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# CHAPTER 1

## Getting Started

This chapter introduces the basic information that is essential for both understanding the guitar and communicating with other musicians. Like any field of endeavor, music has a vocabulary and a system that makes this understanding and communication easier.

Music is a language. Its alphabet is simple. It has only seven letters that are repeated again and again: A - B - C - D - E - F - G - A - B - C etc. Each letter represents a musical sound of a specific *pitch* (highness or lowness). We call these sounds *notes*. Note names recur every eight steps through the alphabet. The distance from a note to the next note with the same name is called an *octave*.

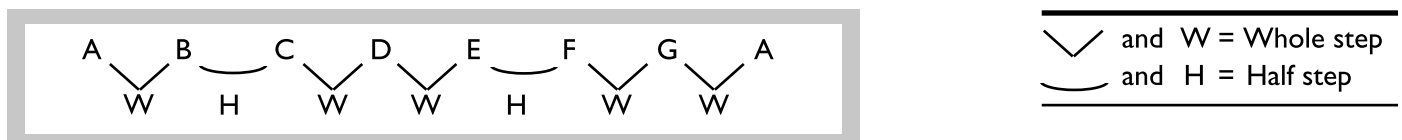
### THE GUITAR FINGERBOARD

#### HALF STEPS AND WHOLE STEPS

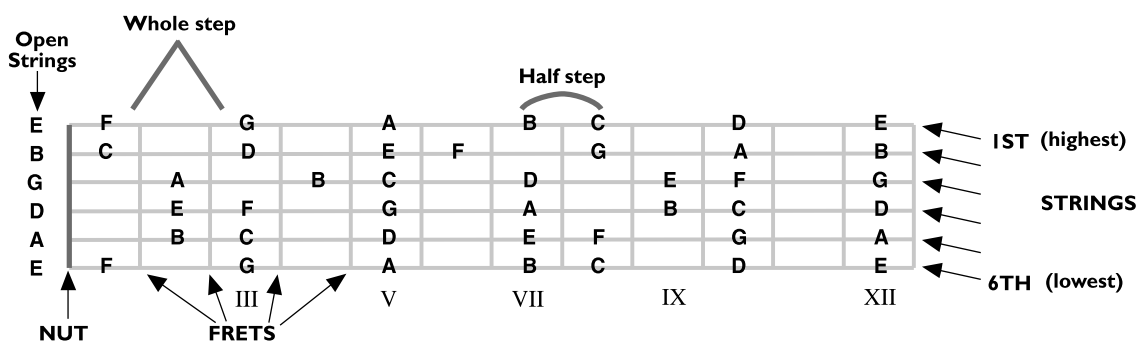
Our first order of business is to understand how the guitar fingerboard works and to learn how to find or name all of these notes on the neck. This is easy if we know about *half steps* and *whole steps*.

A half step is the distance from one fret to the next on the guitar. For instance, the distance from the 1st fret to the 2nd is one half step. This is the smallest *interval* (distance between two notes). Two half steps equal one whole step, which is a distance of two frets on the guitar. For instance, the distance from the 1st fret to the 3rd fret is a whole step.

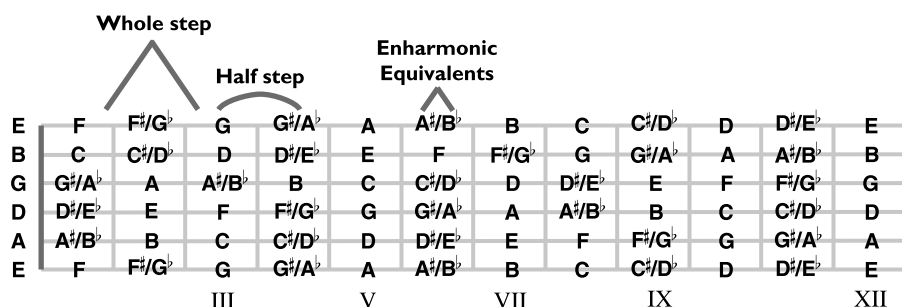
The arrangement of whole steps and half steps in the musical alphabet is as follows:



Here is where all of the notes in the musical alphabet—the *natural notes*—are found on the guitar.



You have probably noticed the blank, unnamed frets on the fingerboard in the diagram on page 6. These are filled with *sharp* and *flat* notes. These are also called *accidentals* or *chromatic tones*. When a sharp  $\sharp$  is placed in front of a note, the note is raised one half step (one fret). For example,  $F^\sharp$  is one fret higher than F. When a flat  $\flat$  is placed in front of a note, the note is lowered one half step (one fret). For example,  $G^\flat$  is one fret lower than G. You will notice that  $F^\sharp$  and  $G^\flat$  fall on the same fret. Two notes which sound the same (played on the same fret), but are given different letter names, are termed *enharmonic equivalents*. Every sharped or flatted note has an enharmonic equivalent.



## THE CHROMATIC SCALE

The chromatic scale contains all of the natural and chromatic tones. It is composed of half steps. Familiarity with this scale will help you learn the notes on the neck.

A	$A^\sharp$	B	C	$C^\sharp$	D	$D^\sharp$	E	F	$F^\sharp$	G	$G^\sharp$
	or			or		or			or		or
	$B^\flat$			$D^\flat$		$E^\flat$			$G^\flat$		$A^\flat$

As you can see, the distance from one note to the next in the scale is always one half step. Also, if you start at any point and count up twelve half steps, you will arrive on the same note name you started with. There are twelve half steps in an octave.

Here is an example of how you can use this information to learn the notes on the guitar:

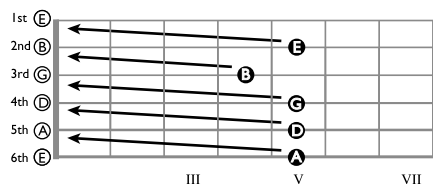
*What note is on the 6th fret of the 6th string?*

Refer to the fingerboard chart above. The open 6th string is an E. Find E in the chromatic scale and count up six half steps (six frets) starting with F (the note after E). You will arrive at the 6th fret and  $A^\sharp/B^\flat$ . Remember, every chromatic note has two names.

## TUNING



There are many ways to get the guitar into standard tuning. Most beginning players tune by comparing the open string to the 5th fret of the next lower string. This works for every string except the 2nd string. To tune the 2nd string, compare it to the 4th fret of the 3rd string.



Use a tuning fork or piano to make sure you are tuning to standard concert pitch (A440). Tuning can be greatly simplified by using an electronic tuner, but it is important to train your ear. Any musician must be able to hear when their instrument is out of tune.