

The first obstacle for beginners is getting their chords to sound clear. A cheaply made guitar will not help, as it may be harder to play. Get your teacher, or a shop, to check that the strings are not too high above the frets (the action) and that the intonation of the instrument is right. Once fixed, you can no longer blame your guitar if things sound bad (you could always blame your teacher though!). So, if you notice the odd buzzing sound or muted note, then you may find the following tips helpful:

Finger position - check that each of your fingers is positioned directly behind the fret (some chord diagrams will show dots in the middle of frets, but this is only to clarify which fret you should be using). If your fingers are too far back then the note will make a nasty buzzing sound and will be harder to press down. With some chord fingerings it is very hard to get every finger right against the fret - the A chord for example - but the aim should be to get them as close as possible nevertheless.

Pointy fingers – press each string down behind the fret with the **tips** of your fingers; each finger should be bent at the last joint. If your fingers are too flat then you may mute other strings. The open D chord is a particular culprit here as the third finger (3

rd fret B string) is often placed on the strings too flat, causing the underside of the finger to catch the thin E string (beneath) and mute it.

Finger pressure – Make sure that you are squeezing hard enough between your thumb and your fingers - but don't over do it either! I have seen several burly guitar pupils nearly snap their guitar in half, as they struggle to get their chord to sound. Once you are getting a clear sound then see how lightly you can press the strings to still achieve this.

Relax your arm – Too many students tense up their fretting arm when playing. This will make things difficult when you start to change between chords.

Don't bend strings – Don't try and bend strings out of the way to stop muting. This will alter the pitch and make your chord out of tune. The open C chord is often associated with this problem. Save your string bends for the guitar solos!

Fat fingers - Those guitarists who have larger fingers often struggle at first when it comes to playing single strings, but most, in my experience, manage to find a way through. I would say, persevere with the standard fingerings if you can, although there are alternative ways to finger

chords though if you are really struggling. Try pushing down two strings with one finger. (Press the finger in-between the two strings in question).

Fine Tuning – Don't give up on your chords! If you persevere and keep fine tuning your finger pressure and position then you will find your own way to play them. Soon you will wonder why you ever thought it was difficult at all!