

Slur Exercise for Left Hand Alone, Part 1 of 2

By Douglas Niedt

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Is there an exercise that will develop speed, accuracy, agility, finger independence, strength, and endurance? Yes, there is.

A former student on spring break dropped into town for a lesson and wanted to go over exercises. I showed him some slur exercises and told him I would send him the link to the technique tip for a detailed explanation of how to do them. The tip was not there. I couldn't believe it. The exercise I have practiced daily for over 40 years that I have recommended to students over and over was not there. I have a long article about executing slurs, but no tip on this particular exercise. Well, here it is.

Guitarist Jorge Morel taught me this exercise when I was sixteen years old. Keep in mind that even at sixteen, my technique was very well-developed.

BUT AFTER A FEW MONTHS PRACTICING THIS EXERCISE, THE IMPROVEMENT IN MY LEFT-HAND SPEED, AGILITY, FINGER INDEPENDENCE, DEXTERITY, AND ACCURACY WAS ABSOLUTELY AMAZING.

WARNING! These exercises are very strenuous on the tendons and joints of the left hand.

1. Make sure you warm up with other exercises or pieces for at least 30 minutes before practicing these exercises.
2. Practice them every day. Practicing them sporadically will strain and possibly injure the hand.
3. Maintain a steady level of practice. Gradually increase the duration and speed of the exercise over many weeks. Contrary to the recommendations of sports medicine doctors, do not take a day off. Do not alternate a day of intense practice of the exercise with a day of light practice. You will not get good results and you will stress your hand. The key is a gradual increase of practice.
4. If you are prone to hand problems, don't practice this exercise or if you do, use caution. On the other hand, if you practice these exercises very carefully there is a chance that

the gradual strengthening of the hand could reduce the frequency of future hand injuries.

5. Do not over practice the exercises. Just because 10 minutes of practicing the exercise improves your hand 25% does not mean practicing 40 minutes will improve it 100%. That type of thinking will lead to hand injury. It is the gradual increase of duration and speed that makes the difference and produces results.

Here is the basic exercise, to be practiced LEFT HAND ALONE as taught to me by Jorge Morel.

Example #1.

TO BE PLAYED ENTIRELY BY THE LEFT HAND ONLY.
Do not pluck any note with the right hand.

The ascent upward from 1st position to 8th position:

3-1-3-1-4-2-4-2-4-2-4-2-5-3-5-3-5-3-5-3-6-4-6-4-6-4-6-4-7-5-7-5

5

7-5-7-5-8-6-8-6-8-6-8-6-9-7-9-7-9-7-9-7-10-8-10-8-10-8-10-8-11-9-11-9

9

Begin the descent downward from 8th position to 1st position:

11-9-11-9-10-8-10-8-10-8-10-8-9-7-9-7-9-7-9-7-8-6-8-6-8-6-8-6-7-5-7-5

13

7-5-7-5-6-4-6-4-6-4-6-4-5-3-5-3-5-3-5-3-4-2-4-2-4-2-3-1-3-1-0

Repeat the pattern on the 5th string and the 4th string.

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #1: The Entire Exercise



Start with the basics: 10 Preliminary Steps

Don't begin practicing the entire exercise just yet! Let's talk about and review the basics first.

The left-hand position:

Place all four fingers on the 6th string in 5th position (1st finger at the 5th fret, 2nd finger at the 6th fret, 3rd finger at the 7th fret, 4th finger at the 8th fret). It is a good idea to begin in 5th position because the frets are closer together and playing in the middle range of the neck tends to produce less stress on the wrist and elbow.

Checklist #1 (left-hand position)

1. The left hand must be in a parallel-with-the-neck position.
2. All four fingers should be right up against their fret.

3. For most players the 1st finger will lean to the left and the pinky will lean to the right.
4. The 2nd and 3rd fingers will be standing vertically or perpendicularly to the fret board on the very tips, the strings close to the fingernails. The 1st and 4th fingers will on the side of their tips. They will both probably lean against or touch the 5th string.
5. The thumb should be behind the neck opposite the 2nd finger or between the 1st and 2nd finger.
6. The palm will be very close to the neck, even touching or resting against the edge of the neck.
7. The elbow should be hanging freely, close to your left side.
8. The wrist will be straight to gently rounded, not kinked outward.

Here, let me show you the position in Video #2:

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #2: The Left-Hand Position



1. Practice the 3rd-finger hammer-on (ascending slur) on the 6th string

Set the left-hand fingers on the 6th string in 5th position. Go through the left-hand position checklist #1 above. On the right hand, plant the thumb on the 4th string, "i" on the 3rd string, "m" on the 2nd string, and "a" on the 1st string.

Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 5th fret and practice the ascending slur (the hammer-on):

Example 2.

Left-Hand Alone:
Practice hammering the 3rd finger onto the 6th string at the 7th fret.

Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 5th fret.

Keeping the 1st finger down, lift the 3rd finger from the rear joint only. Don't move at all from the middle or tip joint. Show wrong way Keep the movement restricted to that rear joint.

Lift the 3rd finger 1/2-1 inch (1.3-2.5 cm) above the 6th string. Closer is better for precision and speed but at first you might get more momentum and a louder hammer-on by lifting higher: 1-1 1/2 inches (2.5-3.8 cm).

Don't lift the hand away from the neck to "help" the finger hammer onto the string. The 2nd and 4th fingers will probably lift with the 3rd finger. That's okay for now, but advanced players should work at keeping 2 and 4 steady while raising 3. Keep 2 and 4 above the 6th string. The 4th finger especially will tend to wander over toward the treble strings.

Hammer the 3rd finger onto the 6th string with speed and force. After hammering 3 onto the string, keep it there for a beat or two to let the B ring. Then do another hammer. Repeat over and over.

There will be a huge urge to tense other parts of your body when executing hammers and pull-offs. Keep the rest of your body relaxed. Be sure your right-hand fingers are relaxed, not digging into the strings. Your mouth, lips, and jaw should be loose, not clenched. Your feet and legs should be loose.

"I miss the string a lot. What do I do to fix that?"

Think of what most of us amateur carpenters do when hammering in a nail. We take the hammer and first lightly tap-tap-tap and then we give it a good whack. Try the same thing with the hammer-on. Lightly tap the string a few times telling the finger, "This is where you are going to land buddy" and then do the hammer-on. Of course your accuracy will improve over time (weeks-months).

Watch me demonstrate the hammer-on with the 3rd finger in Video #3:

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #3: The Hammer-On with the 3rd Finger



2. Practice the 3rd-finger pull-off (descending slur) on the 6th string

Place the 1st finger on the 6th string at the 5th fret. Place the 3rd finger on the 6th string at the 7th fret on the very tip with the string close to the fingernail. The 2nd and 4th fingers should be hovering about 1/2 inch (1.3 cm) or less above the 6th string.

Go through the left-hand position checklist #1 above. Set the right-hand fingers lightly on their strings.

Using only the tip joint and middle joint of the 3rd finger, pluck the string, snapping the finger into the fret board with the 3rd finger landing against the 5th string. Do not use the right hand. This is left hand only. It is a left-hand finger rest stroke!

Example #3.

Left-Hand Alone:
Practice the pull-off from the 3rd finger to the 1st finger on the 6th string.
Do not do a hammer-on. Only execute the pull-off.

SET the 3rd finger on the B at 7th fret. Do not hammer-on.

"Snap" the 3rd finger off the string to produce a pull-off to the A held at the 5th fret with the 1st finger.

Plant 1st finger ⑥

Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 5th fret.

SET the 3rd finger on the 6th string at 7th fret. Do not hammer-on.

Keep 1st finger on 6th string on 5th fret

After snapping the string, be sure to release the tension present in the forearm. Allow the A you are holding with the 1st finger to ring for a few beats. Then do another snap. Repeat over and over.

I can't overemphasize that the 3rd finger should land on the fret board against the 5th string. This type of left-hand finger rest stroke produces maximum volume with minimal effort. And again, be certain the 3rd finger is placed on the very tip with the string close to the fingernail. Otherwise you will encounter excessive string resistance and have difficulty snapping the 3rd finger off the string.

The 1st finger serves as an anchor for the 6th string. Therefore, when the string is snapped, you should see very little lateral movement of the string. When you snap the string with the 3rd finger, the 2nd and 4th fingers will probably move too. That is okay for now. Advanced players should try to keep the 2nd and 4th fingers hovering above the 6th string.

Let me show you how to do the pull-off with the 3rd finger in Video #4:

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #4: The Pull-Off with the 3rd Finger



3. Combine the two movements. Hammer-on 3, pull-off 3. Repeat over and over on the 6th string.

Practice example #4.

Left-Hand Alone:

Practice hammer-ons and pull-offs with the 3rd finger.

[illegible]

Checklist #2:

1. Review your left-hand positioning checklist #1.
2. Set the right-hand fingers on their strings.
3. Be certain the hammer-on movements are coming from the back joint.
4. Hammer onto the very tip of the finger, the string falling close to the fingernail.
5. Make certain the pull-off movements are coming from the tip joint and middle joint.
6. For the pull-offs, "snap" the string with the 3rd finger. The 3rd finger should land on the fretboard against the 5th string.
7. Do not use the hand to "help" the hammer-on or pull-off.
8. The fingers should either be on the 6th string or hovering closely above it at all times.
9. The 4th finger (pinky) should be bent at all times with the tip of the finger pointing directly downward at the strings.
10. Play the exercise slowly and in rhythm—all quarter notes at about 50-60 beats per minute on the metronome.
11. Be sure your right-hand fingers are relaxed, not digging into the strings. Your mouth, lips, and jaw should be loose, not clenched. Your feet and legs should be loose.

Watch me demonstrate the combined hammer-on and pulloff movements in award-winning video #5:

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #5: The Hammers and Pull-Offs with the 3rd Finger



4. Practice the 4th-finger hammer-on on the 6th string.

Reset the left-hand fingers on the 6th string in 5th position. Go through the left-hand position checklist #1. On the right hand, plant the thumb on the 4th string, "i" on the 3rd string, "m" on the 2nd string, and "a" on the 1st string.

Keep the 1st finger down and practice the ascending slur (the hammer-on) with the 4th finger:

Example #5.

Left-Hand Alone:

Practice hammering the 4th finger onto the 6th string at the 8th fret.

1 Prepare 4th finger Hammer-on with 4th finger Prepare 4th finger Hammer-on with 4th finger Prepare 4th finger Hammer-on with 4th finger Prepare 4th finger Hammer-on with 4th finger

Plant 1st finger ⑥ Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 5th fret.

TAB Hammer-on with 4th finger [5] 8 [5] 8 [5] 8 [5] 8 [5] 8 [5] 8

Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 5th fret.

Keeping the 1st finger down, lift the 4th finger from the rear joint only. Don't move at all from the middle or tip joint. Show wrong way Keep the movement restricted to that rear joint.

Lift the 4th finger 1/2-1 inch (1.3-2.5 cm) above the 6th string. Closer is better for precision and speed but at first you might get more momentum and a louder hammer-on by lifting higher: 1-1 1/2 inches (2.5-3.8 cm).

Don't lift the hand away from the neck to "help" the 4th finger hammer onto the string. The 2nd and 3rd fingers will probably lift with the 4th finger. That's okay for now, but advanced players should work at keeping 2 and 3 steady while raising 4. Keep 2 and 3 above the 6th string.

Hammer the 4th finger onto the 6th string with speed and force. After hammering 4 onto the string, keep it there for a beat or two to let the C ring. Then do another hammer. Repeat over and over.

Some players have weak middle joints especially on the 4th finger that collapse straight when they hammer onto the string. This is very bad! If that happens, move the little finger side of the hand in closer to the neck and even onto the 1st and 2nd strings. The elbow will tuck tighter into your side. The hand will no longer be in a parallel position. Moving the hand closer into the neck forces the pinky to bend more preventing the middle joint from collapsing.

There will be a huge urge to tense other parts of your body when executing hammers and pull-offs. Keep the rest of your body relaxed. Be sure your right-hand fingers are relaxed, not digging into the strings. Your mouth, lips, and jaw should be loose, not clenched. Your feet and legs should be loose.

"Wow, I'm really missing the string a lot with the pinky. What's my problem?"

The pinky is of course the weakest, most uncoordinated left-hand finger. It is not unusual for this finger to frequently miss the hammer-on. It will need extra attention and extra practice. Once again, try the amateur carpenter approach and lightly tap tap tap the string a few times and then do the hammer-on. Your accuracy will improve over time with practice. It may be a few months before you see marked improvement of the pinky finger.

Watch me demonstrate the hammer-on with the 4th finger in Video #6:

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #6: The Hammer-On with the 4th Finger



5. Practice the 4th finger pull-off (descending slur) on the 6th string.

Place the 1st finger on the 6th string at the 5th fret and the 2nd finger on the 6th string at the 6th fret. Place the 4th finger on the 6th string at the 8th fret on the very tip with the string close to the fingernail. The 3rd finger should be hovering about 1/2 inch (1 cm) or less above the 6th string. Go through the left-hand position checklist #1 above. Set the right-hand fingers lightly on their strings.

Using only the tip joint and middle joint of the 4th finger, pluck the string, snapping the finger into the fret board with the 4th finger landing against the 5th string. Do not use the right hand. This is left hand only. It is a left-hand finger rest stroke!

Example #6.

Left-Hand Alone:

Practice the pull-off from the 4th finger to the 2nd finger on the 6th string.

Do not do a hammer-on. Only execute the pull-off.

SET the 4th finger on the C at 8th fret. Do not hammer-on.

"Snap" the 4th finger off the string to produce a pull-off to the Bb held at the 6th fret with the 2nd finger.

Plant 1st & 2nd fingers

Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 5th fret, and the 2nd finger on the 6th string at the 7th fret.

SET the 4th finger on the 6th string at 8th fret. Do not hammer-on.

Keep 1st finger on 6th string on 5th fret and the 2nd finger on the 6th string at the 6th fret.

After snapping the string, be sure to release the tension present in the forearm. Allow the Bb you are holding with the 2nd finger to ring for a few beats. Then do another snap. Repeat over and over.

I can't overemphasize that the 4th finger should land on the fret board against the 5th string. This type of left-hand finger rest stroke produces maximum volume with minimal effort. And again, be certain the 4th finger is placed on the very tip with the string close to the fingernail. Otherwise you will encounter excessive string resistance and have difficulty snapping the 4th finger off the string.

The 1st and 2nd fingers serve as anchors for the 6th string. Therefore, when the string is snapped, you should see very little lateral movement of the string.

When you snap the string with the 4th finger, the 3rd finger will probably move too. That is okay for now. Advanced players should try to keep the 3rd finger hovering above the 6th string.

Watch me demonstrate the pull-off with the 4th finger in this mesmerizing video #7. You get 10 extra points if you stay awake through the entire clip!

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #7: The Pull-Off from the 4th to the 2nd Finger



6. Combine the two movements. Hammer-on 4, pull-off 4. Repeat over and over on the 6th string.

Practice exercise #7:

Left-Hand Alone:

Practice hammer-ons and pull-offs with the 4th finger.

Plant 1st & 2nd fingers. Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 5th fret, and the 2nd finger on the 6th string at the 6th fret.

Keep 1st finger on 6th string on 5th fret and the 2nd finger on the 6th string at the 6th fret.

Checklist #3:

1. Review your left-hand positioning checklist.
2. Set the right-hand fingers on their strings.
3. Be certain the hammer-on movements are coming from the back joint.
4. Hammer onto the very tip of the finger, the string falling close to the fingernail.
5. Make certain the pull-off movements are coming from the tip joint and middle joint.
6. For the pull-offs, "snap" the string with the 4th finger. The 4th finger should land on the fretboard against the 5th string.
7. Do not use the hand to "help" the hammer-on or pull-off.
8. The fingers should either be on the 6th string or hovering closely above it at all times.
9. Play the exercise slowly and in rhythm—all quarter notes at about 50-60 beats per minute on the metronome.

10. Be sure your right-hand fingers are relaxed, not digging into the strings. Your mouth, lips, and jaw should be loose, not clenched. Your feet and legs should be loose.

Watch Video #8 as I demonstrate how to do hammer-ons and pull-offs with the 4th finger:

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #8: The Hammer and Pull-off with the 4th Finger



7. Combine both finger combinations in 5th position. Practice 3-1-3-1 and 4-2-4-2 slurs and repeat over and over on the 6th string.

Practice exercise #8:

Left-Hand Alone:

1 Combine both finger combinations. Practice 3-1-3-1 4-2-4-2 slurs in 5th position.

Plant 1st finger

Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 5th fret.

Keep 1st finger on 6th string on 5th fret

Don't over practice!

The same Checklist #2:

1. Review your left-hand positioning checklist #1.
2. Set the right-hand fingers on their strings.
3. Be certain the hammer-on movements are coming from the back joint.
4. Hammer onto the very tip of the finger, the string falling close to the fingernail.
5. Make certain the pull-off movements are coming from the tip joint and middle joint.
6. For the pull-offs, "snap" the string with the 3rd finger. The 3rd finger should land on the fretboard against the 5th string.
7. Do not use the hand to "help" the hammer-on or pull-off.
8. The fingers should either be on the 6th string or hovering closely above it at all times.
9. The 4th finger (pinky) should be bent at all times with the tip of the finger pointing directly downward at the strings.

10. Play the exercise slowly and in rhythm—all quarter notes at about 50-60 beats per minute on the metronome.
11. Be sure your right-hand fingers are relaxed, not digging into the strings. Your mouth, lips, and jaw should be loose, not clenched. Your feet and legs should be loose.

Special note: In this exercise, the 2nd finger will be placed on the string at the 6th fret a split second after the 4th finger does its hammer-on. The two fingers will not land on the string together.

Watch me demonstrate the 3-1 to 4-2 pattern in 5th position in video #9:

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #9: The Slurs in 5th Position



8. Practice the exercise in descending positions on the 6th string.

This exercise will get your hand gradually accustomed to playing in the lower positions. The lower positions are a little more challenging because the frets are further apart. For some, positioning of the left arm, hand, and wrist in the parallel-with-the-neck position (see checklist #1) may be more difficult.

Example #9:

Practice the exercise in descending positions on the 6th string.

5th position
Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 5th fret.

4th position
Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 4th fret.

3rd position
Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 3rd fret.

2nd position
Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 2nd fret.

1st position
Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th string at the 1st fret.

Don't over practice!

1. Repeat the pattern in each position until you feel like you have good control and are producing clear hammer-ons and clear pull-offs. Do extra repetitions of the 4th finger if it feels weak or out of control. But don't overdo it and stress the finger.
2. It is important to play rhythmically.
3. Practice with a metronome at an easy, effortless speed. Some may be comfortable at 50=quarter note. Others will be comfortable playing twice as fast. Practice at a comfortable speed. If you try to play too fast, your finger muscles will get prematurely tight and fatigued and you will have difficulty finishing the exercise.

4. Rest for ten seconds between each change of position.
5. As you descend, the frets become wider apart. Try to keep the fingers close to the frets.
6. Review your checklists and remember to keep your right-hand fingers relaxed, resting lightly on the strings. Your mouth, lips, and jaw should be loose, not clenched. Your feet and legs should be loose.
7. If your hand or fingers become fatigued before you get to 1st position, that is okay! Stop, take note of where you finished. Tomorrow try to go a little further. Go further each day until you can get down to the 1st position.

Let me show you how to practice the slur exercise in descending positions (Video #10):

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #10: Practice the Exercise in Descending Positions



9. Start in 1st position and play non-stop through 8th position on the 6th string.

Practice example #10:

Ascend up the fretboard with the 3-1-3-1 4-2-4-2 slur pattern.
Start in 1st position and play non-stop up to 8th position on the 6th string.

1st position 2nd position 3rd position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 1st fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 2nd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 3rd fret.

4th position 5th position 6th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 4th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 5th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th fret.

7th position 8th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 7th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 8th fret.

Don't over practice! If your hand or fingers become fatigued before you get to 8th position, that is okay! Stop, take note of where you finished. Tomorrow try to go a little further. Go further each day until you can get to the 8th position.

1. The 1st finger stays in contact with the 6th string the entire time. However, the finger will release its pressure on the string at each shift to the next position.
2. If you begin missing hammer-ons or pull-offs stay in that position and do extra repetitions until you clear up the problem. The 4th finger can be given extra repetitions as long as you don't overdo it.
3. Be sure the left-hand thumb stays with the hand (opposite the 2nd finger or between the 1st and 2nd finger) as you ascend. Don't allow it to drag to the left of the 1st finger.
4. Practice with a metronome at an easy, effortless speed. Remember, if you try to play too fast, your finger muscles will get prematurely tight and fatigued and you will have difficulty finishing the exercise.

At this point, we are working on stamina, not speed. Do not push the speed.

I will demonstrate how to practice the slur exercise from the 1st position to the 8th position (Video #11):

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #11: The Slur Exercise from 1st through the 8th Position, Non-Stop



10. Start in 8th position and play non-stop down to 1st position on the 6th string.

Practice example #11:

Descend down the fretboard with the 4-2-4-2 3-1-3-1 slur pattern.
Start in 8th position and play non-stop down to 1st position on the 6th string.

1

8th position 7th position 6th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 8th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 7th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th fret.

11 9 11 9 10 8 10 8 10 8 10 8 9 7 9 7 9 7 9 7 8 6 8 6

4

5th position 4th position 3rd position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 5th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 4th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 3rd fret.

8 6 8 6 7 5 7 5 7 5 6 4 6 4 6 4 6 4 5 3 5 3

7

2nd position 1st position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 2nd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 1st fret.

5 3 5 3 4 2 4 2 4 2 3 1 3 1

The descent is a bit more difficult than the ascent. Therefore, practice more slowly at first to maintain precision.

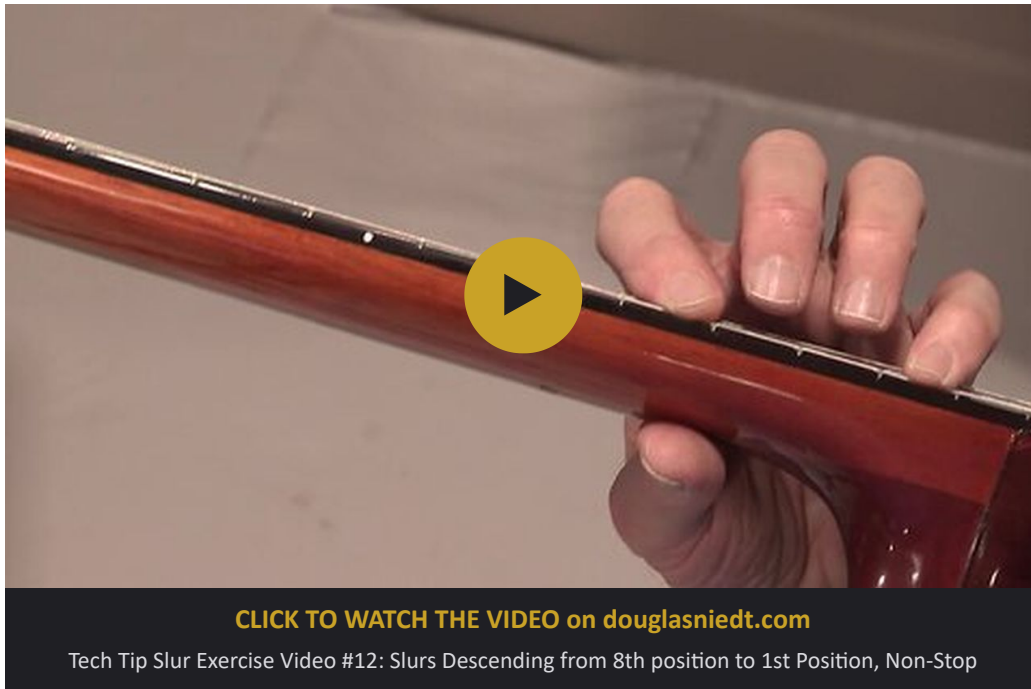
Don't over practice! If your hand or fingers become fatigued before you get to 1st position, that is okay! Stop, take note of where you finished. Tomorrow try to go a little further. Go further each day until you can get to the 1st position.

1. The 1st finger stays in contact with the 6th string the entire time. However, the finger will release its pressure on the string at each shift to the next position.
2. The 2nd finger will be placed on the string a split second after the 4th finger does its hammer-on. The two fingers will not land on the string together.
3. On the descent, you may find shifting is easier if the left-hand thumb is opposite the 1st finger rather than between the 1st and 2nd fingers or opposite the 2nd finger.
4. Practice with a metronome at an easy, effortless speed. Remember, if you try to play too fast, your finger muscles will get prematurely tight and fatigued and you will have difficulty finishing the exercise.

Again, at this point, we are working on stamina, not speed. Do not push the speed.

I will demonstrate in Video #12:

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #12: Slurs Descending from 8th position to 1st Position, Non-Stop



Begin Serious Work on Stamina (no, not speed yet)

Before working on speed, it is important to develop your stamina. This exercise will significantly build up the strength of your joints and hand/finger musculature. Stronger fingers and joints will enable you to play with greater precision and agility.

Goal #1: The first goal is to be able to go up and down all three bass strings non-stop. Depending on the initial strength of your hand, fingers, and joints, this will take anywhere from a few weeks to three months to achieve.

Goal #2: The second goal is to be able to play the slurs up and down on the bass strings non-stop for ten minutes.

What about practicing on the treble strings? You can do that, but I find you will obtain the best results in less time by practicing solely on the bass strings.

Goal 1, Step #1: Work up your stamina to play non-stop on the 6th string from 1st position up to 8th position and back to 1st position.

Practice example #12:

Play the slurs non-stop up and down the 6th string

The Ascent:

1st position 2nd position 3rd position 4th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 1st fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 2nd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 3rd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 4th fret.

5th position 6th position 7th position 8th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 5th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 7th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 8th fret.

The Descent:

8th position 7th position 6th position 5th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 8th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 7th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 5th fret.

4th position 3rd position 2nd position 1st position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 4th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 3rd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 2nd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 1st fret.

The musical notation is written on a single staff with a treble clef. It consists of four measures of music, each representing a different position on the 6th string. The first measure is labeled '1st position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The second measure is labeled '2nd position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The third measure is labeled '3rd position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The fourth measure is labeled '4th position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The fifth measure is labeled '5th position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The sixth measure is labeled '6th position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The seventh measure is labeled '7th position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The eighth measure is labeled '8th position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The ninth measure is labeled '8th position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The tenth measure is labeled '7th position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The eleventh measure is labeled '6th position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The twelfth measure is labeled '5th position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The thirteenth measure is labeled '4th position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The fourteenth measure is labeled '3rd position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The fifteenth measure is labeled '2nd position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. The sixteenth measure is labeled '1st position' and contains a slur over a series of notes. Below the staff, there are two rows of fret numbers: the first row shows the fret numbers for the ascent (1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8) and the second row shows the fret numbers for the descent (8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1).

I cannot overemphasize: don't over practice! If your hand or fingers become fatigued before you complete the exercise, that is okay! Stop, and take note of where you finished. Tomorrow, try to go a little further. Go further each day until you can get all the way back to 1st position.

Continue to practice with a metronome at an easy, effortless speed. Remember, if you try to play too fast, your finger muscles will get prematurely tight and fatigued and you will have difficulty finishing the exercise.

Review the checklists to be certain you are doing everything correctly. Be sure your right-hand fingers are relaxed, not digging into the strings. Your mouth, lips, and jaw should be loose, not clenched. Your feet and legs should be loose.

Once again, at this point, we are working on stamina, not speed. Do not push the speed.

Goal 1, Step #2: Play non-stop on the 6th string from 1st position up to 8th position and back to 1st position and then add the 5th string from 1st position up to 8th position and back to 1st position.

Add the 5th string:

Example #13.

Play the slurs non-stop up and down the 5th string

The Ascent:

1st position 2nd position 3rd position 4th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 1st fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 2nd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 3rd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 4th fret.

5

5th position 6th position 7th position 8th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 5th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 7th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 8th fret.

The Descent:

8th position 7th position 6th position 5th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 8th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 7th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 5th fret.

9

4th position 3rd position 2nd position 1st position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 4th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 3rd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 2nd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 1st fret.

13

Once again, do not over practice. When your hand is tired or becomes fatigued, quit. If you can't complete the exercise, take note of where you finished. Each day try to go a little further even if it is only one fret, until you can get up and down both strings.

Most people find that executing hammers and pull-offs on the 5th string is a little more taxing to the joints and muscles. Fatigue can set in quickly.

Continue to practice with a metronome at an easy, effortless speed. Remember, if you try to play too fast, your finger muscles will get prematurely tight and fatigued and you will not make progress.

Goal 1, Step #3: Play non-stop up and down all three bass strings from 1st position to 8th position and back to 1st position.

Finally, add the 4th string to your practice:

Example #14.

Play the slurs non-stop up and down the 4th string

The Ascent:

1st position 2nd position 3rd position 4th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 1st fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 2nd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 3rd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 4th fret.

5

5th position 6th position 7th position 8th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 5th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 7th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 8th fret.

The Descent:

9

8th position 7th position 6th position 5th position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 8th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 7th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 6th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 5th fret.

13

4th position 3rd position 2nd position 1st position

Keep the 1st finger down on the 8th fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 3rd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 2nd fret. Keep the 1st finger down on the 1st fret.

I know I keep repeating myself, but do not over practice. When your hand is tired or becomes fatigued, quit. If you can't complete the exercise, take note of where you finished. Each day try to go a little further even if it is only one fret, until you can get up and down all three bass strings.

Most people find that executing hammers and pull-offs on the 4th string is taxing to the joints and muscles. Fatigue can set in quickly.

Continue to practice with a metronome at an easy, effortless speed. Remember, if you try to play too fast, your finger muscles will get prematurely tight and fatigued and you will not make progress.

Watch me in this cliffhanger as I play the exercise up and down the bass strings (Video #13):

Tech Tip Slur Exercise Video #13: Slur Exercise Up and Down the Bass Strings



Goal 2: Play the slurs up and down on the bass strings non-stop for 10 minutes.

It is a good idea to use a stopwatch for this step. Continue to use a metronome to maintain an even, easy, effortless speed. Once again, if you try to play too fast, your finger muscles will get prematurely tight and fatigued and you will not make progress.

Continue practicing up and down the bass strings from 1st position to 8th position and back. But now, using a stopwatch, **keep track of how long you play the exercise.** For example, if on day #1 you are able to play the exercise for 4 minutes and 20 seconds, on day #2 try to do it 4 minutes and 30 seconds. On day #3 play for 4 minutes and 35 seconds. Add a few more seconds (or whatever you can manage) every day. You may "get stuck" at the same time duration for a few days. That is okay. Soon you will be able to add more time. Push it, but do not over practice and strain the hand.

Be sure your right-hand fingers are relaxed, not digging into the strings. Your mouth, lips, and jaw should be loose, not clenched. Your feet and legs should be loose.

Once you are able to play these slurs non-stop for 10 minutes, you have reached a significant milestone in developing the strength and endurance of your left hand. When you play pieces you already know, it should be quite noticeable that you are playing them better than before—with more accuracy and agility, less effort, and more confidence.

IMPORTANT: For those whose total practice time is limited to less than an hour a day, I would stop here. Remember, you should play for 30 minutes before practicing this exercise. So at this point, you have practiced for 40 minutes. You have 20 minutes left. Although continuing on to practice for speed is helpful, it is more important that you spend additional time on new pieces or practice your repertoire of old pieces during your final 20 minutes of practice.

Coming next month: How to begin practicing the slur exercise for endurance AND speed to achieve an even more amazing improvement in your left-hand speed, agility, strength, and endurance.