

Learning the guitar is a very rewarding form of musical learning, and the selection of a child's first instrument also plays a big part in their experience. Therefore, it is important to consider carefully before purchasing that first guitar. The best piece of advice is to, when possible, consult with your guitar teacher via the practice diary, as to their preferences and recommendations. But here is some basic advice on what to look for:

Selecting the type of guitar

Guitars come in several different types. The most obvious difference, of course, is between electric and acoustic guitars. The other main difference is the type of strings on the instrument.



Nylon String Acoustic



Steel String Acoustic



Electric Guitar

Assuming for now that we're not considering an electric guitar, there are two main types of acoustic guitar: Nylon String (or 'Classical' guitar) & Steel String (or 'Western' guitar) [note that they do look quite similar].

We generally recommend that a beginner start on a nylon string guitar. Mainly because they tend to be cheaper, and the nylon strings are a little bit easier on young fingers. For example, you can get a reasonable beginner nylon string guitar for about £50-60, going up to something very good for higher grade levels for £200-£300. The main problem with starting on a steel string guitar is that the cheaper instruments can be very difficult to play, and if the strings aren't cleaned and regularly changed they corrode, which is very unpleasant to play on.

NOTE: the difference in these guitars is not just the strings. The entire construction of the guitar is geared towards the significantly different tensions that the materials put on the instruments. Therefore, *never* try to change between types of strings; especially *never* put steel strings on a nylon string (classical) guitar.

Selecting the size

Thankfully, size isn't quite as crucial on guitar as it is with some other instruments (e.g. violin), but if the instrument is *too* big for the student, they will struggle to play with correct posture and technique. A good guitar shop assistant should be able to help with sizing but, as a general rule, *most* key stage 2 (yrs. 3-6) students will be fine with a $\frac{3}{4}$ size guitar, unless they are particularly small or large for their age. Younger than that you should try a $\frac{1}{2}$ size. A year 5 or 6 student who is beginning may be able to go straight to full-size.

Choose your budget

Our experience is that nylon-string guitars that are less than £50 retail value tend to be of substandard quality which can include a jagged and uncomfortable fingerboard, cheap tuning mechanisms which make tuning difficult, or bridges & necks not secured to the body properly which leads to 'lifting' (making the instrument increasingly difficult to play). You won't go wrong with a tried and tested brand like Yamaha, whose C40 classical guitar (c. £120) is a very good quality beginner-intermediate instrument, but there are cheaper brands that are fine for a beginner. The advice you receive from a reputable music shop, paired with the ability to try out the instrument first, can prove very worthwhile, rather than ordering from an online catalogue and hoping for the best.

Clip-on guitar tuner



Get a Tuner

You will need to decide how you're going to tune the instrument. The most common solution is to purchase an electronic tuner. There are models now available for around £10 which clip on to the headstock of the guitar and tell you whether to tune up (tighten) or tune down (loosen) the string to achieve the correct pitch. There are also many guitar tuner apps available for free for smart phones. Some of these include: GuitarTuna, Fender Tune, Tuner Eclipse, etc.

We wish your child all the very best as they embark on the exciting and rewarding adventure of learning a musical instrument.