

Totally  
Awesome

Rob's  
Guitar Teaching  
Handbook

Rob Hampton

# About The Author



Since starting his business Heartwood Guitar Instruction in 2003, Rob has taught hundreds of students, from 3-year-old “Hokey Pokey” fans, to teenage indie-rockers, to septuagenarian folk-music lovers. Twice a year, his students perform in The Coffee Shop Jam, a day-long music extravaganza that’s part recital, part rock concert.

Rob’s love for the guitar began one day after school when he was twelve years old. Poking around the house, he found his mother’s neglected Martin guitar, and plunked out the bass riff to “I Heard it Through the Grapevine.” He loves reliving the excitement of that day every time he teaches new students how to fret their first notes.

Find more about Rob [at his website](#).

# About The Book



This eBook is 100% free of DRM (Digital Rights Management), which means there's nothing stopping you from sending it to everyone you know, except the goodness of your heart. I keep it DRM-free in the spirit of trust we share in the musical community. We let touring musicians sleep on our couches, support street performers, and lend our precious guitars to one another. Please keep the trust alive by keeping the book to yourself.

That is, unless you've got an aspiring teacher sleeping on your couch because they couldn't pay rent. If you think they might

benefit from this book, pass it along, and wish them good luck for me!

## Thanks

You know the angel and devil that supposedly sit on our shoulders, whispering in our ears? I'm lucky to have a couple high school teachers perched there instead. One is Mr. Lorentz, who sat at the "Teaching" booth at my school's career fair. I told him I was interested in teaching, but worried I'd be short-changing my future children if I didn't earn enough money to support them. "Do what you love," he said, "and the money will come." I've followed that advice ever since, thank goodness. The other teacher is Mr. Devine, my high school theater director, who taught me that my awkward fumbling on stage was significant, even magical. When I'm teaching, I like to imagine that I'm passing on some of the magic he created for me.

Other inspiring teachers include Steve Kahl and Lydia Zele, my mentors at Stanford; my sister Clare who does amazing work with young kids; my high-school friend Justin, whose own path to music and teaching has guided mine; and the teachers at Puget Sound Guitar Workshop, who are so generous that several have contributed to this book.

Thanks to Charlie for helping me get my first students, and to Lydia, my first student, for your patience.

I want to thank my parents for giving me the freedom to follow my bliss. Your support means so much.

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# Introduction

*There are few things more satisfying than seeing a student's face light up when they're first able to play something new and lovely.*

**Steve Baughman**

Thanks for giving me a chance to share what I've learned about teaching guitar. This job has given me tremendous satisfaction, and has earned me a better living than I thought possible. It really is my dream job. If you have a dream of making guitar teaching a fulfilling career, this handbook can help make it real.

## What's In The Book

There are three chapters. In the first, I do my best impersonation of a career counselor, helping you decide whether teaching's your "thing." I love this job, but I understand that it's not for everybody.

The second chapter is all business: How to fill your schedule and make money. I describe how I chose a teaching space, got those precious first students, filled my schedule, started a waiting list, and doubled my hourly rate—from \$40 to \$80—in my first year.

The third chapter describes some critical teaching skills, focusing on beginners, since they're both the most plentiful kind of student, and also the most challenging. It takes more teaching skill to show a 7-year-old how to play "Mary Had a

Little Lamb” than it does to teach “Little Wing” to a veteran. But, like any skill, teaching can be taught.

Throughout the book, some of my favorite teachers offer wisdom, encouragement, and wise-ass sarcasm.

## My Background

For most of my life, I thought I wanted to be a high school English teacher, and playing guitar was just a hobby. Good classroom teachers are so badly needed, and I thought I could be a great one. But I quit teaching after three years of waking up with a knot in my stomach every morning, and spending Christmas vacations grading papers while the rest of my family went ice skating and ate figgy pudding. In photos from that period, I look like Rick Ocasek with a head cold.

Without a career goal for the first time since I was 14, I spent a couple years as Seattle’s worst handyman, installing doggie doors that didn’t open and fences that fell down. But at the same time, I was pursuing passions I’d neglected when I started teaching. One of those passions was playing in a rock band. I was in rehearsal one day, complaining to my bandmates about the terrible job I was doing painting a house, and the singer, who teaches guitar for a living, said, “Hey man, *you* should teach guitar.”

BING! In life there are a few pivotal moments, when the earth spins under our feet, sometimes without us noticing, and we march in a completely new direction. This was the day I found my path.

It's been a wonderful seven-year journey. When you teach music, your real job is spreading joy—something everyone wants and needs. You teach a newlywed a love song, and they serenade their sweetheart. You teach a self-conscious teenager power chords, and they're the coolest kid at the school talent show. A child who learns "Mary Had a Little Lamb" plays it for grandma at her 80th birthday, and it brings tears to her eyes.



Teaching guitar creates transcendent moments.

I'm sure you appreciate the power of music, so I'll stop gushing. But here's the real surprise in this Handbook: Despite what everyone says—most guitar teachers included—you can make a great living spreading joy.