

Basic Techniques (Part I)

Our right hand thumb is one hand and plays the bass figures while our index finger is our second hand and plays the melody. Our third hand is our left hand which fingers chords. The results produce a full and orchestrated fingerstyle sound with a rhythmic bass played against melodic lines. This is the alternating bass technique which we sometimes jokingly refer to as "bum-chuck." It is the most popular fingerpicking style played and has been used by legendary guitarists. Mississippi John Hurt, Rev. Gary Davis, Merle Travis, Doc Watson, Chet Atkins are but a few of the giants of this style.

In order to understand how to actually play fingerstyle guitar, we must first understand some of the basic techniques that are applied to it. Believe it or not, most of these.....

You May Already Know!

You're already headed in the right direction, so that's good news, right?!

Here are the first four techniques that we will incorporate into playing fingerstyle guitar. Each example listed below will ONLY cover one technique at a time. The last supplemental example will incorporate all of these elements for fun.

1. Basic Slide (technique, not style)
2. Vibrato
3. Hammer Ons
4. Pull Offs

There are MANY more techniques, but be familiar with these as of right now so that we can begin our exercises immediately after this category.

Using the examples below, play each technique to prepare for the actual exercise. In order to keep from confusing you, all of the techniques are applied within our actual exercise.

1. Basic Shift Slide (technique, not style)

A shift slide is when you strike the target note instead of the note you start on

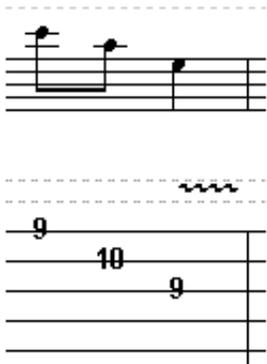
In other words, for the tablature below, the shift slide takes place on the A string from the '4' to the '7'.



The shift slide is noted by the 'sl.' as well as horizontal(ish) lines that run to the next series of notes that you are sliding to.

2. Vibrato

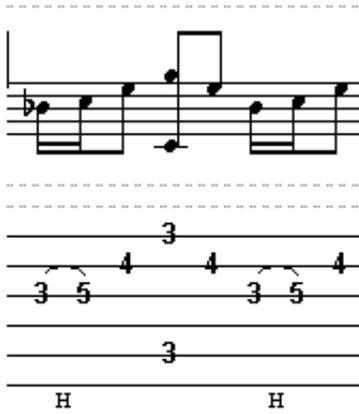
Here we apply 'vibrato' and for our basic techniques. Vibrato is a periodic variation in the pitch (frequency) of a musical note. A basic vibrato is performed by vibrating a note(s) rapidly by a bending and releasing of a note with your fret hand. We're not bending it up to a higher pitch per say, just "shaking" the string.



The vibrato applied here is on the D string on the ninth fret.

3. Hammer Ons

A Hammer On is a simple technique of "hammering on" the fretboard with one or more of your fingers to produce a note instead of picking the note.

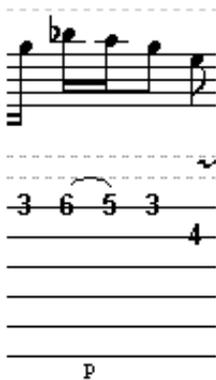


The Hammer On is noted with an 'H' in tablature and there are two in this tab above. They both take place on the G string.

4. Pull Offs

Pull Offs are performed by picking the 1st note and "pulling-off" to sound the 2nd note without picking it. Both fingers are to be placed on the notes to be sounded. Strike the 1st (higher) note, then sound the lower note by pulling the finger off the higher note while keeping the lower note fretted.

The Pull Off is literally the EXACT same thing as a hammer on, but reversed.



The Pull Off is noted with a 'P' in tablature and is noted on the high E string from the sixth fret to the fifth fret.

Supplemental Example

*Warning: If you are not quite familiar with these techniques and try to play the following example, don't worry. We will explore all of these techniques in the near future.

Overall Chord Progression: C, Am, G, E (in no particular order)

There are only a few techniques that I've included on this Supplemental Example that you may not be familiar with.

1. Tied Note - this was explained in our demo exercise, but I'll explain it again for reference.

A tied note is a curved line connecting the heads of two notes of the same pitch, indicating that they are to be played as a single note with a duration equal to the sum of the individual notes' note values. A tie is similar in appearance to a slur.

Here it is as it appears in this tablature:

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The staff is labeled "Am" above it. The first measure contains a tied note (a half note) on the G string (4th fret), followed by a quarter note on the G string (4th fret) and a quarter note on the B string (2nd fret). The second measure contains a quarter note on the G string (4th fret) and a quarter note on the B string (2nd fret). Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six strings. The strings are numbered 1 to 6 from top to bottom. The first measure of the tablature shows: 0 0 0 | 0. The second measure shows: 1 1 1 | 1 1. The third measure shows: 0 0 0 | 2 2. The fourth measure shows: 2 2 2 | 2. The fifth measure shows: 3 3. The sixth measure is empty.

Many times it is noted by a 'grayed' area on the tab staff. This helps in keeping consistency in strumming. If it didn't appear at all, it could get rather confusing. The tied note is found in Measure 1 for Guitar 1.

2. Natural Harmonic (N.H.) - a Natural Harmonic is a "bell like" tone that is produced by lightly touching a string of the guitar over some specific fret bars. What we are going to be talking about in this lesson is natural harmonics. These harmonics are produced from the open strings of the guitar only. There are other techniques for playing harmonics (artificial harmonics, touch harmonics, tap harmonics, pinch harmonics) but they will be the subjects of another lesson.

Here it is as it appears in the tablature.

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The staff is labeled "NH" above it. The first measure contains a natural harmonic on the G string (4th fret), followed by a natural harmonic on the B string (2nd fret) and a natural harmonic on the G string (4th fret). The second measure contains a natural harmonic on the G string (4th fret) and a natural harmonic on the B string (2nd fret). Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six strings. The strings are numbered 1 to 6 from top to bottom. The first measure of the tablature shows: [12] [12] [12]. The second measure shows: [12] [12]. The third measure is empty.

This appears in Measure 4 for Guitar 2.

One more note: Pay CLOSE attention to the note value changes. Since we've got two guitars playing, they don't always play the same note value, so it's VERY important that you see the differences at times. Again, this is a SUPPLEMENTAL example into what we will be playing in the future, so don't worry if you can't play this quite yet. I've also included a full version of this song in our "Basic Jams 1" so that you can practice this at your leisure.

Just don't steal it from me...I wrote it! (Just kidding...you can steal it.)

Musical notation for a fingerstyle exercise. The top staff shows a melodic line with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The bottom four staves show the guitar fretboard with fingerings: 3 6 5 3 on the 6th string, 4 on the 5th string, 3 5 on the 4th string, and 5 3 5 on the 3rd string. The 3rd string starts with a '3' indicating a triplet. The exercise is divided into two measures, labeled 'H' and 'P'.

Here they are together:

Musical notation for a combined exercise. The top staff shows a melodic line with a tempo of $\text{♩} = 60$ and a key signature of one flat. The bottom four staves show the guitar fretboard with fingerings for two versions, 'Ver I' and 'Ver II'. 'Ver I' includes a wavy line indicating a tremolo effect. The exercise is divided into two measures, labeled 'H' and 'P'.

G E

3 3 5 5 7 7 7
5 5 8 8 8
9 9 9

3 3 0 2 5 5 0 4 7 0 7 7 7
H H sl

NH
{[12]}
{[12]}
{[12]}

3 2 0 2 5 4 0 7

G E

9 10 9 10 9 10 8 7 8 7 8 7
11 9 11 9 11 9 9 7 9 7 9 7
9 9 9 9 9 9 7 7 7 7 7

sl

9 10 9 10 9 10 7 8 8 9 9
9 11 9 9 9 9 7 9 9 9 9

H

C Am

3 4 3 5 4 4 3 5 4

3 3

H H

3 6 5 3 4 4

3 5 3 5 3

H P

How Did You Do?

If you were able to breeze right through this example, then you're well on the road to playing great fingerstyle guitar. While the song might not be your absolute favorite, the idea here is to see what we can do and how we can do it. If you did well, great. If you are struggling with this, don't worry.

Now we have completed our first run at the many techniques you will be playing using fingerstyle guitar. Let's try out a few exercises now.



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