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Exploring Fingerpicking Technique

There are two distinctly different Fingerpicking Styles. The Classical (pima) and "Alternating Thumb" styles. This workshop will give you and introduction to both styles with a focus on the Alternating Thumb style.

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Fingerpicking - Getting Started

The Two Distinct Fingerpicking Styles

There are two distinctly different fingerpicking styles. One is the Alternating Thumb and two finger style commonly called Travis Picking in the guitar world and Scruggs Style in the banjo world. Both named after the most famous musicians that made the styles famous.

This series of lesson's focus is on the second style most associated with the other style, the classical guitar technique that involves the thumb and three fingers. In the classical guitar world the fingers are known as indicated with **pima** for the Spanish initials of the thumb and finger names. For these series of lessons I'll stick with the English initials.

Each repetition should be done a massive number times. That *IS* the key to developing the finger strength and finger independence needed for this style.

Fingering Notation

- Thumb (**t**)
- Index finger (**i**)
- Middle finger (**m**)
- Ring finger (**r**)

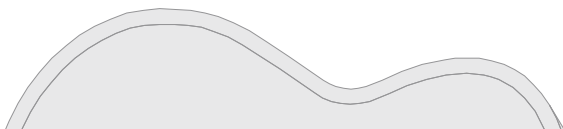
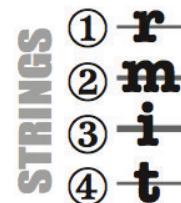
Each finger is assigned to a string. String ④ is the closest to your nose and string ① is closest to the floor - your toes.

String ④ is played by the *thumb* (**t**)

String ③ is played by the *index* finger (**i**)

String ② is played by the *middle* finger (**m**)

String ① is played by the *ring* finger (**r**)



24 Possible Combinations

Play each of the individual patterns melodically as single notes.

t i r m example

t	i	m	r
t i m r	i t m r	m t i r	r t i m
t i r m	i t r m	m t r i	r t m i
t m i r	i m t r	m i t r	r i t m
t m r i	i m r t	m i r t	r i m t
t r i m	i r t m	m r t i	r m t i
t r m i	i r m t	m r i t	r m i t

The next step is to play the combinations harmonically - two, three and finally all four strings together.

Practice Tips

- 1) With only the open strings
- 2) With a single chord
- 3) Switching between two chords
- 4) Applied to a chord progression or song
- 5) Vary the rhythmic value of the notes

Using the original **24** combinations, melodically make one finger louder > than the others.

>
t i m r >
t i m r t i m r >
t i m r t i m r t i m r >
t i m r

As you can see there are a lot of possibilities. Each with a distinct musical sound and possibility.

Rest Stroke and Free Stroke

When plucking a single string there are two distinct strokes, the rest stroke and free stroke. Both strokes start with the pad of the fingertip touching the string. What happens next determines the sound and what the stroke is traditionally called. The rest and free stroke can be used with the thumb, index, middle and ring fingers.

For a **REST STROKE**, the finger follows through to the next lower string, coming to rest on that string. The pad of the fingertip is responsible for more of the stroke than the fingernail. The rest stroke can heavier, louder sound.

When using the rest stroke on the lowest string ④ of the ukulele, follow through as if there was an additional lower string. The rest stroke is relegated to single notes.

Using the rest stroke requires having shorter nails. With longer nails a good sounding rest stroke is not possible.

A **FREE STROKE**, is when the finger does not follow through, producing more of the sound with the fingernail. The free stroke produces a lighter sound.

The free stroke is necessary in cases when you don't want to mute the lower string when it's needed to keep sounding. The free stroke is necessary when playing multiple strings such as intervals and chords.

In the classical guitar world that are some players that promote one stroke versus the other – both are a necessary musical tool to develop and explore. Both strokes will vary between players depending in their nail length and shape.

Explore both strokes with ALL exercises:

Single Strings

For single strings any one of the your plucking hand fingers can play that single string. It can be either **t**, **i**, **m**, or **r**. All depends on whether you are making a musical decision or a purely technique decision. I would explore each possibility and all single strings.

For quicker single note runs a combination of fingers will probably be more efficient and maintainable in the long run.

Single String, One Finger Drills

Explore the following using **t**, **i**, **m**, and **r**.



Alternating Fingerpicking Patterns - Summary

Rhythm is the Foundation

At the heart of all fingerpicking patterns, whether you call it *Tavis Picking* or *Scruggs Style* or *banjo rolls* – it's all just a different execution of specific rhythmic patterns in a particular style.

Here are the core fingerpicking patterns from my book "Fingerpicking for Ukulele – Alternating Thumb Style". These are the same patterns I use for all private students, regardless of the instrument.

After the foundation of the alternating thumb is established the fingerpicking patterns are organized into levels according to the number of fingers involved with the alternating thumb. For the basic style it's the index (**i**) and middle (**m**) fingers only and the number of times within a pattern the finger is used.

Thumb and Index Finger - Level One

Here's the index finger incorporated one time in a four beat pattern.

pattern 1	{	t i t + t + t +	}	/ / / /
		1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +		
		↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑		
pattern 2	{	t + t i t + t +	}	/ ▭ / /
		1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +		
		↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑		
pattern 3	{	t + t + t i t +	}	/ / ▭ /
		1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +		
		↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑		
pattern 4	{	t + t + t + t i	}	/ / / ▭
		1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +		
		↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑		