

(Last updated October 2011)

The Rule and Guiding Principles

If we have a Rule for running the jam sessions it would be this: "Treat others the way you want to be treated. "



Of course those of you who are regulars know that we would be hard pressed to describe how we do, what we do, with a series of rules but we do have a few guiding principles.

1. This is a recreational jam. We aren't rock stars (well maybe some of us:-) and we aren't trying to show everyone how wonderfully talented we are. We are playing music recreationally to "re-create" and celebrate the spark that the day-to-day grind tries to crush out of us.

It is also a bit of an instructional jam. From time to time I will be happy to provide a brief explanation of musical concepts or techniques. If I go too long Randy will "sound the rooster." Most of what you learn will come from simply making music with others.

2. Who is Welcome - anyone and everyone who enjoys recreational music.

3. Singing - Everyone is encouraged to sing (even if you are an innocent bystander without an instrument in hand). Yes, we play a few songs that may feature a lead singer but anyone is welcome to join in as they see fit. The guiding principle is to listen to what is going on and be respectful of others (see the Rule.)

4. Playing - we are a guitar dominated group but all instruments are welcome. Instruments that work well in this type of setting are typically acoustic: banjo, mandolin, harmonica, misc percussion, etc. but electric instruments played at a volume compatible with acoustic instruments are welcome also.

5. Song Sheets - I have been to too many jam sessions where most of the time is taken up with "whadda you wanna play?" Since our goal is to actually play, I've found it helpful to prepare song sheets in a standard format

ahead of time. this lets us literally "be on the same page" (or pages - be sure to check the bottom of the page to see how many pages there are " 1 of _?")

This standard format includes: Title, artist, capo placement - if applicable, lyrics, dots and chords. I place the chord as accurately as possible over the appropriate word where the chord is played. The dots "...." indicate the number of beats to play the chord. This is a very primitive but effective way of communicating simple musical ideas. All I can say is "doing de dots is better than trying to play a sheet with no dots"

5a. The Danger of Song Sheets - the potential problem with song sheets is that they let us play a lot of songs without knowing any songs. When we play a song you like and want to add to your repertoire, you will need to take the time to memorize it without using a song sheet. Everyone should work on developing and memorizing at least five songs that you can easily play under any circumstances, day or night. You will have unexpected opportunities!

5b. Where "Standard Format" Song Sheets Originate - When someone sends me the title of a song they would like to do, I go to youtube and find an acceptable version, preferable the most popular studio version, then download the lyrics, cut and paste them into Word, listen to the song, figure out the chords and add the dots. It's not a big mystery but it does take time and a bit of ear training. There are lyric and chord sheets for tons of popular songs on-line. Some of them are stellar most are incomplete and inaccurate.

7. What to bring - an instrument, a music stand if you have one, song sheets (printed out and looked at ahead of time if possible), a tuner (tune before and after arriving), picks, a capo.



8. Good Idea (see the Rule) - if a commercial establishment is letting us use their facility, patronize them. Buy something when you are there for the jam or come back some other time and mention that you appreciate them hosting the jam and then buy something.

Well I have gotten way too wordy here, and I'm sure Randy would have started "sounding the rooster" somewhere around point 4, but hopefully this has been helpful.

One more thing: I greatly enjoy facilitating the jam but it does take up a bit of time and effort. A donation in the neighborhood of \$5 at the end of a session is appreciated but not mandatory. I never want money to be the reason a person is not making music.

Thanks to each of you who are committed to making the world a better place through musical performance.

John