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Using Your Left Hand

The job of a left-hand finger is to shorten the vibrating string length by pressing the string into a fret. The shorter the vibrating string, the higher the *pitch* (pitch is the highness or lowness of the sound). Note that we *do not press the string into the wood of the fretboard*. It is by pressing the string securely into the fret wire that we change the vibrating length of the string, so the most efficient left-hand technique is one that accomplishes this using as little strength as necessary. Be sure to review How to Read Chord Diagrams with your child.

Introducing the Left-Hand Fingers

Numbers are given to the left-hand fingers for easy identification. The fingers are numbered consecutively, with the index finger being 1 and the pinky, 4.

1. Have your child hold up their left hand. Point to each finger and say the corresponding finger number.
2. Repeat, but this time, ask your child to say the finger number as you point.

Practice Suggestions

1. Have your child trace their left hand on a separate piece of paper. Then, number each finger.
2. Have your child hold up their left hand. As you call out finger numbers, have them wiggle the correct finger.

Hand Position and Placing a Finger on a String

Fingers are naturally stronger and will provide the best leverage in a curled position, like gently holding a ball. The left thumb should be in the middle of the back of the ukulele neck, between fingers 1 and 2. Keeping the elbow loosely in and the fingers curled, use the very tips of the fingers to press the strings, placing them directly next to the fret wire, but not actually ON the fret.

Practice Suggestion—Butterfly Finger Exercise

1. Using the photos on page 17 as a guide, have your child lightly place finger 1 without pressing down on the 2nd string, right next to the 1st fret. You can say the finger should be “like a butterfly landing on the string.”
2. Ask him or her to pluck the 2nd string with the pick or right-hand finger. You will hear a clicking, unpitched sound. No note will be heard.
3. Have your child slowly begin to add pressure with the finger as they pluck the string. The instant the string sings out a clear note, the student should stop adding pressure. That is as hard as they need to press to play.

Subsequent Lessons

Your child may experience a little discomfort at first. It takes a while to develop calluses at the tips of the left-hand fingers. Keep practice sessions short to minimize associating discomfort with playing ukulele, and always remind them that their fingers should not press hard or squeeze the neck. Repeat the “butterfly finger” exercise described above often.

Using Your Left Hand

Hand Position

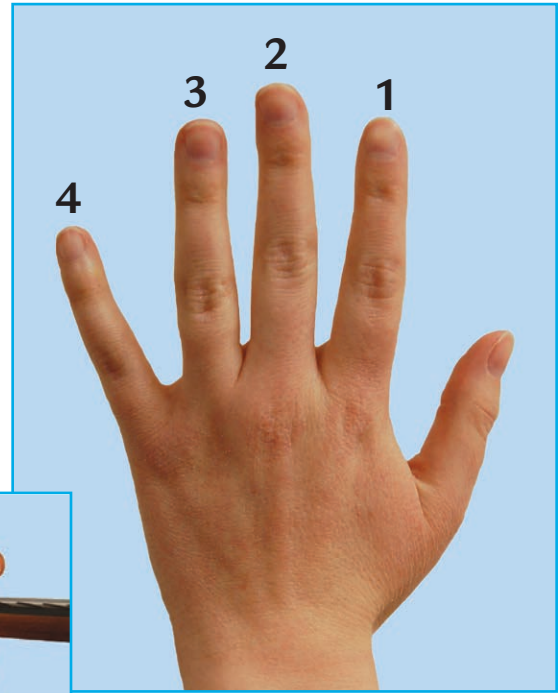
Learning to use your left-hand fingers easily starts with a good hand position. Place your hand so your thumb rests comfortably in the middle of the back of the neck. Position your fingers on the front of the neck as if you are gently squeezing a ball between them and your thumb. Keep your elbow in and your fingers curved.



Keep elbow in and fingers curved



Like gently squeezing a ball between your fingertips and thumb



Placing a Finger on a String

When you press a string with a left-hand finger, make sure you press firmly with the tip of your finger and as close to the fret wire as you can without actually being right on it. Short fingernails are important! This will create a clean, bright tone.



RIGHT
Finger presses the string down near the fret without actually being on it.



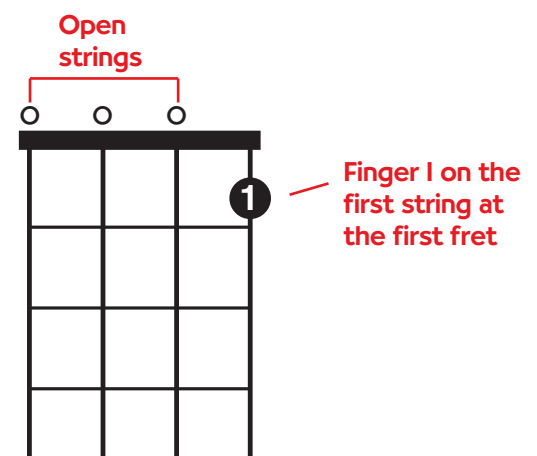
WRONG
Finger is too far from fret wire; tone is "buzzy" and indefinite.



WRONG
Finger is on top of fret wire; tone is muffled and unclear.

How to Read Chord Diagrams

Chord diagrams show where to place your fingers. The example to the right shows finger 1 on the first string at the first fret. The "o"s above the second, third, and fourth strings tell you these strings are to be played open, meaning without pressing down on them with a left-hand finger.



Three Chords in One Song

This song combines all three chords we've covered, plus rests. By now, your child should be developing some good practice habits, so putting three chords all together to play a song should be an attainable goal. If you haven't already, it's a good time to start singing "Skip to My Lou" around the house—you'll be playing it next! Have fun!

Introducing the Page

Together, begin by slowly playing each of the three chords—C, C⁷, and F—and discuss the different finger positions used to play them.

1. Since we must stay clear of the adjacent string to play an F chord, finger 1 needs to stand up nice and straight on the left side of the tip of the finger.
2. For the C⁷ chord, finger 1 is probably not standing up quite as straight, but we are still on the left side of the very tip of the finger.
3. For the C chord, we are right up on the center of the tip of finger 3, making an "okay" sign.
4. Now, discuss the content of the "Remember" box on page 29—you'll have to take things slowly since "Rain Comes Down" features three chords, quarter rests, and chords that change in almost every measure.
5. Can your child find the ONE measure in "Rain Comes Down" that does NOT have a chord change?
6. Ask your child to find the ONE measure in "Rain Comes Down" that does NOT have a quarter rest.
7. Point out that the second line of music does not have a new chord frame at the beginning of the staff, so the F chord from the first line just continues.

Practice Suggestions

1. Point at each quarter-note slash and rest in "Rain Comes Down" as you slowly and evenly count aloud, saying "1 2 3 rest 1 2 3 rest." Take special note of the one measure where there is no rest.
2. Practice going from measure 1 into measure 2 several times—F to C is a new chord change.
3. Use the rests as an opportunity to move a finger to the next chord.
4. Counting aloud, slowly strum "Rain Comes Down."
5. When strumming this song is comfortable and easy, try playing along with Track 14.

Subsequent Lessons

Remember to stay vigilant about your child's playing position. Are their shoulders level and relaxed? Is their spine straight? Is their left arm hanging loosely in and not poking out to the left? Keep your child's foundation solid!

Three Chords in One Song

F



C⁷



C

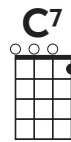
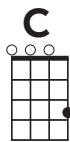
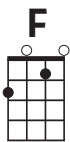


Remember:

This song has three different chords in it. At first, take your time and play slowly so that all the notes sound clearly. Don't forget to be silent for a beat on each quarter rest as you change to a new chord.



Rain Comes Down

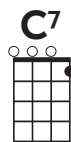
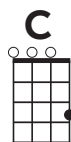


Musical notation for the first line of the song. The staff is in 4/4 time. The notes are: Tap (quarter), tap (quarter), tap (quarter), (rest) (quarter), rain (quarter), comes (quarter), down, (rest) (quarter), from (quarter), the (quarter), sky (quarter), (rest) (quarter), to (quarter), the (quarter), ground. (quarter).

Count: 1 2 3 (rest) 1 2 3 (rest) 1 2 3 (rest) 1 2 3 4

Tap tap tap, rain comes down, from the sky to the ground. —

(No new chord symbol, so keep playing F!)



Musical notation for the second line of the song. The staff is in 4/4 time. The notes are: Tap (quarter), tap (quarter), tap (quarter), (rest) (quarter), hear (quarter), the (quarter), beat. (quarter), (rest) (quarter), Rain (quarter), - drops (quarter), fall (quarter), (rest) (quarter), all (quarter), a (quarter), - round. (quarter).

1 2 3 (rest) 1 2 3 (rest) 1 2 3 (rest) 1 2 3 (rest)

Tap tap tap, hear the beat. Rain - drops fall all a - round.

Notes on the Second String: Introducing F

A note on the first space of the staff is called F. Use finger 1 to press the 2nd string at the 1st fret. Pick only the 2nd string. This fingering is the same as for the top fingered note in an F chord.

Introducing the Page

1. Review the F chord (page 27).
2. Draw your child's attention to the picture of the F note on the staff, the fretboard diagram, and the photograph on page 71.
3. Have your child position the left hand as for an F chord, with finger 1 on the 2nd string at the 1st fret, then, instead of strumming, pick just the 2nd string.
4. Congratulate him or her for having learned a new note!
5. Practicing "F Warm-up" will prepare your child for "Ping Pong Song" and "Soccer Game."
6. Notice that in the last measure of "Soccer Game," the 1st finger holds down the F on the 2nd string as you pluck the open 1st string A note. This will require playing on the very tip of the finger, being careful not to interfere with the vibration of the 1st string.

Practice Suggestions

Do these activities together for both songs:

1. Point at the notes and say their names.
2. Point at the notes and say which string they're on.
3. Point at the notes and say the finger numbers.
4. Use additive practice, mastering two measures at a time before adding them to measures previously mastered.

Subsequent Lessons

Practice all songs until secure, confident, and fluent enough to play along with the recording without error or confusion. Ease, accuracy, and confidence will never result from difficulty, error, and insecurity. SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE.

Notes:

Notes on the Second String

Introducing F

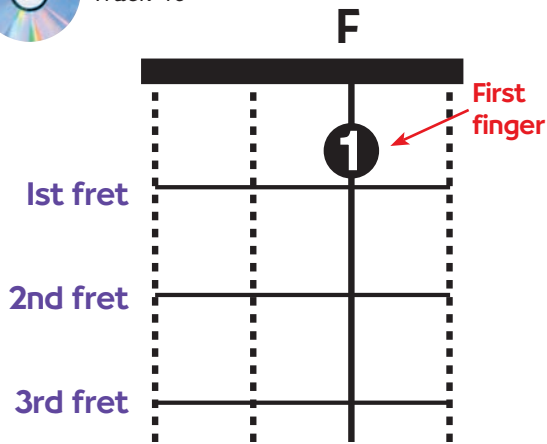
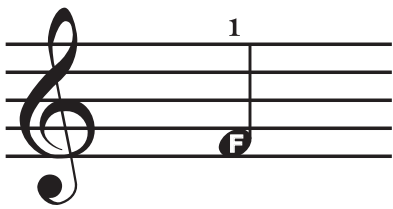


Hear this note!



Track 46

A note on the 1st space of the staff is called F. Use finger 1 to press the 2nd string at the 1st fret. Pick only the 2nd string.



Track 47

F Warm-up



Ping Pong Song



Track 48



Soccer Game



Track 49

