Note Finder

Most people spend years playing the guitar without actually being able to name the notes past the first five frets. However the fretboard is not that enigmatic and with a few simple key-points and this exercise, within a few months we can learn all the notes on the guitar neck comfortably.

Firstly, let's look at the neck. There are literally hundreds of guitar diagrams on the internet that chart every single note in various colours. To be honest, I cannot remember finding these that useful when I was learning but feel free to check them out.

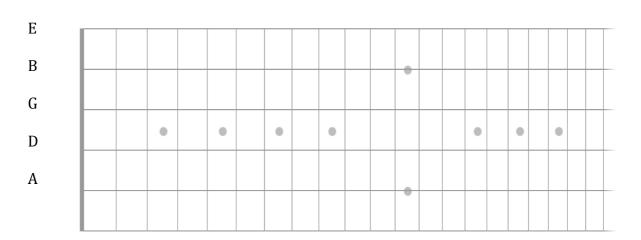
However, we will be using this exercise I simply call "the note finder". It works because it makes you think through the notes and work them out rather than just looking them up on a sheet. In my own experience I have found that information gained easily is often lost easily- An example of this is that I often memorise more technically challenging pieces better than I do easy pieces simply because I have had to spend more time and attention on them. This is of course anecdotal but you can make your own minds up as you learn and study the guitar!

The dots on the guitar are worth noting. The fret with two dots on electrics and most acoustics, (sometimes just one or even none, on a classical), is the 12^{th} fret. On sheet music this is often represented as roman numerals- xii).

The 12th fret is exactly half way between the nut (where the strings meet the head of the guitar) and the saddle/bridge.

The 12^{th} fret is exactly one octave above the open string. So the 12^{th} fret on the E string is E an octave higher. The 12^{th} fret on the A string is A an octave higher, and so on.

Now this immediately cuts the neck in half in terms of working the notes out! Lets look at the other dots. Due to styles of different makes, guitars sometimes vary in this respect but most follow the pattern below.



The first dot on the neck in this diagram (from left to right) marks the 3rd fret. If we play the 3rd fret on the low E string it gives us the note G. Play it now. The first dot *after* the 12^{th} fret on the same string also gives us a G but an octave higher (this is the 15^{th} fret). Play this and listen to the two notes in turn.

The second dot on the diagram marks the 5th fret. This would be an A on the low E string. Play this now. The fret with the second dot *after* the 12th fret would give us the same note, A, but an octave higher. Play this and listen to the two notes in turn.

And so on.

Look at the tab in the Note Finder download. Set a metronome to 50 or 60 bpm. Now playing semibreves (1 note per bar). Try and play two E's on each string. This will not be possible on every string on some guitars- Classicals for example. But play any that are there, even if they are really high up. If you have to start without a metronome that is not a problem, but once you can find them all, start trying with a metronome.

Spend a week doing this for a few minutes every day as a warm-up and you will soon see improvements. The trick is to keep looking ahead- as soon as you have struck one note, you should be looking for the next E, always at least one step ahead of your hands.

After the first week, try finding all the F's on the guitar. This is made significantly easier because you now know all the E's as a point of reference. F is one semitone, or one fret, higher than E.

When you have done this, try finding the G's. Again, use the previous note as a reference. G is one full tone, or two frets, above the F.

Do not rush this exercise, instead use it as a nice relaxed warm-up. Always start with E, then F, then G, until after several weeks you have gone through all the notes- E,F,G,A,B,C,D, and back round to E. Always using the previous week's note as a reference for the next note.

So the first week- E. Second week- E, F. Third week- E, F, G And so on...

Aim for lovely tone on each note, avoid fret buzz or pressing too hard. This gets us used to the different tension and tones all over the neck.

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Ten Minute Tech

Note Finder

See "Note Finder Intro" download for explanation

