



Guitar Council Dr. Kevin Vigil, Chair

Basic Right Hand Position (Finger Assignments)

Contact should be made on the left side of the finger at the point where the fingernail and flesh meet.

p = Strings ⑥, ⑤ & ④

i = String ③

m = String ②

a = String ①

Right Hand Basics: Tone or Twang

Over the last several editions of *VMEA Notes*, I have introduced basic technical concepts to support the non-guitarist guitar educator. The first such article was [Positioned for Success \(Winter, 2020\)](#) and the second [Minimizing Left Hand Tension \(Winter 2021\)](#). This current article will address basic right hand technique.

Many adjectives are commonly used to describe tone: “good”, “bad”, “beautiful”, “harsh”, “bright”, “dark”, etc. This makes for a very challenging topic to discuss in a written article. These terms are all subjective. For the purposes of this article, I will discuss the basics of right hand technique that should result in a clear and defined tone and avoid “twang”.

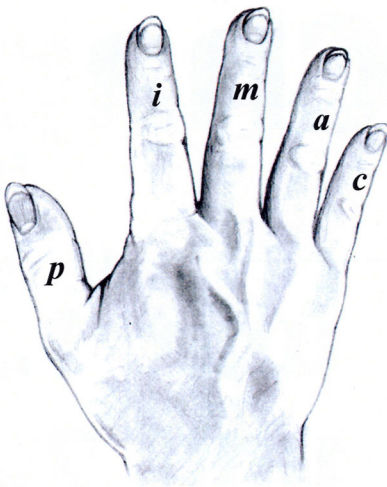
Right Hand Finger Names

p (pulgar) = Thumb

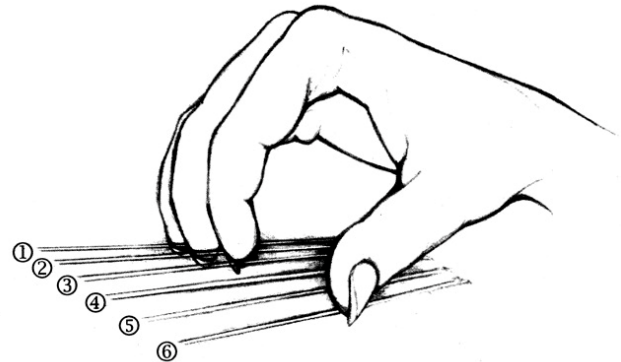
i (indice) = Index

m (medio) = Middle

a (anular) = Ring



(Illustration by Mariya Khan)



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Keep a Straight Line from Elbow to Knuckle Joints

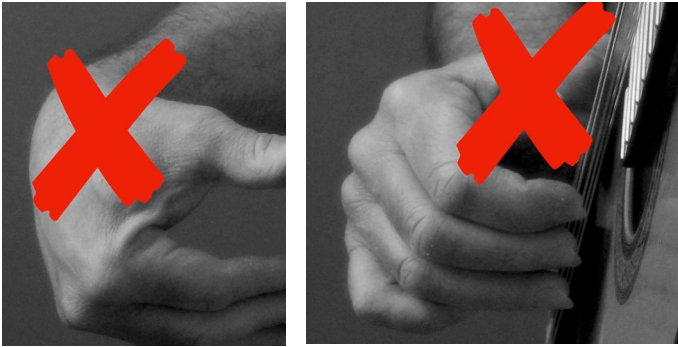


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Avoid Bending the Wrist

Bending the wrist increases the likelihood of a repetitive motion injury (carpal tunnel, tendinitis, etc.)



Avoid Placing the Pinky Finger on the Soundboard

Placing the pinky on the soundboard restricts the movement of the other fingers and changes the angle of the finger stroke.



Keep Finger Joints in Mid-Range of Motion

When the wrist is straight, the middle and tip joints are neither extended or flexed.



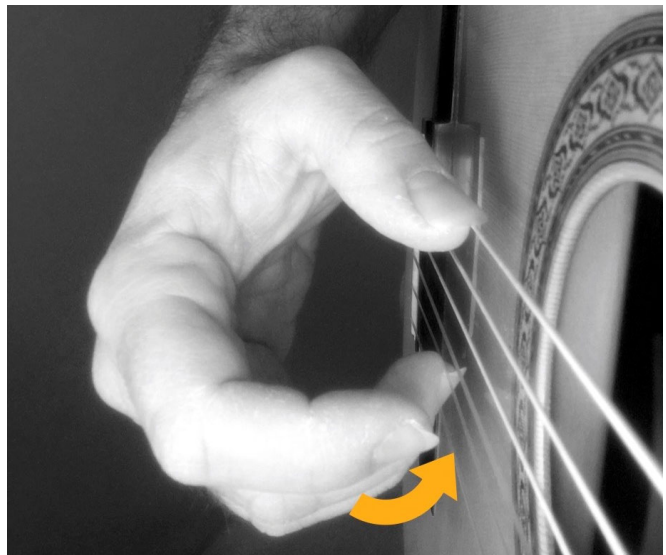
Plucking the String

If the hand is positioned as demonstrated in the previous examples, the stroke will be approached at an oblique angle to the string. Move primarily from the knuckle joint. Accuracy is achieved by aligning the individual knuckles over their assigned strings. As the finger moves, it creates a parabolic curve. The contact point (string and the fingertip) is at the lowest point of the stroke (180° or 6 o'clock).

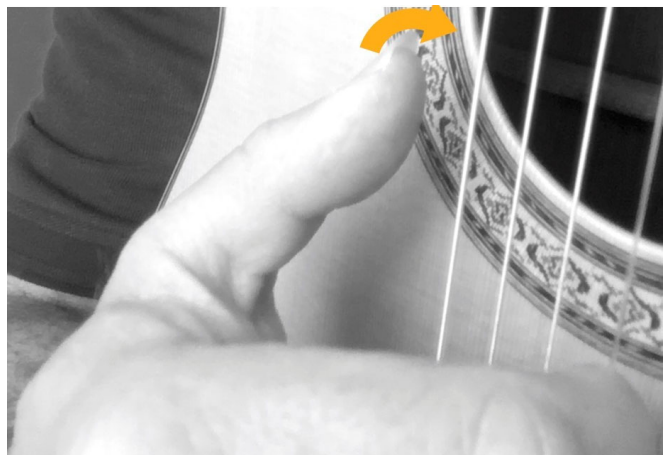
While the stroke is a fluid motion, there are four definable stages:

1. Preparation
2. Contact
3. Follow-Through
4. Return

Stage 1: Preparation: Before Contact



i preparation

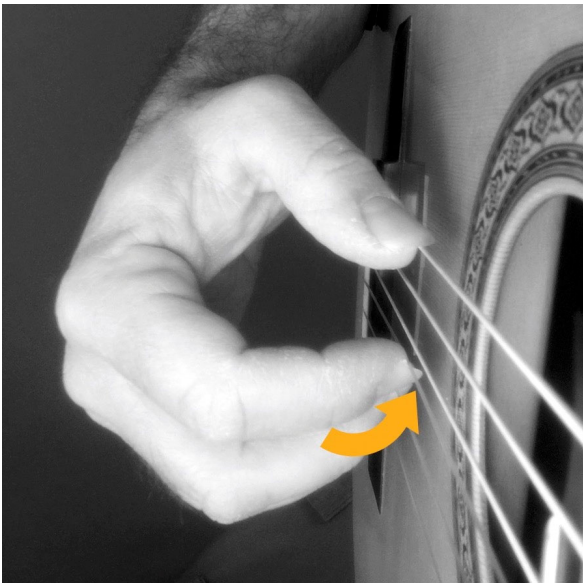


p preparation

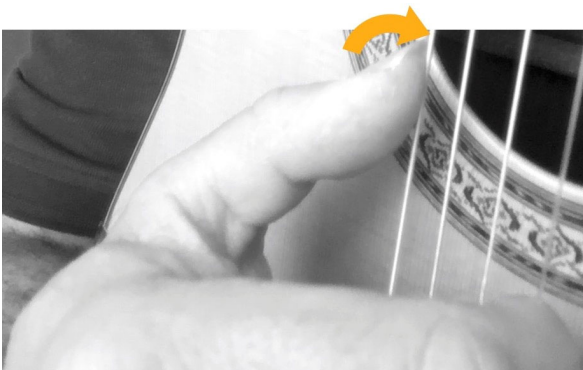
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Stage 2: Contact: Fingernail/flesh contact the string



i contact



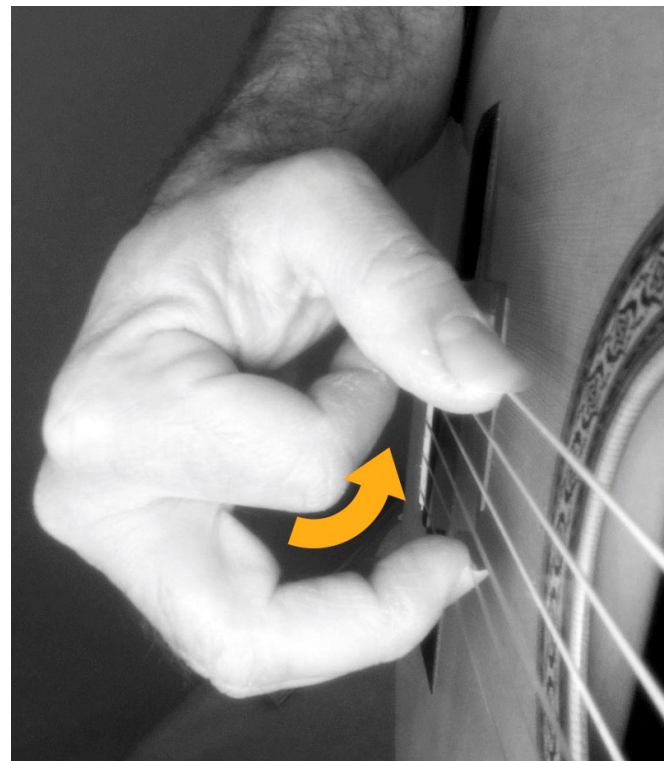
p contact

Stage 3: Follow Through:

This is the most important of all. Once the finger makes contact with the string, the motion continues as the string is pressed toward the soundboard (not pulled up and away from the soundboard). It is at this point that the string is displaced to the lowest point of the stroke. It is also important to know that during the stroke, the string will move from the far left side of the fingernail to the peak of the fingernail where the string will be released (180° or 6 o'clock).



i begins follow through



i begins follow through

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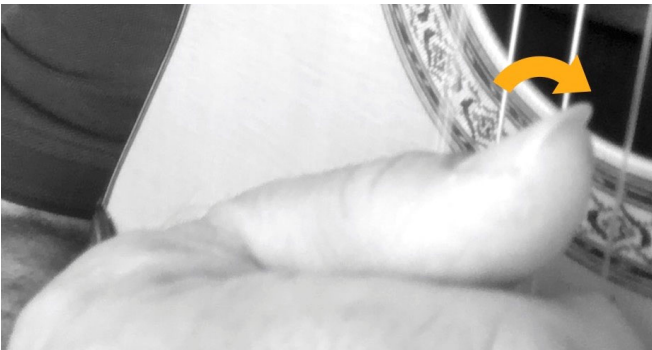
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p begins follow through



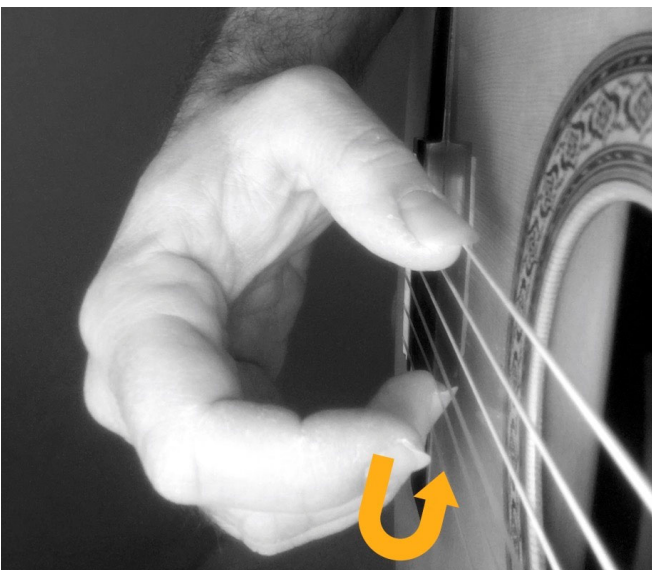
p return



p completes follow through

Stage 4: Return

This is the point that the finger returns to the preparation position. This is most efficiently done by simply relaxing the finger as it returns to its natural (static) position.



i return

Nails or No Nails

Most professional guitarists grow their right hand fingernails for articulation, tone, and projection. The use of nails requires an understanding of nail shape, size, and texture (smooth or rough). To learn more about nails and tone production, I strongly recommend this video by William Kanengiser: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ36c3_6jks

Closing

To create a clear and defined tone on the guitar, the string must be attacked in such a manner that it transmits direct energy to the saddle which transmits vibration to the bridge, interior braces, and the soundboard. If the string is pulled up and away from the saddle, it will result in indirect energy which lessens the attack of the note and may also create fret buzz. The technique that has been discussed should better serve you and your students in the creation of a clear and defined tone.

For further insights on right hand technique from several different perspectives, watch [GFAtv Foundations Episode 2](#).