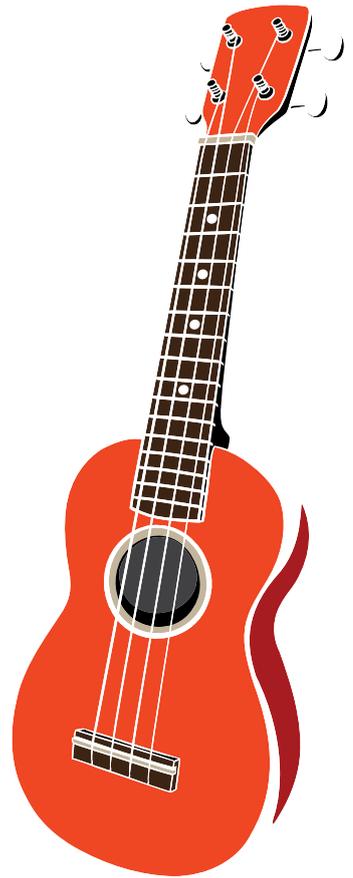
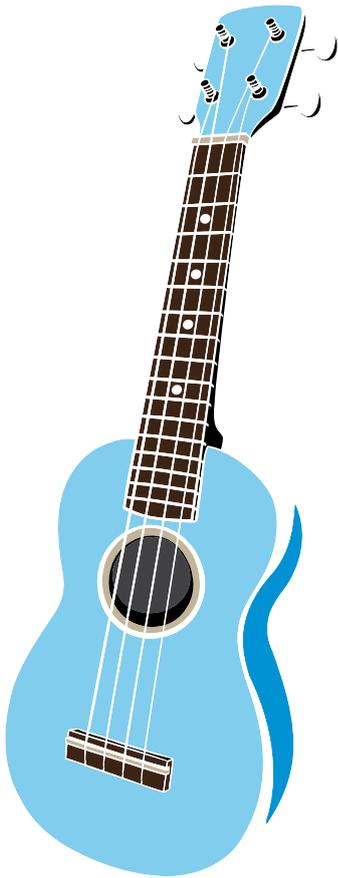




How to get started

Teaching the Ukulele



Introduction.

Welcome! You've chosen to read an e-book called "How to get started Teaching the Ukulele"!

This means that either:

a) You've been asked to take a ukulele class, or are thinking about using ukulele in your classes and you have no idea where to start.

or

b) You have been teaching or have played ukulele in the past, and you're looking for new ideas.

Either way, we want to help you with this e-book and give you a few tips and tricks that we know will make your life easier.

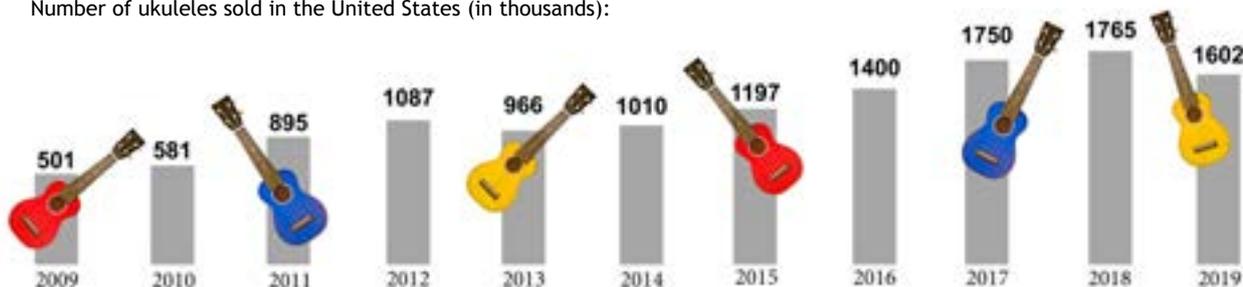
Firstly, it's important to understand a few key points about WHY teachers and schools choose to use ukulele in the first place.

The ukulele is a fretted stringed instrument that is commonly associated to the music of Hawaii. This is because it was introduced to the Hawaiian Islands by Portuguese immigrants and developed in the 1880s. So as teachers we must acknowledge and appreciate its Hawaiian roots and history.

However, the ukulele is much more than just a Hawaiian instrument. It has been and can be used in just about any style of music.

The ukulele has become very popular in the last ten years. The number of ukuleles sold in the United States has tripled in the years 2009 - 2019.

Number of ukuleles sold in the United States (in thousands):



The main reason for this popularity is that the ukulele is approachable, and it is one of the few instruments where it is possible to create a musical experience with relatively few background skills.

It's also relatively inexpensive, with a ukulele of reasonable quality being available for under \$50 in most places around the world today.

So those two factors are the reason for this obvious incline in popularity over the last ten years. There are ukulele clubs everywhere, and a class set of ukuleles is a common sight in school classrooms.

What if you have no experience?

Teachers come to music teaching from a wide variety of skill levels. Many teachers have university qualifications in music, or have undertaken many high level training experiences before. Others are asked to teach music because they might be the only person available to do it! Others may have a lot of experience teaching general music, band or other instruments, but may never have touched a ukulele before.

So no matter what your experience is, you can learn what you need to learn and pick up the ukulele and teach your students. It's not quite like some other areas of music instruction, where you need to be more specialised and trained in the area ... because of the approachable nature of the ukulele anyone can learn the skills to effectively teach it in the classroom.

What does success look like for you in teaching ukulele?

Before you begin, we encourage you to consider a question.

The question is this:

What do I want to achieve by teaching ukulele?

The answer could be any number of things:

“To give my students an all-round experience with music.”

“To inspire students to one day take up the guitar or another instrument.”

“To help students understand what chords are and their function in music.”

“To help the students have FUN with music!”

To help with this, we highly encourage you to take a few minutes to write this down in your own words. Don't just say “because someone told me I had to” because that isn't going to result in a quality experience for you, or for your students! You need to find reasons that are compelling, exciting and fun for you and for your students, in order to really enjoy this experience of teaching ukulele that you are about to embark on.

The reason I am teaching ukulele is ...

How to setup for success.

The first thing to think about when embarking on teaching ukulele in the classroom is to think about:

- a) How the room will be set up for these classes.
- b) What your classroom rules and expectations will be.

If you do that, you'll have a much greater chance of success with reaching your outcome that you identified on the previous page.

Classroom setup

If you have enough room, we recommend setting the room up in a semicircle of chairs. This will mean that you can see each student, and this will allow you to correct any problems quickly.

However, many classrooms may not have the room for this, and so it may be necessary to set up in rows. Just make sure that chairs are spaced enough apart so that students can hold their ukuleles correctly without touching the person next to them or any classroom furniture.

Classroom management

Before your very first class, you need to clarify in your own mind exactly how and when you will hand out the ukuleles to the students.

Is it ok for them to go and select one from the rack, or will you hand them out? Do you have a signal that invites them to go and pick up an instrument? How will you handle it if you have different instruments, some that are more attractive and sought-after by the students? These are all issues you need to think about before your very first class.

Another aspect of classroom management is to work out how you handle the students playing and making noise while you're attempting to give instruction. How much playing and noise making with the instruments will you accept?

I've witnessed classes falling apart from too few rules being enforced, and I've witnessed classes where the students weren't having any fun because they couldn't make a sound without fear of being yelled at. So, before you begin, make sure that you clarify in your own mind what your expectations are, so that you can effectively communicate them to the students.

Take a moment to write down a sentence or two here of your expectations of your students, and what will happen if and when the students get excited and don't follow instructions well:

Four simple instructions to help students hold their ukuleles correctly

Holding the ukulele correctly is one of the main issues that students will initially face in their early lessons. Many have never even held a musical instrument before, so these are the key instructions that students need to remember, and teachers will need to remind them of these things constantly in the early days of ukulele lessons.

Luckily, in the [Fun Music Company Ukulele Curriculum System](#) there are instructional videos and lots of exercises to help the students learn to hold the ukulele correctly.

However, here are the four simple instructions to remember:

1) The ukulele should be held vertically.



Students may start playing the ukulele wanting to lay it down on their lap to look over the top of the strings, or they may hold it at a strange angle. Use the instructional cue: “the back of the ukulele should be on your tummy” to remind the students of this position.

2) The right forearm helps hold the ukulele in place.



This concept is a little challenging for beginning ukulele students. You may find it helpful to refer to the right forearm as being like a “seatbelt” for the ukulele. The right arm has to hold the ukulele and strum, to give the left hand the freedom to move around the fretboard and play chords and notes.

3) The neck should be angled up at approximately a 45 degree angle.



Students should not have the head of their ukulele pointing towards the ground or the ceiling. You can use a clock analogy here and tell them to point their ukulele to 10:30 ... If 12 o'clock is straight up and 9 o'clock is horizontally out to the side; tell them to “find 10:30” with their ukulele head.

4) The left hand thumb should be behind the neck.



Students sometimes try to play with their left hand thumb in strange positions, pointing out into the air or tucked into the hand. The left hand thumb should always be positioned behind the neck, allowing the perfect position for the left hand fingers to move around the fretboard.

To pick or not to pick ... that is the question!



Like the guitar, players can choose to play the ukulele with a pick, instead of strumming with the fingers. Because of the lighter strings than a guitar, a felt pick is usually recommended for the ukulele, rather than a plastic guitar pick.

However, in the classroom, we recommend strumming with the fingers instead of using a pick. Having picks in the classroom will result in lots of extra classroom management issues. “Miss ... someone stole my pick!”... “Can I have a different colour pick?”... and so on.

In the [*Fun Music Company Ukulele Curriculum System*](#) we teach two types of strumming, initially starting by strumming downwards with the thumb, and then using index finger strumming as the students get into more complex strumming patterns.

The more you can minimise extra bits and pieces that the students need, the better off you will be. Picks definitely fit into that category.

Some students initially may complain and say that their strumming fingers or thumb hurts. If this is the case, then they simply need to stop and start again, strumming more gently!

What is the one thing you probably expect to be a challenge, that will eventually stop being a problem after a while?

One thing that can be an initial hurdle to overcome is getting the ukuleles in tune. However, once you're experienced with this you may find that this doesn't become an issue in the long term.

When your ukuleles have been used a few times, the strings stretch and get used to being played, so the instruments should stay in tune most of the time, and tuning may not be a big issue.

A beginner class with a set of ukuleles that they are pulling out of the box for the first time may become a nightmare of tuning! So, for this reason, spending the time yourself to play each ukulele, or allowing experienced students to play them in for a while is a very good idea.

In the [*Fun Music Company Ukulele Curriculum System*](#) we recommend not teaching tuning at all in the beginning, and then by the end of the course we encourage students to learn to tune their ukulele by ear themselves.

What is the one thing teachers don't expect to be a challenge, but may end up being your worst nightmare?

One thing that you may have happen is a student will pipe up in the first lesson and say, *“What do I do if I'm left handed?”* How you answer this question could potentially end up being your worst nightmare, as it can cause you a lot of extra work and practical issues in the classroom.

The ukulele, like the guitar, is fundamentally designed to be a right-handed instrument. It is designed so that you strum with your right hand and use the fretboard with the left.

If you were to reverse everything and play it the other way: strumming with your left hand and playing the chords with your right hand, then the instrument needs to be set up differently, with the strings the other way around. This isn't as simple as just reversing the strings and tuning them differently, as the instrument should be adjusted properly by a luthier (stringed instrument technician).

Most players who are left handed simply learn to play the ukulele or the guitar right handed. However, there are a few notable exceptions in the guitar playing world: - Jimi Hendrix and Paul McCartney among them - who do play the guitar left handed, and they have specially made and set up instruments that allow them to do this.

In the music class however, this causes a problem. It is possible to have a couple of ukuleles set up for left handed students and allow them to play this way; however, all chord charts and all materials have to be presented backwards as well for these students, which complicates everything you're teaching.

The best way to handle this is to say to a student... *“Wow... you're lucky that you're left handed, as the left hand has to do the most work playing the ukulele!”* and then tell them that everyone plays the ukulele the same way, regardless of if they are right or left handed. You can also say... *“There isn't a right or left handed piano, is there?”*

It is possible that you'll have a student or a parent challenge you further on this and insist on playing left handed, complaining that they can't play properly right handed. In this case you can always allow them to do it; however, requiring that:

- a) They bring their own instrument and keep it separate from the others.
- b) They learn to read all the chord charts and materials “backwards” and translate them in their head as they play.

If a student is playing left handed they will also need to be seated on the right end of a row, as otherwise their ukulele head will contact the ukulele of the person next to them who is playing right handed.

What to teach, and when to teach what.

There are hundreds of ukulele instructional books, instruction methods, videos and systems online for playing the ukulele, and each of them takes a different approach. There are also hundreds of songs that your students will enjoy playing, using a variety of chords.

No matter what method you choose, what it all comes down to is teaching the students three basic skills:

- 1) Learning to hold chord shapes with the left hand and strumming with the right hand.
- 2) How to play some simple melodies by finding notes with the left hand while plucking the strings with the right hand.
- 3) Playing a song with other musicians, with singing and/or other instruments.

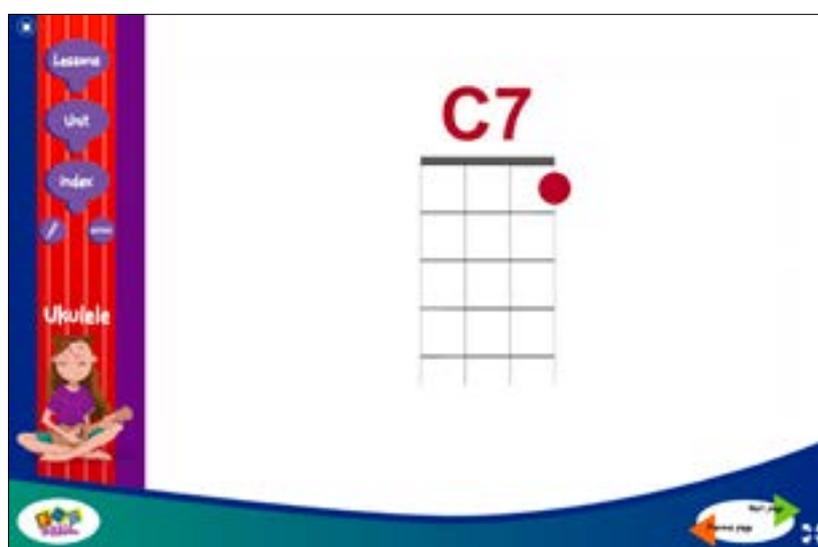
That is why the [Fun Music Company Ukulele Curriculum System](#) is structured the way it is - with three core areas: **Chords** - where students will learn all the basic chord shapes in a systematic fashion, **Melody** - where students will learn to play melodic patterns, and **Ensembles** - where students play chord and melody parts together in a variety of fun ensemble arrangements.

Here are some examples of the types of exercises included:

Chord exercises

Students need to learn how to hold the chord shapes, and most importantly, remember the shapes for each chord. For this reason, the way that the [Fun Music Company Ukulele Curriculum System](#) teaches this is to share the chord diagram at the beginning of each exercise and then the chord strumming pattern is represented as large colorful blocks. This, together with lots of repetition, means that students will remember each chord and be able to move to each one quickly.

This is all taught through video instruction, and every song is presented as a video with the chord reminders at the beginning and bouncy balls to keep the students in time.



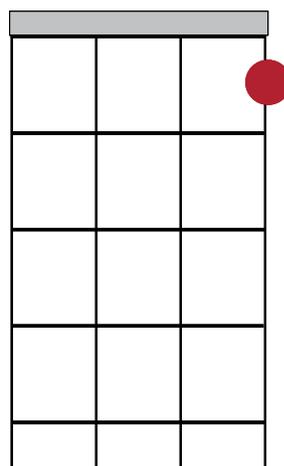
Chord exercise example



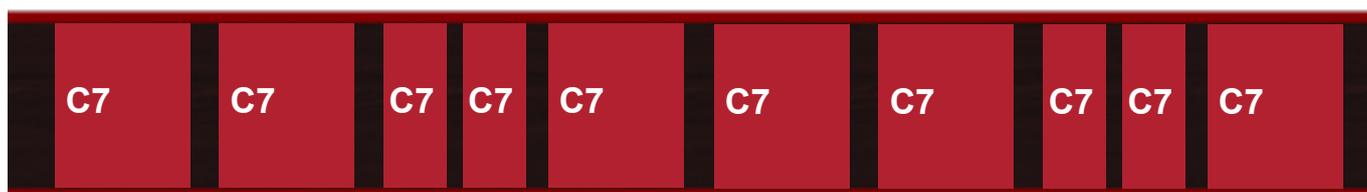
[Click here to access a free sample of this lesson.](#)



C7



Chord playing 5 - C7 chord

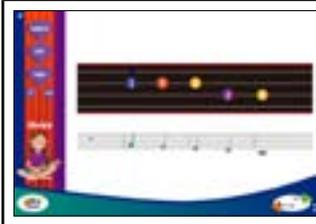


Melody exercises

If ukulele students just learn chords, then they make get a rather narrow view of the instrument, which is why students should also be exposed to a few simple melodic exercises on their Ukulele.

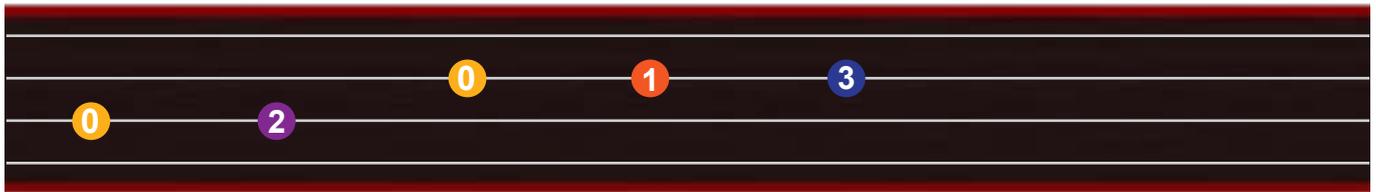
Like other *Fun Music Company* materials, students are exposed to the sheet music, without necessarily expecting that they retain and understand everything about the notation. Students read the following exercise along with the video and the bouncy ball, and will enjoy the challenge of playing the melodies along in time. The numbers in the coloured dots represent the fret that is held, and the colour denotes the finger that is used.

Melody exercise example



[Click here to access a free sample of this lesson.](#)

Melody playing 13 - Up and down



The secret to making your ukulele lessons FUN!

Most of all, ukulele, like any music lessons, should be FUN!

If students have a positive experience making music, then they will likely continue playing music in some form or other in their lives. If they don't enjoy it, then they'll choose sport, art or some other subject instead of music.

So we have a duty and a responsibility to make sure that the lessons and activities we present are fun for the students, and fulfilling as well.

If students don't achieve anything, then all of the most "fun" songs in the world won't help.

The ukulele on its own isn't fun, unless you make it fun!

You CAN make it fun! Be light hearted, be energetic. Expect the best behaviour from your students, and remember that they will enjoy it if YOU enjoy it!

So do you want to know the secret to making sure that your classes are fun?

Don't be burned out yourself.

If you spend hours and hours preparing every lesson, looking through YouTube to find the songs to play and creating your own dedicated curriculum... then yes, you might have great lessons, but you'll start the classes burnt out and tired.

This is why we created the [Fun Music Company Ukulele Curriculum System](#) - so you don't have to spend your time creating materials, and you can concentrate on the important things: like being ready to present amazing lessons with great energy!

There are 40 lessons, set up into four sets of ten, with an assessment at the end of each section. Everything here is handled, so that you can go in, pop it up on your classroom whiteboard and begin teaching. All the music is integrated into the videos, and there is just the right amount of video instruction included to assist you with teaching what is needed.



Sign up now for a monthly or an annual membership to the teaching system here:
<https://funmusicco.com/ukulele-curriculum-system/>