

The Banjozone Method

A Modern Method for 5-String Banjo

Book 1

by Dennis Bailey

banjozone.com

Banjozone Method
Book One
Table of Contents

• Introduction.....	3
• Parts of the Banjo.....	5
• Playing position.....	7
• Left hand technique.....	10
• Right hand technique.....	11
• Tuning the Banjo.....	13
• How to read tablature.....	17
• Rhythm Exercises.....	20
• Basic rolls.....	23
• Left hand fingering.....	25
• Basic chords.....	26
• The Alternating thumb roll.....	27
• Fret markers.....	29
• "Banjo in the Hollow".....	30
• "Goodnight Ladies".....	31
• "Skip to my Lou".....	32
• "You are My Sunshine".....	34
• Vamping with chords.....	36
• Slides.....	38
• "Worried Man Blues".....	39
• The G major scale.....	40
• "Red River Valley".....	41
• Hammerons.....	42
• Pulloffs.....	43
• "Cripple Creek".....	44
• Practice tips.....	45
• "Wildwood Flower".....	47
• "I'll Fly Away".....	48
• "John Hardy".....	50
• "Devil's Dream".....	52
• "Dueling Banjos".....	55

♫= indicates example or song is on CD or MP3

Welcome to this method for learning the 5-string banjo!

Our goal is to teach you to play music on the Banjo. This book covers the basics of the Banjo and progresses to teach you how to start jamming with others.


The Banjo is basically a drum with strings on it. It could be thought of as a percussion instrument that melodies can be played on. One of the essential elements to producing musical sounds on the Banjo, is timing. The banjo has little sustain so it is essential that it be played with good timing. Sustain is the length of time the string rings after it is picked.

This approach is a method to guide you through the beginning stages of learning the banjo. We will progress onto more advanced skills in later books.

We start out as if you have never played any type of musical instrument. If you have played an instrument before it will be helpful but not necessary.

Rather than just teaching licks and songs, we try to get you to look at the banjo from several different angles. We use tablature, written music and ear training to do this.

This book is written as a stand alone instructional manual (with accompanying CD) or to be a companion to the videos on our website: www.banjozone.com Each section of the book is explained in detail via video.

The musical note symbol  indicates that a recording is available to practice with. Each recording is played at three tempos, or speeds. The Banjo is in the right channel so that it can be turned off if you wish to play along with only the Bass and Guitar.

Our ultimate goal is to help prepare you to jam with others, how to solo and backup others, and build a storehouse of songs, licks and backup techniques. As we progress through this series of books, you will possess general musical knowledge that will enable you to compose your own solos and write your own music on the banjo. You will also have a vocabulary that will enable you to communicate with other musicians.

There are three main styles of Banjo playing in three finger style playing:

- Scrugg's style
- Melodic style
- Single String style

In Scrugg's style, we play a melody and have fill in notes played around the melody. We have two things going on at the same time. We have a melody and an accompaniment played at the same time. This may sound difficult, but with the instruction in this book, we ease you into this style of playing. We will learn some melodies and then apply some of the rolls (patterns) to them.

In Melodic style, every note is a melody note, but the notes are spread out over different strings. In other words we are not playing the same string twice in a row (usually)

In Single String style, every note is also a melody note, but many of the notes occur on the same string. For example, two or more notes may be played on one string before going to a higher or lower string.

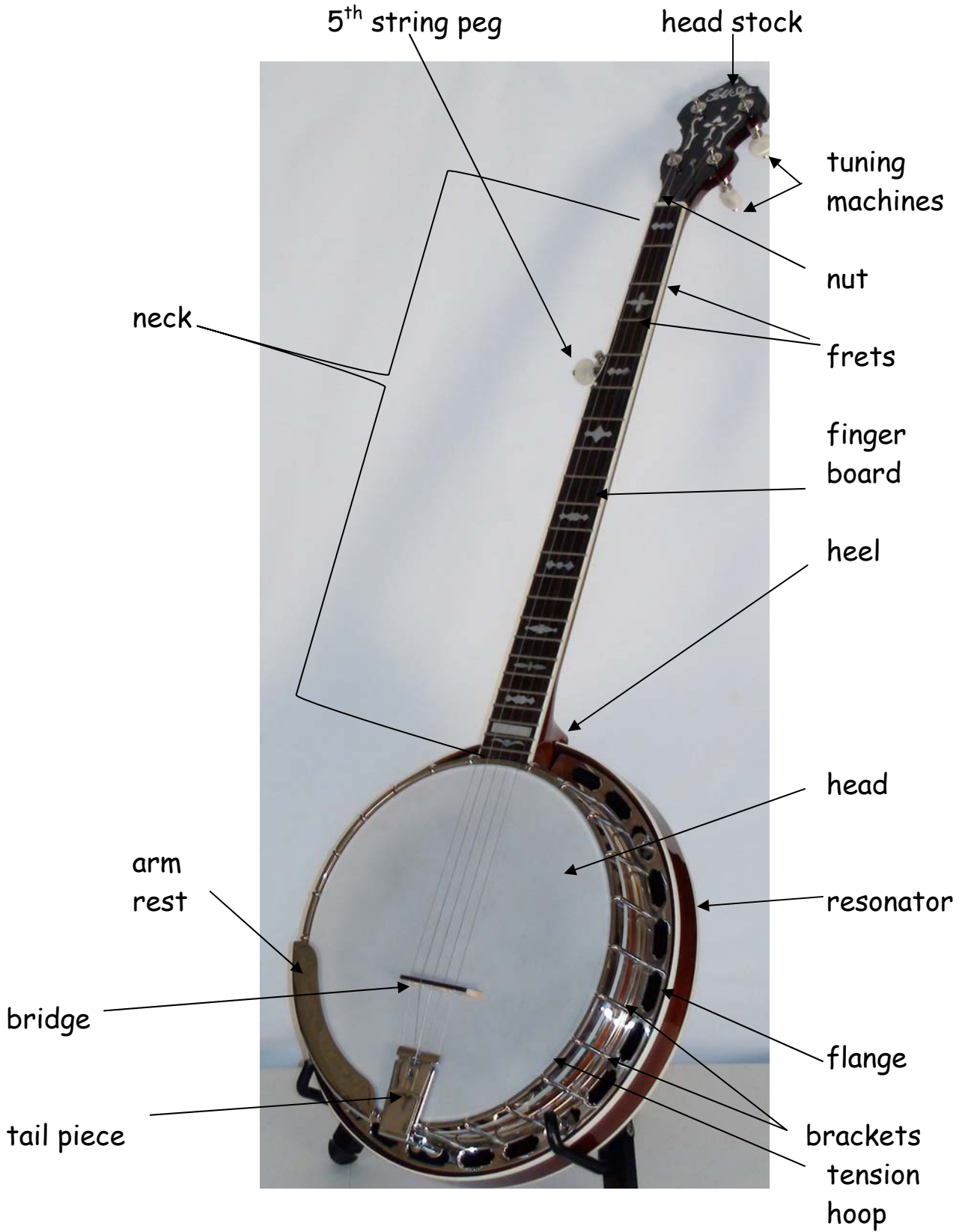
This book will focus mainly on Scrugg's style with the exception of "Banjo in the Hollow" which is a melodic tune.

So let's get started!

First let's learn about some of the parts of the Banjo. It is helpful to know a few of the part names of the Banjo. You may need to communicate with a repair person at some point, and you will be able to describe the part that needs attention.

Two charts are presented. The first one with the parts listed, and the second chart with blanks. Over the next few practice sessions, test your self on these parts.

Parts of the Banjo



Playing Position

The banjo tends to be a little "neck heavy". In other words, the neck needs to be supported by your left hand. In order to free up the movement of your left hand, it's best to wear your strap when sitting. When in proper playing position, the neck should stay stationary when you remove your left hand. So in other words, you should not have to support the neck with your left hand while playing.

The following pictures will show the best place to attach the strap to achieve the best balance for your banjo.

Notice in figure 7-1 that the strap is attached to the first bracket on the bottom of the heel.

Figure 7-1



Playing Position (cont.)

Notice in figure 8-1 that the strap is attached to the first bracket above the tail piece. By attaching the strap ends to these brackets, It will provide the best balance and comfort while playing the banjo. The Banjo should rest lightly on your lap when in playing position. Keep both arms and hand relaxed and sit in a chair that will provide adequate lumbar support.

Figure 8-1



Playing Position While Sitting

Figure 9-1



Notice the angle of the neck. It is approximately at a 45 degree angle to the floor. Due to the length of the the neck, it is best to hold the Banjo with the neck at this angle to facilitate ease of left hand playing. Just let the banjo rest gently against your body, remembering to keep arms, shoulders and hand relaxed. Again, just a reminder, if the left hand is removed, then the neck should stay stationary.

Left Hand Technique

Cradle the neck loosely in the "V" part of your hand. Bend your wrist slightly (as if you are pointing at yourself) By keeping a slight bend in your left wrist, this will help place your fingers out over the fingerboard. Play with the tips of your finger, as opposed to the pads. When fretting the Banjo, place your fingertip directly behind the fret. If the fret is touched, it will mute the string and if your finger is too far away you may get a buzzing noise. Just press the string down with enough force to obtain a clean tone. If the string is pressed too hard, it can push the string out of tune. Also check your fingers that they are coming down at a right angle to the neck. Try not to bend the string up or down as this will also stretch it out of tune. Think of your left hand fingers as you would if you were fretting a string with a pencil.

Figure 10-1



Your fingers should come down on the fingerboard in a perpendicular manner. By keeping your wrist bent slightly, this will also allow you to get a clean tone by not touching the surrounding strings.

Right Hand Technique

Put your right arm about in the middle of the arm rest. Now make a fist and relax it. Place your little finger down on the Banjo head and that is your right hand position. Keep just a slight bend in your right wrist. The fingers always pick up and the thumb always picks down. You may find more stability in your right hand by placing both the little finger and the ring finger on the head. Some players, however, find that this technique hinders the movement of the middle finger. Experiment with both techniques and find which feels the most comfortable.

You will need two finger picks and a plastic thumb pick. There are many different picks on the market. At Banjozone, we recommend Kyser finger picks and Goldengate thumb picks.

Figure 11-1



Bend the finger picks so follow the contour of your finger tip up to about the middle of your fingertip.

You may want to experiment with several different angles until you find what works best for you.

Figure 12-1



The finger picks take some getting used to. You may be tempted to practice without them. We recommend practicing with the picks on all the time. After awhile, you will not even notice them.

Your finger picks will eventually form themselves to your fingers (like a pair of shoes if you will)

Mark your finger picks so that the index finger pick always goes on the index finger and the middle pick always goes on the middle.

A knife can be used to make a mark on the inside of the index pick. The finger picks should hit the string squarely. You will get a fuller tone if the pick contacts the string with the most pick surface.

Tuning the Banjo

This chart shows how the strings are numbered and the note name of each string. The most common tuning is *G* tuning. There are other tunings for the Banjo, but for this book we will be using *G* tuning. Tuning by ear takes some practice, but over time your ear will develop.

Figure 13-1

	4-D	3-G	2-B	1-D
5-G				

Let's learn three new terms concerning tuning:

Pitch: Literally means vibrations per second or hz (hertz) hz is how many thousand vibrations per seconds the string is producing. A higher pitch has more vibrations per second than a lower pitch. The first string D is higher than the second string B. Therefore, the first string has a higher pitch than the second string.

Pitch: (cont) An A note at the first string 7th fret has a pitch of 440 hz. A 440 is the International standard to which we tune any instrument. When tuning with an electronic tuner, it is best to make sure it is set (calibrated) to A 440

Sharp: The note is higher than the desired note we are tuning to.

Flat: The note is lower than the desired note we are tuning to.

When tuning with an electronic tuner, pick the string closer to the neck. This will give the string more sustain and make it easier for the tuner to read the pitch.

Start by tuning the fourth string first as it is the heaviest and less likely than the other strings to stretch or go out of tune. Then tune the, third, second, first and fifth. You may have to tune the strings several times to get your Banjo in tune. When you change the pitch of a string, it affects the tension on the bridge which in turn affects the pitch of the other strings.

It is best to tune up to the correct pitch rather than down to the pitch.

There are several "pinch points" on the strings: tuning machines, nut, bridge and the tail piece. By tuning up to the pitch, it takes the stretch out of the string not allowing it to get stuck on one of the pinch points.

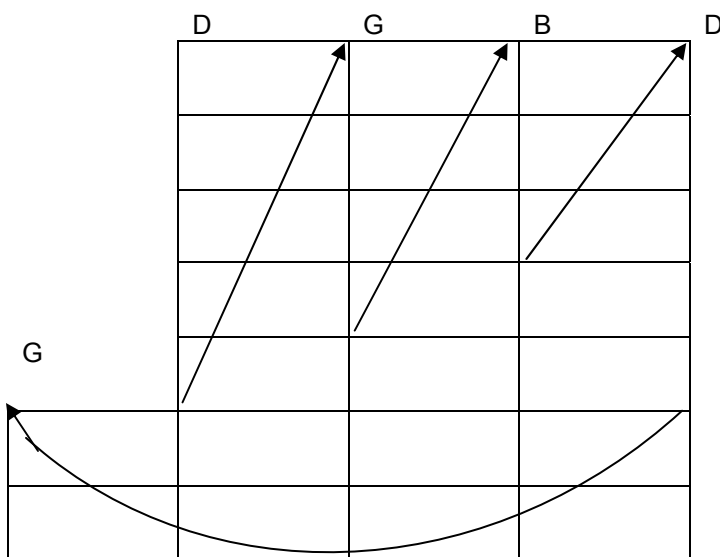
For example: If your third string (G) is a little bit sharp, then tune down below the desired pitch and the back up to the desired pitch. If the string is just a little sharp, it is sometimes possible to stretch the string with your right hand, and it will lower to the proper pitch. To stretch the string, press down on the top of it (two or three inches away from the bridge). Press down approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch.

The chart page 15-1 shows how to tune the banjo to itself. First let's get the fourth string in tune. We can tune it to another instrument or to an A tuning fork. If you play a harmonic (a note which is produced by lightly touching the string directly over the fret) on the fourth string at the 7th fret, that is an A note. This note is equal to the pitch of an A tuning fork.

If we play the fourth string at the 5th fret, that is equal to the 3rd string open, or G. The third string at the 4th fret is equal to the 2nd string open or B. The second string at the 3rd fret is equal to the 1st string open or D. The first string played at the 5th fret is equal to the 5th string open or G.

Here is a chart to illustrate :

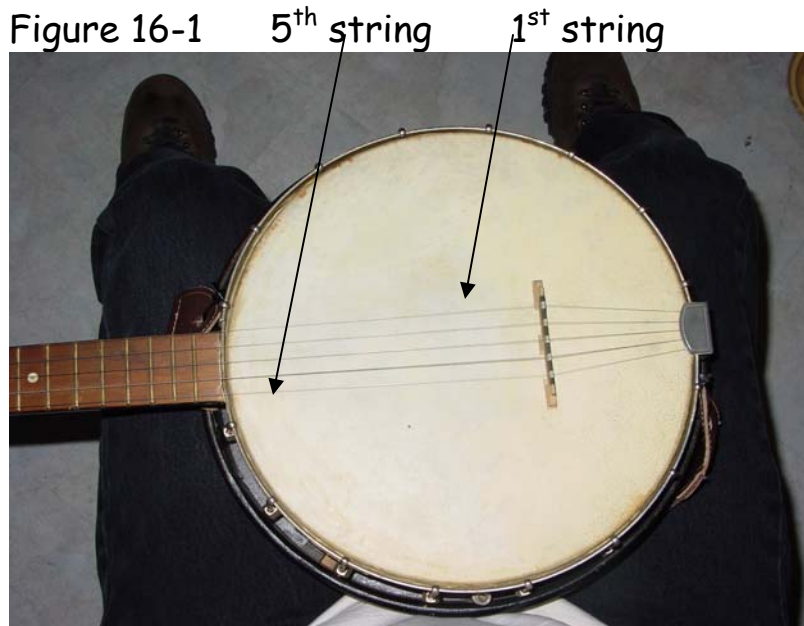
Figure 15-1



How to Read Tablature

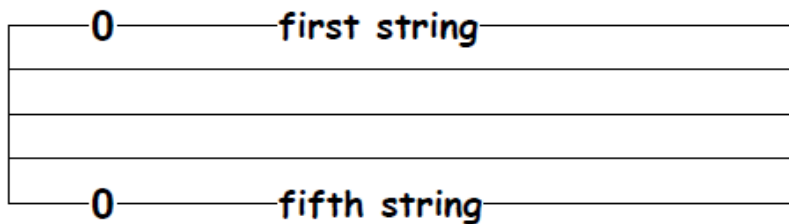
Tablature had been around for centuries. It was used for the Lute and the Vihuela which were predecessors to the Guitar. It is simple method of writing down which string and fret to play.

To start out with, lay your banjo in your lap. As you look at your banjo, notice that the first string is on the top and the fifth string is on the bottom.



That is exactly how it appears on paper too.

Figure 16-2



Tablature tells us which string to play and whether to play that string open or at a particular fret. First we need to decide which string to play and then whether to play it open or at a fretted position. If the note is a zero, then it is played open (no frets) . If the note is a number, then we play it at that fret. Let's look at this example. Find these notes on your banjo.

Figure 17-1

0	1st string open		
		4	2nd string 4th fret
		5	4th string 5th fret
0	5th string open		

Tablature also tells us what the rhythmic value of the note is, and will often tell us which right and left hand fingers to use to play the notes.

Let's explore some rhythms and time signatures.

Written music, tablature or actual notation, has what are called time signatures. A time signature always has two and only two numbers. It looks like a fraction. Ex. 4/4, 6/8, or 3/4 etc.

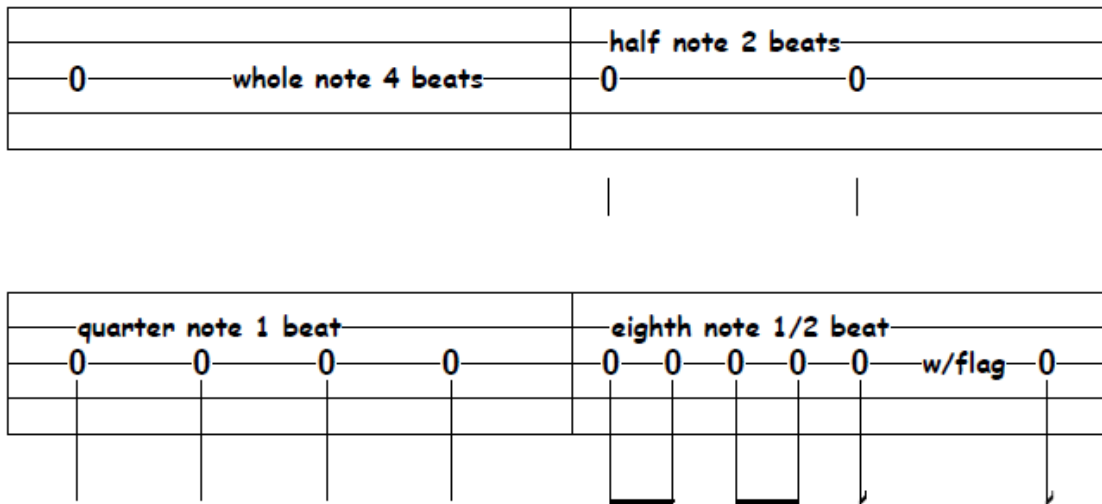
The first number tells how many beats there are per measure and the second number tells which kind of note gets one beat.

The time signature of 4/4 has 4 beats per measure and a quarter note gets one beat. 6/8 has 6 beats per measure and an eighth note gets one beat. 3/4 has three beats per measure and a quarter note gets one beat. For this book we will be using a 4/4 time signature.

Let's take a look at how some different types of notes are notated in tablature.

The examples in fig. 18-1 cover four kinds of notes: a whole note which gets four beats, a half note which gets two beats, a quarter note which gets one beat, and an eighth note which get a half of a beat. Notice that a whole note does not have a stem, a half note has a short stem, a quarter note has a long stem and an eighth note has a long stem connected at the bottom. If there is only one eighth note it will have a flag at the bottom.

Figure 18-1



Music also has rests in it. When you see a rest, it means don't play for the length of the rest. For example, if we see a whole rest then we would rest for four beats. In figure 19-1 we have a whole rest, 1/2 rest, 1/4 rest and 1/8 rest.

Figure 19-1

1 whole rest 4 beats

2 half rest 2 beats

3 quarter rest 1 beat


4 eighth rest 1/4 beat

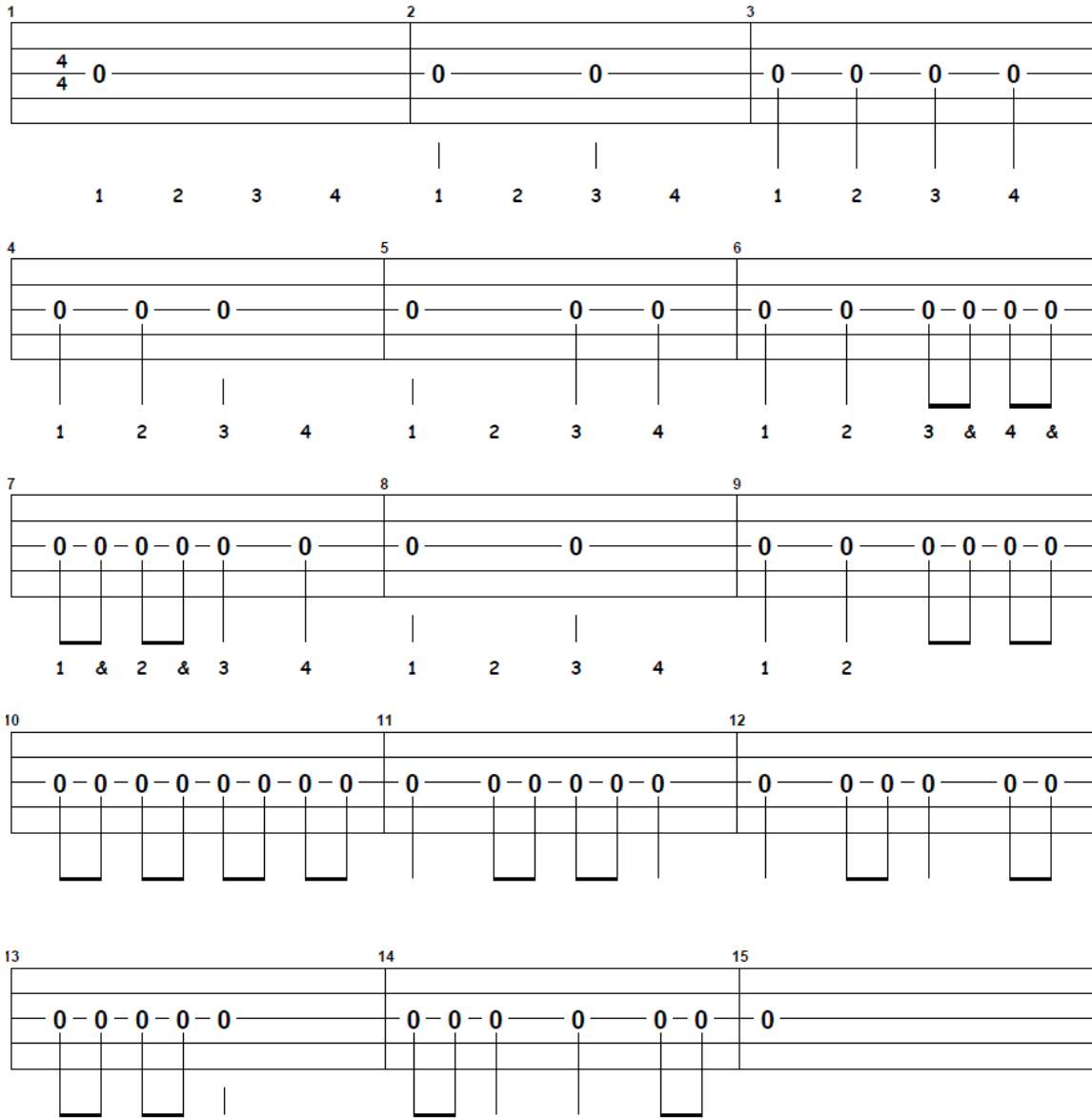
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Let's play some rhythmic examples using these notes and rests. The exercises on pages 20 and 21 are in 4/4 time. The counts for each note are written below. Notice that a measure with eighth notes is counted: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &. All of the notes are open on the third string. For now we can play all of the notes with our thumb. In rhythm exercise 1 we have the note that we have learned and in exercise 2 we have notes and rests. Practice these slowly and evenly.

Rhythm Exercise 1

Figure 20-1 



1 2 3

$\frac{4}{4}$ 0 ————— 0 ————— 0 ————— 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 —

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

4 5 6

0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 —

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 & 4 &

7 8 9

0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 —

1 & 2 & 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 & 4 &


10 11 12

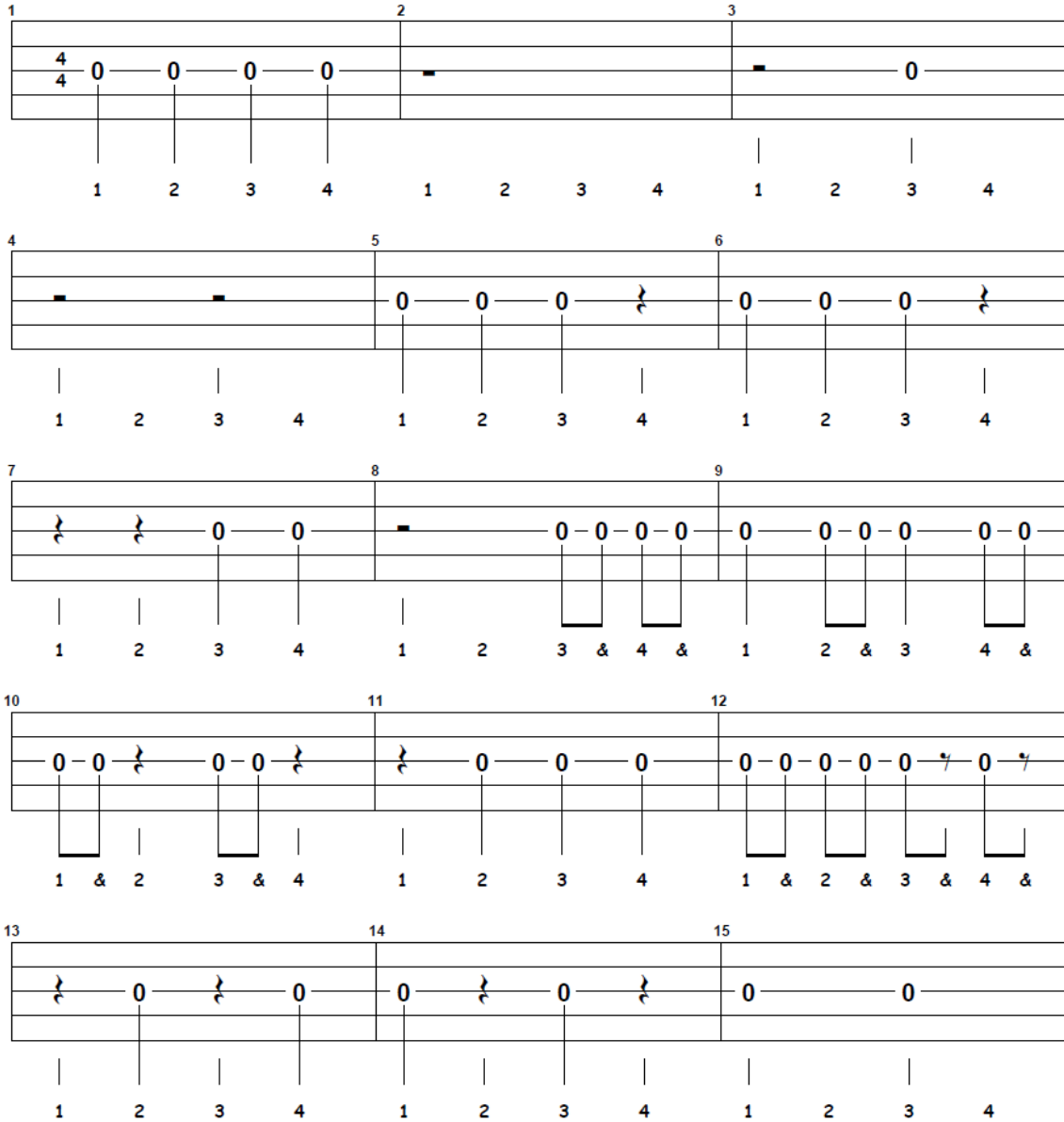
0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 —

13 14 15

0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0 —

Rhythm Exercise 2

Figure 21-1 



The image displays a rhythm exercise consisting of 15 measures, organized into five groups of three measures each. Each measure is represented by a five-line staff with a central line. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 below the staff, and accents are shown as small black squares above the staff. Measure 1 is marked with a 4/4 time signature. Measure 12 includes an accent on the second measure of the group (measure 12.2).

Measure 1: 4/4, 0-0-0-0 (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 2: - (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 3: - 0- (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 4: - (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 5: - (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 6: 0-0-0- (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 7: - (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 8: - (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 9: - (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 10: 0-0- (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 11: - (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 12: 0-0-0-0-0-0- (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 13: - (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 14: 0- (fingerings 1-4)
Measure 15: 0- (fingerings 1-4)

When two or more notes are tied together, only the first note is picked. This is illustrated in Red River Valley. Notice in measures 4 and 5 that we have a quarter note tied to a half note which is then tied to the first half note in measure 5. so the notes on the word "me" will get 5 beats altogether.

Figure 22-1  Red River Valley

4/4

come and sit by my side if you

love me do not hasten to

bid me adieu just re-

mem- ber the red ri- ver val- ley

and the cow- boy who loved you so

true

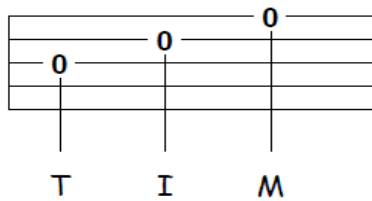
Ok we have some tablature skills now. Soon we will be picking some songs.

But first let's learn how to play some rolls. A roll is a right hand finger pattern. Notice how the right hand fingering is indicated:

T= thumb, I= index and M= middle

Here is a forward roll:

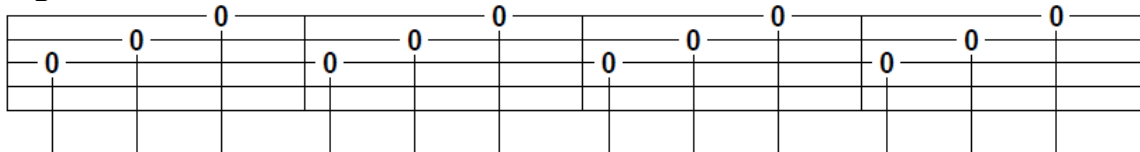
Figure 23-1



When you play, try to minimize the motion with your fingers. If we play with "economy of motion" it will give more control, better tone and eventually help us develop speed. Try to move your fingers just enough to produce a good tone.

Let's play several forward rolls in a row:

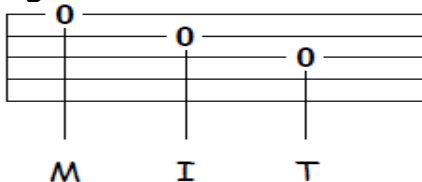
Figure 23-2



Here is a

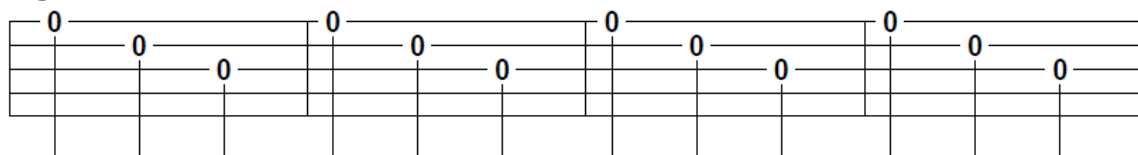
Reverse , or backward, roll:

Figure 23-3



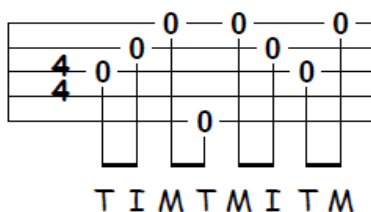
Let's practice some reverse rolls:

Figure 24-1



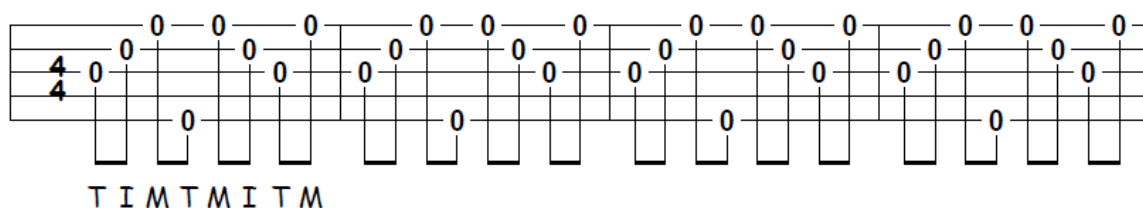
Now that we can play a forward and a reverse roll, let's learn a roll that combines them both: The forward/reverse roll.

Figure 24-2 the forward/reverse roll



Let's practice some forward/reverse rolls

Figure 24-3



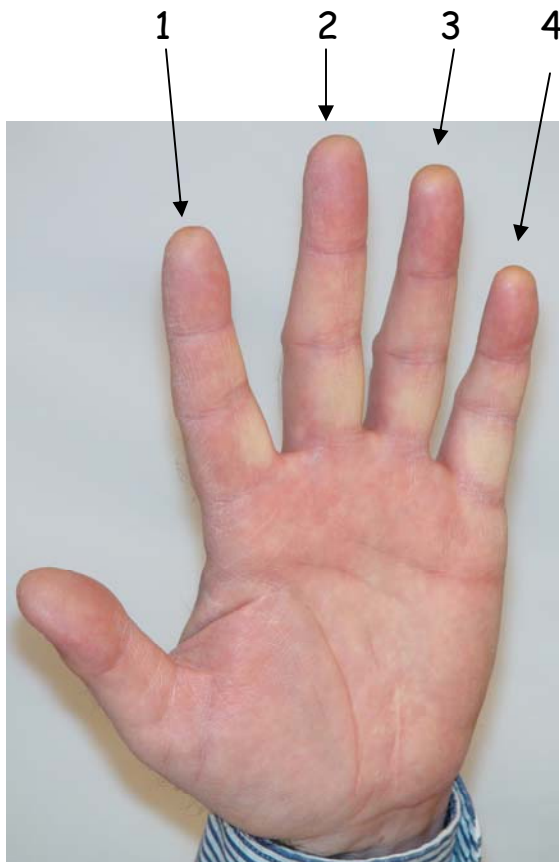
Now we are ready to apply our roll to a chord progression. A chord progression is simply the chords to a song.

Before we learn some chords, let's learn how the fingers on your left hand are indicated. A circled number above a note, in tablature, shows which left hand finger to play that note with. Also a circled number on a chord chart indicates which left hand finger to use on that string.

The chart in figure 25-1 shows how the left hand fingers are numbered.

The Left Hand

Figure 25-1



Notice that the index finger is 1. This is called our "guide finger". Whatever fret the guide finger is on is which position we are in.

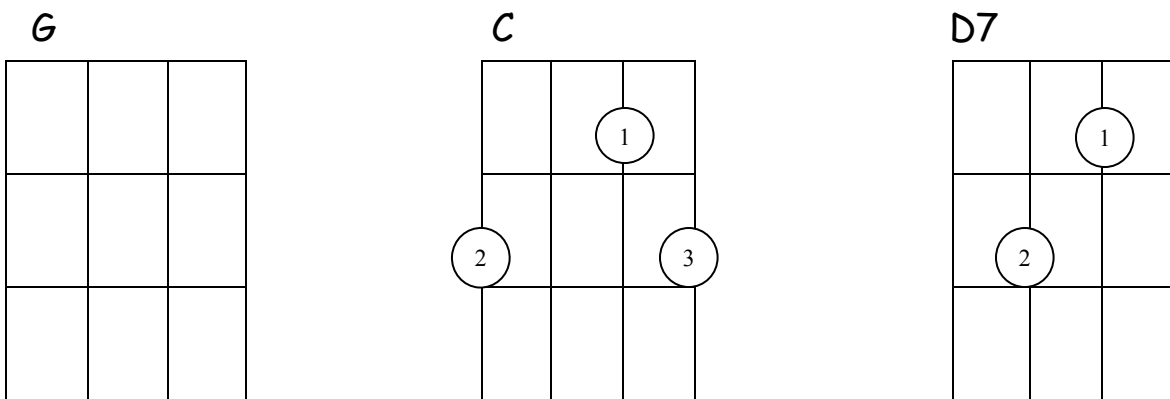
For example: If your guide finger is on the 1st fret, then that is 1st position. If it is on the 3rd fret, that would be 3rd position. Again the circled numbers above the note (in tablature or written music) indicate which finger to use for that note.

Just as we play with "economy of motion" with our right hand, we can do the same with our left hand. Just move your fingers enough to get a clean tone out of each note. Remember to keep just a slight bend in your left wrist.


Basic Chords

Chord charts for the Banjo are written as if you are looking at the neck from the front.

Figure 26-1



Let's practice strumming the chords over this chord progression:
Each slash (/) equals one strum

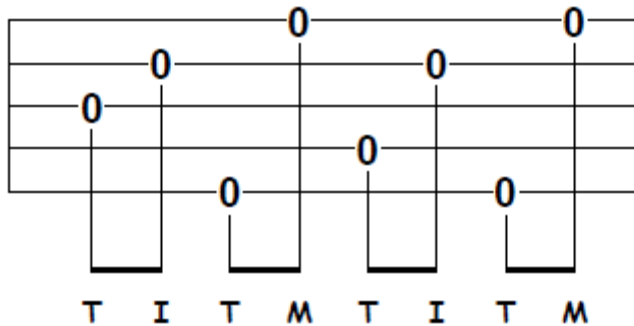
Figure 26-2 

G C G D7 G
// // // // //

Now let's play the forward/reverse rolls with the same chord progression. Play one roll for each /
Practice this exercise slowly and smoothly. It should sound like one continuous stream of notes. Practice without watching your right hand.

Here is a new roll: the Alternating Thumb Roll:

Figure 27-1



Let's play this with our chord progression from page 23:

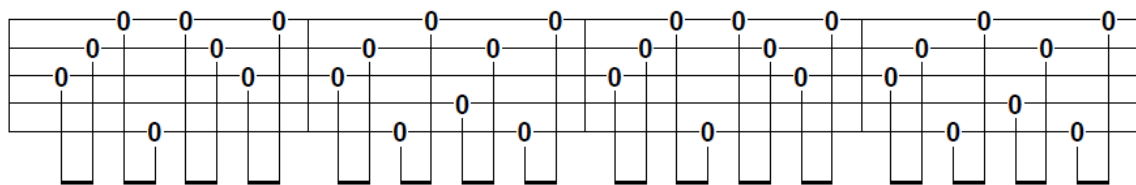
Figure 27-2 ♪

G C G D7 G
// // // // //

Ok now that we can play two rolls, we are ready to start playing some songs. Before we do, let's practice switching back and forth with our rolls. Play a forward/reverse roll and then an alternating thumb roll then back to the forward/reverse roll etc.

Tabbed out it looks like this:

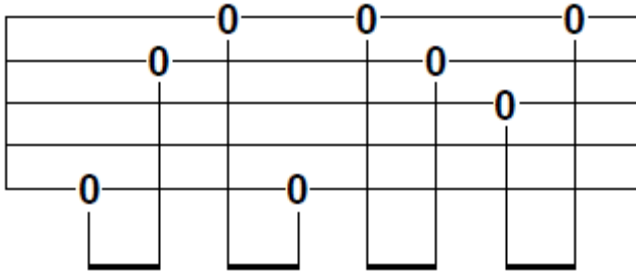
Figure 27-3



Rolls do not always have to be played on the strings indicated.

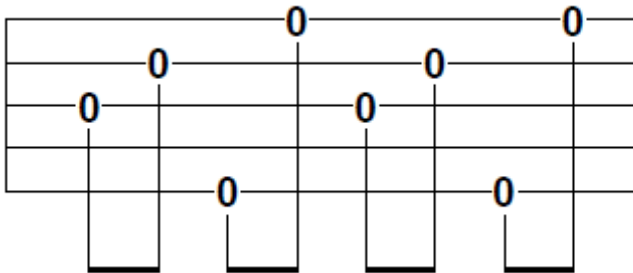
Think of them as a combination or sequence for your right hand fingers to follow. For example, we can play a forward/reverse roll starting on the 5th string:

Figure 28-1



Or we could play an alternating thumb roll using just the third string:

Figure 28-2



Just a note here, as soon as you can play a song slowly and somewhat smoothly, memorize it. If we can play a song from memory, we will be able to concentrate on producing musical sounds easier.

We have markers on the side of the neck to guide us around the fret board. Most banjos have markers at the 5th, 7th, 10th and 12th frets. In this figure, we have placed a piece of tape at the 7th, 10th and 12th frets. By placing a piece of tape here, it will make it easier

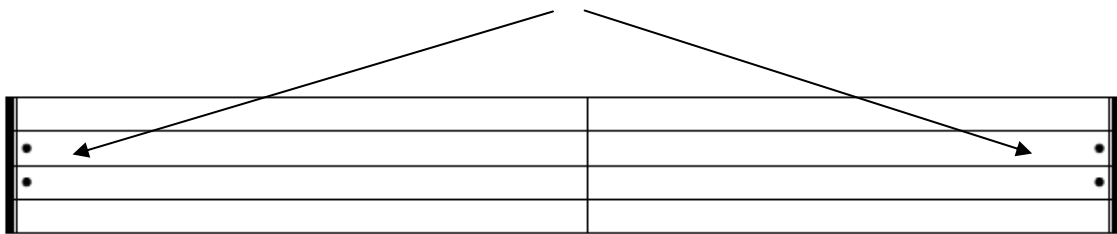
to find your way around the fretboard. After a few weeks, take the tape off and just use the markers (dots) as guides.

Figure 29-1



Let's learn how to play "Banjo in the Hollow". It uses our two rolls: the alternating thumb roll and the forward reverse roll. Notice that we have repeat marks. Repeat the measures between them.

Figure 29-2



Here is "Banjo in the Hollow". Figure 30-1

Banjo in the Hollow

T I M T M I T M T I M M T M I T M T I T M T

As you can see, every note is a melody note. Now let's explore some Scruggs style tunes. In which we have a melody note and then two or three "fill in" notes.

The next song is: "Goodnight Ladies"

Figure 31-1 is the melody only and figure 31-2 is the melody with rolls.