FINGERPICKING QUICKSTART

BLUES GUITAR INSTITUTE

THE PLAN

A Goal Without A Plan Is Just A Wish.' (Antoine De Saint-Exupery)

Fingerpicking is a rewarding style of guitar music to play. There's just you and your guitar creating a full arrangement of bass, chords and melody - all at the same time.

But it's difficult to learn for most guitarists, even if you've been playing guitar for a long time like I had been when I first started my fingerstyle journey.

I made many mistakes learning how to fingerpick and I've spent the last decade helping my students from 20 years old to 80, avoid those same mistakes.

FINGERPICKING QUICKSTART

This QuickStart will get you started in the right direction by focusing first on the fundamental movements that you'll use in nearly every fingerstyle blues song you'll play.

Use this set of exercises as your plan to reach your goal of building great fundamental fingerpicking skills so that you can play this amazing style of music on your guitar.

Dedicate regular time in your practice sessions working on these exercises and you will see improvement in your fingerpicking. It takes time, but more importantly, it takes focused practice to build your skills.

Quick Tips:

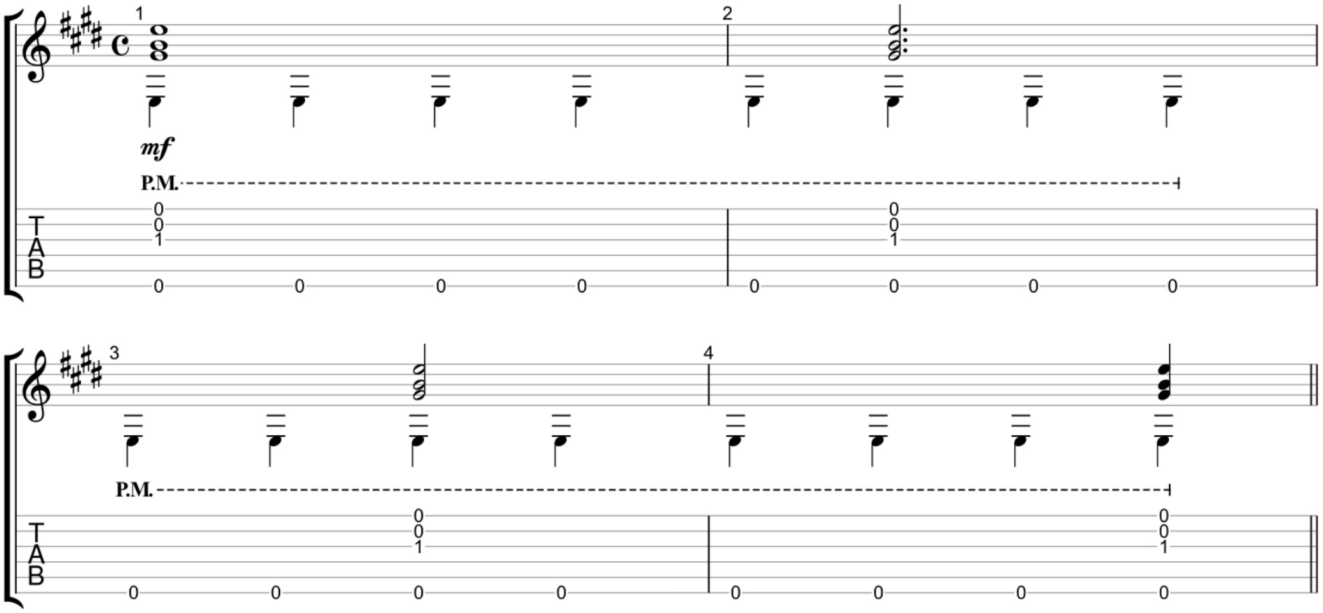
- Use a metonome
- Play free strokes with the thumb (pick away from the guitar)
- Try palm mutes on 6th string exercises
- Use a thumb and three finger picking style (index = 3rd, middle = 2nd, ring = 1st)

THUMB CONTROL

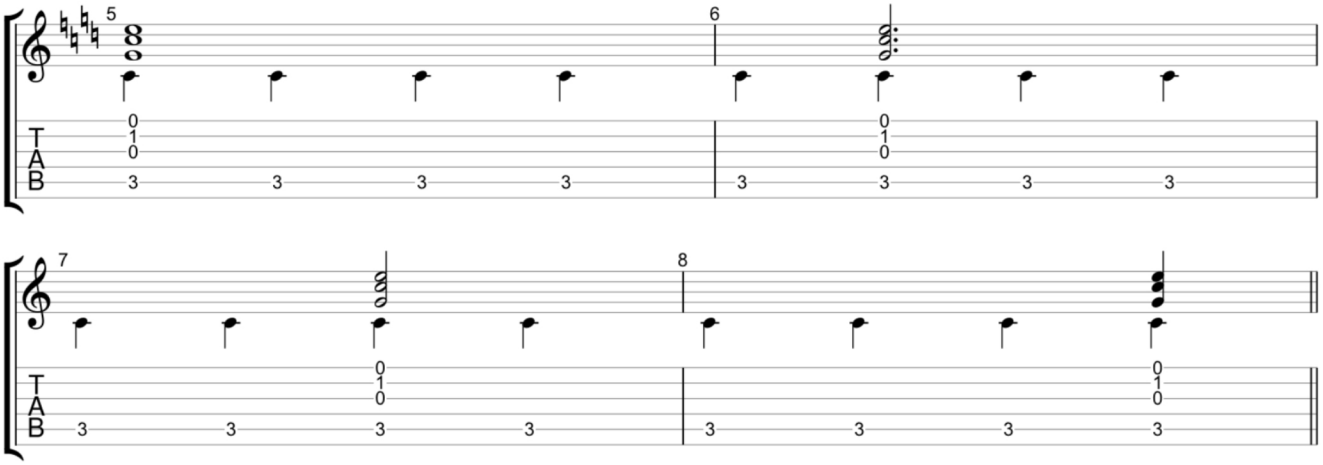
The thumb has two vital roles in fingerpicking: **Keep the Beat** and **Play the Bass.**

You'll develop control of your thumb by drilling it's ability to play a note on the beat. We'll we'll also leverage the natural tendency of the picking fingers to move with the thumb to play chords on the top three strings.

EX1: Moving the Chord (in E)



EX2: Moving the Chord (in C)



In **EXERCISE 1**, you will begin developing your thumb's ability to play a steady beat. Add a light palm mute to the 6th string to mimic the rhythmic thump of a kick drum.

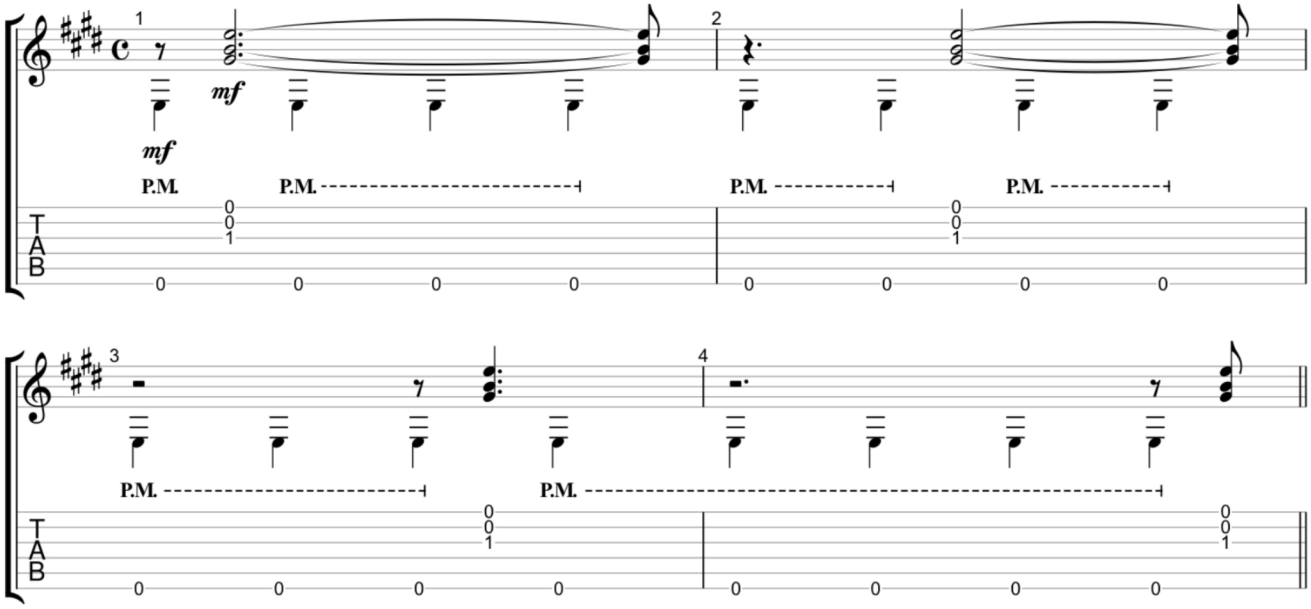
EXERCISE 2 continues the emphasis on keeping the beat but with the chord rooted on the 5th string. Try this exercise without a palm mute so the bass note is clear and present.

FREEDOM

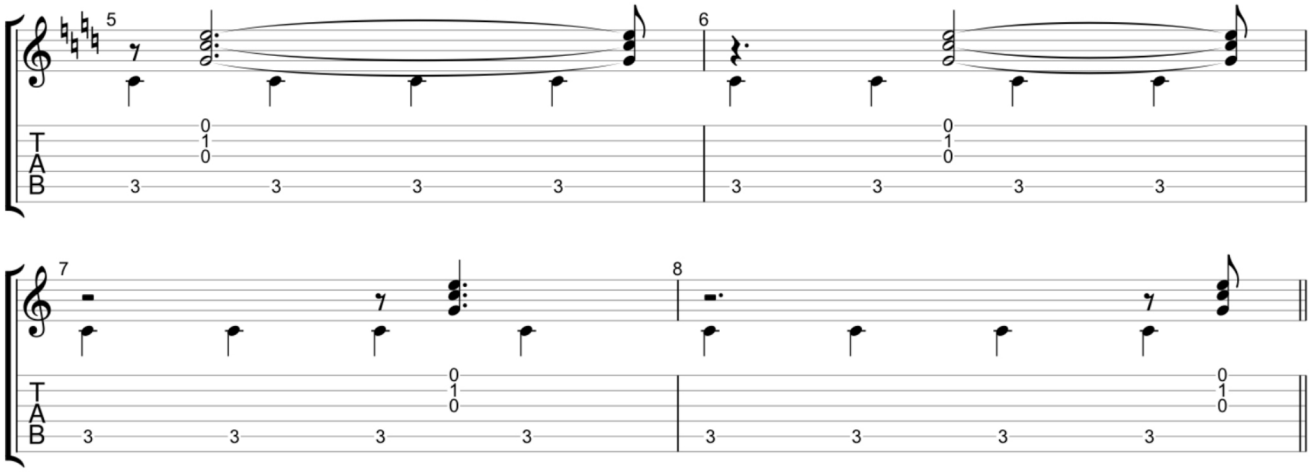
Once the thumb gets accustomed to keeping the beat, it's time to break the fingers natural tendency to pick with the thumb. In the next two exercises, we will work on developing the fingers' freedom from the thumb.

The picking fingers will still move together as a group but now they will pick in between the beats.

EX3: Between the Beats (in E)



EX4: Between the Beats (in C)



In **EXERCISE 3**, we will continue training the thumb to keep a steady beat. But we'll build the skill of picking chord tones in between the beat. Separating the chord from the bass adds rhythmic interest and is a fundamental fingerpicking skill.

EXERCISE 4 moves the thumbs focus to the 5th string. Remember to avoid the palm mute and let the bass note ring clearly until the next beat.

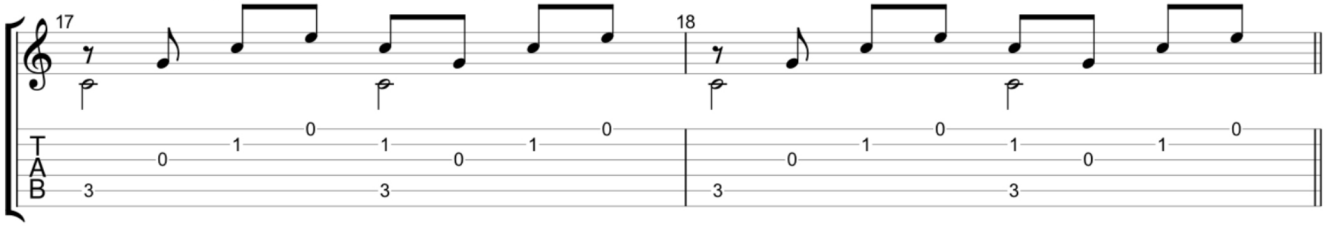
SEPARATION

By now, the thumb should begin to carry out it's primary jobs of keeping the beat and playing the bass.

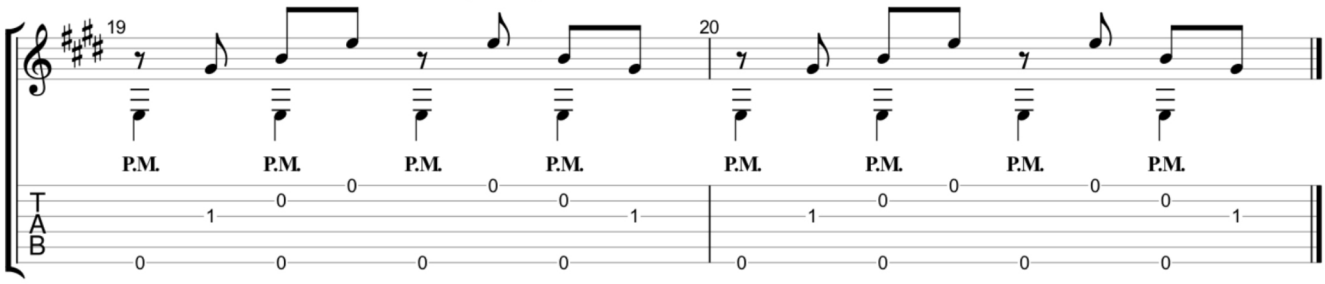
So far we've let the index, middle and ring fingers operate together as a group. This is a fundamental movement and you'll use it in songs to play chords over the bass line. You'll also need the ability to call on each finger separately to pick a note which is our focus in the next two exercises.

EXERCISE 5 and **EXERCISE 6** can be challenging, but they are essential and will enable you to play melody and hot licks as you hone your skills.

EX5: Long Separation (in C)



EX6: Short Separation (in E)



In **EXERCISE 5**, we'll build a longer picking pattern that incorporates single notes on separate strings at different beats. You will need to separate your index, middle and ring fingers for the first time.

Begin this exercise by playing through the ascending pattern of the first four notes. Do not worry about timing at first. Just pick through the strings one at a time to get used to calling on each finger to pick alone.

After you feel comfortable with the movement, progress through the second half of the pattern. Notice that the thumb doesn't pluck the 5th string on each beat as with previous exercises. Since this combination of movements can be challenging, let the thumb rest and use the relaxed thumbpicking as an opportunity to focus on picking accurately with your fingers.

EXERCISE 6 brings increases the challenge by having the thumb play each of the quarter notes. Doing this helps prepare you for blues songs that frequently use these movements.

FINGERPICKING QUICKSTART

What is the Fingerpicking QuickStart?

When you listen to a great fingerpicking song, it almost seems like magic that someone can play a bassline, chords and melody all on one guitar and all at the same time. Fingerpicking isn't magic though. It's something you can learn to do with the right plan. **The Fingerpicking QuickStart is your plan to building and strengthening the core movements you need to be a successful fingerpicker.** This QuickStart was created to help get you started on your fingerpicking journey so that you can go on to play magical acoustic music on your own guitar.

John Hatcher is the founder of Blues Guitar Institute (BGI), a blues-focused guitar educational site. Since 2011, John has dedicated himself to teaching acoustic blues with a simple, straightforward approach.

He has grown a popular YouTube channel and cultivated an engaged online guitar community of pickers and students at BGI.

His library of no-frills lessons helped him win TrueFire's Next Top Guitar Instructor contest and helps students play the music they love.