This book is intended for the beginning student with no previous music experience. It's goal is that students acquire proficiency in three distinct areas: popular, classical and ensemble playing.

**Popular Style**

Students will learn all the basic chords, including extended chords and bar chords, along with a variety of strumming patterns. Chords and strumming patterns are always learned in the context of playing popular songs, from a variety of genres, so that there is immediate and relevant application. Students will learn to play with the recordings of these songs not only because it is fun, but also so that they learn how to listen to and play to a beat. Additionally, students will learn all songs by reading song charts, which contain the chords, rhythms, form and other details of the song.

The last song in the book is *Stairway to Heaven*, an icon of rock music, which for an excellent class final for the rock section. It includes a variety of chords and strumming patterns with demanding and aggressive rhythms, as well as a variety of fingerstyle patterns. Beginning in Lesson 13, students will learn this section by section, as it correlates to the objective of each lesson. By Lesson 20, students will not only learn to play this song proficiently, but also *authentically*, and that is something that is rare with even the most seasoned player. This is the goal with all the music learned in this book– that students go beyond mere proficiency, but learn to master the music, playing it with both skill and musicianship. (My grading rubric, on page 113 is constructed with this perspective.)

**Guitar Ensemble**

One of the goals of including ensemble music in this book is to teach students how to play with other musicians. This is a hugely important, but often neglected skill in many guitar programs. Students will form quartets and will prepare music for performances. This means that students will not only learn their individual part, but will learn how to rehearse – the skill of working together cooperatively to put four parts together, considering balance, tone, phrasing, dynamics, tempo fluctuations and other expressive devices. In short, they learn how to listen. Ensemble playing not only equips students with this skill, but also, it provides the students with the experience and joy of making music with other musicians.

Ensemble playing actually begins in chapter 3, when students begin learning to read music in the context of playing duets with the teacher. Like playing songs with recordings, learning to read music in this context not only gives students a relevant and enjoyable application to acquiring music-reading skills, but it also teaches students to listen, preparing them to play student quartet music in the spring semester.

**Classical Guitar**

By the second semester, students will also have become proficient enough in music reading skills to begin learning classical guitar. Classical guitar technique is presented methodically, beginning with simple arpeggios and ending with three-part compositions. All repertoire is taken from standard classical guitar literature. While developing technical skill is obviously an objective here, the goal should be more than that. As important as it is, technique is only physical. No one, including the performer, wants to hear only fingers move in a performance. From the beginning, I emphasize to my students that what makes classical guitar meaningful to both the audience and the player is when the player is able to express how they hear the music – their interpretation, framed within the perimeters of the composer's intentions. The purpose of technique is to give us the tools to articulate what hear. It's never about the fingers, but about the inner ear. When students are able to play what they hear, the music becomes *far* more personal because they are expressing their thoughts and emotions through the notes. Subsequently, the music becomes so much more meaningful to them and the audience. From my experience, when students internalize the music and make expression the goal, technical mastery will be automatic.