

Lesson plan 1:

CHORD STRUMMING FOR THE BEGINNER

Suitable for:

Beginners with absolutely no previous experience. Beginners who appear particularly shy or nervous.

Prerequisites:

None

General Objective:

To get the student in contact with the instrument and with the subject of learning to play it. To get them started on basic rhythm guitar.

Summary of this lesson plan:

A series of steps calculated to familiarize the student with the instrument and help them lose any apprehension they may have about their learning to play it. Introduction to chords and how they are used to accompany songs.

Stress:

Relaxed, casual approach by tutor. Make it fun. Keep it light. Avoid too much discussion and explanation. Focus on getting student to DO.

Materials required:

Diagram of String Names

Diagram of First Chords

Song sheet

Special equipment required:

None

Objectives and methods:

Objective 1. Student comfortable holding the guitar

Methods:

1. Tune the student's guitar
2. Hand their guitar back to them
3. Check that they are holding the guitar in a viable manner
4. Ask them if they find the way they are holding the guitar comfortable
4. Get them to try out different positions if appropriate

Objective 2. Student orientated to strings and their related sounds

Methods:

1. Ask them how many strings the guitar has
2. Get them to play each string one at a time and to listen to the sound made
3. Ask: 'Which string sounds the highest? Which string sounds the lowest?'
4. Indicate on the string names diagram the top string and the bottom string

Objective 3. Student orientated to frets and related sounds

Methods:

1. Point at frets and tell the student: 'These metal strips are called "frets"'
2. Tell the student to press any string down against the 1st fret
3. Get them to play the fretted string and listen to the sound it makes
4. Get them to move up a fret on the same string, play and listen
5. Ask them: 'Which sounds higher?'
6. Continue the exercise until the student knows they can play higher or lower notes on any given string

Objective 4. Student orientated to string numbering

Methods:

1. Indicate diagram and tell student that the highest sounding string is called the 'top' string.
2. Ask them to guess what we call the lowest sounding one!
3. Explain that the strings are often referred to by numbers 1 - 6
4. Tell them the top string is the 1st string, the bottom one the 6th
5. Now get them to play strings at random as you call out the numbers
6. Continue this drill until the student's *response time* has markedly reduced

Objective 5. Student orientated to fret numbering

Methods:

1. Indicate diagram and tell student that the frets are numbered from 1 upward, starting at the nut.
2. Tell them to play the 6th string at the 3rd fret, 9th fret, 4th fret etc.
3. Continue at random until student's response time has markedly reduced.

Objective 6. Student orientated to finger numbering and able to take instructions as to left hand placing.

Methods:

1. Get student to hold out their left hand, fingers spread.
2. Point to each of their fingers as you tell them: 'We'll call this the 1st finger, this the 2nd finger, this one the 3rd and this one the 4th finger okay?'
3. You say: 'Okay, lets see if we can put all this together now: hold down the 5th string at the 2nd fret with your 1st finger. Now, at the same time, the 6th string with your 2nd finger. Good! Finally add the 3rd finger on the top string at the 3rd fret.'
4. You say: 'Strum that and hear how it sounds'
5. You say: 'Well done you have just played your first chord!'

Objective 7. Student able to memorize a chord

Methods:

1. Get student to hold down the G chord as in previous objective
2. Tell them to look at the pattern of the fingering on the chart and relate it to the shape their fingers are making on the fretboard
3. Tell them in particular to note the position of the 1st finger
4. Tell them to take the hand away and then find the shape again referring to the diagram only if necessary
5. Repeat until student can find the chord, ideally without reference to the diagram

Objective 8. Student able to play a variety of chords

Methods:

1. Decide on a song to best suit the student as their first song to learn
2. Go through the procedures outlined in objectives 7 and 8 above with each of the chords in the song.
3. Continue until the student can play each of the chords successfully (though not necessarily completely clean-sounding). They should be allowed to refer to the diagrams as needed at this stage.

Objective 9. Student's expectations of their own progress adjusted to line up with reality.

Methods:

1. Listen to the results the student is achieving whilst carrying out the above objective. If the student is getting perfectly clean sounding chords then skip the rest of this step.
2. Bring to the students attention any non-optimum sounds - buzzes, dead strings etc.. that they get on a specific chord.

3. Show student that some of these problems can be cured by paying attention to correct positioning of the fingers (right behind the frets), correct pressure and correct angle of approach.
4. Assure the student that many of these details will sort themselves out over time and that the more time spent playing and changing chords the sooner they will sound good.
5. Convey to the student that, even if they do everything correctly, it may be some time before the chords sound perfect. They must allow for the hardening of the finger tips and the strengthening of the finger and wrist muscles to occur before this is realistically achievable.
6. Encourage the student to practice chords and chord changes on a 'little and often' basis during the early stages of their development.

Objective 10. Students ability to read a simple *rhythm chart*.

Methods:

1. Indicate the part of the song sheet showing the rhythm chart .
2. Point to the bar lines and define them.
3. Point to the time signature and define it.
4. Point to the chord symbols and relate them to the work the student has done thus far.
5. Assure the student that, initially, you don't expect them to play in perfect time. (Because it is not physically possible to change chords fast enough before they have practiced a fair number of hours.)
6. Get the student to play through the chart simply hitting four straight strums to the bar.
7. Continue and/or repeat this step until the student is interpreting the chart confidently and correctly.

Objective 11. Student's agreement to focus on their ability to change chords.

Methods:

1. Tell the student that there are three main areas of development in playing rhythm guitar: right hand movement, left hand precision (clean chords) and chord changing speed.
2. Demonstrate each of these to the student on your own guitar.
3. Explain that if they focus on chord changing speed, the other two will more or less look after themselves.
4. Get their agreement to make this their main practice focus.

Objective 12. Student's ability to practice chord changes effectively

Methods:

1. Refer to rhythm chart of chosen song
2. Ask student to work through the sequence as in objective 10, but strumming only once per bar (once per chord if more than one chord in a bar).
3. Coach student on consistency of finger movement over changes. 1st-finger-first is probably the best rule to follow for most changes. The point is to get the student to figure out their own best way of changing and then stick to it.

Objective 14. Student's ability to play in time

Methods:

1. Tell student to play through chosen song as per Objective 12 but explain that this time you are going to accompany them.
2. Stress that all they are required to do is arrive at the first beat of each bar with the right chord. You are going to fill in the rest.
3. Do this real slow so that the student has every chance of achieving the objective.
4. Talk to the student as you play thus:
'Okay after 4 lets play G 1... 2.... 3... 4.... Play! Now get ready with D. ..3... 4 and Hit It! Good! now A minor ... get ready and 3... 4... Hit it! ' etc....
5. Continue the exercise, speeding up slowly if possible, but not so fast that the student can't keep up. The goal is to play in time, not to play to correct tempo.

References:

1. Article: *Contact with the Subject*
2. Article: *The Virtuous Circles of Confidence Building*
3. Article: *Little and Often*