



Common Guitar Learning Myths

There are many myths around learning guitar. Here are some that are commonly heard, followed by what really happens in practice. In most cases it is the exact opposite of what you hear. Most other guitar- or music-related myths not mentioned here, are likewise, totally wrong.

You need to have rhythm (or be born with it) to play guitar.

Everyone is born with rhythm. For example, you going to bed at night and waking in the morning is a circadian rhythm, and that is one you are born with. Musical rhythm is something you are taught, you are not born with it, gifted with it, or get it naturally, or in any other way.

When you study music you will begin with simple rhythms to get started, and then progress onto more difficult ones. Yes, some simple rhythms are easy to pick up, but getting past the simple stage requires some serious study and lots of practice. Playing guitar is like most other things – the more time you put in, the more enjoyment you will get out of it.

The guitar is an easy instrument.

Most people think 'easy' means it can be learnt in five minutes, however, the guitar is not easy to master and playing it is very physical in nature. Still, it is not beyond anyone, with a bit of practice each day. You cannot rush the physical aspect of learning simply because your muscles will tell you otherwise, by being painful.

Because the guitar is one of few instruments where you can play chords, you will need to use every finger on your fretting hand to play them – which also takes time. Chords can be very difficult at all levels and the amount of time required to master them depends on how much time you put in.

You need lots of good luck to make it in music.

Luck has nothing to do with learning music or the guitar, I'm afraid. There is an old saying that goes, 'the harder you work and improve your musical abilities, the better your luck'. That goes with most things in life.

You need long, skinny fingers to play guitar well.

Most professional guitarists I know don't have long, skinny fingers. It really doesn't matter what your fingers are like, though it would help to have five of them of course.

I'd have to be a natural or born guitarist to...

There is no such thing as a natural guitar player or someone who is born with a guitar in

their hands. Some people have an advantage by coming from a musical family, but that is only an advantage, it doesn't make them a natural. To this day, I have never come across a natural and I don't know any other teachers who have. Of course some people learn quicker than others, but you will find that the quick learners are normally the ones who have a great teacher and spend more time practising.

Children learn faster than adults.

This myth may hold true in other areas, but is not true for music. It all depends on how motivated you are and how much time you put in. Children tend to have plenty of time to practice, whereas an adult has a job, mortgage, family, or whatever to think about so it is much easier to get distracted. Teenagers and adults learn quicker but tend to practice less unless they are highly organised and motivated.

It takes a lifetime to learn music.

It doesn't take a lifetime to have fun playing music with your friends. If you want to be one of the world's best it could take many years, but certainly not a lifetime if you do it right.

You need to have a good ear.

As with rhythm, you are not blessed with a good ear for music. You are taught rhythm and any good teacher will teach you all about improving your ear from beginner level right up to advanced levels. Amazingly enough, your caregivers teach you at a young age to use four of your senses (sight, taste, touch and smell), but don't teach you how to use your ears.

Nylon-stringed guitars are easier on your fingers.

They might feel easier on your hands when you begin, but your fingers have to harden up to play any guitar. The finger tips are soft to begin, but after a few weeks will harden up. Nylon string guitars are classical guitars, for playing classical types of music, so don't buy one if you intend to play rock, blues, jazz, etc.

Reading 'tab' is easier or better.

Guitarists who read tab never achieve much in the way of musical satisfaction. One reason could be that in any musical situation like bands, recording studios and the like, they only use real music notation and tab players tend to lack the discipline needed to become sought-after.

From a teaching point of view, tab readers don't learn rhythm, which is the backbone of music, and they also can't keep in time because they lack an ability to count time while playing.

Would you want to play with someone who can't keep in time or doesn't know rhythm?

Reading music is too hard.

This is one of the biggest myths for guitarists. When you see it for the first time it looks like a foreign language, and that is where the myth comes from, but I teach six-year old kids how to read music and they don't find it difficult. It is not beyond anyone no matter what age, but I recommend you get a teacher as it does make the transition from non-reader easier.

Not being able to read music puts you at a serious disadvantage in terms of being musically literate and is the number one downfall of many players. Music is a language and takes time to learn and digest, but it is not difficult.

Music is a 'soft' or easy subject.

Many people think that learning a musical skill is a waste of precious time, but in fact it is the opposite. It teaches you discipline, commitment, time management, people skills and many other skills, too numerous to mention here. Most of these are not skills caregivers teach you when you're growing up.

Employers often value the skills of talented musicians in their organisations precisely because of such skills.

It is best to play by ear.

Some guitarists say they play by ear, when in fact they play by sight. These are two different things. Playing by ear means you can hear something once, whether it is on a recording or an idea in your head, then immediately play it correctly on your guitar. Playing by sight means that have to witness someone showing it to you or read it from some form of music transcription like Tab, lyrics with chords over the top, YouTube, or music notation.

Professionals do need to be able to play by ear, but it is best achieved by following a graduated path of musical study, and part of that study involves ear training. After you have done an extensive amount of ear training, or aural training as some call it, you will be able to begin the process of really being able to play by ear.

To be able to improvise, or play by ear, up to very high standards, it is essential that you can read and understand music theory.

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