

# Introduction to Book 1

*I know – I never read introductions either. But read this one.*

Welcome to Book 1 of “Field Guide to the Mountain Dulcimer,” the first in a series of two books. This volume contains Level I, and you’ll find Levels II and III in Book 2.

## A little background

A number of years ago I taught a gifted young dulcimer student. Because of her age and her obvious talent, I decided that each week I would write a piece of music that would help her to understand a new skill. Occasionally I would throw in an arrangement of a well-known folk song or carol, but most of the pieces were original. She wrote a few herself.

My young student grew up, her interests changed and she stopped taking lessons, but I’d gotten into the habit of writing these tunes. I found they worked equally well in workshops and in lessons with adults. As this material began to take shape, I realized that I’d need to write exercises to demonstrate what I usually show by example. Through years of experimenting, I discovered the mix of exercises and original and familiar tunes and songs that seemed most helpful to students, and that is what I share here with you.

Eventually, it became obvious that I was actually writing two books. Book 1 (Level I) is a beginner’s guide containing information on how to buy, maintain and start playing mountain dulcimer, and Book 2 (Levels II and III) continues on with more advanced techniques.

## How this book works

This book is laid out in the same manner as I would teach a private student, from simple one-line tunes up through more complicated arrangements.

Here’s how “Field Guide to the Mountain Dulcimer, Book 1” is organized:

- It begins with an overview of the material that we’ll be covering.
- Each chapter begins with an explanation of its goals, and then moves on to exercises and tunes that support the new skills and concepts being presented.
- It closes off with a chapter called “Take a Break,” in which you get to play tunes designed to reinforce the skills you’ve been working on.
- And finally, there’s an introduction to Book 2 to let you know what you’ve got waiting for you!

With my private students, I try to teach by ear, eye and example and only use the written music as back up – something to take home to help remember the lesson. Since we can’t do that here, we have to rely on “tablature,” or “TAB” for short.

So what’s that? TAB is kind of a guided tour of the fretboard that shows your left hand exactly where it needs to go. We’ll get into it in depth in the chapter called “Basics.” Although it’s necessary to use tablature to communicate ideas within the limitations of a book, I hope you’ll use it as a guide – not a crutch. I encourage you to make your playing a reflection of your own artistic expression.

