

How to Introduce Fingerstyle Technique to Your Guitar Class

by

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to assist teachers in introducing fingerstyle playing technique necessary for executing arpeggios on the guitar.

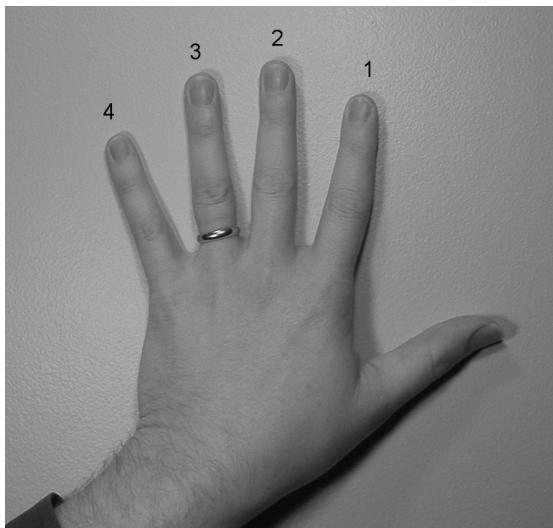
Rational

Why introduce students to fingerstyle playing?

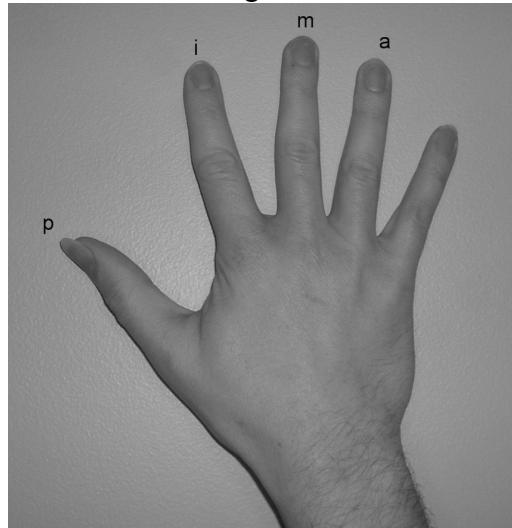
- Forms a solid foundation of musicianship and technique with the guitar
- Rich tradition dating back to the 16th century
- Vehicle for solo and ensemble literature
- Potential college study
- Students may not be exposed on their own
- Difficult for students to learn without instruction

Terminology

The Left Hand



The Right Hand



Sitting Position for Fingerstyle Technique

The preferable sitting position for fingerstyle playing is that which classical guitarists have adopted for over one hundred years.



The guitar is secure at four points

1. The student sits forward with the left leg elevated.
2. The lower bow of the guitar rests on the left leg with the instrument resting naturally the legs.
3. The neck is angled so that the headstock is approximately level with the eyes.

Rational for this position:

1. The student sits upright and brings the instrument to the body. This position assists in maximizing the anatomical function of the neck, shoulders, arms, and hands.
2. The guitar is secure at four points (the front of the body, the left leg, the right leg, and the right forearm) and will move with the player, not against the player.
3. The guitar is basically in the same position it would be in if the student were standing with a guitar strap.

Possible problems with the “classical position”

1. Foot supports must be supplied by the teacher or the students.
2. Short skirts may be problematic (although school dress codes should address this).

3. Full sized steel string acoustic guitars can be awkward for smaller students.

Problems with resting the guitar on the right leg:



1. Sitting upright in this position is more difficult and the student often has to twist and bring his/her body to the guitar.
2. The guitar is secure at only two points: the right arm and the right leg. These two points function as a fulcrum on which the guitar may pivot, not unlike a seesaw. Therefore, the guitar will move against the player when slight pressure is applied to the instrument with the right elbow. Sitting with the guitar on the right leg often results in poor left hand position (see picture) because students use the left hand to stabilize the instrument.

Lesson Plan

How to Teach Right Hand Position for Fingerstyle Technique

Conceptual Objective: Proper right hand position facilitates the execution of rhythm, melody, harmony, form, expression, and style.

Behavioral Objective: Upon teacher explanation and demonstration, students will be able to form a proper right hand position with 80% accuracy.

Materials: Guitar and foot stool

Sequence:

1. Teacher explains that proper right hand position is crucial for playing well and avoiding injury.
2. Teacher explains right hand terminally to students. The names for the fingers are derived from Spanish due to the guitar's rich history in Spain: *p* = thumb (plugar), *i* = index (indici), *m* = middle (media), *a* = ring (anular).
3. Teacher models proper right hand playing position, explaining that the right hand thumb should extend beyond the index finger and that the large knuckles should be approximately over the string being plucked. The palm of the right hand should be aligned on a plane parallel to the soundboard of the guitar.



4. With the students seated in playing position, the teacher asks for the students to give him/her a “thumbs up” with the right hand forming a loose fist. Teacher models “thumbs up” for students.



5. While modeling, teacher instructs students to rest *p* on the fourth string, which is the third string down from the top.
6. Teacher instructs students to open their fists, bring *i* to rest on the 3rd string, *m* to rest on the 2nd string, and *a* to rest on the 3rd string. *i*, *m*, and *a*, should all be arched with each large joint above its respective finger tip. Teacher models this activity (see picture for step 3).
7. Teacher explains that these are the steps to take when forming right hand position. Teacher reviews what constitutes a proper right hand position and its importance in playing rhythm, melody, harmony, form, expression, and style.
8. Students are paired and alternate forming and evaluating one another's right hand position.

Evaluation: Teacher observation of group during lesson and during step 8.

Lesson Plan **Introduction to Fingerpicking: Scratching Exercise**

(All steps modeled by the teacher)

The purpose of this lesson is to prepare students to engage the flexor muscles when plucking the strings. This lesson immediately follows “How to Teach Right Hand Position for Fingerstyle Technique.”

Conceptual Objective:

Individual notes of a chord, when played in succession, form an arpeggio. (This lesson assumes that students have been exposed to the concept of chords. It is not absolutely necessary that this is the case.)

Behavioral Objective: Upon learning to form right hand position, students will develop proper right hand anatomical function for playing arpeggios with the “Scratching Exercise” and “On-String Pressure.”

Materials: Guitar and foot rest

Sequence:

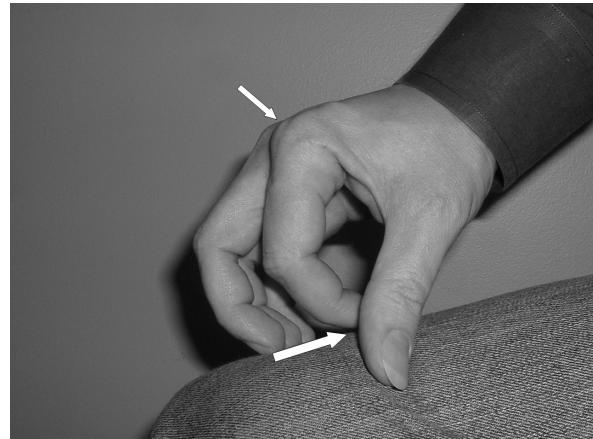
1. Teacher explains that an arpeggio is a chord whose notes are played individually in a sequential order.
2. **Scratching Exercise:**
Students are instructed to sit, without the guitar, both feet flat on the floor. Teacher reviews the names of the right hand fingers: *p* = thumb *i* = index, *m* = middle, *a* = ring.
3. Students are instructed to form a “thumbs up” with the right hand.
4. Students are instructed to rest their right hand thumb on their right leg. The wrist and hand should be elevated with the knuckles of the right hand parallel to the surface of the leg.



5. Students are instructed to open their fists and rest the backs of their fingertips against the leg. At this point the students' right hands should be in a playing position with the thumb extended, the fingers arched, and the joints where the fingers meet the hand approximately above their respective fingertips. Teacher may need to go around the room and check students' positions.

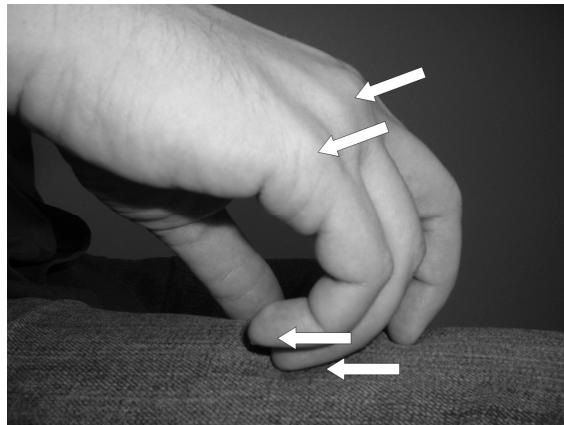


6. Students are instructed to scratch their right leg with *i*. The scratching motion is initiated at the large knuckle (where the finger meets the hand) and the fingertip does **not** break contact with the leg.



7. Previous step is repeated with *m* and *a*.

a. Special note on the *a* finger: The right hand pinkie should move with the *a* finger.



8. Students are instructed to scratch the following sequences maintaining a steady beat.

4/4: *i-i-i-i, m-m-m-m, a-a-a-a*, repeat

3/4: *i-i-i, m-m-m, a-a-a*, repeat

2/4: *i-i, m-m, a-a*, repeat

4/4: *i, m, a*, repeat

Evaluation: Teacher observation of group.

Proceed to “On-String Pressure Exercise”

Lesson Plan

Introduction to Fingerpicking: On-String Pressure Exercise

(All steps modeled by the teacher)

The purpose of this lesson is to prepare students to engage the flexor muscles when plucking the strings. This lesson immediately follows the “Scratching Exercise” lesson.

Conceptual Objective:

Individual notes of a chord, when played in succession, form an arpeggio. (This lesson assumes that students have been exposed to the concept of chords. It is not absolutely necessary that this is the case.)

Behavioral Objective: Upon learning how to form right hand position, students will develop proper right hand anatomical function for playing arpeggios with the “Scratching Exercise” and “On-String Pressure.”

Sequence:

1. This lesson immediately follows the Introduction to Fingerpicking: Scratching Exercise lesson plan.
2. Teacher instructs students to sit in playing position with the instrument.
3. Teacher instructs students to form a right hand fingerstyle position resting *p* on the 4th string, *i* on the 3rd string, *m* on the 2nd string, and *a* on the 3rd string. The thumb should be extended beyond the index finger and *i*, *m*, and *a* should be arched. The joints where the fingers meet the hand should be approximately above their respective fingertips.
4. Students are instructed to apply pressure to the strings in the same manner as in the scratching exercise; the fingertips should not leave the strings.
 - *p* applies downward pressure, initiated at the joint where the thumb meets the hand, without leaving the 4th string.



- *i, m, and a* apply upward pressure, initiated at the joint where the finger meets the hand, without the finger tips leaving the strings.



- Teacher takes students through the following exercises maintaining a steady beat. The fingers are to apply pressure on the strings, with the beat, but not leave the strings:

4/4: *p-p-p-p, i-i-i-i, m-m-m-m, a-a-a-a, repeat*

3/4: *p-p-p, i-i-i, m-m-m, a-a-a, repeat*

2/4: *p-p, i-i, m-m, a-a, repeat*

4/4: *p, i, m, a, repeat*

Evaluation: Teacher observation of group

Proceed to “Introduction to Fingerpicking: Open String Arpeggios”

Lesson Plan

Introduction to Fingerpicking: Open String Arpeggios

Conceptual Objective:

Individual notes of a chord, when played in succession, form an arpeggio. (This lesson assumes that students have been exposed to the concept of chords. It is not absolutely necessary that this is the case.)

Behavioral Objective: Upon learning to form right hand position, the “Scratching Exercise,” and “on-string pressure,” students will develop proper right hand anatomical function for playing arpeggios utilizing *pima* patterns.

Materials: Guitar and foot rest, Open String Arpeggios Exercise 1 (optional – students who have not yet learned notation may be taught Exercise 1 by rote).

Sequence: This lesson immediately follows the “On-String Pressure” lesson plan.

1. Having covered step 4 of the “On-String Pressure” lesson, teacher instructs students to form a right hand fingerstyle position resting *p* on the fourth string, *i* the 3rd string, *m* on the 2nd string, and *a* on the 3rd string. The thumb should be extended beyond the index finger and *i*, *m*, and *a* should be arched. The joints where the fingers meet the hand should be approximately above their respective fingertips.
2. Teacher explains that the right hand thumb plucks the string by releasing downward pressure. The thumb then forms a small oval as it returns to the string to pluck again.
3. Students try plucking the fourth string with their thumb. Students then are instructed to pluck the third string with *i*, the second string with *m*, and the first string with *a*. Teacher assists students as needed.
4. Teacher takes students through “Open String Arpeggios Exercise 1” either by rote or using the “Open String Arpeggios Exercise 1” sheet below.
5. Once students are able to play the repeated *pima* arpeggio (the last line of Exercise 1), teacher explains that they are playing an E minor 7 arpeggio. Teacher then reviews the definition and meaning of arpeggio – explaining that any chord can be made into an arpeggio by playing its pitches one at a time in a sequential order.

Evaluation: Teacher observation of the group during steps 3 and 4, and/or during a playing examination.

Open String Arpeggios Exercise 1

4/4

3/4

2/4

4/4

i *i* *i* *i* *m* *m* *m* *m* *a* *a* *a* *a* 4x

i *i* *i* *m* *m* *m* *a* *a* *a* 4x

i *i* *m* *m* *a* *a* 4x

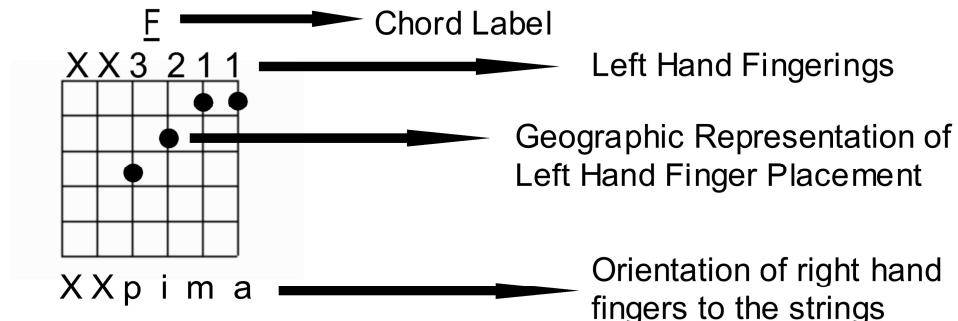
i *m* *a* *i* *m* *a* *i* *m* *a* *i* *m* *a*

Moving Beyond An Introduction to Fingerstyle Technique

The above sequence of lesson plans flows naturally into applying various right hand arpeggio patterns to standard chord progressions. What follows is a brief discussion of how teachers can incorporate chords with fingerstyle arpeggios.

How to read chord diagrams:

1. Vertical lines represent the strings with the 6th (bass) string on the diagram's left and the 1st (treble) string on the diagram's right.
2. Horizontal lines indicate fret wires.
3. X indicates that a string is not to be played.



4. In the chord sheets below, a “Set” represents a chord progression.

A variety of lesson plans can be constructed utilizing the following chord sheets (or your own). Conceptual objectives may focus on various aspects of harmony and the relationship between chords and scales.

Eventually students should be taught to play the same, or similar, material as found in the chord sheets utilizing standard music notation.

3-Note Chords and Arpeggios Sheet 1

Arpeggio Patterns (4 X per chord)

pim pimi
pmi pmim

(Set 1)

Em G7 Em G7

XXX 0 0 0 XXX 0 0 1 XXX 0 0 0 XXX 0 0 1

p i m p i m p i m p i m

(Set 2)

C Em C Em

XXX 0 1 0 XXX 0 0 0 XXX 0 1 0 XXX 0 0 0

(Set 3)

C G7 C G7

XXX 0 1 0 XXX 0 0 1 XXX 0 1 0 XXX 0 0 1

(Set 4)

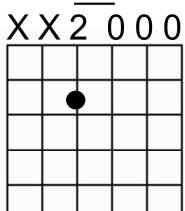
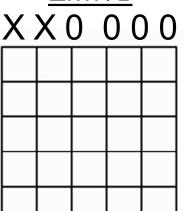
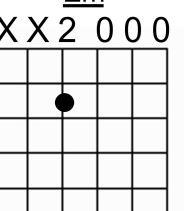
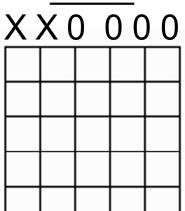
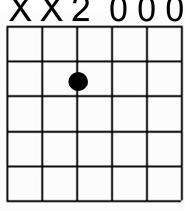
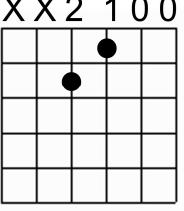
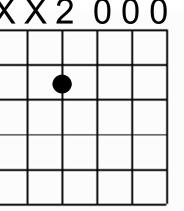
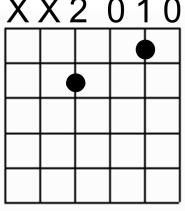
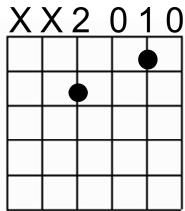
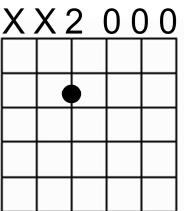
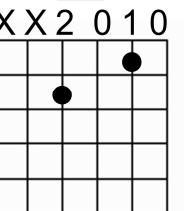
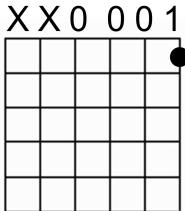
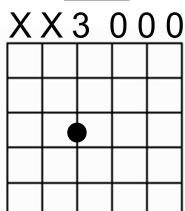
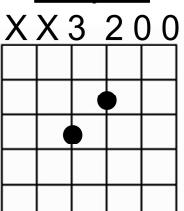
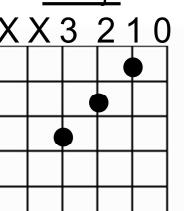
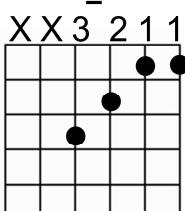
C Em C G7

XXX 0 1 0 XXX 0 0 0 XXX 0 1 0 XXX 0 0 1

4-Note Chords and Arpeggios Sheet 1

Arpeggio Patterns (4 X per chord)

pima paim pmai
 pam pmia piam pimami

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> Em  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> Em7/D  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> Em  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> Em7/D  </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> Em  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> E  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> Em  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> C/E  </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> C/E  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> Em  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> C/E  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> G7  </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> Em/F  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> FMaj7-b5  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> FMaj7  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> E  </div>
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Assessment Rubric¹
(For formative or summative playing exams)

Fingerstyle Performance Evaluation

1. Posture and Instrument Position: _____/4

2. Right Hand Position and Anatomical Function: _____/4

3. Left Hand Position and Anatomical Function: _____/4

4. Rhythm: _____/4

5. Accuracy of Notes: _____/4

Total Score: _____/20

Additional Comments:

¹ Adapted from: Benham, Stephen. "Assessment Simplified: Strategies for Increasing Musical Outcomes in the Studio, School, and Classroom." Lecture, 2009 ASTA National Convention, Atlanta, GA, March 20, 2009.

Definitions of Rating Scale Points: Beginning Fingerstyle Guitar

Posture and Instrument Position

1. Student does not demonstrate an understanding of correct sitting position or posture.
2. Posture is basically correct but the instrument is not secured at four points.
3. Posture and instrument position are basically correct but the instrument is held at an angle that impedes right and/or left hand function.
4. Posture and instrument position are consistently correct and functional.

Right Hand Position and Anatomical Function

1. Student does not demonstrate correct placement of fingers or correct anatomical function of fingers.
2. Student demonstrates some correct finger placement and function but not all aspects are correct.
3. Student has correct finger placement but does not demonstrate proper anatomical function of all or some fingers.
4. Student demonstrates consistent finger placement and correct anatomical function.

Left Hand Position and Anatomical Function

1. Left hand position and thumb placement are completely incorrect.
2. Left thumb is in correct position but wrist/hand do not address instrument correctly.
3. Left arm, wrist, and hand are in correct position but are not flexible or do not display correct anatomical function or consistent fingering.
4. Left arm, wrist, and hand are fully functional.

Rhythm

1. Student does not keep a steady beat or execute correct rhythms.
2. Student executes correct rhythms but does not display a sense of meter (pauses frequently).
3. Student keeps a steady beat but some rhythmic errors are present.
4. Student performs with mastery of rhythm and meter.

Accuracy of Notes

1. Multiple errors are present; student unable to play notes correctly; may indicate lack of preparation or material that is too difficult.
2. Student performs with control, although some errors are present.
3. Student performs with fluency; errors are infrequent.
4. Student performs with complete mastery of notes; no errors.

Materials and Resources

Commercially available books:

Everybody's Classical Guitar 1 with CD

Sutherland, John, B.J. Sutherland, David Hoge, Philip Groeber, and Antigoni Goni. *Everybody's Classical Guitar 1 with CD*. Fort Lauderdale: The FJH Music Company Inc., 2011.

The Christopher Parkening Guitar Method

Parkening, Christopher. *The Christopher Parkening Guitar Method*. Milwaukee: H. Leonard, 1997.

Classical Guitar Pedagogy

Glise, Anthony. *Classical guitar pedagogy: a handbook for teachers*. Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 1997.

Free online resources:

<http://www.guitaredunet.org/>

Teaching Guitar Workshops

<http://www.classicalguitarschool.net/en/>

Massive amount of classical/fingerstyle music and methods

PRELIM.	1018	The first guitar milestone (Sveinn Eythorsson) or
	1037	First guitar lessons (Eythor Thorlaksson)
	1066	Guitar tunes p. 3 - 7
1. GRADE	1038*	Guitar Method, grade 1 (Eythor Thorlaksson)
	1005*	Guitar Moment Volume 1.
	1066	Guitar studies p. 15 - 22 (Sveinn Eythorsson)
	1004	Guitar tunes p. 8 - 15
	1009*	Carulli Brevier p. 3 - 9
	1085	9 guitar works p. 3 - 5 (Sveinn Eythorsson)
	1025*	Scales and arpeggios grade 1.

Example 1. Beginner repertoire available at Classical Guitar School organized by level of difficulty, catalogue number, and title.



Example 2: Classical Guitar School - Study 15 from *The First Guitar Milestone*

<http://www.guitardownunder.com/>

Lots of free scores here

Your comments are always welcome. Please let me know if the material in this clinic/booklet proves helpful for you and your students.

Sincerely,

Luther Enloe

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