

VII. Open-Position

A. Overview

Position I is often called Open-Position because the open strings are routinely used. In Positions II, and higher, we normally do not use the open strings.

Whenever we are talking about Position-Playing, we are speaking about a system whereby we get a relatively automatic fingering generated for single note lines based solely on where our hand happens to be on the fretboard at any particular time.

Here is a brief review of the basic “rules” of position-playing as first presented in Chapter IV. - H., Position-Playing On Single Strings. For now, I’ll be applying them to Pos I only. The higher positions have other considerations too, such as 1st finger and 4th finger stretches:

In Pos. I any notes that we need to play in the 1st fret are played only by the 1st finger.

In Pos. I any notes that we need to play in the 2nd fret are played only with the 2nd finger.

In Pos. I any notes that we need to play in the 3rd fret are played only with the 3rd finger.

In Pos. I any notes that we need to play in the 4th fret are played only with the 4th finger, except for the note B natural on the 3rd string. This note is available as the open 3rd string, so there is often no need to use the fretted note. Also, in Pos I, the 1st string - 5th fret - A, can be played with the 4th finger as a “stretch”.

Any other notes that need to be played are available as open strings.

As soon as any finger plays a note in a different fret from the ones prescribed above, you have shifted to another position.

Ex. VII.A-1 The Chromatic Scale in Open-Position

Use all down picks (▼) for now.

The musical notation for the chromatic scale in open position is presented across six lines. The first line is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It shows the notes of the scale from E4 to E5. Above the staff, four square pick direction symbols (▼) are placed over the first four notes. Below the staff, fingerings are indicated by circled numbers: 6 for E4, 5 for F4, 4 for G4, and 3 for A4. The second line continues from A4 to A5, with fingerings 2, 1, and 1. The third line continues from A5 to A6, with fingerings 2, 3, 4, and 5. The fourth line shows the final notes of the scale, with a circled 6 above the staff. The fifth and sixth lines show the final notes of the scale, with a circled 6 above the staff.

B. Picking Techniques

1. Alternate Picking

The alternate picking technique involves alternating down-strokes and up-strokes with the pick. In general, this technique is best applied to “duple” rhythms. I.e. When rhythms are grouped in pairs, or in multiples of

2, such as 4 quarter notes in 4/4 time, or 8 eighth notes, or 16 sixteenth notes, etc. Triplets are the most common example of a non-duple rhythm as they are in groups of three rather than two. Triplets can be viewed as a duple rhythm plus an extra pulse: 2 + 1 or 1 + 2. So, there really only exist duple rhythms and single pulses.

In its simplest application to simple music, alternate picking involves playing all down-beats with down-picks, and all up-beats with up-picks.

Ex.VII.B.1.-1 Alternate Picking

Ex.VII.B.1.-2 Alternate Picking

2. Triplet Picking Techniques

Triplet figures can be picked with a strict alternating picking pattern too. But this will result in some down-beats having up-picks, which may seem awkward at first.

Ex.VII.B.2-1

Sometimes the pattern is adjusted so that all down-beats have down-picks. This will regularly involve two down-picks in a row, which may seem physically clumsy sometimes but can result in a better pulse overall.

Ex.VII.B.2-2

3. Reverse Alternate Picking

When moving to a higher string, after just executing an up-pick, the motion needed to accomplish a down-pick is often a little bit awkward. When moving to a lower string, after just executing a down-pick, the motion needed for an up-pick is often clumsy as well. One way around this awkwardness is to play passages like this with reverse alternate picking. I.e. With duple rhythms, down-beats are played with up-picks and up-beats are played with down-picks.

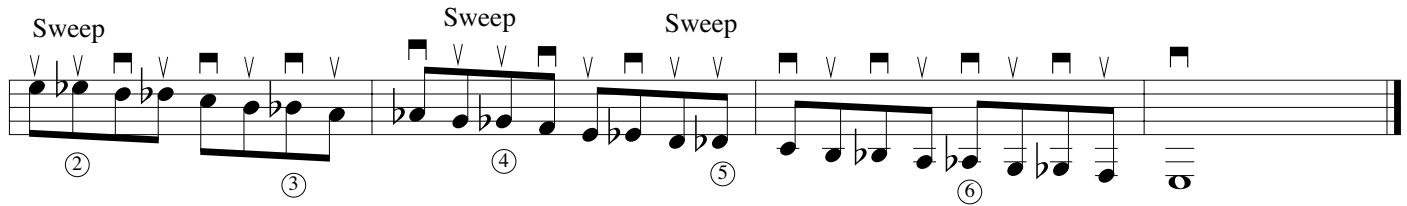
Ex.VII.B.3-1

I will usually be suggesting that you practice all exercises in this book with constant alternate picking (as well as with constant reverse alternate picking, just for control). However, most exercises where I bother to notate the picking scheme at all will be notated with “economy picking” (see below).

4. Economy Picking (aka “Sweep Picking”)

Using either strict alternate picking or strict reverse alternate picking, for a passage of any length, is likely to result in several of these awkward situations, described in Section B-3 above, when moving from one string to another. A type of picking that involves sweeping the pick in one direction across adjacent strings can often be the ticket around this clumsiness. It is much trickier than the other two picking techniques however, and requires some extra developed coordination to execute. I tend to think that economy picking is somewhat less suitable for improvising than alternate picking, because it requires so much more forethought. Passages that use economy picking pretty much need to be worked out before hand. Often, the benefits of the economy picking are overshadowed by the amount of thinking involved and the extra coordination required. However, it can also help to enable some passages to be exceptionally smooth and fast. The logic involved is sort of hard to explain in words. Hopefully, my numerous examples of economy picking, in the following exercises, will make it clear as to what the principles behind it are. Basically, the idea is to completely avoid the two awkward situations mentioned above in Section B-3. Essentially, alternate picking or reverse alternate picking is used until one of these clumsy situations arises, and then the pick is swept in the same direction across two or more adjacent strings. Then alternate or reverse alternate picking is resumed.

Ex.VII.B.4-1 Pos I Chromatic Scale With Economy Picking Where Needed

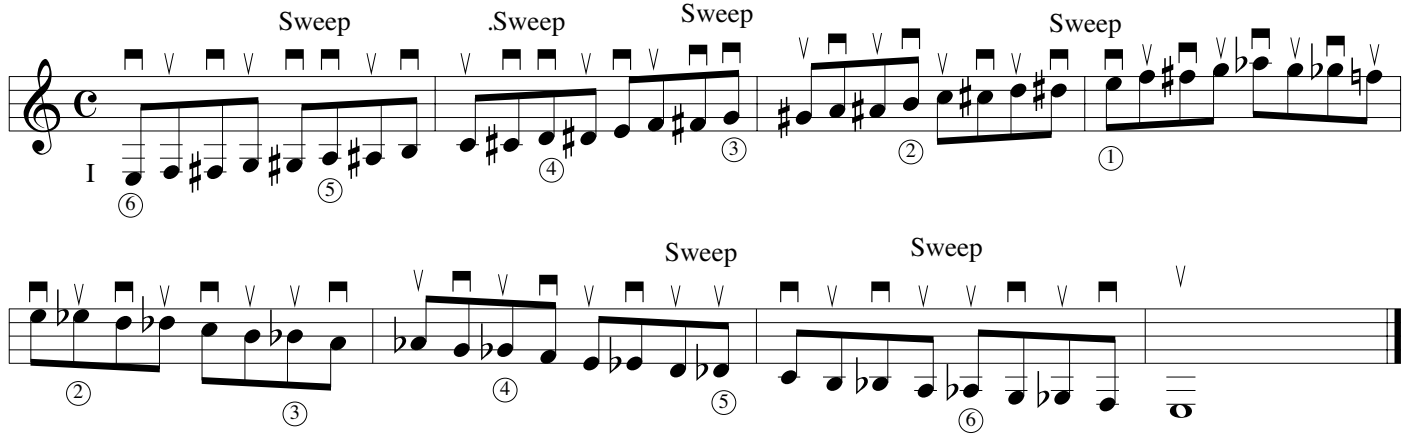


The well-known and highly technically proficient American guitarist, Jimmy Bruno, has suggested another dialect of economy picking to me. His “rules” are quite simple.

“When you go to a higher string, it’s a downstroke.
When you go to a lower string it’s an upstroke.”

This technique will precipitate frequent sweeps across several strings, depending on the passage of course, but it often also creates several more of the awkward string skips that my style of economy picking is designed to avoid. Jimmy’s thing does allow you to sort of go on autopilot in the same way that alternate picking does, so it may prove to be a more effective technique for improvising than the type of economy picking that I have presented in this book. I have not worked on Jimmy’s technique enough to know whether it will be useful to me, but Jimmy sure sounds good with it! I suggest that you try all the exercises in this book using Jimmy’s style of economy picking as well as my own.

Ex. VII.B.4-2 Chromatic Scale With Jimmy Bruno Style Economy Picking



Frank Gambale also has some fabulous materials on Sweep Picking, as does Jack Zucker, (<www.sheetsofsound.net>).

C. The Major Scales

The following series of exercises will simply map out where all the notes of all the major scales, and of all the major triad arpeggios built on the tonics of those scales, happen to fall under the fingers when the hand is placed in Position I. These are, as all position-style fingerings are, simply automatically generated fingerings based solely on hand position. They are not necessarily the “best fingerings”, or even good fingerings, for these scales. They simply ARE. They exist. You should know about them. You should train your hands and your head to be able to play them. What you do with them after you’ve learned them is your own business. These fingerings are great for developing finger independence and strength. Position-style scale fingerings are also a great tool for sight-reading, as we shall see later.

You will find that some of these fingerings become second nature to you right away. Some of them will always be difficult, and you’ll learn to avoid them for as long as you play the guitar. Most of the difficult ones will become easier, and more useful to you, over time.

Play the exercises with strict alternate picking, as well as with the economy picking that is indicated. Also try strict reverse alternate picking, and Jimmy Bruno style economy picking. Treat all the exercises in this book in this same way with regards to picking.