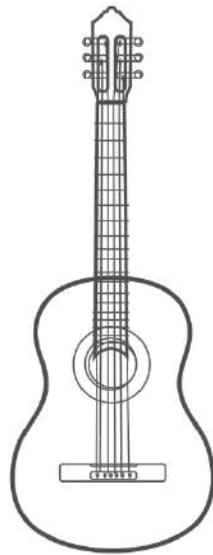


—FROM ZERO TO—
GUITAR FINGERPICKER

IN 30 DAYS



PATRICK O'MALLEY



Course Syllabus

Section 1 – Getting Started

The goal of this section is to ensure you have everything you need to really be effective in further sections of the course. By the end of this section, you will be able to play the six most common chords and change between these chords. You will be able to read guitar tablature and chord charts.

I provide some helpful links in case you need help to put strings on your guitar for the first time and how to tune your guitar. to make sure your guitar is tuned.

This is a beginner course. If you have played some guitar before, you can skip any lessons that you don't need. For example, if you can play common chords but can't yet read guitar tablature, then you could skip the chords lesson and go straight to the guitar tab primer.

Section 2 – Fingerpicking Basics

We start fingerpicking in this section, beginning with the background on how fingerpicking works and which fingers play which strings. We learn two different fingerpicking notations and learn several fingerpicking patterns, initially over one chord and then over several chords.

Section 3 – The Thumb

The real magic of fingerpicking is playing multiple guitar parts on one guitar. We require the thumb does the work of the bass player and the fingers play some nice melodies at the same time. We master the thumb in this section and the fingers in section 4.

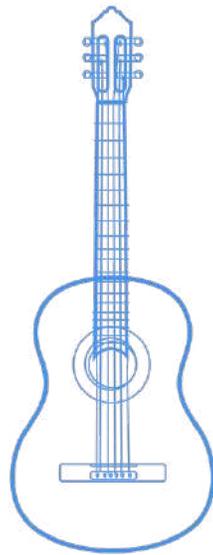
In this section, we play alternating bass and walking bass examples, we add more fingerpicking patterns.

Section 4 – The Fingers

Building on our thumb technique from the previous section, we add a melodic component using the fingers. We play more advanced patterns using the fingers of the right hand, pinching, play fingerpicking sequences of different length and a workshop to help you write your own fingerpicking patterns. We explore pinching and varying pattern length.

Section 5 – Advanced Techniques

The final section of the course builds on all these thumb and finger lessons we have taken and technique we have mastered. I take you through advanced fingerpicking patterns like Travis Picking and Clawhammer.



Section 1

Getting Started

1.1 - Some Beginner Resources

There are a few things that you need before you get started:

1. Have a guitar
2. Be able to string up your guitar
3. Be able to tune your guitar

The chances are that you already have a guitar if you are taking this course. But if you do not, (or if you are thinking of a little upgrade) then check out some of the options [here](#)

If you have an old guitar and you need to buy strings, then it's probably good to get a light set of strings or "11 gauge strings" for your acoustic. You need to be able to put strings on your guitar so if you can't do it yet, then bite the bullet and try. The worst that can happen is that you break a string. This is ok! - it's the only way to learn how to change strings. Always buy two or three packs of strings at a time so that breaking a string doesn't stop you from playing for too long!

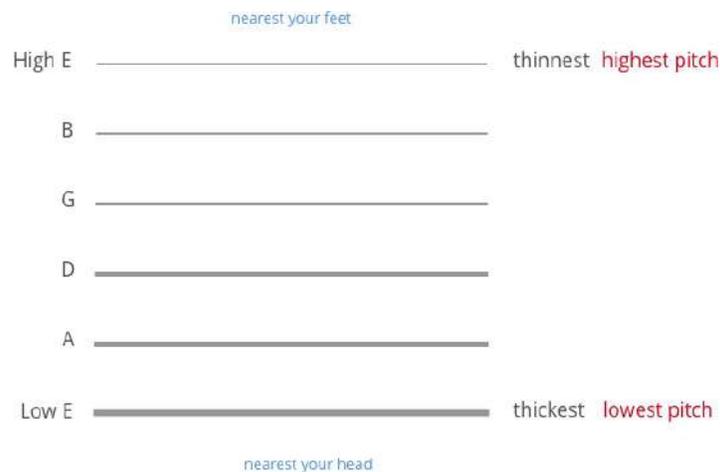
This is a great [YouTube video](#) if you need guidance on how to put strings on your guitar

For tuning your guitar, there is a [good guide here](#)

1.2 String Names

Look down at the guitar on your lap. The string nearest your head, which you will notice is the thickest string also has the most bass sound. It is an E note. We call this the 6th string for the rest of the book.

The next string (the next thickest and next nearest your head) is the A string which we call the 5th string. Then we have the D string (which we call the 4th string), G string (3rd string), B string (2nd string) and then the thinnest string (furthest from your head) is another E note which we call the 1st string.



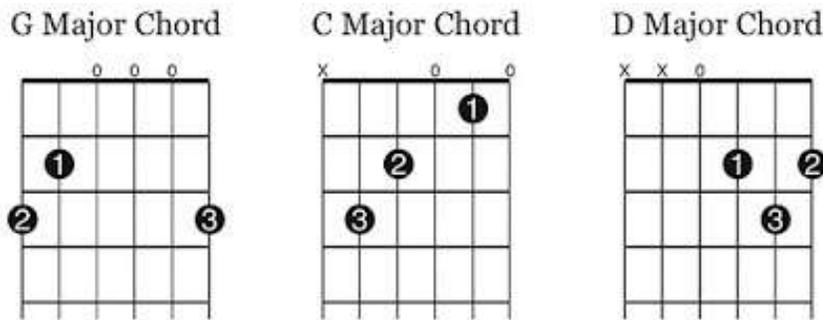
You will notice two strings are E notes (6th string and 1st string) but if you play them both you will hear that one is quite bass-sounding (the low E) and one is very high pitched (the high E). It's worth saying that when we say low here, we mean the tonality of the note (and not where the string physically is on the guitar).

There are ways to remember the string names. If you can remember the phrase "Eat Apples Daily Grow Big Ears" then that mnemonic will help you remember EADGBE, the strings in order.

1.3 - Three Chords

The first 3 chords we learn are G major, C major and D major.

Have a look at the chord charts below and we'll learn these three chords in no time! The number in the black circle is the finger (left hand finger) to use. The low E (thickest) string is on the left and the high E (thinnest) string is on the right.



For the G Major chord:

1. Place the (left hand) second finger on the low E (thickest) string at the 3rd fret.
2. Place the (left hand) index finger on the A string (string below) at the 2nd fret.
3. Place the (left hand) third finger on the high E (thinnest) string at the 3rd fret.

Strum all six strings and you get a G chord. Make sure to take your time and play each note individually to make sure they all sound nice and clean.

For the C Major chord:

1. Place the (left hand) third finger on the A string (5th string) at the 3rd fret.
2. Place the (left hand) second finger on the D string (4th string) at the 2nd fret.
3. Place the (left hand) index finger on the B string (2nd string) at the 1st fret.

This time, you only strum the five highest (thinnest) strings with the right hand - the low E or thickest string you don't need to play.

For the D Major chord:

1. Place the (left hand) index finger on the G string (3rd) at the 2nd fret
2. Place the (left hand) third finger on the B string (2nd) at the 3rd fret
3. Place the (left hand) second finger on the high E string (1st) at the 2nd fret

Now, strum the four high (thinnest) strings with the right hand (not the two thickest strings).

Take your time, play each chord slowly. Playing individual notes of the chord is the way to know if you make a mistake. Listen for any bad or wrong notes and then correct (by taking a good look at what the left hand is actually fretting!).

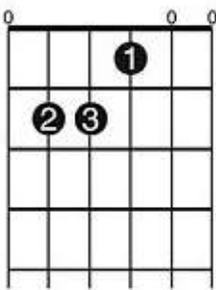
1.4 - Another Three Chords

We learned three more chords in this lesson: A minor, E and E minor.
Note that we write A minor as “Am” and E minor as “Em”.

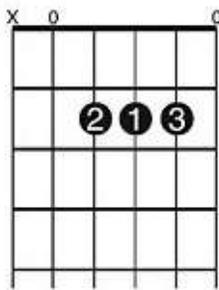
You can play everything in section 1 and section 2 with just the first 3 chords (G, C and D), so it is ok if you want to read this lesson to have a quick look at these chords but to decide not to learn them just yet – instead to focus on learning just the G, C and D and finishing section 1 and section 2 first. If you are a complete beginner, that is the best way to move forward. But the choice is yours; you can learn all 6 chords now if you want to.

Have a look at the charts below. Remember when you look at a chord chart, the number in the black circle is the finger (left hand finger) to use. The low E or thickest string is on the left and the high E or thinnest string is on the right.

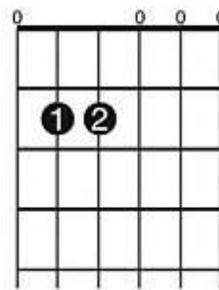
E Major Chord



A Major Chord



E Minor Chord



So for the E Major chord:

1. Place the (left hand) second finger on the A string (5th string) at the 2nd fret.
2. Place the (left hand) third finger on the D string (4th) also at the second fret.
3. Place the (left hand) index finger on G string (3rd) at the 1st fret.

Then play all six strings and you get a E chord. Make sure to take your time and play each note individually to make sure they all sound nice and clean.

For the E Minor chord:

Fret the E major chord and remove the index finger off the fretboard and you have E minor! You have the 5th string and the 4th string both fretted at the 2nd fret. The 3rd string is open (or not fretted). Strum all six strings.

For the A Major chord:

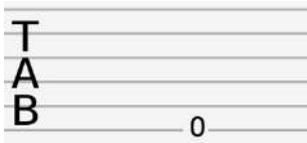
The 4th, 3rd and 2nd string are all fretted at the second fret. This time, you only strum five strings with the right hand - the low E or thickest string you don't need to play.

1.5 - Reading Guitar Tablature

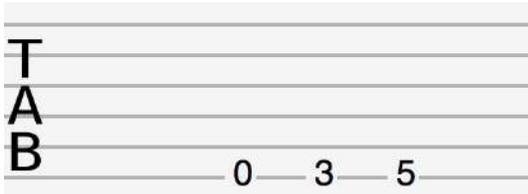
Guitar Tablature (or guitar tab) is a way of notating music for guitar. It is not quite reading “sheet music” like our piano-playing friends, it is a little bit easier but still takes a little getting used to.

We’ll start by playing a melody on one string. Then we will add other strings. Then we will look at how chords are written in tab.

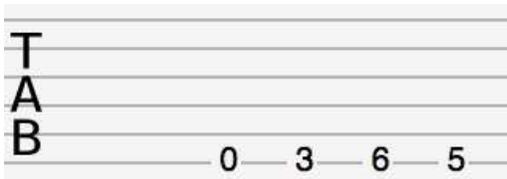
So we’ll start by looking at playing one note - the 6th string (low E). This is just playing an open string so don’t fret anything with your left hand - just play the thickest string on your guitar and let it ring. Note if you are not fretting a string, then we call that an open string and it is denoted in tab as a ‘0’.



Now if we play that same string (the low E string) three times: first as an open string, then at the 3rd and 5th fret, it would have guitar tab that looks like this



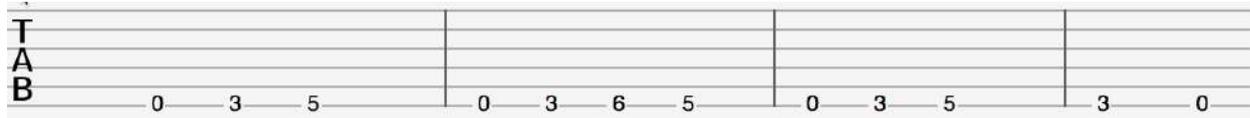
If we play the same string low E four times - first open, then 3rd fret, then 6th fret then 5th fret, it would look like this.



Finally if we play both patterns above, then add a few more notes - the low E string

open, 3rd fret, 5th fret, 3rd fret, open string, you are playing a line similar to Smoke on the Water by Deep Purple. You probably know this riff! Google it if you are not familiar with it and then hum it and then play this tab until it matches.

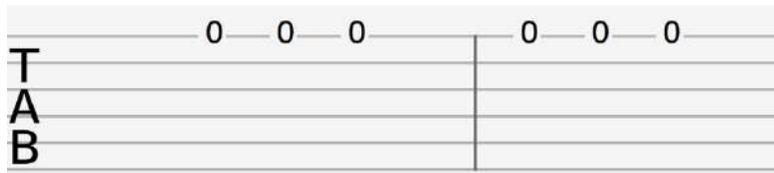
Now you will have followed tab to play a song on one string!



Notes on Several Strings

So now let's play the 1st string (high E / thinnest string) three times open.

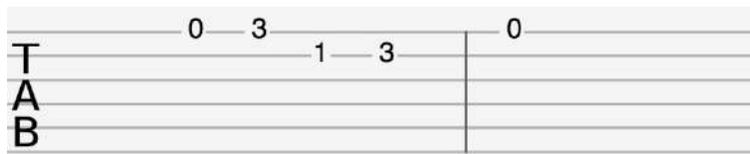
Repeat.



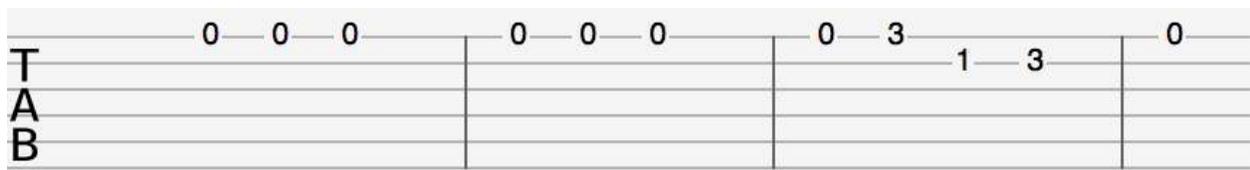
And now play the high E string open, then at the third fret.

And now the 2nd string (B string) at the first fret then third fret.

And finish by playing the 1st string (high E) open.



Congratulations. You have just played Jingle Bells - but really this is kinda cool because this is reading tab on two strings!

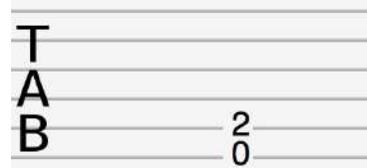


Playing Notes at the Same Time

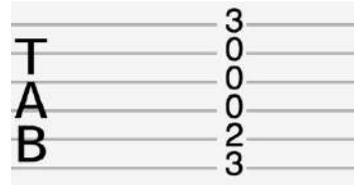
Up until now, we have played notes sequentially, meaning one then the next one after that.

But what if we want to play two notes at the same time?

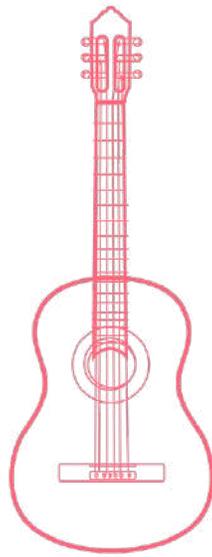
Well if we play the 6th string (low E) open and the 5th string (A) at the second fret - at the same time - then it looks like this



And if we wanted to show a G chord using tab, it would look like this.



Remember from the last section how to play a G chord. We fret the 6 string (or low E or thickest string) at the 3rd fret. Then we play the 5th string (A string) at the second fret. The 4th and 3rd strings (D and A) are open. Then we play the 6th string (the high E or thinnest string).



Section 2

The Basics

2.1 The Big Rule

The key to fingerpicking guitar is the right hand – and this is where we begin! We begin by learning *the Big Rule* – which determines which right-hand finger plays which string.

For the next few lessons, we will typically just fret one chord for the entire lesson. For this lesson, we will just fret the G chord with our left hand.

What is The Big Rule?

When you play guitar, you use two hands - the right hand frets chords or individual notes and the left hand hits the strings. When you play a chord, you strum all the strings at once. But when you fingerpick, each finger will hit individual strings.

In playing guitar with the fingers, there is one big rule:

- The thumb plays the bottom three strings (the bass strings which are the 6th, the 5th and the 4th) and it has ownership for any notes played on those three strings (the one nearest your head) and the other three fingers play one string each!
- If there is a note on the 6th, 5th or 4th string, the thumb must play it.
- The index finger always plays the G string or 3rd string.
- The middle finger always plays the B string or 2nd string.
- The ring finger always plays the high E string or 1st string.
- And that's it!

It sounds simple. It is simple! However, it will take a little bit of practice for those fingers to obey. In particular, in a rush to play what the brain is telling it, some students end up playing with one finger - because it is easier. Well, if you notice that, just make yourself practice using the correct fingers per string again. Here is a great exercise if you notice that happening.

One Finger Per String Exercise - Open Strings

What we will do now is play a G chord.

- The bass note is on the sixth string (low E string). Let's play that four times with the thumb (T)
- The G string is played by the index finger - let's play that four times
- The B string is played by the middle finger - let's play that four times.
- The high E string is played by the ring finger - let's play that four times.

It is really nice to play each of these notes four times. Because when you do so, it gives your mind some time to play and also to think about ‘am I using the right finger there?’.

So as a beginner, feel free to play this exercise a few times. If you think it’s really super easy, then try to speed it up. But the goal is to use the correct finger, rather than speed.

One Finger Per String Exercise - G chord

Now we fret the G chord with the left hand.

And we are going to leave it there for the rest of this lesson so once you have it fretted, your left hand has nothing more to do.

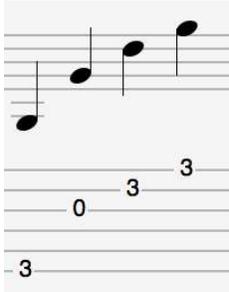
And then we do the same thing as before with the picking hand.

First play the thick string (6th) four times, then the third, second and first strings – each four times.

It looks like this:

Our First Pattern – T123

Let's play the same thing – but playing each string once now.

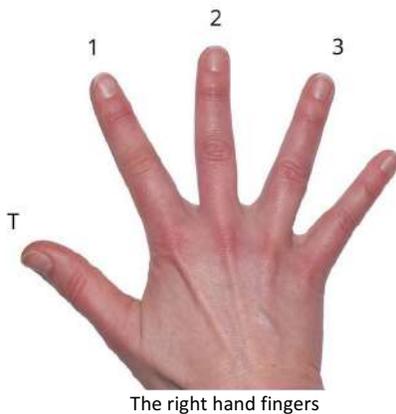


If you look at the fingers of the right hand (the picking hand) and you describe the order in which they play notes, you might describe it as “thumb, index finger, middle finger, ring finger”.

You could also describe it as “thumb, first finger, second finger, third finger” of the right hand and as a shorthand, we will refer to that as “thumb 1-2-3” or T123.

Note that this refers to which right hand finger you use. As the thumb covers three strings according to the Big Rule, you might also add which string the thumb is going to play. So you could describe the pattern above as T123 where the thumb plays the 6th string.

It is important to note that if I say T123 that I mean thumb, first **finger**, second **finger** and third **finger** – not thumb, first *string*, second *string*, third *string*.



If you think about this for just a second then it will make sense, and you will be clear for the rest of the course. We know from the Big Rule which string the first finger (index finger) will play for example. It's always the third string. Because of this, it is possible to not talk about which strings and just which fingers. As I said above, you might just make a note of which of three strings the thumb will play (and I will always tell you).

But once you know the finger pattern (and which note for the thumb), then you by default know which strings to play. This might be confusing at first, but don't spend too long puzzling over it. It will become obvious as we go if it isn't right now.

Note our focus is not on speed; rather we focus on using the correct fingers of the right hand and having a nice clean note! That's the most important thing.

Assignment 1

Play this pattern (exercise 2) for a few minutes until you are comfortable with it. Feel free to stick with just the G chord.

But try something new also with the right hand. Experiment! Do something different! Maybe it is to play the notes backwards (from highest E to the low E). Or maybe you play each note twice? Maybe you skip a note?

You could even try this pattern with other chords - you might notice it sounds great with other chords and sometimes not. Any idea why? We'll explain it in lesson 2, but it's worth thinking about...

2.2 - Fingerpicking over Two Chords

Last Assignment

So how did playing your first pattern go? Did you experiment a bit and try some new permutations? If you did, was that fun? Here's a question - when you started playing with other variations, did you keep using the designated right hand fingers per string? If so, awesome.

Sometimes we may notice as beginners that you start off playing each string with the right fingers but then if we relax our concentration, we find that one finger may take over. So for example, maybe the index finger tries to play all the strings!

This might be the easiest way to play something today but the problem is that if we want to play something complex or start to speed up, it's going to be impossible. So it's important that during the first week, we pay particular attention to using the Big Rule of which finger play which strings. Even at a really slow speed (like super slow!) if you are using the correct right hand fingers and thumb to hit the appropriate string, then I am happy.

If it was a bit difficult to keep the right finger hitting each string, go back and play exercise 1 again. That will iron that out for you, guaranteed! Play exercise 1 for a while and then go back to exercise 2 and see that the right fingers are being used!

The image shows a musical score for a fingerpicking exercise in 4/4 time. The score is written on a single treble clef staff. The time signature is 4/4. The piece is marked with a dynamic of *mf* (mezzo-forte). The exercise is divided into four measures, each labeled with a number 1, 2, 3, or 4 above the staff. Measure 1 contains four quarter notes, each with a stem pointing down, representing the strings of the guitar. Measure 2 contains four quarter notes, each with a stem pointing up. Measure 3 contains four quarter notes, each with a stem pointing down. Measure 4 contains four quarter notes, each with a stem pointing up. Below the treble staff, there are two bass staves. The first bass staff contains four '0' characters, one under each measure, indicating that the left hand is not fretting any strings. The second bass staff is empty.

Using a Metronome

The next thing we will do to help us practice is use a metronome. A metronome is just a tool that plays a solid beat, and our goal is to play along with one. I suggest that you buy one. This Snark metronome is nice and does the job but any metronome will do. If you don't have one, it's ok as you can play along with me when I'm using the metronome and that will be enough for now. But I'd recommend buying one anyway - it will be huge for your progress.

I use a Snark Metronome because it costs around \$20 and has different volumes which is great if you want to be able to practice sometimes a bit more loud and sometimes more softly if there are other people you don't want to disturb. There's also free online metronomes that you can use. They will work fine today if you don't have a physical metronome, but it means you need to turn it on and off at your computer or laptop and I prefer to be able to press a physical button.

Here is a link to a free online metronome - <https://www.metronomeonline.com/legacy>

Playing Exercise 2 with a Metronome

Let's start at 40 b.p.m.

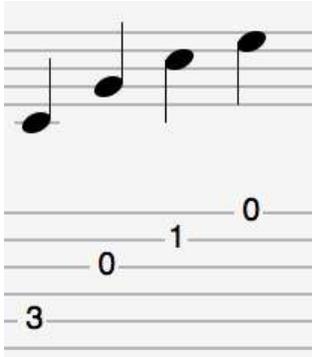


So try it yourself, play one note for each hit on the metronome. I'll let it play for a little while so that you can try that. So how did that feel? If it was too hard you can slow the metronome down even more. Or if it was too easy then you can speed it up! But for now, you just want to use the right fingers of the right hand and make a good connection. Speed will come in time, believe me!

Please don't skip this exercise. Playing something very slowly in time to a metronome and then upping the speed to a higher tempo and then to a higher tempo again is a really fundamental part of being able to play accurately in time. At the very least, play along at 60 bpm. It should sound pretty nice and we're using the right fingers of the right hand and it's a great start to building our fingerpicking technique, which will get pretty complex - but it all starts here.

Another Pattern

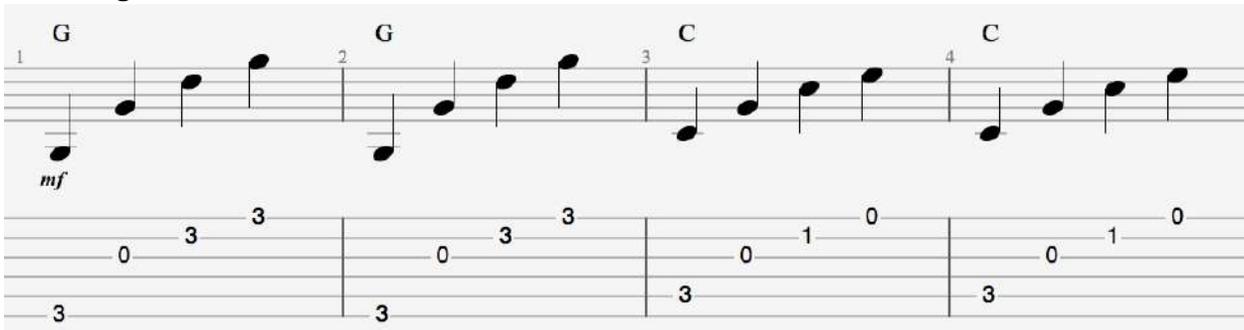
So now we are going to play a very similar pattern. Except now we're playing the C chord with our left hand. The one thing to note here is that the thumb hits a bass note on the fifth string.



Start slowly and make sure the right fingers are hitting the right strings.

Assignment 2

Your exercise is to play the G pattern above followed by the C pattern, If you know the chords well already, then your job is to think about the fingers of the right hand - are they sticking to the right strings? Is the thumb hitting the 6th string for the G bass note and the 5th string for the C bass note?



If you are completely new to guitar, then don't worry about this being difficult. It's great practice and I'm going to give you a great tip for how to change chords quickly in the next section. But don't go there yet! Spend 10-15 minutes trying to change chords and using the right fingers of the picking hand (left hand).

If you have done your 15 minutes homework and you want to mess around, try new things, experiment and see what sounds musical, feel free!

2.3 Other Patterns Over Two Chords

Last Assignment

I'm so excited to see you do that last exercise:

- We have two chords
- We are changing between them
- We are fingerpicking each chord
- We are using the thumb to play different bass notes on each chord

Now let's just consider for a second if you found that hard, your fingers wouldn't behave themselves and it was just tough to play it the way you wanted. Don't get frustrated! It's going to take some time. You can't just pick up the guitar and do everything, but I've three helpful tips and routines so that nobody gets left behind.

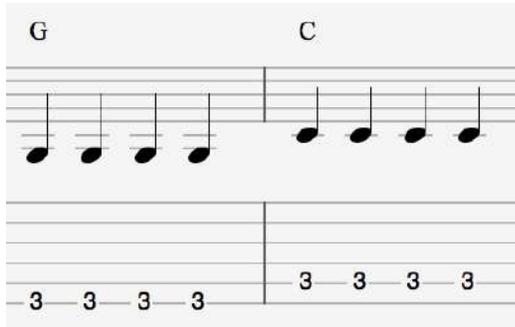
Assignment Help 1 - Big Rule Exercise

First question, did you stick to the Big Rule? If one finger started to play each string (instead of one per string) we play the exercise below, which we saw in the previous lesson. This will help here.

The image shows a musical score for a guitar exercise in 4/4 time. The score is divided into four measures. Measure 1: Four quarter notes on the 6th string (G), marked 'mf'. Measure 2: Four quarter notes on the 5th string (C). Measure 3: Four quarter notes on the 4th string (F). Measure 4: Four quarter notes on the 3rd string (G). The bass line is indicated by '0' on the 6th and 5th strings in measures 2, 3, and 4.

Assignment Help 2 - Thumb String Changing Exercise

Second question, how was it to play different bass notes with the thumb? We had one bass note on the 6th string and one bass note on the 5th string. It does take some practice and concentration. If it was really hard to master, here is an exercise that I would suggest the following exercise. Play your G chord with the left hand and then just hit the 6th string four times (with the right hand thumb). Then play your C chord and just hit the 5th string four times (with the right hand thumb). And repeat. Eventually the thumb should get used to the distance between the strings and like any practice - eventually it becomes second nature. You could be having a conversation with somebody and doing this! But in the early days, it takes some attention and conscious practice.

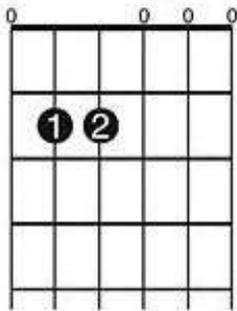


Assignment Help 3 - Easier Chord Changing Options

Third question, what if the changing of chords was too hard? Maybe once the chord was fretted, you were doing great. You could fingerpick away, and you could use the Big Rule and it was all fine. But when it came time to get to the C chord, it took a long time to get those fingers in place. Here's a little exercise in case the chord changing was hard.

If we look at an Em chord chart, it looks like this.

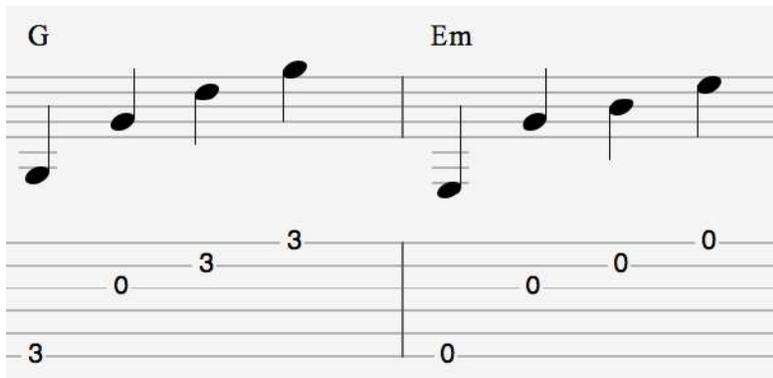
E Minor Chord



Now if we choose to play the 6th string then 3rd, 2nd, 1st strings of the Em chord, we might notice that all of those strings are strings that the left hand does not fret (they are called open strings for this chord).

What that means is that if you take your whole left hand away from the guitar and play the 6th, 3rd, 2nd, 1st strings (the left hand is not used at all) it sounds the same as when you play the Em chord.

So that gives us a really easy exercise. Play the G chord and do our last exercise and then take the left hand off the guitar (slightly off the fretboard) and play and then put the G chord back on with the left hand).



Up & Down Exercise in G

Our exercises so far have been in one direction - ascending.

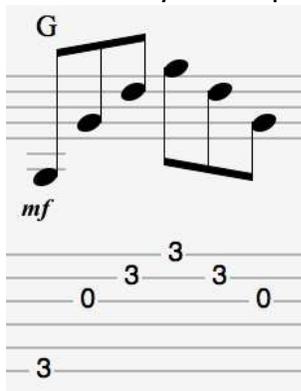
What I mean by that is that we started at the thumb and then each note was higher in pitch. Play them again and hum along and you'll see what I mean



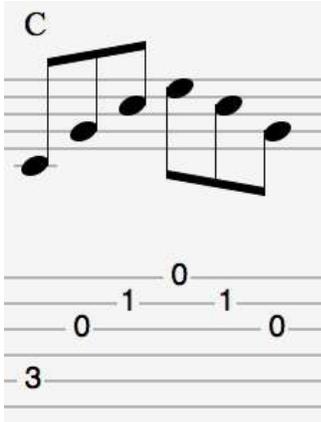
Now we want to play this again but add two notes - which looks like this. Fret a G chord. So you will play the bass note on the 6th string with your thumb. If we look at the right hand, play the 6th string with the thumb, then index, middle, ring, middle, index.

You could write that (right-hand) pattern like this: T-1-2-3-2-1

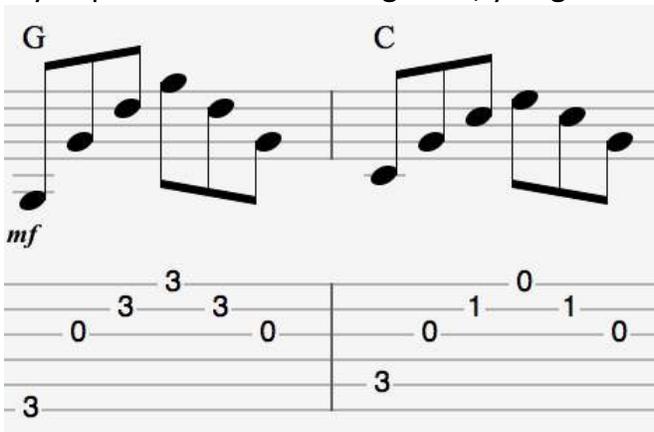
Now what you are playing looks like this:



Now we can try that in C. Note that the bass note for C is on the 5th string (you might remember that from the last section)



If you put those last two together, you get this



Assignment 3

This exercise above is your exercise for today.

But I want you to mess around with it. Honestly, the best way to master music is to learn something and then do as many different things with that as you can.

Play it with happy thoughts in your mind. Now play it with a sad feel.

Can you play it using different chords? Maybe get your Em in there, or your easy Em (taking the left hand off the guitar altogether).

Play with different permutations of G, C and Em and anything else you can think of. There are no right things to do, apart from enjoying yourself!

2.4 - The Backwards Pattern

Last Assignment

Let's have another look at the last exercise.

- You are really fingerpicking now - you have G, C and Em
- You are using different fingerpicking patterns
- You are playing the thumb on different bass notes

1 G 2 G 3 C 4 C

mf

0 3 3 | 0 3 3 | 0 1 0 | 0 1 0

3 3 3 3

Challenge

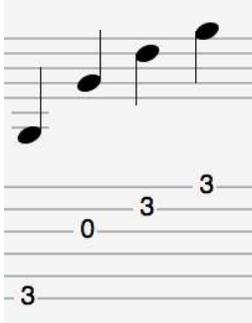
Either that exercise went really well, in case I'm going to challenge you to get your metronome back out and try to play it a little faster! Maybe from 60 bpm to 70 bpm. Playing each note cleanly and playing to the beat are the key. This is such a good exercise for you.

Or if it was tough, get your metronome out and try and play it at a really slow speed but using the correct fingers of the right hand (our Big Rule) and in time with that (slow) metronome beat. If it's taking some time to master, don't worry, it will come eventually.

A New Pattern - The Backwards Pattern

Recall the T123 pattern - one of the first we looked at. Here the thumb plays the 6th string (as we know now is the default bass note we play for our G chord with the thumb). And then we play index, middle, ring fingers.

We write this a T-1-2-3 (Thumb of right hand, first finger of right hand, second finger of right hand, third finger of right hand)



Now play those same four notes, but in a different order.



We write this as T-3-2-1.

(Thumb of right hand, third finger of right hand, second finger of right hand, first finger of right hand).

I love this pattern I use it myself a lot. It sounds so musical, with the bass followed by three notes that decrease in pitch.

I would advise just to play this for 2-3 minutes to get used to the feel of it.

Now play a T321 with a C chord. Notice the bass of the C chord (which we play with the thumb of the right hand) is on 5th string.

The image shows a musical score for a T321 pattern in C major. It consists of two measures. The first measure is labeled 'C' and the second is also labeled 'C'. The top staff shows the melody: a quarter note on the 5th string (C), followed by quarter notes on the 4th string (B), 3rd string (G), and 2nd string (F). The bottom staff shows the fretting: the 5th string has a '3' (third fret), the 4th string has a '0' (open), the 3rd string has a '1' (first fret), and the 2nd string has a '0' (open). This pattern is repeated in the second measure.

Now do the same pattern in E minor (written Em). The bass of Em is the low E string (the 6th string). The easy version of Em is when the left hand doesn't play anything.

The image shows a musical score for a T321 pattern in E minor. It consists of two measures, both labeled 'Em'. The top staff shows the melody: a quarter note on the 6th string (E), followed by quarter notes on the 5th string (D), 4th string (B), and 3rd string (G). The bottom staff shows the fretting: the 6th string has a '0' (open), the 5th string has a '0' (open), the 4th string has a '0' (open), and the 3rd string has a '0' (open). This pattern is repeated in the second measure.

Assignment

Play the T321 for at least 15 minutes.

Your exercise is to vary the chords as much as you can. One example could be this: Do the pattern in G twice then C twice then Em once then C once (for example).

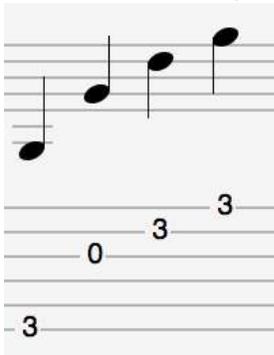
It's fine if you just want to change between G and C for now. But if you want to mess around with other chords and the length of time you spend in each chord, I think that would be fun!

2.5 - The PIMA Notation

For this lesson, we will focus a little bit on theory. This is just to take a little bit of a break from learning new patterns.

If you are serious about being a guitar fingerpicking you are going to want to be able to go out there and play music that you find online, in guitar magazines or through DVDs, so it is good to be familiar with the standard of notation used so that you can comfortably get and play music from other sources.

In the past we have played something like this and we have used the notation for the right hand as T-1-2-3 (thumb, then index, middle, ring of the right hand):



A Little Spanish

Another way to describe this is a PIMA notation.

In Spanish:

- Pulgar = Thumb
- Indecio = Index
- Medio = Middle
- Anular = Ring

So if you translated “thumb, index finger, middle finger, ring finger” into Spanish, you would get “Pulgar, Indecio, Medio, Anular”. And because the origins of fingerpicking are from that part of the world, that is now a well used standard.

Two PIMA Examples

TAB	NUMBER SYSTEM	PIMA SYSTEM
	T-1-2-3	P-I-M-A
	T-3-2-1	P-A-M-I

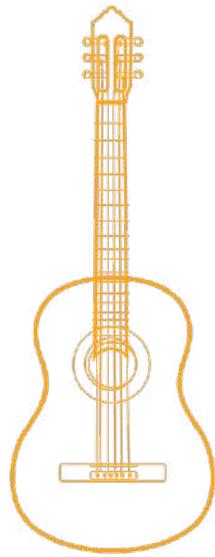
Here in the second example, it is what we practised in our last exercise. So you know how to play that.

Now it's simple - call the right hand pattern T-3-2-1 like we did.

Or call the right-hand pattern P-A-M-I if you wish.

Either way, they both describe the same order of strings you hit with right hand fingers.

I'm now going to return to our T123 notation for our next section. Why? Because students find it easier to follow! But it's always good to be aware of what other musical sources will use.



Section 3

The Thumb

3.1 - Alternating Bass Notes

One of the things that I really appreciated when I was first listening to guitar - one of the things that was really magical to me - was when I heard guitar players playing and I asked myself how many guitar players were playing on a record and it turned out that there was only one. I couldn't believe it. I was so excited. It made me want to learn guitar, to play guitar.

The way to get to this level with fingerpicking guitar is for the thumb playing baselines and the fingers playing melody lines so that they are almost independent of each other. That's why right now we are going to focus on the thumb. We are going to focus on how the thumb can choose which notes to play. This will make it sound like you are playing a bass line at the same time as you are playing all these other notes.

Alternating Bass On A G Chord

One great way to work on the thumb being independent is to give it a second note to play. Let the left hand just fret a G chord. And then with the right hand, we just play two notes with the thumb first the 6th string then the 5th string.

So the bass is going to go like this:

A musical staff for guitar showing a C chord. The top staff has four measures, each with a whole note on the 6th string. The notes are G2, F2, E2, and D2. The first measure is marked with a dynamic of *mf*. The bottom staff shows the fretting for the C chord: 3 on the 5th string, 2 on the 4th string, 3 on the 3rd string, and 2 on the 2nd string.

And then I am going to fill in the notes and play T123 (where T = thumb on 6th string) and then T123 (where T = thumb on the 5th string)

A musical staff for guitar showing a C chord with a melody line. The top staff has four measures, each with a quarter note on the 6th string followed by three eighth notes on the 5th, 4th, and 3rd strings. The notes are G2, F2, E2, and D2. The first measure is marked with a dynamic of *mf*. The bottom staff shows the fretting for the C chord: 3 on the 5th string, 2 on the 4th string, 3 on the 3rd string, and 2 on the 2nd string. The fretting for the melody line is indicated by numbers 0, 1, 0 on the 5th string and 0, 1, 0 on the 4th string.

So you can hear that the bass is alternating there between playing this note on the 6th and this notes on the 5th (this is called alternating bass). The great thing is that on the right hand you are just playing a G chord!
Let the fingerpicking fingers do the work and it sounds great

Exercise

Your exercise for today is to play this for 10-15 minutes.

If you have another 15 minutes, then take another chord (so the left hand just frets that - no need for chord changes) and then let the thumb play two notes (using either the 6th, 5th or 4th strings) and see how it sounds!

A good choice would be E minor (Em).

Try to figure out an alternating bass pattern that you can play on it!

In the next section, we will see what you did.

And give you some helpful pointers if you need some!

3.2 - Alternating Bass

Last Exercise - A Two Step Approach

How did you get on with the last exercise?

It may have been a challenge, so let's break it down.

The best way to approach this exercise (let's take C as an example) is:

- 1) Play two bass notes
- 2) Adding the notes with the fingers (filling it in) looks like this.

Musical notation for the first step of the exercise. The top staff shows a C major chord (C4, E4, G4) with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The bottom staff shows the bass line with fingerings: 3, 2, 3, 2.

Musical notation for the second step of the exercise. The top staff shows a C major chord (C4, E4, G4) with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The bottom staff shows the bass line with fingerings: 3, 2, 3, 2. The notes are filled in with a sequence of notes: C4, E4, G4, C4, E4, G4, C4, E4, G4, C4, E4, G4.

Alternate Bass with E Minor

Let's think for a second how you might approach playing alternate bass with a new chord (like E minor)?

First play the Em chord with the right hand.

Then, the rule is simple - any of the three bass strings you can hit with the thumb. (6th, 5th, 4th).

So do a T123 with any of these bass notes

And then a T123 with any other of these bass notes.

I'm going to choose the 6th string and the 5th string as my bass notes.

Musical notation for the E minor (Em) chord. The top staff shows the chord structure with fingerings: 2 on the 6th string, 3 on the 5th string, and 4 on the 4th string. The bottom staff shows two alternate bass lines: the first line has a thumb (T) on the 6th string (0) followed by a T123 pattern on the 5th string (2, 0, 2); the second line has a thumb (T) on the 5th string (0) followed by a T123 pattern on the 6th string (2, 0, 2). The dynamic marking *mf* is present.

And then I fill in with the fingers (doing a 1-2-3 or index-middle-ring finger picking)

Musical notation for the E minor (Em) chord with finger picking. The top staff shows two measures of finger picking: measure 1 has notes on the 4th, 5th, and 6th strings (1-2-3), and measure 2 has notes on the 6th, 5th, and 4th strings (1-2-3). The bottom staff shows the chord structure with fingerings: 0 on the 4th string, 0 on the 5th string, and 2 on the 6th string. The dynamic marking *mf* is present.

Three Patterns

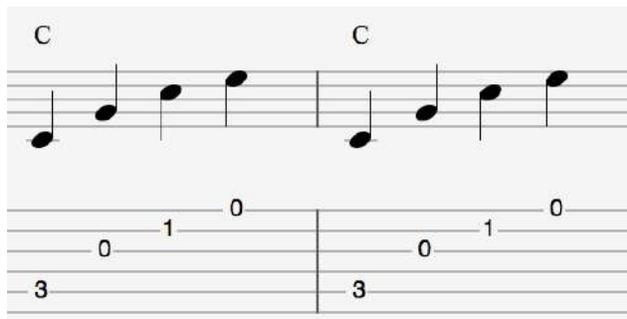
So there are three patterns I would like to share with you and the best way to get familiar with them is just to play them first.

The first one is on a **D chord**.

The bass note here is on the 4th string which the thumb will play (because the thumb always plays our bass notes!) and we get a T123



The second one is on a **C chord**. The bass note here is on the 5th string and we play T123



The third one is on a **G chord**. The bass note here is on the 6th string and we play T123T123



You might notice that these three patterns are very similar.

They are the same apart from the bass notes - which was on the 4th string for D pattern, 5th string for C pattern and 6th string for G pattern.

Exercise

Your exercise for today is to play these three patterns back to back (i.e. one after another)
It is going to sound like this.

The image shows a musical exercise on a six-string guitar. It consists of three measures, each representing a different chord: D, C, and G. The top staff shows the notes for each chord: D (D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4), C (C3, E3, G3, A3, B3, C4), and G (G2, B2, D3, F3, G3, B3). The bottom staff shows the fretting patterns for each chord: D (0, 2, 3, 2, 0, 0), C (3, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0), and G (3, 0, 3, 3, 0, 0).

Assignment

Try playing T123 using 2 chords that have a 6th string bass.
Playing T123 over E and G would be one example of this.

As a bonus, try changing from E to A with a T123.

Note that the thumb plays the 6th string bass over E and a 5th string bass over A!

3.3 - Goes Both Ways

Last Exercise

Our assignment was to play the T123 pattern over E and G (both 6th note bass chords)

The image shows a musical exercise on a six-string guitar. It consists of two measures. The first measure is for an E chord (6th fret bass) and the second is for a G chord (6th fret bass). The melody is written on the treble clef staff, and the fretting is indicated on the strings below. The notes in the E measure are G#2, A2, B2, and C3. The notes in the G measure are G2, A2, B2, and C3. The fretting for the E measure is: 1st string (0), 2nd string (1), 3rd string (0), 4th string (0). The fretting for the G measure is: 1st string (0), 2nd string (3), 3rd string (3), 4th string (3).

What about the E to A exercise?

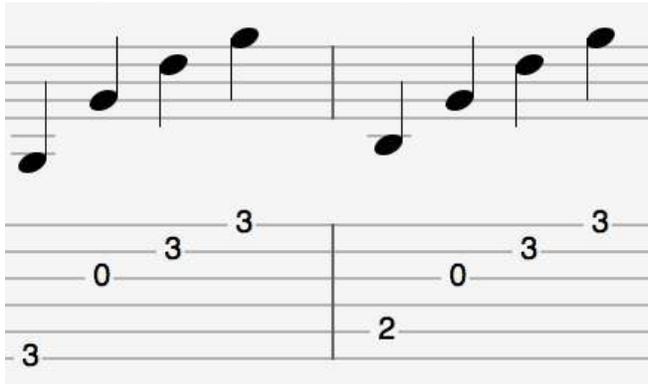
We have a 6th string bass note on E and a 5th string bass note on A. Putting those together, we get this:

The image shows a musical exercise on a six-string guitar. It consists of two measures. The first measure is for an E chord (6th fret bass) and the second is for an A chord (5th fret bass). The melody is written on the treble clef staff, and the fretting is indicated on the strings below. The notes in the E measure are G#2, A2, B2, and C3. The notes in the A measure are G#2, A2, B2, and C3. The fretting for the E measure is: 1st string (0), 2nd string (1), 3rd string (0), 4th string (0). The fretting for the A measure is: 1st string (0), 2nd string (2), 3rd string (2), 4th string (0).

That sounds great.

The E to A change is one you might hear a lot in the future. If you are playing blues in the key of E, then you will use the A chord. To play a full 12 bar blues you need another chord which we haven't covered yet but worth just mentioning now that E and A are good chords together.

Let's try something new where we are going to play two bass notes over a G chord. You might remember we play this:



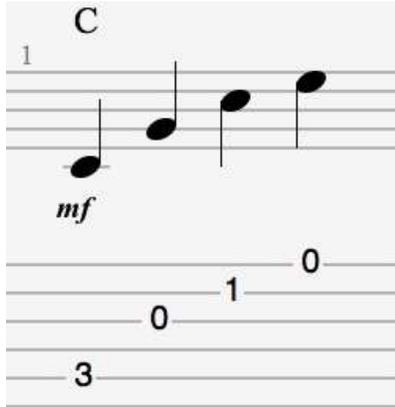
Now we do it with a slight twist. And we play it like this T123 (thumb on 5th string) and **then** T123 (thumb on 6th string)



It's quite a different sound. It's quite interesting to see what the difference when we start with a higher note and then play a lower one.

Let's take another example - Let's play a C chord.

It's a 5th string chord - the bass note is played with the thumb on the 5th string.

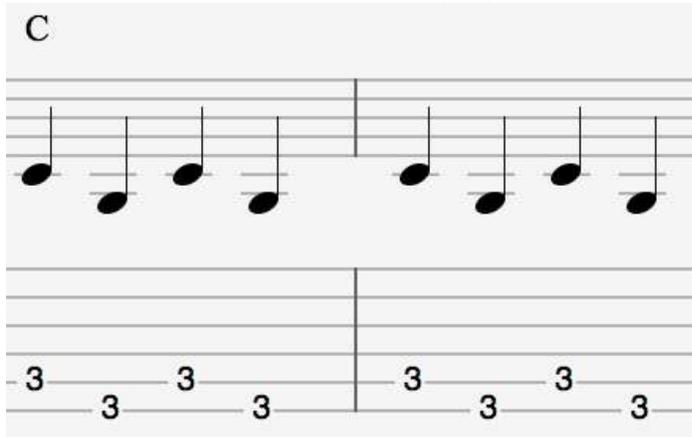


A Little Trick with the C Chord

Now we're going to do a little trick.

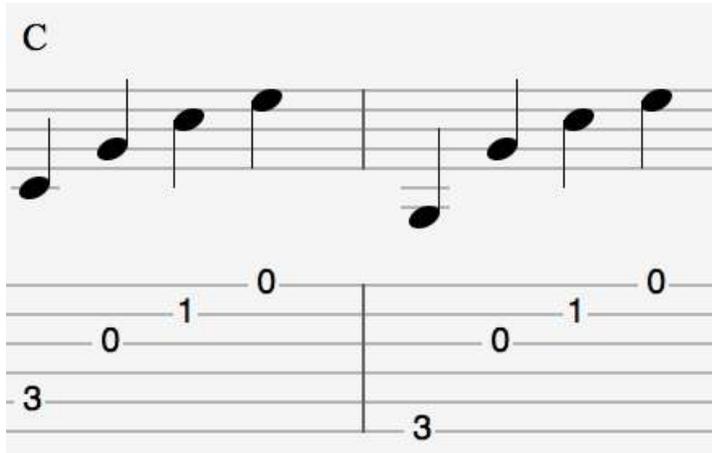
We're going to take the third finger of the left hand and move him up a string (from the 5th string to the 6 string) and keep the rest of the left hand fingers fretting the C chord and not leaving the fretboard. So the first finger and second finger stay holding down strings and the third finger moves up and down the 5th and 6th strings.

Leave the C chord fretted. Just play the thumb part of this for a minute or two.



You can probably guess what comes next - we add the 123 part.

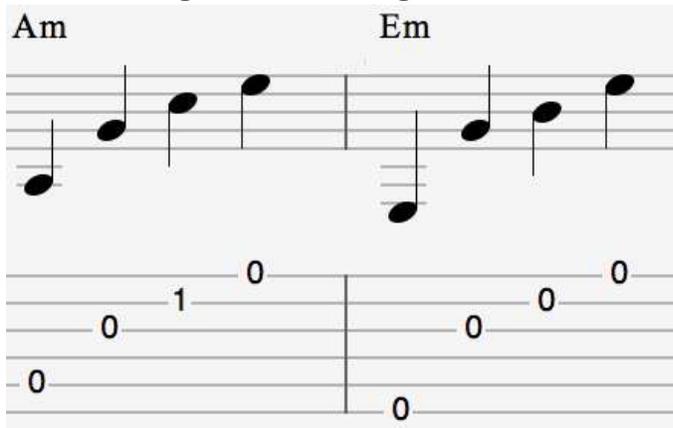
When we do, it sounds like this.



If that sounds a little bit like Simon & Garfunkel's the Boxer, that's because it is indeed more or less the pattern of that intro. It is a chord and pattern that you will hear in lots of songs.

A Pattern in A minor to E minor

We take an A minor (thumb is on the 5th string) and an E minor (thumb on 6th string) Put those together. Sounds good.



Putting It Together

You might notice that both exercises have thumb on 5th then thumb on 6th.

The first Simon & Garfunkely one and then the second which has two different chords.

Putting that together you get.

The image shows a musical score for a guitar exercise. It consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 4/4 time signature. The exercise is divided into four measures, each with a different chord: C, Am, Am, and Em. The notes are: C (C4, E4, G4), Am (A3, C4, E4), Am (A3, C4, E4), and Em (E3, G3, Bb3). The notes are played in a sequence of quarter notes. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six lines. The first line (high E) has fret numbers 0, 1, 0. The second line (D) has fret numbers 0, 1, 0. The third line (G) has fret numbers 0, 1, 0. The fourth line (B) has fret numbers 0, 0, 0. The fifth line (D) has fret numbers 3, 3, 0. The sixth line (low E) has fret numbers 0, 0, 0. The dynamic marking *mf* is placed below the first measure.

This is sounding quite musical. You can see the thumb there on both parts was doing 5th string then 6th string, going the “other way” from a higher bass note to a lower note. The whole thing is starting to sound great right now.

Exercise

The exercise is just to play this exercise for a good 15-20

Getting that thumb feeling like its moving and hitting the right string and moving independently.

If you find it difficult, don't worry as we'll give you some help in the next section.

But give it a go, and if you get the hang of it, start to play around and experiment and have fun as always...

3.4 - Walking Bass

Last Exercise

How did you get on with the last exercise?

If it was really difficult, here's a tip - just isolate the bass.

So if I were playing that exercise from yesterday

Musical notation for a walking bass exercise. The top staff shows a melody line with four measures. The first measure is labeled 'C', the second 'Am', and the third 'Em'. The bottom staff shows the bass line with fingering: 0 1 0, 0 1 0, 0 1 0, 0 0 0. A dynamic marking 'mf' is present.

If it wasn't going well, then I would play just the bass for a couple of minutes

Musical notation for a walking bass exercise focusing on the bass line. The top staff shows a melody line with four measures. The first measure is labeled 'C', the second 'Am', and the third 'Em'. The bottom staff shows the bass line with fingering: 3 3 3 3, 0 0 0 0.

Then go back to playing it all again.

This is a great tip in general as you try to master fingerpicking pieces.

Take some time to play just the thumb parts and then revert to playing it all.

Passing Notes and Walking the Bass

Moving on to today's lesson on passing notes

We want to talk about getting more movement in the bass.

If you watch a bass player, they will play some in-between notes in between the chord changes they are playing over.

Let's say I am playing Am to C.

If I look at the bass notes, it is the 5th string open (for Am) and 5th string at the third fret (for C).

So a bass player would often play a note in between

If you go straight

Musical notation showing a straight bass line from Am to C. The Am section has four notes on the 5th string (open, 1st, 2nd, 3rd fret). The C section has four notes on the 5th string (3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th fret). The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 3/4 time signature. The Am section is labeled 'Am' and the C section is labeled 'C'. The fret numbers are 0 0 0 0 for Am and 3 3 3 3 for C. A '36' is written above the first note of the C section.

If you put in an intermediate note, it gives a much better sense of movement.

Musical notation showing a walking bass line from Am to C. The Am section has five notes on the 5th string (open, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th fret). The C section has four notes on the 5th string (3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th fret). The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 3/4 time signature. The Am section is labeled 'Am' and the C section is labeled 'C'. The fret numbers are 0 0 0 0 2 for Am and 3 3 3 3 for C. A '5' is written above the first note of the Am section. A blue arrow points to the 2nd fret note in the Am section.

You don't stay on this intermediate note for very long, it is more of a passing note, it's on the way to where we are going. When we have a lot of movement like that in the bass, it feels like a walking bass. It feels like the bass is just walking along!

Passing Note in Am to C

Playing in Am to C - as part of the change we put in a middle note like this:

The image shows a musical score for a guitar. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has four measures, each labeled with a chord: Am, C, Em, and G. The Am measure contains a sequence of notes: A2, C3, E3, G3, A3, with a slur over the last two notes. The C measure contains a sequence of notes: C3, E3, G3, A3. The Em measure contains a sequence of notes: E2, G2, B2, D3, with a slur over the last two notes. The G measure contains a sequence of notes: G2, B2, D3, E3. The second system shows the fretting for each measure: Am (0 0 0 0 2), C (3 3 3 3), Em (0 0 0 0 2), and G (3 3 3 3).

Let me break that down for you into three parts:

- T123 in A minor
- Then open, 2nd fret, 3rd fret on the fifth string (A string) - all hit by the thumb.
- T123 in C

You might recognize this song as similar to the House of the Rising Sun, a classic song that we will look at later.

Passing Note in Em to G

We have a similar option to introduce a passing note where we change between the chords of Em and G

Em is a 6th string chord (thumb on 6th)

Then G is a 6th string chord. (thumb also on 6th)

So you have the opportunity to play that 2nd fret in the middle.

The image shows a musical score for a guitar. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has two measures, each labeled with a chord: Em and G. The Em measure contains a sequence of notes: E2, G2, B2, D3, with a slur over the last two notes. The G measure contains a sequence of notes: G2, B2, D3, E3, with a slur over the last two notes. The second system shows the fretting for each measure: Em (0 0 0 0 2) and G (3 3 3 3).

Exercise

Your exercise is to play the two changes:

- 1) Am to C
- 2) Em to G

And to practice putting those middle notes in.

Play both of these for 10 minutes each.

And then to try to put the two of those changes together

Doing that might sound like this:

The image shows a musical exercise on a six-line staff. The top staff contains a melody line with four measures. The first measure is labeled 'Am' and contains a half note G2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. The second measure is labeled 'C' and contains a half note C3, a quarter note D3, a quarter note E3, and a quarter note F3. The third measure is labeled 'Em' and contains a half note G2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. The fourth measure is labeled 'G' and contains a half note G2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. Below the melody line is a bass line with four measures. The first measure has a thumb note (0) and a bass note (0). The second measure has a thumb note (0) and a bass note (3). The third measure has a thumb note (0) and a bass note (0). The fourth measure has a thumb note (0) and a bass note (3). The dynamic marking 'mf' is placed below the first measure of the bass line.

A Review: Where We Are Now

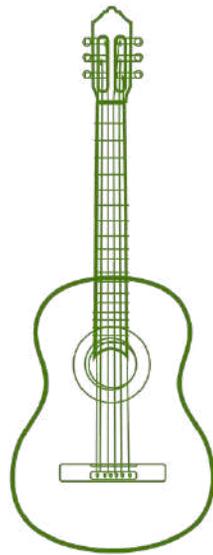
And feel good about what we are playing now.

We have gone from just fretting the chord and fingerpicking certain notes of the chord into actually playing bass notes now that are not part of the chord.

Now your thumb will play things that actually sound much more like a bass player playing.

As we try to go to that sound of two guitars playing at once - all played by you (one guitar player), then freeing up the thumb to play baselines like this is a huge part of that. I'm really excited for you to spend some time on this technique and master it.

In the next two sections, we are going to put it all together and learn two new songs that put together all of the various techniques that we have learned thus far. Can't wait to see you then.



Section 4

The Fingers

4.1 Finger Pattern 1

In the last section, we learned many ways of using the Thumb (alternate bass, passing bass notes and different bass patterns). The goal was to develop our thumb playing so that later we can play bass ideas similar to what a bass player might play.

We now focus on the other fingers of the right hand (index, middle and ring finger). Building on the thumb work we did in the last section, we can now investigate patterns that use these fingers in different ways.

We will start with the D chord. Here is something we played in the last section. Note the thumb plays the 4th string and we have a T123 pattern.

How can we make this more interesting?

The image shows a musical staff for a D chord. The notes are G4, F#4, E4, and D4. The dynamics are marked *mf*. The fingerings for the right hand are indicated by numbers 0, 2, 3, and 2 below the notes. The left hand fingering is 0.

T213 Pattern in D

Keeping the thumb the same, we can change the order of the right-hand fingers. Let's see what it would look like if we played T213 instead (where we use the right hand thumb, right-hand middle finger, right-hand index finger then finally right-hand ring finger).

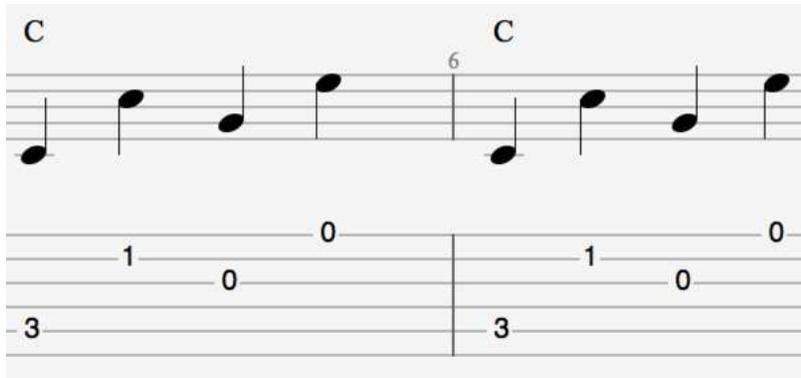
The image shows two measures of musical notation for a D chord. The notes are G4, F#4, E4, and D4. The fingerings for the right hand are indicated by numbers 3, 2, 2, and 2 in the first measure, and 3, 2, 2, and 2 in the second measure. The left hand fingering is 0 in both measures.

Because we have played mostly T123 patterns up until now, this example requires different muscle memory and may take some practice. But it's worth sticking with, and if you play it for a few days will become second nature and no problem at all.

T213 Pattern in C

We now adapt the T213 pattern and adapt it to a C chord.

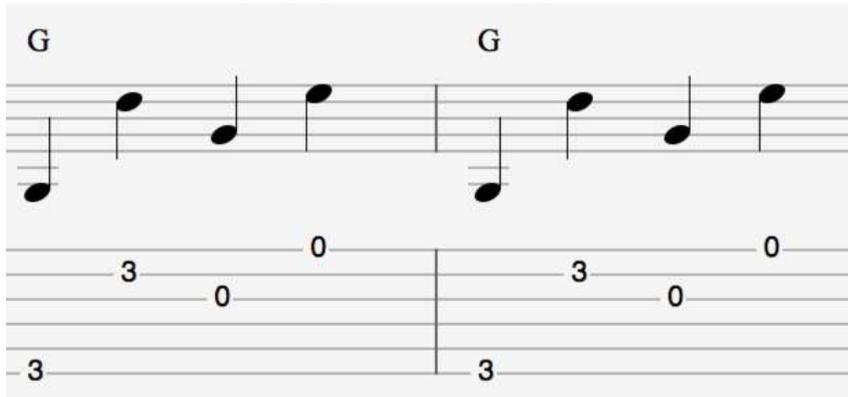
Note the thumb playing the 5th string (as is the default for a C chord as we saw in the last section).



T213 Pattern in G

Now we adapt the T213 to a G chord.

Note the thumb playing the 6th string (as is the default for a G chord).



Exercise

Play T213 in D, then C then G. You are going to therefore have the 4th string bass, then 5th string bass and then 6th string bass.

The image shows a musical exercise on a six-string guitar. It consists of three measures, each labeled with a chord: D, C, and G. The notation includes a melody line with notes and a bass line with fret numbers. The D measure has a melody of D4, E4, F#4, G4 and a bass line of 0, 3, 2, 2. The C measure has a melody of C4, D4, E4, F4 and a bass line of 3, 1, 0, 0. The G measure has a melody of G3, A3, B3, C4 and a bass line of 3, 0, 0.

Exercise

Your exercise is to play this for 10-15 minutes. Feel free to try it with different chords, feel free to play it faster or slower or to even try to make it sound 'happy' or 'sad'. Play with it and make it your own and we'll examine your progress in the next section.

4.2 - Finger Pattern 2

Last Assignment

Were fingers were behaving themselves during that last assignment? It does take some time for the right hand fingers to 'open up' so if you haven't got it yet, just slow down and keep practicing!

Let us now learn a new pattern -T132.
We can play this on C, then G, then Am.

T132 in C

In C, it sounds like this. (Bass note on the 5th string for C)

Musical notation for T132 in C. The notation shows two measures of music on a six-string guitar. The first measure is labeled 'C' and the second measure is labeled 'C' with a '14' above it, indicating a barre. The notes are: C4 (5th string, 3rd fret), D4 (4th string, 2nd fret), E4 (4th string, 1st fret), and F4 (4th string, 0th fret). The bass line consists of three notes: C3 (5th string, 3rd fret), D3 (4th string, 2nd fret), and E3 (4th string, 1st fret). The fingerings are: 3, 0, 0, 1 for the first measure and 3, 0, 0, 1 for the second measure.

T132 in G

In G, it sounds like this (Bass note on the 6th string for G)

Musical notation for T132 in G. The notation shows two measures of music on a six-string guitar. The first measure is labeled 'G' and the second measure is labeled 'G'. The notes are: G2 (6th string, 3rd fret), A2 (5th string, 2nd fret), B2 (5th string, 1st fret), and C3 (5th string, 0th fret). The bass line consists of three notes: G2 (6th string, 3rd fret), A2 (5th string, 2nd fret), and B2 (5th string, 1st fret). The fingerings are: 3, 0, 3, 3 for the first measure and 3, 0, 3, 3 for the second measure.

T132 in A minor

In A minor (often written Am), it sounds like this. (Bass note on the 5th string for Am)

The image shows two measures of musical notation for the T132 exercise in A minor. The first measure is labeled 'Am' and the second measure is labeled 'Am' with a '18' above it. The notation consists of a treble clef staff with a single bass note on the 5th line (A) in each measure, and a guitar fretboard diagram below. The fretboard diagram shows the 6th, 5th, and 4th strings. In the first measure, the 6th string is at 0, the 5th string is at 2, and the 4th string is at 1. In the second measure, the 6th string is at 0, the 5th string is at 2, and the 4th string is at 1.

Exercise

If we put all those together, it sounds like this.

Note the thumb will play bass notes on 5th string, 6th string, 5th string.

The image shows three measures of musical notation for an exercise sequence. The first measure is labeled 'C', the second 'G', and the third 'Am'. The notation consists of a treble clef staff with a single bass note on the 5th line (C) in the first measure, a single bass note on the 4th line (G) in the second measure, and a single bass note on the 5th line (A) in the third measure. The guitar fretboard diagram below shows the 6th, 5th, and 4th strings. In the first measure, the 6th string is at 0, the 5th string is at 0, and the 4th string is at 1. In the second measure, the 6th string is at 0, the 5th string is at 3, and the 4th string is at 3. In the third measure, the 6th string is at 0, the 5th string is at 2, and the 4th string is at 1.

Now you can hear some nice 'movement' in the melody - it is not always going 'up' and 'down' like T123 sounds. So you get a really nice feel when playing this.

Exercise

Your exercise is to play this for 15 minutes, and maybe try it also with some other chords? Or try with these chords in different order? Play this pattern until it feels comfortable and you can play it naturally.

4.3 Finger Patterns 3

T232

Let us now learn a new pattern –T232.

Here you may notice that we don't use the '1' at all. There is no rule that says we have to! This pattern will soon feel comfortable if you play it a couple of days in a row for 20 or 30 minutes!

Don't lose heart if something feels awkward. This shows that we are doing the work - we are building dexterity and flexibility. Your fingers are literally in the gym and after all this training, the future is that you'll be able to see a piece of fingerpicking music and your fingers can play it whatever it is.

T232 in D

It looks like this:



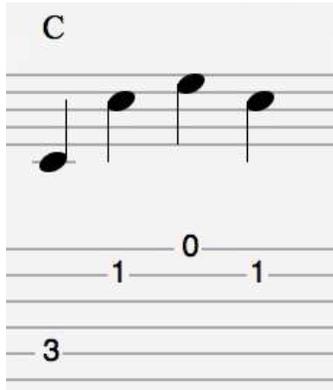
T232 in A

Note the thumb plays bass is on the 5th string



T232 in C

Note the thumb plays bass is on the 5th string



T232 in G

Note the thumb plays bass is on the 6th string

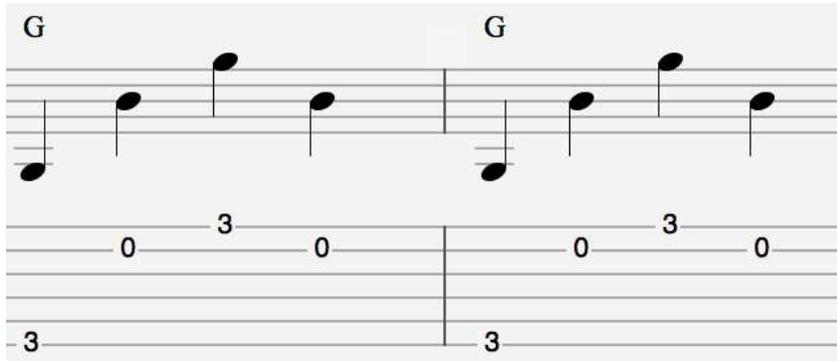


A new type of G chord

I want to introduce you to a different type of G chord (a different voicing of the G chord).

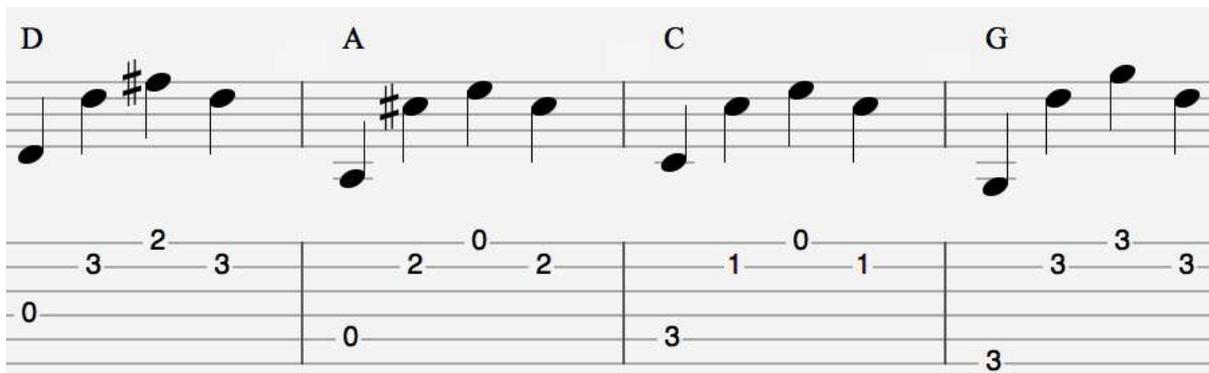
The G chord we have used up until now that had the left hand ring finger playing the 2nd string at the third fret. If you just take the left hand ring finger off the fretboard (meaning the 2nd string or B string is open), then it is still a G chord!

The same pattern played with an open 5th string looks like this. Either G pattern will do. Play both and see which one you prefer.



Exercise

Lets put each of the four T232 pattern from this lesson together so that you are playing T232 over four different chords.



Review

It's a good moment to look at how far we have come:

- We are changing between four different chords
- We are playing a T232 pattern in each
- We are playing the bass note is on different strings for each chord

Nice work. The exercise is to play this for 15-20 minutes and as always, it's a great idea to try this pattern on different chords. But make sure you master this exercise first!

4.4 Six Note Sequences

Until now, we have played sequences or repeating patterns of notes that are four notes long. For example, T123 is a bass note played with the thumb then three notes with the fingers; four in total.

We want to expand our patterns a little bit more by experimenting with the length of the pattern. Rather than our pattern being four notes long, we want to play patterns that are six notes long.

Six Notes: T12323

Let's start with T12123.

This is a thumb playing a bass note then five notes with the fingers

Let's play it in D

Musical notation for a six-note sequence in D major. The notes are D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, and B4. The sequence is played in a single breath, indicated by a slur. The notes are: D4 (thumb), E4 (index), F#4 (middle), G4 (ring), A4 (pinky), and B4 (thumb). The dynamic marking is *mf*. The fingering is: 0 2 3 2 3 2.

Now let's play it in C.

Musical notation for a six-note sequence in C major. The notes are C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, and A4. The sequence is played in a single breath, indicated by a slur. The notes are: C4 (thumb), D4 (index), E4 (middle), F4 (ring), G4 (pinky), and A4 (thumb). The dynamic marking is *mf*. The fingering is: 3 0 1 0 1 0.

We can put D and C together and see what that pattern sounds like.

The image shows musical notation for two chords, D and C, with a six-note pattern. The D chord is on the left, and the C chord is on the right. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The six-note pattern is shown in the bass line below the chords. The pattern for the D chord is 0 2 3 2 3 2, and the pattern for the C chord is 0 1 0 1 0. The bass line is shown on a five-line staff with a 3 on the bottom line.

And it sounds really nice.

Create Your Own 6 Note Pattern

And we can create a new six note pattern by playing a bass note with the thumb then any other five notes with the fingers.

Let's have a look at T13232 for example, over the D and C chords

The image shows musical notation for two chords, D and C, with a T13232 pattern. The D chord is on the left, and the C chord is on the right. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The T13232 pattern is shown in the bass line below the chords. The pattern for the D chord is 0 2 3 2 3 2, and the pattern for the C chord is 0 1 0 1 0. The bass line is shown on a five-line staff with a 3 on the bottom line.

Exercise

Your exercise for today is to play this pattern in D, C and G and make sure it sounds good - nice clean notes and keep the rhythm.

4.5 Create Your Own Fingerpicking Sequences

Last Exercise

If you tried to do the six note T-1-2-3-2-3 pattern over the chords D then C then G, it would look like this:

The image shows a musical score for a fingerpicking exercise. It consists of three measures, each corresponding to a different chord: D, C, and G. The notation is written on a six-line staff. The first measure is for the D chord (D4, F#4, A4, B4), the second for the C chord (C4, E4, G4), and the third for the G chord (G3, B3, D4). The notes are played in a sequence: T (thumb), 1 (index), 2 (middle), 3 (ring), 2 (middle), 3 (ring). Below the staff, the fretting for each measure is indicated by numbers 0-3 on the strings. The first measure has fretting 0, 2, 2, 3, 2, 3. The second measure has fretting 0, 0, 1, 0, 1. The third measure has fretting 0, 3, 3, 3, 3.

Create Your Own Fingerpicking Sequences

Today I want to talk to you about something that is revolutionary for your learning, and indeed your guitar enjoyment.

I have done this with many students and it has always had a fantastic response.

I will give you a formula so you can make up your own fingerpicking patterns.

It is a simple formula.

You take your numbers 1, 2 and 3 and make a sequence of digits that is either 3, 5 or 7 digits long.

So 3-2-1 is a sequence of length three.

And 2-3-2-3-1 is a sequence of length five.

And 1-3-2-3-1-3-2 is a sequence of length seven.

If you do that, then you play a thumb and then you play the pattern you have written down and then the fingers will play whatever pattern you have written down.

I highly recommend that you go and do this right now. Pause the tape and then

I am going to illustrate this by inventing my own pattern that is five long.

And I'm going to do 1-3-2-3-2 (see it is five numbers long).

So I add the thumb T-1-3-2-3-2.

And I choose a chord of Am.

Am

Play the same fingering pattern now over the chord of C

C

And then back to Am and putting them together you get

Assignment

- Get a pen and paper out
- Make some lists where you jumble up the numbers 1, 2 and 3
- Make it three, five or seven numbers long
- Add the thumb before the number pattern you have written down.
- Choose some chords to play this pattern on. Am and C could be nice. But try others too

Do this for at least two patterns.

4.6 - Pinching

Welcome back and today we are going to talk about a really cool technique called “Pinching”.

I want you to think about a guitar player and bass player playing in a room together. Sometimes they will be playing different notes. But sometimes they will also play the same note at the same time, at the start of a bar for example.

So if you want to get that sound of two guitars playing at once (or a guitar player and bass player playing together), then we need to be able to play a bass note and also other higher notes at the same time.

If you look at me playing this G chord - playing the bass note on 6th string and playing the 3rd finger, then when I play it and you look at my hands, it looks a bit like pinching something.

Let’s illustrate this in G – taking the 3212 pattern.

G

mf

3 0 0 3 | 3 0 0 3

Now we add a G bass note at the start of each bar:

G

mf

3 0 0 3 | 3 0 0 3

3 3

Do the same with the chord of C
This will be the same finger pattern of 3-2-1-2

C

Musical notation for the C chord pattern on the first four strings. The notation consists of two measures. The first measure contains four quarter notes: C4 (open), D4 (first fret), E4 (second fret), and F4 (third fret). The second measure contains four quarter notes: G4 (third fret), A4 (fourth fret), B4 (fifth fret), and C5 (fifth fret). The fretboard diagram below shows the fingerings: 0, 1, 0, 1 for the first measure and 0, 1, 0, 1 for the second measure.

Add the C bass note (thumb plays fifth string):

C

Musical notation for the C chord pattern including the bass note. The notation consists of two measures. The first measure contains five quarter notes: C3 (open), C4 (open), D4 (first fret), E4 (second fret), and F4 (third fret). The second measure contains five quarter notes: G4 (third fret), A4 (fourth fret), B4 (fifth fret), C5 (fifth fret), and C4 (open). The fretboard diagram below shows the fingerings: 0, 1, 0, 1 for the first measure and 0, 1, 0, 1 for the second measure. The fifth string is played with the thumb, indicated by the number 3.

Now let's play those two patterns back to back

G C

Musical notation for playing the G and C chord patterns back to back. The notation consists of four measures. The first two measures are for the G chord pattern: the first measure has G2 (open), G3 (open), A3 (second fret), B3 (third fret), and C4 (third fret); the second measure has D4 (third fret), E4 (fourth fret), F4 (fifth fret), G4 (fifth fret), and G3 (open). The last two measures are for the C chord pattern: the third measure has C3 (open), C4 (open), D4 (first fret), E4 (second fret), and F4 (third fret); the fourth measure has G4 (third fret), A4 (fourth fret), B4 (fifth fret), C5 (fifth fret), and C4 (open). The fretboard diagram below shows the fingerings: 3, 0, 0, 3 for the first measure; 3, 0, 0, 3 for the second measure; 0, 1, 0, 1 for the third measure; and 0, 1, 0, 1 for the fourth measure. The fifth string is played with the thumb, indicated by the number 3.

Review

That's a really nice-sounding, musical example.

The thumb plays the 6th string over G and the 5th string over C.

We have a nice pattern of 3-2-1-2 with the fingers.

And we're adding some pinching on top of these.

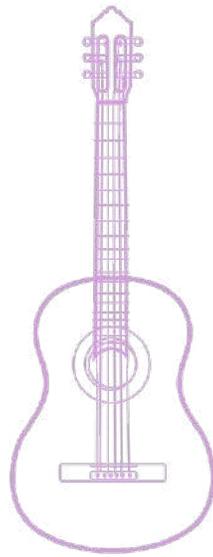
Exercise

Practice this for a while.

I also encourage you to try the same exercise but in other chords of your choice!

If you're stuck for inspiration, then what about Am and C as a suggestion?

Lots to practice, see you in the next lesson.



Section 5

Advanced Techniques

5.1 - Travis Picking

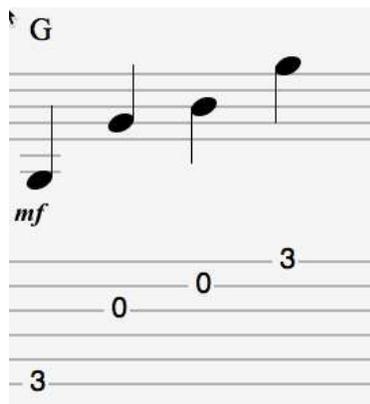
In this section, the really fun stuff begins!

Everything you have learned up until now allows us to dive into more advanced techniques such as Travis picking and the Clawhammer style.

To play these styles effectively, we begin with the thumb and focus on the steady rhythm of the thumb playing alternate bass.

A Simple Exercise

We will begin with a simple pattern in G. We will then add layer by layer until we have constructed a Travis picking style. For this simple pattern, the thumb plays the 6th string and the other fingers play a string each.

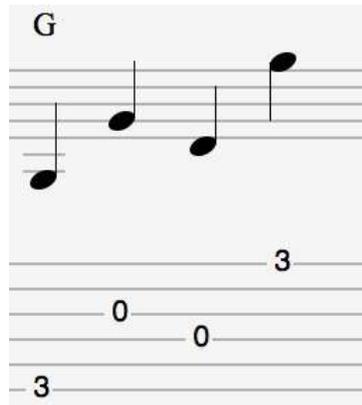


Using the Thumb Twice

Now instead of playing T123, let's use the thumb twice.

Let's play "thumb index finger" and then "thumb third finger" which we could write as T1 then T3.

The first time the thumb will play the 6th string. The second time it plays the 4th string.



Take a few minutes to play that until it feels comfortable. This is a little different to what we have played in previous lessons so it will take a bit of time to feel natural.

The main difference between this and the simple exercise above is that the thumb is playing two notes out of four and therefore it must jump between the 6th string and the 4th string.

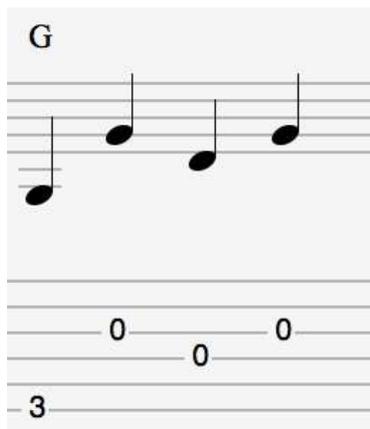
Watching The Thumb

You might remember our big rule when it comes to fingerpicking: the thumb plays the lowest three strings. Watch the thumb of the right hand move between the two bass notes as you play it for a few minutes.

Assignment

Your assignment is to play a similar piece – T1T1

The first thumb is on the 6th string and the next thumb is on the 4th string (as before).



I want you really now to spend time on playing this pattern.

- Sometimes you might hit into the wrong string. It doesn't matter, keep playing and slow down if you're not playing it accurately.
- Make sure you are hitting the notes cleanly.
- Make sure you are using the right fingers.

Tips

First question, did you stick to the Big Rule?

If one finger started to play each string (instead of one per string), go back and check out the exercises we had to correct that.

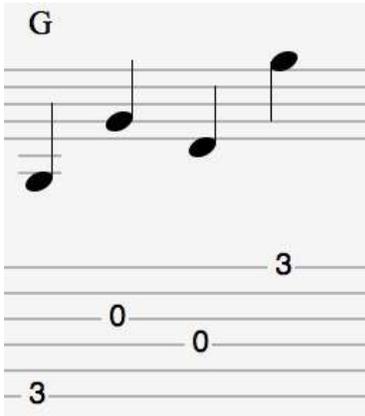
You need to spend hours before this feels truly comfortable. Allow yourself to spend a couple of hours on these exercises if it feels good and it feels like you are making progress.

This thumb movement combined with fingers is the core of Travis picking, so it's worth the time you put in.

5.2 - The Inside Outside Pattern

Last Assignment

It is so important to get that thumb keeping constant time and playing bass notes cleanly.



If you want to make sure your timing is good, you can use a metronome.

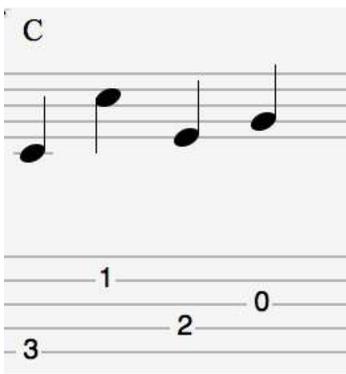
This movement of the thumb from 6th string to 4th and back - this is the movement that you need to get comfortable with and should have been doing in those last exercises.

Now we are going to learn a new pattern - the outside in pattern.

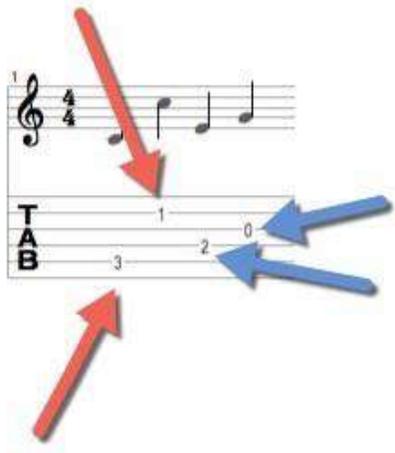
Outside-In in C

Fret a C chord with your left hand.

Now play T2T1 where the first thumb is on the 5th string and the second thumb note is on the 4th string.



If you want to understand why this is called “outside inside”, look at what I am playing, the first two notes are on the “outside” strings (red arrows) and then the next two notes are on the two “inside” strings (blue arrows).



Outside-In in G

Let's play an outside-in pattern in G.

The pattern is T2T1 where the first thumb is on the 6th string and the second thumb note is on the 5th string.



Change Chord Exercise

And a good exercise is to take a pattern and change chords will doing it.

So let's try this in C and then change to G.



Assignment

Your assignment has two parts.

1. Take this pattern that I have shown you in this lesson and practice it.
2. Take two new chords and apply this pattern to it.
(A good choice would be A minor, but choose any chords you like)

Assignment – Helpful Note

I do want to point out that what you are trying to get the feel of here is to get that thumb moving. Isolate the thumb part and play it on it's own for a few minutes.

Musical notation for a thumb exercise. The first staff shows a C chord (C4, E4, G4) and a G chord (G2, B2, D3). The second staff shows the fingerings: 3, 2, 3, 2 for the C chord and 3, 2, 3, 2 for the G chord.

Then you can add all the notes to it

Musical notation for a full chord exercise. The first staff shows a C chord (C4, E4, G4) and a G chord (G2, B2, D3). The second staff shows the fingerings: 3, 0, 2, 0 for the C chord and 3, 0, 2, 0 for the G chord.

Have fun practicing this!

5.3 - Building Up Travis Picking

Last Assignment – Inside Out picking

Let's go over the last exercise.

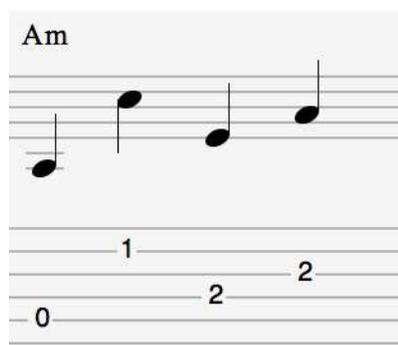
It is so important to get that thumb moving where you keep that time constant and playing those bass notes accurately and smoothly.

I challenged you to apply the outside in pattern to two chords of your choice.

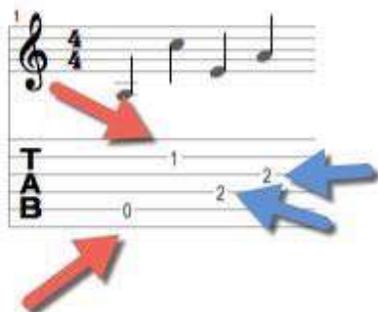
Let me show you an example – using A minor and C as my two chords.

For A minor (written Am), the pattern used is T2T1 (thumb, second finger, thumb first finger)

The first thumb is on the 5th string, the second thumb is on the 4th string.



If you visualise this pattern as the two outside notes (red arrows) then the two inside notes (blue arrows), then I think that helps



Now that you can play it in Am, you can mix it with other chords.

Let's see what it sounds like if we change Am to C playing this pattern

Am C

0 1 2 2 | 3 1 2 0

It sounds really nice.

Back to Travis Picking in G

Let's examine the thumb actions needed to play Travis picking. Let's start in G. Fret a G chord with the left hand.

For this exercise, the thumb here actually plays all of these notes (all four notes!)

We play thumb on the 6th string, then the 4th string, then the 5th string then the 4th string.

G

0 2 0

3

Add a Melody Note

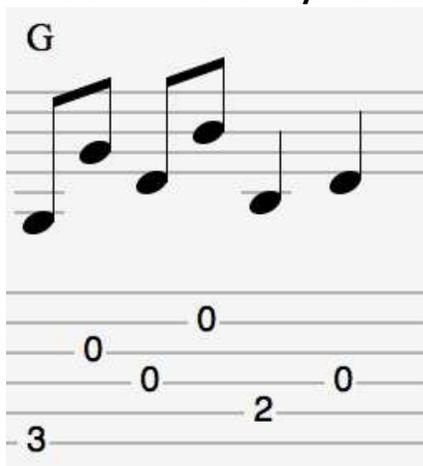
Now let's add one melody note. We will play it on the 3rd string (so index finger or first finger will play it) and we put it between the first and second bass note.



So now we have introduced one melody note (played by one of the fingers) into our Travis playing thumb exercise.

The next step is to add another melody note.

Add a second Melody Note



The thumb is still playing 6th, 4th, 5th, 4th strings in that order.

We have the note we added above and another new note played between the 2nd and 3rd bass notes (on the second string and played with finger 2 – our middle finger).

Our pattern is T1T2TT

Fretting a New Type of C

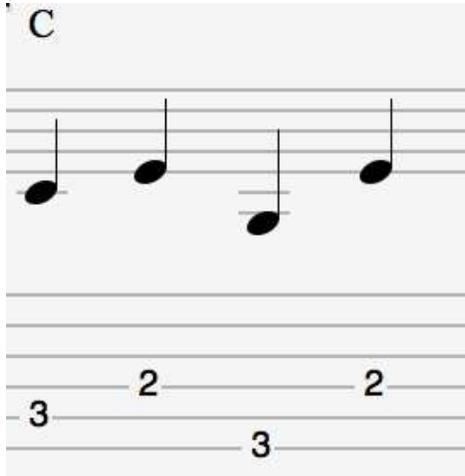
I tend to fret the C chord a bit differently when playing Travis Picking style.

I fret the 3rd fret of the 6th string.

The reasons that I am doing that is that all 6 strings are fretted and I can pluck all 6.

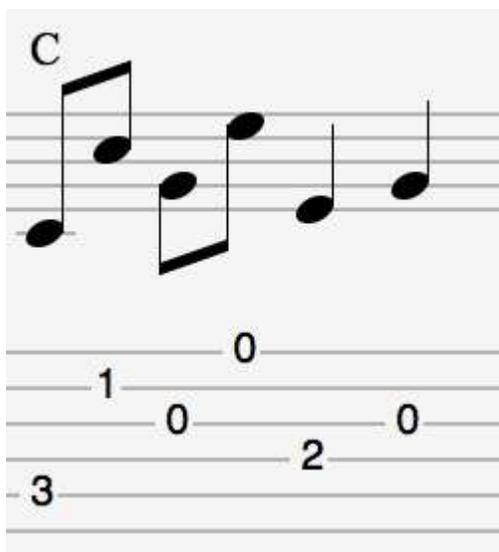
Travis Picking in C

With that fretting, I can now play a bass pattern like this with the thumb using a 6-4-5-4 pattern.



Let's add two melody notes like we did above in the example in G.

(pattern of T1T2TT)



Now are Travis picking on a C chord!

Assignment

Practice both of the Travis picking patterns that we have seen in this lesson (the first had one melody note and the next one had two melody notes).

Practice them both in G and then in C.

Practice Notes

Take this really slowly. You don't get this mastered in 5 minutes. You need hours to get this down.

There are times when your thumb will not behave! It's ok. Take a five minute break and come back to it.

This is so worth mastering. And the road to getting there will no doubt involve some moments where it seems difficult but after a few hours, it will start to get there. Trust me.

5.4 - Isolate & Build

Last Assignment

Travis Picking is not easy.

It may well be the most challenging thing you have tried to do on a guitar.

So do we give up if we don't get it immediately? Of course not.

This lesson recaps how to build up a travis picking pattern.

If you're finding it difficult, then go back to the bass and add a note and then another and then another.

Let's see what this looks like with a G chord.

We isolate the thumb. Let's just get a solid bassline to begin with.

Note the thumb plays the 6th, 4th, 5th, 4th strings - in that order.

The image shows a musical staff for a G chord. The top staff contains a sequence of five notes: a quarter note on the 6th string (G2), an eighth note on the 4th string (B2), a quarter note on the 5th string (G2), and two eighth notes on the 4th string (B2). The bottom staff shows the corresponding fretting: 0 on the 6th string, 0 on the 4th string, 2 on the 5th string, and 0 on the 4th string. The 3rd string is fretted with a 3.

Let's take a scenario where I'm trying to learn this and I'm finding it really hard.

I'll just play with the thumb, just playing the bass notes.

The image shows a musical staff for a G chord. The top staff contains a sequence of four notes: a quarter note on the 6th string (G2), a quarter note on the 4th string (B2), a quarter note on the 5th string (G2), and a quarter note on the 4th string (B2). The bottom staff shows the corresponding fretting: 0 on the 6th string, 0 on the 4th string, 2 on the 5th string, and 0 on the 4th string. The 3rd string is fretted with a 3.

And then I'll add a melody (high) note

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The chord is G major, indicated by the letter 'G' above the staff. The notes are G4 (open string), A4 (first fret), B4 (second fret), and G4 (open string). Below the staff, the fretting is shown as 3 on the low E string, 0 on the A string, 0 on the D string, 2 on the G string, and 0 on the B string.

And then a second melody note

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The chord is G major, indicated by the letter 'G' above the staff. The notes are G4 (open string), A4 (first fret), B4 (second fret), C#5 (third fret), and G4 (open string). Below the staff, the fretting is shown as 3 on the low E string, 0 on the A string, 0 on the D string, 2 on the G string, and 0 on the B string.

And a third melody note

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The chord is G major, indicated by the letter 'G' above the staff. The notes are G4 (open string), A4 (first fret), B4 (second fret), C#5 (third fret), D#5 (fourth fret), and G4 (open string). Below the staff, the fretting is shown as 3 on the low E string, 0 on the A string, 0 on the D string, 2 on the G string, and 0 on the B string.

Summary

This is a really important and practical strategy. You isolate the thumb and add one note at a time until you have a complete fingerpicking pattern mastered.

You will use this approach for your entire guitar-playing and fingerpicking life to flip back, isolate the thumb and build as you are learning new pieces.

Exercise

Play this pattern for 15 min

Have lots of fun, take your time, be patient and I'll see you in the next lesson.

5.5 - Pinching and Travis Picking

Pinching

Blending the pinch technique with Travis picking produces a really nice effect where we play bass with the thumb and some melody notes *at the same time* as that bass note.

On & Off

If I want to pinch in G, I might play these two notes and then I 'pinch' and play them together.

The image shows a musical staff for a guitar in G major. The staff is labeled 'G' at the top. The melody line consists of four quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, and G4. The bass line consists of four notes: G2, B2, D3, and G2. The first two notes (G4 and G2) are played together, indicated by a vertical line connecting them. The second two notes (A4 and B4) are played together, indicated by a vertical line connecting them. The third two notes (D3 and G2) are played together, indicated by a vertical line connecting them. The fourth note (G4) is played alone. The bass line is written on a five-line staff with the following fret numbers: 0, 0, 2, 0. The melody line is written on a five-line staff with the following fret numbers: 3, 0, 2, 0.

Because I play the melody note at the same time as the bass note, I can think of it as being "on" the bass note.

If I played a melody note in-between bass notes, then it is "off" the beat of bass notes.

The image shows a musical staff for a guitar in G major. The staff is labeled 'G' at the top. The melody line consists of four quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, and G4. The bass line consists of four notes: G2, B2, D3, and G2. The first two notes (G4 and G2) are played together, indicated by a vertical line connecting them. The second two notes (A4 and B4) are played together, indicated by a vertical line connecting them. The third two notes (D3 and G2) are played together, indicated by a vertical line connecting them. The fourth note (G4) is played alone. The bass line is written on a five-line staff with the following fret numbers: 0, 0, 2, 0. The melody line is written on a five-line staff with the following fret numbers: 3, 0, 2, 0.

Let me play two rounds where I sometimes play it “on” the beat and sometimes I play it “off the beat”.

G

This is an important concept.

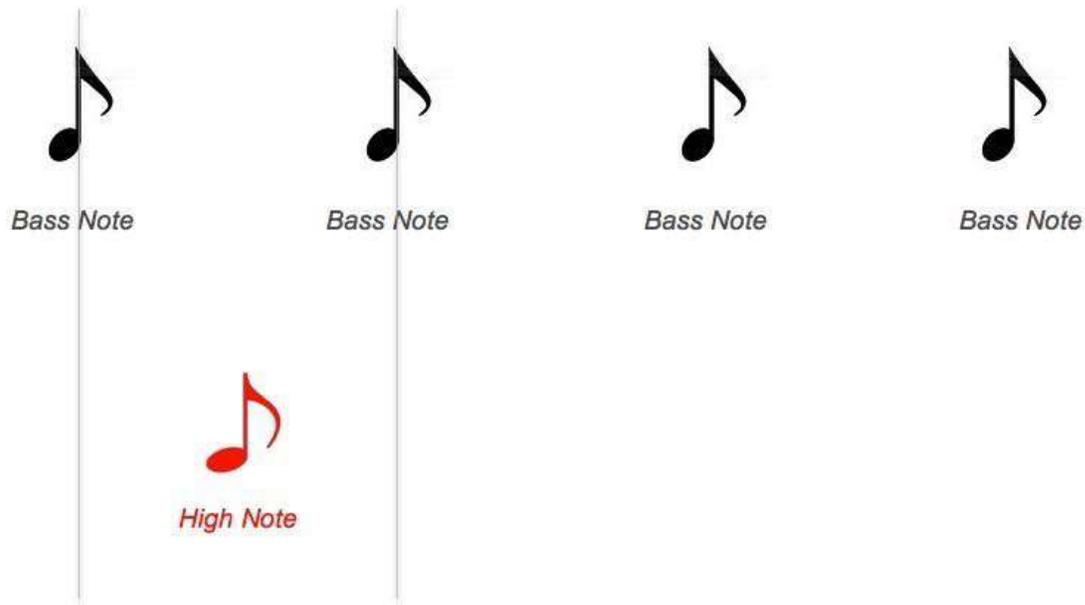
As you develop your Travis picking, you aim for a point where you can play a melody note on the beat or off the beat between any of your bass notes.

Just to illustrate further, you can think of the four bass notes as being played and then sometimes the red note below is at the same time (which we call on the beat)

Bass Note Bass Note Bass Note Bass Note

High Note

And sometimes we play our four bass notes (with the thumb) and we put that high note (played with the fingers) in between two bass notes



Previous Example - Ons and Offs

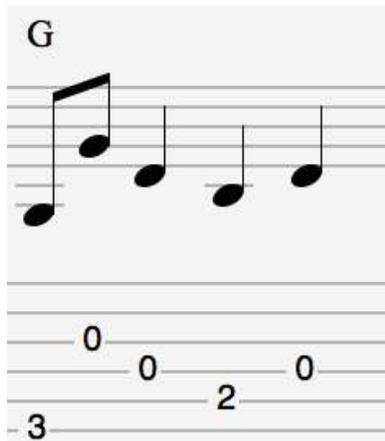
Remember that when I say "On" here, I mean a high note played at the same time as a bass note, which is also known as a pinch.

Take a bass pattern of 6454 in G

1. On the first bass note, pinch the 2nd sting
2. Second bass note
3. Third bass note

And then a high note in between third and fourth bass notes on G string.

4. Then fourth bass note.



Assignment.

Your exercise is to practice this pattern today.

Play it until it is comfortable, and you can play it on and off the beat.

As always, I encourage you to come up with your own pattern also.

Start with Travis bass in G, C, Am or any chord.

Add one note on the beat.

Add one note off the beat.

See if you can play it eventually without thinking too much, that it just becomes more natural after a while.

5.6 - The Clawhammer

Last Assignment

As you play these exercises, remember that you are mastering some really great techniques that you are going to enjoy for years and years. If it takes you some hours to make it sound really sweet, then stick with it.

Remember if you get stuck, go back to the thumb and use that to anchor you.

The difference between Travis Picking & Clawhammer

With the Travis fingerpicking, the pattern we played with the thumb (the bass pattern) was 6454 where we played the 6th string, then 4th, 5th, 4th strings. See table below.

The clawhammer pattern, however, requires that we play a 5464 pattern.

So our thumb will play the 5th, 4th, 6th, 4th strings to generate a bass pattern.

Let's try a 5-4-6-4 bass pattern with a C chord.

The image shows a musical staff for a C chord. The staff is labeled 'C' in the top left corner. The notes are: G4 (5th string), F4 (4th string), C4 (6th string), and G4 (4th string). Below the staff, the fingering is indicated by numbers: '3' under the G4 note, '2' under the F4 note, '2' under the G4 note, and '3' under the C4 note.

TRAVIS BASS	CLAWHAMMER BASS

And now we can add a high note and we'll pinch it - and play it at the same time as our first bass note. I call this 'on the beat'

It looks like this:

Now we can add a high note, this time 'off the beat'.



Assignment

Play this as much as you can to get it down.

- Play 5-4-6-4 bass on any chord.
- Add a note on the beat (a pinch) and try to add one off the beat (between one of the bass notes)
- Em or G are great chords to play in clawhammer style.

Thank You

- The most important thing for you now is to play regularly. Try to place 15 to 20 minutes a day.
- Always stay learning.
- Discover other artists who are playing in this acoustic style and listen to their albums.
- Check out the free lessons and advanced courses at my website www.learnfingerpicking.com
- If you want to purchase a course with video examples for all of the lessons in this book, you can purchase the Zero to Fingerpicking course and see me playing each piece in high definition video with cameras focused on both the left and right hands breaking everything down.

Thanks for following this course, all the time and attention you have given me is much appreciated. I'm proud of you for getting this far, and I hope to talk to you soon