



# Recording Electric Guitar

by [Phil Gates](#)

## Happy Fourth of July! Independence Day!

Last month we spoke about mic'ing acoustic guitars. This month we can talk about mic'ing electric guitars.

### How do I mic my electric guitar amp?

Mic'ing guitar amps is more than slinging a mic in front of the amp, and using the mic cord as a tie-off from the handle on the top of the amp. It's not rocket science, but it's more than that.

There are different tones to a speaker depending on not only the distance from the speaker, but also WHERE on the speaker the mic is placed.

For instance, let's try these examples. I used my MusicMan® guitar in the neck pickup position going direct into an old Mesa Boogie®. Then I put a Sennheiser® E609 mic dead in front of the center of the speaker, (Fig. 1) and tried a sound.

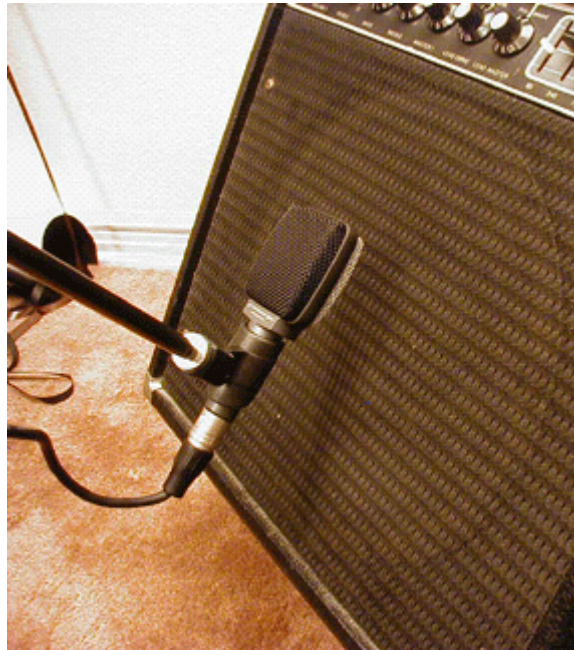


Fig. 1

This would produce a very bright, thin sound. Way too thin for a neck pickup sound. Although there may be a use for it somewhere.

Next is the more popular version of mic'ing the guitar amp. Place the mic about half-way between the center of the speaker, and the edge of the speaker. Kind of in the middle of the cone area. (Fig. 2)

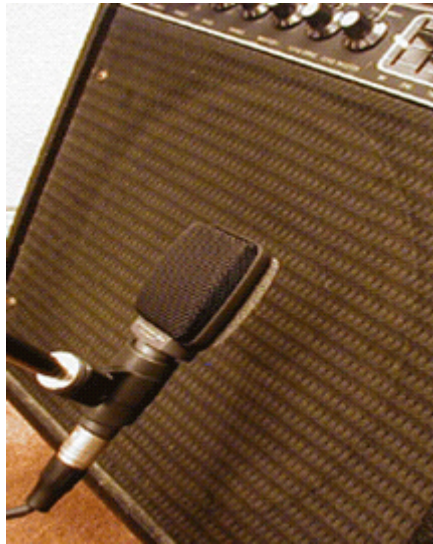


Fig. 2

This is great for getting a big fat sound-distorted or not. These mic'ing techniques are applicable to any style of amp, or genre of music.

But if you were to move the mic even farther out to the edge of the cone, you'll hear that the sound gets brighter, but still has more body than the center of the speaker. (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3

So the idea is to move the mic from maybe mid speaker, to the edge and back, until you find the tone that seems to best replicate the sound you're going after.

You could easily have used another mic, like a Shure® SM-57, and the tone results would react similarly. And like the acoustic guitar, you might want to try another mic about 6 to 8 feet away facing in the direction of the amp for an ambient mic. Now let's talk about after the recording...you have the guitar tracks recorded, now it's time to get the most out of them.

### **Recording styles**

A Les Paul has a more beefy kind of tone to it, a Stratocaster, has its trademark sound, as does a Telecaster, a Music-Man w/ active pick-ups, or a Paul Reed Smith. Use the different guitars in your arsenal for different types of projects. If you only use one type of guitar, stay with it! You can still get a lot of great tones out of it as you know. Also, for tracking purposes, the different types of string gauges can make a big difference as well. Even just changing strings from that "Lucky Set" that's been on there for eight months, to a new set!

There are different ways to record guitar, EQ guitar, and mix guitar, but let's talk about a few approaches. Try these for yourself, maybe combine them with techniques you already use. There's nothing wrong with trying many different ways of getting the right sound for you.

Here are some ideas:

1. Double the guitar tracks. Try playing the guitar parts twice, then panning them differently in the mix. You could electrically double them, but I think actually playing them twice will have little subtle differences that can make for a much bigger sound.
2. Use different pick-ups. Maybe lay down a rhythm track using the neck pick up, then on the second track, play the same rhythm part using the bridge pick-up. This will give a more full sound for the track.
3. If you're tracking guitars w/ distortion, set-up a splitter before the distortion box, or before the amp, if that's what is being used for the distortion. Then record both the clean & distorted sound at the same time on separate tracks. You can then use the clean track to give a little brilliance to the distorted track. It will also help to define chords that can get lost when a lot of distortion is used.
4. Use more than one mic when recording. Try one over the center of the speaker & one on the cone. Do this, then record the mics to separate tracks. Experiment with the mic placement heavily. See what works best for you. Also try a remote mic, or a "Room" mic. This will capture the ambient sound of the room. Obviously this is best utilized when the guitar is being recorded by itself. Although I have heard live room mics with the band playing add a lot of sound to the overall mix.
5. When EQing the guitar, pay special attention to the 2.3-2.5kHz range. This is the range of intelligibility for distorted guitars. Take it away for a less distinct sound, bring it up some to have the guitar pop right out in front. 1.2kHz is another interesting area. Pull this a little to get rid of funky nasal tones from recording a thin sound.

6. A little gets a lot. With EQ, if you find yourself swinging all over the place frequency & gain -wise, you may be moving too much. Try small moves. A half a dB here a dB there, can make a huge difference.

Get used to your guitars and how they sound through a mic. They will probably sound different than when you gig. Because when you think of it, most of the time when we're playing, the speakers are pointed at the back of our legs, back, or head. Not the best listening environment. You don't want to put your ears a couple of inches from the speaker either. You can however place a mic there, record a little, move the mic to a new place, record that & see what you think of the two mic positions. I tend to keep a little note book of how each mic position sounds so that later, if I need kind of a cool twang rhythm but not too thin, I can look it up in my book, and see where to put the mic. After a while it just gets to be second nature.

Have fun with tracking electric guitars, and try everything. You may just come up with the perfect recorded tone!

Take care,  
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