

A few personal opinions in choosing a good guitar.

A good guitar does not necessarily have to be too expensive but it is going to be pretty hard to find any great degree of excellence in something that would be only a little more money than what you might spend if you went out for one night to see a professional sporting event or even for a meal at a fancy restaurant. Students with lesser quality instruments may have struggled through Guitar Fundamentals Primer with some success but what greets you in this book is going to be tough enough that you should not have the quality of the instrument impeding your progress.

Acoustic instruments: The most common body shape for a "flat-top" guitar is the dreaded "dreadnaught." For most youngsters, these guitars are too large. I would suggest something more along the size of a "classical" guitar. It does not have to be an actual classical (nylon string) guitar but something about that size. An acoustic guitar with a more pronounced "waist" line tends to be easier to hold when playing seated. The dreadnaught body shape is cumbersome at best.

Electric instruments: The most common body shape is the "Fender-Stratocaster" body style. There is nothing particularly wrong with that but the "Telecaster" body style in fact, sits better in your lap if you are playing "sitting down." The body size on some famous solid body electrics is so small that it feels like a "two egg frying pan." While these guitars might be very playable in a standing position, they are hard to play comfortably when seated. Some thin body acoustic electrics are pretty good but often suffer the same problems as the dreaded dreadnaught in that the lower bout is extremely wide. Full sized jazz guitars run into similar problems.

Purchase the guitar from a reputable dealer rather than at the local big box store. Be ready to spend a few extra dollars to get something that is readily adjustable for string action. If the guitar is well made, any necessary adjustments are going to be very small.

The frets on the instrument must be high enough that you do not have to press the string down to the wood of the fretboard. I have seen some good guitars with very shallow frets which in my opinion makes them hard to play even if the string action is set to a fine tolerance.

A slightly wider neck on a guitar does not make things more difficult. One only has to get the left hand "on" to the fretboard. The left hand does not have to go around the neck like holding a base ball bat or a hockey stick.

A high gloss finish on a guitar makes it more impervious to dirt and also it will not slip around as much. A low luster finish on the guitar is hard to keep clean and the guitar will feel as if it is sliding around in your lap.

Mostly, the guitar should be a comfortable size for the player and the string action must be highly refined meaning that string height at the fretboard should be minimal from the first to the twelfth fret. Lots of well made instruments come out of the factory with less than stellar action. Refining the action takes patience and a fair bit of time and unless you know what you are doing, I would suggest you have the set-up done by a professional.

Good guitars are manufactured all around the world. Poorly made instruments also are made all over the world including North America. Sometimes, poorly made guitars are manufactured right along with the well made ones in the same factory.

Name brand instruments are usually better than the no-name ones. On the other hand, many "name-brand" companies have secondary lines of instruments that are not as good as the "real thing."

Try not to fall prey to sales gimmicks and pitches. A mediocre guitar is going to be exactly that, regardless of how much sales effort has gone into convincing you that it is a remarkable instrument.

An interesting side note to electric guitar technology and such is that they were invented more than 50 years ago and have not changed a whole lot in that time. However, in the last 50 years or so, people have generally gotten quite a bit taller so they have outgrown the comfortable size of the small solid body instruments. It amazes me to see a 6'3" guy playing a guitar that was invented for a player who was only maybe 5'7" or so. The ergonomics seem to be wrong. (G.A.)