

Fingerstyle References

Because the focus of this series is to show you how to improvise any fingerstyle song, instead of being specific on each and every chord used, instead you only need a template that can easily suggest a given fingerstyle phrase. To keep this simple, I've organized a series of 'rules' to help you learn to play fingerstyle guitar the EZ way.

Rule #1: ONLY use your thumb and 1st finger. The thumb will play the notes that provide any and all of the deeper tones found within a given chord. This can include, but is not solely limited to: The Low E string, the A string, and at times the D string. Since we are using two fingers over six strings, it is much easier to assign the thumb to the lowest tone strings. The 1st finger will stay within the guidelines of the three additional strings, usually from the G string, the B string, and the High E string. When this concept changes it will be noted within the chord shapes found below. The chord shapes below are ALL of the chords used in this series.

Rule #2: Experimentation is the key. Or should I say improvisation. When you watch the videos I provide, it is important to understand that I am loosely picking out the notes found within each chord. There is no set tablature for this, and there shouldn't be. If you spend all of your time reading tablature, then you'll find that when you want to learn NEW songs, you will look for the tab as a crutch.

Rule #3: It may not come as EZ as you want it to at first. However, following the guidelines I present with each chord will allow you to use what you are learning in ANY and EVERY song you ever want to apply fingerstyle guitar to.

Rule #4: The concept of the 'roller coaster' is the most important part of the fingerstyle concept. In a roller coaster we have three points of action: (1) The **rising action** (2) the **falling action** and (3) the **climax**.

The rising action is the beginning of the song. It sets the tone to suspense, and can be started out low or high, depending on what you want the falling action to become. If you start with the high notes in the rising action, then you'll need to begin the low notes in the falling action. If you set the song up with a D Major, a happy chord, then the next chord that moves into the falling action could easily be a mid-range or lower chord.

The falling action is the mid-range section of the song. It sets the mood of the song, and allows the listener to either feel a dynamic change in the song, resolving itself toward the climax, OR it can allow a listener to 'feel at home' with the song. If there aren't a large number of chord changes, usually the falling action is a 'catch-all' chord, such as a C Major. Think of the concept of a piano having a middle C. That stays in the mid-range.

The climax is basically the turnaround in blues, or the dynamic change in rock. A good example of a climax in this series is the chord changes found in "Far Side Banks of Jordan" as seen below:

^F
 And I'll be waiting on the far side banks of Jordan
^{Bb} I'll be sitting drawing pictures in the sand ^F
^C And when I see you coming I will rise up with a shout ^F
^{Bb} And come running through the shallow water reaching for your hand. ^C ^F

The climax doesn't appear in the chorus here until we reach the "...and when I see you coming I will rise up with a shout..."

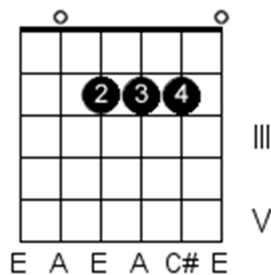
Because the F - Bb - F is so monochromatic (one color) we must create a climax that will take the listener to a resolve, or a turnaround, at some point. In the case of the C - F there is a dynamic change, accompanied by an even bigger climactic ending from Bb - F - C - F. What is strange about this song is that even though there are only three chords in the entire song, the arrangement of each chord is crucial in the overall tone, or feeling, of the song. Sometimes less is really more!

All that aside, as long as you follow these rules your fingerstyle ability will increase ten-fold. Now I present you with the chords used in all of the songs. Each chord will show a diagram, a tabbed-out fingerstyle legend of logical notes to play using the roller coaster effect, and a brief explanation of each chord.

Note: Below each chord diagram is a tab file that displays all the logical 'colors' of the chord. These can be played in any order. The "actions" are also displayed. Each of these actions show the logical roller coaster movement I've been referring to. (The note usage doesn't matter. It just prints that way.)

A Major (A)

A

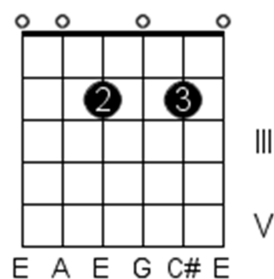


Rising Action		Falling Action		Climax	
0	0	0	0	0	0
2	2	2	2	2	2
2	2	2	2	2	2
2	2	2	2	2	2
0	0	0	0	0	0

The A chord is very simple. As long as you keep a consistent open A note run during the climax, you'll allow this chord to shine very easily.

A Dominant 7 (A7)

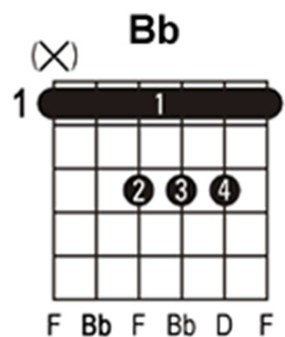
A7



Rising Action					Falling Action					Climax				
0	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	2	0
2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2	0	2
0	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	2	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

As you can see there is no real change between the A and the A7. Simply remove the fretted note on the G string.

B Flat (Bb)

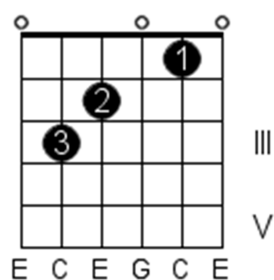


Rising Action				Falling Action				Climax			
1			1	1			1	1		1	1
3		3	3	3	3		3	3	3	1	3
3		3	3	3	3		3	3	3	3	3
3	3		3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
1			1	1		1		1	1	1	1

The Bb, while perfectly fine to strum as a whole unit (including the Low E string note) but doesn't sound too great when fingerpicked. This time, try to avoid using the Low E string when playing fingerstyle.

C Major (C)

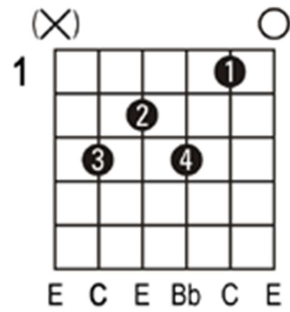
C



Rising Action				Falling Action				Climax			
0			0	0			0	0		0	0
1		1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1
0		0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0
2	2		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3			3	3		3		3	3	3	3

There's nothing special about the C chord. It just plays as a perfect mid-tone, or 'safe' chord when using fingerstyle. There's not much you can do wrong!

C Dominant 7 (C7)

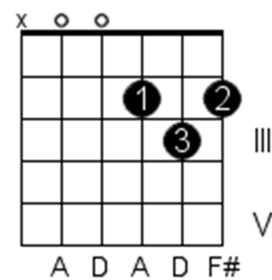


Rising Action		Falling Action		Climax	
0	0	0	0	0	0
1	1	1	1	1	1
3	3	3	3	3	3
2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3

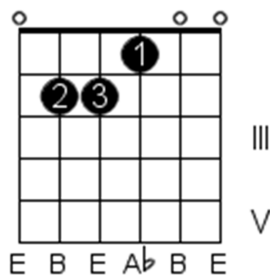
The C7 plays as the C chord, but with the added 3rd fret note on the G string.

D Major (D)

D



Rising Action		Falling Action		Climax	
2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3
2	2	2	2	2	2
0	0	0	0	0	0

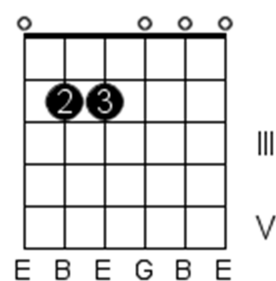


Rising Action		Falling Action		Climax	
0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0
1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2
2	2	2	2	2	2
0	0	0	0	0	0

The E chord opens up every possible door on your guitar. You can literally play ANYTHING within this chord. It's perfect to practice with over and over.

E minor (Em)

Em

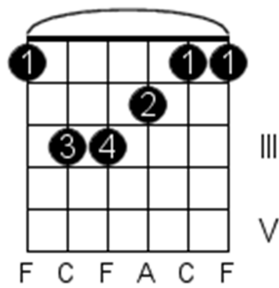


Rising Action		Falling Action		Climax	
0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0
2	2	2	2	2	2
2	2	2	2	2	2
0	0	0	0	0	0

The same applies here as with the E chord. Lots of possibilities!

F Major (F)

F

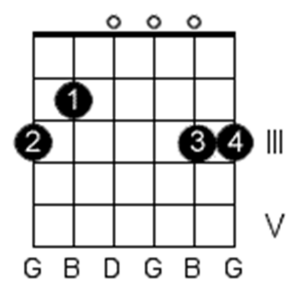


Rising Action		Falling Action		Climax	
1	1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3
3	3	3	3	3	3
1	1	1	1	1	1

The F chord also includes virtually every possible note that you could want to play on the six strings you have available.

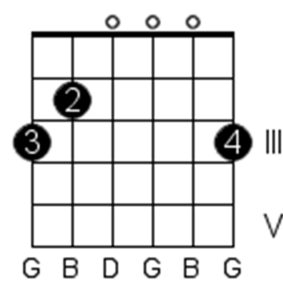
G Major (G)

G



OR

G



Rising Action		Falling Action		Climax	

Notice above that I included two chord options. The tablature doesn't show it, but that's only because if you choose the second version, with the B string played open AND different finger arrangements, you just omit the 3rd fretted note on the B string. I included two versions because in the case of "Peace In The Valley" you'll have a quick change from G to G7. Using the second version of the G presented above will allow you a much easier transition. Again – it's just an option.

G Dominant 7 (G7)

G7

III
V
G B D G B F

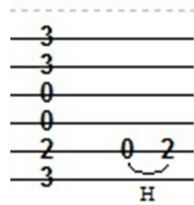
Rising Action		Falling Action		Climax	

The G7 offers nothing any more special than the G chord, except of course the fretting. Instead we've got a 1st fretted note on the High E string instead of a 3rd fretted note. That's it!

Applying A Few Basic Techniques

What if you wanted to begin making these chords sound MORE like a fingerstyle song using a few techniques? Well, it's easier than it may seem. While the songs presented here are more for the beginner fingerstyle guitarist, (in essence really just using arpeggios to learn the basics of fingerstyle) there are some basic techniques you can employ:

Hammer-On: A hammer-on looks like this on a G chord....

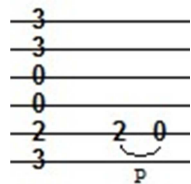


All you are doing is striking the note once – AND ONLY ONCE! – and then applying a higher fret number to the same string. Doing so will make the string's note go up in pitch. Remember that you don't strike the note twice. Only on the first note. The second note will 'sound' as you apply the new fret number.

In the case above, first the G chord is shown. Then, the open fretted note on the A string is shown. The hammer-on calls for an open string struck once, and then a 2nd fretted note applies to the same string. The notation shows an "H" indicating a hammer-on.

When to use this: Open chords are the best choice for hammer-ons. Usually the root note (lowest) or the next to lowest note is the best bet. However, the D chord works great on the High E string. Just experiment with the options as you play along. You'll discover a lot by just experimenting!

Pull-Off: A pull-off looks like this on a G chord....



Basically take everything you've just learned about a hammer-on and REVERSE the note order. Instead of going UP in pitch, you're going DOWN in pitch. It's that simple.