Monthly and One-Year Course of Study (Structured Study Plan) for a Beginning Classical Guitarist

I'm a beginner. How do I get started playing classical guitar?

This outline is for guitarists of average ability, practicing 30 minutes per day. Progress will be faster for more talented players or those with more time to practice.

If you are an absolute beginner classical guitarist, start learning with an experienced classical guitar teacher in person, using a suitable guitar method book. Here are some suggestions:

1. A Modern Approach to Classical Guitar Book 1 (Charles Duncan)
2. Cornerstone Method for Classical Guitar Grade 1 (Simon Powis)
3. Classical Guitar Method Volume 1 (Bradford Werner)
4. Christopher Parkening Guitar Method (Christopher Parkening)
5. Scott Tennant's Basic Classical Guitar Method, Book 1 (Scott Tennant)
6. Classical Guitar Technique Volume 1 (Aaron Shearer)

Use one or several of those method books and follow this suggested course of study:

MONTH #1—Weeks 1-4

Learn the classical guitar sitting position and how to hold the guitar.

Learn to tune the guitar with an electronic tuner.

Learn the right-hand position.

Practice playing the open strings first. Learn to play free stroke and rest stroke. Be able to use the "i" (index), "m" (middle), and "a" (ring) fingers in various patterns, alternating the fingers.

Next, practice playing the open bass strings. Play them free stroke with the right-hand thumb.

If the student wants to use the fingernails to pluck the strings, learn how to shape the fingernails and how to use them to pluck a string.

MONTH #2—Weeks 5-8

Learn about musical notation: clefs, staff, ledger lines, note stems, note heads, note flags and beams, bar lines, measures, repeat signs, notation of meter, chromatic signs, note values, ties, slurs, left and right-hand fingering notation, etc.

Learn what the first three (treble) open strings look like in musical notation.

Learn to read and play open-string studies on the treble strings using rest and free stroke with various patterns, alternating the fingers. Be sure the studies cover various meters (4/4, 3/4, 6/8, 2/4) and mixed rhythms of eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, and dotted notes. **Important: be able to count the rhythms out loud.**

Learn what the open bass strings look like in musical notation.

Learn to read and play open-string studies on the bass strings using free stroke. Be sure the studies use various meters (4/4, 3/4, 6/8, 2/4) and mixed rhythms of eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, and dotted notes. **Important: be able to count the rhythms out loud.**

Play basic arpeggio patterns on open strings with the fingers only and then in combination with the thumb.

If the student wants to use the fingernails to pluck the strings, learn how to shape the fingernails and how to use them to pluck a string.

MONTH #3—Weeks 9-12

Learn the left-hand position.

Learn the notes on the first string (first four frets).

Play a chromatic scale on the first string from open to the 4th fret and back.

Play studies using the notes on the 1st string (open through the 4th fret) and the open bass strings. The studies should: Use various meters (4/4, 3/4, 6/8, 2/4) and mixed rhythms of eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, and dotted notes. **Important: be able to count the rhythms out loud.**

- Focus first on the 1st string only.
- Combine the notes on the 1st string with the open bass strings.
- Use rest and free stroke with the fingers but free stroke with the thumb.
- Learn to follow right-hand fingerings.

If the student wants to use the fingernails to pluck the strings, learn how to shape the fingernails and how to use them to pluck a string.

EXERCISES:

- **The Press-Release Exercise—Part 1**
- **The Press-Release Exercise—Part 2**
- **The Switching Exercise—Basic and Advanced Version**
- **The Chromatic Scale—Left Hand Alone on All Strings in 5th Position**
- **The Chromatic Scale—Both Hands Together on All Strings in 5th Position**

MONTH #3—Weeks 13-16

Learn the notes on the 2nd and 3rd strings (open through the 4th fret).

Play a chromatic scale on each string from open to the 4th fret and back.

Play studies using the notes on the 1st string, 2nd string, 3rd string, and the open bass strings. The studies should: Use various meters (4/4, 3/4, 6/8, 2/4) and mixed rhythms of eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, and dotted notes. **Important: be able to count the rhythms out loud.**

- Focus first on the 2nd string only.
- Then, focus on the 3rd string only.
- Next, focus on the first three strings mixed together.
- Combine the notes on the first three strings with the open bass strings.
- Use rest and free stroke with the fingers but free stroke with the thumb.
- Include basic arpeggios with simple left-hand chord changes.
- Learn to follow right-hand fingerings.
- Focus on right-hand string crossings (switching from one string to another).

Introduce reading music in two parts.

Introduce reading music with sharps, flats, and naturals.

If the student wants to use the fingernails to pluck the strings, learn how to shape the fingernails and how to use them to pluck a string.

EXERCISES:

- **The Switching Exercise—Basic and Advanced Version**
- **The Chromatic Scale—Left Hand Alone on All Strings in 5th Position**
- **The Chromatic Scale—Both Hands Together on All Strings in 5th Position**
- **NEW: The Hopping Exercise**
- **NEW: The Plant 2-Move 2 Exercise**

MONTH #4—Weeks 17-18

Learn the notes on the 4th string (first four frets).

Learn the chromatic scale on the 4th string from open to the 4th fret and back.

Play studies using the notes on the 1st string, 2nd string, 3rd string, 4th string, and the open bass strings. The studies should: Use various meters (4/4, 3/4, 6/8, 2/4) and mixed rhythms of eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, and dotted notes. **Important: be able to count the rhythms out loud.**

- Focus first on the 4th string only.
- Combine the notes on the first four strings with the 5th and 6th open strings.
- Play studies and simple pieces that use rest and free stroke with the fingers but free stroke with the thumb.
- Include basic arpeggios with simple left-hand chord changes.

Introduce eighth-note triplet rhythms.

MONTH #4—Weeks 19-20

Learn the notes on the 5th string (first four frets).

Learn the chromatic scale on the 5th string from open to the 4th fret and back.

Play studies using the notes on the 1st string, 2nd string, 3rd string, 4th string, 5th string, and the open sixth string. The studies should: Use various meters (4/4, 3/4, 6/8, 2/4) and mixed rhythms of eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, and dotted notes. **Important: be able to count the rhythms out loud.**

- Focus first on the 5th string only.
- Combine the notes on the first five strings with the open 6th string.
- Play studies and pieces that use rest and free stroke with the fingers but free stroke with the thumb.
- Include basic arpeggios with more challenging left-hand chord changes.

EXERCISES:

- **The Switching Exercise—Basic and Advanced Version**
- **The Chromatic Scale—Left Hand Alone on All Strings in 5th Position**
- **The Chromatic Scale—Both Hands Together on All Strings in 5th Position**
- **The Hopping Exercise**
- **The Plant 2-Move 2 Exercise**

MONTH #5—Weeks 21-24

Learn the notes on the 6th string (first four frets).

Learn the chromatic scale on the 6th string from open to the 4th fret and back.

Focus on studies using the notes on the **bass strings only** in various meters (4/4, 3/4, 6/8, 2/4) and mixed rhythms of eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, and dotted notes.
Important: be able to count the rhythms out loud.

- Then, play studies and pieces incorporating the notes on all six strings.
- Learn a variety of right-hand arpeggio patterns with challenging but not difficult left-hand chord changes.
- Learn basic diatonic and chromatic scales in first position.
- Begin learning the spider exercise and "switcharoo" studies to improve left-hand finger independence and mobility.
- Continue to focus on following written-in right-hand fingerings.

EXERCISES:

- **The Switching Exercise—Basic and Advanced Version**
- **The Chromatic Scale—Left Hand Alone on All Strings in 5th Position**
- **The Chromatic Scale—Both Hands Together on All Strings in 5th Position**
- **The Hopping Exercise**
- **The Plant 2-Move 2 Exercise**

MONTH #6—Weeks 25-28

Begin learning the common "folk guitar" open chords in first position. Learn how they are constructed and be able to recognize them in easy pieces.

Begin learning simple studies by Carulli, Aguado, Sor, Giuliani, and Carcassi.

The following and many other method books will contain many easy pieces to learn.

1. A Modern Approach to Classical Guitar Book 1 (Charles Duncan)
2. Cornerstone Method for Classical Guitar Grade 1 (Simon Powis)
3. Classical Guitar Method Volume 1 (Bradford Werner)
4. Christopher Parkening Guitar Method (Christopher Parkening)
5. Scott Tennant's Basic Classical Guitar Method, Book 1 (Scott Tennant)
6. Classical Guitar Technique Volume 1 (Aaron Shearer)

EXERCISES:

- **The Switching Exercise—Basic and Advanced Version**
- **The Chromatic Scale—Left Hand Alone on All Strings in 5th Position**
- **The Chromatic Scale—Both Hands Together on All Strings in 5th Position**
- **The Hopping Exercise**
- **The Plant 2-Move 2 Exercise**

MONTHS #7-12—Weeks 29-52

As you progress through one or more basic method books over several months, you'll gradually build the skills and knowledge necessary to tackle more challenging beginner-level pieces. These could be compositions by renowned classical guitar composers such as Carcassi, Carulli, Giuliani, Tárrega, and Sor.

Here are some easy pieces from Charles Duncan's excellent book, "A Modern Approach to Classical Guitar, Part One":

- Allegretto (Fernando Sor)
- Scottish Dance (Écossaise in A minor, Op. 33, No. 10) (Mauro Giuliani)
- Moderato (Fernando Sor)
- Allegretto (Fernando Sor)
- Waltz in G (Ferdinando Carulli)
- English Dance (Ferdinando Carulli)

And here are some additional pieces you can find in "Easy Classical Guitar Volume 1" (Simon Powis) and other sources:

- Andantino, Opus 241, No. 5 (Ferdinando Carulli)
- Walze, Opus 241, No. 21 (Ferdinando Carulli)
- Andante, Opus 35, No. 1 (Fernando Sor)
- Allegretto, Opus 80, No. 6 (Joseph Kuffner)
- Allegro, Op. 50, No. 13 (Mauro Giuliani)
- Allegretto, Op. 50, No. 12 (Mauro Giuliani)

If you are interested in more modern, contemporary easy pieces, try these by Andrew York:

- Six Easy Pieces
- 4 in A in 4

- Eight Discernments

EXERCISES AT THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR OF STUDY:

- **NEW: Odair's Favorite Drill (easy version)**
- **NEW: The Switcharoo Exercise (opposing finger motions)**
- **NEW: The Spider Exercise**

Throughout the Year:

- Regular daily practice routine. Start with 30 minutes and gradually increase to one hour per day.
- Listen to classical guitar recordings
- Learn and carry out instrument maintenance (string changing, cleaning)

Study with a Teacher

If you cannot find a private, in-person guitar instructor, these are excellent websites for online classical guitar instruction for beginners:

- Classical Guitar Corner (Simon Powis)
- This is Classical Guitar (Bradford Werner)
- Classical Guitar Shed (Allen Mathews)
- Tonebase.co. Tonebase has many teachers, some of whom are famous guitarists. They have beginning to advanced lessons, but the quality of instruction varies greatly.