

# Tuning the Mandolin: G-D-A-E

First, when we say the "1st string," we really mean the 1st unison pair of strings. So, the "strings" are numbered from 1 to 4, from right to left in the diagram below. The 1st string is the thinnest and highest in pitch and the 4th string is the thickest and lowest in pitch, so when you hold the mandolin as a righty, the "highest" string (pitch-wise) is the "lowest" in elevation above sea-level. Sorry about the confusion. We'll stick with the pitch-wise definition.

Now, listen up: I would suggest that you go out and buy an **electronic tuner**. No, really, you should get a tuner. Put another way: A tuner you should get, no, really.

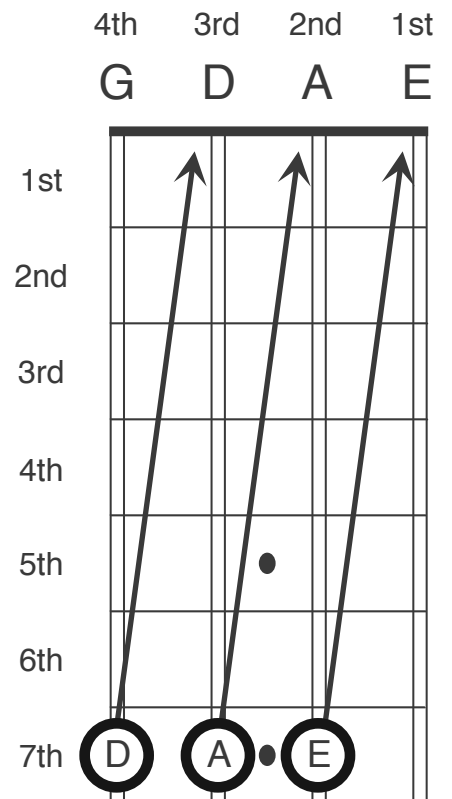
I'm only thinking of **you**. Tuning by ear, known as **Relative Tuning**, is tricky, especially if your ear for music is still developing. It's better to employ the tuner and be **CERTAIN** that you are in tune, than it is to throw a Hail Mary pass and land somewhere nearby. Better to hear yourself playing in tune from the start. That said, I will run you through the process of Relative Tuning, just in case.

So. The diagram to the right gives you a bird's-eye-view. This is a **Fretboard Diagram**, where the dark line on top represents the nut, the vertical lines are the 8 strings, labeled G - D - A - E (4th through 1st pairs), and the lower horizontal lines are the first 7 frets.

You'll need to get a **G** note from a trusted source (piano, pitch pipe or phone) and tune the **first** 4th string to that pitch as closely as you can. Now play the **second** 4th string and use its tuning peg (make sure it's the proper one) to close the gap (and I'll bet there **IS** one) between the two sounds.

As you approach the right pitch, you'll hear and feel a beating sound (**wa-wa-wa**) that will begin to slow down and finally disappear once the notes are in perfect unison (**wa-waaaa-waaaaaaaaa**).

Now play the note at the 7th fret of the 4th string. This means, put a left-hand finger in the space between the 6th and 7th frets (there should be a dot there) and push down until you get a note to ring when you hit the string with your pick. We call this space between the frets the "fret" for expediency.



This is a **D** note, and we'll use it to tune the open 3rd strings, which also need to be **D** notes. Play the 7th fret of the 4th string and the **first** 3rd string **together**, compare pitches, turn the knob for the **3rd** string to lose the beating, then tune the **second** 3rd string to the first 3rd string.