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Online audio is included with this book. Using the recording will help make learning more enjoyable and the information more meaningful. Listening to the audio will help you correctly interpret the rhythms and feel of each example. The symbol to the left appears next to each song or example that is performed on the recording. Example numbers are above the symbol. The track number below each symbol corresponds directly to the song or example you want to hear. Track 1 will help you tune to this recording.

## *The Role of the Nail*

The nail is used in guitar playing to give a brightness and clarity that is not there when we pluck with only the skin; it also gives volume and helps project the sound outward from the body of the instrument. This projection of sound is a key element in all of the major right-hand flamenco techniques.

A well-shaped nail will flow easily over the string, but needs to be long enough to make contact and brighten the note. When nails are just right, there is a feeling of support and leverage that helps project the note in a way that seems disproportionate to the amount of energy being put into it—like a natural amplifier.

## *Strengthening the Nail*

Many people find that the techniques of flamenco playing tear up their nails. However, as one's technique evolves—becoming more and more relaxed—the nails act more as a bridge allowing a transfer of weight from the hand into the string, with impact on the nails being less and less. That being said, everyone's nails are different, and if you wind up playing with dancers, singers, and other instrumentalists, the intensity of playing is likely to take a toll. Because of this, you should consider some of the following ways to strengthen your nails.

Many people use products, including drugstore nail hardeners and, very commonly, nail glue. Often, a single layer or two of nail glue on the last third of the nail is sufficient to keep it from breaking. If glue alone is not doing the trick, silk wraps and/or acrylic powder can be added to the glue, then carefully shaped and buffed, creating extremely hard nails.

Time, experimentation, and daily vigilance are important factors in getting your nails just right. It is necessary to have a variety of nail files and/or grades of sandpaper (from medium grade to extremely fine) on hand for the daily care of your nails. It is actually a big time-saver, in the long run, to make sure at the beginning of each practice session that your nails are smooth and not catching on the strings. Sometimes, the temptation to just start playing leads us to ignore roughness in the nail that, in turn, leads to poor sound and erratic technique—not a good use of our valuable time.

Do not get salon acrylic nails. These tend to be clunky and lead to very poor sound. Also, for the sake of overall nail health, it is recommended, when using nail glues, to cover the least amount of nail possible while still doing the job. These products tend to damage the nail slightly when they come off, causing a weakening in the nail, and in turn creating more dependency on the glues. There are also cases of guitarists developing destructive nail fungus from prolonged use of these products. So, while many professional flamenco guitarists rely on these products, use them with caution, and avoid them if possible.

Today, there are various “fake nail” products that have been created specifically for guitarists and intended to not damage the nail underneath. You may want to explore these options if you find your own nail simply will not stop breaking or tearing.

Diet is also a factor in nail health, and further research into the effects of certain types of food may yield helpful information.

# Chapter 5: Additional Techniques


In the Technique Survival Kit (see page 17), we looked at the fundamental techniques needed to start playing real music. However, flamenco guitar utilizes an array of additional techniques as well, which we will look at in this chapter.

## Some Practice Pointers

As always, approach the material in this chapter with a relaxed and patient attitude. Remember that real progress

comes over time to those who practice daily (or at least 5–6 days per week). It is not recommended to practice technique only for more than two or three hours per day; keep in mind that even 15–45 minutes can yield good results. Regardless of how much you practice, make sure you stay relaxed, letting your arms hang by your side for several seconds between each exercise and standing up regularly. It is also recommended to take a 10–15 minute break after every 45 minutes of practice.

## Ligado: Hammer-Ons and Pull-Offs

*Ligado* (which means smooth, connected) is a technique where you play groups of notes without plucking with the right hand. All the notes are sounded with the left hand alone, using *pull-offs* and *hammer-ons*. Playing *ligado* is often viewed as more advanced and/or strenuous to the hand, but when approached properly, it can feel quite natural. Legato passages are connected with curved line called a *slur* .

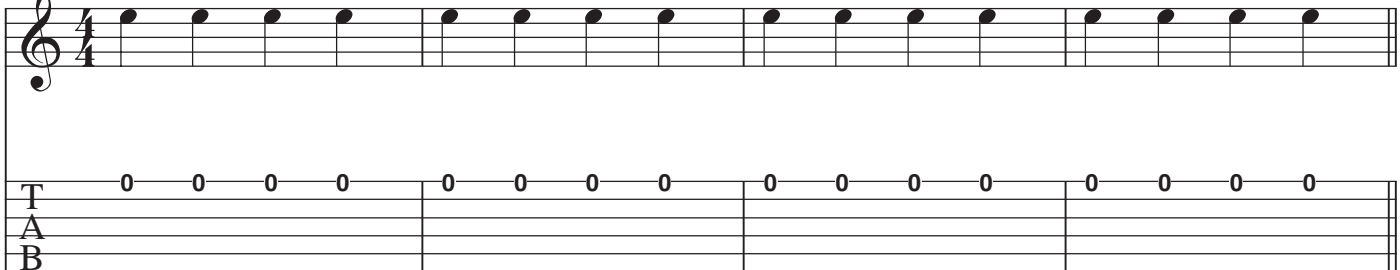
## Pull-Offs

To execute a pull-off, pull your finger downward—or off of—a fretted note, thereby sounding a second note on the same string; this second note needs to be already fretted, or you can pull off to the open string itself.

Let's build up to this technique by plucking the open high-E string with each finger of the left hand, one at a time. This will give us the feel for both hammering-on and pulling-off.

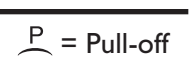
Pluck with left-hand fingers: 1 2 3 4 etc.

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Next, you will be pulling off from a fretted, plucked note. For example, In the first measure, fret the A note with your left hand and pluck it with your right, then pull off with your left-hand finger to sound the open E string, and

repeat the process. Try to maintain a consistent volume between the first and second notes of each pull-off.

 = Pull-off

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Track 55

