

Guitar Pedagogy, APP, 302-1
San Francisco Conservatory of Music

Overview
Thoughts on group guitar instruction

Group instruction can provide an alternative to independent guitar study, as it can:

- Provide an interactive experience and bring, a social aspect to music
- Allow students to learn from each other and feel motivated by peers to try their best
- Develop more critical listening skills in students
- Improve teachers class numbers and retention
- Offer an ideal atmosphere for working collaboratively on ensemble music, note reading, and technique
- Improve sight-reading and rhythmic skills
- Increase the student's enjoyment in studying guitar (similar to students who enjoy performing in band or youth orchestra who feel a great deal of satisfaction experienced from working collaboratively with others).
- Increase teacher income per hour of lesson time, and provide potential private students who wish to have individual attention after attending group classes. Still, some guitarists who study in group settings, may prefer a group lesson format to private lessons, even when given the option.

Group guitar lessons are an efficient and enjoyable way to present areas of music that are more suited to longer periods of time than the private lesson allows, such as:

- Music theory
- Sight-reading
- Harmonizing a melody
- Music history
- Fretboard skills
- Performance in front of a group
- Play by ear
- Rhythmic training

Other considerations:

- If a teacher has two well prepared guitarists, groups of four can be scheduled with two at each guitar part.
- Some group teachers provide combinations of group and private lessons. For instance, teachers may offer: Private lesson during some weeks, alternating with group lessons in others.

- Private lessons every week supplemented with an additional group lesson during certain weeks
- Offer two lessons a week: one private and one group

There are several ways to have success when developing group guitar lessons in an independent studio:

- 1) For some it is a good idea to organize groups that work well together. Matching age, level of playing ability, and personalities with the time available in students' schedules. If this rule is not followed, there is an advantage in having experienced players helping less experienced.
- 2) Having an intelligent and effective curriculum for the group. Progressive lessons, a study guide, ensembles, and other materials that are carefully chosen to fit within group instruction. In this way the group experience becomes a musically fulfilling environment.
- 3) The space and equipment of the studio should facilitate and serve the needs of the class.

Other thoughts on curriculum and group chemistry

Care must be taken when choosing a method book, study guide, or ensemble music for group beginners and especially adult learners. Some method books are written specifically for class instruction. Within these, the beginner and adult learners are addressed. Choices should be carefully made because some texts will meet the demands of class guitar in a university setting, other approaches may serve beginners and adult learners as recreational players.

Some adult students are not beginners, but come to the class with a strong background in guitar, and those needs and materials must be carefully addressed for them as well. If they want to play Bach, Sor, or Brouwer studies you may want to let them. Suggesting a particularly rewarding piece that may be outside of their comfort zone will hopefully broaden their horizons. There are other considerations but there is not the same obligation to develop a well-rounded, progressive repertoire that exists when taking a younger student through their formative years of study.

Many adult students see guitar lessons as a time to indulge themselves, to enjoy an activity away from the stress in their lives. For those, guitar becomes a special and personal choice of study; no one else is insisting they take lessons. These students are delightful to teach, especially when they take pleasure and reward from the journey toward musical learning regardless of the final destination.

One possible scenario; guitar students come together once a month for a party (not a performance) and play for each other. You may even offer food, and wine to sip (small portions to relax and not impede playing). Hopefully many will develop friendship and camaraderie which will increase the enjoyment of lessons and provide social interaction and friendship.