

How to Master String Crosses on Classical Guitar, Part 2 of 2

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Anticipatory Planting and Staccato Practice of String Crosses, String Crossings, or String Changes

Some teachers recommend anticipatory planting and staccato practice as an essential part of mastering string crosses. Both types of practice are designed to impart a feeling of security and stability by preplanting a right-hand finger on the new string before plucking it.

These are practice strategies to master string crossings and are not usually used in actual pieces, especially in fast passages.

Anticipatory planting with FREE STROKE

These techniques are a little easier to learn with free stroke at first. Let's look at Example #1:

Example #1. String crosses executed with anticipatory planting, playing each note 4 times.

1. Practice with these alternation patterns: im, mi, ma, am, ia, ai.
2. Begin with free stroke only.
3. Experiment with thumb positioning.
4. Move the forearm/shoulder to a new position for each string.
5. Maintain strict finger alternation.
6. Keep the hand the same distance from the bridge for each string.
7. Maintain the same angle of attack and fingernail contact point for the treble strings.
8. Maintain the same angle of attack and fingernail contact point for the wound bass strings (which may be different from that of the treble strings).
9. Anticipate and think about each upcoming string cross as you play the last repetition of a string.

Practice FREE stroke.

If you use thumb planting, at each string cross plant the FINGER FIRST—then reposition the thumb.

The musical notation consists of three staves in 4/4 time. Each staff contains a sequence of notes with fingerings 'i' and 'm' indicated above them. Red dots and the text 'Plant "i"' are placed below the notes to indicate where the index finger should be planted on the string before plucking. The first staff shows a sequence of notes on strings 1, 2, 3, and 4. The second staff shows a sequence of notes on strings 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1. The third staff shows a sequence of notes on strings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1.

As you can see, at each string cross, the next finger (in this case, "i") is preplanted on its string before it must pluck its string. This imparts stability and confidence that the string cross will be executed flawlessly.

Be certain to pre-plant the finger on the string with flesh and fingernail simultaneously. This will help to produce a good tone when the next string is plucked, with little extraneous noise.

Also, note that if you use thumb planting as described in Part 1, when using anticipatory planting with free stroke, it is best to preplant the finger on its string first, then reposition the thumb. (Rest stroke will be different.)

Here is the same exercise alternating "m" and "i" but starting with "m". Example #2:

Example #2.

Same as Example #1 but with "mi", starting with "m":

Practice FREE stroke.

If you use thumb planting, at each string cross plant the FINGER FIRST—then reposition the thumb.

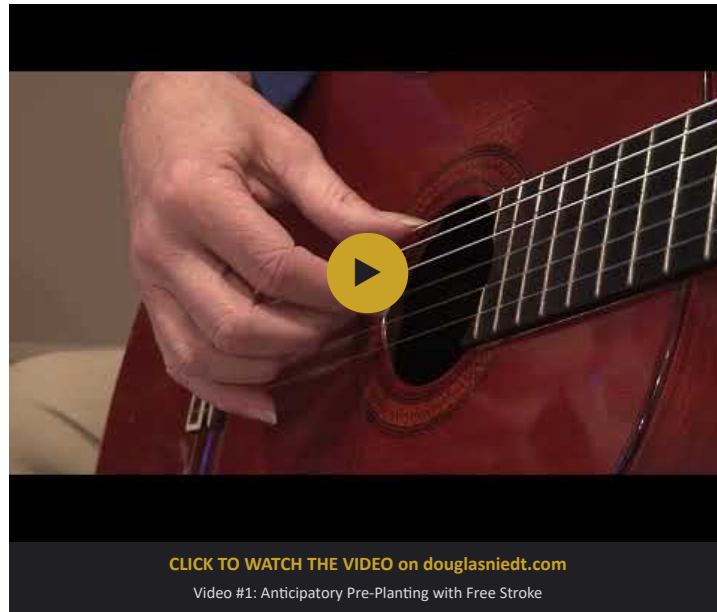
The musical notation consists of four staves, each containing a sequence of notes. Above the notes are letters 'm' and 'i' indicating the strokes. Red dots on the strings, labeled 'Plant "m"', indicate where the thumb should be planted. The first staff has three 'Plant "m"' markings. The second staff has four 'Plant "m"' markings. The third staff has two 'Plant "m"' markings. The fourth staff has one 'Plant "m"' marking.

For best results, practice the exercise free stroke with these patterns: im, mi, ma, am, ia, ai.

Watch me demonstrate in Video #1.

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #1: Anticipatory Pre-Planting with Free Stroke

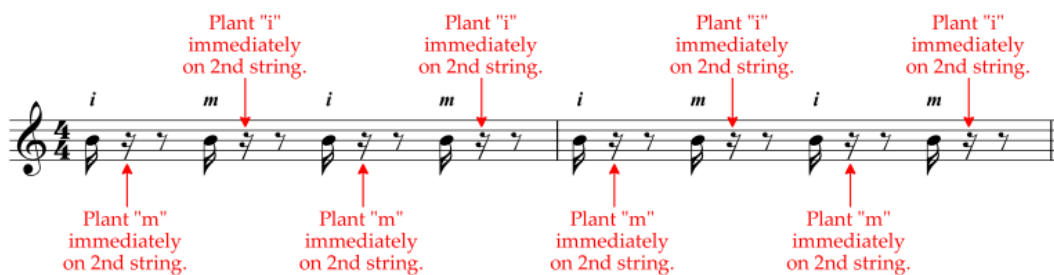


Anticipatory Pre-Planting PLUS Staccato

Practicing the previous exercise with staccato emphasizes the tactile awareness of anticipatory preplanting. First, a review of right-hand staccato. Example #3:

Example #3.

Right-hand staccato:



Right-hand staccato is executed as follows:

1. Pluck a string with finger "x".
2. Immediately damp the string with finger "y" by planting "y" on the same string.
3. Keep finger "y" on the string.
4. Then, finger "y" plucks the string.

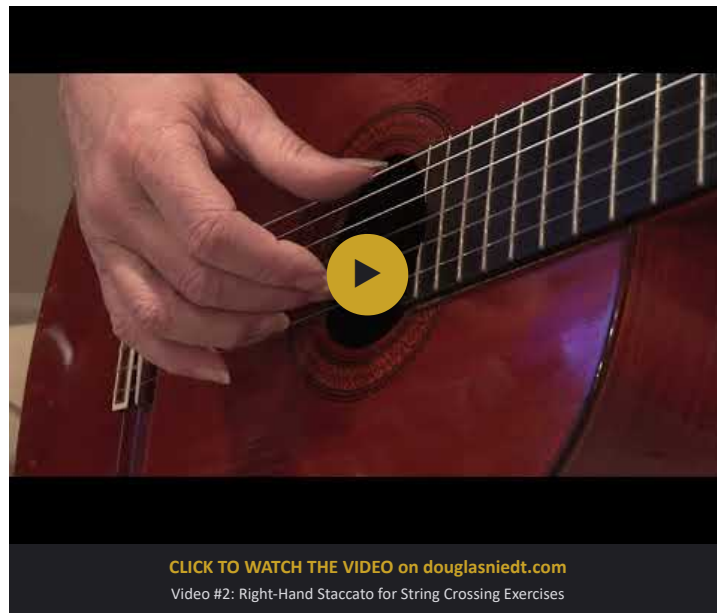
5. Immediately damp the string with finger "x" by planting "x" on the same string.
6. Keep finger "x" on the string.
7. Repeat the process.

When the damping finger lands on the string, it is important that it not contact the string with the fingernail first. If the fingernail touches the string before the flesh, extraneous string noise will be heard.

Watch me demonstrate right-hand staccato in Video #2:

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #2: Right-Hand Staccato for String Crossing Exercises



Now, let's apply the staccato technique to the anticipatory planting exercise. Note that in this exercise, the last note before a string cross will ring freely into the next measure. It will not be played staccato. Also, remember that if you use thumb planting as described in Part 1, when using anticipatory planting with free stroke, it is best to preplant the finger on its string first, then reposition the thumb. (Rest stroke will be different.) Example #4:

Example #4.

String crosses executed with right-hand staccato PLUS anticipatory planting. Play each note 4 times.

The image displays four staves of musical notation, each representing a string cross exercise. The notation is in 4/4 time and uses a treble clef. Each staff consists of a series of eighth notes, with the first note of each pair being an eighth rest followed by an eighth note. The notes are labeled with 'i' (indicating the first string) and 'm' (indicating the middle strings). Red dots on the notes are labeled 'Plant "i"', indicating the anticipatory planting technique. The exercises are as follows:

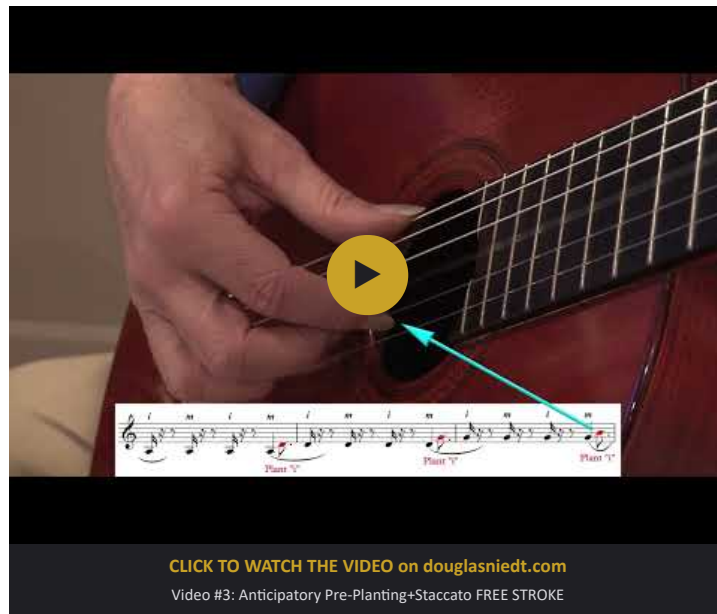
- Staff 1:** A sequence of eighth notes on the first string (i) and middle strings (m), with three 'Plant "i"' markings.
- Staff 2:** A sequence of eighth notes on the first string (i) and middle strings (m), with three 'Plant "i"' markings.
- Staff 3:** A sequence of eighth notes on the first string (i) and middle strings (m), with three 'Plant "i"' markings.
- Staff 4:** A sequence of eighth notes on the first string (i) and middle strings (m), with one 'Plant "i"' marking.

For best results, practice the exercise free stroke with these patterns: im, mi, ma, am, ia, ai.

Watch me demonstrate anticipatory pre-planting PLUS right-hand staccato using FREE STROKE in Video #3:

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #3: Anticipatory Pre-Planting+Staccato FREE STROKE



Anticipatory Pre-Planting Plus Staccato Practice with REST STROKE

The anticipatory planting plus staccato practice exercises should also be practiced rest stroke. The tactile feel of the techniques with rest stroke is very different and there are a few subtle differences in execution. If you use thumb planting as described in Part 1, one of the differences with using rest stroke with anticipatory planting is at what moment you reposition the thumb. When using rest stroke, the preplant of the finger on its string and the repositioning of the thumb should be done simultaneously. On free stroke the finger is planted first, and the thumb is repositioned second.

The sound of Example #4 with rest stroke will vary depending on whether the guitarist has thin fingers or thick fingers. See Example 4a:

Example #4a. The sound of Example #4 with rest stroke will vary depending on whether the guitarist has thin fingers or thick fingers.

Rest stroke. String crosses executed with right-hand staccato PLUS anticipatory planting.

The musical notation consists of four staves, each containing a sequence of eighth notes. Fingerings 'i' and 'm' are indicated above the notes. Red dots on the notes are labeled 'Plant "i"'. A blue annotation '*See below' points to a specific measure in the second staff.

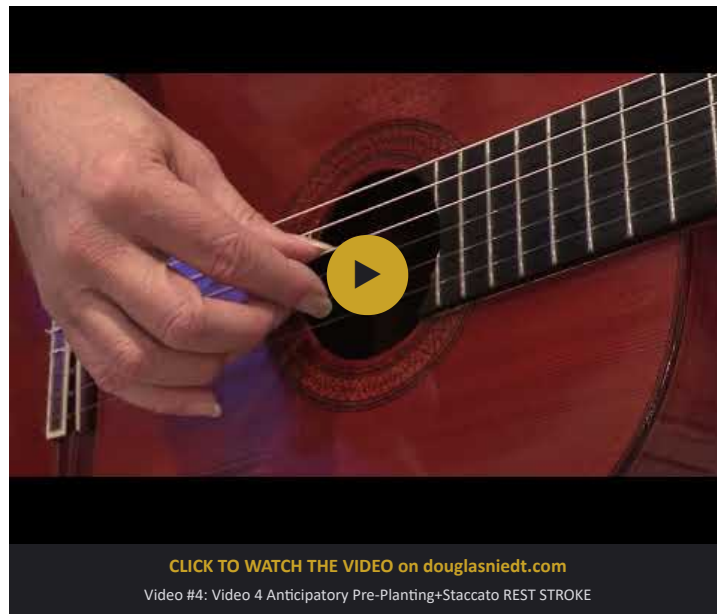
*If you have large or thick fingers, the ascent from the 6th string to the 1st string will sound like this instead. All the notes will be staccato. The last note of each measure will not ring as a quarter note.

The musical notation consists of two staves, each containing a sequence of eighth notes. Fingerings 'i' and 'm' are indicated above the notes. Red dots on the notes are labeled 'Plant "i"'. The notes are staccato, and the last note of each measure is not a quarter note.

Watch me demonstrate Exercise #4a using anticipatory pre-planting PLUS staccato with rest stroke. Video #4:

★ Be sure to watch on full screen. In the lower right corner of the video, click the full-screen icon:

Video #4: Video 4 Anticipatory Pre-Planting+Staccato REST STROKE



You Now Have the Skills to Move on to These Next Exercises

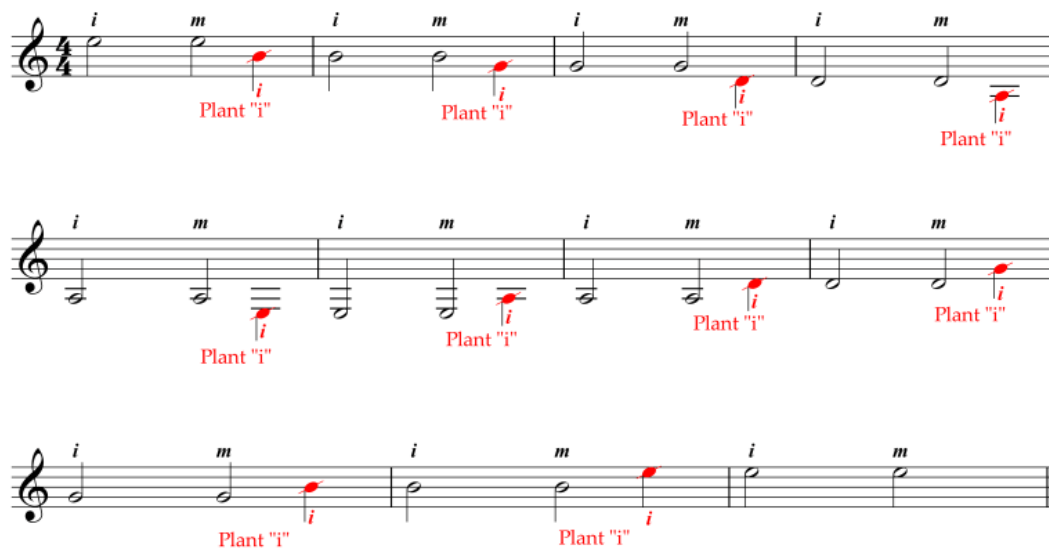
Practice these exercises playing each string only 2 times.

Example #5:

Next, play each string 2 times. Use anticipatory planting, no staccato.

Practice im, mi, ma, am, ia, and ai. Practice rest stroke and free stroke.

If you use thumb planting, remember to adjust the planting technique accordingly.



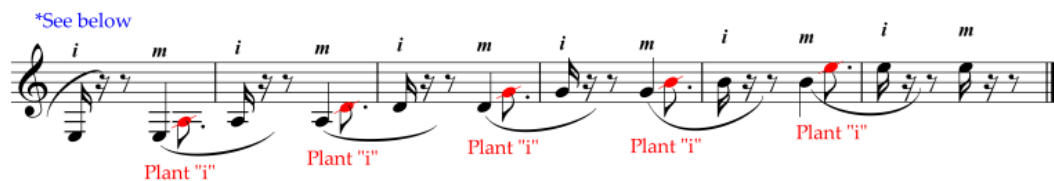
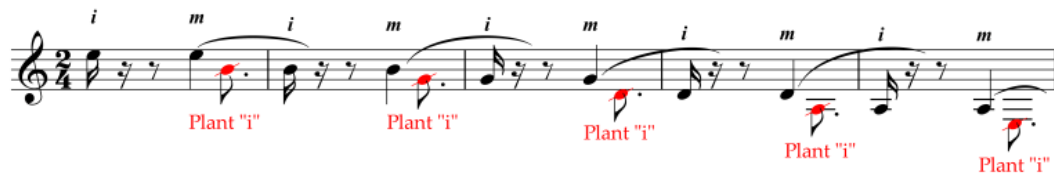
The image shows three staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. Each staff contains a sequence of eighth notes with fingerings (i, m) and red 'i' marks labeled 'Plant "i"'. The first staff has four measures, the second has four measures, and the third has three measures. The notes are on the first four lines of the staff, representing strings 1 through 4.

Example #6:

Next, play each string 2 times with anticipatory planting PLUS staccato.

Practice im, mi, ma, am, ia, and ai. Practice rest stroke and free stroke.

If you use thumb planting, remember to adjust the planting technique accordingly.

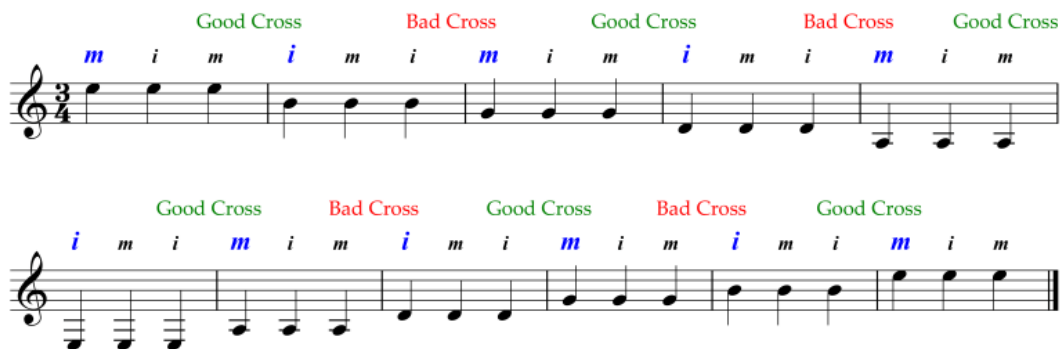


*If you have large or thick fingers, the ascent from the 6th string to the 1st string will sound like this instead. All the notes will be staccato. None will ring into the next measure as above.



You will recall from Part 1 that playing each string 3 times can be difficult and challenging. This is because each measure will start with a different finger and each string cross will alternate between being a good cross and a bad cross. Example #7:

Example #7:



Try anticipatory pre-planting using free stroke and then rest stroke on this exercise of notes in groups of 3. Example #8:

Example #8: Play each string 3 times. Use anticipatory planting.
Especially be certain to maintain strict finger alternation!

Practice FREE stroke first, then try rest stroke. If you use thumb planting, remember to adjust the planting technique accordingly. Practice with im, mi, ma, am, ia, and ai.

The first staff shows a sequence of notes with fingerings *i m i m i m i m i m i m*. Red arrows indicate planting for 'm' and 'i' strokes. The second staff includes a blue annotation '*See below' and shows a similar sequence with planting for 'm' and 'i'. The third staff continues the sequence with planting for 'm' and 'i'.

*When playing rest stroke, if you have large or thick fingers, the ascent from the 6th string to the 1st string will sound like this. The last note (in blue) of each measure will be cut short.

The staff shows a sequence of notes with fingerings *m i m i m i m i m i m i m i m i*. Red arrows indicate planting for 'i' and 'm' strokes. The last note of each measure is marked with a blue dot and a red arrow, indicating it should be cut short.

Now, practice groups of 3 notes with anticipatory pre-planting PLUS staccato. Learn the exercise with free stroke first, and then rest stroke.
Example #9:

Example #9: Play each string 3 times. Use anticipatory planting PLUS staccato. Especially be certain to maintain strict finger alternation!

Practice FREE stroke first, then try rest stroke. If you use thumb planting, remember to adjust the planting technique accordingly. Practice with im, mi, ma, am, ia, and ai.

Plant "m" Plant "i" Plant "m" Plant "i"

*See below

Plant "m" Plant "i" Plant "m" Plant "i"

Plant "m" Plant "i"

*If you have large or thick fingers, when using rest stroke, the ascent from the 6th string to the 1st string will sound like this instead. All the notes will be staccato. None will ring into the next measure as above.

Plant "i" Plant "m" Plant "i"

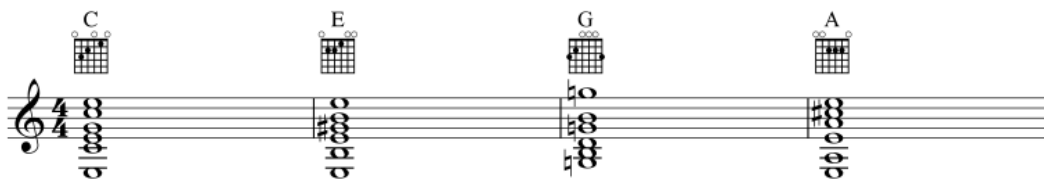
Plant "m" Plant "i"

Getting Bored Again?

As I pointed out in Part 1, if practicing nothing but open-string exercises starts to get on your nerves, you can certainly hold chords with the left hand for variety. Holding chords also has the benefit of varying the string tension to add a bit more reality to the exercises and thus improve the right-hand touch and control even more.

Once again, you could hold simple chords in first position. Example #10:

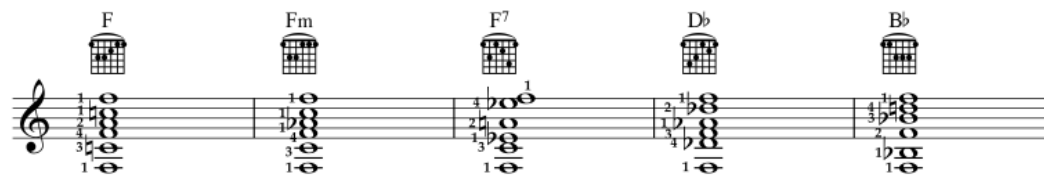
Example #10:



Or, if you want to challenge your left hand, you could hold a few nasty "monster" bar chords! Example #11:

Example #11:

Monster bar chords!



Remember, be careful. Don't hold these chords too long and strain your hand. Also, remember the focus is supposed to be on the right hand. Don't get distracted by the left hand!

Summary

1. String crosses, string crossings, or string changes occur in almost every piece you play.
2. In order to maintain consistent tone quality and control, one must maintain a consistent hand position as one traverses the strings by moving the hand from the forearm. The guitarist may move the forearm from the shoulder (recommended) or from the elbow.
3. The thumb may be planted on the guitar or the strings as needed to provide stability and act as a spatial reference point for the fingers.
4. The exercises in this article should be practiced with im, mi, ma, am, ia, and ai with both free stroke and rest stroke.
5. The exercises in this article are an excellent beginning to mastering string crossings. They will teach you the basic concepts and get you started on the correct path.
6. But ultimately, you will also need to extract specific passages from real pieces and practice them right-hand alone and both hands together for complete mastery.