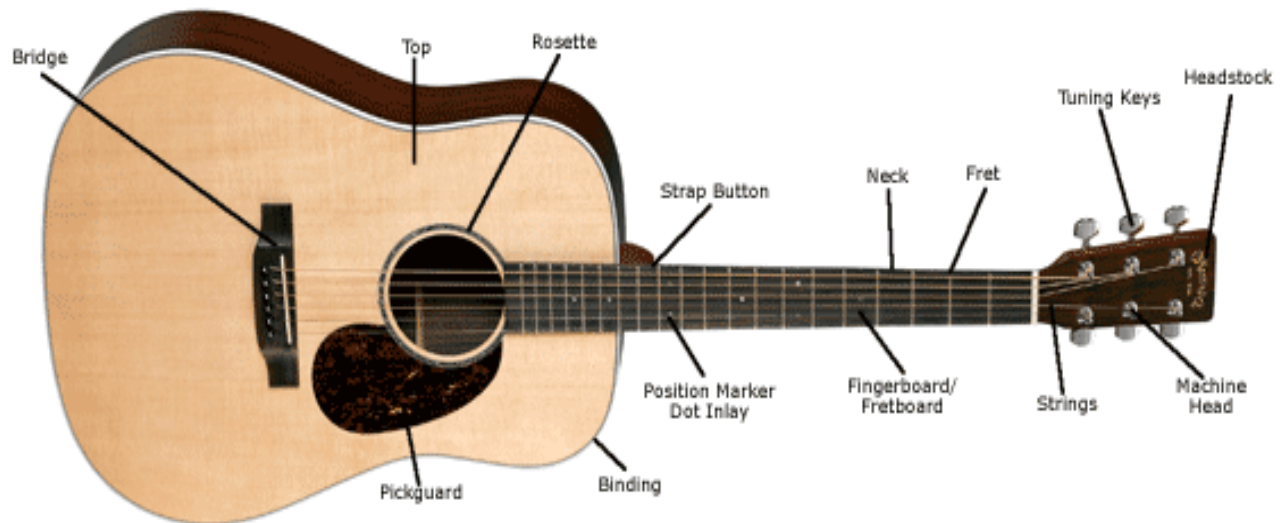


Your Practice Packet

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A look at all the guitar basics, as well as accompanying exercises.



Introduction-

Welcome! This packet is designed to reinforce the ideas and musical concepts we've discussed in our lessons thus far. Specifically, we're going to be paying close attention to **strumming, finger placement, chords, and rhythm**. Each of these concepts is given its own time and page, with exercises to help you improve your technique. I encourage you to work at your own pace, though I will be emphasizing things in the packet to work on between our weekly lessons.

Important things to note-

This packet includes various forms of music notation, some of which you have seen before and some of which you have not. I'll be going over the new notation in the lesson, but to help you remember I've prepared this key which should make clear anything you're not already familiar with:

KEY OF NEW NOTATION:

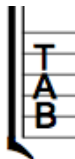
 This is a form of music notation called **tablature** or 'tab' for short. It is often used concurrently with a treble clef staff above it (see fig 1.) and is used to make specifically clear how to play the notes of a song. In tab, each line does not represent a note, but a string on the guitar. The top line represents the thinnest string (high 'e'), and the bottom line represents the thickest string (low 'e'). The numbers on each line indicate which fret to play on that particular string. See fig. 2 for a more in depth diagram of this.



Figure 1.

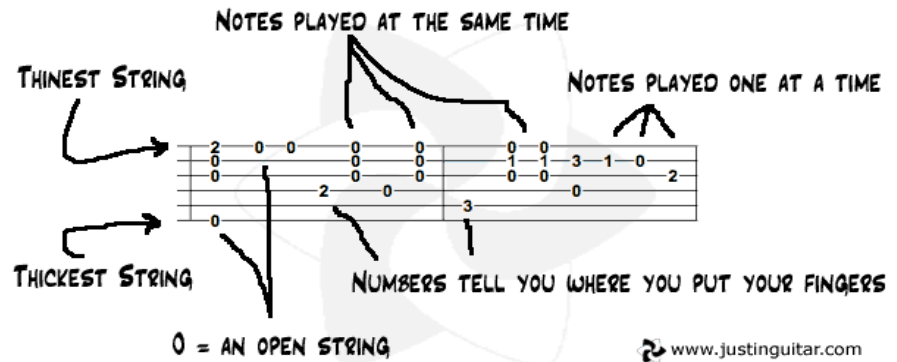


Figure 2.

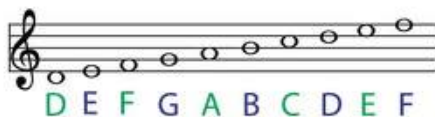


This is a **repeat sign**. It is used to indicate when a passage should be played twice.



This is a **chord diagram**. When playing guitar music, it is sometimes more helpful to just look at the chords that will be played for a song, rather than the tab or the notes themselves. The letter indicates which chord to play and the graphic below shows one way to play it.

Finally, here are staves with the names of the treble and bass clef notes to help you recall note names.



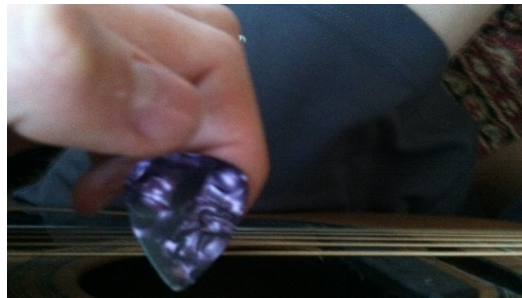
Part one: Strumming-

Being able to strum chords with confidence and familiarity is the foundation of playing almost all popular guitar music today. Because of that, this page is devoted to improving all aspects of your strumming technique. You don't need to perform these exercises with chords or a metronome, but you can if you want. The point here is to get yourself to feel comfortable with a pick in your hand.

Holding the pick:

The most important thing to remember when holding and using a pick is that it shouldn't get in your way when playing. When you strum a chord it shouldn't feel cumbersome or like there is a foreign object in your hand. The key is to hold it firmly enough so that it won't fall, but not so tightly that it gets caught on a string and impedes smooth playing. As far as pick angle goes, there are a wide variety of options, and you should work on finding a way to hold the pick that is both comfortable and helpful to your own playing. As an example, here is how I hold my pick when playing:

I like to keep the pointy corner of the pick parallel to my index fingernail, as if the pick is an extension of that nail. Notice also how I'm not holding the pick in the exact middle, but more toward the upper corner. For me, this gives me maximum comfort and playability. When I'm strumming, it looks like this:



Chris's Pick Grip

Remember, there is no wrong way to hold a pick, as long as it works for you!

The strumming motion:

A smooth strum is the key to musical sounding chords, and it is important to get comfortable strumming both downwards and upwards.

For confident strumming, try these exercises:

Downstroke-

*Grab a normal sized match box and match. Take a match and, using the wooden end so it won't catch fire, strike it against the side of the box a few times. Notice how you use a combination of wrist and forearm movement as you strike the match. The movement of striking a match is remarkably similar to a good downwards strum! Now, take the match box and turn it vertically, so you're striking the match downwards instead of away from you. Again, notice the kinds of muscle movements that occur. Next, keeping the box in its vertical position, substitute the match you've been using with a guitar pick. Treat the guitar pick like a match and strike downwards against the box. **This is the kind of effortless movement you should be using when strumming!** Finally, put the matchbox away and bring out your guitar. Take your pick and strum downwards at the strings as if they were the side of the matchbox. Don't worry about hitting them all, just focus on moving your pick like you're striking a match on the guitar strings.*

This exercise is meant to give you a confident downstroke while playing. It may seem weird at first, but given time it will help you internalize what's going on when you strum downwards. Relax! Let it happen!

Upstroke:

Take a whisk and a normal sized mixing bowl and pretend that there are three cracked eggs inside of it. Whisk the eggs towards you, as if you were trying to scramble them. Notice how the arm naturally moves. There is a strong motion inside the bowl as the eggs are whisked towards you, but a smooth move back as the whisk repositions itself for its next stroke in the bowl. **That strong movement as you whisk the eggs towards you is how you should treat upstrokes on your guitar.**

Now, take your guitar and pick. Remembering how your arm felt whisking in the bowl, strike the strings upwards. That is how a confident upstroke should feel!

Applying it to music:

Now, take your downstroke and upstroke and apply it to the following strumming exercises. They needn't be practiced with a metronome to start. Focus only on the motion of your arms as you strum up and down. If you would like, you can play with muted strings or on a favorite chord while you practice.

Strumming Exercises:

Start slowly, and speed up as you feel more comfortable.

1.)



Exercise 1 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff contains four measures, each starting with a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. The second staff is identical to the first but includes a double bar line with repeat dots at the end.

2.)



Exercise 2 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff contains four measures of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5 in the first measure; D5, E5, F5, G5 in the second; A5, B5, C6, D6 in the third; and E6, F6, G6, A6 in the fourth. The second staff is identical to the first but includes a double bar line with repeat dots at the end.

3.)



Exercise 3 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff contains four measures of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5 in the first measure; D5, E5, F5, G5 in the second; A5, B5, C6, D6 in the third; and E6, F6, G6, A6 in the fourth. The second staff is identical to the first but includes a double bar line with repeat dots at the end.

Part two: Finger placement

When playing chords it is important to rest our fingers on the neck of the instrument in the most efficient, comfortable way possible. This allows for the easiest playing and quickest learning time. This page is devoted to improving your chord fretting, separated from actually playing chords.

What to try to do:

When fretting a chord it is important to remember that it is the tip of each finger that is pressing down on the string. Place your fingers on the strings as if you were poking something with your fingers, instead of placing them on an ink pad to get your fingers printed.

Finger pressure is another important aspect to fretting chords. Here, the rule of thumb is *use as little pressure as necessary, but no less*. In time, you'll be able to feel exactly when the string has been pushed down enough to sound pleasantly, but for now focus on trying to ensure that each finger is staying out of the way of each other finger, and that each fretted string is heard without being muted.

Fretting Exercises:

For these exercises, fret the chords indicated by the chord diagrams, but don't strum them until your fingers feel comfortable enough to change between the chords smoothly. These exercises are for your fretting hand, not necessarily your picking one. Use a metronome to keep the time so you know when to switch chords. Start slowly, then go faster.

1.)

1.)

2.)

2.)

3.)

3.)

4.)

4.)

Part three: Chords

The chord is the bedrock of most western music, and guitar playing is no exception. If you can get your chords sounding nice and smooth, your overall skill level will increase greatly—and you'll look like a more confident player to boot!

In the previous exercises, we have focused on strumming and fretting in a vacuum, now we combine these two skills into a new one: playing chords! You already know how to fret a good amount of chords for now, so in these exercises we will focus only on strengthening what you already know.

This group of exercises will take you through all the chords you have learned so far. They are meant to be played **one chord at a time**, as slowly as you want. Strum each chord once and let it naturally fade out. If it sounds good to your ear, move onto the next chord. If not, find and fix the problem you have, then try again. **Don't focus on switching chords in time**, just focus on making them sound as musical as possible before moving onto the next chord in the sequence. Remember what you learned in the previous sections about finger placement and strumming! It will make thing easier in the long run.

A musical staff in 4/4 time showing a sequence of eight chords. Above the staff, the chord names A, E, Am, C, G, D, Em, and Dm are written. Below each name is a guitar chord diagram. The staff itself shows the notes of each chord: A (x02232), E (x02210), Am (x02210), C (x32033), G (x32033), D (x02321), Em (x02210), and Dm (x02321). The notes are represented by dots on the staff lines.

Part four: Rhythm

The final part in this packet focuses on improving your rhythmic skills, it is one thing to be able to play chords that sound nice, and quite another to play chords in a notated rhythm. However, once you get the feel for it, everything in your playing will come more easily to you. In this section, we will work on helping you to 'feel' beats, as well as work on your rhythmic playing technique.

Can you feel it?

At the heart of every song there is a rhythmic pulse that gives the song its life and moves everything forward. Some pulses are very fast and rigid, while others flow like a lazy river. Outside of your playing, I am sure you have been able to tap into these pulses when you listen to music for pleasure. If you've ever clapped your hands in time with a performance or danced (bad dancing counts!) to a song at a party, you were able to 'feel' the pulse of the song and let it move you. As a musician, one of the most important aspects of your playing comes from your ability to feel a song and let it guide you as you play. These exercises are designed to help you play notated rhythms, but are also helpful for improving your inner ear as you focus on the overall pulse behind what you're playing. **A metronome is necessary for this section!**

Exercise 1.)

Grab your metronome and set it to 120. Yes, 120. Don't be afraid of the fast beat. Now, without playing, become attuned to that pulse. Nod your head, clap your hands, snap your fingers, anything. That is is underlying pulse of everything we'll be playing. With that pulse in your head, play the following rhythm on an 'E' chord:

A musical staff in 4/4 time showing a sequence of eight E chords. Above the staff, the chord name E is written eight times. Below each name is a guitar chord diagram for E (x02210). The staff shows the notes of each chord: E (x02210). The notes are represented by dots on the staff lines.

Exercise 2.)

Once you feel comfortable playing just one chord to that rhythm, we can start adding more complex progressions to that same rhythm. Because we'll be moving between chords, **slow your metronome down to around 70 to start**, though if this is still too fast bring it down until you're comfortable. Now, play that same rhythm to these chord changes.

Remember, the most important thing is to keep the pulse in your head. Keep nodding or swaying to the beat. The rhythm hasn't changed, just a couple of the chords. Once you feel comfortable playing, you can increase the metronome setting to more challenging speeds. Don't think it, feel it!

Chord diagrams for E, G, A, E, G, A, E, G, A, E, G, A are shown above the staff. The staff contains a sequence of chords in 4/8 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Putting it all together-

After you have practiced and feel comfortable with the rhythm and playing exercises provided in this packet, try to apply what you've learned by playing this classic folk song. These are the chords to the American standard, "This Land is Your Land," Focus on playing with a metronome until you feel like you don't need it anymore to keep time. Then, play through the piece without a metronome and make it as musical and interpretive as you like! *The purpose of learning this song is to familiarize yourself with changing chords in time, as well as getting comfortable reading some simple music.*

Take your time to understand and 'feel' the beat as you listen to the metronome. Allowing yourself to internalize the pulse of the song will help your playing become more fluid and confident. Good Luck!

Folk Song

Tempo marking: ♩ = 60-80. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. Chord diagrams for D, A, E, and A are provided above the staff. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) with fret numbers for each string.