

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*).

Romanza (Anonymous)

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Romanza (Anonymous)". It is written in treble and bass clefs, with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure is marked with a Roman numeral "II" above the staff, indicating the second fret. The second measure is marked with a Roman numeral "VII" above the staff, indicating the seventh fret. A red arrow points to the transition between the second and seventh frets, labeled "Hinge bar shift". The score includes fingerings (1-4) and triplets (3) for the right hand. The left hand is shown with fret numbers (2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9) and a "T" (thumb) on the first string. The bass clef part shows fret numbers (2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9) and a "B" (bar) on the first string.

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

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

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

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

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

Etude No. 1 (Heitor Villa-Lobos)

Hinge bar shift

V VII

15

T
A
B

Watch me demonstrate this shift.



How to Use Hinge Bars as Guide Fingers, Video #3: Villa-Lobos Etude No. 1

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

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”.



CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

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

[illegible]

Watch me play this passage from “Jesu”.



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

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

Chôros Typico (Heitor Villa-Lobos)

Hinge bar shift Hinge bar shift

V III I

The musical score is for a guitar piece in 2/4 time, key of D major. It starts at measure 11. The treble clef staff shows a sequence of chords and single notes. Above the staff, there are three groups of chords, each with a bracket and a Roman numeral: V, III, and I. Red arrows point to the first and third groups, labeled 'Hinge bar shift'. Below the treble staff, there are three staves labeled T, A, and B, representing the guitar's strings. Each string staff has a sequence of numbers indicating fingerings. The T staff has numbers 7, 5, 7, 5, 3, 5, 3, 5, 3, 1, 3, 1, 3, 1, 3. The A staff has numbers 5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 4, 3, 3, 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1. The B staff has numbers 5, 3, 3, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1.

Watch me play the passage.



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

CLICK TO WATCH THE VIDEO on douglasniedt.com

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.