Introduction To Guitar For Worship

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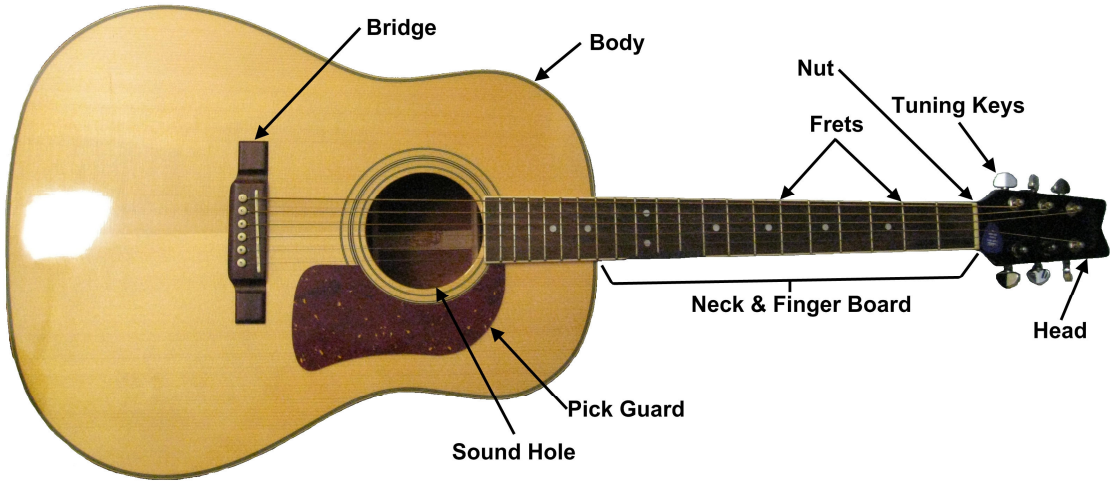
Introduction

The purpose of this document is to teach you how to play guitar for the purpose of worshiping and leading others in worshiping God. Although these lessons teach the basics of playing guitar, it requires consistent and regular practice in order to become proficient.

Section 1 – The Basics

First, familiarize yourself with the parts of the guitar as shown in Figure 1.

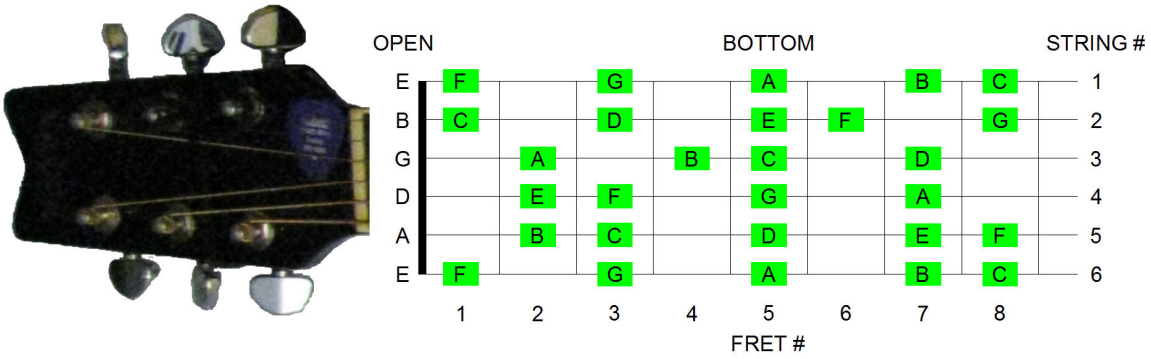
Figure 1: Parts of a Guitar



Guitar Notes:

Next, familiarize yourself with the notes on a guitar. The 6th string is the top string (the thickest string) also known as the E-string. When playing from the top string to bottom string, the open notes are E, A, D, G, B, and E (see Figure 2). One method to help remember the notes corresponding to the open strings is through the use of an acronym: **E**ddie **A**te **D**ynamite, **G**ood **B**ye **E**ddie. Figure 2 also shows the corresponding notes when certain frets are pressed.

Figure 2: Notes on a Guitar (Sharps and Flats Excluded)

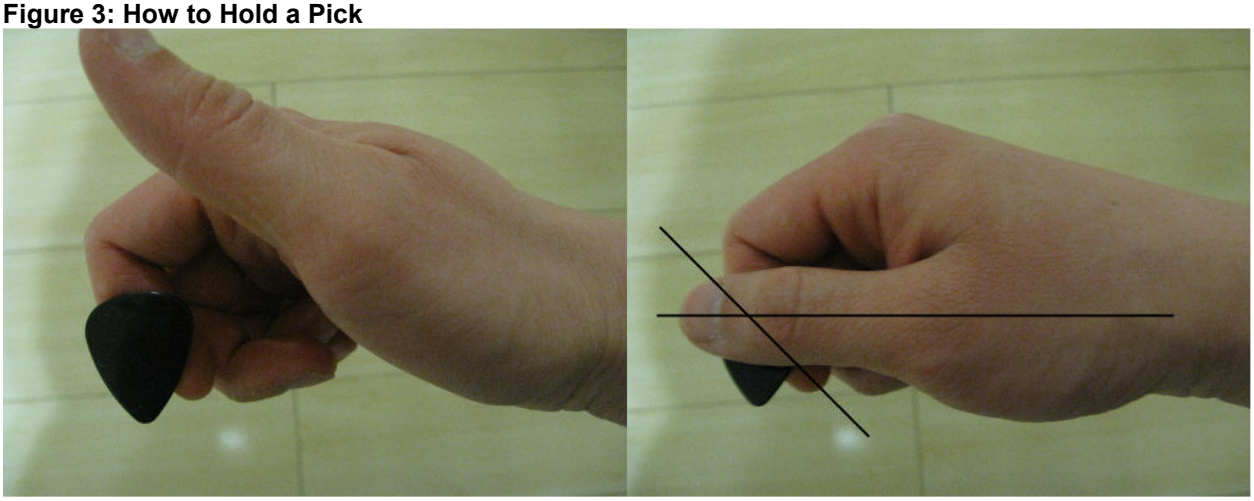


Holding a Pick:

A pick should be held firmly between your thumb and index finger in a comfortable position. It should only be held firmly enough to avoid dropping the pick during strumming. It should not be gripped too tightly otherwise your strumming will become too stiff.

When holding a pick, the index finger should be curled with the tip crossing the thumb as shown in Figure 3. Your thumb and index finger should cover approximately 2/3 of the pick with the sharper corner of the pick sticking out beyond your thumb. Avoid having the pick stick out too much as this will result in a loss of control. If it sticks out too little, you run the risk of your hand hitting the strings instead of the pick.

Figure 3: How to Hold a Pick



Tuning the Guitar:

Unless you have perfect pitch, a guitar tuner is recommended. However, when playing with a worship team that includes a piano, it is better to tune to the piano to ensure all instruments are in tune with one another. Ask the pianist to play the notes corresponding to the open strings of the guitar (E, A, D, G, B, and E) and try to match each note. If you have difficulty tuning by ear, a guitar tuner can be used to determine the frequency of the piano (should be around 440 Hz). The tuner can then be set to this frequency before using it to tune the guitar. Refer to your guitar tuner manual.

One way to confirm that your guitar is in tune with itself is by comparing the notes between strings. Starting from the 6th string, press the 5th fret. This should match the sound of the 5th string when played open. If not, adjust one of the tuning keys. Refer to Figure 2 (to see corresponding notes) and Figure 4.

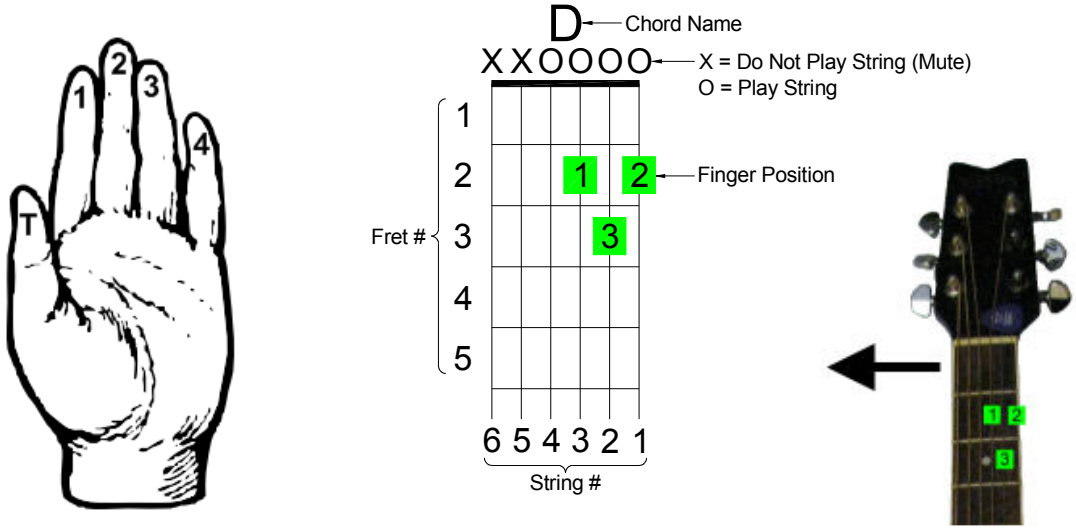
Figure 4: Tuning Guitar – Reference Figure 2

6th string, 5th fret = 5th string open (A)	5th string, 5th fret = 4th string open (D)
4th string, 5th fret = 3rd string open (G)	3rd string, **4th fret** = 2nd string open (B)
2nd string, 5th fret = 1st string open (E)	1st string and 6th string should be same note

Section 2 – Chord Diagrams and Charts

A chord diagram provides a visual representation of a guitar chord. It shows the frets, finger position, six strings, and which strings to play. The orientation of the chord diagram shows the guitar in an upright position with the head of the guitar on top. The finger position shows the actual location (fret number and string) your fingers press down on with the numbers corresponding to the specific fingers shown in the diagram below.

Figure 5: Chord Diagram Explained



In addition to chord diagrams, chords are often shown in a single line using fret numbers starting with the sixth string (thickest string). This provides a compact method to show how to play a chord by identifying which fret is pressed on each string. However, it is recommended that beginners start with chord diagrams as they also indicate exact finger positioning. The number reflects which fret is pressed with an "X" denoting that the string is not played in the chord and a "0" indicating an open string.

Figure 6: Example Chords using Fret Numbers

Chord Name	Fret Numbers
A	[X 0 2 2 2 0]
C	[X 3 2 0 1 0]
E	[0 2 2 1 0 0]
G	[3 2 0 0 0 3]

Chord Name	Fret Numbers
B	[2 2 4 4 4 2]
D	[X X 0 2 3 2]
F	[1 3 3 2 1 1]
or:	[X 3 3 2 1 1]

How many guitar chords are there?

The reality is it can feel like there are an endless number of guitar chords and many different ways to play the same chord. Fortunately, you do not need to know all of them to start playing songs. The most common chords used in most contemporary worship songs are shown in the following pages (Figure 7, Figure 8, and Figure 9).

Figure 7: Major Chords

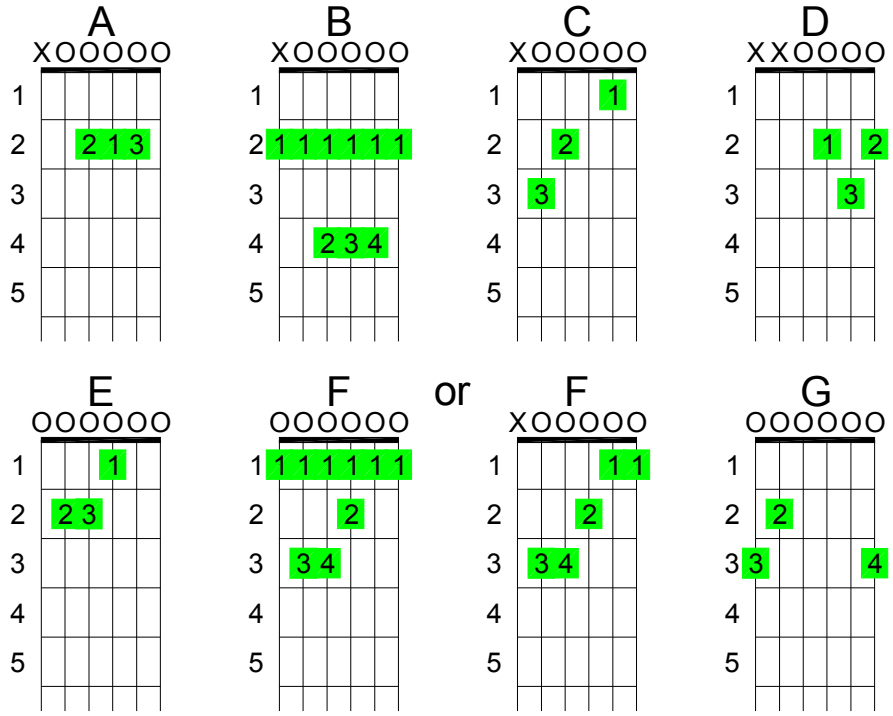


Figure 8: Common Minor Chords

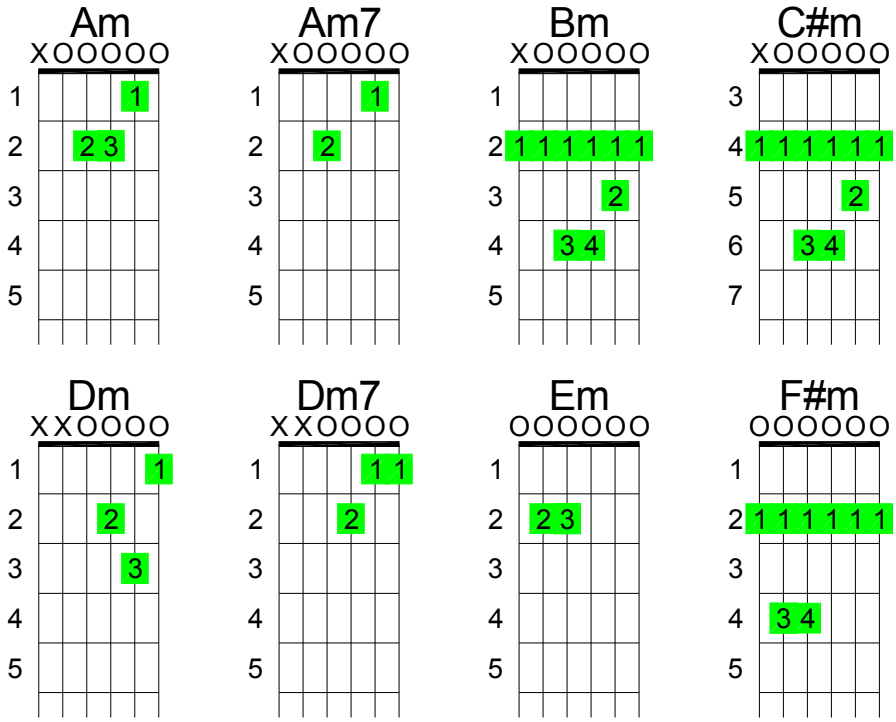
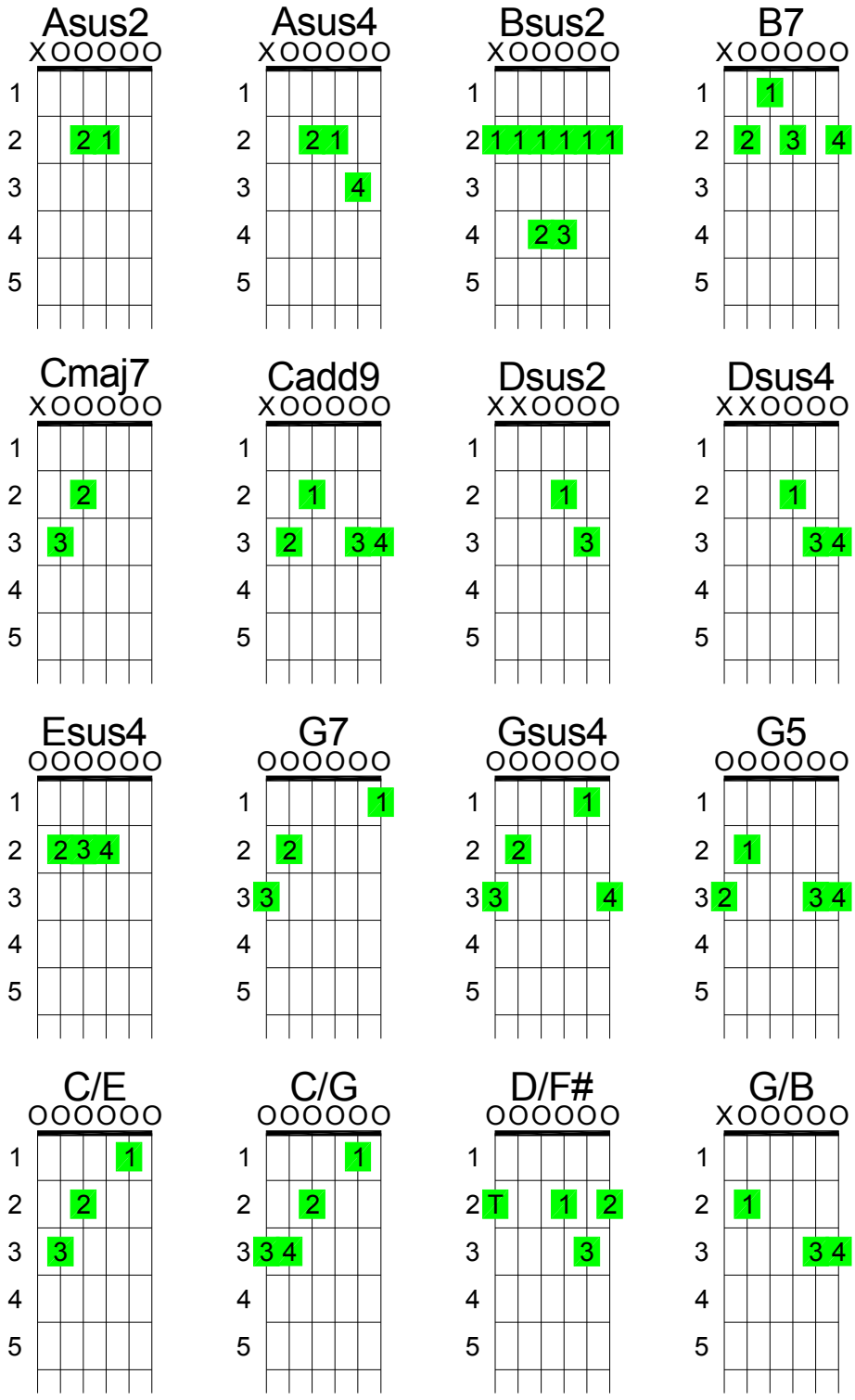


Figure 9: Other Common Chords



For more chords, the internet provides a wealth of information in terms of chord charts. For example, try the following website: http://www.chordbook.com/guitarchords.php

What does the Slash (/) mean in the chord?

You might have noticed that for the last four chords listed (C/E, C/G, D/F#, and G/B) there was a slash in between. This represents chords that use an alternative bass note (or low note). The first letter represents the main chord, while the letter after the slash represents the bass note. For example, D/F# refers to a D chord with an F# bass note.

Section 3 – How to Hold a Chord

Holding a chord properly will take some practice so be patient. Some tips to keep in mind:

- Keep your fingernails short.
- Curl your fingers while pressing on the strings. This is necessary to avoid having your fingers hit more than one string unintentionally.
- Only the tips of your fingers should press on the strings and they should be applied perpendicular to the guitar neck. This is why it is important that your fingers are curled. The exception would be a bar chord where your index finger is intentionally pressing more than one string.
- Use the palm portion of your thumb or your thumb itself as leverage by pressing it on the back of the neck. This helps give you the strength to press your fingers on the strings. The exact position of your thumb will depend on the size of your hand and what is comfortable and may also change depending on the chord. Keep in mind that the position of your thumb can affect your ability to curl your fingers.

Figure 10: How to hold a chord (Left shows D, Right shows A)

If you have problems with some of the strings sounding muffled, play each string one at a time to determine where the muffled sound is coming from and work on resolving the problem. Some potential problems are:

- Not pressing a string down hard enough.
- One of your fretting fingers is not curled enough and is hitting another string.
- One of your unused fingers is rubbing against a string.

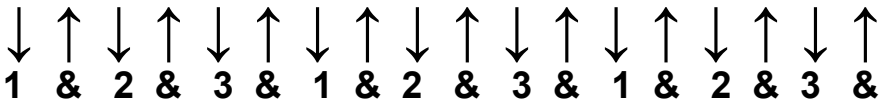
Again, it is important to remember that this takes practice. It may take time for you to strengthen your hand in order to press down hard enough or to get used to positioning your hand properly. The key is to be persistent and to keep on trying.

Section 4 – Strumming

Strumming refers to running your fingers or the pick across the guitar strings. Some important strumming tips:

- Strum directly over the sound hole.
- Strumming is a combination of moving your forearm and your wrist with the majority of motion being from your wrist.
- The forearm should move up and down with the elbow almost fixed in position. To assist with positioning your arm, you can rest the bend of your arm on the body of the guitar.
- The wrist action is similar to the action of your wrist when fanning yourself.
- The forearm and wrist actions should be in sync. They should move either up or down together.
- Avoid having the pick go in too deep into the strings. The tip of the pick should firmly brush across the strings.
- When strumming down (↓), the pick should move down and away. When strumming up (↑), the pick should move up and away.

When strumming, it is important to maintain a consistent beat. Start by alternating between strumming down and up while holding an A chord:



When first learning to strum, count the beats out loud while strumming ("one and two and three and one and …"). The numbers in the pattern above (1, 2, 3) are on beat while the "&" is off beat. If you have difficulty staying on beat, use a metronome (a practice tool that produces a steady audible beat). An online metronome can be found at:

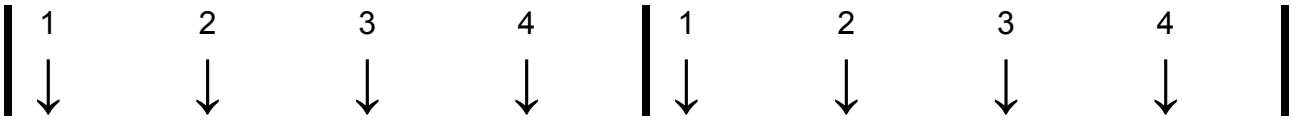
http://www.metronomeonline.com/

Set the metronome to 80 beats per minute (BPM) and practice the above strumming pattern. If you have trouble staying on beat, try playing the down strokes on beat first. Once you are able to stay on beat, add the upstrokes. Continue to loop the strumming pattern until you are comfortable strumming and are able to consistently stay on beat. Remember to count out loud.

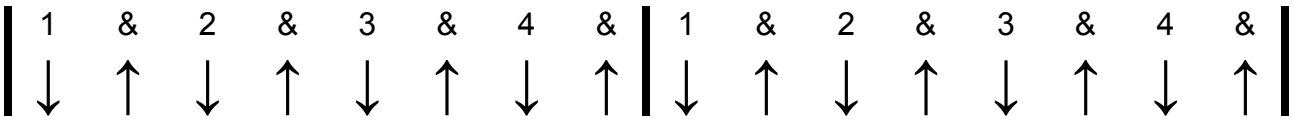
Exercise:

Try the following **four beat strumming patterns** and remember to count out loud:

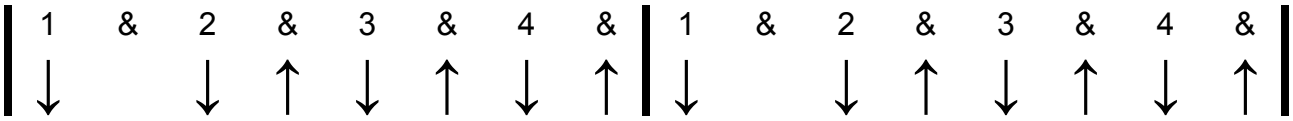
Pattern # 1



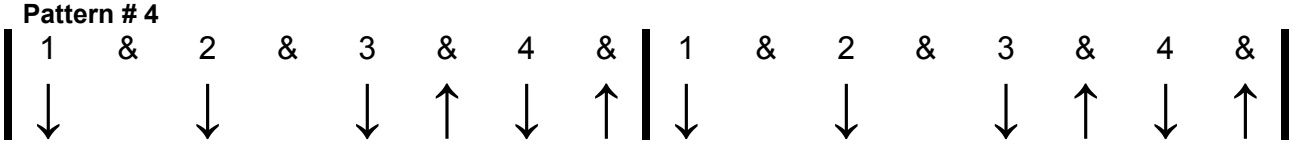
Pattern # 2



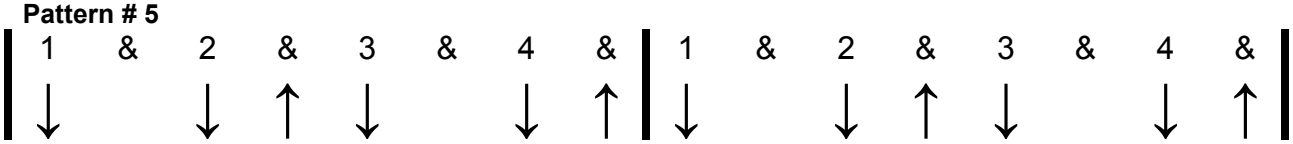
Pattern # 3



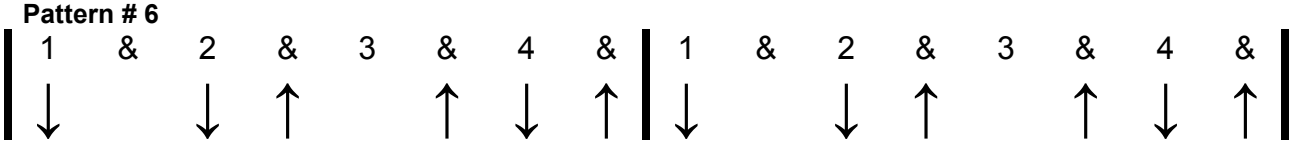
Pattern # 4



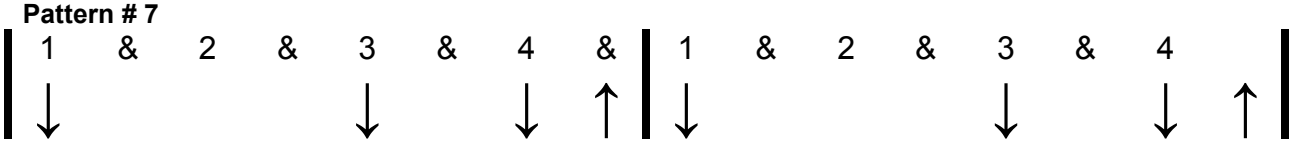
Pattern # 5



Pattern # 6



Pattern # 7



The above strumming patterns represent four beats per bar with two bars shown. Note that the strumming pattern repeats every four beats. To help recognize when the pattern repeats, try playing just the base note on the first beat. The base note is the lowest note played in the chord (e.g. open 5th string in the A chord, open 4th string in the D chord, or open 6th string in the E chord – refer to Figure 7).

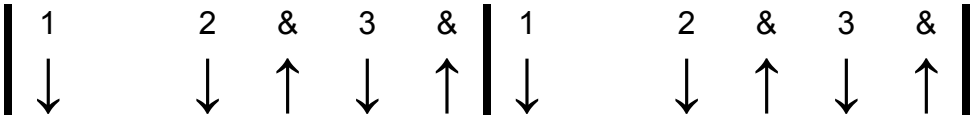
4/4 Examples:

Song Name	Artist	Strumming
All The Heavens	Reuben Morgan	Pattern # 4
A Pure Heart	Rusty Nelson	Pattern # 4
As Bread That Is Broken	Claire Clonginger / Paul Baloche	Pattern # 4
He Knows My Name	Tommy Walker	Pattern # 7
Here I am to Worship	Tim Hughes	Pattern # 3
I Will Offer Up My Life	Matt Redman	Pattern # 3 Pattern # 7
You Are My King (Amazing Love)	Billy James Foote	Pattern # 3 Pattern # 7

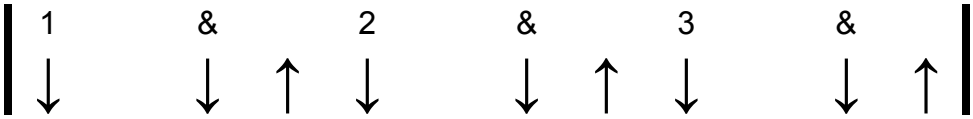
Note: It is important to remember that there is more than one way to strum a song.

Try the following **three beat strumming patterns**:

Pattern # 8



Pattern # 9



3/4 Examples:

Song Name	Artist	Strumming
Beautiful Saviour	Henry Seeley	Pattern # 8
Be Thou My Vision	Eleanor Hull, Mary Byrne	Pattern # 9
Be Unto Your Name	Gary Sadler, Lynn DeShazo	Pattern # 8
He is Exalted	Twila Paris	Pattern # 8
Shout to the North	Martin Smith	Pattern # 8

Section 5 – Reading Chorded Music

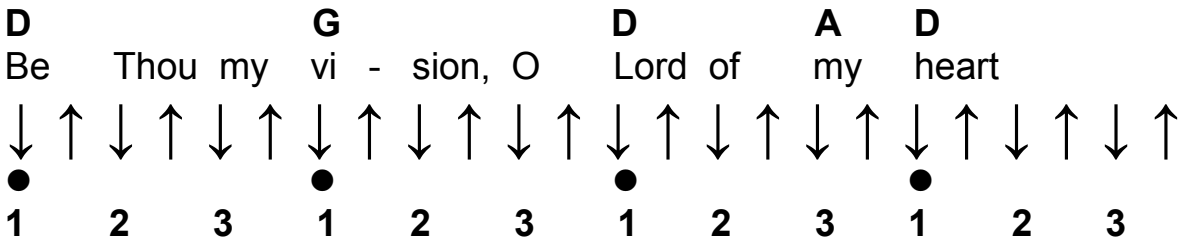
In most cases, music used for worship comes in the form of chorded music sheets. The following is an example taken from "Be Thou My Vision":

D G D A D
Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
A G A
Naught be all else to me save that Thou art,
G D/F# Bm G A
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
D Bm G A D
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Above the lyrics of each line are the guitar chords that are played. Generally speaking, the chord is placed above the words where the chord is changed. However, it is important to **listen** to ensure that the music matches the singing. As the quality of chorded music sheets can vary, it is possible for the chord to be over the wrong word.

When listening to worship music, try to get a sense of the beat of the song and tap your foot to the beat. What you should notice is that in most cases, the chord will change after a specific number of beats (e.g. 2, 3, or 4 or a multiple of these numbers) and usually changes on the first beat of the bar which is normally a down stroke (there are exceptions).

In the case of "Be Thou My Vision", there are three beats between each chord. The exception is the "A" over "my" in the first line which is a transition chord. The first line breaks down as follows:

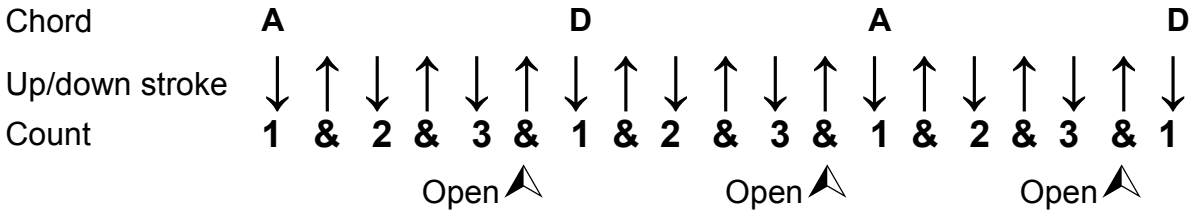


Section 6 - Transitioning Chords

Before moving onto this section, make sure that you have at least tried all of the chords in Figure 7 and Figure 8. Your goal should be to memorize the fingering of each of these chords so that you can easily recall them from memory.

Once you are comfortable with holding a few chords and are able to strum, the next step is to work on transitioning between chords. Some important tips:

- Learn to recognize what each chord sounds like so that you can identify if you are playing it correctly when transitioning chords.
- Memorize the fingering of each chord. You should be able to play them clearly.
- Move your fingers as a group, not individually.
- When transitioning chords, you can play an "open chord" in the upstroke while your fingers are moving to the next chord. An "open chord" means you are not pressing on any of the frets (except perhaps fingers that are common between both chords).



- Start practising at a comfortable slow speed. Try to keep the rhythm constant. You need to be able to transition chords without changing your rhythm. As you feel more confident, increase your speed.
- As you feel more confident, try to change chords without looking at your fingers. Ultimately, your eyes should be on the music, not your hands.
- It's all about patience and practice!

Exercises:

1. Strum from A → D → A → E Repeat
2. Strum from D → G → D → A Repeat
3. Strum from C → F → C → G Repeat
4. Strum from C → G → Am → Em Repeat
5. Strum from D → F#m → G → Bm Repeat

Try the above exercises with the strumming patterns from the previous section. Change chords after each bar.

Section 7 – Basic Theory

Although a thorough understanding of music theory is not required to be able to play the guitar, it does help to know some basic theory for practical reasons. For example, a basic understanding of music theory will allow you to properly transpose a song to use chords that are easier to sing or to use chords that are easier to play on the guitar.

The Basics

- Musical notes are named after the first seven letters of the alphabet (A, B, C, D, E, F, and G).
- A **pitch** is the perceived sound of a note. It is the frequency of a sound in Hertz (Hz) or cycles per second. This is in essence the perceived sound produced based on the number of vibrations of a string per second.
- A **tone** is a musical sound of definite pitch.
- An **octave** is the interval between one tone and another with either half or double the frequency. Both tones have the same name. It can be thought of as the same note but higher or lower in pitch. For example, the first and last strings of the guitar are both E strings but are two octaves apart.
- Western music is divided into 12 semitones which equal an octave. A **semitone** is a pitch interval halfway between two whole tones. Figure 11 shows the names of all twelve semitones. Think of Figure 11 as a measuring stick with each semitone spaced equally apart. Just like there are 12 inches in a foot, there are 12 semitones in an octave.
- Moving one fret up or down a string is one semitone up or down.
- A **sharp (#)** is a note that is raised by a semitone while a **flat (b)** is a note lowered by a semitone. Just remember that sharp means a half step higher, flat means a half step lower.
- Every note that is sharp has an equivalent note that is flat. In other words: same note, different name. This means **A# = Bb**, **C# = Db**, **D# = Eb**, **F# = Gb**, and **G# = Ab**.

Figure 11: "Measuring Stick" of Pitch – 12 Semitones in an Octave

Note	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A
Tone	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	½
Semitone	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	-

With the exception of the notes between B – C and E – F, every note has a sharp or a flat. This means there is no such thing as a B#, Cb, E#, or Fb. To help remember where these exceptions occur, remember the following acronyms (these acronyms work for me because I am a Canadian engineer):

BC = British Columbia **EF** = Electric Field

Section 8 - Application of Theory

"This song is too high" – It happens time and time again... you want to play a great worship song but it's way outside of your singing range… so what do you do? The easy answer is to transpose the song in order to change the pitch of the song. Just make sure you don't transpose it to a point where you're the only person who can sing it. If the song is too high, transpose the song down. If the song is too low, transpose the song up. How far up or down takes a bit of experience, and a bit of trial and error.

In order to transpose a song, you need to remember the names of the 12 semitones. Remember the first seven letters of the alphabet and the acronyms BC (British Columbia) and EF (Electric Field) from the previous section. If you forget, you can always refer back to Figure 11 while you transpose the song. The goal is to move an *equal distance with each chord* you transpose.

Using "**Be Thou My Vision**" as an example, let's say the original chords are as follows:

C F C G C
Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
G F G
Naught be all else to me save that Thou art,
F C/E Am F G
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
C Am F G C
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

If these chords are too low, try transposing the chords up one whole tone or key (or two semitones) so that you can sing it higher:

D G D A D
Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
A G A
Naught be all else to me save that Thou art,
G D/F# Bm G A
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
D Bm G A D
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

The reverse is also true if the song starts off too high and you want to transpose down to sing lower. In this particular case the following changes were made:

C → D F → G G → A C/E → D/F# Am → Bm

Note that the bass chord in D/F# was also transposed a whole tone (E → F#). Note that each chord or note was transposed two semitones up from the original chord or note as per Figure 11.

"How do you play an Eb??" – Does this scenario sound familiar: Great worship song, but the chords are not designed with a guitarist in mind. Or how about a worship song that is full of bar chords and your left hand feels like it's about to fall off? So what do you do? It's time to introduce one of the great inventions of the 17th century: The capo.

Using a capo:

The capo is a useful tool for a guitarist as it is a simple way to raise the pitch by effectively shortening the strings. Chords are played with the same fingering except the "first fret" is shifted up the neck to the position right after the capo. Not only can this produce a more desirable sound in certain cases, it can be used to change the pitch of the song to make it easier to sing, or make the song easier to play.

As previously indicated, each fret represents a semitone. As a result, if a capo is placed on the second fret, the sound of the guitar is changed by one full tone. In this case, if an A chord is played, it would sound like a B chord if there were no capo. In the same way, B would sound like C#, C would sound like D, D would sound like E, E would sound like F#, F would sound like G, and G would sound like A.

In the previous example with "Be Thou My Vision", the pitch was raised by transposing the chords one full tone up. This could also have been done by placing a capo on the 2nd fret while playing the original chords (C, F, G, C/E, and Am). However, if you are playing with other instruments like a piano, you will still need music for those instruments.

In the case where the original chords work well from a singing perspective but are difficult to play on guitar, use a capo **and** transpose the chords to keep the same pitch. This is done by transposing the chords down the same number of semitones as you raise the pitch up through the capo. Think of it like taking two steps forward and two steps back to end up in the same original location.

Example:

The chords for "**You Are God Alone**" are Ab, Db, Eb/G, Fm7, and Cm7. By using a Capo on the 1st fret, the guitar chords become G, C, D/F#, Em7, and Bm7 which is significantly easier to play. However, by using a capo, it allows the piano to play the original chords and it allows the congregation to sing the song in the original key. In this case, by placing the capo on the first fret, the chords were transposed by one semitone:

Ab → G Db → C Eb/G → D/F# Fm7 → Em7 Cm7 → Bm7

In this case, the capo raised the pitch by one semitone while the chords were transposed down one semitone. Refer to Figure 11.

Capo Tip:

When you wish to keep the pitch the same and use a capo to simplify the chords, look at the bar chords to help give you a starting point to transpose. Place the capo where your index finger is for the bar chord and look at the position of the remaining fingers. They will represent the transposed chord.

For example, if the original chord was a B, place the capo on the 2nd fret where your index finger is normally positioned. If you look at the remaining frets being pressed, this represents an A chord. As a result, transpose the entire song one full tone down.

Same Finger Position, Different Chord

Another advantage in understanding that each fret change represents a semitone change is the fact that you can figure out new chords without a chord chart. This for example can provide a means to play the same chord but at a higher pitch which can add more layers to a song.

Example:

Consider the F chord. If you keep the exact same fingering and just shift your entire hand up one fret, you now have an F# (one semitone up). If you shift one fret down from F, you lose the need for a bar and the chord becomes an E chord. The following figures provide examples of this concept:

Figure 12: Bar chords derived from the E chord

Fret Barred:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Chord:	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D

Figure 13: Bar chords derived from the Am chord

Fret Barred:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Chord:	Am	A#m Bbm	Bm	Cm	C#m Dbm	Dm	D#m Ebm	Em	Fm	F#m Gbm	Gm

Figure 14: Bar chords derived from the Em chord

Fret Barred:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Chord:	Em	Fm	F#m Gbm	Gm	G#m Abm	Am	A#m Bbm	Bm	Cm	C#m Dbm	Dm

Figure 15: Bar chords derived from the A chord

Fret Barred:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Chord:	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G

Exercise: How do you play an Eb using the fingering from a D chord?

