



**Guitar Virtual Learning**

# **Guitar Body Shapes**

**May 14, 2020**



# Guitar

Lesson: May 14, 2020

## **Objective/Learning Target:**

What different guitar shapes are there, and what are the differences between those shapes?

# Warm-Up Activity

Watch the following video by YouTuber “Minor7thb5” (which is a music theory reference!). In it, he plays the same piece of music two times with two different guitars. The guitars are of similar build quality and materials, but they are different shapes. One is a parlor guitar and the other is a dreadnaught.

How do they sound different to you?

These differences are subtle. It might be easier to hear by using headphones.



## 2nd Warm-Up Activity



These were the two guitars he played. The one on the left is an Eastman parlor guitar, the one on the right is a Martin dreadnought. How do they look different? How do they look the same?





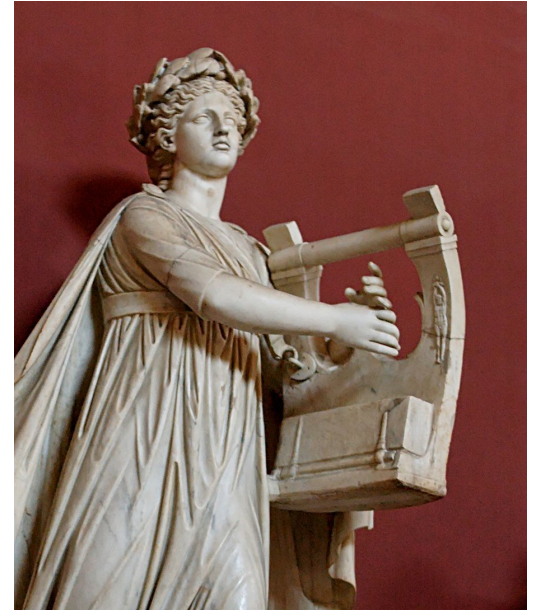
# Guitar Shapes

For the lesson today, we are going to do a brief overview of the different guitar shapes and styles you can find today. This lesson will build on the lessons from earlier in the week where we discussed the differences between classical, steel-string, and electric guitars.

Now, we will see what different body shapes there are, especially for the steel-string and electric guitars, and what makes them different!

# A Brief history of guitar shapes

The word “guitar” comes from the Greek word “kithara,” which shows up in Greek mythology from thousands of years ago. These stringed instruments didn’t look much like our guitars now, but they were strummed like our guitars.



# A Brief history of guitar shapes

Then, over the course of the next 3000 years, string instruments that you strum continued to evolve. Developments included the oud, the lute, the Baroque guitar, and the vihuela.



Oud (9th century)



Lute (12th century)



Baroque Guitar (16th century)

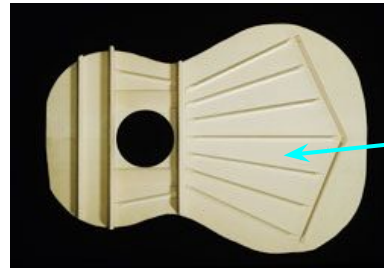


Vihuela (16th century)



# Classical guitar

As we have discussed before, the first version of a “modern” guitar that we still see today is the classical guitar, which was largely invented by luthier **Antonio de Torres**. His guitar was larger than earlier versions, and included a new type of reinforcement of the soundboard of the guitar called “**fan bracing**”, which is still used on classical guitars built today!



The bracing inside the guitar spreads out like a fan.

# The Steel String Guitar

In the second half of the 19th century, immigrants to the USA started replacing the gut strings of classical guitars with steel strings. These strings were louder and crisper sounding than the gut strings of the time, but put a great deal more tension on the neck and body of the guitar.

To account for this, master luthier C. F. Martin changed the shape of the head stock and bracing pattern underneath his guitars.

# The Steel String Guitar

The headstock became a solid piece of wood instead of slotted like before, and the fan bracing was replaced with something Martin called “X-bracing”, since it made the shape of an X.

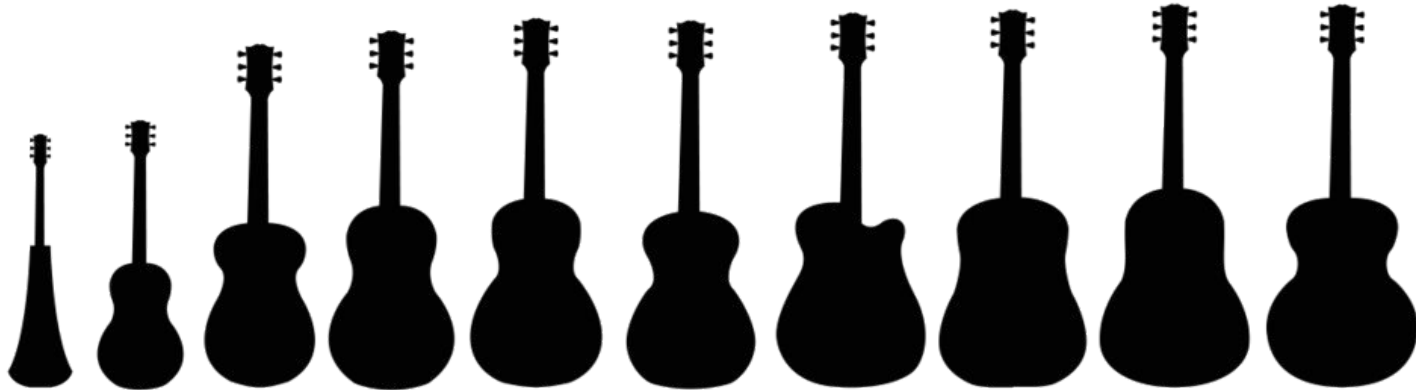


# New Body Shapes

Martin continued to innovate in the end of the 19th Century and beginning of the 20th century. As guitar playing became more popular to a wider audience, there became more diverse needs for guitars. Martin elongated the necks on his guitars to join them at the 14th fret (instead of the 12th fret), then introduced a new, larger body shape. Named after a naval ship known for being the largest of its kind (the HMS Dreadnought), the dreadnought guitar became immediately popular and is still popular today.

# Steel String Guitar Body Shapes

With that basic history in mind, let's run through all the major body shapes you can find in guitars now, running generally from smallest to largest. We will give a brief description and picture to help you understand the difference.



# Travel or Mini Guitars

Travel guitars and mini guitars are the smallest types of acoustic guitars you will find. They are specifically built to be smaller than a “full-sized” guitar for convenience of travel or for specific playing situations where space is limited. They tend to make a thinner sound than regular-sized guitars because of less space to resonate.



# The Parlor or O-Size

The smallest “full-sized” guitar, these guitars have the same scale length as their bigger siblings but have more narrow and thinner bodies.

This shape is most similar to the original guitars of the 1800s. They tend to be quieter but sweeter sounding



# Concert or OO-size

This guitar shape has been around for a long time, and is typically favored by fingerstyle players and blues players.

It is still on the smaller side, so it doesn't have as much volume or bass sounds as some of the larger shapes do.





# Auditorium, 000 or OM size

Sometimes also called a “grand auditorium” size, this is now one of the most common sizes of guitar.

It has a good balance of comfort, tone, volume and versatility.



# Dreadnought

As we mentioned before, dreadnought guitars are bigger, with a wider middle section. This allows them to be louder and richer sounding in the bass notes.

Dreadnoughts are very popular for strumming and flatpicking players, such as country and bluegrass players.



# Jumbo

Jumbos are the largest standard acoustic guitar size. They are typically shaped in the same style as an OM or Grand Auditorium guitar, but with larger overall dimensions. This typically gives them the largest sound and biggest low notes.



# The Electric Guitar

Since electric guitars are, fundamentally, electronic pickups build into solid wood, they can theoretically come in infinite body shapes.

A few, however, have been more impactful than the rest.



# Origins: The hollow body electric

In the 1930s, quite a few guitar makers were experimenting on how to make a guitar that could be amplified electronically.

One of the first successes was the Gibson 150, which had a hollow body and a row of pickups.



# Origins: solid body

By the 1940s, many guitar makers had figured out that the best way to make an electric guitar that would sound even across the strings and avoid feedback with the amplifier was a solid body guitar. Les Paul's "The Log" was one of the first of these.



# Fender Stratocaster

By the 1950s, electric guitars had come into their own, largely due to the advent of Rock & Roll music. The Fender Stratocaster was one of the first commercially successful electronic guitars.

Among other things, it featured a metal bridge that could be tweaked with a separate whammy bar to create tremolo.



# Fender Telecaster

Made alongside the Stratocaster was the Fender Telecaster. Due to slightly different electronics set-up, particularly in the pickups under the bridge, the Telecaster produces more of a “twangy” electronic sound.

This has made it more popular with Western and country music over the years.





# Gibson Les Paul

Perhaps the grandfather of the solid-body electric guitar, the Les Paul is a guitar made by Gibson and named to honor guitar pioneer Les Paul. Having endured the test of time, it has a more traditional look than the Fender Guitars.



# ALL the body shapes

Led by Gibson, as the 1950s wore on, all sorts of experiments in body shapes continued. Today, you can find electric guitars in all sorts of shapes. The main differences come down to look, feel, weight, and playability.



# Semi-hollow: still around

As the electric guitar has grown and evolved, some people still prefer the tone and natural sounding nature of semi-hollow guitars. With pickup innovations that have largely fixed issues of feedback, these guitars are now considered very versatile!





# Follow-Up Activity

Watch Joe at Reverb.com walk through the different guitar shapes of acoustic guitars. In this video, you not only get to see how the different guitars look different, you can see for yourself how they sound different!

# Follow-Up Activity



*Reverb*

ACOUSTIC GUITAR BODY SHAPES:  
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



## 2nd Follow-Up Activity

Watch this video detailing three of the most important electric guitar models, the Stratocaster, the Telecaster, and the Gibson 335 (which is a semi-hollow body).

Which sound do you like best?

# 2nd Follow-Up Activity

