

The Best Exercise You Can Practice for the Left Hand, Part 2 of 2

Slurs for the Left-Hand Alone

Begin Speed Practice

Speed Practice Step #1

Once you are able to play the slurs non-stop for 10 minutes, it is time to build speed and even more stamina.

1. Set your metronome at the same easy, effortless speed you have been using all along.
2. Play up and down all three bass strings.
3. Increase the metronome speed one notch (or 3-5 beats on a digital metronome). Play up and down all three bass strings.
4. Increase the metronome speed another notch (or 3-5 beats on a digital metronome). Play up and down all three bass strings.

Continue the routine until you are playing the exercise for 15 minutes. Stay at this stage for two weeks.

Review your checklists and 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.

Speed Practice Step #2

After two weeks of Step #1, practice the exercise but increase the speed (one notch analogue or 5 beats digital) **at each change of string**.

1. Begin at an easy, effortless speed. Play up and down the 6th string.
2. Increase the metronome speed. Play up and down the 5th string.
3. Increase the metronome speed. Play up and down the 4th string.

If at any time the slurs begin to feel unstable, sloppy, or out of control, *stay at the same speed on the same string* for a while until the problem clears up. If it does not clear up, slow down a notch or two. If the problems still do not clear up, it means you tried to increase the speed too quickly. **You may need to go up and down the strings twice instead of once at each metronome setting.** However, that said, *at the fastest limits of your speed* the slurs will become unclear. That is normal and expected.

Continue:

4. Increase the metronome speed and continue up and down the 6th string.

5. Increase the metronome speed, play up and down the 5th string.

6. Increase the metronome speed, play up and down the 4th string.

Keep going! Keep increasing the metronome speed.

Although this slur exercise may be practiced on the treble strings too, I find most players get the best results in less time by practicing only on the bass strings.

Review your checklists periodically and 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.

IMPORTANT

•**STOP when your hand/fingers/joints are tired or you begin to “feel the burn” in your left forearm.**

When you feel a burning sensation or significant tightness in your left forearm, your body is telling you your muscles have had enough. It is good that you are feeling this sensation, because it is a sign that your muscles are being challenged, which makes them stronger. Just be sure to listen to your body. The burning sensation is a warning that the muscles are reaching their limits, so stop! If you ignore the warning, you could be risking an injury. **When you feel a slight burning, STOP.**

•**ALWAYS begin at the slow, easy, effortless metronome speed.** Keep track of how fast you play each day from your slow speed to your fastest speed. Try to increase the speed one notch every day or at least meet the speed you did the previous day. Remember, *at the fastest limits of your speed* the slurs will become unclear. That is normal and expected.

•**Stop each day after 20-30 minutes. Doing more than that risks injury.**

•If your hand is getting fatigued before the end of 20 minutes, spend more time at the slower metronome settings—you may be increasing the speed too quickly.

•If you find that at the end of 20 minutes your hand is not tired and you feel like you could probably play significantly faster, begin the session at a faster starting tempo. *As you increase your top speed you can increase your starting speed.* Again, limit the entire time spent on the exercise to between 20-30 minutes.

•You will hit plateaus where you will be stuck at the same metronome speed for days, weeks, or months. But then one day, you will be able to hit the next notch. Eventually you will reach your limit.

You are a Guitar Superman with a Guitar Superhand!

An additional fascinating benefit of practicing this exercise, whether for 10 minutes or 30 minutes, is that for about 15 minutes after completing the exercise, your hand will feel like “Superhand”. It will move with an additional degree of speed and agility you did not know you had. Unfortunately, the effect wears off after about 15 minutes or so.

Patterns I later added to Jorge Morel's original exercise

After getting outstanding results from Jorge Morel's original exercise, I realized I was not addressing the abysmal lack of independence between my 2nd and 3rd and 3rd and 4th fingers. Therefore, I added these patterns to my practice:

Example #15:

Example #15

For strength and independence between the 1st and 2nd and 3rd and 4th fingers:

1st position (up one fret) 2nd position

Continue up and down the neck...

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

TAB

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

Detailed description: This musical example is for a guitar exercise. It consists of two measures. The first measure is labeled '1st position' and the second '2nd position' (up one fret). The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first measure contains a sequence of eighth notes: 2# (F#2), 1 (F1), 2# (F#2), 1 (F1), 4# (F#4), 3 (F3), 4# (F#4), 3 (F3). The second measure contains: 2 (F2), 1# (F#1), 2 (F2), 1# (F#1), 4 (F4), 3# (F#3), 4 (F4), 3# (F#3). Below the staff is a TAB line with the following fret numbers: 2, 1, 2, 1, 4, 3, 4, 3, 3, 2, 3, 2, 5, 4, 5, 4. A bracket above the staff indicates the exercise continues up and down the neck. Two purple annotations are present: 'Keep the 1st finger down on the 1st fret.' under the first measure and 'Keep the 1st finger down on the 2nd fret.' under the second measure.

Example #16:

Example #16

For strength and independence between the 2nd and 3rd and 1st and 4th fingers:

1st position (up one fret) 2nd position

Continue up and down the neck...

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

TAB

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

Detailed description: This musical example is for a guitar exercise. It consists of two measures. The first measure is labeled '1st position' and the second '2nd position' (up one fret). The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first measure contains a sequence of eighth notes: 3# (F#3), 2# (F#2), 3# (F#3), 2# (F#2), 4# (F#4), 1 (F1), 4# (F#4), 1 (F1). The second measure contains: 3# (F#3), 2# (F#2), 3# (F#3), 2# (F#2), 4 (F4), 1# (F#1), 4 (F4), 1# (F#1). Below the staff is a TAB line with the following fret numbers: 3, 2, 3, 2, 4, 1, 4, 1, 4, 3, 4, 3, 5, 2, 5, 2. A bracket above the staff indicates the exercise continues up and down the neck. Two purple annotations are present: 'Keep the 1st finger down on the 1st fret.' under the first measure and 'Keep the 1st finger down on the 2nd fret.' under the second measure.

So now, I practice all three patterns on each string at each metronome speed. However, I would recommend *sticking with the original pattern for six months* before trying the other patterns.

More Patterns, More Exercises

I think Morel's pattern produces great results. But many more exercises and patterns can be practiced. Here is a sampling.

Examples #17-21

Example #17

Plant the fingers indicated to help isolate the slur movements to one finger.
This will help develop finger independence.
Practice on the bass strings, up and down the neck.

Keep these fingers down Slurs left-hand alone

Keep these fingers down Slurs left-hand alone

Keep these fingers down Slurs left-hand alone

Keep these fingers down Slurs left-hand alone

Example #18

Groups of 4-note slurs (NOT all left-hand alone as in the previous exercises).
Practice up and down the neck on the bass strings:

1st position (up one fret) 2nd position

Pluck Pluck Pluck Pluck

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

Continue up and down the neck...

Example #19

Groups of 4-note slurs (NOT all left-hand alone as in the previous exercises).
Practice up and down the neck on the bass strings:

1st position (up one fret) 2nd position

Pluck Pluck Pluck Pluck

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

Continue up and down the neck...

TAB

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

Example #20

Groups of 5-note slurs.
Practice up and down the neck on the bass strings:

1st position (up one fret) 2nd position

Pluck Pluck Pluck Pluck

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

TAB

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

Example #21

Groups of 6-note slurs.
Practice up and down the neck on the bass strings:

1st position (up one fret) 2nd position

Pluck Pluck

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

(Repeat preceding measure) (Repeat preceding measure)

Continue up and down the neck...

TAB

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

And then we have the sometimes tortuous exercises from Emilio Pujol's *Escuela Razonada de la Guitarra*, a book "Based on the principles of the technique of Tárrega."

The exercises range from the doable:

Example #22:

Example #22

From *Escuela Razonada de la Guitarra* (Pujol-Tárrega)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for guitar. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a tablature staff labeled 'TAB'. The first system shows two measures of music. The first measure has a treble staff with a half note G#4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5, all beamed together. The second measure has a treble staff with a half note D5, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note A4, all beamed together. The tablature staff for the first measure shows the sequence 1-2-1-2-1-2-1-2, and for the second measure, it shows 1-2-1-2-1-2-1-2. The second system starts with a measure number '13' above the treble staff. It shows three measures of music. The first measure has a treble staff with a half note G#4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5, all beamed together. The second measure has a treble staff with a half note D5, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note A4, all beamed together. The third measure has a treble staff with a half note E5, a quarter note D5, a quarter note C5, and a quarter note B4, all beamed together. The tablature staff for the first measure shows the sequence 1-2-1-2-1-2-1-2, for the second measure, it shows 1-2-1-2-1-2-1-2, and for the third measure, it shows 1-2-1-2-1-2-1-2.

To the challenging:

Example #23:

Example #23

From *Escuela Razonada de la Guitarra* (Pujol-Tárrega)

The musical score for Example #23 consists of two systems. Each system has a treble staff and a tablature staff. The first system shows a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures, followed by a repeat sign. The tablature staff shows the corresponding fret numbers: 2, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4. The second system shows a similar melodic line with a slur over the first two measures, followed by a repeat sign. The tablature staff shows the corresponding fret numbers: 2, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4.

To the nearly impossible to play that will put you in a hand-injury clinic:

Example #24:

Example #24

From *Escuela Razonada de la Guitarra* (Pujol-Tárrega)

The musical score for Example #24 consists of two systems. Each system has a treble staff and a tablature staff. The first system shows a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures, followed by a repeat sign. The tablature staff shows the corresponding fret numbers: 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3. The second system shows a similar melodic line with a slur over the first two measures, followed by a repeat sign. The tablature staff shows the corresponding fret numbers: 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3.

He has many more in the book. If you choose to have a look at them, practice them with great caution.

THE BOTTOM LINE

There is no better exercise than slurs to develop left-hand speed, agility, finger independence, dexterity, and accuracy. *But they must be practiced correctly and carefully to produce results.* Do not over-practice any slur exercise.