

# STEVE'S BEGINNER GUITAR BOOK

BY STEVEN PRINCE



# PREFACE



I'd like to begin this book by telling you something about myself.

I have been a guitarist for over 40 years and a teacher for over 24 years. My experience has included many years of live playing in bands, being a songwriter both for myself and other singers as well as recording, releasing and producing albums. I have been the band leader of a number of bands and the Music Director of two contemporary style churches, coordinating various musicians, singers and choirs.



# INTRODUCTION

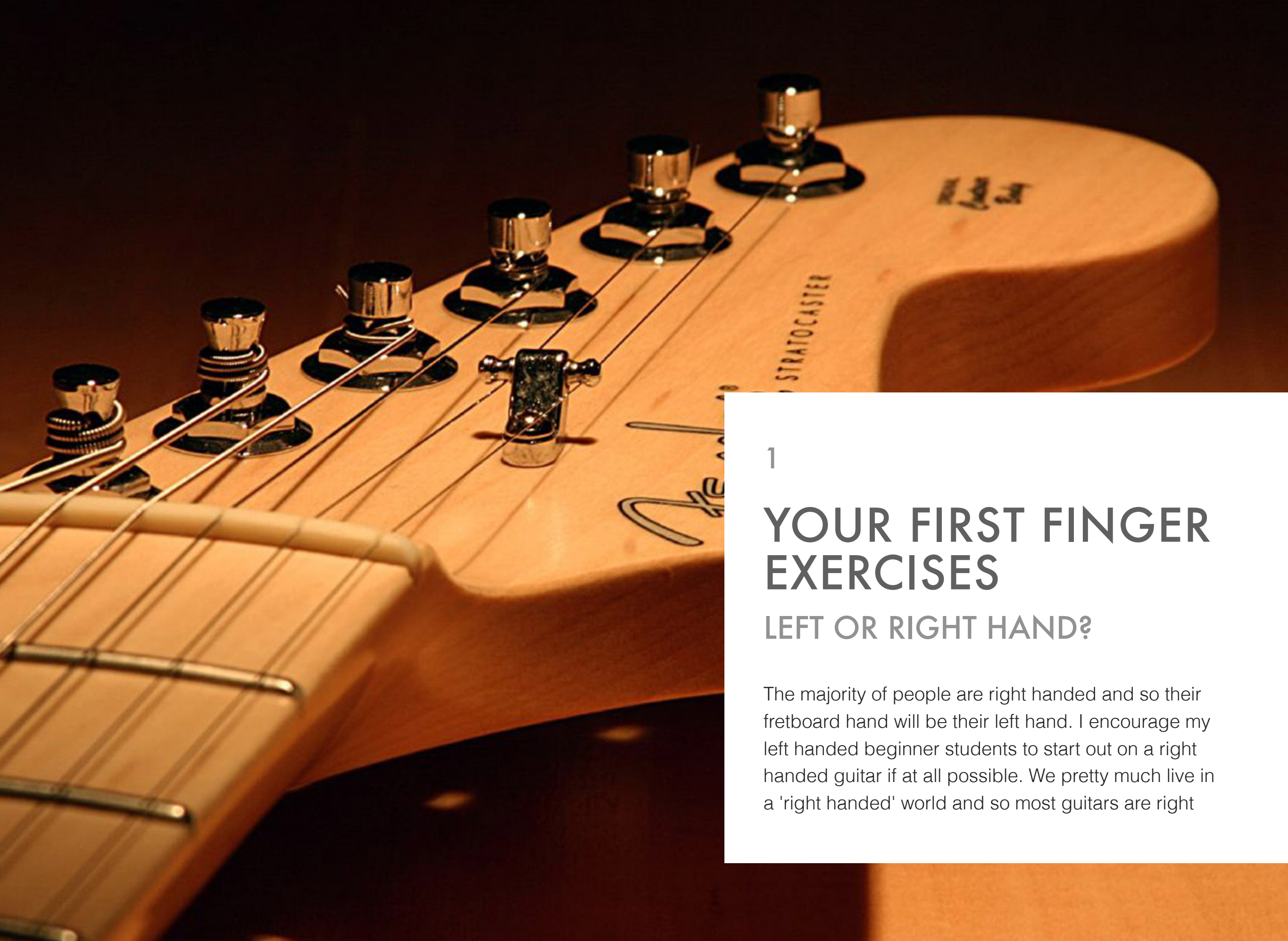


In this book I will guide you through the approach that I have developed to teach the guitar. I have honed and improved this approach over the twenty plus years that I've been teaching. In that time I have discovered what works and what does not, in helping my students to master this instrument.

I will cover the basics of beginning to play the guitar. The focus will mainly be on the practical techniques of playing and I will guide you through to an intermediate level of accomplishment.

Reading of music notation will only be sparsely covered here. This is because I have found that my beginner students want most of all to play the guitar and not so much learn how to read music. I often say to my students that, "You learn how to talk before you learn how to read and write and I believe music should be the same. It is a language after all." So let's begin learning the 'language' of guitar.





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# YOUR FIRST FINGER EXERCISES

## LEFT OR RIGHT HAND?

The majority of people are right handed and so their fretboard hand will be their left hand. I encourage my left handed beginner students to start out on a right handed guitar if at all possible. We pretty much live in a 'right handed' world and so most guitars are right



handed ones. If you can play a instrument like this then you can pick up guitars anywhere and play them. Diagrams of chords and fretboards that you'll encounter will be right handed also. If you require a left handed instrument then that limits your options. The other point I would make is that, when a left handed person plays a right handed guitar then their most agile hand is on the fretboard where greater dexterity is needed; this is an advantage. However, if you are left handed and don't feel comfortable playing a right handed guitar then, by all means start out on a left handed instrument.

## STRING NAMES

Memorise the letter name and number of the guitar strings. We normally think of the strings from the thickest down to the thinnest. I like

FIGURE 1.1 String Names



to use the sentence, "**E**lephants **A**nd **D**onkeys **G**row **B**ig **E**ars" to help my students remember the string letter names. The thickest string is the 6th and the thinnest string is the 1st. I sometimes say to students, "From the ground up we have the 1st floor up to the 6th floor" as a way to help them remember their string numbers.

## FRETBOARD HAND FINGER NUMBERS

FIGURE 1.2 Finger Numbers





In the previous diagram (Figure 1.2) you can see the numbering for the fingers on the left/fretboard hand. Index finger is numbered '1', Middle finger is numbered '2', Ring finger is numbered '3' and the Pinky finger is numbered '4'.

Most of the time we use the tips of our fingers to press the strings onto the frets by placing the finger tip just behind (but not on top of) the fret. There are occasions when we flatten our fingers over multiple strings but we will cover that technique later on. For now, try to press the strings down with your finger tips. We do this to avoid touching the strings at either side of the string we are pressing down. All of the open chords we will be playing later require you to press down some strings but leave other 'open' so that they can make a clear sound.

## THUMB AND WRIST POSITION

Always have your thumb pointing vertically when you play the guitar. The angle and height of the thumb can vary slightly but should always be approximately vertical. Generally, when playing chords your thumb will be in a higher, partially closed fist position and your thumb will be lower for scale/lead playing. To position your thumb otherwise will be to restrict the span and reach that you have across the frets. See the photos of my hand position to illustrate this point.

Your wrist should be straight or bent outwardly when you play the guitar. Most of the tendons in our hands run along the back of the hand. When we bend our wrist our tendons have to travel further and so reach is restricted considerably. If you keep your thumb pointing vertically then it's impossible to bend your wrist in the wrong way as show in the photo (Figure 1.5).

**FIGURE 1.3** Thumb Position For Chords



**FIGURE 1.4** Thumb Position For Scales





FIGURE 1.5 Wrist Angle



## HOLDING THE GUITAR PICK

Let's turn our attention now to how we hold the pick or plectrum. I think it is best to balance the pick on the tips of the index and middle fingers while applying pressure with your thumb (see photo). Some players prefer to hold their pick between the side of the index finger and their thumbs but I think this technique is restrictive.

Apply just enough pressure with your thumb to ensure you don't drop the pick while playing. The tighter you hold the pick the louder the guitar will sound but this will also make smooth strumming more difficult.

FIGURE 1.6 Holding the Guitar Pick



There are many types of guitar picks available. Thicker picks are stiffer and lend themselves more to single note playing rather than strumming. Thinner picks are more flexible and make strumming easier but don't work as well for single note playing. The type of material (normally plastic) that the pick is made of can have an effect on the tone you get from the strings. Some plastics are more brittle than others and sound brighter, whereas other plastics (like nylon) are softer and sound more mellow. I like to use a nylon pick of 1 mm thickness. I find this size not too thick to make strumming difficult and not too thin to make single note playing more challenging. I also like my picks to have a knurled textured surface so that they don't slip from my fingers when they are sweaty.





## TIMING

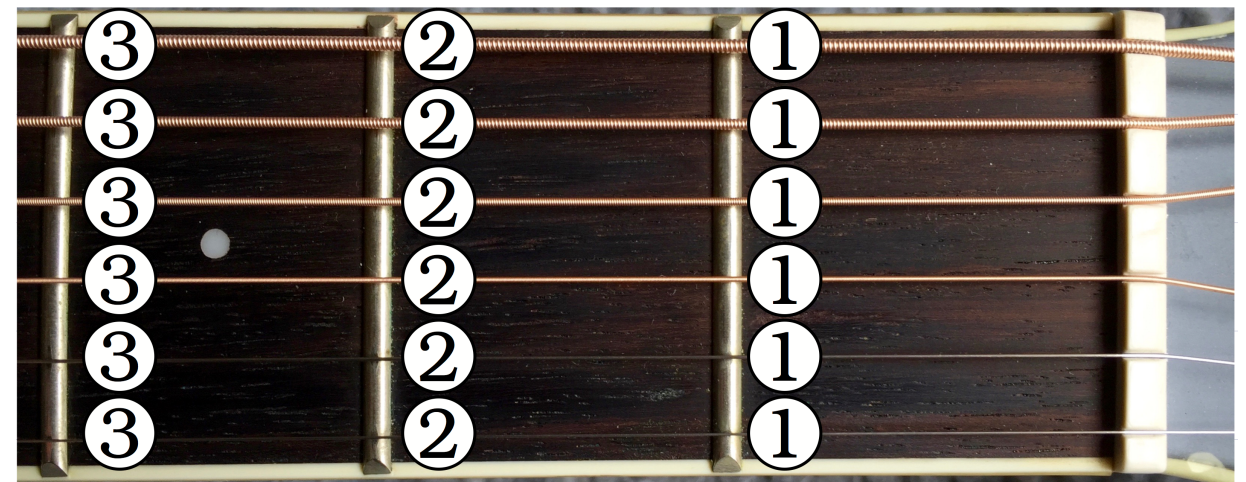
From the outset I want to emphasise the importance of solid timing. Timing is the most important factor in music in my opinion. Developing a firm and steady awareness of timing is crucial to being an effective musician. Make it your goal to play everything that you play in steady time to a beat. This will be a challenge at first but it is well worth bearing in mind as you practice. One tool that is helpful when you're working on your timing is a metronome. The photo above shows an old style mechanical metronome; but these days the easiest metronomes to use are apps on your phone or tablet device. At first practicing with a metronome is difficult; the metronome feels like a harsh task master. But in time the 'harsh task master' changes its guise into a supportive assistant. Eventually, with dedicated prac-

tice, you will be able to play more accurately in time with a metronome that you will be able to without one.

## YOUR FIRST FINGER EXERCISE

This finger exercise is designed to give you flexibility of movement and increase the strength of your fretboard hand. Whilst your fingers may not be strong while separated; this exercise will help to give your hand the strength needed to play the guitar.

**FIGURE 1.7** Your First Finger Exercise



As in the diagram shown above, place finger 1 on string six in the first fret. Using fingers 1,2 & 3 climb one note at a time until you reach the last note for finger 3. When you are comfortable with this try descending 3,2,1 back to the starting point. Try to keep your fingers hovering over the note you will play next, especially on string changes. This will train your fingers to be strong while separated which is a necessary skill in guitar playing.

You can also practice the same exercise with all four fingers.



# REMEMBER THESE POINTS AS YOU PLAY:

- Use the tips of your fingers
- Keep your fingers close to where they are to play next (economy of movement)
- Play with a steady tempo, don't rush
- It's not important how fast you play but it is important how steadily you play, timing is everything
- Your fingertips will get sore if you practice enough; this is to be expected. Eventually callous will grow on your fingertips and the soreness will subside.

You can expand this exercise in the following way to get the feel of notes going up the whole fretboard:-

Begin the exercise as before, but when finger 3 (or 4 if you are using the extra finger) reaches its highest note, slide it up one fret and descend 3,2,1 until finger 1 reaches its new lowest note.

Slide up one more fret and repeat this process until you run out of fretboard.