and work with it a bit. In time, you will put together enough pieces to see a picture emerge.
- It takes time to comprehend and absorb new concepts. If you are accustomed to reading quickly through material, consider slowing down a bit and re-reading frequently. You will reach your destination more quickly by going more slowly.
- Learning music theory may not be as difficult as you might have thought, but it probably will require more practice time than you guessed. Just as sufficient practice is required in guitar playing, drilling and using the concepts repeatedly is necessary to ensure long-term recall and comprehension. Complete the exercises at the end of the chapters before taking on the next chapter and incorporate any new information into your playing as soon as possible. It is essential that you complete the worksheets at the back of the book, and it's even better if you do them repeatedly. True understanding comes through *doing*. Practice!

As a result of our experiences in competitive and school environments, most of us feel a certain amount of anxiety and pressure when we begin a new course of study. These feelings are not only unpleasant, they are detrimental to our progress. As you work through this course, I urge you to put aside self-judgment. Relax, and enjoy your new discoveries! Your success will depend greatly on the amount of patience and emotional detachment you are able to muster. Keep in mind that this music theory course does not include grades or time frames, and your lessons will always be relevant. With each concept or exercise, I have included an explanation of why you need it or how you will use it, as well as ways to learn or remember it easily.

Please approach this study with a beginner's mind. I have taught these concepts for many years and have witnessed the confusion and frustration that those students who "know a little" have faced. Invariably, they are burdened with misinformation and unclear ways of thinking about music theory. When I am teaching in person, I can receive feedback and therefore can tell where the student's thought process is headed. The minute their thinking veers off course, I can reach down, pull them out of the quagmire and place them back on track. In other words, I constantly manage

and direct the student's thought process and I do not allow them to indulge in ways of thinking that are unclear.

You are perfectly capable of managing and directing your own thoughts in this same way. In order to do so, you will have to trust in and be committed to the clean approach that I am presenting to you. Forget what you already know. Don't hurry through or skip over any of the material – in fact, read it multiple times. Remember that words matter, so learn the proper terms and be disciplined about using them correctly. And, last but certainly not least, do all of the written worksheets. If you make copies of the worksheets, you will be able to do them repeatedly. This repetition will deepen your comprehension and retention of the material presented.

Begin by reading through the following chapter several times and make it a point to return to it often as you work through the book. You will be learning about the terms and concepts in greater depth as you progress, so don't feel that you have to completely understand all of the definitions before you begin. Just read them and let them roll around in your head. Remember – you're collecting puzzle pieces!

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— ❖ Definitions of Terms ❖ —

Note name or **pitch class** – The name of a note will be a letter. The letter may have a sharp (#) or flat (b) after it. Examples of note names are A, A# or Bb, B, C, etc.

Some people who are new to the language confuse the term “minor” with the name “flat”. Just remember that a note or pitch class will never be “minor” or “major” – those terms describe quality – but it can be “sharp” or “flat”.

Here are the names of the notes: A A# B C C# D D# E F F# G G#
Bb Db Eb Gb Ab

The musical alphabet goes from A through G and starts over again. In between most of the natural notes is a note that is named with a sharp or flat. The “in-between” note is called sharp if it is higher than the note that you are comparing it to and flat if it is lower. For example, the note that is ½ step higher than A is A#. The same note is ½ step lower than B and is therefore called Bb. If there is no context, it doesn’t matter which name you call the note. In a song or a scale, however, only one of the note names is correct. You will learn more about this later in the book.

Accidental – An accidental is a note that is not a member of the scale that the piece (or the part of the piece in which the accidental occurs) is written in. There will be either a sharp (#), a flat (b), or a natural sign (♮) to indicate a raising or lowering of the pitch.

Quality – The terms major, minor, augmented, and diminished are quality names and describe a combination of two or more notes. Two notes form an interval. A combination of three or more notes will define a chord.

Intervals

Why you need to know about intervals:

Every time you go from one note to another, you play an interval. Recognition of intervals is not only a skill that facilitates note reading, it is also one that is essential in learning to play by ear. Knowledge of intervals will allow you to recognize chord tones when determining chords by ear. In addition, you will use your knowledge of intervals when playing fills and leads.

How to make it easy:

Know the key signature to as many major scales as possible, so that you can easily recognize the Major and Perfect intervals and assess the rest of the intervals from that perspective.

Use the chart on page 5 (the note names) as a “cheat sheet” until you can hold the order of notes clearly in your mind.

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Intervals

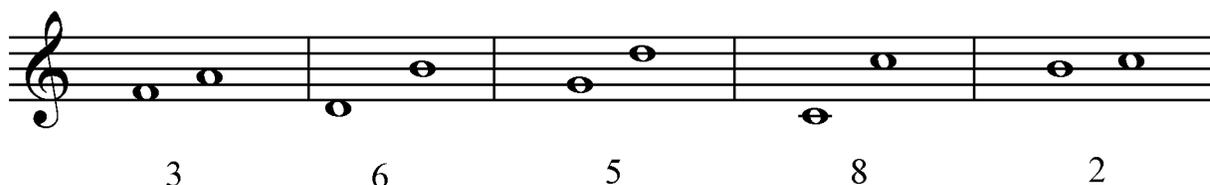
The term interval refers to the distance between two notes. An interval can be either harmonic (two notes played simultaneously) or melodic (two notes played in succession).

Interval names have two parts, a quantity name and a quality name. The quantity name of the interval describes the number of staff degrees covered, or the number of letter names covered. You can determine the quantity name by simply counting the staff degrees (lines and spaces), remembering to include the ones that the notes are on. For example, C (as the bottom note) up to E is a 3rd; C up to A is a 6th.



Practice counting staff degrees until you can quickly and comfortably determine the quantity names. Here's a shortcut: if both notes of the interval are on a line or both are in a space, the quantity name will be an odd number. For example, the number of staff degrees from a note on the bottom space of the staff to one on the next space is 3, which is an odd number. However, if one of the notes is on a line and the other is in a space, the quantity name will be an even number.

Here are several intervals with the quantity names labeled.



As you will soon realize, the quantity name doesn't give enough information to completely define the interval. C up to E covers three staff degrees, which makes it a 3rd, but C up to E \flat is also a 3rd, as is C \sharp to E, or C \sharp to E \flat . The quality name defines these intervals more specifically by describing the actual distance in $\frac{1}{2}$ steps.

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by Charlotte Adams

Designed for the beginning guitarist
and the seasoned player alike,
A Guitar Player's Guide to Music Theory
is an invaluable aid to musical
comprehension, creativity,
and communication.

Topics covered include:

THE STAFF

TIME SIGNATURES

KEY SIGNATURES

SCALES

CHORD CONSTRUCTION

ALTERED AND EXTENDED CHORDS

THE CIRCLE OF FIFTHS

TRANSPOSING

...and more!

Worksheets & Answer Sheets Provided

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BY CHARLOTTE ADAMS

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