

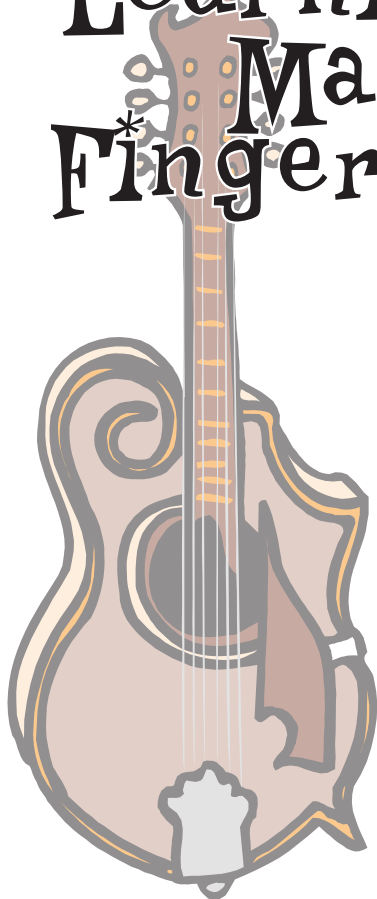
Learning the Mandolin Fingerboard

by Curt Sheller

**Tuning
G D A E**

*It's not as hard as
you think.*

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Introduction

Memorizing the notes of the mandolin fingerboard is not as hard as one would think. Although there doesn't seem to be any pattern and the same letter can be found on every string. There is a systematic approach that can be used to help remember the notes.

The most common tuning used today for mandolin is G D A E (GG, DD AA, EE). This is the same tuning as violin.

A mandolin has eight strings. Four courses of two adjacent strings double in pitch.





Learning the Mandolin Fingerboard

The most common mandolin you encounter in contemporary music is the soprano mandolin. One of several members of the mandolin family.

Standard Tuning

Finally, really learning the names of the notes of the fingerboard is a liberating musical moment. A major breakthrough in most player's learning and enjoyment of the mandolin.

Knowing the names of the notes is separate from learning to read standard music notation. To learn to read music on the mandolin see my series of books: *Reading Music on Mandolin*.

Knowing the notes of the fingerboard is so important that this book is dedicated to that goal.



Standard Tuning

Standard tuning for mandolin is C D A E. With each course of adjacent strings doubled.



④

G

③

D

②

A

①

E





Learning the Mandolin Fingerboard

Key Frets

open

G

D

A

E

In addition to the open strings, which most mandolin players seem to remember. There are three other frets with no sharp or flat notes, fret (5), fret (7) and fret (10).

fret (5)

C

G

D

A

fret (7)

D

A

E

B

fret (10)

F

C

G

D

These are *key* or *reference frets*. From these frets other frets can be derived.

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Learning the Mandolin Fingerboard



Frets (1), (4), (6), (8), (9) and (10) can be referenced relative to the open strings, fret (5), Fret (7) and fret (10) by flatting or sharpening all the notes of those frets.

<i>open</i>	G	D	A	E
<i>fret (1)</i>	G#*	D#	A#	E#
<i>fret (4)</i>	Cb	Gb	Db	Ab
<i>fret (5)</i>	C	G	D	A
<i>fret (6)</i>	C#	G#	D#	A#

* See page 11 & 12 for enharmonic equivalent note spellings.





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fret (6)	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb
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fret (7)	D	A	E	B
----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

fret (8)	D#	A#	E#	B#
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fret (9)	Fb	Cb	Gb	Db
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fret (10)	F	C	G	D
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fret (11)	F#	C#	G#	D#
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Secondary Frets

Frets (2) has one sharp each.

fret (2)	A	E	B	F#
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Frets (1) and (3) can be referenced relative to fret (2) by flatting or sharpening all the notes of the that fret.

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Learning the Mandolin Fingerboard



<i>fret (1)</i>	Ab	Eb	Bb	F
<i>fret (2)</i>	A	E	B	F#
<i>fret (3)</i>	A#	E#	B#	G

From the open strings and four additional frets, you now have the whole mandolin fingerboard memorized. That is every fret and note of the mandolin fingerboard in standard. A lot easier with a system.

Review the frets ascending and descending; with sharps; with flats; mixed sharps and flats. Know the fingerboard inside and out.

Whether practicing or playing; reading or improvising; playing single notes of chords; not matter what style you are playing. ALWAYS know the notes you are playing. This will make the notes of the mandolin reflexive and second nature.





Learning the Mandolin Fingerboard

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Enharmonic Equivalents

Enharmonic equivalents are where the same pitch can have multiple names. In other words, if two notes have the same pitch but are represented by a different letter name and accidental ($\sharp \flat$) they are enharmonic.

Sharps to Flats

A $\sharp$ is the same pitch as **B $\flat$**

B $\sharp$ is the same pitch as **C**

C $\sharp$ is the same pitch as **D $\flat$**

D $\sharp$ is the same pitch as **E $\flat$**

E $\sharp$ is the same pitch as **F**

F $\sharp$ is the same pitch as **G $\flat$**

G $\sharp$ is the same pitch as **A $\flat$**





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Flats to Sharps

A $\flat$ is the same pitch as **G $\sharp$**

B $\flat$ is the same pitch as **A $\sharp$**

C $\flat$ is the same pitch as **B**

D $\flat$ is the same pitch as **C $\sharp$**

E $\flat$ is the same pitch as **D $\sharp$**

F $\flat$ is the same pitch as **E**

G $\flat$ is the same pitch as **F $\sharp$**

Learning the Mandolin Fingerboard Sharp and Natural Notes



STRING	④	③	②	①
open	G	D	A	E
1	G [#]	D [#]	A [#]	F
2	A	E	B	F [#]
3	A [#]	F	C	G
4	B	F [#]	C [#]	G [#]
5	C	G	D	A
6	C [#]	G [#]	D [#]	A [#]
7	D	A	E	B
8	D [#]	A [#]	F	C
9	E	B	F [#]	C [#]
10	F	C	G	D
11	F [#]	C [#]	G [#]	D [#]
12	same as open strings one octave higher			

Sharp & Natural Notes 13



Learning the Mandolin Fingerboard

Flat and Natural Notes

STRING	④	③	②	①
open	G	D	A	E
1	A $\flat$	E $\flat$	B $\flat$	F
2	A	E	B	G $\flat$
3	B $\flat$	F	C	G
4	B	G $\flat$	D $\flat$	A $\flat$
5	C	G	D	A
6	D $\flat$	A $\flat$	E $\flat$	B $\flat$
7	D	A	E	B
8	E $\flat$	B $\flat$	F	C
9	E	B	G $\flat$	D $\flat$
10	F	C	G	D
11	G $\flat$	D $\flat$	A $\flat$	E $\flat$
12	same as open strings one octave higher			

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