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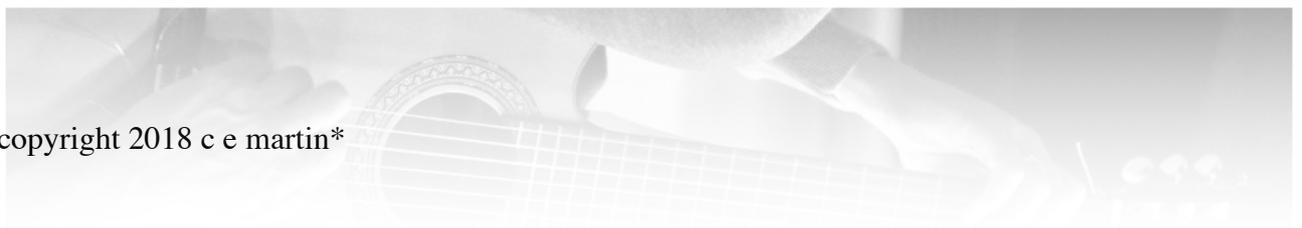
LEARNING ALTERNATE PICKING IN DETAIL

The aim is to impart subtle and sometimes hidden information.

These concepts are really a guide for those who are stuck or who are unsure of what is involved regarding the physical elements required for the alternate picking method of the guitar.



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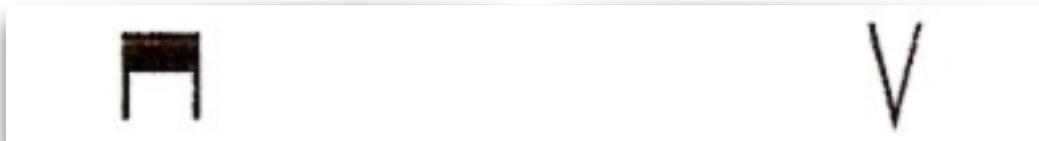


ALTERNATE PICKING FOR GUITAR IMPROVISATION

Alternate picking is a strict Up/Down or Down/Up Picking Movement as opposed to a hammering on and pulling off technique. We do this by employing a relaxed wrist motion plucking up and down or down and up from the WRIST. **Never do we pick from the elbow, forearm or shoulder!** We sometimes use a floating motion across the strings and sometimes a pivoting or anchoring technique by resting our palm lightly on the bridge of the guitar. The exercise below demonstrates the basic "Down Up" and "Up Down" Strict alternate picking movement.

DOWN STROKE

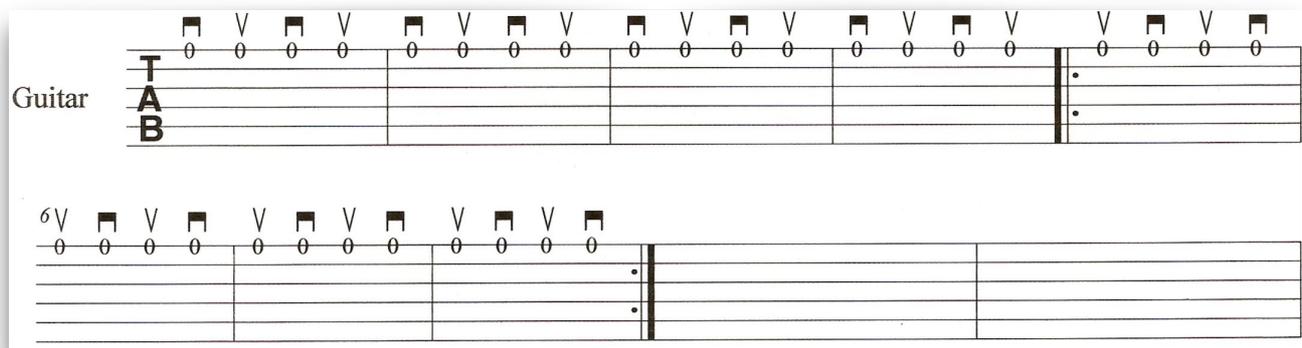
UPSTROKE



EX.1

Down Up etc.

Up Down etc.

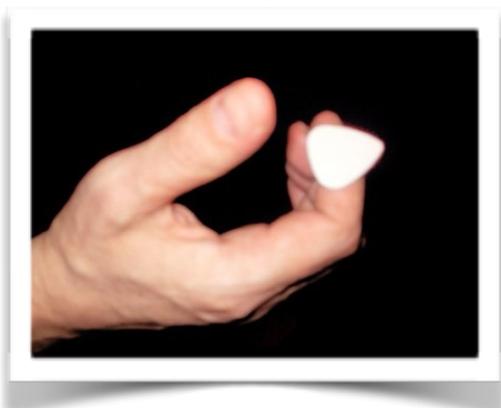
Guitar tablature for Exercise 1. The first system shows the top three strings (Treble, A, B) with a sequence of notes on the open string (0). The pick notation above the notes is: D, U, U, D, U, D. The second system shows the bottom three strings (6th, 5th, 4th) with a sequence of notes on the open string (0). The pick notation above the notes is: U, D, U, D, U, D, U, D, U, D, U, D. A double bar line is placed after the 12th measure of the first system and the 6th measure of the second system.

When Holding the pick [plectrum] the thumb needs to be "Rigid" but not tense [Flexible is the best definition]. There must be zero tension in the hand either. [With a loose thumb it is easy to drop the pick and lose fluidity.]

Ex.2 Simple exercise for holding the Pick:



Put out your hand as if to shake hands



Bring the fingers in as if to hold a cup



Bring down the thumb. It can remain "Flexible" but not wobbly and helpless.



Inside of plectrum grip. [Fingers Lightly Folded In]



Basic Grip with the **THUMB** as the "Powerhouse" [Never the arm/elbow]



Ready to Play! Although the thumb is gripping the plectrum firmly there is no tension in the hand or wrist.

THE CLASSIC PLECTRUM GRIP (MY STYLE)

The hand is closed but it is not tense. The fingers are lightly tucked in. The wrist is loose. This is a very common grip. This is a really excellent grip if you are having problems with your picking hand. This is the grip as used by the great improvisers like John McLaughlin and Al Di Meola.



OTHER GRIPS:



MAB Anchoring



Fanned out



Meola

Different players grip the pick in different fashions. I use the classic John McLaughlin grip because I feel it is the best one when it comes to jazz/fusion improvisation and complex rhythms. Whichever grip you choose always remember that regardless of how you hold the plectrum the Principles remain the same. ***The Thumb being the powerhouse that takes any "Pressure" as we "Pluck/alternate with the wrist".***

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO UNDERSTAND

THE MECHANICS!

If we look at the diagram below we can see what is PHYSICALLY taking place when we are crossing the strings.

If you pluck UP on your 1st string you will have to SKIP OVER the second string before plucking DOWN on it.

So when we are plucking across the strings **we are in a way string skipping.**

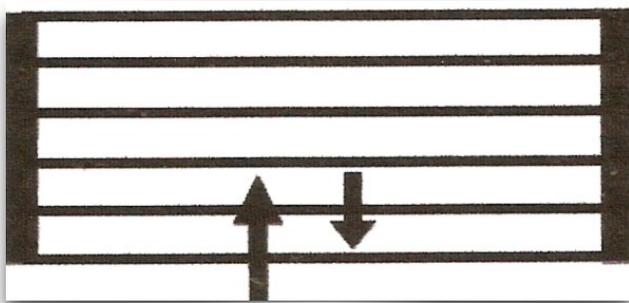
Most people I have taught are completely unaware of this. This is why so many people find/assume that alternate picking is difficult.

From the outside of the strings it is **UP SKIP OVER PLUCK DOWN PLUCK UP**

(DOWN SKIP OVER PLUCK UP-reverse

From the "Inside" of the strings it is **DOWN SKIP OVER PLUCK UP.**

(UP SKIP OVER PLUCK DOWN-reverse



VERY COMMON EXAMPLES/EXERCISES PT2

Down skip over pluck up-when crossing

This musical exercise is presented in two staves. The top staff is in 4/4 time and features a series of eighth-note triplets. The first triplet is circled, showing a downward skip from the 5th fret to the 8th fret. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB with the same sequence of notes: 5, 8, 5, 6, 5, 6, 8, 5, 8, 6, 5, 6, 8, 5, 8, 6, 5, 6, 8, 5, 8, 6. The first triplet (5, 8, 5) is also circled, illustrating the 'down skip over pluck up' technique.

Up skip over pluck down-when crossing

This musical exercise is presented in two staves. The top staff is in 4/4 time and features a series of eighth-note triplets. The first triplet is circled, showing an upward skip from the 5th fret to the 8th fret. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB with the same sequence of notes: 5, 8, 5, 8, 6, 5, 6, 8, 5, 8, 5, 8, 6, 5, 6, 8, 5, 8, 5, 8, 6, 5, 6, 8. The first triplet (5, 8, 5) is also circled, illustrating the 'up skip over pluck down' technique.

EXERCISE 3: "EVEN" Groupings 16ths Semiquavers.

Start with a downstroke and feel the last stroke in the group of 16th notes which will be an upstroke. Use this to be aware in order for you to pluck and accent the 1st stroke in the next group of four 16th notes. **This is an EVEN grouping in double timed 16ths meaning the picking pattern repeats itself.**

The exercise/lick below on a 3 6 2 5 | is built on 4 note groupings of 16ths called "TETRACHORDS". Take it slowly using the rhythmic method from the 16ths exercise above.

Exercise 4: **GROUPS OF 6 NOTES "ODD" grouping**

Start on a DOWN STROKE and then come "UP" on the second group of triplets and follow the sequence. The pattern DOESN'T repeat itself like 16ths because each group of 3 notes starts on a "Different Stroke".

FREVO INTRO By John Mclaughlin/Paco De Lucia

down up

The image displays a musical score for the 'FREVO INTRO' by John Mclaughlin/Paco De Lucia. The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system features a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a sequence of triplets of eighth notes. The first triplet is circled in black, and the second triplet is circled in green. The guitar tablature below the staff shows fingerings for each note, with the first triplet circled in black and the second in green. The second system also features a treble clef staff with a 4/4 time signature and a guitar tablature below it. The tablature shows fingerings for a sequence of triplets of eighth notes.

ALTERNATE PICKING ALIGNMENT

In the diagram below we can easily see the right hand crossing the strings picking each string naturally as it comes. We can also see that the right hand is always aligned with the string it wishes to pluck.

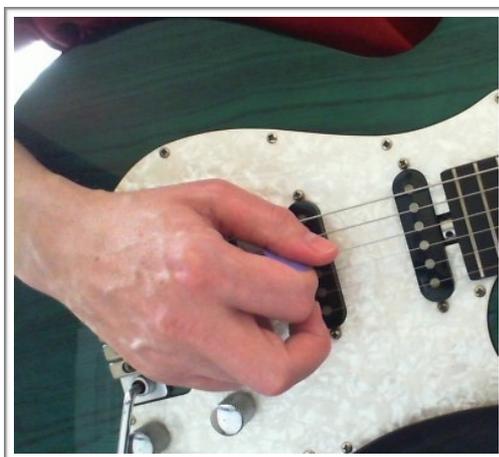
Aligned with the 6th string Open E



Aligned with the 5th string Open A



Aligned with the 4th string Open D





Aligned with the 3rd string Open G



Aligned with the 2nd string Open B



Aligned with the 1st string Open E

BE AWARE!

If you do alternate picking properly and pluck each string and each note of a phrase with a loose wrist and a relaxed arm/hand then you will avoid injury.

But if you just do a tremolo and hammer on then you will put yourself at risk.

The principles outlined in this short book are very simple and easy to understand. *They are not only here to help you progress but also to help you avoid injury.*



Bad Jammed wrist. Will stick when crossing 3 strings.



Nice loose wrist and perfect string alignment.

PALM ANCHORING/FLOATING

Anchoring means pivoting on the bridge lightly

Floating means not resting on the bridge for support. Although this support could come from resting the arm on the body of the guitar [mainly acoustic].

Below is an example of what I do which is a mixture 70% FLOATING with 30% Anchoring.



Palm in Position for Descent



Ready to Descend



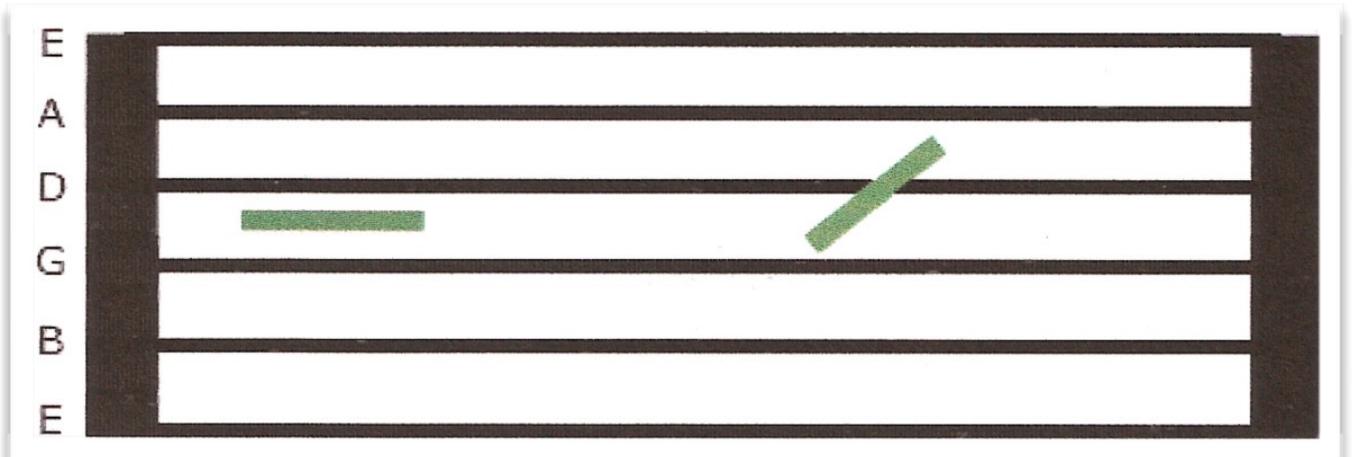
Palm in Position for Ascent



Ready to Ascend

ANGLING THE PICK

Some people prefer to angle the pick. Some people do this naturally.



Pick Flat

Pick Angled

It is best to use a “Hard” Plectrum for alternate picking. [Jim Dunlop do some very good hard plectrums].



METRENOME



Employing the metrenome is the only way to learn quickly and effectively. This amazing device will have you performing smooth and precise rhythms.

CONCLUSION:

This book is only a guide and was written for the main purpose of helping a beginner to understand alternate picking and avoid injury whilst learning it.

Thank you for reading and good luck

C E Martin

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