

ELECTRIC GUITAR BUYER'S GUIDE & FAQs

What are things to consider when buying an electric guitar?

Factors to consider include, but aren't limited to:

- Tonewood
- Pickups
- Neck
- Size

Tonewood

What wood should I choose?

Choosing the wood that the body of your guitar is constructed of affects three main factors: sound, appearance, and weight. Common examples of tonewoods are maple, alder, and mahogany. Denser woods create flatter, thicker tones while lightweight woods produce brighter tones. When deciding on the tonewood of your guitar, sound is generally considered the most important factor to take into account.

The other factor most affected by the body wood is the appearance you're looking for. Though more exotic and expensive woods may not always improve the sound of the guitar, they can create a unique and beautiful finish.

Weight may not be an obvious concern for a first-time buyer, but it's important to consider for a few reasons. It's generally accepted that heavier woods produce greater sustain (depending on other factors), but they can also be more challenging to wear on a strap or rest on your knee for extended periods due to their weight.

Pickups

How do I know what pickups to choose, and what's a Humbucker?

Pickups are the components that transfer the sound of a resonating guitar string to an amplifier. They use magnets to transform the sound of the strings into electrical current, which then travels down a cable and into an amp, where a speaker eventually turns the current back into sound at an amplified volume.

Single-coil pickups were the original pickups used in electric guitars, and are still used today for their distinctive sound. They have a clean, thin, and transparent sound that's very recognizable.

Double-coil pickups, more commonly referred to as "humbuckers," came about in the 1950s as an answer to the single coil's susceptibility to RF interference, or hum. By pairing two single coils

together with one out of phase, the guitars signal could be amplified cleanly while the hum was “bucked.” Humbuckers have a warm, smooth, and slightly thicker sound.

Some guitars come with a combination of both types of pickups, which would give the player the option of switching between the two distinctive tones depending on the creative will of the artist.

Neck

What does all the neck terminology mean?

Choosing the construction of your guitar’s neck is largely a matter of preference. From a beginner’s perspective, the choices can seem overwhelming. Here we’ll clarify some of the most common terminologies by category: the wood, the neck joint, and the profile.

-Wood type:

Like the body, there are many woods used to construct guitar necks. Common types include Maple, Rosewood, and Mahogany. Some necks are made of more than one piece of wood laminated together, sometimes combining different woods. For example, you could have a one-piece maple neck with a maple fretboard, or a two-piece neck with a maple back and rosewood fretboard. (“Fretboard” refers to the flat, front part of the neck where the fingers press on the strings). As mentioned before, it’s largely a matter of what’s comfortable and preferred by the player.

-Neck Joints: Bolt-on, Set, and Neck Through-Body

A bolt-on neck is usually secured to the body via screws, contrary to the name. A benefit would be easier maintenance and repair, while a disadvantage by some opinions is reduced sustain.

A set neck is glued into place and is carefully cut to match its mounting point on the guitar body, most commonly using dovetail joints. This produces improved sustain, but makes repairing and maintenance of the neck more challenging.

A neck-through-body design refers to solid-body guitars in which the neck is an integral part of the body itself. The neck runs the entire length of the guitar, and is usually ‘sandwiched’ between the top and bottom sections of the body. This produces a warm, smooth tone with exceptional sustain. However, due to its design, the benefits and structural integrity would be ruined if the neck was ever broken or severely damaged.

-Profile

The shape of the neck is one of the most personal elements contributing the feel or ‘play’ of a guitar. Profile refers to the cross-section of a neck, for example “C,” “D,” or “V” shaped. “C” necks are slightly oval, “D” necks are thicker, and “V” necks have tapered profiles. When considering which is best, look at your hands. Bigger hands need bigger necks for the best comfort, and vice versa.

Size

What do the measurements mean and what size is right for me?

There are many different sizes of guitars, commonly referenced by fraction (e.g. $\frac{1}{2}$ size) or measurement (e.g. 38"). Most adults will want a full size guitar for maximum comfort and playability. A full-size guitar is 41" in length, and is referred to in item descriptions as "Full" or "Full Size." While less common, $\frac{7}{8}$ size or 38" guitars are sometimes favorable for their compact size and shorter neck. There are also more playable for guitarists with petite builds, small hands, or children.

Smaller guitars like $\frac{1}{2}$ size and 25" are recommended for children, so that they can more easily learn the basics of technique without getting frustrated by a body they can't get their arm around or a neck they can't grasp.

The bottom line in choosing the guitar's size is selecting what's going to be most comfortable for the player.