

Guitar Capos

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Hi members, its capo time! Yes, that ubiquitous little latch thingy that is so useful in changing guitar keys, positions and harmonies. When you walk into any guitar stores there is a whole plethora of style and types its enough to make your mind boggle so generally you grab just the nearest one. But is that one the actual best for what you want? In this article I'll be exploring the world of the capo often seen in its natural home of the guitar case.

As to its use as songwriters a capo is an absolute boon. Its funny how playing say an open G chord on an open guitar has a particular feel, but once you put on a capo on say, the fourth fret, then that exact same chord shape, apart from being in a different key has a different feel as well. I find this is especially true with minors. It can open up a whole new sonic array for your songwriting to explore, as well as presenting keys that might suit your voice more.

"Here Comes The Sun" by George Harrison off The Beatles' album, "Abbey Road" I've read was initially written on a ukulele, but then George finished it with a capo on the fifth fret on an acoustic guitar. Play that song anywhere else on the fretboard and it doesn't sound the same.



So, as a songwriter use a capo to explore new territories. I've heard of people who've used alternative tunings but have never used a capo before! It's a lot easier to move around the fretboard than retuning each time.

The first recorded use of a "capotasto" was by Italian Giovanni Battista Doni in 1640, but I'm sure other people had tied down a key changer before that on many a stringed instrument. The first capo that was patented was American, James Ashborn, in 1850. So,

from there we have the Industrialisation of capos for easy use.

Thinking of the capo, what attributes must a good capo then have? Not all of the capo types listed further below have all of these as well, so there can be compromises to dealing with capo use.

1. **Ease of use:** A capo needs to be removed or moved around the fretboard with ease. If it has projections pointing out they can snag the hand, the guitar, or curtains, etc. This can also depend on where the capo is being used. A studio use, where you have plenty of adjustment time, to live in front of an audience and you need something quick can determine the capo used.

2. **Tension:** This can refer to the overall tension, or how some capos have uneven tension due to their attachment style. Too much tension and the strings can be out of tune, too little and the intonation will sound woolly. If the tension is not even across the fretboard, then one side will be in tune, while the other will be less so.

3. **Mechanisms:** The way the capo is placed on the fretboard is determined by the mechanism it uses. Some use straps, springs, clamps, screws, rollers, etc, etc. Is the mechanism going to suit your needs as you might not want something that takes a bit of knowledge to adjust?

4. **Weight:** Some of the larger capos can add extra weight to the neck, which could cause neck dive, where you have to hold up the neck while you play. Many guitars are so finely balanced between neck and body balance that a capo can tip the scales on some.

5. **Price:** There are some prices on capos out there, especially for the beginner, but like anything you buy some are better value in the long run. Remember some metals, or plastics, or straps, can fatigue over time and you'd hate to have a capo fly off during an important performance, let alone you may be getting eye damage.

6. **Looks:** Okay, probably the least important of all the attributes, but one you may want to consider. A petite, smaller capo might suit a more feminine player, whereas a bigger, bulkier capo might suit a player who throws their guitar around. A silver one might suit your style compared to a black coloured one, or coloured version.

7. **Accessibility:** Some capos can be brought from just your local JB HiFi, some can be obtained from a nearby guitar store, and some need to be brought online as they are so different, or specialised.

Okay, so keeping these attributes in mind what types are available? I'm using a number of sites for reference, which you'll find at the end of the article. I may miss some that you know, or like. If so, then drop me an email and we'll also share that with Society members in future Songsmiths. These are in no particular order:

a. **Pencil & Rubber Bands:** What??? I hear you exclaim. We'll if its good enough for the old blues guys and you get caught out at a gig it will work. Trust me, I've done it, but that pencil has to be super tight against the fret board. Some of the old blues guys used to swear by this type of capo as the tension is even across the pencil. Obviously, the rubber bands will perish and if you use leather straps they will loosen, plus of course the snagability factor. However, as an emergency capo it does work. Here's a site to help: <https://takelessons.com/blog/how-to-make-a-homemade-capo-diy-z01>



b. **Strap Capos:** These have a bar, usually metal, across the fretboard, which is tightened with a generally cloth covered elastic strap that goes around the neck. The strap usually has holes in it so you can do different adjustments for different instruments. They are easy to use, cheap and can be moved around easily. However, the elastic can wear out and they can slip if knocked changing the tuning. Dunlop makes a variety of types, while there is even a Performance one for classical guitar. I had one of these when I started out and you'll find many a guitar case with one of these sitting as an emergency capo.



c. **Toggle Capos:** These were the types of capos I used for many years. They are similar in mechanism to the strap capos in that you have a thin bar with notches on it and an elastic strap that goes around the neck. When you push down the latch after notching the strap it tightens enhancing and securing the capo. They are cheap once again and harder to knock out of position. However, their very tightness can affect the tuning and I used to retune after putting one of these on. One other con is the metal bar is quite thin and



I've had a few snap in half. The rubber base that sits on the fretboard stops them flying apart, but its goodbye capo. Dunlop makes these in flat, or curved versions and they are ubiquitous in every guitar store.

d. **Trigger Capos:** These use a tensioned piece of metal to provide the clamping. It acts like a binder clip in that you hold back the bar, attach, then release the tension. They are easy to use with a simple mechanism, easy also to move in a live situation, are firmly attached and tend to last a long time before breaking. Because of this they are one of the most popular capos on the market and a lot of our Society members use them. The only problems is that the tension comes from one side only so you can have a problem with constant tuning across the neck – you may need to use another capo with studio use. They can dig into the wood and their snagability factor is high. Some people even feel they look lopsided on the guitar's neck. There are a number of companies who make this style like Kyser, Dunlop, Nordic, etc and they are big sellers in most guitar stores.

e. **Spring Capos:** These work in a similar fashion to Trigger Capos and have a number of the same inherent problems. However, it is easier to move with one hand and has a more solid attachment. It's the one I use as it's easy to use and remove in a live setting. It easily clamps onto the top of the headstock when not being used. It probably digs into the neck less than the Trigger type however the side tension is still a problem. Every time I've used one in the studio, I have to retune the whole guitar to that capo so that it's in tune with every other instrument. So, great live, so-so in the studio. Once again there are a number of companies that make this type like Dunlop, Donner, Mugig, etc and you'll find them in every guitar store. Trigger and Spring Capos are more expensive than the strap types, but generally pay for themselves as they last a long time. The Guitto GGC-02 Revolver

capo has a place to put spare guitar picks.

f. **Screw Capos:** These are quite a popular variety as they address a lot of the tension problems found with spring, or trigger, types. These are a modern capo produced by Planet Waves, Hamilton, Paige, etc.

g. **Adjustable Screw Capos:** These are probably the oldest style of capo? They have a mechanism where you put the rubber coated metal bar across the strings, then tighten the screw to create the tension. They aren't as expensive as the clip-on capos, and they apply a constant pressure across all of the strings so great for studio work. However, for ease of removal in a live situation they can be fiddly. Shubb, etc make versions of these. These are also called C-Clamp Capos.

h. **Yoke-style Capos:** These are very similar to the Adjustable Screw Capos in that they use a screw mechanism and apply an even tension to the neck. However, it totally wraps around the neck as the metal bar that sits on the fretboard swings open. Better than the Adjustable Screw Capos in moving them around, but still a little fiddly. A lot of people like them as they look centralised on the guitar and there less of the snagability factor. G7 and Paige make versions of these.

i. **The Performance 2:** This style of capo has an unusual type of tensioning system in that when you close the capo it holds tight against the fretboard. It is the easiest system, but some may wonder about the tension pressure. It releases via a lever and is made by G7.

j. **Roller Capos:** These are similar to Adjustable Screw Capos but have a rubber roller underneath the neck which means they can be repositioned fairly fast. Some people swear by them, but they are not as popular as you might think. Glider make them and you can access them through Amazon.

k. **Partial Capos:** This has a short arm so only some of the strings are covered. This is good for use with alternative tunings or complex chord voicings. They come in either spring, or adjustable screw types. They are made by Shrubbs, G7, Kyser and tend to be found more at stores that specialise in acoustic guitars.

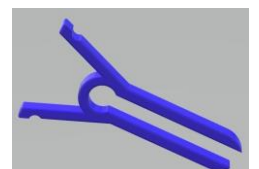
l. **Spider Capo:** This type of capo has a swing gate for each string, so it lets you capo each string individually. I have one of these and they can be quite expensive. I find the string tension isn't as strong as other capos and you can only capo those strings in one fret. The capo is clamped with a screw mechanism. An E minor would be easy, while an open C would be impossible. There are a range of prices and companies through Amazon and Ebay like Creative Tunings.

m. **Thalia Capos:** these are very expensive capos that have individual height adjustments and neck radius adjustments. The debate is out as to whether the G7 is a better deal.

n. **Flamenco Capos:** These are the true high-end capos. Usually made of polished wood these are heavily screw to the guitar's fretboard and are also used with classical guitars. Don't expect much change from \$100, if not more. Very specialised and hand made.

o. **Combo Capos:** These are combinations of capos and tuners in a one size fits all situation. They are not that expensive and tend to be the spring type as far as the capo goes. It might be handy, especially if you leave the capo sitting on the headstock and you have a tuner there as well – less space. Flonzo make them and they are available on Amazon.

p. **3D Printed Capos:** I've tried to include everything here, but the styles and shapes do make me question their integrity under pressure. But some people like to try everything. At least they'd be cheap to reproduce as long as you have a 3D printer.





So, there you have it, everything you wanted to know about capos. I doubt I've covered every type that's available and members will surely say I missed such and such capo. However, I hope it does open up some possibilities to enhance your future songwriting.

I used a number of sites as reference which I will place below as you'll find more detail and you can check prices and styles.

<https://www.guitarworld.com/features/best-guitar-capos>

<https://www.guitarfella.com/types-guitar-capos/>

<https://ehomerecordingstudio.com/best-guitar-capos/>

<https://www.theguitarjournal.com/guitar-capo-guide/>