

How To Play Acoustic Guitar – Beginner Guide

Want to learn how to play acoustic guitar? You're in the right place. This is one of our most popular guides so let's jump straight in!

How To Play Acoustic Guitar (A guide for beginners)



In this free guitar guide you will learn:

- Posture: The best way to hold the guitar
- 4 easy beginner chords that sounds great
- Anatomy: The important parts of your guitar that you need to know
- How to strum a guitar (AKA 'how to sound musical')
- Melody & harmony: Understanding notes vs chords
- The correct way to hold a guitar pick
- 3 easy beginner songs you can play right now

I hope that sounds useful for you? By the end of this lesson you will have an excellent understanding of how to play acoustic guitar. Let's do it!

You'll learn how to play acoustic guitar a lot faster if you put great 'fundamentals' in place. And the most important thing of all is posture.

Posture (AKA 'how you hold the guitar') isn't the most sexy subject in the world but it is the most important. Nothing will influence your chances of successfully learning guitar more than your posture.

If there are errors in your posture you will never learn how to play acoustic guitar as well as you'd like.

How to have perfect guitar posture

Ok, this is super important: The Thing You Sit On is vital.

1) Don't slump down into a low sofa



This restricts your movement and makes playing guitar very difficult. (Especially if you're using a large bodied dreadnought or jumbo acoustic.)

You shouldn't have to reach OVER the guitar to play it.

2) Don't sit in a chair with arms

Again, this restricts your movement and encourages you to keep your left elbow tucked in to your torso, this is *terrible* for guitar playing!

If you want to learn how to play acoustic guitar correctly your left arm must be completely free of obstructions.



3) Don't perch on a high stool

Low stools are perfect for guitar playing, but high stools are forbidden for guitar players! If you've tried playing at the breakfast counter you will probably have experienced this already...

Playing on a tall stool tends to make your thighs slope downwards and this means the guitar slips away from you while playing.

If you want to learn how to play acoustic guitar it's a prerequisite that the instrument is secure.



4) So what's the best 'Thing To Sit On'?

Sit on anything you want, provided these two things are in place:

- Your knees should be at a 90 degree angle or angled *slightly* towards you.
- Both arms should be totally free from obstruction.

With these two things in place you can learn how to play acoustic guitar quicker and with less frustration.

How to Play Acoustic Guitar – Important Guitar Anatomy

You don't need to know much about your guitar's anatomy, but you do need to know a little. Here are the parts of the guitar that are 'essential knowledge':

The 'Fretboard'



This is where you press your fingers to play different chords or notes. Learning how to play acoustic guitar is simpler than electric guitar because we don't need to worry about amplification. We can focus purely on your right hand and left hand technique.

The 'Bridge'



This is where the strings are held in place. On an acoustic guitar the strings are usually fixed into the bridge using small pegs.

The 'Machine Heads'

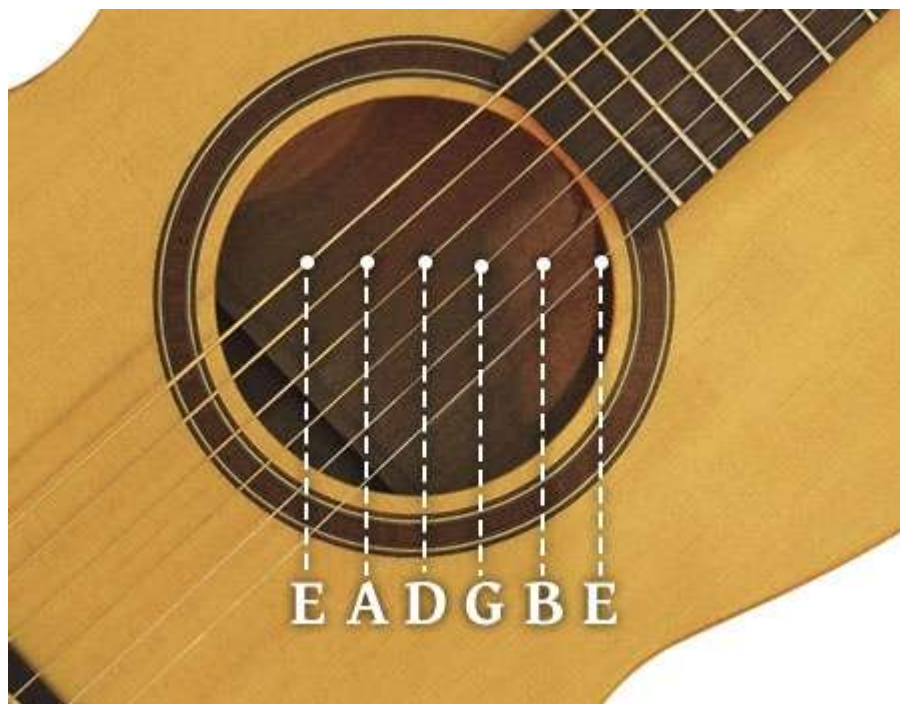


Inside the red box above you will see the guitar's 'headstock'. You'll also see some keys that can be turned. We call these 'machine heads' and they raise and lower the pitch of each string. Adjusting these is how you keep your guitar in tune.

If you want to learn how to play acoustic guitar you must know how to keep the instrument in tune, so the machine heads are a vital piece of your guitar's anatomy.

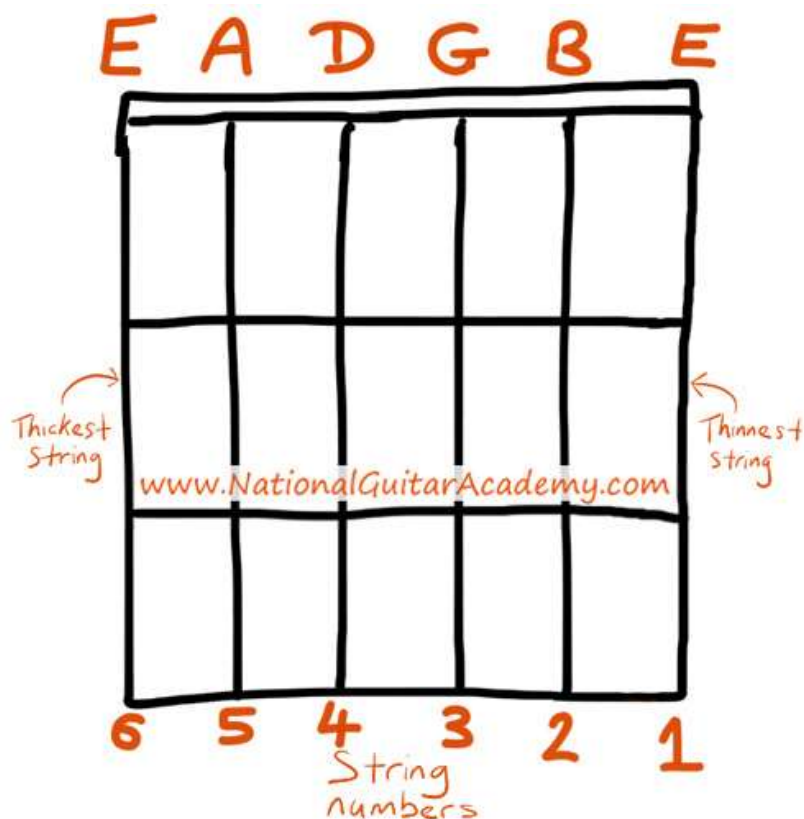
Learn more in this article: [How To Tune A Guitar Correctly: A Guide For Beginners](#)

What are the note of the guitar strings?



You'll find it almost impossible to learn how to play acoustic guitar if you don't know the notes of the strings. In standard tuning the strings have a name AND a number.

- The **thickest string** is called the **6th string**. In standard guitar tuning, this is tuned to **E**. We often refer to this as the '**low E string**'. This is the deepest/lowest guitar note you can play.
- The **5th string** is tuned to **A**, so it's usually referred to as **the A string**.
- The **4th string** is tuned to **D**, so it's usually referred to as **the D string**.
- The **3rd string** is tuned to **G**, so it's usually referred to as **the G string**.
- The **2nd string** is tuned to **B**, so it's usually referred to as **the B string**.
- The **1st string** is tuned to **E**. This is the thinnest of all the strings. We often refer to this as **the 'high E string'**.



How to remember the string names/notes

The easiest way to remember the string names is by using a mnemonic.

Try this one:

- Elephants
- And
- Donkeys
- Grow
- Big
- Ears

This next one is my favourite:

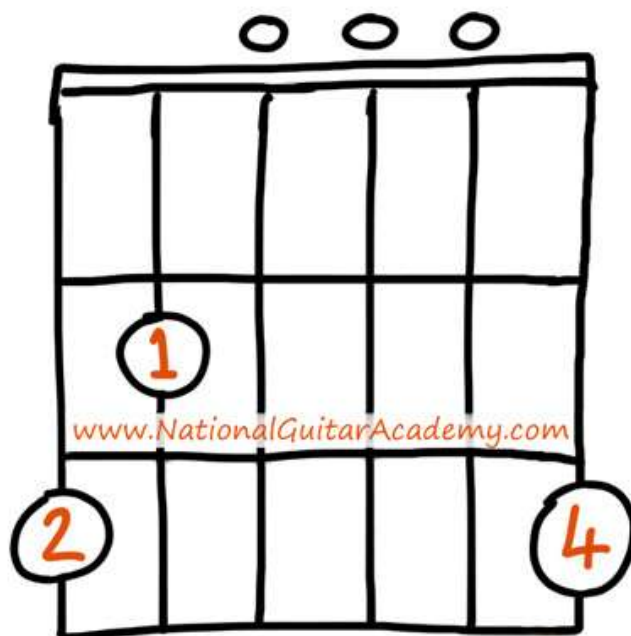
- Eddie
- Ate
- Dynamite
- Good
- Bye
- Eddie

What's the difference between chords and notes?

- A **note** is a solitary pitch. It's what you hear when you pluck one string.
- A **chord** is a group of notes played together at the same time.

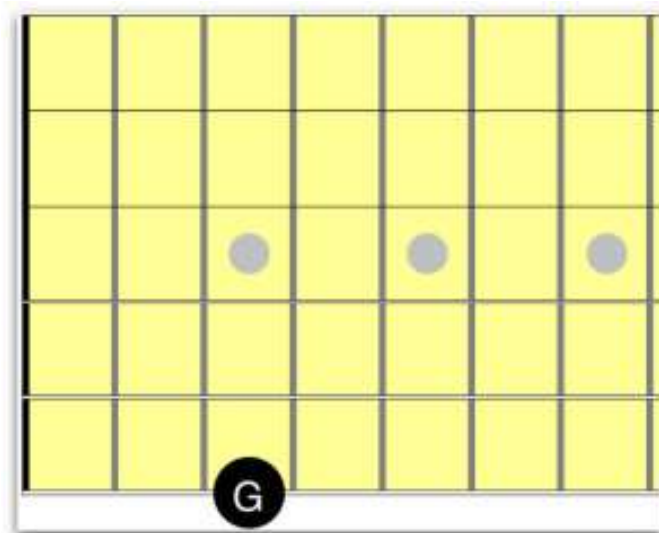
Think of it like this: Notes are like letters. Chords are like words.

For example, here is a G Chord...



Do you understand this chordbox image? If not, here's an article which will help you: [How To Read Guitar Chordboxes](#)

...And here is a G Note...



There are a lot of guitar notes on the fretboard and it can be really overwhelming for a beginner. All beginners should focus solely on CHORDS. Don't try and understand all the notes of the fretboard as a beginner – that's a frustrating and unhelpful path to take.

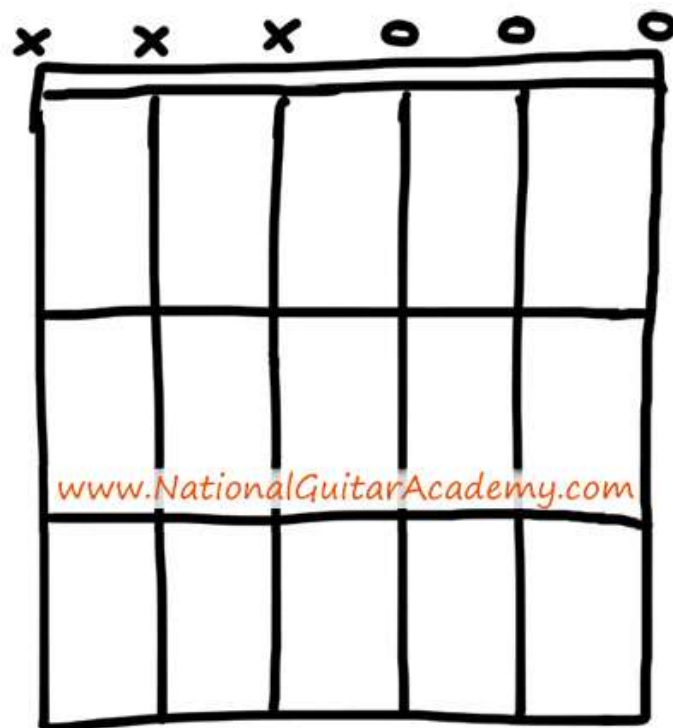
When you're ready to learn more about the note of the fretboard, this article will help you: [Guitar Notes Explained – A Guide For Beginners](#)



What are 'chords'?

If you want to learn how to play acoustic guitar you must understand chords. **A chord is a group of notes played together at the same time.**

For example, if you strum the G, B and E string, you play a chord. (Because you're strumming a 'group' of notes at the same time.)



‘Should I focus on notes or chords?’

They’re both awesome. But chords are more suitable for beginners. If you want to learn how to play acoustic guitar easily then definitely start with chords.

How to fret chords correctly

Make sure you use the very TIPS of your fingers. You don’t want to use the fleshy part, where your fingerprints are.

Using the tips of your fingers allows the maximum space in between each string. This means notes can ring clearly without being muffled or deadened by unwanted fingers.

Try playing some simple chords with your finger tips vs your fingerprints. You will quickly see which one sounds best!



- Each note needs to be clear and clean.
- Make sure to place your finger in the middle of the frets, not ON the frets. Your finger needs to go in the gap. This helps stop deadened notes and is a crucial part of learning how to play acoustic guitar in a clean and articulate way.



- For the vast majority of chords your thumb should be in the middle of the neck and pointing to the ceiling.



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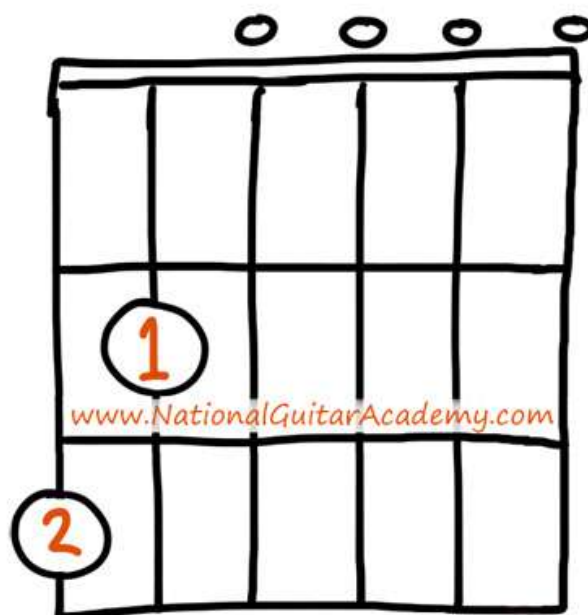


How to play acoustic guitar – 4 easy beginner chords

Let's look at some cool beginner chords that make it easier to learn how to play acoustic guitar.

This is a G6 chord. You can use it as a substitute for any G chord.

G6



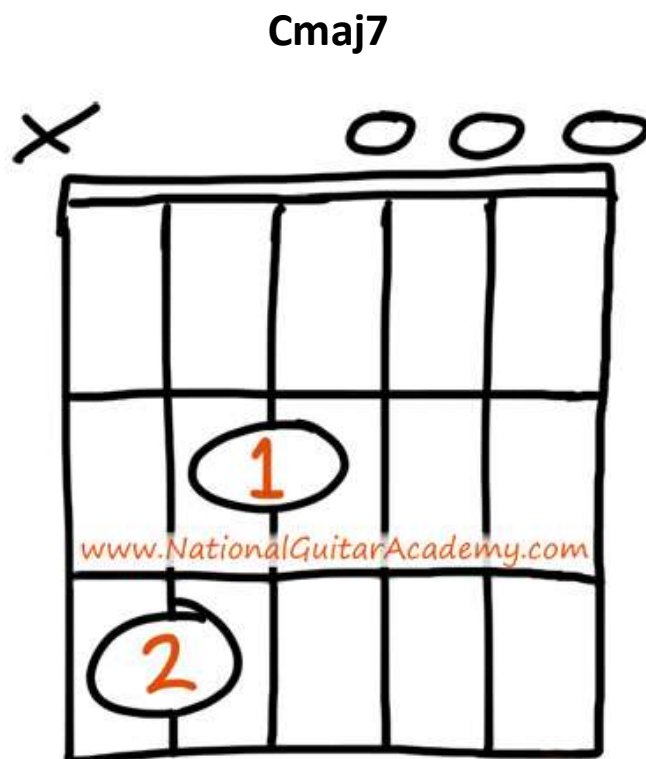
To play this chord you:

- Place your second finger on the third fret of the Low E String.
- Place your first finger on the second fret of the A String.
- Strum all 6 strings.

G Chords are great and there's so many different ways to play them. Here's article which explains a whole bunch of G Chords: [4 Easy Ways To Play The G Chord On Guitar](#)

C Major 7

This is such a cool chord. It sounds awesome and is easy to play. You can use it as a substitute for any C chord.



To play a this chord you:

- Place your second finger on the third fret of the A string.
- Place your first finger on the second fret of the D string.

- Strum from the A string.

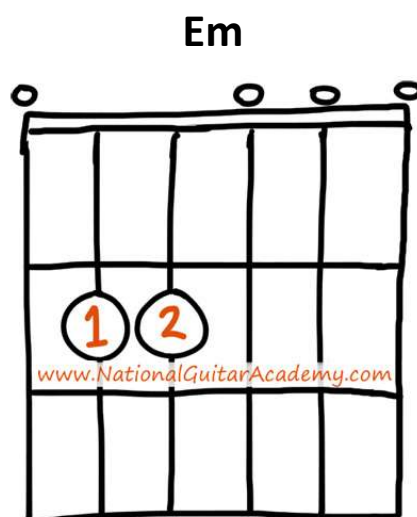
Learning how to play acoustic guitar requires you to learn some important chords. There are no chords more important than G and C, which is why these two chords are so useful.

Check out this article for more cool C chords: [4 Easy Ways To Play The C Guitar Chord](#)



The E Minor Chord

This is another fundamental guitar chord. If you want to learn how to play acoustic guitar this is a brilliant chord to get under your belt. It sounds really full-bodied on an acoustic.



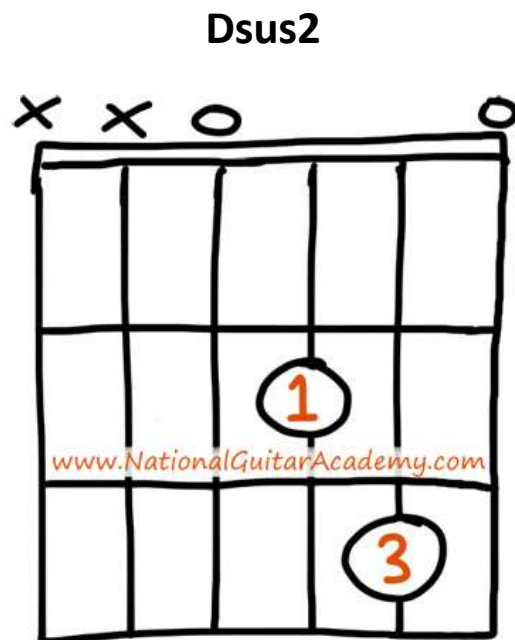
To play this chord you:

- Place your first finger on the second fret of the A string.
- Place your second finger on the second fret of the D string.
- Strum all 6 strings.

You can learn more E minor chords here: [Em Guitar Chord – 4 Easy Ways To Play This Essential Chord](#)

The Dsus2 chord

The final one of our fundamental chords is Dsus2. You can play this as a substitute for any D chord:



To play this chord you:

- Place your first finger on the second fret of the G string.
- Place your third finger on the third fret of the B string.
- Strum from the D string. (Avoid strumming the 5th and 6th strings.)

D is a great chord and there are loads of different ways we can play it. Read this article to learn more: [3 Easy Ways to Play the D Chord on Guitar](#)



How to strum a guitar

Chords are important, but strumming is how we make music. This is where everything comes to life!

One of the key things in learning how to play acoustic guitar is developing a strong and rhythmic strum. Unlike electric guitarists, you can't hide behind effects or a distorted amp. Your strumming has to be on point.

'Should I use a pick to strum?'

Learning how to play acoustic guitar is easier with a pick. It feels weird to begin with, but that only lasts for a few hours.

After tens of thousands of hours of teaching guitar I learned that, overall, people learn guitar faster if they play with a pick.

- Play with your fingers too, by all means, but don't do it at the expense of using a pick.

- Never, EVER, strum with your thumb. This is an incredibly limiting habit which will stunt your progress as a guitarist.

The correct way to hold a pick

1 – Do a thumbs up sign:



2 – Place your pick on the top of your index finger, with the pointy edge facing you



3 – Bring your thumb down



That's how you hold a pick. This takes EVERYONE a while to get used to, so don't worry if it feels foreign or awkward to begin with.

How to strum an acoustic guitar

Strumming can be difficult when we first start, but it's essential you master it if you want to learn how to play acoustic guitar. This is how we bring music to life.

- When you strum, you want to have a nice swinging motion **from your elbow** and just a little wrist movement. 90% of the strum comes from your elbow.
- Make sure your wrist is nice and straight and not angled inwards like a swan neck.



This is what it should look like from your perspective when you strum:

Check out this article to learn much more about strumming: [How To Strum A Guitar](#)

Timing Tips

If you don't keep in time you will find it hard to play along to songs and with other people. **This is important.**

Most of the time when we strum chords, we want each strum to be even. So the gaps between each strum are the same.

You don't want to have uneven gaps as this often causes you to go OUT of time.

Here I've strummed a chord four times.



Feeling the tempo

When we listen to music we often hear a 'pulse', this is the beat.

We notice this when we tap along to a piece of music, we feel the music and instantly know whether it's fast, slow or medium paced.

Once we've established the beat we can use it to help our strumming technique.

The vast majority of popular music is in 4/4 time. This means there are four beats per bar of music. Don't worry too much about what this means – as a beginner all you need to know is that you should count 1, 2, 3, 4 repeatedly!

So because our beats go 1, 2, 3, 4.... We strum downwards on each beat.

This sounds ok because it's in time. But it doesn't sound very fluid. This is where upstrokes arrive.

We need to add some upstrokes in too. We add these in-between the beats.

So instead of just strumming, 1, 2, 3, 4.

We strum: 1 **and** 2 **and** 3 **and** 4 **and**, etc...

(On the "and" you should use an up stroke.)

If you want to learn how to play acoustic guitar this is a critical point, so forgive me for labouring it. This needs to be clear!

1	And	2	And	3	And	4	And
Down	Up	Down	Up	Down	Up	Down	Up

Let's take it to the next level...

The final strumming pattern we can do here is simply **double** the speed of our last one.

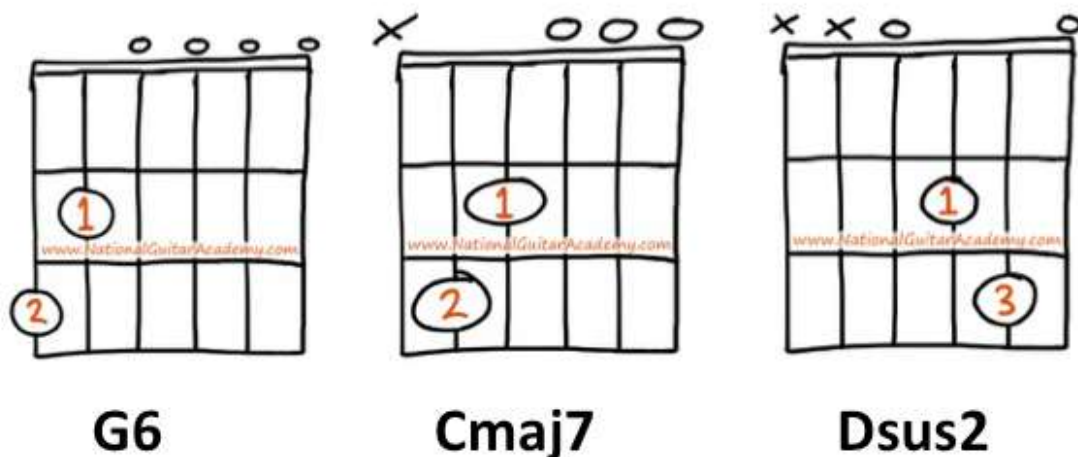
This is slightly harder to play but gives us a relentless fluidity which sounds great in acoustic & folk-based tracks.

The easiest way to learn how to play acoustic guitar is simply to learn as many acoustic-based songs as possible. We learn best by playing songs we love.

Here's 3 cool acoustic tracks you can try right now.

1 – 'Three Little Birds' by Bob Marley

An awesome tune by Bob Marley and it's so great for beginner as it only uses 3 chords: G, C and D. (We can use G6, Cmaj7 and Dsus2 to make things easy.)

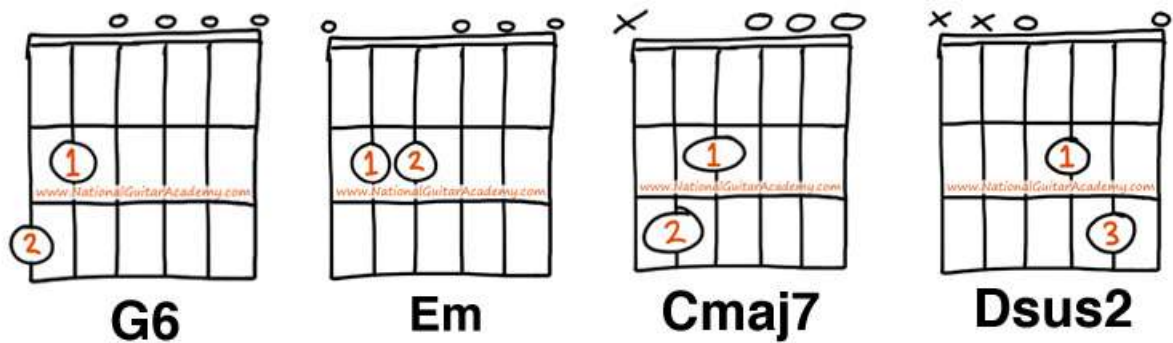


Play along to the track using the above chords, try and figure out the changes yourself.

2 – 'Stand By Me' by Ben E. King

This is a perfect beginner acoustic song, it uses just four chords and they repeat in the same order for the whole song.

The chords for this song are G, E Minor, C and D. However we're going to use our stepping stone version chords which are G6, E Minor, Cmaj7 and Dsus2.



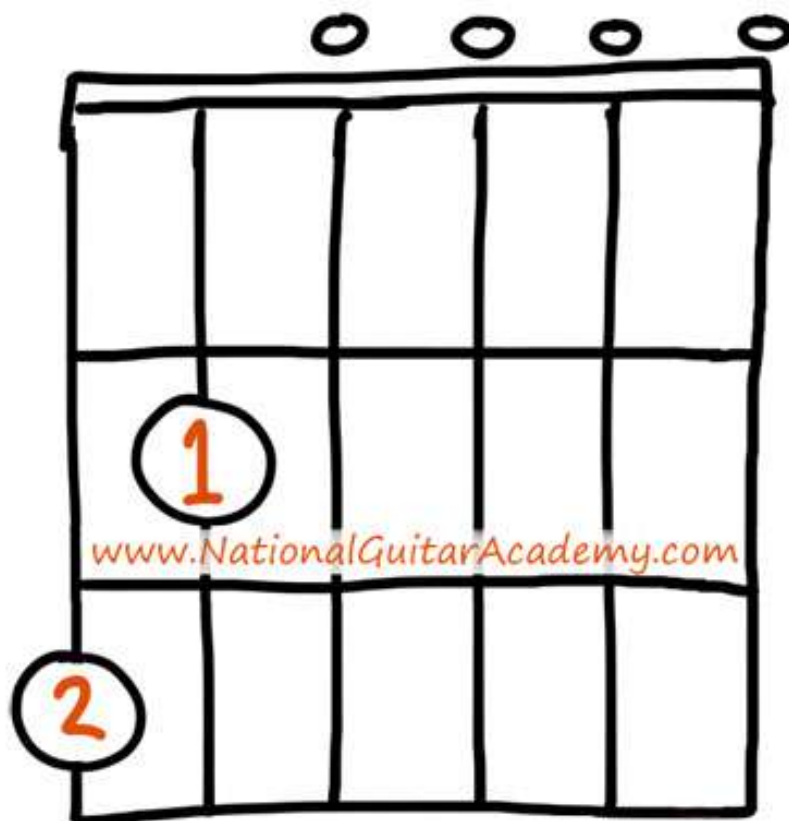
3 – ‘Songbird’ by Oasis

‘Songbird’ is a sweet acoustic track that’s very easy to play.

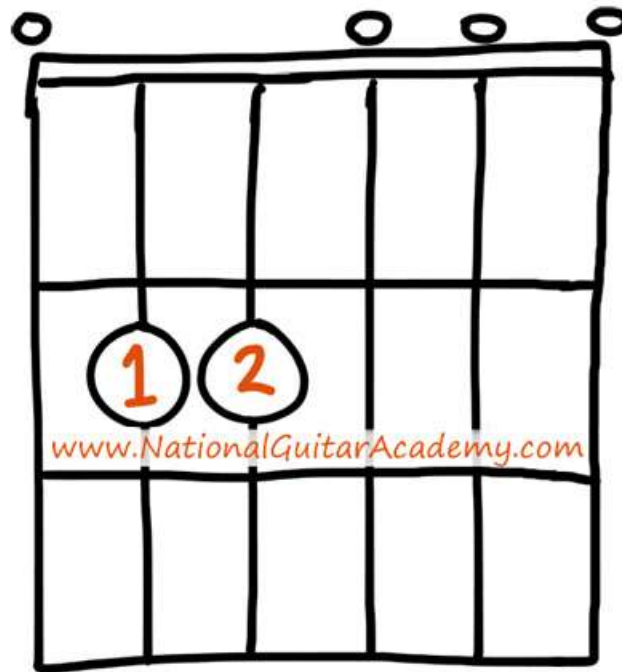
Check it out. The video is terrible, so just focus on the music! (The music starts at 39 seconds.)

This song only has two chords and sounds great on acoustic guitar. To play ‘Songbird’ we only need G6 and Em:

G6



Em



Download this lesson's worksheet

Download [this lesson's worksheet & checklist by clicking here](#) – You can print it off or save it for future reference and this will help you internalize the key points.

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