

Anchor Fingers

By Douglas Niedt

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One of my students recently returned from the excellent master class (part of the Bowdoin International Music Festival) given annually by Ricardo Iznaola in Bowdoin, Maine. Ricardo encouraged my student to make more use of the anchor-finger technique. It's a technique I began using unconsciously many years ago. But, no one ever mentioned it. It was never written about in books or magazines. Teachers never brought it up. Since I never heard anyone talk about it, I thought maybe it was a crutch, and I shouldn't use it. Finally, I heard Christopher Parkening remark in a master class that he used the technique. So, I finally felt vindicated. Since then, I've heard it mentioned a few times, but it seems to receive little discussion.

The anchor finger technique may be defined as placing a right-hand finger (usually the "a" finger, but sometimes the pinky or "m") on a string while playing other strings. Setting the right-hand thumb on the guitar or on a string while playing other strings with the fingers, is a more well-known use of the anchor technique. I will describe it later.

Be sure to place the anchor finger in ready-to-play position—string in contact with flesh and left side of fingernail. This is important, because many times, the anchored finger will eventually pluck the string on which it is set.

 Watch how it's done in videoclip #1:



The use of anchor fingers differs from the planting technique in that the anchor finger might not play the string on which it is anchored. Or, if it does play the string, it happens sporadically, not in a pattern. Planting on the other hand, is done with the express purpose to have the finger on the string as preparation to pluck the string. It is usually used as part of a pattern of execution such as, most commonly, an arpeggio.

The Benefits of Using Anchor Fingers

1. Anchor fingers lend stability to the right hand, resulting in security and confidence. In situations such as public performance, the hand may shake from nervousness. The use of anchor fingers helps keep the hand steady, greatly increasing accuracy and confidence, thereby lessening performance anxiety.
2. At the same time they provide benefits such as stability and speed, anchors provide ancillary benefits such as string damping to clarify melodic lines or eliminate unwanted dissonances.
3. Increased right-hand stability often translates into increased left-hand accuracy.
4. The anchor finger serves as a spatial reference point, resulting in more accurate playing by the other right-hand fingers.
5. Speed.

6. Enhanced touch for better control of dynamics.
7. Control of tone color changes.
8. Improved tone quality.
9. Provide stability for the execution of descending slurs ("pull-offs").
10. Provide stability for the execution of ornaments.
11. Provide spatial reference points and stability for execution of harmonics.
12. Provide accuracy, security, and improved tone quality for strums with the thumb.
13. Provides stability for melodic passages executed by the thumb.

How It's Done

Ferdinand Carulli's *English Dance* provides a good example how the anchor finger technique works:

The image displays three staves of musical notation in 2/4 time, illustrating the anchor finger technique. The notation includes fingerings (i, m, a) and dynamic markings (f, p). Annotations explain the technique:

- Staff 1:** "a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger. The notation shows a sequence of notes with fingerings i, m, i, m, i.
- Staff 2:** "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string. "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor. The notation shows a sequence of notes with fingerings m, i, a, i, a, i.
- Staff 3:** "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string. The notation shows a sequence of notes with fingerings i, a, i, a, i, //.

Before playing a single note, the "a" finger is placed on the first string. That is the anchor finger. It stabilizes the hand, keeping the hand steady. It provides a spatial reference point. What I mean by that is, since "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. Playing the correct string is simple, because the "a" finger is already on the string as the anchor. Plus, the tone quality should be excellent because the "a" finger anchor has already been set on the string on the left side of the fingernail and flesh—the sweet spot.

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

Here is the entire piece with my indications for the use of anchor fingers:

The musical score is written in 3/4 time and consists of five measures. The annotations and musical details are as follows:

- Measure 1:** An annotation above the staff reads "a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger". The music begins with a half note G (first string) and a quarter note G (second string).
- Measure 2:** The music continues with a half note G (second string) and a quarter note G (third string).
- Measure 3:** The music continues with a half note G (third string) and a quarter note G (fourth string).
- Measure 4:** The music continues with a half note G (fourth string) and a quarter note G (fifth string). An annotation above the staff reads "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string".
- Measure 5:** The music continues with a half note G (fifth string) and a quarter note G (first string). An annotation above the staff reads "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor".

The score ends with a double bar line and the word "Fine".

The image displays four staves of musical notation for Carulli's *English Dance*. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. Annotations above the staves provide technical guidance:

- Staff 1: "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string (pointing to a sixteenth note), "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor (pointing to a subsequent sixteenth note). An "Or" indicates an alternative fingering.
- Staff 2: "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string (pointing to a sixteenth note), "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor (pointing to a subsequent sixteenth note), and "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string (pointing to a final sixteenth note).
- Staff 3: Continuation of the musical sequence.
- Staff 4: "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor (pointing to a sixteenth note), "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string (pointing to a sixteenth note), "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor (pointing to a subsequent sixteenth note), and "Or" indicates an alternative fingering. The staff concludes with "D.C. al Fine".

As usual, it is much easier to show you how to use the technique than to describe it in words.



Watch videoclip #2 as I demonstrate how to use anchor fingers on Carulli's *English Dance*:

A close-up photograph of a hand plucking a string on a guitar. A large yellow play button is overlaid in the center of the image. At the bottom of the image, the URL www.DouglasNiedt.com is displayed. Below the image, there is a dark grey banner with the text:

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com
 Douglas Niedt Tech Tip: Anchor Fingers Clip 2 - English Dance Full Demo

In a more advanced piece such as *Etude #7* by Matteo Carcassi, I would use anchors the same way:

The image displays three staves of musical notation for a piece of music, likely a guitar etude. Each staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and fingerings (i, m, i). Above the staves, there are annotations in quotes explaining the use of the 'a' anchor finger technique:

- Staff 1: "a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger. "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string. "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor.
- Staff 2: "a" STILL anchored on 1st string. "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string.
- Staff 3: "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor. "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string. "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor.

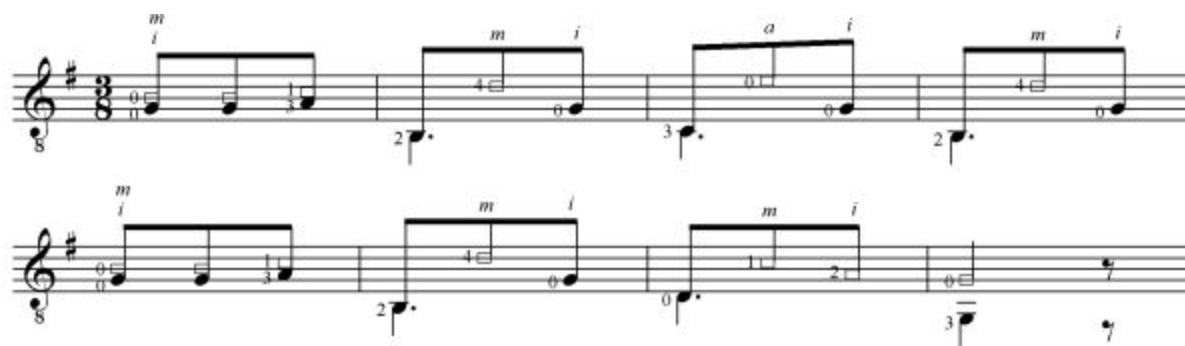


Watch videoclip #3:



Anchors Can Clarify the Melodic Line

One subtlety of the technique that must be taken into consideration, is exactly when to place the anchor finger on the string. Let's look at an example that on the surface seems simple and straightforward. Unfortunately, it's not. Here is Carulli's *Waltz in G*. I have indicated with hollow square note heads which notes comprise the melody:



Using anchor fingers can produce this result:

The image displays two musical staves in 3/8 time, illustrating the technique of using an anchor finger (finger 'a') on the first string.

Top Staff:

- Measure 2:** An annotation points to the first string: "a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger.
- Measure 3:** The melody is a quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8). An annotation points to the first string: Lift B and D from previous measure.
- Measure 4:** The melody is equal to dotted quarter-note. (Receives 3 beats in 3/8). An annotation points to the first string: "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string.
- Measure 5:** The melody is a quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8). An annotation points to the first string: "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, muting 1st string.

Bottom Staff:

- Measure 4:** An annotation points to the first string: "a" STILL anchored on 1st string.

Note how the use of the "a" finger anchor in measure 4 mutes the ringing open E from measure 3. This is a good thing—in classical period music of this type, we don't want the open E forming a dissonance against the second string D. But, note that there is a lack of uniformity in the rhythmic duration of the D to E to D. For many, that may be just fine. But, there are more possibilities.

To achieve a desired uniformity of sound, the melody notes in measures 2, 3, 4, and 6 could all be played as quarter notes. To do so requires that the open E in measure 3 be muted at the downbeat of measure 4. The solution? Place the "a" finger as an anchor on beat one of measure 4. It works out perfectly:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

Lift B and D from previous measure

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, muting 1st string

Melody is quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8)

Melody is quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8)

Melody is quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8)

"a" STILL anchored on 1st string

But, what if we want the melody to be completely sustained from note to note? If this is the desired effect, it is important not to place the anchor finger on the first string until beat two of measure 4. A completely sustained melody would be notated and executed as:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

DON'T lift D from previous measure

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, muting 1st string

Melody equal to dotted quarter-note. (Receives 3 beats in 3/8)

Melody equal to dotted quarter-note. (Receives 3 beats in 3/8)

Melody is quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8)

DON'T lift D from previous measure



Watch video clip #4 as I demonstrate these points:



Fernando Sor's *Etude #2* (Segovia edition) provides an excellent example of how the use of anchor fingers can serve double duty—not only providing stability but helping to clarify the melody by damping unwanted ringing notes. If we want to play the melody note values precisely as written, we could use anchor fingers as notated here:

"a" finger is placed as anchor on 1st string, which mutes previous open E

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E



Watch videoclip #5:

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Douglas Niedt Tech Tip: Anchor Fingers Clip 5 - Sor Study 2 Clarify Melody

Anchors=Right-Hand Stability=Left-Hand Accuracy

If you didn't want to use anchors as extensively as in the preceding example with the resulting string damping (for some, it's too "dry" a sound), anchors could still be used at key points in the piece. Keep in mind benefit #2 listed above: increased right-hand stability often translates into increased left-hand accuracy.

For instance, in Sor's *Etude #2* above, playing the ascending scale from measure 24 into 25 can be tricky. Using an anchor to stabilize the right hand gives the left hand more security, bringing much-needed stability to the passage:

The image shows a musical score for Sor's *Etude #2*, measures 24 and 25. The notation is in 2/4 time, with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The left hand plays a complex ascending scale pattern, while the right hand provides a steady accompaniment. Two annotations highlight the use of an anchor finger:

- An arrow points to the first measure of measure 24, stating: "a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger.
- An arrow points to the first measure of measure 25, stating: "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string.

The notation includes various fingerings (e.g., 0, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, #) and dynamic markings (e.g., *a*, *m*, *i*, *m*, *i*, *m*, *i*, *a*, *m*).



Watch how it works in videoclip #6:



Another example can be seen in measures 29-30. It is a difficult chord change for the left hand. But by anchoring the "a" finger on the first string, most of the difficulty for the right hand is neutralized. This allows total focus on the left hand. Because the right hand is stable, no right-hand tension is present that could transfer to the left hand to make its job more difficult:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

Lift 1st finger off of C# now, to go to 6th string low F



Watch me demonstrate in Video #7:



Speed

This benefit may be more of a byproduct of other factors, rather than inherent to the technique itself. I say this because some people say that although they use the technique for its many benefits, it doesn't seem to increase their speed of execution. Others say it does. 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 the technique provides. 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 very useful in Leyenda by Isaac Albeniz. In the opening measures, speed is not an issue, but even here, it's nice to have the added stability of the anchor:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

Open B's
"i" or "m" or
alternate "im"

"a" STILL anchored
on 1st string

Several measures later, in the tremolo section, the anchor begins to lend some real benefits in stability and in my opinion, speed:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

VII

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

VII

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

VII

"a" STILL anchored on 1st string



Watch me demonstrate these sections of Leyenda in videoclip #8:



Tone Quality, Dynamics, and Tone Color

The use of anchor fingers can improve your tone quality in a couple of ways. The most obvious is the same as in planting. If the finger is placed on the string before it has to play, plenty of time is available to set it precisely on its sweet spot--the left side of the fingernail and flesh. The other way tone quality is improved with the use of anchor fingers, is by the increased stability of the hand. With less extraneous hand movement and better spatial sense of where the strings are, the precision of placing the fingers on their sweet spot is greatly increased. It is far more difficult to hit that precise spot if the hand is moving around (even a small amount) or a finger is not exactly certain where its target spot is on the string.

The same points apply to playing loud and soft. Having a finger anchored on a string provides an incredible amount of security when trying to play very quietly—especially if you are nervous and your hand is already shaking. When trying to play loudly, the tendency is to make bigger finger movements. The entire hand also tends to get involved with the act of playing loudly. It starts to jump around or make small extraneous movements. Not only does it become increasingly difficult to control the volume level, but accuracy plummets as the hand movement increases. The anchor finger will lessen hand movement. Sometimes it will eliminate it altogether. I think that in loud playing, the leverage element of the anchor finger also comes into play. The slight pushes and pulls of the anchor against its string seem to enable the other fingers to confidently dig in more to their strings for greater volume while still retaining accuracy.

How many times have you tried to change tone color by moving the hand along the length of the string only to mess up the passage because your fingers began missing the strings? Let's look again at Sor's *Study #2*.

We would probably begin with a normal tone color. We could change to a bright tone color at the repeat of the melody at measure 9. Without an anchor, the right-hand fingers could easily lose their sense of where the strings are as the hand travels towards the bridge. But, with the "a" finger anchored on the first string, the problem is eliminated:

Normal tone quality--right hand at right side of soundhole (index finger over rosette)

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

"a" finger slides on first string toward bridge to guide right hand to the bridge

Bright tone quality--right hand is now playing close to bridge (sul ponticello)



Watch as I demonstrate in videoclip #9:



For a simpler example, let's look again at Carulli's *Waltz in G*. A common way to learn to execute tone-color changes is to change the color at the repeats:

First time: normal tone quality--right hand at right side of soundhole (index finger over rosette)

On repeat: dark tone quality--right hand over soundhole or at fretboard (sul tasto)

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

"a" finger slides on first string toward bridge to guide right hand to the bridge

Bright tone quality--right hand is now playing close to bridge (sul ponticello)

"a" STILL anchored on 1st string

"a" finger slides on first string toward fretboard to guide hand to sul tasto (dark) for repeat.

Once again, moving the hand toward the bridge for the bright tone color (called ponticello, which means at the bridge) without an anchor is very precarious. With the anchor, it is no problem.

Incidentally, the term ponticello (pronounced pone-tee-CHELL-oh) is Italian for bridge. Technically, to indicate to play close to or at the bridge for a bright sound, we should say sul ponticello. Its opposite is sul tasto—to play on or at the fingerboard. For guitarists this is often interpreted to mean to play over the soundhole, and is sometimes indicated with the word dolce (sweet).

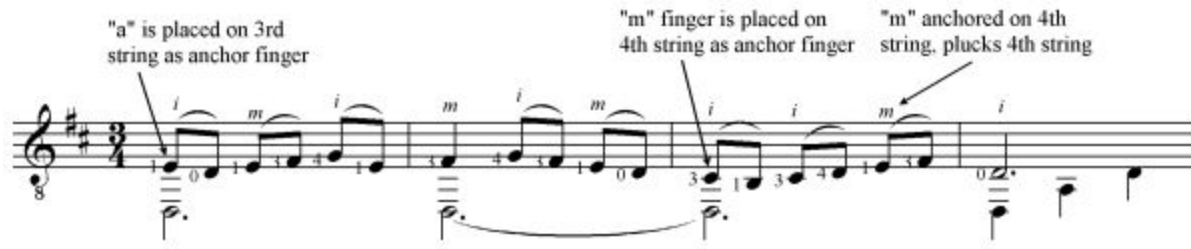


Watch videoclip #10:



Descending Slurs (Pull-offs)

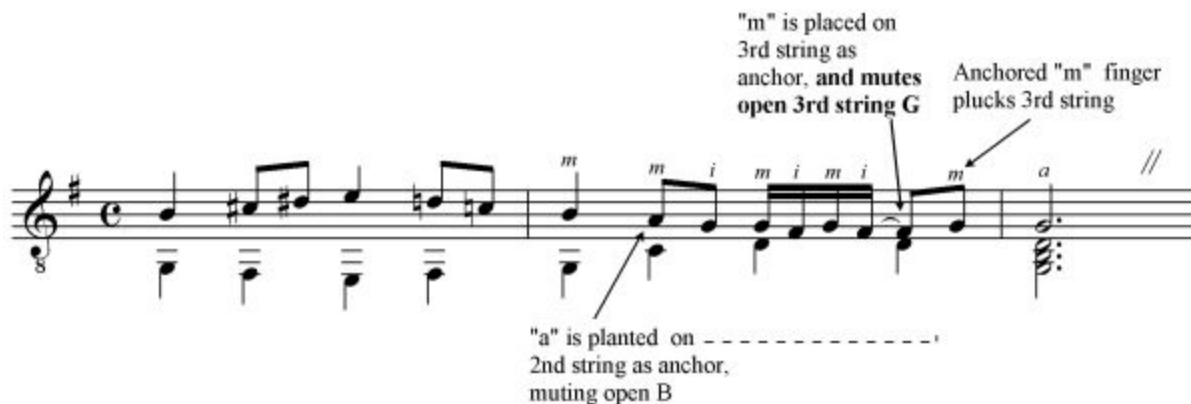
At first, you might think a right-hand technique would have little to do with a technique executed almost solely by the left hand. But, one of the most common uses of the anchor finger is in conjunction with descending slurs, often referred to by guitarists as pull-offs. In my lengthy tech tip on slurs, I explained the use of the right-hand fingers as safety stops or safety blocks. [Go here for a detailed explanation](http://douglasniedt.com/techtipslursmultipage3.html). See [//douglasniedt.com/techtipslursmultipage3.html](http://douglasniedt.com/techtipslursmultipage3.html) for a detailed explanation. But briefly, when doing pull-offs on the 2nd through 6th strings, there is a danger of producing an unwanted note from the adjacent higher string as a result of the pull-off or snap movement of the left-hand finger. The technique used to prevent the unwanted note is a safety stop (some call it a safety block.) The safety stop is done by damping (muffling or muting) the adjacent higher string. Safety stops are often done by the right hand using anchor fingers. The *Saltarello*, from *Six Lute Pieces of the Renaissance*, edited by Chilesotti, provides a great example:



The anchor finger not only serves the purpose of muting the string to prevent unwanted noises, but once again, by providing stability and confidence in the right hand, lends additional confidence and accuracy to left-hand execution.

Ornaments

Anchor fingers can facilitate the secure and clear execution of ornaments. Anchors' secondary benefit of string damping makes ornaments sound cleaner. Here is a cross-string trill at the end of the first section of J.S. Bach's *Bourree* from *Lute Suite No. 1* (BWV 996). The use of anchor fingers makes execution easier and mutes an unwanted open G at the end of the trill:



Watch videoclip #11:



The opening of Bach's *Courante* from the same lute suite can be particularly troublesome. Once again, anchor fingers to the rescue. The anchor fingers give a sense of security and confidence from the very first note, provide a crucial spatial reference point, and damp an unwanted open G:

"a" is placed on 2nd string as anchor for duration of passage -----

(The "i"s and "m"s can be reversed)

Ornaments written out in approximate rhythmic values

"m" is placed on 3rd string as additional anchor and to mute 3rd string open G

Anchored "m" plucks 3rd string

(Optional restrike of G suspension)



Watch videoclip #12 for a demonstration:



Anchor fingers deliver similar benefits on trills consisting of hammers and pull-offs. Here is a passage from *Bianco Fiore*, the second of the *Six Lute Pieces of the Renaissance*:

"a" finger is placed as anchor on 1st string, which mutes previous open E

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E

"a" STILL anchored on 1st string

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E



I will show you in videoclip #13:

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Douglas Niedt Tech Tip: Anchor Fingers Clip 13 - Bianco Fiore

Harmonics

As you are aware, the execution of any kind of harmonic requires delicacy of touch. They can be tricky to play well, even when practicing at home. In a high-pressure performance situation with shaky hands, passages of harmonics can be ruined by instability. Anything that can stabilize shaking hands and fingers is especially welcome.

The most commonly used anchor for playing harmonics is actually the thumb. In the well-known section of harmonics in Villa-Lobos' *Prelude No. 4*, the thumb, resting on a bass string, can serve as a stabilizer for the hand and spatial reference point for the fingers.

Rafaga, by Joaquin Turina, provides an excellent example of how an anchor finger can aid in playing natural and artificial harmonics in the same passage:

The image displays two staves of musical notation in 3/8 time, illustrating a technique for playing harmonics using an anchor finger.

Top Staff: Shows three measures. The first two measures contain chords. In the third measure, the first string is muted, indicated by a dashed line and the text: "a" finger is placed as anchor on 1st string, which mutes previous open E.

Bottom Staff: Shows three measures. The first measure has a natural harmonic at the 12th fret, with a circled 5 indicating the fifth harmonic. The second measure has a natural harmonic at the 7th fret, with a circled 4 indicating the fourth harmonic. The third measure shows an artificial harmonic on the 1st string at the 17th fret, with a circled 1 indicating the first harmonic. The text "a" finger anchor plucks artificial harmonic points to the 17th fret. The resulting pitch of the harmonic is shown as a note on the staff. A held note is also indicated on the 1st string.

In measure three, the anchor damps the first string open E. In measures 4 and 5, the anchor on the first string keeps the hand steady for the thumb to play the natural harmonics. In the final measure, the "a" finger travels lengthwise along the string toward the fretboard to guide the hand into position for the index finger to touch the first string at the 17th fret. The "a" finger is already on the first string to pluck it, producing the artificial harmonic.



Watch videoclip #14:



Strums

Anchor fingers perform several useful functions when strumming with the thumb. One function is to serve as a stop for the thumb. In the first of Chilesotti's *Six Lute Pieces of the Renaissance*, is a passage with two strums:

Set "a" on first string
as anchor before
beginning strum of
following chord

8

2 1 3

② //

By placing the "a" finger as an anchor on the first string, the thumb will not overshoot its strum, accidentally playing the first string. If it did follow through too far and play the first string, it wouldn't sound, because the string is muted by the anchor.



Watch as I explain in videoclip #15:



An anchor finger is very helpful in producing a strum with a good tone quality. The anchor stabilizes the hand and lends very fine control of the placement of the thumbnail on the strings and the angle and speed of the actual strumming motion. The melody to *Capricho Catalan* by Isaac Albéniz opens with a strummed chord. To ensure accuracy and a beautiful tone on this chord (the thumb must contact the strings at just the right spot), the "a" finger can be planted on the first string from the very beginning. The anchor, providing a spatial reference point, also helps the thumb jump accurately to the low A on the 5th string immediately after the strum:

Plant "a" on 1st string before beginning song

"a" finger anchor aids execution of strum and helps thumb find 5th string bass note



Watch videoclip #16:



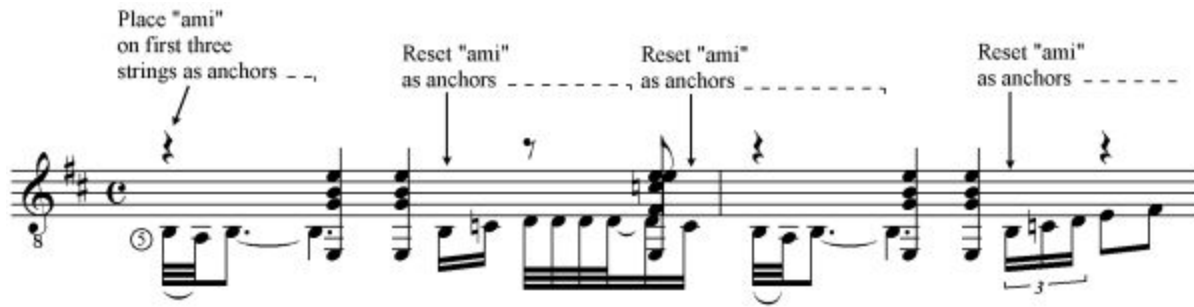
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Douglas Niedt Tech Tip: Anchor Fingers Video Clip 16 - Capricho Catalan Strum

Thumb Stability

In the second movement of Joaquin Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*, the thumb has a passage where it plays the melody:



By using anchor fingers on the treble strings, the thumb has better control and stability to play the melody with exquisite refinement.



Watch me demonstrate in videoclip #17:



The Thumb As Anchor

One of the most common anchoring roles of the thumb is to serve as an anchor in the execution of scales and melodic passages played by the fingers. Players seem to fall into two camps on where to anchor the

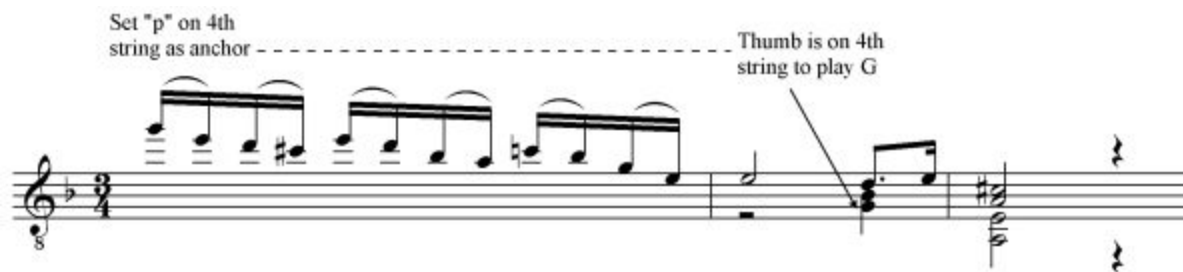
thumb. For fast rest-stroke scales spanning several strings, some players set the thumb on the rosette when they play the bass strings and on the sixth string when they play the trebles. Others let the thumb follow behind the fingers at a distance of two or three strings. If the passage only spans a few strings, the player will anchor the thumb wherever it is comfortable.



Watch me demonstrate in videoclip #18:



Many times, the thumb is planted on the string it will play next after the scale or melodic passage. The opening of Francisco Tárrega's Capricho Árabe is a good example:



In Fernando Sor's *Variations on a Theme by Mozart*, execution of the first several measures of Variation #1 is made easier by the use of the thumb as an anchor. It lends stability and confidence in the execution of the slurs and scales in the upper part, and helps keep the overall texture clean by damping bass strings:

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Variation #1 of Sor's *Variations on a Theme by Mozart*. Each system includes specific instructions for thumb anchoring and plucking techniques:

- System 1:**
 - Place thumb on 6th string as anchor
 - Thumb, anchored on 6th string, now plays 6th string
 - Place thumb on 5th string as anchor, but lean thumb back to mute open 6th string
- System 2:**
 - Thumb, anchored on 5th string, now plucks 5th string
 - Reset p on 5th string as anchor
 - Thumb, anchored on 5th string, now plucks 5th string
 - Place p on 4th string as anchor
- System 3:**
 - Thumb, anchored on 4th string, now plucks 4th string
 - Place thumb on 6th string as anchor
 - Thumb, anchored on 6th string, now plays 6th string



Watch videoclip #19:



I briefly touched on the use of the thumb as an anchor when playing harmonics with the other fingers. It can be especially useful in playing passages of artificial harmonics. Here is a passage from Enrique Granados' *Spanish Dance No. 5*. Anchoring the thumb on the 4th string would help guide the hand along the length of the string to execute the artificial harmonics—it would also position the thumb to play the 4th-string bass notes. Unfortunately, sliding the thumb along the length of the wound 4th string produces too much string noise. Therefore, we have to anchor the thumb on the 3rd string instead, and move the thumb to the 4th string to play the bass notes:

Place thumb on 3rd string as anchor -----

Reset thumb on 3rd string as anchor -----

Melody in artificial harmonics. Notes produced sound one octave higher than written.

Right-hand harmonic, 5th string 19th fret

Reset thumb on 3rd string as anchor -----

Reset thumb on 3rd string as anchor -----

Thumb, anchored on 3rd string, now plays 3rd string

Once again, the thumb anchors the right-hand playing mechanism for added control of the very fine movements required to play this type of harmonic.



Watch me demonstrate in videoclip #20:



Is There a Downside to Using Anchor Fingers?

The main difficulty in learning to use the anchor-finger technique, is that it takes quite a while to get used to. At first, it will seem to inhibit movements of the other fingers. Or, it will seem to be a lot of trouble for little benefit. But as with many things, once it is learned and becomes comfortable to use, you will wonder how you ever got along without it.

The other downside is that when using the "a" finger as an anchor on say the first string, a beginning or intermediate student will sometimes roll or lean their hand to the right. But with observation and reminders, it should be easy to correct.

Final Thoughts

When I began writing this tech tip, I thought I could crank it out in a page or two. But then I began thinking how I use anchor fingers. For me, it has become such an unconscious technique, that I didn't realize I used anchors in over a dozen ways in literally hundreds of pieces. It's another of those lesser-known techniques that will make a significant difference in your playing.