

Guitar Tablature

Guitar Tablature, also known as '**TAB**', is a written form of music specifically designed for guitar players. Once the beginner student knows the '*Three Sets of Numbers*', the next step will be to use guitar tablature to immediately begin learning some basic guitar songs.

Tab vs. Standard Notation



Examples comparing both standard notation with tablature (aka 'tab').

Even though **standard notation** (aka *piano music*) and **guitar tablature** share a slight resemblance, both are totally different formats for written guitar music. Compared to having to learn how to read standard notation, which takes years to master, understanding how to read a guitar tab only takes minutes. Adapting standard notation for guitar occasionally requires interpreting how to properly play a guitar part, whereas a correct guitar tab will show the exact strings and fret positions to play a guitar part correctly. All the guitarist will need to know to start reading tab are the '*Three Sets of Numbers*'.

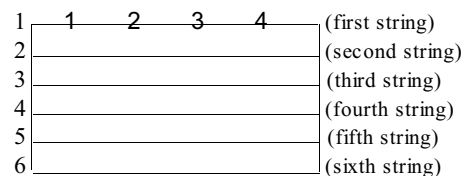
How Tab Works

The '*Three Sets of Numbers*' (*fingers, frets, and strings*) can all be represented in written form using guitar Tab:

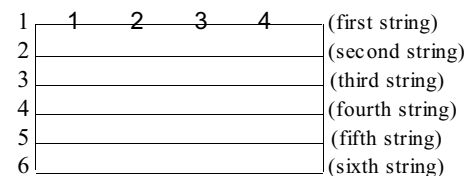
The **string numbers** are represented by six lines, with the top line being first string and the bottom line being the sixth 'bottom' string.

The **fret numbers** are represented by the number placed on each line. A number '1' appearing on the top line means the *first string/first fret* is being played.

The **finger numbers** to fret with are shown under the six lines, directly below each corresponding fret number. Finger numbers are not shown with most guitar tabs, but are included here to ensure all notes are fretted properly. As guitarists gain more playing experience, knowing which finger numbers to use will become less of an issue.



String & Fret Numbers



String, Fret, Finger Numbers

Tab Websites

There are many **guitar tab websites** that provide tabs for just about any popular guitar song. One drawback to using these websites is there are no guarantees that each tab will be 100% correct, since anyone can submit how to play a song. There are no actual 'censors' to block out incorrect tabs, but there are usually ratings that indicate which tabs are better. The more playing experience one has, the better judge one will be in determining a good tab from a bad one. The key is to know that just because a tab is put into written form doesn't necessarily guarantee it is actually a correct one.

Example



The ultimateGuitar.com homepage, a website featuring free guitar tabs

Chord Symbols

For those guitarists whose primary focus is to sing and strum along to songs, understanding and using **chord symbols** will be more of a priority than using guitar tablature. Once a guitarist develops a decent chord vocabulary, reading the details of guitar tab will be unnecessary as chord symbols above lyrics will be all that is needed to play basic strum-along songs.

Example

Am	C	D	F
<i>There is... a house in New Orleans...</i>			
Am	C	E	E
<i>They call... the Rising Sun</i>			

The 'I Have to Learn to Read Music' Myth



The Beatles: the ultimate example of composing and performing music without relying on standard notation

Contrary to popular belief, learning how to read standard notation (*piano music*) isn't necessary in order to become a great guitarist. Guitarists can learn to compose, perform, and communicate musical concepts without having to read or write a single note of standard notation. Think of any famous guitarist or group you may like and picture them on stage performing. The odds are they will not be sitting on chairs reading standard notation. Those guitarists who focus more on the *technical* aspect of sight reading are more likely to become studio or classical musicians, while those who focus more on the *creative* aspects of playing are more likely to become songwriters and performers in their own right.

Reading Music vs. 'Learning By Ear'



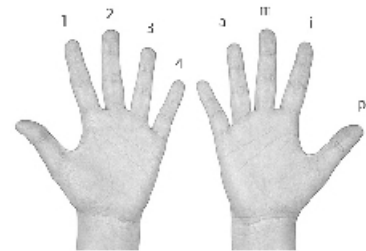
Steve Howe, who composed solo guitar classics 'Mood For A Day' & 'Clap' without reading music or formal classical training

When a beginner is told that reading music isn't required, the typical response is: 'Oh... so you just go by ear then?' There is much more to it than just learning by ear. In fact, most guitarists who are classically trained *wish* they knew how to compose, improvise, and learn 'by ear'. The ability to sight read beyond just single-note melodies takes years of practice, with the result being an acquired technical skill, but no applicable knowledge of how to be creative with the guitar. Most aspiring guitarists would rather learn to be creative instead of becoming a studio or classical musician. The following sections will show the initial steps that will enable beginners to start teaching themselves how to learn and play songs without having to rely on using standard notation.

Three Sets of Numbers

Any guitarist can be taught how to play any song on guitar by simply knowing *three sets of numbers*:

Finger numbers (shown right) are numbered '1' through '4' on both hands, starting with the index finger ('1') and ending with the 'pinky' finger ('4'). The thumb is often notated with the letter 'T'. Though beginners will initially be focused on the left hand finger numbers for fretting notes, the right hand finger numbers will also become a primary focus when learning fingerstyle technique. For those who play piano, the finger number system for guitar is different. For those who have had classical training, finger numbers are used in place of the '*PIMA*' method for naming fingers.



String numbers are numbered '1' through '6', with the first being the thinnest string and the sixth string being the thickest. All guitar descriptions are based primarily on sound, so the highest-sounding first string is referred to as the 'top' string, while the lowest-sounding sixth string is referred to as the 'bottom' string. This initially can be confusing for beginners because when holding a guitar, the sixth 'bottom' string is actually positioned above the first string.

Frets are the metal bars that lay across the fretboard. The **fret numbers** begin with the first fret, which is located closest to the headstock. The total number of frets will vary depending on the model, with a typical range being between 19-22 frets on most guitars.

