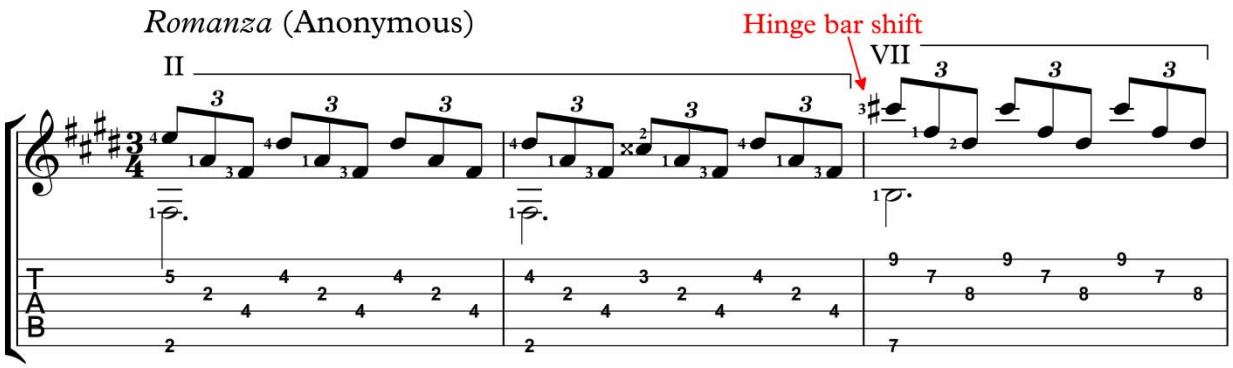
How to Use a Hinge Bar as a Guide Finger

By Douglas Niedt

A few years ago I wrote a lengthy technique tip about guide fingers. You can read it here. One technique I touched upon in the article was using hinge bars as guide fingers. I would like to explain the technique in more detail in this technique tip.

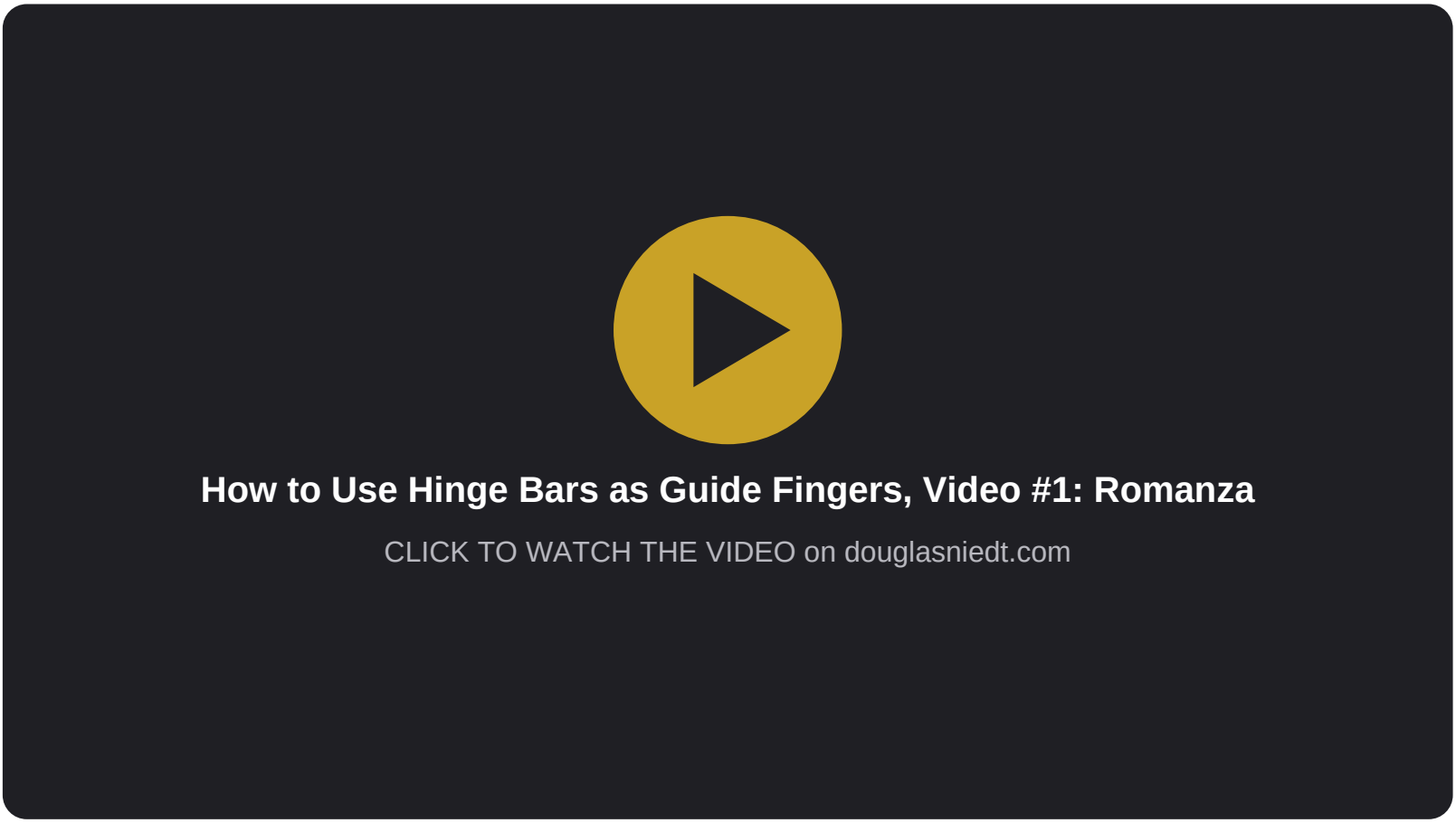
Let's look at a difficult chord change in the famous anonymous *Romanza* (also known as *Romance* or *Romance de Amor*).



It is usually not a good idea to use a full bar as a guide finger. Moving any bar up or down the neck with full or even reduced pressure creates heavy friction or drag. Freedom of movement is impaired. Usually, loud bass-string squeaks are produced.

In this example, it isn't a good idea to slide the full bar from the second fret to the seventh fret. The correct way to make the change in *Romanza* is to turn the full bar into a hinge bar at the moment of the shift, slide up, and then resume with a flat, full bar at the seventh fret. In other words, at the moment of the shift, *lift only the tip* of the bar finger off the bass strings. Keep holding the first string with the inner part of the bar finger. You now have a hinge bar. Slide this hinge bar along the edge of the fretboard to the seventh fret. As you reach the seventh fret, place the tip of the bar finger back onto the bass strings. You now have a full bar again. During the slide up the neck, the inner part of the bar finger should not lift off the first string. Maintain constant and secure contact with the edge of the neck. Using the hinge bar as a guide finger allows total mobility, creates very little drag, promotes speed of movement, and is very stable.

Watch me demonstrate.


How to Use Hinge Bars as Guide Fingers, Video #1: Romanza
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The technique is relatively simple. Watch me demonstrate the basics and how to practice it.

How to Use Hinge Bars as Guide Fingers, Video #2: The Technique

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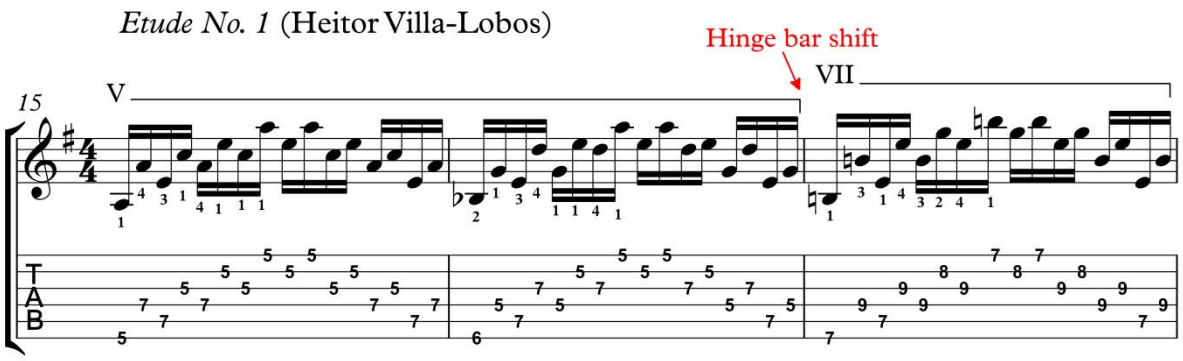
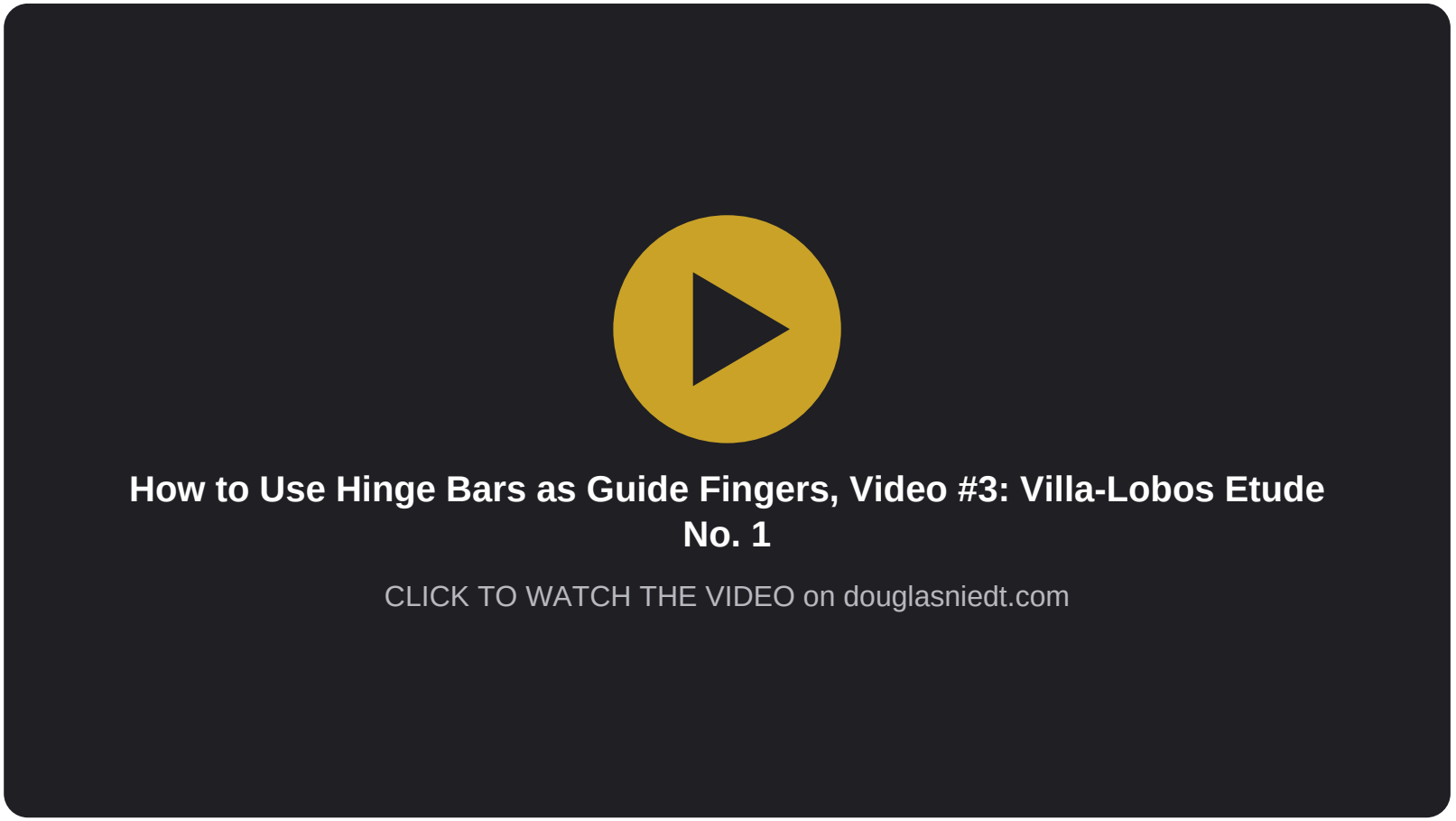
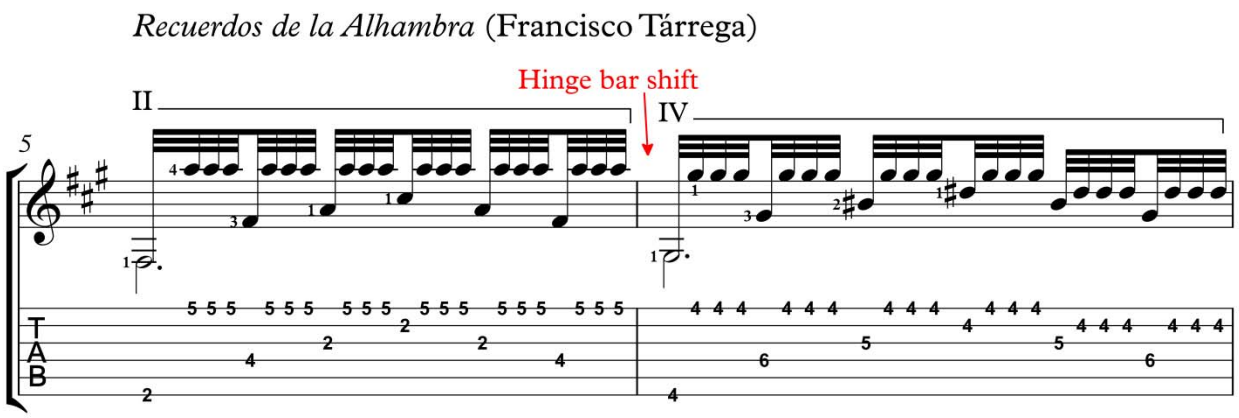
Many examples can be found in the repertoire where hinge bars serve as guide fingers. Following are some examples of ascending shifts.



Watch me demonstrate this shift.



This next example from Francisco Tarrega's famous *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* is particularly important. Sliding the entire bar from the second to the fourth fret produces a loud squeak that is distracting and can ruin the mood of the piece. Using the hinge bar as a guide eliminates the squeak, preserving the magic.



Watch me demonstrate the hinge bar shift on “Recuerdos”.

How to Use Hinge Bars as Guide Fingers, Video #4: Recuerdos de la Alhambra

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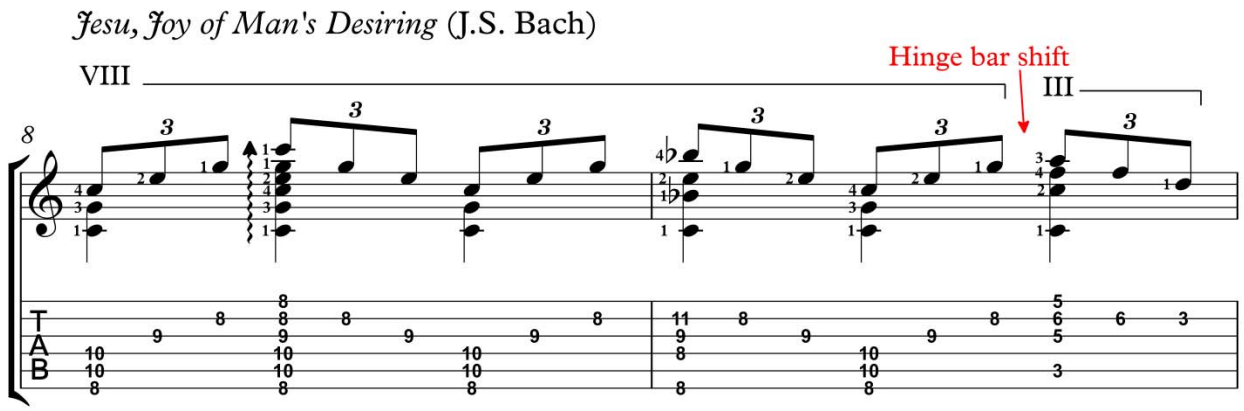
Hinge bars are also used as guide fingers in descending shifts. Here are some examples:



Watch me play this passage from “Jesu”.

How to Use Hinge Bars as Guide Fingers, Video #5: Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring

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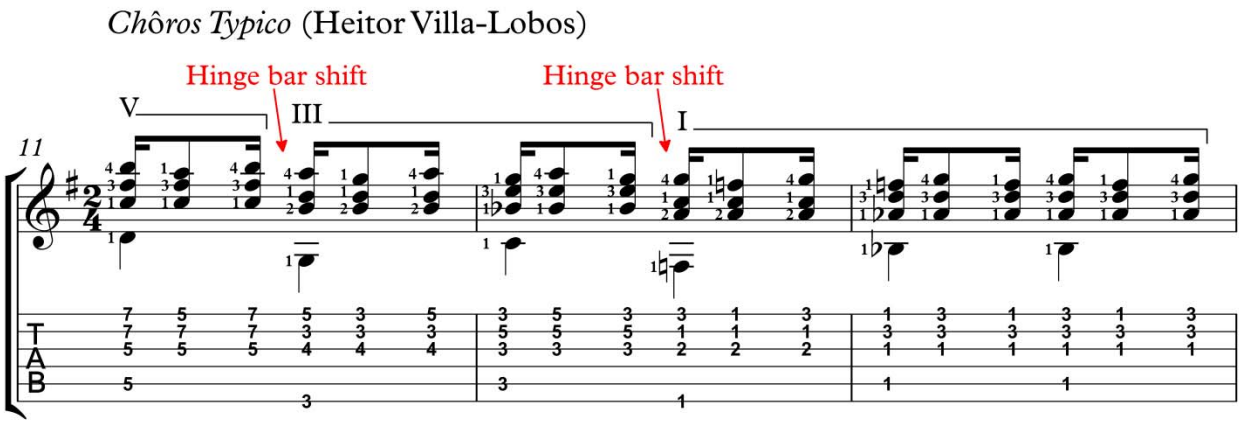

Watch me play the passage.

How to Use Hinge Bars as Guide Fingers, Video #6: Choros No. 1 by Villa-Lobos

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Summary

In general, when you come across a passage with consecutive full bars, shift from one to the other using a hinge bar. It doesn't matter whether the shift is up or down the neck. It will sound smoother and will make less noise. Also, the technique requires far less hand strength than sliding full bars up and down the neck. For that reason, in pieces with many bar chord changes, using hinge bars tires the hand much less, promoting greater left-hand stamina.