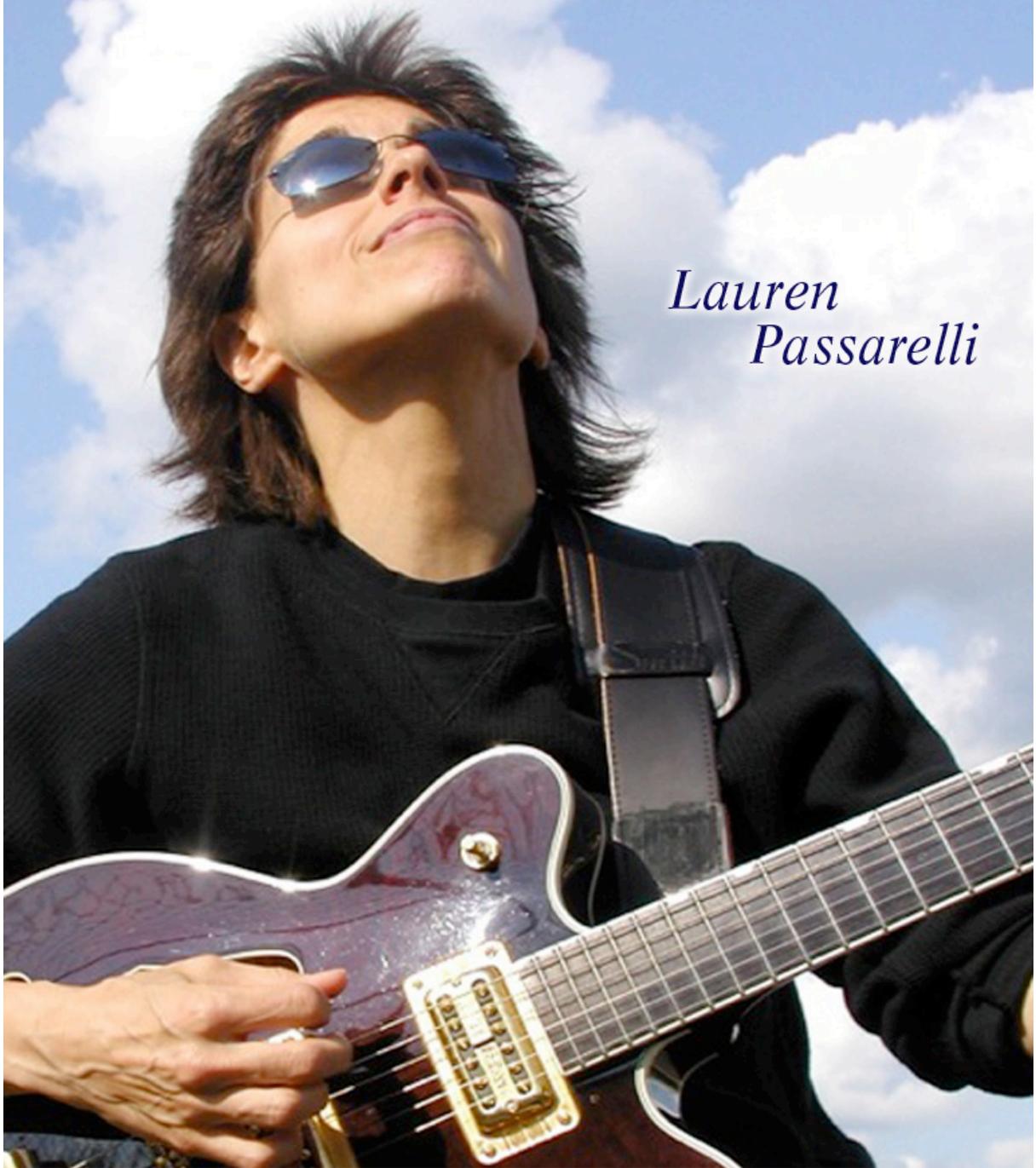


# GUITAR INSIGHTS

MINOR TWEAKS, MAJOR RESULTS

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Guitar Insights

minor tweaks, major results

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On the cover: Gretsch Country Classic Jr.

Inside pix: Dillion Rockinbetter, Fireglow 6 string.



## PREFACE

From choosing a guitar or choosing a teacher to demystifying the often unspoken details that some advanced players do naturally and other players have never heard of, it is my desire that Guitar Insights will be a resource for every guitar player wanting to know what makes the professional difference.

The guitar is one of the most accessible and easiest instruments to come by and learn on your own. Three chords did rock the world and I love that anyone can have fun and enjoy guitar, in any capacity and for whatever reason, in any style and genre.

Having seen and heard thousands of guitar playing students over the years, I can tell where a student is at within a few minutes of hearing or watching their playing, what experiences their hands have had, if they've had quality lessons or great players for role models, and what their playing could use in order to improve their sound, their technique, and to reach their playing goals.

I want to share a few thoughts with you, give you some ideas and hopefully new things to try and think about when choosing a guitar and teacher, what books to get into that have helped me and specific playing tips that distinguish players and make a player sound polished and know how to get great sounds.

## INTRODUCTION

In this introduction, I'm going to cover some topics which may be entirely new to beginners but which some of you more advanced players may know already. Still, even if you have been playing awhile, you might find some helpful tips here about choosing a guitar and a teacher that really support your playing.

### Choosing a Guitar

See which kind of guitar attracts your interest. What kind of guitar did you see and hear first that gave you the desire to play?

There are so many factors to consider and enjoy: sound, color, weight, size, shape and price. If you can love as many things about it as possible, you'll be more interested in playing it.

Go to a musical instrument store that has a variety of guitars and hold and play many different types. As you consider your budget narrow down your choices by what attracts your senses. If you're just starting to learn how to play and not sure what to look for in a guitar, you may even want to bring a more advanced player with you so you can really listen to what the guitar is capable of.

Acoustic guitars will have a louder sound than solid body guitars when not plugged in. There are semi-acoustic guitars that are electric guitars that you can hear un-amplified and there are electric acoustic guitars, acoustic guitars that you can plug into an amplifier.

Check the weight. When you pick up a guitar vertically and hold it under the headstock (where the tuners are), make sure it doesn't hurt your hand or arm because it's too heavy.

Position the guitar on your lap and notice the comfort factor of the weight on your leg. And if you find you love it and it is heavy, try a wide strap and stand up to feel the weight on your shoulder and back. Can you imagine playing this guitar while standing for hours?

I prefer that the guitar balances well when I'm sitting and playing without a strap. I don't want to need to use any of my energy or will to keep the guitar in place. Because of that, I don't want the headstock to pull to the floor, and I don't want the body to pull the opposite direction to the floor. The muscles and tendons in your hands, wrists, forearms and shoulders are busy enough they shouldn't have to be used for anything but making music.

## Acoustic versus Electric

Most of the time acoustic guitars have thicker gauge strings with a bronze outer coating that adds to the mass of the string width and that makes it a little harder to fret the notes and chords, which means to hold down the strings. Acoustics also have bigger bodies, higher action, which is how high the strings are from the fretboard, and they often have wider and thicker necks.

Many electric guitars are often made with smaller necks, have thinner gauge strings, and are easier to play because the fretting is easier and the action is lower.

## The Neck Size at the Nut



I want you to notice the sloping distance between your thumb and index finger on your fretting hand (the hand that makes the chord shapes and plays the notes). This is where the guitar will sit, and the size of this slope determines how comfortable the neck will feel resting in your hand. It's good to know the measurement of the nut width, that raised curb-like material that is up by the headstock and in which the strings are sitting. My preference is for guitar necks with a measurement of one and eleven sixteenths inches at the nut or smaller. This is one of the standard sizes. I consider nut width when I hold a guitar and

when I read the specs of a guitar, especially when I'm unable to check out the guitar in person.

Another standard size measurement at the nut is one and three quarters inches. Even a millimeter difference can feel like a mile in that slope of your hand when you're checking necks. Ideally for me, the neck should fit comfortably in that slope so my thumb and index finger don't feel over extended. The neck width of every guitar gets wider as the neck meets the body of the guitar. So knowing your hand's comfort width at the nut will make sure the guitar doesn't literally get out of hand, as you play in higher positions up the neck toward the body.



### **Neck Width, Depth and Shape**

Check the width, depth, and shape of the neck, too. Some folks have much bigger hands and prefer a V neck. Because I have smaller hands, I prefer small rounded guitar necks, called C and U shape necks. These letter names aren't important, but how the neck feels in your hand is very important. Then if you have a preference you can remember what you prefer by name.

## **Body Width, Depth and Shape**

The body of the guitar varies quite a bit. So many sizes and shapes. The depth is very important and where and how the guitar fits to your body is another thing to consider. Does it feel comfortable? Can you see both of your hands while playing? Can you reach all the different positions of the neck easily and play up and down the neck? Can you strum the guitar without cutting off the circulation to your strumming arm?

## **Frets**

The frets manufactures use vary too, and it's not usually an option to choose which you prefer. They vary in height, width and shape and bigger frets actually make my finger tips ache, and I have been playing since 1969. With big frets, I can slide a note on guitar that should make the sound of a glissando and instead I hear each note sound separately, as if I was striking individual notes on a piano, an instrument that can't slide. That's a big sign that the frets are too big for me, and too painful.

## **Pickups**

There are different types of pickups on a variety of guitars. These are microphones for the strings and they have different tonal properties that contribute to the sounds of the guitars when they're plugged in.

## **Play the Guitar Through an Amplifier**

Whatever amp you're plugged into, set the amp dials to neutral, not adding or subtracting tone, and set a comfortable volume level. Trust your ears. Really, it's all up to what you like. You have listened to music all your life, and you know what you like when you hear it. Is it too dark, too bright? Play with each knob, button, or toggle switch on the guitar and listen for how it changes the sound. Now play with each knob, button, or toggle switch on the amp and listen for how it changes the sound. Gradually you will have settings and combinations of pickups and controls that give you your desired sound. Can you find a tone that you love? Compare other electrics with different size and brand pickups. Do you have a preference?

## **Pickup Locations**

The pickup right at the neck provides a warm, round sound. In the middle of the body of the guitar, the pickup is a bit brighter, and the one at the bridge, close to where the strings go in and on the guitar, is very bright and has much more of a midrange sound.

## **Acoustic**

When trying out acoustic guitars, play all different shapes and sizes and listen to which one sounds best to you. You also want a guitar that feels inviting, and easy to play. It shouldn't be a struggle. Even if you are a beginning player, there will be guitars that feel easier to play than others. Buy one that is easy to play.

## **Unplugged**

The better the guitar sounds un-amplified, even a solid body, the better it will sound plugged in.

## **Choosing a Teacher**

There are as many teaching styles as there are learning styles. How do you best learn? You can study with a teacher in person or online, one on one or in a group lesson, watch videos and/or work through books. Cost, convenience, distance, age, personality, and experience will all vary and factor in.

Choose someone you enjoy spending time with, someone you respect, and someone whose playing you admire. If you need encouragement, find someone who is encouraging. If you prefer boot camp and scare tactics, those teachers exist too.

No matter what, NEVER let anyone make the guitar your enemy. If you desire to play, then guitar is for you. Your desire along with the right information and help will have you playing guitar.

## **LESSONS OR SELF-TAUGHT?**

Music is a language unto itself and often it can be daunting to hear so many unfamiliar terms concerning a subject we want to know more about. It reminds us of the fear of learning any new subject or the mountains of information to learn a new speaking language.

The great thing about music is anyone can jump in as little or as deep as they like and find enjoyment and great pleasure.

I want you to know that there are a lot more well known artists that didn't have guitar lessons or theory and harmony lessons than there are who have.

Your desire is enough. Jumping in to music because you love it is all you need. It will always be there to support you if you keep that foundation of love.

Playing songs that give you goose bumps is such a surge of energy that it will sustain you. So please don't feel like theory and harmony are too far out of your reach and therefore music is not for you.

Take as much or as little as you want. Ask further when you are curious or need an explanation. Then theory and harmony make sense in that moment for your needs and you can understand them in relation to what you already know.

## ALTERNATING PICKING

Each instrument has its challenges and unique hurdles to master. But it is often these very challenges that open the instrument up to us and unlock its full potential. Getting around the drum set, adjusting embouchure to play a note on the trumpet that has the same fingerings as another note, and skipping strings on the guitar are a couple of those difficulties.

Depending upon what your experience is on guitar, if you play with your fingers, it seems more challenging to play with a pick, while other players find if they started learning to play with a pick, and never learned to play with their fingers, that finger picking is challenging.

There is the foreign aspect to using a pick. We have much better control over our fingers when finger picking since we have been using our fingers our whole life for everything else we do. But a pick and even a combination of playing with pick and fingers are great ways to get new sounds out of those same notes and chords your fretting hand is playing. It is a great thing to have control over what strings you hit since they determine what notes you play and what pitches sound as you strum a chord.

A piano player doesn't play every key at every moment. Having to strike the keys with their fingers helps, because they can press down the notes they actually want to hear. On guitar, there are strings in the way. And actually being specific about what strings you strum and pick is a big challenge for any player, especially in the beginning.

Try not to decide whether something like using a pick is right for you or not solely based on whether or not it comes easy for you. Choose how you play based on the sound you want to get. Watching and listening to more experienced players will give you ideas.

Many players, including Pat Metheny, have said to me that they wished they had worked on alternating picking. It's never too late to add cool new skills to your playing.

A Modern Method For Guitar by Bill Leavitt has exercises to develop accurate playing technique in both hands.

You can work on holding the pick so that it feels comfortable between your thumb and first finger and gently play the strings with the pick.

### **Try This:**

Focus on one string and play that string open, and use a down stroke to play that open string. Then play that same open string note with an upstroke. Play it repeatedly with the down stroke then the upstroke, down up down up down up. Make the note sound the same volume and tone by listening to how it sounds with a down or upstroke. Intend to keep these repeated notes even and smooth until you can pick them smoothly with the pick.

### [Alternating Picking Video](#)

Finger exercises are a must to train your fingers, hands, arms, wrists, tendons, muscles, and synapses to play guitar. You are literally creating the pathway to fluency and ability.

In biology it is a known fact that our brains release a chemical to create a new groove in our brain every time we learn something new, whether it is a concept to understand or a physical movement to do with our bodies. When repetition has occurred enough times, the groove is deep enough and we understand the new information or have the new physical ability. The synapse connection is complete. It's that feeling you get when the light bulb goes off and you say, "Oh! I get it now!" So repetition is essential. You can be patient with yourself knowing that dexterity, strength, coordination, flexibility, and fluency are just repetitions away. Like water and sunshine, showing up to practice will help you grow.

### **Finger Exercises with Alternating Picking**

**1234**

**1342**

**1423**

**1324**

**1243**

**1432**

**2341**

**2413**

**2134**

**2431**

**2314**

**2143**

**3412**

**3124**

**3241**

**3142**

**3421**

**3214**

**4123**

**4231**

**4312**

**4213**

**4132**

**4321**

Here are 24 different finger exercises. Work on one per week. The numbers indicate your fretting hand fingers as well as the first four frets of the guitar. Play them ten to twenty times on each string. Do all repetitions on one string at a time at first, and in one direction before changing to other strings.

### **Try This:**

Finger the first fret of the thin E string with your first or pointer finger to play the note F with your pick and use a down stroke. Keep the note held down, place your second finger or middle finger on F# on the second fret, and play the note with an upstroke and keep that note held down. Now put your third or ring finger on the third fret and play the note G with a down stroke, keep it held down and put your fourth or pinky finger on the fourth fret or G# and pick that note with an upstroke.

Keep your fingers low to the fret board; focus on a clean tone for each note. Play each note evenly by giving each note the same length of time. Play smoothly using the pick, playing with alternating picking.

[Fingering Hand, 1234 Finger Exercise Video](#)

[Picking Hand, 1234 Finger Exercise Video](#)

Scales and arpeggios give you fluency across and up and down the fretboard. You can play them one, two, and three octaves to increase your fretboard knowledge and ability to glide and flow through the notes.

Play with Bill Leavitt's, Classical Studies for Pick Style Guitar Book. The best way to learn a technique like alternating picking is to learn a piece that requires it. Allegro by Carcassi, the second piece in this book will teach you how to use alternating picking by the time you've learned the piece.



## SOUND AND TONE

Your touch and the way you make a sound will have everything to do with your experience, how long you've been playing and what players have influenced you.

In some instances I have met students who adore a certain player so much that even their hands look like their favorite guitar player when they themselves play guitar. They shape shift into that player. This is a wonderful way to learn how to play any instrument.

Play as if you already are a great player. Play for yourself. Play to impress yourself. Play to please yourself. Play guitar with your whole self, with all your love and care, with your whole heart and mind.

Play the music you love, by the players you love and really work at wanting to make it sound as good as when your favorite player plays it. You will learn infinite great habits if you choose great players to imitate.

To me, it's like learning our native tongue to speak. Thankfully everyone around us was helpful and told us the real names of things and the right letters to pronounce. We imitated everyone we heard even by osmosis and sometimes unconsciously. We as a species are always learning this way naturally, so it's cool to pay attention to what you are noticing, what you are picking up from another person, what you like and what you don't like so that you can choose mindfully and choose deliberately.

In the beginning as with learning a language, we are learning how to learn, what to learn, how to speak and what gets said when. We learn timing for conversation and how to listen and focus to watch the shape of the speaker's mouth and how to articulate what we hear them say and we repeat it exactly as they say it, to learn how to say it correctly. We say it with the same emphasis, the same volume, tone, timbre, accent, rhythm and with the same excitement or calm. We transcribe and repeat what we hear back to them. Eventually we speak our own thoughts and say what's on our own minds, we learn how to think, we learn how to put words to what we are thinking. It's miraculous really.

This learning by observing comes through when we listen to our favorite musicians too. We can be just as careful to listen to great playing and absorb what we need, to create music.

Many of my musician heroes did not take lessons or study theory or harmony. They listened to real music and developed great ears and practiced consistently to learn everything it took to make a great sound.

## **Finding Your Own Voice**

My advice is to listen intently and transcribe another artist's playing note for note, and to be this precise with as many players as you are interested in, so that you have a variety of skills and sounds when playing guitar. You will naturally develop your own voice and style, the way you did with language. You have your own unique fingerprint and if you allow many great players into your psyche, you will have a variety of options and a blend of abilities that is all your own.

Each hand has a different job to do. The fretting hand and the picking hand have their own sets of techniques they need to learn in order to make a great noise. The way you hold your hands, if they hover over the strings or lean on the pick guard, if they feel comfortable or awkward all factor in.

It's easy to think that the gear has a lot to do with how great a player sounds, but sound and tone has everything to do with a player's touch. How hard or soft they play the strings, how accurately they strum, which strings they hit, if their fretting hand pull the strings out of tune when holding down a chord or if the strings buzz because they don't hold the strings down far enough to contact the fret long enough and let the notes ring.

### **Try This:**

Select one acoustic guitar and pass the same guitar and same pick to several players in the same room and the guitar will sound like a different instrument in each person's hands.

This happens for every instrument. The music comes from the player.

"Practice until the difficult becomes easy, then practice until the easy becomes habit, and finally practice until the habit becomes beautiful." ~ Doug Henning

## THE REST STROKE

I liken playing with the rest stroke to being articulate and speaking clearly, or following through with a bat swing to connect with a ball squarely. To get the whole picture, the whole sound, and the full tone, the rest stroke is a technique that surprisingly, many accomplished players don't use.

When playing a single note with a pick, use a down-stroke and stop the pick against the very next string, like a stop sign. Pause there, touching the next string. Without the rest stroke there is often a hit or miss outcome. With the rest stroke, you can be certain that you will hear every note you intend to play.

The rest stroke is essential when playing chord solos, sometimes called chord melodies, because the highest pitched note is usually the melody. It sounds sloppy and often the melody is missing without the rest stroke. It would be like speaking words and leaving off the consonants at the end of each word. It would be difficult to know what someone was saying without all the letters and it is hard on the ears to strain for the missing melody when the chord solo is played without the rest stroke.

Too much chance and inaccuracy causes stress for the player, because they know they don't always hit the strings they want to hit.

The rest stroke can be used to play two notes, three note chords, four and five note chords. It's also great when playing faster; the clarity of hearing every note in the chord makes the speed that much more impressive.

### [Rest Stroke Music Examples Video](#)

The image shows a musical score for guitar. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of a series of chords. The first measure has a rest stroke over the first two notes. The second measure has a rest stroke over the first note. The third measure has a rest stroke over the first note. The fourth measure has a rest stroke over the first note. The fifth measure has a rest stroke over the first note. The sixth measure has a rest stroke over the first note. The seventh measure has a rest stroke over the first note. The eighth measure has a rest stroke over the first note. The ninth measure has a rest stroke over the first note. The tenth measure has a rest stroke over the first note.

|   |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |
|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| T |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |
| A |    | 7 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 7 |  |
| B | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 7 |  |

### Pick the Strings You Actually Want to Hear

Some players hit all the strings all the time. Well piano players don't hit all the keys all the time, just the ones they need. Guitarists can be that precise too. It takes practice.

### Repetition Makes it a Permanent Place in Your Playing

Repetition is the mother of skill. Repetition is what creates the synapse connection in our brains. Repetition makes the playing ability you're looking for, possible. Like sun and water given everyday they're needed, a plant will grow. Repetition is the answer. Good repetition, because even if you practice sloppy guitar playing, you're permanently building sloppy guitar playing into your way of always playing. The repetition is making it a permanent place in your technique. So be mindful of how you sound, what you are doing and why you are doing it.

### Try This:

Try the rest stroke on the sixth string. Just play the sixth string open E with your pick and rest your pick against the fifth string. Get used to how this feels. At first you may experience that the pick feels like it is slipping past the fifth string. Deliberately make it stop. This takes time to "feel" correct in your hand.

Use the rest stroke on scales you know, play each note slowly stopping against each adjacent string using the rest stroke.

### [Rest Stroke Video](#)

## BARRE CHORDS

Many players learn to read chord diagrams and can teach themselves new voicings. Barre chords are a challenge for everyone at first. The strings buzz, your hand hurts, and it doesn't feel like your hand is going to ever want to play barre chords.

### Your Guitar Should Be Easy to Play

Make sure you are playing a "playable instrument", that the action isn't too high, that the guitar neck isn't too big for you, and that the string gauge isn't too heavy to press the strings down to get a clean sound. It shouldn't take great strength to play guitar. If you are playing an acoustic guitar, try playing barre chords on an electric guitar. Is it any easier? It will eventually get easier on an acoustic guitar, too, with repetition. This is where the finger exercises really help your hands develop coordination, dexterity, strength, endurance, and flexibility.



In the meanwhile, F major barre chord is possible to play in other positions or simplified. Remember that it only takes three notes to spell a triad like F major: FAC. So we really don't need all six strings to sound the chord. While you are building your skills you could play the top three strings, as if you were playing an open position voicing for D-7, but instead of picking the 4<sup>th</sup>, open D

string, just play strings three, two, and one, and that is an F major chord that can get you through the song you're playing that needs the F barre chord.



If you can manage to get your third finger down on the third fret of the fourth string and add the note F under that D-7, you'll have a four string voicing to sound the F major triad with a sound that is a little fuller.



### **Leverage and Finger Exercises**

A little trick Bill Leavitt taught was to utilize the automatic leverage that occurs when arching your first and third fingers to play a barre chord.

### **Try This:**

Finger the barre chord you want to play and reach your first and third fingers in opposite directions by stretching your fingers apart as if you were going to cup a ball. Your first and third fingers create legs for this barre chord to stand on. Leverage occurs with your fingers this way, and if the guitar is set up properly and is the right size for you, your barre chord problem goes away. Arching your fingers almost instantly creates a clean-sounding barre chord in which every note is audible. The chord will sound better using the side of your first finger to barre.



### **Using a Capo**

Depending upon the style of music you desire to play, a capo can be very musical and a very cool tool. I use a capo quite often. I like the higher string notes being able to ring because they are now open strings when using a capo. To hear open strings in keys that are unexpected, or to quickly transpose a song that is too low for you to sing, using a capo is a great tool.

### **Try This:**

If you're having trouble playing the F barre chord and you can finger the notes X22100 to play the chord E major in open position easily, you can put a capo on the first fret of the guitar (literally in the space between the first and second frets) and simply play your E major, open position triad. The capo allows

you to play open position voicings or chords while the capo does the work of sounding as if you are barring the chord to play F major.



Now put the capo on any higher fret and play the same chords you were just playing and you will hear that the chords sound higher. You have just changed keys, yet the chord shapes can remain the same.

## WHAT GAUGE STRINGS?

Do take into account your size and strength and comfort when choosing your strings. There are all types of people and players, so nothing is wrong in this category unless it is wrong for you. Some people love to challenge themselves in unique ways. It doesn't always lend itself to a great tone or sound or playing ability but it is indeed a challenge.

I am often asked what strings and picks I use. If I want to play lead guitar with a lot of bending notes I will use an electric guitar with the gauge set of strings called 9s. String gauge is measured in thousandths of an inch. This means that in a full set of strings, the top E string (the thinnest string) is a .009 gauge. If I don't need to bend much I will use 10s on my electric guitars, so my top E string is a .010. My acoustics usually have .011 or .012 gauge string sets.

Many players want to play with the heaviest strings possible to get a big fat tone. This works well if you have big, strong hands and strong forearms.

I use thin strings and play with thick rounded edge picks of 1.5 mm by Dunlop and get a big fat, warm tone, playing with a light touch and heavy picks. Thick heavy strings don't ring as long as thin strings do. So you can get interesting combinations and results and see what works best for you.

### Check The Intonation

#### Try This:

If you are playing an acoustic guitar, play the thin top E string open and listen to the pitch. Then play the harmonic of that note at the 12<sup>th</sup> fret and let that pitch ring. Then fret the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of the thin top E string and listen to that pitch. All three attacks that you just played should sound the same pitch. What you are checking is the intonation. Check the intonation on each string by playing each open string, 12<sup>th</sup> fret harmonic, and fretted note at the 12<sup>th</sup> fret. If the fretted note at the 12th sounds sharp, your acoustic set of guitar strings is too heavy for your guitar.

If you check the open E string, 12<sup>th</sup> fret harmonic, and fretted note at the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of your acoustic and the fretted notes sounds flat, you are using a gauge of strings too light for your acoustic.

Either way you won't have an accurately in-tune instrument and depending upon the music you play, you will hear that your guitar isn't always in tune with itself. It does not matter if every open string is in tune with your tuner. When

you fret notes and chords, you will be out of tune or frustrated that your guitar is only in tune in one area of the neck if you are using the wrong gauge strings for your guitar.

Every guitar was designed with a set of algorithms that define the distance, shape, and tension of the guitar and strings that they need to comply with so that the instrument is in tune with itself. Each instrument has a different set of measurements and each guitar manufacturer knows which gauges of strings work best on their guitars but I've only known Fender to tell me in their paperwork with my first Stratocaster that my guitar was set up for a Fender 150 set of strings with the E string gauge of .009.

With my other guitars it's a bit of guess work and trial and error. Electric guitars have adjustable intonation so there is room for a few different gauges; you just have to set your string height and intonation to accommodate the different gauge of strings so that your guitar will be in tune with itself.

Now, guitars are quite inaccurate to begin with. The standing joke is, guitar players spend half their life tuning and the other half playing out of tune. Sad, and it's mostly true.

### **Setting the Intonation On an Electric Guitar**

Electric guitars have a bridge that includes individual saddles that each string sit on that are adjustable. Check the string height of each of your strings and then play every fret of every string to make sure you have zero buzzes. (If the string height is too low to the fret board you will hear buzzes when you fret a high note)

Changing the string height changes the pitch of the string, so set your string height first, and then set your intonation. Check the open, harmonic, and fretted notes of each string at the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of your electric guitar. If the fretted note at the 12<sup>th</sup> fret sounds sharp, you need to move the saddle out toward the bridge of the guitar with a screwdriver on the adjusting screw. If it is flat you need to move the saddle in toward the neck. Each time you move the saddle you have to retune the open string to your tuner, because moving the saddle also affects the pitch.

I love DR Handmade Strings and D'Addario Strings. They are consistent, last long, have a variety of gauges, features, and tones for all my stringed instruments. DR Handmade Strings does a unique thing. They make their strings with a thinner core wire and a heavier wrap on the outside so that the string is easier to bend, yet intonates at a lower gauge.

## **PROGRESS**

Mindful playing everyday will help you reach your ultimate playing goals.

Paying attention to

how you hold your hands

how the guitar feels when you play it

how each note sounds when you pick it

how clean each chord sounds when you strum it

how well you can keep a feel, groove, and tempo

how the overall impact of the musical expression sounds to your ears as you listen to yourself

is mindful playing.

### **Record Yourself**

I always recommend recording audio and video of yourself while playing. It is a vital tool to get perspective. We're too busy making the music to pay attention to how it sounds at first. It takes all our awareness and synapses just to make the sounds happen. You may be surprised to hear how you play. Like listening to your voice speaking back on a recording, or watching yourself on video for the first time, you need this reality check, to hear how you actually sound, and how you are progressing on guitar.

Save all recordings and videos and date them. Like measurements on the wall to calculate your height, these recordings will be your guide to making real progress with your guitar playing.

### **Evaluate Where Your Playing Is**

I always ask my students, where is your playing level now and where do you dream it would be? Who do you sound like now and what great players' level do you wish for? When you hear your favorite artists play your favorite songs, what new hand techniques, rhythms, or grooves do you wish you played better? What type of lead guitar, single line, or soloing do you aspire to? Learn those exact songs, so that you develop the new abilities and techniques in a natural, musical way.

Depending upon your background, your previous experiences, and who you listen to and watch play guitar, you can get on a path with the right teacher, or self study some of the abundant information available to help you reach your playing goals.

Repetition is the mother of skill, and the amount of time you put in will determine your ability. When you admire someone's playing, you're hearing someone who has put in their time.

### **Here's a Secret**

It's smaller amounts of time EVERYDAY that make a HUGE difference and are more effective to your playing and practice schedule than an hour playing once a month. Each day you practice reinforces the previous day's session.

Depending upon what guitar materials you choose to work on, you have the option to challenge yourself.

If you're self taught, or studying with a teacher, there are several great books that I recommend that can enhance, enlighten, organize, and give you a basis for what you wish to accomplish. We all have holes in our understanding and it's wonderful to find answers all in one place arranged in a way that we can make step-by-step progress.

### **Great Books**

If you're just beginning to play guitar and want to know the names of the strings and where the notes are, Alfred's Basic Guitar Method #1 is a great book to start off with. Melbay has a basic method series as well.

If you're a little further along and want to make serious progress, check out, *A Modern Method For Guitar, Volumes I, II, and III*, by William G. Leavitt. These books cover everything about the guitar, teach you contemporary harmony and theory right on the guitar, give you exercises to coordinate both hands, skip strings, speed exercises, scales, arpeggios, chord forms, how to read music, and get you started playing chord melodies. Because the guitar has six strings, it has six voices that can be arranged like a mini-orchestra for melody, counterpoint, bass lines, and harmony at the same time. Bill was a master composer and arranger, and started the Berklee College of Music guitar department. He was the third guitarist to ever attend Berklee.

Another book that I enjoy is *Zen Guitar*, by Philip Toshio Sudo. There isn't any music notation to read in the book, just words about playing, how to study, and how to make progress.

As with all books and information, look and get a feel for how they are presented. If you enjoy the tone of the writer and if it has material that you need, and is organized in a way that helps you, dive in.

### **Sound Waves and Goose Bumps Came First**

Remember music came first, followed by the analysis of music. Someone made a great noise and someone else took the time to notice what was played, name it, and pass it on to the rest of us.

The music is in the person. The music is in you. Allow yourself to have it and get it in any way you can (being kind to yourself and others, of course) by applying your attention to your guitar and making progress everyday.

### **Website For Online Guitar Lessons**

A really great website for online lessons and for guitar information is jamplay.com. <http://www.jamplay.com/trial/card> I am one of the many teachers doing weekly live chats and archived video lessons on jamplay. If you use this code **55DB3375AA** you can have a whole free week of lessons and information, 24 hours a day.

## **RECOMMENDED BOOKS**

Alfred's Basic Guitar Method Series

Melbay Basic Guitar Method Series

Berklee Basic Guitar Phase Series by William G. Leavitt

A Modern Method For Guitar vols 1, 2, 3, by William G. Leavitt

Reading Studies For Guitar by William G. Leavitt

Melodic Rhythms For Guitar by William G. Leavitt

The Advancing Guitarist by Mick Goodrick

Zen Guitar by Philip Toshio Sudo

## CONCLUSION

- \* Spending time playing your guitar,
- \* focusing on how you make it sound,
- \* watching great players' hands and listening to the sound they create;
  
- \* listening to great recordings of guitar playing,
- \* diving into helpful guitar books,
- \* studying with a proven teacher;
  
- \* learning how to play your favorite guitar parts in songs you love,
- \* learning how to play your favorite songs;
- \* stretching your abilities to sing and play at the same time,
- \* learning harder guitar songs;

are action steps you can take to constantly grow, improve and develop, and will get you past your limitations and put you on your path to reach your playing goals.

### **Don't Let Anyone Discourage You**

Enjoy your time. Have a blast. Make a great noise and let me know if I can help you in any guitar way. Don't let anyone discourage you. Guitar is amazing fun. It has always been my best friend. If you've always wanted to play guitar, now is a great time to play.

## Let Yourself Have Music

If you've been playing awhile and need to reboot, I hope these insights have sparked you into new territory.

If you are thinking about picking up your guitar again, because you haven't played for years, I encourage you to spend time with the finger exercises in this book to reconnect with your guitar. Learn some of your favorite songs that you've always wanted to play. The resources available today can fill in the gaps for you in meaningful ways. It's so easy to jump in now with so much fun material out there to choose from.

Play until you feel like resting. Rest until you feel like playing. ~ Martha Beck

Thank you for buying my ebook. Guitar Insights will continue in my subsequent ebooks with more ideas for the guitar player in you.

Let yourself have music.

Lauren Passarelli  
Massachusetts, April 2013

**Grazie Mille,**

For all their love, generosity, talents, and faith in me;  
I am forever grateful:

My parents, Ed and Patricia Passarelli, Lou Sabini, Richard Piazza, Stefanie Badach Mis, Valarie Olsen, Sarah Burrill, Cindy Brown, John Stevens, Larry Baione, William G. Leavitt, Lynn Mckenna, and Kate Chadbourne.

**With Special Thanks To:**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lauren Passarelli is an award winning teacher and distinguished alum from Berklee College of Music where she has been a guitar Professor since 1984.

Originally from Paramus, NJ, Lauren received a fantastic guitar foundation with her first guitar teacher, Lou Sabini, using the Alfred's, Mel Bay, Harry Shearer and William G. Leavitt guitar books. Lauren began giving guitar lessons when she was 14 years old.

Graduating in 1982 as the first woman to finish the guitar performance program, Lauren also became the first woman to join Berklee's guitar faculty and the first to be promoted to full Professor.

She's a multi-instrumentalist, vocalist, arranger, recording engineer and record producer and has worked with Cindy Brown, Stefanie Badach Mis, Fuji Fujimoto, Kate Chadbourne, Tim Donahue, Bob Zung, Louis Arnold, Kathy Burkly, Richard Passarelli, Dorothy Sikora, Mark Shilansky, Suzanna Sifter, Matt Johnson, Erika Luckett, Ruth Mendelson, Les Harris Jr., Joe Santerre, Leni Stern, Mark Heard, Thaddeus Hogarth, Danny Morris, Robin Stone, Mark Kohler, Jeff Song, Sandy Kott, John Mettam, Pat Metheny, Elizabeth Lorrey, Nancy Beaudette, Melissa Etheridge, Sarah Burrill, Jane Miller, Kate Finn, and many others.

She is the co-founder of Feather Records, Cotton Moon Music, Wizard and Feather Brown Productions, and PassaBrown Studios.

## **STUDENTS**

Her students include: Derek Sivers, founder of cdbaby; Panos Panay, founder of sonic bids; Will Knox; Kyle Patrick of the band, Click 5; Jesse Ruben; David Rawlings; and Rob Harkness, founder of Barn Productions.

## **CLASSES**

She created the Beatles Guitar Lab and Beatles Ensemble at Berklee. She also teaches a Songwriting Guitar Lab and Private Guitar Lessons specializing in creativity, composing, sight reading, the ability to groove, the music of The Beatles, alternate guitar tunings, song writing, recording, producing, arranging, and Artist survival skills. She writes in standard and alternate tunings, plays slide and fretless guitar, and approaches the guitar as a mini orchestra. She has the ability to play funky riffs and sing counter melodies at the same time.

## **ENDORSEMENTS**

She endorses the following equipment and instrument manufacturing companies: Agile Partners, Joe Meek, Avant Electronics, PMI Audio, Waves, IK Multimedia, East West, Apple, Rane, Electro Voice, Crowley and Tripp, Fishman, Frontier Design, M-Audio, AKG, Cascade, Audio Technica, Groove Tubes, Bose, Peterson, DR Handmade Strings, D'Addario, Planet Waves, Fishman, Guitar Pro, Hammond, Presonus, Studiomaster, ADA Amplification, Marshall, Vox, ART, Peterson Tuners, Line 6, Wechter, Guild, Fender, Taylor, Godin, Washburn, Yamaha, and Martin guitars.

## VIDEOS

There are hundreds of performances, clinics, and interview videos on youtube featuring Lauren and her original music as well as Beatle covers while she was touring as the sound-a-like George Harrison.  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/laurenpass?feature=watch>

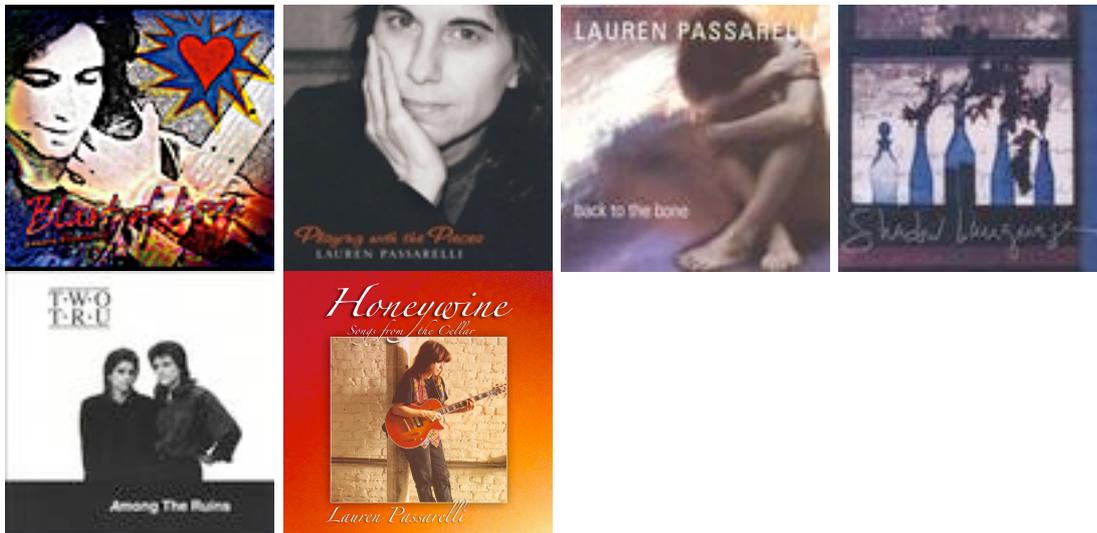
## QUOTES

“Lauren Passarelli is a great guitar player.” ~ Pat Metheny

“I wanted to make sure I gave you a much deserved (and printable/frame-able should you choose) thank you for how wonderful it was studying guitar, music, and life with you this past semester. I admittedly was a little burnt out on guitar and so was not practicing as much as usual (still everyday though). But in the past few weeks I have had a drastic increase in motivation and optimism. I know for a fact that this renewal was due to your open-minded approach to lessons.” ~ Austin Wells

“I have started your lessons on jamplay and I have to say I really like your relaxed, conversational style of conveying mountains of information.” ~ Michael Jordan

## CD DISCOGRAPHY



[Honeywine](#)

[Blast of love](#)

[Playing with the Pieces](#)

[Back to the Bone](#)

[Shadow Language](#)

[Among The Ruins](#)

**GLOBAL LIVE PERFORMANCES**



Photo by: Patty Jackson Axford

<http://www.stageit.com/lauren-passarelli>

**LESSONS**



Photo courtesy of Jamplay

Lauren Passarelli is one of the featured teachers with video lessons on JamPlay.com as well as weekly chats on jamplay.com.  
<http://www.jamplay.com/trial/card>

*24 hour guitar info*

*This code 55DB3375AA will give you 1 week FREE!*

**She offers Skype lessons with guitar players all over the world.  
[lpassarelli@berklee.edu](mailto:lpassarelli@berklee.edu)**

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