

27 REASONS TO PRACTICE THE CLASSICAL GUITAR WITH THE RIGHT HAND ALONE

Part 5

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21. Test possible fingerings for any passage

Sometimes there may be several right-hand fingerings for a piece or passage. We could test the fingerings practicing with both hands together, but often the best fingering will become apparent more quickly if we practice with the right hand alone without the distraction of the left hand. And, as mentioned before, if the left-hand configurations are difficult (such as bars or stretches), your hand will probably tire out before you can thoroughly test all the right-hand fingerings. In some cases, you may injure the left hand if you hold the complicated configurations for too long.

I will illustrate the efficiency of practicing with the right-hand alone, even on a relatively easy piece. Here are the first four measures of *Study 5* from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6*, by Fernando Sor. Example #1:

Example 1.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measures 1-4.

The musical notation for Example 1 consists of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 1 and 2, and the second system covers measures 3 and 4. Each system has a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. Below the treble staff is a guitar-specific notation with three staves labeled T (Treble), A (Alto), and B (Bass). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and fingerings (1, 2, 3, 0). A dashed line with a circled '2' above it indicates a second fingering option for the first measure of the first system.

Two possible right-hand fingerings immediately spring to mind. First, a basic arpeggio fingering using "p," "i," "m," and "a." Example #2:

Example 2.

Study 5 from Twelve Studies, Opus 6 (Fernando Sor), measure 1.

Arpeggio-style fingering, Option #1 with *pima*.

Or, we could omit the "a" finger (as Sor probably would have done) and use only "p," "i," and "m." Example #3:

Example 3.

Study 5 from Twelve Studies, Opus 6 (Fernando Sor), measure 1.

Arpeggio-style fingering, Option #2 with *pim* only.

You may tell me, "Doug, that is only two possibilities. It's no big deal for me to practice these two with both hands together to decide which I like best." Unfortunately, things are not simple and straightforward on the classical guitar.

Although we have two fingerings, we can play each fingering using four different techniques! So yes, now we have a total of eight possibilities, some of which will require extra practice to evaluate. If you try to test all these fingerings with both hands together, your left hand will tire before you get through the first four. Let's have a look.

If we use fingering Option #1, the least complicated technique is to use no planting and play the thumb free stroke. Example #4:

Example 4.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #1, *pima*.

The least complex technique: no planting and thumb free stroke.

p p i m a m p p i m a m

1 **No plant** **No plant**

Play both thumb strokes free stroke. Play both thumb strokes free stroke.

Here is how to practice it with the right hand alone on open strings. Example #4a:

Example 4a. Open strings.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #1, *pima*.

The least complex technique: no planting and thumb free stroke.

Practice on open strings with the right hand alone.

p p i m a m p p i m a m

1 **No plant** **No plant**

Play both thumb strokes free stroke. Play both thumb strokes free stroke.

The second technique is to use planting for stability. We can plant "ima" on the first three strings where we see the quarter rests. This choice adds a layer of complexity, but many players welcome the added confidence planting provides. Example #5:

Example 5.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #1, *pima*.

This technique is somewhat complex:

Plant "ima" on the quarter-rests. Thumb strokes are free stroke.

p p i m a m p p i m a m

1 Plant "ima"

Play both thumb strokes free stroke.

Plant "ima"

Play both thumb strokes free stroke.

T 3 2 0 1 0 1

A 3 2 0 1 0 1

B 3 2 0 1 0 1

Here is how to practice it with the right hand alone on open strings. Example #5a:

Example 5a. Open strings.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #1, *pima*.

This technique is somewhat complex:

Plant "ima" on the quarter-rests. Thumb strokes are free stroke.

Practice on open strings with the right hand alone.

p p i m a m p p i m a m

1 Plant "ima"

Play both thumb strokes free stroke.

Plant "ima"

Play both thumb strokes free stroke.

T 0 0 0 0 0 0

A 0 0 0 0 0 0

B 0 0 0 0 0 0

The third technique is to use no planting, but "drag" the thumb across the bass strings. Play the 5th string with rest stroke and the 4th string with free stroke. This technique adds a layer of complexity, but dragging the thumb may provide some players with added stability. Example #6:

Example 6.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #1, *pima*.

This technique is somewhat complex:
No planting but "dragging" the thumb.

p p i m a m p p i m a m

1 No plant

Drag the thumb: play the thumb rest stroke on the 5th string and then free stroke on the 4th string.

No plant

T A B

3 2 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1

Here is how to practice it with the right hand alone on open strings. Example #6a:

Example 6a. Open strings.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #1, *pima*.

This technique is somewhat complex:
No planting but "dragging" the thumb.
Practice on open strings with the right hand alone.

p p i m a m p p i m a m

1 No plant

Drag the thumb: play the thumb rest stroke on the 5th string and then free stroke on the 4th string.

No plant

T A B

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

The fourth technique is the most complex. We use planting AND drag the thumb. Once mastered, using both techniques provides the most stability and speed. Example #7:

Example 7.

Study 5 from Twelve Studies, Opus 6 (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #1, pima.

The most complex technique:

Plant "ima" on the quarter-rests and "drag" the thumb (play the 5th string rest stroke).

1 *p* *p* *i* *m* *a* *m* *p* *p* *i* *m* *a* *m*

Plant "ima" Plant "ima"

Drag the thumb: play the thumb rest stroke on the 5th string and then free stroke on the 4th string.

T
A
B 3 2 0 1 0 1 3 2 0 1 0 1

Here is how to practice it with the right hand alone on open strings. Example #7a:

Example 7a.

Study 5 from Twelve Studies, Opus 6 (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #1, pima.

The most complex technique:

Plant "ima" on the quarter-rests and "drag" the thumb (play the 5th string rest stroke).

Practice on open strings with the right hand alone.

I should point out that if you are a beginning or early intermediate guitarist, you may be unfamiliar with planting and dragging the thumb in this fashion. In the early stages of testing, you will decide it is much easier for you to do neither. But to improve your guitar playing, in the long run, it is vital that you master these techniques. Yes, they will feel awkward at first, but once learned, you may find that you prefer these over the initially more comfortable methods. Once your hand is "educated," THEN choose which techniques you want to use to play the piece. Plus, these techniques are essential, not a matter of choice, in other pieces and passages. You might as well master them early on.

Similarly, we have four techniques we can use to play fingering Option #2, the option that does not use the "a" finger. Once again, the least complicated technique is to use no planting and play the thumb free stroke. Example #8:

Example 8.
Study 5 from Twelve Studies, Opus 6 (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #2, pimi.

The least complex technique: no planting and thumb free stroke.

Here is how to practice it with the right hand alone on open strings. Example #8a:

Example 8a. Open strings.
Study 5 from Twelve Studies, Opus 6 (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #2, pimi.

The least complex technique: no planting and thumb free stroke.
 Practice on open strings with the right hand alone.

The second technique is to use planting for stability. We can plant "im" on the first two strings where we see the quarter rests. This choice adds a layer of complexity, but many players welcome the added confidence planting provides. Example #9:

Example 9.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #2, *pimi*.

This technique is somewhat complex:

Plant "im" on the quarter-rests. Thumb strokes are still free stroke.

p p p i m i p p p i m i

1 Plant "im"

Play the three thumb strokes free stroke.

Plant "im"

Play the three thumb strokes free stroke.

Here is how to practice it with the right hand alone on open strings. Example #9a:

Example 9a. Open strings.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #2, *pimi*.

This technique is somewhat complex:

Plant "im" on the quarter-rests. Thumb strokes are still free stroke.

Practice on open strings with the right hand alone.

p p p i m i p p p i m i

1 Plant "im"

Play the three thumb strokes free stroke.

Plant "im"

Play the three thumb strokes free stroke.

The third technique is to use no planting, but "drag" the thumb across the bass strings. Play the 5th string AND 4th strings with rest stroke and the 3rd string with free stroke. This technique adds a layer of complexity, but dragging the thumb may provide some players with added stability. Example #10:

Example 10.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #2, *pimi*.

This technique is somewhat complex:
No planting but "dragging" the thumb.

p p p i m i p p p i m i

1 No plant No plant

Drag the thumb: play the thumb rest stroke on the 5th string and 4th string and then free stroke on the 3rd string.

T 0 1 0 1 0 1
A 3 2 0 3 2 0
B 3 2 0 3 2 0

Here is how to practice it with the right hand alone on open strings. Example #10a:

Example 10a. Open strings.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #2, *pimi*.

This technique is somewhat complex:
No planting but "dragging" the thumb.
Practice on open strings with the right hand alone.

p p p i m i p p p i m i

1 No plant No plant

Drag the thumb: play the thumb rest stroke on the 5th string and 4th string and then free stroke on the 3rd string.

T 0 0 0 0 0 0
A 0 0 0 0 0 0
B 0 0 0 0 0 0

The fourth technique is the most complex. We use planting AND drag the thumb. Once mastered, using both techniques provides the most stability and speed. Example #11:

Example 11.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #2, *pimi*.

The most complex technique:

Plant "im" on the quarter-rests and "drag" the thumb (play the 5th and 4th strings rest stroke).

p p p i m i p p p i m i

1 Plant "im" Plant "im"

Drag the thumb: play the thumb rest stroke on the 5th string and 4th string and then free stroke on the 3rd string.

T 0 1 0 1
A 3 2 0 1 0 1
B 3 2 0 1 0 1

Here is how to practice it with the right hand alone on open strings. Example #11a:

Example 11a. Open strings.

Study 5 from *Twelve Studies, Opus 6* (Fernando Sor), measure #1. Fingering Option #2, *pimi*.

The most complex technique:

Plant "im" on the quarter-rests and "drag" the thumb (play the 5th and 4th strings rest stroke).

Practice on open strings with the right hand alone.

p p p i m i p p p i m i

1 Plant "im" Plant "im"

Drag the thumb: play the thumb rest stroke on the 5th string and 4th string and then free stroke on the 3rd string.

T 0 1 0 1
A 3 2 0 1 0 1
B 3 2 0 1 0 1

It may take a few days or even weeks to master all the techniques with fingering Option #2. And again, it will be much easier to test both fingering options and all the techniques if you practice the right-hand alone first.

Once you have mastered them, put both hands together. It will take only a day or two to determine which option and technique are best for you and the piece. The reason I say "and the piece" is that you may decide that although planting makes the piece easier to play and makes your playing feel more secure, you may not like the *sound* of the planting damping the ringing notes. Or, you may decide you don't like the *sound* of the thumb rest strokes. For me, the sound of the music is always the determining factor in every decision I make.

Next, let's look at how we can practice with the right hand alone to test possible fingerings on an advanced piece. The first three measures (each of which is repeated) of the *Allegro Solemne* from *La Catedral* by Agustín Barrios Mangoré uses this arpeggio configuration. Example #12:

Example 12.

Allegro Solemne from *La Catedral* (Agustín Barrios Mangoré). Measure #1.

When I teach this piece, I have the student test eight different right-hand fingerings. Once again, testing the fingerings while holding the chord will be very fatiguing to the left hand. As fatigue sets in, tension will transfer to the right hand. This transfer of tension will have a deleterious effect on the test results, rendering them meaningless.

Therefore it is essential to test right-hand fingerings on a passage such as this by practicing with the right hand alone.

Following are eight right-hand fingerings (there are more which I don't find useful) and how to practice them on open strings with the right hand alone.

Fingerings 1a and 1b use the "i" finger a little more than the other fingering options. They are fast fingerings, but the danger is that "i" could become fatigued. Fingering 1b alleviates that by changing one "i" to "m." Each also has an option to use or not to use the "a" finger. Example #13:

Example 13.

Allegro Solemne from *La Catedral* (Agustín Barrios Mangoré).

Fingering #1a:

Fingering #1b:

The difference

Here is how to practice it with the right hand alone on open strings. On the open-strings version, a note value changes to reflect the slur.

Note that you must practice all of the open-string exercises with the repeats. Repeating the measure over and over will replicate the experience of playing the passage with both hands together. Example #13a:

Example 13a. Open strings.
Allegro Solemne from *La Catedral* (Agustín Barrios Mangoré).

This note value is changed to reflect the slur (hammer-on).

Fingering #1a on open strings.

Fingering #1b on open strings.

The difference

Fingerings 2a and 2b use the "m" finger a little more than the other fingering options. They are fast fingerings, but the danger is that "m" could get fatigued. Fingering 2b alleviates that by changing one "m" to "i." Each also has an option to use or not to use the "a" finger. Example #14:

Example 14.
Allegro Solemne from *La Catedral* (Agustín Barrios Mangoré).

Fingering #2a:

Fingering #2b:

The difference

Here is how to practice fingerings 2a and 2b with the right hand alone on open strings. On the open-strings version, a note value changes to reflect the slur.

Note that you must practice all of the open-string exercises with the repeats. Repeating the measure over and over will replicate the experience of playing the passage with both hands together. Example #14a:

Example 14a. Open strings.

Allegro Solemne from *La Catedral* (Agustín Barrios Mangoré).

This note value is changed to reflect the slur (hammer-on).

Fingering #2a on open strings.

Fingering #2b on open strings.

The difference

Fingerings 3a and 3b are more conventional than the other fingerings, but for most players, are the slowest. After the first four notes, "i" plays the notes on the 4th string, "m" plays the notes on the 3rd string, and "a" plays the notes on the 2nd string. Example #15:

Example 15.

Allegro Solemne from *La Catedral* (Agustín Barrios Mangoré).

These two are fairly conventional fingerings but are the slowest.

Fingering #3a:

Fingering #3b:

The difference

Here is how to practice fingerings 3a and 3b with the right hand alone on open strings. On the open-strings version, a note value changes to reflect the slur.

Note that you must practice all of the open-string exercises with the repeats. Repeating the measure over and over will replicate the experience of playing the passage with both hands together. Example #15a:

Example 16.

English Dance (Ferdinand Carulli) measures 1-9.

Place the "a" finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger.

"a" anchor finger plucks the 1st string

Reset the "a" finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger.

"a" anchor finger plucks the 1st string

Before playing a single note, place the "a" finger on the first string. The "a" finger is the anchor finger. It stabilizes the hand, keeping the hand steady. It provides a spatial reference point. What I mean by that is, with "a" is on the first string, "m" and "i" can better feel where their second and third strings are.

In measure 4, we arrive at the high G on the second beat. Plucking the correct string is easy because the "a" finger is already on the string as the anchor. Plus, the tone quality should be excellent because the "a" finger anchor is already sitting on the string on the left side of the fingernail, with flesh and nail together—the sweet spot.

At measure 5, reset the "a" finger on the first string as the anchor. It remains there for the repeat. When you continue to the next section, the "a" finger anchor is already on the first string, ready to play the F on the first beat of measure 9.

For a beginning player, anchoring the "a" finger on the 1st string may seem awkward or unnatural. If so, practicing the technique on open strings is very helpful.

For the *English Dance*, we can construct an effective exercise by extracting the open strings from just the first two measures. Example #17:

Example 17. Open strings.

English Dance (Ferdinand Carulli) measures 1-2 on open strings.

Plant the "a" finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger. Leave it on the string.

Once you learn that, add the left hand for the first 3 ½ measures. Example #18:

Example 18.

English Dance (Ferdinand Carulli) measures 1-4.

Place the "a" finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger. -----

Next, in measure #4, learn how it feels to have the "a" finger already on the 1st string with the string seated against the fingernail on the left side, flesh and nail together. Then, feel the sensation of plucking the 1st string from that static position, without having to reposition the finger on the string. Here it is with both hands together. Example #19:

Example 19.

English Dance (Ferdinand Carulli) measure 4 hands together.

But it is best to practice it with the right hand alone on open strings to focus 100% on the "a" finger. Example #20:

Example 20.

English Dance (Ferdinand Carulli) measure 4 on open strings.

Then, practice measure #4 with both hands together.

The next and possibly most challenging problem in the passage occurs in the transition from measure #4-5 where we must re-plant the "a" finger on the 1st string at the same time we play the interval on the downbeat of measure #5 with "p" and "m." Example #21:

Example 21.

English Dance (Ferdinand Carulli) measure 4-5.

This transition is definitely a passage we should practice with the right hand alone, so we are not distracted by the left-hand chord change. Depending on our comfort level, we can practice just the boxed-in section or both measures together on open strings. Example #22:

Example 22.

English Dance (Ferdinand Carulli) measure 4-5.

Once the right hand feels confident, add the left hand. Speed is not an issue here. It is a problem of coordination and synchronization.

On other pieces, speed is an issue. I should point out that some people say that although they use anchor fingers for their many benefits, the anchor finger technique doesn't seem to increase their speed of execution. Others say it does.

Also, some players say the anchor finger resting on its string acts as a springboard and lends leverage to the movements of the other fingers and hand. It enables more efficient and synergistic use of all the mechanisms involved in playing.

What I think happens is that the increase in speed, real or imagined, is a result of the added stability, security, confidence, and accuracy anchor fingers provide. You will just have to test it yourself. Do some A-B tests of your speed on various passages with and without using an anchor finger. But, don't try to test it until you are totally comfortable, confident, and at ease with using the technique.

I have found the technique to be beneficial in *Leyenda* by Isaac Albéniz. In the opening measures, speed is not an issue, but even here, it's nice to have the added stability of the anchor. Example #23:

Example 23.
Leyenda (Isaac Albéniz) measures 1-4.

Plant the "a" finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger. Leave it on the string. -----

1

Play the open Bs with "i" or "m" or alternate "im"

3

Keep the "a" finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger.

Several measures later, in the tremolo section, using an anchor on the 1st string lends some real benefits in stability. And possibly, it gives the player the ability to play the part faster. Let's look at measures #25-28. Example #24:

Example 24.

Leyenda (Isaac Albéniz) measures 25-28. The beginning of the tremolo section.

The image displays the musical score for measures 25-28 of Isaac Albéniz's *Leyenda*, specifically the beginning of the tremolo section. The score is presented in two systems, each with a guitar staff and a corresponding tablature.

Measure 25: The guitar staff shows a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody begins with a half note chord (F#4, A4, C5) followed by a series of eighth notes. A red arrow points to the first eighth note (F#4) with the annotation "Plant the 'a' finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger." The tablature for this measure shows the strings (T, A, B) with fret numbers: T (7), A (7), B (9). The fret numbers for the eighth notes are: T (7), A (7), B (9) for the first eighth note; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the second; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the third; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the fourth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the fifth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the sixth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the seventh; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the eighth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the ninth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the tenth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the eleventh; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the twelfth.

Measure 26: The guitar staff continues the melody with eighth notes. A red arrow points to the first eighth note (F#4) with the annotation "Plant the 'a' finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger." The tablature for this measure shows the strings (T, A, B) with fret numbers: T (7), A (7), B (9). The fret numbers for the eighth notes are: T (7), A (7), B (9) for the first eighth note; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the second; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the third; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the fourth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the fifth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the sixth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the seventh; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the eighth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the ninth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the tenth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the eleventh; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the twelfth.

Measure 27: The guitar staff continues the melody with eighth notes. A red arrow points to the first eighth note (F#4) with the annotation "Plant the 'a' finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger." The tablature for this measure shows the strings (T, A, B) with fret numbers: T (7), A (7), B (9). The fret numbers for the eighth notes are: T (7), A (7), B (9) for the first eighth note; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the second; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the third; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the fourth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the fifth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the sixth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the seventh; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the eighth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the ninth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the tenth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the eleventh; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the twelfth.

Measure 28: The guitar staff continues the melody with eighth notes. A red arrow points to the first eighth note (F#4) with the annotation "Plant the 'a' finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger." The tablature for this measure shows the strings (T, A, B) with fret numbers: T (7), A (7), B (9). The fret numbers for the eighth notes are: T (7), A (7), B (9) for the first eighth note; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the second; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the third; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the fourth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the fifth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the sixth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the seventh; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the eighth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the ninth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the tenth; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the eleventh; T (7), A (7), B (9) for the twelfth.

Watch me demonstrate how to use the anchor finger technique in *Leyenda* in Video #8 from my technique tip on the anchor technique. Watch Video #1.

★ BE SURE TO WATCH ON FULL SCREEN. Click on the icon at the bottom on the far right:

How to Use an Anchor Finger on *Leyenda*



Learning to plant the anchor finger in this passage can be difficult. It will require many repetitions. There is no way you will want to practice this over and over, holding those bar chords! Therefore, practicing with the right hand alone on open strings comes to the rescue yet again. Here is the same passage with the open strings extracted. This exercise will be much easier to practice, and you will be able to focus on planting the "a" anchor finger without being distracted by the mechanics of the left hand. Example #25:

Example 25. Open strings.

Leyenda (Isaac Albéniz) measures 25-28. The beginning of the tremolo section, open strings extracted.

Plant the "a" finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger.-----, Plant the "a" finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger.-----,

25

Plant the "a" finger on the 1st string as an anchor finger.-----,

27

Practice slowly at first until any sense of awkwardness disappears. Then, practice faster and faster until you reach your target speed. Once the right hand has learned what to do, practice with both hands together. Begin slowly and then speed up to your target tempo. Alternate between practicing the passage with the right hand alone and both hands together, slow and fast. When practicing with both hands together, learn to switch your attention from the left hand to the right hand at will.

24. Apply articulation or staccato to a passage. Improve the clarity, degree, and control of the staccato.

The reason to practice staccato with the right hand alone is to master the basic technique. Practicing a staccato passage from a piece is best done with both hands together. Usually, the right hand will not be able to cut every note short. There will be a few that require the participation of the left hand. But still, practicing staccato on open strings with the right hand alone is a great way to learn to reduce noise and control the degree (the shortness of the notes) of staccato. For detailed information on staccato, see my three-part technique tip [How to Play Staccato](#).

That being said, here is an example where practice with the right hand alone can be very helpful. In *Bianco Fiore* by Cesare Negri, measure #3 is often played staccato to give the phrase a dance-like flavor. Example #26:

Example 26.

Bianco Fiore (Cesare Negri) measures 1-4.

♩=176

⑥=D

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Finger alternation is a valuable technique in playing staccato passages. Remember that most staccato is correctly produced by the right hand stopping the strings, not by the left-hand fingers lifting off the strings. In general, the right hand can produce a cleaner, more varied, and controlled staccato than the left hand.

Many players would play each interval in measure three with "p" and "m" and stop each interval (the staccato) with "p" and "m." But because we usually play the piece very fast, repeating the fingers would produce a lot of tension in the right hand and arm. A far better way is to alternate.

Here is how to play this measure staccato, step-by-step. But I warn you; it is complicated and somewhat overwhelming to have to learn the notes and the staccato technique at the same time. There is a shortcut I will explain shortly, but first, let's have a look at the entire process.

Step#1: Pluck the first interval with "p" and "m." Then, stop the sound of those two notes by immediately placing "p" and "i" on the fourth and first strings. Example #27:

Example 27. Staccato, Step #1.
Bianco Fiore (Cesare Negri) measure #3.

Pluck the first interval with "p" and "m"

Immediately set "p" and "i" on the 4th and 1st strings to stop the sound.

T 7 5 3
A 5 4 2
B 5 4 2

Step #2: Go ahead and pluck the second interval (F# and A) with "p" and "i" since they are already on the 4th and 1st strings from Step #1.
Example #28:

Example 28. Staccato, Step #2.
Bianco Fiore (Cesare Negri) measure #3.

Pluck the second interval with "p" and "i"

"p" and "i" are on the 4th and 1st strings.

T 7 5 3
A 5 4 2
B 5 4 2

Step #3: Stop the sound of the second interval by immediately placing "p" and "m" on the fourth and first strings. Example #29:

Example 29. Staccato, Step #3.
Bianco Fiore (Cesare Negri) measure #3.

3

4

m

i

m

p

p

p

7 5 3

5 4 2

Immediately set "p" and "m" on the 4th and 1st strings to stop the sound.

Step #4: Go ahead and pluck the third interval (E and G) with "p" and "m" since they are already on the 4th and 1st strings from Step #3.
 Example #30:

Example 30. Staccato, Step #4.
Bianco Fiore (Cesare Negri) measure #3.

4

m

i

m

p

p

p

7 5 3

5 4 2

Pluck the third interval with "p" and "m"

"p" and "m" are on the 4th and 1st strings.

Step #5: Stop the sound of the third interval by immediately placing "p" and "i" on the fourth and first strings. Example #31:

Example 31. Staccato, Step #5.
Bianco Fiore (Cesare Negri) measures #3-4.

Immediately set "p" and "i" on the 4th and 1st strings to stop the sound.

Step #6: Go ahead and pluck the trill in measure #4 with "p" and "i" since they are already on the 4th and 1st strings from Step #5.
 Example #32:

Example 32. Staccato, Step #6.
Bianco Fiore (Cesare Negri) measures #3-4.

Pluck the trill with "p" and "i"

"p" and "i" are on the 4th and 1st strings.

I warned you. It is complicated, right? But if we follow those five steps, we will ultimately master the passage. Unfortunately, there are so many details in each step, that learning them while also trying to play the left-hand notes is overwhelming.

Here is the shortcut I mentioned earlier. It is much easier to learn a passage like this if we practice the staccato technique with the right hand alone on open strings first. We can practice this basic exercise, which covers all the right-hand movements in the passage. Example #33:

Example 33. Staccato exercise on open strings.
Bianco Fiore (Cesare Negri) measures #3-4.

Plant "p" and "i" on the 4th and 1st strings

Plant "p" and "m" on the 4th and 1st strings

Plant "p" and "i" on the 4th and 1st strings

Practicing this exercise on open strings without the distraction of the left hand makes it much easier to understand what our right hand is supposed to do to play staccato. Alternate between practicing slowly and at tempo.

Once we learn the basic technique on the open strings and are confident of what our right hand should do, we can alternate between practicing the right hand alone and both hands together, slowly and at tempo.

Remember, when we begin by practicing the right hand alone, we can later integrate the left hand much more quickly.

25. Correct the alternation of the fingers.

Repeating a finger is not always a bad thing. See my technique tip, [Right-Hand Finger Alternation](#). But in many cases, repeating fingers, especially in a fast passage, can wreak havoc.

Sometimes we will unknowingly not follow an intended right-hand fingering in a passage because we are distracted by a problematic shift or stretch for the left hand. Because we are concentrating intently on the left hand, the right hand forgets what it is doing or tenses up in response to left-hand tension, resulting in incorrect fingering. If you correct the right-hand fingering, you will often find that the difficulties for the left hand lessen or disappear altogether.

For example, I had a student working on the *Courante* from Bach's *Lute Suite No. 1* (BWV 996), edited by Julian Bream. She was having a problem with this passage. Example #34:

Example 34.

Courante from *Lute Suite No. 1*, BWV 996 (J.S. Bach) measures #17-18. Edited by Julian Bream.

III

i m a

2 3 5 5 3 5 7 3 5 7 10

She had tremendous difficulty changing from the thirty-second notes at the end of measure #17 to the G major chord on the downbeat of measure #18. One's instinct would be to examine and work with the left-hand technique, which is what she had done all week.

But her problem was actually with the *right* hand. She was so focused on her left hand that she did not realize she was using "m" to play both thirty-second notes. The tension thus produced in the right hand added stress to the left hand. When we corrected the right-hand fingering, she was able to play the passage with greater ease.

By the way, she could also have changed the fingering and used a slur from the G to the A. That would sound fine but could have caused a whole new set of problems to solve because of the slur.

The problem spot requires a full bar plus the large stretch to play the G chord. I wanted her to focus on the right hand and not fatigue her left hand, so we extracted the open strings. Example #35:

Example 35.
Courante from *Lute Suite No. 1, BWV 996* (J.S. Bach) measures #17-18. Edited by Julian Bream.
 Open strings extracted:

You can see this is a lot easier to practice than to hold the bar chord and the nasty stretch. And, we can focus totally on the right hand.

Once she was comfortable with the right-hand alone exercise (which she practiced slowly and as a speed burst), she added her left hand. She alternated practicing between both hands together and the right hand alone. She mixed slow practice with speed bursts. When playing both hands together, she also developed the ability to switch her focus at will from the left hand to the right hand to be sure she was alternating the fingers. She solved her problem.

Let's look at an easier piece. I have another student who recently learned *Study No. 4, Op. 35* by Fernando Sor. We were using the following fingering. Example #36:

Example 36.

Study No. 4, Op. 35 (Fernando Sor) measures #1-4.

She was having trouble following the right-hand fingering and was not alternating the fingers. She was too distracted by the left hand to pay much attention to the right hand. So, we extracted the open strings. Example #37:

Example 37.

Study No. 4, Op. 35 (Fernando Sor) measures #1-4.

Open strings extracted.

We broke it down:

1. We practiced only measure #1 to the downbeat of measure #2 with the right hand alone. When she was solid with that, we added the left hand. She practiced slowly and at a medium tempo.
2. Next, we practiced measure #2 to the downbeat of measure #3. Again, she practiced the right hand alone, both hands together, slowly, and faster.
3. Using the same practice process, we combined measures #1 to the downbeat of measure #3.
4. Then, we learned measure #3 to the downbeat of measure #4.
5. Finally, we combined all four measures.

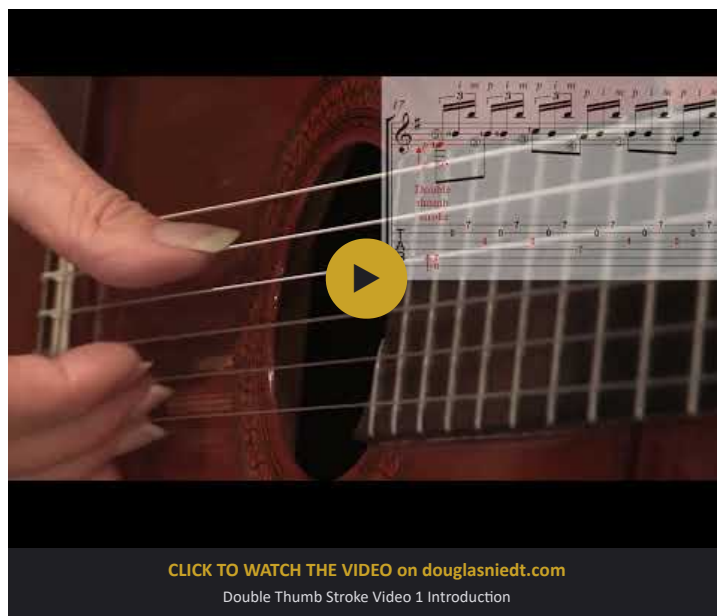
We had to go back and apply additional practice to some elements, but in two weeks, her right hand learned the correct fingering, so she no longer repeated any fingers.

26. Apply and improve the use of double thumb-strokes.

For complete information about what these are and how to play them, see my technique tip, [How to Play the Double Thumb Stroke](#). Here is Video #1 from that technique tip explaining the basics. Watch Video #2.

★ BE SURE TO WATCH ON FULL SCREEN. Click on the icon at the bottom on the far right:

Double Thumb Stroke Video 1 Introduction

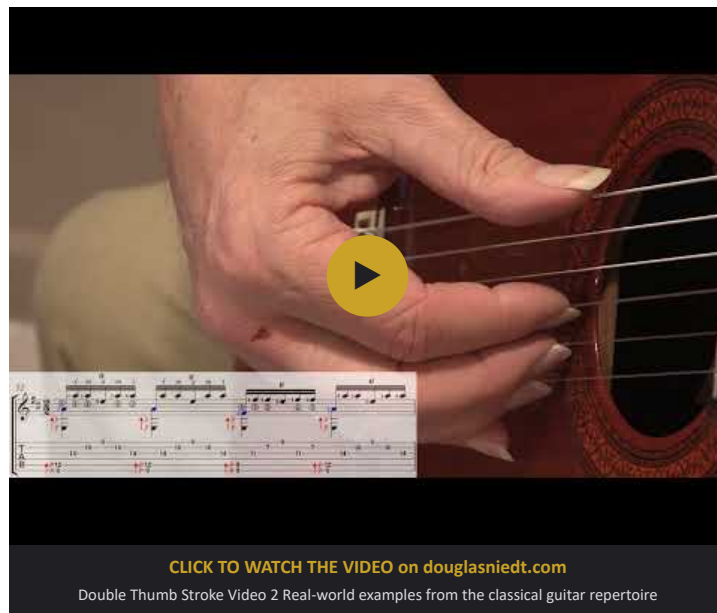


We can use the technique in many pieces. Here, in Video #2 from that same technique tip are some examples. Watch Video #3.

★ BE SURE TO WATCH ON FULL SCREEN. Click on the icon at the bottom on the far right:

Double Thumb Stroke Video 2

Real-world examples from the classical guitar repertoire

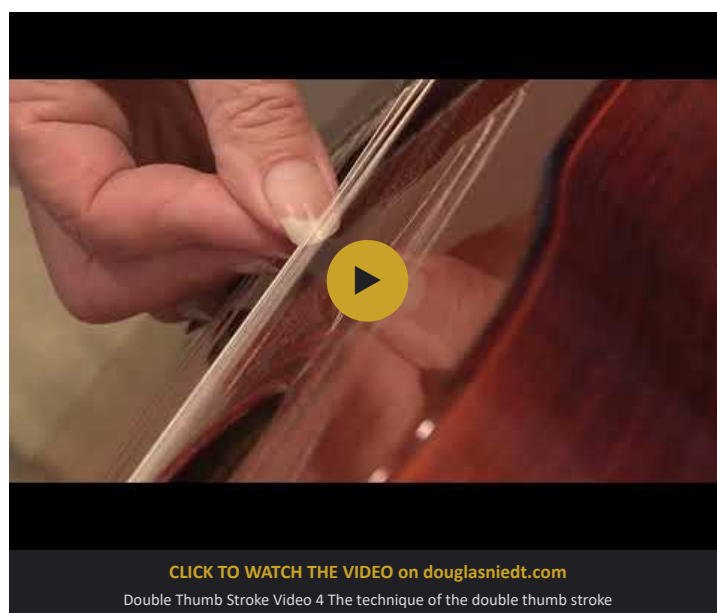


And here is Video #4 from that tip explaining how to execute the technique. Watch Video #4.

★ BE SURE TO WATCH ON FULL SCREEN. Click on the icon at the bottom on the far right:

Double Thumb Stroke Video 4

The technique of the double thumb stroke



It is a somewhat complicated technique and requires focus and quite a bit of finesse. Therefore, on any interval, chord, or passage that employs this technique, it is almost always best to extract the open strings and practice with the right hand alone so you can give your full attention to the right-hand thumb.

Once the thumb is "educated," add the left hand but keep your attention focused on the right hand for best results.

27. Increase your overall confidence in performing a piece by knowing your right-hand fingerings and techniques as thoroughly as you know the left hand.

When we learn a piece, we tend to focus on left-hand fingerings. There is rarely any doubt as to which finger we intend to use to play each note. But many guitarists let the right hand "find its own way," making few conscious decisions about specific fingering. That is a grave error. Bad right-hand fingering can cause dysfunctional tension in the right hand, inaccurate playing by the right hand, transfer of tension from the right hand to the left hand (causing inaccurate playing in the left hand), loss of speed, and poor tone quality.

Leaving right-hand fingering up in the air or allowing the right-hand fingers to just "do their thing" is a recipe for disaster, especially under the stress of live performance.

As you are learning a piece or passage, practice the right hand alone. You will gain tremendous confidence knowing that you are choosing and following the best right-hand fingerings for that piece or passage. The fingering will be locked in as it is for the left hand with no second-guessing or doubt.

Write your right-hand fingerings in your music

You must make one additional commitment. Write your right-hand fingerings in the music. This step is so important. Most of us are reasonably diligent about writing our left-hand fingerings in our music. *But most of us fall short on writing down our right-hand fingerings.* One way to dramatically improve your playing is not only to purposefully choose your right-hand fingerings but WRITE THEM DOWN. If you don't, you will forget them. I don't care if you're young or old—right-hand fingering is notoriously difficult to remember.

Then, *be sure you are following the fingering you have written down.* Many times we will choose a good right-hand fingering. But we all know that fingers have minds of their own. Sometimes they will do a different fingering from the one we have chosen. If we have our fingerings written down, we can periodically check to be sure our hand is following them.

Here are four more reasons to write down your right-hand fingering:

1. If you have found two or three fingerings that might work, write them all down so you can experiment over time with them. If you don't write them down, you will probably forget the options.
2. When you discover two or three fingering options, you will usually choose the one that immediately works. But things change. For example, as you increase the tempo of the piece or change dynamics, the option that initially seemed to be best may fail. One of your other options may work better. If you have them written down, you can retest them without having to try to remember what they were.
3. Sometimes you will learn a piece and later drop it for a few months or even years. But if you have meticulously written in your fingerings, you won't have to start all over to recall your original fingerings.
4. When you make conscious fingering decisions and write them down, your fingers are more likely to follow them.

Congratulations!

If you read all five parts of this technique tip, you read 123 pages, studied 125 musical examples, and watched 21 videos. Congratulations! If you skipped over some text, didn't study some of the musical examples, and didn't watch the video examples, may the fleas of a thousand camels infest your armpits. As penance, practice the Giuliani 120 arpeggio studies for three weeks and practice all your repertoire with a metronome. 🐜