

Although we are barring 5 strings, it is only necessary for the bar finger to hold down the 1st and 5th strings. This is an example of using minimal effort to achieve a goal.

Watch me demonstrate this bar technique in Video 12. Watch on full screen.

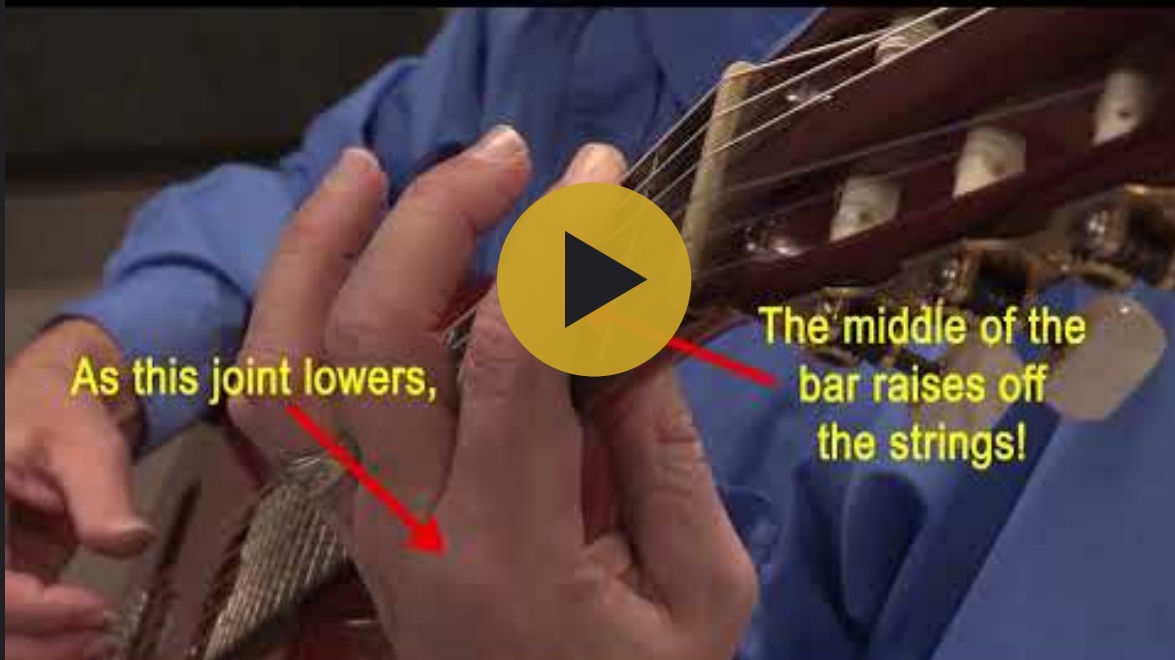


Tech Tip Relaxed Left-Hand Video #12: Efficient Bar Chord Study No. 5 (Sor)

3. Experiment with how many strings to bar. Do what is easiest for you. The music score may indicate that a chord is to played using a half bar. But if you play the chord better and with less effort using a *full* bar, do it.

4. Keep the rear joint of a full bar raised so the bar is flat across the fretboard.

Many students and even professional teachers overlook this technique. Watch me demonstrate in Video 13. Watch on full screen.



Tech Tip Relaxed Left-Hand Video #13: On Bar Chords, Keep the Rear Joint Raised Up

5. Bar chords especially, require adjustments to the balance between arm force, arm weight, and thumb pressure. Most bar chords require a significantly greater amount of arm pull force than arm weight or thumb pressure.

See the section above (and the video) titled, "USE THE CORRECT BALANCE BETWEEN USING THE THUMB, PULLING WITH ARMS, AND ARM WEIGHT".

Also, have a look at my technique tip, [Bar Chords, The Secret \("Little Jennifer's Secret"\) of How to Play Clear Bar Chords.](#)

IT MAY BE HOW YOU PRACTICE

How you practice and learn a piece is so important. Most people learn to play with tension as they learn a new piece. When they do that, it is extremely difficult to fix later because it was ingrained from the beginning.

Playing efficiently with minimal effort is a form of muscle memory. **Your hand must remember what it feels like to play efficiently without excess tension.** *It must be practiced*, just like you practice playing the chord changes, slurs, or dynamics in a piece.

1. Take breaks. Do you take breaks or just keep going non-stop? Over-practice *trains you to stay tense*. Take breaks so you prevent tension buildup.

2. Practicing with speed bursts can work wonders.

Speed burst practice focuses on learning small, manageable bits correctly with minimal effort.

Even if it's a fast passage, speed bursts train you to play it with minimal effort.

In passages you play with excessive tension, speed burst practice is excellent for retraining your hand to play them with minimal effort.

See my technique tips [How to Use Reflex Bursts to Learn a Fast Scale](#) and [How to Use Reflex Practice to Master Fast, Difficult Passages Other Than Scales](#) for more information on speed bursts.

3. Metronome practice has its place, but if it is used incorrectly for increasing the tempo of a piece, it can lead to teaching the hands to play tense. Speed burst practice is often a much better way to learn to play fast pieces.

4. Consciously practice efficient technique with minimal effort every day.

5. Within pieces, practice releasing tension at key points such as the ends of phrases or sections. Don't carry over the increased functional tension that may be required for a difficult passage into the next passage. Practice releasing it.

6. Practice a piece at a very slow, undemanding tempo. Slow practice of a piece can be helpful to gain a sense of the minimal effort required to play it.

7. Use the "Stop and Let Go" method of practicing. In his excellent book *The Natural Classical Guitar*, Lee F. Ryan describes this method of training your body to go on alert when it senses tension and immediately let go of it. When you notice unwanted or excessive tension in any body part, immediately

stop playing. Focus on where the tension is and release it. Let go of it. Empty the tension. If you need to, massage the body part or shake it out. Stand up and walk around if necessary. Once the tightness is released or the tension dissolves, resume playing from that relaxed state. Every time you sense tightness, clenching, or excessive effort, stop right away and release the tension.

Ryan says you will probably need to stop every 30 seconds at first. But he says that is okay because you are developing your awareness of your body and playing mechanism. The goal is to make efficient playing a habit.

Of course, if you find the tension always seems to return, you will need to dig deeper into the specifics of what is causing the tension and apply the relevant solutions.

AWARENESS

Awareness is crucial. You must be able to tell if your hand is tense. If you can't feel the difference between tensed muscles and relaxed muscles in your bicep, shoulder, forearms, elbow, fingers, and hand, you won't be able to eliminate dysfunctional tension.

A practice method that can increase your awareness is to purposely play a passage or piece with extreme tension. Then play it again without the extreme tension and feel the difference. This should help to increase your awareness. It also helps to develop your ability to consciously turn off tension.

Here is another very basic exercise to help you feel the difference between tension and relaxation: stretch your fingers out as hard as you can. Then release. Stretch out hard, release.

CONFIDENCE

When you are practicing efficiently, and you are well-prepared, you will be confident. If you are confident, dysfunctional tension will be reduced, especially in performance. See my technique tip [The Keys to Consistent Classical Guitar Playing, Parts 1 and 2](#) for information about efficient practice. However, staying "relaxed" in performance is a separate topic. See [How to Control Stage Fright \(Performance Anxiety\)](#).

THE BASICS OF LIFE THAT IMPROVE MUSCULAR CONDITION AND EFFICIENCY

1. Breathe. Yes, this one is obvious but easily forgotten in the heat of battle. How many times have you caught yourself in a performance or guitar lesson holding your breath as you play difficult passages in your pieces?

2. Drink water. It is good for your body! Duh.

3. Avoid non-guitar tasks that require excessive gripping. This could include prolonged lifting of heavy objects, exercise on fitness machines, digging and other garden tasks, house painting, carpentry, prolonged scrubbing, etc. Once the hand becomes extremely tense from such tasks, it can take days for it to recover for guitar playing.

Summary

An effortless and relaxed left-hand technique is not produced by a command to relax. Rather, *it is the sum of many parts*, all of which contribute to an EFFICIENT left-hand technique. An efficient left-hand technique is developed by making a habit of applying minimal effort for maximum efficiency in every movement made by the left-hand fingers, hand, and arm.