



Intro to Fingerstyle Guitar

MWG 
MATT WARNOCK GUITAR

Fingerstyle guitar is one of the most enjoyable ways to play guitar and can be used in any style of music such as pop, folk, classical, jazz, rock, and more.

When fingerpicking, it's essential to develop rock-solid technique so that you give yourself the best foundation to build upon in your fingerstyle development.

While knowing that fingerstyle means playing with your fingers, you may not know which fingers go where, how to alternate, and what is PIMA exactly?

In this beginner fingerstyle lesson, you explore all of those ideas and more as you build a strong fingerpicking foundation in your studies.

Have fun as you delve into cool sounding and fun world of fingerstyle guitar with these essential and enjoyable fingerpicking lessons.

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Fingerstyle Exercises – Thumb

To begin your study of fingerpicking, here are a series of exercises that work your thumb, which plays the 6-5-4 strings on the guitar.

Over time you can adjust what strings you play with your thumb, but in the beginning, using your thumb on 6-5-4 builds a solid foundation.

From there, once your thumb is solid, you add the other three fingers on the top-3 strings to cover every string on the guitar.

Have fun as you begin your fingerstyle explorations in the practice room with these essential thumb exercises.

Thumb Workout

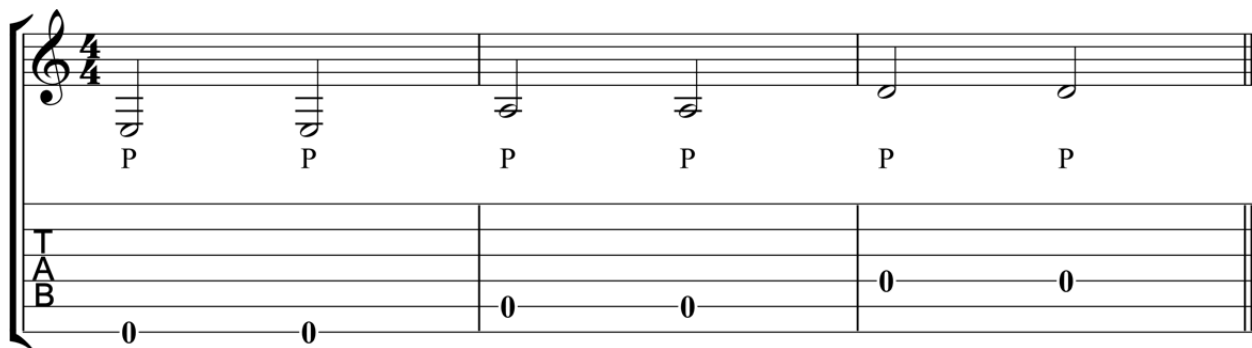
The first thumb exercise plays the 6th, 5th, and 4th strings twice as you work your way up the strings.

To take this exercise further, you can play down the strings, and then try different rhythms for each bar or note.

To play with proper thumb technique, keep your thumb in front of your fingers, towards the neck, and keep it straight like you're hitchhiking.

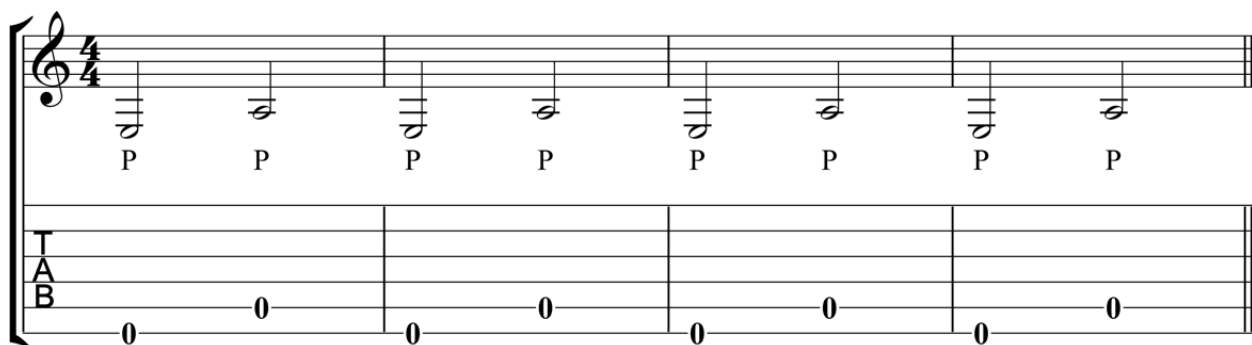
This prevents you from hitting your hand when playing with your thumb and gives you the best and cleanest tone possible.

Have fun starting your fingerstyle journey with this thumb intro exercise.



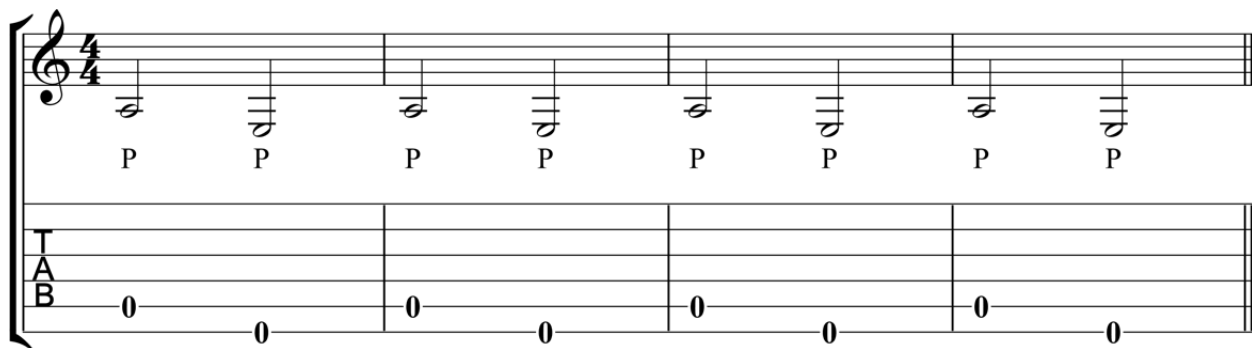
You now alternate your thumb on the 6th and 5th strings as you develop your fingerstyle technique further.

Go slow, use a metronome, and focus on play note evenly with tempo, tone, and clarity.



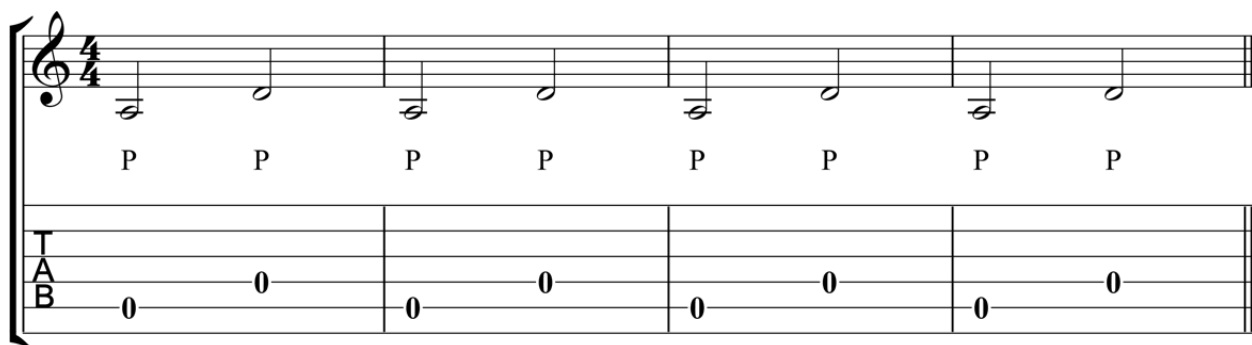
Here, you reverse the previous pattern as you now alternate the 5th and 6th strings with your thumb with half notes.

Work this exercise with a metronome, and when ready, alternate this and the previous exercise for a full thumb workout on these two strings.



You now alternate your thumb on the 5th and 4th strings as you develop your fingerstyle technique further.

Go slow, use a metronome, and focus on play note evenly with tempo, tone, and clarity.



Here, you reverse the previous pattern as you now alternate the 4th and 5th strings with your thumb with half notes.

Work this exercise with a metronome, and when ready, alternate this and the previous exercise for a full thumb workout on these two strings.

A musical score for guitar in 4/4 time. The score consists of two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a melody of eighth notes: F#4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, and G5. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a bass line of whole notes: F#3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F#4, and G4. The notes are grouped by a brace on the left. The notes are labeled with 'P' for the melody and '0' for the bass line. The notes are grouped by a brace on the left.

4/4

P P P P P P P P

T
A
B

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Technical Challenge

To finish your thumb workout, here's a technical challenge where you play different combinations of strings with your thumb over an A blues progression.

Start this fingerstyle blues exercise by working out the notes without any tempo.

Then, when ready, add in a metronome and slowly increase the tempo when ready.

Remember, you don't have to play fast to get benefit from any fingerstyle exercise.

In fact, the most benefit comes when you play slow and focused.

So, work this challenge with a metronome, speed up if you feel comfortable, but don't feel pressure to practice fast with this, or any, exercise.

A⁷ **D⁷** **A⁷**

First system (measures 1-4): Treble clef, 4/4 time. Chords: **A⁷**, **D⁷**, **A⁷**. Bass line: 0, 0, 0, 0.

D⁷ **A⁷**

Second system (measures 5-8): Treble clef, 4/4 time. Chords: **D⁷**, **A⁷**. Bass line: 0, 0, 0, 0.

E⁷ **D⁷** **A⁷** **E⁷**

Third system (measures 9-12): Treble clef, 4/4 time. Chords: **E⁷**, **D⁷**, **A⁷**, **E⁷**. Bass line: 0, 2, 0, 0, 0, 2.

Fingerstyle Exercises – Fingers

After working on developing your thumb, you're ready to dive into using your fingers on the top strings of the guitar.

Here are the shorthand names of each finger to keep in mind and use as a reference going forward.

- P = Thumb
- I = Index
- M = Middle
- A = Ring

As was the case with your thumb, which you used on 6-5-4 strings only, each finger is assigned to a specific string.

Here are those assignments to memorize and use as a reference.

- 6-5-4 = P (Thumb)
- 3 = I (Index)
- 2 = M (Middle)
- 1 = A (Ring)

Notice that you don't use your pinky finger.

As that's a more advanced technique, it's left out of this intro lesson.

As you develop your fingerstyle chops, over time you can add in your pinky in specific situations.

For now it's not needed and so you focus on developing a rock-solid foundation with your thumb and other 3 fingers.

When playing with your fingers, work on moving from your big knuckle mostly, where your finger meets your hand.

As well, keep your hand relaxed and don't curve your wrist towards the floor.

Segovia and a few others got away with that technique, bending the wrist, but since then we've realized that can cause tone, dexterity, and physical problems.

To get a relaxed wrist, hold your arm out in front of you, let your fingers and wrist go limp, then put that shape on the strings.

You can make small adjustments, but that's the basic fundamentals for playing fingerstyle properly.

Now that you know the names of each finger, and where to use them, time to get those fingers on the strings and level up your fingerstyle guitar playing.

Finger + Thumb Workouts

To get you started with alternating your thumb and fingers, here are 9 exercises that explore different finger + thumb combos in your studies.

In these first 3 exercises, you alternate P and I, thumb and index, as you develop your fingerstyle technique with these two fingers.

To begin, here's an exercise where you alternate P and I with half notes.

Use a metronome to make sure you nail the fingers and timing on this workout.

When ready, you can expand out to playing P (thumb) on the 5th and 6th string, sticking to I (index) on the 3rd string for now.

You now work on alternating P and I as you develop this finger combination further in your studies.

This exercise can be tricky, especially as you work on faster tempos, so take your time, start slow, and speed up only when comfortable.

Have fun expanding your P-I alternating technique in your practice routine.

In this exercise you play four notes in a bar, P-I-I-I, as you work on repeating you're I finger in the last 3 notes of each bar.

Go slow with this exercise, use a metronome to make sure each note is even, and stick to the written fingerings to give those fingers as solid workout today.

In these next 3 exercises, you alternate P and M, thumb and middle, as you develop your fingerstyle technique with these two fingers.

To begin, here's an exercise where you alternate P and M with half notes.

Use a metronome to make sure you nail the fingers and timing on this workout.

When ready, you can expand out to playing P (thumb) on the 5th and 6th string, sticking to M (middle) on the 2nd string for now.

You now work on alternating P and M as you develop this finger combination further in your studies.

This exercise can be tricky, especially as you work on faster tempos, so take your time, start slow, and speed up only when comfortable.

Have fun expanding your P-M alternating technique in your practice routine.

In this exercise you play four notes in a bar, P-M-M-M, as you work on repeating you're M finger in the last 3 notes of each bar.

Go slow with this exercise, use a metronome to make sure each note is even, and stick to the written fingerings to give those fingers as solid workout today.

In these next 3 exercises, you alternate P and A, thumb and ring, as you develop your fingerstyle technique with these two fingers.

To begin, here's an exercise where you alternate P and A with half notes.

Use a metronome to make sure you nail the fingers and timing on this workout.

When ready, you can expand out to playing P (thumb) on the 5th and 6th string, sticking to A (ring) on the 1st string for now.

You now work on alternating P and A as you develop this finger combination further in your studies.

This exercise can be tricky, especially as you work on faster tempos, so take your time, start slow, and speed up only when comfortable.

Have fun expanding your P-A alternating technique in your practice routine.

In this exercise you play four notes in a bar, P-A-A-A, as you work on repeating you're A finger in the last 3 notes of each bar.

Go slow with this exercise, use a metronome to make sure each note is even, and stick to the written fingerings to give those fingers as solid workout today.

Musical score for guitar in 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the fretting guide is on a bass clef staff. The fretting guide uses letters P, A, and 0 to indicate fingerings.

Measure	Melody (Treble Clef)	Fretting Guide (Bass Clef)
1	G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter)	P (0), A (0), A (0), A (0)
2	B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter)	P (0), A (0), A (0), A (0)
3	D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F5 (quarter), G5 (quarter)	P (0), A (0), A (0), A (0)
4	F5 (quarter), G5 (quarter), A5 (quarter), B5 (quarter)	P (0), A (0), A (0), A (0)

Technical Challenge

To test your fingerstyle chops up to this point in the lesson you work on a technical challenge over a common progression.

Here, you're given the notes, chord symbols, and tab, and it's up to you to work out the fingerpicking for each note/chord.

I recommend using this approach to start, then work out variations from there.

- 6-5-4 = P (Thumb)
- 3 = I (Index)
- 2 = M (Middle)
- 1 = A (Ring)

Now that you know how to work this challenge, dive in and have fun working on it in your studies this week!

F G C

1 2 1 1 3 5 4 4 5 3 2 0 2 0 0 3 2 0 0 1 0 3 2 0 0 1 0

F G C C7

1 2 1 1 3 5 4 4 5 3 2 0 2 0 0 3 2 3 2 3 1 3 3 2 3 1 0

F Fm Em Dm

1 2 1 1 3 3 1 1 1 3 2 0 0 0 0 0 2 3 2 3 1 0 2 2 0 0

C G G C

0 0 1 0 5 4 3 4 3 3 5 4 6 4 6 6 3 2 0 2 0 1 0 3 2 0 2 0 1 0

Fingerstyle Exercises – Combinations

As well as playing fingerstyle chords, you can apply fingerpicking to any single-note ideas on the guitar.

These include scales, arpeggios, patterns, melodies, lick, lines, phrases, and more.

In this section you learn the three different finger combinations to work on when playing single notes in a fingerstyle context.

Remember, these are the names for each finger.

- P = Thumb
- I = Index
- M = Middle
- A = Ring

Now that you know what to do, time to apply fingerstyle techniques to single-note exercises on the guitar.

Alternating Fingers Workout

To help you develop your alternating fingerpicking technique, here are three combinations to work on in the practice room.

Each exercise is presented over an Am pentatonic scale, and you can apply these finger combos to any scale or arpeggio in your studies.

The first finger combination to work on in your studies is I-M, index and middle alternating.

Here's an example of this pattern in action over an Am pentatonic scale.

Start by working these fingers over the Am pentatonic scale, then take that scale to other keys to move it around the fretboard.

From there, take this finger combination to other scales and arpeggios to take it further in your studies.

The image shows a musical score for an alternating fingerpicking exercise. The top staff is in 4/4 time, featuring an Am pentatonic scale (A2, C3, E3, G3, B3) with a descending sequence. Below the staff, the finger pattern "I M I M I M I M etc..." is written. The bottom staff shows the fretboard with fingerings: 5-8, 5-7, 5-7, 5-7, 5-8, 5-8-5, 8-5, 7, 5-7-5, 7-5, 8-5.

The next finger combination to work on in your studies is I-A, index and ring alternating.

Here's an example of this pattern in action over an Am pentatonic scale.

Start by working these fingers over the Am pentatonic scale, then take that scale to other keys to move it around the fretboard.

From there, take this finger combination to other scales and arpeggios to take it further in your studies.

I A I A I A I A etc...

The final finger combination to work on in your studies is M-A, middle and ring alternating.

Here's an example of this pattern in action over an Am pentatonic scale.

Start by working these fingers over the Am pentatonic scale, then take that scale to other keys to move it around the fretboard.

From there, take this finger combination to other scales and arpeggios to take it further in your studies.

M A M A M A M A etc...

Technical Challenge

Here's a technical workout that will challenge your fingerpicking skill set.

In this challenge, you play up and down each of the modes in the C major scale on the same string set.

As you work on this challenge, on your own or with a metronome, you have a number of options for finger choices.

These options are:

1. P Only
2. I Only
3. M Only
4. A Only
5. Alternate P-I
6. Alternate P-M
7. Alternate P-A
8. Alternate I-M
9. Alternate I-A
10. Alternate M-A

As you can see, there are 10 different finger combinations that you can use to play this exercise.

Start with one per day and see how that goes, spending 10-15 minutes on that finger combination.

Over the course of 10 days you'll have worked each variation without cramming or overloading this material in the practice room.

Have fun as you work this technical challenge in your fingerstyle guitar workout.

First system of musical notation. Treble clef staff and guitar tablature staff. The tablature staff shows fret numbers for the T (top) and B (bottom) strings. The sequence of frets is: 3, 0, 2, 3 (B line), 0, 1 (T line), 4, 2 (B line), 3, 1 (T line), 5, 3, 2 (B line), 4, 5 (T line), 7, 3, 5, 7 (B line), 3, 5 (T line), 9, 7, 5 (B line), 6, 5 (T line), 8 (B line).

Second system of musical notation. Treble clef staff and guitar tablature staff. The tablature staff shows fret numbers for the T (top) and B (bottom) strings. The sequence of frets is: 10, 7, 9, 10 (B line), 7, 9 (T line), 12, 10, 9 (B line), 6, 8 (T line), 12, 14 (B line), 10, 8 (T line), 14, 10, 12, 14 (B line), 10, 9 (T line), 14, 10, 12, 14 (B line), 10, 12 (T line), 15, 14, 12 (B line), 13, 12 (T line), 15 (B line).

Third system of musical notation. Treble clef staff and guitar tablature staff. The tablature staff shows fret numbers for the T (top) and B (bottom) strings. The sequence of frets is: 14, 10, 12, 14 (B line), 10, 12 (T line), 12, 10, 9 (B line), 10, 8 (T line), 12, 10 (B line), 10, 9 (T line), 10, 7, 9, 10 (B line), 7, 9 (T line), 9, 7, 5 (B line), 6, 8 (T line), 8 (B line).

Fourth system of musical notation. Treble clef staff and guitar tablature staff. The tablature staff shows fret numbers for the T (top) and B (bottom) strings. The sequence of frets is: 7, 3, 5, 7 (B line), 3, 5 (T line), 5, 3, 2 (B line), 3, 1 (T line), 5, 3 (B line), 4, 2 (T line), 3, 0, 2, 3 (B line), 0, 1 (T line), 3, 2, 0 (B line), 0, 2, 0 (T line), 3 (B line).

Creative Challenge

To finish your intro to fingerstyle guitar, here's a creative challenge where you're given the chord shapes and the rest is up to you.

Start by playing through each chord, memorizing them if you can.

Then, when ready, fingerpick each chord as you loop the progression with a metronome in your studies.

You can do this in three ways:

1. Use 1 fingerpicking pattern for entire performance.
2. Use different fingerpicking patterns for each loop.
3. Mix patterns at will in each bar or phrase.

You can work these three options separately, or just pick one you like and stick to that, either way you get a ton of benefit from this exercise.

Have fun as you complete your fingerstyle guitar intro and challenge the skills you've learned in this lesson.

A⁷ **D⁷** **A⁷**

T	2	2	2	2
A	0	1	0	3
B	2	2	2	2
	0	0	0	0

D⁷ **D[#]0** **A⁷/E** **A⁷**

T	2	2	3	2
A	1	1	2	0
B	2	2	2	2
	0	1	2	0

E⁷ **D⁷** **A⁷** **E⁷**

T	0	2	2	0
A	3	1	0	3
B	1	2	2	1
	2	0	0	2

Next Steps

Now that you understand the fundamentals of fingerstyle guitar, you're ready to take your skills and experience to the next level.

The best next step is to check out the Fingerpicking Essentials video course, which is part of the Guitar Mastery Membership Program.

In this course you learn the exact exercises, patterns, workouts, and more to level up your fingerstyle guitar playing.

As a Guitar Mastery Member you get 2 courses each month plus access to all previous courses in the membership.

Check it out and skyrocket your guitar playing today!

Check out the Guitar Mastery Membership Program [HERE](#)

