

An Easy Way To Add Fret Marker Dots To Your Guitar

By Douglas Niedt

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Dots=cheap guitar

50 years ago, all the best handmade guitars played by the greats (Andrés Segovia, Julian Bream, John Williams) did not have fret markers or dots on the side of the neck. Because of that, when I was growing up, my dream was to someday own a guitar that didn't have dots. That was the test. If it didn't have dots, it was a real guitar worthy of being played by a real artist!

The fall of civilization

In the past 20 years or so, some of the best luthiers began putting a dot at the 7th fret. I considered it a deplorable turn of events. I thought they were dumbing things down. If one of my students had a guitar without dots, I always encouraged them not to add a dot—I told them to learn to feel and judge by sight where the frets were.

Old age strikes

About ten years ago my eyesight began to get worse (yes I was getting old!). I began having occasional problems with depth perception. I started missing shifts or was suddenly unsure where I was on the neck. Of course I didn't want to take the chance of missing a shift in a concert or even in front of a student. But I didn't want to admit to myself that I needed those stupid dots. After many inner struggles I realized I had to face reality. My eyesight was not going to get better. I relented and finally added dots at the 5th and 7th frets. And I'm glad I did. Adding the dots solved my problems.

Common solutions

If you want to add dots to your guitar, probably the best solution is to have a luthier or skilled guitar repairman do it. The dots can be very attractive if done in mother-of-pearl, semi-precious stones, or even diamonds (yes, it's been done). But that can be expensive or inconvenient if a skilled craftsman isn't nearby. Or you can go the cheap route. I have seen students use everything from pieces of scotch tape to Barbie stickers to mark their frets.

A cheap and effective solution

WARNING: DO NOT USE THIS METHOD IF THE NECK OF YOUR GUITAR IS UNFINISHED OR FINISHED WITH FRENCH POLISH OR OTHER DELICATE FINISH.

If you want an easy, neat, professional-looking solution, try this.

Materials needed:

1. A fine-point paint brush
2. A little bit of white or ivory **latex** paint. **Do not use oil based or alkyd paint.**
3. Some paper towels and water

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How to do it. WATCH THE VIDEO!

1. Set the guitar on its side so the neck is as horizontal as possible.
2. Dip the *tip only* of the brush into the paint.
3. Touch the tip of the brush to the guitar on the side of the neck where you want the dot. This will leave a perfect small circle of paint that looks just like a real fret marker without the muss and fuss of having a repairman drill and insert a marker.
4. If your aim was off with the brush, wipe off the paint immediately with a damp paper towel and then a dry paper towel. Try again until you get it right.
5. Keep the guitar on its side with the neck as horizontal as possible and wait for the paint to dry. Just to be safe, keep the guitar in the horizontal position and allow the paint to dry overnight.

Although some people use nail polish or White Out (Wite Out) liquid correction fluid, I don't recommend it. *It can eat into the finish of the guitar. If you make a mistake it can be more difficult to wipe off without damaging the finish.*

The fret markers I added to both of my Ramirez guitars ten years ago are still there and look great. There are no signs of wear. And, I haven't missed a shift since. Well, maybe one or two...

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In this video, watch me demonstrate how to add fret marker dots to your guitar.

Click in the video area to activate. Then, right-click on the video and choose "Full Screen Multimedia" to view on full screen (recommended). Right-click again and choose "End Full Screen Multimedia" or press "Escape" key on your keyboard to return to normal viewing.



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