



Guitar Best Practices

Years 1, 2, 3 and 4

Many schools today offer guitar classes and guitar ensembles as a form of music instruction. While guitar is a popular music choice for students to take, there are many teachers offering instruction where guitar is their secondary instrument.

The [NAfME Guitar Council](#) collaborated and compiled lists of **Guitar Best Practices** for each year of study. They comprise a set of technical skills, music experiences, and music theory knowledge that guitar students should know through their scholastic career.

As a Guitar Council, we have taken careful consideration to ensure that the lists are applicable to middle school and high school guitar class instruction, and may be covered through a wide variety of method books and music styles (classical, country, folk, jazz, pop). All items on the list can be performed on acoustic, classical, and/or electric guitars.

NAfME Council for Guitar Education Best Practices Outline for a Year One Guitar Class

YEAR ONE - At the completion of year one, students will be able to:

1. Perform using correct sitting posture and appropriate hand positions
2. Play a sixteen measure melody composed with eighth notes at a moderate tempo using alternate picking
3. Read standard music notation and play on all six strings in first position up to the fourth fret
4. Play melodies in the keys **C major, a minor, G major, e minor, D major, b minor, F major** and **d minor**
5. Play one octave scales including **C major, G major, A major, D major** and **E major** in first position
6. Have a tonal range which extends to the A above the staff
7. Identify chord diagrams and play major, minor and dominant seventh chords in first position in the keys of **C major, G major, D major, d minor, A major, a minor, E major**, and **e minor**
8. Strum rhythms to include whole, half, quarter and eighth notes including simple syncopation
9. Play power chords using roots on open sixth, fifth and fourth strings
10. Read and understand symbols indicating up and down strokes using a pick also known as alternate picking
11. Play arpeggios in a finger-style style as an accompaniment
12. Identify and use p-i-m-a including rest stroke (apoyando) and free stroke (tirando)
13. Improvise a melodic line to a simple two or three chord progression such as the blues using a pentatonic or blues scale
14. Identify and name the parts of the guitar

15. Identify basic musical symbols
16. Tune the guitar by pitch matching
17. Play effectively and dependably as a part of an ensemble. As a class, the students should have a repertoire of at least four ensemble selections that they can play accurately and musically
18. Identify and perform in time signatures 4/4, 3/4 and 2/4
19. Perform in a variety of tempos
20. Perform with a metronome, electronic drummer, or recorded accompaniment
21. Demonstrate through performance appropriate dynamics including (forte and piano)
22. Sight-read a simple melodic line of 8 measures in first position, using simple meter in the keys of **C major**, **G major** and **a minor** containing whole, half and quarter notes and corresponding rest rhythms

NAfME Council for Guitar Education Best Practices Outline for a Year Two Guitar Class

YEAR TWO - At the completion of year two, students will be able to:

1. Play all notes on each string through fifth position
2. Read and play with standard notation for pitch, rhythm, meter, articulation, dynamics, and other elements of music as outlined in year one.
3. Demonstrate through performance appropriate dynamics to include mezzo forte and mezzo piano
4. Read and perform rhythms and rhythmic patterns with note values including whole notes, half notes, eighth notes, sixteenth notes, eighth-note triplets, dotted halves, dotted quarters, dotted eighths and corresponding rests
5. Sight-read a moderate level melodic line of 16 measures in simple meter in the keys of **C major**, **G major**, **D major**, **F major** and **a minor**, **b minor**, **e minor**, and **d minor** containing whole, half, dotted half, quarter, dotted quarter, and eighth note, rhythms and corresponding rests in first through fifth positions.
6. Play in time signatures 3/8, 6/8 and alla breve (C - cut time)
7. Play in Fifth Position in the keys of **C major**, **a minor**, **F major** and **d minor**
8. Play melodic lines in the keys of **C major**, **a minor**, **D major**, **b minor**, **F major**, **d minor**, **G major**, **e minor**, **A major**, **f# minor**, **Bb** and **g minor** (three sharps and two flats)
9. Play major scales in the keys **C**, **D**, **F**, **Bb**, **G**, **A** & **E** and natural, and harmonic minor scales **a**, **d**, **e**, and **b** in two octaves
10. Play one form of the movable, two-octave pentatonic scale
11. Play chromatic scale in first position ascending and descending
12. Play from E3 – C6, low open e string to 8th fret of high e string
13. Play moveable barre chords based on the "E" and "A" chord forms
14. Play I-IV-V7-I in every key using moveable forms
15. Play power chords with roots on the E and A strings
16. Play major, minor, major sevenths, dominant sevenths, minor sevenths and power chords in every key using moveable forms
17. Play a standard 12-bar blues progression in a variety of keys and rhythmic styles
18. Read chord diagrams and play from lead sheets using chord symbols and diagrams
19. Strum syncopated rhythms demonstrating facilities in both pick and finger-style techniques
20. Demonstrate the ability to perform right-hand arpeggios (p-i-m-a and its variations), and alternation techniques including using a pick (Alternate picking and Travis picking)
21. Create simple melodies in ABA form
22. Participate in performance and evaluation of music

23. Become aware of musical styles and composers and their correlation to world history
24. Define and apply music terminology found in the music literature being studied
25. Perform solo guitar literature with two contrapuntal voices
26. Tune the guitar using harmonics
27. Utilize tone color changes in performance to include *tasto* (neck), *ponticello* (bridge), and *pizzicato* (palm muting)

NAfME Council for Guitar Education Best Practices Outline for a Year Three Guitar Class

YEAR THREE - At the completion of year three, students will be able to:

1. Play all notes on each string through ninth position
2. Play "swing" eighth notes in the jazz style
3. Play in duple, triple and compound meters to include 9/8, 12/8
4. Recognize and interpret general articulations such as *staccato*, *legato*, *tenuto*, *marcato*, accent marks
5. Using movable shapes, play major, natural minor, harmonic minor and melodic minor scales in every key in two octaves
6. Perform melodies in keys of **Bb major**, **Eb major**, **g minor** and **c minor**
7. Recognize and interpret ornamentations such as slides, slurs (*hammer-on* and *pull-off*), trills and mordents
8. Play two notes simultaneously using intervals of thirds, sixths and octaves
9. Play augmented and diminished chords in every key using moveable shapes and barre chords
10. Play major sixth, minor sixth, ninth, thirteenth and suspended 2nd and 4th chords using moveable shapes
11. Play intermediate-level syncopated strums
12. Perform intermediate arpeggiated studies demonstrating facilities in both flat picking (*Alternate picking*, *Travis picking*) and finger-style techniques (*rest stroke - apoyano* /*free stroke - tirando*)
13. Perform in a variety of ensemble settings
14. Evaluate career opportunities related to music and guitar
15. Perform intermediate level solo guitar literature with three to four voices
16. Demonstrate through performance appropriate dynamics including *fortissimo*, *pianissimo*, *crescendo* and *decrescendo*
17. Sight-read a moderate level melodic line of 24 measures in simple and compound meters in **C major**, **G major**, **D major**, **A major**, **F major** and **a minor**, **b minor**, **e minor**, **f# minor**, and **d minor** containing whole, half/dotted half, quarter/dotted quarter, and eighth note, rhythms and corresponding rests in first through seventh positions
18. Perform natural harmonics using the 5th, 7th and 12th frets

NAfME Council for Guitar Education Best Practices Outline for a Year Four Guitar Class

YEAR FOUR - At the completion of year four, students will be able to:

1. Play the full range of the fingerboard
2. Play scordatura (alternate) tunings
3. Play Greek modes (ex. Dorian, Lydian, Mixolydian, etc.) in every key using moveable shapes in two octaves
4. Improvise over basic 12-bar blues and ii-V7-I chord progressions in a variety of keys and rhythmic styles
5. Perform complex rhythms and syncopations
6. Perform compound duple, triple and asymmetric meters
7. Perform stylistically appropriate accompaniment techniques (ex. Latin, flamenco, rasgueado, jazz comping, palm muting)
8. Perform in a variety of small and large ensembles incorporating different styles
9. Play appropriate selected studies, ex. Carcassi, Giuliani, Sor, Leo Brouwer, William Leavitt – Modern Method for Guitar - Berklee
10. Create a chord melody arrangement from a given melody and chord symbols
11. Demonstrate advanced facilities in both flat picking and finger-style techniques, including but not limited to Sweep picking and Tremolo picking
12. Perform melodic lines in the major keys up to four sharps and four flats including relative minor keys
13. Perform advanced-level solo guitar literature with three to four voices
14. Perform artificial and pinch harmonics
15. Develop a personal portfolio for post-secondary opportunities related to music and guitar
16. Have a basic level of knowledge and skill using technology related to composition and performance (amplifiers, computers, recording software, MIDI, effects units and guitars)

Scroll to next page for Additional Information

Further reading:

[“Top 6 ½ Things Beginner Guitarists Should Know in Their First Year”](#)

[“6 ½ More Things Beginner Guitarists Should Know in Their First Year”](#)

<https://nafme.org/finding-right-music-literature-guitar-program/>

<https://nafme.org/evaluating-guitar-performance-using-comprehensive-assessment-students/>

About the author:



NAfME member Christopher Perez is the Director of Guitar Studies at Freedom High School in Orlando, Florida, and a graduate of Western Illinois University. Selected as a [quarterfinalist](#) for the 2017 GRAMMY Foundation Music Teacher of the Year Award, he remains very active as a teacher, presenter, adjudicator, clinician, composer/arranger and musician. Mr. Perez is a member of NAfME (National Association for Music Education) serving on the Guitar Council as the Southern Division Representative and as the Guitar Manager for the Guitar All-National Honor Ensemble, FMEA (Florida Music Education Association) serving on the FMEA Guitar/General Music Committee, GFA (Guitar Foundation of America), and Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia.

Mr. Perez continually serves on several local and state curricular and music assessment writing teams. His music is published with Drop6 Media, Inc. and has several arrangements on the FBA State Music List. He is a percussionist with the Southern Winds Symphonic Band and with “ENCORE! Performing Arts”. Mr. Perez has presented sessions at NAfME, FMEA and OCPS Music Conferences and the FHS Guitar Ensembles continually perform on local, state, national and international stages. Under his direction, the [FHS Guitar Ensembles](#) performed several times as a demonstration music ensemble and in concert at FMEA All-State Music Conference in Tampa, Florida, and in concert at the Stetson University Guitar Day in DeLand, Florida, the 2013 & 2017 Long Island Guitar Festival in New York and the Florida Guitar Festival at Florida State University.

The Freedom High School Guitar Program received the distinction from the Guitar Foundation of America as being a GFA Certified School, one of only a few select high schools in the United States offering the best in guitar education.

<https://www.guitarfoundation.org/page/CertPrograms>