

ACOUSTIC GUITAR PLAYERS AND SINGERS

How to stay active while practicing social distancing

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Copyright page

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1. The show must go on



The COVID-19 global crisis has required many of us to take a step back and reassess our day-to-day lives. Musicians are no different. Quarantining and social distancing is already an odd concept to most people, but it can be especially challenging for those in the habit of being creative and collaborative in close quarters. These joint musical sessions are cathartic, productive, and often the root of inspiration.

Creativity aside, the livelihood of musicians has also changed drastically. With strict social regulations and policies, artists are no longer able to count on their main source of income: live performances. With no clear end in sight to the global pandemic, you may be asking yourself as a musician what you can do to stay productive, inspired, and keep financially afloat.

With so much uncertainty, anxiety, and sadness flooding the world these days, it appears as though we need music now more than ever. The good news is that there are plenty of opportunities and strategies for musicians who sing and play acoustic guitar. Use this guide to walk you through the steps it takes to record, promote, and monetize your original music in these uncertain times.

1.1 A brief history of music and its benefits

Music can be found in just about every single culture, past or present. Our ancestors used music for healing purposes and often integrated it into their religious and spiritual rituals. While the earliest forms

of music were most likely voice- or percussion-based, it's evolved greatly over thousands of years, expanding to the use of numerous instruments in an abundance of styles and genres.¹

Today, music is a strong catalyst for emotional expression, and has even been shown to reduce anxiety and enhance mood. Studies tell us that music engages areas of the brain that correspond to attention, memory, and predicting. There are even special therapies that utilize music to help patients improve their emotional and physical functions.^{2 3}

1.2 How COVID-19 has changed the music industry

The COVID-19 crisis makes it easy to jump to bleak conclusions regarding the future of the music industry. With the cancellation of thousands of tours and festivals across the world, musicians are left wondering how to adapt after their main source of revenue was abruptly stripped away.⁴ Performance aside, musicians are also adjusting to a world where isolation is the new normal. This poses even more challenges as writing and recording is often an extremely collaborative effort.

Ironically, society has become even *more* reliant on music as a source of comfort and entertainment through these difficult times, perhaps forgetting the behind-the-scenes effort it takes to create. While the future of the pandemic remains uncertain, this doesn't mean you cannot release music to people interested in and even reliant on hearing it.

¹ Bernie Krause, *The Great Animal Orchestra* (New York: Little Brown/Hachette, 2012), 46.

² Mary, "The Amazing Health Benefits of Music Therapy," Healthcautions.com, 2 Aug. 2018, <https://healthcautions.com/the-amazing-health-benefits-of-music-therapy/>.

³ Valorie Salimpoor, "Investigations of the Links Between Music, Emotion, and Reward," McGill University, 23 Nov. 2011, <https://www.mcgill.ca/channels/event/investigations-links-between-music-emotion-and-reward-valorie-salimpoor-212212>.

⁴ Gideon Waxman, "The True Impact of Covid-19 on the Music Industry," Liveforlivemusic.com, 20 Mar. 2020, <https://liveforlivemusic.com/features/impact-covid-19-music-industry/>.

2. Getting started



2.1 The right tools

Putting together the right tools to set up a home recording rig can be overwhelming. There are many different recording components to choose from, all on varying places on the spectrum of price, required capability, and quality of result. Be sure to have the following key items on hand:

- [Your voice](#)
- [Acoustic guitar](#)
- [Microphone and stand](#)
- [Recording interface](#)
- [Computer with Digital Workstation \(DAW\)](#)
- [Headphones and monitors](#)

2.1.1 Your voice



What you need to know:

No matter what style of music you perform, your voice will always sound its best with some preparation and maintenance. The more you practice proper warm-up techniques, the more comfortable and confident when you record.

Tips:

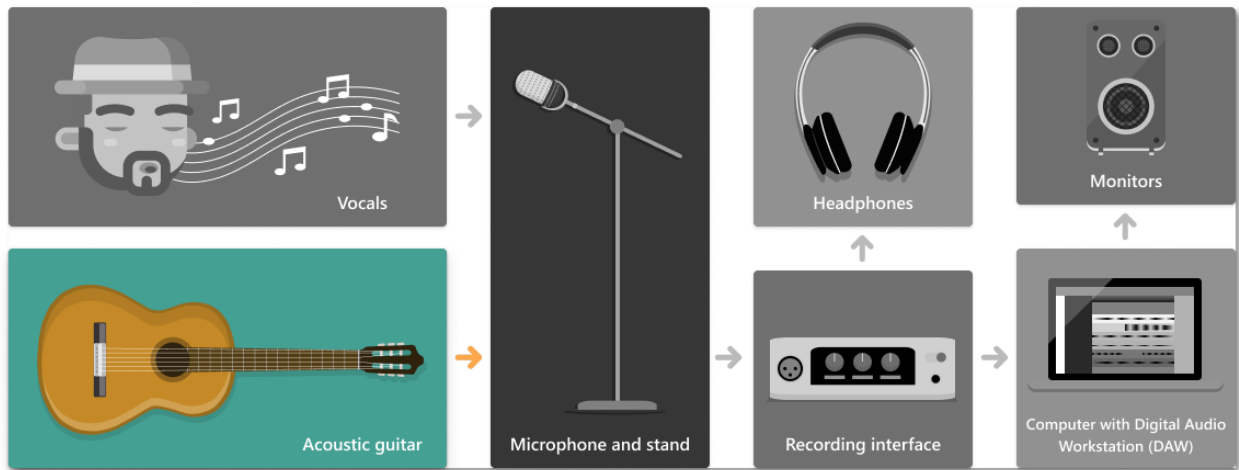
Here are some links to physical and vocal exercises that will help warm yourself up before singing:

- **Stretch your body:** [Quick Warm-Up Stretches for Singers](#)
- **Lip trills:** [How to Lip Trill](#)
- **Yawn-sigh:** [How a Yawn Space Can Help Your Singing](#)

What the experts say:

[“It takes a lot of stamina and energy to sing onstage and bring the venue to life. That’s why singing, like any other physical activity, should involve a warm-up, as well as a vocal cool-down.”](#)

2.1.2 Acoustic guitar



What you need to know:

The acoustic guitar has become a staple in modern music and is incorporated into just about every musical genre out there.

Tips:

Always re-string your guitar before starting any new recording session. Old strings are going to sound dull and muffled, while fresh strings pack more punch. This may go without saying, but be sure to tune your guitar as often as you can during the entire recording process. Imagine recording an incredible take, only to find out that it is out of tune. An out of tune guitar part will make playing or singing over it later a logistical nightmare.

What the experts say:

"Have you ever wondered how each part of the instrument makes up the sound you hear when somebody is playing it? The brilliance of the strings, the resonance of the wood, and the amplification of the body all contribute to what you perceive to be an acoustic guitar sound."

2.1.3 Microphone and stand

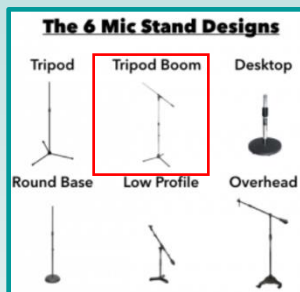


What you need to know:

Microphones are tools that capture sound waves and convert them into electrical energy, which can be amplified, transmitted, or recorded.⁵ Whether it's vocals or guitar, you'll need a microphone to capture the sound they make in order to record them.

Tips:

With thousands of microphones on the market, all with varying price, quality, and style, making the right choice on which one to use can be difficult. Whichever you decide, be sure it's an XLR microphone, which is the standard for any musician that takes themselves seriously. These have a special 3-prong plug and need to be connected to a recording interface before sending its signal to a computer. While they are more expensive upfront, the enhanced sound quality speaks for itself.



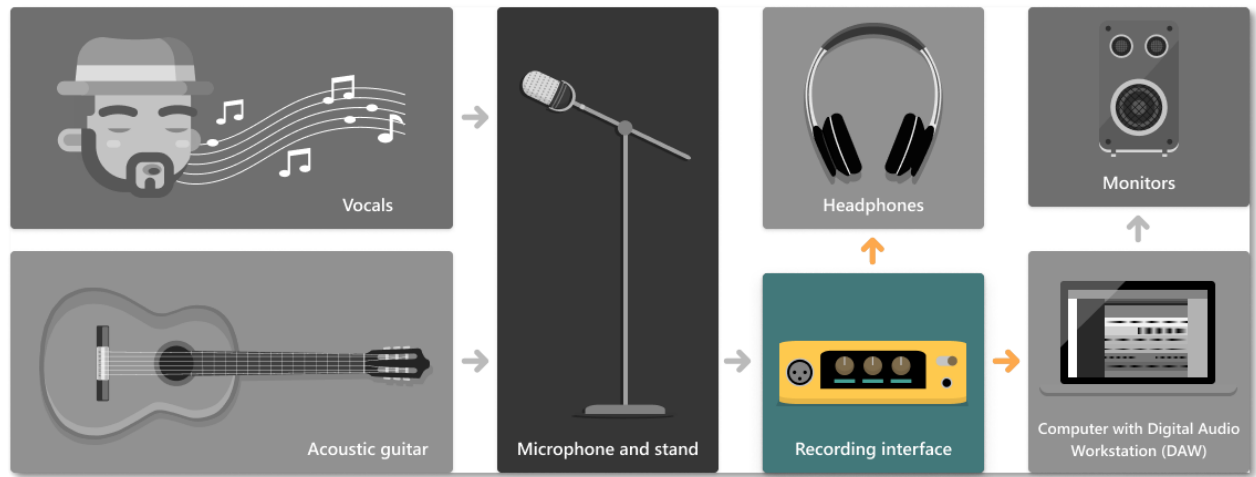
There are six main types of microphones stands, each with a unique specialty. The **tripod boom** offers a longer reach than the other stands and can easily be modified to fit just about any scenario.

⁵ "USB vs XLR Microphones: Death Battle." Podcast.co, <https://www.podcast.co/create/usb-vs-xlr-microphone>.

What the experts say:

“Ultimately, you need to get a microphone in your hands and onto your stand to really judge what it can do for you. No amount of listening to internet samples will change that. Remember, at the end of the day, these are just tools. No one walks down the street humming the microphone.”

2.1.4 Recording interface



What you need to know:

Think of a recording interface as a translator between your analog equipment (microphones, guitars, etc.) and your computer; it converts the signal from your analog sound into a digital one that your computer can understand.⁶

Here are some items to consider when deciding on the right recording interface:

Front of recording interface



Letter	Name	Description
a	Line inputs	This is where you plug your analog equipment into. The more input jacks you have, the more instruments you can record.
b	Mix levels	This allows you to alter the gains of your inputs.
c	Meter	This allows you to check the sound levels to avoid distortion.
d	Output controls	This is where you are sending your sound signal to. This can be to connect to speakers, monitors, or headphones.

⁶ Brad Pack, "Choosing Your First Audio Interface and DAW," Reverb.com, 19 Jul. 2017, <https://reverb.com/news/home-recording-basics-ii-choosing-your-first-audio-interface-and-daw>.

Back of recording interface



Letter	Name	Description
e	Microphone inputs	These take your male XLR microphone cables.
f	Combination inputs	These take both line-level and microphone-level cables.
g	Standard line inputs	These take guitar and synthesizer cables.
h	Multiple outs	These are where you are sending your sound signal to. Having multiple outs give you the flexibility to send to multiple monitors or headphones.
i	Optical input	This allows you to send out an additional 8 outputs that may connect to other units.
j	Computer connector	This is the connection from the interface to your computer. There are three main connection types: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USB: Is generally the cheapest option but offers the slowest transfer rate. • FireWire: A step up both in price and transfer rate. • FireWire Thunderbolt: Extremely fast transfer rate, but only found on Mac computers.
k	MIDI interface	This allows MIDI equipment such as synthesizers or sound modules to connect to your computer.
l	S/PDIF in and out	These are connectors that take in or push out signals from effect pedals.

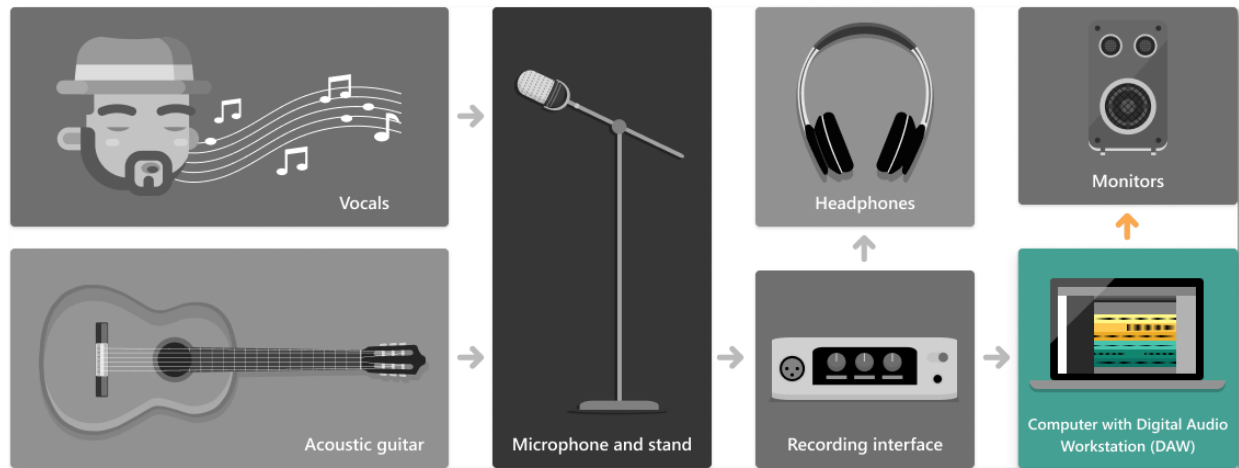
Tips:

Make sure the audio interface syncs up with your computer before buying one. Most brands will have guides on their website for you to doublecheck prior to purchasing.

What the experts say:

“Just like instruments themselves, audio interfaces come in all sorts of variations; purpose built for recording, live shows, general or hybrid use; and some have built-in effects, and others are as simple as a small box with one input and one output.”

2.1.5 Computer with a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW)



What you need to know:

A digital audio workstation (DAW) is a digital user interface used for audio recording and editing. Its software often features virtual mixers, filters, timelines, and organization tools. ⁷

Tips:

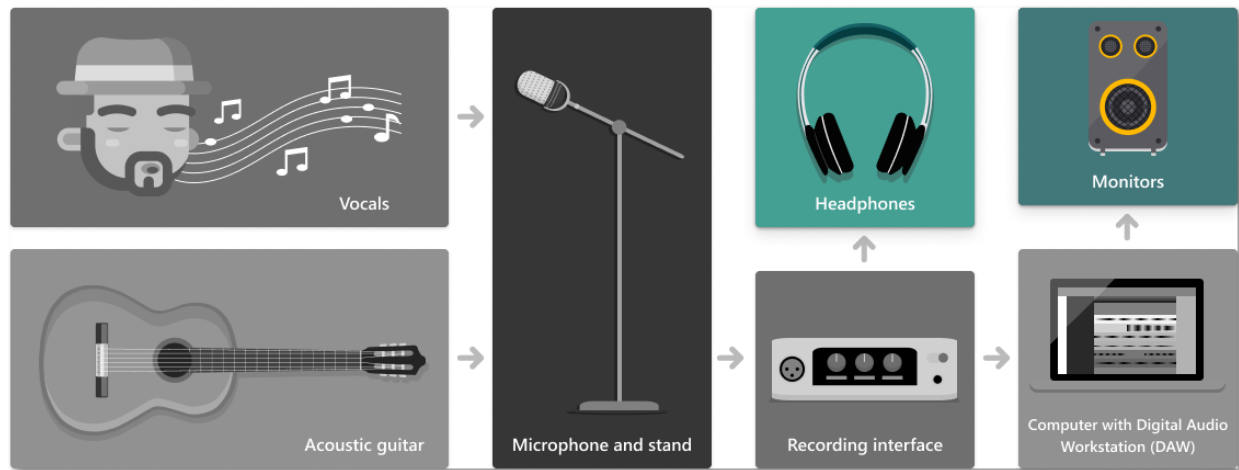
Once you install your DAW, you will need to assign inputs and outputs for recording and playback (these are the items going in or out of your recording interface). Then, start by creating a few tracks. The more tracks your song has, the more layers and depth you can bring to it. However, there is nothing wrong with keeping it simple!

What the experts say:

[“In any professional field, your workflow should be fast enough to tackle the time commitment. Music production is not an exception.”](#)

⁷ Dante Fumo, “What is a DAW? - The Basics” Reverb.com, 1 Apr. 2018, <https://reverb.com/news/what-is-a-daw-the-basics>.

2.1.6 Monitors and Headphones



What you need to know:

Monitors and speakers are what you will use to listen back to your performances. Monitors are speakers that project sound out to the room, while headphones project sound directly into your ear.

Tips:

It's important to note that there is no one way to listen back to your music. It's often times a matter of space and convenience. Recording out of your bedroom and don't want to disturb the roommates? Listen back on your headphones. Want to crank things up to ten while being completely engulfed in sound? Go with monitors. If you're able, you can also bounce between both to catch nuances!

What the experts say:

"The endless discussion around mixing with headphones vs monitors is tiresome and full of misinformation. We're here to put the record straight: both have their benefits and disadvantages. Any mixer worth his or her weight should be using both. We'll teach you how."

3. Time to record

3.1 Organizing your DAW



What you need to know:

Before diving into your recording session, it's a good idea to get organized. This can help you optimize your workload while staying on top of the multitude of recording details. Think of this task as an investment: the more time you spend getting organized up front, the more time you can devote to being creative.

Tips:

Big or small, keeping your tracks organized can be difficult. Stay on top of what's happening in your session by color coding your tracks based on the type of source. For example, all rhythm vocals are blue, or lead guitars are green, etc. While it doesn't matter which colors you choose, be sure to stick with the system you create from song to song. In time, you'll memorize your system, which will make items easier to recognize and manipulate.

Another efficient organizational strategy is to arrange your instruments consistently. That means keeping like-minded tracks together. For example, grouping the varieties of guitar tracks on top, followed by different vocal tracks.⁸

⁸ Mike Levine, "10 Ways to Better Organize your DAW Mixing Sessions," Waves.com, 27 Sept. 2018, <https://www.waves.com/ways-to-better-organize-your-daw-mixing-sessions>.

What the experts say:

"I used to leave my large projects unedited and disorganized, but that always proved problematic. Over time, I realize I worked much faster when my sessions were organized in a way that makes sense."

3.2 The metronome



What you need to know:

A metronome is a device that produces an audible clicking sound to mark time at a selected rate. In a recording session, this is known as the “click track”.

Tips:

Metronomes make post-production a lot easier when it comes to synchronization. Need to fix errors later on and worried about staying in time? With a metronome, this is no problem. Referencing the song’s original metronome ensures your music is tight, clean, and follows the right time signature.

What the experts say:

“Click tracks can be both a saving grace and a musician’s bane. Some musicians swear by them while others swear at them.”

3.3 Setting up your microphones



3.3.1 How to mic your acoustic guitar

What you need to know:

Before you start recording your first track, you'll need to set up a microphone to capture the sounds your guitar makes.

Tips:

Proper microphone placement is extremely important in catching a great acoustic guitar sound.

1. Find a comfortable spot to sit with your guitar.
2. Adjust your microphone stand, so that it's directly in front of the spot on the guitar where the neck and body come together. This is usually around the 12th or 14th fret.
3. Keep the microphone close to the bottom of the guitar neck.
4. The microphone should be about 6 inches away from the guitar.



What the experts say:

"Any mic placed directly in front of the guitar will have all detail washed out by the gushing bass frequencies that come blasting out through the sound hole."

3.3.2 How to mic your voice

What you need to know:

Once you've recorded some foundational acoustic guitar, it's time to set up a microphone to capture yourself singing.

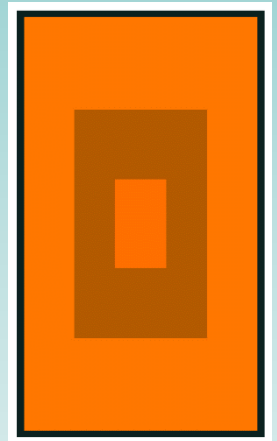
Tips:

The two most important things to consider when recording vocals are: 1) the room in which you're recording and 2) the microphone placement. Find a small to medium-sized room with lots of items to absorb sound. Beds, couches, pillows, and rugs can all help to improve the sound quality. Avoid rooms with windows and hard surfaces, which will make the sounds bounce all over the place and therefore deteriorate recording quality.

When it comes to setting up your microphone, keep these two rules in mind:

- A microphone should not be in the exact center of the room.
- But, keep the microphone as far away from walls as possible.

Pretend as though the image to the right is your room. Orange represents areas you'll want to avoid and brown represents the "sweet spot."⁹



What the experts say:

"Vocals are the one thing we all record and the one thing all listeners here. It demands our best work."

⁹ Rob Mayzes, "Big Mistakes and How to Avoid them," Landr.com, 15 May. 2018, <https://blog.landr.com/recording-vocals-mistakes/>.

3.4 Mixing and mastering your song



What you need to know:

Mixing combines and adjusts the individual tracks from your recording session into a stereo or multichannel format. Mastering processes your mix into its final form so that it's ready for your audience to hear.

Tips:

Listen to your mixes and masters on different devices. While you may have gotten them sounding great in your DAW, how does it sound in your car stereo or phone? Don't forget that your fans may be listening to your music on multiple devices, so you'll want them to all share a great sound experience.

What the experts say:

"Mixing is the intermediary step between recording and mastering. Therefore, the job of the mix engineer is to prepare a recording for mastering."

4. Promote and monetize

Now that you have some songs recorded, it's time to get it out to your fan base. While many musicians enjoy writing, recording, and performing for the fun of it, others use their music to make a living. To accomplish the latter, you'll need to take the right steps to ensure you're effectively showcasing yourself to the people that want to hear your music the most.

4.1 Promoting your music



4.1.1 Get your music streaming

What you need to know:

Digital streaming platforms allow you to listen to music without downloading files from the Internet. Music services like [Spotify](#), [Pandora](#), [YouTube](#), and [Apple Music](#) all use streaming to provide songs on different digital devices. ¹⁰

Tips:

The more services your music is featured on equates to more exposure. Familiarize yourself with the individual nuances of each service to determine how to best to utilize each one.

What the experts say:

[“If you commit to the medium and create lots of content that your fans love, it’s possible to earn money.”](#)

¹⁰ Mark Harris, “What is Streaming Music?” Lifewire.com, 9 Mar. 2020, <https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-streaming-music-2438445>

4.1.2 Social media

What you need to know:

Social media is a combination of websites and applications that enables anyone to create and share content or participate in online networking. Regardless of the platform, social media connects you with your fans, shares your music, and/or lets them know what other projects you're working on.

Tips:

There's a good chance when someone looks you up as a musician, they'll try to find you through [Google](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), or [Facebook](#). When creating individual profiles for each, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do my social media profiles point directly to my latest promotion?
- Are all pictures [appropriately sized](#) according to which social media platform they appear on?
- Is all information about me and my music up to date and accurate?

What the experts say:

["Make no mistake: social media isn't some sort of silver bullet for musicians with stars in their eyes. However, a smart social presence is undoubtedly the best way to grow your audience and fill space at your gigs."](#)

4.2 Monetizing



4.2.1 Fundraising

What you need to know:

Fundraising is one of the quickest ways to raise money for yourself or a musical project. Many musical artists have effectively raised funds on sites such as [Kickstarter](#), [Indiegogo](#), [PledgeMusic](#), [Pateron](#), [Go Fund Me](#). Be sure to describe yourself, your project, and your goal, and request support from the public.

Tips:

Consider incentivizing to your audience by offering items such as stickers, photos, or exclusive access to your recording to everyone that wants to donate to your project.

What the experts say:

[“When you’re looking to make money and raise funds, it helps to remember that all crowdfunding resources are not created equal! While all of them allow you to crowdsource funds, some have posting fees, some take a percentage of your earnings, some charge your donors a donation fee, while others only let you keep the money you earn if you reach the full one-hundred percent of your fundraising goal.”](#)

4.2.2 Sell digital downloads

What you need to know:

Giving fans a platform to download your music digitally has a great deal of benefits. Not only does it connect you directly with your fans, but it also gives you the opportunity to customize your branding and keep all of your profits.

Tips:

Offer your songs by utilizing a pay-what-you-want pricing model. While some fans may download the music for very little, there are others willing and able to pay more.

What the experts say:

[“Today, there are more opportunities to sell music than at any other time in music history. Gone are the days of pressing master recordings and painstakingly distributing vinyl and tapes to record shops across the country.”](#)

4.2.3 Musical licensing

What you need to know:

Musical licensing is when you give permission to someone or an organization to use your music for projects such as movies, commercials, or video games. This is a great way to gain exposure to new fans, collaborate with artists outside of your medium, and, of course, generate a profit.¹¹

Tips:

Consider having multiple versions of your music available to showcase. Music licensers may love your song, but will perhaps require an instrumental version to accommodate their project.

What the experts say:

[“Getting a successful placement can come with huge exposure and generate significant revenue through sync license fees and performance revenue.”](#)

¹¹ Mary Woodcock, “Music Licensing: Sync Licensing Guide for Success,” Musicgateway.com, 13 Jun. 2019, <https://www.musicgateway.com/blog/how-to/beginners-guide-to-sync-licensing-tips-and-tricks-of-the-trade>.

5. Conclusion



I hope this guide acts as a linear path through the creative and technical process of recording, promoting, and monetizing your music. While it's clear that musicians have been hit hard during these unprecedented times, there are still lots of opportunities for acoustic guitar players and singers. Don't give up! Music is a major catalyst in creating hope and optimism, both for the ones that play, and the ones that listen.

Good luck and be safe out there!

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<https://www.musicgateway.com/blog/how-to/beginners-guide-to-sync-licensing-tips-and-tricks-of-the-trade>.

7. Style guide

Item	Description
Organization or project name	Acoustic guitar players and singers: How to stay active while practicing social distancing
Plan author	Jon Meyers
Date	July 1st, 2020
Scope	This project will sequence the necessary steps for acoustic guitar players and singers to record music and release it directly to their fanbase, all without ever leaving their home.
Owner(s)	Jon Meyers
Reviewer(s)	Maria Blyther, classmate
Audience, users	Professor, classmates, acoustic guitar players, singers, general musicians
Dictionary	Online OK
Style guide	<i>Microsoft Writing Style Guide</i> , Microsoft Corporation, 2018
Thesaurus	Online OK
Other resources	https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/style-guide/welcome/
Location and archiving	This PC> Local Disk (C:)> >Desktop>Technical Writing Course>Capstone Project

Item	Description
Updating and version control	Jon Meyers, Maria Blyther Review and replenish: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7/1-7/14
Permissions: Rights to change Rights to view	Rights to change: Jon Meyers, Maria Blyther Rights to view: Classmates, any external viewers
Publishing (print, online)	Online only (read-only Word document and .pdf file)