We often can't be bothered doing it and leave our beloved guitars with rusty, dull sounding strings far too long.

It’s a bit like going to the dentists - every now and again you have to do it, but you don’t enjoy it.

**It doesn’t have to be such an ordeal.**

In this article I'm going to take the pain out of it and show you how to do it the right way.

By the end you'll be saying to yourself "why didn’t I do it earlier? Now my guitar sounds amazing again. It’s hard to believe it’s the same guitar!"

Let's dive in...

**HOW TO RESTRING A GUITAR: COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**What are the signs that my strings need changing?**

It might sound like a stupid question, but you want your guitar to have the best sound it can, right?

Your strings play a massive part in making the sound that comes out of your guitar. Yeah, it’s obvious, right, so why are you compromising on the sound you could be getting by leaving dull strings on your guitar?

While good strings won't make a bad guitar sound amazing, bad strings can totally ruin the sound of a **good guitar**.

**When we say “bad” strings we’re talking about their tonal quality.**

Unfortunately, the tonal quality of your strings will start to decrease, and fairly quickly, from the moment you put them on the guitar.

The main enemies of good tone are corrosion, stretching and wear.

So how do you know when your strings need changing?

1. **Build up of 'gunk'**
Take a cloth and run it along the underside of your strings. What do you notice? There’s probably a buildup of gunk, that can even be a yukky green colour if you use bronze strings.

It’s perfectly normal, and it’s a reaction of the metal to the oily, salty sweat on your hands. It is, however, a sure sign you need to change your strings.

Washing and drying your hands before you pick up the guitar can help to reduce corrosion, but changing your strings frequently is the only way you can win the battle.

2. Strings go out of tune easily

Tuning is more difficult on older strings, so that could be another tell-tale sign your guitar is due for a restring!

Strings naturally stretch every time you play and tune your guitar. But over time they lose that elasticity and tone suffers. The strings become dull and lifeless.

3. Flat spots start to appear

Your strings are constantly being pressed against the frets of your guitar.

This eventually causes fret wear and flat spots can appear on wound strings, which can cause them to buzz.

....another reminder their time is up!

How often should I string my guitar?

The age old question.

Some guitarists say strings can be boiled and they come out good as new! It's much easier to buy yourself a set of new strings though!

How often you change your strings will depend on how often you play, how hard you play and how well you care for them. The people over at hubguitar.com have some good advice on this:

As a general rule of thumb, noticeable wear can become visible on the strings beginning within 1-2 weeks or 5-10 hours of practice. By the time 3 months or about 100 hours of practice have passed, your strings will be fairly worn out and by this time most players would change them. However, some wait longer, up to 6 months or more.

Hubguitar.com
How do I know if I’m stringing my guitar properly?

For a beginner guitarist, it’s disheartening to hear people say that something is easy... when you've never done it before and you really don't have a clue where to begin. So ok, we won’t say it’s easy.

But then again changing guitar strings isn’t rocket science. You’ll have to do it yourself, unless you want to run the risk of being laughed out of your nearest guitar shop!

All guitarists are right to be concerned, but only about doing the job properly. And we’re about to take care of that.

So how do you know you’re doing it properly?

Well, there are a few things you should bear in mind, even if you've never changed guitar strings before.

One difference between acoustic and electric guitars is that an acoustic uses removable bridge pins to hold the strings in place at the bridge.

Bridge pins require a little more fiddling to get them to secure correctly to the string in place at the bridge. Which brings us to the first thing you should think about, and don’t laugh, but...

You want your strings to stay on the guitar.

Here’s a little story...

Guitar Restring Horror Story!

A guitarist friend of mine (who prefers to remain anonymous out of sheer embarrassment!) decided to hastily restring his guitar before a friend’s birthday party in Manchester a few years ago. He did this whilst watching a football game on TV and eating a pizza, he later confessed.

He had recently taken up the guitar, and his plan was to play Leonard Cohen’s “Sisters of Mercy”, (that party classic!) in what would be his first public performance.

Calling everyone to gather round, he then realised (thankfully, we thought) that his guitar was desperately out of tune. He apologised to the assembled crowd before starting to tune up as quickly as he could, but he was getting flustered and...

Imagine the look on his face as his friends suddenly had to take evasive action from a flying bridge pin, which shot out from his guitar like a bullet across the room!

Needless to say, not even Leonard Cohen himself could have recovered from that setback!

Luckily no-one was hurt, and our friend was able to laugh off his embarrassment, but it could have been avoided, and I hope his suffering will help to prevent yours!

What is the best time and place to restring my guitar?
You really need to find the right moment and place to do the job with space to concentrate on what you’re doing…

We don’t need to tell you strings can be dangerous to small children and pets. Even your friends and family could be at risk from flying bridge pins!

Once you begin, it’s better to do the job in one sitting. Give yourself at least half an hour off from anything else you might need to do. Your guitar is going to need your undivided care and attention.

You should sit the guitar on a firm, flat surface like a table or desk. That means the guitar should be horizontal. To prevent any scratches on your precious guitar or the table, use a blanket or a towel or tablecloth.

Take it slowly. If you think you’ve made a mistake, it’s ok, just undo what you’ve done and start again. Even if you crease or coil a string, it’s not a permanent problem.

**How do I choose the right type of strings for my guitar?**

Strings are made in various thicknesses or gauges.

This is expressed in thousandths of an inch, so the lightest string could be a .010 (the high E string) and the heaviest a .059 (your low E string).

When describing gauges, guitarists will normally say a "ten" when referring to a 0.10 gauge. There are pros and cons to using lighter/heavier gauge strings (see table below).

You can buy individual strings, but thankfully they come in a ready made pack of 6. We just need to decide how light or heavy we want them.

**TYPES OF GUITAR STRINGS**

**Acoustic Guitar Strings**

Acoustics guitars usually come equipped with "light" gauge strings.

This is a good place to begin, but if you’re a heavy strummer and you break strings often, you’ll need to think about heavier gauge strings.

Here’s a list of the standard string gauges found in each set of acoustic guitar strings. The 'string weightings' refer to each of the 6 strings, as shown below:
Here are all the types of acoustic guitar strings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>String weightings</th>
<th>Nickname</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;extra light&quot; acoustic</td>
<td>.010 .014 .023 .030 .039 .047</td>
<td>&quot;tens&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;custom light&quot;</td>
<td>.011 .015 .023 .032 .042 .052</td>
<td>&quot;elevens&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;light&quot;</td>
<td>.012 .016 .025 .032 .042 .054</td>
<td>&quot;twelves&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;medium&quot;</td>
<td>.013 .017 .026 .035 .045 .056</td>
<td>&quot;thirteens&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;heavy&quot;</td>
<td>.014 .018 .027 .039 .049 .059</td>
<td>&quot;fourteens&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the geeks among us, take a closer look at acoustic guitar strings and what they are made of...
Electric Guitar Strings

Most new electric guitars come with "super light" guitar strings. Of course that string gauge might not be to your taste.

Different brands might give you slightly different string gauges in their sets. Electric strings are usually composed of a lighter-gauge wire, and the 3rd string (G) is unwound, or plain, whereas an acoustic guitar’s 3rd string is wound. A nylon-string guitar 3rd string also is unwound but is a thicker nylon string.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>String weightings</th>
<th>Nickname</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;extra super light&quot;</td>
<td>.008 .010 .015 .021 .030 .038</td>
<td>&quot;eights&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;super light&quot;</td>
<td>.009 .011 .016 .024 .032 .042</td>
<td>&quot;nines&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;light&quot;</td>
<td>.010 .013 .017 .026 .036 .046</td>
<td>&quot;tens&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;medium&quot;</td>
<td>.011 .015 .018 .026 .036 .050</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;heavy&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;twelves&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HOW TO RESTRING A GUITAR: INSTRUCTIONS

Before we start, I really recommend you grab some tools. It's going to make you're life easier...

Essential Tools To Make Your Life Easier

Planet Waves Pro Winder String Winder and Cutter

They have many different names - you know what we're talking about. Clippers, pliers or wire cutters (not scissors, as they won't cut the thicker strings) . Planet Waves Pro Winder String Winder and Cutter combines both a winder and a cutter.

Price: $7.49 on Amazon

The Good

- The swiss army knife of guitar stringing tools
- High-quality peg winder with built-in string cutter
- Integrated bridge pin puller for acoustic instruments

The Bad

- Arm not rubber coated so may chip. If you spin it too aggressively and fast, and it runs into your headstock, it could chip or leave a mark on your clearcoat

Roadie Automatic Tuner and String Winder
This cool little gadget is a string winder and automatic tuner to boot! It tunes your guitar for you automatically, but not only that - it actually measures the elasticity of your strings and tells you when your strings need changing.

Price: $99 from Roadie website

The Good

- Accompanying bluetooth app to help you tune your guitar
- For electric guitars you have a line in for noisy environments
- 3 times more accurate than the human ear
- Tells you when your strings need swapping

The Bad

- The price. There are tuners and string winders out there a lot cheaper, but with the same coolness factor? Probably not.

How To String An Acoustic Guitar

Ok, so let's get down to it. You've got an acoustic guitar that needs new strings.

We’ve got a great video from the guys at Fender University that covers all the bases.

If only one string has broken, you'll have to consider how long the rest of the strings have been on the guitar.

If it's been a while, it could be the first of many in quick succession to break, making a complete change a sensible move.

Your new strings will continue to stretch (and go flat) even after you tune them. Don’t panic!

To help get that initial stretchiness out of the string, pull on the string gently but firmly (outwards, away from the fretboard) and then tune the string up to the right pitch. Repeat the process until the string no longer goes flat after you pull it.

You may have to do this a few times, and we know you’re anxious to get playing, but we’re only talking about a 5 minute operation.

Believe us, it’s time well spent.

How To String An Electric Guitar

There’s good news for electric guitar players: your guitar strings are much easier to change than any other type of guitar (acoustic and classical for example.)

Electric guitars are built with hardware that makes the process of changing strings very quick and easy.
Step 1
Fully loosen the tuning pegs on the top of your guitar. This will allow you to easily remove the old strings. You can also cut them off using wire cutters.

Step 2
If you did not use wire cutters, unthread all of the strings from the guitar head & bridge.

Step 3
Your fretboard and whole guitar is probably so dirty it constitutes a biohazard. Give it a good clean with a guitar cleaning solution or (only slightly wet) cotton cloth.

Step 4
Thread the first string to be replaced through the bridge (or underside of guitar). Keep threadings at the ball end locks in place.

Step 5
Thread the string through the hole in the tuning peg & pull tight. Now estimate how much extra string is needed to create 2–3 rings around the peg when you begin to tighten it.

Step 6
Push the bend you made in the string down to the top of the tuning peg so it rests against it. Begin to tighten the string the correct direction (see below). To ensure the string neatly spirals downwards as it gets wound, place your finger over the string being fed and push down slightly. Make sure the excess unwound string stays pointing upwards and away from the strings being wound.

Step 7
Repeat the process for the other 5 strings. Neaten everything up by cutting the excess string off with wire cutters.

Which Side of The Tuning Peg Does The String Go?

Ibanez style guitar heads always go to the right hand side of the peg.

For Les Paul style heads, the left 3 pegs have the string going down the right side. The right 3 pegs have the string going down the left side.

How Much Slack Needs To Be Left For Each String?
Unfortunately getting this right can be trial and error. Too little and the string may easily break. Too much and it not only looks messy from all the overlapping strings, but can make the string more prone to breakages too.

However using the method above it can be much easier to measure the amount of slack you need.

As a rule of thumb the thinner strings need more slack than the thicker ones. Use this rough guide to get a general idea:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>String</th>
<th>Slack</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>3.3 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>3.8 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>4.3 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>5.3 cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How To String a Classical (or Spanish) Guitar

There’s very little that’s not covered in this video by Dave Doll at Martin guitars.

If you have any problems keeping up with him, just stop the video and go back, but it’s a really simple and clear demonstration.

Summary

We guitarists forget how good new strings feel. We convince ourselves it’s not that important because we’re lazy, and changing strings isn’t much fun. But we know we’re only fooling ourselves…

Listen to this track played on brand new strings- compare it to how your guitar sounds. Don’t worry, it’s not “Sisters of Mercy!”

Check out our free 7 Top Tips for Restringing your Guitar download below - with exclusive info not included in this article...