

How to Replace the Strings on an Acoustic Guitar

Replacing guitar strings is standard maintenance that every guitarist should perform regularly. After much playing, guitar strings become dull and dirty, losing sustain and tone. While nearly every music shop can perform this task, it is simple enough to learn to do on your own, which can save time and money.

What You Need

- Acoustic Guitar
- Needle Nose Pliers w/Wire Cutter
- 1 Pack of Acoustic Guitar Strings
- Guitar Neck and String Polish
- Cleaning Cloth

Selecting the Right Guitar Strings

There are several different types of guitar strings, each with their unique sound and purpose. The most important properties are string gauge (size) and material.

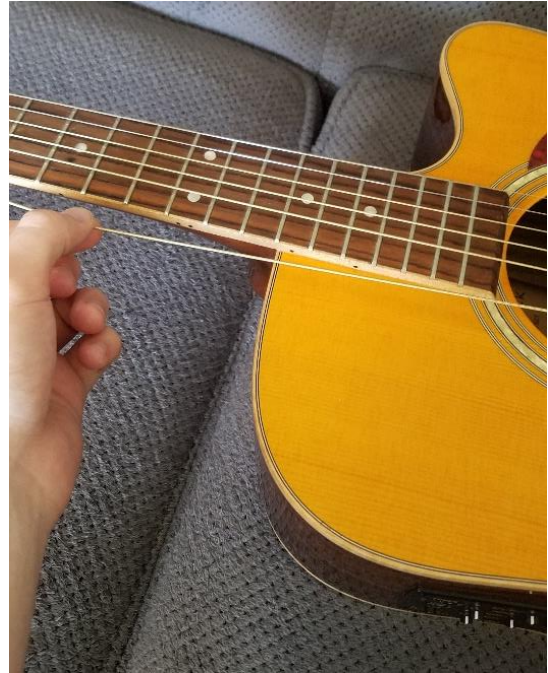
Lighter gauge strings typically are easier to play, but are more prone to buzzing and breaking. Heavier strings produce louder, better sustained notes, but require more force to press down and exert a lot of tension on the neck of the guitar. The string gauge is usually stated by the thickness of the smallest string. For example, “Twelves” are lighter strings with the high-E string being .012” around. Common acoustic guitar string materials are Bronze, Phosphor-Bronze, and Brass. Each one has their own distinct sound and feel, giving guitarists the option to find what they like best.

Many packs of strings come in a single package will all six strings wrapped together. In this case, the strings have color coded ends to signify which string is used in which position.



Removing the Old Strings

The first part of the process of replacing your strings requires you to remove the old, unwanted strings from the guitar. The process is the same for all six strings and the pictures demonstrate how to remove the Low-E string. Consult Figure 1 in the Appendix for guitar parts diagram.



1. Loosen the tension on one of the strings by turning the tuning peg clockwise, doing so until it is flimsy and does not play a note when strummed.



2. Cut the string near the body using the wire cutter, making sure to only cut the loose string.

CAUTION!

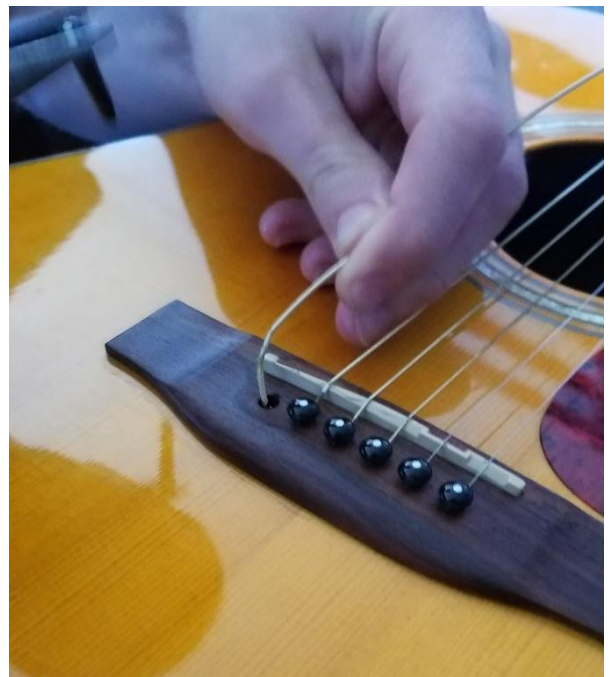
Strings will fling back when cut, even with little tension applied to them. Do not get too close to the bridge of the guitar while cutting strings.



CAUTION!

The ends of guitar strings are typically clipped pieces of metal and can be very sharp. Be careful when handling them to avoid scraping or piercing your skin.

3. Remove the top part of the string by unwinding it from the tuning post and pulling it out. Be wary of the sharp end of the string and carefully discard the part you removed.



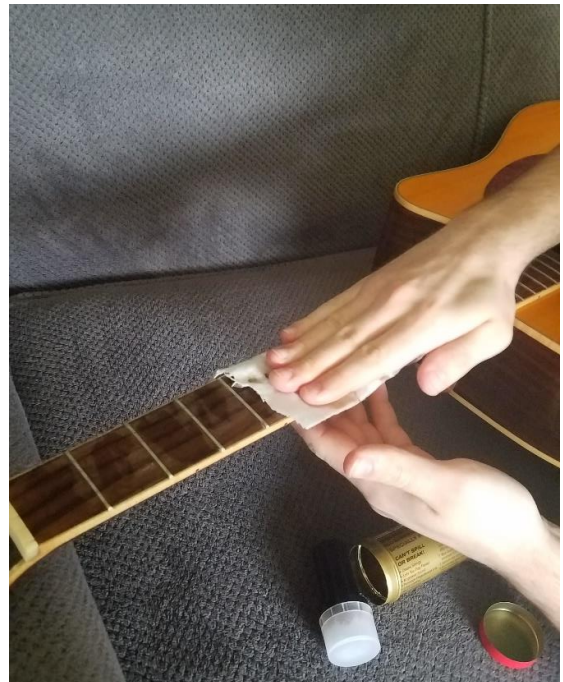
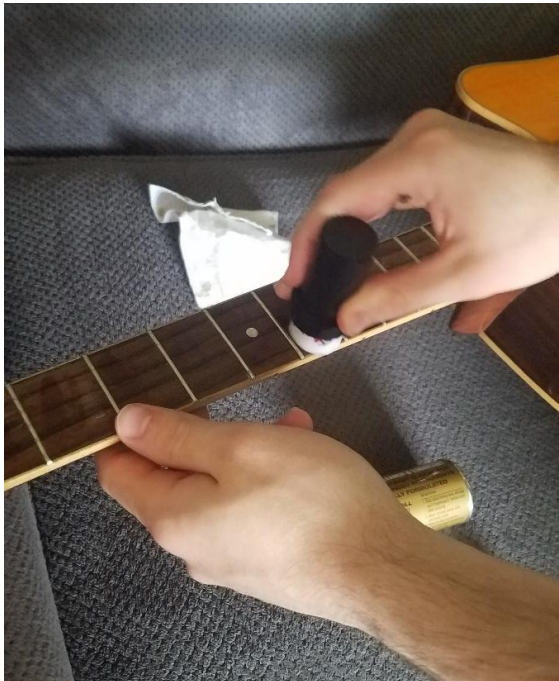
4. At the bridge of the guitar, use the needle-nose pliers to remove the bridge pin by pulling directly upward. Remove the other end of the string from the pin hole, carefully discarding it.

Cleaning the Guitar

Now that the old strings have been removed from the instrument, you are now able to clean the neck, body, and headstock of the guitar. A clean guitar neck will help the instrument sound better and make it easier and more comfortable to play.

WARNING!

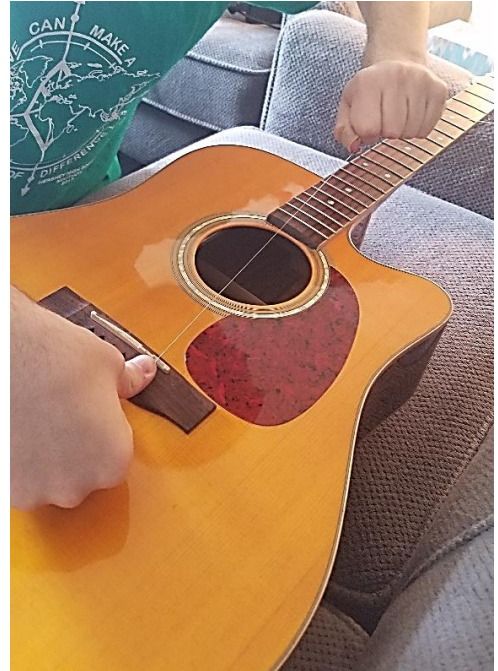
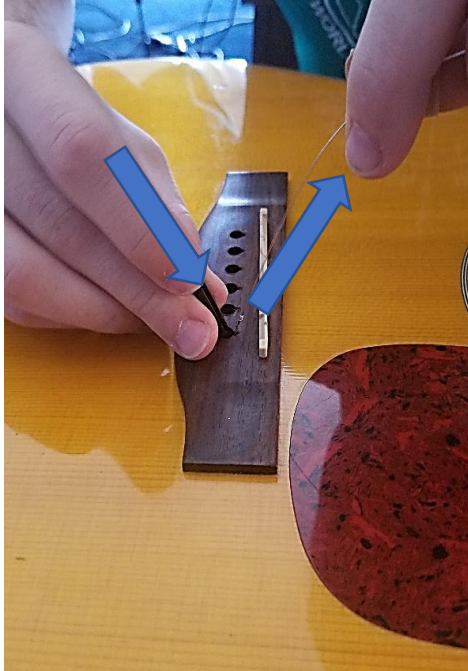
Use only cleaners specifically for instruments. Household wood furniture cleaners will leave a residue that can cause harm to the neck



5. Apply the string/neck cleaner to the neck of the guitar, covering all frets. Use the cloth to wipe away dust and grime from the all parts of the guitar.

Putting on the New Set of Strings

After cleaning your guitar, you are ready to finish the string replacement process. Putting on the new strings may seem difficult, but it is a simple process explained in only a few steps. Just as in the first section, only one string, in this case the High-E string, will be replaced in the instruction. Repeat this process, with noted changes for different strings, for all six strings on the guitar. For this section, make sure you know the individual notes each string should play for your desired tuning. Figure 2 in the Appendix shows the notes for Standard Tuning.



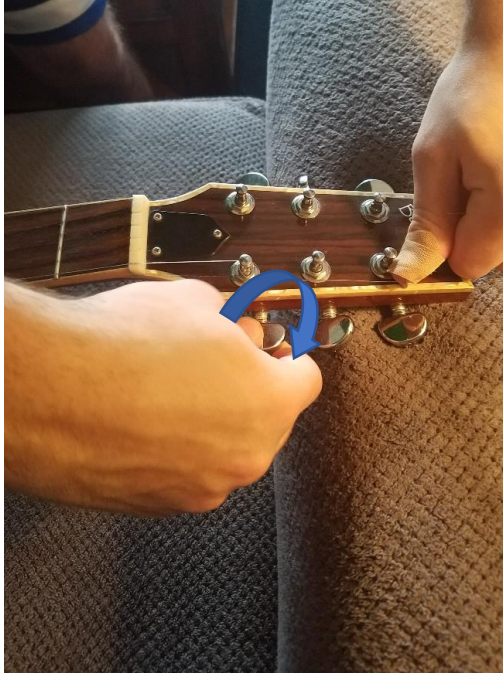
6. Grab the string in one hand and hold a bridge pin, with divot facing the neck, in the other. In one swift motion, push the pin down into the hole as you pull upwards on the string. Make sure the pin is firmly in the hole and cannot be pulled out when the string is forcefully pulled.



CAUTION!

Different headstock styles may require you to route the string through additional parts prior to reaching the tuning post. Make sure the new strings are strung the same way as the previous.

7. Feed the top of the string through the hole in the tuning post. Make sure the string is fed over the correct notch in the bridge and the nut, and through any additional string positioning parts that your guitar might have.



8. Leave a little bit of slack between the nut and the tuning post and begin to rotate the tuning peg clockwise, increasing the tension of the string.



WARNING!

Strings may break during this step if one tuned too quickly or if the bridge, nut, or a tuning post has a sharp edge to it. Use sandpaper or a nail-file to smooth any sharp pieces that could cause the string to break.

9. Continue to turn the tuning peg, allowing the string to wind around the tuning post and above the previous loop of the string. Tune until the string plays the correct pitch associated with it.

Appendix

The following figures are useful for identifying the parts of an acoustic guitar and the tuning on the strings. The information presented in this section is necessary to successfully restring a guitar.

GUIDE TO ACOUSTIC GUITAR PARTS

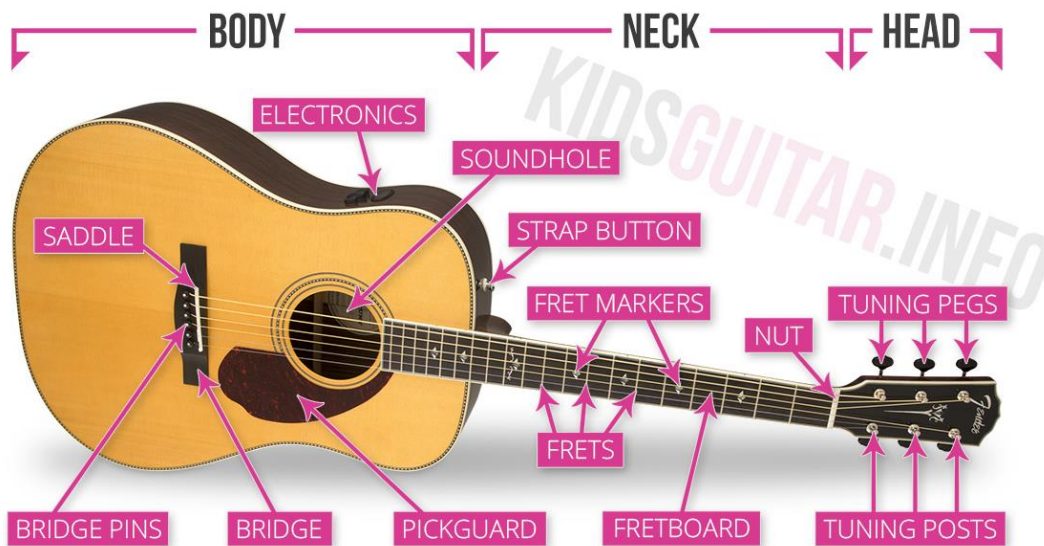


Figure 1: Parts of the Acoustic Guitar

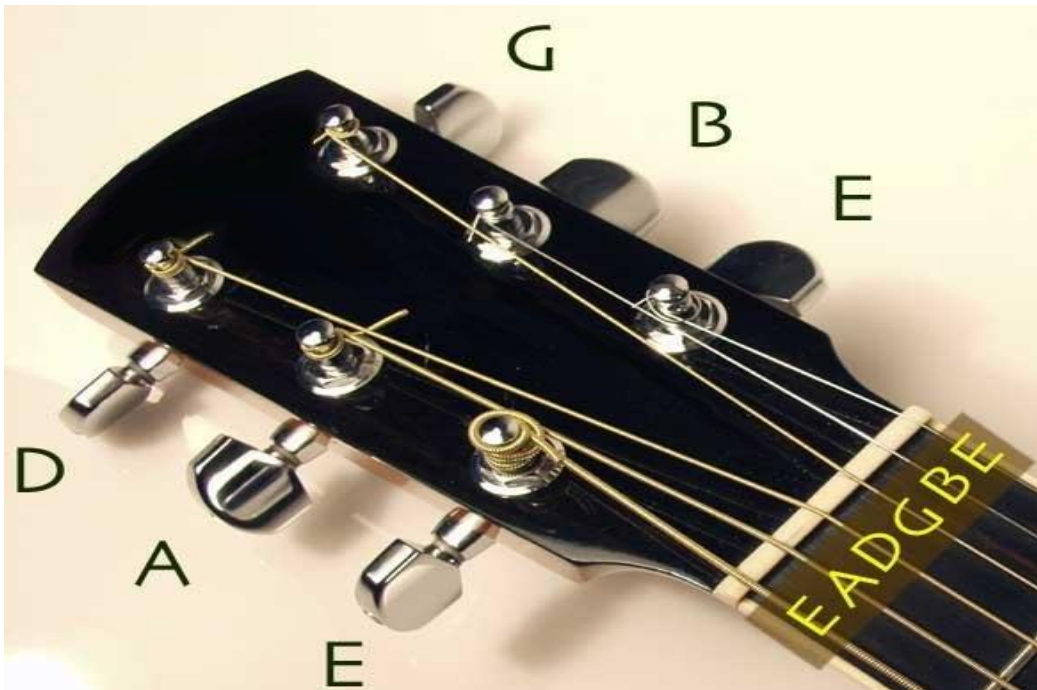


Figure 2: Standard Guitar Tuning for a Six-String Acoustic Guitar