



10 Things You Should Know About Choosing the Best Guitar Strings

- **TERM: Gauge** The gauge of the guitar string is referring to the thickness of the string. Thickness is measured in thousandths of an inch. For example, if I say I'd like a set of "10s" I'm referring to the thickness of the highest or 1st string which would be .010 of an inch.
-

1 - What are the best guitar string gauges for acoustic guitar? The most common guitar string gauges for acoustic guitar are .010 - .013 (10s to 13s) . Usually the 10s are also called extra light, 11s and 12s are considered light gauge and 13s would be considered medium gauge. I'm not sure what happened to "heavy" gauge.

The most common gauge would be 12s, but I often prefer 11s for students because it's a little easier on the fingers. I wouldn't be afraid to go with 10's when you're starting out, but know that they'll likely break easier than the thicker gauges.

And by the way... this distinction can differ with brands and there is no one agreed-upon standard.



2 - What are the best guitar string gauges for a nylon string guitar? For some reason strings for the nylon on guitar (aka. classical or flamenco guitar) are usually referred to by how hard the tension is (go figure). The gauges are still listed on the pack, but I usually only look at that when I need to purchase a single guitar string.

The options are normal, hard and extra hard tension. I've never seen a light tension. I recommend beginning students use the normal tension, but I prefer a hard tension for myself because it has more volume and a fuller tone.

3 - Why use different tensions or gauges? Thicker strings are louder and provide a little fuller tone. However they are harder to press down. With steel strings they will also cut into your fingers more and make for sore fingers.

Thinner gauges are easier to press down and usually make your fingers less sore. They also break easier and are not as loud.

4 - What makes the biggest difference to getting a good sound? Often students ask this question and they're thinking that I'll recommend a certain material, or the right brand, or the best gauge.

As long as you're using any decent guitar string the actual difference in your sound will be small. The big difference, by far, and I mean like the difference between going around the block or traveling to Thailand from the US, will be your [PLAYING TECHNIQUE](#) and the QUALITY OF GUITAR. Oh... And by the way... A



mediocre set of strings when brand-new sounds better than the most expensive when they get old. Change your strings more often than you think you need to.

5 - Can I put nylon strings on an acoustic (steel string) guitar and vice versa? The short answer is no.

In the case of putting nylon strings on an [acoustic guitar](#) it would be very difficult to actually physically get them on the guitar. Aside from that they would sound terrible. It has to do with the acoustics of the guitar and the bracing underneath the face of the guitar.

How about putting steel strings on the nylon string guitar? Most nylon string guitars, as in 99%, do not have a truss rod in the neck like a steel string guitar. This does make for a lighter guitar, but the neck of the nylon string guitar cannot really hold the attention of the steel strings. Over time it's likely the neck would bow. Not good.

Also it really wouldn't sound good again because of the acoustics of the guitar and the way it's constructed.

6 - Acoustic guitar... Phosphor bronze or bronze strings? There are two flavors, or rather metal compositions, that account for most acoustic guitar strings... Phosphor bronze and bronze.



Bronze strings tend to be brighter and after a little more. That bright tone doesn't last that long and you'll find yourself changing strings a little more often.

Phosphor bronze tends to have a warmer sound with less bite. The tone last longer also In part because the small amount of phosphor added helps the strings to resist corrosion. For that reason there slightly more popular.

7 - What are coated strings? Acoustic guitar and electric guitar strings can be purchased as what is called a “coated” string. This means that there is a very thin synthetic polymer coating put on the string. The advantages are the string last quite a bit longer because it doesn't corrode as easily. It also makes the string a little more slippery and easier to slide up and down with your fingers.

The downside is there quite a bit more expensive. Some people tell me they also make the guitar not quite as bright sounding, though I've heard different opinions.

8 - Electric guitar string composition. The most popular electric string is a nickel plated string. The thicker strings are wound with stainless steel that has a thin nickel plating to help it resist corrosion.

There is also a pure nickel string that is a little warmer and give you more that classic sound which is great for blues, jazz and classic rock.



Finally you can also find stainless steel strings which tend to be a little brighter. Because the steel is a harder metal they can tend to wear out the guitar frets faster, but is a worthy choice if you like that very bright sound.

9 - Silk And Steel...and sore fingers. Silk and steel strings are sort of a hybrid between a steel string and the nylon string. The wound strings have a steel core and then are wrapped with a silk filament. Finally it's wrapped with a silver plated copper winding.

The strings can be a great option on an acoustic guitar to reduce sore fingers. The sound is softer, warm and mellow... not as bright as most acoustic guitar strings. For that reason it may not be the ultimate sound you're looking for but can be a great way to [make your acoustic guitar easier to play](#).

Just to be clear there are some guitarists that really like the sound, usually for fingerpicking, and use these on a regular basis.

10 - What is the best brand of guitar string? Some of the popular brands are D'Addario, Martin, Ernie Ball, GHS, Dean markley, Fender, Gibson, Dunlop, Thomastik, DR, Black Diamond, Savarez (Classical only) and Elixir (coated only).



What is the best string for you will depend on many variables. In fact there is not as much difference based on the brand of electric or acoustic guitar string as it would appear.

To start with this thing strings are all made out of a monofilament metal that pretty much comes from the same few factories. The [wound strings](#) have the most differences based on how accurate their machines are as well as the metal compositions there using.

However much of this raw materials come from the same factories and often the machines are not that much different. Much of it comes down to marketing, how good the packaging is so the strings don't corrode before you get them, and to some degree the quality control in winding.

In spite of this some guitarists will swear by one brand of string and other guitarists will swear by a different one. I decided the best thing to do is to tell you what I and a few of my guitar teaching associates use. I think you'll find it both interesting and helpful.

Alex Doty - Pro Guitarist (Electric), Guitar Instructor

There is 2 types of strings, coated, and not coated. so I'll weigh in on both.

Coated



D'addario EXP is way better than Elixir. I hate the feel of those Elixir and the coating falling off sucks. The D'addario feels like a regular string, and lasts a long time. But, out of the box the tone lacks compared to a non-coated string.

Regular strings

If money was no object I would play Thomastik strings... they sound incredible. But I look at it objectively. Once you put strings on your axe they start dying. So how often do you want to change them? I use D'addario for all my guitars because they are the right price, they sound good out of the pack, they are consistent, and you can get them everywhere (that's huge).

Furthermore they don't break the bank so you can keep your guitar fresh sounding, when you want it to be (particularly for gigs and studio sessions). I wish I could do new strings every week but I generally go longer (2.5-3 weeks... then I can't stand it anymore).

I play 11's on my electric but I'm considering going down to 10's for a more snappy sound. And perhaps that snappiness will stay longer. I need to experiment. I like the heavy feel of 11's though. On the acoustic I play D'addario custom lights.

String choice is personal and the options are vast. You need to experiment to get your guitar dialed with a string that works for you. I say just try a bunch of strings out and see what works for you and your guitar.

Alex Doty Fusion Rock - <http://www.alexdotymusic.com/>



John Gilliat - Guitarist (Flamenco/Pop-Rock), Recording Artist, Instructor

As for guitar strings...I have tried all types of nylon strings and I still always go back to D'Addario J45 normal tension strings. They last a long time, stay in tune, and the D string doesn't break like a lot of the others. I also really like the way that they feel under my fingers.

As for the electric guitar these days I really like the Ernie Ball Cobalt string gauges .009 to .042. On my steel string I use the D'Addario Phosphor Bronze Light gauge sets.

John Gilliat Latin / Fiery Rumba Flamenco Jazz - <http://acoustic-guitarmusic.com/>

Dan Maya - Guitarist (Classical/Flamenco), Recording Artist, Instructor

Overall, I find that the D'Addario Pro-Arte nylon strings are the most reliable for intonation and durability. They're also relatively inexpensive, a real plus for the working guitarist. They generally last for three weeks to a month of constant play, are usually in tune and have a good basic sound.

They can be too bright for some classical guitarists, but that makes them good for Flamenco guitar, where brightness and clarity is a virtue. They now have a



"Dynacore" model which some guitarists and luthiers have recommended to me, but I have yet to try.

I also like Savarez strings. Their "Corum" and Red Card brands have a warm, almost cello-like sound, but they go dead after a few weeks. The yellow card strings last even less - the 4th - "D" - string started unwinding after only 2 weeks.

If I had the money and didn't mind changing strings every couple of weeks, I'd go with the Savarez for the sound, but again, overall the Pro-Arte strings are more reliable and durable.

I've stopped using Hannabach strings because their intonation is poor. I do like Hense strings, but they're a little too pricey to use all the time.

It is important to change strings every month or so, in order to develop your ear to produce a good tone. Also, the pleasure of playing is enhanced by the sound of new strings.

You only have to change the trebles every third time you change the basses, because new basses tend to liven up the trebles, which, being unwound, don't accumulate dirt and perspiration like the basses. So, try to buy two sets of bass strings for every full set you buy.

Most nylon strings come in light, medium and heavy tension, based on their relative thicknesses. You need to experiment to see which you prefer. I like the heavy tension, because I play hard and I like the resistance of the string... but each player needs to find the tension they are most comfortable with.



After replacing your strings, check the intonation of each string by playing the open string then the harmonic at the 12th fret. If they don't match, the string is bad and you need to replace it. For this reason, keep a few individual strings on hand as well.

Danel Maya Latin Guitar Grooves - <http://www.danielmaya.com/home.html>

Wayne Anderson - Pro Guitarist, Instructor

As far as strings go, two have been my favorite for years depending on which guitar I am using.

For solid body guitars (Blues, Funk, or Rock) I use D'Addario strings, set of 10's and just recently 9.5 sets. These strings are consistent in tone production and last a good while before needing a change.

For my Jazz guitars I use Thomastik Infeld (George benson Series) flat wound, gauge 12s or 13s. These strings are in the upper end of the spectrum in cost and don't last too long, but the sound quality and bounce of the string when new is amazing in my option. They (Tomastik) also make lighter gauged strings as well.

Wayne Anderson Jazz Blues Funk -

<http://www.starlandmusic.com/music-teachers/wayne-anderson/>



Tomas Michaud - Guitarist, Recording Artist, Guitar Instructor (me)

For my nylon [Flamenco guitars](#) (I have several) I have tried many different strings. For years I used a little-known Spanish made string called Lisa. They were recommended by a well-known luthier and they sound great on my guitar. However the D string when out so quickly that I just got tired of changing strings.

I went on to try the D'Addario Pro Arte and have been using some version of them ever since. They hold out much better, are affordably priced and easy to get.

I'm currently using the D'Addario Pro Arte Dynacore, Silverplated wound, Titanium Nylon... Hard Tension EJ46TT.

For acoustic guitar I usually use D'Addario EJ16 Phosphor Bronze Acoustic Guitar Strings.

Tomas Michaud New World Flamenco -

<http://www.amazon.com/Beauty-And-Fire-Tomas-Michaud/dp/B0028SVTOI>