

AN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE OF LEFT-HAND FINGERING

How to Choose Left-Hand Fingering

By Douglas Niedt

Copyright Douglas Niedt. All Rights Reserved.

This article may be reprinted, but please be considerate and give credit to Douglas Niedt.

This important principle of left-hand fingering is pretty simple. It is pretty basic. HERE IT IS:

If the goal is to play smoothly, when two notes fall consecutively on two different strings, always use two different fingers to play the two notes.

Here is another way to say it: When you move consecutively from one string to another, always use two different fingers to make the change.

The concept is not complicated. And it is not difficult to apply the principle to your pieces. It just requires a bit of thought when you work out your fingerings.

While the principle is not complicated, WATCH THE VIDEOS to fully understand *how to implement it into your pieces*.

I don't care how carefully you try to connect the notes, even on adjacent strings, if you try to use the same finger on both notes, there will always be a slight gap between the two notes. We don't want that. Our goal is to play legato. In other words, we want to connect our notes smoothly and seamlessly.

It doesn't matter if the notes fall on adjacent strings, or if they fall on strings that are spaced widely apart. It doesn't matter which fingers you are using. It doesn't matter if a shift is involved. Our principle of left-hand fingering tells us, whenever possible, to use two different fingers to move from one string to the next. Do not hop a single finger from string to string. If you do, your playing will sound choppy.

Jumping a finger from one string to another not only produces choppy playing but also leads to mistakes. If you jump a finger from one side of the fretboard to the other, there is a good chance the finger will miss the jump. By using two separate fingers, you improve your accuracy.

In printed music, and music you come across on the internet, you will often find editions with substandard or flawed fingering. You will find countless instances where this important principle of left-hand fingering is ignored. In most cases (but not all), those instances can be fixed.

Let's have a look at how to use this principle of left-hand fingering in actual pieces in the videos that follow.

Specifically, I will use examples from:

- *Minuet* by Georg Philipp Telemann
- *Lágrima* by Francisco Tárrega
- *Leyenda (Asturias)* by Isaac Albéniz
- *Julia Florida (Barcarola)* by Agustín Barrios Mangoré

Video #1: Introduction

Video #1 is a short introduction to this important principle of left-hand fingering.

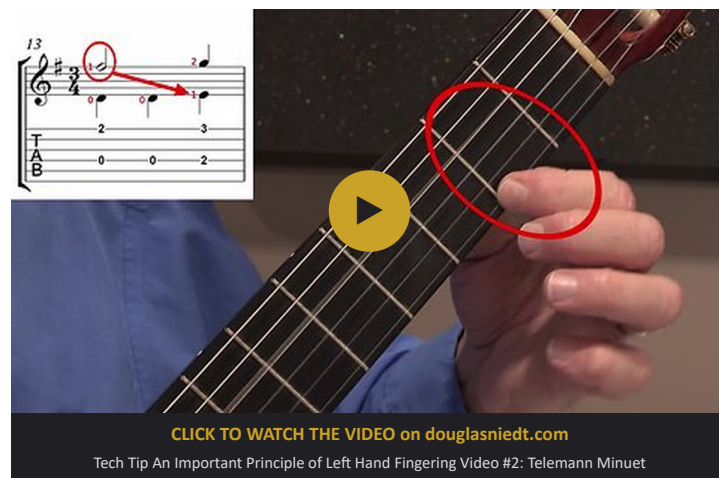
Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #1: Intro



Video #2: The Telemann Minuet

Scores and excerpts from the video are below. Be sure to watch full screen so you can read the fingerings!

Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #2: Telemann Minuet



Minuet by Georg Philipp Telemann

These musical examples are all in the video. However, I have reprinted them below in case you want to examine them more carefully.

For those who might want to learn the entire piece, go to the downloads section at the end of the article. Two versions are available, one in standard notation only and one in standard notation plus tab.

Part 1: Measures 1-8

Minuet by Georg Philipp Telemann (Part 1, no fingering)

The image shows the first part of the minuet, measures 1 through 8. Measures 7 and 8 are marked as first and second endings. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) with fret numbers (0, 1, 2, 3) and fingerings (1, 2, 3).

Measures 2-3

Minuet by Georg Philipp Telemann (Part 1)
A common but flawed fingering

The image shows measures 2 and 3 of the minuet, with first and second endings. Red boxes and text highlight specific fingering issues: "1st finger must jump" and "3rd finger must jump going to next measure". The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) with fret numbers (0, 1, 2, 3) and fingerings (1, 2, 3).

Measures 4-5

4 Solution #1 for measures 4-5 *Minuet*

0 0 2 0 1 3 0 3

4 Solution #2 for measures 4-5 *Minuet*

The musical notation shows a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The guitar tablature below shows fret numbers for each note.

Tablature (TAB):

Measure 4: 0, 0, 2, 0, 1

Measure 5: 3, 0, 3

4 Solution #3 for measures 4-5 *Minuet*

The image shows a musical score for measures 4 and 5 of a Minuet. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is written for guitar, with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melody with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, and G5. The bass staff contains a bass line with notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, and G3. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above or below notes. A red '4' is written above the first note (G4) and a red '2' is written below the last note (G5). The guitar part is indicated by 'T', 'A', and 'B' on the left side of the bass staff.

Part 2

Measures 12-14

Minuet by Georg Philipp Telemann (Part 2, measures 10-14, no fingering)

The image shows a musical score for measures 10 through 14 of a Minuet by Georg Philipp Telemann. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is written for guitar, with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melody with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, and G5. The bass staff contains a bass line with notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, and G3. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. The guitar part is indicated by 'T', 'A', and 'B' on the left side of the bass staff.

Minuet by Georg Philipp Telemann (Part 2, measures 12-14)
A common but flawed fingering

The image shows a musical score for measures 12 through 14 of a Minuet by Georg Philipp Telemann. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is written for guitar, with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melody with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, and G5. The bass staff contains a bass line with notes G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F#3, and G3. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. A red box highlights a flawed fingering in measure 13, where the first finger is shown jumping from the 1st string to the 4th string. A red arrow points to this fingering with the text: "1st finger must jump from 1st to 4th string. That chops off the melody."

Solution for measure 13 *Minuet*

Now, the connection in the melody from F# to G is legato.

12

TAB

Measures 21-22

Minuet by Georg Philipp Telemann (Part 2, measures 20-23, no fingering)

20

TAB

Minuet by Georg Philipp Telemann (Part 2, measures 21-22)

A common but flawed fingering

3rd finger must jump from the 5th string to the 2nd string. That chops off the C bass note.

21

TAB

Solution #1 for measures 21-22 *Minuet*

21 (Lift 1st finger as you place 2nd finger.)

Solution #2 for measures 21-22 *Minuet*

21 (Lift 1st finger as you place 2nd finger.)

Video #3: *Lágrima* by Francisco Tárrega

Scores and excerpts from the video are below. Be sure to watch full screen so you can read the fingerings!

Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #3: *Lágrima* (Tarrega)

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #3: *Lágrima* (Tarrega)

Lágrima by Francisco Tárrega

These musical examples are all in the video. However, I have reprinted them below in case you want to examine them more carefully.

Part 2: Measures 9-11

Lágrima by Francisco Tárrega (Part 2, measures 9-11, no fingering)

This image shows the musical score for measures 9-11 of 'Lágrima' by Francisco Tárrega, specifically Part 2. The score is presented in standard notation (treble and bass staves) and guitar tablature (TAB). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure (measure 9) contains a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second measure (measure 10) contains a series of eighth notes. The third measure (measure 11) contains a series of eighth notes. The tablature is written below the standard notation, with numbers indicating fret positions. The score is labeled 'no fingering'.

Lágrima by Francisco Tárrega (Part 2, measures 9-11)
A common but flawed fingering

This image shows the musical score for measures 9-11 of 'Lágrima' by Francisco Tárrega, specifically Part 2, with a common but flawed fingering. The score is presented in standard notation (treble and bass staves) and guitar tablature (TAB). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure (measure 9) contains a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second measure (measure 10) contains a series of eighth notes. The third measure (measure 11) contains a series of eighth notes. The tablature is written below the standard notation, with numbers indicating fret positions. The score is labeled 'A common but flawed fingering'. A red box highlights the fingering in measure 10, with a red arrow pointing to the first finger. A red text box above the box says '1st finger must jump from the 3rd string to the 4th string and back to the 3rd string.' A red text box below the box says 'Very choppy.'

Lágrima by Francisco Tárrega (Part 2, measures 9-11)
Another common but flawed fingering

This image shows the musical score for measures 9-11 of 'Lágrima' by Francisco Tárrega, specifically Part 2, with another common but flawed fingering. The score is presented in standard notation (treble and bass staves) and guitar tablature (TAB). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure (measure 9) contains a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second measure (measure 10) contains a series of eighth notes. The third measure (measure 11) contains a series of eighth notes. The tablature is written below the standard notation, with numbers indicating fret positions. The score is labeled 'Another common but flawed fingering'. A red box highlights the fingering in measure 10, with a red arrow pointing to the first finger. A red text box above the box says '1st finger must jump from the 3rd string to the 4th string and back to the 3rd string.' A red text box below the box says 'Very choppy.'

Solution #1 for measures 10-11 *Lágrima*

10

TAB

0 1 0 0 2 0 0 0 0 0 0

2 5 4 2 2 4

7 5 4 2 4

or or

Solution #2 for measures 10-11 *Lágrima*

Video #4: *Leyenda (Asturias)* by Isaac Albéniz

Scores and excerpts from the video are below. Be sure to watch full screen so you can read the fingerings!

Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #4: Leyenda (Albeniz)

To move consecutively from one string to another, always use two different fingers. Don't hop a finger from string to string.



CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #4: Leyenda (Albeniz)

Leyenda (Asturias) by Isaac Albéniz

These musical examples are all in the video. However, I have reprinted them below in case you want to examine them more carefully.

Measure 25

Leyenda (Asturias) by Isaac Albéniz (measure 25)

Measure 25 of *Leyenda (Asturias)* by Isaac Albéniz. The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major, and features a VII chord. The guitar part shows a sequence of chords: p m i, p m i, p m i, p m i, p m i. The bass part shows a sequence of notes: 7, 7, 8, 9, 9, 7, 9, 9. The guitar part includes a red box highlighting the 3rd finger moving from the 5th string to the 4th string.

Leyenda (Asturias) by Isaac Albéniz (measure 25)
A common but flawed fingering.

Hopping the 3rd finger from the 5th to the 4th string increases the likelihood of missing the change. It can also cause the chord to be cut short.

The solution for measure 25, *Leyenda (Asturias)*

Measure 41

Leyenda (Asturias) by Isaac Albéniz (measure 41-42)

VII

VIII

p i a p i a p i a p i a

p i a p i a p i a p i a

TAB

Leyenda (Asturias) by Isaac Albéniz (measure 41)
A common but flawed fingering.

VII

41

p i a p i a p i a p i a p i a

Hopping the 3rd finger from the 5th to the 4th string increases the likelihood of missing the change.
It can also cause instability in firmly holding the chord.

TAB

The solution for measure 41, *Leyenda (Asturias)*

VII

Hopping the 3rd finger from the 5th to the 4th string increases the likelihood of missing the change. It can also cause instability in firmly holding the chord.

Measures 48-49

Leyenda (Asturias) by Isaac Albéniz (measures 45-49)

Leyenda (Asturias) by Isaac Albéniz (measures 48-49)
A common but flawed fingering.

The high B is severely chopped short because the 1st finger must jump from the 1st string to the 6th string.

Solution #1 for measures 48-49, *Leyenda (Asturias)*

Solution #2 (not in the video) for measures 48-49, *Leyenda (Asturias)*

Musical score for measures 48-49 of *Leyenda (Asturias)*. The score is written for guitar, showing the treble and bass staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and a solution for measures 48-49, marked with a red '7' and a red '1'.

Video #5: *Julia Florida (Barcarola)* by Agustín Barrios Mangoré

Scores and excerpts from the video are below. Be sure to watch full screen so you can read the fingerings!

Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #5: *Julia Florida* (Barrios)

Video thumbnail showing a close-up of a guitar player's left hand. The player is wearing a blue shirt and a ring. The video is titled "Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #5: *Julia Florida* (Barrios)". The text on the video says: "To move consecutively from one string to another, always use two different fingers to make the change." Below the text is a yellow play button icon. At the bottom, it says "CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com".

***Julia Florida (Barcarola)* by Agustín Barrios Mangoré**

These musical examples are all in the video. However, I have reprinted them below in case you want to examine them more carefully.

Measures 6-7

Julia Florida (Barcarola) by Agustín Barrios Mangoré (measures 3-7)

3 ⑥=D

5

Julia Florida (Barcarola) by Agustín Barrios Mangoré (measures 6-7)
A common but flawed fingering.

6 III ③

Choppy

The 1st finger must jump from the 2nd string to the 5th string. That chops the D melody note short.

Solution #1 for measures 6-7, *Julia Florida*

6 III ③

Connected

Solution #2 for measures 6-7, *Julia Florida*

Musical score for Solution #2 for measures 6-7 of *Julia Florida*. The score is in 8/8 time, key of D major (two sharps). Measure 6 starts with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps, and a time signature of 8/8. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is written in the bass clef. The melody for measure 6 is: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C#5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). The bass line for measure 6 is: D3 (half), A2 (half). Measure 7 starts with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps, and a time signature of 8/8. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is written in the bass clef. The melody for measure 7 is: D5 (quarter), C#5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The bass line for measure 7 is: D3 (half), A2 (half). A red box highlights the notes D5 and C#5 in the melody of measure 7, with the word "Connected" written above it. The score is labeled "III ③" at the beginning of measure 6.

Solution #3 for measures 6-7, *Julia Florida*

Musical score for Solution #3 for measures 6-7 of *Julia Florida*. The score is in 8/8 time, key of D major (two sharps). Measure 6 starts with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps, and a time signature of 8/8. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is written in the bass clef. The melody for measure 6 is: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C#5 (quarter), D5 (quarter). The bass line for measure 6 is: D3 (half), A2 (half). Measure 7 starts with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps, and a time signature of 8/8. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is written in the bass clef. The melody for measure 7 is: D5 (quarter), C#5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The bass line for measure 7 is: D3 (half), A2 (half). A red box highlights the notes D5 and C#5 in the melody of measure 7, with the word "Connected" written above it. The score is labeled "III ③" at the beginning of measure 6.

Video #6: BONUS FINGERING! *Julia Florida* (Barcarola)
by Agustín Barrios Mangoré

Scores and excerpts from the video are below.

Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #6: *Julia Florida* Bonus!

Video thumbnail for Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #6: *Julia Florida* Bonus!. The thumbnail shows a close-up of a person's left hand on a guitar neck. The hand is positioned over the fretboard, with the index finger pressing down on the string. A green circle highlights the index finger. A yellow play button icon is overlaid on the center of the image. In the top left corner, there is a small musical score snippet for measure 18, showing a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps, and a time signature of 8/8. The melody for measure 18 is: D5 (quarter), C#5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The bass line for measure 18 is: D3 (half), A2 (half). The text "CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com" is written in yellow at the bottom. Below that, the text "Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #6: *Julia Florida* Bonus!" is written in white.

BONUS FINGERING *Julia Florida (Barcarola)*

by Agustín Barrios Mangoré

These musical examples are all in the video. However, I have reprinted them below in case you want to examine them more carefully.

Measures 18-19

Julia Florida (Barcarola) by Agustín Barrios Mangoré (measures 17-19)

Julia Florida (Barcarola) by Agustín Barrios Mangoré (measures 18-19)
A common but flawed fingering.

The solution for measures 18-19, *Julia Florida*

Video #7: SUMMARY

Tech Tip An Important Principle of Left Hand Fingering Video #7: Summary

