

Lesson 7:

Developing Scale Technique, Part 7

Preparation Technique

Preparation technique, the ability to place the finger that will pluck the next note on the string, is an important and valuable technique. Used not only for developing speed, greater right hand coordination, control, and tone, preparation will assist you in creating a greater articulation palette. When you use the preparation technique, you are actively controlling not only the type of attack you produce but the duration of the note. This allows you not only to play staccato but to produce different types of legato. By now you will have gotten comfortable with the first two lessons, relaxing the finger tension immediately after you have plucked a note. We will use this skill to develop the preparation technique.

Exercise 1:

Begin by placing your thumb on the third string and the index finger on the first string. Using free strokes, pluck the i finger. Immediately release the tension in the mid-joint needed to pluck the string, but this time allow the finger to return to the string. Do this several times and then repeat the exercise using the m then a finger. **(It is important to relax the tension in the finger rather than pushing it back to the string. Do not be concerned if, at first, the finger goes beyond the string. If this happens, relax the finger tension and let the finger go to the string.)** Now practice this exercise using rest strokes.

Exercise 2:

Begin by placing your thumb on the third string. In the first position, slowly alternate between i and m playing free strokes on the first string. When i plucks, release the tension in the mid-joint of the middle finger and allow it to go to the string. When m plucks, release the tension in the mid-joint of the i finger and allow it to go to the string. Practice this slowly until the movements are comfortable. **(Do not be concerned if the finger produces a staccato sound. Here, we are developing the technique not controlling the sound.)**

Now play a chromatic scale on the first string using i and m. After you play each note, release the tension in the mid-joint of the non-plucking finger and

allow it to return to string. It is important that you maintain the walking motion between the fingers, by coordinating the release of tension between the strokes. When you are comfortable, practice the same exercises using rest strokes.

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.

The following exercises will allow you to develop the necessary coordination to control the duration and attack of each note. It is important not to attempt these until you are comfortable with the previous exercises.

Exercise 3:

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The scale consists of 12 notes: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, B, A, G, F, E, D, C. The notes are grouped into four measures of four notes each. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1, 4, 3, 2, 1, 4. Articulation markings include 'Phy' and 'Phœ' above notes, and 'Phœ' and 'Phce' below notes. A 'Simile' marking is placed below the first measure.

We control the length of the note by preparing the next finger on the eighth rest. We will be coordinating the release and placement of the finger in the same manner that we coordinated the walking motion in Lesson One. It is important to:

1. Hold the note for its duration.
2. Alternate between the index and middle fingers.
3. Always have the nail resting in playing position on the string.
4. Verify that when you pluck you are producing a good tone.

Practice this exercise using both rest and free strokes.

When you are comfortable doing the above, apply the technique to a first position chromatic scale. When playing the scale, you will notice that as you change strings the last note on the string continues to ring. This happens because you are preparing the next note and not stopping the note you played. Using your left hand, shorten the note to match the others played. After a little practice, this will occur naturally.

It is important that you are comfortable with the previous exercises before attempting Exercise 4. Playing legato uses the exact techniques but with

greater control. Though the next exercise may appear silly, it is perhaps the most important one of the series.

Exercise 4:

Using the sound Ta, sing any series of scale-wise notes as legato as possible. Concentrate on when your tongue touches the back of your teeth. You will discover that it is against the teeth a fraction before the sound is produced. Contrary to what you may believe, there is always a slight space between the notes in legato. We will now practice coordinating our fingers with our tongue to achieve this space. Playing the open E string with i and m, pluck the string exactly when your tongue touches the back of your teeth. (You can do this, but it's not as easy as it sounds.) While doing this exercise, listen to the sound you are producing on the guitar. Make sure it is as legato as what you are singing. When comfortable doing this exercise using free and rest strokes, apply the technique to the chromatic scale we have been using.

Again, use both rest and free strokes.