

THE GUITAR NINJA

# GRADING SYLLABUS

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Master the guitar

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# GRADINGS EXPLAINED

## *Introduction*

Whilst the student learns what is required to become a guitar ninja of their own, they are expected to develop a range of skills and not just how to play a few songs. As with all martial arts, you do not become a master by simply knowing how to punch. You must kick, block, dodge and even run at times, and more importantly know where and how to make use of your skills for maximum impact to your opponent with minimal impact to yourself.

This is the same with the guitar. If we wish to become a master we must learn more than just how to play the odd song but instead understand the guitar, the music, the passion, and more importantly know how to appeal to an audience with maximum impact. Only then can we truly master the guitar.

## *About the senseis*

It is a sensei's job to teach the student in a professional yet fun manner. To encourage passion and confidence as well as skill. To grow each student beyond just playing the guitar. To write, to perform and to grow as an artist, and possibly even inspire them to become a sensei of their own.

All sensei's will have the required checks for the country and area they work in. for instance, Rory Price - Our Sensei from Northampton, England has a fully enhanced DBS (originally called a CRB check) to ensure he can teach all ages with peace of mind as required in the UK and public liability insurance.

## *Why straps?*

As a guitar ninja, the grading syllabus is based on any other martial art. We use our guitar straps in the same way they use their belts to represent their grade. This grading system gives a clear visible representation of your skills and a clear set of tasks for the student to reach the next grade.

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## *How is the grading performed?*

The grading must be booked in advance with your sensei. Currently these are being made available over Video call as well due to the Covid-19 protective measures. The grading take the following structure:

- 1) Previous grading questions
- 2) Knowledge section
- 3) Technique section
- 4) Ability section
- 5) Reading tab
- 6) Presenting of the strap with photograph (Not available online)

Section 1 relates to Yellow strap and above. A student is expected to retain their previous abilities when moving through the grades. This means that they are expected to be able to answer questions and perform techniques relating to earlier grades.

Sections 2 and 3 are completed face to face or over video call with your sensei. The things covered in these sections are mentioned below and are grade specific.

Section 4 takes the following aspects into mind.

- a) Correct notes played
- b) Timing
- c) Section changes at the right points in the song
- d) (later grades only) Stage presence and visual confidence

Section 5 is covered in just the first half of the belts, however is an important part of learning to play the guitar. As guitarists we only focus on the reading of guitar tab and not full musical score. If a student wishes to learn score we will see what we can arrange for them on a personal level.

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## *What is required to pass a grade?*

The student is required to demonstrate a level of knowledge, playing ability and Techniques (KAT) as listed in this syllabus to acquire any specific strap. The earlier grades have an extra section for reading (KATR). A student is expected to hold their strap for a minimum of three months before progressing onto the next grade with an exception for the white strap which can be held for as little as 3 weeks. This is to ensure you have the experience and have put in the practice time.

Students who have been learning for a while and not graded before may run through the entire syllabus until they reach their current grade level. However, every grade must be fully passed with no exceptions for additional mistakes or missed information.

Please refer to the following sections of this booklet to see what is required for each strap.

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# WHITE STRAP

## *KATR*

### *K - Knowledge*

Name the three main parts of the guitar

Finger, Fret and string numbers

Explain how the strings and frets are numbered

What are the open strings tuned to in standard tuning

### *A - Ability/performance*

Perform the white strap section of the Guitar Ninja anthem (single notes) from start to finish (all 6 loops) along and in time with the music.

Tune a guitar yourself - any type of tuner is allowed to assist in tuning.

### *T - Technique*

Hold the guitar correctly

Play a clear sounding fretted note without fret buzz or muting

Down pick with a plectrum using a good grip technique

### *R - Reading*

Read some basic TAB that you haven't seen before. (There is no timing shown in TAB, so you are just required to get the order of notes correct)

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# YELLOW STRAP

## *KATR*

### *K - Knowledge*

Name all of the parts of a standard electric guitar

Name all 12 individual notes of music

### *A - Ability/performance*

Perform the yellow strap section of the Guitar Ninja anthem (Power Chords) from start to finish (all 6 loops) along and in time with the music.

Perform a scale run over all 6 strings and back. (most common choice is the 1st position of the minor pentatonic scale)

Perform a song - Please see the song requirements page towards the end of this document. Additional information - You may play a simplified version of the song as long as you have two different sections, the notes you play are in the song (even if they're just root notes for the chords) and you have at least two different lengths of notes. (e.g. whole and half notes)

### *T - Technique*

Demonstrate the correct wrist angle to assist in finger reach/stretch

Demonstrate correct thumb positioning for reach and speed

Demonstrate using 1 finger per fret by playing a finger warm up exercise

Perform a muted note (percussive mute) and explain how it's written in tab

### *R - Reading*

Read some TAB that you haven't seen before. This tab will cover all strings and muted notes (There is no timing shown in TAB, so you are just required to get the order of notes correct)

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# ORANGE STRAP

## *KATR*

### *K - Knowledge*

Explain the meaning of the following terms:

Pitch, Note, Chord, Interval, Semitone, Tone

Find a note (picked by the sensei) on every string of the guitar

### *A - Ability/performance*

Perform a scale up and down over at least 5 strings from memory. This must be different to the scale used for previous grades. (Common choices are the first position of the major scale, the first position of the natural minor scale or one of the 5 pentatonic scale positions - including the 5 string pattern starting from a root note on the 5th string)

Perform a song - Please see the song requirements page towards the end of this document. Additional information - This song must use Power chords with a minimum speed of quarter notes, or have a riff section with a minimum speed of 8th notes.

Perform the Ninja anthem. This is the complete rhythm section with power chords and 8th notes

### *T - Technique*

Demonstrate 3 of the following techniques:

Slide, ½ bend, full bend, vibrato, natural harmonic, pick scratch)

### *R - Reading*

Read power chords in TAB

Explain how to read/write the 3 techniques you demonstrated for this grade.

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# GREEN STRAP

## *KATR*

### *K - Knowledge*

Explain the meanings of the following words: Scale, Root Note, Octave, Key

Explain how to tune the guitar by ear with a reference note of E

Explain in simple terms the difference in sound between Major and minor

### *A - Ability to Perform*

Play a scale over a range of at least 8 frets without skipping notes. This can be connecting different scale positions or using a diagonal run.

Improvise over a backing track selected by the grading Sensei (Grading teacher) and show use of at least 4 different techniques.

Perform the lead over the third line of The Ninja Anthem. This is the first slide section over a single loop of the chords.

Perform a song - Please see the song requirements page towards the end of this document. Additional information - The song must use at least 4 regular chord shapes that use at least 4 strings each.

### *T - Technique*

Perform a hammer on from both an open string and from another fret

Perform a Pull off to both an open string and to another fret

Demonstrate Muting unwanted strings when playing chords

Demonstrate all - Slide, ½ bend, full bend, vibrato, natural harmonic, pick scratch

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## *R - Reading*

Read chords in both TAB and using chord graphs - The grading Sensei will choose the chords for you to read and play during the grade

Explain how to read/write hammer ons and pull offs in official TAB and common online practices for demonstrating the techniques in TAB.

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# BLUE STRAP

## *KAT*

### *K - Knowledge*

Explain how we can use the minor pentatonic scale over a Major backing track - you can refer to the relative scales or simply mention a relocation of the scale shape

### *A - Ability to perform*

Demonstrate a full 6 string run of the Major scale, the Natural minor scale and a Pentatonic scale.

Improvise over both a Major and a Minor backing track selected by the grading Sensei (Grading teacher), and show use of at least 6 different techniques.

Perform the lead over the third and fourth line of The Ninja Anthem. This is the entire slide section, and is half of the total lead sections.

Perform a song/songs - Please see the song requirements page towards the end of this document. Additional information - The song(s) must use at least 6 regular chord shapes that use at least 4 strings each. These chords are all covered in the Techniques section.

### *T - Technique*

Perform the chords: A, C, D, E, G, Am, Dm, Em

Demonstrate Palm Muting while playing a short riff using power chords

Demonstrate 3 Intermediate Techniques:

Trem picking, Tap harmonics, finger tapping with 3 fingers, Arpeggio runs, Double stop bends, Intermediate bends, Intermediate slides, Legato, Hybrid picking

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## *R - Reading*

Explain how the techniques demonstrated can be shown in tab

Recognise the 8 regular chord shapes from their chord graphs

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# PURPLE STRAP

## *KAT*

### *K - Knowledge*

Recite the intervals of the Major scale and work out the notes from 2 different root notes. (pen and paper allowed for working out, but no notes allowed)

Explain the meaning of Key in as much detail as possible

(What it is, what it does, why it is important, how it relates to Chords etc.)

### *A - Ability/performance*

Perform a song - Please see the song requirements page towards the end of this document. Additional information - The song has to be of Orange grade level or harder but must be performed as though you are playing to an audience. Either interacting with the Sensei directly or Interacting with the camera as though the Sensei is in the room with you. (This includes, Standing up, looking away from the guitar at times, eye contact for brief moments and moving around)

Perform all of the sections of the guitar ninja anthem lead

Perform a 6 string scale shape that has not been used for any previous grades.

### *T - Technique*

Perform the 4 main barre chord shapes (A and Am aka 5 string shapes, E and Em aka 6 string shapes)

Demonstrate 6 Intermediate Techniques:

Trem picking, Tap harmonics, finger tapping with 3 fingers, Arpeggio runs, Double stop bends, Intermediate bends, Intermediate slides, Legato, Hybrid picking

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## *R - Reading*

Explain how the techniques demonstrated can be shown in tab

Read a barre chord in a chord graph

Read a barre chord in guitar TAB

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# BROWN STRAP

## *KAT*

### *K - Knowledge*

Write a song of your own. This can be on guitar alone, or if you have access to the facilities to record and write multiple layers then you are welcome to do so. The piece must fit the usual song requirements of having at least two sections, and lasting over 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

Explain how you went about writing the song and why you used certain chords or techniques

Explain what Key the piece of music is in, and if any notes seem to be out of the key.

### *A - Ability/performance*

Perform your song in full twice - Twice to ensure you play it the same both times.

Perform a guitar solo to a song - This can be from a known song or can be one you've written yourself, however if you have written the solo it must also be written in TAB and played the same way twice to prove it is not improvised.

### *T - Technique*

Demonstrate all Intermediate Techniques:

Trem picking, Tap harmonics, finger tapping with 3 fingers, Arpeggio runs, Double stop bends, Intermediate bends, Intermediate slides, Legato, Hybrid picking

### *R - Reading*

Write your song in TAB. This can be each section once with an order list, or the full song in completion.

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# BLACK BELT - 1ST DAN

## *KAT*

### *K - Knowledge*

Recite the intervals of the Natural minor scale and work out the notes from 2 different root notes

Explain Relative key as though you are teaching someone - Include intervals, examples with notes and chords. (your Sensei will act as a student and may ask questions for more clarity)

If your brown grade song was in the Major key, write a song in the minor Key, If your brown grade song was in the minor key, write a song in the major Key

### *A - Ability/performance*

Perform both of your songs from start to finish as though you are performing them. Remember to Interact with the Sensei directly or Interact with the camera as though the Sensei is in the room with you. (This includes, Standing up, looking away from the guitar at times, eye contact for brief moments and moving around)

Improvise using 3 different scales/keys over 3 different backing tracks. You can choose the Key and your sensei will either choose a backing track or play the backing chords for you to perform over.

(Major, minor, Harmonic minor, Dorian etc.)

Perform a solo performance publicly at a guitar ninja event. If you are unable to attend a performance event, you may arrange an online, live performance with your sensei/Tutor.

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## *T - Technique*

Demonstrate 5 string arpeggio shapes by performing the Major, minor and diminished arpeggios in the correct order for any chosen Major key.

Demonstrate one of the follow techniques

(Pinch Harmonics, Sweep picking, finger tapping with 4 or more fingers)

Please note: Once you have passed your black strap your journey has only just begun. There is a world of guitar and music to yet understand from more chords and scales, to writing and improvising with more advanced and varied techniques, to adding real emotion to your playing, Industry knowledge for those wanting to become famous, studio understanding for those wishing to record and master their songs, and even filming and editing for those that wish to be an online guitarist like many Youtubers and Instagram guitar stars!

You are not at the end of your journey but at the beginning. The more you learn, the more you realise there is to learn!

**YOU ARE NOW A GUITAR NINJA!**

You may now continue to grade through the Dan grades. These are all Black strap grades however each Dan shows another large step in your progress to becoming a true master of the guitar!

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# DAN GRADING REQUIREMENTS

As with the Japanese martial arts that our grading system is based on, The Black belt is a sign that you have learnt enough of the basic principles to start your true journey of learning.

You now know enough to learn effectively and efficiently as you continue to develop your guitar playing.

Once you have your Black strap, your learning direction is now down to you. Instead of following a strict list of tasks to understand and complete you can grade from 1st Dan up through the Dan grades using a point based system. This gives you the flexibility to work on guitar and music in your own path. Some may choose to become an original artist, some may choose to be in a function band, some may choose to deepen their understanding of music theory, some may want to advance their playing skills and become a more technical guitarist, some may want to focus on music production, some may want to look into guitar repairs or manufacture, some may wish to become a Sensei themselves, and many other options not covered in this list.

We keep it as flexible as possible, while keeping things clear and easy to work towards, by offering a range of courses, each worth an amount of points that will go towards your next grade when you complete the course.

Points can also be gained by taking part in The Guitar Ninja community. This can be by helping to run events, performing at Guitar Ninja events, assisting with teaching others, testing and developing new ventures and showing support to the other students.

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Some example course titles include:

- Sweep picking patterns
- Model theory and practical uses
- From Major to minor - Harmonic and Melodic minor scales explained
- Understanding and playing different 7 chords
- Understanding and playing Sus Chords
- Stage performing tips
- Live performance etiquette
- Chord building workshop: Laying out chords on the fretboard
- Recording guitar
- Introduction to writing songs
- Improvisation Workshop
- Developing advanced techniques
- Setting up a guitar
- Building a guitar from a kit
- Building a guitar from scratch
- Restringing Standard classical acoustic and electric guitars
- Restringing guitars with unusual bridges
- Combining techniques
- Introduction to Fingerstyle
- Band/artist management tips (for yourself or others)

Courses are continuously being developed and more courses made upon requests by students.

The point system is made clearer in the Dan Grade Grading Syllabus.

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# SONG REQUIREMENTS

## Requirements

A song for any grade must be played in a single run from the start to the finish of the song without a break.

The song must be played along to the music as you will be graded on both timing and that you change from one section to another at the right point in the song.

The song must have at least 2 different sections and last for more than 2minutes 30 seconds to count as a full song.

Some grades have specific requirements about the song, or the way it is to be played, please see these points on the specific grade sheet.

## Grading/Scores:

When performing a song, you will be given a mark for any mistakes you make. The amount of marks you have at the end of the song will determine if you have passed or failed. If you fail you can have a second attempt within any single grading, however if you fail twice you will need to re-book and retake the entire grading at another time.

We like to encourage creativity with our students and therefore alterations to the song are welcome as long as they sound good and are in key, and are explained or perceived to be planned out beforehand.

Clearly wrong note - 1

Single note out of time by an eighth note or more - 1

Changing section at the wrong time during the song - 5

Missed notes/sections after a mistake - 2 (per bar)

9 marks is a pass however 10 is a fail

Some grades may differ from this scoring, but they will state it in the grade sheet if they do.