

Could you become a guitar technician?

Questions you may have if you're interested in this line of work

I'm not very good at guitar, does that mean I can't become a guitar tech?

Absolutely not, I myself am not the most competent guitarist, growing up it was never my main instrument - I started playing piano in Primary School then Bass Guitar when I was around 15 years old. I think if you fundamentally understand how an instrument works i.e. Guitar or Drums - then you can adequately apply this knowledge to working in the field.

What equipment do I need to get started?

If you watched the videos I have put together you will see the basics of what you need:

- **Tuner** - you need to make sure the guitar is in tune before and during shows.
- **Neck Rest** - When working on a guitar you need to support the neck so it's not resting on the surface you're working on
- **Cleaning Products** - One of the main elements of 'maintaining' an instrument is to make sure its clean.
- **Tools** - Like most 'hands on' jobs like this, you're going to need some screwdrivers, allen keys and pliers

The following slides will show some examples of these.

What equipment do I need to get started?

Tuners:

The Boss TU-3 is essentially an 'industry standard' it's easy to use, durable, runs from a 9 volt battery or mains power, easy to see in the dark (as a Guitar Technician, you're usually in the wings of a stage - even though the stage looks bright, the lights aren't pointed at you) and are pretty cheap to buy.

However there are many other tuners out there that do a similar, if not better job.



What equipment do I need to get started?

Tuners:

I actually use a Peterson StrobePlus in conjunction with a Boss TU-3. I find the Peterson is more accurate although don't get me wrong, I spent years using just the Boss Tuner and its still first in my setup for the previous reasons given. I just wanted that extra visual aid to make sure I'm not missing anything, especially when I'm tuning different guitars for different songs, you won't be able to hear the guitar when the band are playing 10 feet away from you.

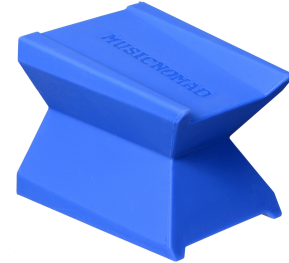


What equipment do I need to get started?

Neck Rest:

When working on a guitar whether repairs, maintenance or general cleaning you need it be stable otherwise it'll be susceptible to scratching or movement which if you're doing something intricate like tightening screws or adjusting intonation it may start sliding and potentially fall off your work surface, then you're in trouble.

There are many different types, they all fundamentally work the same way, it just comes down to budget.



What equipment do I need to get started?

Cleaning Products:

Again, like most things, there are many different companies making different products, its somewhat down to trial and error to find what works for you.

I started off using Dunlop products (Top Left) then found Big Bends gave me a better finish on Electric Guitars (Top Right). Martin Cleaner works well on acoustic guitars for me (bottom left) and Music Nomad Fretboard Oil (bottom right) is a great all natural substance that preserves the wood of fretboards.



What equipment do I need to get started?

Tools:

Get yourself a string winder, of course you can do this by hand but if you're working with a lot of guitars it's going to take you far too long to change strings on a day to day basis.

I started off using a Planet Waves string winder. This is a good all rounder as not only you can wind strings but it also has snips to cut strings and a pin puller to pull out the pins on an acoustic guitar which hold the strings in.



What equipment do I need to get started?

Tools:

I actually still use the Planet Waves winder to cut strings and pull bridge pins, however for speed, I use a small rechargeable drill with a drill bit specifically made to wind strings.



What equipment do I need to get started?

Tools:

You're going to need some tools to keep a guitar in perfect playing condition, I've amassed many screwdrivers, allen key sets and pliers over the years but you can start off with a multi tool that has a small selection of each, they're affordable and take up very little room.

I ended up with a bigger selection, more or less because it gets fiddly to go between different tools on one chassis.

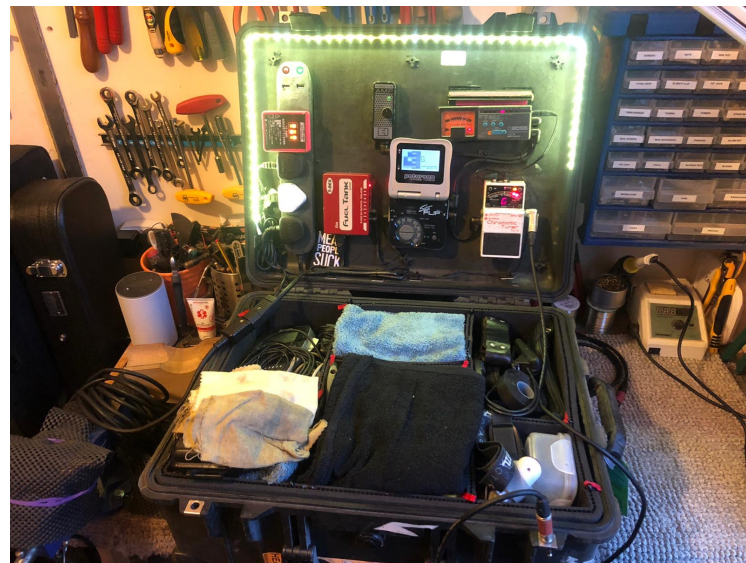
Also, when it comes to working with effects pedals and amps, you're more than likely going to need different sizes and fittings.



Is there some sort of guitar bench I need?

I suppose this is like most of the other questions, you don't need industry specific equipment to be able to do a competent job that there is a reason some brands and designs are seen more frequently in the touring world.

For example, Peli is a brand that make lightweight cases made from molded plastic, they're so hard wearing they hardly ever break. Here's a photo of my colleague Ozzy's setup on Franz Ferdinand (For Franz, I am actually keys and drums technician) Ozzy has attached his tuners, power and lights to the inside lid for ease of setup.



Is there some sort of guitar bench I need?

A lot of flight case manufacturers make specific Guitar Tech cases similar to the one I use. Like Ozzy, I used to use a peli with tuners inside the lid but on certain tours, specifically when I have worked with the support band, you are not left with too much room to set up your tech world. So I transitioned into a case that took up as little room as possible.

Here is my setup from a 2018 festival show I did with Crystal Fighters. For this band, rather than being in the wings of the stage I was hidden behind stacks of speakers on stage for ease of access to the guitarist and his amplifiers.



Is there some sort of guitar bench I need?

The bigger the artist, the bigger the budget, and the bigger the way of transporting the equipment, so its common place to see full guitar work stations at gigs where the band are likely to be playing to 2000 or more people per show.



Is there a uniform i have to wear?

The short answer is yes and no. Wear black, you're not there to be seen so you want to blend into the background. Some artists I've worked have had crew shirts made that have the artists name on but that lower levels of touring, keep it simple and don't wear anything too colourful.

Here's a photo of me changing strings whilst on tour with Lewis Capaldi in 2019 - note how dark the background is in the wings of the stage.



How do i get started?

There isn't a right or wrong way to get going with working in live music.

For myself and many people I've worked with over the years, it's part who you know and part what you know. I found through playing with various bands since approximately 2006 I made a lot of friends and gained a lot of bits of knowledge. So when I decided to try my hand at working full time in music I did a lot plate spinning so to speak - I drove the van, set up the stage, liaised with promoters and venues and booked hotels.

So with this I, by default became the Tour Manager - looking after the logistical and financial side and also became the Backline Technician - looking after the stage and equipment side.

As the acts I worked with became more high profile each job became more specific to one field i.e the role of Tour Manager and Backline Tech becomes two people; then the higher still, the job of Backline Tech is split between two people, so you will have a Guitar Tech and Drum Tech, and so forth.

How do i get started? ...The Who You Know

As mentioned previously, I've found you need knowledge of what you're doing and the right contacts to get into the field.

Who you know

If like me you've played in bands, studied music courses or have friends that regularly play shows, one of the best ways to get started is to help out.

You may not know anyone like this, however, all is not lost. There are many crewing companies in each city. These are businesses that send local people to help load vans and trucks worth of gear into venues. You can get started by learning the ropes from this side and build your network that way.

How do i get started? ...The What You Know

Perhaps you're thinking 'well I know people that play in bands local to me but I haven't a clue how any of that works' - this can be your way in. Using resources like this, online tutorials and helping out your friends' bands you can start building your knowledge bank.

Going to rehearsals and helping set up equipment will let you learn how the equipment works together, as much as this information has been instrument specific, more than likely the guitar will plug into pedals, which in turn will plug into an amplifier or some variation of an amplifier. So there is much to learn from the basic level of people playing music together in a room.

Helping your friends load their gear into venues for gigs will add yet more knowledge to your arsenal; the etiquette on how a stage is set up and how stage technicians will get the sound from the stage to the crowd can greatly help in understanding how things work and being able to troubleshoot when a problem arises during a show.

What does your working day look like? (1 of 2)

A working day can change from one to the next, this is perhaps one of the main reasons I love working in this field, no day is truly the same. But let's look at the itinerary from the last show I did with Franz Ferdinand on November 19th 2019 at the Movistar Arena in Bogota, Colombia. This is more or less how a Show Day runs on tour with a band playing a show of this size - I believe the capacity of the venue was 14,000.

- **8am Crew Lobby Call** - this is our pick up time from the hotel to travel to the venue.
- **9am Load In** - Our hotel is usually approximately 30 minutes so we have a little bit of time to see the venue and meet the local crew - remember I mentioned local crew earlier? This could be you if you're trying to get into this industry.
- **9am - 11am Set Up** - For this gig 2 hours is an adequate amount of time to get set up, although I was drum and keys tech for Franz, Ozzy the guitar tech would set up the stage (amps, cables, and pedals) and then the guitars.
- **11am - 1130am PA Check** - Rik our Front of House (FOH) Sound Engineer then has a little bit of time to play some music through the PA to check it's all working like it should.
- **1130am - 12pm Line Check** - This is where myself and Ozzy would go round the stage making sure all the equipment is working as it should be for Rik at Front of House and Conor, who looks after the bands on stage sound (Monitor Engineer).
- **12pm - 1pm Soundcheck** - This is when the band take to the stage to play through some songs. The FOH engineer can dial in each instrument through the PA, the monitor engineer can make sure the band are happy with how it sounds when they're playing together, and the backline techs can make sure everything is working as it should be.

What does your working day look like? (2 of 2)

- **1pm Clear Stage** - This is where you move the equipment off the stage or in some cases further back so the support band can set up. In the case of this tour, the band setting up were Interpol, so this was actually a co-headline tour where we rotated who headlined the show each night, therefore since both bands are seen as the 'headline act' we finish at 1pm to give them the same amount of time as we had - in most cases we would clear the stage later if it was our own headline show.
- **2pm Return to Hotel** - It's important in a working day like this to get some down time, you're going to be getting to your bed late so you need to make sure to get adequate rest when you can, also it's a good time to get in touch with family and friends - it's important to look after your mental health as well as your physical health when you're on tour.
- **730pm Lobby Call** - Again, this is us returning to the venue for dinner and the rest of the work day.
- **845pm to 10pm Interpol Stage Time** - This is when we get ready for our show, for myself making sure everything is clean and in place for the show, and for Ozzy, making sure all the guitars are tuned and polished.
- **10pm - 1040pm Changeover** - We have 40 minutes to get Interpol off stage and our equipment setup, line checked and ready for the band to walk on. It doesn't sound like a long time and it isn't but the more shows you work and the more experienced your team are then you this is more than adequate, usually the standard changeover time is 30 minutes.
- **1040pm - 1210am Franz Ferdinand Stage Time** - The band are on and hopefully this is the least amount of running about I've had to do all day as this means everything is working as it should.
- **3am Return to Hotel** - it always takes less time to pack down the gig than it does to set up, so as soon as the band come off stage we start packing everything away, the local crew return to load the equipment back onto the truck. Once this is done we get a chance to have some food and relax before returning to the hotel.

Any other tips?

- **Be vigilant** - once you've set up your show and the band are playing, keep an eye on the stage. If the guitarist breaks a string be ready with a backup guitar that's in tune to swap so the gig can keep on going.
- **Be polite and try to stay calm** - you never know when you might come into contact with another band or crew that liked the way you acted and/or the way you dealt with a tricky situation, they may just be the next people you work with. This is definitely how I've got many gigs over the years.
- **Don't be afraid to ask questions** - if you find yourself working with an artist or crew and there's something you don't understand then speak up. You're all there for the common good of making the show the best it can be - you all need to be on the same wavelength.
- **Lend a hand if you can** - Again, similarly to being polite and staying calm, lend a hand to another artist or crew member if they need it, whether it pushing a case for a fellow guitar tech as they load in at a festival while you're standing around or helping a support band set up once you've cleared the stage from your soundcheck, do it, little goes a long way and you will probably need that help one day.
- **Look after your ears** - If the band you're working with use on stage monitors or commonly referred to as 'wedges' get a good set of ear plugs, it's going to be loud! If they use in ear monitors so they hear the stage mix on headphones get an adequate set of these so you can hear as best you can. The company Shure make great entry level ones.

Where to buy?

Here's some links for the various items I mentioned earlier:

- Boss TU3 Tuner Pedal - <https://www.boss.info/uk/products/tu-3/>
- Peterson StrobePlus HD Tuner - <https://www.peterson tuners.com/products/stroboplus/>
- Planet Waves Neck Rest - <https://www.pmtonline.co.uk/planet-waves-guitar-headstand>
- Jim Dunlop Care Kit - <https://www.jimdunlop.com/44616504001-formula-65-care-products/>
- Big Bends Cleaner - <https://www.gear4music.com/Guitar-and-Bass/Big-Bends-Gloss-Sauce-Polish-2oz/1Z2A>
- Martin Polish and Cleaner - <https://shopping.adference.io/products/martin-guitars-polish-cleaner-2427934080>
- Music Nomad F1 Oil - <https://www.musicnomadcare.com/Products/Fretboard-F-ONE-Oil-2-oz/>
- Planet Waves String Winder - https://www.thomann.de/gb/planet_waves_pro_winder.htm
- Music Nomad Drill Bit - <https://www.musicnomadcare.com/Products/GRIP-Bit-Peg-Winder/>
- Rechargeable Drill - <http://shorturl.at/yHKQZ>
- Allen Keys - <https://www.northwestguitars.co.uk/guitar-allen-key-hex-wrench-set-for-truss-rod-bridge-saddle-nut-adjustment/>
- Plier Set - <http://shorturl.at/mrtX8>
- Peli Cases - <https://peliproducs.co.uk/>
- Guitar Tech Case - <https://www.flightcasewarehouse.co.uk/industry/product.asp?item=guitar-tech-flight-case-8136-3979>
- Production Tech Case - <https://www.flightcasewarehouse.co.uk/type/product.asp?item=4-drawer-orange-backline-tool-flightcase-with-3u-rack-space-12238-12176>