

2009 Edition  
Revised and  
updated!

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**HOW  
TO  
MAKE  
A LIVING**



**TEACHING  
GUITAR**

New Revised Edition (2009)  
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Free sample chapter



## 2 BEFORE YOU START

You will know from my web site that this book assumes only three things about you:

- That you can play guitar reasonably well,
- That you can communicate with confidence and
- That you can demonstrate patience.

If you are human you may well have some niggling doubts about these points so lets get them out the way to start with.

### **Is your guitar playing good enough to teach others?**

The minute you start considering teaching guitar you will automatically bring to mind all the areas of your guitar knowledge and ability that you feel are deficient in some way. Believe me, that is a universal reaction!



In this business the quality of your *teaching* is many times more important than the quality of your playing.

There are several points to make here:

Nobody ever finishes (in the sense of 'completes') the process of learning. In fact the more you learn, the more you realise there is to learn. The majority of your students (the word I use to describe your clients) will be beginners or almost beginners. Most vitally: In this business the quality of your *teaching* is many times more important than the quality of your playing.

Over many years of hiring and training music tutors, I have learnt that exceptionally good musicians actually find it harder to be good teachers. Why is this? Well the further away from the beginning stages one gets, the more apt one is to forget how it feels like to have five thumbs on each hand.



If you have only been playing a few years yourself, you will relate well to the beginner and you will have a similar enthusiasm that comes naturally when a subject is still fresh.

Let me tell you a trade secret. One of the reasons why teaching guitar is such an easy business to start is that many of those already doing it are actually doing it very badly! This is not, I hasten to add, because they are bad people – it is simply because there is a tendency for people to over-emphasise the importance of musical skills and under-emphasise the importance of teaching skills. So often, teaching guitar is seen as something for a would-be professional musician to do as a sideline, so that they can make enough income to survive while they pursue their main career of performing, songwriting or producing.

There are relatively few people who make *teaching* guitar their main career (whilst perhaps performing, songwriting and producing as a sideline).

Having said all that, it is obviously necessary to have a certain level both of understanding and ability to play guitar in order to present yourself in a creditable fashion.

As a guitar tutor you will be expected to be able to

- Read and interpret tablature and rhythm charts.
- Understand and interpret standard notation .
- Listen to reasonably easy guitar parts and transcribe them into tablature.
- Name notes on the fret board.
- Explain the basics of music theory.
- Accompany your student playing lead or rhythm guitar.
- Demonstrate how to use the various controls on your guitar and amp.

If there are one or two of these things you can't do at all then I would advise teaching yourself to do them as soon as you can, but that's not necessarily a reason to delay starting to teach (perhaps on a 'beginners only' basis).



If you are short on most of the items on the list then consider an intensive few weeks of self-tuition before you start teaching. It will help if you have learnt to play at least the basics of several different styles of guitar.

The demands of your students will vary according to where in the world you are of course, but in the UK, I can say that there are probably a hundred new students expressing an interest in playing Rock, Indie or Pop music for every one interested in Jazz or Classical guitar.

If you can broaden your spectrum of expertise it will help you build your client base quicker.



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### **Can you teach ?**

Teaching is a specialised form of communicating. It does not have to be a particularly complex process. This manual will provide you with the essential know-how and in particular tell you what to avoid. The two essential elements this manual can't give you directly are confidence and patience.

You are going to be helping your students to gain confidence in their playing and confidence is infectious, so your level of confidence directly affects your students' progress.

The rate at which people learn varies enormously. You must be prepared to spend a whole lesson helping a student achieve something that you feel you might have achieved in mere seconds yourself. If you don't demonstrate patience in these situations then that will badly affect your student's confidence. So patience is an essential quality in a good teacher.



## Building your confidence

It's vital that you don't keep putting off the decision to start teaching.

What is going to make you an expert teacher is *doing lots of teaching!* There is simply no substitute for experience.

If you really feel that you can't justify charging money for your teaching just yet then start teaching for free. Ask around your friends and neighbours and see if there's anyone trying to learn the guitar and just pitch right in and offer to help them - no shame in that as a confidence-building step.

What is going to make you an expert teacher is *doing lots of teaching!*



Meanwhile spend every spare minute sorting your own playing out. Treat yourself as you would a paying client. Set yourself goals, buckle down and practice the basics (Chords, Scales, Arpeggios, Finger exercises). Surf the net for sites that offer theory-made-simple lessons. There are plenty of free sites offering guitar lessons. Absorb what you can.

Find others to play with - it will add greatly to your confidence to find your feet as a 'group musician'. If you can join a band, even just a rehearsing outfit, then so much the better. You don't have to be a gigging musician to teach, but again, if you can get some live performance experience it all helps boost your confidence and credibility.



## **Are you ready to run your own business?**

You may have some qualms about giving up the security of your day job and relying on your own efforts to earn a living.

The answer is simple: don't give up your day job just yet! Wait until you have established your teaching business on a part-time basis and have been running it for long enough to know what your typical income pattern is.

The point is that this is a repeat-business type venture meaning that your clients generally keep coming back week after week. Of course some drop off along the way, some come for one lesson and never come back. But before long, if you stick to the guidelines in this book, you will have a central core of reliable weekly clients that provide you with a reasonably predictable income.



... don't give up your day job just yet!

## **What about the formalities?**

Depending on whereabouts you are in the world requirements to register a new business will vary. In the UK it is simply a matter of informing the tax office that you are now self-employed. But other Countries have different requirements so it is vital that you check this out with a suitable professional (Lawyer or Accountant) before you start.

If you are teaching from home, you are advised to check your rental, lease or mortgage conditions as well as you housing insurance policies to see what effect, if any, running a business from home may have on these agreements.