
Guitar Exercises
FOR
DUMMIES®

Guitar Exercises
FOR
DUMMIES®

by Mark Phillips and Jon Chappell



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Dedication

Mark Phillips: For my wife, Debbie, and my children, Tara, Jake, and Rachel.

Jon Chappell: For my wife, Mary, and my children, Jennifer, Katie, Lauren, and Ryan.

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Introduction

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Playing guitar is an activity that has so many terrific qualities. It's artistic, expressive, inspiring, therapeutic, and even cathartic. Nothing beats the blues like playing the blues. Guitar playing is an effective and natural means for relieving stress. But it's like sports, games, and any other physical endeavors requiring strength, speed, stamina, and coordination: The more you practice, the better you become at it. And the better you are at guitar playing, the more successful your music making efforts will be.

One of the best ways to become more accomplished in the purely physical aspects of playing guitar is to exercise your fingers — the main agents of guitar playing — to get them conditioned. And that's what *Guitar Exercises For Dummies* focuses on. By picking up this book, you've agreed to send your digits off to spring training. After going through the pages of *Guitar Exercises For Dummies*, your fingers will come out faster, nimbler, stronger, and more confident, and they'll be better team players as well. And because music involves the mind as well as the body, we give you tips and advice that will get you thinking. As Yogi Berra said, "Ninety percent of the game is half mental," so we work on strengthening your gray matter too.

In this book, we give you exercises that make sense in a musical context; that way, you learn useful things like scales, arpeggios, and chords — all of which are incorporated into the songs and pieces you play. Your brain is the coach, and the following pages are your play-book. After putting your fingers through the workout regimen of *Guitar Exercises For Dummies*, they will be lean, mean playing machines.

About This Book

Because there are real physical aspects to playing guitar, we recognize that what's true for guitar playing is also true for swimming, running, golf, or Guitar Hero: You don't get better unless you practice. And practice, in terms of the physical conditioning we talk about here, is known as *exercise*. Exercise is an efficient way for your body to practice moving specific parts in the way a given activity requires. Football players lift weights to become stronger and more powerful against opponents on the gridiron. Guitar players practice scales to become more facile at playing melodies on the fretboard.

This book is a reference you can jump into and out of at will. In other words, you don't have to read from cover to cover. Just head to the table of contents to find what you need to practice at any given moment. But it's worth noting that we present scales, arpeggios, and chords in a logical, organized way that allows you to train your fingers and learn the musical vocabulary that comes up time and again in real-life musical situations. We explain the exercise presentation most thoroughly in Chapters 3 and 4 to get you up and playing, and then in later chapters we provide more great practice opportunities but with less commentary (we can almost hear you sighing with relief). Also notice that Chapters 3 through 12 are grouped in pairs, where the first, odd-numbered chapter in the pair introduces a new concept (such as a scale or arpeggio pattern) and the second chapter has you applying that concept in a series of exercises. Both chapters in each pair include helpful exercises, but to get the most out of these chapters and be sure you can easily follow along, you may find that it's best to tackle these pairs starting with the odd-numbered chapter, where we take a little more time to explain things.

We think it's also cool that all the exercises in this book are presented in *movable* form, which means you can move them anywhere on the neck without changing the fingering, because the pattern or form uses no open strings. A movable scale, arpeggio, or chord can be transposed to any key by simply shifting your hand up or down the neck to a different starting note and playing the same pattern. So though we present these exercises in specific keys, you can move them to any fret on the neck. We remind you of the exercises' movability throughout the book, but we mention it here as well because it's an important concept in understanding how this book is organized.

Finally, most chapters end with composed pieces of music that give you a chance to play what you learn in the context of making "real music." You find these full-length practice pieces, as well as many other examples you can play along with, on the CD that accompanies this book.

Conventions We Use in This Book

Because we assume that you already play the guitar a little and are familiar with practice drills and exercises, we adopt certain conventions in this book and adhere to certain accepted terms and practices for guitar playing. For example, when we say *up* we typically mean higher in pitch, whether it's referring to a string (the high E string) or to a position. So "going up the neck" means heading in the direction of the bridge, not the nut. *Down* means lower in pitch or lower on the neck (toward the nut and headstock).

Notice, too, that throughout this book, we call the hand that you fret notes with the *left hand*, even though some left-handed people will turn the guitar over, string it in reverse, and fret with their right hand. But rather than say "fretting hand" and "picking hand," we use "left hand" and "right hand," respectively. We beg the forgiveness of southpaws everywhere.

We employ a bit of logic in the ordering of the figures presented. For example, you may notice that we introduce the major scale before the minor one. And for the three types of minor scales presented, we start with the natural minor scale. We do this because scales have a conventional order of presentation, not because, say, the major scale is necessarily easier to play than the minor scale. Also note that we always present the various patterns for both scales and arpeggios based on their starting notes — moving from low to high within a given position.

In the music figures, we introduce each new scale with a neck diagram showing you where to put your fingers on the frets and strings. The left-hand finger indications appear inside the circles (1 = index, 2 = middle, 3 = ring, and 4 = little), and the *tonic*, or name tone, of the scale appears as a white number in a black circle. The corresponding music notation is presented without bar lines. We do this to show you that it's not meant to be played in a particular meter but instead is a figure you can use to see and hear the scale without worrying about the rhythmic context. The tab staff that's presented below the figures shows the corresponding string and tab numbers, and below that are the letter names of the pitches, with the tonics circled.

Additionally, we always provide the starting left-hand finger, which appears just to the left of the first note in the standard music staff. If we offer other left-hand fingers within the figure, it's to signal that you're playing an out-of-position note, or to remind you which finger takes you back into position after having just played an out-of-position note. (By the way, an *out-of-position note* is one that doesn't fall within the four-fret span defined by the position and that requires a stretch by the 1st or 4th finger to play it.) Keep in mind that these fingerings serve as gentle reminders only. If you can play out-of-position notes using fingerings that are more comfortable or more logical, please feel free to do so. Just be sure to get back on track with

the correct fingering as quickly as possible so that the following notes will be played in the proper position.

We don't provide notation for the right hand because you can play these exercises either with your individual right-hand fingers or with a flatpick. If you play with your fingers, practice the scales and arpeggios by alternating your index and middle or the middle and ring fingers. If using a pick is more your style, play the scales using *alternate picking* — playing downstrokes and upstrokes in an alternating motion, starting with a downstroke on the first note. Sometimes we tell you when a certain scale or arpeggio may favor one approach over the other, but you can play any exercise in this book using either right-hand technique. Many well-rounded guitarists play both fingerstyle and with a pick, and you're encouraged to do the same with these exercises.

You'll notice black track boxes above the music figures in this book. These boxes tell you the CD track number that the recorded version appears on. In these boxes, we sometimes include the starting time within the track. In many instances, multiple figures are included in a single track, so the timing helps to separate them. A time of 0:00 means the figure is the first one on the track.

And don't forget about the usual *For Dummies* convention that has us italicizing any important new words that you may need for the topic at hand. These italicized words are always followed by a clear, easy-to-read definition.

What You're Not to Read

One of the things we like about *Guitar Exercises For Dummies* (if we do say so ourselves) is that the music figures — which include the chord diagrams, neck diagrams, songs, and exercises — are all self-contained. That is, you can open the book to any piece of music or exercise and know what to play without reading the text that surrounds it. That's because we provide all the components you need to put your fingers on the strings and play the piece in front of you.

However, we do think it's a good idea to read the text so that you have context and a good reason for playing the figure at hand. If you decide to take the picture book route through *Guitar Exercises For Dummies* (and only look at the figures), we suggest that you start at the beginning of a chapter. This way you're introduced to each new scale, arpeggio, and chord with graphics that show you complete fingerings, letter names, and other potentially useful information.

Foolish Assumptions

Because this book features exercises — and lots of them — we decided to keep the talk brief and focus on the music. As such, we assume that you play some guitar. If you need instruction on things like buying a guitar, tuning your guitar, or playing basic chords, check out *Guitar For Dummies*, 2nd Edition.

We built this book to be played as much as read. Still, we didn't just throw you into the deep and say, "Okay, *arpeggiate* your way out of this one." We provide a basic review on holding the guitar, definitions for the notation system we use, and advice on warming up. We put a lot of music in this book, and we expect you to play all of it (eventually), so we want to make sure that you're properly prepared to spend some quality time with your guitar.

How This Book Is Organized

We organize the bulk of this book into three distinct aspects of playing the guitar: scales, arpeggios, and chords. Within each main category is a subcategory, which we call *sequences* for scales and arpeggios, and *chord progressions* for chords. Each of these pairs of activities (for example, scales and scale sequences) constitute a *part*, with the individual major and minor scales and their corresponding sequences breaking down into individual chapters. The following sections describe further what you find in each part.

Part I: Preparing to Practice

In this part, we review the skills you need to play through the book. Some material we present will no doubt be familiar to you (if you've played before). However, we also cover aspects of notation that may be new to even experienced players. So even if you don't need advice on standing or sitting with the guitar, you should check out the notation definitions in Chapter 1, especially the section on tab and rhythm slashes. In Chapter 2, we offer ways to warm up, get your head in a good place for practicing, and bolster the complementary skills of relaxation and focus.

Part II: Scales and Scale Sequences

This part begins the essence of *Guitar Exercises For Dummies*, where the rubber meets the road — or where the fingertip meets the fretboard, if you will. We start with the major scale and its corresponding sequences, and then head into the minor scale and its sequences. Besides learning the major and minor scales (and all the various patterns and corresponding sequences), in this part you also get a feel for how the book is set up. We present each scale in five patterns, and we introduce the patterns in the same order for each scale.

Part III: Arpeggios and Arpeggio Sequences

This part is where we explore the wonderful world of arpeggios — the transition point between single-note playing and chords. Technically, you play arpeggios the same way you do single notes — one at a time, just like in a scale. But with an arpeggio, you change strings more often because the spaces between the notes — which are skips instead of steps — are wider. But musically, you're really outlining chords with those single notes. So arpeggio playing is useful for getting used to how chords work in music.

Part IV: Chords and Additional Exercises

Many guitar exercise books would simply stop after presenting a healthy dose of scales, scale sequences, arpeggios, and arpeggio sequences. But that's what makes *Guitar Exercises For Dummies* so special. In Part IV, we provide the bonus material: a whole chapter on chords and chord playing. We also include supplemental exercises designed just for developing speed, strength, and independence.

Part V: The Part of Tens

If you're familiar with the grand traditions of the *For Dummies* series, you know that the Part of Tens is the fun part. It's the opportunity for the authors to take you on a bit of a side trip. In our Part of Tens, we want to give some suggestions for helping you play guitar. However, we want these suggestions to be different. We don't want to provide you with, say, ten more ways to play scales. Because much of this book is technical, we decided to discuss some ideas in a non-technical way — even if we offer advice to take up something technical (and there's a difference . . . we think). Chapter 15 focuses on ways to make your practice time more efficient. After all, we feel there's a difference between *practicing* the guitar and *playing* the guitar. When you practice, you should be as brutally efficient and serious as possible. But when you're simply playing, you should have fun. Chapter 16 is a similarly non-technical chapter. It offers ways to improve your musicianship, including activities that don't require a guitar.

Don't forget to check out the appendix at the back of this book! *Guitar Exercises For Dummies* comes with an accompanying CD that presents recorded versions of many of the figures. The handy appendix tells you how to use the CD and provides the track listing and exercise descriptions.

Icons Used in This Book

In the margins of this book, you find helpful little icons that can make your journey a little easier. Here's what the icons mean:



This icon highlights important info that comes up again and again. So read this info carefully and store it in your brain's hard drive.



These handy tidbits of info are designed to make your practice sessions easier, and they're offered at no additional charge.



When you see this icon, watch out! It points to trouble spots where you could damage your guitar or someone's ears.

Where to Go from Here

If you already have a good practice routine in place and are looking for material to start drilling those digits, skip to Chapter 3. If you find something in the written figures that you don't understand, you can always flip back to Chapter 2 for details about the notation. If you know scales already, you may want to look at the arpeggio and chord chapters, as much of this material isn't covered in other guitar exercise books.

Part I

Preparing to Practice

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"This next exercise is designed to stretch my fingers and Mona's patience."

In this part . . .

In this part, we quickly go over all the essential things you need to know to practice the exercises that appear in this book. If it has been a while since you have played, we offer a brief refresher course in Chapter 1 on holding the guitar while sitting or standing. We also cover all the notation devices and conventions that you need to be familiar with to navigate the different types of exercises presented. The material in Chapter 2 focuses on warming up. It's always a good idea in any physical endeavor (and yes, guitar playing is physical) to limber up. And because guitar playing is also a mental game, requiring focus and concentration, we give you some ways to gear up the old gray matter as well.

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