

# CHOOSING YOUR FIRST INSTRUMENT

If you're just getting started playing an instrument, you may want to consider buying an entry-level model or borrowing one from a friend. Purchasing an instrument ultimately could save you money, but renting may save you the hassle of reselling it if you lose interest or want to upgrade.

Renting typically involves monthly or quarterly rental fees and there may also be a minimum rental period. While smaller woodwind instruments or strings can rent for less than \$20 a month, prices for some instruments are much more. Grand pianos, for example, could lease for around \$300 a month.

Many stores offer rent-to-own programs where you can try out an instrument by renting, and if you decide that you want to purchase the instrument, a portion of your monthly payments will go toward the purchase of that instrument, or possibly a new one. Other companies may offer purchase discounts to rental customers.

Whether renting or buying, be wary of low-quality instruments. Choose your instrument wisely: a good investment in a quality first instrument can last many years. Ask for assistance from the store employees, your teacher, or another experienced player.

When looking at instruments, be sure to ask the right questions. How much of your rent would go toward a purchase? Will the rental charge change after an initial rental period? Are there additional fees involved such as interest, insurance, or maintenance? What if the instrument is lost, stolen, or damaged? Who takes care of maintenance and repairs? Is it possible to get a loaner instrument during repairs?

# FINDING THE RIGHT MUSIC TEACHER

Many students make the mistake of using the trial and error method, repeatedly hiring and firing until they find the right teacher, when they really should spend more time "shopping" to get the right fit from the start. Following this series of steps will help you find a teacher who meets your needs.

**1** Figure out exactly what you are looking for in a teacher and make a list. What would you like to learn and what would you like to achieve on your chosen instrument? What genre(s) of music do you want to learn? Will performance be part of your hobby or will you just play for your own personal enjoyment? Would you prefer the camaraderie of group lessons or the personal attention of private lessons?

**2** Look for teachers in your area. Talk to area musicians, the music department at public schools and colleges, and approach music stores. Many stores have bulletin boards where teachers post availability. Visit the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) website ([www.mtna.org](http://www.mtna.org)) to find teachers close to you.

**3** Once you have identified one or more teachers that fit your needs, make appointments to speak with them. Bring along your list of requirements and interview them as if they were applying for a job.

**4** Remember that, in this case, personality does count. Do you want a serious instructor who will push you toward flawless performance or someone who has fun and a more relaxed attitude toward learning? A good teacher will be just as eager to know

what you want to achieve and should ask you about your goals on your first meeting.

**5** Ask teachers about their background. What are their professional, teaching, and educational qualifications and experiences? What would they expect from you in terms of a weekly practice commitment? Finally ask about price, scheduling, and what will happen if you must miss a lesson. Is there a written studio policy that you could review?

**6** Try to arrange a time to sit in and observe a lesson for a student who is similar in age, qualifications, and needs to you. This is the best way to evaluate how the teacher teaches. Does the teacher explain things well and does the student feel free to ask questions? Is the teacher passionate about teaching music or just going through the motions? Is this a person you can relate to and whom you could take criticism from?

**7** Finally, don't give up if you do not find what you are looking for the first time out. Keep shopping around until you find the right teacher to inspire and motivate you on your fun, musical journey of lifelong learning.

# Meet Your Musical Matches

There are plenty of ways to find like-minded musicians who are into a specific genre, like '60s rock or folk tunes, for weekly or monthly jam sessions. Here are some resources for locating and assembling a group:

## A LOCAL MUSIC STORE

What better place to find other recreational musicians than your home base for gear? Ask a store employee if you can post a flyer and check if the store has a room you can use for jam sessions. You will probably have to pay for the room, but if you find a group of regular participants, you can split the cost.

## MEETUP.COM

By simply typing in your zip code and what you're interested in (use search terms like "jam," "musicians," "jazz," etc.) you can browse music groups near you. If you don't see what you're looking for, you can start your own group.

## CRAIGSLIST

Most communities have established a presence on this free, local classifieds site. Find the "Community" listing in the top left corner and click on the word "Musicians." Here you can browse posts by people seeking potential bandmates, or someone to jam with. Or you can set up your own posting to find musicians who want to play in a Led Zeppelin or blues jam group. Set up a preliminary meeting in a public place, like a coffee shop, then find a neutral venue, like a community center, to play at.

Further resources to help you get started may be found on:

- Guitar & Accessory Marketing Association ([www.discoverguitar.com](http://www.discoverguitar.com))
- National Guild for Community Arts Education ([www.nationalguild.org](http://www.nationalguild.org))
- National Piano Foundation ([www.pianonet.com](http://www.pianonet.com))
- New Horizons International Music Association ([www.newhorizonsmusic.org](http://www.newhorizonsmusic.org))
- Percussion Marketing Council ([www.playdrums.com](http://www.playdrums.com))

Visit [MakingMusicMag.com](http://MakingMusicMag.com) for more resources.

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