

Checking Banjo Head Tension Using Straightedge & Coin



The photo above shows the basic method of checking banjo head tension using a 7" straightedge and standard U.S. coins. The bar is cut from a 12" piece of commonly available hardware store stock; it stands by itself and stores in many case or bag pockets. The photo demonstrates its use with an 11" Renaissance head, 5/8" bridge, no down force from the tailpiece, and using medium steel strings.

The method can be used to "rough in" head tension, especially if the user has not developed a feel for proper head tensioning, but the results may or may not suit the preference of the player. Small changes in head tension can have a large effect on the tone and volume, so use this as a starting point until more experience with adjusting head tension has been gained.

Actual results will vary dependent upon numerous variables such as string choice, tuning, bridge height, head material & diameter, tailpiece type & adjustment, etc. I prefer the tone produced by "nickel" spacing, but I'm a clawhammer player.