Bill Swick’s
Beginning Guitar Class
Teacher’s Manual
Quarter One
Quarter Two

2 Quarters of Weekly Instruction, 18 Lesson Plans, 2 Curriculum Maps, 2 Backward Assessment Maps, 6 Pre-tests
This manual is intended to be make *Guitar Methods Quarter One & Two* a stand-alone text. As a classroom guitar teacher, it is necessary to have plenty of classroom material to fill the class time and keep students active in learning. Most published beginning guitar methods are intended for individual use and not for the classroom. Therefore, there is rarely enough materials for classroom activities.

With these two texts and manual, there are almost 200 pages of materials to assist in teaching the six strings on the guitar. There are few methods are on the market that are written specifically for classroom use. These materials are written specifically with teaching guitar in the classroom in mind.

This manual is intended to be used with *Guitar Methods Quarter One & Two* to teach the all six strings in two 9-week quarters spending approximately 2 weeks teaching each string with plenty of supplementary materials for combining the strings.

Included are two quarters of weekly instruction, 18 lesson plans, 2 curriculum maps, 2 backward assessment maps and 6 pre-tests.

The materials have been time tested and used in the classroom for over a decade.

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Teaching Beginning Guitar

Introduction

The task of teaching beginning guitar may seem simple at first, but let’s look at exactly what needs to be taught to have a successful first quarter. In the very beginning, students should be taught:

1) Note recognition (names of lines and spaces)
2) Note placement (where notes are on the guitar)
3) Rhythmic notation (recognize quarter, half and whole notes)
4) How to count
5) The parts of the guitar
6) How to make a sound with the right hand
7) How to place fingers on the fingerboard to change pitches

This list is in no particular order. Some teachers try to teach all seven of these skills in the first few weeks of the quarter, but to whom a big percentage of beginning guitar students still cannot read music after the first year of instruction.

Building a successful guitar program is similar to building a hi-rise structure. The bulk of time needs to be spent on the foundation. If the foundation is not solid, little can be added to it without leading to frustration.

Make quarter 1 & quarter 2 of the beginning guitar class the solid structure necessary for building a successful guitar program. Everyone including the teacher is anxious to get started and to see results. However, taking time to make certain each student understands and can perform the seven tasks mentioned is absolutely essential to building a solid guitar program.

I was teaching a beginning guitar class at the beginning of a school year and there was another teacher also teaching a beginning class in the next classroom. School started on Monday. On Thursday of the first week of school, the new teacher approached me to compare classes. He spoke with a great deal of pride that he had already taught all the notes on strings one through four. He wanted to know how far along my class was and what he should do next. I told this new teacher that my class had not yet been assigned guitars and was working on the names of the lines and spaces and the parts of the guitar. As far as what he should do next, I recommended he start back from the beginning and spend two to three weeks on each string.
Mel Bay Publications publishes perhaps the most sold guitar method book in print. It is entitled *The Modern Guitar Method Book One* by Mel Bay. At one point, I read that over seventeen million copies have been sold worldwide. This was the book I used to teach myself how to read music. I purchased and read volumes of the series and I went through it cover to cover teaching myself guitar from the series many years when I was teaching privately. Something I learned about teaching, we frequently teach the way we learn. I had learned from this method and found myself being quite comfortable teaching from this method. When I started teaching beginning guitar classes with thirty students in each class, my tendency was to teach the class the same way I had taught privately. I discovered quickly there was a flaw in my approach and that I needed a lot more supplementary material than was offered in the Mel Bay *Modern Guitar Method*.

I spent my evenings and weekends writing simple melodies and exercises and simple ensemble pieces so that classes would have ample materials to practice the seven tasks previously listed. My biggest complaint about the guitar methods in print is the lack of supplementary materials necessary to teach a solid foundation. Teaching thirty or more students simultaneously is very different than teach one student privately. The class moves much, much slower and having a built-in break and needing materials to keep a class of students engaged is absolutely essential for classroom management and for maintaining a strong educational environment.

Part of my role as a full-time guitar teacher in Clark County, NV is fulfilling the position of CCSD Guitar Task Force Chair. Part of the responsibilities of this position is answering emails sent to the school district related to guitar and guitar education. I think it is fitting to include some of those questions and answers. It is quite possible if you are reading this, you may have some of the same questions.

**Questions and Answers about Guitar and Guitar Education**

“How much free time do you allow your students each day?” The answer is quite simple. None! There is no “free time” in my guitar classes. I have witnessed by visiting other teachers that free time is generally when guitar strings break and accidents to guitars occur. When writing lesson plans and preparing for classes, think how you are going to engage students from bell to bell.
What is the ideal way to organize a guitar program?

This is a pretty lengthy answer. This response is based on a 10-year record of over 50 schools which offer guitar classes in Clark County. The average attrition rate from one guitar class to another is 50%. So to offer Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced guitar in a program, the classes would look like this:

- 4 Beginning Classes with 30 students each (120 students)
- 2 Intermediate Classes with 30 students each (60 students)
- 1 Advanced Class with 30 students (30 students)

If your school is capable of offering 7 classes in guitar, this is the ideal way to organize a solid program which will continue for years to come. It will take about 3 years to put this organization into place. This program model would service approximately 210 students.

Another solution is to offer Beginning Guitar as a semester class rather than a year-long class. This has been very successful in the schools that have tried it. The classes would look like this:

- 2 Beginning Classes with 30 students each (Semester One) (60 students)
- 2 Beginning Classes with 30 students each (Semester Two) (60 students)
- 2 Intermediate Year-Long Classes with 30 students each (60 students)
- 1 Advanced Year-Long Class with 30 students each (30 students)

This model only requires the teacher to teach 5 classes a day and like the first model services approximately 210 students. This model will also provide a solid guitar program for years to come. In a middle school situation, the way to make sure this model works well is to limit the Beginning Guitar Class to the youngest grade. In Clark County, middle school covers grades 6-8. Therefore, the Beginning Guitar Class is limited to 6th graders only. The Intermediate Guitar Class is only available to 7th graders who successfully completed the Beginning Guitar Class. The Advanced Guitar Class is only available 8th grade students who completed the Intermediate Guitar Class with a “B” or better.
How does Guitar Hero influence student enrollment in guitar classes?
It is widely believed that the popularity of Guitar Hero has had a major influence on the increased interest for guitar classes, particularly in the middle schools. There are a high percentage of students in these guitar classes that quickly discover guitar class is not Guitar Hero. Consequently, those students lose interest in the class and tend not to do well. This is another good argument for offering semester-long Beginning Guitar Classes as opposed to the year-long classes.

What about performing concerts with semester-long classes?
Typically, the semester-long Beginning Guitar Classes do not have performances or concerts. However, it is possible to do concerts if so inclined. For the fall semester students, the Beginning Guitar Class can perform easy arrangements or unison versions of holiday music. The spring Beginning Guitar Class can perform easy arrangements or unison versions of music of the director’s choice. Typically, the Beginning Guitar Class will begin the concert with 3 or 4 songs followed by the more advanced Intermediate Guitar Class. The Advanced Guitar Class would finish the concert. It would basically be a combined concert of all three classes.

Should my school buy electric guitars, steel-string guitars or nylon-string guitars?
The schools in Clark County purchase nylon-string guitars. When writing the Nevada State Curriculum for guitar, it was decided the nylon-string guitar would be the standard. There are a couple of reasons. The nylon-string guitar has a slightly smaller body which is good for smaller students. The nylon strings are softer on the fingers of the left hand. More importantly, the nylon strings are spaced so that the right-hand has room for finger picking. This is possibly the greatest argument. There is left-hand technique and right-hand technique. It is difficult to teach right-hand technique on an instrument in which the strings are not spaced for the right hand. The nylon-string guitar is designed with the correct spacing. It is easier to play on a steel-string or electric guitar after learning on a nylon-string. The same is not true when learning on a steel string.

Nylon-string guitars are generally less expensive than steel-strings or electric guitars. Nylon-string guitars blend together better in a large ensemble than steel-string guitars. Most colleges offering guitar as a major expect students to perform on a nylon-string guitar.
Do you teach strictly classical guitar style?
No. The schools in Clark County have an eclectic approach to guitar. We have a pop/rock element to our programs. We also teach folk, world music, country, blues and jazz. We do not have a classical guitar program, but do not promote a strict classical guitar program.

Do you teach large guitar ensembles or guitar orchestras?
In our district, we typically have 25-50 guitar students in each class. We really have to think in terms of large guitar ensembles. A component of the curriculum is ensemble playing. Many method books designed for classroom guitar have ensemble music. I believe it is important to play as much ensemble music as possible and use the ensemble music to teach the important parts of music as well as note reading.

What kind of equipment should I buy to get started?
The following is the standards list for a new guitar class in the Clark County School District. Each new school comes equipped with the following materials for the guitar room:

- 30 nylon-string guitars (Fender CG-7 or Yamaha CG-101) in cases
- 1 electric guitar (Yamaha)
- 1 electric guitar amplifier (Yamaha)
- 1 electric bass guitar (Squire by Fender)
- 1 electric bass amplifier (Crate)
- (Alesis 16) drum machine
- (Sony) 5-disc CD player
- Choice of a stereo amplifier with speakers or a (Rouge) 6-channel PA with speakers
- 2 (Wenger) violin/viola instrument stands for storage
- 30 chairs
- 30 (Wenger) music stands

I am an orchestra teacher who will be teaching guitar next school year. Can you give me some advice?
In the past decade, I have coached countless orchestra teachers through the journey of teaching classroom guitar. Here are a couple of things I have observed: 1) most orchestra teachers have been opened to idea of teaching guitar, but reserved; 2) after a time, orchestra teachers have discovered that guitar students are not as bright or focused as orchestra students; 3) the guitar plays in tune immediately and is not as loud as orchestra instruments; 4) teaching guitar is not that hard to do.
teaching orchestra, and there are many pluses such as guitar students progress much faster than orchestra students in terms of being able to play simple melodies, etc.; and finally, 5) teaching guitar class only requires teaching one instrument as opposed to teaching four instruments.

Many middle school and high school string orchestra arrangements work well for guitar ensemble. It takes time to arrange the orchestra music for guitar ensemble, but if you are willing to do it, it really works. Imagine teaching an ensemble piece during orchestra class and then teaching it again during guitar class. It makes sense to me and there are signs that some publishers may finally see the sense of publishing pieces for both string orchestras and guitar ensembles. I suggested this idea to a publisher that specializes in string orchestra music. I expressed there is a secondary market for guitar. The owner acted as if I was completely crazy. Maybe I was not that crazy, just a decade or so before my time.

I have been teaching band for the past ten years and was just told I will be teaching guitar next school year. What should I do? Ultimately, I think you will find teaching one instrument goes much quicker and far easier than teaching a dozen or more instruments in band. Also, with your band background, I am sure you will be a very effective classroom guitar teacher. To begin, find a method you like, learn to play guitar well enough to get through the chosen method, model as you would in band, teach reading and counting as you would in band, and enjoy the fact that guitar plays in tune immediately and is not as loud as most band instruments. I know a number of band directors that have eventually give up teaching band altogether to teach guitar full-time.

I had a lot of colleagues and mentors when I was teaching band, but as a guitar teacher, I really feel isolated and want to make my program better, but not sure what to do next. Do you have any ideas? I completely understand the feeling of isolation. That was where my head was about 10 years ago. And, any many aspects, I still feel that way, but that is changing more and more. There are some really talented guitar programs around the country. I have been fortunate enough to meet and visit many of them. The directors all tell the same story of feeling isolated and wondering what else is out there and meeting some of the people who are leading the pack so to speak. Join some of the professional music organizations like MENC, GFA or ASTA.

I remember complaining to a band teacher that I just do not know what a guitar class should “look like.” He reminded me that band directors did not know what a half-time should “look like” sixty years ago. And if you think about it, each decade bands have
made some significant changes in the appearance of half-time shows. There are always leaders and pioneers trying new things, and there are followers who copy those things they like about the leaders. You do not have to be a leader, but at least learn who the leaders currently are, meet them and copy what you like.

Our school provides guitars for the students. Do you allow your students to take guitars home for practice?
Absolutely not! School guitars are for school usage. If a student takes a guitar home and is absent the next day, a student in each class may sit without a guitar to play. If the guitar gets damaged or stolen, it affects more students than just the student responsible. Students are anxious to take school guitars home, but are not equally focused on returning them in a timely manner.

How do students practice if they do not take a guitar home?
As the teacher, it is important to structure the class so there is time to practice in class as a group, not individually. Students will learn more and improve faster if the class is structured to practice all learned skills in class. So why do most teachers waste 20 minutes introducing a skill and then say, “practice it at home and you will be tested on Friday.” It works better for your program to introduce a skill on Monday, practice it each day in class as a group and test on Friday. This way, as the teacher, you are supervising the practice techniques and teaching your students how to practice. Many teachers just tell students to practice, but do not teach them how to do so.

What is the average life span of a nylon-string guitar in the classroom being used all day, every day?
My stock answer has been 4 years. A guitar being used 5 periods a day by 5 different students a day is going to show wear and tear after each year of usage. By the end of 4 years, the guitars start looking particularly worn. This is particularly true if students vandalize the guitars by writing on them or sticking pencils through the wood of the guitars, etc. To slow this process down, it is important to have strict guidelines of instrument care, solid user agreement forms, damage reports, consequences and set fees for specific types of damages in the event an accident.

I try to purchase new guitars each year and store them away. Every four years, I have a new set of guitars that I can replace the ones that have been replacing. If you follow this guideline, you will always have good instruments. Far too many teachers ignore this and at the end of the fifth year need a new set of guitars and frequently do not have the money to purchase 30 guitars.
I have a student who is left-handed. Should the school buy some left-handed guitars?
Clark County School District has approximately 6,000 students enrolled in guitar classes. Many of those students are left-handed. It is the philosophy of the school district to teach guitar in a similar fashion as teaching orchestra instruments. The argument is there are no left-handed violins or basses, etc. Therefore, there will be no left-handed guitars. I have found through experience that left-handed students who learn to play a regular guitar frequently turn out to be some of the most outstanding students. I had a number of college students who were left-handed that played a regular guitar that were quite gifted as performers. The district’s stance is left-handed students may play left-handed only if they provide their own instruments.
It is the first week of school. You have a new group of students walking into your classroom anxious to breakout the guitars and start jamming. The single biggest mistake most new teachers make is allowing the students to play the guitars right away. There needs to be ground rules set. Procedures need to be discussed. Expectations need to be explained. Some form of agreement needs to be made in terms of taking responsibility for the care and usage of the classroom guitars.

If your school requires students to bring their own guitars to school, this may not be quite as important. However, if your school provides guitars for student usage, this section is very important and far too often ignored until it is too late. When I was a new teacher, I was told by some veteran teachers that it is better to hold the reins tightly in the beginning of the year and gradually loosen them as the year goes on, than to start out loosely and try to tighten later.

Start the year with some form of a handbook. The handbook will have the course scopes and goals, objectives and expectations, a course outline and description, required equipment, lab fees, grading procedure, classroom rules and consequences, and a summary of commitments. Typically when writing a class handbook, it is easier to copy one that is already in place. You may copy one that I use by going to: www.classroomguitar.com and clicking “Guitar Handbook” at the bottom of the homepage. There is a general music department handbook available also by clicking, “LVA Music Handbook.”

Frequently, the onsite administrator will request for teachers to provide a curriculum map for the school year. There is one included for quarter 1 and quarter 2 to assist you if you need to create one. The curriculum map enables you as the teacher, your students, parents and administrators to quickly see how the school year is mapped out and approximately where each class will progress on any given month. It is a great way to check yourself and make sure your class is on target. These maps are generally due the first week of school.
You will notice that the one included shows quarter 1 being offered four times a year. I teach at high school that starts at 2:00 p.m. and goes to 8:15 p.m. This school is designed to assist students who are credit deficient. I teach guitar as a fine arts credit which is required for graduation. This school offers beginning guitar quarter 1 each of the four quarters to show the ease. It also offers beginning guitar quarter 2 for all four quarters. My curriculum maps demonstrate that schedule. Your map may look very different or in some cases may be pretty close if you are teaching guitar as an explorations or round-robin.

**Usage Agreement Form**

If using school guitars in the classroom, have each student sign a Usage Agreement Form. Your district may provide a form. If not, I have included one. There is a place to put the model and serial number of the guitar. There is also an outline of the front and back of the guitar to make note of any scratches or damage that already exists before assigning the guitar to a student.

Before students may use a class guitar, they must sign the Usage Agreement Form and take it home to have a parent sign it as well. Once all of the sheets are signed and returned, assign guitars to the students. This will be the only guitar that student will use while in class.

**Damage Report**

It is the responsibility of the student to check the guitar each day before class and report any damage that may have occurred since last using the instrument. Simply fill out the form provided and mark the damage. As the teacher, you can go back and see which student last used the instrument. In my classroom, the person who last used the instrument before a damage report is filed is responsible for the damage. Frequently, a student will deny having contributed to the damage and say something like, “that damage was there already.” Responsibility still lies on the student for not having reported it.

From time to time, you may have a student will enter your Beginning Guitar Class and explain he has been playing the guitar for 2 or 3 years and should be in the Advanced Guitar Class. On the other hand, the majority of the students entering your Beginning Guitar Class will claim they know absolutely nothing about the guitar or music in general. This is where pre-tests can be most helpful. Pre-tests are a great activity for
the first week. I frequently will have one or two tests planned each day during the first week of school. You will find samples of pre-tests later included. The pre-tests are not used for grades. The pre-tests are used to help you determine your students know and do not know. I generate my tests for each student. I put the graded pre-tests in their folders after we have discussed them in class. I give them their folder when they leave the guitar program. Most students really appreciate looking back and realizing how much they learned while studying guitar.

Parts of the Guitar

One of the activities I schedule for the first week of class is to discuss the parts of the guitar. I usually start by asking the students to take a sheet of paper and number it 1-15. I put a guitar in front of the class so all can see and ask that they list each part of the guitar. This is usually the first pre-test I give during the first week. Most students get stuck. Remember the student who insisted on being placed in the Advanced Guitar Class? His/her performance on this first pre-test was a clue to his/her knowledge of the guitar. I clearly have no expectations that students will do well on this first pre-test. The process of taking this test frequently makes the students curious of the answers and makes them want to know the parts of the guitar.

Immediately following the pre-test, I explain the parts of the guitar that I think are important to know. There are about 20 of them. I would like every student to be able to name at least 15 at anytime during the course of the class. The following day, I tend to start the class by asking students by name to name one guitar part. I go around the room until the list has been exhausted or the class gets stuck. At that point, I review the guitar parts. The next day, I do something similar and continue through the first week and frequently into the second week until it is apparent that most students are doing well with this.

Note Names

On the board, I will draw a staff of five lines and four spaces. I will ask the students to get a piece of paper and write the names of the lines. I will also ask them to write the names of the spaces. There are many ways to do this, but here is another example of a first-week pre-test. Do your students know the names of the lines and spaces? You may be surprised to learn how many do. Most learned this information in grammar school. Many have temporarily forgotten it, but quickly remember once they are reminded.
I have a number of worksheets that are fun to do and require students to write in the names of the lines and/or spaces to complete sentences, etc. I consider these as pre-tests and try to give them at least 3 days during week one. It is a simple way to start the process of reading notes and figuring note names without the task of holding a guitar at the same time.

Musical Terms

During the course of the first week, I try to work in an introduction to musical terms. I have included the list I use with the other supplements entitled, “Beginning Guitar: Musical Terms.” I make it a point not to read this page, but make certain that I cover the entire list. I generally review the information on the list everyday for several days. At some point, either on the last day of the first week or in the first days of the second week, I will give a simple quiz which is also included. Again, this is not so much for a grade, but to evaluate who is listening and paying attention. If the scores are really low the first time I give the exam, I may review the information and give again a couple of days later for a grade. As a general rule, I do show the page and pass it out. I think the learning process is more enhanced when students are asked to write something down and to keep a notebook.

Week 1 – Summary

As you can see, if you were to include all of the above activities during the first week, there will be little time to get out the guitars and start playing. I really make an effort not to play the guitars the first week of the class for several reasons. The most obvious reason is that in public schools, students are continually added to your class as much as 10 days into the new session. While it may not be plausible to wait two weeks before playing guitars, holding off the first week will save new students from being behind the minute they join your class.

Setting ground rules and lines of responsibility for handling and care of the instruments is very important. They all need to be done before the guitars are made available. Introducing note reading, musical terms and guitar parts is far easier if done without an instrument.
Week 2

The Guitars

The day will come, most likely during week 2, to assign the guitars. It works well to have a user agreement from each student with an assigned guitar number. This will be the only guitar each student will use. While this may seem a bit rigid, I spend a great deal of time talking about how the guitars will be removed from the cases. I have each student place the guitar case on the right hand side of the chair with the narrow end of the case facing forward. I go into great detail about the number of latches on the case and instruct everyone to lift the case with the left hand and remove the guitar with the right hand. The guitar goes in the lap, face down, and the cases are latched and placed on their sides. This makes walking around the room more plausible.

There are three positions of holding the guitar: 1) Rest Position; 2) Muted Position; and 3) Playing Position. While I am talking and/or giving instructions, all students will be in rest position. Rest position consists of placing the guitar face down in the lap with the neck facing to the left. When the class is ready to play, we go to muted position with the guitars upright on lap and the right hand muting the strings. Playing position means the guitars are upright, feet flat on the floor, backs straight and both hands in position to play.

Guitar Maintenance

It is not uncommon on the first day of removing the guitars from the cases to find broken strings. Having extra strings on hand is an absolute must. The nylon string that breaks most frequently is the 4th or “D” string, followed by the 5th or “A” string. The 3rd string breaks the least amount of any of the strings. Teachers approach this differently, and it is important for you to know how you are going to handle maintenance. If you have more guitars than students, the quick solution is to have a student with a broken string get another guitar. If you have fewer guitars than students, or the same number of guitars as students, it may require repairing the guitar during class.

Learn to replace strings. I use a cordless electric drill with a bit which comes from a sidewinder known as “Turbo Tuner.” I can replace a string in a couple of minutes using this device. Replacing a string by hand will take considerably more time. It is the Clark County School District philosophy to replace strings only when they break. I once shared a guitar room with a teacher who had students grab a different guitar each time
a string would break. I would often spend one preparatory period a week just changing broken strings. Decide how you are going to handle broken strings before being faced with the dilemma.

**Tuning**

There are a lot of ideas about tuning. Some method books come with a cd that has tuning notes in the first tracks. Some teachers like to tune the guitars. Other teachers like teaching students how to tune from the beginning. It is all a matter of choice. Some schools purchase guitars with built-in tuners. Other schools purchase electronic tuners and encourage the students to use them before class begins. There are pitch pipes and tuning forks and a host of ways to go about tuning. Based on your experience as a guitar teacher, decide how you are going to tune your class early on. The nice thing about teaching a beginning guitar class, it is not necessary to tune all of the strings in the beginning. Chances are you can get by with tuning only the first 3 strings for the entire first quarter.

**Picks, Fingers or Thumb?**

It is very important that you make a decision how your students are going to make a sound on the guitar long before the first day they have the guitars in their hands. Are they going to play with picks, fingers or their thumbs? The guitar is no different than any other musical instrument. If you were teaching violin, you would know if students will make their first sounds playing with their fingers or with a bow. If you were teaching band, you would know if a trumpet playing is going to make the first sound by playing into a mouthpiece or just buzzing lips. How are your guitar students going to make a sound on the guitar? There is no wrong answer. However, if your students start out playing with their thumbs, know that this can only be a temporary method that will need to be replaced with fingers or a pick.

**Professor Swick's 5-Minute Guitar Lesson**

You will find a page entitled, “Professor Swick’s 5-Minute Guitar Lesson.” This is the worksheet I start with on the first day with the guitars. Ultimately, the goal is to create a feeling of accomplishment and a sense that playing guitar is possible.
Before we get started, I explain the numbering system. First of all, the fingers on the left hand are numbered 1-4, starting with the index finger. The strings on the guitar are numbered 1-6, starting with the floor and ending with the ceiling. This means the string closest to the floor is string number 1 and the string closest to the ceiling is string number 6. The frets are numbered 1-4 from left to right. Now, place the first finger on the second string just behind the first fret. This is how I give instruction to form the first chord of the 5-minute lesson.

We start with a 3-string C chord and G7 chord played each with just one finger. As we strum the chords, I sing and encourage the class to sing along. Once we have done this several times and it appears everyone is getting it pretty well, we go to the next page, “Mary Had a Little Lamb for Lead Guitar.” I explain the notes have been written in code and anyone who can break the code can play “Mary Had a Little Lamb.”

Some students break the code right away. Others do not try very hard. Eventually, I explain that this is known as “Cuban Tablature” and write the code on the board.

String number/fret number

Within minutes after explaining the code, students begin picking the melody of “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” It is always great to see the smiles and sense of accomplishment. Some want more right away. But first, we play our first duet. Once several students can play the melody, I divide the class into those who can and or willing to play the melody and have the rest strum the chords. We then play our first duet several times until it sounds good.

There are several songs included written in Cuban tablature that you may use during the first weeks of class. Students do respond to these well. The whole purpose of using them is to have the students playing the guitar as quickly as possible and creating the feeling of accomplishment without being overwhelmed with trying to read music all at the same time.

More About Cuban Tablature

Cuban tablature is a great way to communicate the placement of fingers in relationship to the strings. It is at this point in the learning process that I establish a language in which I can verbalize finger placement. There was a day when I would walk around the room and place students’ fingers where they needed to be. In today’s world, I make it a point not to touch students. Therefore, there is a need to communicate finger placement, and Cuban tablature works really well for that. From this point forward, the “E” on the first string is also known as 1/0, “F” is known as 1/1 and “G” is known as 1/3,
etc. This is also helpful for the right hand. Any note starting with the number 1 is played on the first string, etc.

Note Reading

After a day or two of playing from Cuban tablature, it is time to start the process of reading notes. I draw a staff on the board and write the E, F and G on the staff with the Cuban tablature for each note. I also draw a whole note = 4 beats, 2 half notes = 2 beats, and 4 quarter notes = 1 beat. I explain the difference between the three types of notes and their relationship to one another in terms of values, etc. At this point, the class is ready for page 1 of the text, “Notes on the First String.”

While there are only 3 notes to a line and only 7 lines, the activities associated with this page are endless. As a part of the classroom materials, I have an electric drum machine and P.A. system. We play every exercise and every song with a drum track. This helps to keep the class together with musical structure and helps students and it establishes meter and time for students. Teaching without a drum machine or metronome would be very challenging. The students learn to respond well to heavy grooves on the drum machine and when they are not placing the first notes on the first string, it can seem as if they are playing with a major rock band.

I Play, You Play

Modeling is a must. Students respond to modeling. Students do not respond to, “Do as I say, not as I do.” Your students will copy your moves. Make certain that your techniques and skills are worthy of being copied.

There are lots of ways to incorporate “I play, you play.” For example, the teacher may play line one alone and have the class play the next time. The teacher may play line one and have each student respond one at a time. Be creative and think of various ways to present exercises related to these studies. Keep in mind the goal is to keep students engaged from bell to bell. There is no “free time.” Do not rush through each of these exercises one time each and think the students are going to retain the information. These exercises are intended to be played repeatedly. Be creative with pages 1-5 and use these pages in as many ways as you can imagine in terms of student activities.
**Songs**

Pages 8-11 are songs played only on the first string. There are chords included so the teacher can play the accompaniment, whereas students who know their chords and want to play can join in at times, but not at the cost of ignoring note reading. Generally speaking, start out with the tempo on the drum machine at 80 beats per minute and slowly increase the tempo as the days go by. The class will play each song at least 2 times each, more if needed.

Notice the songs using only the first string are titled with words starting with the letter “E”, while the songs for the second string are titles with words starting with the letter “B”, etc. This is done to remind students they are playing on the “E” string or the “B” string, etc. Songs combining strings have more common names.

**Recital Day**

Fridays are “recital day” in my beginning guitar classes. Each student will select two songs from the total amount of songs performed during the week to play as a solo on Friday. The teacher may play along with each student as playing his or her own, or students may perform from their assigned seats or in front of the class. It is scary at first, but this is how students build confidence to perform in front of others. The first recital (week 2) will mostly cover the songs included in the Cuban tablature.

**Micro Steps**

Week two is generally the week that the weekly procedures are defined and introduced. Generally, Mondays are the days the new material for the week is introduced. Tuesdays through Thursdays are review from the new materials on Mondays with additional progress each day. Fridays are recital days or assessment days.

Each week should be clearly defined in terms of how much material will be introduced and covered. The days how students play a guitar or may not practice outside of class. Structure the class so there is plenty of review and practice as a class (not individually) with plenty of activities and opportunities to learn the weekly material. Use Fridays to hear each student perform to make assessments of progress. What you hear on Friday may determine what will occur on Monday of the following week. The class will either go to the next set of pages or there may be a day or two of review from the current week.
Always think in terms of micro steps. One week of progress is not going to be very obvious, but one month of progress will be. Nine weeks of progress will be really obvious. Everything should be done in micro steps with micro progress. Rushing through the note reading process causes less frustration for the students and the teachers. Once the learning cycle is complete, the students will learn the material quickly and will push to move forward. There will also be those students that get frustrated quickly and seem to give up. The challenge will always be to keep a good steady pace, slower than some will like, faster than others will like, but just right for the majority.

Lesson Plans

Lesson plans are included in this text for both Quarter One and Quarter Two. The State of Nevada guitar curriculum objectives are given both under the category “Objectives” and “Skills and Techniques.” As a teacher, it is important to be familiar with your state’s curriculum and to make certain the materials being taught in class follow the state requirements. Many onsite administrators do this extremely well and are happy to see the objectives included in the weekly lesson plan.

Each weekly lesson plan will give you a realistic idea of how many pages may be covered each week. I have taught from this method nine times at the time of this writing. The pace set by the weekly lesson plans is very realistic. However, some months like November have a number of holidays creating 4-day or 3-day weeks. Adjustments will have to be made depending on what part of the year the first quarter material is offered. In my situation, quarter 1 is offered each quarter, four times a year. If you are teaching an explorations or round-robin type guitar class, you may experience something similar where you will need to teach quarter one four times a year.

Vocabulary Words

Notice that each lesson plan has a place for vocabulary words. You may use any set of words you wish, but I try to cover musical terms. One school that I am currently teaching at uses a school-wide set of words with their teachers. In an effort for cross-curriculum, each teacher is requested to work the weekly vocabulary into the lesson plans. For that school, my lesson plans reflect that school’s vocabulary words.
Week 3

Each class period should start with a review of the previous days’ lessons. In the beginning of week 3, it would be helpful to review the parts of the guitar, the names of the notes and spaces, the notes of the first string, and it’s time to perform the pieces from Cuban tablature. Each session should include the exercises for the first string. For the exercises, be creative and make them fun. Review the eight songs on the first string and play through each one a couple of times.

Week 3 will continue with the three notes on the first string. By the second or third day of week 3, if the class is progressing, it will be time to introduce the three notes on the second string.

Many of the weekly procedures were introduced during week 2 and the students will have a strong expectation of how each class will look and what is expected. Students should know how to take the guitars from the case, how to place them on the right side of their chairs, know the three playing positions, know the tuning procedures, etc. They will also be thinking ahead about the recital on Friday.

Overall, week 3 will review pages 6-9 and introduce pages 10-16. Page 17 combines the notes of the first and second strings. This page can create frustration for both the students and the teacher. The students really think they have string one down. It will become obvious how well they know string one when the two strings are combined. Save this for week 4.

Friday’s recital will include any two songs from the string one collection. This would typically be the first assessment in terms of grades.

Week 4

By now, there should be a consistency from day to day in your classroom. Students are learning the classroom procedures and understanding the expectations. Week 4 will start out by reviewing the notes on the first string and the notes on the second string. By the second or third day of this week, it will be time to progress and introduce page 17 which combines strings one and two. Week 4 will include pages 17-25. Friday’s recital will include any two songs from the second string or the combined strings.
Week 5

Week 5 is the half-way mark of the first quarter. At this point, you may be panicking thinking you are halfway through the class and just now combining strings 1 and 2. Not to worry! First of all, the students are now learning at a faster pace than one month ago. The next statement is very important. When teaching from any book, look at the total number of pages in the book, in this case, 65 pages. Divide that number in half, 32-33 pages. At the half-way mark of the quarter (week 5), the class should be on pages 32-33 or half-way through the book. Based on the lesson plans provided, the class will be right on target.

Like each previous week, week 5 will begin with review and then introduce pages 26-34. Students will be exposed to duet playing. This requires independent part playing as well as vertical alignment. Have fun with the duets and trade parts so everyone gets to play both parts.

Friday’s recital will include any two songs from the songs combining strings 1 and 2.

Week 6

Students will be doing a lot of duet playing during week 6. This is their first exposure to ensemble playing and is typically pretty exciting. Be creative and make sure each student plays both parts. Break into small groups or duos and have a little competition amongst the groups. The lesson plan covers pages 35-42 with the week starting with review of the songs using combined strings and then progressing into the new duets.

By mid-week, the class will be ready to move to the third string. They will think it is easy because there are only two notes to learn. There are exercises and a couple of songs played only on the open strings combining all three strings.

Friday’s recital will feature either duos or having each student play a duet with the teacher.

Week 7

Week 7 will start with a review of the notes on the third string and will eventually introduce the rests. Draw the rests on the board similarly as you did the notes. Make a reference to four quarter rests equals two half rests, and two half rests equals on whole rest, etc. Pick-up notes and ties are also introduced during week seven. There are no
explanations about either of these elements in the text, so it is up to the teacher to discuss these elements and explain how they work.

The lesson plans call for covering pages 43-52 this week. Friday’s recital will include two songs from the songs studied this week using all three strings. Discourage students from choosing the songs which only use the open strings.

Week 8

Week 8 introduces the trios. Students will have a chance to continue playing more ensemble music, this time in three parts. Make sure that you arrange the activities so each student plays all three parts. During this week, students will be exposed to the high “A” located on the first string, fifth fret. There is no instruction in the text about the high “A”, so the teacher will need to write this on the board and demonstrate how to play the high “A” preferably with the little, or fourth, finger.

The lesson plans call for covering pages 53-65 this week which will actually complete the book. Friday’s recital will include two songs from the ensemble music studied this week. Students may perform as a trio; the individual students may perform part 1, while the teacher performs parts 2 & 3.

Week 9

Week 9 will be all review of week 8. Also, there should be a conversation about a final exam this week. The final exam may be to perform 2 of the following songs: Flying Trapeze, Red River Valley, Oh, Susanna, Boogie Rock, Gypsy Song and/or She’ll Be Coming Around the Mountain. These songs demonstrate that the student learned to recognize the notes on the lines and spaces, learned the note placements on the guitar and learned to count in time and how to differentiate note values. Week 9 is about reviewing, catching up, evaluating and finishing.

For some students, this will be the end of the line and they may be leaving your class to study a different subject next quarter. Other students may be returning to you at a different time the following quarter to take Quarter 2 of Beginning Guitar. Regardless, towards the end of this week, all exams should be completed and the guitars will be inspected and turned in.

Review the page entitled, “Backward Assessment Models-First Quarter” with your students. Have them evaluate if they each accomplished the goals for the quarter. As
a teacher, you will have already made this assessment and it should reflect in the students' grades for the course.

**Citizenship Guidelines**

Most teachers are required to give every student a grade in citizenship. There was never a time in college that citizenship grades were ever discussed. Every teacher is more or less on their own deciding how to give a grade in citizenship. I have included a guideline that has circulated in the Clark County School District. It has not been officially adopted by the district, but many teachers now use this as a guideline.

**Permutations**

The lesson plans template has a box for “warm-ups.” You will notice that in some weeks there is reference to permutations. I have included sheets of permutations to explain how I warm-up the class each day. The lesson has columns. Each column starts with a different finger of the year-long series. The teacher, after the class warm-up on the first column during quarter 1, the second column, starting with the second finger, during all of quarter 2, and so on. Of all the exercises I have done, I find that these work really well and deliver the results I am looking for. That is, to develop strength and independence in each finger. Most students complain about how week their fourth (or little) finger is, and basically avoid using it. These exercises will help strengthen the little finger.

**Backward Assessment Model**

There are a number of names given to the document entitled Backward Assessment Model. This is the name used in Clark County. It is a document which is filed BEFORE a course is offered and then used to evaluate students at the END of the class. An on-site administrator then performs an assessment to evaluate if: 1) the teacher covered materials which taught the defined skills for the class and 2) if students learned and retained and can demonstrate the skills and knowledge offered in this class. The goal of course is that EVERY student possesses these skills, not just the students who receive an “A” in the class.

As a teacher, having this document in a place that may be reviewed regularly and frequently is ideal. This keeps you, the teacher, focused on the end results of the class.
Experience tells me if you follow the lesson plans and materials in this program, your classes will complete the Backward Assessment Model again and again.
Quarter 2

Week 1

In a perfect situation, students completing Beginning Guitar Quarter 1 will progress right into Quarter 2 in a seamless fashion. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Frequently in my environment, students will take Quarter 1 at the beginning of the school year and wait until the next year to take Quarter 2. Unlike many schools, this school takes new enrollment every quarter throughout the year. So, like quarter 1, it takes about 7-10 days for all the new students to finalize their schedules and to get into the correct classes. Like quarter 1, the first week of instruction does not start with the first day of classes due to the fluctuation of class enrollment.

In theory, no student taking quarter 2 beginning guitar should be in this class unless he/she completed quarter 1 successfully. As you may guess, there will always be exceptions which in itself create challenges which we will address a little later.

For now, we will proceed as if we are dealing in an ideal situation and assume that each student enrolled in quarter 2 has successfully completed quarter 1. The first few days of quarter 2 will be quite similar to week 1 of quarter 1. Time will be spent doing administrative duties such as creating an enrollment list, seating list, assigning guitars, getting guitar user agreements signed, etc.

Students will be knowledgeable about note names, how to get the guitars from the case, how to sit in rest position, etc. The playing days during this week will mostly be utilized to review the first 3 strings and do some ensemble playing. If you choose to do so, begin the fourth string. The lesson plans are identical for both weeks 1 & 2. The goal is to have everyone playing up to the song “Daring” by the Thursday of the second week.

Week 2

Week 2 will be a continuation of Week 1. The lesson plans are identical for both weeks 1 & 2. The goal is to have everyone playing up to the song “Daring” by the Thursday of the second week. Friday of Week 2 will be a recital day. Students will pick 2 pieces to perform from pages 69-71.

The inclusion of string 4 is an interesting part of the progress of guitar playing. If there are students using their right thumb to pick the strings, the addition of the fourth string will present problems. Typically, the thumb can handle three strings, but has difficulty handling four. It is at this time that those students who are still using the thumb make a
decision to switch to a pick or using the fingers. This will become particularly evident when the students are introduced to eighth notes.

**Week 3**

Week 3 combines the strings previously learned with the new notes on string 4. Some students will struggle with this and so it is important not to move too quickly through these pages which will be the tendency. Make certain all students are grasping the concept of reading notes on all four strings. Friday’s recital will consist of each student selecting two pieces each from pages 72-75.

**Week 4**

Week 4 is a pivotal week. Students will review the pick-up notes and ties. On page 76 is the introduction to eighth notes in “Amazing Grace.” Page 78 is another in-depth exposure to eighth notes. It is important to discuss alternate picking during this week and demonstrate how to play down on the beat and upward on the and of the beat. Friday’s recital will cover pages 76-80. This is the middle of the quarter. Page 80 is the middle of the text for quarter 2. If you are following the lesson plans, you and your class will be right on target for covering all of the materials.

**Week 5**

Week 5 introduces the high “A” located on the first string, fifth fret. The fifth string will also be introduced during this week. Use of eighth notes will continue to be reinforced. Week 5 will cover pages 81 – 91. Friday’s recital will cover pages 81-83 and 89-91. Students may choose 2 songs from those pages.

**Week 6**

Week 6 continues with the fifth string. The dotted quarter note, eighth note rhythm is introduced with a number of songs to reinforce this new rhythm. This is an opportunity to do some counting and clapping and be creative with teaching this rhythm. I find that many third-year guitar students cannot read or count this rhythm correctly. Week 6 will
Week 7 introduces the sixth string and will cover pages 101-110. Friday’s recital will include pages 106-110. Spend time reviewing the songs taught during week 6.

Week 8

Week 8 continues with the sixth string and covers pages 111-114. This will complete the text. Much time should also be spent reviewing the exercises and songs from week 7. Students will be challenged by the lower notes and reading ledger lines. There is often confusion about the ledger lines and this range of notes will require a great deal of review. Friday’s recital will include pages 111-114.

This is the week to announce the music under consideration for the final exam, which will be during week 9. The final exam will include any two of the following: Boogie Bass on p.110, Tenting Tonight on p.112 and/or Camptown Races on p.113.

Week 9

The final exam will include any two of the following: Boogie Bass on p.110, Tenting Tonight on p.112 and/or Camptown Races on p.113. These songs demonstrate that the student learned to recognize the notes on the ledger lines and spaces, learned the note placements on the guitar and learned to count in time and how to differentiate note values. Week 9 is about reviewing, catching up, evaluating and finishing.

For some students, this will be the end of the line and they may be leaving your class. Towards the end of the week, students should be contacted and the guitars will be inspected and turned in.

Review the page entitled, “Backward Assessment Models-Second Quarter” with your students. Have them evaluate if they each accomplished the goals for the quarter. As a teacher, you will have already made this assessment and it should reflect in the students’ grades for the course.
Challenges to Consider

As alluded to earlier, school counselors are not always sensitive to quarter 1 and quarter 2 placements. Frequently, it is about lining up academic classes and then filling in with available electives in the open classes. It is common to have a beginner with no skills and no prior experience placed in a quarter 2 class. By the same token, there have been students who have completed quarter 1 and placed into another quarter 1 class.

For the latter, I have written a special text that allows the repeater of quarter 1 to continue learning the lower notes while playing along with the quarter 1 students. The materials are the same with the exception that they are written one octave lower. This was written purely from need as most materials are written. I named the text Quarter 1 Mixed. The word “mixed” is the term used when referring to more than one level scheduled into the same class. This is a big challenge for both the teachers and the students, and apparently a common one.

While not ideal, it is possible to start a beginner on the fourth string. The issues are the inability to read notes and rhythms. However, a determined student will make the effort to play catch up. While you will likely want to avoid this scenario, it is likely to occur if you teach guitar long enough.

When I was teaching in a comprehensive high school, it was common to start the school year with 40 students in the class and end the school year with 40 students. The only challenge was that 10-15 students left the class during the year and 10-15 were added to the class throughout the year. This was most frustrating. It was because of this that I do not teach chords during quarters 1 & 2.

This might be a stretch for you trying to connect those dots. You may be asking yourself, “what does one have to do with the other?” I found that it is easier to teach chords to a new student than to play catch up. So, as new students enter the class, they become “chord strummers.” I schedule the introduction of chords in quarters 3 & 4. I also introduce the keys G, Em, F, Dm, D, and Bm during these quarters if teaching a year-long class. However, as new students join the class throughout the quarter, I teach simple chords to these students. They can play along with those students who are learning to read music and play the melodies.

As you get into this, you will have your own challenges. You may feel the need to discuss these challenges with someone. Please feel free to email me. This brings us back full circle. We started with questions and answers and now we leave with the invitation to send me your questions. Just know you are not alone and for the time being, we are all pioneers in this thing we call guitar education.
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