

Mandolin - First Steps 1

There's no such thing, in my opinion, as an easy instrument. All instruments require a good deal of effort before one can say they can play them. It is my intention to give you a strong foundation of basic techniques from which you can build your skills on the mandolin.

At the start you need two main aptitudes. Firstly, you require **PATIENCE**. You can't pick up the mandolin and expect to be a great player in two weeks; it takes the time it takes, and to some extent that's in *your* hands.

It's also important to have **PERSEVERANCE**.

The world is full of people who gave up learning music at the first sign of difficulty. Every successful musician had the determination to get past these hurdles, and were the better for it.

Use this handout as a reference - you'll need it over the first few weeks. Hopefully I've answered a few questions, but if there's anything you're not sure of, ASK. That's how people learn.

Oh, and try to have fun - it may be hard work, but it should be enjoyable at the same time!

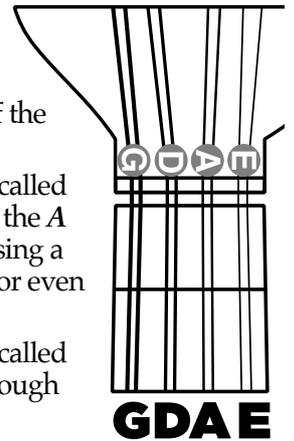
Nigel Gatherer

The Strings

1) Usually when people talk about "a string" on the mandolin, they're meaning a pair of strings. So if I were to say "Play the A string," I'd mean you to strike both of the strings.

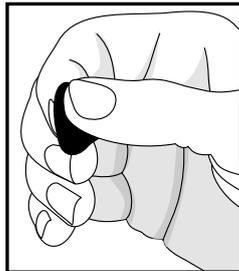
2) It's very useful to know the names of the strings. The thickest pair of strings are called the **G string**; the next thickest pair the **D string**. The second thinnest pair are called the **A string**, and the thinnest pair the **E string**. An easy way of remembering this is by using a phrase such as "Gregg's Doughnuts Are Excellent" or "Green Dinosaurs Are Extinct" (or even "G'day!").

3) The E string (the thinnest pair) is often called the **first string**, the A string can be called the **second string**, and so on. (The E string can also be called the **top string**, even though it's nearest the ground!)



The Plectrum

There are lots of different opinions about the plectrum, also called the pick. Some books will advise you to use a soft pick; others will recommend a stiffer one. I'm afraid in the end it comes down



to personal preference as to which pick will suit you. I would say start with a medium pick and see how it suits you. Try others after a while and see what difference

there is.

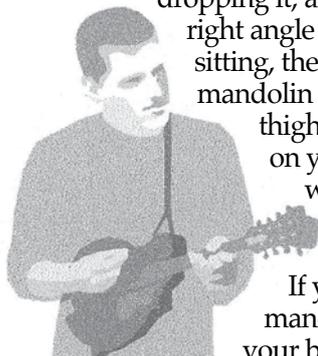
Hold the pick firmly between the thumb and the index finger. The other fingers should be roughly in line. The thumb should be more or less straight with the pointed end of the plectrum coming out at almost right angles.

It is important that the pick is held loosely. If you are dropping the pick, then it is too loose, otherwise loose is good. As you become more experienced, you will adjust to holding it with just enough tension without impairing your stroke.

Holding the Mandolin

Flat backs

It can be a good idea to use a strap, which steadies the instrument gives you some security against dropping it, and helps in getting the right angle for the neck. If you're sitting, the lowest part of the mandolin will be between your thighs and the back will rest on your belly. The neck will be pointing up at an angle of between 30 and 45 degrees.



If you're standing, the mandolin will be in front of your body.

Round backs

Roundback players do not use straps, and usually only play while seated. The mandolin will rest on your thighs and, with the use of a small footstool, either the left leg or both legs are raised. The angle of the neck will be between 45 and 60 degrees, and this is achieved with the help of a leather or synthetic gripping cloth placed in the lap to steady the instrument.



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