

## BASS CHORD PICKING

Bass/chord picking is the final method of strumming hand techniques that we will study. This is the technique used exclusively by classical guitarists, but is widely used by folk, pop and rock guitarists. This technique is commonly referred to as fingerpicking.

It is an extension of the bass/chord strumming we learnt earlier. Instead of strumming the chord strings you will now pick each string separately to make the chord voice more interesting.

You can use any of the three strumming hand techniques - all pick, pick and fingers or all fingers. The all fingers approach is how

classical guitarists play. Hints on each will be given later.

Like strumming and bass/chord strumming where the same strum pattern is used for the whole song, so in picking the pattern is used for the whole song.

As in bass/chord strumming a two tiered system of writing is used.

Remember stems down indicate a bass note while stems up indicate a chord note. Look at this example from “House of the Rising Sun” – notice the same system is used for standard notation as well as TAB notation.

The image shows a musical score for bass chord picking in 12/8 time. It consists of two systems of notation: a standard staff and a TAB staff. The chords are Am, C, D, and F. The standard staff shows stems down for bass notes and stems up for chord notes. The TAB staff shows fret numbers for each string. The first system covers the Am and C chords, and the second system covers the D and F chords. The TAB staff includes a 12/8 time signature and string numbers 1-6.

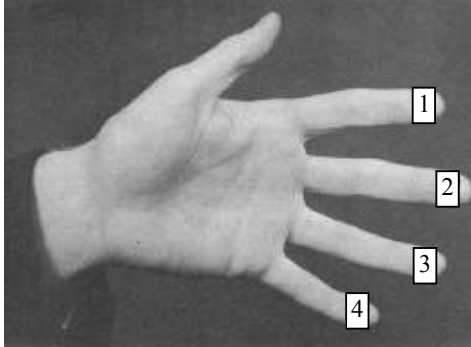
When practicing you should perfect the two hands separately. Firstly get the chords working by using simple strumming, and secondly practice the fingerpicking pattern on one chord until it is second nature. Then you should find putting the whole song together easy.

The work covered in bass/chord strumming regarding the bass note choices and runs also applies to this style e.g. lowest available note as bass, alternating bass, connecting bass runs, hammer bass, etc.

## FINGER NUMBERS AND NAMES

### 1. The Chord Hand.

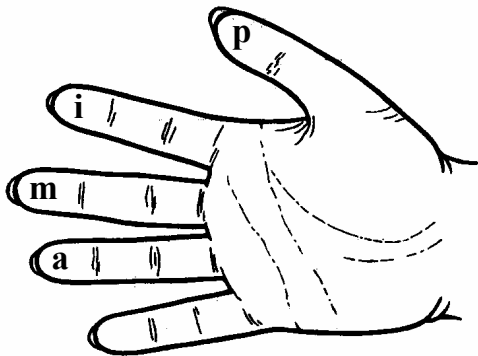
Here the fingers are NUMBERED.



### 2. The Strumming / Picking Hand

Here the fingers are given LETTER NAMES, which are based on the Latin names for our fingers and thumb.

P	= pulgar	= thumb.
i	= indicio	= finger 1.
m	= medio	= finger 2.
a	= annular	= finger 3.



Some pieces of music have hints for which fingers to use so by using numbers and letters it is easy to tell which hand is being talked about.

Here is a look at the three different strum hand techniques you can use for bass/chord picking.

Here are some main points to remember -

1. The bass strings should be louder than the chord strings. The reasons for this are that the bass is usually the fancy part of picking, and they have to ring for a longer time than chord strings so that they connect to each other.

### **Pick style.**

1. Remember to hold the pick correctly i.e. between the thumb and finger 1.
2. Don't dig the pick past the strings towards the sound hole. The pick should be skimming across the strings.
3. Don't use your elbow to strum with. Keep your thumb and finger still and use the wrist to strum with.
4. Pick direction will be shown for each pattern.

### **Pick and finger style.**

This method only uses the pick and fingers m' and a'. The pick and finger style is often used to play rock and blues riffs and songs.

Take note of these important points

1. Use the pick for bass notes and your fingers for the chord strings.
2. Again use your knuckles to make the movements. Hold the hand still and work the fingers.

### **Finger style.**

This is the third method of bass/chord strumming and is commonly referred to as fingerpicking. This is also the method that is used by classical guitarists.

To help distinguish between the fingerpicking hand and the note hand classical guitarists use the standard numbers for the note hand but use a letter system for the fingerpicking hand. The letters are the capitals of the Latin for each finger.

P	= pulgar	= thumb.
i	= indicio	= finger 1.
m	= medio	= finger 2.
a	= annular	= finger 3.

Here are some hints on how to play in the classical style.

### 1. Fingerpicking Hand Position.

The whole fingerpicking hand should be at right angles to the strings. Your fingers should point down towards the floor and your thumb should point along the strings towards the head of the guitar. A good way to get this shape is to make a stop sign with your hand and then flip it over onto the strings.

This will allow the fingers to move in and out from the hand or if you like in a straight up and down fashion - the natural way that they move which will give you the easiest and best use of the fingers. If your hand is in the strumming position (almost parallel with the strings) your fingers have to move across the hand which is unnatural and awkward.

Holding the whole hand in this manner will also allow you to use the thumb correctly. Have the thumb parallel to the strings and also clear of the other fingers.

### 2. Using the Thumb and Fingers.

The fingers should move from the joint nearest to your hand. Your fingers should move in a straight line into and from the palm. The fingers should move across the string rather than pull out from it - don't lift your finger up to make he

sound. The thumb should be kept rigid when playing with the knuckle locked.

The thumb hits the strings in a downward motion using the near side of the thumb to strike with. The movement should be in a circle fashion so that the thumb returns to the top of the strings waiting for its next strike

### 3. Free and Rest Strokes.

The difference between these two strokes is what a finger or thumb does once they have played a string.

The free stroke is when a finger or thumb does not come to rest against any other string once they have picked a string. The finger or thumb would remain in mid air.

The free stroke is more popular in the fingerpicking style with most patterns using it. Because you are finishing in mid air then the strings you strike will keep ringing. With the rest stroke you would be constantly touching strings and they would stop ringing.

The rest stroke is when a finger or thumb does come to rest against another string after they have picked a string. Its main use is accenting a string and therefore is very popular in single note playing. You might sometimes use rest stroke in your bass work to make it louder.

When we studied bass and chord playing we saw the guitar was divided in two. Strings 6, 5 and 4 for bass with the other strings for chord

playing. This is the basis for finger picking as well, though there are often changes to this standard set up.

**1. You can move your fingers towards the floor.**

If you are using your fingers in the classical guitar method (p – i – m – a) you would move your fingers towards the floor e.g. the i finger could play string 2, the m finger then plays string 1 while the a finger moves off the guitar. The thumb is used for any of the bass strings.

An example of this is the classical piece called Malageuna where the thumb plays the melody on strings 4, 3 and 2 while the i finger picks the chord on string 1. Standard thumb and finger use is shaded.

<b><u>BASS</u></b>		<b><u>CHORD</u></b>	
STRINGS	THUMB	STRINGS	FINGERS
6 5 4	Thumb for any.	3 2 1	i m a
6 5 4 3	Thumb for any.	2 1	i m
6 5 4 3 2	Thumb for any.	1	i

**2. You can move your fingers towards the ceiling.**

If you are using your fingers in the classical guitar method (p – i – m – a) you would pull your fingers up towards the ceiling e.g. the i finger could play string 4, the m finger then plays string 3 while the a finger plays string 2. The thumb is used for any of the bass strings.

Two examples of this are sections from My Friends by Pearl Jam and Stairway to Heaven by Led Zeppelin where the fingers pull up one string. Standard thumb and finger use is shaded.

<b><u>BASS</u></b>		<b><u>CHORD</u></b>	
STRINGS	THUMB	STRINGS	FINGERS
6 5 4	Thumb for any.	3 2 1	i m a
6 5	Thumb for any.	4 3 2 1	i m a (Probably only strings 4, 3, 2.)
6	Thumb.	5 4 3 2 1	i m a (Probably only strings 5, 4, 3.)

## FINGERPICKING PATTERNS

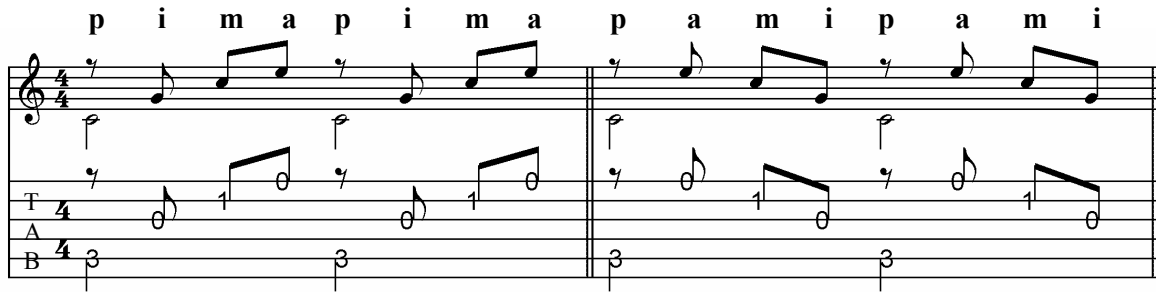
Here are some common fingerpicking patterns for you to use.

These are for songs in 4/4.

Try them with any of your old songs.

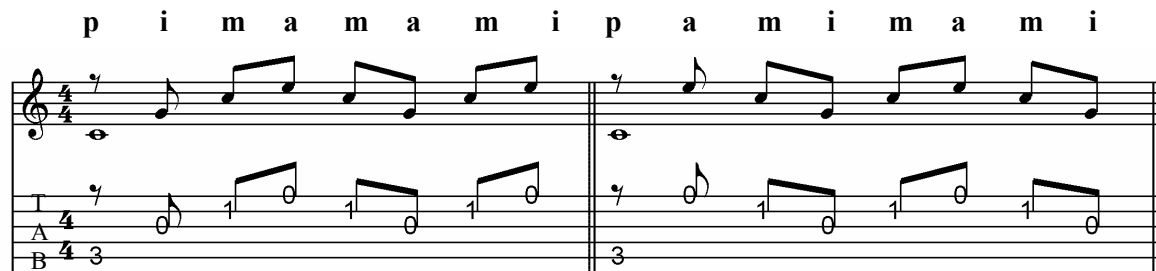
### Pattern 1 and 1a.

p i m a p i m a p a m i p a m i



### Pattern 2 and 2a.

p i m a m a m i p a m i m a m i



### Pattern 3 and 3a.

p i m i a m i m p a m a i m a m

