

# **What To Look For In A Guitar Instructor**

**27 Things That Matter  
and  
3 That Don't**

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A quick note for those of you who are gender or politically correctness sensitive:

I have used “he”, “him”, etc., instead of “he or she”, “him or her”, etc., to keep the text flowing. Please do not take this as any sort of slight against female Guitar Instructors. It would be great to see more of them in this all to often male dominated occupation.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments at: <mailto:admin@kentsmedley.com> .

I look forward to hearing from you!

Kent Smedley

## **Do You Really Need a Guitar Instructor?**

Have you ever had the gut-wrenching feeling of being lost?

What's worse is being lost and not even knowing it!

Let's say I told you that you could have a life in Hawaii with all of the money you could spend for the rest of your life, for you and your family. I'm sure you would be excited!

So I take you and your family to the docks in San Francisco, direct you to a large boat and say “OK, here is your boat, you must leave now. When you get to Hawaii, your new home and all the money you can spend will be waiting for you. There is just one small thing you must do: Find Hawaii. See you later. Have a great life.”

Well, the first thing you would probably ask is, “Which way is Hawaii? It's all water and I can't see Hawaii.” Now that's a big problem! Without a specific plan laid out, you won't reach your dream home with all of the money you can spend. You would just circle the ocean

and hopefully some day someone would rescue you.  
Your dream is now a nightmare.

## **Rule: You Must Know Where You Are Going And How To Get There**

That is what a Guitar Instructor should do, take your dream and give you precise instructions on how to get there.

Well, at this point I must ask, Just what is your dream?  
Where do you want to go with your music?

Let's not waste your time roaming the ocean trying to find Hawaii. Time is too short. Let's find out what your dream really is, what it is that you want to accomplish with your music. Where is this land of paradise called Hawaii for you? Let's find out!

Close your eyes. See yourself with your instrument in your hands. See yourself playing.

What type of music are you playing? Are you playing Rock, Jazz, Classical?



Where are you playing? On a stage somewhere in front of thousands of people; or in the garage at Joe's house, jamming with some friends.

The style of music and where you are playing is where you will find your Hawaii. This is your dream place. This is where you need to be.

Can you reach Hawaii? Yes!!!! Who plots your course? The Guitar Instructor you choose. He is the one with the right charts and the right coordinates that will get you there. When the winds and seas get rough, he will guide you safely through it. He is the one that will make the difficult things seem easy. He will take you by the shortest distance, spending the least amount of your time and hard earned money, to get you there.

You may ask, how long will it take me to learn what I need to know to get me there? Do I need to know everything about music just to reach my dream? How long will it take me to get to Hawaii?

Let me answer that this way:

Let's say you ask the Captain: “What time are we going to set sail, and what time will we get to our destination?”

The Captain (your Instructor) says, “Well, let's see. You must first learn how to build a watch. You will not understand what time it is unless you first understand how the inside of the watch works. The minute and hour hands on the face of the watch are meaningless unless you understand all of the moving parts in the watch.”

Now that is really stupid. I don't need to understand how to build a watch in order to tell time, I just want to know how to tell time. That's all.

**Major question:** Do I really need to know everything about music to accomplish my goals?

The correct answer is definitely NO! You just need to know the specific details relevant to your own musical situation to get you where you want to go. You don't need to know how to build a watch. You just need

to understand the hands on the face of the watch and you will be able to tell time. That is all you need.

The next thing you need to do is determine the correct route to take to reach Hawaii. When is the best time to set sail? Who should the Captain of my ship be? What route should we take to reach Hawaii in the shortest amount of time?

The only thing worse than being lost is being lost and not knowing it. The wrong road could take you months, even years, out of the way of reaching your destination. This would be like going around in circles in the ocean for months on end, with Hawaii nowhere in sight. The only thing you have in the back of your mind is a dream that you will reach Hawaii some day, and chances are you won't.

If the path you are on is not taking you to your dream, then stop now! Don't go another inch. Don't reach for another dollar or waste another minute of your precious time. **You are on the wrong path!**

Let me introduce myself. I'm Kent Smedley, professional Guitar Instructor/Guitarist for nearly 30 years. This is not where I try to sell you on me. This is all about you finding the right Guitar Instructor, and putting the right tools in your hands to be as successful as possible. If I can be a helpful resource to you in reaching your musical goals, I'm thankful to be a part of that.

I have had the opportunity to be part of many success stories in my nearly 30 years of teaching music. I have been a part of countless students starting from learning to tune an instrument, to their live performances, to their professional recording and touring careers. You may find that hard to believe, but I assure you, it is true.

I have never met a student that was born with no talent. I believe everyone has the talent to play an instrument. But I will tell you the secret of success. I will tell you this great secret that has been so closely guarded since the beginning of time, yet is obvious to even the smallest child. It is this: You must have a burning desire to learn and succeed, and you must get good instruction from the best Guitar Instructor you can.

That is the secret to success. That burning desire is the seed that will grow and produce success with any dream you may have. That is where your talent is hidden. If you have a burning desire to play, and if you get the proper instruction, I promise you that in time you will be successful and can reach any goal you set for yourself. I am so excited for you!

**Let's get started!!!**

## **Introduction**

Finding the right Guitar Instructor is hard. It can be a tiring, frustrating and downright overwhelming process. It isn't easy to figure out what you should be looking for, or even where to begin. Where should you look? Who's advice can you trust, and who's should you stay away from? What questions should you ask and who should you ask them to?

This book will answer all of your questions when it comes to finding the best Guitar Instructor to suit your needs. I will show you what, where, and how to look in your quest to find the best Guitar Instructor you can. If you read this book carefully and follow the instructions thoroughly, you will have a foolproof system that will lead you to the best and most qualified Instructors in your area. No matter where you live!

Aspiring guitarists have many different goals they would like to achieve, and dreams they want to fulfill in their music studies. But the process of how to go about finding an Instructor who has the ability to help you is the same no matter what your goals are.

You don't want to waste your time looking in the wrong places, or studying with an Instructor who is not right for you. You need to know as quickly as possible if a Guitar Instructor is, or is not, the one you are looking for. You can't afford to waste your time or your hard-earned cash!

If you are tired of working with one Guitar Instructor after another, and not being able to find one that meets your expectations; if you are frustrated with continual disappointment in your search for an Instructor who can help you reach your goals; or if you just don't even know where to begin:

**The answers you have been looking for  
are here!!!**

## You Need To Have A Plan To Get Where You Want To Go

You need a Guitar Instructor who will provide you with a very clear and well-defined path to follow. The plan doesn't need to be set in stone, though. It should change as you move closer and closer toward achieving your goals.

This is because when you begin your studies you will most likely be working on a wide range of things to acquire the fundamental skills you need as a beginner. As you become more advanced you will need to fine-tune many aspects of your playing, focusing on the details.

The plan does not need to be written, it is not practical to try to see from the beginning to the end anyway. But you should always feel that you are headed in the right direction, with your Instructor leading you where you want to go.



Your progress won't always feel like you are proceeding in a straight line. That is not realistic. Progress, for anyone, will have it's peaks and valleys. But, for the most part, you should feel like you are climbing the mountain confidently.

What you want to avoid with your Guitar Instructor is the feeling that you are being strung along. That you are not really getting anywhere, no matter how much you practice. Like things are not connected . For instance, you may work on something one week, and the next week you will be working on something that seems completely unrelated. This is not always a bad thing, but if your Instructor doesn't take the time, or doesn't really know how, to relate the material it is not good.

You should never feel like you are going in circles, plodding along with no real idea of where you are going, or how you are going to reach your goals.

**Great Players Are Not Always Great Instructors**  
**Great Instructors Are Not Always Great Players**  
**Some Are Both!!**

There are many common misconceptions about this. Many people believe that if you are a good player you will be a good Instructor. This is definitely not the case! It takes a completely different set of skills to teach the guitar effectively than it does to play well.

Many very effective Guitar Instructors aren't really that good at playing. They may have all of the technical and musical knowledge that you need, but they may not have applied themselves as thoroughly as they could have in their own practicing. Or maybe they have been so busy teaching that they just don't have the time to keep up with their own playing.

But here is a not so secret, secret: Some Guitar Instructors are just as good at playing as they are at teaching. This doesn't mean that they are only ½ good at either. You can be great at both!

Many times it takes a really great player with the mind of an Instructor to fully explain things; to break them down in a practical manner. This is because only a great player has the experience in actually doing a thing at a high level, not just the theory of how it should be done. This definitely disproves the old saying: “Those who can't do it, teach.” I believe a more accurate saying would be: “Those who can do more, teach!”

This is one reason that when you study music formally in a College/University/Conservatory of music the Instructors are usually also professional-quality performers.

If you are studying orchestral music, the Instructors are usually good enough to play with most orchestras or even perform as soloists. For guitarists, many of the Instructors at this level are also professional touring musicians who are committed to sharing their knowledge and experience. This is true no matter which style of music, or which instrument, you play.

Realistically though, it is not of the utmost importance that your Instructor is a professional-caliber performer, so long as they have some practical experience in performance. As an example, I had a great Classical Guitar Instructor in College who had trained to become a performer. Due to nerve damage he sustained to his left-hand, which caused it to spasm uncontrollably at times, he had to change his musical path. So, he focused his energies solely on teaching and became an incredible Instructor and mentor. He had the practical performance-based knowledge from before his accident, even though he could no longer perform at a professional level.

## I. Experience Teaching Music

Experience is one of the most important things to consider when looking for a Guitar Instructor. An experienced Instructor has already been through the trial and error part of learning how to teach. He will be able to guide you past the potential pitfalls in your playing and show you a very clear and direct path to reach your goals.

An experienced Guitar Instructor is able to take things that may seem complicated and make them easy to understand. He will prevent bad playing habits before they start, and correct those you already have. He will be able to quickly assess your current level of playing ability and develop a plan that will allow you to improve steadily and consistently.

This kind of Instructor will help you reach your full potential as a musician, and you will grow and improve musically with confidence, knowing that you are headed in the right direction.

There are 5 key areas to consider when it comes to the experience a Guitar Instructor needs. In the following pages I will break down each area and explain: 1. Why it is important, and 2. What to look for in each area.

## 1. Length of Time Teaching Music

This is a 2-part issue to consider. You need to know how long the Instructor has been teaching guitar, and at what level. Let's break down these 2 issues and see how they are related.

First: How long has the Instructor been teaching guitar?

You will generally want someone who has been teaching for many years on a Professional (Full-Time) basis. Now, I know there are some very good Part-Time Instructors out there, but here's why you want to go with a Pro:

A Professional Guitar Instructor with many years of Full-Time teaching experience will have been able to hone his craft on a daily basis. He will be through with the “Trial-and-Error-Learning-How-to-Teach” phase of his own development. He will also usually be much more knowledgeable and versatile in his instruction than a Part-Time Guitar Instructor.

Professional Guitar Instructors have to know what works and what doesn't. Their livelihood depends on it!

Second: You need to know what level of students he has been teaching on a consistent basis. Has he taught mainly beginners, or has he taught intermediate and advanced students as well? Will he only work with students to a certain level, and then send them on to another Instructor as they become more advanced? Or does he not even want to deal with beginning guitar students at all?

You need a Guitar Instructor who can teach at all levels of a students' development, from beginning to advanced, and everywhere in between. The reason is that this type of Instructor will be able to point out and correct things that can become problems for you as you become more advanced, and he will be able to fill in any gaps in your knowledge and playing ability at every level of your musical development – even if this should have been done at an earlier stage in your musical education by a previous Instructor.



These 2 issues are virtually inseparable. If you want the best possible chance to succeed in your study of the guitar, you need an Instructor with many years of professional teaching experience, with students at each stage of development.

This type of Instructor will be able to adapt his methods of teaching to each student, on an individual basis, much more effectively and efficiently than a Guitar Instructor with a limited background in either of these 2 vital areas.

## 2. Number of Students Taught

This is another 2-part item of concern. You need to know how many students the Instructor teaches on a regular basis, week-to-week, and you would also like to have an overall estimate of how many students he has taught in his career (I know this is asking a lot, but you need a ballpark figure, if you can get one).

First: You need to know that your potential Guitar Instructor is teaching enough students on a regular basis so that he is able to stay current in his methods and approaches to teaching.

Second: You need a rough idea of how many students he has taught in his career because this is a big clue to: A) How consistently he has been involved in teaching guitar over the course of his career, and B) How much experience he actually has.

Maybe the Instructor has a lot of students right now, but now so many in the past. This is important because you don't want to study with someone who is still learning how to teach. You want to reap the rewards of

studying with a thoroughly experienced Guitar Instructor, who has taught students at all levels of ability and achievement, week-after-week, month-after-month, year-after-year.

**You don't want to be the Guinea Pig for an inexperienced Instructor!!!**

On the flip side of this issue, there are many vastly experienced Guitar Instructors who have scaled back the number of students they teach on a regular basis. This can happen for a variety of reasons, such as: becoming more active in performing, deciding to be more selective in the types of students they accept, or maybe even getting to the point where they are financially secure and don't need to teach anymore but want to share their musical knowledge on a schedule that is more relaxed for them. In these situations it would be to your advantage to consider studying with this type of Instructor.

The bottom line here is you must be sure that any Guitar Instructor you study with has taught enough students, at all levels, over a long enough period of time to have the professional experience you need.

### **3. What is the Instructor's Motivation to Teach**

It has to be more than just dollar signs! You need to find a Guitar Instructor who enjoys sharing his knowledge and experience with his students. Yes, he has to make a living, but this can not be his only motivation to teach.

Beware of Guitarists in bands, or musical groups, that look at teaching as a supplemental source of income. Many of them teach mainly as a way to pay the bills until they “make it”. Quite a few Guitar Instructors in this situation are far more concerned with themselves and their careers than they are about you and your musical education.

This can also be an issue because many times a Guitarist who teaches on the side doesn't have the experience teaching music you should require of an Instructor. And they are not always motivated to put in the extra effort they should to help you succeed in reaching your musical goals.

You do not want to be an afterthought, “something” that is just paying the bills until the Instructor gets their “big break”.

On the other hand, it is not always a bad thing to study with a professional performing musician, just make sure this Instructor is fully invested in your success in reaching your musical goals, and not distracted by everything that goes along with trying to reach their own.

## **4. Achievements Of Past And Present Students**

It has been said that you can't judge the ability of a Guitar Instructor by the success and ability of his students, but at some point you have to.

As a Professional Guitar Instructor for nearly 30 years, I have many examples of students who have gone on to achieve success in their own chosen fields of study.

There are the Rock Guitarists who have played in bands, recorded albums and toured at professional and semi-professional levels. There are the Classical Guitarists I have taught who have studied at Performing Arts Schools for Middle and High School students, with many continuing their studies in Colleges/Universities/Conservatories of Music. There are the Jazz Guitarists who have gone on to further their studies in College, and even to record and tour as professional performers. And there are many more Guitarists who have achieved their own definition of success in their chosen areas of interest.

This is not to say that all good Guitar Instructors will have students that end up as professional performers.

The vast majority of students are not interested in reaching a professional level. Many just want to have fun playing music for themselves, their families and friends. But if you do aspire to perform at a professional level in the future, it would definitely be a good idea to study with an Instructor who has a proven track-record of helping his students achieve this goal. He will know what it takes to get you to this level in a very direct, straight-forward way.

It would be wise to contact a few current, or former, students of your prospective Instructor. The current students will be able to give you perspective on how the Instructor works with them on a weekly basis, while the former students will have the benefit of hindsight to give you an overall impression of the benefits they received while studying with the Instructor.



## II. Reputation of the Instructor

To gain the necessary information in this unit, you will have to do most of the research on your own. These are not things that you should ask your potential Guitar Instructor. These areas deal with how the Instructor is perceived by students, fellow musicians, and the local music community.

To get the information you need in this unit there are 3 groups of people you need to talk to:

1. **Current Students** who are studying, and **Former Students** who have studied, with the Instructor you are considering.

2. **Parents** of these students.

3. **Owners and Employees of Local Music Stores.**

Each of these groups is invaluable when you are seeking information about Guitar Instructors. But be aware that each also have their own biases you will need to sift through to get to the unvarnished truth.

**Current Students**, who are actively taking guitar lessons, are probably your best source of information. Talk to a few that you know personally and ask them about their experiences with their Instructors. Are they happy with the progress they have been making? Do they like the Instructor on a personal level? How does the Instructor relate to them? Are they motivated to practice each week?

Try to find students who have been studying with the same Guitar Instructor for at least 4 to 5 months. This will give you a more realistic picture of how the Instructor works with them on a consistent basis.

It is easy for a guitar student to be enthusiastic after only working with an Instructor for a few weeks, but if they are still excited about their guitar lessons, and their Instructor, after several months this is a good sign.

**Former Students** will be able to provide a better overall picture of their experience studying with an Instructor, from start to finish. This perspective is important because a former student will be able to look back on their time spent with the Instructor more

objectively. It is usually easier to sift through the bias of former students than with any other group.

**Parents of Current Students** are another important group you need to talk to because they are usually not as awe-struck by the Instructor as a student may be. This group should be able to provide you with an honest assessment of how the Instructor interacts with students, how organized they are, and how reliable and professional they are. The parents also have to deal with the business end of guitar lessons, so they are an ideal source of information on the financial and student policies of the Instructor.

**Local Music Store Owners and Employees** are important to speak with for information on Guitar Instructors because they work in the music community on a daily basis. They hear things constantly about different Guitar Instructors, good and bad. You can benefit from their insider knowledge, but you have to keep it in perspective. Many of them may only recommend Instructors who teach at their store, or those who are personal friends that may be trying to get started as Guitar Instructors. Stress that you are only

interested in experienced, highly educated, Professional Guitar Instructors; those who have a proven history of getting great results with their students.

Try to speak with people that you know on a personal level at the music stores. Get a few names from several of them. If the same names keep popping up as good Instructors, start there. Just be careful if they are only suggesting Guitar Instructors who work for their own store. They may be good, but there may also be other reasons for these recommendations. For instance, if a music store has in-house Guitar Instructors, the store makes money from the rental of teaching spaces to these Instructors. This also generates a steady flow of customers for the store.

Many of these Guitar Instructors are only successful because they teach at a music store where they are constantly fed a steady stream of referrals for students. If they had to cut it on their own professional reputation, many of them couldn't.

This is not to imply that all Instructors who teach at music stores are inadequate. They aren't! Just keep in mind that you need to sift through the biases and opinions of those you seek advice from, so you are able to get a more realistic picture of all of the potential Guitar Instructors you are considering studying with.

There are 5 key areas to consider in this unit. Don't overlook a single one; each is vital to gain to the information you need.

## **1. Professionalism**

You need a Guitar Instructor who's daily life is completely involved with teaching music to the best of his ability. The Instructor must project professionalism and confidence in his dealings with students, parents and people in the local music community. He needs to be completely committed to his craft, refining and improving his teaching methods on a daily basis.

## **2. Reliability**

You need a Guitar Instructor you can count on. If he says he is going to do something for you, he does it. If he shows you how to play something, it is correct. If you need his help in selecting a new instrument, you can trust his guidance to point you in the right direction.

The Instructor must be someone you feel comfortable taking advice from. Someone who is mature and grown-up in their dealings with others, not childish, immature or egotistical.

The bottom line here is that your Instructor must instill in you the confidence and trust that he will be there for you when you need him, you can count on him, and you can trust his musical judgment.

### **3. Completely Knowledgeable in the Style(s) of Music You Are Interested In Learning**

This is a must, obviously. Many Instructors are only truly comfortable teaching 1 or 2 styles of music, while others are well-versed in many. Your own musical goals will determine which type of Instructor you should study with.

If you are interested in playing Rock Guitar, you don't want to study with someone who only teaches Classical Guitar. Likewise, if you are interested in studying Classical Guitar you wouldn't study with a Jazz Guitar Instructor. But if you are interested in more than one particular style of music, or you would like to learn a variety of styles, you need to find an Instructor who is well-versed in and comfortable with teaching all of them.

An Instructor who has taught, played and formally studied the style(s) he teaches should be preferred to one who has studied and played only one style of music, but also offers to teach you others. You must find out what styles are his specialty.



#### **4. Fully Invested in the Success of His Students**

You must know that your Guitar Instructor cares about you and your musical development, and that he is willing to do whatever it takes to help you achieve your musical goals. Whether that means explaining the same thing 5 different ways until it finally “clicks” for you, or scheduling extra time to help you with difficulties in your music for an upcoming performance or audition.

Sincerity is essential here. The Instructor must always have the best interests of the student in mind. He must have the patience to help you through the tough spots, know when to push you in your studies, and when to pull back. He should be seen as a positive and encouraging mentor.

## **5. Keeps Their Ego in Check**

This is a HUGE problem with many Guitar Instructors! They end up making your lesson all about themselves, what they have “accomplished”, and how well they can play. This should have been gotten out of the way at the initial meeting with you, if ever.

You are not there to hear about the Instructors' accomplishments. It should be a given that your Guitar Instructor can play well and has achieved certain successes in his career. But you don't want to be constantly reminded about it. That is the sign of an insecure Instructor, musician and person.

Your lesson time with your Guitar Instructor should be focused exclusively on you and your musical progress. It doesn't matter how much your Instructor knows or how well he can play; if he can't transmit that knowledge and ability to you, he is wasting your time. You have to feel completely convinced that your Guitar Instructor is solely interested in you and your progress during your lessons.

### **III. Personality**

You will know what you need to in this unit after you have been studying with your Guitar Instructor for a few weeks to a few months. You should consider your first 2 to 3 months a trial period with the Instructor. By the end of this period you should have been able to evaluate the Instructor well enough to know if he is someone you would like to continue studying with. Keep your eyes and ears open. If something doesn't seem right, try to find out why. Don't over-analyze every little thing, but do go with your gut instinct.

There are 4 areas of concern in this unit.

## **1. Confident and in Control**

You need a Guitar Instructor who is professional, but puts you at ease. Friendly, but commands respect. You are there to study with this particular Instructor because you honestly believe that he is best suited to help you achieve your goals, and this is evidenced by his behavior and attitude.

Your Instructor must project confidence in his ability to help you, but not be conceited. This can be a fine line with many Guitar Instructors!

Confidence means that the Instructor gives you the quiet assurance that he understands what you would like to achieve, and he will be able to meet your expectations in a realistic manner with a solid plan of action. And you believe that he will! This is the kind of confidence you need to look for in your Guitar Instructor.

Conceit, on the other hand, is characterized as arrogance and egotism. If the Instructor seems more interested in talking constantly about himself and what

he has done, than about you and your goals and concerns, this is conceit. This type of Instructor will say he can help you, but usually offers no real evidence as to how, expecting you to just be grateful you are studying with him.

Any Guitar Instructor who can really help you should be able to lay out a rough plan of action during the first lesson you have with them. If this is not done be aware that you may need to re-evaluate your decision to study with this person.

You should also feel that the Instructor is always in control of the lesson. There should be no wasted time. If you do have extra time in your lesson the Instructor should offer you some relevant insight into the music you are studying, show you something extra that will help you, or go back over any rough spots that you have which could use a little extra attention. You should always feel that your Instructor knows exactly where to go with you next.

## **2. The Ability To Get The Best Out Of You**

A good, Professional Guitar Instructor knows how to motivate you to achieve above your expectations. He knows how far he can push you, how hard to push, and when to stop pushing. A good Instructor will know how much you can be expected to achieve on a daily, and weekly, basis. He has the experience and know-how to get the most out of you. And he can help you achieve more that you ever thought you could.

But he is also realistic. He knows that you have many demands on your time, whether it be school, work, family, etc. A good Instructor will work within your busy schedule to help you find a way to meet your goals.

Daily practice is a must, but an experienced Instructor knows that you may not always have a lot of time for it each day. So he will help you develop a practice schedule that you will be able to scale up or down, based on the amount of time you have to work with, on any given day. Whether you have an hour, 30 minutes, 15 minutes or even less; a good Instructor will show you

how to maximize the time you do have to get the most out of each practice session.

### **3. Adaptability**

An experienced Guitar Instructor will work with you, based on your own musical goals, level of experience, interests and personality, to develop a plan that is best suited for you. He will not try to fit you into the same mold as any of his other students.

The Instructor will also have some flexibility during your weekly lessons to incorporate things that you may be more interested in; such as a song you have been wanting to learn, or a specific area you would like to work on a little more. He will be able to change the lesson plan if he senses that you need extra work in a specific area, or he may move forward a bit more than originally intended if you happen to pick up on something more easily than he had anticipated.

Your Guitar Instructor must be able to adapt to, and be prepared for, any teaching situation that may arise in the course of your lesson. You don't want an Instructor who seems caught off guard and uneasy when you try to work some things that interest you into the lesson, or who adheres to a rigid schedule of what to do during



each lesson.

That said, your Instructor shouldn't make you feel like you are jumping from one thing to another either. A typical ½ hour guitar lesson is plenty of time for you to show the Instructor the progress you have made in the past week of practice, for the Instructor to make any corrections that may be necessary, and for him to show and fully explain to you everything you need to work on for the upcoming week. You should not feel rushed!

A good Guitar Instructor will help you reach your musical goals, keep things interesting along the way, and also provide you with a solid musical foundation to work from while doing so. This will mean working on some things that you may not be particularly excited about. That is OK, you need to trust your Instructor's guidance here. If you only ever work on what you want to do with your Instructor, and he has no real opinion on things he feels you need to do, you need to re-evaluate who you are studying with. You are not the Instructor!

If you end up constantly steering the direction of your guitar lessons you are sure to be missing out on many valuable things that will help you with your playing and musical education.

Remember, you are studying with this particular Instructor because you firmly believe that he will help you reach your goals. He has the experience teaching to make you a better guitarist. Yes, you should be able to work on some of the things you are interested in right now, and your Instructor should be able to easily adapt your lessons to include them. But the Instructor should never give you the impression that he is not in control of, or doesn't know what to do next during, your lessons.

## **4. Clearly Explains What You Are Working On, And Why You are Working On It**

Every good Guitar Instructor will make sure that you thoroughly understand the music you are working on: where the difficult parts are, what fingerings to use, any issues with phrasing, dynamics, etc. They will also clearly explain to you why you are working on these specific pieces of music and how you will benefit from doing so.

Your Instructor must provide you with a clearly defined plan for each week's practice sessions. He must break down each piece of music, exercise and study that you are working on thoroughly.

You must also know how you are going to work on your music from a technical point of view: How fast should it be played? Are there specific fingerings and/or dynamics that must be observed? What are the musical and technical benefits you will gain from working on this music? How does each study/exercise/piece of music fit into the big picture of where you are going with your playing?

Your Instructor must also provide you with intermediate- to long- range goals, along with your weekly goals. The weekly goals you achieve should be seen as stepping stones on your path toward reaching your long-term objectives. You must always feel that the work you are putting in on a daily basis is getting you one step closer to where you want to be with your playing.

There will be stopping points and setbacks along the way, there always are. But you should generally feel that you are headed in the right direction, with your Instructor leading the way for you.

If you have any questions or uncertainty about what you are studying you should tell your Instructor right away. He should be more than happy to clarify anything that you do not understand. If you are at home working on your lesson material and a problem arises, or you are very confused with the lesson material, you should call your Instructor. You may have to leave a message for him, but he should call you back as soon as possible with the help that you need. If you have to wait for days, or worse yet don't even get a call back, you are

apparently not enough of a priority to the Instructor, and you need to find one who will make you a priority. Any Instructor who operates in this way, no matter how “good” he supposedly is, will not retain students for very long.

If you continually leave your lessons confused and unsure of what you need to work on and/or why, and if your Instructor can't seem to find a way to make things clear for you, you need to find one who can.

Playing guitar is a very creative and artistic endeavor, but there are logical ways to learn it. There are no secrets or shortcuts. One small discovery after another will eventually lead to mastery of your instrument and a deeper understanding of music, if you are willing to practice consistently and are able to study with a good Guitar Instructor.

## **IV. The Reliability Factor**

Reliability, when it comes to Guitar Instruction, encompasses 4 major areas. Your Instructor has to have a firm grip on each one of them. If your Instructor is lacking in any one of these areas, you will have a very difficult time progressing with him.

These are things that you can get a pretty good feel for by talking to past and current students of the Guitar Instructor you are considering studying with. Although many times you will not know exactly what you are getting into until you have been working with the Instructor for a few months. And you should still do as much of the investigative research as possible ahead of time.

All of the following issues must be met by any Guitar Instructor that you are considering studying with!

## 1. On Time – All The Time

Your Guitar Instructor must treat your time as valuable as he would like you to treat his. Your Instructor must be consistently on time and ready for your lessons. You should have a regular time for your lessons each week that works for both you and your Instructor.

You don't want an Instructor who is constantly late, or is continually calling and canceling your lessons with little notice. This is bad for 3 reasons: 1. It is extremely difficult to make consistent progress with your studies in this way, 2. The Instructor is not treating your time as valuable, and 3. It is not professional and the Instructor is not serious about teaching you.

Granted, sometimes things happen that we all have no control over: illness, emergencies, etc. But these should not be common occurrences. Your Guitar Instructor would not want you calling at the last minute to cancel a lesson, continually calling with excuse after excuse as to why you can't make your lesson, or worse yet just not showing up at all.

If you can't make the commitment to be there when you need to be, you can't really be that serious about taking guitar lessons; and if your Instructor can't consistently be there for your lessons at the time you have both agreed on, he can't be that serious about teaching you.



## **2. Thoroughly Prepared For Every Lesson**

A professional Guitar Instructor will be thoroughly prepared for you at each lesson. This means knowing what you are working on, where to go next with you, and having all the necessary materials you may need. Let's examine each of these issues individually.

An Instructor will usually know what you are working on week-to-week by one of two methods:

Method 1 would be the Instructor, or you, having a notebook with your weekly assignments written in it. It is usually better for you to keep this notebook so that there is no confusion as to what you need to work on each week. You would then need to bring this notebook to each lesson.

Method 2 would be the Instructor writing the dates on the music you are working on, along with any relevant instructions for you relating to the music. Either of these 2 methods is good, it is the Instructor's personal preference as to which one to use, but they need to use one or the other (or both).

Your Guitar Instructor should be able to confidently show you what to work on from week-to-week, in a logical manner. You should never feel that your Instructor is at a loss for where you should go next, musically, or that he is merely giving you busy work. He should be able to logically connect what you have worked on before to what you are working on now, and to what you will be working on in the next few weeks.

Your Guitar Instructor must also be prepared with any relevant copies, hand-outs, etc. that you may need each week. It is up to you to bring your music each week, but if the Instructor has told you he will have a copy of something for you, he needs to have it. He must have what you need, when you need it, every week.

Once again, I do realize that things come up and sometimes your Instructor may not be able to get you the hand-outs, copies, etc. in time; just make sure that this is not a common occurrence. If it is, or if it does become a consistent pattern of behavior, you can not afford to have your progress derailed by your Instructor's unpreparedness.

If you are practicing hard all week for your guitar lesson, your Instructor needs to be thoroughly prepared for your lesson. Every week. Period.

### **3. Gives You Complete Attention for The Entire Lesson**

You must be the center of attention in your guitar lessons. You have been working hard on your music all week, you have made the time to be there, and you are paying good money for top-quality Guitar Instruction from a Professional Instructor. You should reasonably expect your Guitar Instructor to be able to focus on you completely for the ½ hour or so that your lesson lasts.

You do not want an Instructor who seems distracted or uninterested, spaced out or looking bored. The Instructor needs to be focused on and actively interested in the progress you have made in the past week, and fully attentive to be able to make the necessary corrections.

You also do not want a Guitar Instructor who is constantly making, or receiving, phone calls or text messages during your lessons. The Instructor may occasionally have to take a call during the lesson, but this should not be a common occurrence, and he should make sure you still receive your full lesson time.

As a rule any calls, texts, etc. should be handled before or after your lesson. If it is not extremely important, it can wait. Your lesson is not the time for your Instructor to socialize with other people, it is your time, and he needs to give you his complete and undivided attention. If you can't get this kind of attention from your Instructor on a regular basis, you need to find another Instructor who will give it to you.

## **V. Musical Education**

Because music is one of the performing arts, the educational background of its Instructors can seem quite erratic and difficult to comprehend at times. In this unit I will show you how to make sense of your Instructor's background as a student himself, what this can tell you about him, and why it is important to you when considering who to study with.

Generally, you will want an Instructor who studied guitar formally by taking lessons for many years, and who also continued his studies at a higher level in a College/University/Conservatory. This type of Guitar Instructor will have the solid background that will ensure you are guided confidently, and correctly, in your studies.

Two points to consider here are:

1. A well-educated, competent Guitar Instructor does not always have a degree in music. There can be many reasons for this, but the most common may be that the Instructor may have started his own musical education at an early age, having achieved a high enough level of proficiency to begin performing professionally early on, and therefore did not need to continue studying at a higher level of institutional learning.

Also, the higher-level programs at many Colleges/Universities/Conservatories have not always been as well-defined and structured for the guitar as they have been for other instruments, to say the least.

2. The proliferation of the lie of the “self-taught” Guitar Instructor. Steer clear of this joker! There is no way a “self-taught” musician will make a good Instructor. They will almost always have severe gaps in their knowledge, experience and education.

You wouldn't want a “self-taught” doctor operating on you, would you? Or how about a “self-taught” lawyer defending you in a court of law? The aura of being “self-taught” is designed to gratify the Instructor's ego, and you should avoid it at all costs.

Instructors who teach efficiently and effectively, know how to play well and are thoroughly knowledgeable about music are not self-taught. And they will usually be formally educated in music.

There are 5 major issues to consider in this unit.



## **1. You Need To Know The Details Of Your Instructor's Education**

At what age did your Instructor begin studying the guitar formally with lessons? How long did he continue with the lessons? Did the Instructor continue his music studies at a College, University, or Conservatory? If so, where and when?

## **2. What Style(s) Of Music Did Your Instructor Formally Study?**

Classical? Jazz? Rock? Etc. Did your Instructor's Guitar Instructors show him not only how to play the style(s) of music he specializes in, but also the nuts and bolts of how music works (Theory)? Did your Instructor specialize in one style of music, or did he learn many different styles? Whether he has studied many different styles or only one, how proficient is his ability in and understanding of these styles?

### **3. Who Did Your Instructor Study With?**

You don't need to know everybody your Instructor has studied with from the very beginning, but if there are some prominent guitarists that your Guitar Instructor has studied with you should find out who they are and what made them top-quality Guitar Instructors.

This is usually more important if your Instructor has had formal musical training at a higher level. If he has studied at a College/University/Conservatory, who were the Instructors and what were their specialties?

If your Instructor hasn't studied with any particularly notable Guitar Instructors, this is not necessarily a bad thing. It is just helpful to know that he has a solid educational background in your area(s) of interest. If your Instructor has studied with a prominent Guitar Instructor or two, that is just one more potential benefit to you as his student.

#### **4. Which Style Of Music, And At What Level, Is Your Guitar Instructor Comfortable Teaching?**

Even though many very good Guitar Instructors have studied a wide variety of styles of music, they may only really be comfortable and experienced in teaching one or two of them. You need to make sure that your Instructor's area(s) of expertise match(es) your area(s) of interest.

You must also know what level of student your Instructor is comfortable teaching. Some will be more used to teaching beginners and children, as this can make up the bulk of the schedule for many private Guitar Instructors. Others may prefer to work primarily with more advanced students.

Realistically though, if this is a private Guitar Instructor who has taught professionally for an extended period of time, he should be comfortable and experienced enough to teach students of almost any level in whichever style(s) he specializes in. The important thing here is to make sure the Instructor can teach you at whatever level you are at, in the style(s)

you are interested in.

## **5. Did The Instructor Receive Any Formal Coaching In How To Teach Music (Pedagogy)?**

This is an important question because many Guitar Instructors, even those who graduate from upper-level music schools, enter the field of Guitar Instruction with little or no knowledge of how to teach. They may understand music and be able to play at a high level, but may not be able to relate that knowledge to you as a beginning or intermediate student.

It can be quite difficult for someone who has gone through a high-level music program to bring themselves back to the mindset of a beginner. You need someone who can relate to you, no matter what level of skill you currently have, and be able to break things down for you in a way that is easy to understand.

If your Instructor had the benefit of teaching under the supervision of an experienced Guitar Instructor for an extended period of time, you will definitely reap the benefits of this apprenticeship. This does not mean that if your Instructor lacks this sort of background he won't be good at teaching you, but it will certainly shave a few

years off of the learning curve for them in figuring out how to teach effectively.

## **IV. Real-World Experience**

The information in this unit will apply, in varying degrees, to each and every guitar student. It is important that the Guitar Instructor you study with has at least some experience outside of the music studio. You don't necessarily need an Instructor who has played all over the world, or even one who gigs a lot; but you should make sure he has enough real-world experience to prepare you for the realities of performance.

There are 4 issues to be aware of in this unit.



## **1. Performance Background**

It is important to study with a Guitar Instructor who has a solid performing background. This is because he will be able to get to the heart of the matter when it comes to how you need to work on your music in a realistic manner, geared toward your being able to perform it effectively. It does not matter if your Instructor is a world-class performer or not; he should know the steps you need to take in order to be prepared to perform at the highest level that you are capable of at this time.

You also need to know which styles your Instructor has performed in, especially if he teaches multiple styles. It is very important for you to know that the Guitar Instructor you are studying with has an extensive performing background in the style(s) you are interested in learning.

You do not want an Instructor who teaches a lot of styles of music, but only has experience performing in one of them that is not in your area of interest. For instance, you don't want to study Classical Guitar with a

Jazz Guitar Instructor who “also” teaches Classical, but has never played a Classical gig. Likewise, you wouldn't want a Classical Guitar Instructor to teach you Rock Guitar if he has no background playing Rock gigs.

The value in studying with a Guitar Instructor who has extensive performance experience is that this will have allowed him to fine-tune his mental and musical approach to the music, based on what works and what doesn't work, with an audience. A “trial-by-fire”, so to speak.

This is a great way for you to gain the insights that can only come with repeated performance in front an audience, without having to go through the pain of discovery yourself. If you are, or think you might be, interested in becoming a performer yourself, it is extremely important for you to study with someone who has an extensive background in performance.

Make sure that your needs and wants as a Guitar Student match the specialties and experience of your Instructor.

## **2. Recording**

Most serious Musicians, and Instructors, have at least a little experience in this area. And it is always a good idea for you, the prospective student, to hear some of the things your Instructor has recorded. Some Guitar Instructors may not have much experience in this area, and that is OK. But if they do, it is a good way to gauge their ability to play a specific style, and what level they are able to play at themselves.

This is just one more thing that will help you to gain confidence in the abilities of your Instructor. A good recording puts a musician under the microscope, and can be a valuable source of information for you to use in determining who to study with.

### **3. Has To Know What Works And What Doesn't In The Real World**

This is a must for any Guitar Instructor. No matter what level of guitarist you are, no matter what your musical goals are, you need an Instructor who knows what works in a real playing situation. And the only way an Instructor can gain this knowledge is by performing themselves. This is a big problem for many Instructors who shy away from performing.

You have got to know what works and why it works, and what doesn't work and why it doesn't work in a real playing situation. Only a good and experienced Guitar Instructor with a lot of playing experience will be able to give you this information in a straight-forward manner.

He will be able to help you work on your music in a way that will give you the best chance for success in performance, help you tailor your repertoire to suit your audience, give you realistic strategies to help you deal with stage-fright, etc.

If you really want to learn to play your instrument to the best of your ability, whether you have aspirations of performing or not, you need a battle-tested Instructor who has refined his approach to performing and teaching with real-world experience. One who deals in the realities of what works, not untested theories of what should.

#### **4. Is Able To Provide Direction And Guidance For Each Stage Of Your Musical Development**

You need to know that as you become more advanced in your playing, your Instructor will be able to guide you through every stage of your development.

When you begin your studies, your Instructor should be your main source of information, and you need to follow what he says to the letter. In this stage of your development you will be building the musical foundation that will serve you the rest of your life.

As you progress in your playing, a good Instructor will give you the freedom to develop your own style and approach to music. A good Guitar Instructor will not want you to be a copy of himself. He will provide you with a definite way of learning and performing to a point, then allow you to incorporate your own musical personality and direction into your playing and studying.

As you reach an advanced level of skill on your instrument, your Instructor will become more of a mentor. He will be there to guide you, to help you look at the big picture more than the “nuts and bolts” of the music. This can involve looking at phrasing, alternate fingerings for a more musical effect, seeing the music in more general terms, etc. He should also be able to jolt you out of your way of thinking about a specific piece of music and provide you with a different perspective.

If you think you have found an Instructor that you would like to study with for quite some time, it is very important to know that he has the ability to assume the different roles you will need at each stage of your musical journey with him.

### **3 Things That Don't Matter** **(and why)**

If you are really serious about finding and studying with the best Guitar Instructor you can, the following things should not be major points of concern for you. Some of this may go against what you have been led to believe, but I will explain each issue, and why you don't want to make it a sticking point that will keep you from studying with the best Guitar Instructor you can find.



# 1. Convenience

## A. Location

One of the biggest mistakes people make when trying to find a Guitar Instructor is not looking outside of their own neighborhood. Yes, you may be fortunate enough to have a top-quality Guitar Instructor within a few minutes drive of your home, but often this is not the case.

By considering only the nearest private Guitar Instructors, or only the nearest music store that has them, you may be missing out on finding a Guitar Instructor who will be the best fit for you. This may mean driving an extra 10, 15, 20 minutes or more to study with him. But if it means the difference between settling for an Instructor who is not quite what you are looking for, or really going for it with the best Instructor you can study with, you need to find a way to carve that extra time out of your schedule. 6 months spent studying with the right Guitar Instructor will benefit you far more than a few years wasted with one who is not right for you!

There are many good Guitar Instructors out there, and you may very well be fortunate enough to find one in your own neck of the woods. Just don't narrow down your search to Instructors who are only in your immediate area.

**Bottom Line:** Your priority should be to study with the best Guitar Instructor you can find, even if you have to go a little out of the way to do so.

## **B. Your Schedule**

Everyone has a busy schedule, and I am not suggesting that you totally disregard yours for the sake of guitar lessons. What I am suggesting is that when you decide to start working with a good Guitar Instructor, you need to realize just how busy his schedule is, and be willing to change yours a bit if necessary. Here's why:

A good, successful Guitar Instructor is usually in very high demand. And he only has so many hours in each day to teach. So if you are going to study with him you need to be aware of this, and be willing to make adjustments to your own personal schedule. You don't want to say that you have to have a lesson time at “6:00 on Wednesdays”, for instance. Instead, ask what the Instructor has available and see if you can make it work.

You should try to provide the Instructor with a range of days and times that you can make yourself available for lessons. For instance: Monday from 4:00-7:00PM, Tuesday from 6:00-8:00PM, or Thursday from 3:30-7:00PM. This will show the Instructor that you are willing to rearrange your schedule to study with him;

even the busiest and most in-demand Instructors will appreciate this and be more motivated to find a time in their schedule that will work for both of you.

This does not mean that you can't ask for a specific time slot for lessons, just be realistic about the possibility that you may need to accept one that is not your first choice. After awhile, your preferred lesson time may open up, and your Instructor should be able to move you into it.

It would be a big mistake to disregard studying with an Instructor just because he has a busy schedule and is unable to give you the “perfect” time slot!

There is a reason that a good and experienced Guitar Instructor is busy and in demand; that is because he is very skilled and effective at what he does. Conversely, there is also a reason that many Instructors seem to have just about any time slot available for lessons; they are usually inexperienced and/or ineffective as Guitar Instructors.

**Bottom Line:** An Instructors' busy teaching schedule should be more motivation and reassurance that you are making the right decision to study with him. If you are really serious about studying with the best Instructor you can find, one who will help you achieve your musical goals, make it a priority in your own schedule.

## **2. Price**

### **A. Cheaper Is Not Better**

If you are looking for the cheapest Guitar Instructor, you are not looking for a good Instructor!

A successful, well-established Guitar Instructor will never be your cheapest option. If you are looking for cheap, you are not looking for quality.

You should be willing to pay a little more for a good Guitar Instructor than an inexperienced one for several reasons. An experienced Instructor's time and abilities are worth far more than one who is just beginning his teaching career. A good Instructor will show you the correct way to play your instrument; addressing, correcting and preventing any bad playing habits immediately. This can save you many years of wasted time you may otherwise have spent with a less qualified Instructor; because bad habits are much harder to correct if you have had them for years than if they had been prevented or corrected by a good Instructor in the first place.

**Bottom Line:** If you are looking for the cheapest Instructor you can find “just to get started”, you will find him, and you will regret it if you do study with him. Habits, good or bad, that are formed by beginning musicians can last a lifetime.

## **B. Complaining About Price**

Don't do this! Here's why: A good Guitar Instructor usually has as much education and experience in his chosen field of expertise as a doctor or lawyer has in his own trade. Many have more.

We are talking about people who often begin their own musical training at a very young age, consistently studying and practicing on a daily basis for 5, 10, 15 years or more before they even get to an upper-level music school, where they will spend many hours each day working on music for many more years.

The Instructor must base the fees for lessons on his own level of musical education and experience in teaching, just as any other professional must. Keep this in mind before you complain about his rates.

**Bottom Line:** If you don't think the Instructor is worth the rates he charges for lessons, you should study with someone else.



## C. Bargaining Or Haggling To Try To Get The Price Down For Lessons

This is not the way you want to begin the relationship with your Instructor!

Bargaining can create an atmosphere of disharmony and resentment that will adversely affect the rest of your time studying with a Guitar Instructor. While you may succeed in getting a small discount, it will become a sore spot between you and the Instructor.

What you need to do is go along with the Instructors' price for lessons, at least for a few months, if you really believe him to be your best option. If, after studying with him for awhile you don't feel that he is worth the money you are paying him, you need to find a new Instructor. This is better because at this point you don't want to ask for a discount due to the fact that you believe he is not worth the price you have been paying.

**Bottom Line:** If you feel that your Instructor is not worth the money he charges, he is not worth your time either, and you need to find someone who is.

To sum up this unit, I would ask this of you: Don't make price an issue, but don't get taken either.

If you follow the guidelines in this book and do the research you need to do on your Instructor, you will get what you pay for. If you insist on going with the cheapest option, or you don't do the research you need to do, you will regret it.

I would like to conclude the unit on price with a quote that sums up my, and many excellent Instructors I know, attitude toward the issue of price. It should be the motto of all professional Guitar Instructors when confronted with the issue of price:

**“I don't begrudge those who charge less, they know what they are worth.”**

### 3. Affiliation With A “Music School”

This is actually something that has become much more of an issue over the past 15 to 20 years. By “Music School”, I do not mean a higher-level music program at a College/University/Conservatory. What I am referring to is the proliferation of the “Strip-Mall, Cookie-Cutter” music schools that keep popping up with fancy names to create a false sense of legitimacy.

Now, I am not implying that all local “Music Schools” are bad. Just be aware that places with names like “Insert your city or state name here” Conservatory of Music, or “Your State name here” School of Music, etc. are designed to create this warm, fuzzy feeling that they are somehow superior to private Guitar Instructors who teach from their own homes or studios.

Nothing could be further from the truth! These are fictitious names that anyone can use for their businesses. These “Music Schools” are not subject to any certification or accreditation with any governing body that will ensure that you are actually going to receive top-notch Guitar Instruction. That is still up to

you, as it should be.

In this unit I will discuss 4 issues that you should be aware of if you are considering taking lessons at one of these “Music Schools”. Keep in mind that most of these businesses are created with the best of intentions for you to receive a solid musical education. Unfortunately, some are more interested in separating you from your hard-earned cash than providing you with the positive and enriching learning experience you need.

So let's look at each issue, one at a time, and examine what they are, why it is important for you to be aware of them, and what to look for if you are interested in studying at one of these “Music Schools”.

## **A. Many Music Schools Have A High Rate Of Instructor Turnover**

This is a big problem for you, the student, because you don't have the benefit of studying with one Guitar Instructor long enough for them to sufficiently help you. With every change of Instructor you must back-track and start over to some degree.

You may also have little, if any, say in which Guitar Instructor you get to study with. Many times this is at the discretion of the “Music School”, based on who they currently have on their roster of Instructors, and who has availability.

One of the main reasons for the high turnover rate of Instructors is that many of them are new to the profession. When these Instructors get enough experience teaching they often realize how little they are actually being paid for their efforts, and decide to strike out on their own. Which leads to my next point.

## **B. Many Of The Most Qualified Guitar Instructors Teach From Their Own Homes Or Studios**

The reasons for this are many. It gives the Instructor the freedom to teach in the way he feels is best, with no interference from the owners/managers of a “Music School”. The Instructor can set his own teaching schedule, and he is in a much more relaxed environment which will allow him to teach you more effectively.

Another big issue for the professional Guitar Instructor is this: It is common practice for a “Music School” to keep 1/3 to 1/2 of the price you pay each month in lesson fees for administrative costs. This can make it difficult, if not impossible, for a Guitar Instructor to make a living. This practice by the “Music School” can be understood by looking at our next item of concern.

### **C. “Music Schools” Are Businesses**

The owners of a “Music School” must be focused on the running of the business. That means focusing on profit/loss, overhead, Instructor turnover, etc. They must set the wages and hire the most qualified Instructors they can, at a price they can afford to pay. Unfortunately, this often means hiring Instructors with little or no experience in teaching guitar, and minimal formal music education.

You definitely don't want an Instructor who is still learning how to teach. Or one who is just “getting his feet wet” to see if he wants to make a career out of Guitar Instruction.

## **D. Contracts/Registration Fees/Automatic Withdrawal “Oh My”**

These 3 common business practices by “Music Schools” are always a bad idea. To understand why, let's examine each one individually.

### **1. Contracts**

A contract, in this instance, is nothing more than a guarantee that you will be financially obligated to the “Music School” for a specific period of time. This can be for 3 months, 6 months, 1 year or even longer. In return, the “School” will provide somebody to teach you.

If you have any doubts about being able to study with the Instructor of your choice, you should not commit to a contract for any length of time. You need the freedom to choose your own Instructor, and to discontinue your guitar studies at any time you see fit.



**Bottom Line:** A reputable, private Guitar Instructor will never try to get you to sign a contract of financial obligation. You are free to leave at any time you feel you need to, although it is common for the Instructor to request one month's advance notice of your decision to stop taking lessons so that they may plan their schedule accordingly.

## 2. Registration Fees

A registration fee is nothing more than you paying for the privilege of being on the “Music Schools' ” schedule.

Does it really cost \$40, \$50 or more for someone to type your name into a computer, write it on a piece of paper, and put you with a Guitar Instructor who has an opening for lessons? Of course not! Yet this is a fee that seems to be unquestioningly accepted by most students of these “Music Schools”.

**Bottom Line:** A reputable, private Guitar Instructor will never ask you for a registration fee. There is just no justification for it.

### **3. Automatic Withdrawal Of Lesson Fees From Your Bank Account**

#### **ARE YOU KIDDING ME?????**

Unless this is some highly-regarded national chain of “Music Schools”, or someone you have a close relationship with (and even there you may be treading thin ice), why would you EVER give anybody access to your bank account?

I have seen “Music Schools” taken to court over this practice because they continued to withdraw money for lesson fees months after the students had ceased taking lessons. And believe it or not, many times the “Music School” has found legal loopholes that have allowed them to keep this money!

**Bottom Line:** This is not the kind of practice that any reputable “Music School” will engage in, and it is certainly not conducive to the positive, enriching experience you are looking for in your guitar studies.

## **Bottom Line To The “Music School” Section:**

The most important thing is the positive relationship between you, the guitar student, and your Instructor. If you can find this at a “Music School” then you are fortunate, because it is much more commonly found by studying with a Private Instructor at his own home or studio.

## Conclusion

In the end, your choice of Guitar Instructor is a personal one. The 3 questions you should be asking yourself at this point are:

1. Does this Instructor have the education and experience to help me reach my musical goals?
2. Does this Instructor have the personality and professionalism in his teaching that I need?
3. And probably most importantly: Do I firmly believe that this Guitar Instructor is the best fit for me based on all of my research?

It will take time and persistence in your search, but if you follow the guidelines set out in this book and do your research, you will be perfectly positioned to reach your musical goals. A good Instructor can help you become a better player than you ever dreamed you could be, but a bad one will surely keep you from reaching your full potential. Chose wisely my friend.

Kent

## **Biography**

Kent Smedley is a Guitar Instructor in Jacksonville, Florida with nearly 30 years of professional teaching experience. He has performed as an International Rock Recording Artist, sharing the stage with the likes of Megadeth, Pantera, Yngwie Malmsteen, and many others. He performs as a solo Classical Guitarist, and as a member of The Riverside Guitar Quartet. Kent has also worked as a studio musician, has recorded a Jazz/Fusion album with Acoustic Collective, and performs regularly as a Singer/Songwriter in the Northeast Florida area of the United States with original music from his album “Whispered Dreams”.

Kent has studied Classical Guitar with James Chandler, Dr. Stephen Robinson, and Christopher Parkening at his 2006 master-class in Coral Gables, FL.

He has studied Jazz Guitar with Gary Starling, Professor of Jazz Guitar at Jacksonville University, and with Jack Petersen at the University of North Florida.

Kent also studied Classical Piano for 8 years with Rebecca Hodges, and Ileana Fernandez, Principal Keyboardist for the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra.

Kent teaches full-time at his own private guitar studio, in the Lakewood area of Jacksonville, FL. He can be reached for lessons at (904)993-8728, or at his website: <http://www.kentsmedley.com/> .

# Instructor Evaluation Forms

## I. Experience

1. Length of time teaching \_\_\_\_\_

2. Number of students

Now \_\_\_\_\_

Overall \_\_\_\_\_

3. Motivation to teach \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Notable achievements of past/present students

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## II. Reputation

### 5. Professional Reputation

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### 6. Reliability

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7. Is this Instructor considered thoroughly knowledgeable? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Is this Instructor fully invested in the success of his students? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Ego issues? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Is this Instructor considered a great player,  
a great Instructor, or both? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Does this Instructor seem to have a plan for  
each student that seems logical and connected?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### III. Personality

12. Confident, friendly, professional?

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13. Able to get the best out of his students?

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14. Adaptable? \_\_\_\_\_

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15. Clearly explains what you are working on,  
and why? \_\_\_\_\_

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Are goals clearly defined? \_\_\_\_\_

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#### IV. The Reliability Factor

16. On time/All the time? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

17. Prepared for each lesson? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

18. Completely focused on you for the entire lesson? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

V. Musical Education

19. How long did the Instructor study music?

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20. What styles? \_\_\_\_\_

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21. Notable people the Instructor studied with?

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22. What styles does the Instructor teach, and at what level?

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23. Does the Instructor have formal coaching in  
how to teach music? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, with whom? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How long? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## VI. Real-World Experience

24. Performing \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

25. Recording \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

26. Knows what works and what doesn't?  
\_\_\_\_\_

27. Is the Instructor comfortable mentoring more advanced students? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tread lightly here. Many Guitar Instructors will be offended if they think you are interviewing them for the “job” of teaching you. Be discreet. Learn what you can over the phone, in e-mails, talking to people who know the Instructor: past/present students, etc.

But you must do the work of investigation!

Most down-to-earth, Professional Instructors will understand your concerns and welcome the opportunity to answer any, and every, question you may have.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments you may have, I would be happy to assist you in any way that I can in your search for a Guitar Instructor and your musical journey.

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