

Alternate "m" and "a"

1. Set the thumb on the 5th string. Leave it there. The pinky finger should hang loosely next to or slightly in front of the "a" finger.

2. Place all three fingers ("ima") between the 1st and 2nd strings. (Practicing on the second string makes the 1st string a boundary line that the fingers should not cross).

3. **Pluck** the 2nd string with "m". Allow it to IMMEDIATELY **return** to its starting position in front of the string by releasing the tension created when the finger plucked the string. Think: let go, empty the finger of tension, relax the finger. Use whatever phrase connects with you so that *gravity* pulls the finger back to its starting position. Do NOT forcibly push the finger back.

- Therefore, there is no follow-through. Well yes, you must follow-through to pluck the string, but THINK ZERO FOLLOW-THROUGH. Remember, *the release of tension in the finger should happen almost at the same time the string is plucked.*
- The finger should not travel past the 3rd string.
- Also, be certain the finger returns all the way in front of the string. Otherwise, a wasteful additional movement forward will be required to pluck the string again.
- Remember to "play on top" of the string. Don't pull across or from underneath.
- Make sure the "i" and "a" fingers are still hanging in place in their position between the 1st and 2nd strings.

4. **Pluck** the 2nd string with "a". Allow it to IMMEDIATELY **return** to its starting position in front of the string by releasing the tension created when the finger plucked the string. Think: let go, empty the finger of tension, relax the finger. Use whatever phrase connects with you so that *gravity* pulls the finger back to its starting position. Do NOT forcibly push the finger back.

- Therefore, there is no follow-through. Well yes, you must follow-through to pluck the string, but THINK ZERO FOLLOW-THROUGH. Remember, *the release of tension in the finger should happen almost at the same time the string is plucked.*
- The finger should not travel past the 3rd string.
- Also, be certain the finger returns all the way in front of the string. Otherwise, a wasteful additional movement forward will be required to pluck the string again.
- Remember to "play on top" of the string. Don't pull across or from underneath.
- Make sure the "i" finger is still hanging in place in its position between the 1st and 2nd strings.

5. Continue plucking the 2nd string alternating "m" and "a" VERY SLOWLY. Set your metronome at 70 or 72 for a quarter note (crochet). Play whole notes (semibreves). In other words, *the metronome will tick four times for each note you pluck.*

Practicing at 70 or 72 may seem like it is way too slow, but do it. It is important to be aware of the near-total relaxed state of the fingers and hand. The goal is to imprint on your brain that this is now the normal state of your hand when playing the guitar.

- During the time between plucking the string, feel how loose the fingers feel just hanging there in position. Do not ignore this step of *feeling the near-total relaxation of the fingers*. It is as important as the stroke itself.
- Be certain your head is in a position where you can clearly see the movements of the finger.
- Keep all three fingers ("ima") positioned together, always between the 1st and 2nd strings.

Be sure the "a" finger minds its manners! Sometimes it will fail to completely release its tension and therefore will not return to its starting position, or will follow-through too far, or even curl up.

STEP 3. PRACTICE PLAYING THREE STRINGS SIMULTANEOUSLY

This exercise is very good for increasing the player's awareness of the difference between the tension present in the fingers to pluck the strings (turning the tension switch "on") and the near total absence of tension immediately after (turning the tension switch "off").

1. Set the thumb on the 6th string. Leave it there. The pinky finger should hang loosely next to or slightly in front of the "a" finger.

2. Place the "a" finger between the 1st and 2nd strings. Place the "m" finger between the 2nd and 3rd strings. Place the "i" finger between the 3rd and 4th strings. (Playing the inner strings instead of the first three strings makes the 1st string a boundary line for the "a" finger).

3. **Pluck** the three strings simultaneously with "ima" (the thumb does not play).

Allow all three fingers to IMMEDIATELY **return** to their starting positions in front of their strings by releasing the tension created when the fingers plucked the strings. Think: let go, empty the fingers of their tension, relax the fingers. Use whatever phrase connects with you so that *gravity* pulls the fingers back to their starting position. Do NOT forcibly push the fingers back.

- Therefore, there is no follow-through. Well yes, you must follow-through to pluck the strings, but THINK ZERO FOLLOW-THROUGH. Remember, *the release of tension in the fingers should happen almost at the same time the strings are plucked*.
- The fingers should not travel past the next adjacent string.
- Also, be certain all three fingers return all the way in front of their strings. Otherwise, a wasteful additional movement forward will be required to pluck the strings again.
- Remember to "play on top" of the strings. Don't pull across or from underneath.

4. Continue plucking the three strings over and over VERY SLOWLY. Set your metronome at 70 or 72 for a quarter note (crochet). Play whole notes (semibreves). In other words, *the metronome will tick four times for each chord you pluck*.

Practicing at 70 or 72 may seem like it is way too slow, but do it. It is important to be aware of the near-total relaxed state of the fingers and hand. The goal is to imprint on your brain that this is now the normal state of your hand when playing the guitar.

- During the time between plucking the strings, feel how loose the fingers feel just hanging there in position. Do not ignore this step of *feeling the near-total relaxation of the fingers*. It is as important as the stroke itself.
- Be certain your head is in a position where you can clearly see the movements of the fingers.
- For most players, the three fingers will lightly touch each other at the tip segments. Do not consciously splay the fingers apart.

Feel the sensation that *the release of tension in the finger should happen almost at the same time the strings are plucked*. It happens so fast that the fingers and hand will feel relaxed both before and immediately after the stroke.

VIDEO #4: PLAY THREE STRINGS SIMULTANEOUSLY.



**Tech Tip Free Stroke Pluck Return Video 4 PLUCK THREE STRINGS
SIMULTANEOUSLY**

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