

Evolution of the Banjo - This is a very high-level view; there was far more experimentation and cross-fertilization among traditions than is possible to show here; this is provided as a general guideline. Copyright© 2017 by Paul D Race PaulRaceMusic.com and CreekDontRise.com

Name or Class	Physical Description	Typical # of Strings	How Played?	Musical Styles Supported?	Tuning?
Akonting and related African instruments	Gourd body, gut strings, long, round, fretless neck	3	Strummed downward with fingernails, drone string plucked with thumb	Traditional African music, songs of enslaved people	Various
Early Minstrel Banjo	Drum-style body, wide, flat, fretless fingerboard, gut strings, open-back	5	"	Songs of enslaved people, parodies of songs of enslaved people	Various
Later Minstrel Banjo	Frets added, neck assumes a "D" profile, Metal strings allow shorter necks (36" scales common)	5	"	Parodies of songs of enslaved people, dance hall songs	Tending toward DBGcG (counting from your toes upward)
Classic Banjo	Banjo dimensions and tuning begins to stabilize, neck ~26", experiments with resonator, tone ring, metal strings	5	Plucked similarly to classical guitar	Tunes and arrangements written for 5-string banjo	Generally DBGcG
Zither Banjo (European)	Head adjustment screws on front of banjo, drone string attached to head and tunneled down to the fifth fret	Usually 5, a few 6	"	Popular & classical songs arranged for 5-string	Generally DBGcG
Melody Banjo (Not shown)	Invented for mandolin players, short-lived, eclipsed by Tenor eventually	4	Flatpicked melody, mostly	Same as Classic banjo	EADG (same as mandolin)
Plectrum Banjo	Four-string version of Classic 5-strings (5th string clashed with Jazz chords)	4	Strummed across all four strings with a flatpick	Early Jazz	DBGc (counting from your toes upward)
(Jazz) Tenor	17 or 19 frets, Tuning and scale length likely influenced by Mandola. Much tone ring & resonator experimentation	4	"	Early Jazz, some Folk music (Kingston Trio)	ADGC (viola tuning)
6-String	Usually a wide head, such as 14", resonator common, some tone rings	6	Jazz: Individual notes flatpicked, Blues: fingerpicked	Early Jazz, also fingerstyle Blues	Varies, including guitar tuning
(Irish) Tenor	17 or 19 Frets, 19 preferred. Tone Ring and Resonator optional	4	Individual notes flatpicked to play melody or arpeggios.	Celtic, some Folk	EADG (octave down from Mandolin)
Tenor Guitar (not shown)	Full-sized guitar body, made so Jazz tenor players could double on guitar	4	Initially played like a Jazz tenor banjo	Jazz, Swing, Folk	Initially, ADGC, many other tunings now
"Old-Timey" Banjo	"D" neck and metal strings of Classic Banjo, usually open-back, no tone ring	5	Strummed downward with fingernails, drone string plucked by thumb	"Old-Timey" music, pre-Bluegrass "Mountain Music"	Varies, including DBGcG & DBGDg
Folk Banjo	"D" neck and metal strings of Classic Banjo, Tone Ring and Resonator optional	5	Usually Old-Timey, some Classic and Bluegrass style	Folk Revival Music (Weavers, etc.)	Varies, usually DBGcG
Bluegrass Banjo	"Specs" of Classic banjo, Updated Tone Rings and Resonator	5	Fingerpicks. Picking with thumb, 1 st and 2 nd finger	Bluegrass, Newgrass, etc.	Usually DBGDg
Modern 6-string	Guitar width, "D" shaped neck, banjo-length on better instruments	6	Best sound: fingerpicking or from flatpicking individual notes.	Country, Rock, Folk	Usually guitar tuning (EBGDAE)