

# Class Guitar I: “Instant Syllabus”

by Mary Jo Disler, M.Mus. Theory, The University of Michigan  
Retired, Oakland Community College, Farmington Hills, Michigan

Author, *Guitar QuickStart*<sup>™</sup> :

*A Guide to Playing and Understanding Music Reading and Chord Techniques*

Lyra House Music Publications: ISBN-13: 978-0-9642229-0-6

**Price: \$19.95      Orders: Amazon.com**

*Bookstores may order directly from Lyra House Music Publications, or through Baker & Taylor Books.*

*Complete information at [iteachGuitar.com](http://iteachGuitar.com)*

---

---

PROFILE: This "Instant Syllabus" represents class structure for Class Guitar I, before Ms. Disler's retirement from Oakland Community College (OCC), Orchard Ridge campus, Farmington Hills, Michigan. Supplementary reading assignments in the original syllabus, now out of date, are listed for reference only. Dates are blank so the Syllabus may be photocopied "as is", or used as a template to customize.

The primary text, *Guitar QuickStart*<sup>™</sup> by Mary Jo Disler, makes no pretense of teaching numerous styles, but rather drives home the foundation that helps students understand concepts, terminology and style techniques in other books. It coordinates well with material for either classic or plectrum techniques.

Guitar classes are still a popular elective at OCC as taught by Ms. Disler's successor, and *Guitar QuickStart*<sup>™</sup> continues to be the foundation text. Classes are limited to fifteen students. Guitar I is a 2-credit hour course, taught in one two-hour session weekly. As a beginners' elective course offered to all students, it enrolls people with various backgrounds (and non-backgrounds!) in music. Although a followup class (Guitar II) is offered, the school does not have a comprehensive guitar curriculum. Therefore beginners are introduced to all 3 pillars for learning guitar: music reading, chart reading with song accompaniment, and simple tablature.

BACKGROUND: Ms. Disler pioneered the development of guitar classes at southeastern Michigan colleges for 25 years. Refined in the classroom, *Guitar QuickStart*<sup>™</sup> emphasizes an understanding of essential guitar concepts within the limited time of a semester. A unique approach – not a clone of other methods – it has proven highly successful. Students and teachers are very complimentary.

*This syllabus may be freely photocopied and used, as long as the copyright information is preserved and no charge is made to students for copies.*

## Class Guitar I: Course Syllabus

**Course Description:** Guitar I provides an introduction to playing chords and reading music on guitar.

**Textbook and Materials:**

- Guitar QuickStart™* by Mary Jo Disler [MJD]
- Supplementary reading, book or material selected by the instructor \_\_\_\_\_
- Acoustic guitar, either nylon or steel string.
- A medium pick for steel-string guitars only.
- A foot support is recommended for practice at home. Footstools are provided in the classroom.
- Pencil preferred for tests.

**Educational Objectives:** You will...

- Learn the application of the music alphabet to the entire fretboard.
- Begin to read music notation on the fretboard.
- Memorize fifteen basic chord fingerings.
- Learn several strumming and freestroke (finger) techniques for accompanying songs.
- Play several songs.
- Learn basic skills, terminology, and theoretical principles which will help you understand many of the commercially available books for learning guitar.

**Requirements:**

- Syllabus assignments are to be prepared ahead for the days they are listed. Class time will focus on practicing songs and exercises, explaining theoretical principles, and demonstrating new techniques.
- Attendance is required. Two absences (for any reason) are allowed without affecting the grade.

**Test Dates :**

_____	Written midterms.
_____	Midterm performance test.
_____	Performance final.

Throughout the semester the teacher will check your performance as announced.  
Extra credit options will be announced.

**Grading:** Study, practice and personal participation are the essence of this course.

The final grade will be based on the following percentages:

- 25% for the two midterm tests [The two grades will be averaged.]
- 25% for the graded performance check
- 25% for each of the two final examinations (written and performed).
- Borderline grades may be offset by extra credit options, to be announced.
- Three or more absences will lower the earned final grade by a half-grade level for each absence over two.

**Class structure:**

1. "Play today": Classes will begin with group performance of material as described in the syllabus.
2. "New today": New concepts will be explained and tried. Students should preview new material and concepts, based on the syllabus. New material should be practiced at home after it is introduced.

1. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter 1 "The Guitar," MJD pp.1-7.

Instructor will check tuning on all guitars.

Chapter 2 "The Guitar Fretboard," §A - C, MJD pp. 8-12.

- Play the scale of natural notes both directions on each string to fret XII, saying letters as you go. Use the single-string playing technique (pick, or rest-stroke with fingers) suitable for your guitar.

2. Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Play today:*

- The teacher will check tuning.
- Numbers and letter names for the open strings: Memorize!
- Play the scale of natural notes both directions on each string to fret XII, saying letters aloud.

*New today:*

Reference A "Tuning the Guitar," MJD pp.77-78, §A & B.

Chapter 2 "The Guitar Fretboard", §D, MJD pp.13-14.

Chapter 3 "Reading Music on the Guitar," §A & B, MJD pp.15-17.

3. Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Play today:*

- Students tune their own guitars from this class on.
- Play the scale of natural notes both directions on each string to fret XII, saying letters as you go.
- Play the first position natural scale both directions.

*New today:*

Chapter 3 "Reading Music on the Guitar," §C & D, MJD. pp.17-25.

Chapter 4 "Guitar Tablature and Notation," §A & B, MJD. pp.26-28.

4. Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Play today:*

- Scale of natural notes both directions on each string to fret XII.
- First position natural scale.
- First Position Reading Charts and Exercises, pp.19-24.
- "Ode to Joy," p.28.

*New today:*

Chapter 4 "Guitar Tablature and Notation," MJD. pp.29-31.

Handout: "Playing the Major Scale on the Guitar." Selected scales in first position: C major, G major, F major  
Test Review.

5. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Written Midterm #1, second class hour

*Play today:*

- First position natural scale, complete.
- Review and play the C major scale in first position.
- "Ode to Joy" & "Swedish Folk Song," MJD pp.28-29.

*New today:*

Diagram the G major and F major scales in first position.

Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_ Prepare for next week: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Play today:*

- Major scales: C, G, & F.
- Songs, MJD pp. 28-31.
- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_

*New today:*

Chapter 4 “Guitar Tablature and Notation,” §C, pp. 32-33.  
 Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_

***Midterm Performance Test Preparation:***

☞ Choose one of the selections listed here to play for a grade, Class #8:

- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_

7 Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Play today:*

- Scales of C, G & F major
- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_

*New today:*

Chapter 5 “Chord Basics,” §A-C, MJD. pp.36-41.

8. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Second hour, graded performance test. (See description below.)

*Play today:*

- Beginning Chord Fingering Exercises, MJD pp.39-41.
- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_ (test pieces).

*New today:*

Chapter 6 “Song Accompaniment and Charts,” MJD, pp.42-45.

***Midterm Performance Test***

☞ **Choose one of the three songs listed here to play for a grade:.**

- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_

**Students will be asked to play the song three times:**

1. Say letter names aloud while you play.
2. Count aloud while you play. Accuracy is important, but speed is not.
3. Play musically, without saying any information aloud, at a tempo that is right for you.

9. Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Play today:*

Chapter 6 "Song Accompaniment and Charts," MJD p.42. • Memorize #4, the "Folia."

*New today:*

Chapter 7 "Songs: Charts with Words," MJD pp.46-48.

Chapter 8 "Counting by Note Values," MJD pp.49-51.

Midterm #2 next week: Class review.

10. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Midterm #2, second class hour.

*Play today:*

• "Folia," p.45, with several rhythmic variations.

Chapter 8 "Counting by Note Values," MJD pp.49-51.

*New today:*

Chapter 9 "Converting Songs to Charts," MJD pp.52-54.

11. Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Play today:*

Chapter 8 "Counting by Note Values," MJD pp.49-51.

*New today:*

Chapter 9 "Converting Songs to Charts," MJD pp.52-55.

Chapter 11 "Freestroke with Chords," MJD pp.62-64.

"Homage to Pachelbel," MJD p.45 #5. Apply the finger pattern P i m a to each measure.

"Greensleeves / What Child is This?" MJD p.66. Convert the lead sheet form to a basic chart.

12. Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Play today:*

• Diagram chart for "Greensleeves / What Child is This?" MJD p.66.

• Review of songs.

*New today:*

Chapter 10 "Alternating Bass for Chords," MJD pp.57-61.

Chapter 12 "The Chords Most Likely to Succeed," MJD pp.70-72.

Harmonize "Happy Birthday," MJD p.75.

Final Exams Review and Preparation:

13. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Second hour: Final Exam Part I, Written

*Play today:*

• Practice Chart for Primary Key Chords.

• Play through Performance Final items, p.8 of syllabus.

\*\*Sign up for your Performance Final exam time.

14. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Final Exam Part II, Performance.

## Final Exam: Performance

**Choose four of the five items listed on this page to play for your final exam.**

**1. Memorized Chords: Prepare both items A and B.**

- A. Finger and play three chords, with correct low root-strings, chosen by the instructor from this required list:  
A, Am, A7, B7, C, C7, D, Dm, D7, E, Em, E7, F, G, G7
- B. Memorize the "Folia," *Guitar QuickStart*, p.45, #4. Play it twice, then conclude with the final Am chord.  
Use a different rhythm pattern the second time through: either your own [be sure it is in 3/4 time!],  
or one chosen from pp.50-51.

**2. One note-reading piece:** Work out the notes and rhythm and play one of the following pieces from Supplementary Reading. [You do not have to speak letters or counting for this test.]

- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_
- Supplementary reading \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Scales:** Play one major scale of your choice, C, G, or F, in first position.  
Play both directions. Say letters aloud. Refer to the class handout for review.

**4. One song with chords:** Use either a strumming or freestroke technique.  
Choose one of the songs learned in class, or choose a new song from MJD.  
Use any one of these strumming techniques learned in class.  
If you use the freestroke technique, you may play "Homage to Pachelbel," MJD p.45 #5.

**5. Primary Key Chords, MJD, p.70.**

- Choose **one** of the following two options, using MJD, p.70, as your resource.
- A. Play the correct key chords by memory for the keys of A, D, E, or G major, A minor and E minor.  
The instructor will choose one of these keys at the exam.

OR :

- B. Play "Happy Birthday" as it was worked out in class.  
For extra credit, play "Happy Birthday" in one additional key from the one worked out in class.

## Class Dates [Sample List]

*Match these class dates and numbers with class numbers in the syllabus:*

1. January 8  
[January 15: Martin Luther King Day, NO CLASS]
2. January 22
3. January 29
4. February 5
5. February 12    Written midterm #1
6. February 19  
[February 26: Midwinter Recess]
7. March 4
8. March 11    Performance midterm test
9. March 18
10. March 25    Written midterm #2
11. April 1
12. April 8
13. April 15    Final exam: written
14. April 22    Final exam: performance