

Tuning the Guitar by Ear



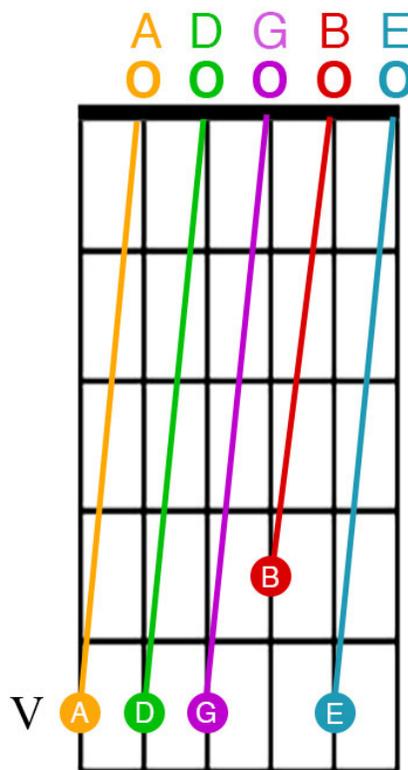
Classical Guitar Corner Academy

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5th- and 4th-Frets Method

1. First tune the sixth-string open E to a tuner, tuning fork, or another instrument already in tune.
2. Play the A on the fifth fret of the sixth string. Now match the open fifth-string A to that pitch.
3. Play the D on the fifth fret of the fifth string. Now match the open fourth-string D to that pitch.
4. Play G on the fifth fret of the fourth string. Now match the open third-string G to that pitch.
5. Play the B on the fourth fret of the third string. Now match the open second-string B to that pitch.
6. Play the E on the fifth fret of the second string. Now match the the open first-string E to that pitch.

Tuning by unisons will give solid results in that it works well with equal temperament (it doesn't leave some intervals more in tune than others). This is also a long-standing method for tuning the guitar and is even recommended by Ferdinando Carulli in his early nineteenth-century method (Op. 241: pp. 8-9 of the UE Greman Krempf edition). However, just like the above 5th- and 7th-frets harmonics method, any slight errors from one string to the next will accumulate because this method does not use one reference pitch but instead uses five separate reference pitches. Moreover, using fretted notes will exacerbate any inherent intonation issues with the strings or setup issues such as with the nut and saddle of your guitar and so errors are more prevalent.



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Using Reference Strings

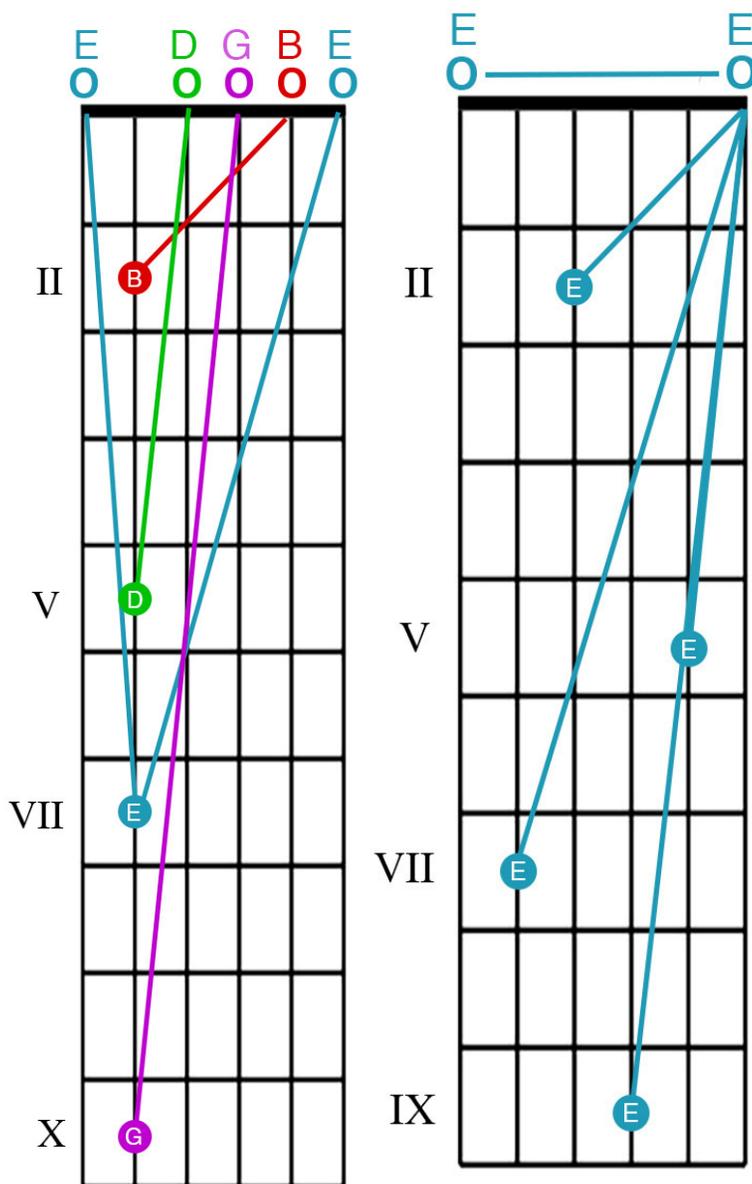
If you use only one string as the source of your reference pitches then you will avoid compounding any errors that arise as you tune.

This makes for a more accurate tuning overall and allows for an easy and accurate method.

There are two different ways you could approach this method:

1. You could use one string to play the various pitches of the open strings then match the pitch at unison or octave.
2. You could simply use one open string and then find those same notes on each string at the unison or octave.

The greatest benefit of this approach is having a consistent reference pitch. It can be more challenging to tune strings using octaves rather than unison but with a little practice you will get it in no time!



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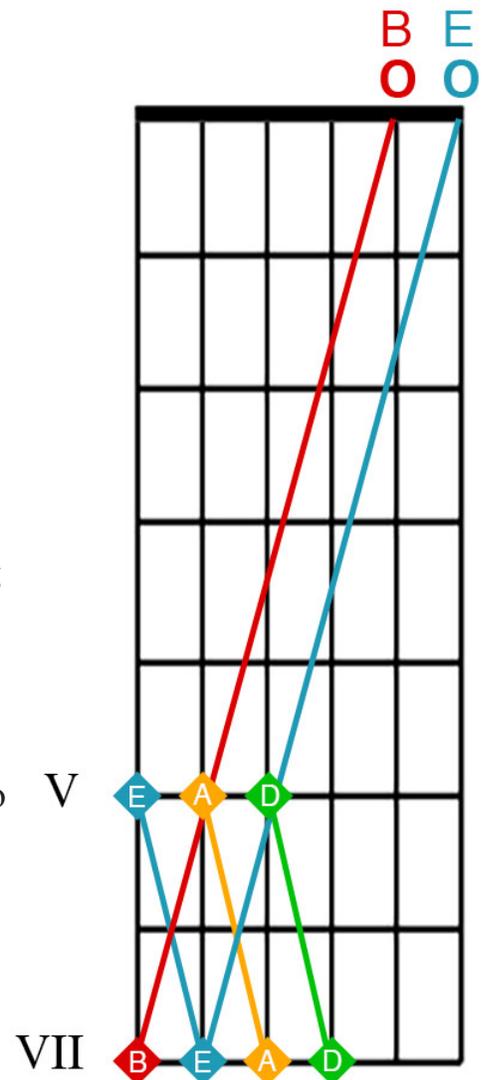


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5th- & 7th-Frets Harmonics

1. Tune the harmonic at the fifth fret of the sixth string to a tuner, tuning fork, or another in-tune instrument such as a piano.
2. Now play the in-tune harmonic at the fifth fret of the sixth string and let it ring while playing the harmonic at the seventh fret of the fifth string. Adjust the tuning peg of the fifth string until it matches the ringing sixth-string harmonic.
3. Then play the harmonic at the fifth fret of the fifth string and let it ring while playing the harmonic at the seventh fret of the fourth string.
4. Then play the harmonic at the fifth fret of the fourth string and let it ring while playing the harmonic at the seventh fret of the third string.
5. Then play the harmonic at the seventh fret of the sixth string and let it ring while playing the open second string (no harmonic, just the open B).
6. Then play the harmonic at the fifth fret of the sixth string and let it ring while playing the open first string (again, no harmonic, just the open E).



Because of the limitations of equal temperament this particular method of tuning is not very reliable for two reasons. First of all, any slight error in tuning will accumulate since you are not tuning from one reference point, but from four to five. Secondly, using the harmonics at 5th and 7th frets method will mean that some intervals are perfectly in tune while others are quite out of tune.