

IX. Position-Playing

A. The Chromatic Scale In Pos. V

B. The C Major Scale In 12 Positions

By following the rules of position-playing (as discussed earlier in Chapter IV. - H. Position-Playing On Single Strings and in Chapter VII. - A) it is possible to derive a movable finger pattern (i.e. a transposable finger pattern, because it uses no open strings) for any single note structure (be it a scale or an arpeggio or a melody) based solely on the hand's position at any given time.

Position-playing is really a concept for studying the possible fingerings of single-note lines on the guitar fretboard and, in its strictest application - as detailed here, it was invented by William G. Leavitt (as far as I can tell). If you really want to understand this concept I suggest that you go through his 3 volumes of *A Modern Method For Guitar* as well as his 2 volumes of *Sight-Reading Studies For Guitar* (Berklee Press). That's where I got this stuff. I am only briefly touching on this complex concept in my book.

This is an important concept and skill for an improvising guitarist to have. By studying this technique you will develop the ability to be able to start any new musical ideas you have at whatever fretboard position your hand happens to be in when you have your idea. Practicing in-position helps train you to intuitively know where under your fingers the melodies you are hearing happen to be. Practicing in-position helps you to develop finger independence and strength. Practicing in-position can do wonders for your sight-reading abilities because it puts you on an almost equal footing with instruments like the piano, where there is only one spot to play any particular pitch. Practicing melodic improv within a single position, can help you see how arpeggios link-up between chords in a way that would not be apparent if you were using the entire fretboard.

Position playing is certainly not "the correct way to play". Many young guitarists fall prey to this misconception, probably because position playing IS such a very powerful tool, and because it is conceptually similar to ideas like barre chords and the novice blues player's notion of "box" playing. But if you played and stayed in a single position for any length of time, your phrasing would likely sound very stiff. In actuality, finding a good fingering for a passage is about finding a fingering that lets you phrase things musically. This usually involves a liberal use of hammer-ons, pull-offs, glissandi, bends, etc.,; things that usually can not be accomplished *unless* you shift position A LOT. So, don't be afraid to shift position when the phrasing dictates it.

There are 12 possible position-style fingerings for the major scale. Seven of these are pretty comfortable for most players. The five remaining patterns are a little trickier but should be learned anyway. They have their uses too. First off, we will learn the C maj scale in all 12 possible position patterns (Positions II thru XIII.)

Use alternate picking at first. But once you're comfortable with the scale patterns try the economy picking as indicated. Try consistent reverse alternate picking too. (See Chap VII.-B-1, 2, 3 and 4.)

Ex. IX.A-1: The C major scale in Pos. II.

s = finger stretch

Pos. II

Note: This is one of the seven comfortable fingerings that most players know. It has two 1st-finger stretches, one on the 1st string and a corresponding stretch on the 6th string.

Ex. IX.A-2: The C major scale in Pos. III

The musical notation shows the C major scale in Position III. The scale is written on a single staff in treble clef with a common time signature. The notes are: C5 (5th fret, 5th string), D5 (4th fret, 4th string), E5 (3rd fret, 3rd string), F5 (2nd fret, 2nd string), G5 (1st fret, 1st string), A5 (open, 1st string), B5 (2nd fret, 2nd string), C6 (3rd fret, 3rd string), B5 (2nd fret, 2nd string), A5 (1st fret, 1st string), G5 (open, 1st string), F5 (2nd fret, 2nd string), E5 (3rd fret, 3rd string), D5 (4th fret, 4th string), C5 (5th fret, 5th string). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above the notes. Stretches are marked with 'V' and '1s' or '4s' above the notes. The strings are numbered 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 5 from left to right.

Note: This fingering uses only 1st finger stretches (except for the high B). In my experience 1st finger stretches work better than 4th finger stretches about 75% of the time, especially on scalar passages. 4th finger stretches are often more useful on certain arpeggios though. My advice is to use 1st finger stretches most of the time, unless you have to use a 4th finger stretch for one reason or another.

There are two spots in this fingering, when going up the scale, where a 1st finger stretch is immediately followed by a note 1 fret above it that also uses the first finger. This is a natural thing for your hand to want to do because after you stretch your 1st finger it naturally springs back in towards the other fingers. On the way down the scale though, this is a little more awkward. It takes a bit more effort to push your 1st finger down 1 fret to make a finger stretch, and then to play a note on a lower string with a different finger.

The musical notation shows the C major scale in Position III using only 4th finger stretches. The notes and string/fret assignments are the same as in Ex. IX.A-2. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above the notes. Stretches are marked with 'V' and '4s' above the notes. The strings are numbered 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 5 from left to right.

This fingering is also in Pos. III but I've used only 4th finger stretches. It's pretty tricky all the way through. The last part of the pattern (from the 4th string downward to the 6th string) makes sense though, because it avoids the awkwardness discussed above with regards to 1st finger stretches where a half-step is involved.

The musical notation shows the C major scale in Position III using a combination of 1st and 4th finger stretches. The notes and string/fret assignments are the same as in Ex. IX.A-2. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above the notes. Stretches are marked with 'V' and '1s' or '4s' above the notes. The strings are numbered 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 5 from left to right.

In this position, the above fingering is one I sometimes prefer (although I usually use the 1st of the 3 fingerings). It uses 1st finger stretches on the way up and 4th finger stretches on the way down, but only when a 1st finger stretch would be clumsy due to a half-step preceding the stretch.

Note: The patterns for the C major scale in Pos III are not among the group of 7 comfortable fingerings. But the upper strings are fairly logical because the outlines of a C maj triad grip are so readily seen at this spot on the fretboard. What is often called for, in this area of the fretboard, is a combination of Pos. II or Pos. IV along with Pos. III.

Ex. IX.A-3: The C major scale in Pos. IV

The musical notation shows the C major scale in Position IV. The scale is written on a single staff in treble clef with a common time signature. The notes are: C5 (5th fret, 5th string), D5 (4th fret, 4th string), E5 (3rd fret, 3rd string), F5 (2nd fret, 2nd string), G5 (1st fret, 1st string), A5 (open, 1st string), B5 (2nd fret, 2nd string), C6 (3rd fret, 3rd string), B5 (2nd fret, 2nd string), A5 (1st fret, 1st string), G5 (open, 1st string), F5 (2nd fret, 2nd string), E5 (3rd fret, 3rd string), D5 (4th fret, 4th string), C5 (5th fret, 5th string). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above the notes. Stretches are marked with 'V' and '1s' above the notes. The strings are numbered 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 5 from left to right.

Note: The above pattern IS one of the 7 comfortable fingerings. Notice how it uses the same finger sequence (1-2-4) on every string except the B string. (6th string: 1s-2-4, 5th: 1s-2-4, 4th: 1s-2-4, 3rd: 1-2-4, 2nd: 2-3, 1st: 1s-2-4)

Ex. IX.A-4: The C major scale in Pos. V

Pos. V

Note: This IS one of the 7 regular fingerings. It needs a finger stretch for the note “B” on the 3rd line of the staff. On the way up the scale, I’ve used a 1st finger stretch. On the way down the scale I’ve used a 4th finger stretch because of the half-step involved. Practice all 3 possibilities (i.e. all 1st finger stretches, all 4th finger stretches, and as written).

Ex. IX.A-5: The C major scale in Pos. VI

Pos. VI

Note: This is not one of the 7 comfortable fingerings, although the 3rd and 4th strings are sort of interesting. What is often called for, in this area of the fretboard, is a combination of Pos. V or Pos. VII with Pos. VI.

Ex. IX.A-6: The C major scale in Pos. VII

Pos. VII

Note: This IS one of the 2 most comfortable fingerings. It has no finger stretches at all.

Ex. IX.A-7: The C major scale in Pos. VIII

Pos. VIII

Note: This is not one of the most comfortable fingerings, although the upper strings are quite sensible because the outlines of a C major triad grip are seen so readily. What might be called for, in this area of the fretboard, is a combination of Pos. VII or Pos. IX with Pos. VIII. Try it with only 1st finger stretches, only 4th finger stretches, as well as as written.

Ex. IX.A-8: The C major scale in Pos. IX

Pos. IX

Note: This IS one of the 7 normal fingerings. Notice again the common finger sequence on all but the 2nd string. It does not involve any 4th finger stretches.