

Lesson: 1

Developing Scale Technique, Part 1

By
Richard Provost

Free Strokes

The basis of good scale technique is releasing tension between the fingers. Most, if not all of us, were taught to develop a walking motion between i and m when playing scales or single note melodies. While this, in principle, is correct, the finger exchange must come from the release of tension between the fingers rather than the imposition of the exchange. The following exercise will help you see the difference.

Exercise 1:

Begin by placing your thumb on the third string. Place the i finger on the first string with the mid-joint over the string being plucked. Using free strokes, pluck the i finger. Immediately release the tension in the mid-joint needed to pluck the string, and let the finger return to its original position. Repeat this several times and then practice the exercise using m and then the a finger. **It is important to train the pinky and a finger to move with the middle finger. This will minimize unnecessary tension. Again, make sure the mid-joint is over the string you are plucking. Always begin by placing the finger on the string. This will allow you to feel the movement and tension better. It is important to relax the tension in the finger, rather than pushing it back to its original position.**

Exercise 2:

Begin by placing your thumb on the third string. In the first position, slowly play a chromatic scale on the first string using i and m. **Remember to train the pinky and a finger to move with the middle finger.** After each note is played, release the tension in the mid-joint and allow the finger to return to its original position. If you are playing slowly enough, you will see that there is no walking motion between the fingers. When you are comfortable playing this exercise releasing the tension in the finger, slowly increase the speed but continue releasing the tension in each finger. You will

discover that when you reach a certain tempo the walking motion has returned to your finger movements. The difference, and it is great, is that the release of finger tension is now creating the walking motion. Go back and create the walking motion by releasing the tension between the fingers. This is accomplished by releasing the muscle tension holding the finger in the hand exactly when the other finger plucks the string. When you are comfortable doing this on the first string, apply this concept to a first position chromatic scale. When comfortable, practice this exercise alternating between i and a and then m and a.

Note: It can take up to four weeks of practice before you feel comfortable playing this way. Once you are comfortable, warm up with these two exercises before playing your scales. If you find that you are hitting the lower string when playing free strokes, your mid-joint is not over the string you are plucking.

For more information regarding playing free strokes see my book, Classic Guitar Technique Volume 1, published by Professional Guitar Publications.

Good luck and happy practice.

Lesson: 2

Developing Scale Technique, Part 2

Rest Strokes

Part one of this series presented scale exercises using free strokes. Let's look at how the principles discussed in Part One can be applied to rest strokes. The rest stroke follow through occurs by releasing the plucking tension and directing the finger motion of the plucking finger to the next lower string. When the finger comes to rest on this string, it must immediately rid itself of the tension used in plucking the string. The following exercise will help train the release of finger tension.

Exercise 1:

Begin by placing your thumb on the third string. Place the m finger on the first string with the mid-joint over or slightly below (bass side) the string you are plucking. Using the m finger, play a rest stroke on the first string. **Remember to move the pinky and a finger with the middle finger.** After plucking, become aware of how much pressure you are using to keep the finger on the adjacent string. Practice releasing the tension needed to pluck the string as it comes to rest on the lower string. **(Don't be discouraged. You are developing a greater tactile awareness of your fingers.)** When you can feel the release, practice this exercise using the i then a finger.

Exercise 2:

Place the i finger on the first string. In the first position, slowly play a chromatic scale on the first string using i and m rest strokes. **Remember to move the pinky and a finger with the middle finger.** After plucking, observe the tension left in the finger. The goal is to leave just enough tension in the finger to keep it on the next string. As each finger plays, immediately release the tension in the finger resting on the string and allow the finger to come out to its playing position. **(The release should occur exactly when the string is being plucked.)** When you are comfortable with this exercise on the first string, apply this concept to a first position chromatic scale. When comfortable, practice this exercise alternating between i and a and then m and a.

Note: It can take up to four weeks of practice before you feel comfortable playing this way. Once you are comfortable, always warm up with these and the previous weeks exercises before playing your scales. It is important to keep the mid-joint of the plucking finger over or slightly below the string being played.

For more information regarding playing rest strokes see my book, Classic Guitar Technique Volume 1, published by Professional Guitar Publications.