

PLAY IT

LESSON ONE—Beginning to Play

FOR ALL BANJOS First Things First

1) Your Banjo

If you've never played the banjo, have someone who knows banjos or stringed instruments look over your banjo to make sure it's ready to play. Your banjo must be in good working order. It's more than just tuning up.

Bridge: Banjos have moveable bridges, and the bridge must be in just the right place so that the banjo will play in tune when strings are fretted. Having a banjo set up to stay in tune and play comfortably will save a lot of time and make your learning much more enjoyable.

Strings: Make sure your strings are new, and light gauges.

Tuning Pegs: Tuning pegs need to be tight enough to hold strings in tune. Tuners should be replaced if they don't turn smoothly or keep the banjo in tune.

Action (height of strings above fingerboard): Strings should be no more than about 1/8 of an inch above the twelfth fret for beginners. That means the neck must be set at the proper angle to accommodate a bridge at least 1/2 inch high.

Head: The banjo head should be pretty tight for the best sound, and all parts of your banjo should fit together snugly. For best results in learning to play, it's important to have an instrument you can rely upon to stay in reasonably good tune and which has a consistent tone.

Banjo Care and Maintenance pages will be added at a later date.

For All Banjos, First Things First, continued

2) Electronic tuners, tuning forks and metronomes

If you're playing the banjo for the first time, an electronic tuner is highly recommended. Later, an A440 tuning fork will be all you'll need because you will have the "ear training" to get in tune. To keep steady time and develop your sense of rhythm, get a metronome. If you can find a good guitarist or bass player to play with, and with whom you can develop your sense of timing and rhythm, you'll have a solid learning experience and learn the joy of playing with others.

3) Music Basics

Rhythm, *melody*, and *harmony* are three basic elements of music, and all work together. **Rhythm** is the beat or pulse of music, that might set your toes tapping or your feet to dancing. When beginning, the beat needs to be steady, regular, and in synch with a metronome or other musical instrument keeping time.

Melody is the tune, just as your voice sings, you'll want to learn to make the banjo sing.

Harmony refers to notes of a different pitch which work together with the melody. At the beginning, they're known as *chords*. In **Lesson 3**, you'll learn your first chords.

4) Learning and Notation—All of us learn differently. Some learn physically, by movement and the sense of touch. This is *kinetic* learning. Others rely more on their hearing, our *auditory* sense. For others, their eyes provide most of the information they take in. They are *visual* learners. Our sense of smell and taste have little to do with learning music, but are part of what we sense no matter where we are. All our senses, especially auditory, kinetic and visual, work together and reinforce one another as we learn to play a musical instrument. The blind, who rely greatly on their auditory and kinetic senses can and have become great musicians. *Multisensory* learning, in which all senses come into play, has been shown to be the most quick, effective way to learn. Your brain, and how it processes information plays the most important part, and it's where *desire* and *motivation* and *persistence* originates.

Notation: Reading written music in the form of tablature or standard music notation is a valuable skill you can add as you learn. Like reading English or any other language, it's a skill which you can develop, plus it shows just how the notes are made, that is, just what string to play and where and when to play it. See the **Notation** pages explaining tablature and music notation.