

# Teaching Elementary Guitar

A guide to classroom management,  
sequencing instruction, and creating  
resources



# Overview

- Objectives
- Set-up/Classroom Management
- Accommodating Special Learners
- Introducing the instrument/technique
- Finding/Selecting Repertoire
- Introducing Chords
- How to teach Strumming



# Objectives

- Identify what it is you want your students to accomplish. For example:
  - Identifying song structure
  - Understanding harmonic progressions
  - Playing cyclic and non-cyclic repertoire
  - Playing melodic material
  - Songwriting



# Classroom Management

- Set Up a Routine
  - Where do they get their guitars?
  - How do they hold them while walking back to their seats?
  - What do they do with the instruments when they get back to their seats?
  - How do they put their instruments back?
  - How do they get the instruments out of their case?



# Classroom Management

- Highlighting student achievement.
  - Rockstar of the week (Use Positive Reinforcement)
    - Special Guitar Pick
    - Electric Guitar
    - Wall of Fame
    - Golden Record
  - How do students become the rock star?



# Accommodating for Diverse Learners

- Stickers
  - Use stickers to color code different guitar chords
  - Blue Painters Tape
    - Mute Strings on Easy Chord Variants
  - Larger picks for students with difficulty in motor skills
  - Chord Buddy



# Introducing The Instrument

- Labeling the major parts
  - Neck, body, frets, tuning pegs
- Fret Recognition
- Importance of not touching the tuning pegs
  - Strings breaking
  - Instrument out of tune



# Guitar Technique

- Guitar Playing Position

– Modern vs Classical Position



# Guitar Technique

- Location of the thumb on the left hand.
  - Can affect the students' ability to play full chords later on.
  - Thumb in the middle promotes curved fingers
- Guitar Picks
  - Increase Sound
  - Easier for student strumming/less pain



## PLAYING CHORDS

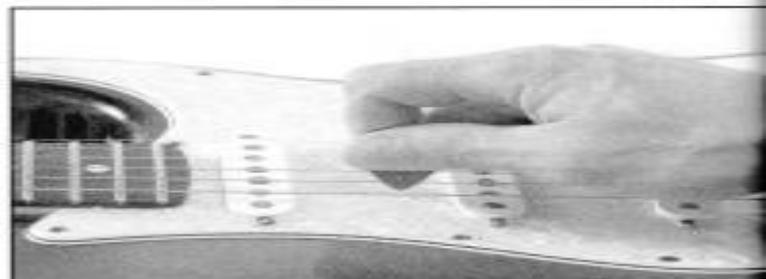
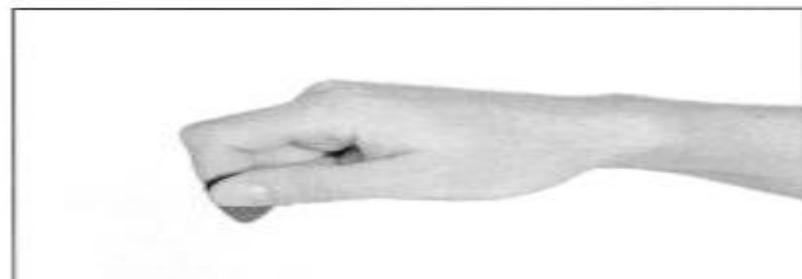
### Left-Hand Position

Left-hand fingers are numbered 1 through 4. (Pianists: Note that the thumb is not number 1.) Place your thumb on the underside of the guitar neck and arch your fingers over the fingerboard. Position your thumb roughly the opposite of your 2nd finger. Avoid touching the guitar neck with your palm.



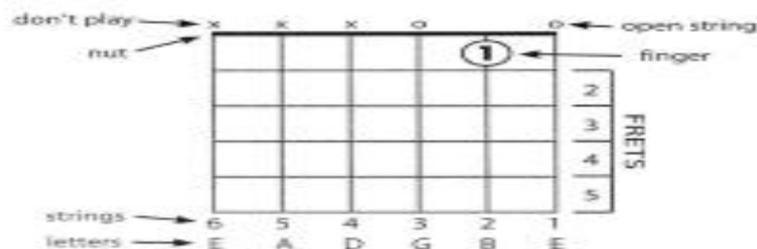
### Right-Hand Position

When you play, you'll be striking the strings with either your thumb or with a pick held in your right hand. To hold the pick properly, grip it between your thumb and index finger.



### Chords & The Chord Diagram

A chord is sounded when three or more strings are played at the same time. Your first two chords will be the C and G7 chords. Begin by looking at the chord diagram below to understand how these chords will be played. An "O" shown above a string indicates that the string should be played "open," or without a finger on the string. An "X" indicates that the string should not be played. Memorize the parts of the chord diagram including string numbers and letter names.



## Chapter 2

# RIGHT HAND EXERCISES

(Basic Picking Warm-Ups; String Skipping; Sweep Picking)

In this chapter, we'll concentrate on the picking/strumming hand.

Now that we're all stretched out, limbered up, and mentally sharp, it's time to pick up the guitar. All of the warm-up exercises in this chapter employ open strings, exclusively (no fretted notes). This allows us to concentrate solely on the right hand. If you wish, you can let your left hand rest in your lap (if you're seated), or let it hang by your side if you're standing.

## BASIC PICKING WARM-UPS

This first set of warm-ups involves basic picking exercises. First up is a simple, downstroke exercise that crosses all six strings, from low-E to high-E. Play each measure twice, picking down on the downbeat of each beat (1–2–3–4). Don't worry about left-hand muting; just allow all the notes to ring together. [Note: always use a metronome, or some other type of time-keeping device (sequencer, drum machine, loops, etc.) when you warm up. As you play these examples, tap your foot in time (in quarter notes), and count aloud if you need to. Remember: speed is not the main issue in these exercises (suggested tempos start at around 60 bpm). Clarity, accuracy, and consistency are the main goals for warm-ups.]



TRACK 2

$\text{♩} = 60$

let ring throughout  
 \* □ = pick down

cont. simile

Now, let's reverse the process, using all upstrokes to play each string, from the high-E to the low-E.



TRACK 3

$\text{♩} = 60$

let ring throughout  
 \* ▽ = pick up

cont. simile

Here is an alternate-picking exercise that uses eighth-note rhythms. Basically, a revved-up version of Track 2, it begins on the low-E string, and employs a "down-up-down-up" picking pattern. This results in a downstroke on the downbeat of each beat (1-2-3-4), and an upstroke on the upbeat ("and" of 1-"and" of 2-"and" of 3-"and" of 4).

 TRACK 4

$\text{♩} = 60$

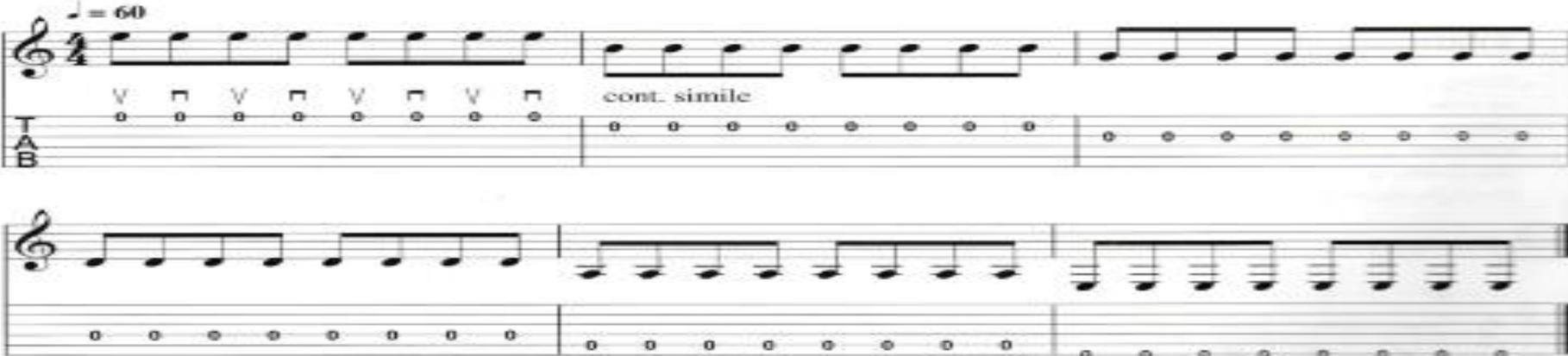


cont. simile

Track 5 is an alternate-picking exercise that starts on the high-E string, and uses an "up-down-up-down" pattern. In direct contrast to the previous example, this places upstroke attacks on the downbeats, and downstrokes on the upbeats.

 TRACK 5

$\text{♩} = 60$

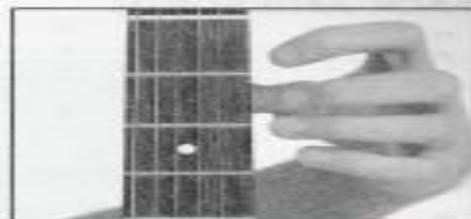
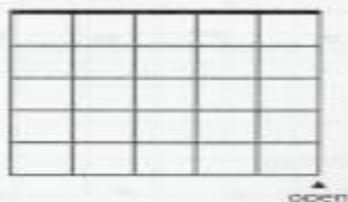


cont. simile

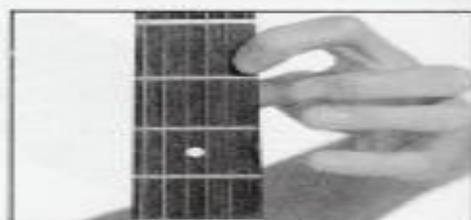
## NOTES ON THE FIRST STRING

Now let's play some single notes. Follow the same right- and left-hand position guidelines as you did with chords. Here you will pick on one string at a time.

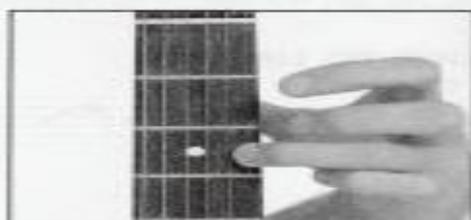
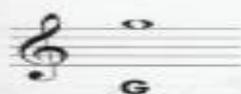
**E**  
open



**F**  
1st fret  
1st finger



**G**  
3rd fret  
3rd finger



**Downstroke**  This sign tells you to strike the string or strings with a downward motion of the pick or thumb.

### 10. WHOLE NOTES

1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4

*Hold down 1st finger*

### 11. HALF NOTES

1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4

### 12. QUARTER NOTES

1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4    1 2 3 4

# Finding/Selecting Repertoire

- Factors to consider when selecting repertoire:
  - Appropriate Lyrics
  - Speed of Harmonic Movement
  - Cyclic Progressions vs non-cyclic progressions



# Speed of Harmonic Movement

- Harmonic Movement: The speed at which harmonic changes occur in the song.
- Slower harmonic movement = better
  - Set them up for success



# Speed of Harmonic Movement

## Yes!

**G**

Verse  
2X  
Chorus  
2X

**Emi**

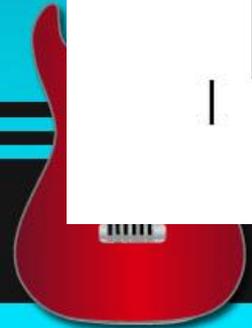
||: / / / / / | / / / / / | / / / / / | / / / / / |

**C**

**G**

Verse 2X  
Chorus 2X

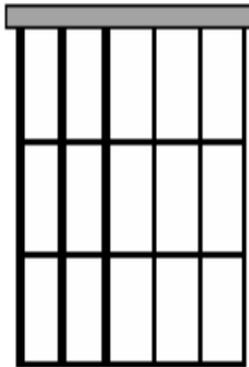
/ / / / / | / / / / / | / / / / / | / / / / / :||



# Speed of Harmonic Movement: Not So Much.

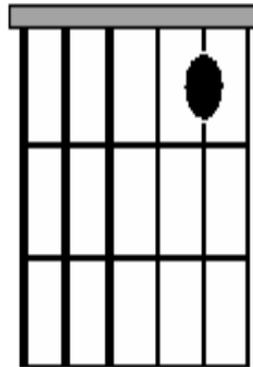
**Easy Emi**

X X X 0 0 0



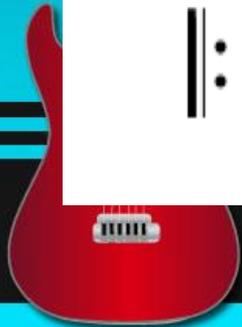
**Easy C**

X X X 0 0



**Easy G**

X X X 0 0



# Cyclic Vs Non-Cyclic Progressions

- Cyclic: A chord progression that repeats over and over again.
  - Easier for students to follow patterns
  - Faster Memorization
  - Lets students think ahead on switches



# Cyclic Vs Non-Cyclic Progressions

- Non-Cyclic Progression: Complex harmonic movement without repetitive patterns.
  - Very difficult for younger students to memorize
  - Risk of increased frustration



# Cyclic

Verse 4X  
Chorus 4X

The image displays four guitar chord diagrams in a row, each with its name above it. The diagrams are for G, Ami, Emi, and C. Each diagram shows a six-string guitar neck with frets and strings. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 in circles. Open strings are marked with 'o' and muted strings with 'x'. Below each diagram is a rhythmic notation consisting of four slashes, indicating a four-beat measure. The first and last measures are enclosed in double bar lines with repeat dots.

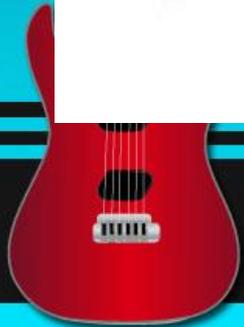
**G**  
o o o  
3 2 4

**Ami**  
x o o  
2 3 1

**Emi**  
o o o o  
2 3

**C**  
x o o  
3 2 1

Verse 4X  
Chorus 4X





# Finding Repertoire

- [Jamzone.littlekidsrock.org](http://Jamzone.littlekidsrock.org)
  - Sort songs by difficulty.
  - Tons of songs listed, great resource
- The radio!
- Your Students



# Modifying Harmony in Repertoire

- Good Old College Days
  - Roman Numeral Analysis
    - Song has the chords F(I), C(V), Bb(IV), and D minor(vi)? No problem!
    - G major is a great key. G(I), D(V), C (IV), Emi(vi)
- Change the Key of the Song!



# Modifying Harmony in Repertoire

- Difficult Chords
  - B minor is a popular chord but not the easiest for beginners
    - B minor chord tones: B, D, F#, A
  - Substitute D or D7 for B minor
  - Another Example:
    - F chord → Sub. A Major (Plays as an Fmaj7)



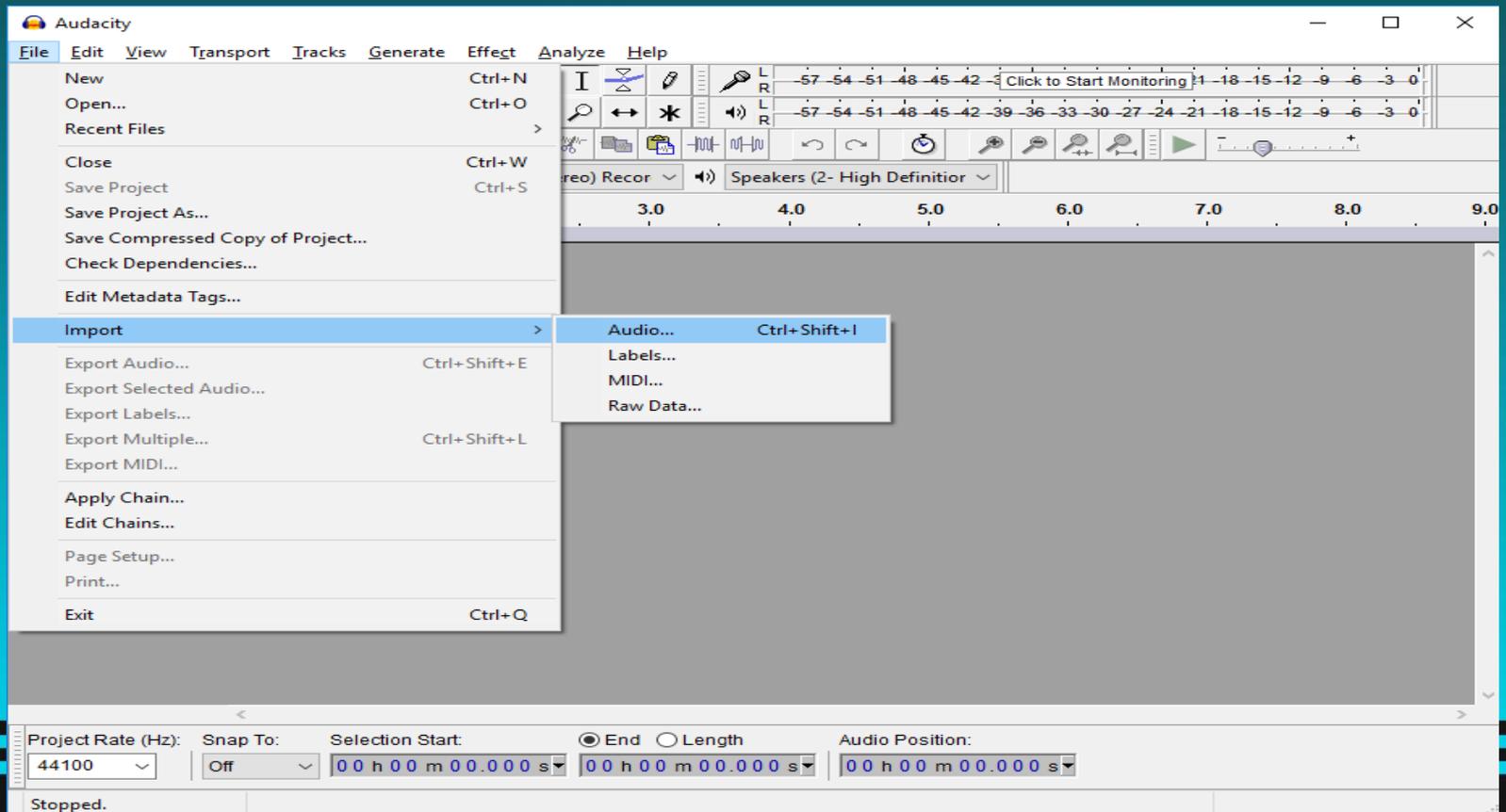
# Change the Key of the Song

- Using any DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) you can change the key of a song.
  - Saves money on buying a class set of capos.
  - Makes more repertoire accessible for students.
  - Put all files together in a powerpoint.
- Audacity (Free DAW) very user friendly.



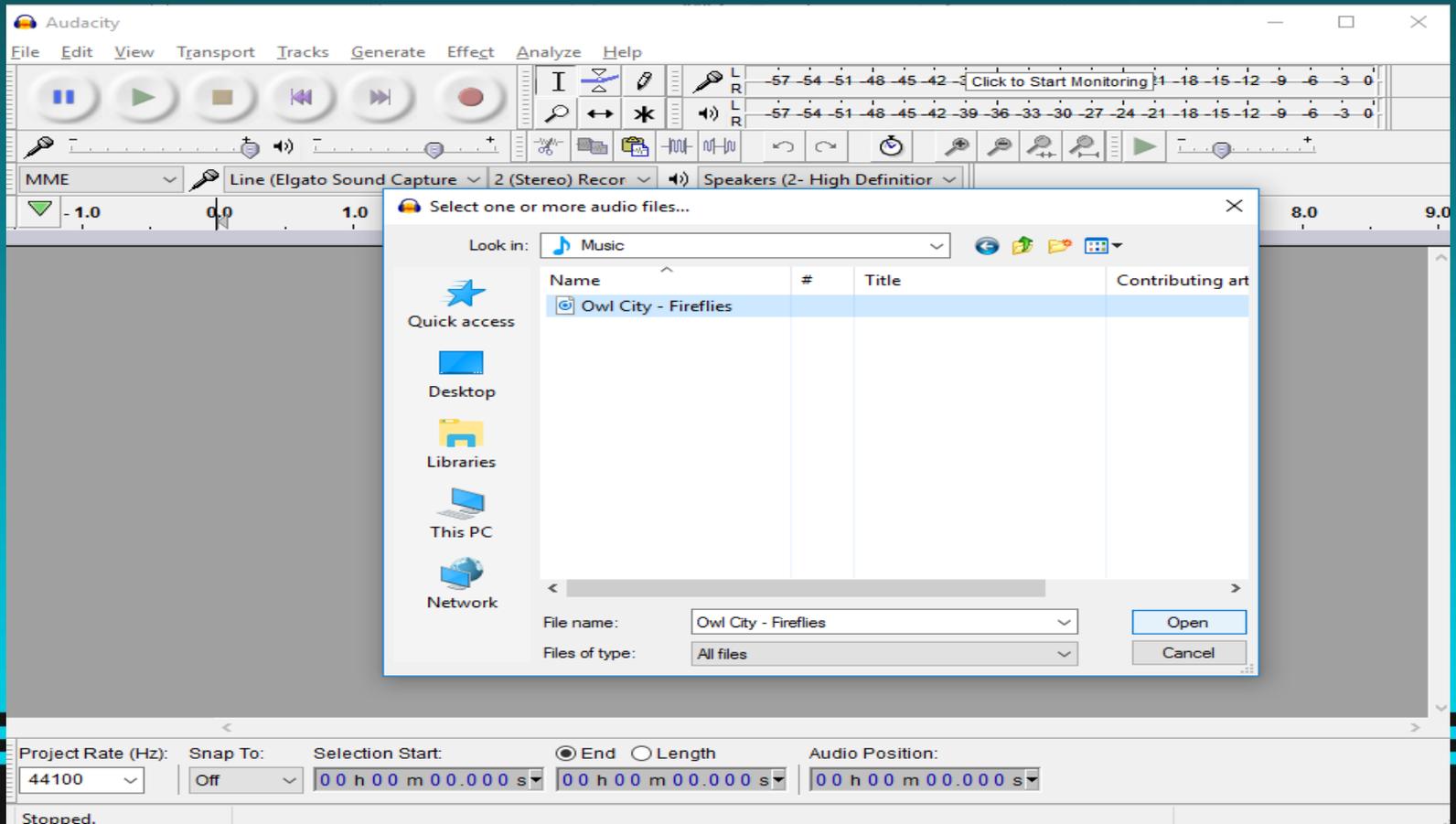
# Change the Key of the Song In Audacity

- Step 1: Import Audio File



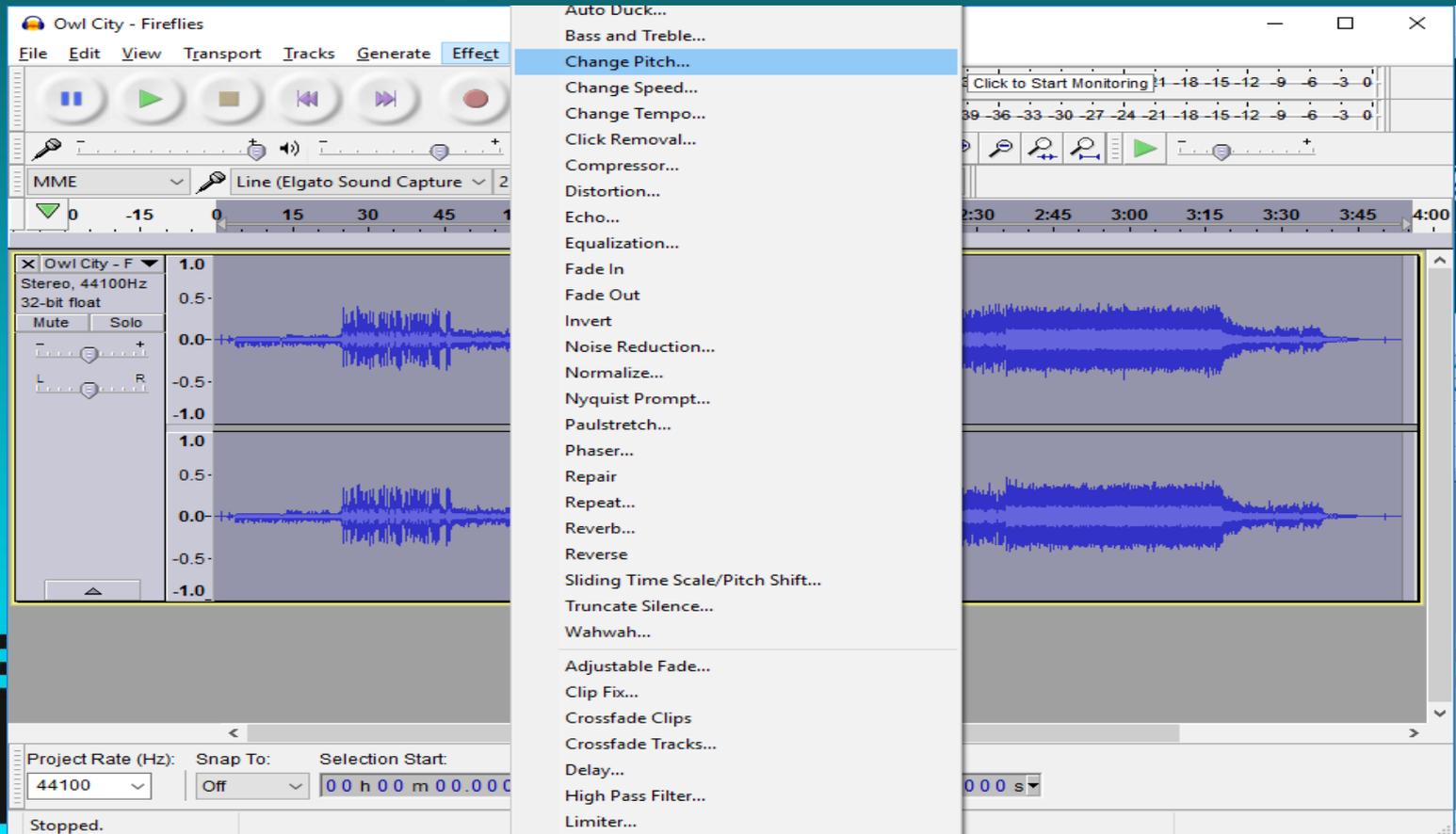
# Change the Key of the Song In Audacity

- Step 2: Select File



# Change the Key of the Song In Audacity

- Step 3: Highlight the Waveform then go to effect and select “Change Pitch”.



# Change the Key of the Song In Audacity

- Step 4: Enter the semitones up or down you want to change, then click “ok”.

Owl City - Fireflies

File Edit View Transport Tracks Generate Effect Analyze Help

MME Line (Elgato Sound Capture) 2 (Stereo) Recorder Speakers (2- High Definitor)

Change Pitch

Change Pitch without Changing Tempo

Estimated Start Pitch: F1 (43.109 Hz)

Pitch

from F 1 to G 1

Semitones (half-steps): 2.00

Frequency

from 43.109 to 48.388 Hz

Percent Change: 12.246

Use high quality stretching (slow)

Manage Preview OK Cancel

Project Rate (Hz): 44100 Snap To: Off Selection Start: 00 h 00 m 00.000 s End: 00 h 03 m 55.934 s Audio Position: 00 h 00 m 00.000 s

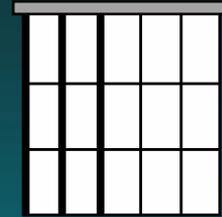
Stopped.

# An Order to Introduce Chords



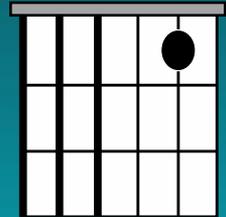
# The First Three

Easy Emi  
xxxooo



- Easy E minor
  - “Everyone play the bottom three clear strings, no fingers.”

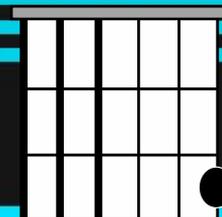
Easy C  
xxxo o



- Easy C
  - “Place your finger on the first fret of the B string” vs “Put your finger on the red sticker”.

- Easy G
  - “Place your finger on the third fret of the high E string” vs “Place your finger on the green sticker.”

Easy G  
xxxoo



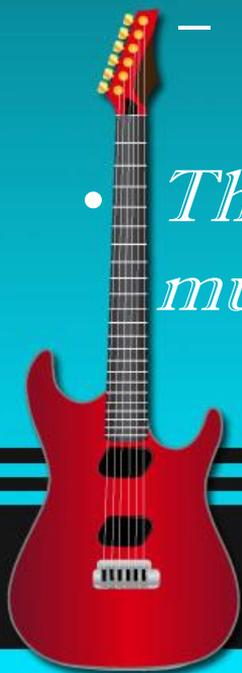
# The First Three

- Switching Between Chords
  - More fun to do with songs than in isolation
- E minor to G
  - *Haiti* - Arcade Fire
  - *Hang Me Up to Dry* – The Cold War Kids
- E minor to C
  - *Eleanor Rigby* – The Beatles (Not Cyclic)
    - Call out chord changes as they occur.



# The First Three

- Three Chord Songs Using Emi, C, and G
  - *Just the Way You Are* – Bruno Mars
  - *I ‘ve Got a Feeling* – Black Eyed Peas
    - *Slower Harmonic Movements, Different order of chords*
  - *Wake Me Up* – Avicii
    - *Faster Harmonic Movement, more advanced.*
- *These three songs are cyclic. Easy to develop muscle memory*



# What's Next?

- D7
  - Use instead of D because of anchor notes (C)





# Anchor Chords

- Use old chords as anchor points to teach new ones.
- This technique can be applied to introduction of any new chords

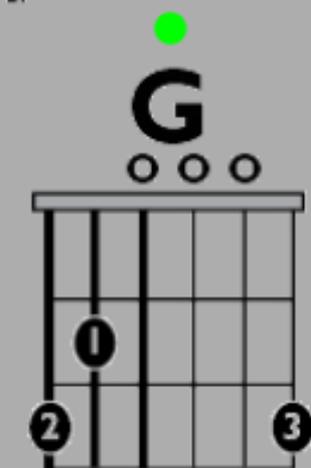
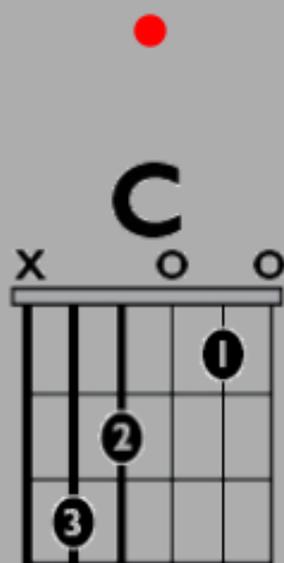


# Strumming

- Short, repetitive two beat strum patterns
  - Avoid syncopation for elementary
- Find songs with strong rhythmic motifs
- Use rhythmic ostinati



# Shake It Off - Taylor Swift



# Contact Us!

- Ryan Gardner
  - [ryangardner@dadeschools.net](mailto:ryangardner@dadeschools.net)
- Jessica Urbanik
  - [jurbanik@dadeschools.net](mailto:jurbanik@dadeschools.net)

