

Learning Your First Song Pt. 2

Learning the Second Chord and Switching Sides

After the students have learned the first chord, and played along with the song, then teach the second chord the same way (D6 for Horse With No Name). This time have the rest 4 beats then play 4 beats. So they're resting on the Em, playing on the D6. The teacher can also alternate with the students. Once they can do that, divide the class into two parts and have one side play Em the other D6. Play along with the song. To keep continuity you could have them play while alternating on the verse, sing along with the chorus, then each side will switch the chords they play on the next verse. This is a great time for the teacher to circulate and fix any issues with chords, since they're only playing one chord per side, or with hand position, or picking patterns, etc.

Switching Chords

By this point the students should be familiar with the song, and have had plenty of experience playing each chord. The next step is to switch chords. Show the class (use the camera and LCD if you have one) how the first finger move up a string, the second finger moves down a string from the Em to D6. See if they can move both fingers together, give them a minute or two to practice it by themselves. Make this a habit too, they need to time to work out the kinks on their own, especially if they don't have guitars at home. Have the class play along with you at a slow speed, switching chords. Once they're feeling comfortable have them play along with the song. Again, have them sing the chorus, or count beats or anything that keeps them engaged and listening.

A Fork in the Road

At this point you've got several options, you can:

- Learn the chords for the chorus
- Learn a right hand pattern
- Practice singing and playing at the same time
- Learn how to read chord charts.

If you're going to teach the chords in the chorus, you'll basically follow the same pattern for learning the verse chords. In fact, you can use this lesson as a template on how to learn songs.

If you're going to teach a right hand picking pattern you might have to take a step backwards. Don't focus on changing chords - just play one chord for 4 beats, then rest for 4 beats, like when your first learned the chord, unless the students are really solid with changing the chords. When you're first learning guitar it's tricky to strum a rhythm pattern and change chords. While the

LESSON PLAN

eventual goal is to see right hand and left hand technique as one integrated skill, it's best to compartmentalize them at first.

Playing and Singing at the Same Time

If you decide that playing and singing at the same time is your next goal, you'll also have to simplify things in the left and right hand department. The easiest way is to have the students only play the chords on beat one. Go line by line with the song, have the students listen to you play the chord changes and figure out what word the chord changes on. For example in "Horse With No Name" - On the first part of the journey, etc. The Em comes on the word "first" the D6 on the word "journey". Have the students play the chord one time when they sing the words first or journey, etc. Which brings us to the next part,,,

Reading Chord Charts

If your students can change chords on the right words, then have them write the chord charts. The teacher can play the song slowly, letting the students watch the teachers fingers. Go line by line and figure out which word to put the chords on. If you've got an easy song with a repetitive chord progression they can play, then it's much more authentic and engaging to have the students figure out the chord charts, instead of the teacher putting the chart up, then explaining it then playing it.

Summary

You can use these techniques for any song that you like. You'll find as the students get more confident with the guitar, that you can spend less time on technique, and more time on concepts, like musicality, feel, dynamics or form. You can even start talking about lyrics, and what the composers intentions were.

When you're teaching new songs try to find the easiest part of the song to play, and learn that first. You want your students to spend more time playing than you spend talking. The sooner they start playing, the better.