

What Is Fingerstyle?



Ok. First things first. If you have a pick anywhere NEAR your computer, hide it!

Fingerstyle guitar is the technique of playing the guitar by plucking the strings directly with the fingertips, fingernails, or picks *attached to fingers*, as opposed to flatpicking (picking individual notes with a single plectrum called a flatpick) or strumming all the strings of the instrument in chords.

The term is often used synonymously with fingerpicking. Music arranged for fingerstyle playing can include chords, arpeggios and other elements such as artificial harmonics, hammering on and pulling off with the fretting hand, using the body of the guitar percussively, and many other techniques.

Physically, "Fingerstyle" refers to using each of the right (or left) hand fingers independently in order to play the multiple parts of a musical arrangement that would normally be played by several band members. Bass, harmonic accompaniment, melody, and percussion can all be played simultaneously when playing Fingerstyle.

Since this course will cover not only HOW you can incorporate fingerstyle into your guitar playing, but more importantly...how you will develop ground-breaking skills *as* a fingerstyle guitar player, we must cover some basic material before getting too far ahead in the course.

Fingerstyle Vs. Flatpicking

There is a major difference between using your fingers to pick and using an actual plectrum (pick) for many reasons. Though many artists will employ the usage of both, which we'll get into later on in this program, the idea here is to forget that you've ever even learned to use a pick when playing fingerstyle guitar.

A few key differences when playing with your fingers instead of a pick are:

1. Using your fingers allows you to pluck or pick multiple notes that usually aren't 'pickable' using a standard plectrum. Though there are times that you can do this, often when playing fingerstyle, it is much too difficult to 'string skip' in a way that is logical and easy to address. So, we *'use what we have'* in fingerstyle, allowing us up to five fingers at any given time to play multiple notes. Artists such as Lindsey Buckingham and Chet Atkins employ this method and it can be heard on songs such as "Landslide" and "Big Love" (Buckingham) as well as "Wheels" (Atkins) to provide a beautiful non-plectrum-picked 'airy' or 'open' sound.
2. When playing fingerstyle, usually the strings you play on don't sound quite as harsh as they would when playing with a plectrum. This goes back to the availability when playing fingerstyle to provide a beautiful 'airy' sound as opposed to a methodical plectrum sensation.

3. Your fingers naturally want to curve even when holding a pick, and believe it or not, your muscle memory will almost always retain this open position of holding a pick even when you are playing in fingerstyle. There are exceptions to this, depending on how you would usually hold a pick, but for the most part it rings true.

Try this right now:

Find that pick I told you to hide (hopefully you didn't throw it away!) Hold it like you usually would when playing a riff or article of tab, often with your thumb and 1st finger.

With Plectrum:



Without Plectrum:



Now, keep your hand exactly in the same position, and with your other hand, remove the pick from the grasp of your fingers. More than likely, you are forming a "C" formation with your picking hand. Your 1st finger and Thumb are probably more 'toward the audience' than your other fingers. Your 2nd, 3rd, and 4th finger may even be right up against the body of the guitar. Are they?

If so, then you've already found the perfect position to finger any piece of tablature that you'll come into contact with in this program.

Since most guitars have six strings, and your hand usually only has five fingers (counting the thumb as a finger in

fingerstyle guitar playing) you'll probably notice that most of your fingers already loosely line up with the six strings on your guitar, minus of course one string for the lack of an additional finger.

The key here is to learn to completely separate your 1st finger and your Thumb. Doing this will help you start to develop the muscle memory that your fingers need in order to finger a multiple string attack using fingerstyle. Your other fingers will start to naturally cooperate by slowly spacing themselves away by 'feeling' the strings.

The main difference between fingerstyle and using a plectrum (pick) is that when playing with a pick, you tend to 'feel' the strings by using the tip or side of the plectrum. However, with fingerstyle, your actual fingers need to be the guide for each other. You must force yourself to 'feel' the strings with your fingers because when you do so, your fingers will start to line up with the appropriate number of strings you need in order to play a given melody.

In the next lesson, I will show you how to properly apply your fingers to the strings on the body of the guitar so that every string loosely lines up with your finger placement.

The Picking Hand

Our previous lesson dealt with the main difference between using a plectrum and using your actual fingers. Here is how we can learn to retain that 'muscle memory' that I was referring to.

In the video reference file, you'll see the placement of my picking fingers in relation to the strings. Notice that I'm keeping my 1st finger and Thumb rather close at times, but also rather far away, alleviating the need to form a position that would usually apply to plectrum picking with a 'pinch' formation of your thumb and 1st finger together.

Take note of the position of my picking hand. I like to rest my 4th finger (pinky) at times with an arch right under the sound hole on the guitar body, depending on the overall pattern of a given passage. In this simple example of fingerpicking with the picking hand, also take note that a majority of my finger picking comes from my thumb and 1st finger. I add the 2nd finger and 3rd finger when it calls for it, but when first learning to finger pick, it's always a great idea to start off simple and then move forward. I also like to move my thumb from the lowest strings to the highest strings almost constantly, as I am much more comfortable with playing notes with my thumb.

Notes:

1. By focusing on keeping my thumb in 'starter' position (meaning anchoring my hand near the lowest string, depending on the passage) I'm actually able to play up to two strings easily using only my thumb. Neat huh?
2. By keeping my 1st finger a little closer to the High E string, I'm able to quickly play on any of the following strings: High E, G, and D. In all honesty, you can actually get by with ONLY fingerpicking using your 1st finger and your thumb in some cases, but we want to move out of that normal routine.

Before we try out an example, let's take a look at the fretting hand, as there is some information here that you need to know about.

The Fretting Hand

So we've learned what fingerstyle guitar is, the difference between it and plectrum picking, and how you can initially start working up your 'muscle memory' in efficiently placing your picking hand on the guitar.

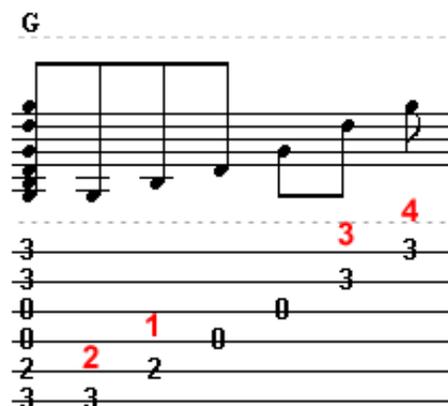
Now let's take a look at your fretting hand.

There are a few important things to understand about the fretting hand. Many times in fingerstyle guitar, you will be 'thrown off' or 'out of your element' when fingering a given standard chord, because due to the adding and subtracting of common open chord notes, your fingers sometimes have to adjust to the tablature provided.

For example:

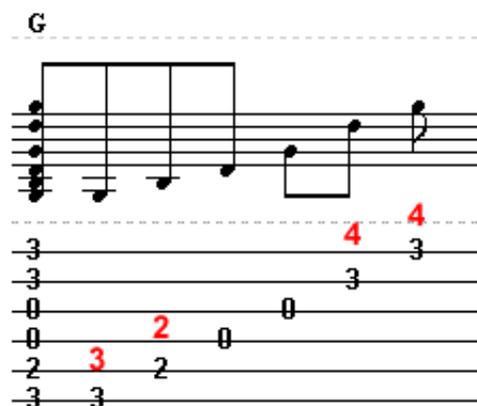
As you will recall in the beginner exercise, there was a G chord that could have been played numerous ways, either by the most common way in which you use your 2nd finger on the Low E string, 1st finger on the A string, and 3rd and 4th fingers on the B and High E string to play the third fretted notes. Some even barre the third fretted notes with their 4th finger. It just depends on how comfortable you are.

Here is the more common way, with red numbers indicating finger placement:



You're probably more accustomed to this method, as it tends to be easier to strum than the method below.

Here is the more traditional/classical way, with red numbers indicating finger placement:



Food For Thought...

If you've ever wondered why sometimes chords have various finger placements, here's why. Originally the

'standard' or 'theory' behind fingering chords was based on the 1, 2, 3, 4, and sometimes 5 rule. This of course goes back to deciding which fingers to use. For example:

In the G chord above, notice that the fingerings for the Low E and A string are the exact same number as the fretted notes. This goes back to logics. Since music (and math) is a 'universal language', the logic in fretting relate to your finger 'construction.' When you place your fretting hand on the fretboard, your 1st finger is the farthest from you, and your 4th finger is the closest to you, right? Mathematically speaking, that would mean that the 1st finger is as far back on the fretboard as it can be, so it would be impossible to finger the third fret on the A string from the G chord with your 1st finger and then try to form a "C" chord without moving all of your fingers.

Try it! It's not possible. You must move virtually all of your fingers in order to form the C chord. However, if you try it using the more classical method, you actually CAN do this. It's not easy, but it's possible. You just simply move your fingers down to the A string as your root, and it still remains a C chord formation if you remove your 4th fingers and add your 1st finger to the B string. Neat huh?!

In the video provided, I'm playing a standard chord progression using only a few fingers and only a few chords. Take note of the position of my fretting hand. It is very important not to 'anchor' your fretting hand at any point in the way that you do sometimes with basic chord progressions. When playing basic strumming chord progressions, we tend to press down hard on the strings to guarantee that the strings ring through in full. The beauty of fingerstyle is that many times you can begin to form a chord, without FULLY forming it, and it creates a much higher sense of fluidity in your playing.

The overall pattern here is C, Am, Em, and Am with variations based on fingerstyle. I will play partials and at times add notes, and this was done on the fly. You can see that my hand rarely forms a full chord, mainly because that allows for quick movement and partial notes that are added to a standard chord. Of course you can see the C, Am, Em, and Am patterns, but they are so loosely played that you can just move around with it without feeling 'stuck' or 'anchored' to a given chord.

How Will I Know Which 'Version' To Use?

That's where it gets tricky when playing fingerstyle guitar. Sometimes you have to look further ahead in a given piece of tab or sheet music in order to calculate logical fingering positions for ease of transition into the next phrase. I'll touch base on that in this section under "Fingerstyle In Use."

The History of Fingerstyle Guitar

Because notes are struck by individual digits rather than the hand working as a single unit, fingerstyle playing allows the guitarist to perform several musical elements simultaneously. One definition of the technique has been put forward by the Toronto (Canada) Fingerstyle Guitar Association:

Physically, "Fingerstyle" refers to using each of the right hand fingers independently in order to play the multiple parts of a musical arrangement that would normally be played by several band members. Bass, harmonic accompaniment, melody, and percussion can all be played simultaneously when playing Fingerstyle.

Steel string acoustic guitars

Fingerpicking

Fingerpicking (also called thumb picking, alternating bass, or pattern picking) is a term that is used to describe both a playing style and a genre of music. It falls under the "fingerstyle" heading because it is plucked by the fingers, but it is generally used to play a specific type of folk, country-jazz and/or blues music. In this technique, the thumb maintains a steady rhythm, usually playing "alternating bass" patterns on the lower three strings, while the index, or index and middle fingers pick out melody and fill-in notes on the high strings.

The style originated in the late 1800s and early 1900s, as southern African American blues guitarists tried to imitate the popular ragtime piano music of the day, with the guitarist's thumb functioning as the pianist's left hand, and the other fingers functioning as the right hand. The first recorded examples were by players such as Blind Blake, Big Bill Broonzy, Memphis Minnie and Mississippi John Hurt. Some early blues players such as Blind Willie Johnson and Tampa Red added slide guitar techniques. Fingerpicking was soon taken up by country and Western artists such as Sam McGee, Ike Everly (father of The Everly Brothers), Merle Travis and "Thumbs" Carllile. Later Chet Atkins further developed the style.

Most fingerpickers use acoustic guitars, but some, including Merle Travis often played on hollow-body electrics.

Travis picking

This style is commonly played on steel string acoustic guitars. Pattern picking is the use of "preset right-hand pattern[s]" while fingerpicking, with the left hand fingering standard chords.

American primitive guitar

American primitive guitar' or American Primitivism is a subset of fingerstyle guitar. It originated with John Fahey, whose recordings from the late 1950s to the mid 1960s inspired many guitarists such as Leo Kottke, who made his debut recording of 6 and 12 String Guitar on Fahey's Takoma label in 1969. American primitive guitar can be characterized by the use of folk music or folk-like material, driving alternating-bass fingerpicking with a good deal of ostinato patterns, and the use of alternative tunings (scordatura) such as open D, open G, drop D and open C.

Ragtime guitar

As mentioned above, fingerpicking was probably originally inspired by ragtime piano. An early master of ragtime guitar was Blind Blake, a popular recording artist of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

In the 1960s, a new generation of guitarists returned to these roots and began to transcribe piano tunes for solo guitar. One of the best known and most talented of these players was Dave Van Ronk who arranged St. Louis Tickle for solo guitar. In 1971, guitarists David Laibman and Eric Schoenberg arranged and recorded Scott Joplin rags and other complex piano arrangements for the LP The New Ragtime Guitar on Folkways Records. This was followed by a Stefan Grossman method book with the same title. A year later Grossman and ED Denson founded Kicking Mule Records a company that recorded scores of LPs of solo ragtime guitar by artists including Grossman, Ton van Bergeyk, Leo Wijnkamp, Duck Baker, Peter Finger, Lasse Johansson and Dale Miller. One of today's top ragtime stylists is Craig Ventresco, who is best known for playing on the soundtracks of various Terry Zwigoff movies.

"New Age" fingerstyle

In 1976, William Ackerman started Windham Hill Records, which carried on the Takoma tradition of original compositions on solo steel string guitar. However, instead of the folk and blues oriented music of Takoma, including Fahey's American primitive guitar, the early Windham Hill artists (and others influenced by them)

abandoned the steady alternating or monotonic bass in favor of sweet flowing arpeggios and flamenco-inspired percussive techniques. The label's best selling artist George Winston and others used a similar approach on piano. This music was generally pacific, accessible and expressionistic. Eventually, this music acquired the label of "New Age", given its widespread use as background music at bookstores, spas and other New Age businesses. The designation has stuck, though it wasn't a term coined by the company itself.

Folk baroque

A distinctive style to emerge from Britain in the early 1960s, which combined elements of American folk, blues, jazz and ragtime with British traditional music, was what became known as 'folk baroque'. Pioneered by musicians of the Second British folk revival began their careers in the short lived skiffle craze of the later 1950s and often used American blues, folk and jazz styles, occasionally using open D and G tunings. However, performers like Davy Graham and Martin Carthy attempted to apply these styles to the playing of traditional English modal music. They were soon followed by artists such as Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, who further defined the style. The style these artists developed was particularly notable for the adoption of D-A-D-G-A-D (from lowest to highest), which gave a form of suspended-fourth D chord, neither major or minor, which could be employed as the basis for modal based folk songs. This was combined with a fingerstyle based on Travis picking and a focus on melody, that made it suitable as an accompaniment. Denislow, who coined the phrase 'folk baroque' singled out Davy's recording of traditional English folk song 'Seven Gypsies' on Folk, Blues and Beyond (1964) as the beginning of the style. Davy mixed this with Indian, African, American, Celtic and modern and traditional American influences, while Carthy in particular used the tuning in order to replicate the drone common in medieval and folk music played by the thumb on the two lowest strings. The style was further developed by Jansch, who brought a more forceful style of picking and, indirectly, influences from Jazz and Ragtime, leading particularly to more complex baselines. Renbourn built on all these trends and was the artist whose repertoire was most influenced by medieval music.

In the early 1970s the next generation of British artists added new tunings and techniques, reflected in the work of artists like Nick Drake, Tim Buckley and particularly John Martyn, whose Solid Air (1972) set the bar subsequent British acoustic guitarists. Perhaps the most prominent exponent of recent years has been Martin Simpson, whose complex mix of traditional English and American material, together with innovative arrangements and techniques like the use of guitar slides, represents a deliberate attempt to create a unique and personal style. Martin Carthy passed on his guitar style to French guitarist Pierre Bensusan. It was taken up by in Scotland by Dick Gaughan, and by Irish musicians like Paul Brady, Dónal Lunny and Mick Moloney. Carthy also influenced Paul Simon, particularly evident on 'Scarborough Fair', which he probably taught to Simon, and a recording of Davy's 'Anji' that appears on Sounds of Silence, and as a result was copied by many subsequent folk guitarists. By the 1970s Americans such as Duck Baker, Eric Schoenberg were arranging solo guitar versions of Celtic dance tunes, slow airs, bagpipe music, and harp pieces by Turlough O'Carolan and earlier harper-composers. Redbourne and Jansch's complex sounds were also highly influential on Mike Oldfield's early music. The style also had an impact within electric folk, where, particularly Richard Thompson used the D-A-D-G-A-D tuning, but with a hybrid picking style to produce a similar, but distinctive effect.

Slack-key guitar

Slack-key guitar is a fingerpicked style that originated in Hawaii. The English term is a translation of the Hawaiian ki ho 'alu, which means "loosen the [tuning] key." Slack key is nearly always played in open or altered tunings-- the most common tuning is G-major (DGDGBD), called "taropatch," though there is a family of major-seventh tunings called "wahine" (Hawaiian for "woman"), as well as tunings designed to get particular effects.

Basic slack-key style, like mainland folk-based fingerstyle, establishes an alternating bass pattern with the thumb and plays the melody line with the fingers on the higher strings. The repertory is rooted in traditional, post-Contact Hawaiian song and dance, but since 1946 (when the first commercial slack key recordings were made) the style has expanded, and some contemporary compositions have a distinctly New Age sound.

Slack key's older generation included Gabby Pahinui, Leonard Kwan, Sonny Chillingworth and Raymond Kane. Prominent contemporary players include Keola Beamer, Moses Kahumoku, Ledward Kaapana, Dennis Kamakahi, John Keawe, Ozzie Kotani and Peter Moon and Cyril Pahinui.

Percussive fingerstyle

"Percussive picking" is an emerging term for a style incorporating sharp attacks on the strings, as well as hitting the strings and guitar top with the hand for percussive effect. Flamenco guitarists have been using these techniques for years but the greater resistance of steel strings made a similar approach difficult in fingerstyle until the use of pickups on acoustic guitars became common in the early 1970s. Michael Hedges began to use percussive techniques in the early 1980s. Current percussive fingerstylists include Tommy Emmanuel, Preston Reed, Kaki King, Justin King, Erik Mongrain, Phil Keaggy, Thomas Leeb, Eric Roche, Doyle Dykes, Michael Gulezian, Don Ross, Andy McKee, Antoine Dufour and Newton Faulkner.

Nylon string

Classical guitar fingerstyle

A wide range of musical styles can be played on the classical guitar. The major feature of classical fingerstyle technique is that it has evolved to enable solo rendition of harmony and polyphonic music in much the same manner as the piano can. The thumb, index, middle and ring fingers are all employed for plucking. Chords are often plucked, with strums being reserved for emphasis. The classical guitar excels in such performance and allows a high degree of control over the musical dynamics, texture, volume and timbral characteristics of the guitar. The repertoire is very varied in terms of keys, modes, rhythms and cultural influences. Altered tunings are rarely employed, with the exception of Dropped D.

Flamenco guitar fingerstyle

Flamenco technique is related to classical technique, but with more emphasis on rhythmic drive and volume, and less on dynamic contrast and tone production. Flamenco guitarists prefer keys such as A and E that allow the use of open strings, and typically employ capos where a departure is required. They often strengthen their fingernails artificially.

Some specialized techniques include:

Picado: Single-line scale passages performed apoyando but with more attack and articulation.

Rasgueado: Strumming typically done by bunching all the right hand fingers and then flicking them out in quick succession to get four superimposed strums. The rasgueado or "rolling" strum is particularly characteristic of the genre.

Alzapua: A thumb technique which has roots in oud plectrum technique. The right hand thumb is used for both single-line notes and strummed across a number of strings. Both are combined in quick succession to give it a unique sound.

Tremolo: Done somewhat differently from the conventional classical guitar tremolo, it is very commonly played with the right hand pattern p-i-a-m-i.

Electric fingerstyle

Fingerstyle jazz guitar

The unaccompanied guitar in jazz is often played in chord-melody style, where the guitarist plays a series of chords with the melody line on top. Fingerstyle, plectrum, or hybrid picking are equally suited to this style.

True fingerstyle jazz guitar, without the use of a plectrum, dates back to occasional use by players like Eddie Lang (1902-1933) and Carl Kress (1907-1965), but the style did not really fully develop before the invention of the electric guitar. George van Eps (1913-1998) was revered for his polyphonic solo guitar playing. Ted Greene and Lenny Breau were other masters.

A prominent master of modern jazz guitar finger playing was Wes Montgomery (1925-1968). He was known for using the fleshy part of his thumb to provide the bass line while strumming chordal or melodic motives with his fingers. This style, while unorthodox, was widely regarded as an innovative method for enhancing the warm tone associated with jazz guitar. Certainly Wes Montgomery's influence extends to modern polyphonic jazz improvisational methods.

Today, fingerstyle jazz guitar has several proponents, from British player Martin Taylor to the pianistic Jeff Linsky, who freely improvises polyphonically while employing a classical guitar technique. Earl Klugh has also recorded several fingerstyle jazz projects on the solo guitar. Charlie Byrd played fingerstyle in a latin american style on the classical guitar.

There is no single technique of fingerstyle jazz, but players generally avoid the use of capos and altered tunings.

Solid-body electric guitar

The solid-body electric guitar is rarely played fingerstyle, although no great technical challenges are presented. Well-known exponents of fingerstyle electric guitar include Mark Knopfler, Jeff Beck (after years of pick playing), Duane Allman (when playing slide guitar), Robbie Krieger, Lindsey Buckingham, Albert King, Albert Collins, John Lee Hooker and Ry Cooder.

Some notable guitarists

Chet Atkins, Davey Graham, Jerry Reed, John Jorgenson, Doyle Dykes, Tommy Emmanuel, Michael Hedges, Jerry Donahue, Leo Kottke, Will Ray, Bert Jansch, Pierre Bensusan, Danny Gatton and Merle Travis

Fingerstyle In Use

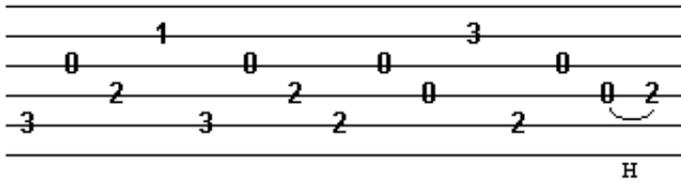
Here's where the fun begins! We'll take a look at a very simple but sometimes misunderstood fingerstyle song.

"Landslide" by Fleetwood Mac

Here is an excerpt tab from this hit song. Now we all know that Lindsey Buckingham is notorious for only using his fingers. When viewing the tab below, you'll see why:

The song is traditionally played with a capo on the third fret, but that's of no importance right now.

Here we have a standard C chord being played, which moves into a G/B chord. You'll see the transition as noted by the change of the "3" on the A string to a "2" on the A string.

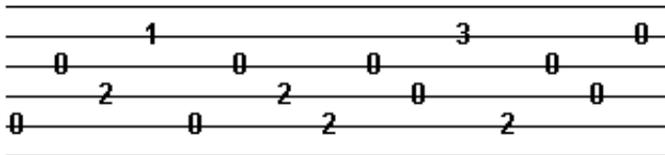


If you notice above, this C chord can be fingered as you normally would, so there is no issue on finger placement here. It's standard and easy to play. If you were to try and pick this out using a plectrum, odds are you'll get stumped due to the string-skipping that is required between each fretted note. Instead, try to play along with the video provided and watch my fingers:

In the video, I DO NOT use a capo on the 3rd fret. This is just an option when learning the song. If you want to play it in the appropriate key, you'll need to place the capo on the 3rd fret.

As you can see, I'm using ONLY my 1st finger and my thumb. I'm easily able to transition to the G/B chord because of the initial placement of my fingers using the standard C chord. What's even cooler is that you'll see that the 'hammer on' from the open note on the D string to the second fret on the same string actually works quite easily because I've positioned my fingers correctly. When I hammer on I'm able to immediately form the Am style chord (actually an Am7) and continue to the next measure with ease.

Here is the next measure:



Again, the change from G/B into the Am7 chord comes rather easily by proper finger placement. You're forming the standard Am chord, but omitting the note on the G string. That note is open here. You may see a note that looks familiar on the tab directly above. There's that change again from the note on the A string. Originally it was a "3" from earlier, and now it has changed to an open string note played twice. You should then see the "2" that comes immediately after the ending of the Am7 chord. That tells us we are going back into the G/B chord.

The only difference is that we've got an additional open note at the end of the measure, which takes us back to the original theme or phrase of the song. It is simply played open to round out the measure.

Practice playing this along with the video and see how easily you can transition from one chord to next when using the proper placement. Remember that the speed as well as the use of the capo is NOT important for this exercise.

Proper Positioning

There are a few different positions that are applicable to overall guitar playing, be it:

1. Standing with a strap
2. Classical style
3. Standard style

Not only is it important in how you position your body in relation to the guitar, with fingerstyle it is even MORE important, because as we move through the program, there will be times that the way you sit or stand affects your overall finger dexterity. For all intensive purposes in this program, we'll assume that we will all be sitting down with the guitar. However, if you feel that you wish to stand, make sure you are using a strap and that the absolute bottom part of the guitar is positioned NO LOWER than your belt.

Here are some of the various positions you can try to find out which one is more comfortable to you.

Standing With A Strap



As one of my personal all-time favorite guitarists (Dave Matthews), I've found that this position is by far the most comfortable when standing with a guitar. As you can see, Dave keeps his guitar a little higher than some do, but doing this will most definitely allow you free range of movement.

Even if it is sometimes the popular thing to do, try your absolute best to keep the bottom of the body of the guitar no lower than your belt line or waist line. Trust me on this. It will get VERY difficult to play anything other than open chords or power chords, let alone barre chords. I don't feel that any of us will need to worry about whether

our guitars are positioned logically. This isn't a rock guitar website, so I imagine you understand the necessity of proper positioning.

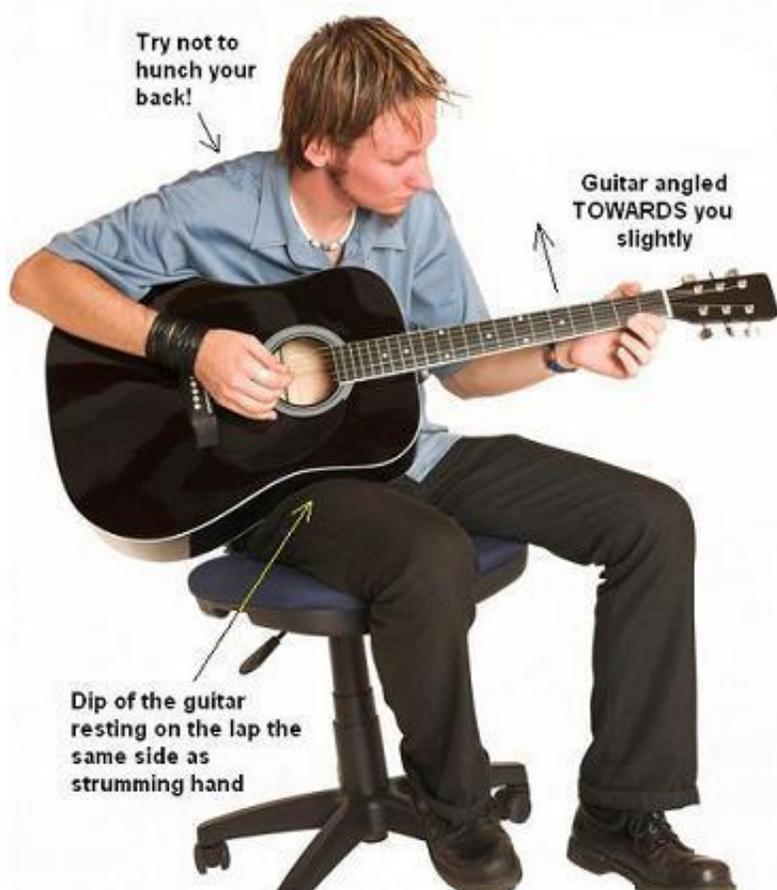
Classical Style (Sitting)

Fingerstyle virtuosos such as Christopher Parkening sit in the proper classical formation as seen below:



As you can see, he's positioned his guitar on his left knee, with the actual guitar held at a 45 degree angle. This allows for more comfort on both the fretting and picking hand. It also enables the guitarist to get a little closer to those intricate strings that must be plucked in the many various fashions needed for fingerstyle guitar. It is also very important not to 'slump' when playing fingerstyle guitar, as this will not only cause back issues but it will also hinder your fretting AND picking hand as well. If you aren't comfortable with this style, try it for a few days and if you still just can't handle it, proceed to the more 'standard' style.

Standard Style (Sitting)



This image shows the standard style of playing your guitar. This is by far the most common approach, but it tends to get a little difficult at times when playing classical or fingerstyle guitar. (That's not me by the way. It's just a standard picture.)

Chords vs. Fingerstyle

As promised, before we move too much further, I'd like to touch base on the main difference between playing standard chords and playing fingerstyle.

Many times, fingerstyle guitar will add or omit certain notes within a chord.

Remember the demo exercise? Let's take a look again at that particular exercise and get a little deeper into it:

Taken From Measure 1 - Basic Exercise Demo

Your usual G chord is:

G

3 3 3 3 3 3

0 0 0 0 0 0

2 2 2 2 2 2

3 3 3 3 3 3

But in this tablature....

G

Gtr I

T 0 0 2 0 3

A 0 0 0 0 0

B 3 3 3 3 3

some of the notes within the standard G chord have been not only omitted, but added to as well.

If you were to finger every note shown here, except for the second fretted note on the G string, you would still basically hear a G chord. However, with the added second fret note, it doesn't sound quite the same, does it?

Now, instead of strumming the chord, try picking out each note one at a time, except for the notes that are played in unison together. Play those together.

Now *finger pick* out the 'usual G chord' from the tab above and listen closely. Do you hear any real difference in the notes? There's not much is there?

In order to create a more 'airy' sound from fingerpicking this G chord, we've omitted playing the High E string and the A string. We've also added a few notes to create a melody. That comes in on the second fret note from the G string. When you play it, notice that it adds a depth to the passage.

In addition to adding the note, we've also got an open note on the B string that then moves to the standard third fret note on the same string. You're still basically fingering a G chord, BUT by adding, altering, or subtracting a set of notes within a standard chord, you're able to not only add alternating bass notes, but more melody to the song.

Fingerstyle Introduction Part II

Now it's time to introduce living, breathing fingerstyle guitar work to you.

(Mini-Song Study)

The tablature below is actually a rendition of the song "Danny Boy" in which we've applied fingerstyle to. The song snippet itself isn't hard to play or even finger, but you'll see that there are a quiet a few note-related points of interest. This is VERY common in fingerstyle guitar. You really have to understand note values and how they relate, so I decided to add that right here before everything gets too complex.

Before we begin this second introduction to fingerstyle guitar, we have to learn something very important.

Low Melody and High Melody

Notice on the tablature below that you'll see the note values both in upright position, and some that are 'upside down.' In fingerstyle guitar, this tells us that there are low and high melodies. While the low and the high melody MIGHT NOT play at different values, sometimes they do. Right now, I haven't included anything too advanced, so you can treat both low and high melodies roughly the same way. I just wanted to point out that if you see a note value turned 'upside down,' that simply means it is a low melody.

This tablature represents a series of fingerstyle picking that incorporates the usage of your thumb, 1st, and 2nd finger.

Notation Legend:

(In order of appearance)

Quarter Rest - It denotes a silence of the same duration as a quarter note.



Quarter Note - note played for one quarter of the duration of a whole note. Quarter notes are notated with a filled-in oval note head and a straight, flagless stem. The stem usually points upwards if it is below the middle line of the staff or downwards if it is on or above the middle line. However, this may be changed if there is more than one part to differentiate between the parts.



Dotted Half Note - a note with a small dot written after it. The dot adds a half as much again to the basic note's duration. If the basic note lasts 2 beats, the corresponding dotted note lasts 3 beats. A dotted note is equivalent to writing the basic note tied to a note of half the value, or with more than one dots, tied to notes of progressively halved value.



Half Note - a note played for half the duration of a whole note and twice the duration of a quarter note. In time signatures with a denominator of 4, such as 4/4 or 3/4 time, the half note is two beats long.



Whole Note - a note represented by a hollow oval note head, like a half note, and no note stem. Its length is typically equal to four beats in 4/4 time.



Whole Rest - denotes a silence for the same duration. Whole rests are drawn as filled-in rectangles hanging under the second line from the top of a musical staff.

Measures 1 - 2

♩ = 60

Str I

Breakdown (Measure 1):

- We begin with the high melody (open high E string) playing a dotted half-note WHILE the low melody ('3' on the A string) plays a standard half note.
- We then play the high melody (the '3' on the B string) using a quarter note, AFTER the low melody ('2' on the A string) plays a half note.

Breakdown (Measure 2):

- All notes in Measure 2, except for the open note on the A string (which IS a low melody note, but the whole note symbol doesn't change) are played with quarter notes. Simple huh?!

Measures 3 - 4

Breakdown (Measure 3):

- This is basically an F chord. Check it out on the tablature. The low melody note (the '1' on the Low E string) is played with a dotted half note WHILE the high melody note (the '3' on the B string) is played using a standard quarter note.

- Next, the '1' on the B string is played using a quarter note, and then we play the '2' on the G string using a half note. End this measure with a low melody note of '3' on the D string playing a quarter note.

Breakdown (Measure 4):

- A simple quarter note progression with an added low melody note of '3' on the A string.

Measures 5 - 6

The image shows musical notation for two measures. The top part is a standard staff with a treble clef. The first measure (Measure 5) contains a dotted half note on the high E string (the top line). The second measure (Measure 6) contains a quarter note on the high E string. Below the staff is guitar tablature. Measure 5 has notes 3, 5, 3, 0 on the strings from high E to low E. Measure 6 has notes 3, 1, 5, 4, 0, 3, 2, 3 on the strings from high E to low E.

Breakdown (Measure 5):

- Here we have two high melody notes playing dotted half notes. While this is played, the low melody note, the '3' on the A string, plays a quarter note.

- The low melody note of '2' is played with a quarter note, and then the open string note on A is played with a half note. End the measure with '5' on the G string and '5' on the high E string playing quarter notes.

Breakdown (Measure 6):

- Much like Measure 2, this entire measure plays using quarter notes.

Measures 7 - 8

Breakdown (Measure 7):

- Both low melody notes (the '3' on the Low E string and the '2' on the A string) play using half notes, while the high melody note (the '3' on the B string) plays using a whole note, as well as the '3' on the D string.

Breakdown (Measure 8):

- This could be considered the turnaround to the song, since we aren't playing it in its entirety. This is pretty easy.
- We play the 'high' melody using a quarter note on the open B string (all high melody parts in the eighth measure are quarter notes).
- The 'low' melody, which is the '3' on the Low E string plays using a dotted half-note.

Special Note:

As you can see, though it may not be difficult to actually play these passages, it can be confusing when you force yourself to limit which fingers you are using. If you had any trouble with these examples, try going over them a few more times and pay special attention to where your fingers 'wander' when trying to use the appropriate ones.

If you find that a given finger that you are not supposed to play finds itself plucking a string, take note of that. It could very well be a dominant finger and MAY be more comfortable for you to fingerpick with. I'll talk more on that later in the program.

The key here is to find what feels natural...note it...and then try to incorporate it later in our advanced studies.

For now, please just follow the guide in which fingers to use so that we have a firm foundation on finger positioning.

Fingerstyle vs. Arpeggios

In the event that you aren't familiar with what an arpeggio is...

An arpeggio is built from the notes that make up a chord, but are picked as individual notes. They may be used as fill-ins, linking melodies with chords and chord/melody. Arpeggios have their own patterns but not unlike their chord counterparts.

So...

I'd like to touch base on the difference between playing fingerstyle guitar and playing arpeggios.

Here is a standard open E chord, played both using an arpeggio and then using fingerstyle:

The image displays two systems of musical notation for an open E chord in 4/4 time. Each system consists of a staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature, and a corresponding guitar fretboard diagram below it. The first system shows an arpeggio: the first bar contains an ascending sequence of notes (E2, G2, B2, D3) followed by a descending sequence (D3, B2, G2, E2). The second system shows a fingerstyle variation: the first bar has notes E2, G2, B2, D3, E2 with fingerings 0, 2, 2, 1, 1; the second bar has notes E2, G2, B2, D3, E2 with fingerings 0, 2, 2, 0. The third system shows another fingerstyle variation: the first bar has notes E2, G2, B2, D3, E2 with fingerings 1, 1, 2, 2, 0; the second bar has notes E2, G2, B2, D3, E2 with fingerings 0, 0, 1, 2, 2.

The first bar is an ascending and descending arpeggio, in which I've omitted the open string notes on the B and high E strings.

The next bar is a simple variation on fingerstyle guitar, where you are **STILL PLAYING THE SAME** chord, but we've added some open notes and instead of picking individual notes (the key to arpeggios) we are playing more than one note at a time in the passage.

Oops!

Did you notice something? I sure did. There are **NO** low melody notes. While this isn't absolutely 100% necessary, it would actually read like this in fingerstyle guitar for the second bar:

E E

0 0 0 | 0 0 0

1 1 2 | 1 2 2

2 2 2 | 2 2 2

0 0 0 | 0 0 0

In this passage, I've made the Low E string and the A string the low melody notes. This will work for now in terms of being cohesive with our current studies.

Long Story Short

The MAIN difference that we are focusing on right now is that an arpeggio is played with only one note at a time, whereas when playing fingerstyle, you usually play MORE than one note at a time. That's one of the big differences. There are more, but let's wait for additional info on that.



Video Reference: Much more material is covered in our Fingerstyle 101 DVD. Please refer to Chapter 1 "Fingerstyle 101" on the DVD for additional information.