

The 10 most common mistakes people make when getting Guitar Lessons...And how to avoid them

By Johnny London (<http://LondonSchoolofGuitar.com>)

Introduction

Learning the guitar is fun, creative, inspiring and incredible at ANY age. Also, it's a fundamentally GOOD thing to do and will bring you countless hours of Joy, Inspiration, Focus and Discipline.

My very first recommendation for all would-be guitarists is to *believe* you can do it and have faith and trust in your ability - a large part of my teaching deals with **reversing negative self belief** that stands in the way of your progress - the negative belief is **never** real, only imagined.

Your next step is to get an instructor, finding a good one can be tough as with most professions there are a lot of amateur guitar instructors: cheap, inexperienced and unprofessional that will always end up wasting your time and money in the long run.

Here are **the 10 most common mistakes people make when getting Guitar Lessons**:

1. They take lessons with an inexperienced instructor
2. They take lessons with someone who hasn't got a track record of success
3. They take lessons from someone who isn't into the same style of music as they are
4. They take lessons from someone who isn't 'walking the talk'
5. They take lessons with someone who doesn't have a professional syllabus or method of teaching
6. They take lessons with someone who doesn't have and use all the available tools for your success
7. They take lessons with someone who has a fuzzy studio policy
8. They use price as the determining factor (cheap isn't better!)
9. They take lessons with an instructor who is a flake
10. They don't devote enough time to practice

There are definitely more, but these are the most common and if you keep reading you'll find out just how to solve these problems effortlessly.

It's all about asking the right questions

If your instructor or Music School is professional you will need to set up an audition/interview where you will be asked questions and in turn you can ask your own questions. At the interview, as well as asking the questions below you should be checking out the environment/location that the instructor teaches in - is it tidy, warm, conducive to learning etc?

So if you want to separate the wheat from the chaff, then you need to ask these 11 questions to your instructor:

1. How long have you been teaching?

Ideal answer: I've been Teaching for half the amount of time I've been playing and have been playing for 15-20 years

Why this answer - If you are serious about learning and you want to get results then you need someone who is professional with experience, someone who has made the mistakes and has learnt and developed ways round those obstacles in their learning so as to make their teaching and your learning easier, faster and more enjoyable.

My answer: I have been playing for 20 years and teaching for 10, I play, on average, about 5 hours a day, and if added up I have the equivalent time investment in my instrument and craft as someone with 43.8 doctorate degrees!!*

2. What is your experience, education/playing/teaching?

Ideal answer: A doctorate in music doesn't necessarily make someone a good teacher, but it definitely helps with regards to knowledge they can impart. Also, a great degree from a good college doesn't necessarily mean that someone has got 'out there' and 'lived' what you want to live and experience as an aspiring guitarist. So you ideally want someone with experience relative to the type of direction you want to take. You want them to have been teaching for at least 5-10 years and to have the same amount of time playing out - gigging, session work, collaborating, being in bands, involved in making and selling records/merchandise etc - in short, someone who can **walk the talk** and if they have a degree or equivalent then that is an added bonus.

My answer: I have played in numerous bands, some achieving chart success and I've played gigs on National Television to audiences that reached 20 million. I also play now mainly as a session 'gun-for-hire' and am very selective about the shows I play as my wife and 2 children don't like it when I'm out too late gigging! I have a CMS from Goldsmiths College in London and have taught 100s of students from the age of 4 to 75 - currently my oldest student is a 68 year old woman who is a complete beginner - she is INSPIRING!

3. What is your track record of the type of guitarists that you've taught? - have anyone of them gone on to do X? (insert your goal here) Are you capable of teaching me what I need to learn and guiding me to where I want to get to?

Ideal answer: I wouldn't go and see a doctor whose patients all come out worse than when they go in - it'd be a major turn off! I want to hear stories and read/see testimonials of inspired people raving about the magical healing powers of the doctor! Then I'd want to see him! It's the same with guitar instructors - there are many 'quacks' out there - that lack experience, structure and any track record of success - so what you want to see is - guitarists that have achieved and are living the dream you want to see realized - and how the teacher intends for you to recreate the successes of their current and former students.

My answer: Currently a number of my students are playing gigs all around SLC, another student has done the Warped tour this year and last. Students of mine in the UK have toured with NoFX, Alice Cooper and gone on to successful careers in the Music Industry. Also, with my guidance, all of my students reach their goals which are as varied as just playing for enjoyment, playing around the campfire, or learning a song to impress a boy or girl they like. My students are excited about learning and inspired to, and do achieve more in their lives.

4. What is the main style that you teach? Who are your favourite guitarists?

Ideal answer: Is the style in line with the kind of guitar you want to learn? If not, then it may not be the right fit because inadvertently you'll pick up on some of your instructors stylistic leanings - I

wouldn't advise taking lessons from a classical guitar teacher if all you want to do is play like Korn or some other Death Metal band! Also, do you know and like the guitarists your instructor likes?

My Answer: I can teach most styles, but would consider Blues, Rock, Indie, Metal my specialities, I enjoy Jazz and Classical but I use these styles to complement my teaching style not as a main focus. My favourite guitarists include Jimi Hendrix, SRV, BB King, Albert King, Eric Clapton, Joe Satriani, Tommy Emmanuel, Mark Knopfler, David Gilmour, Nick Drake (and many more!) I also like to focus on using the guitar as a tool for self expression and creation and as an avid songwriter and producer love to teach the hows and whys of songwriting with the guitar

5. How often do you want lessons to take place/how long are they?

Ideal answer: I recommend an hour lesson weekly for adult learners - budget and time permitting that is...You really need structure when learning and a definite weekly lesson as something that you can both be there for is important. Another thing, busy instructors are busy for a reason, and that is because they are good, so sometimes an instructor with just a few slots could be a good one.

My Answer: As above, an hour a week if you are an adult (depending on your budget), or 30 minutes for younger students (13 or younger)

6. What type of syllabus do you use?

Ideal answer: You want to look for someone with structure and a focussed learning path to go down - someone with an intrinsic understanding of the overview of how to get you to where you want to get to is important. It's true that not every student is the same and there's no one right way to learn, but it will really help you to know if your instructor is serious by the fact that he has taken the time to think about the structure of teaching and learning and written it down.

Also, does the syllabus look professional and cover the 'angles'?

My answer: I offer a self written instruction book that comes with guitar notation, TAB (specialized guitar notation) and a CD with all the tracks in the book, and this book accompanies the beginning lessons, I also have 2 other books relevant to different stages of learning. As well as those I have a list of over 300 songs that I'm ready to teach at any given moment, I also use Youtube to teach songs that the student wants to learn that I've not heard of and can work songs out by ear pretty much instantaneously - another thing is, I have a great knowledge of the overview of what you need to do to play what you want to, and I can explain at any given time exactly where you are/relevance of what we're doing and why it will help/and where what we're doing lies on my overall path of progress for you.

7. What other methods/tools do you have to help me learn?

Ideal answer: What kind of multimedia does the instructor use? If they are just scribbling vague notes on scrap paper, then that's a major turn off! What handout's/task-sheets does the instructor use and are they professional looking?

My Answer: As well as the books with CDs and Backing Tracks, I have a large library of video lessons/songs that students can access so they can watch them between lessons - this really helps out and can prevent getting into bad habits etc. Lessons also take place in a professional project

studio and I can record to audio lesson parts and with many students actually go on to record albums and EPs with them!

8. Do you have recitals and chances for me to get up and perform in front of and with other people?

Ideal answer: The thought of recitals or playing in front of people might scare you, but playing in front of others is extremely good for you and the chance to do it in a non-threatening and nurturing environment is extremely important. Also, playing with others is good fun and very helpful too.

My Answer: I have a recital roughly every 3 months and we also have a Summer Guitar Workshop (<http://LondonSchoolOfGuitar.com>) every year that helps students come together and is incredibly inspiring for all who take part. Our yearly workshop is the ONLY one of its kind here in SLC!

9. How many times on average do you (the instructor) cancel or reschedule lessons?

Ideal answer: Never! But life can get in the way of a busy instructor and the odd reschedule from them is OK as long as they have a solid and serious approach to your learning, and will happily refund or reschedule lessons that is fine. Someone who is constantly rescheduling you, for whatever reason, is someone you want to avoid.

My answer: I very rarely cancel lessons and always make up the ones I do.

10. What is your cancellation policy?

Ideal answer: This is more a bureaucratic question, but you might need to cancel a lesson or two and it's worth knowing where you stand. A professional instructor will not tolerate being mucked around, they will have too many students and won't necessarily be able to fit in make-up lessons - a detailed and clear policy sheet that you both understand is important. A 24 hour cancellation notice is acceptable with one make lesson a quarter.

My answer: As I am very in-demand I allow 1 make up lesson a quarter and expect a 24 hour notice for cancellation.

11. What methods of payment do you take? Do you have a per lesson or monthly tuition?

Ideal answer: A serious instructor will take all forms of payment as they will have gone to the trouble of getting a business license and merchant account etc to be able to do it - also, look for someone who will take tuition on a monthly basis - these are indicators of commitment, both from you and the instructor.

My Answer: I accept all methods of payment and tuition is paid by the month. The preferred way of paying tuition is Direct Debit as it's efficient, convenient and reliable for both parties.

The type of answers you get from these questions will dictate the level of experience and professionalism you can expect from your instructor/school - if the answers are very different from the ones above then you can almost guarantee that the instructor isn't professional or experienced and definitely someone to avoid.

What next?

An educated, experienced instructor is as professional as a doctor or lawyer and should be treated as such. One of the main problems with guitar instruction is that anyone at any time in their playing career can just say 'I'm going to teach guitar' - which neither qualifies or entitles them to a place in a professional marketplace - but the beginning instructors like this advertise online and can seem pretty decent, but if you don't get answers comparable to the ones above you should steer clear - you will only end up wasting time and money - even if the basic rate is less than someone else's.

Before you actually take the plunge and sign up for lessons, there are a few other things that you should be aware of - do you LIKE this person? Are they affable, upbeat, enthusiastic, optimistic and knowledgeable? Can you see yourself actually learning from and respecting them enough to pay them good money to become your Guitar Guide/Guru? Also, take into consideration, do they have a local 801 number? Do they seem trustworthy?

What about the cost?

I believe in the philosophy that you get what you pay for, and it holds just as true for guitar instructors as anyone else - someone who respects their own time and experience will charge accordingly - this is why I charge more than any other guitar instructor in the valley, because I have the professional experience, education, expertise and ability to ably justify my rates. For the more budget conscious individual I have trained Teachers who use my syllabus and method and charge less than I do.

Call for rates and availability - 801.906.8248

I hope this short report helps you out on your path to Guitar Mastery! It would be a pleasure to talk to you when you decide to call and enquire about lessons.

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P.S If you don't have a guitar, then I will be able to help you out in finding a relevant one, I recommend getting a relatively inexpensive one at first (between \$300-\$500) to get the ball rolling (a Yamaha APX is a pretty good electro acoustic with steel strings (it's an acoustic guitar that can be plugged into an amp) If budget is a concern you can get \$100 starter guitars from Guitar Center or Musicians Friend too.

*Based on the calculation that an educated and focused person can do a Doctorate in 1 year if they devote 16 hours of focused time per week to it. (taken from 'The Now Habit' by Neil Fiore)