

Getting Your Fingers In On the Action

Once you are able to **strum** with your fingers, you can begin **fingerpicking!** The first task is to learn your hand position and to learn which fingers are used on which strings. For simplicity, I am assuming that you are right-handed, so left-handed people should reverse these instructions. (I'm left handed as you know!!)

1. Place the heel of your right hand on the bridge of the guitar.

- Your fingers should extend almost to the soundhole (if you have an acoustic guitar).
- Your hand should be in a very relaxed position, with your fingers softly touching the strings. Your hand should not feel uncomfortable.

2. Form a normal C chord with your left hand.

3. Place your fingers on the appropriate strings as follows:

- Thumb on the 5th string
- Index finger on the 4th string
- Middle finger on the 3rd string
- Ring finger on the 2nd string

4. Now, practice picking with each finger.

- For the thumb, pick downwards using the inside edge of your thumb.

- For all other fingers, pick upwards using the fingertip. You can use the flesh of your fingertip or your fingernail; whichever you prefer.
- Practice each finger for a minute or two, never allowing the finger to leave its associated string mentioned above.
- Keep your hand planted on the bridge throughout this exercise. It should not be uncomfortable while picking.

5. Eventually you will want to change your hand position so you are not muffling the bridge.

- By resting your hand on the bridge it deadens the sound, so you will want to move your hand off of the guitar top.
 - To do this simply keep your pinkie sitting on the guitar top below the strings and pick like you normally do. Your pinkie will brace your hand to allow you to pick.
 - This may be uncomfortable at first, but you will get used to it. If you find it difficult, you can always continue using the first method.
 - You don't need to change your hand position immediately; just change it when you feel comfortable changing it.
- **Proceed only after you feel comfortable picking with each finger.**

Your First Picking Pattern

After you have learned to associate your fingers with particular strings, you can begin to develop a coherent pattern of picking. The first pattern you will learn is an arpeggiated C chord. This pattern can then be varied to fit any musical requirement.

- 1. Play the four strings listed on the previous page, in order, from low to high: 5th, 4th, 3rd, 2nd, as shown in *Figure 1* below. Always use the correct finger for each string.**

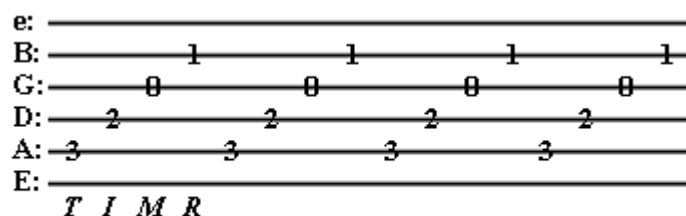


Figure 1: Your First Picking Pattern

- The correct fingers are shown below the tab: **T=thumb, I=index, M=middle, and R=ring.** These designations are used throughout the rest of the lessons.
- Use these same fingers for each repetition.
- Start very slowly at first. After the last exercise you should be comfortable picking each string, but you must now train your hand muscles to perform this pattern.
- Play this pattern repeatedly, until you can play it at a moderate speed. The only way to learn this pattern and to train your hand is to repeat this exercise many times.
- Remain on the C chord, because other chords require you to use other strings.

2. Once you have learned this first picking pattern, you can begin changing your pattern.

- Reverse this picking pattern; that is, play chords from high to low, as in *Figure 2*. This pattern will require a bit more concentration because you must now train your hand to do the exact opposite motion. If this exercise is difficult for you, repeat the top exercise until you are comfortable with it.

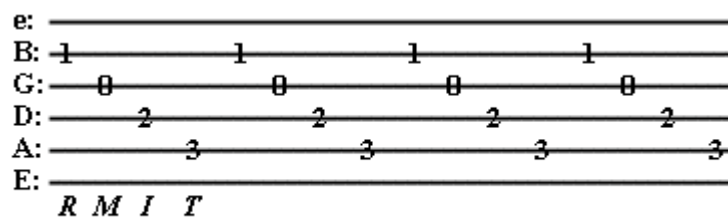


Figure 2: The Opposite Direction

- Pick the chord from low to high and back down, as in *Figure 3*. Once you have learned the above two exercises, this should be a bit simpler to do. However, it does require integration of the above exercises, so if you can do this pattern you will be able to play almost anything else you want.



Figure 3: The Key To Picking

More Complex Picking Patterns

Once you have learned how to pick, you can begin to learn new chords and to make up your own picking patterns. Basically I will outline patterns on common chords, and allow you to invent different ones and to play around on more obscure chords.

1. Now we will study a pattern for the D chord. This pattern is very similar to the C chord pattern except different strings are used. Simply shift your fingers up one string, so the thumb is playing the 4th string, as shown in *Figure 1*.

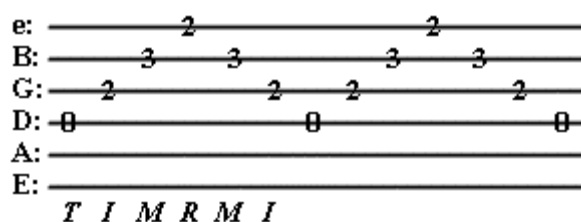


Figure 1: A New Chord!!

- This pattern should be relatively simple, because it is just a repeat of the previous pattern. However, it may take some time to get used to the feel of the new strings. Once you feel comfortable playing this, move on to the next step.
 - This should sound like the first measure of R.E.M.'s *Everybody Hurts*, just so you know.
2. Now I will introduce a new pattern, based on the C and D chord patterns learned above. This new pattern is shown in *Figure 2*. Notice that in the middle of this exercise you must change your finger position to switch between the C and D chord.

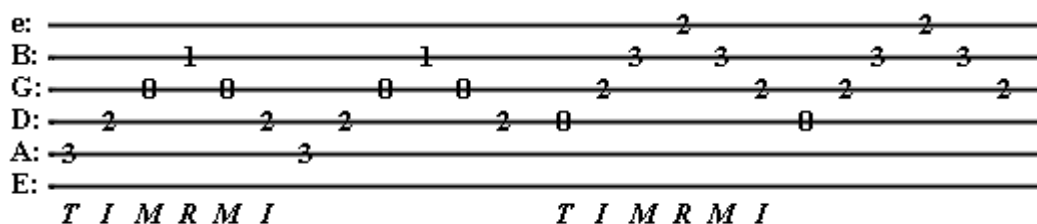


Figure 2: Picking Two Chords in the Same Measure

- After you have played the C chord through once, as shown in the figure, you must move your thumb up one string (to 4th string), and move your other fingers up in the same manner.
- This exercise is not complicated except for the transition between chords. Concentrate on this transition, because it will be very important when you begin to play songs.

3. Once you feel comfortable changing chords, you can learn a new pattern of picking, shown in *Figure 3*. Start slowly, and work up to speed; you have never seen this pattern before.

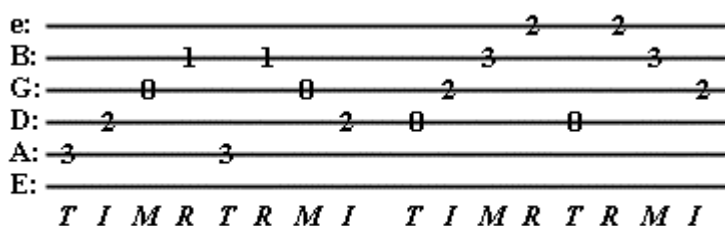


Figure 3: A New Progression

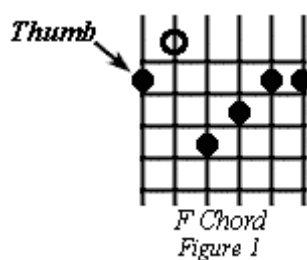
- When you play this exercise, play the bass note of the chord (e.g. C for a C chord, D for a D chord, etc.) on the strong beats, as is notated. Play this exercise slowly, because it is the first time you will be playing strings out of order.
- The most important thing to notice about this exercise is the repeated use of the bass note of the chord. Most picking patterns that I do try to

emphasize the bass note of the chord, because I believe it is important for a solid-sounding chord.

Changing Strings While Picking

Once you know how to change chords and move your fingers to accommodate the new chord, we will begin to move your fingers around during chords. This becomes necessary when a chord requires you to play more than four strings (such as G or F).

1. We will look at the F chord first because the only finger that moves while picking it is the thumb. Try to make the F chord shape shown in *Figure 1*.



- Place your four fingers on the first four strings as in a normal F chord, then bring your thumb around the neck and thumb the first fret on your sixth string.
- This method of chord formation is better while picking because it is easier and faster than using the barre chord F, and has a fuller sound than the simple four-string F.
- Most fingerpickers wrap the thumb around to the sixth string for chords which use the sixth string. This is a very helpful technique, which saves a lot of time and hand strain. I use it on D/F# (200232), F (103211), and lots of other chords.

2. Now play the picking pattern shown in *Figure 2* using the form of the F chord shown in *Figure 1*.

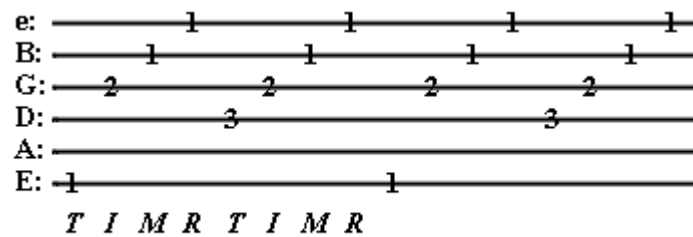


Figure 2: Changing Strings

- Pick both the 6th string and the 4th string with your thumb.
 - The purpose of this exercise is to get your picking fingers used to moving on the strings, because most chords require you to do this, and if you want to make your patterns musically interesting you will want to change strings.
 - Once again, start slowly and work up to speed. This exercise should not be difficult, but it should take time to get used to.
3. Now play the pattern for a G chord as shown in *Figure 3*. Like the F chord, G requires you to play more than four strings to get a decent sound. However, the main difference is that instead of moving your thumb, you move the three fingers.

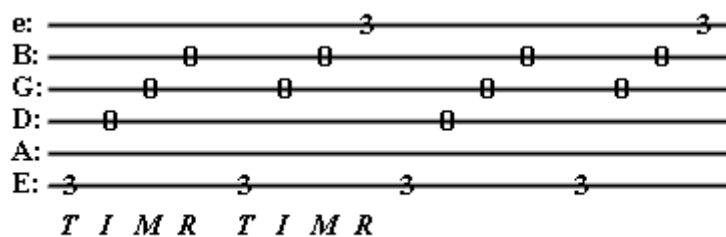


Figure 3: The Most Important Chord

- Play this exercise like all the others. Use the following fingers: thumb on 6th, then the remaining three fingers on the top three strings.

- **These three strings will change during the measure so you must move your fingers back and forth to accommodate the change.**
- **Obviously, start this one very slowly and work slowly up to speed.**
- **Do not get frustrated; keep at it and you will learn the pattern.**

Two- and Three-Note Chords

Before you play the songs, there is one more technique that you need to know.

This one should be pretty self-explanatory, but not necessarily obvious at first. Most songs use two- and three-finger chords at one time or another; they don't always use the broken picking patterns we have studied. As an example, I am going to use the opening to [Tears in Heaven](#), by Eric Clapton, so check that out before we start.

1. Use the shape shown in *Figure 1* for the opening chords to *Tears in Heaven*.

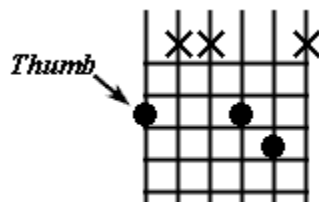


Figure 1: Clapton's Chord Formation

- **Play the 2nd and 3rd strings with your middle and index fingers, respectively. They are picked at the same time, so use the same picking motions you have been using but pick them simultaneously. This pattern is used throughout most of the song.**
- **When you encounter three-note chords, use your index, middle, and ring fingers.**

Once you have completed this exercise, you are officially a fingerpicker! You can now practice and refine your skill, working with different chords and sounds to create the musical style you want. The only way to improve your picking is to practice. Good luck, and have fun with your newfound skill!

