

## Fretting and picking hands

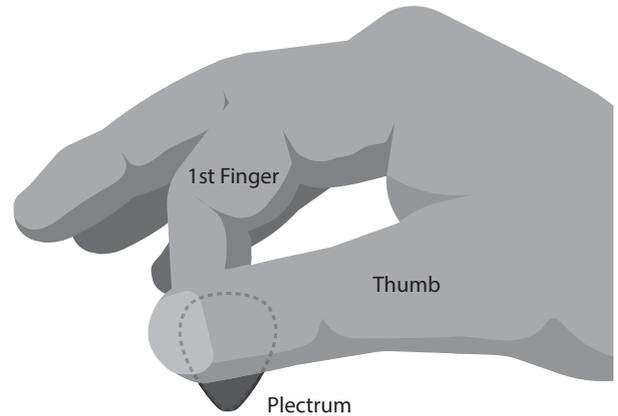
If you are right handed, you will pick or strum the strings with your right hand while using the left hand on the fretboard; if you are left handed this will be reversed. To avoid confusion we will refer to the picking hand and fretting hand in this book.

## Picking hand – plectrum or fingers?



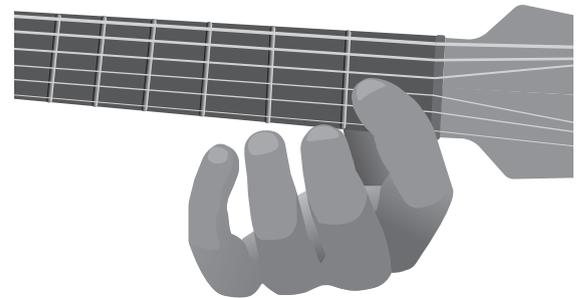
Notes and chords are played either using a plectrum (also known as a pick) or using the thumb and fingers on their own. It's good to be able to do both, but for now we'll work mainly with the plectrum.

The plectrum is held between the thumb and 1st finger of the picking hand. Plectrums vary in shape, but generally the most pointed corner is used to pick the strings. There should only be a few millimetres protruding from between the finger and thumb.



## Fretting hand

The fretting hand fingernails should be kept short. If you ever feel them contacting the strings or fretboard, they are too long and need to be trimmed. The fingers of the fretting hand push down on the strings to produce the notes or chords that are picked or strummed by the picking hand. Usually, only the tips of the fingers are used. Avoid flattening the finger as this will often get in the way of other strings.



## Tuning

It is important to make sure the guitar is in tune. This can be challenging for beginners and often requires help from a teacher, friend or family member with some musical experience.

Tuners come in many forms including clip-on and app versions. There is a tuning exercise towards the end of this book.



# Chords and chord boxes

## Chords and chord boxes (E minor chord)

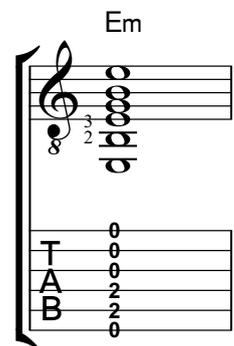
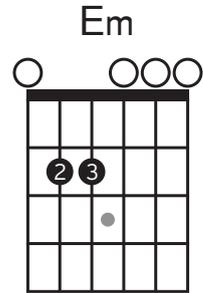
Full chords on the guitar may involve four, five or even all six strings. Guitar chords usually contain at least one fretted note and also often some open strings.

Chords are often shown using **chord boxes** (also called **chord diagrams**). A chord box is a grid which tells you where to place your fingers to play a given chord, and sometimes also use numbers to show which fingers to use. This represents the fretboard as seen from the front. The vertical lines are strings (with the low E string on the left); the horizontal lines are frets. The large black dots are fingers.

The example here shows how to play the chord of E minor, which is one of the easiest chords to start with. So in this case, the 2nd finger frets the 5th string, 2nd fret while the 3rd finger frets the 4th string, 2nd fret. All other strings are open strings – this is indicated by the circles above the other strings.

This chord can be shown in tab as seen below the chord box (the only missing information being which fingers to use).

There are many ways to play chords. The simplest is to strum from the chord's lowest string to the highest.



Tracks 36a & 36b

## Strum It!

Em

T  
A  
B

### Handy tip

Strums can be fast (so the notes almost sound at once) or slow (so you start to hear the notes separately, one after the other). Most of the time, strums should be fairly fast, but relaxed enough that they don't sound too aggressive.

# Fingerstyle basics

While most electric guitarists use a plectrum most of the time, many acoustic players use the thumb and fingers, especially when playing 'let ring' passages, as opposed to when strumming or playing melodic lines.

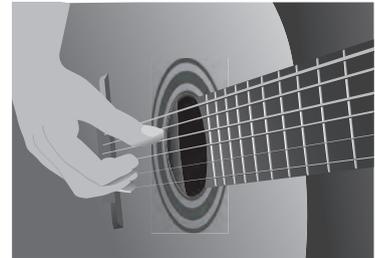
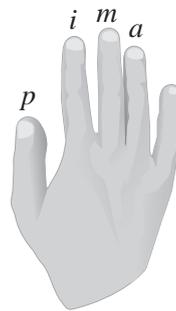
Using the fingers instead of a plectrum is known as **fingerstyle** playing. Whichever instrument or styles you are interested in, it's definitely worth exploring. However, all the fingerpicking pieces here can also be played using the plectrum.

## Picking hand

Usually, the thumb plays the lower three strings (E, A and D). The next three fingers cover the upper three strings (one finger each). This doesn't have to be a super-strict rule, and can be varied depending on the material. Strumming can be incorporated using either the thumb or several fingers together.

Where picking-hand fingering is shown, the following letters are normally used:

- p* thumb
  - i* 1st (index) finger: 3rd (G) string
  - m* 2nd (middle) finger: 2nd (B) string
  - a* 3rd (ring) finger: 1st (high E) string
- The 4th (little) finger is not usually used.



Tracks 62a & 62b

## Picking Time

Even though you don't always play every note of the full chords you have learnt, this piece will be much easier if you place your fingers as if you were going to strum the whole chord.

Musical notation for the first system of 'Picking Time'. It consists of a treble clef staff in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first three measures are: Em (i, m, a), G (i, m, a), and C (i, m, a). Each measure has a 'let ring' instruction below the staff. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with strings T, A, B labeled. The first measure has frets 0, 0, 0. The second measure has frets 0, 0, 3. The third measure has frets 3, 0, 1.

Musical notation for the second system of 'Picking Time'. It starts with measure 7, which is a D chord (i, m, a) with a 'let ring' instruction. This is followed by a double bar line and a measure with a G chord (i, m, a) and a '(strum)' instruction. Below the staff is a guitar tablature. The first measure has frets 0, 2, 3. The second measure has frets 2, 3, 3. The third measure has frets 3, 0, 2.