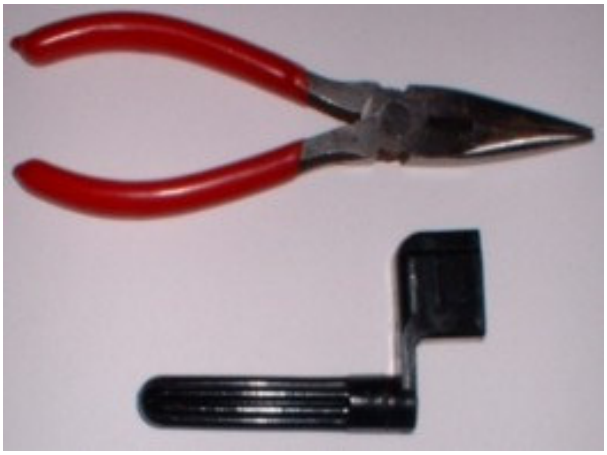
Changing Strings

Guitar strings should be changed about every six months. Changing strings on a guitar often seems rather complicated to most beginning guitar players. It even seems a little bit scary as most beginners are afraid to tighten the strings up and risk breaking them. A little bit of caution goes a long way in this regard.

Here in this lesson, I will go over the basic steps of changing the strings on your guitar and give a tip for getting them to stay in tune.



To start with, I recommend that you only change one string at a time. This is how I do it and I think it helps. That way, if you get interrupted, you can still play your guitar.

Before you start, there are some tools to have on hand that will make things a little easier. These tools are a string winder and a pair of needle-nose pliers.

Because most guitars have steel strings, that is what I'll focus on for this discussion.

Step 1: I usually start with the low E string. The first thing to do is to remove the old string and dispose of it.

Step 2: Take the new string out of the package and make sure that the string you have is the one you want to replace. Sets of strings come in square envelopes. When you remove the strings from the envelope, they are usually either all packaged together in another envelope or bag, or they are each packaged in their own envelope inside the main one. Those that are packaged in their own envelopes usually have the string gage and pitch printed on the envelope. The others are either labeled individually with little tags or some have different color "balls" on the ends that correspond to a chart on the main envelope.



Step 3a: There will be a hole in the bridge of your guitar that the old string was threaded through. Thread the new string through that hole and pull it tight so that the "ball" end is snug against the bridge. Most electric guitars thread the string through the body of the guitar, while acoustic guitars (and some electrics) will only thread the string through the bridge.







If your guitar has nylon strings, there are nylon string sets available that have a "ball end". If the nylon strings you are using do not have a "ball" end, then you can tie a knot in one end and use that as the "ball."

Step 3b: Most acoustic guitars will have round pins in the bridge that hold the string in place. String winders come equipped with a rounded slot on one end that is designed for removing these pins.



After putting the ball end of the new string into the hole, replace the pin and use the string winder or the pliers to press it firmly back into place.

Step 4: Run the free end of the string up the neck to the nut and through the hole in the tuning key and pull it tight.



Don't worry about pulling too tight right now, just pull it tight enough that the string will stay in its slot in the nut.

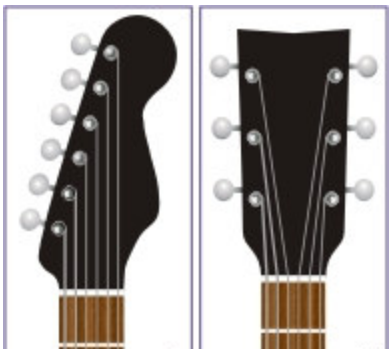
Step 5: Pay attention to whether the string is "plain" or "wound". The three lowest pitched strings (low E, A, D) will always be wound strings. You can tell they are wound by looking at them closely and noticing that they seem to be a string, with wire wound tightly around it. The two highest pitched strings (B & high E) will nearly always be plain. These do not have a wire wound around the string and are much thinner than the wound strings. The third string (G) will usually be plain, but <u>some</u> acoustic guitar sets will use a wound string for this one as well. If the string you are working on is plain, then you will want to loop the string around the tuning key and put the end back through the hole again. This will help stop the string from slipping. The hole is usually not big enough for you to do this with wound strings, and they usually don't slip as easily anyway, so don't do this with wound strings. Instead, what I do with the wound strings on my guitars is I bend them around the back side of the tuning key. This usually does the trick.

Step 6: Put the string winder over the part of the tuning key that you use to tighten or loosen the strings and use the handle to turn the tuning key to tighten up the slack on the string.





You need pay attention and make sure that the string is winding around the tuning key the right direction. You want the string to wind to the side that is most straight to the slot in the nut.



Play one of the strings next to the one you are tightening and use your ear to tell when you're getting close to the right pitch. While you are winding the string up to pitch, you may hear it drop pitch dramatically even, though you are tightening he string. This is perfectly normal and nothing to get worried about or frustrated with, just go with it. When you're close to the target pitch, take the string winder off the tuning key and use your fingers to finish tuning it up to pitch, using your electric tuner.

Step 7: Move on to the next string and repeat steps 1 through 6 for each string.

Step 8: Use the needle-nose pliers to clip the excess string off at the tuning keys.

Tips for getting new strings to stay in tune and prolonging the life of your new strings:

New strings need to stretch before they will stay in tune very well. This stretching happens naturally over time as you play the guitar, but that can take weeks if you don't play very often.

There is, however, a way to speed things up a bit. After you get the string up to normal pitch, grab it with your hand and yank it around.





Don't get too rough, but give the string a good vigorous work out. Then tune it back up and do it again. If you tune it up and yank it around and it stays in tune, yank it again and see if stays again. I usually keep at this until I can yank it and it stays in tune at least three times in a row. Sometimes this takes quite a while, and sometimes it happens quickly. If you can grab that string and yank it hard and it stays in tune, then it is very unlikely that anything you do while you're playing will cause it to go out of tune later. Your strings will probably still go out of tune a little bit every now and then, but this should take care of the worst of it and make future adjustments small.

The bad news on this is for guitars with nylon strings. Although this tip will work fairly well for wound strings, it won't work as well as it does for steel strings, and it doesn't work very well at all for the higher pitched nylon strings. In a set of nylon strings, although the wound strings do have a wire wound around the core, the core is a fiber thread, not a plain steel string like in a steel string set. So even though this technique does get some of the stretching out of the wire that is wound around the core, it doesn't do very much for the core itself. I still recommend doing this, as it does have some limited beneficial effect. But in the end, the only thing that really stretches nylon strings is playing them. When I change the nylon strings on my classical guitar, I usually play on the strings, tuning often, for about a half hour to help them settle in a bit. I will usually have to tune the strings often for the next week or so before the strings begin to stay in tune between practice sessions.

With steel strings, on my electric guitars, I can usually change the strings in a half hour, stretching included, and then have them stay in tune for months with only slight adjustments necessary in between practices.

This lesson is just the basics of changing strings and is by now means an exhaustive discussion on the topic. The steps presented here are nearly universal to all modern guitars and there are so many variables involved with going into more detail that I could write a small book about it and still leave some things out.

In general, your guitar strings should be changed every six to nine months. After strings get to be a certain age, they will often stop staying in tune very well, as if they were new again. If this starts happening, then consider changing the strings. Also, if you feel like your guitar is sounding dull and lifeless, consider changing your strings then, as well. New strings will almost always sound brighter than old strings.

Also, string life can be greatly reduced by not keeping your strings and fretboard clean. Always wash your hands before you play, and it is recommended to wipe the strings and fretboard off with a clean, soft cloth after playing. Do not use a cloth that leaves pieces of lint behind on the guitar.

Follow these steps and tips and you will be an expert at changing your guitar strings in no time!