

Bluegrass Jam Etiquette Guidelines

Bluegrass music is defined as music played on acoustic string instruments following in the footsteps of the Father of Bluegrass, Bill Monroe. Folk music, blues, swing, rock and pop are not bluegrass and are generally not tolerated at a bluegrass jam. A bluegrass jam is a group effort at making music and is never intended to be a performance. An individual should not come to a jam in order to “perform” a song. The purpose of a bluegrass jam is to allow people to come **TOGETHER**, each song a journey where each musician has an equal participation in that song, thereby allowing the **BLUEGRASS** music to be played with a measure of quality. The musicians sit in a circle and sequentially **SHARE** solos and song choices. Musicians are welcome to join the jam within certain limits. Musicians in the circle (referred to simply as “the circle”) will always have expectations of the other persons in the circle and expect a certain level of skill and competence from the other musicians. Jams are rated according to skill, such as Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced. You should not try to join a jam circle above your skill level, but you may generally sit outside the circle and play along with the circle **QUIETLY, TO YOURSELF**. Professional musicians (pros) generally will **NOT** regularly associate with non-pros and their jams are above Advanced. Non-pros should not try to join a pro jam unless invited. If a pro joins your circle you should be very humble and thankful that the pro has chosen to share his/her music with you and you should do your very best to not bother the pro. Every competent player has spent much work, time and treasure getting to where they are. If you wish to play as well as they do, you will probably have to expend as much, or more, work, time and treasure as they did. You may want to take some lessons.

Here are a few things for you to consider.

1. If you can't hear **EVERYONE** in the circle, **YOU** are playing too loudly and you won't be able to make good music, which might bother someone. Try to point your instrument away from your neighbor.
2. If your instrument is not in **PERFECT** tune, you might bother someone. Good enough is **NOT**.
3. If you play on top of someone else, you might bother them.
4. If you can't play a song being played, and you try anyway, you might bother someone. Sit it out.
5. If you speed up, slow down or lose the beat, you **WILL** bother **EVERYONE**.
6. If you choose a song that's not bluegrass, or one that's too hard for the circle, you might bother someone.
7. If you practice your playing where everyone in the circle can hear you, you might bother someone.
8. If you practice your playing while the song is going on, you **WILL** bother everyone. You must practice only by yourself or with others who are practicing.
9. If you sit in the main circle and cannot keep up, you **WILL** bother everyone. You must sit outside the main circle (then go home and **PRACTICE**, and join a lesser skilled jam).
10. If you sit outside the main circle, and you practice so the circle can hear you, you **WILL** bother everyone.
11. If you sit outside the main circle, and you talk or make noise so the circle can hear you, you **WILL** bother everyone.
12. If you bring good music to the circle, you might get a pass on an above transgression.
13. If you bother someone, you might get yelled at.
14. If you don't get yelled at, you might get left alone (players will leave the circle and go start their own circle).
15. If you don't get left alone, you might be asked to leave.
16. If you have a problem accepting any of the above, go start your own jam.
17. If you start your own jam, you will soon be seeking out these guidelines to hand out to your jammers.

Most importantly, have fun, respect your fellow musicians and follow the Golden Rule.