

Building a Solid Foundation - The Basics



Fingerstyle or **Fingerpicking** is the technique of playing by plucking the strings directly with the fingertips, **fingernails**, or picks.

For ukulele, it's common to employ a hybrid approach that incorporates elements of fingerpicking with strumming techniques.

Fingerpicking can be organized into two styles:

- An Alternating Thumb style that uses the thumb and two fingers.
- Traditional Classical Fingerstyle that uses the thumb, index, middle, and ring fingers.



NOTE: All Standard Music Notation examples are shown in C Tuning with a High "G" string four unless otherwise noted.

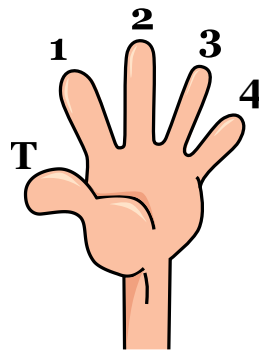




What Finger is What?

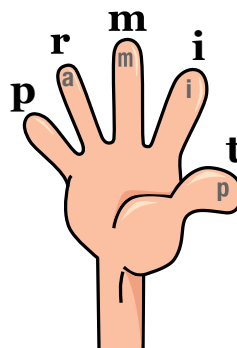
Here are the common fingering names, abbreviations and notations I've come across for both fingerpicking styles.

Fingering for the fretting hand, the left-hand for a right-handed player, is expressed using Arabic numbers **1, 2, 3, 4**, and **T** for thumb.



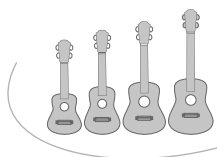
Fretting Hand Fingering Notation

For the plucking hand, the right hand for a right handed player, the traditional *Spanish* classical guitar abbreviations and *English* abbreviations (*top of illustration*) are shown here.



Plucking Hand Fingering Notation see chart next page





	NUMBER	ENGLISH	SPANISH
Thumb	T	t	p
Index	1	i	i
Middle	2	m	m
Ring	3	r	a
Pinky	4	p	C x, or e

- **Thumb (t)**, not really a finger but a digit. In classical guitar notation, this is Pulgar (**p**).
- **Index (i)** finger. In classical guitar notation Indice (**i**).
- **Middle (m)** finger. In classical guitar notation Medio (**m**).
- The **Ring (r)** and **Pinky (p)** fingers are not used on ukulele for the Alternating Thumb fingerpicking style.

If you're studying classical guitar technique, the classical terms **p i m a** are what you'll encounter most often. For this book I use and recommend using the English initials for indicating the *thumb*, *index*, *middle*, *ring*, and *pinky*:

t i m r p

The alternating thumb style in this book only uses the thumb (**t**), index (**i**), and middle (**m**) fingers. *Meet Tim!*

t i m





Developing Thumb Independence

As the title of this book – **Fingerpicking for Ukulele - Alternating Thumb Style** – implies, the focus is on the alternating thumb fingerstyle. Commonly called “Travis Picking” after the late, great country guitar virtuoso, Merle Travis.

For guitar, it’s an alternating bass note style with the thumb playing the lower, bass notes while the fingers simultaneous play melody notes on higher strings.

For the ukulele, without any real bass notes, the thumb handles the lower two strings, four (*G string*) and three (*C string*).

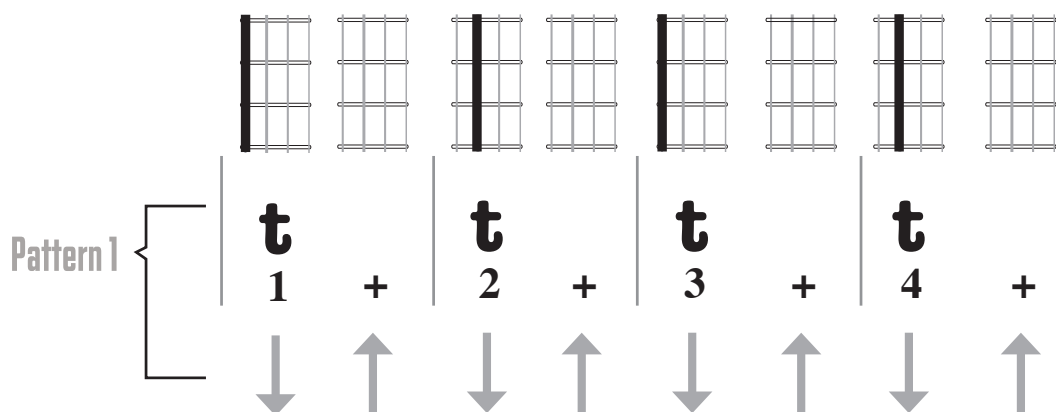
The foundation of this style is, naturally, the alternating thumb.

Using any chord or the open strings, have your thumb (**t**) alternately play string four, then string three. Repeat this pattern over and over, in tempo, counting evenly as indicated below.



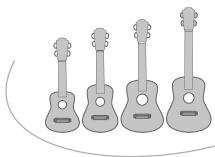
Basic Alternating Thumb Pattern

The basic alternating thumb patterns are shown graphically and in standard notation with tablature or “TAB” for short. For a description of the TAB used in this book visit the chapter on TAB.

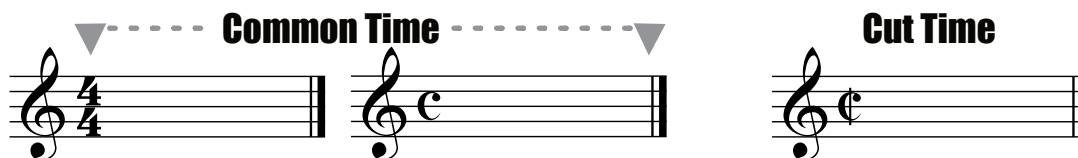


The example is shown in C Tuning, High G

The numbers (**1 2 3 4**) are the downbeats with the upbeats, pronounced “and” indicated with a plus sign (**+**). The arrows indicate the downbeat and upbeat pattern. This count is used for all patterns and variations.

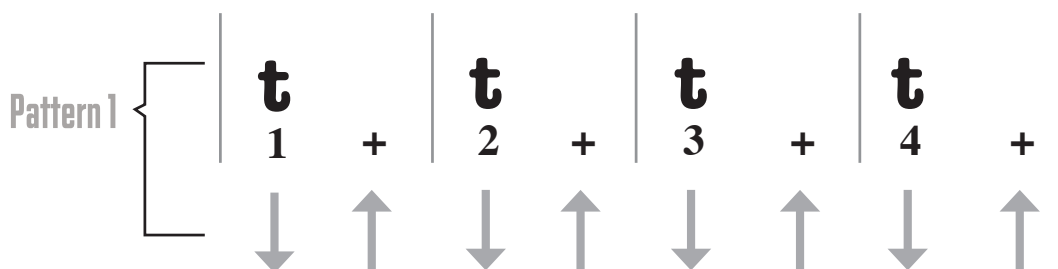


If you're tapping your foot on the *one, two, three, and four*, you're in **4/4** or *common time*. If you're only tapping your foot on the *one and three*, you're in cut time and feeling the four in two.



Time Signatures for Common and Cut Time

Here is the pattern without the string graphics.





Exercise and Technique Tips

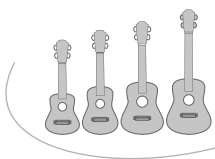
- The thumb, with the help of gravity, plays its assigned strings with a downward motion across the string.
- The motion of the index (**i**) and middle (**m**) fingers are a closing motion to the palm of the hand. Your wrist does not move away from the strings.
- Start with one chord and do each pattern until mastered before adding additional chords.
- Keep your motions small and precise using an efficient and a minimum of motion.
- Your pinky can rest *lightly* on the body of the ukulele for added stability.
- Keep your index (**i**) and middle (**m**) fingers poised under strings two and one – *ready to go*.
- Counting evenly and using a metronome to ensure you are playing the patterns in tempo.



Efficient Fingerpicking Thumb and Finger Placement

That's all there is for the basics of developing thumb independence. The next chapters explore using your index and middle fingers with the alternating thumb.





Standard Music Notation and TAB

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a TAB staff below it. The musical staff contains four quarter notes: G4 (first space), B4 (second space), D5 (third space), and G4 (first space). The TAB staff has four fret numbers: 0, 2, 3, and 0, corresponding to the notes above. The strings are labeled T (top), A, B, and B (bottom) on the left side of the TAB staff.

Example shown in C Tuning, High G. Starting one String Three

Starting String Variation

Patterns are shown starting on string four. It's also possible to start any pattern on string three and alternate between string three and string four.

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a TAB staff below it. The musical staff contains four quarter notes: G4 (first space), B4 (second space), D5 (third space), and G4 (first space). The TAB staff has four fret numbers: 0, 2, 3, and 0, corresponding to the notes above. The strings are labeled T (top), A, B, and B (bottom) on the left side of the TAB staff.

Example shown in C Tuning, High G. Starting on String Three



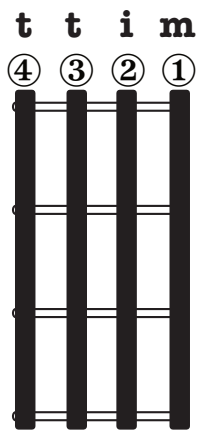


String Sets

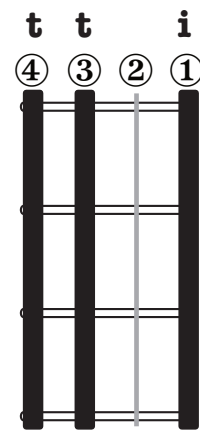
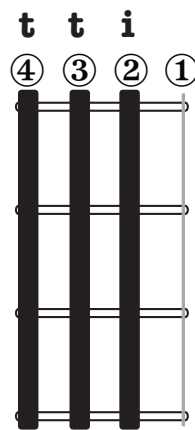
Since the thumb plays strings four and three for these basic patterns, there are only three possible string combinations when incorporating the index and/or middle fingers.

When using the thumb, index, and middle fingers, all four strings are played. When using only the thumb and index finger there are only two possible string sets.

Thumb, Index & Middle Fingers



Thumb and Index Finger Combinations



Thumb, Index and Middle Finger String Assignments

The focus of **Fingerpicking on Ukulele - Alternating Thumb Style** is on the above finger and string combinations.

