

Speed Picking

Over the years of playing, performing and teaching guitar, one of the biggest problems encountered is not with the left hand fingerings as much as with the right hand picking technique. Many guitarists openly admit that their picking is pretty bad.

Unfortunately, there is not much written on this particular subject and that is the purpose of this book, to give you an insight into the techniques that I have been developing and using that really work. The basic idea has been with us for many years and can be used to achieve mind-boggling speed and flawless accuracy while being completely relaxed in the right hand.

I refer to this style of picking as SPEED PICKING (sometimes referred to as sweep picking). A lot of us know at least one SPEED PICKING lick:

Example #1

The diagram shows a single string lick. The treble clef staff has four notes with fingerings 3, 2, 1, and 4. The bass clef staff shows fret numbers 7, 6, 5, and 8. A hammer-on (HO) is indicated over the 5th fret note.

In this example of SPEED PICKING, one down stroke is used for the first 3 notes and a Hammer-on for the last note. Most guitarists have played this simple lick at some time or another and leave the technique at that, little knowing how far this germ of an idea may be taken.

The most common style of picking today is 'Alternate' picking (down up down) or the reverse (up down up) which is an excellent way to pick and I am by no means trying to talk anyone out of it. What I am trying to do is broaden your horizon. Alternate picking is fine for scale-type runs but just doesn't cut it for arpeggios or lines where there is only one note per string for example.

SPEED PICKING is actually partly alternate picking except, whenever a string is crossed, one stroke is used for the two notes whether going from low to high or the reverse.

Example #2

The diagram shows a scale-like run across multiple strings. The treble clef staff has 17 notes with fingerings 1, 2, 4, 1, 2, 4, 1, 2, 4, 1, 2, 4, 1, 3, 4, 1, 3. The bass clef staff shows fret numbers 5, 7, 9, 5, 7, 9, 6, 7, 9, 6, 7, 9, 7, 9, 10, 7, 9.

So as you can see in example #2, each time you change string, a single down stroke is used in each case. So, this is the most fundamental pattern for this picking approach (down up down down up down down up etc).

Another important thing is the use of scale patterns with three (3) notes per string. SPEED PICKING lends itself to these, but be sure that when you practice these patterns to keep the notes 8th's or 16th's. Because of the three note system it's easy to play everything as triplets. Also, there is a tendency at first to accent the first note of every string, like accenting the first note of every triplet. This situation is normal and just takes a little time to get used to the feeling of using a single stroke when crossing strings. You can see almost immediately that the amount of right hand picking is reduced by 1/3, a lot less work required to play the same amount of notes.

Now that you've played the scale from low to high, you're probably wondering how to get back down. Conveniently, the last notes in example #2 on the first string were played with a down then an up stroke, so we can go directly back to the second string and continue with the picking strokes in reverse. Also, note that there are only two notes on the 1st string.

Example #3

The image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The notes are: F#4, A4, B4, C#5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C#6, D6, E6, F#6, G6, A6, B6, C#7, D7, E7, F#7, G7, A7, B7, C#8, D8, E8, F#8, G8, A8, B8, C#9, D9, E9, F#9, G9, A9, B9, C#10, D10, E10, F#11, G11, A11, B11, C#12, D12, E12, F#13, G13, A13, B13, C#14, D14, E14, F#15, G15, A15, B15, C#16, D16, E16, F#17, G17, A17, B17, C#18, D18, E18, F#19, G19, A19, B19, C#20, D20, E20, F#21, G21, A21, B21, C#22, D22, E22, F#23, G23, A23, B23, C#24, D24, E24, F#25, G25, A25, B25, C#26, D26, E26, F#27, G27, A27, B27, C#28, D28, E28, F#29, G29, A29, B29, C#30, D30, E30, F#31, G31, A31, B31, C#32, D32, E32, F#33, G33, A33, B33, C#34, D34, E34, F#35, G35, A35, B35, C#36, D36, E36, F#37, G37, A37, B37, C#38, D38, E38, F#39, G39, A39, B39, C#40, D40, E40, F#41, G41, A41, B41, C#42, D42, E42, F#43, G43, A43, B43, C#44, D44, E44, F#45, G45, A45, B45, C#46, D46, E46, F#47, G47, A47, B47, C#48, D48, E48, F#49, G49, A49, B49, C#50, D50, E50, F#51, G51, A51, B51, C#52, D52, E52, F#53, G53, A53, B53, C#54, 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E606, F#607, G607, A607, B607, C#608, D608, E608, F#609, G609, A609, B609, C#610, D610, E610, F#611, G611, A611, B611, C#612, D612, E612, F#613, G613, A613, B613, C#614, D614, E614, F#615, G615, A615, B615, C#616, D616, E616, F#617, G617, A617, B617, C#618, D618, E618, F#619, G619, A619, B619, C#620, D620, E620, F#621, G621, A621, B621, C#622, D622, E622, F#623, G623, A623, B623, C#624, D624, E624, F#625, G625, A625, B625, C#626, D626, E626, F#627, G627, A627, B627, C#628, D628, E628, F#629, G629, A629, B629, C#630, D630, E630, F#631, G631, A631, B631, C#632, D632, E632, F#633, G633, A633, B633, C#634, D634, E634, F#635, G635, A635, B635, C#636, D636, E636, F#637, G637, A637, B637, C#638, D638, E638, F#639, G639, A639, B639, C#640, D640, E640, F#641, G641, A641, B641, C#642, D642, E642, F#643, G643, A643, B643, C#644, D644, E644, F#645, G645, A645, B645, C#646, D646, E646, F#647, G647, A647, B647, C#648, D648, E648, F#649, G649, A649, B649, C#650, D650, E650, F#651, G651, A651, B651, C#652, D652, E652, F#653, G653, A653, B653, C#654, D654, E654, F#655, G655, A655, B655, C#656, D656, E656, F#657, G657, A657, B657, C#658, D658, E658, F#659, G659, A659, B659, C#660, D660, E

Examples 2 and 3 are designed to give you the idea of going up the scale then connecting it to come back down, so here we have some more examples of scales and related modes;

Example #4

Bm7

Example #4 shows a Bm7 scale in a treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The scale is written as a series of dots on the staff, with fingerings (1-4) written below. Below the staff are three lines labeled T, A, and B, representing the guitar strings, with fret numbers and stroke directions (up/down) indicated.

Here are two short exercises to strengthen the UP stroke (example #5) and both the UP and DOWN strokes in example #6.

Example #5

Am7

Example #5 shows an Am7 exercise in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The exercise consists of four groups of three notes, each with a '3' above it indicating a triplet. The notes are ascending in each group. Below the staff are three lines labeled T, A, and B, with stroke directions (up/down) and fret numbers indicated.

Example #6

Am7

Example #6 shows an Am7 exercise in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The exercise consists of four groups of three notes, each with a '3' above it indicating a triplet. The notes are ascending in each group. Below the staff are three lines labeled T, A, and B, with stroke directions (up/down) and fret numbers indicated.

