



GEAR

Stratocaster or Telecaster: Understanding the Basic Differences

Can't decide between a Strat or a Tele? Here is a basic guide between the two.

By Mike Duffy

The **Telecaster** and the **Stratocaster** — two instruments that set the standard for electric guitars since their inception in the 1950s.

Both guitars are beloved by casual players and iconic artists alike around the world and have been used to create just about every genre of music imaginable.

For those looking to purchase a first Fender or Squier Tele or Strat, there are a few differences that could help you choose between this iconic pair.

Looking for a beginner guitar? Our interactive gear guide, [FindYourFender.com](#), matches you with the perfect model by learning about your sound & style. You'll be well on your way to finding the right guitar for you.

But first...

A Brief History Lesson

As the world's first commercially successful solid-body electric guitar, the **Telecaster** was groundbreaking when Leo Fender introduced it in 1951.

At the time, rock and roll was still a few years away, and Leo and his staff were building guitars and amplifiers for western swing guitarists looking to get more volume and projection.

"There are very few objects that you can think of that influence an entire movement in music that if they didn't exist could have — and probably would have — changed the course of musical history. I think the Fender Telecaster is one of those iconic objects." — THE EDGE

Twang-loving country legends like Luther Perkins and Buck Owens helped bring the Telecaster sound to the masses, influencing rock players like Keith Richards, Jimmy Page and George Harrison who would, in turn, change the face of music in the 1960s and beyond.

As for the **Stratocaster**, Leo was initially looking to refine the classic Tele design, but during the development process, an entirely new model rose from the sawdust. Owing many design elements to the Telecaster, in addition to the Precision Bass that also came out in 1951, the Strat was a step up, boasting three pickups with switching and controls that created greater tonal versatility, a contoured body, and an innovative bridge.

Introduced in 1954, the guitar piqued curiosity when Buddy Holly played one on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1957, but truly gained global acclaim in the hands of 1960s virtuosos like Jimi Hendrix, David Gilmour, Robin Trower and Eric Clapton.

When I first saw a Stratocaster, I realized it's a thing of sculpted beauty. It could be something flying through space to me. It's a utilitarian thing, but it's beautiful." — MARK KNOPFLER

Amazingly, traditional versions of the Stratocaster and Telecaster have gone largely unchanged for more than 60 years, and their popularity shows no signs of waning.

While Fender has made several iterations of both guitars over the years, here is a breakdown of what separates is thought of a traditional Tele and Strat.

Stratocaster Players

Buddy Holly

Jimi Hendrix

Eric Clapton

Robbie Robertson (the Band)

Buddy Guy

Jeff Beck

Dick Dale

David Gilmour

Ritchie Blackmore

Mark Knopfler (Dire Straits)

Eric Johnson

Stevie Ray Vaughan

Dave Murray (Iron Maiden)

Robert Cray

Yngwie Malmsteen

Nile Rodgers (Chic, David Bowie)

The Edge

Billy Corgan (Smashing Pumpkins)

John Frusciante

Jim Root (Slipknot)

Gary Clark Jr.

Telecaster Players

Buck Owens

Luther Perkins

Steve Cropper

George Harrison

Muddy Waters

Keith Richards

Graham Coxon (Blur)

Curtis Mayfield

Conway Twitty

Marty Stuart

Joe Strummer (the Clash)

Paul Westerberg (the Replacements)

Frank Black

Chris Shiflett (Foo Fighters)

Carrie Brownstein (Sleater-Kinney)

Jonny Greenwood

Brad Paisley

Keith Urban

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Stratocaster Necks vs. Telecaster Necks

Both the modern Telecaster and Stratocaster bolt-on necks largely feature 22 frets and a 25.5" scale, with identical nut width and 9.5" fretboard radius.

But the Stratocaster has a noticeably larger headstock, whether the original iteration or the bulky one that was used from 1965-81. Some guitarists claim that the larger Strat headstock gives the guitar more sustain and tone, but that debate has raged for years.

READ MORE: [What Is Fingerboard Radius?](#)

READ MORE: [How the Strat Came to Have Two Heads](#)

Stratocaster Bodies vs. Telecaster Bodies

The bridge is probably the most glaring distinction here. Both have six adjustable saddles (vintage Teles had three saddles), but the Telecaster houses the bridge pickup, while the Strat bridge is a two-point tremolo system.

The Strat bridge is attached to springs that allow the player to raise or lower the pitch of the strings through the use of a "whammy bar."

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Stratocaster Electronics vs. Telecaster Electronics

The Stratocaster and Telecaster generally have similar electronics. They each have a master volume control, but where the Tele only has one tone control, the Strat has dedicated tone knobs for the middle and bridge pickups.

The switching, however, is another story. The Telecaster has always carried a three-way switch, but after guitarists found that they could get more tonal versatility by jamming the Strat's original three-way switch in between the first and second position and second and third position, Fender outfitted it with a standard five-way selector.

The Telecaster typically has two single-coil pickups, with the bridge pickup being wider and longer than its Strat counterpart.

What's more, it is mounted on the Tele's metal bridge plate, which can give it a more powerful tone.

(Fender also makes Stratocaster and Telecaster models with humbucking pickup options.)

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Stratocaster Heads vs. Telecaster Heads

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