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Left-Hand Position

The left hand should cradle the neck but not hold it up. Your strap and/or sitting position should keep the neck in position so that your left hand can move freely. The neck should rest in the curve of the hand between the thumb and index finger. Again, remember to avoid tension. If you play guitar, you may find the left-hand position for mandolin to be a bit strange. If you play the violin, however, the position will be more familiar. Two of the main differences between the violin and mandolin are the doubled strings and the frets (violins have single strings and no frets).

Let's get the left hand into the act. Curve your 1st (index) finger over to the 2nd fret of the 4th course and place the tip of the finger just behind (nut side) the 2nd fret. You don't need to push hard; hold the string to the fret so that it can vibrate from the 2nd fret to the bridge. Give the string a good downstroke. If the sound is clear and free of any buzzing or rattling sounds, you've got it. If there is buzzing, or if the sound is muffled, make sure that you are applying enough pressure and that your finger is close enough to, but not on top of, the fret. Try this several dozen times with each finger on different courses at different frets to get a good feel for the way the left hand works.



Curve your fingers. Play on the fingertips just on the nut side of the fret.

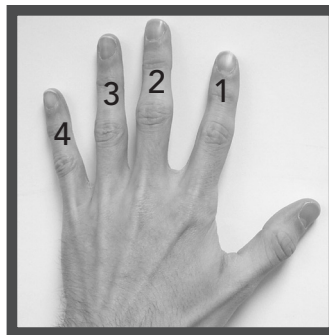
Left-Hand Finger Warm-up Exercise

Here are the fingers of the left hand and their number names:

Below is a finger exercise to warm up with. You should always warm up before practicing.

WARM-UP ON THE 4TH COURSE

- Play the open course, then
- 1st finger on the 2nd fret, then
- 2nd finger on the 4th fret, then
- 3rd finger on the 5th fret



The left-hand finger numbers.

As you add each finger, leave the previous finger down on the string in its position while playing the others. Then, lift all three fingers and begin again. Do this four times on each course.

Always pay attention to the quality of the tone you coax from your mandolin. Many factors contribute to tone: instrument type, pick, string choice, angle of the pick, left-hand pressure, etc. The most crucial factor is the player's concept of what the tone should be. To develop this ear for tonal quality, you must learn to listen. It may seem almost too simple, but that's all there is to it. Listening to great players will help you to develop a "model" of tone to emulate. You must also listen critically to yourself.

To play *Amazing Grace*, we have to move between two different courses, the 4th and the 3rd. As before, play only downstrokes, keep the pick perpendicular to the strings and maintain a good right-hand position. On the 3rd course, we will play D (open), E (2nd fret) and G (5th fret).

"But wait!" you say, "I have already played both D and G on the 4th course! What gives?" That's right—you played a D on the 7th fret of the 4th course and the open 4th course is a G.

The D on the 7th fret of the 4th course and the D on the open 3rd course are what we call a *unison*. They are simply two different ways to play the same pitch. The G on the 3rd course is one octave higher than the G on the 4th course; this means that for the higher G, the strings vibrate at exactly twice the rate of the lower G. (Physics at the service of music.) The two G's sound like the same pitch but in different ranges, as if one were sung by a man with a low voice and the other by a woman with a higher voice. They are still both "G." This also accounts for the fact that we only use the seven letters from A to G repeatedly to name our pitches (page 10). See page 13 for more about unisons.

♩ = 96

Track 5 *Amazing Grace*

	G C			E E			D C			A G			G		
T															
A															
B	0	5	2	2	0	5	2	0	5	2	0	0	0	0	
Count:	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3

	C E E			D G			E								
T															
A															
B	5	2	2	0	5	2	2	0	5	2	2	0	5	2	
Count:	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3

	G E E			D C			A G			G					
T															
A															
B	5	2	2	0	5	2	0	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	
Count:	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3

	C E E			D C											
T															
A															
B	5	2	2	0	5	2	2	0	5	2	2	0	5	2	
Count:	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3