



Positioned for Success

How do you hold a guitar? Short answer... you shouldn't. Instead, consider positioning the guitar. This may seem like semantics, but there is a real difference. Playing the guitar well requires an understanding of the instrument's physics and our human physiology. An efficient and healthy technique comes about when these two align.

There are many guitar methods on the market, but there doesn't seem to be much consistency on this topic. In fact, some books suggest one way to hold a steel string guitar, another for electric, and yet another for classical. Method books, pop culture, and YouTube videos leave students with mixed signals. Your students look to you for answers, so what do you model and why?

In my opinion, it comes down to an order of priorities:

Injury Prevention: Playing a musical instrument is a lifelong endeavor. It is important to position the guitar and your body in a manner that minimizes the potential for repetitive motion injuries. In short, all the joints should be in a mid-range of motion; not in an extended or flexed position.

Technical Facilitation/Stability: The guitar should be positioned so that the player has access to the entire fingerboard without contorting the body. In addition, the guitar must

be stable. Can you imagine playing a piano that is rolling around on the floor? Many beginning students position their guitars in ways that allow the instrument to move with every note or chord that is pressed by the left hand. This makes it difficult to develop a firm technical foundation.

Comfort/Relaxation: Comfort is perhaps best described as not being uncomfortable. Sitting upright in a chair is not the most comfortable position, but it is not uncomfortable. The most relaxed state for the human being is lying down in bed. This does little for technical facilitation.

To better understand guitar position, it is important to consider how we position ourselves without the guitar.

Step One: Without the Guitar

Relax your shoulders, turn your left palm facing forward and swing your arm from the elbow to approximately a 90-degree angle.

Swing your right arm to the left from the elbow so that your hand is in front of your stomach. Again at about a 90-degree angle.



Without Guitar

Guitar Council Dr. Kevin Vigil, Chair

Step Two: Positioning the Guitar

Bring the guitar to you. Do not change your body to accommodate the instrument. It doesn't matter what type of guitar you play, your body position is the priority.

When you position the guitar without changing your body, you may find that the neck is below your left hand. This is when some type of device is usually necessary.



Footstool, Strap and Guitar Support

Using a device is a great way to customize your relation with the instrument.

In general, the angle of the neck should be about 45 degrees. This will give the left hand full access to the fingerboard without contortion.

Examples of Guitar Position with Devices



*Electric Guitar, Standing with a Strap
(continued on next page)*

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Classical Guitar, Sitting with a Guitar Support



Steel String, Standing with a Strap



View from a Different Angle

Whether you play electric, steel string or classical guitar, standing or sitting, the position should be consistent. When you bring the guitar to your body, you are positioned for success.

For a more thorough (2018) discussion on this topic, I highly recommend, *Playing with Ease, A Healthy Approach to Guitar Technique* by David Leisner, published by Oxford University Press.



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