

# Selecting A Guitar For Beginning Guitar Students

By Randolph Walker

A starter guitar need not be expensive, nor should it be hard to play.

The tone (sound) of the guitar is not critical for a beginner, but the action (height of the strings above the frets) **is** important. If the action is too high, the strings will be too hard to press down, and the student will get discouraged.

Recommended string height is  $\frac{5}{64}$  or  $\frac{6}{64}$  inch between the bottom of the 6th string (the heaviest, largest diameter string) and the top of the 12th fret, and  $\frac{4}{64}$  or  $\frac{5}{64}$  inch between the bottom of the 1st (lightest) string and the top of the 12th fret.

At the music store, ask to borrow a string gauge so you can measure the action at the 12th fret, as described above. If they say "We don't have a string gauge," or "We don't let customers use it," or "All our guitars are fine, you don't need it," **turn around and walk out.**

## New or used?

I usually recommend that beginners buy a guitar from a local music store so it can be returned if there are problems or taken back for adjustment if necessary. However, I have had many students buy guitars online with no problems.

Inexpensive guitars sold new aren't necessarily set up well at the factory, although some are. If you're buying new from a local store, ask them whether they will adjust the action if necessary, and how much they will charge.

Many inexpensive guitars are listed on Craigslist. If you are new to guitar, and you have a guitar playing friend, you may want to ask him or her to go along with you to look at a used guitar. Look for obvious problems like cracks in the wood. Make sure the tuners work smoothly by tightening and loosening the strings. Ask the person selling the guitar to demonstrate it by playing all the frets. Listen for buzzes or muffled notes.

I'd pay no more than about \$130 (new) or \$100 (used) for a beginner guitar, especially if you're not sure if the student is going to stick with it. Pay a little extra, if necessary, for a carrying case and electronic guitar tuner.

## Acoustic or electric?

Acoustics don't need to be plugged in, obviously. However, electrics can also be played (and practiced) without plugging in; they just don't sound very loud. A beginner amplifier need not be more than \$50.

Electrics have advantages especially for kids. The strings are generally lighter and easier to press down. The thin body is much easier to get your arm around, especially if the student is a child, making it more comfortable to play. Also, it is far easier to adjust the string height both up and down on an electric guitar. A decent starter electric costs no more than an acoustic.

## Brand names

Virtually all starter guitars, regardless of brand names, are made in Asia. Some of the brands I see a lot on inexpensive guitars are Squier, First Act, Rogue, Ibanez, Danville, Alvarez. I don't really have a preference. Follow the guidelines above, especially on action (string height) and you can get started on guitar for a very modest investment.

# Size

Below article is from an Ebay guide by 2kool4skool-music.

## Size Chart

Age	Height of Player	Size of Guitar
4-6 years old	3'3" to 3'9"	1/4-Size
5-8 years old	3'10" to 4'5"	1/2-Size
8-11 years old	4'6" to 4'11"	3/4-Size
11-Adult	5' or taller	4/4-Size



As you can see from the picture above, the scale length measures the part of the strings that actually vibrate when you pluck the string. This is the only relevant way to compare guitar sizes. A 38" classical guitar and a 41" steel string guitar can have the exact same "scale length" and both of them can be "full size" guitars. The only way to be certain what size they are is to measure the scale length.

## Guitar Scale length Chart --lengths can vary

4/4 full size	24.75" or 25.5"
3/4 size	22.75"
1/2 size	20.5"
1/4 size	19"