

Lesson 5:

Developing Scale Technique, Part 5

Refining Left Hand Shifts

During the previous four lessons, we have concentrated on refining right hand. Let's look at perhaps the most critical left hand issue to developing a strong scale technique, shifting.

In order for the improvements that you have made in your right hand technique to come into play, you must be able to go from one position to another easily. While shifting involves moving the hand from one position to another, the movement itself comes from the weight of the arm and not directly from the hand and fingers. To develop fluent shifts, we must work on integrating the necessary shoulder, elbow, and arm movements to support the hand movement. The wrist must never be allowed to deviate right or left. It must always form a straight line from the side of the fourth finger to the elbow.

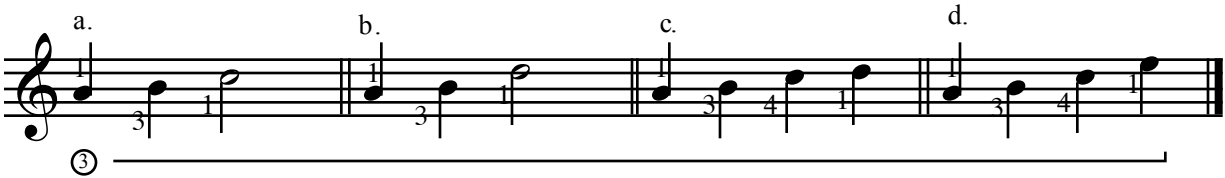
Using whatever right hand stroke that is the most comfortable, play the A on the third string fretting it with your first finger. Making sure that your left hand knuckles are parallel to the edge of the fingerboard, release the pressure on the finger and thumb but do not lift the fingers or thumb from the string or back of the neck. Release the tension in your shoulder and allow the weight of the arm and elbow to move the hand up the fingerboard. It isn't important what note you land on, but that the movement is achieved by releasing the tension in the shoulder and feeling the weight of the arm. Practice this movement until you are comfortable. Now practice the same movement from A but now stop on the fifth fret C. If you find that you are going beyond the C, you are probably using the correct movements. If you are landing before you get to the C, you are probably not fully releasing the tension in the shoulder and trying to control the movement with the hand. When shifting, either up or down, we are in effect traveling a prescribed distance. If the distance from one position to the next is accurately felt, the shift will be fluent and accurate. If not, it will be tense because you will have to stop the movement to land on the right note. (I know that this is a bit confusing, but if you work on this and think about it, it will begin to make sense.)

The following are some exercises to practice to get more comfortable with

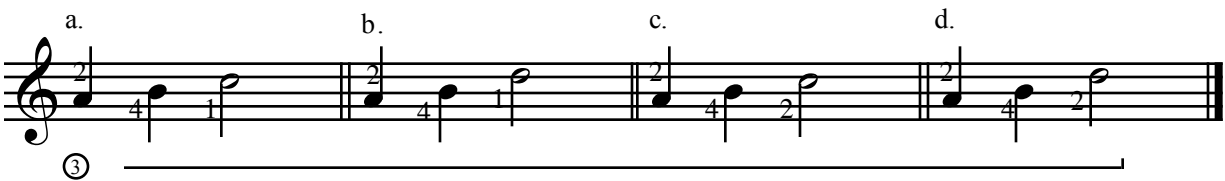
the movement. Always alternate using i and m:

Exercise 1:

Shifts using the first finger

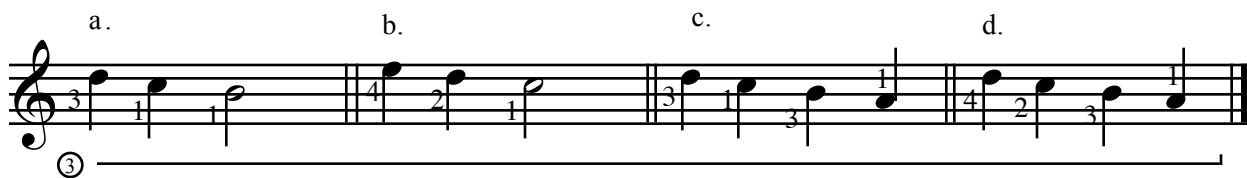


Shifts using the second finger



Descending shifts work the same way but are a bit more difficult to feel since we are working against gravity. I would suggest not practicing descending shifts until you are comfortable with the ascending shifts in Exercise 1. We will begin by shifting from D on the third string to C. Play the D using the first finger in the left hand. Release the pressure on the thumb and finger. With your first finger still on the string, pull your elbow away from your body and allow the hand to move stopping on C. It is important when leading with the elbow, not to lead too much as excessive movement will pull the hand out of position. Lead only as much as will allow your left hand knuckles to remain parallel to the edge of the finger board. When you are comfortable with this movement, practice the following exercise. When playing these exercises, always keep the first finger lightly on the string during the shift. Though you may not be using the first finger, leaving it down will help you maintain good hand balance.

Exercise 2:



For more information on shifting see my book *Classic Guitar Technique, Vol. 1*, published by Professional Guitar Publications.