Finger Development and Warm-up Exercises
Robert Higginbotham

The following exercises are provided for various purposes such as right and/or left hand development, warm-up, ear training, thought provocation, etc.

Once you are comfortable with a particular exercise, i.e. the exercise is "under your fingers" then you should always use a metronome when practicing it. Exercise slowly striving for even tone, even volume, and precise rhythm. Your goal is to lock in with the metronome. In the real world, you will be locking in with other musicians.

Never practice an exercise faster than you can play it. Otherwise, bad habits will come quickly. Play the above both ascending (as written) and descending. Play exercises slow enough to keep the tempo even, keep the volume even (unless purposely accenting) and strive for good tone.

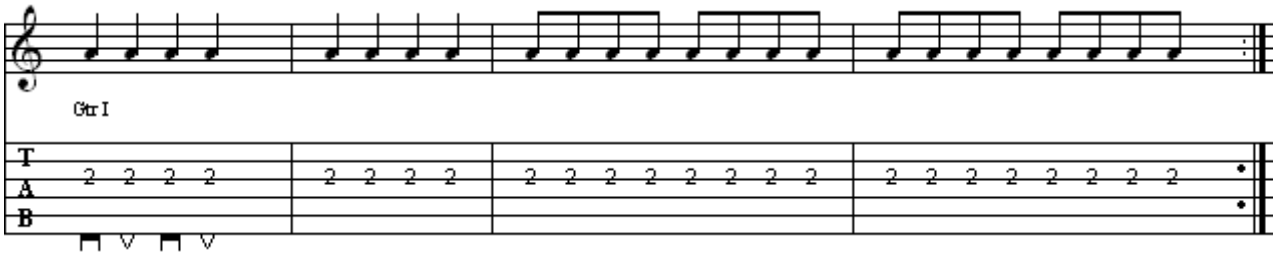
When using the metronome, tap your feet for at least a measure or two before playing to get the feel of the rhythm in your body. Take your time. There is no hurry.

Count quarter notes as one – two – three – four. Count eighth notes as one and – two and – three and – four and. Count sixteenth notes as one ee and uh – two ee and uh – three ee and uh – four ee and uh.

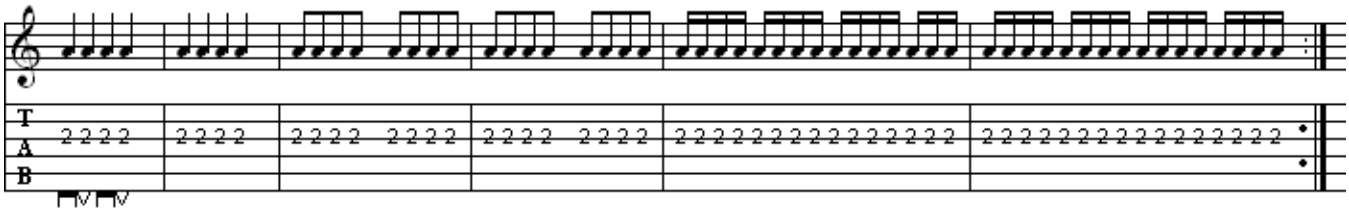
1. Right hand development

The important things to remember when practicing the following exercises are:

a. Keep the pick in close – it is an extension of your fingers
b. When picking, roll your wrist. Your arm should not be involved.
c. Using alternate picking (downstroke followed by an upstroke), pick down only as far as the other side of the string, then pick up only as far as the other side of the string
d. place a slight emphasis on beats 1 & 3. Once you have this down, you can alternate the exercise by placing a slight emphasis on beats 2 & 4. Beats 1 and 3 drive, beats 2 and 4 swing.



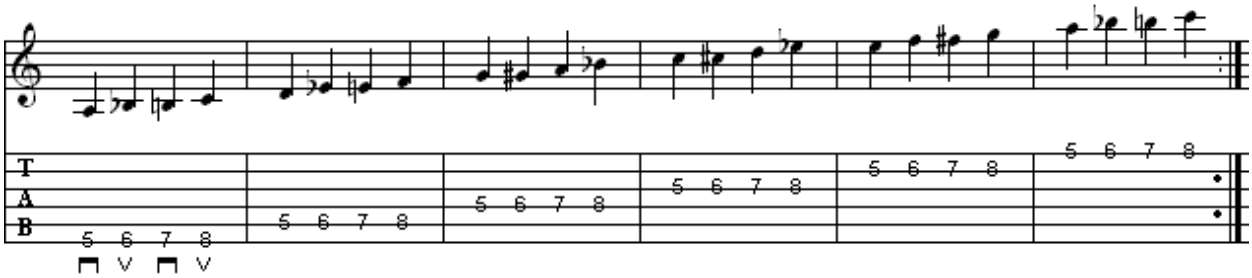
Once you are comfortable with quarter and eight notes, add sixteenth notes:



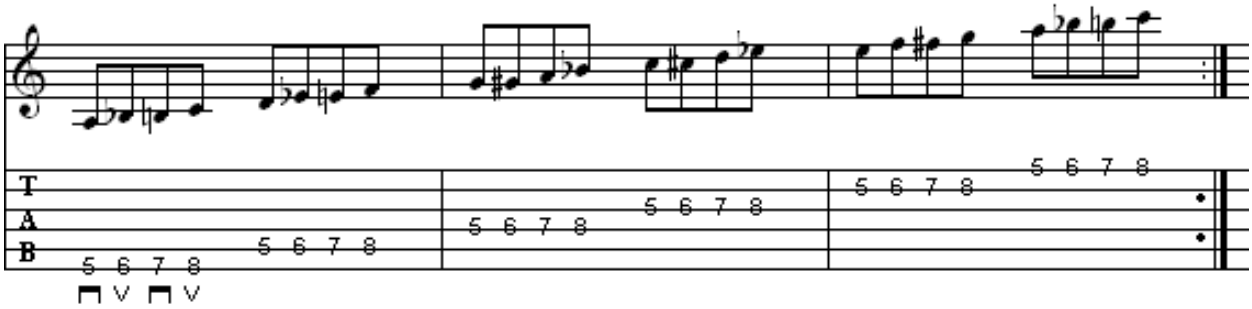
Practice these at any fret, or even open strings. These exercises are meant to focus on your right hand only.

2. Chromatics

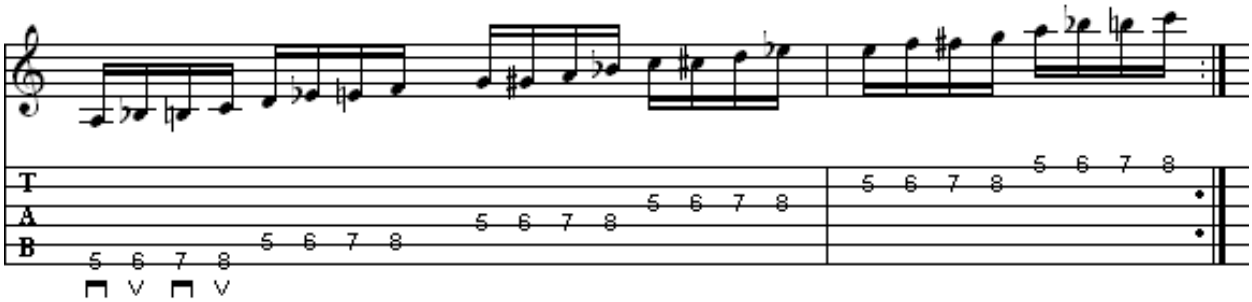
These exercises are intended to develop the ability to play neighboring notes.



Double up and play as eighth notes when you are ready:

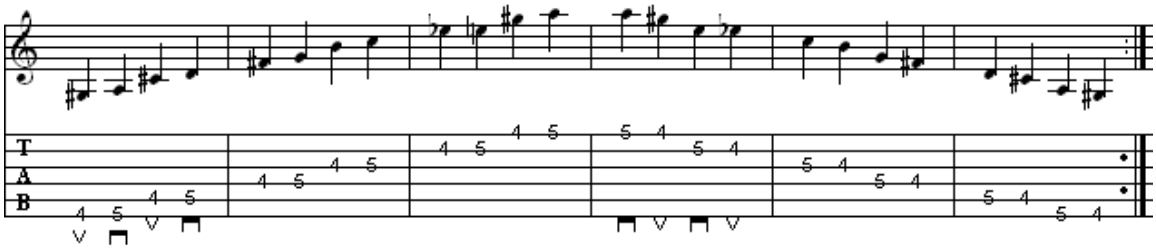


then as sixteenth notes when you are ready:



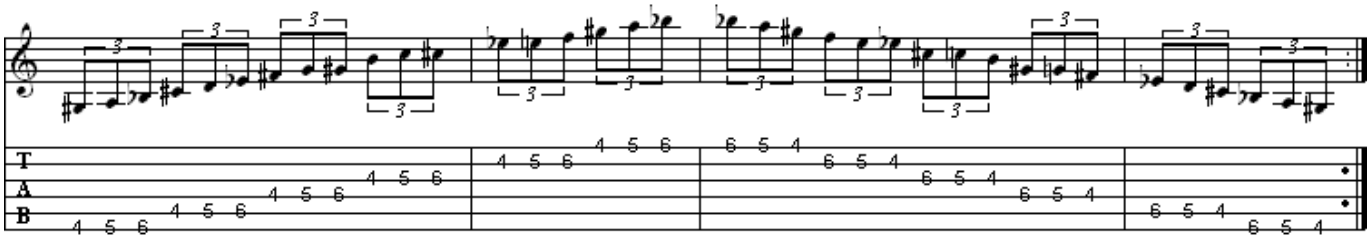
3. Two finger exercises for the left hand

Play this with your first and second fingers, then with your second and third fingers, then with your third and fourth fingers. This exercise should be played starting at different frets up and down the neck. Also notice that the alternate picking changes direction. The concept is simple – when you are changing strings towards the floor use a downstroke, when changing strings towards the ceiling, use an upstroke. As it becomes comfortable then apply the different speeds we used in example two – starting with quarter notes, then eighth notes, then sixteenth notes. Thirty-second and sixty fourth notes are fine too when you are ready:



4. Three finger exercises:

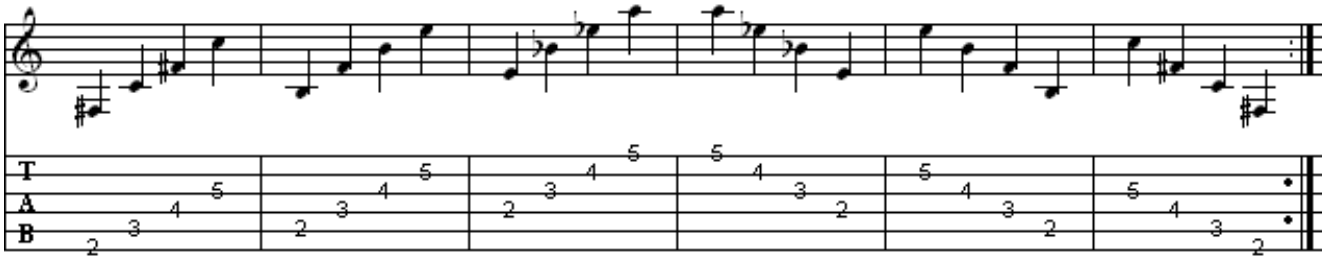
Play this with your first, second and third fingers, then with your second, third and fourth fingers. Because these are groupings of three, it may feel more natural to play the exercise as triplets (3 beats to one) so it's written as such:



One of the challenges with the above is the picking across strings. Using alternate picking will allow you to practice changing strings regardless of whether you are using upstrokes or downstrokes.

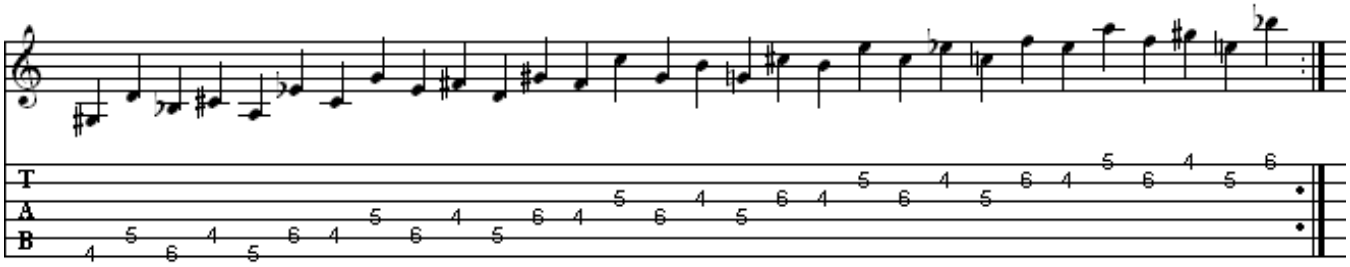
5. Diagonal lines

A good non-musical warm up exercise.



6. The Spider

This exercise comes from a Musician's Institute book entitled Ultimate Guitar Technique. It is an engrossing kind of a thing. While this example starts on the 4th fret, feel free to play it anywhere on the guitar. It is designed to develop finger independence.



These 'non-musical' exercises are meant as 'development' and/or warm up exercises. They are more valuable before you play something musical rather than afterwards because they are not musical. You can focus on your fingering and achieving good tone only rather than concerning yourself with the musicality of it.

Enjoy !