**Mary Rose Academy**

**Music Training A: music facilitation technical support**

**Open tunings**

The guitar is one of the most widespread instruments in the world, which might explain why it is so popular among children and adults. However, fretting technique (the pressing of strings against the fingerboard in between two frets to produce a specific tone) demands advanced fine motor skills that can take some time to develop. But guitars can be played in different ways to create sounds that are pleasant as well as rewarding. In what in musical terms is called an ‘open tuning’, strings are retuned so that they form a series of notes that produce the sound that you want without having to use conventional fretting techniques. Open tunings are generally achieved by changing the conventional guitar tuning so that the open strings produce a simple chord.

**Step-by-step guide to open tunings: what you will need**

*Acoustic guitar*

You might want to practice with an old guitar that still has some strings left or is a bit damaged but can still produce a guitar-like sound. Most school guitars will fit this description. Acoustic guitars come in many sizes but most of them normally have 6 strings tuned in the same way.

*Optima guitar application*

You can use this app in a tablet or a Smartphone. Once you open the application, the display should by default show the ‘all notes’ function. You can easily confirm this by looking at the bottom of the display which features the options.

The ‘all notes’ option displays a clock-like hand that points towards a tuning graph that shows a ‘0’ in the middle, a ‘-50’ on the left and a ‘50’ on the right.

On top of the left end there is a *b* (the musical sign for ‘flat’) and on top of the right end there is a # (the musical sign for sharp). On top of the centre of the graph there is a circle that turns green when the hand is pointing at it.

Right under the axis of the tuning hand, the reference note is. The reference note is the one that the application is detecting. If the note is flat, the tuning hand will be turning towards the left, if it is sharp, it will point towards the right, and will point to the centre when it is in tune, triggering the green light.

**A few things to have in mind before you start**

1. The order of the notes in the Western scale: a-b-c-d-e-f-g. Sharps (#) transpose notes a semitone higher, flats (*b*) a semitone lower. If you start tensing up a string that is in D, the next note you reach will be D sharp, which is the same as E flat.
2. The register of the guitar in relation to the width of the strings. The lowest open note is a low ‘e’ played by the thicker top string (known as the 6th), whereas the highest open note is the ‘e’ two octaves higher played by the thinnest, bottom string (known as the 1st).
3. The conventional tuning of the guitar goes up from a low ‘e’ in the thick 6th string UP to the next ‘a’ in the 5th string, UP to the next ‘d’ in the 4th string, UP to the next ‘g’ in the ‘3rd’ string, UP to the next ‘b’ in the 2nd string, and finally UP to the next ‘e’ in the 1st string. In the following guide I will show you how to change this to two types of open tunings.

**Step-by-Step Guide**

Note: this guide will teach you how to tune a guitar from conventional tuning to open tunings; if the guitar is heavily out of tune, you can still apply the same principle, but departing from whatever tone each string is tuned to.

**Start with the TOP 6th string and make your way downwards to the BOTTOM 1st string**

**Step 1:** Play the string and check the note in the application display. If the guitar has been tuned before, it will be an ‘e’ or a note close to it ‘d’, ‘d#’, ‘f’.

**Step 2:** Adjust the tuning until you get the reference note that you need and the tuning hand is pointing towards the centre, triggering the green light.

**Step 3:** Repeat this process with all the other strings.

**From conventional tuning to D major open tuning (the easiest):**

Tune the 6th string DOWN from ‘e’ to ‘d’.

Leave the 5th string as it is, an ‘a’.

Leave the 4th string as it is, a ‘d’.

Tune the 3rd string DOWN from ‘g’ to ‘f#’

Tune the 2nd string DOWN from ‘b’ to ‘a’

Tune the 1st string DOWN from ‘e’ to ‘d’

**C major open tuning:**

**Note:** this tuning will be useful to you as most tuned school instruments are in the scale of C major. If you include group playing or ensemble work in your planning, tuning guitars to an open C major chord will create a consonant sound.

Leave the 6th string as it is, an ‘e’ (or down to a ‘c’, for a nice bass note)

Tune the 5th string DOWN from ‘a’ to ‘g’

Tune the 4th string DOWN from ‘d’ to ‘c’

Leave the 3rd string as it is, a ‘g’

Tune the 2nd string UP from ‘b’ to ‘c’ (or DOWN to an ‘a’, to create a pleasant added 6th note to the basic C major chord triad)

Leave the 1st string as it is, an ‘e’.