



Guitar String Tuning 101

By Tom Spaulding

There are several ways to get your guitar in tune. You can tune by ear or use mechanical or electronic tuners. Tuning "by ear" means finding a reference note that you know is in tune and tuning your guitar to it.

Tuning with a piano:

- Play the "A" an octave below middle C on the piano and tune your open A (5th string) to it.
- Fret the low E string at the 5th fret and tune it to match the open A string
- Fret the A string at the 5th fret and tune the open D string to it
- Fret the D string at the 5th fret and tune the open G string to it
- Fret the G string at the 4th fret and tune the open B string to it
- Fret the B string on the 5th fret and tune the open high E string to it.

Using a tuning fork tuned to "A" or "E":

Strike the tuning fork against a hard surface and listen to the note. If you are tuning an acoustic guitar, place the stem of the fork right behind the bridge of your guitar. The guitar will amplify the tone of the fork.

If it is an "A" tuning fork, tune your open 5th string to the note (You will be an octave lower than the struck note). If your tuning fork is in "E", tune either E string to it. Tune the rest of the guitar using the method above.

Using a Pitch Pipe:

- A pitch pipe is a device that uses airflow to vibrate metal reeds to produce a note, similar to how a harmonica works. The reeds are tuned to the chromatic scale. Using a pitch pipe can get you close, but is not recommended for accurate tuning.
- Blow gently into the pitch pipe to get a reference tone and tune your strings to each reference note. As pitch pipes are not tempered like pianos and electronic tuners are, you may have to adjust the tuning slightly using your ears.



Electronic tuners:

- If your guitar has a pickup, plug it in to the tuner. If not, be sure your tuner has a built-in microphone and place the tuner close to your guitar's sound hole.
- Strike the low E string and bring the string to pitch. Look for the tuner to read "E".
- Most tuners have a display where the LED lights indicate sharp, flat or in tune.
- A red LED to the left of center will indicate flat notes.
- A red LED to the right of center will indicate sharp notes.
- "In tune" notes are indicated by a green light in the center of the display.