

Now here's a topic that gets guitar teachers talking—how old should a child be to start guitar lessons, and how do you effectively teach students under age ten? Through an online survey we posed a series of questions about teaching guitar to kids, and within a few days more than 900 teachers had shared their views. Not surprisingly, the respondents have differing ideas and methods but also plenty of common ground—especially a true dedication to lighting the fire of music in young students.

—*Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers*

Do you teach guitar to children under age ten?



If yes, in which settings do you teach young children?

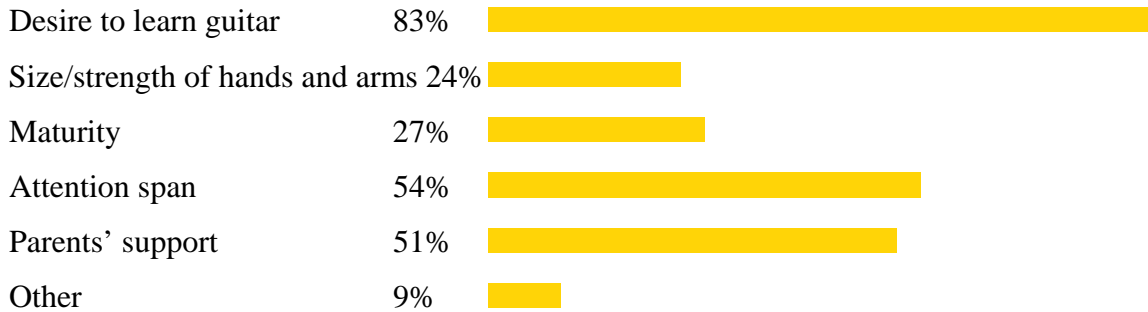


What is the earliest age at which a child should begin guitar lessons?

Average	Median	Low	High
7	7	1	10

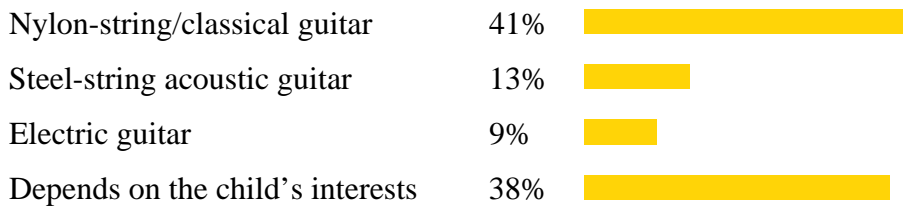
Note that the survey requested an age between 1 and 10, but some respondents felt that 12 or 13 was a more appropriate answer. Others abstained, arguing that the right age for lessons depends entirely on the child.

What are the most important factors in determining a child's readiness for lessons?

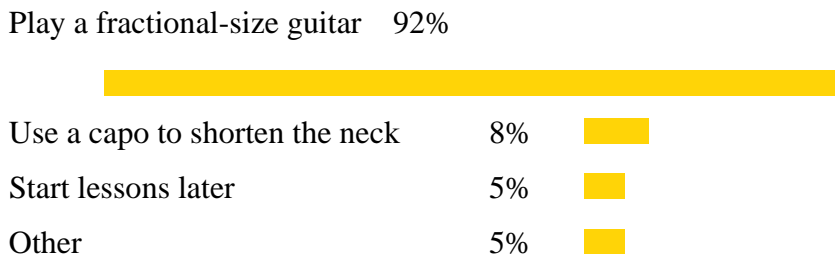


Other factors cited included patience, access to a suitable instrument, and the ability to read.

Which type of instrument is best for a young beginner?

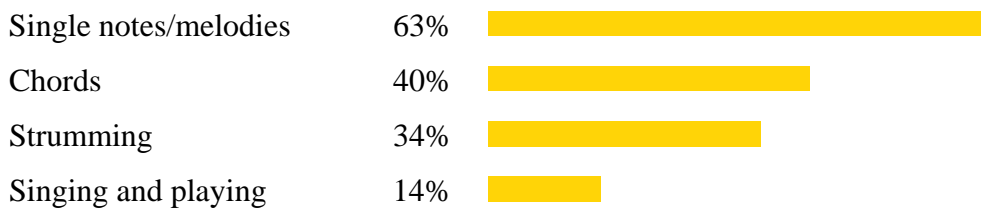


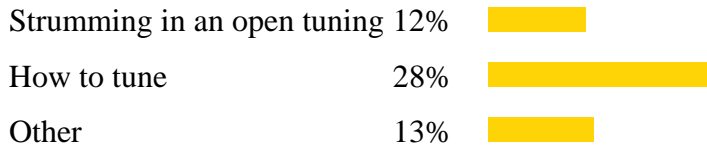
If you believe a child is too small for a standard-sized guitar, what do you recommend?



The most common additional recommendations were to play ukulele, or to start with piano instead.

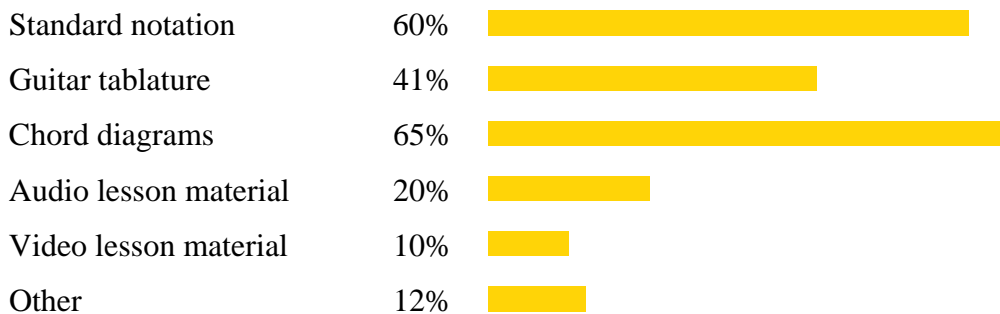
Which techniques should children learn in their first lessons?





Other topics covered in the first lessons include the parts of the guitar, basic instrument care, and how to hold the guitar comfortably.

Which of the following do you use with young children?



Several teachers use Suzuki ear-training exercises and various types of imitation games. Some place dots on the fingerboard as a learning aid.

Which specific educational programs or published methods do you use with guitar students under age ten?

About a third of the teachers who responded to this question use no published materials or write their own. For those who do teach with published methods, here are some series designed for all ages that received numerous mentions: Mel Bay's *Modern Guitar Method*, Hal Leonard's *Guitar Method* and *Essential Elements for Guitar*, Alfred's *Basic Guitar Method*, *Berklee Basic Guitar: Phase One* (Berklee/Hal Leonard), *21st Century Guitar* (Warner/Alfred), and *The Acoustic Guitar Method* (String Letter/Hal Leonard).

Among methods designed specifically for kids, popular choices included Dick Bennett's *Guitar for the Small Fry* (Beacon), Mel Bay's *Children's Guitar Method*, the *Suzuki Guitar School* series (Summy-Birchard), Jessica Baron Turner's *SmartStart Guitar* (Hal Leonard), Sonia Michelson's *New Dimensions in Classical Guitar for*

Children (Mel Bay), Alfred's *Kid's Guitar Course* and *Girl's Guitar Method*, *FJH Young Beginner Guitar Method* (FJH), and Childbloom curriculum (www.childbloom.com).

At the close of the survey we asked for comments on any aspect of teaching guitar to young children that wasn't covered in the above questions. In these responses, there were some recurring pieces of advice:

- * Make it fun!
- * Keep it short (15 to 30 minutes per lesson).
- * Be patient.
- * Use familiar songs that kids want to learn (Cartoon Network themes, anyone?).
- * Involve the parents. Many teachers require that parents sit in on lessons, so they can help kids practice at home.

SPEAK UP

In each issue we'll survey readers about key aspects of teaching, both practical and pedagogical. If you'd like to be included in future surveys, make sure we have your current email address on file by visiting www.guitarteachermagazine.com and clicking on the Subscribe button, where you'll be directed to our Subscriber Services page. You'll also find results from past surveys, as well as links to new surveys, on the Teachers Talk page. To suggest topics, email editors.gt@stringletter.com. Let's talk.