

The Picking Hand

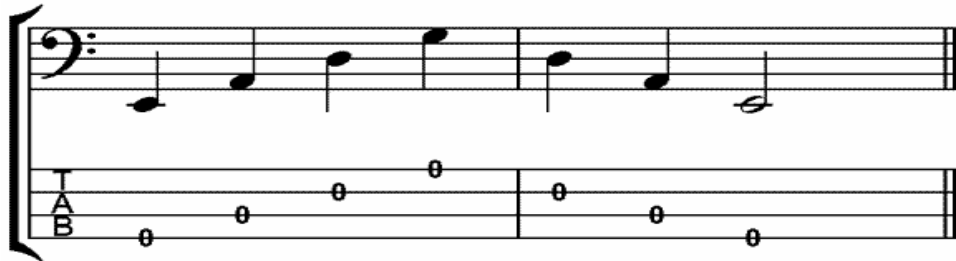
For the purposes of this lesson, I'm going to refer to the way I play – that is right handed and (usually) with two fingers. Please adapt the lessons to your personal preference eg three fingers, pickstyle (substitute up and down strokes for the fingers), etc

So that the lessons are applicable to all, I'm mainly going to show the examples on four string. Please add (or subtract!) strings to your taste.

In all cases, we are going to strictly alternate fingers when picking. In real life, I often pick multiple notes with one finger, but these lessons are designed to strengthen both fingers, so alternating is the way to go.

The theory behind these exercises is that any number of notes can be broken down into combinations of one, two and three. That's it – if you can play groupings of one, two and three on any set of strings, your picking hand can cope with any challenge in terms of string crossing and skipping. Sounds easy, doesn't it?

Let's start off with the basics – one note per string:



Ensure each note is clean and that the other strings aren't ringing. First time, alternate Index (I) and Middle (M), then alternate M and I. One will invariably feel more natural than the other but bear with it. When I started playing, I would often stumble if I had to cross strings with the "other" finger, and it took me a while to work out why some lines felt weirder than others.

OK, those exercises are fine if we only ever play consecutive strings, but there will be times where the music requires your picking hand to skip over one or more strings so the next series of exercises are based on something I saw Michael Manring do - covering every possible combination of strings.

On a four string bass, the possible string pairs:

EA ED EG
AE AD AG
DE DA DG
GE GA GD

That's it, twelve potential pairs. What we need to do is repeat the earlier exercises – ones, twos and threes starting with either finger over each string pair. In total, that gives us 72 exercises.

If you can play all of those , your hand will be able to cover any crossing/skipping challenge that you encounter.