

PLAYING A 4 STRING CIGAR BOX GUITAR



For fretted 4 string guitars tuned GDGB

Flatpicking and Fretting

LESSON 1 PICKIN'

Making a Sound

Right hand position
How to hold your pick
Striking the string
Palm muting
Playing in time
What not to do

Before You Start

This is the first Picking lesson so there are no skill prerequisites. Just make sure that you've watched the video through once and that your guitar is in tune G D G B.

When You've Finished

At the end of this lesson you'll be able to use the pick well enough so that you can play the song for this lesson, Willie Dixon's Spoonful. Here's a checklist so that you know when you're ready to move on.

1. First and foremost your arm and hand will be relaxed as you play a note.
2. You'll have learned a comfortable position for your arm and hand.
3. You'll have learned how to hold the pick.
4. You'll have positioned your hand to allow for more advanced techniques later on.
5. You'll be playing a note and tapping your foot in time.

Hand position

Your hand hangs off the end of your arm and is able to move around in space courtesy of your shoulder and elbow. That's a system that's worked well up until now so let's stick with it.

1. Your shoulder can relax so that your upper arm simply hangs vertically. Your elbow then bends just enough to position your hand at the guitar and your wrist is straight.
2. For now rest the heel of your palm on the bridge of your guitar as shown in the video
3. That'll do

Holding the pick

This is important and is best learned by watching the video. The main points:

1. Hold the pick between your thumb and the side of your index finger.
2. The other three fingers can rest in a relaxed curve away from the pick. Don't involve your middle finger in the process at all.
3. Contact the guitar with your little finger if you like, some find that it helps.

Striking the String

The pick hitting the string is your 'rubber on the road' and so it'll help here to focus in on the precise movements in your wrist, hand and fingers. Again you should watch the video but here are the main points.

1. Keep your wrist straight and your hand as relaxed as possible, don't drop the pick though.
2. Bring the pick through the string at a slight angle and with a little follow through like in a golf swing, or as if your shooting pool.
3. Involve your wrist and fingers in the movement and allow it to flow from your arm, through your wrist and fingers to the pick like water through a hose. Again the golf swing is a good analogy, or hitting a baseball where the hips move first and the rest of the body follows. In this case the movement will pivot through your wrist.

Palm Muting

This is a technique that will develop over time so don't feel that you need to master it straight up. The main thing will be to have your hand in a position to allow it to happen, whether it does every time or not....

1. Gently rest the heel of your palm on the bridge of your guitar and strike the bass string.
2. Depending on exactly where you're making contact with the string and the amount of pressure you're using you'll notice the sound deaden just a little, it won't ring out as much.
3. You generally only need a little pressure on the string but it may be worth experimenting, the main thing will be the position of your hand. As you move your hand up toward the neck you'll notice more damping and there'll be less as you move back. Find a spot that allows you to get a good percussive tone. Take your cue from the video.

Playing in Time

It's important to remember at this early stage that you're doing all of this is so that you can make music. You can make giant steps toward making that happen right now by developing your ability to *play* in time and *stay* in time.

There'll be specific exercises to help with this in upcoming lessons but for now as you practice these techniques make sure that you're also tapping your foot and playing in time. As you develop a new skill your brain will associate that skill with whatever else it is doing at that time. Your pick is the 'rubber on the road' remember, it places the note in time and so you want to link the two things right from the outset.

What not to do

There are a few very common 'bad habits' that I've seen over the years and that I discuss briefly in the video, take good note of these as well.