

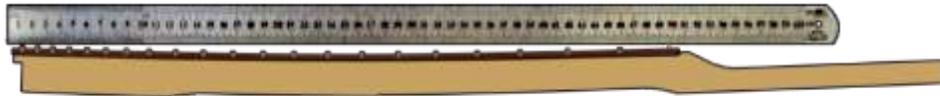
Adjusting the Neck (No Chiropractor Needed)

Many years ago, a supposed guitar tech said he would check the bow in the neck of my guitar. He raised the back of the body to his face, pointing the neck outward – I thought he was going to play it like a trombone.

In any case, it struck me that – while he might have known about guitar electronics – he probably knew little about optics. Sighting down the neck of the guitar is not a good way to check the condition of the neck.

Why? Because looking from that severe point of perspective will give a false view of the neck contour, relative to the strings of the instrument.

So, what's the right way? Using a long metal straight-edge (as long as the neck,) viewed from the side of the neck, will give a true angle to the condition of the neck. (BTW, a wood ruler is out. It's prone to warping, damage, and won't give an accurate assessment of the neck.)



Why adjust the neck? Depending on its shape, it might be creating a nightmare for you as a player. The action might be higher than the Golden Gate Bridge, or there might be string buzzing like a swarm of you-know-whats.

There is a simple rule of thumb (or fingers): If your strings buzz on the lower frets (say, from the nut to the 7th fret) you should increase neck relief. If your strings buzz on the higher frets (from 12th fret to the end of the fretboard) then raise the bridge saddles.

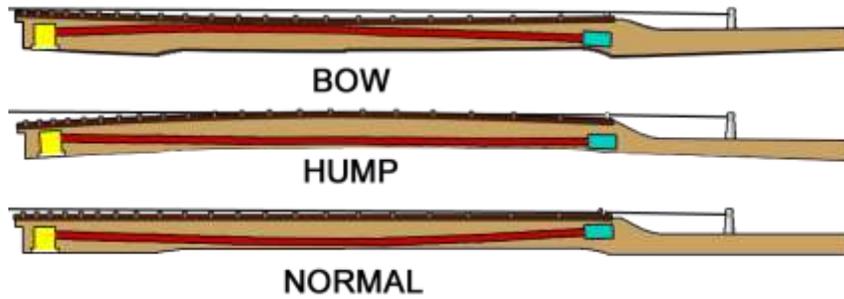
Many players fear adjusting their guitar's neck, believing they'll cause irreparable damage – amid the ridicule of their in-the-know friends. "You tried to adjust your neck? What a moron!"

Fiddle-faddle, I say (or some other mild expletive.) Just take your time and know what you're doing before you do it.

Depending on your type and brand of guitar, you will need:

- The aforementioned metal straightedge
- A Philips-head or straight-head screwdriver OR an Allen wrench/hex driver OR socket driver
- A business card or credit card (No, this isn't going to cost anything.)

First, you need to determine what kind of adjustment needs to be made. In relation to the strings, does the neck look like a smile? It is bowed. Does the neck frown? It has a hump (insert camel joke here.)



Almost all guitars have what's known as a truss rod – a metal or graphite bar inside the neck. The purpose of the truss rod is to counteract the natural tension on the wooden neck from the strings.

Somewhere on the guitar is a way to increase or decrease the tension on the neck – which increases or decreases the bow or hump. It may be a screw head or hex nut and it may be at the headstock end or body end of the guitar. But, never fear – it is there.

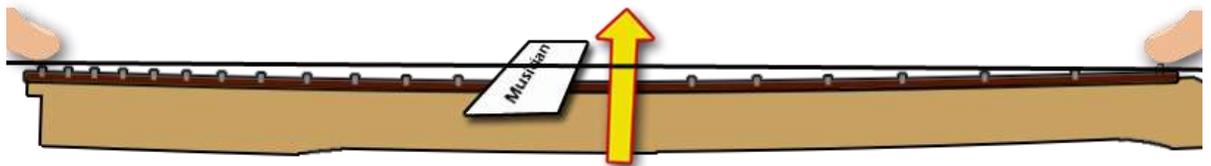




If there's a truss rod cover at the base of the headstock, remove the screws and take it off.

Using the appropriate tool, the neck should be adjusted – just a quarter-turn at a time. If the neck is bowed, tighten the truss rod in a clockwise manner (as you look at it, turn toward the right.) If it has a hump or is back-bowed (same thing,) loosen the neck tension by turning counter-clockwise (as you look at it, turn toward the left.)

Fret the low E string at the first and last fret. Check the distance between the 11th fret or so and the string by inserting a business card or credit card (depending on the amount of relief you're looking for.)



Keep adjusting in quarter-turns until you're happy with the relief - it's a matter of personal preference. What may be fine for one player will be too bowed or too straight for the next player.

But remember, you don't want a perfectly straight neck – it should have at least a slight bow. If it didn't have that – it's buzz city all the way.