

Tuning Methods

Here are four common ways to tune. There is no perfect method of tuning, and it's a skill most musicians improve over time.

Beginner method

This is the method most players learn first. It's simple to play, but it can be difficult to be accurate since you're playing both open and closed notes, and it's sequential, meaning if you mess up the first interval, the rest will likely be out of tune.

e:-----	-----	-----	-----	-----0--
B:-----	-----	-----	-----0--	--5-----
G:-----	-----	-----0-	--4-----	-----
D:-----	-----0--	--5-----	-----	-----
A:-----0-	--5-----	-----	-----	-----
E:-5-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Harmonic method

This method is common for electric and steel string guitarists. For those good at harmonics, this can be easier to hear and tune than the beginner method. The 7th fret harmonics aren't 100% in tune to standard tuning, so it's not as common among classical players and those looking to be perfectly in tune.

Using harmonics to tune is easier than using closed notes since they'll ring over the other pitch without using the left hand.

e:-----	-----	-----	-----	-----<7>--
B:-----	-----	-----	-----0-	--<5>-----
G:-----	-----	-----<7>--	-----	-----
D:-----	-----<7>--	--<5>-----	-----	-----
A:-----<7>--	--<5>-----	-----	-----	-----
E:-<5>-----	-----	-----	--<7>-----	-----

Matching tone color

This method is like the first method, only it's much easier to distinguish an out-of-tune note from an in-tune note since the pitches sound much more alike.

e:-----	-----	-----	-----	-----7--
B:-----	-----	-----	-----8-	--<12>-----
G:-----	-----	-----7--	--<12>-----	-----
D:-----	-----7--	--<12>-----	-----	-----
A:-----7--	--<12>-----	-----	-----	-----
E:-<12>-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Referencing one string

This method solves the problem of sequentially tuning. If you incorrectly tune one string, all of the subsequent strings aren't out of tune.

e:-----	-----	-----	-----	-----0--
B:-----	-----	-----	-----5-	-----
G:-----	-----	-----9-	-----	-----
D:-----	-----2--	-----	-----	-----
A:-----7--	-----	-----	-----	-----
E:--<12>----	--<12>-----	--<5>-----	--<5>-----	--<5>-----

Additional notes:

It's recommended that you use multiple methods when tuning your guitar. It's never a bad idea to check each string to a couple different strings to ensure an accurate tuning. Just seek the exact same pitch in another location.

For instance, here are five more ways to cross check the high E string.

e:-----5--	-----3--	-----10--	-----3--	-----15--
B:-----	-----	-----	-----8-	-----
G:-----	--<12>-----	-----	-----	--<5>-----
D:-----	-----	--<5>-----	-----	-----
A:--<5>-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
E:-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

As a last resort, if you find it impossible to accurately tune your guitar, one or more of your strings might actually be imperfect - meaning the thickness of the string is slightly uneven over the spread of your guitar. This results in slightly higher or lower pitches than what they normally should be. Although the degree of imperfection varies, to a well-trained ear, around 15% of classical guitar strings have a noticeable intonation problem.