

The right hand makes the sound, the left hand modifies the sound.

Strums are one way to make the sound. Fingerpicking is another way, and much more complex and interesting.

Even a simple fingerpicking pattern played smoothly and up to speed sounds like something really elaborate and special.

This is a brand new motor skill, and it takes time to wire the brain and muscles together

** 15 minutes of practice every day will show good results in a few weeks **
(much better than two hours of marathon playing once a week)

Go slow! Slower! Slower still! So slow that you cannot make a mistake....

Practice the right thing slowly, rather than going too fast and practicing your mistakes. Speed, smoothness and reliability will come with repetition

- needs to be completely ingrained until you can do it without thinking
- practice it while watching TV, talking, reading the newspaper, etc
- go slow enough that you cannot make a mistake

Finger Assignment

Initially we want to dedicate fingers to certain strings. The thumb handles the fourth (or top) string, index finger hits the third string, middle finger covers the second string, and ring finger covers the first string. Try to stay with that arrangement. You will almost certainly deviate from it later – most fingerpickers use the thumb and two fingers, not three fingers. But let’s start off with good finger discipline and all three fingers. Otherwise, you won’t build skills in all of your fingers – skills that you will wish for later.

1-----x-----	ring
2-----x-----	middle
3-----x-----	index (pointer)
4----x-----	thumb

Pre-load the fingers on all four strings at the beginning.

finger dexterity patterns, that also reinforce finger assignments:

i = index m = middle r = ring finger

fingers	i - m - i - m	i - r - i - r	m - r - m - r
strings	3 - 2 - 3 - 2	3 - 1 - 3 - 1	2 - 1 - 2 - 1

Alternating Thumb

We can also use an alternating thumb technique borrowed from fingerstyle guitar. The thumb handles the “bass” part of the pattern and notes, while the fingers handle the melody on the “treble” strings. Alternating thumb will probably sound better on ukulele with a low G string.

Thumb covers strings 4 and 3, alternating on down beats

Index and middle fingers cover 1st and 2nd strings

Ring finger is only used occasionally as needed, but is not part of the basic pattern

1-----	middle
2-----	index or (pointer)
3-----x-----x-----	thumb
4----x-----x-----	thumb

start with strict finger assignments to strings
eventually some crossover will be necessary and useful

KEY CONCEPT

There are really only two things you can do when fingerpicking:

pinch pairs together on the beats

1-----x-----x-----
2-----x-----x-----
3-----x-----x-----
4-----x-----x-----

quarter notes

alternating strings in between beats

-----x-----x-----
-----x-----x-----
-----x-----x-----
-----x-----x-----

eighth notes

***you either pick the bass and melody strings together on the beat (pinches),
or alternating in between beats
or a combination of the two when doing more advanced patterns and instrumentals***

Suggested instructional material:

Learn To Play Fingerstyle Solos For Ukulele, book/CD by Mark Nelson. www.mark-o.com

(Note: this is a repertoire book, not a “how to fingerpick” manual).

Easy Steps to Guitar Fingerpicking - Vol 1, DVD by Happy Traum, www.homespunta.com

Beginning Ukulele, DVD by Keoki Kahumoku, www.thegt.com

Independence Exercises

Alternating bass, add a melody string, drop it out again
always keep the bass going
add melody notes on first string, different beats
then add notes on second string, third string

1) alternating bass plus a "pinched" melody note on beat #1

Musical notation for exercise 1. It consists of four strings: A, E, C, and G. The G string has an alternating bass pattern: x on beat 1, rest on beat 2, x on beat 3, rest on beat 4. The C string has an alternating bass pattern: rest on beat 1, x on beat 2, rest on beat 3, x on beat 4. The E and A strings are silent. A blue 'x' is placed on the A string at the beginning of beat 1 in the first measure, and another blue 'x' is placed on the A string at the beginning of beat 1 in the second measure. The strings are labeled A, E, C, G on the left. The beats are labeled 1, 2, 3, 4 under the first measure and 1, 2, 3, 4 under the second measure.

2) alternating bass plus a "pinched" melody note on beat #2

Musical notation for exercise 2. It consists of four strings: A, E, C, and G. The G string has an alternating bass pattern: x on beat 1, rest on beat 2, x on beat 3, rest on beat 4. The C string has an alternating bass pattern: rest on beat 1, x on beat 2, rest on beat 3, x on beat 4. The E and A strings are silent. A blue 'x' is placed on the A string at the beginning of beat 2 in the first measure, and another blue 'x' is placed on the A string at the beginning of beat 2 in the second measure. The strings are labeled A, E, C, G on the left. The beats are labeled 1, 2, 3, 4 under the first measure and 1, 2, 3, 4 under the second measure.

3) alternating bass plus a "pinched" melody note on beat #3

Musical notation for exercise 3. It consists of four strings: A, E, C, and G. The G string has an alternating bass pattern: x on beat 1, rest on beat 2, x on beat 3, rest on beat 4. The C string has an alternating bass pattern: rest on beat 1, x on beat 2, rest on beat 3, x on beat 4. The E and A strings are silent. A blue 'x' is placed on the A string at the beginning of beat 3 in the first measure, and another blue 'x' is placed on the A string at the beginning of beat 3 in the second measure. The strings are labeled A, E, C, G on the left. The beats are labeled 1, 2, 3, 4 under the first measure and 1, 2, 3, 4 under the second measure.

4) alternating bass plus a "pinched" melody note on beat #4

Musical notation for exercise 4. It consists of four strings: A, E, C, and G. The G string has an alternating bass pattern: x on beat 1, rest on beat 2, x on beat 3, rest on beat 4. The C string has an alternating bass pattern: rest on beat 1, x on beat 2, rest on beat 3, x on beat 4. The E and A strings are silent. A blue 'x' is placed on the A string at the beginning of beat 4 in the first measure, and another blue 'x' is placed on the A string at the beginning of beat 4 in the second measure. The strings are labeled A, E, C, G on the left. The beats are labeled 1, 2, 3, 4 under the first measure and 1, 2, 3, 4 under the second measure.

Now do the same thing adding a melody note on the second string and dropping it back out again, always keeping the alternating thumb going.

5) alternating bass plus a "pinched" melody note on beat #1 *SECOND* string

Musical notation for exercise 5. It consists of four strings: A, E, C, and G. The G string has an alternating bass pattern: x on beat 1, rest on beat 2, x on beat 3, rest on beat 4. The C string has an alternating bass pattern: rest on beat 1, x on beat 2, rest on beat 3, x on beat 4. The E and A strings are silent. A blue 'x' is placed on the E string at the beginning of beat 1 in the first measure, and another blue 'x' is placed on the E string at the beginning of beat 1 in the second measure. The strings are labeled A, E, C, G on the left. The beats are labeled 1, 2, 3, 4 under the first measure and 1, 2, 3, 4 under the second measure.

Fingerpicking Patterns

- need to be completely ingrained until you can do it without thinking (auto-pilot)
- practice patterns while watching TV, talking, reading the newspaper, etc
- go slow enough that you cannot make a mistake, then build speed later

First picking pattern: arpeggio (3/4 time)

R -----x-----x-----
M -----x-----x-----x-----x-----
I -----x-----x-----x-----x-----x-----
T -----x-----x-----

count: **one** two three **four** five six **one** and **two** and **three** and

sample song: House of the Rising Sun 3/4 or 6/8 time

Second picking pattern: outsides-insides (4/4 time) strings 4 – 1 -- 3 -- 2

-----x-----x-----
-----x-----x-----
-----x-----x-----
-----x-----x-----

count: one and two and three and four and

sample song: Ain't She Sweet

Third picking pattern: evens & odds strings 4 and 2, then strings 3 and 1

-----x-----x-----
-----x-----x-----
-----x-----x-----
-----x-----x-----

count: **one** and two and three and four and

sample song: Hanalei Moon

Fourth picking pattern: pinch, rest, insides-outsides-insides

-----x-----x-----
-----|-----/-----x-----x-----
-----|-----/-----x-----x-----
-----x-----x-----

count: **one** and two and three and four and

sample song: Somewhere Over the Rainbow