

***THE
PRINCIPLES
OF
CORRECT PRACTICE
FOR GUITAR***

The Perfect Start for Beginners, and the Answer to the Problems of Players



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Preface

Like many people, I found myself, while a young teenager, with a great desire to play the guitar. As a few years went by, I found myself with an intense desire to play the classical guitar, and to play it well. And again, like many people in that situation, I found myself greatly frustrated by the difficulty of actually playing as well as I heard so many people play on recordings.

No matter how much I practiced, so many things seemed difficult or impossible. I often felt like I didn't have the talent, the gift that made other people able to do it, but not me. In my teaching experience later on, I learned that my experiences and feelings were not unique, but were shared by many people wanting to play the guitar.

The most frustrating memories were with a well-known teacher in New York City. After practicing a piece for anywhere from 4 to 6 hours a day, his reaction to my problems playing it would be an authoritative "PRACTICE"! Well, damn it, I was practicing!

This book is a result of my feelings of frustration about the problems of learning to play the guitar, and the gradual discovery of the answers to those problems. I have called these answers the **Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar**.

As I began teaching, I taught the way I had been taught, and the first thing I noticed was the amazing lack of results I was getting from my students. Although I had my areas of difficulty in playing, they were mostly the more advanced areas of playing the guitar. A lot of what playing the guitar is about came easily to me, and these things that I had been able to do easily and intuitively seemed impossible for so many students to grasp. Of course there was the occasional talented individual, but it was no fun to be so ineffective with the majority of people desiring to play.

The normal scenario in such a situation would be that the teacher feels inwardly "there must be something wrong with this student, after all, I can do it, and I've shown him how". And the student feels inwardly "there must be something wrong with me, after all, he can do it, and he's shown me how".

But does the teacher really show "how" just by demonstrating? The answer depends entirely on the student. It depends on whether or not they can "get it" by the way they are being shown "how". My experience is that once in a while, what we call a "naturally gifted student" will get it by just seeing someone do something, but the great majority of students will not.

Of course, I am assuming the student really desires to play well, and is willing to work at it. (Which is why the first chapter is about Desire). I have found that almost always this is the case. Students just need to *see results* so they will have the confidence to believe they can do it, and then they will do the necessary work.

In my efforts to get results with students, I would break things down into smaller and smaller pieces, and put it back together again, taking nothing for granted. Students of every age and level of natural talent presented different problems in learning. (I have learned the most from meeting the challenges of the least skilled). I began to uncover a number of fundamental reasons why students had difficulty with developing the skills necessary to play well, and I began to be effective in the results I was getting. I began to get results from all types of students; even the ones who had tried to play and failed, or got stuck along the way. This was the greatest satisfaction.

The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar

There are two fundamental reasons people have trouble learning to play the guitar:

- they don't know *exactly* what the playing mechanism (that is, all the parts of the body actively involved in playing) should be doing at any given time, and how it should be doing it
- they don't have a systematic practice approach that will train the muscles *in accordance with the way nerves and muscles actually learn*

The intention of this book is to give that understanding, and that approach. This book is unlike most books available in that it is not full of exercises, scales, chords, etc. That is, it does not stress content (learn these thousand scales), but approach (here's how to learn whatever you want). Books of content are available in great abundance. This book will give students what they need in order to benefit from all those other books. I believe this book will be a great benefit when used along with the usual method books, or books full of musical content.

It should be stated that I am only talking about technique here, that is, the physical ability to play the notes. Being a good musician in a musical sense is another matter. But you can't begin to be musical until you can actually play the notes, and play them with ease. You cannot express your musicality when you're struggling just to get the notes out. The physical problems in learning to play are the first ones encountered, and once dealt with, the musical part is allowed to develop naturally.

It is very much like a child learns to speak. The child will work on producing sounds with the speech mechanism, tongue, lips and all the rest, for a few years. They will intuitively learn the meanings of these sounds, and how they are put together. Eventually, they will actually have things they want to say! If the earliest parts of the process did not go along as they should, the child may end up with some kind of speech impediment. A stuttering problem would certainly stand in the way of self-expression through speech throughout that person's life. In the same way many guitarists are plagued with technical problems that get more obvious and troublesome as time goes on, especially when efforts to advance to a higher level of playing are made. **The Principles of Correct Practice** will go a long way toward preventing this situation from developing in the first place.

Also, this book is by no means a complete treatment of all the various techniques used by fingerstyle or pick style players. Rather, in covering some of the most basic areas, the areas where most people go wrong, I hope to give the student *a way of thinking* about the problems they encounter in practicing and playing, so these approaches can be applied to an infinite number of actual playing techniques. In short, I am not giving the hungry person a fish, I'd rather teach them how to fish!

I have always been fascinated by the details of the life of the great classical guitarist John Williams. He is known for his outstanding and "perfect" technique, and I was astounded when I learned that he practiced very little. Later, I learned other details of his early training that I believe are extremely revealing if properly appreciated. He was taught by his father, who was reputed to be a great teacher. He started at four, and although he only practiced about a half-hour a day, he was not allowed to practice unsupervised for a number of years.

This means, *he was not allowed to do anything wrong while practicing*. He was not allowed to practice on his own until he could be responsible for perfect practice. This is similar to how singers were traditionally trained, when they lived with their teachers, and were not allowed to sing a note unless the teacher was there.

So the fundamental reasons for problems in learning were not present in his case. He always knew the right thing to do, and great pains were taken to make sure that he did do the right thing. In fact, when asked the reason for his great talent, all he said was "I was extremely well trained".

The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar

This is the foundation of my entire book. How you practice is everything when it comes to being successful at learning to play. Your understanding of how to practice is everything when it comes to *your* ability to do this.

Having the personal attention of a great teacher is always the best situation. I had many teachers, some good and some great. I learned valuable things from each one, and those things became the starting point of my own investigations. But there were also many necessary things they either didn't teach or didn't stress, and these are the things I have written about.

These Principles of Correct Practice have worked for me, and for the hundreds of students I have taught over the years. Whatever your level of aspiration may be as a player, I believe anyone who studies and uses the understandings and tools in this book will be able to fulfill their desires, eliminate the frustration that accompanies practicing for so many people, and have the means for ever-growing ability and satisfaction in playing the guitar.

As you work with "The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar", you are invited to stay in touch with me about your progress. I am available for questions you may have as you go along. Visit me at <http://www.guitarprinciples.com/>

How To Use This Book

This book should be used a few different ways, depending on who is using it. If you already play, and are going to re-examine your playing and its relationship to your practicing, then read straight through, and absorb and use the ideas as they are presented.

If you are a beginner, or a teacher teaching a beginner, you should start it in a few places at once. I will give some general guidelines that have worked for me, as a teacher and as my own student. As you use the book, you will develop your own approaches, based on your understanding and assessment of the results you achieve.

The reason this book is to be used in this way is because it is composed of three elements, Understandings, Tools, and Exercises. The most important part is the Understandings. Tools and Exercises cannot be used properly without the Understandings. Only when the student truly understands the reason for doing extremely slow practice, with great attention, will he or she actually *do* it. And once a student experiences the results of practicing this way, they wouldn't waste time practicing any other way.

I have found the best approach is to combine a little of each of the three elements at each step. I will give an outline of the order in which material should be presented to a beginning student. It goes without saying that many people who have played for many years should be treated as beginning students when it comes to making the fundamental change in playing ability this book is designed for.

If you are using this book by yourself, at whatever level of player you happen to be, you should read the material in this book over and over again. If you are a teacher using this book with a student, you should point out the appropriate section to be reviewed and re-enforced whenever a failure to understand something is evidenced by the student.

In other words, if a student is clearly *not* practicing with full attention, and playing with tension that is evident to the teacher but not the student, then that student does not understand, or is not applying, the concepts of Muscle Memory, and the material presented in the section "The Discovery of Sensations", and "Why You Must Pay Extreme Attention When You Practice". The teacher and the student will discover that by continually reviewing this material as new situations arise, understanding will deepen, practice will improve, and this will show itself in the students ability.

Here is the order in which concepts should be Understood, Tools should be learned and applied to Exercises. As you work with the book, keep reviewing these things.

Order Of Material

Phase One:

UNDERSTAND page 18, "Understanding Muscle Memory"

UNDERSTAND page 19 "Why You Must Pay Extreme Attention When You Practice"

UNDERSTAND page 24 "No Tempo Practicing"

UNDERSTAND & DO: page 28-32 "How to Sit and Hold the Guitar", "Total Body Awareness", and Exercise #1 "Chair and Pillow"

Phase Two:

The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar

Read page 33-36

UNDERSTAND: "Sympathetic Tension and Total Hand Awareness"

DO: Exercise #2 "The Cup", and read "Teaching the Arm to Move the Hand",

DO: Exercise #3 "The Right Hand String Shifting Exercise", Step 1 and Step 2,

UNDERSTAND page 37, "The Types of Thumb Movement"

UNDERSTAND page 44, "The Complete Stroke"

DO: Exercise # 5, Step Three of "The Right Hand String Shifting Exercise", page 38, using the Thumb. Look out for Sympathetic Tension in the hand as the Thumb plays. Make sure the Thumb does a Complete Stroke as it plays.

Phase Three:

Read page 51 through 55: "The Basic Mechanics of Using the Pick"

UNDERSTAND: How to position the Arm and Hand. How to Hold the Pick and Bring it to the String.
Sympathetic Tension

UNDERSTAND: Using The Gradual Pressure Technique to Minimize Sympathetic Tension.

Skills to Understand and Master:

How to do a Down Pick

How to do an Up Pick

Read page 44, "The Complete Stroke"

Do three steps of Right Hand String Shifting Exercise with Pick.

Phase Three:

Read all of Chapter One and Two

Read and do all of Chapter Four

Your goal is the ability to do the following exercises, which end the chapter, with perfect technique. YOU MUST READ AND RE-READ ALL MATERIAL IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL. YOU CANNOT SET THIS PERFECT FOUNDATION OF TECHNIQUE WITHOUT TRYING YOUR BEST, CONSTANTLY.

After you have understood and discovered the Floating and Heavy Arm, The Light and Firm Finger, and have done the exercises associated with them (Finger Flapping, String Push Downs, the Crutch) you should start working to achieve perfect form and control with the following simple exercises for the left hand. Only do these NO TEMPO until you begin to get the form and control. There is no benefit, and much harm to be done by increasing speed if the Form is incorrect, or Tension is present in the muscles.

Achieve Perfect Form on the following exercises:

Exercise #24, The Butterfly, P. 66 (Walking across the strings with the Floating Arm and Light Fingers)

Exercise #25 The Ladder, P67, (Walking across the strings with the Heavy Arm and Firm Fingers) (The Butterfly and the Ladder should be done first with fingers 1&4, then 1&3, then 1&2)

The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar

Do all the above exercises from the ninth to the first frets. Use the thumb to play the notes, in the same way as you used it in the String Shifting Exercise.

PUTTING ALL THE ABOVE MATERIAL TOGETHER IS A MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENT! WALKING ACROSS THE STRINGS, USING FINGERS 1-4, 1-3, AND 1-2, AND KEEPING THE INACTIVE FINGERS QUIETLY ALONGSIDE THE ACTIVE ONES, AND KEEPING THE RIGHT HAND (PICK OR THUMB) MOVING ACROSS THE STRING CORRECTLY, REQUIRES A LOT OF CORRECT PRACTICE, AND A LOT OF ATTENTION. WORK FOR PERFECTION EVERY DAY. EVERY DAY YOU WILL GET CLOSER!

Phase Four:

Read p. 40-41 "The Rest Stroke". Do the Right Hand String Shifting Ex. with the fingers. Do Step 1 and 2 with fingers only touching strings, no playing. Do Exercise #6, using fingers Rest Stroke, first index-middle, then middle-ring finger combinations.

Read p.36. Do Exercise #4, Thumb Up

Read and do p. 42-46, Free Stroke, and Finger Dipping Exercises (Exercises #7 & 8)

Do the rest of the exercises in this chapter, Exercises 9-14.

Phase Five:

Do The Butterfly and The Ladder using index and middle fingers Rest Stroke, then middle and ring fingers, Rest Stroke.

BE CONSTANTLY AWARE OF HAND POSITIONS AND SYMPATHETIC TENSION!

From here, read all of Chapter Five, and work to increase speed with all exercises using the Basic Practice Approach, P. 70

SUMMARY OF UNDERSTANDINGS, TOOLS AND EXERCISES IN "THE PRINCIPLES OF CORRECT PRACTICE FOR GUITAR"

UNDERSTANDINGS	TOOLS	EXERCISES
	<i>Mental Tools</i>	<i>Exercises for the Body</i>
Desire	Rotating Attention	The Chair
Attention	Following	The Pillow
Awareness		
Technique	<i>Tools For Routines</i>	<i>Exercises for the Right Hand</i>
Muscle Memory	No Tempo Practice	The Cup
Finger Intimacy	Posing	Right Hand String Shifting Exercise, Step 1
Beginner's Mind	The Basic Practice Approach	Right Hand String Shifting Exercise, Step 2
		Thumb Up
Mistakes	<i>Physical Tool</i>	Right Hand String Shifting Exercise, Step 3
Watching the Fingers	Gradual Pressure Technique	Developing the Rest Stroke
Intention and Attention		Finger Dipping: The Thumb
Holding the Guitar		Finger Dipping: The Fingers
Total Body Awareness		The 4 note Arpeggio
Total Hand Awareness		The 6 Note Arpeggio
Sympathetic Tension		Thumb Free Stroke
Use of Right Arm, Hand, and Finger		Thumb Free Stroke with Arpeggio
The Cup		Thumb Rest Stroke
How the Arm Moves the Hand		Thumb Rest Stroke with Arpeggio
The Thumb and Sympathetic Tension		
The Action and States of the Thumb		
Role of the Upper Arm		<i>Exercises for the Left Hand</i>
Correct Finger Action		The Balloon
Rest Stroke and Free Stroke		The Light Finger: Finger Flapping
The Complete Stroke		
Exercises		The Firm Finger: String Push Downs
Placing the Arm and Hand Pick Style		All Aboard with the Floating Arm and Light Fingers
Holding the Pick		The Clamp
Bringing the Pick to the String		All Aboard with the Heavy Arm
How to do a Down Pick		The Crutch: Floating Arm, Light Fingers
How to do an Up Pick		The Crutch: Heavy Arm, Firm Fingers
How the Fingers Work		The Butterfly
Effect of Upper Arm on Lower		The Ladder
Effect of Raising the Arm		Play 2 3 Touch
The Floating Arm		
The Light Finger		
The Firm Finger		
The Heavy Arm		
Problems of Developing Left Hand		
How to Develop Left Hand		
Using a Metronome		
The 3 Levels of Practice		

One day a man approached Ikkyu, a Zen master, and asked: "Master, will you please write for me some sayings of the highest wisdom?" Ikkyu took his brush and wrote: "Attention".

"Is that all?" asked the man.

Ikkyu then wrote: "Attention. Attention."

"Well," said the man, "I really don't see much depth in what you have written."

Ikkyu wrote again: "Attention. Attention. Attention."

Half-angered the man demanded: "What does that word 'Attention' mean, anyway?"

Ikkyu looked at him straight in the eye and said: "Attention means Attention".

Zen Story

CHAPTER ONE

DESIRE, ATTENTION, AND AWARENESS

Desire, Attention, and Awareness are the three things you must understand in order to begin your journey toward getting as good as you want to be on the guitar. Each leads to the other.

DESIRE: YOUR FUEL FOR SUCCESS

I have seen that I can give students everything they need to learn to play well, maybe play great. With one exception, that is. In fact, there is one most important quality you must have, in order to go through what it takes to learn to play the guitar. That is desire. You must really feel a need for it in your life, whether you want to play on the amateur level, or the professional.

Unfortunately, desire alone is not enough..., I have often met people who had that desire, but lost it due to frustration about not being able to make any progress.....

When I find this desire in people, it strikes me as a beautiful thing. Unfortunately, desire alone is not enough. In fact, I have often met people who had that desire, but lost it due to frustration about not being able to make any progress in their efforts to learn the guitar. They assumed they didn't have the talent, and gave up. I have also met many people who have played badly for years, and they bravely keep hoping that all the problems they have with all those pieces they struggle with will

someday go away. Someday playing will be enjoyable, and satisfying, and even sound good! Someday they won't fall apart when they play in front of other people.

The person who gives up, and the person who continues playing the same way year after year, assumes that the great players have some special natural ability that they unfortunately do not possess. It is a rather hopeless feeling. Even though I think the methods in this book will help anyone, I am writing this book especially for people who are in this state of frustration, so they will learn that the problem is not lack of ability. They just do not have the *correct information about how to practice to get results.*

I am happy to tell you that if you understand and use the methods in this book, you will have the tools to become as good as you want to be on the guitar....

Your desire to play the guitar is what makes you begin your journey, and when

coupled with the correct information about the mechanics of playing and practicing, your desire will increase and carry you further. I am happy to tell you that if you understand and use the methods in this book, you will have the tools to become as good as you want to be on the guitar.

The person who gives up, and the person who continues playing the same way year after year, assumes that the great players have some special natural ability that they unfortunately do not possess.... They just do not have the correct information about how to practice to get results.....

ATTENTION AND AWARENESS: THE PRICE YOU MUST PAY, AND WHAT YOU GET FOR IT.

It is the desire to play well that I draw upon in the student, in order to get them to pay the price that must be paid on a daily basis, in order to play well. Many students resist paying this price. I am not talking about time spent practicing. I am talking about the *mental*

Sounds simple, doesn't it. And yet it is the first thing I have to teach most students....

power and focus it takes to develop the AWARENESS that is essential for playing well, and enjoying constant improvement. You develop this awareness by learning how to PAY ATTENTION.

Sounds simple, doesn't it. And yet it is the first thing I have to teach most

I am talking about the mental power and focus it takes to develop the AWARENESS that is essential for playing well

students. I usually have to teach them that they are not paying attention when they practice; they are not intense enough mentally. They are not noticing all the things that must be noticed to develop the necessary "sensations" required to control the fingers, so they can do their job

I believe that anyone can learn to play the guitar as well as they want to, if they are willing to pay this price. We usually think of all the hours of practice it takes to play well. And yet I have seen people who have put in many years of practice, and they don't play well at all. So the price of playing well can't be just time spent practicing. No, it has more to do with what you are doing when you practice. And not just what you're doing with your fingers, but more importantly, what you are doing with your mind, with your *attention*. That's why it's called "paying attention".

There is an old saying, "genius is the ability to pay attention to details". If you really understand this statement, you will see that anyone can be a genius.....

There is an old saying, "genius is the ability to pay attention to details". If you really understand this statement, you will see that anyone can be a genius. It should really be understood backwards. What we call genius is the result of enough time spent developing a great awareness and sensitivity to something, by continually focusing our attention on it in an intense way.

It doesn't matter how much time you spend if you don't know the correct things to do, and the correct way of doing those things.....

One of the biggest myths and misunderstandings that I would like to dispel is the idea that a lot of time spent practicing is the key to playing well. It doesn't matter how much time you spend if you don't know the correct things to do, and the correct way of doing those things. Fifteen minutes of *correct practice* will do you more good than 5 hours of incorrect, unintelligent practice. (Actually, bad practice doesn't do you any good at all. It just makes you better at playing badly!

HOW THIS BOOK IS ARRANGED

There are three aspects to this book: **Understandings**, **Tools**, and **Exercises**.

Understandings are things you must know and understand about how the muscles function and also how they learn. You must understand these things so you will be able to use the Tools.

Tools are specific approaches you can use in practicing that will bring results, that is, solve problems.

(You will begin to see that practicing is nothing but the process of discovering and solving problems.) Most importantly, the tools will lead you to discover and experience the correct sensations necessary to perform the various movements involved in playing

Exercises are routines that use these approaches that will develop and maintain your technique. You cannot do these exercises and actually benefit from them, until you have first experienced the correct sensations by using the tools.

USING TOOLS: THE DISCOVERY OF SENSATIONS

All great players pay extreme attention to what they are doing. And as the years go by they become incredibly aware of **sensations** that go by unnoticed for most people. These sensations, or awarenesses, are absolutely essential to good performance of any specialized activity, whether it's singing, playing the piano, violin, guitar, or even swinging a golf club.

I have noticed in my years of teaching that the most valuable qualities a guitar student can have are desire and the ability to concentrate, that is, focus their attention. I have also noticed that what is lacking so often in students' development,

I have also noticed that what is lacking so often in student's development, is they are never shown exactly what to focus their attention on..

is *they are never shown exactly **what** to focus their attention on.* This was true to a great extent in my own case, and only by discovering what those things were, did I develop the awareness of the sensations that lead to good playing.

TECHNIQUE: WHAT IS IT?

Technique, by the way, is a word you hear all the time in relation to playing an instrument. It really means “what you do, and how you do it, to get what you want”. Of course “how you do what you do” makes all the difference in the world when it comes to playing the guitar. We want good technique, which means we get what we want from the guitar in the most economical, effortless manner, with a minimum of stress produced on the playing mechanism, that is, the parts of the body used to play the guitar. Good technique is like a racing car, finely tuned to make every motion in the best

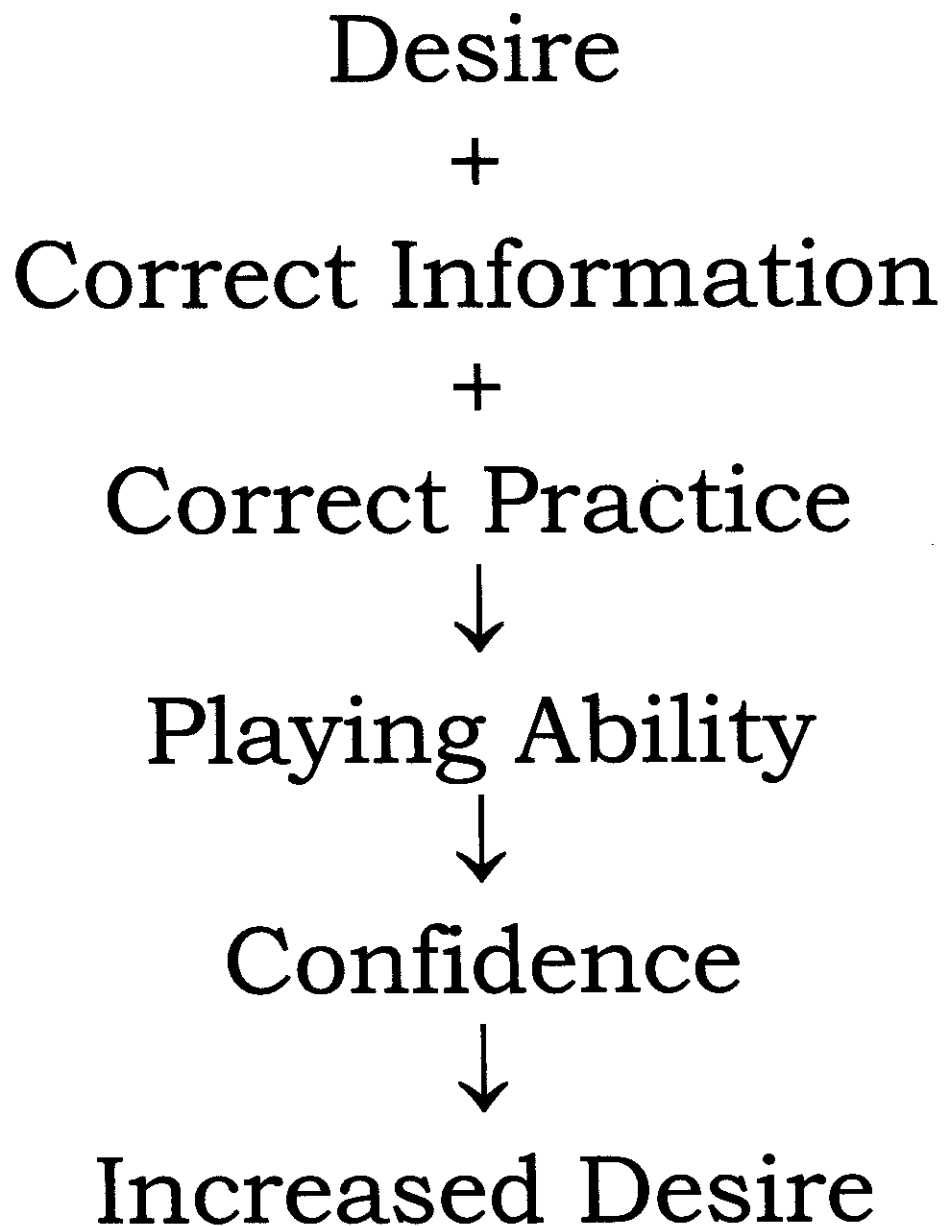
possible way, to maximize performance. Bad technique is like..... well, you figure it out!

It's important to realize that when you see a good player do something you can't do, it's not because they have talent and you don't. It is because they are doing it differently than you are. If they were doing it the way you are, they wouldn't be able to do it either!

It's important to realize that when you see a good player do something you can't do, it's not because they have talent and you don't. It is because they are doing it differently than you are. You may lose control at a certain speed, and not know it's because you are allowing tension in your shoulder, which makes it impossible to have control of the fingers. The person you are watching play it well is very relaxed. He has already paid attention to this tension and gotten rid of it. His inner experience is totally different than yours. If he were doing it the way you are, he wouldn't be able to do it either!

Technique means.....what you do, and how you do it, to get what you want

I firmly believe that anyone can learn to play the guitar as well as they want to, if they have the correct information and use the correct approach.



"When you see the complexity of what you think is simple, then you will see the simplicity of what you think is complex".....Jamey Andreas

CHAPTER TWO

MUSCLE MEMORY

UNDERSTANDING: HOW THE FINGERS LEARN

Your fingers have this amazing ability, as does every muscle in your body, to "remember" anything they do. We all use this ability of the muscles in different ways in various things we do in life. We're all familiar with how a carpenter will take a few practice swings with a hammer before striking a nail. He will slowly bring the hammer to the nail head, **guiding his arm and the hammer along the path he wants them to take when he swings fast and with force.** Then, after a few practice swings, he'll let it fly. The muscles "remember" the path they took at the slow speed, and have no trouble repeating the exact movements necessary to take that path again, and hit the nail accurately.

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The same process occurs in practicing an instrument. The person practicing performs various movements with the fingers, directed to a certain result. If the movements were done slowly and accurately, **with no extra tension in the muscles involved**, the fingers would have no trouble reproducing them at a faster speed.

Why slowly? Because that is the only way to have the mind control the fingers and *make* them do what is desired, and keep extra tension to a minimum, or eliminated entirely. That's why the carpenter does his practice swings slowly, so he can control the path of the hammer. What he's really doing is allowing his muscles to experience

...this is not some special secret thing only some people have or some people use....

the exact movements and adjustments that are necessary to hit the nail accurately. Remember this: Whatever your fingers experience doing slowly, in a state of total relaxation, they will be able to do very quickly, provided they experience enough absolutely correct repetitions of that action.

This ability of the muscles and nervous system of our body to remember and repeat movements they have already experienced is the foundation of how we learn to play the guitar, or any instrument for that matter, and is called **muscle memory**.

It's important to realize that this is not some special secret thing only some people have or some people use. We all do it already, but you must understand it and respect it when you practice, in order to be able to practice effectively, that is, get results. The great players understand these things, and they practice like they understand them. You can too!

***Why slowly?
Because that is the only way to have the mind control the fingers and make them do what is desired, and keep extra tension to a minimum, or eliminated entirely***

***Remember this:
Whatever your fingers experience doing slowly, in a state of total relaxation, they will be able to do very quickly.....***

For You or Against You

Good Practice is knowing the right thing to do, and then making sure your fingers do it!

Muscle memory is a great thing, but it can work for you or against you, because if you do the right thing once, then the wrong thing, and then various combinations of right and wrong, you end up with some pretty confused fingers. This is what most people actually do when they practice, and why they experience little, or inconsistent results, and a lot of frustration.

When they practice, they do not **make** the fingers do the right thing. They are allowing the fingers to make haphazard and inaccurate movements. In ten repetitions of a passage, the fingers may actually do it ten different ways (resulting in various mistakes, wrong notes, or “oops” moments). Usually, the person practicing is not aware of the fact that he was doing it ten different ways. It may be something relatively obvious like using slightly different fingerings, or something more subtle, like tension in various muscle groups. The person practicing is not aware of the differences, but the poor fingers are! When the player then tries to play that passage for someone, well, how will they ever know which of those ten ways the fingers might decide to do it?

This leads to a very useful definition of good practice. **Good Practice is knowing the right thing to do, and then making sure your fingers do it.** This means you must **know** what the fingers should do, and then you must **make** them do it over and over. This is another way of saying, “do the right thing and do enough of it”.

your fingers are your faithful servants and friends. They have great memories, but they have no conscience, that is, they don't know the difference between right and wrong

The key to knowing how to do good practice is to realize that your fingers are your faithful servants and friends. They have great memories, but they have no conscience, that is, they will remember and repeat whatever they do, but they don't know the difference between right and wrong. So, they are just as happy to do the wrong thing as the right thing, they just do what you have taught them (actually, they *are* happier doing the right thing, it's just that they

really have no choice, since they can only repeat what they have already done). Since they don't know if what you just had them do is the right thing or the wrong thing, they leave that up to you. *It's your job to make sure it's the right thing.*

UNDERSTANDING: WHY YOU MUST PAY EXTREME ATTENTION WHEN YOU PRACTICE

Of course, as we continue to try the new skill, and assume the effort we feel must be that way, it becomes ingrained into our approach, and gets worse. So we have a vicious circle, which leads to frustration and bad playing.....

The relative state of tension or relaxation in the muscles is one of the hardest things to be aware of. I once saw a person play with so much tension in her right shoulder that it was up to her earlobe! Always trying to be helpful, I pointed this out to her when she finished. As she let her shoulder down a few inches to it's normal position, she told me I was wrong, she wasn't tense, but very relaxed!

The reason she felt this way is because we *very quickly* become used to whatever we experience, and consider it *normal*. We never question whatever tensions we experience in learning new skills on the guitar, and in fact consider it part of the doing of it. And it often is, but it doesn't have to continue to be that strenuous. We can learn to do the movements with less effort.

However, when we first try something, it is often not possible to do it without a lot of excess tension. The mistake we make is that we assume the tension is inevitable, and never realize we can get to a

point where we can get the result we want without all the huffing, puffing and straining. Often, more stretch or muscle development is required, which will come with a correct approach.

Of course, as we continue to try the new skill, and assume the strain and effort we feel is essential in order to do what we are trying to do, that effort becomes ingrained into our approach, and creates even more strain and stress. So we have a vicious circle, which leads to frustration and bad playing.

So extra tension in the muscles, which every advanced player knows is the number one cause of playing difficulty, becomes a blind spot for us. Usually we are only aware of the *result* of the tension, which is that mistake we just made. Often it happens we are not even aware of that,

As you will see shortly, the correct approach to dealing with "mistakes" caused by tension, is to repeat the movement extremely slowly, with a great focus on keeping all muscles relaxed

because we start to filter out those unpleasant reminders of our troubles.

So extra tension in the muscles, which every advanced player knows is the number one cause of playing difficulty, becomes a blind spot for us

As you will see shortly, the correct approach to dealing with "mistakes" caused by tension is to repeat the movement extremely slowly, with a great focus on keeping all muscles relaxed. With each repetition, the muscles learn the relaxed way of moving to produce the result you want.

UNDERSTANDING: BECOME INTIMATE WITH YOUR FINGERS

As I said before, your fingers can be your best friend, or your worst enemy. You decide which one they will be, by how much you pay attention to them, and get to know them in the act of practicing and playing. Sort of like the rest of life. Nobody likes someone who never pays attention to them and doesn't get to know them, how they think and how they feel. Your fingers are the same way.

I have seen people play with their fingers like claws, and other muscles hard as rocks. They never bothered to stop and notice this, but rather are trying to bully their poor fingers in to producing the results they want, that is, the unfortunate music they are trying to play. Again, like the rest of life, we get what we give.

UNDERSTANDING: KEEP BEGINNERS MIND

There is a Zen teaching that I have always applied to guitar. It is the concept of "Beginners Mind". It is the principle that whatever we do or experience once, we tend to not be fully present with our attention the second time. The second time we tend to experience not the thing itself, but our *memory* of it. Then with each repetition, we get more and more numb to the actual action or experience. This applies to everything in life, and to guitar as well.

One of the best things I ever did for my own playing is when I put a sign up in my studio that said, **"I don't know how to play the guitar!"** This was after 25 years of playing! Now this sign sure did cause some questions and comments from my students, but it made me incredibly better by leading me to discover many new things I wasn't seeing, because I thought I already knew what these things were about.

One of the best things I ever did for my own playing is when I put a sign up in my studio that said, "I don't know how to play the guitar!"

Every time I touch the guitar, I try to make it the first time. I recommend you do too.

Listen to the words of Hector Berlioz, one of the few great composers who were a guitarist, not a pianist. He is famous for his brilliant and innovative use of the orchestra. He once listened to the (rather unremarkable) music of another composer who was very educated and learned, and knew "everything" there was to know about how to compose. After it was over, he said dryly "He has everything. The only thing he lacks is inexperience."

TOOL: ROTATING ATTENTION

As I said earlier, good practice means knowing the right thing to do, then making sure you do it. There are two very effective ways of doing this. The first is Rotating Attention.

Each step of the way in your development as a player, you learn new

I think of a little man in my head, like the guy in the tower at a prison yard, looking around in a circle all the time to make sure the inmates are behaving!

things to do with your fingers. Scales, arpeggios, hammers and pulls, and so forth. For each one of these techniques, there are vital things to know about how the fingers, and other parts of the body should be working. I will convey many of these things later on.

After you know what should be happening while you are practicing a particular technique, it is your job to make sure these things *are* happening. In the case of minimizing muscle tension, it is a matter of making sure it *isn't* happening. In any case, there will be a number of these things to pay attention to. It often isn't possible to hold them all in your awareness at once. So you must *rotate* your attention frequently as you practice. I think

of a little man in my head, like the guy in the tower at a prison yard, looking around in a circle all the time to make sure the inmates are behaving! Or to be more musical, think of a conductor, watching and listening to everyone in the orchestra.

There will be a number of these things to pay attention to. It often isn't possible to hold them all in your awareness at once. So you must rotate your attention frequently as you practice....

For example, shoulder tension is one of the hardest things for players to eliminate from their

The fact is there is always a reason for mistakes. They always have a cause.....

playing. While practicing, your attention should frequently go there, to see what is happening, and deal with it. Very often, someone will play with shoulder muscles locked the whole time, and never know it. Even if they resolve to keep relaxed before beginning, it seems to happen by itself along the way.

Rotating your attention and awareness on a continual basis while practicing and playing is a powerful tool in eliminating many of the underlying causes of problems in playing.

TOOL: FOLLOWING

Following is more like a laser beam of attention on to a finger or other body part while practicing a particular action, or passage of music. I use this when something is really hard to get control of, when it really seems to be happening by itself (such as shoulder tension, or tension in the abdomen, which I will get to later).

Like a pit bull, focus your attention where needed, mentally, (and visually, for example, looking at a finger), and hang on through the playing. Do this over and over, and your awareness and control will increase.

Like a pit bull, focus your attention where needed, mentally, (and visually, for example, looking at a finger), and hang on through the playing.....

UNDERSTANDING: THERE ARE NO “MISTAKES”, ONLY UNWANTED RESULTS

In order to practice effectively, we must change our idea of what the word “mistake” means. When a mistake happens in our practice, there is usually an immediate emotional reaction. Some annoyance, some feelings of inadequacy, and probably the feeling that it shouldn’t have happened, or probably won’t again. It was some act of God. (This is especially true when playing in front of someone else, when all the weak spots come out).

The fact is there is always a reason for mistakes. They always have a cause. Usually, the cause is not even that difficult to uncover if you know how to look. If we have allowed our first finger to be held stiffly, sticking up in the air, in reaction to what our fourth finger is doing, we shouldn’t be surprised if that first finger misses it’s next note, especially in a fast piece.

I have learned over the years that we deserve every mistake we make. In fact, we have created and guaranteed them by the way we practice. They are simply the result, or effect, of our practice. Our practice is the cause. This is good news, because if we change the cause, we will get a different effect, or result. This means we can figure out how to get the result we want.

So begin to replace the word “mistake” with a much more accurate and useful phrase. A “mistake” is just an unwanted result. No emotion attached to it. Our job is to know the result we want, and figure out how to produce that result by working according to our understanding of the mechanics of playing.

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UNDERSTANDING: YOU MUST WATCH YOUR FINGERS

So we must train ourselves to notice these “results”, and trace their cause, and figure out how to produce different results, the ones we want. This is a matter of tracing backwards from “effect” to “cause”, in doing so, we will always discover some condition that is producing tension in the muscles we need to have control over to get the result we really want.

To do this, we must train ourselves to be aware of all the muscles involved in playing, which means

***We must watch the
fingers most of the
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doing!***

everything from the waist up, and especially the shoulders, arms, hands and fingers. *We must watch the fingers most of the time while practicing, so we know what they are doing!* Not watching the fingers is one of the biggest mistakes students make, and I have seen some books that tell you not to watch them. This advice is wrong. As remarked above, your fingers learn by doing, and remember everything they do. If you don’t watch them and monitor them closely, you won’t know what they’re doing. If you do watch them, and make sure they do the right thing, they will more and more tend to do the right thing when left to themselves, without you watching.

Many people erroneously think that watching the fingers will make you dependent on always having to watch them when you play. They don't understand that because of muscle memory, the fingers will remember what to do if they are shown over and over. I think of it as taking them by the hand and walking them through what I want them to do.

When you are in first grade learning how to write the letters of the alphabet, you learn how to guide the pencil by tracing dotted lines in the shape of letters. This does not produce people who can't write without dotted lines, but rather trains the muscles to make the shapes on their own, by experiencing the correct movements over and over, with the crutch of the dotted lines, which are eventually removed. Makes sense, doesn't it.

When you are in first grade learning how to write the letters of the alphabet, you learn how to guide the pencil by tracing dotted lines in the shape of letters...this trains the muscles to make the shapes on their own, by experiencing the correct movements over and over.....

Some people take the tough approach. They put their fingers through the school of hard knocks. They figure the fingers will figure it out if they are forced to. It's kind of like teaching a kid to swim by throwing him in the lake. You know, it may work once in a while, but I wouldn't walk away without watching to see if they drowned or not!

No, the fact is, you must be much kinder to your fingers than that, or believe me they will have their revenge!

For instance, say I notice I keep missing a note in a passage. I then notice it's right after my second finger pulls off to my first. I then notice the note that I'm having trouble with is supposed to be played with my fourth finger, but my fourth finger is busy curling up with tension in reaction to what my first and second fingers are doing.

No, the fact is, you must be much kinder to your fingers than that, or believe me they will have their revenge!

The only way to get the result I want is to change the behavior of the fourth finger. I MUST REPEAT THE PASSAGE OVER AND OVER, SLOW ENOUGH SO THAT I CAN

CONTROL MY FOURTH FINGER AND MAKE IT DO WHAT I WANT. This may mean doing it incredibly slowly. As you will see in the section under posing, it may mean not moving at all, but holding a position and relaxing in to it.

The only time watching the fingers is a bad idea, is when sight reading, where obviously you need to keep your eyes on the music. This is not the kind of practice for technique building that I am talking about. When you do sight read, if you have trained the fingers properly by watching and guiding them, they will work properly when not watching them while sight reading.

Obviously, if you are watching your fingers, you have to either play from memory, or be looking back and forth between the music and your fingers.... This means you will most often be working on small fragments of music.....

Obviously, if you are watching your fingers, you have to either play from memory, or be looking back and forth between the music and your fingers. This means you will most often be working on small fragments of music, and using the practice tool I will describe next, called No Tempo Practice.

Remember, practicing means knowing the right thing to do, and making sure you do it. This often requires watching the fingers intently to make sure they are doing the right thing. This is how you train them to work correctly when you're not watching.

UNDERSTANDING: THE FINGERS ARE ENERGIZED BY INTENTION AND ATTENTION

I think all teachers have something good to offer us. It might be one thing they say, or sometimes even just an attitude about music or the guitar that we pick up sub-consciously. I once had a teacher exclaim to me "you must play with INTENTION". Unfortunately, he didn't go into much detail. Or maybe I'm a slow learner, because I think it took me about twenty years to really understand this!

When you practice, you must have the *mental idea* of what you want your finger or fingers to do, before you do it. You must know, in a mental way, so that you could say out loud what you want. You must hear what you want. You must feel what you want physically. You must be able to see the fingers do what you want in your mind's eye.

And most importantly, you must NEED and DESIRE the notes, that is, feel an emotional need for them that will be satisfied by hearing those notes. I call this Loving the Music.

All of this is INTENTION. And it takes great ATTENTION to make all this happen when you practice. It is how the fingers get their orders, how the mind tells them what to do. It is rather mysterious, magical in fact. When you play, it happens sub-consciously, but can be made conscious if desired. This is the basis of Mental Practice, which many players use.

When you practice, you must have the mental idea of what you want your finger or fingers to do, before you do it.....

TOOL: NO TEMPO PRACTICE

Tempo means the speed of the beat at which you are playing. When you have a tempo, even a slow one, you must be there with the note at the right time, whether or not your fingers are doing the right thing in the right way. That is why it is often a very bad idea to practice with a tempo, especially when you are trying to teach your fingers something new and relatively complicated. Practicing with a tempo will often result in imprecise, awkward, and tension producing movements.

No tempo practicing simply means making the movements one at a time, with full attention to making sure that everything is being done in the right way, with minimum tension and maximum relaxation, especially between the notes.....

No tempo practicing simply means making the movements one at a time, with full attention to making sure that everything is being done in the right way, with minimum tension and maximum relaxation, especially between the notes.

When doing no tempo practice, you must make sure you completely release any tension generated by the last effort you made, before you begin the effort to play the next note.

Often what happens when someone practices is that they just push through the music, trying to play it as fast as they heard some other guy play it, or as fast as it goes on the record. This is the worst possible thing you can do. It will really tie your muscles up in knots, and you will have to spend a lot of time untying those knots, if you're lucky enough to sometime learn what practicing is really about.

No tempo practice, used with the next tool, Posing on the stress points will enable you to learn *anything* you want to learn on the guitar, given enough time.

TOOL: POSING

Posing is one of the most powerful techniques you can use to improve on the guitar and solve any problems you are having. All problems in playing come from two sources: not knowing the correct thing to have your fingers do to achieve the result you want, and not knowing how to practice in a way that makes sure your fingers are doing the right thing every time.

All problems in playing come from two sources: not knowing the correct thing to have your fingers do to achieve the result you want, and not knowing how to practice in a way that makes sure your fingers are doing the right thing every time

These two conditions, together, produce the biggest and most immediate obstacle to getting the result you want in your playing, and that big obstacle is **unnecessary muscle tension**. It is this muscle tension that must be eliminated, and the first step in doing it, as in solving any problem, is to become aware of it. Until you are aware of your unnecessary muscle tension, you can play a passage over a million times, and it isn't going to change, except for the worse, because going over and over it with the same muscle tension will just produce more muscle tension to deal with and play through.

A person who learns this way, and most do, including myself, is like a child who is learning to walk, but doesn't know that somebody tied his shoelaces together. They will learn to walk somewhat, in a very limited way and with a lot of trouble, but they certainly will never run! This is how so many people play, when they play with excessive muscle tension. They are walking with their shoelaces tied, and when they try to run, they usually fall over.

Posing is a way of stopping and looking down, to see something you never noticed before, your shoelaces are tied together. So you bend down, untie them, and walking feels completely different.

So what is posing? It is simply stopping, and noticing what is happening in your body (and especially the different parts of the playing mechanism, neck, shoulders arms and hands) while you are in the middle of trying to do whatever it is you are trying to do. It sounds very simple, and it is, and when you get used to doing this, instead of always rushing in trying to force things to come out when you play, you will start doing it all the time, especially when you see how it improves your playing.

As you play, notice those spots that give you the most trouble. These are the spots where you are having the most unnecessary muscle tension. I call these stress points.

As you play, notice those spots that give you the most trouble. These are the spots where you are having the most unnecessary muscle tension. I call these **stress points**. Most people, unknowingly, train themselves to ignore these problem areas. They are vaguely aware they are having a problem, and they know they don't like that spot very much. But if they were to stop themselves right in the middle of that action, and observe everything that was going on *at the exact moment the problem occurs, they would see the problem, and the solution*. And they would discover that muscle tension, and the various things causing it, are the source of the problem. ALWAYS IDENTIFY AND POSE ON THESE STRESS POINTS.

You should use posing when you first discover a problem, to find out what is happening. But this technique will not help you if you don't know what the correct thing to do in your problem situation is. You still have to know what the fingers should be doing in order to give you the correct result.

Posing is a way of stopping and looking down, to see something you never noticed before, your shoelaces are tied together. So you bend down, untie them, and walking feels completely different.....

The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar

For example, should the finger be closer to the string, should the hand be in a different position, should the finger be moving from a different joint as it strikes the string?

Here are some examples of common stress points:

I hope it is clear now that practicing is much more than taking out your instrument, and going over the music. Although this is what so many people do, it does not make you any better, and can actually make you worse.

- Any time you place a bar or half bar
- Any time you separate the right hand thumb from the fingers, as in reaching back for a bass string in an arpeggio.
- Any time the left hand is in the air, with no finger down, supported only by the arm and body (The Floating Arm)

We will use Posing and No Tempo Practice in the exercises that follow.

I hope it is clear now that practicing is much more than taking out your instrument, and going over the music. Although this is what so many people do, it does not make you any better, *and can actually make you worse.*

if they were to stop themselves right in the middle of that action, and observe everything that was going on at the exact moment the problem occurs, they would see the problem, and the solution

In the following pages, I will go in to detail about exactly what your fingers should be doing when you play, as well as other essential elements of playing and practicing, such as how to sit, and how to position the hands.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- 1) Your fingers learn by doing. Whatever they do, they remember and repeat. This is called Muscle Memory.
- 2) Practicing means knowing the right thing to do, and then making sure you do it. Your job, when you practice, is to make sure you understand what you're supposed to do *before you play a note*, and then make sure that is what actually happens when you do play a note. This is much easier said than done. This demands your absolute attention.
- 3) Your fingers are energized by Intention and Attention. This is how your mind tells them what to do.
- 4) We must be aware of the result we want, and the result we actually get. We must not let blind spots become part of our practicing. We must then treat every "unwanted result" as an effect whose cause must be discovered.
- 5) We must watch our fingers most of the time while practicing.
- 6) It is essential to spend a good amount of time doing *No Tempo Practice*. This means you are playing with no beat, only examining each movement as it takes place, and making sure only the correct movements occur. While doing this, you will become aware of the **stress points** that occur in the music, that is, the movements that are causing you the most unnecessary muscle tension, and therefore the most difficulty.
- 7) Posing, along with No Tempo Practice, will train, or re-train the muscles to perform the required movements with no harmful tension. As stress points are discovered by observing and analyzing unwanted results, we use Posing and No Tempo practice to "de-stress" these points.
- 8) As your understanding of guitar technique advances, you will know what to do about each one of these stress points. In the beginning, you must rely on the guidance of your teacher.
- 9) The techniques of Posing and No Tempo Practice are the best ways to deal with extra tension, because they are themselves the practice of becoming aware of the tension. You can eliminate a great deal of tension from the muscles simply by being aware of how they feel, and consciously relaxing them as you do your slow and no tempo practice.

"The process of learning how to play is the process of learning how to hold the guitar and how to touch the strings".....Jamey Andreas

CHAPTER THREE

HOLDING THE GUITAR, USING THE RIGHT ARM, HAND, AND PICK

UNDERSTANDING: HOW TO SIT AND HOLD THE GUITAR, THE FOUNDATION OF YOUR TECHNIQUE

When I first started teaching myself to play the guitar, I sat on the edge of my bed. Later on, when I began taking classical lessons, I remember arguing with the teacher because I wanted to sit cross-legged on the floor with the guitar! Well, he was right, and I was wrong. Fortunately, I did what he told me and sat on a chair. I might still play sometimes sitting on the floor cross-legged, or even sitting on the bed, but I wouldn't do any serious practicing that way. Not unless I want to have lots of trouble playing, and probably walking too!

Many people cause themselves trouble the moment they sit down with their guitar to practice. This is because they don't realize that how you sit and hold the guitar is extremely important, and affects everything you try to get your fingers to do.....

Many people cause themselves trouble the moment they sit down with their guitar to practice. This is because they don't realize that *how you sit and hold the guitar is extremely important, and affects everything you try to get your fingers to do*. I have seen some students, coming in for their first lesson after already playing for awhile, who have guaranteed that it will be extremely difficult, or impossible for them to play, because of the way they are holding the guitar.

they never experience how it feels to have the fingers do their job while the muscles of the shoulder and upper arm are relaxed

They don't realize, for instance, that their shoulder muscles are constantly tense, maybe because they are trying to prevent the guitar from falling off their lap, or for some other reason. Often, they start to learn this way, and it feels normal after a while, and they never experience how it feels to have the fingers do their job while the muscles of the shoulder and upper arm are relaxed. You must realize

that everything is connected, and all muscles affect one another. So pay attention to how you sit and hold the guitar. I have given some general guidelines here, and a sketch. There are many books that cover the subject very well, and you should consult other books about it also, especially the classically oriented ones. I just want to make the point that how you sit and hold the guitar is vitally important, it's importance is often overlooked, and you should pay attention to it, and investigate the matter.

- Sit on a chair, not a sofa or bed. The chair should be a hard, not a soft chair. At most, it may have a slight cushion of only a half-inch or so. It must be level, and not slope back. A slight slope will leave you with many back problems. You may have to experiment with different chairs for a while.

How to sit and hold the guitar ("classical" style, recommended).....

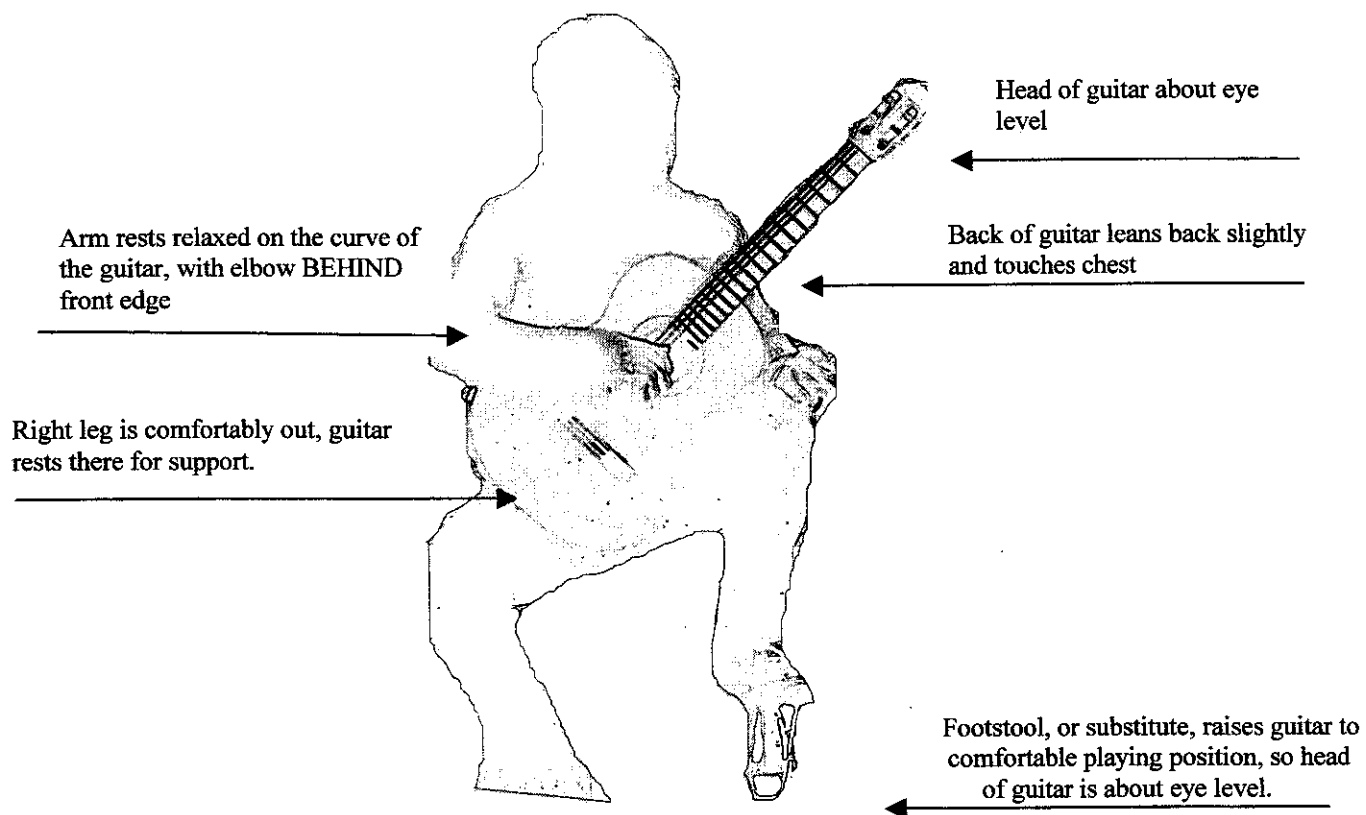




Fig. 1. Sitting for practice, p. 28
doing Baloon Ex., p. 59



Fig. 2. Placing right arm.
Read over description on p. 30

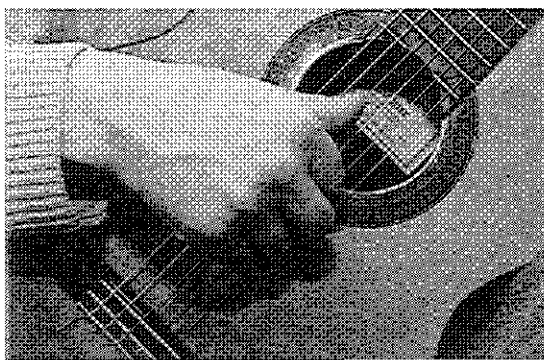


Fig. 3. The Cup, p. 34

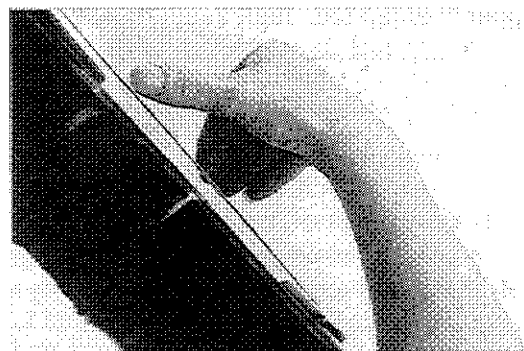


Fig. 4. The V, see p. 31.
Placing the Arm and Hand in position



Fig. 5. Right Hand String Shifting Ex.
Fingerstyle, Beginning



Fig. 6. Right Hand String Shifting Ex.
Fingerstyle, End

I recommend this position over the more casual one. It gives the most support to the instrument.... If you practice in this position, and get used to it, you will easily be able to play in the other one. But not vice versa.

- Sit to the edge of the chair, with your back straight.
 - If you are playing casual style (the guitar on your right leg), it is necessary to elevate your right foot with some books or a stool, about 4 inches or so, to bring the guitar up enough to feel comfortable. (Many people unconsciously raise their right heel, and play that way, because their body knows the guitar needs to be a little higher). Do yourself a favor, put some books under your foot, or get a classical type footstool, available in any music store.
 - If you are playing classical style, elevate the left foot, and place the guitar on the left leg, so it is held in place equally by both legs, and leans back slightly onto your chest. I recommend this position over the more casual one. It gives the most support to the instrument, and allows the body to remain as relaxed as possible, so the arms, hands, and fingers can do their job. If you practice in this position, and get used to it, you will easily be able to play in the other one. But not vice versa.
- Check your position with a mirror each time you sit down. Check it as you play. Make sure you are not twisting your body, or leaning to one side. **MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT RAISE THE RIGHT SHOULDER AS YOU PLAY. CHECK IT CONSTANTLY.** If you find your right shoulder raised up, you have already allowed a high degree of tension into those muscles. Playing with that tension “locks” it in to the muscles, and gradually, you don’t even feel it as tension, but think it is a “normal” feeling. Do it long enough, and you will notice it as PAIN! Study the pictures I have included in this book carefully, and re-study them. Your sensitivity to how you sit will develop over time.

UNDERSTANDING: TOTAL BODY AWARENESS

One of the most important things you must keep in mind when you practice and play, is that all the parts of your body affect each other as you are making the movements involved in playing. If you want to have the control of the fingers necessary to play well, you must be aware of your whole body as you practice, not just your fingers. This begins with an awareness of how your body feels and what it is doing as you simply sit and hold the guitar.

If you want to have the control of the fingers necessary to play well, you must be aware of your whole body as you practice, not just your fingers..

I will illustrate this by telling you about two students who started lessons with me as beginners. They were mother and son, the mother middle aged, and the son about twelve years old. The mother went first, and I showed her how to position the guitar on her legs, classical style, and then I placed her arm on top of the guitar, as I have described earlier. I told her to relax into that position, which she did to the best of her ability. However, as I checked her over, I saw that the area from her shoulders to her neck was raised, bringing her shoulders up *even though she wasn’t doing anything with her hands!*

If you find your right shoulder raised up, you have already allowed a high degree of tension into those muscles that you must not play with, or through, as so many unfortunate guitarists do...

I pointed this out to her, and with a little focusing of her attention there, and the help of a mirror, she was able to relax them. I had her focus on this feeling of relaxation, since she would have to get very used to this feeling.

Now when it came to the son, it was even more interesting. He could not even sit with the guitar without his legs tensing and moving around probably in an attempt to feel secure with the guitar. His arms also tensed, and pulled and pushed the guitar. *Any attempt to learn to play would have been useless without addressing this situation first.* By making him aware of all this, and having him

sit to the edge of the chair, with good posture, he began to get comfortable holding and sitting with the guitar. I had him just sit with it motionless, focusing his attention on his body, and relaxing. Like many people, he found that he would tense up *without even attempting to use either hand*.

We all have areas of body tension that affect our efforts to learn an instrument. Every time I become aware of a new area of tension, and work with it while practicing, I find noticeable improvement in my playing

Now, most often in this situation, a student will just go ahead and begin to attempt to play with this kind of tension present. It will become integrated into all the movements being practiced, and will limit or prevent the performance of those movements. Luckily, they were beginners, and will be able to avoid developing these problems by developing awareness and understanding instead.

We all have areas of body tension that affect our efforts to learn an instrument. I have had to focus on my jaw, my tongue, my throat, my ankles, and my abdomen, to name a few, at various times in my playing life, and new ones are always cropping up. Every time I become aware of a new area of tension, and work with it while practicing, I find noticeable improvement in my playing. If you constantly practice with whole body awareness, your awareness becomes extremely refined.

UNDERSTANDING: THE CORRECT USE OF THE RIGHT ARM, HAND AND FINGERS

Fingerstyle, The Arm (for pickstyle, see the end of this chapter)

If you are training yourself to play classical guitar, you must sit in the classical position. I recommend you try this position anyway, and try to get comfortable with it, as it gives the guitar more stability for the player in all circumstances. It allows the arms and hands to be more relaxed as they function, which is extremely important.

the poor man clawed away with both hands so tight, it looked like he was beating the guitar with clenched fists!

Your shoulder will tend to tense up with every move your fingers make.

- The arm should be on top of the guitar, comfortably extended so that your arm is touching the upper curve of the guitar at the point where the body of the guitar begins to curve downward.
- Your elbow should not be past the front edge of the guitar. Your arm should rest on the guitar so that your elbow is about 2 inches behind the front edge. This allows the arm to gain support from the guitar, so it takes minimum effort on your part to keep your arm from falling off

the guitar. (This works for most people, however, some players simply have longer arms, which require the elbow to be placed more to the front, perhaps even in front of the bout. This requires a different muscular adjustment, but is a workable position).

Watching your hand in a mirror is strongly recommended....

I am describing the correct position of the arm here, but in the next section I will give you steps to follow that will put your arm and hand in to the correct position.

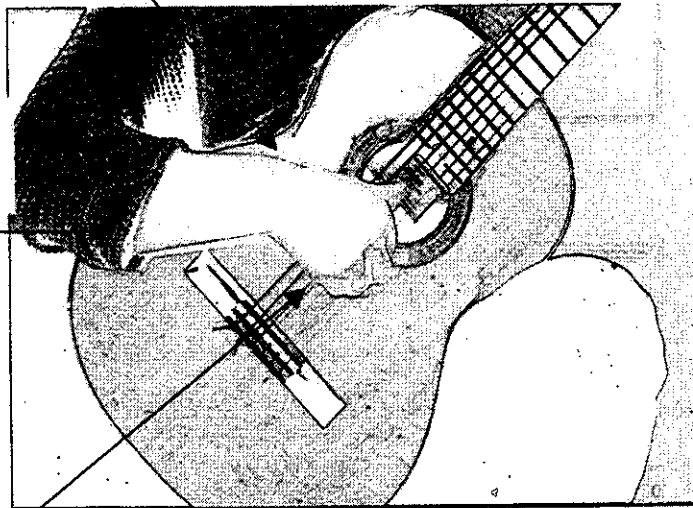
You *must* realize how extremely important it is to keep your neck and shoulder relaxed as you play. Your shoulder will tend to tense up with *every move your fingers make*. If you are not practicing constant

awareness of the shoulder, you will have big troubles with the hand and fingers. Part of the reason is because any tension that develops in the neck, shoulders or upper arm, will always work to pull the hand out of position, and it takes a while to gain enough awareness and control of these muscle

How to place the right arm and hand for fingerstyle... ..

There is a space, about 2 ½ inches, between your wrist and the guitar.

Arm makes contact at the front edge of the guitar, where it starts to curve downward. The arm touches guitar 1 to 2 inches in front of elbow.



*Wrist is turned and hangs downward so that knuckles are parallel, or nearly parallel to strings
Thumb is visibly out to the side*

groups. It is essential, as you practice, that you are always aware of and checking your hand position. Watching your hand in a mirror is ESSENTIAL!

Placing the Arm and Hand Into Position

Follow these steps to get the right hand into the correct position for fingerstyle playing. Do this in front of a mirror, so you can be as sure as possible of getting it right. Getting and keeping the correct hand positions is one of the most important responsibilities you have. It is a vital part of all the pieces that work together to make up your technique. If hand positions are not right, nothing will be right.

Getting and keeping the correct hand positions is one of the most important responsibilities you have.....

Sit in a chair, and hold the guitar as correctly as possible.

While holding the guitar in normal playing position, place the right hand on the neck, so your hand is palm down, flat on the strings, and your entire forearm is also flat down, touching the strings. Your forearm, right down to the elbow, should be lying on top of the strings, actually touching them. Your hand will be somewhere between the 5th and 1st fret, your elbow near the sound hole or pickups for electric.

Slide your arm straight back, keeping your arm flat to the strings. As you do so, your elbow will begin to go up a little (in the direction of the ceiling), but keep your elbow, wrist, hand and fingers straight in relation to themselves.

- Stop when your hand is over the sound hole, (or pickups for electric). Your elbow now will be pushed over the edge of the curve of the guitar.
- Keeping the hand flat and fingers together, *turn* your fingers so they point straight down to the floor.
- Now keep everything as it is, except for this: raise your hand 2 ½ inches off the face of the guitar. Place index, middle and ring fingers *lightly* on the first string.
- Extend the thumb toward the top of the guitar (toward the neck); you should see a V shape formed by where your thumb crosses your index finger. Look down and check for this V shape.
- Again, keeping everything as it is, *lightly* place the index on the third string, middle on the second, and keep the ring finger on the first string.

If you are not practicing constant awareness of the shoulder, you will have big troubles with the hand and fingers

If you have done everything correctly, your hand should look very much like figures 3&4. This is the position that is used by the great players for fingerstyle, or classical. It gives the optimum use of the fingers, in a powerful way, from a relaxed hand. I call it The Cup. YOUR HAND AND FINGERS SHOULD BE IN THE SAME POSITION AS IF YOU WERE "CUPPING" THEM AROUND A BASEBALL OR TENNIS BALL". There will be slight differences of detail depending on particular hand anatomy, but the essential position is as described, and should be your starting point, to be adjusted as you gain experience and insight.

Pose in this position many times, at random, during practice sessions, 15 seconds or so at a time. Do the Chair and the Pillow, and focus your attention on a relaxed shoulder, arm, wrist, hand and fingers. It will be a very wise and rewarding investment of practice time.

EXERCISE #1: THE CHAIR AND PILLOW *see fig. 1*

This is a passive exercise, or pose. I once used this on a seventy-year-old man who had tried to play for years. Actually, he did play, but it was much more like work. Work for him, and agony for the

listener as the poor man clawed away with both hands so tight, it looked like he was beating the guitar with clenched fists!

Obviously, he had a lot of muscle tension locked in to his muscles from years of wrong effort. So I had him do the following exercise every day, and within a month he was a new man. When he started, he literally could not hold either hand still, in position, without it shaking. After working with the exercise, he was able to hold his hands in position without shaking, and had the foundation to build real technique.

I have had people come to me after playing for a few years..... They don't realize how much tension they are always playing with, and how it is locked into the muscles....

This man was an extreme case, but I have seen teenagers in the same condition. It is not an age thing. I have had people come to me who, after playing for a few years, are having problems with more advanced things, especially speed. They don't realize how much tension they are always playing with, and how it is locked in to the muscles. When I slow them way down, or give them a pose like the following one, their hands start to shake! It can be hard to take in the beginning, but as they stay with it, things begin to calm down. The important thing is to relax as the tension builds or actual shaking occurs, not tighten further against it, which is what these players have been doing for years.

The Chair

This pose should be done for 30 seconds every day, and at random while practicing. It is simply a device for getting you to focus your attention into the body while sitting with the guitar, so that your awareness of your body will develop and increase.

- 1) Just sit with the guitar, and place your right hand in The Cup position according to the directions above, and notice how your whole body feels as you do so. Have a mirror set up in front of you, and ask yourself these questions:
- 2) Does the guitar feel very solid and secure, held in place by its points of contact with the body, and the right arm on top of it?
- 3) Do my legs and feet remain relaxed and still, or are they tending to tense up, even though my arms and hands aren't doing anything?

From my observation, I have noticed that the abdomen tends to tense before other body parts, and keeping it relaxed helps keep the rest relaxed.....

- 4) How do my ankles feel? Do they tend to tense up? How do the top of my thighs feel as the guitar rests on them? Do they stay relaxed?
- 5) Is my back straight, or am I slouching?
- 6) Are my shoulders remaining relaxed? Are they even with each other, or is one higher than the other one?
- 7) Do I feel the weight of my right arm as it rests on top of the guitar? Is my right shoulder completely relaxed?

I hope you appreciate how profoundly important these considerations are in learning to play. I hope you use this exercise in your own practicing, and don't dismiss it because it seems so simple.

The Pillow

There is one body part that tends to tense up with drastic effects for the rest of the body, and for the control especially of arms, hands and fingers. That body part is the abdomen, or belly. I have found it very useful to think of my belly as a pillow, which should be soft, and let go, as the guitar rests against it, like a Pillow on the Chair. As you are doing the Chair, pay attention to your belly, and

make sure it is a soft Pillow for the guitar, and check it often as you play. Make sure it is always there.

I have found it extremely useful to make a habit of "breathing into the pillow" at random times during playing

From my observation, I have noticed that the abdomen tends to tense before other body parts, and keeping it relaxed helps keep the rest relaxed. It is also connected with another one of the worst things you can do: hold your breath! Students tend to do this all the time. Be on the lookout for it. *Tensing the abdomen and holding the breath happen especially when playing fast, and when shifting the left arm and hand, especially outward, away from the body.*

I have found it extremely useful to make a habit of "breathing into the pillow" at random times during playing, especially during difficult passages. It increases awareness of this important area, and helps relax everything.

UNDERSTANDING: SYMPATHETIC TENSION AND TOTAL HAND AWARENESS

Now is a good time to introduce a concept that is of vital importance to proper development, and to getting results from your practice time. This is the concept of Sympathetic Tension.

Soon after I began playing, I noticed that whenever my left hand did something difficult, like a bar chord, it was harder to control my right hand, and I would make more mistakes. After studying this for awhile, I realized that it was a basic principle that I could state this way: Whenever the left hand does something requiring a lot of strength, the right hand (and arm) muscles will also contract, in sympathy with the left arm and hand. It's as if they want to help out.

One of the major problems in learning to use the right hand fingers in playing is sympathetic tension caused in the hand and arm by the upward movement of the thumb, toward the bass strings

I then observed that almost any movement, whether of large muscles or small, would induce tension in surrounding muscles. The movement of any finger would tend to tense other fingers.

It seems very obvious, and perhaps seems like it hardly needs to be said. But believe me, it does. People almost always tend to focus on the muscles they are trying to control, and ignore what else might be happening. Think of the image of someone trying to thread a needle, and

screwing their face up, and sticking out their tongue while they do so; as if that would help!

This is why I mentioned Total Body Awareness earlier. As you move the individual fingers, extend this idea to Total Hand Awareness, and pay attention to the tension induced in the inactive fingers because of the effort of the active ones. Reduce this tension through focusing your attention and relaxing. Otherwise, your muscle memory will make sure that the tension becomes a part of your playing and feels normal.

I noticed that whenever my left hand did something difficult, like a bar chord, it was harder to control my right hand, and I would make more mistakes.....

One of the major problems in learning to use the right hand fingers in playing is sympathetic tension caused in the hand and arm by the upward movement of the thumb, toward the bass strings. The hand is expanding as it does this, and many things go wrong during this movement. Very often, the hand position will be lost due to a build up of tension throughout the hand *and* arm, all the way up to the shoulder. The Thumb Up Exercise will deal with this problem later on.

In pickstyle, sympathetic tension makes the muscles of the wrist and hand tense unnecessarily when the pick makes contact with the string, and exerts pressure on it. (See "The Correct Way To Do A Down Pick", and "The Correct Way To Do An Up Pick" at the end of this chapter.

UNDERSTANDING: THE CUP, THE BASIC RIGHT HAND POSITION

As stated, the resulting position you get by following the steps described for placing the Right Hand is called The Cup. The Cup is the position the right hand is in most often when playing, the position from which the fingers will move, and to which they will return. They will assume other positions also, and you must learn to be relaxed in those also, but the cup is primary.

Tension in the right hand is extremely common. It comes from wrong sitting, wrong positioning of the arms and hands, and wrong use of the fingers. It is enhanced by inattention to the physical body while playing, so the feelings of tension are not recognized for what they are. It is very common that if a student begins with good positions, after a little bit of playing, he will have lost them because of tension retained in the hand from those movements, and not released.

The following exercises will be very valuable for changing this situation. They will build the awareness, and resulting control you need.

EXERCISE #2: THE CUP

It is very common that if a student begins with good positions, after a little bit of playing, he will have lost them because of tension retained in the hand from those movements, and not released.....

When you play with your fingers, the role of the fingers is the same as the role of the hammers inside a piano that strike the strings. Look inside a piano. You will notice all the little hammers sitting above their strings, very close to them. Hit a key. One hammer goes up, the others remain still. The hammer that moved returns to its position. What would happen if each time you played a note, the hammer ended up in a different place from where it started? What if when you looked under the piano lid you saw a mess of hammers all over the place!

You probably know what I am getting at. Your fingers must function like the hammers. The more they do, the better and easier you will play. They don't tend to function like piano hammers at first. They have to be trained. Any tension allowed into the arm and hand while practicing will prevent them from being properly trained.

The mechanism of the piano itself holds the hammers in place. When you play the guitar, your arm position and hand position hold the fingers or pick in place, so they can act like delicate hammers to strike the strings.

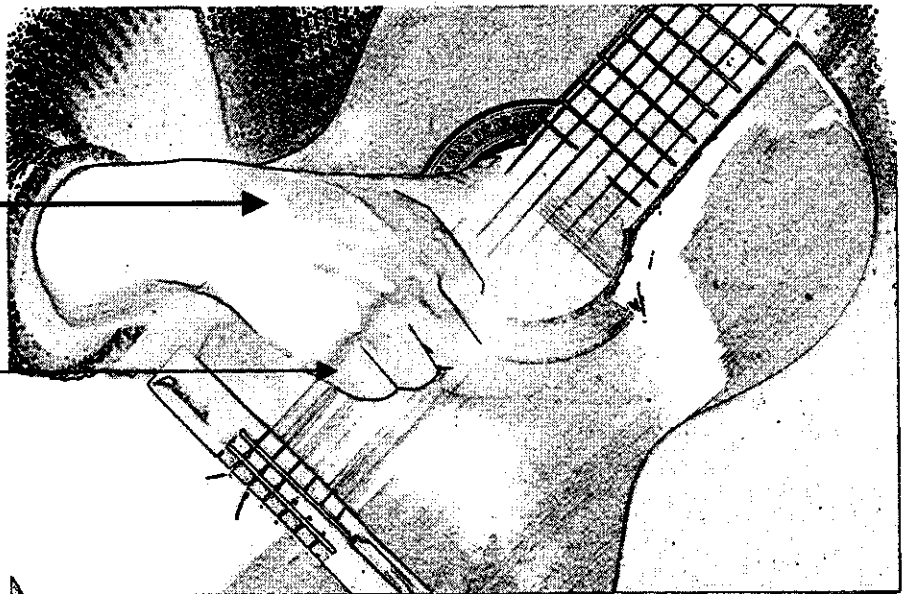
- 1) The position for The Cup is the same described above for the right hand. Get in to this position, and end up with the thumb on the 4th string, index on the 3rd, middle on the 2nd, and ring finger on the 1st.
- 2) Make sure you see the V between the thumb and index, and the wrist is *slightly* raised.
- 3) Focus intensely on relaxing everything as much as possible, especially hand and fingers. Focus on the feeling of the fingertips touching the strings.
- 4) Gently bring the fingers close to each other, so they are lightly touching each other. There should be no space between them. The index finger should tuck into and slightly behind the middle finger. Your hand is in a "cupped" shape.
- 5) You are using only enough effort to sit and maintain this hand position. You are extremely relaxed and your fingers are lightly touching the strings. I use some images to help me get the right feeling. I imagine my fingers are a bunch of bananas, hanging from a tree. Or a bunch of

I imagine my fingers are a bunch of bananas, hanging from a tree. Or a bunch of sausages, hanging in a deli. You know, the big fat ones....

The Cup

Thumb is out to side, when you look down, you see a V between thumb and finger

Fingers are touching each other lightly
Knuckles are parallel, or mostly parallel to strings



sausages, hanging in a deli. You know, the big fat ones. Choose the image you like, or make up your own. (I suggest vegetarians pick the former).

- 6) Take your fingers off the strings, keeping them extremely close, but not touching (the piano hammers). Bring them back to the strings, touching lightly. Do this over and over.
- 7) Sit and relax with the fingers lightly touching. Then sit and relax with them not touching, *but dipped in between the strings*. Relax in each of these positions for 15 seconds to a minute.

UNDERSTANDING: TEACHING THE ARM TO MOVE THE HAND

We need to talk about the cause of one of the most common problems guitar players have, which is getting around the six strings with the right hand, whether one is playing fingerstyle or pick style.

The purpose of this exercise is to train the right hand to move properly when changing its playing position from one string to another.....

We have already discussed how to position the arm and hand, and how to bring the fingers or pick to the string. Now we need to learn how to keep each finger in its best position, while playing on the different strings, and moving from one to another.

This exercise is very simple, and very effective. It trains the hand to move properly across the span of the strings, and to stay relaxed in position as it does so. It also trains the larger muscles of the upper arm and shoulder to act correctly, and not produce extra tension as the lower arm moves. **In short, it will help you avoid one of the most common barriers to using the right hand efficiently, whether you play with the pick or with the fingers.**

EXERCISE#3: RIGHT HAND STRING SHIFTING, STEPS 1 &2 *see figs. 5-6*

The purpose of this exercise is to train the right hand to move properly when changing its playing position from one string to another, whether you are using a pick or fingers. The muscles involved in this movement are the neck, shoulder, and upper arm muscles. Some of these muscles are merely holding the upper arm in place, and some are actually moving the forearm. Many players hold these muscles tight when they play, and greatly restrict the mobility of the right hand.

Step 1. Swinging the Width of the Strings

FingerStyle: Swinging the Width of the Strings

- 1) Place the arm and right hand in The Cup. Keeping the wrist arched, and not changing anything about the arm/hand relationship to each other, lower the hand, and place the thumb lightly on the first string. The thumb is comfortably extended to the left, and you see the V between the thumb and the index finger.
- 2) Now pretend that your elbow is screwed down to the top of the guitar, and your arm swings freely from that point, swinging from the elbow. The point of contact of your arm on top of the guitar must be correct, and since it's screwed down, it cannot change.
- 3) Begin to move your hand slowly upward, moving from the elbow, and let your thumb glide past the strings until it comes to rest on the sixth string. As the hand moves upward, it also moves slightly to the left as it goes from string to string. By the time you get to the 6th string, your hand will be almost an inch further to the left than when you started.



Fig. 7. Thumb Up - Beginning. p. 36



Fig. 8. Thumb Up - Middle



Fig. 9. Thumb Up - End



Fig. 10. Rest Stroke, p. 41, with Gradual Pressure Technique Done wrong, adjacent fingers tense



Fig. 11. Rest Stroke with Gradual Pressure Technique Correct, fingers kept relaxed

- 4) *Keep the wrist at the same distance from the face of the guitar the whole time, don't let it flatten out and drop toward the guitar as you move. Also, the turn of the wrist in relation to the arm must be the same; it can't change as you move. You need to be very aware of your wrist as you do this, and you need to WATCH YOURSELF IN THE MIRROR. Do this **very** slowly. It should take you at least a full 10 seconds to move from the first to the sixth string. Focus on a relaxed neck, shoulder, and arm as you move.*
- 5) Now let your thumb fall slowly back to the 1st string, again moving from the elbow, and keeping the hand position intact. Let the thumb fall gently. Take ten seconds at least to go from the 6th string to the 1st. Focus on the whole body, and especially the arm and hand.
- 6) Do this several times, until you are satisfied that your arm is moving correctly, and the hand and fingers stay in the same relationship to the strings, whether you are on the first string or the sixth string.

Step 2. Moving String to String

FingerStyle: Moving String to String

This time you will move one string at a time, placing the thumb on the first, then second, then third etc.. Go to the sixth and then back to the first, placing the thumb lightly and correctly each time. **IMPORTANT:** Make sure you allow the fingers, still in The Cup Position, to move as well. When the thumb is touching the 3rd, 2nd and 1st strings, the fingers will be moving *below* the strings, toward the floor, still in The Cup, and close to the guitar.

Before doing Step 3 of the Right Hand String Shifting Ex., we need to discuss the Thumb

UNDERSTANDING: THE THUMB AND SYMPATHETIC TENSION

One of the major problems in learning to use the right hand fingers in playing is sympathetic tension caused in the hand and arm by the upward movement of the thumb, toward the bass strings. The hand is expanding as it does this, and causes the upper arm and shoulder to tense in sympathy. Very often, the hand position will be lost due to a build up of tension throughout the hand *and* arm, all the way up to the shoulder. Here is an exercise that is very effective for dealing with this problem, and teaching the arm to stay relaxed.

EXERCISE #4: THUMB UP *see fig. 7-9*

- 1) Place the fingertips of your index, middle and ring fingers *gently* on the 1st string. Rest your thumb lightly on the 2nd string. Do the Chair, the Pillow, and relax the entire arm in position. Feel the weight of your arm on top of the guitar. Look at your right hand and make sure you see the V between thumb and fingers.
- 2) Keeping your fingers on the 1st string, begin to float your thumb slowly up past the 2nd string, then the 3rd, until it reaches the 6th string. Watch your fingers intently for any sign of movement or tension. Stop and relax at any sign or feeling of tension.
- 3) When you reach the 6th string, let the thumb touch it and rest on it. Pose and relax in this position.

UNDERSTANDING: THE THUMB, TYPES OF THUMB MOVEMENT

There are 3 types of movement the thumb performs. They are Circling, Pushing, and Bouncing. In addition, there are two conditions the Thumb will assume. They are Floating and Resting.

The Floating Thumb

The thumb is held in position, relaxed and dipped in between two strings, or close to the 6th string, if that is the next note to play. The feeling of the Floating Thumb is very important to get familiar with, as the thumb is often held tense when not in use, often as a result of sympathetic tension from the left hand. This causes innumerable problems in playing.

The Resting Thumb

The relaxed thumb is resting on a string, waiting its turn to play that string.

The Circling Thumb

After playing a string, the relaxed thumb moves upward in a small circular (actually, elliptical orbit, that is, staying close to the strings and not traveling out away from them), and travels to another string, either floating, dipped in between two strings, or resting lightly on a string, waiting to play.

The Pushing Thumb (Thumb Rest Stroke)

This is one of two ways in which the thumb behaves while exerting pressure on a string to play a note:

- The thumb touches the string, grows heavy, and begins to press on the string.
- Everything else stays in a relaxed balance as the thumb presses. All the muscles of the arm, and indeed the upper body, work together to counterbalance the force of the string pushing back at the thumb. They remain as relaxed as possible, making only the adjustment necessary to maintain correct form and position, while the thumb exerts pressure on the string.
- The thumb then pushes through the string, coming to rest on the next string. When someone learns to shoot a gun, they are told to “squeeze” the trigger. This is to prevent a jerky motion as the result of incorrect adjustment of the arm muscles. The feeling is similar with the thumb here. It “pushes” or “squeezes” through the string.
- The thumb relaxes immediately.
- Depending on it's next job, the thumb may stay on that string if it is to be played next, or bounce off and circle upward to a lower (pitchwise) string, or bounce off that string it has landed on and go to another position either Resting on a string, or Floating, dipped in between two strings.

The Bouncing Thumb (Thumb Free Stroke)

The other way the thumb behaves in striking a string is to allow the impact of striking the string to be absorbed by the thumb, and used to propel it in it's next necessary direction:

There are 3 types of movement the thumb performs. They are Circling, Pushing, and Bouncing. In addition, there are two conditions the Thumb will assume. They are Floating and Resting.

- If it is to play the same string again, it will perform a small circle, and end up in playing position over the string.
- If it is to play the next string, it will perform a small circle, and go in to position over the next string, either Resting, or Floating, before playing that string. NOTE: This circling motion of the thumb happens extremely rapidly, and cannot be seen by the naked eye. It is more to be *imagined*, and *felt*.
- If it has to skip a string, as in playing the 6th string, and then the 4th, it will perform a larger circle that carries it over the 5th string.

UNDERSTANDING: THE ROLE OF THE UPPER ARM AND SHOULDER

Every time you play a note with a right hand finger or pick, it is not just the finger or pick playing the note. The entire arm and shoulder play every note. I will explain what I mean, and also why many people have a big problem with accumulated tension in the upper arm.

Think of your arm and hand resting comfortably in position on top of the guitar. Then a finger

Every time you play a note with a right hand finger or pick, it is not just the finger or pick playing the note. The entire arm and shoulder play every note.

begins to apply pressure to a string. What happens? The string begins to apply pressure back at your finger. The upper arm and shoulder muscles must make many adjustments to maintain their position, and the position of your hand while the string is pushing at your finger. In effect, the muscles must tighten, however slightly. As the note is played, and the string released, the pressure against the finger is released also. Now the upper arm and shoulder must relax the effort they made to adjust to the pressure of the string.

The common situation is, however, that a player does not release that effort from the upper arm, and it remains, as a constant tension, which is not consciously identified by the player. This is why keeping the shoulders

relaxed while playing can be so difficult. There must be a constant process of releasing tension from the shoulder, just as there is from the fingers. Of course, with practice, it becomes to a great extent automatic. It becomes a “feeling” you play with. Similar to walking, and relaxing the leg that is in the air, swinging forward, while the other one is supporting your weight.

Keep these things in mind as you do the following exercise, and indeed, any time you play a note. This is an example of what I meant in the previous chapters about discovering sensations, and increasing awareness by paying attention to subtle details. Develop an awareness of the entire arm before, during, and after the stroke.

EXERCISE #5: RIGHT HAND STRING SHIFTING, STEP 3

Step 3. Playing String to String

Goal: Coordination of the Arm moving the Hand, with use of the Thumb motion and conditions described, observing the role of the Upper Arm, and maintaining the arm/hand relationship.

Finger Style: Playing String to String

Thumb Free Stroke

In this 3rd step, you will be doing the same movements as in step 2, but now you will be playing the notes with the thumb. With the hand in The Cup, and thumb out in a V, you will make the movements in this order:

- 1) The Floating Thumb is over the 6th string.
- 2) The Resting Thumb touches the 6th string, begins to apply slight pressure, while the hand and arm remain relaxed in position.
- 3) The thumb pushes through and becomes the Bouncing thumb, and does its little circle, and lands on the 5th string, becoming the Resting Thumb.
- 4) Repeat these steps on all strings, moving the arm correctly as described above, so that hand and finger are brought properly into position.

Thumb Rest Stroke

Do the same as above, but for Step 3, use the Pushing Thumb, which lands directly on the next string, with no circle performed as in the Bouncing Thumb. It relaxes immediately and becomes the Resting Thumb.

Later on, after covering the Rest Stroke, do this exercise again with the fingers.

UNDERSTANDING: GETTING THE CORRECT FINGER ACTION: WAVING BYE-BYE

You have three joints in each finger. Most people who play finger style make the stroke from the middle joint of the finger. This is not the best way; although it is the way you would naturally use the finger if you didn't know any better. It gives your stroke less power, speed, and creates tension in the hand.

Most people who play fingerstyle make the stroke from the middle joint of the finger. This is not the best way, although it is the way you would naturally use the finger if you didn't know any better...

The correct way is to move from the big knuckle, or first joint of the finger.

Here is a good way of getting in touch with the feeling of using the fingers from that joint.

- Raise your hand up to eye level, and cup your hand so your fingers are lightly touching, and point your fingers away from you.
- Move your fingers as you would if you were waving bye-bye to someone, moving them from the big knuckle.

It is essential, as you practice, that you are always aware of and checking your hand position while you practice and play. Watching your hand in a mirror is strongly recommended.

You are now using your fingers in the correct way for playing fingerstyle on the guitar. You are moving them from the metacarpo-phalangeal joint, or more simply, from your knuckle, the big one near your palm, the one we crack when we "crack our knuckles". Moving the finger from this joint when you play, instead of the middle knuckle, as is commonly done, will give you more power and speed, and less tension.

Along with keeping the correct hand positions while playing, the correct action of the finger is one of the hardest things to attain.....

A word of caution! Along with keeping the correct hand positions while playing, the correct action of the finger is one of the hardest things to attain. Very often, students think they are doing it correctly when they're not. Very often, they do it correctly for a while, then stop checking, and it starts to go wrong. Make sure you pay a lot of attention to this, and are constantly checking it. Eventually, of course, as you get used to the feeling of the finger being used this way, it will maintain itself.

TOOL: GRADUAL PRESSURE TECHNIQUE, REDUCING AND ELIMINATING SYMPATHETIC TENSION

This technique will enable you to minimize unnecessary tension. It will help train you to only activate the muscles needed to do a particular action. As just explained, Sympathetic Tension will tie up unneeded muscles, making it difficult or impossible to get the correct result from the needed muscles.

Although it is good to become aware of this tension, and relax it when you do, you are still getting rid of it after it has already occurred. It is much better to not have it occur. If you can prevent unneeded muscles from tensing and reacting in the first place, you will have much better technique.

That is what the Gradual Pressure Technique does. It slows the whole process down, so you can observe it, and gain control over it.

The Gradual Pressure Technique is the slow application of pressure to a string, while Sympathetic Tension is observed and minimized. We will use it in the following exercises.

Although it is good to become aware of this tension, and relax it when you do, you are still getting rid of it after it has already occurred. It is much better to not have it occur.....

UNDERSTANDING: REST STROKE AND FREE STROKE, DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT NOTES

Rest Stroke

The Rest Stroke involves holding the finger at about a 45-degree angle to the string, (in other words, if a sheet of paper were lying flat on the strings, the finger would be halfway to perpendicular to the paper). The finger then *pushes* through the string with a relaxed fingertip, and comes to rest on the string behind. It relaxes immediately.

Study figure 11. It shows how your hand should look to you in a mirror. The index has done a rest stroke, and the middle and ring finger are positioned to do rest strokes.

This stroke is used for maximum volume and a full tone. It is used for melodies and when special emphasis is desired. It is often used in conjunction with free stroke.

Bringing the finger to the string

- 1) Review the directions for placing the right arm and hand in position for fingerstyle, and do The Cup. From this position, with your fingers completely relaxed, extend the index finger to the first string *without moving anything else, and let the fingertip rest lightly on the first string*. Take your middle and ring fingers off their strings, and hold them relaxed just outside of the first string.
- 2) Look down at your hand. Your index finger should be at about a 45-degree angle to the string. (See fig. 11).
- 3) Take your thumb off its string, and let it float, dipped in between the 4th and 3rd string. Make sure it is out to the side, look down and make sure you see the V between thumb and fingers

The Rest Stroke involves holding the finger at about a 45-degree angle to the string, pushing through the string with a relaxed fingertip, and coming to rest on the string behind..

Using the finger with the Gradual Pressure Technique

- 1) *Slowly* begin to apply pressure with the finger, and make sure you are making the movement from the big knuckle of your hand. Watch for any reaction from other muscles, especially the thumb. **Relax the thumb as it tenses in reaction to the pressure applied with the index.** Relax the middle and ring fingers as they tense in reaction to the pressure applied with the index finger. This is the Gradual Pressure Technique.
- 2) Watch the distal joint of the finger, that is, the last joint, closest to the fingertip. It should not stay bent and rigid as the finger applies pressure, but should relax and give. The finger should not straighten out either. The middle joint should remain bent somewhat, as the finger continues to apply pressure and completes the stroke.
- 3) Increase the pressure on the string, until the finger pushes through the string, and sets it into motion. When you strike the string, move from the big knuckle, and allow the finger to come to rest against the next string, and then relax. **The finger must relax immediately, and allow the pressure of the string it is touching to propel it to the position from which it will play next. If it is to play on the string it is resting on, it stays there. Otherwise, it uses the energy of that string to propel it to its next necessary location. A common mistake people make is keeping the finger pressed against the string after a rest stroke, and even keeping it there while they struggle to get the next finger to play its note.**

A common mistake people make is keeping the finger pressed against the string after a rest stroke, and even keeping it there while they struggle to get the next finger to play its note.

To begin to get familiar with the rest stroke, use the index and middle finger on the first string. Carefully check everything you're supposed to do before you begin, and keep checking as you do it. **Be aware of the feeling in all your muscles, from the neck to the fingertips, to make sure they remain relaxed in the correct position.**

a finger begins to apply pressure to a string. What happens? The string begins to apply pressure back at your finger.

EXERCISE #6: THE REST STROKE WITH GRADUAL PRESSURE TECHNIQUE *see fig. 10-11*

After you have gotten used to doing the Rest Stroke while keeping the rest of the hand in position and relaxed, begin to integrate this stroke with the arm movements practiced in the Right Hand String Shifting Exercise. Put the hand in position for Rest Stroke, and play from the 1st string to the 6th, using index and middle rest stroke. Then practice with the middle and ring fingers alternating. Then reverse the order of the fingers, use middle and index, and middle and ring.

Look out for these things:

- The hand and wrist *always* stay in position.
- The Hand is completely relaxed before and after each stroke.
- As each finger touches, then applies pressure to the string, other fingers or muscles don't tense in sympathy with the active finger. You must watch the hand, and use the Gradual Pressure Technique.

Use index and middle with Rest Stroke. Then do it with the middle and ring finger. Watch the hand, use the Gradual Pressure Technique, and be on guard against Sympathetic Tension.

UNDERSTANDING: FREE STROKE

The position of the finger before striking the string with a Free Stroke involves having a wider angle between finger and string. There is more involvement of the middle and tip joints in making the stroke, and the tip joint does not usually relax fully, but maintains some firmness. Most importantly, the fingertip *does not come to rest on the string behind*, but passes over it.

Actually, The Cup position, when properly done, is the position from which the Free Stroke is made. The additional descriptions in this section will make it clearer.

This stroke is used the most in playing. It is what is commonly known as fingerpicking. It is used for arpeggios of all types, and for the tremolo. It may also be used for scales and at times when a lighter touch and tone are desired.

A correct Free Stroke is one of the trickiest things to learn, and also one of the most important. If you can learn it properly, you can develop great speed and ease of playing, and be able to do any kind of fingerpicking.

This stroke is used the most in playing. It is what is commonly known as fingerpicking.

Bringing the finger to the string

The position for free stroke is quite different than the one used for rest stroke. The free stroke is a lighter stroke, *and the finger does not touch the string behind as it follows through.*

A good guide to use is this: the finger that is going to play must be positioned so that its middle knuckle is below the string it is going to hit.....

The hand is positioned lower toward the floor when playing free stroke. It is still the same distance from the face of the guitar, but it is lower to the floor **because the hand must bring the finger into a different position in relation to the string it is going to play**, since you don't want it to touch the string behind. A good guide to use is this: the finger that is going to play must be positioned so that its middle knuckle is below the string it is going to hit. **Warning: students often think their middle knuckle is below the string it is going to hit, but it isn't. Look at your hand, use a mirror, and make extra sure of this each time you practice.**

The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar

- 1) Review the directions for The Cup. Make sure you have it in all its details.
- 2) Slowly begin to apply pressure with the finger, and watch for any reaction from other muscles, especially the thumb. Relax the thumb as it tenses in reaction to the pressure applied with the index. Relax the middle and ring fingers as they tense in reaction to the pressure applied with the index finger.
- 3) The distal joint of the finger will stay firmer for the free stroke than for the rest stroke, not giving as much as it did for the rest stroke. The middle joint should remain bent, as the finger continues to apply pressure and completes the stroke.
- 4) Increase the pressure on the string, until the finger pushes through the string, and sets it into motion. When you strike the string, **BEGIN THE STROKE FROM THE HAND KNUCKLE, AND USE THE MIDDLE KNUCKLE ONLY TO GUIDE THE FINGERTIP OVER, BUT CLOSE TO, THE STRINGS BEHIND THE STRING BEING STRUCK.** If you are doing The Cup correctly, the position that your finger is being held in, in relation to the string, should allow your finger to pass over the string behind it as it follows through with its stroke.
- 5) If your finger hits the string behind it after its stroke, you are not positioned correctly, or you are not using the finger correctly. **Go over and check everything again!**

The most common problem with the free stroke, aside from beginning the stroke with the middle knuckle instead of the big one, is keeping the finger up in the palm after the stroke.....

How To Tell If You Are Doing The Free Stroke Correctly

Here is a good way of checking for the correct action of the finger during free stroke.

- Place your hand in position for free stroke, and place the index finger on the 3rd string, the fingertip just lightly touching the string.
- Without playing the 3rd string, lift the index finger off of the string, and place it on the 4th string, *so that the nail is touching the string.* Relax in this position. Do you see how your finger looks? Do you see how you must move from the big knuckle in order to get your nail on the 4th String?
- Now, from this position, without moving the hand, place the nail of the index on the 5th string, which makes you move even more from the big knuckle. Do you feel that stretch in the finger? This is the look and feel of the finger as it does a free stroke.
- Now, go back in to the Cup, and this time, *play* the 3rd string with the index, using the finger in the same way, getting the same look and feeling, moving from the big knuckle. Sail over the strings behind, but keep the fingertip close to the strings. Don't let it go up into the palm.

After the finger makes its stroke, and follows through, let it relax and return either to the position it came from, or where it will be used next, if that is different. The most common problem with the free stroke, aside from beginning the stroke with the middle knuckle instead of the big one, is keeping the finger up in the palm after the stroke, not returning to a relaxed starting position near the strings, ready to play. (Read the Complete Stroke). The worst thing you

can do is keep the finger up in the palm, and then begin to use another finger. Pretty soon, none of your fingers will be near the strings, they'll all be up in your palm!

A correct Free Stroke is one of the trickiest things to learn, and also one of the most important. If you can learn it properly, you can develop great speed and ease of playing, and be able to do any kind of fingerpicking.

and have them make a difference in your playing, will be exactly in proportion to how much of yourself, that is, your attention, you put into them.

UNDERSTANDING: THE COMPLETE STROKE

This is one of the most important Understandings that you, as a guitar player, can have. If you keep this concept in mind each time you practice, your practice will be very powerful. As with all the Understandings in this book, make sure you return to them again and again. Your actual understanding of them, and ability to use them,

the finger is relaxed and in position before the note is played, and it returns to its next position, relaxed and ready to play the next note....

You must make sure each note is played using the COMPLETE STROKE. This means the *finger is relaxed and in position before the note is played, and it returns to its next position, relaxed and ready to play the next note.*

Begin to apply slight pressure to the first string with your index finger, pushing into the string slightly. As you do this, keep your attention focused on the rest of your hand, especially the thumb and the little finger...

Think of a great pool player, who can clear the table without missing a shot. In order to do this, he must, with each shot, be able to leave the cue ball exactly where he wants it so that he is *already set up for the next shot*. He sees each shot as a part of a process, not an isolated incident. This is how you must see each note, and all the movements necessary to make each note.

The most obvious violation of this is when someone does a rest stroke, and keeps the finger pressing against the string it has come to rest on, while the next finger comes in to play. The more notes you play like this, the more build-up of tension, and playing becomes difficult or impossible.

If you use a pick, observe your pick hand and wrist before you play a note. Is it completely relaxed in position? Observe it after you play the note. Is it completely relaxed again and in position to play the next note, or is it still retaining some of the tension from the playing of the last note?

Very often, a student will pick a note and leave the pick somewhere far from the strings, and far from its next note

Very often, a student will pick a note and leave the pick somewhere far from the strings, and far from its next note. Of course, it takes a lot of time and effort to bring it back into position for the next note. Sometimes it's not even possible. Even if it is possible to make the next move, you will pay a price in extra tension created to make it in time. All of this can be avoided by making a complete stroke each time you play a note. When you practice No Tempo and slow tempo, watch your fingers or pick and make sure they are doing this.

If you use your Attention properly, you can make sure that you are doing a Complete Stroke. When you do No Tempo practice, watch each finger make its move. Think about where that finger is going to play next, and don't take your attention away from that finger until you have left that finger in its next playing position (see Following, p. 21), and you are keeping it as relaxed as you possibly can.

EXERCISE #7: FINGER DIPPING WITH THE THUMB *see fig. 12*

Goal: Learning how to use the Thumb to sound notes, while keeping the hand in The Cup, and completely undisturbed by the action of the Thumb.

"Finger dipping" is the phrase I use to describe where and how the fingers should be positioned.

There is a basic principle in playing. It is that your fingers should always be "relaxed, and in position"....

There is a basic principle in playing. It is that your fingers should always be "relaxed, and in position". Jascha Heifitz, the great violinist, known for his incredible technique, was asked his secret. He said, "I know where my fingers are". I would add to this "Know *how* your fingers are." Easier said than done.

"Follow the Fingertips" is one of my constant thoughts in practicing. Knowing where your fingertips are at all times reveals the source of most problems.

The first obstacle to always being "relaxed and in position" is being able to tell the difference between actual relaxation, and varying degrees of tension

The first obstacle to always being "relaxed and in position" is being able to tell the difference between actual relaxation, and varying degrees of tension. As already discussed, many people cannot, and this ability must be cultivated through attentive practice. The other obstacle is *knowing* the correct position in any situation. It can take a great deal of analysis and experimentation to know what the best place for a particular finger might be at any given time, especially with the left hand.

"Follow the Fingertips" is one of my constant thoughts in practicing. Knowing where your fingertips are at all times reveals the source of most problems.

The right hand is a little easier in this regard. One thing we know is the fingers must be NEAR the strings in order to strike them, and the closer the better. A distance of even an 1/8 of an inch can be the difference between being able to do something, and not being able to, especially at high speeds.

Practicing Finger Dipping, with a free stroke, from the Cup position, is a great way to train the fingers to play and stay close to the strings.

Preparation: Faking It

First, we will "fake it". That is, we will make the motion of touching and sounding the string, but will not actually do so. We will use each finger, one at a time, and let the finger pass over the string, and return to position. *In this way, you get to practice the correct motion, without*

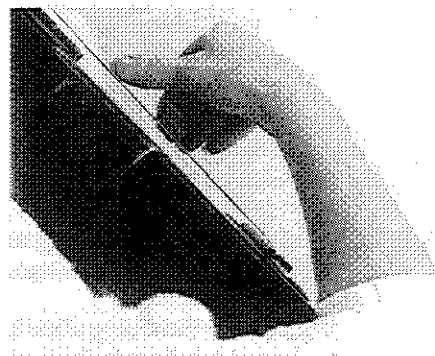


Fig. 12. All fingers dipped, in Cup. Notice how you can just see fingertips below strings. See p. 46

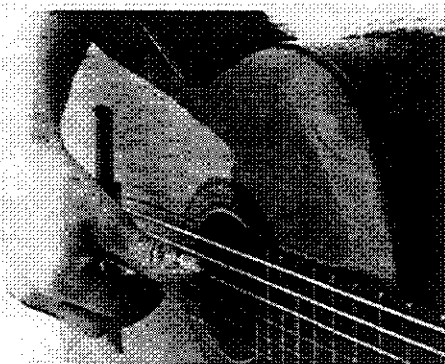


Fig. 13. Index before Free Stroke Quietly alongside middle

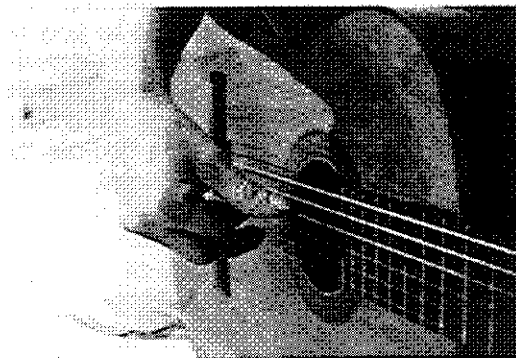


Fig. 14. Index after Free Stroke. Fingertip low to strings. Movement from Big knuckle

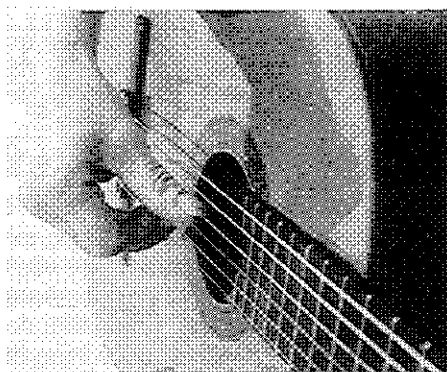


Fig. 15. Incorrect Free Stroke. Middle knuckle sticking out past middle finger



Fig. 16. Middle after Free Stroke. Index and ring finger stay in Cup position



Fig. 17. Ring finger after Free Stroke. Index and middle stay in cup position

inducing Sympathetic Tension into the right hand, and losing the position. (Actually coming in to contact with the string, and pushing it, engages the muscles of the arm, as they make their necessary adjustment in order to keep the arm and hand position. Of course, this is necessary, as discussed above, but it is better to have the fingers practice their movements without this difficulty first.)

So, do the following exercise, but first, do it without actually touching and sounding the string, then do it with touching and sounding it.

- 1) Get into the Cup. Make sure your fingers are lightly touching each other, you have the V between thumb and fingers, and the middle knuckle of each finger is below the string it is touching.
- 2) Keeping the fingers lightly touching the strings, allow the thumb to “fall”, and sound the 4th string. That is, use the thumb to play the 4th string, but only allow the thumb to move, nothing else, especially the wrist. The thumb should move from the joint at the wrist, not the middle joint. (It is a good idea to use The Gradual Pressure Technique here).
- 3) Watch your fingertips as you use the thumb. Make sure they stay lightly touching the strings. You must stay extremely relaxed in order to keep your fingertips in position.
- 4) After it “falls”, bring the thumb back up to where it began, touching the 4th string. Bring it up in an elliptical motion, that is, circle it up, but keep it close to the strings, don’t allow it to move far outward from them. Let it come to rest finally on the 4th string. All fingers should be as they were when you started.
- 5) Now remove the thumb and fingers from their strings, but keep them extremely close, dipped in to the strings. Relax, and let the thumb fall again in the same way. Watch the fingertips, and keep them close and dipped in to the strings.
- 6) Do this over and over, paying attention to everything, relaxing, and keeping the fingers dipped in position between the strings.

***The other obstacle
is knowing the
correct position in
any situation....***

EXERCISE #8: FINGER DIPPING WITH THE FINGERS *see figs. 13-17*

Goal: to begin to gain independent, individual use of each finger, which is essential for reliable technique at any level of playing. To develop the ability to have each finger perform a Free Stroke, without inducing Sympathetic Tension in other fingers, or anywhere else.

Preparation: Let’s review the correct action of the finger for Free Stroke. Go into the Cup Position. Without playing the 3rd string, lift the index finger off of the string, and place it on the 4th string, so that the nail is touching the string. Relax in this position. Do you see how your finger looks? Do you see how you must move from the big knuckle in order to get your nail on the 4th String? Make sure you use the fingers this way in the following exercises.

Also, as in the previous exercise, do this first with “faking it”. Make the motion with the fingers, but pass over the string without touching and sounding it.

- 1) Get into the Cup. Make sure your fingers are lightly touching each other, you have the V between thumb and fingers, and the middle knuckle of each finger is below the string it is touching.
- 2) Keeping the thumb, middle and ring fingers on the strings, make a stroke with the index finger, while you keep everything else lightly on their strings. Make sure the index makes it’s stroke from the big knuckle, waving “bye-bye” as discussed before. Also make sure it clears the strings

behind it, sailing past them. Keep it close to the strings as it sails past, don't let it curl up into the palm.

- 3) Now take the fingers *off the strings, and keep them dipped*. Make the same stroke with the index finger, watching the others, making sure they stay in place.
- 4) Do the same thing using the middle, then the ring finger, keeping the others in place. First, with the others lightly on the strings, then close and dipped in.

You will find that using the middle finger, while keeping the others relaxed, is particularly difficult. Do you see how your index wants to come off the string when you use the middle finger, during the time the middle finger is returning? You must use a lot of Posing, and No Tempo practice to train the fingers in this regard. If you can reach the required level of mental intensity, you will be successful.

I cannot over-emphasize attention to the entire body, and constant checking of the shoulder, wrist and hand *during and after every move*. I have found that students *always* get tense in the shoulder, and/ or go *slightly* out of position with the wrist or hand. I would like to be there to correct you as you get tense or go out of position, but I probably won't be, so please correct yourself!

It will take a lot of practice to get this control, but you will get it if you stay with it. Do these every day for a few minutes.

EXERCISE # 9: THUMB AND FINGERS, THE 4 NOTE ARPEGGIO

Goal: to perform a basic four note pattern (arpeggio) with Thumb and Fingers playing adjacent strings, maintaining the Arm/ Hand relationship and The Cup position during movements, and returning to the correct position at the end.

If you can do this finger movement correctly, you have the basis for all other types of fingerpicking patterns. After practicing The Cup, and the Finger Dipping Exercises, do this exercise.

- 1) Get into the Cup, fingers lightly touching the strings.
- 2) Play the 4th string with the thumb.
- 3) As the thumb returns to a dipped and floating position over the 4th string, play the 3rd string with the index finger.
- 4) As the index returns to its position, and lightly touches the 3rd string, which it has just played, and while it *remains lightly in touch with the 3rd string*, play the 2nd string with the middle finger.
- 5) As the middle returns, (*and making sure the index stays in light contact with the 3rd string, it will want to come off*), play the 1st string with the ring finger. Return the ring finger to the outside of the 1st string. Your hand should look as it did when you started.

You must make sure your fingers are doing a *correct* free stroke. MAKE VERY SURE!

EXERCISE #10: THUMB AND FINGERS, THE 6 NOTE ARPEGGIO

Goal: the same as the previous exercise, with the addition of two notes, as is often required in playing.

This very important and often used arpeggio pattern is an extension of the previous one. Do the 4 note Arpeggio above, and then follow Step 5 with these steps.

- 1) As the ring finger returns, play the 2nd string with the middle finger.

- 2) As the middle finger returns, play the 3rd string with the index.
- 3) Return the index finger.
- 4) You should be as you were when you started. Repeat from Step 2.

EXERCISE #11: THE BOUNCING THUMB: THUMB FREE STROKE

Goal: *Gaining the ability to keep the fingers relaxed and in position, dipped into the strings, while the thumb is in motion with a Free Stroke (Bouncing Thumb).*

- 1) Do the Cup, fingers off the strings, dipped and floating.
- 2) Touch the 4th string with the Thumb, slowly apply pressure, push through the string, and allow the push of the string back at your thumb to propel it upward, as you circle the thumb slowly up to the 6th string.
- 3) Let it Float over the 6th string a few seconds. Relax everything.
- 4) Let it Rest on the 6th string.
- 5) Keeping the fingers dipped and floating, (watching them), repeat the same thumb action as before, this time on the 6th string. Allow the thumb to perform the little circular motion described under the introduction to the Bouncing Thumb (imagine and intend it), and let the Thumb come to rest on the 5th string.
- 6) Repeat step 5, this time sounding the 5th string, and coming to rest on the 4th.
- 7) Repeat from Step 2.

EXERCISE #12: THE BOUNCING THUMB WITH ARPEGGIO

Goal: *gaining the ability to use the Thumb Free Stroke, (including its upward motion), and maintain the Arm/Hand relationship and relaxation, while the fingers are in motion with a Free Stroke.*

- 1) Do the Cup.
- 2) Lower the Right Hand so that your Thumb lowers to the 3rd string, your index to the 2nd string, and the middle finger is on the 1st. Your ring finger is outside the 1st string, relaxed alongside the middle.
- 3) Rest the Thumb lightly on the 3rd string, slowly apply pressure, push through the string, sounding it, and allow the push of the string back at your thumb to be absorbed, and help propel it upward, and circle it back to the 6th string, *very slowly*.
- 4) *While the Thumb is Circling*, play the 2nd string with the index, free stroke, followed by the middle finger playing the 1st string, and the index again playing the 2nd string. *Keep relaxing everything every step of the way as you do this, and make sure the shoulder doesn't tense up, and the hand doesn't move out of position.*
- 5) As the index plays for the second time, the Thumb should have reached the 6th string.

- 6) Now play the 6th string with the Thumb, using the Bouncing Thumb, and intending the small circular motion it makes as it absorbs the push of the string. As the Thumb plays, make sure the index finger returns to its position dipped in between the 1st and 2nd string, ready to play.
- 7) As the Thumb completes its motion, it comes to rest on the 5th string. Play the 2nd string with the index, free stroke, followed by the middle finger playing the 1st string, and the index again playing the 2nd string.
- 8) Play the 5th string with the thumb in the same way as before, followed by the index, middle, and index sequence. The Thumb ends up on the 4th string this time
- 9) Repeat the thumb, index, middle, and index sequence as before, the thumb finally ending up on the 3rd string. You are now back to where you were in the 3rd step.

EXERCISE #13: THE PUSHING THUMB: THUMB REST STROKE

Goal: gaining the ability to use the Thumb Rest Stroke, (including it's upward motion), and maintain the Arm/Hand relationship and relaxation, while the fingers are in motion with a Free Stroke.

- 1) Do the Cup, fingers off the strings, dipped and floating.
- 2) Touch the 4th string with the Thumb, then slowly apply pressure, push through the string, sounding it, and allow the push of the string back at your thumb to propel it upward, as you circle the thumb slowly up to the 6th string (this stroke is a Free Stroke). Make sure you maintain the hand perfectly in The Cup.
- 3) Let it Float over the 6th string a few seconds. Relax everything.
- 4) Let it Rest on the 6th string.
- 5) Keeping the fingers dipped and floating, (watching them) allow the thumb to grow heavy, and begin to press on the string. Everything else stays in a relaxed balance as the thumb presses. All the muscles of the arm, and indeed the upper body, work together to counterbalance the force of the string pushing back at the thumb. They remain as relaxed as possible, making only the adjustment necessary to maintain correct form and position, while the thumb exerts pressure on the string.
- 6) Keeping the fingers dipped and floating, (watching them), Let the thumb push straight through to the 5th string and Rest. It does not do a bouncing, circular motion.
- 7) Continuing to watch the fingertips to make sure they are dipped and floating, and after checking the shoulder for tension, let the thumb push through to the 4th string, relax it and let it rest.
- 8) Repeat from Step 2.

EXERCISE #14: THE PUSHING THUMB WITH ARPEGGIO

Goal: gaining the ability to use the Thumb Rest Stroke, (including it's upward motion), and maintain the Arm/Hand relationship and relaxation, while the fingers are in motion with a Free Stroke.

- 1) Get into the Cup position.
- 2) Lower the Right Hand so that your index is on the 2nd string, and the middle finger is on the 1st. Your ring finger is outside the 1st string, relaxed alongside the middle.
- 3) Rest the thumb lightly on the 3rd string.
- 4) Let the thumb fall, playing the 3rd string, and then begin to circle it back to the 6th string, *very slowly*.
- 5) While the thumb is circling, play the 2nd string with the index, free stroke, followed by the middle finger playing the 1st string, and the index again playing the 2nd string. Keep relaxing everything every step of the way as you do this, and make sure the shoulder doesn't tense up, and the hand doesn't move out of position.
- 6) By the time the index plays again, the thumb should have reached the 6th string.
- 7) Now play the 6th string with the thumb. Use the Pushing Thumb, and come to rest on the 5th string. As you use the thumb, make sure the index finger has by now returned to its position dipped in between the 1st and 2nd string, ready to play.
- 8) With the thumb waiting and resting on the 5th string, play index, middle, index again, on the 2nd, 1st, 2nd strings. As the index returns after playing the second time, begin to apply pressure to the 5th string with the thumb. Push through the string, coming to rest on the 4th string.
- 9) With the thumb resting on the 4th string, repeat the motions of index and middle from Step 8. End up with the thumb resting on the 3rd string.
- 10) Repeat from step 3.

UNDERSTANDING: ABOUT EXERCISES

I would like to say a little bit about using exercises for developing technique. It should be clear from everything discussed so far, that doing exercises without an understanding of how the muscles function and learn, without a clear understanding of the purpose of the exercise, and without absolute attention to the body, and the sensations occurring while doing an exercise, is useless. In fact, it is actually very harmful. Incorrect practicing locks tension into the muscles, and limits our ability to play, and sometimes makes playing impossible for the aspiring student.

Many people play scales and other exercises for years, and experience no improvement. This is because they are practicing without understanding, attention, and awareness. They do the same thing over and over, for years perhaps, and are never really aware of the presence and importance of all the harmful muscle tension they are creating and playing with, or trying to play with.

In fact, scales and many other exercises are actually much too complex to provide technical benefit to many students. There are many things that must be worked on separately first. Many muscle groups need to be paid attention to and trained in their roles before more complex movements can be done correctly. I played scales for many years, and had many problems at faster speeds, as is

Many people play scales and other exercises for years, and experience no improvement. This is because they are practicing without understanding, attention, and awareness.....

true for a lot of players. It wasn't until I started dealing with the underlying fundamentals of guitar technique, that I developed real speed and control in scales and many other areas of technique.

The exercises that I give in this book are to be considered **Foundation Exercises**. They will provide, over time, the foundation for continuous development of *effective* technique. As you do them every day, you will begin to see a new awareness come in to your playing, and an increased ability to play well, due to increased control of the muscles necessary for playing.

These Foundation Exercises don't require a lot of time. **They require a lot of attention and understanding, and also consistency.** That is, you must actually do them every day.

USING THE RIGHT HAND AND ARM FOR PICKSTYLE

UNDERSTANDING: THE BASIC MECHANICS OF USING A PICK

The Arm and Hand

The best position for the arm and hand when using a pick is quite different from fingerstyle.

Whereas in fingerstyle, you rest your elbow on top of the guitar, for pick style, the arm will be placed *so that the elbow is past the top curve of the guitar*, and the hand will not curve at the wrist, but rather, arm, wrist and hand are flat to the face of the guitar, just floating above the strings about an inch or so. Here is a good way to get into that position.

for pick style, the arm will be placed so that the elbow is past the top curve of the guitar, and the hand will not curve at the wrist, but rather, arm, wrist and hand are flat to the face of the guitar, just floating above the strings about an inch or so

1. While holding the guitar in normal playing position, place the pick hand *on* the neck, so your hand is palm down, flat on the strings, and your entire forearm is also flat down, touching the strings. Your whole forearm, right down to the elbow, should be lying on top of the strings, actually touching them. Your hand will be up around the 5th fret, your elbow near the bridge or pickups.
2. Slide your arm straight back, keeping your arm flat to the strings, but your elbow will start to go past the spot where the strings attach to the guitar. Let it go back, and let your elbow go up a little (in the direction of the ceiling), but keep your elbow, wrist, hand and fingers straight in relation to themselves.
3. End up with your index and middle finger touching, as if holding a pick, over the soundhole, (or pickups, for electric).
4. Now raise your hand and arm together *slightly* so that when you look down, you can see that your arm and hand are in a straight line, and are no more than 1/2 inch above the string. That is, the hand and arm are flat to the face of the guitar. This is the best position for your arm when you are using a pick. Now I must mention a few things about a very important and often overlooked part of technique when using a pick, and that is *holding* the pick.

Holding the Pick

A lot of people cause themselves trouble by the way they hold the pick. There is a certain point at which how you hold the pick is an individual thing, and you will find differences among some great players. Eddie Van Halen holds the pick between his thumb and middle finger, for instance. Most players don't. Most players hold it between the thumb and first finger. This is what I recommend, especially for beginning players.

Now I certainly wouldn't tell Eddie to hold it any differently, but I do tell students not to hold it that way when they start, because for most people it is an unbalanced and awkward position, but if someone insisted, after working with it for awhile, that they seriously preferred the middle finger, I would say go ahead. In some things, your feeling of its rightness for you should take precedence over everything else. Just be sure it really does work for you, and you are not stubbornly holding on to something that is not working, but has just, over time, begun to feel "normal" for you.

A lot of people cause themselves trouble by the way they hold the pick.

After following the preceding section on placing your arm correctly, follow these steps for holding the pick:

and the tip... sticks out about only a quarter of an inch.. This is very important, because if too much of the pick sticks out from your fingertip, you will have too much of it contacting the string, making it difficult to play.

- 1) Hold the tip of the pick in your left hand.
- 2) Hold your right hand in front of you, let the hand be in a relaxed curl, and turn your arm so that your thumb is closest to the ceiling, your palm is facing your left side. (as if you were going to shake someone's hand, but more relaxed).
- 3) Lay the pick on the side of your right hand index finger, the side that is facing the ceiling. The wide part of the pick lies firmly on your finger, and the tip is pointing in the same direction as your finger and it sticks out about only a quarter of an inch. This is very important, because if too much of the pick sticks out from your fingertip, you will have too much of it contacting the string, making it difficult to play. More on this later.

- 4) Now place your thumb over the pick, laying it gently on the wide part of the pick. It should be perpendicular to your index finger, which is how it naturally falls. That is, your thumb and the tip of the pick make an L shape. You should see about a quarter of an inch of the pick sticking out as you look down at your thumb.

Above all, avoid pressing your wrist in to the face of the guitar, which many people tend to do. This causes tension in all the muscles involved in the playing process.

Bringing the Pick to the Strings

With your arm placed as described above, and your hand holding the pick correctly, you are now going to bring the pick to the strings. The thumb and index finger are holding the pick; the other three fingers should be *out from the hand in a gentle curl, not allowed to curl up in to the hand, like a fist*. You have to watch out for this tendency at all times. It is another one of the ways various muscles want to tense up for security. The hand is more balanced if the fingers are out, in a relaxed way.

Above all, avoid pressing your wrist in to the face of the guitar, which many people tend to do. This causes tension in all the muscles involved in the playing process; likewise with pressing the pinky on the guitar for support.

UNDERSTANDING: USING THE PICK

You must understand exactly how to have the pick touch the string when you play. Many problems are caused by the pick touching the string in the wrong way, at the wrong angle, and then leaving the string in the wrong way. Here is the right way.

Many problems are caused by the pick touching the string in the wrong way, at the wrong angle, and then leaving the string in the wrong way.....

With your arm and hand placed correctly, place the pick so that the very tip is touching the first string, laying on top of it, and going past the string, into the soundhole very slightly. It is important to not have too much of the pick on the string when you play. This happens to be one of the most common things beginners do wrong.

Make sure the pick, as it is lying on the string, is at a *right angle to the string, not tilted in any other way in relation to the string*. When you look down at the pick, it should be going straight in to the string, not tilted toward the floor or the ceiling.

When you look down at the pick, it should be going straight into the string, not tilted toward the floor or the ceiling.....

Most players however, do tilt the pick slightly toward the head of the guitar, so the pick does not strike flat against the string. This is a good idea, it reduces the resistance of the pick as it strikes, and also gives a better tone. It is the same thing classical players do with their fingers, tilting them slightly so the left side of the nail strikes the string, for better tone and ease of playing.

TOOL: GRADUAL PRESSURE TECHNIQUE: PICKSTYLE

Downpick

Have the hand in the correct position for pick style, and make sure you are holding the pick correctly, with no extra tension.

Rest the pick on the first string with no pressure. Relax your arm and allow the weight of the arm to come through the pick, and press on the string, moving the string downward about an 1/8 of an inch.

Notice how the fingers holding the pick, as well as the rest of the hand want to tense up in reaction to this. Hold this position, maintain the slight pressure, and relax as much as possible.

Place the pick under the string, and exert pressure against the string, pushing it up. Here the hand tends to react even more....

Up-pick

Place the pick under the string, and exert pressure against the string, pushing it up. Here the hand tends to react even more. Make sure you don't turn the hand one way or the other in following through with the up pick. You should be holding the pick loosely enough so it can give slightly as it plays the strings, without being so loose that you drop the pick, of course. Your wrist should not turn in any way from the beginning to the end of the stroke.

UNDERSTANDING: THE CORRECT WAY TO DO A DOWN PICK

- 1) Place the pick halfway between the 3rd and 2nd string, positioned correctly, straight into the string with only the tip going past the strings, in toward the guitar. Hold the pick firmly but not tightly.
- 2) Tilt the pick toward the head of the guitar.

Don't tighten your grip on the pick as you apply pressure to the string. Let the pick push through the string.

3) Moving from the elbow, *slowly* move the pick toward the 2nd string, and stop when your pick touches the string.

4) Allow the weight of the arm to come through the pick, while you maintain a firm but relaxed hold. Let the pick push against the string, moving it down about an 1/8 of an inch.

5) Release all tightness in the arm as you push the string. Watch the string move slightly as you push on it. Don't tighten your grip on the pick as you apply pressure to the string.

6) Let the pick *push through* the string. Only let the pick follow through half of the distance to the next string, so it will end up between the 2nd and 1st string.

Be careful not to make the motion just from a movement of the wrist, but rather from the elbow, so the whole forearm moves, however slightly. Many beginners get into bad habits because they tighten the wrist muscles in an attempt to anchor the hand. Then, when they have to move along the strings, as in playing a scale that goes from the 6th to the 1st string, their anchored position does not allow them to move, and they tighten even more in the effort.

Many beginners get into bad habits because they tighten the wrist muscles in an attempt to anchor the hand.

Be especially careful, on the up pick, not to let the fingers holding the pick tighten as they start to push on the string.

UNDERSTANDING: THE CORRECT WAY TO DO AN UP PICK

- 1) With your pick between the 2nd and 1st string (from Step 6 above), slowly bring the pick up toward the 2nd string. Stop when the pick touches the string.
- 2) Apply pressure and push through the string as before. Be especially careful, on the up pick, not to let the fingers holding the pick tighten as they start to push on the string. They always want to.
- 3) Push through the string, and circle the pick back to where it started, between the 1st and 2nd string. Make sure the hand and pick do not move *outward* as they come up, away from the strings. Make your stroke straight up, close to the strings, and go straight down, staying as close to the strings as possible without hitting them.

EXERCISE #15: RIGHT HAND STRING SHIFTING EXERCISE FOR PICKSTYLE

Pick Style: Swinging the Width of the Strings

- 1) Place the arm and right hand in the basic position for pick style. Lay the pick on top of the first string, with the tip of the pick going in to the string slightly, and at a right angle to the string. Make sure your arm, especially the upper arm, is relaxed in position.

The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar

- 2) **VERY SLOWLY**, bring the pick to the sixth string, making sure you swing from the elbow, and your hand, wrist and arm stay in a straight line as you move. **TAKE AT LEAST TEN SECONDS TO MAKE THIS MOVE!** End up with the pick lying on the sixth string, straight into the string.
- 3) Bring the pick back to the first string. Again, keep the arm, wrist and hand in a straight line. **TAKE AT LEAST TEN SECONDS TO MAKE THIS MOVE!**

Pick Style: Moving String to String

Lay the pick on each string, one at a time. Do it slowly, and with a relaxed arm.

This exercise works on smaller movements as you go string to string, and builds more refined control of the pick or fingers as you move. Focus on the feeling in your muscles from the neck to the fingertips as you move. Release all tension. If done correctly, and developed over time, a floating feeling will replace the feeling of tightness. Imagine that your arm is floating as you do the exercise, especially when your arm moves downward, toward the floor.

Pick Style: Playing String to String

Play a down, then an up stroke on each string. Make sure you are holding the pick correctly, and you are doing a Complete Stroke each time, bringing the pick into position for the next note.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- 1) How you sit and hold the guitar affects everything you do with your fingers. A bad position will make your back and shoulders tense. You must practice constant awareness of your shoulders as you practice, because they will tend to react to everything you do with your fingers.
- 2) Every muscle affects every other muscle. You must practice being aware of your whole body when you practice. As you do, Total Body Awareness will increase. Also be aware of your breathing, and any tendency to hold the breath.
- 3) Getting the correct hand positions is critical to ease of playing. Always check them while practicing, use a mirror, and try to get feedback from the best player/teacher you can find.
- 4) For Fingerstyle, understand the difference between rest stroke and free stroke, and how to position the hand and use the finger for either one. Make sure you make the stroke from your big knuckle, the one closest to the hand.
- 5) For Pick Style, make sure your arm and hand are positioned correctly. Make sure you are holding the pick, bringing it to the string, and using it correctly.
- 6) Use the Gradual Pressure Technique to become aware of and eliminate Sympathetic Tension. Be constantly on the lookout for this.
- 7) With every note you play, whether pick or fingers, make sure you are using a Complete Stroke, and having the pick or finger end its movement at the best position for its next task.
- 8) You must actually do the Foundation Exercises in order to benefit from them. It is not enough to just read about them. You must understand them, and then do them, correctly and consistently. Do the Chair and the Pillow, and the Right Hand String Shifting Exercise every day, as well as all the others in a practice routine you devise, and revise frequently. **WRITE DOWN YOUR PRACTICE ROUTINE, REVISE IT EVERY WEEK!**

"The use of clay in molding a pitcher comes from the hollow of its absence. Doors, windows in a house are used for their emptiness. Thus we are helped by what is not, to use what is"...Laoze.

CHAPTER FOUR

BASIC TRAINING FOR THE LEFT ARM, HAND, AND FINGERS

I once read in a guitar instruction book that the right hand is one of the biggest problems in playing the guitar. That may be true, but the other biggest problem is the left hand! Many people who want to learn to play cause themselves incredible problems before they even raise their arm to try and play their first note, or chord. I am going to carefully explain what I mean, and also tell you how to avoid these problems if you are a beginner, or undo the problems you may have already developed in the use of the left hand.

I once read in a guitar instruction book that the right hand is one of the biggest problems in playing the guitar. That may be true, but the other biggest problem is the left hand!

UNDERSTANDING: HOW THE FINGERS WORK

I mentioned in an earlier chapter about becoming intimate with your fingers. Here is a chance to begin that. You should understand the basics of what makes your fingers move. Do these next couple of simple things to get to know your hand and fingers, and then think about these things when you practice. Remember, your hand (and indeed the rest of your body) is the machine you operate when you practice and play. And you operate it with your Mind and Attention.

- 1) Place your left hand out in front of you, palm up, fingers relaxed.
- 2) Close your fingers in toward you, as in a fist. You just used muscles on the underside of your forearm (now facing you) to pull your fingers toward you. You will use these muscles to make your fingers Firm, so they can apply pressure to the strings.
- 3) Now turn your hand over, fingers in a relaxed curl, facing downward.
- 4) Straighten your fingers so they are pointing straight outward from the hand. You just used muscles on the top of your forearm to pull the finger bones upward. The muscles on the other side relaxed to allow the bones to move. You will use these muscles to release finger pressure from the strings.
- 5) Place your hand out in front of you, palm facing downward. Spread your fingers apart, like a spiders legs. You are now using muscles located in the hand itself to pull the finger bones apart. You will use these muscles to separate your fingers as you play, so you can get them behind the required frets.

You should understand the basics of what makes your fingers move.....

UNDERSTANDING: THE EFFECT OF THE UPPER ARM ON THE LOWER ARM

Imagine an artist with a small brush in his hand, standing on a long ladder, and doing some fine artwork. Now imagine some guy at the bottom, whose job it is to keep the long ladder steady.

If he doesn't do his job, and keep that ladder steady, it won't matter how good that artist is, he will not be in full control, and will not paint his best. If the ladder gets really shaky, forget it!

When you play, your hand is the artist, and your fingers are the brushes. The ladder is your upper arm and shoulder. The Mind, and the rest of your body, is the guy holding the ladder. Constant attention to relaxation is how you keep the Ladder steady.

When you play, your hand is the artist, and your fingers are the brushes. The ladder is your upper arm and shoulder.

As you use the muscles of your forearm and hand to play on the strings, the larger muscles of your upper arm, shoulder, and other areas of the body as well, will tense in reaction (Sympathetic Tension). This will wobble your ladder, and the fingers will suffer. You must pay constant attention to *re-establishing* relaxation as you practice, especially when using the muscles that *separate* the fingers.

You must pay constant attention to re-establishing relaxation as you practice, especially when using the muscles that separate the fingers.

You will get these tensions. You must be aware of them and control them. They will become less and less. I will elaborate.

UNDERSTANDING: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU RAISE YOUR ARM TO PLAY: THE FLOATING ARM

When you raise your arm to the neck of the guitar, many things can and do happen in your body along the way. Some of these things can cause great problems for you as you try to operate the fingers.

The most common mistake people make is to raise the *shoulder* when they bring their hand up to the neck. All we really want to do is to raise the *forearm*. We don't need to raise the shoulder to do this. It is the muscles of the upper arm that raise the forearm and hand. Realize this, and don't allow your shoulder to rise as you bring your hand to the neck in the exercises that follow.

The most common mistake people make is to raise the shoulder when they bring their hand up to the neck. All we really want to do is to raise the forearm

As the arm is raised, and then moves outward from the body, the weight of the arm needs to be supported somehow, just as the trunk of a tree must support the weight of its branches. Often, the body tenses in various places in reaction to having to support the weight of the arm. The ankles, thighs, and belly especially will tighten up. Of course, then it is impossible to relax your shoulders, and then there go the arms, wrists, and fingers!

The further your arm is from your body, the more weight there is to be supported. This means that playing at the first fret is much more difficult than playing on the upper frets.

Following is an exercise for reversing this situation, and getting what I call The Floating Arm. It will help you begin to develop the awareness you need in order to bring the left arm to the neck with relaxation and control. There is one thing to notice here that is often overlooked. The further your arm is from your body, the more weight there is to be supported. This means that playing at the first fret is much more difficult than playing on the upper frets. Of course, playing at the first fret is where most people start learning as they learn their first chords. This contributes to a lot of the tension many players have locked into their muscles, right from the beginning.

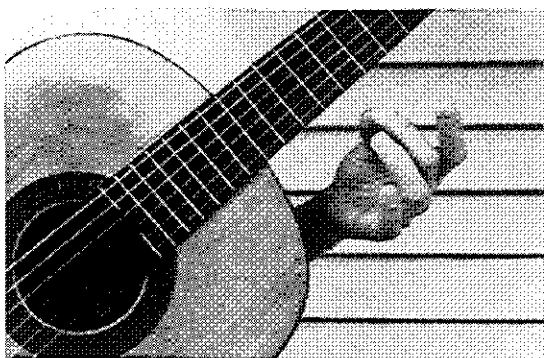


Fig. 18. The Balloon p. 59.
Touching middle and Thumb
Before placing finger on string

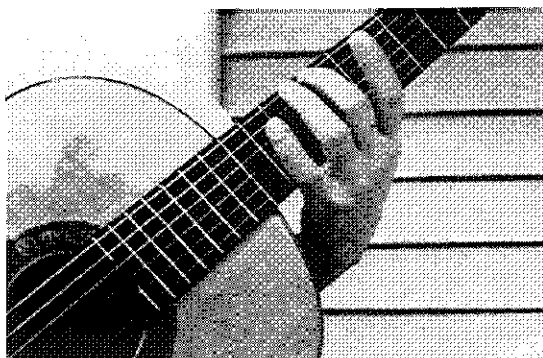


Fig. 19. Middle finger
Touches 6th string with
Light Finger

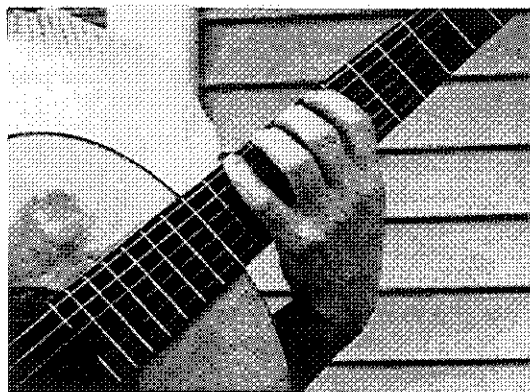


Fig. 20. All Aboard, p. 61.
4 not good enough, not
on tip of finger

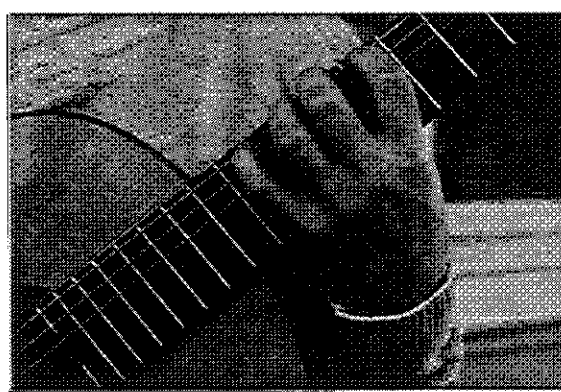


Fig. 21. All Aboard,
4th finger good

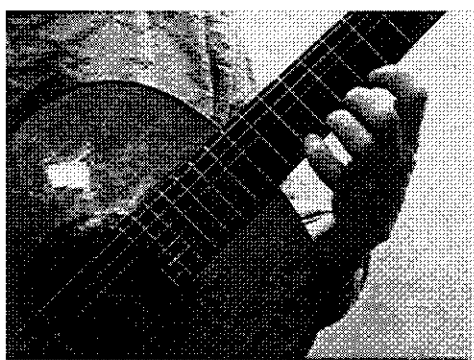


Fig. 22. All Aboard, 1st string, up neck



Fig. 23. All Aboard on 1st string, 1st fret.
Notice 1st on side of tip

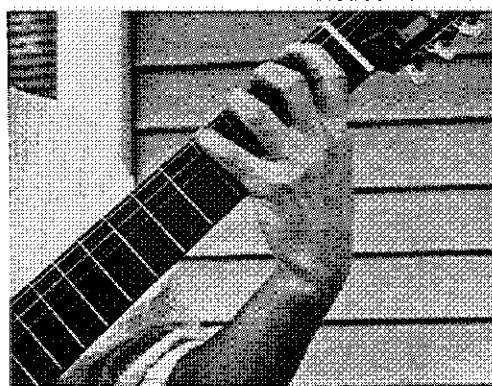


Fig. 24. All Aboard on 6th string, 1st fret

EXERCISE #16: THE BALLOON: DISCOVERING THE FLOATING ARM

Preparation

Sit with the guitar following the instructions given above. Do the Chair, and the Pillow, so your body is nice and relaxed, sitting with the guitar.

Place your right hand on the strings, in the Cup. Your left hand and arm will be hanging at your side. Focus on relaxing the right arm on the guitar for 10 seconds. Feel the weight of the arm on the guitar.

- 1) Focus your attention in your whole body, and slowly raise the left forearm, keeping it close to the body. **DO NOT LET THE SHOULDER RISE AS YOU RAISE YOUR ARM.** Raise the forearm and hand very slowly, and **focus your attention on your neck, shoulders, abdomen, back and legs** as the arm raises. Be on the lookout for any sympathetic tension that develops as you do this.
- 2) Do this until the left hand is close to the neck of the guitar. Pay attention to all body parts and how they are reacting. Stop and relax when necessary.

***This is the
FLOATING ARM,
which is the arm
held by its own
power, and its
weight supported by
a relaxed body.***

- 3) Feel the weight of the rising arm going down into the body.
- 4) Gently touch your thumb to your middle finger, and then separate them. Keep them in line with each other, (don't let the thumb go off to the left), and place the thumb behind the neck, in the middle of the neck, somewhere around the ninth fret, which is about where your hand will be if you raised your arm without extending it outward.
- 5) Let your fingers hover over the strings in a relaxed curl. Your thumb is behind the neck, lined up between the first and second finger. Do not let it go out far to the left. It will not be able to give opposing support to the fingers on the neck if it moves too far to the left.
- 6) Your arm is now *floating*. Hopefully, you have managed to keep your body in general, and your shoulders and arms in particular, relaxed while raising the arm. This is the **FLOATING ARM**, which is the arm held by its own power, and its weight supported by a relaxed body.

UNDERSTANDING: THE LIGHT FINGER AND THE FIRM FINGER

We have discovered the Floating Arm, and later we will work with the Heavy Arm. Before that, we need to discuss the two states the fingers will assume when we practice and play: The Light Finger, and the Firm Finger.

The Light Finger is the completely relaxed finger, brought to the string, and touching the string, with only the *weight* of the finger. It does not press the string down until told to do so. We will discover the sensation of the Light Finger in the following Exercise.

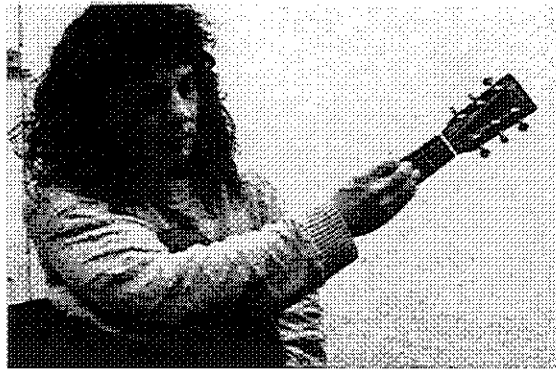


Fig. 30. Placing Arm Pickstyle, Beginning, p. 51



Fig. 31. Placing Arm Pickstyle, Middle, p. 51



Fig. 32. Placing Arm Pickstyle, End, p. 51

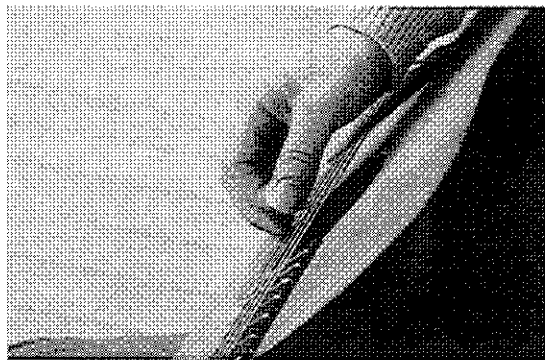


Fig. 33. Holding Pick, p. 51.
Notice only tip touches string

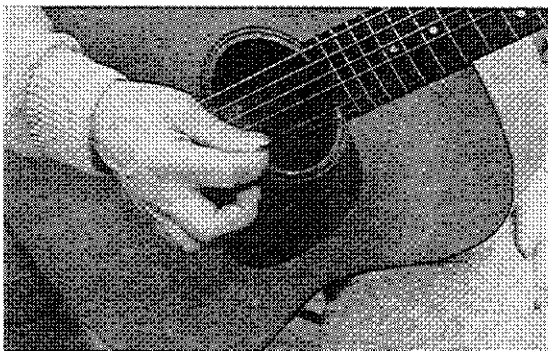


Fig. 34. Practicing Down Pick with Gradual Pressure Technique. Wrong, adjacent fingers curled in tension



Fig. 35. Practicing Down Pick with Gradual Pressure Technique. Right, adjacent fingers out and relaxed



Fig. 36. Up Pick with
Gradual Pressure Technique
Wrong



Fig. 37. Up Pick with
Gradual Pressure Technique
Correct

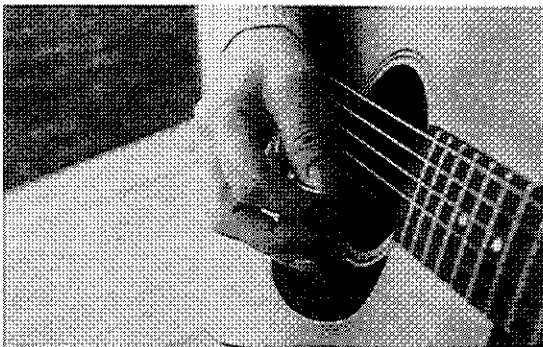


Fig. 38. Right Hand String Shift Ex.
Pickstyle, Beginning, p. 54

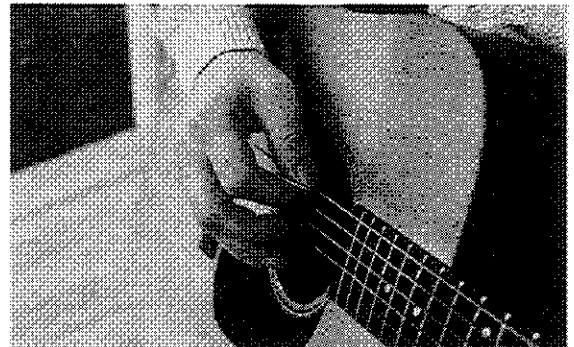


Fig. 39. Right Hand String Shift Ex.
Pickstyle, End, p. 54

EXERCISE #17: DISCOVERING THE LIGHT FINGER: FINGER FLAPPING

Raise your arms in front of you, without the guitar, and take hold of the index finger of your left hand with the thumb and index finger of your right hand. Completely relax the left index, and wiggle it around with your right hand. This is the Light Finger.

Touch the palm of your right hand with your left index. Raise the left index two inches from the palm. Now let it drop *by its own weight* back to your palm, touching it very lightly, with no pressure. This is how the finger feels when it first touches the string.

Now hold the guitar and do The Balloon, again bringing the hand up so that the index finger is lined up with the ninth fret. Have your fingers in a relaxed curl over the 6th string. Allow your Light, relaxed middle finger to fall to the 6th string, behind the 10th fret, so that it touches the string, but applies no pressure. Look at the string under your finger, and see the distance between the string and the fingerboard. Make sure the string does not move at all down toward the fret.

This light feeling is how your fingers will be when they first touch the string to play a note, and it is the feeling they will return to when they release from a note

Raise your finger an inch, and then bring it back to touch the string again in the same way. Do this over and over, touching the string with the Light Finger, bringing it away, and touching it again. This is called Finger Flapping. Do this a few times with each finger every day. Make sure you keep the inactive fingers as relaxed as possible while touching the string with the active finger. This will get you used to the feeling, and over time, very sensitive to the feeling of complete relaxation.

This light feeling is how your fingers will be when they *first touch the string* to play a note, and it is the feeling they will return to when they *release* from a note. It enables them to be prepared for their next job. Many people never have this light feeling, and play with tense fingers all the time, and their playing suffers greatly because of it.

The Light Finger is the completely relaxed finger, brought to the string, and touching the string, with only the weight of the finger.....

EXERCISE #18: DISCOVERING THE FIRM FINGER: STRING PUSH DOWNS

After the Light Finger touches the string, it becomes the Firm Finger. The Firm Finger is used to apply pressure to the string so that it touches the fret, and a note may be

The Firm Finger is used to apply pressure to the string so that it touches the fret, and a note may be sounded.....

sounded. The Firm Finger can be used with the Floating Arm to apply pressure to the string. When it does this, it uses the muscles of the forearm and hand. It can also apply pressure to the string by transferring the weight of the arm, that is, using the Heavy Arm. This will come later, when we do The Clamp. To discover the feeling of the Firm Finger, do this:

Take hold of the left index finger with the right hand thumb and index, as before, and wiggle the Light Finger.

Don't push the string down all the way, just enough so that it moves half way down to the fret

Now tense your finger *slightly* just enough so that it doesn't wiggle. This is the Firm Finger. Don't let the other fingers tense as you do this. They will anyway, but you can minimize by focusing your attention to keep them relaxed. Your ability to do this will increase with practice, and it is necessary in playing to be able to keep the inactive fingers relaxed while one or more of them are being Firm.

Now do Step 3 of the previous exercise, and end up with your Light middle finger touching the 6th string. Look at the space between the string and the fingerboard, and slowly allow your finger to become Firm, and by using a slight squeezing action of the finger and the thumb behind on the neck, push the string half way down to the fret. KEEP THE OTHER FINGERS RELAXED AND SPREAD OUT, EACH OVER ITS OWN FRET. Don't push the string down all the way, just enough so that it moves half way down to the fret. Release it and get the Light Finger again. Repeat this a few times. Then do it with the other fingers, trying to keep the inactive fingers relaxed and spread out over their frets.

These are String Push Downs. Like Finger Flapping, they will make you very sensitive to your fingers and how they apply pressure to the strings.

Now repeat the above step, but push the string all the way down to the fret. Stop exactly at the point where the string is all the way down, and notice how *solid* it feels. Do this with each finger. Focus on the inactive fingers, and keep them as Light as possible. Also, keep them *very close* to the string. Don't allow them to be more than an 1/8 on an inch away from the string. They will want to tense, and rise higher. Pose in this position.

These are String Push Downs. Like Finger Flapping, they will make you very sensitive to your fingers and how they apply pressure to the strings.

EXERCISE #19: "ALL ABOARD" WITH THE FLOATING ARM AND LIGHT FINGERS

- 1) Get settled comfortably with the guitar. Review the section on sitting, and do The Chair and The Pillow.
- 2) Raise the left arm, and feel the floating arm, around the 7th fret. Your fingers are in a loose, relaxed curl.
- 3) Touch the middle finger to the thumb, and then bring them apart slowly, keeping them in the same position relative to each other. Place the thumb behind the neck, in the middle.
- 4) Let your fingers hover over the 6th string. Your arm is floating now. Relax everything again.
- 5) Keeping a space of about one inch between your hand and the guitar, allow your light, relaxed, middle finger to lightly touch the 6th string, right behind the 10th fret. At the spot where your first finger joins your palm, you should have an inch of space, and keep that space as your finger finds its way to the string. Place it so lightly that it doesn't even press the string down. Feel like it is dropping by its own weight on to the string.
- 6) The finger should be bent, curling into the string. The first two joints of the finger are easy; they have to bend to get the finger to the string. Make sure the last joint is bent also, though, the joint near the fingertip. It is a common mistake to place the finger down flat. This is very bad, as it does not direct your force on to the string, and ties all the muscles of the arm up with tension.
- 7) Now the tricky part. With your middle finger touching the 6th string lightly, stretch your index finger out to the left, on to the 6th string, and placed at the ninth fret. Do not apply pressure to the string; just touch it lightly with a relaxed finger.
- 8) Your index finger will not go down straight on the tip of the finger, rather, the fingertip will lean to the left, toward the head of the guitar. So you will be on the side of the tip with the index finger.

Keeping a space of about one inch between your hand and the guitar, allow your light, relaxed, middle finger to lightly touch the 6th string

- 9) You will find that the act of stretching out the fingers causes sympathetic tension in other fingers, the arm shoulder, and indeed, throughout various parts of the body. Learn to be aware of these tensions right from the beginning. Learn to let them go. Untense those muscles.
- 10) Pose in this position for a few seconds, and relax all tensions.
- 11) Holding 1 & 2 lightly on the 6th string, stretch the 3rd finger out to the 11th fret, and place it lightly on the string.
- 12) Do the same with the 4th finger. The 4th finger will lean to the side, like the 1st does. However, it will lean to the right, not the left. The 2nd and 3rd fingers will go down straight.
- 13) Make sure each finger is curved at each one of its joints, especially the 4th finger. Hold the fingers lightly on the string. Go through your body with your attention, from the feet on up, become aware of any tensions and let them go, as your fingers are "All Aboard" the 6th string.

UNDERSTANDING: THE HEAVY ARM

The next important consideration is your awareness of your left arm, in terms of its relative states of tension or relaxation. We have already looked at how the arm feels when it is held up by it's own power entirely, as it often needs to be. We have called this the Floating Arm.

You must know how the arm feels when it is allowed to relax, so that it is "hanging heavy", and its own weight is accomplishing a lot of the work necessary to push the strings down.

You must know how the arm feels when it is allowed to relax while holding notes down, so that it is "hanging heavy", and *it's own weight is accomplishing a lot of the work necessary to push the strings down.*

The inability to tell the difference, or create the difference between these two states, is a big problem for many people....

The inability to tell the difference, or create the difference between these two states, is a big problem for many people that could be eliminated at the beginning with understanding and awareness. If you are a beginner, you can avoid this problem, and if you already play,

you can eliminate this problem by doing the following exercises

Preparation:

beginning to use the left hand fingers can upset everything, unless you understand certain things....

- 1) Put down the guitar, and place your left hand in your lap.
- 2) Let the left arm be completely limp.
- 3) Take hold of your left hand fingers (index and middle will do) with your right hand.
- 4) Pick up your left hand with your right hand, ten inches from your lap.
- 5) Let go with your right hand, *and let the left hand and arm drop into your lap with their own dead weight. That is the feeling of the Heavy Arm.*

Obviously, if your left arm did not fall, you did not completely let go with all its muscles when holding it up with the right hand. Try again.

EXERCISE # 20: USING THE HEAVY ARM, THE CLAMP

- 1) With the arm floating down by the fifth fret, begin to extend your first finger toward the sixth string. As you do so, watch it, so that you make sure it stays relaxed as it reaches. Your hand, arm, shoulder and finger will probably tend to tense as you do this, so be on the lookout, and relax any tension that happens. Also, watch the other fingers. Don't let them pull away and curl up with tension. Touch the sixth string with a relaxed first finger, your thumb behind, in the middle of the neck.

This sensation of the heavy arm is one that you should have often in playing. Unfortunately, many players never have it. Their arm muscles, and other muscles of the upper body are tense all the time.

- 2) Now, to get the feeling of the heavy arm, allow the finger to become a little firmer, as you begin to apply pressure to the string. THE PRESSURE IS APPLIED TO THE STRING WITH THE WHOLE WEIGHT OF THE COMPLETELY RELAXED ARM. The finger, and thumb behind, "clamp" on to the string and the neck of the guitar, using the muscles of the hand and forearm to do so. DO NOT LET THE SECOND FINGER LEAN AGAINST THE FIRST.

The weight of your arm is being supported by the guitar itself, as your arm "hangs on" by the finger and thumb behind. This means your arm is completely relaxed, except for some effort from the forearm, hand and finger. The important point is that most of the effort of getting the string down is done by the weight of the arm.

Make sure the force is directed straight to the string, so the string is "pinned" down to the fingerboard. Don't let the weight of the arm pull the string down toward the floor. Look in a mirror to check this; you can't really tell from your view as the player.

This sensation of the heavy arm is one that you should have often in playing. Unfortunately, many players never have it. Their arm muscles and other muscles of the upper body are tense all the time.

EXERCISE #21: "ALL ABOARD" WITH THE HEAVY ARM

Do everything as described in "All Aboard with the Floating Arm", but do it with the Heavy Arm. You will be "hanging" by each finger as it is placed, and you will be feeling the full weight of your arm. The inactive fingers will be waiting, light, relaxed, and in position for their turn.

UNDERSTANDING: WHAT CAN GO WRONG WITH DEVELOPING THE LEFT HAND?

Plenty!

Even if you have paid attention to all the other physical aspects of playing the guitar that have been discussed so far, beginning to use the left hand fingers can upset everything, unless you understand certain things about how to train and use the left hand fingers. We have set a good foundation so far, and now we will consider how to work with the left hand without disturbing that foundation.

The problem is that the left-hand fingers don't come ready, out of the box, to play the guitar. They must develop two things: strength and stretch. And they must develop strength and stretch *independently of the rest of the body*. That is, you must learn, from the beginning, not to allow the effort the left hand fingers are making to cause sympathetic tension in other areas of the body. You

must also learn to develop each finger so that its effort does not cause sympathetic tension in other fingers of the same hand.

unknown to him, his right hand, holding the pick, tenses up in reaction to the effort of the left hand, and actually pulls the pick away from the string....

In my years of teaching, not understanding this has led to one of the biggest pitfalls for students. I'll give you a simple, and common, illustration.

A beginner buys a book, or has a friend show him some chords. He tries the C chord, one of the most common. He places his first finger down on the second string, at the first fret, as required. As he struggles with bending the finger into place, and pressing the string down, his second finger tightens up, and starts to lean against the first. Now he tries to pry the second finger away from the first to get it into place.

They must develop two things: strength and stretch. And they must develop strength and stretch independently of the rest of the body

While this is going on, the rest of the left arm and shoulder are tensing more and more. The rest of the body will tense up to one degree or another. This student will either give up in despair, or if he stays with it, will hopefully intuitively learn to relax enough to get the fingers in to place. Many of course, do learn to relax enough. I have seen many that do not. I have also seen many who fall in the middle, they learn to play at a simple level, but carry many handicaps of hidden tensions that frustrate their attempts to develop more sophisticated technique.

Here is another example, one of the most common for electric players. A new student is learning his first rock licks, and tries his first bend. His left hand makes the tremendous effort required to bend the string. At the same time, unknown to him, his right hand, holding the pick, tenses up in reaction to the effort of the left hand, and actually pulls the pick away from the string. Just try and play the next note in a fast lick after that happens! I can't tell you how many times I've seen that.

UNDERSTANDING: HOW TO DEVELOP THE LEFT HAND FINGERS

Basically, what we want to do now is develop stretch and strength in the left-hand fingers, without creating sympathetic tension in the larger

Basically, what we want to do now is develop stretch and strength in the left hand fingers, without creating sympathetic tension in the larger muscles of the arm while doing so.....

muscles of the arm while doing so. As you do the following exercises to develop the left hand fingers, you must constantly watch, and feel, all the fingers. You must see how they react to one another. You must relax and control them all, as much as you can. Your ability to keep the inactive fingers relaxed and ready will increase every day, with proper practice. Remember **MUSCLE MEMORY!** If you allow the inactive fingers to tense in reaction to the active fingers, they will remember that. You can make your fingers do anything you want if you use **POSING AND NO TEMPO PRACTICE.**

As you do the following exercises to develop the left hand fingers, you must constantly watch, and feel, all the fingers.....

Remember, the larger muscles of the arm and upper body have the job of bringing your arms and hands and fingers into position. The muscles of the forearm, wrist, hand and fingers will control the precise movements of the fingers, and they will also **DIRECT THE WEIGHT OF THE HEAVY ARM THROUGH THE FIRM FINGER, TO THE FINGERTIP AND ON TO THE STRING**, thereby accomplishing much of the actual work of playing with the help of gravity.

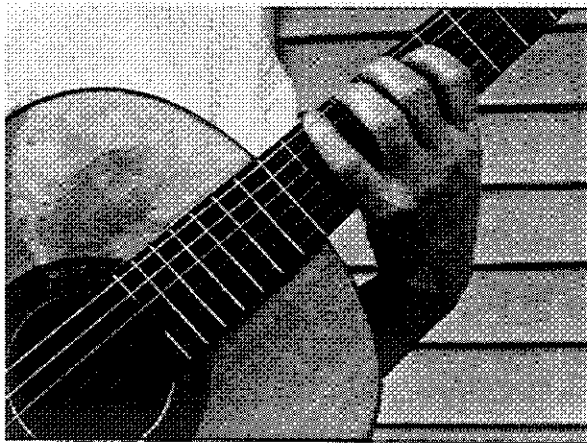


Fig. 25. The Crutch, p. 665.
1st has made move over to next string

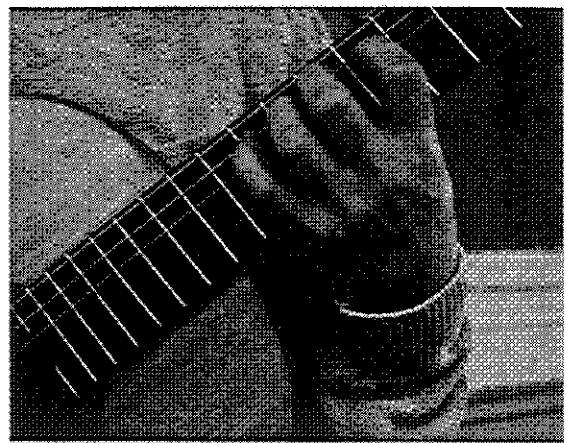


Fig. 26. The Crutch,
Other fingers have followed and placed precisely

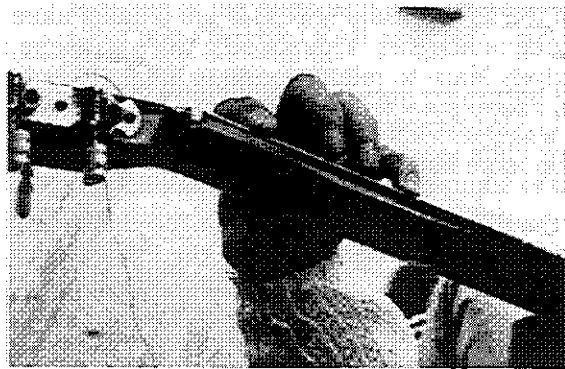


Fig. 27. Walking 1&4, p. 66.
Notice 2&3 kept low to string.
Avoid Sympathetic Tension

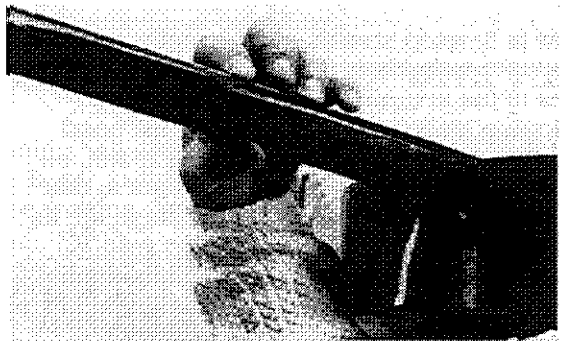


Fig. 28. Walking 1&3. Notice 2&4
kept low to string

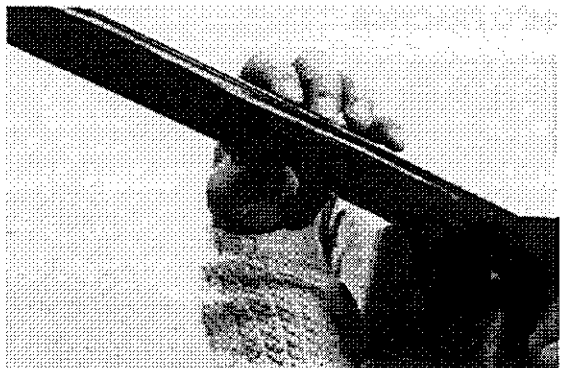


Fig. 29. Walking 1&2. Notice 3&4
kept low to string

I should point out that how much of the arm's weight should be used will vary with each playing situation. You must experiment, and look for a feeling of ease and balance in the hand and arm. The two extremes are the need for the Floating Arm while shifting, and the Heavy Arm while holding a Bar. But even these can vary, as when using a guide finger during shifting, so that some arm weight may stay on the string, or holding a bar, and using other fingers while doing so.

As you work with these exercises every day, you will begin to develop an awareness of how The Floating Arm, The Heavy Arm, The Light Finger, and The Firm Finger all work together in actual playing movements. Being aware of these sensations while playing and practicing is what separates the players from the "strugglers".

Being aware of these sensations while playing and practicing is what separates the players from the "strugglers".

EXERCISE #22: THE CRUTCH: MOVING ACROSS THE STRINGS WITH THE FLOATING ARM AND LIGHT FINGERS

As you work with these exercises every day, you will begin to develop an awareness of how The Floating Arm, The Heavy Arm, The Light Finger, and The Firm Finger all work together in actual playing movements

- 1) Place the fingers All Aboard on the 6th string, with a Floating Arm and Light Fingers. Keep the Floating Arm, and "drag" the light, relaxed 1st finger slightly, and move it over to the 5th string. Do not lift it. Think more of "dragging" it over to the next string. Let it graze over the 5th string as you move the fingertip into position. Keep the fingers and the rest of the body as relaxed as you can while you do this.
- 2) Now bring the rest of your fingers over to the 5th string in the same way. Pose and relax.
- 3) Do the same with each of the other strings. Place a light 1st finger on the next string, then, using it as a point of contact, bring the other light fingers over to the new string. Think of how a person walks on crutches. He swings the crutches out away from the body, and then swings his body forward to where the crutches are.
- 4) Keep a space between all fingers, and keep them light and relaxed on the strings.
- 5) In the same way, go to each string, up to the first, and back to the 6th. Keep the thumb in the middle of the neck, between the 1st and 2nd fingers. It should adjust its position and its direction of pressure slightly as the fingers travel the strings. It will not move very much though.

It is very important to realize that AS YOUR FINGERS "BEND" MORE, COMING ACROSS THE STRINGS, MORE TENSION IS PRODUCED THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE BODY. PAY ATTENTION AND RELAX IT!

EXERCISE #23: THE CRUTCH: MOVING ACROSS THE STRINGS WITH THE HEAVY ARM AND FIRM FINGERS

Now do The Crutch using the Heavy Arm. Follow this procedure: as you bring the finger to the string, it must be The Light Finger. After the light finger touches the string, it becomes The Firm Finger, and transfers the weight of the arm to the string, as in the String Push Downs.

Make sure you keep a space between each one of the fingers, and that each finger is exactly behind its corresponding fret.

Helpful Hints

Make sure you keep a space between each one of the fingers, and that each finger is exactly behind its corresponding fret. They may want to come together and touch one another for support, and

even cling tensely against each other. Have them curl in to the strings, and keep their space, and be as relaxed as you can about it all, from the neck, down your shoulder, the upper arm, forearms, wrist and hand.

You may notice that while you are getting into position, your second finger will want to lean against your first finger, maybe even pressing very tightly against it. This is another thing to guard against. The second finger must develop its own independent strength, which it will do, if you **MAKE THE SECOND FINGER KEEP ITS DISTANCE FROM THE FIRST, CURLED AND WAITING OVER THE SIXTH FRET.**

Pose at random during this exercise, so you can stay in touch with the reaction of all your muscles to each movement you are directing them to do. If you pay the proper attention, you will notice a lot of tension happening from the neck down.

Do this exercise many times every day, with your full attention, and it will get easier and easier, and you will begin to get very relaxed about it. It will make you better at everything you do on the guitar

You may notice that while you are getting in to position, your second finger will want to lean against your first finger

EXERCISE #24: THE BUTTERFLY, WALKING ACROSS THE STRINGS WITH THE FLOATING ARM AND LIGHT FINGERS

Like the previous two left hand exercises, this one will be done first without the right hand sounding any notes. Then, however, it will be done with the right hand as well.

A good image to use as you bring the finger to the string is to think of a butterfly landing on a flower.....

- 1) Check The Chair and The Pillow
- 2) Raise the Left Arm and Hand into position at the 7th fret.
- 3) With a Floating Arm and Light Finger, touch the 6th string with the 1st finger. Do not press the string down. The 1st finger will "lean" slightly to the left, so that the finger goes down on the left side of the fingertip.
- 4) Keeping the 1st finger touching the string lightly, touch the string with the 4th finger at the 10th fret, no pressure. Make sure it bends at each joint, especially the distal joint, the one near the fingertip. The 4th finger will lean in the opposite direction of the 1st finger. It will lean slightly to the right, going down on the right side of the fingertip.
- 5) Keep the 2nd and 3rd fingers low to the string, over their frets. Sympathetic tension tends to pull them upward.
- 6) Keeping the 4th finger on the 6th string, move the 1st finger over to the 5th string. Don't lift it; just lightly "graze" it over to the next string.
- 7) Bring the 4th finger over to the 5th string in the same way. Let the 2nd and 3rd fingers follow along, keeping them as relaxed as you can, and low to the string.
- 8) Continue to the 1st string and back again. Keep the thumb in the middle of the neck, between the 1st and 2nd fingers. It should adjust its position, and its direction of pressure slightly as the fingers travel the strings. It will not move very much though.
- 9) Do the exercise again, using fingers 1 and 3. Then do with 1 and 2. Keep the inactive fingers relaxed and low to the string. This may be difficult at first, but your control will develop.

A good image to use as you bring the finger to the string is to think of a butterfly landing on a flower. Think of how light a butterfly is, and how lightly and gracefully it lands on a flower. Think of your fingers the same way.

After doing this with the left hand alone, do it while striking the strings with the right hand thumb, following the rules of movement for the right hand and arm. The notes will be “dead notes”, no sound that is, because you are not pressing the string to the fret.

EXERCISE #25: THE LADDER: WALKING ACROSS THE STRINGS WITH THE HEAVY ARM AND FIRM FINGERS

As you place each new finger, allow that finger to become firm, and the previous finger, to become light and relaxed.....

Do exercise #24 using the Heavy Arm and Firm fingers (allowing the fingers to become light as they lift, of course). You will now be pressing the string to the fret, allowing the muscles of the forearm and hand to direct the weight of your arm through the fingers and on to the string.

As you place each new finger, allow that finger to become firm, and the previous finger (the 1st finger), to become light and relaxed, but still lightly touching the string. Do not allow the 1st finger to lift when the next finger goes down.

Think of how your legs work when you walk. You place a moving but relaxed leg down on the ground. Then you make it firm, as you pivot on it so you can swing the next leg in front of it. Then that leg becomes firm, and the other relaxes.

Experiment with how it feels to allow different amounts of arm weight to be used to help apply pressure to the strings. Practice also with a Floating Arm, and Light – Firm – Light fingers.

Helpful Hints

When you do 1 and 3, the little finger will definitely react to the third finger, curling up with tension, unless you go extremely slowly, using Posing and No Tempo practice, and pay absolute attention to the process of bringing the finger to the string. Do these things, and keep the fourth finger over its note, alongside the third finger as the third finger directs the weight of the arm on to the string and pushes it to the fret slowly. This will give you the ability to use the fourth finger easily in all your playing, instead of it being a little knot of tension that interferes with the other fingers, as it does with so many unfortunate guitar players.

When 4 goes down, the space between your hand and the guitar at the point where the finger and palm meet should be equal from the first to the fourth finger. This way, all fingers have equal access to the strings. This will be the case, if the middle and last knuckle of the fourth finger are bent, giving the finger a “curled” shape as the finger approaches the string and presses, instead of a “straight out” appearance.

If all the fingers are as they should be, your hand knuckles will be parallel to the strings.

The pinky will definitely react to the third finger unless you go extremely slowly; using Posing and No Tempo practice, and pay absolute attention to the process of bringing the finger to the string. We are going to pay attention to what the fourth finger is doing when the third finger comes into play.....

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- 1) Your relaxed shoulder and upper arm support the hand and fingers, and enable them to function with control. They are like a steady ladder supporting an artist painting with a fine brush. Always be aware of this ladder when you play.
- 2) The Floating Arm and the Heavy Arm are the two states of the arm you will use and combine to direct force to the string in precisely the way required for each playing situation.
- 3) The Light Finger and the Firm Finger are the two states of the finger you will use and combine to bring force to the string in precisely the way required for each playing situation.
- 4) Strength and stretch in the left hand fingers must be developed carefully. Sympathetic tension occurring in the body and other fingers must be controlled by conscious awareness during practicing.

"To know and not to do is not yet to know".....Anonymous

CHAPTER FIVE

The Art and Science of Practicing

I have talked about many things that are essential to understand in order to learn the guitar successfully. But in order to put all of it to use, and have these understandings, tools and exercises give full results, you must understand something about how to go about practicing from day to day.

But in order to put all of it to use, and have these understandings, tools and exercises give full results, you must understand something about how to go about practicing from day to day.....

Obviously, you have seen that practicing is definitely not a matter of taking out the guitar and just "fooling around with stuff". "Just fooling around with stuff" is fine, and has its place, and should be done (that's how hit songs are often written), but you must understand that it will not produce improved ability to play the guitar in a technical sense.

First of all, you must understand that for the player who wants constant improvement of his playing abilities, or wants to maintain his already developed abilities, practicing is an on-going, ever deepening activity. When I was young, I learned all the Segovia scales like every good classical student should. I learned them all in a few months, and then stopped playing them. Then I noticed a curious thing. I couldn't play them anymore, and had, in fact, forgotten them! Then I realized that the time I put in to them was a waste.

for the player who wants constant improvement of his playing abilities, practicing is an on-going, ever deepening activity.....

The reason I had stopped playing them was very simple. My teacher never told me to keep practicing them! Maybe he took for granted that I would know they were exercises, like push-ups, that should always be done, but I wasn't experienced enough to realize that. So I learned as a teacher not to take these things for granted.

I hope I have given you an understanding so far, that in order for exercises to be effective, they have to be practiced the right way, with the right focus of attention...

So here is my advice on exercises. You need some amount of technical ability to play anything, so exercises should always be emphasized for the beginner. If your aspirations are modest, maybe you just want to be able to strum and sing, then after awhile, once you can do what you want to be able to do, you can get by with very little or no technical exercise work on the instrument. If you want to be a great player of your particular style, then you will want to always devote a significant amount of time to this kind of work, in order to develop and maintain technique. Where you fall in that spectrum is all about you knowing what you want, and whether you actually have it or not. And that is a subject that could fill an entire book (which I may write someday).

I hope I have given you an understanding so far, that in order for exercises to be effective, they have to be practiced the right way, with the right focus of attention. Mindless repetition of exercises will get you nowhere. In fact, my entire goal so far has been to give you the understanding and tools necessary to practice exercises effectively. That is why I haven't given you a gigantic list of exercises, as so many books do. They are useless if you don't understand the things I have laid out so far. If you do understand these things, and put them into practice, then you will be able to make use of all exercises.

Understanding: USING A METRONOME TO DEVELOP SPEED

Why? Using Muscle Memory To Your Advantage

Early on in teaching, I began to have all students use metronomes as part of their technical practice. This was because if I told them to do something *slowly*, their idea of slow had no resemblance to what I meant by the word. They would always play at a speed that caused so much tension in the muscles that their practicing was useless, and I could not get them to successfully learn anything. In fact, I was always wasting lesson time making them practice correctly in front of me, hoping they would repeat the process at home. They rarely did.

if I told them to do something slowly, their idea of slow had no resemblance to what I meant by the word.....

So I started having them all get metronomes, and then telling them the exact speeds to use. This, together with the principles outlined in this book, has enabled me to have very satisfying experiences as a teacher, really seeing people develop their ability in a predictable way, and not having hit or miss experiences with the varying talents of students that come every teacher's way.

If you understand what was discussed in the beginning about muscle memory, and the attention and awareness it takes to discover the necessary sensations for playing the guitar well, then you have the foundation for understanding why you should use a metronome as a regular part of your practice routine.

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It is essential to establish the correct sensations of weight and controlled effort and relaxation while playing. This can only be done with Posing and

We want to "BRING UP THE EASE". This means we must gradually increase the tempo, but by such small degrees that the muscles hardly notice the increased demand for speed.....

No Tempo practice. IT IS THEN NECESSARY TO BRING THOSE SAME FEELINGS OF EASE "UP THROUGH THE TEMPOS". Meaning, you play faster, but it feels just as easy, as if the fingers are just doing it themselves.

Many people "bring up the dis-ease". That is, they have a lot of tension they don't know about when they play slowly, and then they bring that tension into their fast playing, where everybody will know about it, (especially in performance).

We want to "BRING UP THE EASE". This means we must gradually increase the tempo, but by such small degrees that the muscles hardly notice the increased demand for speed. As we do so, we continue to pay attention and monitor everything, making sure everything works correctly and stays relaxed.

How? The Correct Practice Approach for Teaching the Fingers New Skills

1. Understand everything possible about what your fingers are supposed to do, and how they are supposed to do it.
2. Walk the fingers through the movements extremely slowly (No Tempo practice), stopping, focusing and relaxing when necessary (Posing). Get familiar with all the "stress points", those movements or positions that cause the greatest unwanted tension.

3. Put the metronome on 60, and walk through a small part of the music (depending on your level, and the level of the piece, this may be a few measures, one measure, or a few notes). Make all the notes whole notes, that is, take 4 full clicks for each note.
4. During the 4 clicks you are waiting, prepare for the next move. Check to make sure everything is relaxed, and your fingers are in position waiting for the next note. Alternate between watching either the left hand or the right hand.
5. If everything goes well, put the metronome on 80, and repeat. Then 100 at 4 clicks per note.
6. Continue with 2 clicks at 60, 80, and 100. Then one click.
7. Continue with 8th notes and beyond as needed. At some point, it will be easy to do the passage with the correct rhythm instead of even note values.

If you do the exercise with a high degree of perfection, over and over, for a period of days and weeks, you will begin to see very noticeable results

This approach will enable you to avoid the common situation of trying to play something too fast, too soon, and having the muscles tied up with tension as a result, and then straining against that tension. This approach is summarized later under the heading "The Basic Practice Approach".

EXERCISE #26: BUILDING SPEED WITH "PLAY 2-3-TOUCH"

Here is another way to apply the above approach. In addition, it uses the idea often talked about by great players. That is the idea of "playing from the string". The string is touched, consciously and carefully, before it is played. This results in the smoothest and most secure feeling in fast playing, when built into the fingers slowly.

- Step 1.** Put your metronome on 60.
- Step 2.** Following the directions from the preceding sections, bring the left hand to the neck, and curl your fingers into the first string, at the fifth fret, until your first finger is touching the 1st string at the fifth fret, and your other fingers are positioned over the string, curled in to the string and just above it, in position, relaxed and ready. Slowly push the string to the fret.
- Step 3.** Get prepared, and then play the first finger note. Say PLAY out loud as you do so (make sure you actually say it out loud, it makes a difference). As the next two clicks go by, prepare mentally for playing the next note, which will be the second finger, say TWO and THREE as these clicks go by. On the fourth click, touch the string, as lightly as described in the section on Finger Flapping, and press the string to the fret. Say TOUCH.
- Step 4.** On the next click, (the first of the next four clicks), play the new note, the second finger note. Say PLAY as you play it. Continue with the PLAY TWO THREE TOUCH as you go across the strings, PLAY TWO THREE TOUCH, to the sixth string and back.
- Step 5.** Do this with the metronome on 80 at 4 clicks.
- Step 6.** Do this with the metronome on 100 at 4 clicks.

Continuing To Build Speed

If you do the previous exercise *with a high degree of perfection*, over and over, for a period of days and weeks, you will begin to see very noticeable results. If you always pay extreme attention to what all your muscles feel like, how your shoulders, arms, hands, and fingers feel, and constantly allow them to relax as they do their work, this exercise will get easier and easier.

As it does, you will be able to ask your playing mechanism to produce a higher level of performance. As you play at faster speeds, you will always make the same effort to be as relaxed as possible at all times.

Most students are very naïve when it comes to the idea of being tense....

And I must give a big word of caution here. Most students are very naïve when it comes to the idea of being tense. So many times I have said to a student they had tension in some body part while they were playing, and they would deny it with great sincerity. "Not I", they will protest, as if I just accused them of bad breath or something!

And there I am thinking of how long I've been playing, and how much time I still spend being aware of tension, and discovering new levels of subtlety in the perception of it. And here this dear student thinks they can be spared from all of that, that somehow they have a body that can begin to learn the contortions of the hands necessary to play the guitar, and have no reactions to it in the form of unnecessary tensions.

So many times I have said to a student they had tension and they would deny it with great sincerity. "Not I", they will protest, as if I just accused them of bad breath or something.

Rest assured, you will be tensing your shoulder in reaction to your finger movements. And one finger will react to what another is doing, and one hand will react to what the other is doing. It is all very natural for it to be so. It is also very natural to build an awareness of the body so that these reactions gradually come under your control, *if you always practice awareness*. The problem of course, is that in the beginning it can be difficult to feel these tensions, these discomforts. And besides, it isn't a pleasant feeling, so it's easy to block awareness by getting even tenser. Then, of course, we begin to feel it as *normal*. Once that is established, it can be hard to convince someone to take a closer look.

Rest assured, you will be tensing your shoulder in reaction to your finger movements. And one finger will react to what another is doing, and one hand will react to what the other is doing....

But you must do this, or, to put it simply **YOU WILL MAKE NO PROGRESS.**

If you do this, **YOU WILL ALWAYS MAKE PROGRESS.**

Building More Speed

Okay, so I will assume you got the point. I make it this strongly because I always have to remind students of it, and I also have to always remind myself! Now back to building speed. Put the metronome on 60 again, and this time, take only 2 clicks per note. Play on one click, let one go by, and prepare yourself. Play again on the next click.

Allow the action of the finger going to the string to happen more automatically than before. Think of it, and intend it, but allow muscle memory to direct the finger more now. If you have done your no tempo practice correctly, and the first metronome speeds correctly, this should happen.

It is also very natural to build an awareness of the body so that these reactions gradually come under your control, if you always practice awareness.....

Put the metronome on 80 and take 2 clicks. If that is comfortable enough, do it at 100 for 2 clicks.

Over a period of days, weeks and months, continue to build speed. Start each session, every day, with no tempo practice and posing where necessary. Build up to your highest speed each day, and know what it is. Write it down.

Continue on with 60 at 1 click. Then 80 and 100.

Continue on with 60, 2 notes per click, or Eighth notes. If you're not sure of what eighth notes are, or how to count them, find another player or a teacher to show you.

Continue with 80 and 100 in eighth notes. As the speed goes up, you should take smaller increments, moving the metronome up by only a few notches, or one at a time.

Eventually, you will be playing sixteenth notes up to and maybe beyond 120 beats per minute. How long this process takes depends on whether you are a beginning player, or a long time player who is improving his technique. Also of course, it depends on how well you practice.

TOOL: THE BASIC PRACTICE APPROACH

This is the practice approach that is to be used to teach the fingers new skills. It is very organized, and very effective. FOLLOW IT!

- Step 1.** **Review and increase your understanding of what you are about to do, how you are going to do it, and what your goals are.** What notes, fingers, pick strokes, etc. are you going to use. Also, review what the main points of technique you should be focusing on as you do the exercise, or selected passage of music. Be clear on what your goal is, what you want to accomplish from the practice you are about to do.
- Step 2.** Walk through the music, or a small part of it, and **pay attention to everything.** Go slow enough to make sure you are doing everything right. Go slow enough to make sure you are doing it with maximum relaxation and minimum effort and tension. Notice the stress points as you go. Use Posing and No Tempo practice on all stress points at the beginning of each session, and **at random as necessary**, to reinforce the correct movements.
- Step 3.** **Go from No Tempo to slow tempo practice.** Start with the metronome on 60, and take 4 clicks per note. Make all the notes even time values in the beginning, so all movements are done at the same speed. You will probably discover places that need more Posing and No Tempo practice. *During the 4 clicks you are waiting, prepare for the next move. Check to make sure everything is relaxed, and your fingers are in position waiting for the next note. Alternate between watching either the left hand or the right hand. Your ATTENTION and your INTENTION should be extremely powerful.*
- Step 4.** Do the passage at 80, with 4 clicks. Make the effort to be aware of everything. Then work it up with the metronome through the following speeds. Here is a list of the speeds to work through.
- | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| 60-4 clicks | 100-1 click | |
| 80- 4 clicks | 60-2 notes per click | (8th Notes) |
| 100- 4 clicks | 80-2 notes per click | |
| 60-2 clicks | 100-2 notes per click | |
| 80-2 clicks | 60-4 notes per click | (16th Notes) |
| 100-2 clicks | 80-4 notes per click | |
| 60-1 click | 100-4 notes per click | |
| 80-1 click | Continue to increase | |
| | to your present limit | |

Using the Basic Practice Approach for Exercises: Begin every day from Step 1. Continued use will improve anything. Use smaller increments of speed on the metronome as you get into sixteenth notes. As you near your limit, increase by only one notch at a time.

Using the Basic Practice Approach for Music: Treat the music as an exercise at the beginning of each session. Make all the note values even, and all the movements of the fingers necessary to make the notes smooth and even. As the speed begins to increase, decide when it is the right time to start practicing with the actual rhythm. When you switch to the actual rhythm, the tempo should be slow enough to allow for the same feeling of ease you had at the slowest speeds.

It is very important to begin the Basic Practice Approach from the beginning each time, starting with *reviewing and increasing your understanding* of what you are about to do, how you are going to do it, and what your goals are, and then following the other steps. You will see great improvement *depending on how well you perform each part of the process, that is, how aware you are of everything as you go along, and how well you can stay relaxed in position.*

UNDERSTANDING: THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PRACTICE

Many students and players find, when they practice, that there is no noticeable improvement in their playing. Instead, there is the feeling of “treading water”, or just keeping your head above water, (perhaps with a sinking feeling of waiting to drown). It is no fun practicing and playing with this feeling. I hope after reading this book, you have a much better understanding of what practicing is supposed to be, and what it isn't. Very often, when people practice, they are merely running through movements they've done a million times, nothing changes. It does however keep the notes in your head, and the blood in your fingers, but that is about the best that can be said.

It is important to understand that even when one is practicing correctly, there are different levels of practice, each with a different goal in mind.....

It is important, however, to understand that even when one is practicing correctly, there are different levels of practice, each with a different goal in mind. They are all necessary in order to experience constant development, and the ability to perform successfully.

I will often spend 15 minutes or so on one movement, or one measure, if I have identified that movement as a problem, using posing, no tempo practice, and the other tools I have described.....

Level 1: Microscopic Practicing

Here we isolate one, or a few, movements. We focus on one note, two notes, or perhaps one measure. We analyze what composes the movement that is giving us trouble, and what is necessary to play the problem note or series of notes. We use extreme attention to discover everything that occurs in the body while performing these movements, and we learn how to do the movements with more relaxation, less effort,

more intelligence in our fingers (we notice, perhaps, we are taking a finger off a string, when it could just as easily stay on, since it is needed there two notes later).

Many students don't solve problems in playing because they never focus like this, they don't get to the root of mistakes in playing, they only review them!

I will often spend 15 minutes or so on one movement, or one measure, if I have identified that movement as a problem, using Posing, No Tempo practice, and the other tools I have described. *Many problems require this kind of focus in order to be solved.* Many students don't solve problems in playing because they never focus like this, they don't get to the root of mistakes in playing, and they only review the mistakes!

This Level of Practice enables you to develop Microscopic Awareness. It is an aspect of the great sensitivity to sensations discussed in the beginning, which comes from the intensity of your Attention.

Level 2: Assimilating

Here we are putting the music together. We take whole phrases and play them at slow tempos and as we get a good grasp on them, we gradually move them up to performance speed, always keeping a sharp eye and ear out for things that may need microscopic practicing later. We feel the music, and start to form ideas about how we are going to interpret the music, and deliver it to the listener. I often go from this type of practicing to Level 1 practice at random in a practice session.

Level 3: Shaping

Here we are playing the piece, and dealing with it almost entirely from the musical level, relating to it emotionally as a piece of music, and the playing of it as an emotional experience. This is basically “practicing playing”, kind of like delivering your lines at dress rehearsal for a play. How well you are

Here we are playing the piece, and dealing with it almost entirely from the musical level, relating to it emotionally as a piece of music, and the playing of it as an emotional experience.....

able to do this will depend on how well you have done your practice at levels 1 and 2. I do more of this as a performance comes near, and of course, when I just feel like playing.

While practicing at this level, there is always a part of the awareness that is doing “critical listening”; noticing things that will need to be worked on later at level 1 or 2. I have found the best thing to do is record yourself, and then do your “critical listening” when you listen back.

Many students only practice at this level, without any practice at Level 1 and 2, which is why they never make any fundamental progress with their playing. To them, practicing is playing. This is one of the first misunderstandings that needs to disappear, if you are going to make the transition from amateur to professional, in terms of your actual playing activity, or at the very least, your attitude.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- 1) For the player who wants constant improvement of his playing abilities, or wants to maintain his already developed abilities, practicing is an on-going, ever deepening activity.
- 2) In the beginning, exercises and technique should be emphasized, since you need *some* technique in order to do anything. As time goes on, you decide what you want from the guitar, and how developed you need to be to get that. That determines how much time and work needs to be put in to pure technique.
- 3) Use a metronome in practice for Level One and Level Two practice, to allow the muscles to assimilate movements in a relaxed way, at increasing levels of speed, without the introduction of tension. Be on the lookout for tension, as you “bring up the ease”. Don’t “bring up the dis-ease”.
- 4) Understand and use the Basic Practice Approach to teach the fingers new things, and things you find difficult. Modify it to suit your needs and situation.
- 5) Understand the 3 levels of Practice, and the purpose of each one. Keep the balance of the three that best suits your needs and situation.

THE BEGINNING, NOT THE END.....

Now that you have finished reading “The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar”, please realize that you haven’t *finished* anything, you have just begun!

Now you are at that very important point where you will decide whether this book is just another book you have read, and finished, and closed, and left most of what is inside it where it was when you read it, inside the book. Or, you will realize that this book is not something you read, but something you live with, day by day. It is something you take inside you, a little at a time, a practice session at a time, a day at a time.

This book should be *consumed*! This book should be *wrestled* with! As time goes by, this book should begin to *fall apart*! You should have to start reinforcing the binding and putting back the pages that fall out! As time goes by, if this book looks as good as new, then that means, most probably, just as there has been no change in the book since you got it, there also has been no change in *you*, as a player, since you got this book.

Unless, of course, you are an incredibly neat person who takes excellent care of things. I admit I’m not!

THE LAST WORD

To know and not to do is not yet to know.

If you give your *full* effort, and your *full* attention to learning and using The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar you will surely see continual growth towards being the guitarist you desire to be.