

tonebase Community | Beginner Challenge

Two Weeks of Right-Hand Technique

Week 1



Your Instructor: Mircea Gogoncea

Suitable For: Beginners

A tonebase Workbook

“Technique is like brushing your teeth: doing it a few minutes a day is much better than spending a whole day on it once a month.”

What You Need

- A guitar
- A metronome ([Google](#) has a free one, and there are many free mobile apps available on iOS and Android)

What You Do **NOT** Need:

- The ability to read music
- A pick (we’ll use our fingers instead)
- Long fingernails (all exercises can be performed without fingernails)

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Introduction

Hello and welcome to the inaugural **tonebase Community Beginner Practice Challenge!**

During the next two weeks, we will work on a select few right-hand exercises that will help you build good guitar technique, strengthen your muscles, and form healthy habits.

This workbook contains a few definitions and explanations, as well as the list of exercises to be practiced every day for the next week. During the second week, we will be learning some new exercises. You can choose whether you continue to practice the Week 1 exercises in addition to those, or not. I would advise that you do! Certainly keep an eye on your own time constraints and prioritize the new ones, however. With all that said, let's dive in!

Overview

This 2-week Practice Challenge begins with a live session on Friday, January 29th, at 11 AM PST. To participate, navigate to Community -> Live Events from the dashboard, or click the link below:

[CLICK TO WATCH THE LIVE SESSION](#)

To get the most out of this Practice Challenge, first check out the [Rules and FAQ page](#) on the tonebase forums. Check this site regularly for information about the next session. Please use this thread if you have any questions. Now, let's get started!

[CLICK TO VISIT THE FORUM THREAD FOR WEEK 1](#)

Basic guitar concepts

Your fingers, strings, and frets all have **names**.

On the guitar, your left-hand fingers are notated with numbers, while your right-hand fingers are notated with letters. Why? Because they typically both need to be written on the same staff, and it would get very confusing if they both used the same system.

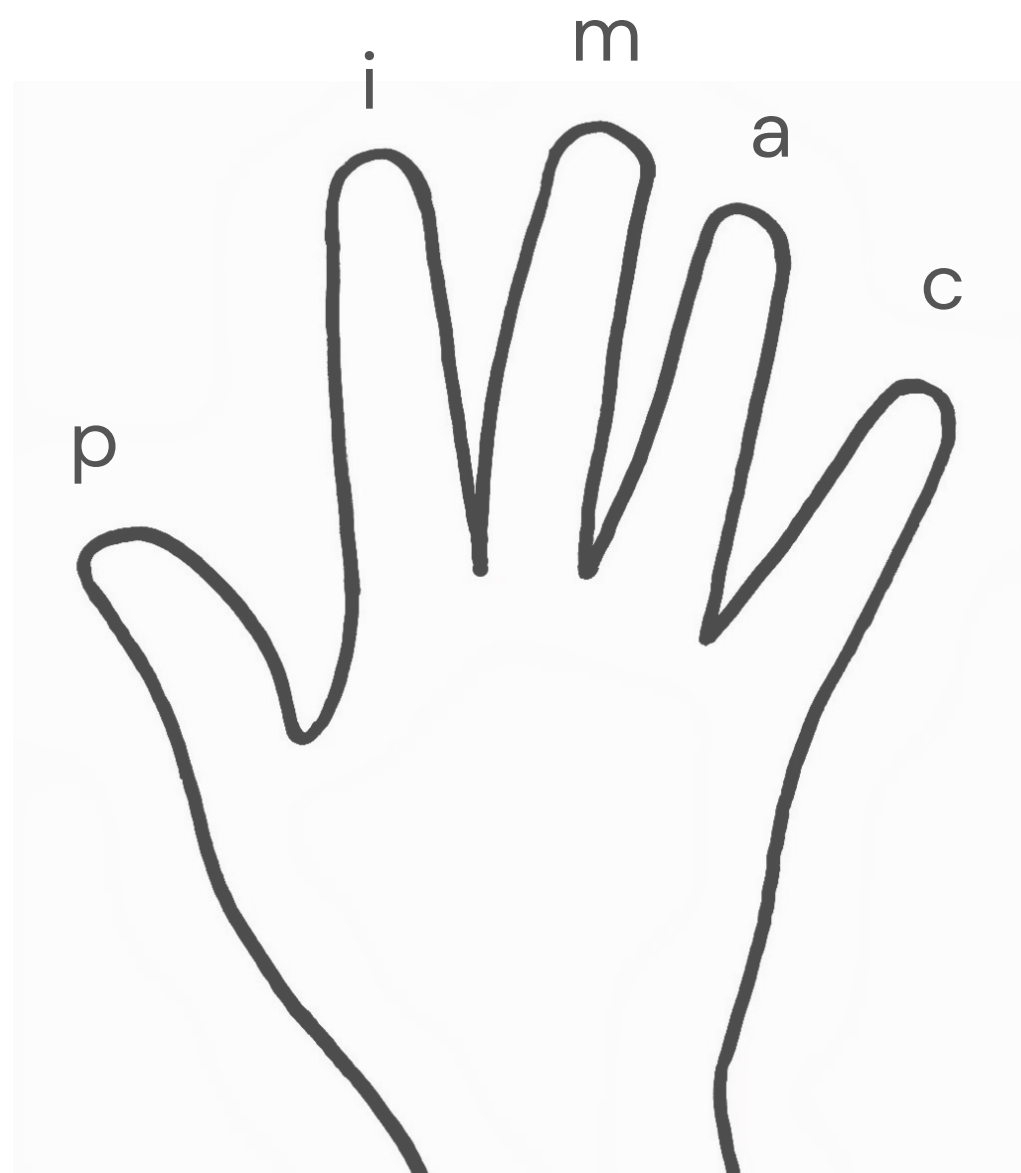
During our practice challenge, we won't be dealing with left-hand finger numbers at all. That's right - we'll only be playing open strings! You can certainly add left-hand fingers for extra spice while you practice at home; however, that is not a requirement.

Fingers

The names of right-hand fingers are as follows:

- Your thumb is called **p**, from Spanish *pulgar*
- Your index finger is named **i**, from Spanish *índice*
- Your middle finger is named **m**, from Spanish *medio*
- Your ring finger is named **a**, from Spanish *anular*

Why are those names in Spanish? Because the modern guitar was invented in the late XIX century in southern Spain. Why is there no name for the pinky finger? Because we don't typically use this one in the exercises we will be learning. (It does, in fact, have a name: **c**, for *chico* or *chiquito*. But it is rarely used outside *rasgueado* technique, which is way beyond the scope of this challenge.)



Strings

⑥

Your strings have numbers, but in order to tell them apart from other staff notation, these numbers are circled, as pictured on the right:

⑤

④

Every time you see a circled number on a guitar score, you can assume it refers to a string. The only issue that can get a little confusing at first when it comes to guitar strings is that the *highest pitched* string is your **first** string, and the *lowest pitched* one is the **sixth**. Due to how strings are laid out on the guitar, this means that your first string ("highest" note) is physically the lowest (closest to the ground), while your sixth string ("lowest" note) is physically closest to the sky.

③

②

This might take a little getting used to initially, but I promise you that it becomes very intuitive once you've spent a bit of time with it.

①

Notes and other markings

I promised you that you won't need to be able to read notes for this practice challenge. So what is this section all about?

Not to worry – I am keeping my promise! In the exercises I've selected for you, everything is explained in text form, using the letters and numbers we've learned above. Moreover, in the two weekly Friday livestreams, we will be going through everything you are supposed to be practicing in great detail, so that you may see and imitate at home.

However, I've also written out these exercises in standard musical notation, for those of you that can read music and would rather look at it that way. For the purposes of this workbook, the only things you need to know to understand this notation are:

- every black circle is a note you should play
- you read everything from left to right and top to bottom, just like you read English text
- you repeat all exercises as many times as you feel comfortable, without rests.

(You are certainly free to rest between practicing in different tempos, and between different exercises. Just make sure you don't leave any time between repeats of the few individual notes within a single exercise. This will be demonstrated.)

Also important to note is that **these are not tabs** – no numbers or any other symbols on here have any connection to the particular frets you should play. In fact, we won't be using frets at all, since this challenge is exclusively for our right hand.

Practice Guidelines

In the explanatory livestreams, I will be talking not only about how to *play*, but also specifically how to *practice* these exercises.

Step one is always to start without a metronome, by simply making sure we are playing the right strings with the right fingers and the right technique. Depending on your level of experience with the guitar, this step can take quite a long time! Feel free to spend as long here as you need.

Step two is to play things in *rhythm*, meaning not only in the right order, but also making sure that each note lasts as long as it is supposed to. In these exercises, all the notes are perfectly equal in length. This is certainly not the case in all music, however, it is a great place to start. Feel free to pick quite a slow *tempo* (speed) to make sure you are playing all the notes evenly, allowing them all to sound for the same length of time and more or less equally loud. No need to use a metronome at this stage either.

Step three is to slowly increase the tempo of these exercises using a metronome. The metronome is a very frustrating tool that will make it painfully obvious when you are not in time (when some notes are longer than others). It is a machine, and it is *supposed* to be annoying. If that happens, it's doing its job! There is no need to force unreasonable speeds on it. There is an entire chapter below dedicated to metronome practice. Just slowly increase the tempo little by little and get your fingers accustomed to the feeling of playing in a more fluid speed.

The metronome

Originally a mechanical device, the metronome is a now ubiquitous tool that can be found anywhere you look for it. There are countless free metronome apps available for your smartphone regarding of operating system (just search on the Google Play Store or Apple Store). For an extremely bare-bones version, feel free to just search for the word "metronome" on Google.

As soon as you turn on your metronome, you will see that its main feature is a numeric value measured in BPM. What is this?

BPM stands for **Beats Per Minute**, and it tells you exactly that: the amount of equal beats that can fit within a minute. The higher the BPM, the faster the speed. A BPM of 60 is equal to one sound being heard every second, since there are exactly 60 seconds in a minute.

Tempo is usually expressed in BPM. The word comes from the Italian word for "time" and simply means "speed" – how fast you are playing a certain passage of music or exercise.

Practicing with a metronome

The most important things to do when practicing with a metronome are:

- make sure you have fully completed steps 1 and 2 outlined above before you start
- always start in a very comfortable tempo, do not ever force yourself to begin in a tempo that is even remotely close to your current upper speed limit. That would defeat the purpose of metronome practice.

There are two ways to practice with a metronome:

1. Using the traditional metronome BPM values
2. Using a fixed increment

Traditional mechanical metronomes featured a logarithmic set of numbers that you could choose from, usually going between the values of 40 and 208. These are: 40, 42, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 63, 66, 69, 72, 76, 80, 84, 88, 92, 96, 100, 104, 108, 112, 116, 120, 126, 132, 138, 144, 152, 160, 168, 176, 184, 192, 200, 208. Musicians would choose a starting point and increase their practice tempo one step at a time, cycling through the available values.

Many contemporary musicians however opt to perform their metronome practice using a fixed increment starting from their initial value. An example would be starting at 80 pm and increasing 5 BPM every round: they would practice their exercises at 80, 85, 90, 95, 100, 105, 110, 115, etc.

Feel free to play around with these! It is perfectly fine – and even recommended – to do multiple repeats of the same exercise at the same speed, or to go "two steps up, one step down", or to keep increasing before bouncing back to a slightly lower value and starting again.

Techniques and Exercises

Rest stroke versus free stroke

In the first livestream on January 29th, we will be talking about two different playing techniques for your right hand. These are called *free stroke* and *rest stroke*. (Internationally, the two are also commonly referred to by their Spanish names, *tirando* and *apoyando* respectively.)

Exercises 1a, 1b, 1c are identical to exercises 2a, 2b, 2c. The only difference is that the first set should be practiced using *free stroke* and the second set should be practiced using *rest stroke*.

At its most basic level, *free stroke* allows your right-hand fingers to move towards the center of your palm after you pluck a string, while *rest stroke* has each of your fingers resting on the next string after they pluck.

Free stroke can sound lighter and more *legato* (the notes connect to each other easier), while *rest stroke* can sound more defined and percussive, and also projects better over long distances. Both are essential techniques for professional guitarists and come with their own advantages and disadvantages.

Although *rest stroke* is also commonly used with *p* (the right-hand thumb), we will not be practicing it in these exercises yet, focusing instead on the *i* and *m* (index and middle finger) for highlighting the two techniques in this challenge.

"Planting" or right-hand preparation

Each one of the exercises we will be looking at requires you to have at least one finger "planted" on the strings while other fingers are playing. What does this mean?

"Planting" or "preparing" is a word used to describe the act of gently resting a finger that is currently not playing on a string that is currently not being played. Some teachers have a very strong preference for or against the word "planting", however, the technique itself is widespread throughout most schools of guitar playing, from the most folkloristic to the most intellectual.

The most important things to keep in mind while planting are:

- Do not tense the planting finger while the other fingers are moving, or push the string it is resting on down or in any direction
- Do not place the finger on the string in an unnatural or new position: rest it on the string as if it was just about to play

Planting gives your hand stability and strength. It can save you a lot of practice time, allowing you to build good habits from the beginning of your guitar journey. I recommend giving it a try!

3a. Everything on the fifth string (see circled number)

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Each black circle represents one note you should play

p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p etc...

Place index finger on 3rd string. Place middle finger on 2nd string. Place ring finger on 1st string. Do not press fingers into the strings. Do not move those fingers.

Repeat as usual

3b. Everything on the sixth string (see circled number)

⑥

Each black circle represents one note you should play

p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p etc...

Place index, middle and ring finger as explained above.

Repeat as usual

3c. Challenge exercise: play one note per string (see circled number)

Each black circle represents one note you should play

⑥ ⑤ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑤ ④ ⑤

p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p thumb p etc...


Place index, middle and ring finger as explained above.

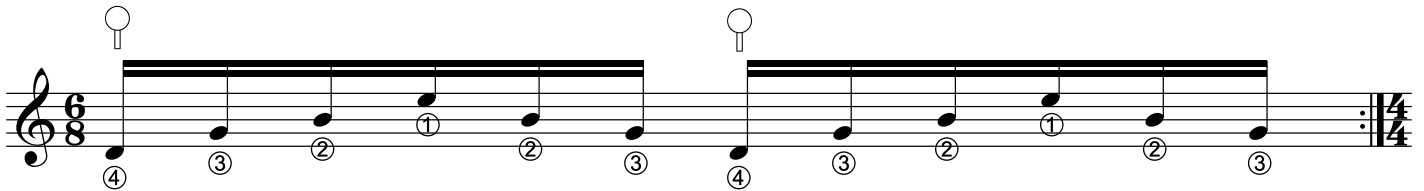
Repeat as usual

Challenge Exercises

5a. Up-and-down arpeggios

Same as 4c, except do not prepare the chord again until the next bass (4th string) comes along.

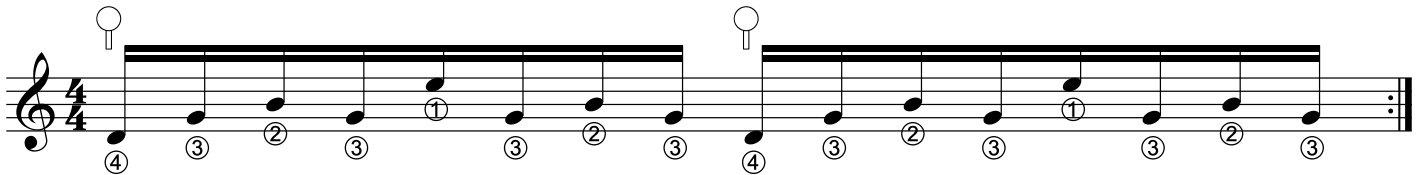
See symbol: 



Although you can initially practice by adding in rests every time you prepare (see symbol), try to get to a point where you can play these exercises without stopping to place all four fingers on their respective strings.

5b. Complex Arpeggio Patterns

Same as 5a.



Remember you can always read the circled numbers (strings) if you can't read music.
All right-hand fingerings in Week 2 exercises are the same (thumb = fourth string;
index = third string; middle = 2nd string; idex = 1st string.)

Next Week

In Week 2 of this beginner practice challenge, we will be working with all four right hand fingers commonly employed on the classical guitar: *p, i, m, a* as we tackle the incredibly important and handy concepts of chords (multiple notes at the same time) and *arpeggios* (playing these notes one by one, usually each on its own different string.)

About Your Instructor: Mircea Gogoncea

Mircea Gogoncea is a Romanian–German classical guitarist based in Los Angeles. He has performed in over 350 concerts on 5 continents. In 2018, these included recitals in Cuba, Nigeria, India, Germany, the UK, the USA, Spain, France, Luxembourg and Romania. Having been awarded a total of 167 prizes, he is also considered one of the guitarists with the highest number of awards in the world. Among the most prestigious of these are the 1st prize at the 2018 Havana International Guitar Competition in Cuba, 1st prize at the Julián Arcas Guitar Competition in Almería, Spain, 1st prize at the GFA Youth Solo Competition in Los Angeles and the Audience Prize at the F. Tárrega Competition in Benicassim, Spain.

In April 2018, he organized and taught the first–ever guitar masterclass and workshop in Lagos, Nigeria. Fundraising for this charity project consisted in a 7–concert tour of India and one performance in Germany, where, together with his chamber music partners, he raised triple their project’s target amount. His trip to India and Nigeria was turned into a documentary [that can be seen on YouTube](#).

He is currently a Teacher’s Assistant for classical guitar at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and a doctoral student under Grammy award–winner Scott Tennant. He graduated with maximum marks and honors from the “Konzertexamen” excellence program at the Robert Schumann Hochschule Düsseldorf under Joaquín Clerch, as well as the “Advanced Diploma” program of the Royal Academy of Music in London. Previously, he had completed two master’s degrees simultaneously in Düsseldorf and London. During his studies in London, he was awarded the inaugural David Russell Prize in 2014.



