EZ Fingerstyle

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E-Book Outline

The following outline is a listing of all material associated within this e-book. Please be sure to follow the material as it appears.

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I – Terminology

A. Speaking my language

While I include many terms that are considered “official” I prefer to use examples that are much easier to follow for both you and I. For example: in Section 2, Part A, I will be discussing what I like to refer to as the “roller-coaster” effect. This is meant to give you a more realistic approach to understanding finger-style guitar instead of the typical music theory you may be accustomed to reading. This is just one of many examples I will be using to give us a better relation to the world of fingerstyle.

One of the many questions in fingerstyle guitar might be …

“How in the world do I know what notes to play? Sometimes it sounds so confusing!”

Unless you are working on a serious fingerstyle song, such as a song by Tommy Emmanuel or Chet Atkins, odds are you can use just a few simple conceptual patterns and they will work just fine for virtually any score you are playing – as well as ANY chord in question.

What is the key to understanding fingerstyle?

While I expand on this question throughout the e-book, there are a few general rules to understanding fingerstyle. Right now I want to touch base on the most important one before you even begin studying this e-book.

Rule #1: There is no “wrong” way to play fingerstyle.

At times it may seem that one particular passage is harder than another, but fingerstyle at its core isn’t all that difficult. It’s how you choose to expand the basic techniques that might make it more difficult. This e-book focuses on just a few patterns that you can almost always use with any song.

(Note: I would say that you can always use these patterns, but there’s a chance that someone catches me on one of my EZ Strummer videos playing something different than these patterns, so I feel it is better to say ‘almost always’ instead.)

Before I show you how I choose to play fingerstyle, I feel as though it is important to first give you a brief guide into how classically-trained guitar instructors choose to teach fingerstyle. While it’s not my first choice in lesson approach, it does provide somewhat of a framework into how I discovered the easiest way to play fingerstyle.

B. PIMA/TIMA

If you are familiar with what “PIMA/TIMA” stands for, as well as how it works, you may skip this section. Just be sure you truly understand it first.
What the heck is “PIMA/TIMA?”

Both of these terms mean the exact same thing, where one replaces the “P” with the “T” instead. The term PIMA is an acronym that stands for:

- **P** = Pulgar (or Thumb, where the “T” in TIMA stands for thumb)
- **I** = Índice (or Index finger)
- **M** = Medio (or Middle finger)
- **A** = Anular (or Ring finger)

It is a Spanish acronym designating which fingers to use on the picking hand for a fingerstyle pattern. Take a look again at the above explanation and you’ll see that the English version is in parentheses. Also note that by learning the above acronym using PIMA you’ve also learned TIMA because the “T” in TIMA has been simplified over the years to indicate the thumb.

(Why we don’t just call it “TIMR” is something I’ve always wondered, and my only assumption is that it just doesn’t sound as cool. 😊)

Notice that there is no “pinky/4th finger” included in this classically-based instructional concept. This is not necessarily saying that the pinky/4th finger is never used. It’s just a finger that beginner/intermediate guitarists rarely use. If we were to use the “pinky/4th finger” then PIMA would then become: PIMAE, where “E” stands for “Mignolo.” Note: The “E” is used instead because we already have an “M.”

To be quite honest, I’ve never used my pinky/4th finger to play any fingerstyle that I can recall. That’s not saying this digit never snuck in on me. In other words – if you like playing with your pinky/4th finger then DO NOT change it to reflect the PIMA/TIMA method. The focus of this e-book isn’t even about the PIMA/TIMA concept. I am just giving you a brief history of this concept, not to mention how stinking confusing it is to use.

The following is a sample musical score in tab that uses the classical concept of PIMA/TIMA.
P = Pulgar/Thumb: The thumb is mostly used to play bass notes. Some flamenco players and some bass players train using an up-down motion with the thumb.

I = Indice/Index: Because most guitarist are best playing with “I” instead of “M” or “A”, many guitarist play the melodies of songs with “I” to make them more pronounced.

M = Medio/Middle: The middle finger is not typically used by itself. M usually is played in the context of a pattern (such as P-A-M-I). It can be very useful to practice playing loud and clean with “M” in case you ever need it for strong melodic or accented note.

A = Anular/Ring: The ring finger, while played in plenty of music, is used the least of the other three P-I-M digits, but is used more than the E (4th/pinky) digit.

E = 4th/Pinky: As already explained, this is a lesser-used element in working with PIMA, and is not included as its original acronym in theory, because it is not 100% necessary to use this finger. However, it makes learning the art of PIMA much easier, because it provides an extra template-based acronym that makes a standard six-string guitar much easier to follow with the added acronym letter.

Here is the breakdown on the average template-based use of the letters. Usually, the following strings are played in conjunction with the letters used in the acronym, but this is not always the case. It depends on the style of fingerstyle being played.

The P (Thumb) is used mostly on the Low E string and the A string of the guitar. Depending on the complexity of the pattern, it can also be used as an anchor on the D string, if only the highest few strings are used.

The I (Index) is used mostly on the A and D string, but can also be used by more intermediate to advanced guitarists on the A string as well. This depends on your ability to use the thumb as a major anchor point.

The M (Middle) is used almost exclusively in conjunction with other acronym letters but is generally
played on the G and/or B string on the guitar.

The A (Ring) is commonly played on the B and high E strings. This depends on your usage of the E (4th/Pinky) and how well you are able to actually play with your 4th finger.

The E (4th/Pinky) is an additional acronym letter that generally ‘bonuses itself’ (adds) into the overall acronym, much like the use of the Middle finger. It rarely plays alone. This acronym letter can be applied to the B and high E string when playing the appropriate strings listed above.

When you look back at the tab again, as seen below, you'll notice that while the pattern is rather self-explanatory, using this method tends to take the focus OFF of the guitar chord and/or notes in question and more on which finger to use based on your picking hand. This is something I would like to avoid.

Example 1

Now, it wouldn't be right for me to say that I want you to avoid using PIMA without explaining how I choose to use this concept. I am going to show you a MUCH easier way to understand the concept of PIMA without using the actual letters. We need to focus on one thing at a time.

C. EZ Positioning

While I tend to teach in a non-traditional manner, I am still using the overall concept of PIMA. By using the framework and applying it to logical and realistic terms, you'll find that everything you just learned about PIMA isn't all that necessary.

I have no problem at all with the concept of using the PIMA system as a guideline, but when you realize how the letters line up with the notes on a staff, you'll begin to see a template that is already comfortable for you - it's just that you might not have noticed it.

Because the letters of PIMA designate the fingers used when picking the strings of a guitar, you can easily lay these letters out according to the strings being used for each passage. One of the neat tricks I
want to show you is how to move this pattern up and down the strings without the need of being too "technical" about it.

1. We already know that the thumb will ALWAYS focus on the bass note of a chord or passage.
2. We also know that looking down at our picking hand, our 1st finger is adjacent to our thumb, our 2nd finger is adjacent to our 1st finger...etc.
3. We also know that the focus of this e-book is to only work with our thumb, 1st finger and 2nd finger. While we could use our 3rd finger (and 4th) to play fingerstyle, we must first understand how our thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers are used in order to add any extra dimension to our playing.

Take a look at this picture:

The hand in the picture above is forming a "C"....as you can see. (HA!)

If you were to apply this C formation using your picking hand to the six strings of a guitar, the thumb would be located at the Low E string, like this:

The thumb is resting on the top of the Low E string (looking down), and all other digits are resting at the bottom of the High E string. This is a very natural position for most any guitarist, so you should feel
rather comfortable with this arrangement.

**There's one VERY important point to mention here:** When you make this formation, be sure that your 2nd finger is actually touching the High E string. When you look down at the strings on your guitar, you should be able to see the High E string making contact with your 2nd finger. Your 2nd finger needs to be under the High E string. This is crucial to the patterns I show you later on.

_Why does this feel natural?_ To be honest I'm not entirely sure. My guess is because through our daily activities this is how we hold things such as shovels, cups, tree branches...the list goes on and on. Also, it just makes sense. Even when we hold a pick, most of us tend to use our thumb and first finger to grasp the pick. It all feels natural.

Obviously we won't only use our thumb to play the Low E string, nor will we only use our 1st finger to play the High E string. Instead, we'll use a combination of outer-to-inner patterns (which repeat) to provide a nice spectrum of notes to play. This "C" formation with our picking hand is the absolute basis of this entire e-book.

You may be wondering...."**How does this all fit in to playing fingerstyle?**"

When you use this formation, you're able to squeeze in a ton of fingerstyle notes the EASY way. Of course, if you were to actually use all of the digits on your picking hand you'd be able to add even more note usage into your patterns, but the focus here is to play fingerstyle the easy way.

Besides, I'm not a fingerstyle master. I didn't train at some prestigious academy. I'm just a regular guitarist like you, so let's keep it simple.

**II – Getting Started**

**A. Real-world scenario**

As mentioned previously, I want to talk to you about a real-world scenario, something we've all probably done at one point in our life: riding a roller coaster. (Though I've found that the older I get the less I can handle! My daughter begs me to ride with her, so while I do so, I cringe at the thought of getting tossed around.)

What are the elements of a roller coaster? Take even the most basic of roller coasters, such as one that just has a bunch of hills. The traditional roller coaster starts you up this massive ascent to usually the highest point of the coaster. As you reach the top, you get a split second with which you can see the track below, and then you're off.

This point, which I will call the "apex," is where you begin your fingerstyle pattern. It doesn't matter what chord you're playing. It doesn't matter how fast (tempo) you are playing. All that matters is that you are setting yourself (and others) for a descent. After all, what goes up - must come down.

I haven't gone crazy, nor have I gotten off-track (pun!). You are setting the tone, the tempo, the...everything - for your audience. So, what do you think a good way to convey a sense of ascent on the guitar?
The answer is: Play no LESS than three strings. This may seem hard at first, but I promise it's not at all. Simply pick a chord and use your thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers to play this chord. Maybe we want to play a G chord. It doesn't matter if it is a barred or open version.

```
G
  3 3 3 3
  2 3 3 3
  1 3 3 3
  0 3 3 3
  3 3 3 3
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Pay no attention to the note values shown (quarter notes) as the idea here is to show you the strings you could play for a G chord. In either case of the open or barred version, the same notes are still produced - at least in this instance. I chose the lowest note (incidentally the bass note on the Low E string) of the G Major chord as well as the highest note of the G Major chord, which is still a G note played an octave higher than the Low E string note. These are both on the 3rd fret of the guitar.

In addition I chose to add the B string 3rd fretted note as well. This is neither a high or low note - it could be considered a mid-melody note. The note played here is a D note. So, while we only have two G notes and a B note being played, this will provide just enough of a bright tone, giving us an apex on the chord. While you could add more notes to this G chord, we don't want to "give too much" right now. We want the other notes to come in and add emphasis throughout the pattern being played. Incidentally, you could strum the entire chord, but this isn't about strumming.

Fingerstyle has a neat way of providing a certain emotion based on the string(s) YOU choose.

You'll recall that I said you wanted your thumb to rest on the Low E string and your 2nd finger to rest under the high E string (keeping in mind that you want to be able to see the actual high E string. Don't place it between the B and high E string. It needs to go under the high E string), so believe it or not you've already got your starting point! All you need to do is figure out which finger needs to be placed on the B string to produce the D note on the 3rd fret.

When you look at your hand, you'll notice that your 1st finger is sitting idle while your thumb and 2nd fingers have their spot on the strings. The 1st finger needs to rest on the B string. Easy huh?!

Remember that we're only at the apex of our roller coaster, so there is more to it than just simultaneously plucking the Low E string with your thumb, plucking the B string with your 1st finger, and plucking the high E string with your 2nd finger. We need to add more to our fingerstyle pattern.

Going back to the roller coaster...once you begin your descent the anticipation slowly fades as you actually start riding the coaster. You build speed. Interestingly enough, in the case of music we could refer to this as tempo. However, tempo is truly irrelevant for now.
Instead, we need to fill the gaps of our fingerstyle pattern to give the sensation of movement (or, creating a descent into the given chord).

How do we decide which notes to add for our descent? There's no real wrong answer, but I still want to give you a logical template to work with.

Our ascent was playing the Low E, B, and high E strings together. Naturally you can assume that those in-between notes need to be addressed as well. We'll still focus on the G Major chord, which actually provides the basis for ANY chord where the root note (bass note) is found on the Low E string.

This time I will start with the open G Major:

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G

-----------------------
|          |          |
|          |          |
|          |          |
-----------------------

3 3 3 3

3 2 0

3 2
```

Because I've included additional notes, you may wonder what digit to use for the second fret note on the A string. You will want to use your thumb. It's a very easy transition from Low E to A. In the case of the open D note on the D string, you can also use your thumb! So, to sum up what we've discovered so far, the thumb does more work than you might have thought. The thumb is playing the Low E, the A, and in this case, even the D string notes! Your 1st and 2nd fingers still assume the same position.

Again, note values don't matter. Later they will. Did you see what I did? You've already seen the ascent, which is the Low E, B, and high E strings played simultaneously. The next thing I chose to do was add the second fret note on the A string. This is a lower note, which provides a bit of a descent into the pattern. I then added the third fret note on the B string to "bring the passage back" a bit. Immediately after that, I used the D note on the D string, which is open.

It may seem strange to play two D notes in a row (because the third fret note on the B string is a D note) but these notes are at different octaves, and the open fret D note provides a mid-range for us to work with. We don't want to stay at the mid-range, so let's brighten it up. As you can guess, I add the third fret note on the high E string followed directly by the third fret note on the B string to drop us just a tiny bit. Since these are all quarter notes, when you play it the passage will feel incomplete. However, if you were to add the correct note value, it would look like this:
Here we start with an eighth note, followed by four sixteenth notes. We then end on an eighth note. Tempo doesn't matter, because tempo is relative to the note values being played. To keep it simple, I didn't include tied notes or any rests. We don't need to worry about those for this e-book.

Of course, you can do the same thing with a G Major barre chord:

There's only ONE slight problem. This arrangement doesn't actually tell the listener that this is a G Major chord, does it? Do you know why? Because we don't have the fourth fret note on the G string (which tells us that this is a Major chord) we have no clue as to whether this is a G Major barre chord or a G minor barre chord. Again, we don't have the fourth fret note.

We should probably have that in there, but technically it's not required as we aren't strumming the chord. The beauty of fingerstyle is that not every single note must be played. But, if I wanted to emphasize that this is indeed a G Major barre chord instead of a G minor barre chord, I would probably do this instead:
All I did was play the fourth fret note on the G string instead of the fifth fret note on the D string. We still have enough of a mid-range there so all is good. The fourth fret note on the G string is a B note. I mentioned earlier that the thumb takes care of the Low E, A, and even D string notes when we play a chord where the root/bass is on the Low E string.

Hmmm...in the case of this official G Major - where the fourth fret note on the G string is used, can you guess which finger you would want to use to pluck that string? Believe it or not, you can STILL use your thumb! Now, this is just my choice. You can also use your 1st finger if you would like, but I've always found it much easier to navigate with my thumb as opposed to my 1st finger.

After a little practice I think you might feel the same way. Again - I'm keeping things simple, so less is more. We don't have to focus on which finger plucks a given note because we are only using our thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers. If our 1st and 2nd fingers typically stay in place, or "anchor" themselves, we can focus more on our thumb movement.

*Note: This is only important when playing a change from a G Major to a G minor. If you aren't switching from a Major to a minor (or vice versa) using the same chord root, you don't necessarily need to do this as the influential change in the chord won't be noticed. I will deal more with this when we get to Section B in this Chapter, called "Chord Groupings."

This is by no means the end of our concept, but could be considered the end of the pattern. Because you will change chords in every song, the pattern need not necessarily be altered. In serious fingerstyle scores there are times that this isn't the case, but as an overall concept this pattern will work for a song's entirety.

So far, we've covered the ascent and descent. Is there more to it? Absolutely. Just like with any roller coaster, there's never just one up and one down. There's a mid-range. While I've touched base on the mid-range, I want to show you on the tab where this takes place:
The "H/L" stands for a combination of high and low. I tend to do this with every single chord, as well as with every transitional chord change. This allows the listener to hear an obvious tone that is neither too obscure or too abstract. I then follow with the mid-melody, which is noted here with an "M." I then follow up with a higher range to round out the chord in question. This is noted by an "H" on the tab staff.

Now the fun begins! Our roller coaster concept will be even easier to understand once we start changing chords. Before we continue our lesson, we need to understand a few more things first. We need to understand how root notes (bass notes when it comes to fingerstyle) designate the pattern we use with chord groupings.

**B. Chord groupings**

The simplest way to think of chord groupings is not focusing on any alterations of a given chord. An example of what I mean could be the alteration of the natural G Major chord to something like a Gsus2 or a Gsus4. The "sus" means suspended, and the "2" or "4" is just an extension/alteration. The beauty of how I teach fingerstyle is that the alterations taking place rarely - if ever - matter at all. This again has solely to do with the root/bass note in a given chord.

**Rule #2: If your root/bass note falls on the Low E string, the pattern doesn't need to change when playing fingerstyle.**

Now, as with everything there are exceptions. However, this is almost always the case. We've already looked at the G Major chord, both open and barred. If we move down the entire fretboard, starting this time with F (because it is the first note on our Low E string) we can see that our fingerstyle pattern of our thumb on the Low E string, our 1st finger on the B string, and our 2nd finger on the high E, we can absolutely play ANY chord found with the root/bass on the Low E string - and the best part is this: we don't need to change a single thing.

You'll recall with the G Major that we didn't have that fourth fret note on the G string we needed to show the listener that it was a G Major and not a G minor, right? For now, we're not concerned with that. We'll worry about that when we have an actual Major to minor change. Instead, our goal right now is to see how every single barre chord relates with the Low E string being the root/bass note. This will not be the case when we work with open chords combined with barre chords, so be sure this makes sense first.
Take a look at the tab below:
Remember that the pattern never changes, so we still use your thumb for the Low E string, our 1st finger for the B string notes, and our 2nd finger for the high E string notes. We can also use your thumb for any A string and D string note that comes into play. I'll go ahead and provide you with the alternate tab series where the note on the G string is played instead of the note on the D string. This references what I was talking about earlier with letting the listener know for sure that the G is a Major and not a minor.
Just remember that the thumb can STILL be used for any of the notes on the G string. You may also use your 1st finger, but I tend to use my thumb exclusively.

While you could simply just play barre chords the way I've shown you and use this overall pattern, odds are you won't. Instead, you'll be playing a combination of open chords along with barre chords. Now I want to discuss how to play barre chords where the root/bass is on the A string. We'll get to the combinations of open and barre chords in a moment.

Let's take a look at the C barre chord where the C root is on the A string at the third fret:

Nothing has changed at all in terms of what notes we want to strike. We still want the root/bass, which is the third fret note on the A string. We also want to add the higher melody in, which is the third fret note.
on the high E string, as well as the "safety" note on the fifth fret of the B string. This will produce the same H/M as with the G Major chord.

The only real difference is that your thumb will now play the bass on the A string instead of the E string. Your 1st and 2nd fingers don't change. You probably already see where I'm going with this, so here is an additional example:

This pattern covers the full spectrum of every possible note in the C Major barre chord where the C root/bass is on the A string. As mentioned with the G Major chord, here we don't need to worry whether it is a C Major or a C minor, because the opening notes clearly tell us that. If this were a Cm chord it would look like this:

Pretty nifty huh? The chords played with the root/bass on the A string is actually much easier, because there's no need to examine the changes. The notes found already tell us the type of chord due to the pattern being played to include the B string note.

Here is a complete rundown of all the A string root/bass chords that can be played. Again, the pattern never needs to change:
Now it's time to have some fun by combining both open and barre chords. This is where the roller coaster really comes together.

Here I want you to take a look at a basic example on combining open chords and barre chords together. Hopefully you are familiar with the chords I am using. You should be, as learning fingerstyle is not a beginner concept.

I am taking a direct serious of chords from the song "Whiskey Lullaby" by Brad Paisley. You need not know this song to understand what I am presenting.

The chord progression during the verse is this:

D - G - Bm | A - D - G - A | Bm - A - D | Bm - A - D - A

It's not as confusing as it looks, but you'll see that there is a combination of open chords and barre chords. What makes this song a little tricky is the changes between the chords. The arrangement as I have it labeled in terms of measures is not technically correct, but I have organized it this way to show you the changes.

Important! Here in a moment I will include the logical fingerings for each of these parts, but before you try to play each part read what I have to say first.
Part 1:

This is just an open D Major. In the case of ANY of the D open chords (Major, minor, suspended, etc.) always realize that you can choose to play the open A string if you wish. This is why I have the "0" in parenthesis. It falls a bit out of the realm of fingerstyle logics, but since the thumb can (and should) take care of the strings from Low E to D in many cases, this isn't a problem. If you choose to not include the open A string, simply shift your normal playing pattern around. In other words, the "0" in parenthesis can be switched with the "0" that isn't in parenthesis on the D string. Again, no big deal here.

You'll also see that the pattern is played the exact same way twice.

Part 2:

Here is a barred version of the G Major chord. You can substitute it for the open version because nothing changes. I didn't include the fourth fret note here on the G string as the movement was from the D Major chord, and therefore doesn't need to be distinguished from a Major or a minor.

Notice again that the pattern is the same and is played twice. I chose to use the barred version because the next chord is a Bm. It truly doesn't matter, but I tend to do this out of habit as the Bm is easier for me to finger moving from a G Major barre chord.
Part 3:

There is no such thing as an open Bm chord, so obviously we have to play the barred version. The pattern hasn't changed, but the amount of times you play the Bm has. Notice that there are only three connected staff groupings instead of four as we did previously. This is a tell-tale sign that something different is about to happen. (At least in how I've presented the tab. It's irregular.)

Part 4:

And as you just read, that "different" thing is happening. Here we start with an A Major, but it's only played as one grouping. This makes up for the irregular grouping previously shown. The A Major is a quick-change chord, so it receives much less of a value. Again, the pattern is still the same.

Take a look at the D Major that follows the A Major. Here we have a grouping of four staffs again. This D Major actually makes the song "fix itself" I guess you could say. And yes...of course...the pattern is still the same ;)}
Part 5:

Another barred G Major with nothing different. This is a grouping of four staffs, and the pattern is repeated.

Part 6:

Yet again we're at the A Major played as an open position chord. You COULD play this as a barred A Major chord, but the next chord is a Bm. Unless you wanted to perform a little acrobatics (or if you want to play the E Style Bm, which is absolutely possible) I recommend sticking to the open A Major.

We'd rather not move all over the fretboard until we're absolutely comfortable. No pattern change here and it's repeated.
Part 7:

This is the same as Part 3, so you know what the deal here is.

Part 8:

This is the same as Part 4, so the same applies.

Part 9:

Starting to see what's going on? This is also the same.
Part 10:

Ok, I'm starting to sound like a broken record! But yes, the same old song and dance until Part 11.

Part 11:

This is still an A Major played open, with a full set of four-staff groupings. This ends the verse. Now, as I mentioned before, I'm not including any confusing rests or tied notes. All of this was created using only eighth and sixteenth notes. To any serious composer what I've provided to you is basically considered wrong, but when you look at the entire series as a unit it's much easier to follow I think.

If you were singing this song while playing, you could omit the last two groupings, or an easier way to say this is just to NOT repeat the pattern. You could just hold that final A Major instead of fingerpicking through it. This isn't important and is really based on your own personal preference.

What does all of this mean? My goal in showing this to you is to allow you to understand that the fingerstyle pattern truly never changes. Of course you could do a ton of different things with this song, but as a general practice session all this does is train your picking hand to follow your fretting hand.

Notice how I worded that...'as a general practice session all this does is train your picking hand to follow your fretting hand.' I didn't say it the other way around. I FIRMLY believe that musicians that struggle with fingerstyle because the focus is directed too much on the picking hand. The picking hand can do a dozen or more things at any given moment, but none of the notes you strike will sound good without the right chord being played.

In this case you made it through an entire verse, with quite a few changes here and there, and the entire time the fingerstyle pattern stayed mostly the same. Here is the full verse score, this time with fingerings
to prove it:

Part 1:

Part 2:

Part 3:
Part 4:

Another barred G Major with nothing different. This is a grouping of four staffs, and the pattern is repeated.

Part 5:

Another barred G Major with nothing different. This is a grouping of four staffs, and the pattern is repeated.

Part 6:
Now that we at least understand how to combine both open and barred chords together (and still magically keep the same pattern!) when will we run across a passage that needs to be finger-picked in a different way? Why aren't we using our 3rd finger? What about our 4th finger? This does happen, and I will discuss this further down, but for our study the truth is this...

You don't really ever need to use any digits other than your thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers! Sure you may have some issues with dexterity, but I find it better to focus on as few fingers as possible until you're truly ready to expand and get serious.

**III – Fundamentals of EZ Fingerstyle**

A. Chicken or the egg?

Ok clearly I've lost my mind, but this question is very relevant to music. When playing fingerstyle, some of the first thoughts that might come to mind are...

1. **If you are covering a song, do you want to play it exactly like the original?** Songs like "Imagine" by John Lennon or "Dust In The Wind" by Kansas really can't be approached without playing as close to the original as possible. You might be able to "fake it" (see below) but the truth is - those are songs that are rather obvious as to whether or not you are truly playing them like their original compositions are
intended to be played. There's nothing wrong with improvisation, but in situations like this, I highly recommend just using a capo to change the key of the song or leaving it "as is."

2. Do you want to "fake it" as we do with EZ Strummer? I spend a great deal of time "faking it" and to be honest, this is exactly how I came up with this method of EZ fingerstyle. I didn't want to spend time reading lines of tab. I just wanted to play the songs. If you choose to fake a fingerstyle song, always try to add as much depth as possible to it. I don't have the luxury of adding too much to any song from the EZ Strummer series, mainly because I can't explain every single thing I add to a song. I may hammer-on or pull-off a chord by habit, but I generally try to keep everything simple. When you work on songs written by other musicians, many times you can hear what should (or could) be done by experimenting just a bit. One song that always comes to mind for me is the song "Blue Eyes" by Elton John. There is a progression in the song that goes like this:

C - G/B - G/Bb - Am (as in "Blue eyes...baby's got...blue eyes...")

While you could just pick out a C - G - Am and hold that G chord instead of adding the split notes of B and Bb to the G, it just doesn't sound the same.

3. Do you want to create your own unique interpretation?

Interestingly enough, one of the most unique ways to give an already-written song a new feel is by combining both of the previous questions. Simply changing the key (either by capo or by shifting chords) can give a song a completely new and enhanced overhaul that you may have never dreamed possible. Another good thing about the capo is many times you can flat out cheat a variety of chords. I'm super guilty of this.

To sum up Section A of this chapter, my point is this:

*If you want to nurture a song and work on it for countless hours, then the egg definitely comes first. If you want to simply grab a song and play it for what it's worth, and then decide if there is something you want to add to it, then for you it's all about the chicken.*

Either way you cut it, the song will be a chicken one day...it all depends on how long you want to wait. :)

B. Choosing your pattern(s) wisely

You should never feel limited to your fingerstyle patterns. They don't always need to stay the same. In this e-book I am just showing you that you can make a song feel like it moves all over the place, when really it's the notes within a series of chords that does the leg work for you. I haven't forgotten about our roller coaster, so there's still more to discuss, but choosing your pattern(s) must be addressed.

If you over complicate a song to the point that it isn't playable, you're only going to find yourself frustrated. This is the main reason I like to stick to a pattern that stays mostly the same. However, you may have already realized that the pattern itself can change in a variety of ways, but you can still choose to use only your thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers. In Chapter IV, Section A I will discuss how to make the right choices as to what you want to play. In a way that section can go hand-in-hand with this section. I simply chose to approach it later because there are a few things we still need to discuss.
C. Construction/deconstruction

Previously I talked about over complicating a song. If you find that you simply can't play a given song using only your thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers, then the song truly needs to be deconstructed.

You can deconstruct a song by breaking down the overall passage. Earlier I talked about "Blue Eyes" by Elton John, where the progression is: C - G/B - G/Bb - Am. This is not necessarily a beginner pattern, because when a split chord is used, it is almost always required that the note being split (in this case a B and Bb from the chord G Major) gets an obvious value in the same way that a walking bass note would. Songs like "Redemption Song" by Bob Marley also works like this. Simply deconstruct the song as mentioned earlier to make it C - G - (G) - Am. Once you are able to play that series of chords using the SAME pattern you choose, you can then slowly add the B and Bb to the G Major chord. This may seem obvious, but I've fielded a dozen or more emails about this.

Frustrated guitarists just can't seem to squeeze those added notes in. Nine times out of ten it is because he or she is trying to stick to a certain pattern and the pattern ends up confusing him or her. This is when you need to break the rules. Deconstruct the song. Determine where you're losing that note. If you purchased my Peter Gabriel collection then you know that in the song "Father, Son" there are a TON of split chords, and they come in rather strangely. In the case of the Peter Gabriel collection, it was mostly due to the songs being played on piano originally. I simply transcribed them to guitar. This makes the guitar part much more complicated because of the arrangement of the strings vs. the keys on a piano.

Trust me on this: deconstruction is the key.

Maybe the song is TOO easy to play. Maybe you want more from a song. I also discuss this further down under Chapter 4, Section A as well, but a quick example would be the song "Much Too Young To Feel This Damn Old" by Garth Brooks. It's a very simple song with easy chord transitions. If it isn't quite enough for you then work with constructing walking notes can help tremendously.

The progression starts with G Major and goes to A minor. You probably wouldn't want to add anything between G - Am, but right after the Am you could easily throw in some added "stuff" like this:

G - Am - {Am7 - Asus4}

The bracketed chords are just alterations of the Am chord. The Am {x02210} could receive an alteration to Am7 {x02213} or even an Asus4 {x02230} if it sounds good.

Always think bigger, but only if you want to construct more in a song. It's also a good idea to look at what the next chord will be when constructing new parts to a song, because this can sometimes cause issues with chord tone if you do too much.
IV – Combining Strumming and Fingerstyle

A. Making the right choices

As promised, I'd like to discuss with you how to make the right choices when you are combining both strumming and fingerstyle. The first thing I'd like to mention, which might be obvious, is this:

I would try to avoid strumming a verse and then picking out a chorus. There are times where it works, which then becomes basically a "reverse climax" as I would call it, but often you'll discover the song loses a bit of expression when you go from strumming to fingerstyle. However, when played the other way around, where it goes from fingerstyle to strumming, the dynamics are usually much more obvious and sound much better.

Exception: Sometimes a reverse climax is what you want. Most of the time this isn't the case, but in songs like "Mercy Street" by Peter Gabriel the chorus is actually anti-climactic. The way that Gabriel fixes this musically is actually with his vocals. Pay close attention the next time you hear it. The music itself (not his voice) actually falls off almost completely. Instead, the vocals overtake the song.

This is, as mentioned, an exception. I am sure there are plenty of others, but this one stuck right out immediately to me.

Another point in playing fingerstyle and making the right choices has to do with adding more notes to a song, and this is where changing up your thumb, 1st, and 2nd finger pattern comes into play. This is the "serious" stuff.

So, what happens when you CAN'T just use your thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers? How will you know when it won't work?

The obvious answer is when there are more than three notes that you want or need to play simultaneously. Since these notes will show up on a tab staff lined up vertically together, you can immediately identify them.

It's important to realize that if you are interested in playing beginner - intermediate fingerstyle, you'll rarely encounter this issue. As an example, I would say it is safe to assume around 95% of the songs from my EZ Strummer program stick with the simple thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers.

But, what if you don't want to just play the super easy way? Maybe you want to play two or more notes together.
Here's how I would recommend doing that, using the verse theme to the song "Imagine" by John Lennon:

**Part 1:**

```
C                  F
\---------------\-\---------------\
|                |                |
| 0 0 0 0         | 2 2 2 2 3      |
| 2 3 3 3 3       | 3 3 3 3        |
```

This C - F is played four times, so all you need are the first two measures. Notice that the F Major chord is not really being played as a "full" F Major. In other words, there's no need to form the first fret note on the Low E string, nor is the B or High E string played at all until we end the F chord measure. Instead, what is happening here is an alteration, or even a "run" if you will - which takes place on the G string from the second fret to the third fret. You then play the B string open to end the F chord measure. Knowing that we don't need to form a full F Major chord, we have an easier finger positioning that won't require too much work. One cool thing about fingerstyle, as mentioned earlier, is the art of expression.

While this song is played on a piano, and while this song needs to have those added notes here and there to make it sound more complete, the truth is we are actually playing an easier F than normal.

Here is how you can use your picking hand to easily transition from C to F, including how to play that end measure F chord alteration:

```
C                  F
\---------------\-\---------------\
|                |                |
| 2 0 0 1 0       | 2 2 2 2 3      |
| 2 3 3 3 3       | 3 3 3 3        |
```

You'll start with the normal thumb, 1st, and 2nd finger pattern, but right before you end the C you'll need to "shift" your 1st and 2nd fingers up, STILL keeping the same pattern concept, to the G and B strings to play the open notes on those strings. The most important part is bringing your 1st and 2nd fingers back down for the F chord that comes next. Once you bring your 1st and 2nd fingers back down, you'll be ready to play the F chord. The only other thing you need to know here is that you'll use your 2nd finger to play the little run from the second fret to the third fret. Also use your 2nd finger to play the open B string.
While you could use your 3rd and/or 4th fingers to play the run and the open note, adding too many picking fingers in can get rather confusing, and since this song runs at a rather slow tempo, the movement shouldn't be too difficult. But, this isn't the entire verse. That comes next.

Incidentally, the F chord should be fingered on your fretting hand the same way you would finger an E Major chord. (Since F is just an extension of E Major that should make sense.)

Also, the C Major here is really a Cmaj7, but since the first fret note on the B string isn't even addressed until the very end of the C chord, we can simply call it a C for easy reference.

Now we've moved beyond playing our C - F (x4) progression. It's time to see what comes next for the verse.

Part 2:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Am/E</th>
<th>Dm</th>
<th>D9 (no 3rd)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
```

![Fretboard Diagram](image)

```
| 1 1 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2 2 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 3 3 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 0 0 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 3 3 | 3 | 3 |
```

This is a bit trickier, but overall I don't think you'll have too much trouble with it. Here we have a continuation from the F Major, as seen in the first four eighth notes in the measure directly above.

If we were in a Classical guitar training class I would need to explain why you see the half notes (the notes turned upside down - NOT filled in at the beginning of each eighth note grouping) are arranged how they are. All you really need to know is that these are considered "low melody notes" and sometimes have a different "duration" than the other notes. In this case it really doesn't matter, because as a solo musician (as in, one person) we will let this series of low melody notes ring anyway.

Technically these notes would ring out twice per measure, or - as you already should know - as two half notes per measure.

Take a look again at the first measure. Why is the Am/E labeled as it is, and not just an Am? After all, it IS just an Am. The Am/E is labeled like this to let the fingerstyle guitarist know that the E note in the Am chord should be "pronounced." In other words, it should be obvious. It doesn't really matter when the Am/E notes are played together, because it truly is just an Am. But, once you've played the original Am once, you then have the E note played all alone. The E note is on the second fret of the D string. While you could just say this is just an F to Am, the score is emphasizing the importance of the bass note of E (just the bass - NOT the root) and should be pronounced.
Look again at the tab:

```
Am/E  Dm  D9 (no 3rd)
```

This is where fingerstyle can get a little confusing. After you've made it past the Am/E part, the next chord is a Dm. Here the Dm is obvious. We DO have four notes though, and prior to this we've been able to use only our thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers. We need to lay out this fingerstyle passage with a pattern.

```
Am/E  Dm  D9 (no 3rd)
```

Don't let this scare you. Everything is still the same, but THIS time we get to add our 3rd finger to the pattern. The good news is that it only happens twice. We then revert back to the same thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers for the D9 (no 3rd) chord.

The reason I always keep the pattern simple is because when we do find the need to add another finger, the actual pattern itself isn't changed - it's added to instead. I've seen fingerstyle instructors completely change a fingerstyle pattern for their students just to switch to a quick chord. I've never understood this. I like keeping it simple.

We're almost done with the verse, and after we've finished it I am going to show you another neat trick.
Part 3:

This part ends the verse theme.

\[
\begin{align*}
G & \quad G7 \\
\text{\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{g_major_g7.png}}
\end{align*}
\]

Whew - it's only a G Major to a G7. Hmmm....the tab calls for a barred G Major. Do we really want to do this? We could, but the G7 is an open chord. That sure seems like a rather big movement to me. It is absolutely possible, so don't try to avoid it if you want to see how well you can play it. Me? I'd like to investigate this part and at least try to make it a little easier.

*Note:* This is where construction/deconstruction takes place. My goal is to try to make the G Major barre chord turn into a G Major open chord. This may seem very easy, but we do need to know more than just making a G barre chord a G open chord. Why? Notice those two 5's on the second to last eighth note in the G chord measure. These are located on the G and B strings. We need to see what these notes are and try to duplicate it when playing our open G Major. After all, we don't want to lose those added notes if at all possible.

The first thing we need to do is examine that 5 on the G string in the second to last eighth note. Since the notes needed to form a G Major chord are G, D, and B, we need to see what that 5 is on the G string.

That note is a C note. The other 5 on the B string is an E note. So, in addition to our G, D, and B, which is required to create a G chord (of either kind) we also now have a C and E note to work in to the open G chord version. Is this possible? Absolutely.

\[
\begin{align*}
G & \quad G7 \\
\text{\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{g_major_g7喱.png}}
\end{align*}
\]
The notes in parentheses are the notes in which I changed. We needed a G, D, and B note to form the G Major. Do we have that?

The G note is on the third fret on the Low E string.
The D note is the open note on the D string.
The B note is open note on the B string.

So, what about the added C and E notes? The C note, which was originally on the fifth fret of the G string, is now located on the third fret of the A string as (3). The E note, which was originally on the fifth fret of the B string, is now located on the high E string played open as (0), which gives us the full range of notes needed. We can see that it would be super easy to play the G7 that comes after it.

**Rule #3: If you CAN make it easy - do it.**

Seriously, do it. If you don't want it to be easy, then don't do it. But, if you have trouble with fingerstyle and want to actually make it through a song, I would always investigate your options.

Speaking of investigation....

What if we wanted to change the G7 instead of the G barre chord? Is the G7 played as a barre chord easier? Let's see.

The G barre chord, when played as a full chord, looks like this: 355433
The G7 barre chord, when played as a full chord, looks like this: 353433

The only difference between the two chords is the "5" from the G Major on the D string. It becomes a "3" instead. If we plot that out, it wouldn't work "as is" because we would simply be playing a partial G Major open chord. It's not a G Major. It's a G7. The "7" is important.

So again, we have to construct/deconstruct. We need that dominant 7th note, which is an F note. How do we "add" an F note to make it work?

The G7 chord needs the notes G, B, D - and now F to make it a G7 instead of a G Major.

As long as we have the G, B, D, and F we can technically do this.
Hmm...take a look at the tab again as transcribed:

Houston...we have a problem. In the original transcription of G7, we DO NOT have a B at all. We have a G note on the third fret of the Low E. We have a D note on the third fret of the B string. Finally we have an F note on the high E string. We are indeed missing a B even with the original transcription. Again, fingerstyle makes use of adding and subtracting notes, but often will still leave the original "feel" of the chord. In essence, this isn't technically a G7 at all - even with the original transcription. Instead it's not a chord at all! Does this really matter when we play fingerstyle? Not too much.

However, when you start to accompany other musicians, you should always consider the chords named as the "full" chord. I'll get into that later on, as well as continue with our roller coaster.

So, back to the question at hand: Can we keep the G barre chord and use the G7 barre chord directly after it? Again, the answer is "Yes!"

Because we never "had" a B note in the G7 chord to begin with, we can also assume that we don't really need it for the G7 barre chord. (Remember: I will be giving you a good reason why when we get to Section B of this chapter)

All we really need for THIS guitar part is a G, D, and F. The F is what makes the G chord a dominant, turning it into a G7.
This isn't a very good representation is it? Try to play it and you'll see it just sounds "blah" - and nowhere near what I would ever consider playing. Instead, if we chose to change this arrangement around to something more logical and playable, we should stick with the first one. To refresh your memory here it is:

Food For Thought: You don't necessarily need to do this at all if you don't find the G barred version to the G7 open version difficult to play. This is only being explained if and when you run into a confusing fingerstyle passage that you just can't master. The last thing we need to do before moving into Section B is label the fingerstyle pattern we use.

Here is the G to G7 part:

Because your thumb takes care of the Low E, A, and even D strings, you can assume that the 1st and 2nd fingers once again just shift up and down. There's no real need to add a 3rd finger. I suppose if you want to you could on the G7, but since there are only three notes being played, you can stick with the easy pattern and avoid any troublesome finger acrobatics.

This was a large amount of information, so to sum Section A of Chapter IV up, the long story short is.... I would only recommend using a different fingerstyle pattern if there are more than three notes that are required to be played SIMULTANEOUSLY. You can always construct and deconstruct chords both before and after a given chord in question, but sometimes you'll find that too much simplification loses
the original "feel" of the song. This happened when we tried to make the G7 a barre chord directly following a G Major barre chord. It just didn't sound as good. Instead, I chose to make the G Major an open chord, and left the G7 as close to the original as possible. By making the G Major an open chord, the fingerings were much easier, and so was the pattern.

B. How to accompany

Maybe you aren't the rhythm guitarist/musician. Maybe you are the fingerstyle guitarist instead that is playing over (or under) the rhythm guitarist/musician. As mentioned in Section A, there are times that you'll see a G7 in tablature or on a chord sheet in which you don't actually play the full chord. In other words, like with the G7 in "Imagine" we never actually played the B note.

In fingerstyle we rarely play a full chord simultaneously. We might play the notes in an arpeggio-based fashion, but usually the full chord usage is reserved for the actual rhythm section. This is a rather short section, but what you read here is very important.

Never overdo your fingerstyle playing when accompanying another musician. Your job as a fingerstyle guitarist is to add emphasis to the rhythm. You'll recall me talking about the low melody notes that were found in the song "Imagine."

When we revisit that tab for the last four measures of the verse in "Imagine" and remove all the notes except the low melody notes we'll find this:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Am/E</th>
<th>Dm</th>
<th>D9 (no 3d)</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>G7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

This looks sparse, but is 100% composition-correct. We have two half notes, which equal one whole note in both of the first two measures from above. We also have a whole note in both of the next measures.

While you aren't "really" playing fingerstyle here, you are playing the bass notes and/or creating a walking series of notes. When you pull all of the other notes out of the equation, you'll find that the song becomes much easier to play. Since you know the chord progression as well, you can always find your own little stuff to play too. This is also an example of deconstruction. You are now free to add a ton of things - even if you want to just add bass to the rhythm.

Why does this matter? When you find the bass notes in a song - as the fingerstyle/lead guitarist in a band - a new world opens up for you. Maybe you want to focus on the bass notes during a verse and then explode with some seriously complex fingerstyle during a chorus. The work is already done for you.
In some ways it is easier to create walking bass lines and elements like that when you are the fingerstyle guitarist. You've got a bit more freedom to express yourself.

Another neat trick is "double-timing" a fingerstyle pattern behind a simple chord progression. The fingerstyle guitar will be playing fingerstyle in double-time, while the rhythm guitar will be playing the original chords found in the song. The rhythm will also just strum the guitar chords, INCLUDING the added/subtracted notes for the run.

Here is a quick example with the fingerstyle guitar on top and the rhythm guitar on bottom:

"Imagine" (Gone Crazy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I told you it was crazy. Please realize that I don't intend for you to actually do this. What I am showing you is how two guitars can interact without changing chord position or the "feel" of one of the guitars at all (the rhythm in this case). The rhythm guitar is just playing straight eighth notes with full chords being strummed - keeping in mind the open notes that are applied at times. The fingerstyle guitar is still playing the same pattern as previously shown, but this time it is being played at double-time (twice as fast). By using all sixteenth notes for the fingerstyle part, this provides the double-time feel without affecting the song structure.
Take a look at the F chords being played:

```
F
```

### Important:
Here the rhythm guitar is just playing an F chord throughout. The fingerstyle part will take care of the 2-3-0 run.

The same applies from the previous measure with this one, except the rhythm section will have two sixteenth notes instead of straight eighth notes.

The fingerstyle guitar is again playing double-time, keeping in mind the runs. The 2-3 run is using a 32nd note instead of a 16th note, and the "0" on the B string goes back to a 16th note.

Why did I show you any of this? Well, when we break this down (deconstruct) we can see an optional run from the fingerstyle part.
Check the C part out again:

Here I removed quite a bit from the fingerstyle part. Basically I removed the open notes. Also note the (4) that I have included. I didn't want to play an open B note on the B string, so instead I found another B note. The fourth fret on the G string is a B note.

As I mentioned before, this might not be the way you would want to play it, but the option is still there. You could then break the song back down FROM constant double-time (which keeps it from sounding so corny and like a weird gallop) to something more like the original:
Here I added low melody notes. The low melody notes are the half notes that are upside down. The first "3" in the tab as well as the next to last "3" are in low melody. The last "3" is not. I also added some pull-offs (P) and hammer-ons (H) to the measure. To simplify things all of these use sixteenth (16th) notes.
Now, before we move any further I want to go back to the F chord and give you a more logical option:

![F Chord Diagram]

There's not a big difference between this fingerstyle part from the C is there? We still have the low melody notes of "3" played as half notes. You'll also be able to notice that the run from 2-3-0 that was omitted in the rhythm part is now here.

**Summing It Up...**

Everything I showed you is based on construction/deconstruction, and now you can see what I reserved this part until now. You can also assume that since there are never more than three notes (or in this case - only 2) you never really need to change the pattern you've been working with.

Before I finalize this e-book, I do want to discuss a more strum-based approach to fingerstyle.

**Digits Striking Multiple Strings...**

This can be tricky, and will cause a very brief lag in the note or tone produced, but I do this frequently. What you basically do is use one digit to strike multiple strings. The important thing to realize, or the trick of this you could say, is making sure the strings are adjacent to each other. This may seem obvious, but I wanted to make sure to mention it.
For example:

\[ \text{G} \]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
2 \\
1 \\
0 \\
\end{array}
\]

\[ \text{let ring} \]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
(9) \\
(0) \\
(3) \\
\end{array}
\]

Remember the G from earlier in "Imagine" right? Take a look at what I've done in terms of fingering. You'll see that I show two "1's" on the G and B string. By brushing your 1st finger in an upward motion you can strike two notes at once. These notes just need to be adjacent. They don't need to be open. They can be fretted as well. I do this frequently with the EZ Strummer songs, and it's very common in Jazz music as well. When you try this, you'll notice a very small pause in between the notes, simply because you can't really strike them together as your 1st finger (in this case) must move from Point A to Point B. However, the pause will practically go unnoticed when actually playing. Again, it's just an option if you find yourself having trouble using more than one or two fingers.

The same can happen with the thumb, or any other digit to be completely honest.

**V – Remember The Roller Coaster?**

I know, I know. It took forever for me to get back to this didn't it? I saved this for the end because we needed to examine much more material before I got back to this concept.

If you’ve ever taken a fingerstyle lesson from me, then you know I do my best to make it an easy concept. While the art of fingerstyle takes years to master, there is always a way to make even the most difficult of chords to be played in the fingerstyle fashion easy to comprehend. The most important thing to understand is the actions that are involved.

1. Rising Action (High/Low Melody)
2. Falling Action (Mid-Melody)
3. Climax (High/Low/Mid Melody)

Just like your standard movie script, play composition, or book, you must create a sense of emotion when playing. These three actions will do the trick – if you understand them.

When you stand in line to ride a roller coaster the anticipation begins before you even set foot in the cart. You’re watching the ride swoop up and down curves, upside down, etc. all from the ground while you wait in line, waiting for your turn. Once you reach the cart, the anticipation grows even more.

Enough of my imagery – let’s get to the point.
The Rising Action (High/Low Melody)

You’re strapped in. You’re ready to go. Even if you start from the very top of a roller coaster, you MUST get there first. This is the rising action. Let’s take a standard coaster that chugs its way up to the top of the first hill – the biggest and baddest hill. In order to get the coaster moving along the tracks, we have to build up enough height so that the fall will develop speed. This is what allows you to make it all the way through the ride without the need of a secondary propulsion. The rising action takes place on the climb.

An example of a rising action in a song might begin with a riff or a chord progression. It doesn’t matter. The rising action just needs to set up the suspense of the song. Using high and low melody in conjunction with each other gives the listener a perfect example of the initial setup.

The Falling Action (Mid-Melody)

After you’ve completed the first (and most likely biggest) hill on the roller coaster, the adrenaline that was once there begins to slowly subside. Not necessarily the fun or thrill, but the initial adrenaline. If you attribute this to performance instead of the roller coaster concept, then an example of the rising action to the song “Stairway To Heaven” might be the intro – which is completely different than the verse. We all know that once that initial intro has finished, the song is about to ‘root’ itself with a standardized progression to set the tone of the vocals that are needed. But back to the roller coaster, as it is easier to explain these actions.

The falling action is what allows the audience to become ‘accustomed’ to their experience. By setting the right mood, the listener can begin to feel comfortable with the song, and then you hit them with the climax to pull them OUT of that comfort zone.

It works like magic – trust me. In essence the falling action is meant to lure the audience into the feeling of ‘normality’. The falling action takes place on the descent.

An example of the falling action would be, as mentioned, “Stairway To Heaven.” We all know the opening notes. We know when Robert Plant is about to sing. Why? Because it begins feeling natural. This could be due to the fact that we’ve heard the song so many times, OR it could be due to the fact that the structure of “Stairway To Heaven” is technically perfect. It’s a long song, but somehow Led Zeppelin keeps you interested. The falling action in “Stairway To Heaven” is the verse theme, which begins on the ever-popular and easy to play C Major chord.

The Climax (High/Mid/Low Melody)

The climax is a bit more difficult to explain, because it comes in various forms. I like the idea of using “Stairway To Heaven” because as mentioned before, it’s technically perfect. Can you guess what the climax would be in this song? You guessed it I bet – but it’s NOT the solo.

It’s the outro chorus of “…and as we wind on down the road…!”

Why? Why not the solo? Well – for starters – the solo doesn’t create a sense of emotion (except for in a guitarist – but remember we’re playing for the audience!) in the same way as a vocal delivery that forces people to listen to what is being sung. Since the solo is played using the same backing chords as the outro chorus, we can easily use the outro chorus as our example.
The climax serves a few functions. In some songs it is simply the chorus. In other songs it is the last section of the song. With bands like Queen and Led Zeppelin, it can be found multiple times in multiple sections.

How do you tell where the climax is? It’s pretty easy. Generally speaking the climax will be your most powerful section of a song. Unlike some movies, the climax in a song does NOT necessarily need to be at the very end of a song. An example of a climax in a movie that doesn’t take place at the end would be “The Sixth Sense.”

The climax in this movie is actually when we find out that Bruce Willis’ character is dead. If you remember – that’s not at the end of the movie. It’s NEAR the end, but remember that his character had a few more ‘things’ left to do in order to cross over. In a movie, the call to ‘resolve’ or ‘complete’ the story is actually called the ‘denouncement,’ pronounced DEH-NOO-MAH. There are denouncements in music as well, especially in blues. In case you’re starting to guess – it’s what you would call a ‘turnaround.’

However – in my teachings I don’t consider the turnaround or denouncement as official actions. Not every song has one. Besides, as a guitarist you are familiar with the turnaround and my references within each song clearly show you where they are located.

**Summing Up The Roller Coaster...**

So, what does a standard roller coaster do? As you'll recall from much earlier, I explained that with our basic roller coaster, it's all a series of hills. The first hill is usually the biggest - which is the climb. We want to "rise" with the song. Once we've risen, we need to "fall" back down. We don't have to slam ourselves down to the ground floor. We just need to back off the initial "hill" so to speak.

When we rise, we want to use low and high melody together. This provides a perfect dynamic.

When we want to fall (just a bit - remember that) we want to get a middle ground. This is your mid-melody.

When we want to climax (basically wrap things up) we don't want to play just low or high melody. We want to add the mid-melody in as well. This could be a final fully-strummed chord, or it could be a combination of more than three notes. Again, you'll recall that I explained how you can do this either by adding a finger or brushing a given digit against two (or more) adjacent strings.

Neat Trick: Play as many chords as you can get your hands on using arpeggios. Simply stated, an arpeggio is merely just an ascending and descending series of notes that are picked out separate from each other. If you start from the lowest notes and go all the way up to the highest notes, and then back down to the lowest notes again, you basically just "rode" a chord-based roller coaster.

The only thing left to do is find out how you would like to create fingerstyle from those arpeggios. This can be done however you are most comfortable. Just remember that true finger-style includes notes that are played simultaneously as well as picked out. It doesn't need to be difficult to sound good. It just needs to....well...sound good.
VI – Additional Experimentation/Arrangement

Included with this e-book are walking bass lines using fingerstyle. I am providing you with the simple keys of C-A-G-E-D. These bass lines will help tremendously in your fingerstyle studies. These files are located within this e-book download. They are in both PDF and PTB format.

The PTB versions will allow you to hear the passages being played at different tempos. You can even change the tempo and experiment with the tabs I provide if you are so inclined.

Final Thoughts…

I appreciate your interest in this e-book, and I realize this is a ton of information to absorb. I hope you enjoyed this E-Book and I appreciate your interest. If you have any questions please feel free to let me know and I will be glad to help you.

Sincerely,

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