

So now we know which string is which. But what about the strings themselves?

We'll begin tuning by using a standard type and gauge of string. Later you can customize your instrument to the pitch of your voice, with the help of the String Tone Tolerance Chart and Range and Tuning Guide in the back of this book. But for now we'll use five-string-banjo strings—two firsts, one second, and a fourth. If you buy them by the gauge, we recommend two .010's, a .012, and a .022. The fourth string (bass string) comes in wound and unwound varieties—you want the wound.

Furthermore, depending upon what kind of tail-piece and string attachment system you have, you can get either “ball-end” or “loop-end” strings. So check this out before you trot off and purchase strings with the wrong kind of end.

Remove your old strings. They may be new, but you never know, and most probably the ones that come with your instrument will be “dead, oh so dead,” and will have a sound like spit hitting a cast-iron frying pan. You may as well learn how to change your strings now so when one breaks you'll know how to deal with the situation.

There is really only one truly efficient technique for putting strings on an instrument; however, there are at least three schools of thought on this matter. Some people are aghast at the thought of cutting off a string's excess length. They wind the string onto the tuning peg in a way that allows the excess length to dangle hither and yon, thereby preserving, as it were, the string's “soul”—while providing a convenient place to jam their filter cigarettes while playing. We call this the “Rock 'n' Roll String Syndrome.” The second group also believes in a string's soul. They either wind the string completely onto the tuning peg (not very practical), or they wind the string around the peg several times and curl the excess length into a little circle (like it was when it came from the package) which clutters up the peg-head.