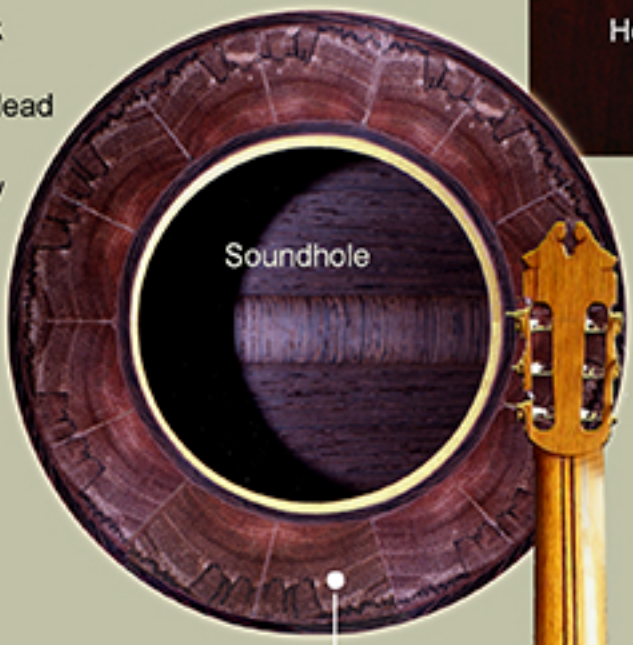
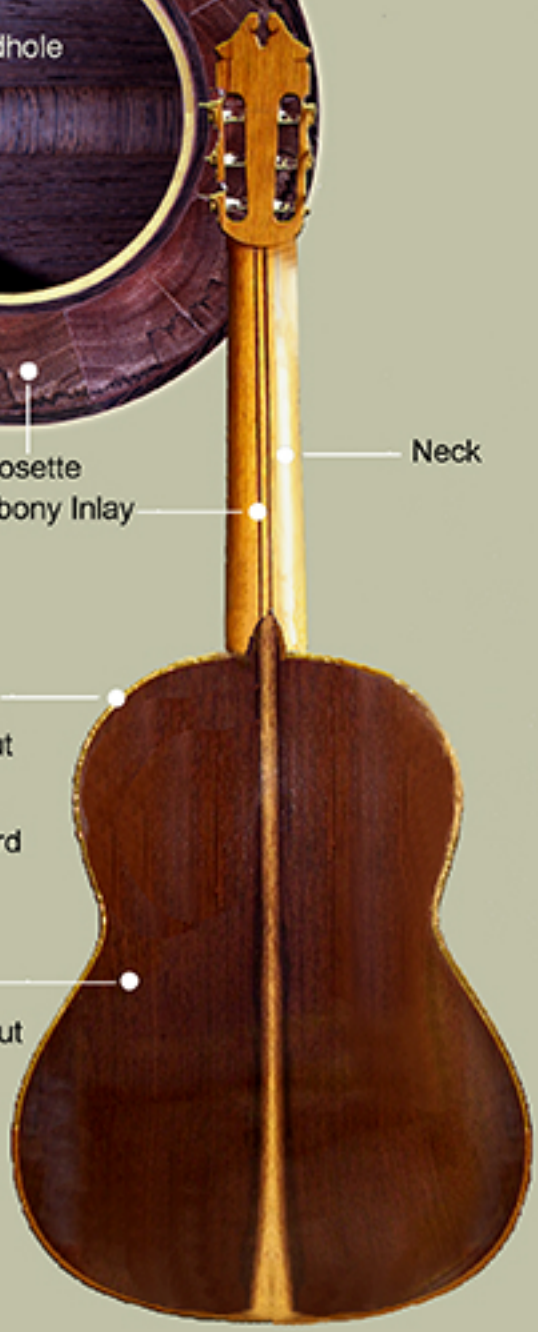
Beginners Guitar Guide

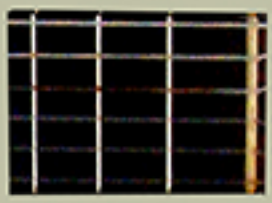
Bob Oort

Guitar Components





Strings



Bass strings: Alloy wound on nylon or fibrous material

Treble Strings: Plain Nylon

Action and Tonal Characteristics

The Action - the height of the strings above the fretboard - determines the string tension, how easy or difficult the instrument is to play, the intonation, tone and volume.

A Flamenco Guitar has a somewhat lower action than a Classical Guitar.
This facilitates easier playing for both hands, and gives the guitar a more distinct, bright and lively Flamenco sound, caused by a slight ring by the strings on the frets.
The action on a Classical Guitar is slightly higher than that of the Flamenco Guitar.
The tone varies a lot in different makes and models, depending on woods used, internal linings, strutting and bracing. Clarity is essential and fret buzzes are not desirable.
Guitars are made in various sizes: **Short and Long Scale Concert, half and three quarter.**
A **Requinto** is a small guitar tuned different from the traditional Concert Guitar.

Traditional Flamenco:
Spanish Cypress sides and back and Spruce top.

Black Flamenco:
Rosewood sides and back,Spruce top.

Classical Guitar:
Rosewood sides and back, Spruce or Cedar top. German Spruce is generally preferred for its volume, evenness and clarity, Cedar has less volume but a warm, mellow tone.

An Ebony Fretboard not only plays a role in tone quality, but also assures a lasting straight neck.

Tap plates or **golpeadors** are essential on a Flamenco guitar. They are either clear or white and facilitate the tapping (golpé) which creates additional percussive effects as a means of accentuating rhythmic Flamenco 'compás'.
In Flamenco guitar playing a **'cejilla'** (capo - capo tasto) is an essential accessory. Its use maintains the tonal characteristics of the different Flamenco forms in higher fret positions when accompanying cantaors or cantaoras (singers).

Various stages in the building of a handcrafted guitar (Courtesy Wesselbaum Guitars)

Universal Guitar Language

Learn this first. Guitar Symbols Language explains what to do in both text books and guitar music. Music and methods not using this language exist, but were written without awareness of the existence of Universal Guitar Symbols.

THE LEFT HAND

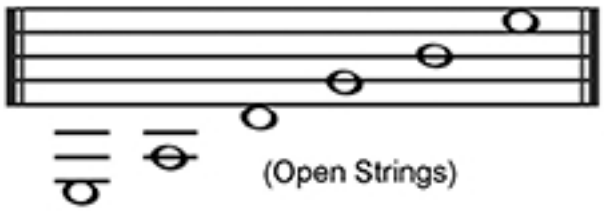
0 - Open String (not fingered)
1 - First Finger (Index)
2 - Second Finger (Middle)
3 - Third Finger (Ring)
4 - Fourth Finger (Little)

THE RIGHT HAND

P - **Thumb (Pulgar)**
i - **Index Finger (Indice)**
m - **Middle Finger (Media)**
a - **Ring Finger (Anular)**

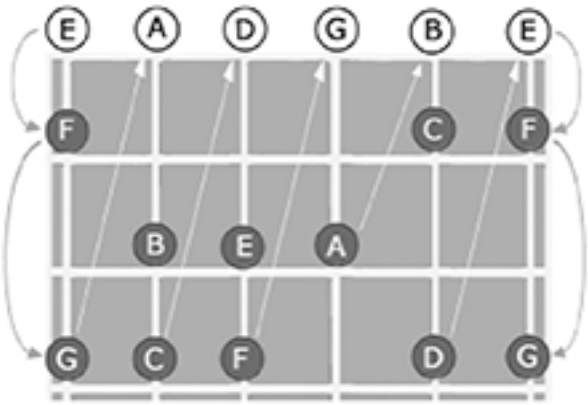
STRINGS are referred to by encircled numbers:

⑥ ⑤ ④ ③ ② ①
E A D G B E



(Open Strings)

1st Position Scale diagram



2 part guitar music

UPWARD STEM:
Treble, played by fingers

DOWNWARD STEM:
Bass, played by thumb (P)

ROMAN NUMERALS (**I II V IX** etc) refer to the FRET POSTION for the 1st FINGER.

The fretting of 2 or more strings with one finger is called 'BAR'. A bar of 5-6 Strings is a FULL BAR, a bar of 2-4 strings is called a HALF BAR. In guitar music this is indicated by:

C → For full bar, from the word CAPO meaning 'BEGINNING'.

¢ → For a half bar, the C has a vertical line through it.

CIII → BAR at the 3rd fret, as in the picture.

THE RIGHT HAND

P - i - m - a play the strings in either:

REST STROKES - **Apoyando** (Classical)
Picado (Flamenco)
FREE STROKES - **Tirando** (both)

The Little Finger (e) is not used except in '**RASGUEADOS**' (Flamenco Strums).

The **Right Hand is the 'Music Maker'**. While co-ordinating with the Left Hand, the Right Hand ultimately produces the tone, the dynamics and the volume. It needs to develop strength and agility, each finger needs to become independent from the other - which is achieved by playing **Scales** and **Arpeggios** (arpeggii) as often as possible. These and other exercises, like squeezing objects such as a small solid ball when you're not playing help develop a strong and dextrous Right Hand.

Fingernails are the essential tools of the Classical and Flamenco guitarist. Some 'Flamencos' prefer the old way, without fingernails. The tips of their fingers develop 'hard as nails' calluses, but to maintain them it is essential to play every day. Fingernails produce a clear, crisp tone. They should protrude about 2mm over the finger tips and are shaped to the contour of the fingers, but not too round or pointy. They are maintained by filing them every day and removing all cuts and blurs. A fine grade black emery paper or board is used to polish off the sharp edges, so that the nails don't cause drag to play the strings, but slide across them and produce a 'round' tone (as opposed to 'tinny').

It is essential that you start playing close to the bridge, rather than above the soundhole. This will develop strong fingers, as the strings don't flex as much near the bridge.

Exercise

Pick the first string (tirando), then lever the hand by means of the fore arm diagonally across the strings and pick the 6th string. Then lever it down again an pick the first string again. Keep doing this 20 times to get the feel of moving across the strings without altering the hand position.

Questions?

Learning guitar presents the dilemma of living in the dark until a later phase sheads light on an earlier phase. Best way to go about it is to take in information when it comes whether you understand it or not, and let time take its course. At one point or other you'll stumble on answers to previous questions.

Get ready to play

Adopt a Playing Position

Whichever position you begin with, make sure to get it right, it will determine whether you're going to play well or not. Whether you aim to be a professional or learn to play for personal growth, interest or pastime is irrelevant.

Take the first step

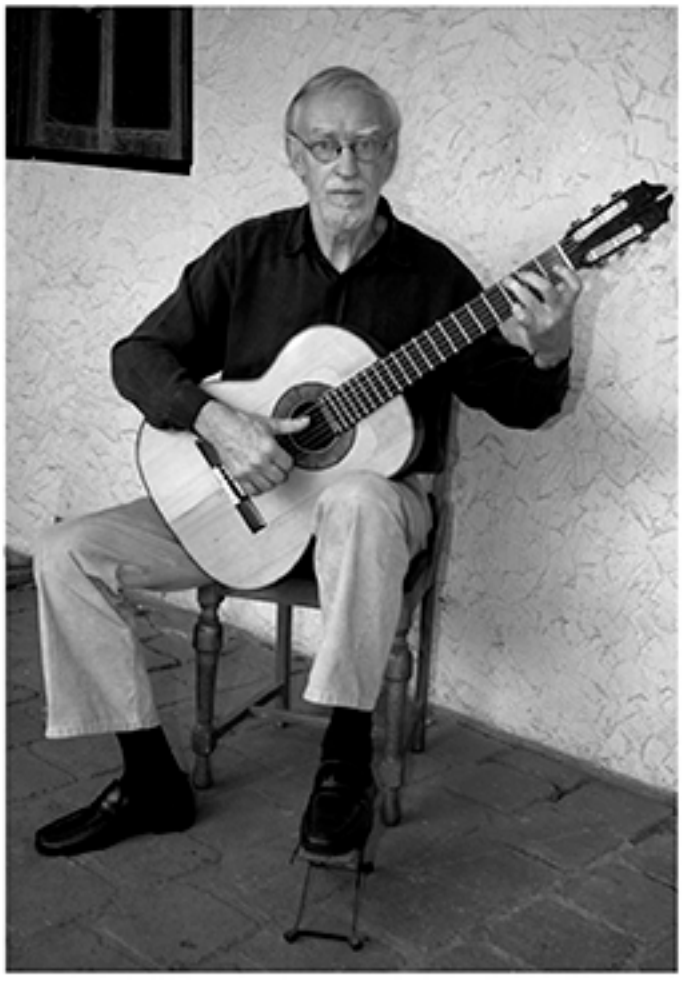
Learn how to hold the guitar - copy one of the following playing positions:

Classical Position

By using a **footstool** the guitar sits firmly in a playing position leaving both hands in control, without having to steady the guitar with either arm.

The Right Fore Arm does not lean on the guitar and is free to move the hand by means of leverage diagonally from the treble to the lower strings.
Note how the hand flows straight from the arm and the lower wrist is only slightly arched. Keep it relaxed, allowing for slight movement only, when required.

The **Left Hand** principles are exactly the same, but coming from below the neck.
Do not wrap the thumb around the neck, it's purpose is to counteract finger pressure and guide the hand up, down, back and forth along the fretboard.
Exercise 6 will help you practice this.

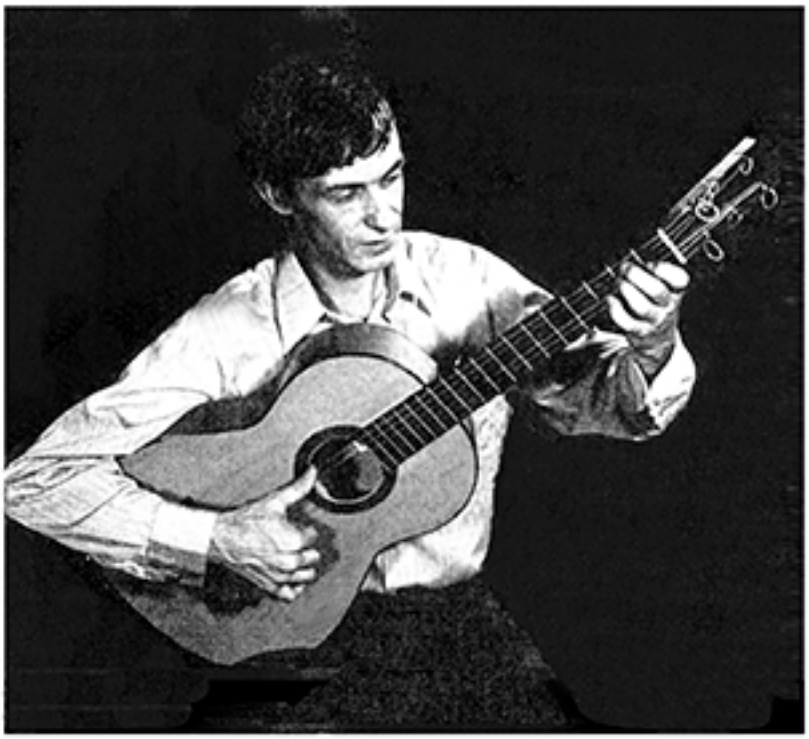


Alternative Position

By crossing the right leg across the left with the fore leg just above the ankle resting on the left leg just above the knee, the guitar sits very steady although not quite as in the Classical Position. (If you're left handed, do the opposite).
Tuck the guitar in so it leans slightly downward and feels steady. Apply the same hand positioning principles as in the Classical Position. You'll find it a little harder to reach the higher fret positions without a swivel of the fore arm but this compromise compensates for the right hand to execute varied strumming techniques such as done in South American rhythms and Flamenco rasgueado techniques. Many Flamenco players use this position in preference to the traditional Flamenco position.

Flamenco Position

Having both feet on the floor, the guitar's lower bout corner sits on the right thigh, while the upper arm keeps the guitar steady.
The fretboard faces diagonally upward and left hand movement is difficult unless the steadiness of the guitar is well under control. This is not an easy way to play the guitar unless you grew up with it to begin with, but it is the traditional Flamenco way of playing, which works great in rasgueo (the rhythmic accompaniment of dancers and the somewhat more intricate song embellishment).
Having the guitar closer to the ear is a definite advantage in Flamenco when accompanying dancers and singers.



Positioning Principles and The Consequences of Wrong Techniques

Once you have copied a playing position, you may need to make some minimal adjustments according to your own build, but don't compromise on the principles: Any over-arched wrist approach is an invitation to Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) which results from not allowing the muscles and tendons to operate unobstructed. Body tension further adds to straining the neck muscles and affects all other working parts right down to the fingers.
Sit up straight, but keep relaxed. A comfortable position is essential, but sitting on a bed or on the floor will invite all the elements prohibiting advancement to good guitar playing.

Hand Positioning

Thumb Positioning

Half Bar Fretting

Good Chord Fretting

Wrong Chord Fretting

Finger i Rest Stroke (Apoyando)

Finger i Free Stroke (Tirando)

Tumb in line with the fingers

Playing a Rasgueado

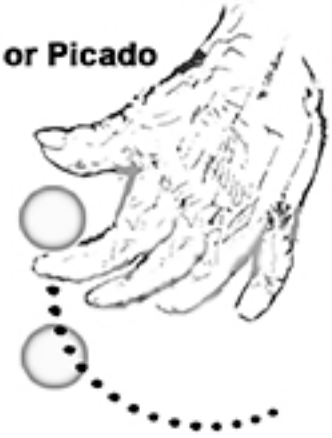
Rest Strokes - Free Strokes - Right Hand Control

1

2

There are two ways of positioning the Right Hand Thumb, both are essential in playing varied ways of "attacking" the strings to facilitate different tone qualities and fortes (strengths).
a) As in picture 1, leaving it rest on the 6th string. This is done when playing **Single Note *i***, ***m*** or ***a*** **Rest-Strokes on the first two or three strings**, when **striking chords with finger *i***, or in varied ***i-m-a*** **rasgueados** (flamenco strums & rolls).
b) As in picture 2, keeping the **thumb pointed down, crossing finger *i***, and **off the strings**. This allows for **both Free Strokes and Rest Strokes**, while allowing the hand to lever from the higher to the lower strings and enable the thumb to play any string at any given time, especially those adjacent to strings played by the fingers.

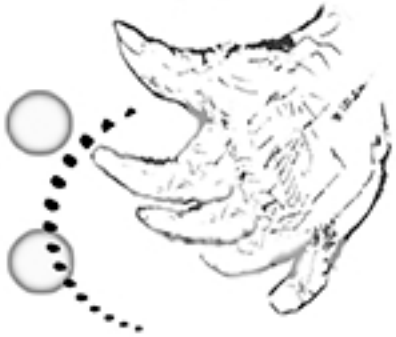
Apoyando or Picado



3

In the **Rest Stroke** the finger stops on the next **Lower** (sounding) **String** after playing the higher string. It is played by alternating **i & m, m & a, i & a**, or a combination of all three successively, and starting from whichever finger is the most logical to begin with in any given situation - this will become quite natural once you have played a few exercises and pieces.

Tirando or Non-Apoyando



4

In the **Free Stroke** the finger bypasses the lower string without touching it. The fingers remain curved and flex inside the hand as they pick the strings. Free strokes prevent stopping other strings from sounding, which is essential in **Right Hand Arpeggios** (another arpeggio is the Scale Arpeggio), where every note needs to harmonize in a chord. If a note in a chord is a melody note, it can be stressed by playing it Apoyando.

P **Apoyando**: The thumb should **fall down** towards the next string, so that the played string vibrates vertically. Pulling it away from the string makes it vibrate horizontally, thereby causing it to buzz on the frets. **As a start**, practice a **Thumb Rest Stroke**, stopping on the next string, then let it describe a **down, outward and upward** circular motion without playing the string you stopped on.

Preparing to play

STEP NUMBER 1 - Position the Right Hand
Copy this picture exactly as you see it:
1: Rest the thumb on the 6th string
2: Make fingers **i**, **m** and **a** into **one unit** and curve all joints, then hook them under the first three strings, make sure not to separate the fingers. **Note** how the thumb sits above the rosette and points towards the soundhole. Don't start any early exercises by playing directly above or further beyond the soundhole - the strings flex more towards the centre of their length, at this stage you need the rigidity to develop a strong, dextrous Right Hand.

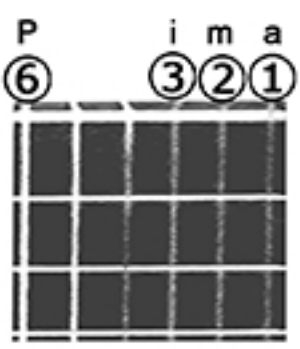
STEP NUMBER 2 - Make some sound
Play the 6th string by letting the thumb slip off the string and **stopping it on the 5th string**. Now take it off the 5th string (without sounding it), and make it go down and back up in an **outward circular motion**, and stop back on the 6th string.
Repeat this a few times until you get the feel.
THE NEXT STEP is to make the circular motion continuous, playing the 6th string without first stopping on it, but **stop on the 5th string every time before continuing the circular motion**. You should hear the sound of the 6th string without interruption between one tone and the next, or hear the string reverberate against the thumb. So, your thumb describes a circle which is momentarily (split second) interrupted by stopping on the 5th string - this is called a **Rest Stroke**, in guitar termonology: **Apoyando**.

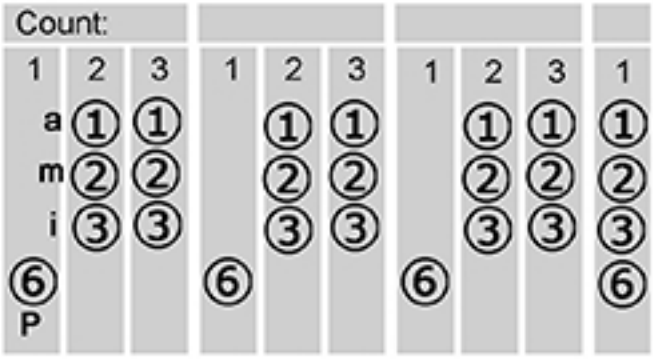
When you've mastered the **P - Apoyando**, pluck the three strings with fingers **i**, **m** and **a**, all at once. You do this by flexing the fingers (still together as one unit) up inside the hand and away from the strings, **without pulling them upward by means of your arm**. The only moving objects are the fingers, nothing else (if you could see your hand as you see it in the picture, you should not be able to tell if the fingers move or not).

Now take the next step. Try and play the following Exercise:
Play the 6th string with **P** as practiced earlier, then, directly after the thumb leaves the 5th string (without playing it), pluck the three **Treble Strings** with **i**, **m**, **a**. - don't hook the fingers back under the strings, but keep them together, ready to play the strings again after the thumb played the 6th string. Neither thumb or any finger should touch the strings until the very moment they play the strings, so that the sound is sustained and not interrupted.

Exercise 1

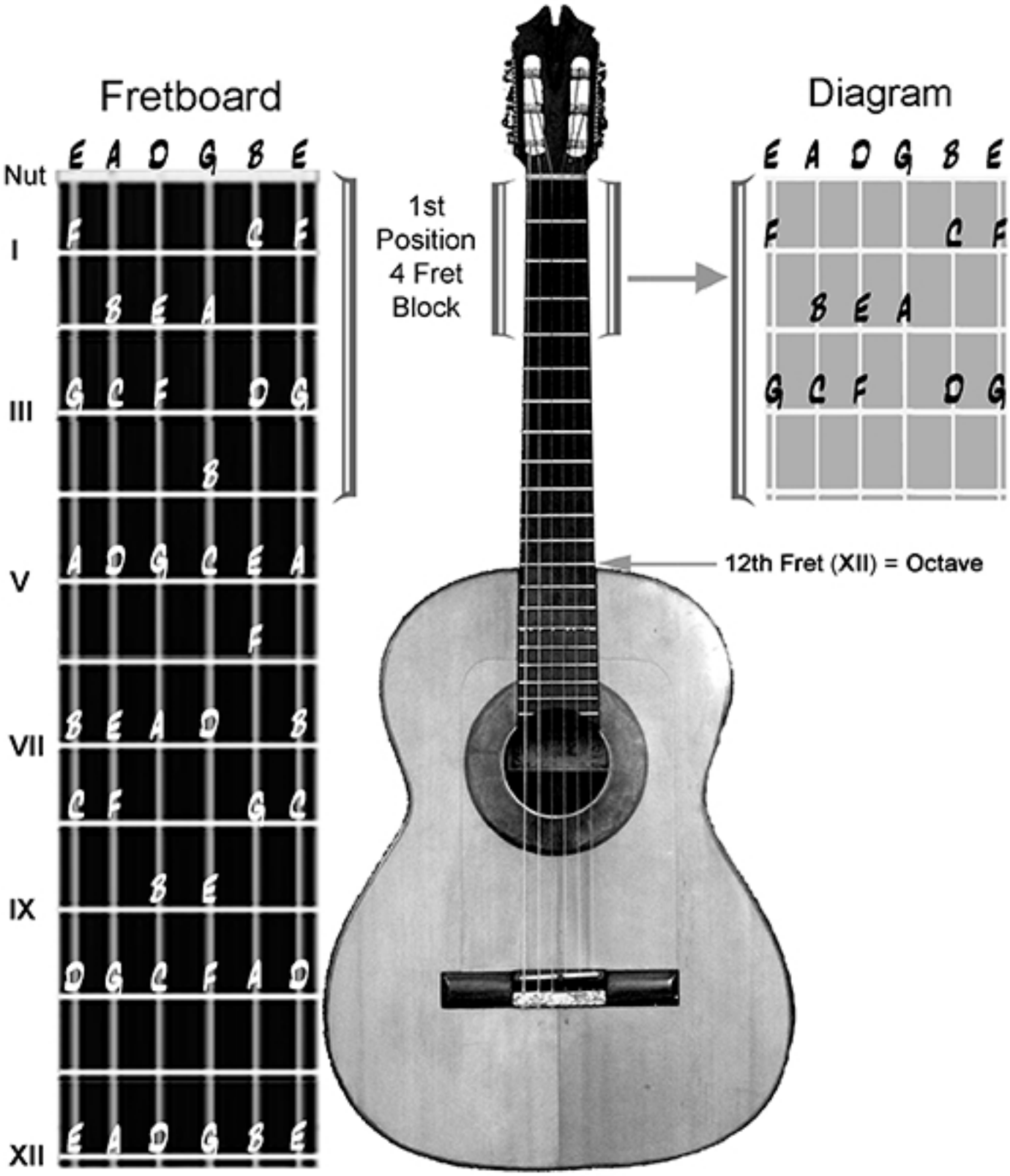
Practice until mastered:
P once, **i-m-a** twice, do tthis 3 times, then end all at once. You can not play **P-Apoyando on the end beat**.





How does it work?
Playing the strings causes them to vibrate, the vibrations resonate through the guitar body, amplify inside the box and are projected out through the soundhole by the back of the guitar. When you put the thumb or a finger back on a string, you stop it from vibrating, and with it you stop the entire sound projection process created by that string - clarity is No 1 objective.

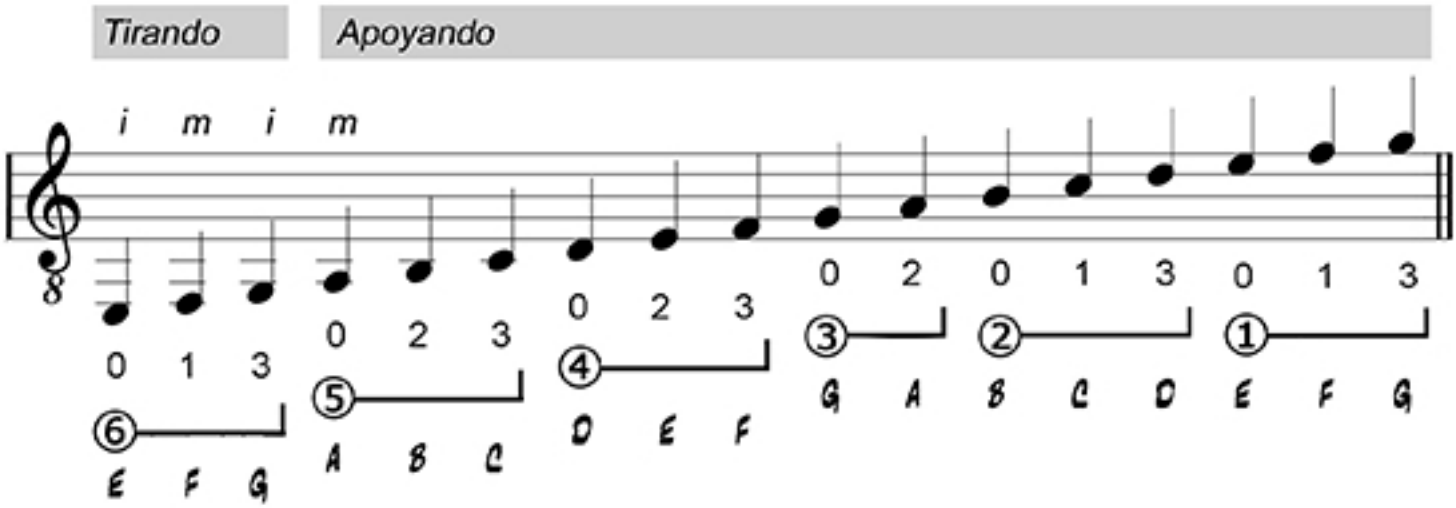
The Notes on the Fretboard to the 12th Fret



A **2-Fret Step** = a **Whole Tone** A **1-Fret Step** = a **Semitone**
There are **8 notes in a One Octave Diatonic Scale**
There are **12 notes** in a **Chromatic Scale** (all Semitones)
The frets between Whole Tones are **Sharps** (♯) or **Flats** (♭)

The 1st Position Scale

Along with the notes the strings are given (encircled numbers), the Left Hand fingers to fret the notes - **1st finger for fret 1**, **2nd for fret 2**, **3rd for fret 3**. The 4th finger doesn't come into it yet, but it will later on. It is essential to **keep it stretched above the 4th fret** and **in line with whichever string you're playing** (this controls the spread of the fingers across 4 frets).



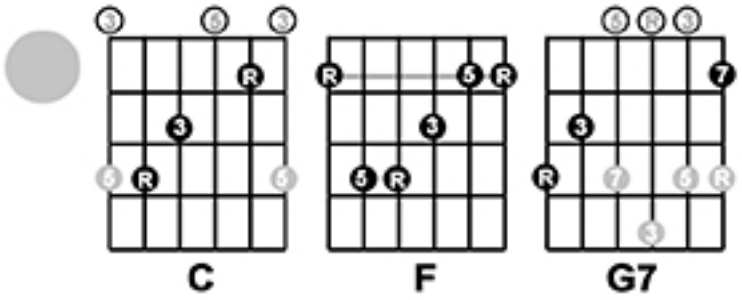
Practice the scale **until it is memorized**
You need to remember:

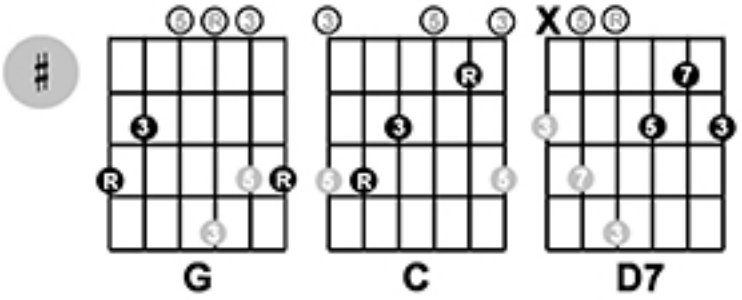
1: The frets where the notes are (**including the Open Strings**)
2: The fingering (every scale has a specific fingering - through practice these become part of the **Central Nervous System**, thereby learning any piece of music easy, as you already have most of what occurs in a key you know the scale of, under control.
3: The names of the **Notes** and where their **Octaves** are.
4: To ***not* watch your Right Hand**, but keep your Mind with it - it will train itself - you can't watch both hands at the same time.
5: To **keep your eyes on the notes you're reading**. You gain two plusses from that, you'll learn to read faster, while your fingers learn to find their way blindfolded. If you can see the **tips of the Left Hand fingers and the 6th string just below the edge of the fretboard**, your hand is in a good playing position and you can focus on moving scale blocks later on.
6: To **hold the guitar vertical or slightly leaning foreward** (pointing to the floor), **not tilting it backward** (which encourages lazy playing, no variable R-Hand attack and eventual damage to the L-Hand wrist). Adopt a straight posture - **never laze back in your chair**.

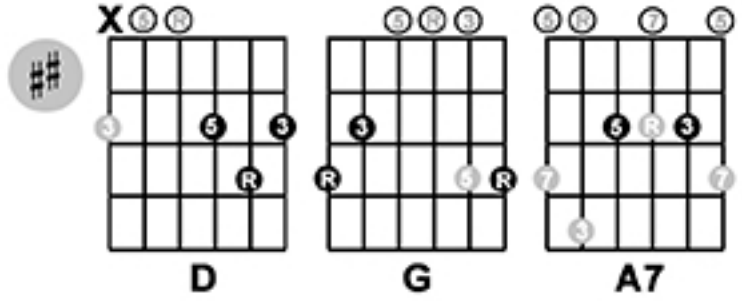
Play the Scale with your eyes closed.
Can you do it? If yes, you have just mastered the most important exercise of your entire guitar playing future.

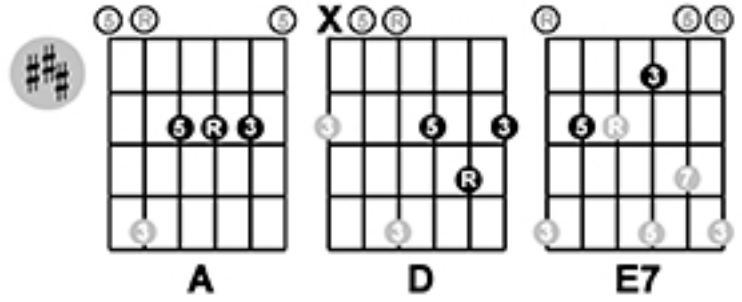
BASIC GUITAR CHORDS

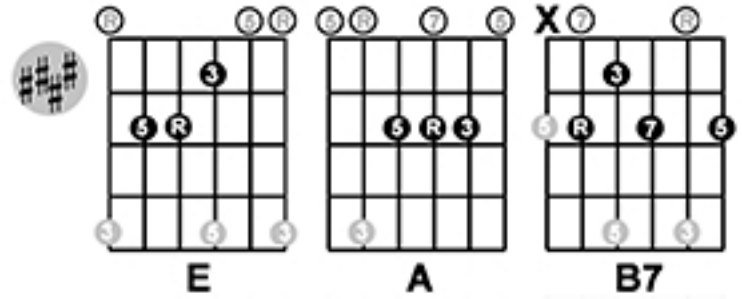
Major Keys

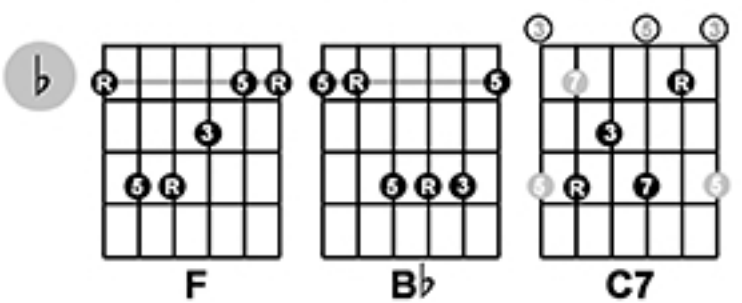




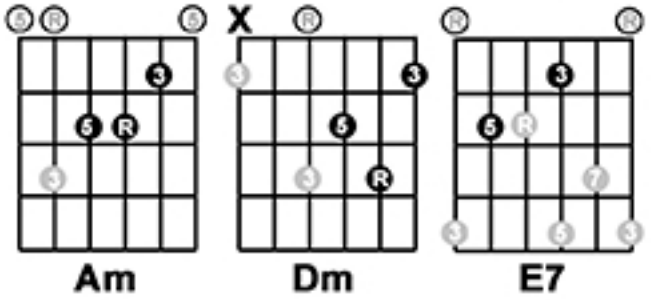


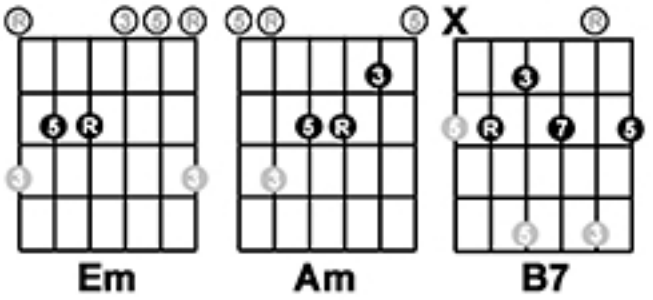


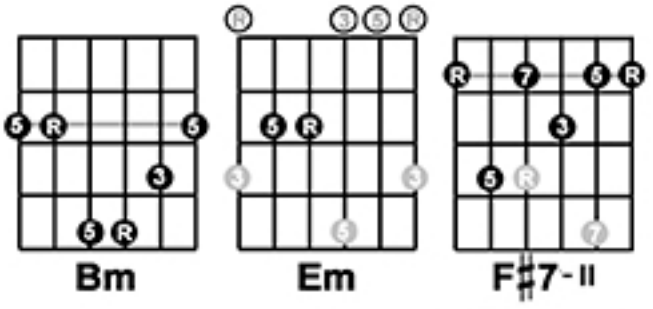


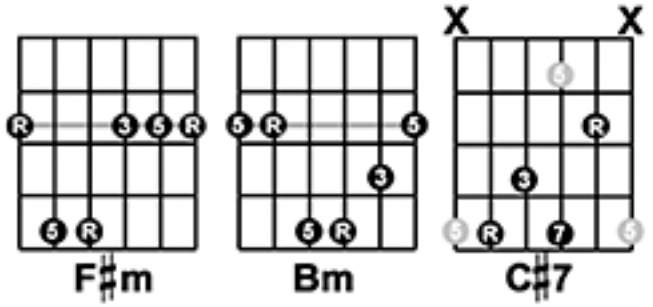


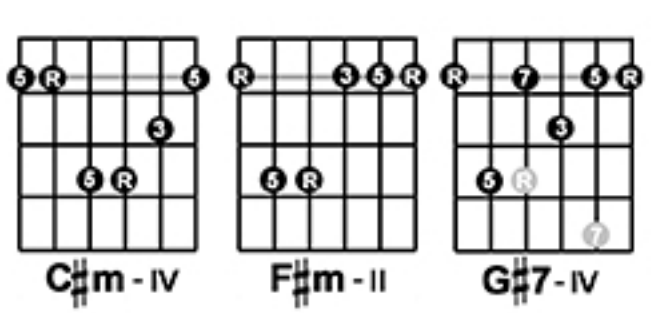
Relative Minor Keys

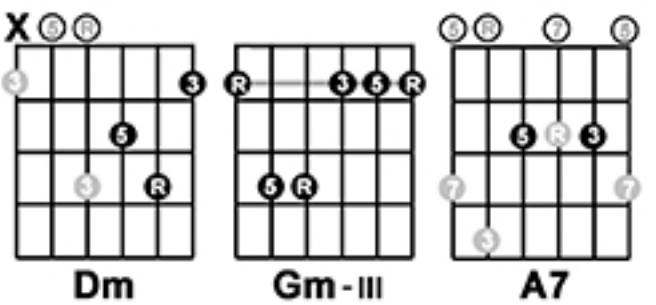












● = Principal Chord ● = Alternative Options ——— = 1st Finger Bar
Ⓡ Ⓡ: Root Note Ⓡ ③ ⑤ ⑦: Open String Chord Notes X: Not a Chord Note ⑦ ❼ ⑦ = ♭7

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