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2nd Edition

# Mandolin

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Get a grip on chords  
and picking patterns

Play bluegrass, blues,  
jazz, and old-time music

**Don Julin**

Professional mandolin player,  
instructor, and recording artist



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2nd Edition

**by Don Julin**

Professional mandolin player,  
instructor, and recording artist

Foreword by Scott Tichenor

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## **Mandolin For Dummies® , 2nd Edition**

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# Foreword

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It is with great pleasure and a sense of pride that I welcome you to *Mandolin For Dummies*. Our unique little musical instrument — the mandolin — is one filled with limitless possibilities. Whether you're just learning or you've been working at it for a considerable amount of time, a wealth of valuable information awaits you within these pages.

The mandolin had its beginning in Europe centuries ago. During the natural migration of humans seeking new opportunities and a better life, people often took with them the family mandolin which was portable, unlike the bulkier guitar or piano. The mandolin found itself in new surroundings, mixing with unfamiliar music and cultures. New music genres were being born. The influence of Italian music took hold in Brazil and spread to other parts of South America. Europe's classical music found a good home in today's Asian mandolin orchestras. In the United States, penniless immigrants who had entered the country through New York's Ellis Island ultimately mingled with the descendents of African slaves to create new styles of soulful, hyper-charged folk music.

It's within this context that we celebrate the mandolin, which brings us to the book's author. Don Julin has dedicated his entire life to making great music on the mandolin. He's a musician's musician. At performances, Don might be trading solos with a Hammond B3 organ, cello, drummer or electric guitar. On occasion, you find him performing solo mandolin with a loop recorder where he layers his own back-up in real time. Don also works with everyone from folk singers to seasoned jazz professionals. As if that isn't enough, he leads ensembles of all sizes (including a mandolin orchestra), composes

for film and television, has owned a recording studio and is widely recognized for his writing and teaching. In short, Don is a musician you won't find tied to or limited by any genre.

Diversity is Don Julin's strength. In him, we have the perfect author for *Mandolin For Dummies* and a terrific mentor to lead us forward in one of life's great joys — playing music. Enjoy!

**Scott Tichenor**

Mandolin Cafe ([www.mandolincafe.com](http://www.mandolincafe.com))

# Introduction

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*Mandolins heal the world! Recent scientific studies show that the mandolin has the amazing ability to reverse the ageing process, give temporary relief from depression and anxiety, and possibly even cure cancer. Experience the miracle of this diminutive yet powerful instrument!*

For many years this was the opening statement on my website ([www.donjulin.com](http://www.donjulin.com)). Even though it may not be backed up by a legitimate medical study, this little sales pitch has put smiles on the faces of many people. I hope that it encouraged some readers to pick up the mandolin and begin to feel the healing.

From Mozart's "Deh, Vieni Alla Finestra" to Led Zeppelin's "The Battle of Evermore," the mandolin has brought that special something to a wide range of musical styles for more than 200 years. The instrument that started out serenading passengers on gondolas in Venice, Italy, played the leading role in the development of bluegrass in America. Although to some people the mandolin looks like a little guitar, hearing a few notes is enough to show that this is no guitar: The mandolin is much cooler than a guitar!

## ***About This Book***

You don't have to read *Mandolin For Dummies*, 2nd Edition from cover to cover, and I promise there's no test at the end! Think of this book more as a reference that allows you to go straight to the topic or technique you're interested in. If scales aren't your focus today, simply bypass those sections and jump to another topic. (Those scales or timing exercises may look [or sound] good in a

few months.) This book has useful information for the beginner, but also includes some sage advice from some of today's top pros.

Here are some tips for getting the most out of this book:

- » **Look carefully at the photos:** Positioning your hands properly is very important to obtain a good tone from your mandolin. The photos give you a better idea of what your fingers need to look like than just using the chord charts.
- » **Listen to the audio tracks:** Music is sound, not paper, and so even though I use paper to communicate many elements of music, the end result is sound. I use the audio tracks to demonstrate many of the songs, techniques, and exercises that I describe in this book. I recommend listening to each exercise a few times before trying to play it.
- » **Read the charts:** I present the songs and exercises in tablature, rhythm patterns for strumming and standard musical notation. You certainly don't need to read music, but it's provided for those who already can. ([Appendix B](#) covers standard music notation.)

## *Conventions Used in This Book*

I use a few conventions in *Mandolin For Dummies*, 2nd Edition to help you navigate your way around the book:

- » Instead of writing "picking hand" and "fretting hand," I use "right hand" for the picking or strumming hand and "left hand" for the fretting hand. I apologize if you're left-handed and ask that you read "right hand" to mean "left hand" and vice versa.

» The terms “up,” “down,” “higher” and “lower” have different meanings depending on which hand I’m referring to. I use “up” and “down” to describe the right-hand movement for strumming or picking. An *up-stroke* is the motion of picking or strumming where the pick is moving up (against gravity). A *down-stroke* refers to picking or strumming with a downward motion (with gravity).

I use these same terms a bit differently for the left hand. “Up” or “higher” refers to the note’s pitch and indicates moving your left hand or fingers towards the body of the mandolin (see [Chapter 1](#) for the different parts of the mandolin); notice that the sound gets higher. “Down” or “lower” also refers to pitch and indicates moving your left hand or fingers towards the headstock of the mandolin (notice the sound gets lower).

» I indicate minor chords with a lowercase “m” after the chord name. So “A minor,” for example, is “Am.”

» I use the US terms for indicating the length of notes, with the UK terms in parentheses. Therefore, I refer to *whole* notes, *half* notes, and *quarter*, *eighth*, and *sixteenth* notes. These US terms seem more logical and clear than the UK equivalents (which are *semibreve*, *minim*, *crotchet*, *quaver*, and *semiquaver*, respectively). Check out [Chapter 4](#) for more details.

## ***Foolish Assumptions***

The only assumptions I make about you are that you’re interested in discovering more about playing the mandolin, that you’re using standard tuning (G, D, A, E) and that you’re playing with a pick. I don’t assume that you can read music or that I know what style of music

you want to play (or that you should be interested in only one style of music). I don't even assume that you own a mandolin yet.

## *Icons Used in This Book*

I use the following icons to call your attention to information that you may find helpful. These icons are placed in the page margins.



**PLAY THIS** This icon lets you know that I demonstrate a technique or tune on an accompanying audio track. Listening to these tracks as you work on a specific skill or tune helps enormously.



**REMEMBER** Paragraphs that I mark with this icon contain important info that people tend to forget. Think of them as the little sticky notes that your spouse or partner leaves on the refrigerator, such as "Turn the oven off at 5!" They may not seem that big, but remembering them sets you up well for the future.



**TECHNICAL STUFF** These icons are more about the whys and how things work than simply what to do. They can prove helpful but aren't essential, and so you can skip over them if you prefer, with no damage done.



TIP

These icons provide expert advice that helps you avoid common pitfalls and so speed up your progress.



WARNING

Danger! Danger! This icon indicates something that can cause harm to your playing or to your mandolin.

## *Accessing the Audio Tracks*

*Mandolin For Dummies*, 2nd Edition comes with 91 audio tracks — each one an essential aid to mastering the songs, techniques, and exercises that I cover in the book. If you've purchased the paper or e-book version of *Mandolin For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, just go to [www.dummies.com/go/mandolinfd2e](http://www.dummies.com/go/mandolinfd2e) to access and download these tracks. (If you don't have Internet access, call 877-762-2974 within the U.S. or 317-572-3993 outside the U.S.) If you have the enhanced e-book version, you'll find the audio tracks right there in the chapters — just where you need them.

## *Beyond the Book*

I've written the chapters in *Mandolin For Dummies*, 2nd Edition so that they're as self-contained as possible. This approach allows you to devise your own personal course through the book, depending on your interests and skill level:

- » If you haven't yet bought a mandolin, jump straight to [Chapter 15](#) to get advice before splashing any cash.
- » If you're a beginner staring at a shiny new instrument, check out the chapters in [Part 1](#) to start a mandolin journey that can last a lifetime.
- » If you're already an intermediate mandolin player, flip to [Part 3](#) and discover some of the finer points of different musical styles; for example, check out [Chapter 10](#) for exciting rural bluegrass, and [Chapter 13](#) for sophisticated urban jazz.

However you decide to use this book, now that you've been well and truly bitten by the mandolin bug the thing to do is relax, read on, and enjoy the ride with the greatest little instrument in the world — the mandolin.

## Part 1

# Being Bitten by the Mandolin Bug