

How To Play...

Fingerpicking Accompaniment



howtoplayukulele.com

How To Play Fingerpicking Accompaniment

Lesson 1

The ukulele is mainly known as a strumming instrument but playing it by picking individual strings is becoming increasingly popular.

There are two broad styles of fingerpicking: melodic and accompaniment. In this mini-course, we're going to be focussing on the latter.

When used as accompaniment, the ukulele can create a delicate, shimmering sound that is familiar from much Hawaiian music (Israel Kamakawiwo'ole was a master) but is also used by more modern players such as Stephin Merritt.

In order to tab fingerpicking, we need to introduce some new notation. The fingers of the picking hand are referred to as:

T = Thumb
I = Index Finger
M = Middle Finger
A = Ring Finger

The ring finger is A as the terms come from Latin (A = annular).

Each of these fingers is allocated to an individual string:

Thumb - G string
Index Finger - C string
Middle Finger - E string
Ring Finger - A string

As you can see, I use my little finger as an anchor. This stabilises the hand. However, there is a trade off. Letting your hand hover over the strings will give your fingers greater flexibility and make it easier to switch between picking and strumming.

Once you've got comfortable with that position, try this simple exercise.

Example 1

Example 1 is a guitar exercise in 4/4 time, featuring a C chord. The notation is spread across two systems. The first system contains two measures: the first measure starts with a red '1' above the first string, and the second measure starts with a red '2' above the second string. Both measures consist of a sequence of notes: 0, 0, 0, 3, 0, 0, 0, 3, 0, 0, 0, 3. The second system contains two measures: the first measure starts with a red '3' above the third string, and the second measure starts with a red '4' above the fourth string. Both measures consist of a sequence of notes: 0, 0, 0, 3, 0, 0, 0, 3, 0, 0, 0, 3. Below the notes are guitar-specific symbols: vertical lines for frets and horizontal lines for strings, with '0' indicating an open string. Underneath the guitar symbols, the letters 'T I M A T I M A' are printed in a spaced-out font, corresponding to the notes.

Once you get the hang of this, you can try changing chords while playing it. Like this:

Example 2

Example 2 is a guitar exercise in 4/4 time, featuring changing chords: C, F, G7, and C. The notation is spread across three systems. The first system contains two measures, both with a C chord, starting with red '1' and '2' respectively. The second system contains three measures: the first with an F chord (starting with red '3'), the second with an F chord (starting with red '4'), and the third with a G7 chord (starting with red '5'). The third system contains two measures, both with a C chord, starting with red '6' and '7' respectively. The final measure ends with a red '8' above the eighth fret. The notes and guitar symbols are similar to Example 1, but include fret numbers (1-3) for the F and G7 chords. The 'T I M A T I M A' letters are printed below the notes.

This can feel like trying to rub your stomach and pat your head at the same time. But a little bit of practice and it start to come more naturally.

Lesson 2

In this lesson, we'll be adding to the examples we went over in the first part - instead of just going up the strings, we'll be going up and down.

This is slightly trickier as you don't have as much time to prepare your fingers - so you have to be accurate straight away.

Here's example 3 which is just a C chord held down.

Example 3

Example 3 shows a C chord held down in 3/4 time. The notation consists of two lines of a six-string guitar. The first line shows three measures of a C chord (0-0-0-3-0-0) with fingerings 1, 2, and 3. Below the notes are the letters T I M A M I. The second line shows a fourth measure of a partial C chord (0-0-0-3) with fingerings T I M A M I.

Once you've got the hang of that, try using this pattern with the chord progression we had in the first lesson.

Example 4

Example 4 shows a chord progression in 3/4 time. The notation consists of two lines of a six-string guitar. The first line shows three measures of a C chord (0-0-0-3-0-0) with fingerings 1, 2, and 3. Below the notes are the letters T I M A M I. The second line shows four measures of a chord progression (0-0-0-3-0-0) with fingerings 1, 2, and 3. Below the notes are the letters T I M A M I. The third line shows a eighth measure of a partial C chord (0-0-0-3) with fingerings T I M A M I.

You might recognise this picking pattern from Smile by Stephin Merritt. Try out chord progressions you're familiar with using this pattern.

Lesson 3

This time, things will be getting a little complicated. We'll be picking more than one string at once and we'll be picking in uneven groups.

It's a step up in difficulty, but this pattern sounds great. It has a real Hawaiian uke-y sound.

In this example, you take the downward picking that we went over in the last email but play the G string with your thumb at the same time as you pick the A string.

Also, the notes are played in two groups of three, then a group of two. This can take quite a bit of practice to get used to. I still flubb it up occasionally.

Example 5

The musical notation for Example 5 consists of two systems of guitar tablature. The first system is in 4/4 time and contains two measures. The first measure has a red '1' above it and contains three triplet chords: A-M-I, A-M-I, and A-M. The second measure has a red '2' above it and contains two doublet chords: A-M-I and A-M. The second system contains two measures. The first measure has a red '3' above it and contains four doublet chords: A-M-I, A-M-I, A-M, and A-M. The second measure has a red '4' above it and contains three doublet chords: A-M-I, A-M-I, and A-M. The notation uses '0' for open strings and letters A, M, I, T for fretted notes. The letters are arranged in two columns: the first column contains the first string (A) and the second string (M), and the second column contains the third string (I) and the fourth string (T). The letters are placed below the strings, with the first string being the top line and the fourth string being the bottom line.

Once you've got the pattern down, you can start introducing the chord changes.

Example 6

Example 6 is a guitar exercise in 4/4 time, consisting of 9 measures. The notation is presented in three systems, each with a guitar staff and a corresponding chord diagram below it. The exercise is divided into three sections by measure numbers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

- Measures 1-2:** C chord. The first staff shows a repeating pattern of triplets: (3 0 0), (3 0 0), (3 0 0). The second staff shows a repeating pattern of triplets: (0 0 0), (0 0 0), (0 0 0). The chord diagram shows an open C chord (A-T, M-T, I-T, A-T).
- Measures 3-4:** F chord. The first staff shows a repeating pattern of triplets: (3 1 0), (3 1 0), (3 1 0). The second staff shows a repeating pattern of triplets: (2 0 2), (2 0 2), (2 0 2). The chord diagram shows an F chord with the third fret on the A string (A-T, M-T, I-T, A-T).
- Measures 5-6:** G7 chord. The first staff shows a repeating pattern of triplets: (2 1 2), (2 1 2), (2 1 2). The second staff shows a repeating pattern of triplets: (0 2 0), (0 2 0), (0 2 0). The chord diagram shows a G7 chord (A-T, M-T, I-T, A-T).
- Measures 7-8:** C chord. The first staff shows a repeating pattern of triplets: (3 0 0), (3 0 0), (3 0 0). The second staff shows a repeating pattern of triplets: (0 0 0), (0 0 0), (0 0 0). The chord diagram shows an open C chord (A-T, M-T, I-T, A-T).
- Measure 9:** A final measure with a triplet (3 0 0) on the first staff and (0 0 0) on the second staff, followed by a double bar line.

I've changed the F chord in this sequence slightly by adding the third fret on the A string. If it's open, you'll be playing the same note on two strings. It sounds fine but adds an extra harmony with the top C in.

If you're getting tripped up by this, just use the standard F shape and concentrate on the picking. Once you've got the picking pattern down, you can start with the fancy chord progressions.

There are many variations of this you can use. Have a play and see what you can come up with. For inspiration, check out, the master of this technique, Israel Kamakawiwo'ole playing Hawaii Aloha.

Lesson 4

I hope you've got your thumb warmed up because it's going to be doing a lot of work today. Twice as much work as it's been doing so far.

In alternate picking, the thumb alternates between picking the G and C strings like this:

Example 7

Musical notation for Example 7, showing a 4/4 time signature and a sequence of four measures of alternate picking on the G and C strings. The notation consists of a single staff with four measures, each containing four eighth notes. The notes are on the G and C strings, alternating between the two strings in each measure. The picking pattern is T (thumb) M (middle finger) T M T M T M. The first measure is marked with a red '1', the second with a red '2', the third with a red '3', and the fourth with a red '4'. Below the staff, the notes are represented by vertical lines, and the picking pattern is indicated by 'T' and 'M' characters. A double bar line is at the end of the fourth measure.

This example is so dull it'll probably turn up on the next James Blunt album. So let's add another bit in.

Example 8

Musical notation for Example 8, showing a 4/4 time signature and a sequence of five measures of alternate picking on the G and C strings. The notation consists of a single staff with five measures, each containing four eighth notes. The notes are on the G and C strings, alternating between the two strings in each measure. The picking pattern is T M T M T M T M. The first measure is marked with a red '1', the second with a red '2', the third with a red '3', the fourth with a red '4', and the fifth with a red '5'. Below the staff, the notes are represented by vertical lines, and the picking pattern is indicated by 'T' and 'M' characters. A double bar line is at the end of the fifth measure.

Here, the index and middle finger are simultaneously plucking the A and E strings. Hopefully, that part shouldn't be too difficult so you can concentrate on moving the thumb accurately between the strings.

Once you've got the hang of it try adding in the chord progression:

Example 9

1 3 3 3 3 3 2 3 3 3 3 3

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

T M T M T M T M T M T M T M

I I I I I I I I I I I I I I

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

0 1 1 1 1 0 1 1 1 2 1 1 1 1

2 2 2 2 0 2 2 2 2 0 2 2 2 0

T M T M T M T M T M T M T M T M

I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I

6 2 2 2 2 7 3 3 3 3 8 3

2 1 1 1 0 3 3 3 3 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

T M T M T M T M T M T M T M

I I I I I I I I I I I I I I

Get the hang of that and in a few days we'll be adding in an extra bit of alternating to take us far away from James Blunt, dull-o territory.

Lesson 5

In the last email, we started alternating the strings picked by the thumb. This time round, we'll be alternating the fingers as well.

The index finger covers the E string and the middle finger plays the A string. The pattern goes like this:

Example 10

Example 10 shows a C chord in 4/4 time. The notation consists of two systems of a five-line staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The first system has two measures. The first measure contains notes on the 5th, 4th, 3rd, and 2nd strings, with a '3' above the 5th string and a '3' above the 2nd string. The second measure contains notes on the 4th, 3rd, 2nd, and 1st strings, with a '3' above the 4th string and a '3' above the 1st string. The second system also has two measures. The first measure contains notes on the 5th, 4th, 3rd, and 2nd strings, with a '3' above the 5th string and a '3' above the 2nd string. The second measure contains notes on the 4th, 3rd, 2nd, and 1st strings, with a '3' above the 4th string and a '3' above the 1st string. The final measure of the second system shows a C chord with a '3' above the 5th string and a '3' above the 2nd string. Below the staff, there are four groups of pick-up diagrams, each with two strings (E and A) and a downward arrow. The first group is labeled 'T I T M' and the second 'T I T M'. The third group is labeled 'T I T M' and the fourth 'T I T M'. The final measure of the second system has a double bar line.

Adding in the chord progression turns it into this:

Example 11

Example 11 shows a chord progression in 4/4 time. The notation consists of three systems of a five-line staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The first system has two measures, both labeled 'C'. The first measure contains notes on the 5th, 4th, 3rd, and 2nd strings, with a '3' above the 5th string and a '3' above the 2nd string. The second measure contains notes on the 4th, 3rd, 2nd, and 1st strings, with a '3' above the 4th string and a '3' above the 1st string. The second system has three measures. The first measure is labeled 'F' and contains notes on the 4th, 3rd, 2nd, and 1st strings, with a '3' above the 4th string and a '3' above the 1st string. The second measure is labeled 'G7' and contains notes on the 5th, 4th, 3rd, and 2nd strings, with a '3' above the 5th string and a '3' above the 2nd string. The third measure is labeled 'C' and contains notes on the 4th, 3rd, 2nd, and 1st strings, with a '3' above the 4th string and a '3' above the 1st string. The third system has two measures, both labeled 'C'. The first measure contains notes on the 5th, 4th, 3rd, and 2nd strings, with a '3' above the 5th string and a '3' above the 2nd string. The second measure contains notes on the 4th, 3rd, 2nd, and 1st strings, with a '3' above the 4th string and a '3' above the 1st string. The final measure of the third system shows a C chord with a '3' above the 5th string and a '3' above the 2nd string. Below the staff, there are four groups of pick-up diagrams, each with two strings (E and A) and a downward arrow. The first group is labeled 'T I T M' and the second 'T I T M'. The third group is labeled 'T I T M' and the fourth 'T I T M'. The final measure of the third system has a double bar line.

It might take you a while to get this pattern 'under your fingers' but once it's there you'll never forget it.

Lesson 6

This pattern is very similar to the one we covered in the last lesson. The only difference is that the thumb switches the order it picks the strings. This is only a minor change in picking but it sounds much more intricate than the last pattern.

Example 12

T I T M T I T M T I T M T I T M T I T M

And with the chord progression it looks like this:

Example 13

C

F G7

C

T I T M T I T M T I T M T I T M T I T M T I T M T I T M T I T M T I T M

As always, mess around with these patterns. Play them in new ways. Mix them up together. Try everything you can think of and see which sounds take your fancy.

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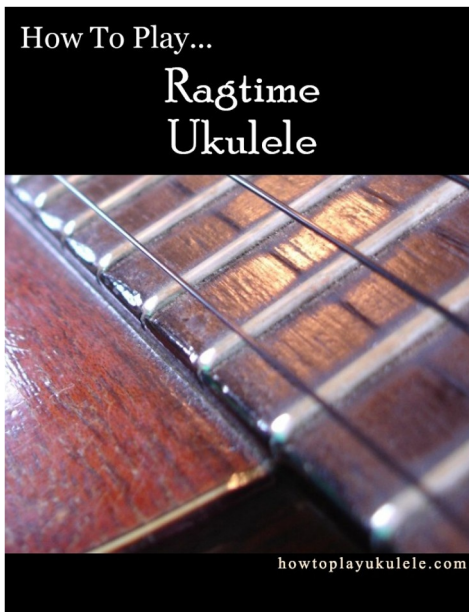


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