

Strings



Your guitar strings are the heart and soul of your tone. Worn and dirty strings will give you a dull and lack-lustre tone as well as affecting the playability of your instrument. You accept that your car needs regular fill-ups with petrol, so you should accept that your guitar needs a regular change of strings. And a change of strings should be the first thing on your agenda with a new guitar.

Which brand you chose will depend on personal preference, cost and availability. The most important thing about the strings you choose is their gauge or thickness. This is measured in fractions of an inch and the measurement of the thinnest string has become accepted as the name for the whole set that contains that string. A good choice for beginners is a set of "nines". Typically

1st String - .009;

2nd String - .011;

3rd String - .016;

4th String - .024 with winding;

5th String - .032 with winding;

6th String - .042 with winding.

A set of "nines" gives a good balance between tone and playability, especially for string-bending during solos. A heavier set of "tens" has more metal in their construction so give better tone and response, but they require a higher tension to come into tune and will be more physically difficult to play as a result. Sets of "elevens" and "twelves" are available, and these give progressively better tone whilst being progressively harder to play. If you have poor strength in your hand you may consider dropping to "eights". These are a lot easier to play but are more prone to string breakage if you're playing aggressively.

Always remember that new strings will have to be stretched in. To do this first tune the guitar using an electronic tuner. Then grab each string in turn at about the 12th fret and pull it up and away from the fretboard. Pull firmly but evenly, don't jerk. This will pull out any slack in the tuners and stretch the string itself. Retune the guitar and repeat the process. Stretch and retune until the strings stay in tune.

