

Want to
start a
band?



**The Cambridgeshire Music
Guide to Starting a Band**

Part

1

Getting started



Getting started

You love music. You can't stop listening to music. And now you want to play music. Only trouble is, orchestra isn't quite cutting it for you – and anyway, you play guitar.

Let's face it: you need your own band.

If this sounds like you, our advice is: do it! Starting a band is not only great fun – with a bit of work it can help you make new friends, meet exciting people and generally crank your social life up to 11, while also boosting your musical knowledge and skills.

But before you get too excited, a word of warning: bands can also be pretty infuriating. Get off on the wrong foot with your bandmates, and you'll kill the fun faster than a mixed bean curry at an all-night dance party – perhaps getting locked into endless, petty bickering about who's out of tune, who writes the songs, and whether anyone actually likes your drummer.



Lucky for you, Cambridgeshire Music has tons of helpful advice on how to make the journey from bedroom musicians to venue-filling sensations a success – even if the venue in question is your auntie's wedding at the local pub.

Welcome to our Guide to Starting a Band – lovingly crafted to help you cut the hassle and save energy for the stuff that really matters: immersing yourself in the music, making a better sound than you can alone, and, most importantly, getting a kick out of playing.

If you're really serious about being in a band, why not also come along to our **School of Rock & Pop**, which runs at centres across the county? It's open to all, and you can learn to play everything from pop to folk to metal. Plus, we'll give you practical help with songwriting, performing, working in the music industry and even making money from your music. For more information, visit our website: <https://www.cambridgeshiremusic.org.uk>

Still not sure?

Here are five reasons to start a band...

1. It keeps you motivated.

Practise alone and there's no deadline, so you can always put it off until tomorrow. Whereas if your band needs to learn a song by next week, there's a big incentive to work on those chords.

2. You'll make new friends.

Chances are you'll have to look outside your immediate social group to get the band together, but even if you don't, you'll find yourself working more closely and spending more time with your friends than ever before.

3. You'll improve your musicianship.

Music lessons are great, but there's nothing like playing with friends to pick up tips and spur each other on to take your music to new heights.

4. You'll learn to work in a team.

Even if you only practise together and never play live, being in a band will help you to collaborate and co-operate, and take on challenges together – pretty handy life skills.

5. Having fun.

Whether you're serious about making this into a career or not, being in a band is a laugh, and you'll feel amazing being able to make music in a group that is better than the sum of its parts.

5

myths about starting a band – the things you don't need



1

You don't have to be good. So, yeah, Jimi Hendrix could play guitar solos with his teeth, but don't assume that you have to be anywhere near accomplished to get up and running. History is littered with bands who didn't know one end of their instrument from another when they got started. What's more there are thousands of amazing songs for which you need to learn a maximum of just four chords ([see examples here](#)).

2

You don't have to perform live. If gigs aren't for you, there's no reason to do them. Bands form for all sorts of reasons and plenty of people just enjoy a social jam. You could also explore becoming specialist studio musicians if recording is more your thing.

3

You don't have to know lots of musicians. Even if you aren't friends with musicians, that's no obstacle, particularly in the wonderful world of social media. Dig around on Facebook for a few minutes and you'll soon find lots of pages about your local music community, packed with adverts and opportunities for wannabe band members.

4

You don't need a practice space. If you don't have a massive house, handy basement, or parents who are prepared to tolerate you accidentally dropping cymbals down the stairs, help is at hand. [Our School of Rock & Pop](#) can provide you with space, or there might be practice rooms at your school.

5

You don't have to write your own songs. There are endless ways to get hold of arrangements of your favourite songs on the web. Lots of bands – from The Rolling Stones to Panic! At The Disco – started out as cover bands. Some have even made a career out of it.

**“For all those
starting a band –
I salute you!”**
Nick Mulvey



Tips on setting up a band from Cambridge-born singer songwriter Nick Mulvey

Singer-songwriter Nick Mulvey started his first band at Chesterton Community College when he was 14. He went on to make his name as a member of Mercury Award nominees, Portico Quartet.

He is now a highly successful solo artist and has just returned from a big European Tour. Nick is curating part of 2019's Cambridge Folk Festival. Here are his tips to you:

“For all those starting a band – I salute you!

“My first tip is this: play for the sheer fun of it. It will always sound better that way. By all means have dreams of success, but let any successes come as a by-product, a welcome side-effect of enjoying yourself making sounds with your friends and getting lost in those sound SO MUCH that someone actually wants to put you in front of an audience, and that audience then catches your bug. And on it goes...

“My second tip is to study your heroes and study them closely! Always remember that they started from scratch too, and there is no reason why you cannot do what they have done. In fact, your artistic heroes (whoever they are) are proof that it CAN be done. They show the way, so read and watch interviews with them, listen to their body of work, wonder about their journey to great artistic achievement, watch their live shows on YouTube, and find out the stories about how they wrote their music, how they achieved their look and mastered their craft.

“I started my first band when I was aged 14, in year 9 at Chesterton Community College. We were called Manifest and it's a mystery why the entire planet never heard of us and our Jamiroquai-meets-Oasis sound (ahem). I jest, but it was a solid start and I loved it. And I've never stopped. So good luck to you – and break a leg!”



Getting started

Now that we've got your attention...

you're ready to take your first steps into the exciting world of band membership. Only trouble is: you probably don't know what those steps are. Don't worry. We have a few recommendations on how to get up and running:

Decide what comes first: the music or the musicians?

Start by thinking about where you personally want to begin. This will dictate what to do first. (But here's a golden rule: no two bands are the same, and every band evolves over time.)

For example, if you already have a particular sound in mind, then you're going to need like-minded musicians who can play the right sort of instrument. There's no pointing recruiting a banjo player and an accordionist if all you want to do is cover Slayer's speed metal masterpiece, *Reign In Blood* – just as your Metal-loving mates are going to be little use if you want to play indie folk and Americana.

On the other hand, some people prefer to match the music to the tastes and talents of musicians whom they already know. Or a third option is simply to get together, have a go, and see what happens. That's fine too – indeed, most bands start by covering songs they like to discover a sound, or by jamming and songwriting.

There are no hard and fast rules here. You know what matters most to you, and over time, you'll find that things change anyway. **The key is to make a decision and see where it takes you.**



Find some willing recruits

Fairly obviously, your band needs members. You might already have some people in mind, but if not, there are lots of ways to start looking.

Social media and the web are an ideal place to find bands looking for musicians, or vice versa. You could try an online classified ads service (Craigslist is the biggest and best in this regard), or just seek out pages or groups on Facebook that cover your local area. Don't be afraid of posting to tell people what you're looking for. Direct message people who are involved with the online community and see if they can give you any names of other people in your area who are looking for a band to join. Always be super cautious about meeting anyone you only know from online contact: ask your parents before you arrange to meet anyone for real.

You don't have to do all of this from behind a computer. If you and a friend love music, go along to some local band nights and see if you can meet some potential collaborators there. Lots of famous bands started out when two or three good friends got together, at school or university.

The important thing to remember is that you can start playing anyway, even if it's just you and a friend to begin with.

Don't lose heart if you can't find recruits straight away. Some musicians are easier to find than others. Drummers are often in high demand, good singers don't necessarily grow on trees, and if you're playing a niche style of music, you may find that all-important double contrabass flautist is proving somewhat elusive.

The important thing to remember is that you can start playing anyway, even if it's just you and a friend to begin with. Try out a few ideas together, and before long, you'll build up a bit of confidence and a vision of where you're going. This will make you a much more attractive proposition to other musicians who might join your group.



Agree some ground rules

Once you've got the beginnings of a line-up, you'll want to start playing, which is bound to lead to some pretty involved discussions.

Remember: this isn't the time to get too expansive with your vision. Talking about royalties from future album sales is, at this point more likely to start a punch-up than be of any use.

Here are a few basics that you should consider from the start:

1. Where are you going to practise?

Practice, you may have heard, makes perfect, so sort out a rehearsal space as soon as you can. You may have a basement or garage handy at a band member's house, but if not, there are alternatives.

Cambridgeshire Music's School of Rock and Pop can offer you a place to practise, plus drum kits, pianos and microphones.

Alternatively, ask at your school to see if they can offer you a rehearsal space. Many do have rooms for this purpose, and you can often get permission to use equipment as well.

2. Decide when to practise.

If you're going to progress at all, you probably want to meet up at least once a week – or more, depending on people's availability.

Ross Wilson, Music Development Manager at Cambridgeshire Music, recommends making your rehearsals at least two hours in length. This will mean that you actually have enough time to work on glitches, get things down, and feel like you're making progress. Try to set up all your equipment as quickly as possible, too, so that setting up doesn't eat into precious rehearsal time. Once every so often, it's a good idea to do a longer session – maybe three to four hours – to go over everything you've recently covered.

3. Make a decision about expectations.

It's important you're all roughly on the same page. Things could go horribly wrong if one of you is expecting to play at your local Battle of the Bands, while someone else just wants to cover love songs at weddings, birthdays and Bar Mitzvahs.

Talk it through, rather than making assumptions about what your band mates think – to make sure everyone has an agreed set of expectations from the off. Are you hoping to start gigging soon? Would you rather record? Are you just bothered about having fun? It doesn't matter what you aim for, so long as you're all agreed.

4. Stay open-minded.

As we already mentioned, bands evolve. Don't assume that, just because you're starting out as a mash-up of ambient techno, noughties breakcore and classic musical theatre, things are going to stay that way forever. Everyone needs to be open to the fact that your sound may change.

Your relationships as a band will change, too. Most bands have a natural leader, usually the songwriter and/or the person who formed the band. It is really important that someone is the "boss" (otherwise you won't get anything done), but it's also important not to be a dictator. Always be open to each other's suggestions – if nothing else, it is the best way to keep progressing and stay fresh.

Disagreements will happen as a natural part of life, but it's how you handle them that matters: listening, respecting each other and holding back on criticism will get you a long way.



Part 2 Getting going



Getting going

However carefully laid your plans are...

it's only when you start playing that you will really know if the band clicks, and if everyone is really committed.

Don't panic if, after a few rehearsals, this turns out not to be the case. If you are serious about making music and everyone else is sitting around joking rather than playing, perhaps this isn't quite the right set-up for you. Lots of early attempts at bands don't quite work out. Usually, they provide you with a basis on which you can make a better go of it next time.

**Practise, practise,
practise**

Your collective sound may sound ropery at first, but the more you rehearse, the better you'll get. Put in the work over a few weeks, and, even if you're just covering other people's songs, you'll find a sound and style start to form.

It's a really good idea to get together after a rehearsal and discuss how things went. Try to focus on the positives – remember, it's important that everyone feels that they are playing a meaningful role. If you can, **take some cameras along, or just film the rehearsal on a phone**, so that you can evaluate your music and work out where to focus your efforts next time.

Practice doesn't just happen at rehearsals. You can also work on your own specific parts at home. If you have access to some basic recording software, such as GarageBand, you can record your track as a project file, which can then be played back on your computer. These programmes also allow you to mute out specific parts so that you can play along with the rest of the band virtually in your bedroom. This is a great way of dealing with the problem of people not being able to make rehearsals.



Writing your own songs

Lennon and McCartney. Jagger and Richards. Morrissey and Marr. Music has known many amazing songwriting partnerships, but they don't always come in twos. Every band does songwriting differently, whether it's by having a single songsmith, or jamming as a group.

You'll often find that songs start with one person bringing an initial idea to the others. If you fancy writing songs yourself, where that inspiration starts is up to you. Loads of artists like to begin with a hook or chord progression and build a song around it. But you may also find that you're struck by a flash of inspiration, perhaps suddenly coming up with a great intro, or a particular lyric.

Don't overcomplicate things if you haven't done much songwriting before. The most complex songs often start with **a simple melody picked out on guitar or piano**. If you hit on something that you like, make sure you record it before you forget it. There's no quicker ticket to smashing up your guitar and/or bedroom with frustration than failing to remember an amazing tune an hour after you first thought of it.

Once someone has the basis of an idea, start kicking it around either with one or two band members, or as a full group. Be prepared to try out different things. If the results don't sound exactly as you imagined, that's OK because (all together now) bands are always evolving.

Lyrics are often difficult things to master. If you're not a budding poet laureate, don't worry. Write about what you know and, again, don't be afraid of keeping it simple.

Finally, if you get stuck, have a breather. Research has shown that people are often at their most creative when – or after – they take a break. Do something different, make a cup of tea, or go for a walk. For inspiration, you could thumb through a book or poetry. You'll find that when you come back, what seemed impossible slots into place with relative ease.

Recording and releasing demos

OK. You've written the songs, practised your individual parts, and rehearsed together until you're tighter than Jon Bon Jovi's spandex pants. You are, to coin a phrase, ready to rock. So how do you get people to listen?

Fortunately, it's never been easier to record and place your demos online – and, with a bit of effort, potentially make money out of them as well. Recording demos is a great way to build your fan base and provide potential venues with a sample of your work if you're looking for gigs. What's more, it will feel as though you are finally starting to see a product for your labours after all those rehearsals.

The Cambridgeshire Music School of Rock & Pop is a great place to get advice about how to start laying down some tracks. We run workshops at various venues throughout the year, teaching the basic skills you need to record and produce an album from your bedroom. We also offer one to one music technology lessons.

When putting your demo together, choose a handful of songs (perhaps two to four) that really represent your sound. Remember, the aim is to give people a glimpse of what you can do. It's best to record into a computer if you can, using an audio interface and software such as GarageBand or Logic. But **if you want to keep things simple (and cheap), there are options for recording on smartphones, tablets, or with digital sound recorders.**

When it comes to putting your work out there, lots of options are available. A good place to start might be social media, where you can get friends to nominate their favourite tracks. Further down the line, Bandcamp is a platform that allows fans to download, and even pay for songs. Crowdfunding sites can be an excellent way to grow your fanbase – they allow you to raise a bit of cash by inviting followers to chip in to a project in return for exclusive extras. We have a few tips on this - and other ways to make money from your lovingly-created demo tracks - in the next section.



Part 3 Getting out there



Nick Mulvey playing the Paradiso, Amsterdam on his 2018 tour

Getting out there

THE NAME. Nothing is more likely to cause an in-studio brawl... than coming up with a name for your band. But once you go public, it's a must.

Start by writing down every name you can think of, including ridiculous ideas that you're likely to write off (some of the most successful band names ever have also been the weirdest: Smashing Pumpkins, anyone?) Try switching words round, or mixing ideas up, until you hit on the perfect title. There aren't many do's and don'ts when it comes to band names, but there are a few things to watch out for. Which things? These things:

1. Don't steal someone else's name by accident.

At best, it's annoying, at worst, it's illegal. Check your ideas on an authoritative music encyclopedia, like allmusic.com, to avoid accidental theft.

2. Don't steal the name of an established brand.

Yes, it is a hilarious idea to call yourselves Mickey Mouse And The Walt Disney Company. That is, until you get sued by The Walt Disney Company. Plus it confuses audiences.

3. Don't accidentally call yourself something rude.

Make sure you haven't inadvertently given yourself a name which has an – ahem – “alternative” meaning. And if you're going for a name with more than one word, check what happens when you put the words together. Speed Of Art, for example, would be a bad choice. You seem clever, we're sure you can work out why.

4. Don't be willfully obscure.

Calling yourself JQ84FPLV%R may seem edgy, complex and interesting. It also means nobody will ever remember your name.

Check what happens when you put the words together. Speed Of Art, for example, would be a bad choice.



Playing gigs

Once you've got the beginnings of a line-up, you'll want to start playing, which is bound to lead to some pretty involved discussions.

Playing live can be an amazing experience. And not only will people pay to see you, they're also a captive audience who will buy stuff like merchandise in the process.

It is, of course, highly unlikely that you'll be in a position to sell out the O2 Arena from the start – unless, that is, you're either fabulously wealthy, or the person running the O2 Arena is your dad. Be prepared to start small. It's always better to play to a small room that's full than a large room that's empty.

A good way to get experience is by asking friends if you can play at their parties. You'll probably only do a couple of songs, but it will give you a sense of how successfully you're performing live, and may help you to build a following. Lots of famous bands have started this way – REM, for example, who became stadium-filling giants in the 90s, played their very first set at a friend's birthday.

There will be pubs and other venues close to where you live that support local bands and host live music. Approach these when you feel ready, but do your research first. If the Dog And Duck's regular drinkers are mostly in their 60s, it's unlikely to be for you. Find a place that's doing your type of music.

Bear in mind that most promoters aren't actually interested in your band's sound. What they really want to do is get people into their venue so that they can sell more stuff. For that, they need customers, so once you've got a gig do your very best to get people to come. That way, the venue manager will feel you were worth the trouble – and be more inclined to invite you back.

Getting involved in the live scene will build you lots of useful connections – especially with other bands. If you

Turn up on time, bring the equipment you need, and use your social channels to get an audience.

Remember that demo?

like another act, see if they fancy giving you a support slot, or sharing the bill at a forthcoming gig. Also, make sure that you repay the trust a promoter puts in you, by being reliable: turn up on time, bring the equipment you need, and use your social channels to get an audience.

Remember that demo that we discussed earlier? When approaching people for opportunities to do gigs, don't forget that it can be an ideal calling card, so share your music with them. It's also useful doing some research: go to a few local gigs to suss out the scene, and then approach promoters who you think might be interested in putting you on stage.

Playing small, **local venues is where you're most likely to meet people who will ask you to play at larger events,** or support them on tour. It may seem a long way from where you want to be the first time you play on a tiny stage in a decades-old pub with peeling wallpaper that smells of stale beer. Mention this to a more established band, however, and they're likely to get all misty-eyed with nostalgia. Why? Because in most cases, that's exactly how they started too.



Making money

Every band in the history of everything ever has at some point made a statement such as: “We just do what we do for the music, and if anyone else likes it, that’s a bonus”.

In the vast majority of cases, this is total rubbish. The more bands say this, the more likely it is that what they actually want is a mansion, fast cars, a gold statue of themselves that spouts champagne, and a giant basement full of cash.

As you get older and more experienced, it’s OK to want a few pounds in your pocket. After all, sooner or later you’re going to need to shell out for new equipment, or other costs. The good news is that there are ways to raise funds fairly early on, even if you’re

not playing big venues and selling platinum albums. In particular, you can do this online. Putting your demos on Bandcamp can be a start, because once you have a bit of a fanbase, you can charge a small fee for downloading your tracks.

Another way of raising money is through crowdfunding. Sites such as Pledgemusic and Kickstarter allow bands to use an initial demo to encourage fans to fund forthcoming work. A great way to build up funds and grow your fanbase is Patreon. This allows artists to create work using contributions from fans who, in return, get access to exclusive content (like new tracks) as a sort of thank-you for their support.

Video power

Don’t underestimate the power of video, either. YouTube is, for many listeners, the premier site for streaming music. Even if you haven’t got a video, you can still upload songs, although some simple imagery will get you more attention. **It’s a fantastic site for getting noticed, particularly if you tag your uploads intelligently** so that people can stumble across them when searching.

Plug in the AdSense function, which allows Google to incorporate advertising into your video when streamed, and you can also make income in the process. The amount of money you get, however, does hinge on the number of views, so make sure you promote the vid.

Once again, Cambridgeshire Music can help with the business side of your musical dream. **All of our rock and pop tutors work in the music industry and expert advice is available through our Rock & Pop workshops.** We also run industry days throughout the year, where you can get tips on how to work in music. Plus, we have a partnership with the Cambridge Junction, who run business days at which you can find out more about careers in the industry. Need advice? Get in touch, [we’re here: www.cambridgeshiremusic.org.uk/pages/about-us/contact-us/](http://www.cambridgeshiremusic.org.uk/pages/about-us/contact-us/)



AND FINALLY

If you're literally just starting to think about putting a band together, some of the steps in this guide may seem far off. Don't be daunted.

Whatever happens it's going to be an experience from which you'll learn something new and hopefully have a great time in the process. And if you need advice, your friendly county music hub (that's us – hello again) is always on hand to offer support.



5
**The five most important
things to remember
when starting out**

1. Be social.

Every step of your band's journey, from finding members through to finding gigs, relies on meeting people and word of mouth. Make connections with people whenever there is a chance. The music industry is full of like-minded people who can give you good advice and practical assistance.

2. Get rhythm.

No, not in terms of sound (although that would help.) Once you've got your band together, make sure that you rehearse at least once a week, and get together frequently to reflect on how it's going.

3. Keep learning.

Always learn new material even when it doesn't seem necessary. It keeps the group fresh, and prevents your sets from becoming boring routines (for you, and the audience).

1. Persevere.

There will be setbacks along the way. Your bandmates will argue. Venues will turn you down. Some people may be disparaging about your efforts. Don't worry, it happens to everyone. The only way to overcome it is to keep going – you won't prove anyone wrong by sulking in your bedroom.

5. Most of all: have fun.

In the end, this is about you doing something you love. If the band ceases to be fun, that doesn't mean you don't love it any more – it just means you might need to start a new one. Do what you enjoy, play music you like, and write songs you're proud of. It's your music. We look forward to hearing the results!

How we can help



The Cambridgeshire Music School of Rock & Pop

If songwriting and playing in a band is your thing, then the School of Rock & Pop is for you. We run several centres across the county, where you can learn to play everything from pop and rock to folk, acoustic and metal:

Cottenham Village College, Wednesdays 3.15-4.45pm

Soham Village College, Wednesdays 3.15-4.45pm

Linton Village College, Tuesdays 3.15-4.45pm

Up to date venues and times are listed on the Cambridgeshire Music website (www.cambridgeshiremusic.org.uk) where you can also find joining information and costs.

You will learn to play as part of a band and develop performance technique and stage presence, as well as arranging and composing songs – both on your own and with others. Students are supported by established musicians and songwriters who help with composition and arrangements. You may also have the chance to perform and compete in a variety of concert opportunities throughout the year, including at Cambridge Junction.

If you already play an instrument, that's great, but complete beginners are also welcome. We provide drum kits, piano and mics, however we only have so much equipment, so please do bring along your own guitars, leads, sticks or instrument if you can.

Contact us

Phone us on 01480 373500

Email cm@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Tweet [@cambsmusic](https://twitter.com/cambsmusic)

Post on our Facebook page [Cambridgeshire Music](#)

Drop in to Cambridgeshire Music, 36, Mayfield Road, Huntingdon, PE29 1NL. We are open 8.30am – 5.30pm Monday to Friday.

