Douglas Niedt's GUITAR TECHNIQUE TIP OF THE MONTH

Your free classical guitar lesson



I'm Douglas Niedt and these are my very detailed, in-depth, how to play the classical guitar technique tips, many with high def classical guitar videos. Almost like free guitar lessons.

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It contains ALL of Doug's Previous
Guitar Technique Tips of the Month

How to Master the Tremolo Part 1

One of the great mysteries of life for guitarists is how to develop a good tremolo. Many guitarists work at their tremolo for years and still can't play it evenly. A guitarist should be able to develop an excellent tremolo in six months to one year if they practice at it for thirty to sixty minutes every day. Here are some tips to help you learn to play a good tremolo once and for all. What's a good tremolo? I think a good tremolo technique encompasses these elements:

1. It's rhythmically precise. Four even 16th, 32nd, or 64th notes.

2. The volume difference between the thumb and fingers can be controlled at will. Usually the fingers will be loudest because they usually play the melody.

3. It can be played at a variety of speeds.

4. It can be played at a variety of degrees of loudness and softness.

THE TRADITIONAL "pami" TREMOLO IS DEAD. MAY IT REST IN PEACE!

Well, it's not exactly dead, but using a different tremolo pattern may be the answer to all your troubles:

Eliminate the "a" finger and use pimi or pmim as your tremolo pattern.

Usually, the "a" finger is the source of most problems when trying to play an even tremolo. In order to play the traditional "pami" tremolo pattern evenly, one must have exceptional independence between the "m" and "a" fingers. The "m" and "a" fingers do not have the natural independence between them that "i" and "m" have, or "i" and "a". Independence between "m" and "a" must be developed independently of working on the tremolo and usually takes many months to achieve. I will talk about that later.

By eliminating the "a" finger from the tremolo pattern, you are now using the strongest fingers on the right hand that already have very good independence between them from the get go.

I spoke with the outstanding guitarist, Ana Vidovic about her tremolo. She uses “pmim”. I asked her how she came to use that pattern. She told me that early in her studies she couldn’t get the traditional “pami” pattern to work for her. No one told her to try “pmim”. She just did it, it worked, and she has used it ever since. I told Ana that I used “pimi”. She thought that was odd. So I asked her, “If you had to choose, which of your fingers is strongest, “i” or “m”? At first, she didn’t want to admit that either one was stronger. After all, it’s kind of a badge of technical mastery to say that all of one’s fingers are equally strong and independent. But reluctantly, she finally admitted that “m” was stronger. I said, “Yes, that’s why I use ‘pimi’. The third note of the pattern should have a slight accent since metrically, the thumb is the downbeat and the third note is the upbeat in the 4-note group (I will explain this in detail later). Therefore, my pattern makes more sense since it puts the stronger “m” finger on that slightly accented third note.” She understood my point but thought her pattern felt more natural to play. It was a fun discussion and we both agreed to try each other’s pattern.

But, the point is that a “pimi” or “pmim” tremolo pattern, omitting the “a” finger, will inherently be more even and controllable than the traditional “pami” pattern. The downside of the “pimi” or “pmim” pattern is that some players may have difficulty playing them at fast speeds or may have problems with finger fatigue since one finger must be used twice in each cycle of the pattern.

I will speak more about mastering this pattern later in the article. First, let’s have a look at the traditional “pami” pattern.

THE PREREQUISITES TO MASTER ANY TREMOLO PATTERN

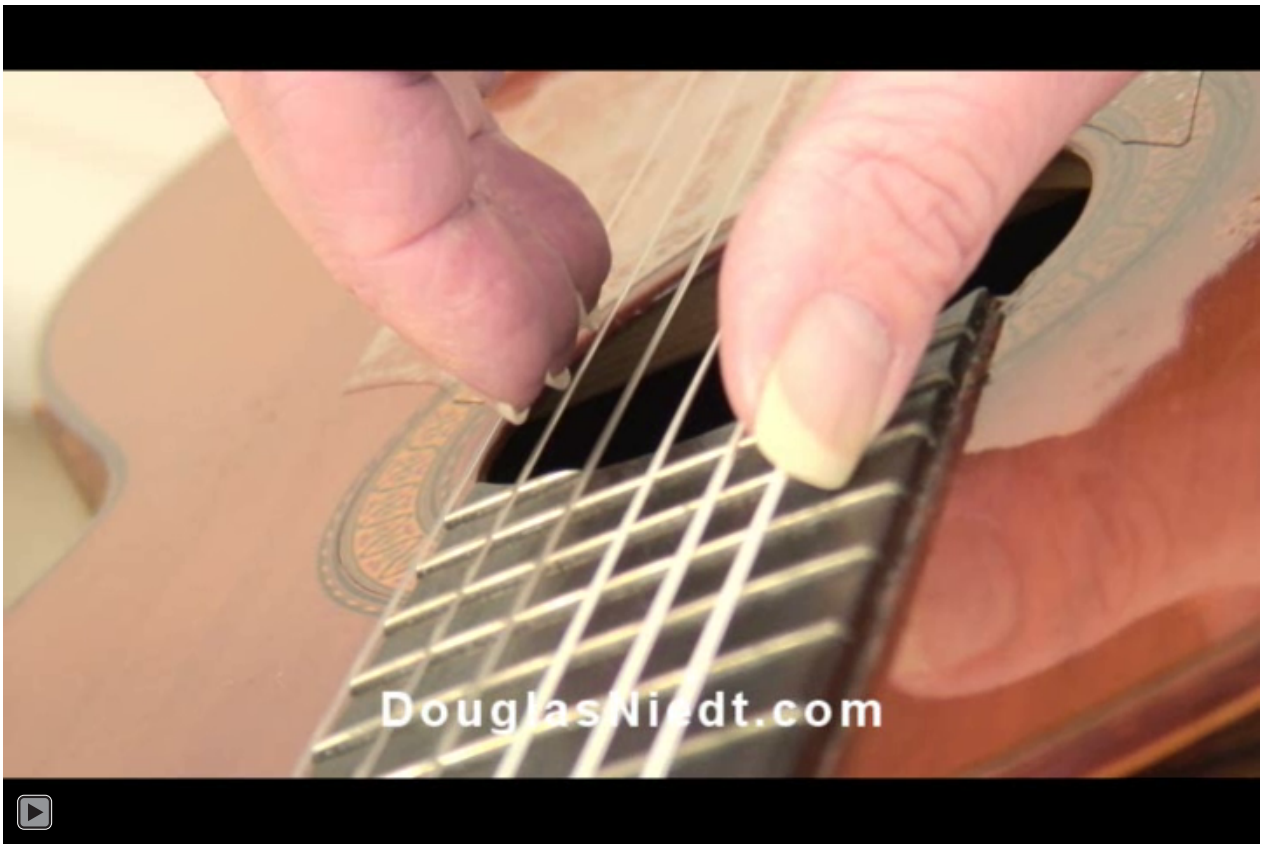
HAND POSITION

It is important that “ami” be in a perfect line in front of the string they are playing. To do this, some teachers recommend that the wrist be turned to the right. They further recommend that in order to do this, the player elevate the neck about ten degrees to help the wrist attain better flexibility and comfort. However, placing the wrist in this position tends to make the fingers strike the strings straight on to the fingernails producing a brighter and thinner tone. I personally don’t recommend this method. However, as I will say over and over about tremolo techniques, try it out and see what you think. What doesn’t work for others may work very well for you. You never know until you try it.

I prefer to find a hand position for a student that produces not only mechanical efficiency, but produces a beautiful tone. I want to hear “Recuerdos” played with a tone that is full and rich, not bright and thin.

Also be sure your fingers are not splayed apart. Splayed fingers are usually an indicator of dysfunctional tension. For most people, the fingers should hang together with minimal separation at the fingertips between “a” “m” and “i”. Monitor this at slow and fast speeds. Some players do fine at slow speeds, but as they play faster the fingers tense and begin to splay apart.

Watch this video on hand position. (I’m considering submitting this one to the Cannes Film Festival.)



FINGERNAIL NOISE

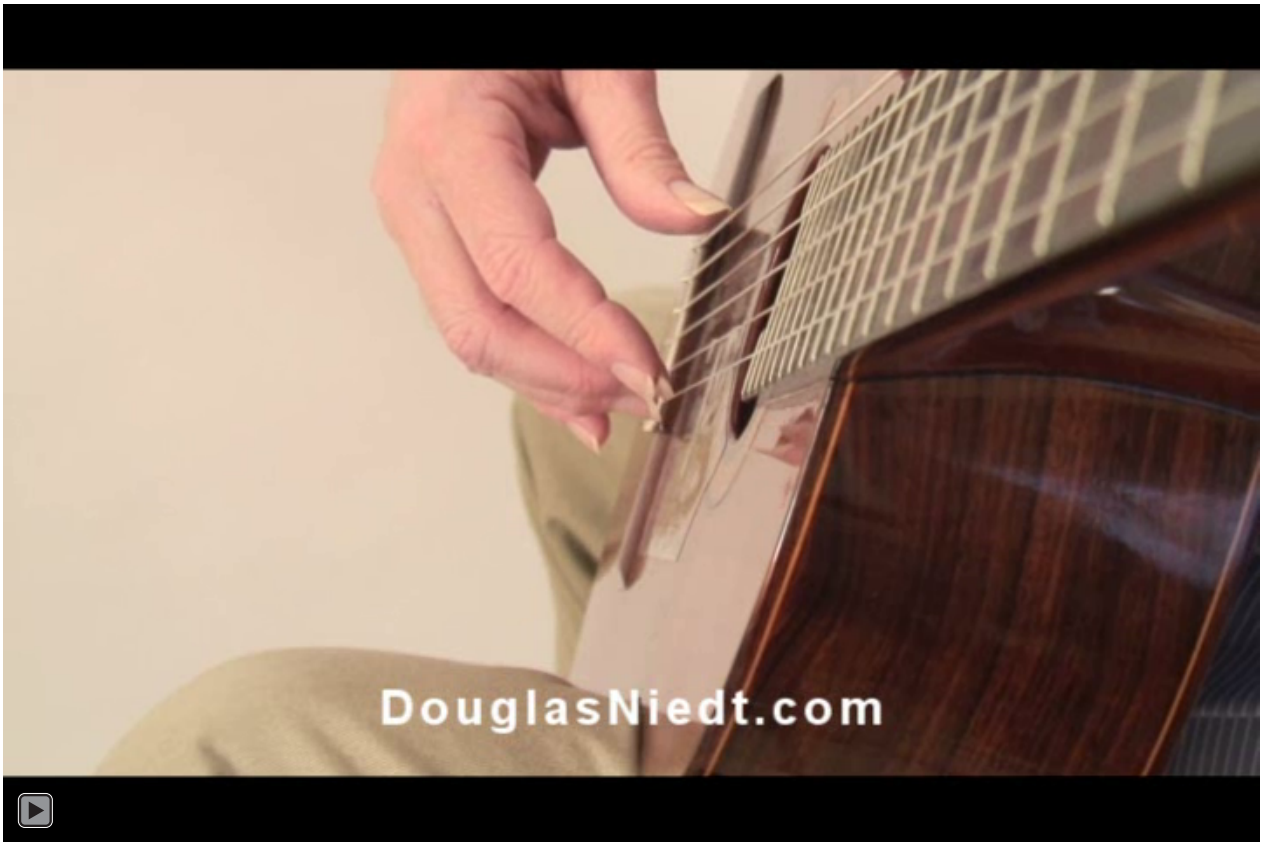
As in normal playing, fingernail noise should be minimal when playing the tremolo. Standard flesh/nail contact on the left side of the fingernails must be preserved. Because of the speed of tremolo execution, the fingers can err and miss that sweet spot, producing clicks or nail noises. The following discussion of finger and thumb movements should help increase your accuracy of fingernail and thumb contact with the strings and minimize extraneous noise. Not only that, greater awareness of and accuracy in hitting that sweet spot will also help maintain the same

tone quality from note to note, producing a more even-sounding tremolo. When we practice tremolo exercises, we understandably tend to focus on rhythmic evenness and speed. But be sure to listen for extraneous fingernail and thumbnail noises and tone quality evenness as well.

FINGER MOVEMENTS

No matter which tremolo pattern you use, one of the basic requirements to produce an effortless and accurate tremolo is to make small finger movements. The range of motion must be short. If your fingers make large follow through motions or begin their stokes far from the string or high above the string, you are asking for trouble. Obviously, the further the finger is from the string the greater the chance of missing the string entirely or not hitting the sweet spot of flesh/nail contact. The greater the distance each finger has to travel, the more difficult it will be to play fast. The same holds true for the thumb. Although speed is not an issue for the thumb in the tremolo, accuracy and tone quality certainly are.

Watch this shocking video clip on fingers gone wild:



How to play a tremolo with small finger movements

Three approaches:

1. Be sure to practice all tremolo exercises on the second string

Having the first string in front of the fingers and the third string behind them necessarily requires the use of smaller finger motions. Practicing on the first string is certainly much easier, but allows the fingers far more freedom to make large motions.

2. Use pluck-release strokes

I actually advocate this method for arpeggio playing as well. Other teachers do not.

The finger plucks the second string and the tension in the finger is immediately released (Pepe Romero describes it as emptying the finger of its tension). Then, the finger falls back to its position in front of the second string (by the force of gravity, not conscious effort) and remains there, ready to play again. Very little follow through exists in this stroke. Travel distance is minimized. The finger should not travel past the adjacent string. This results in excellent accuracy both in playing the correct string and hitting the precise flesh/nail contact point for best tone quality.

I use a little mental trick to help me execute this technique. I tell myself not to follow through at all with my finger stroke. Now, I know in the back of my mind I *must* follow through to pluck the string, but by telling myself "no follow through" it helps minimize the amount of finger travel. Here are detailed instructions and a video on how to use this technique.

1. Line up "ami" in front of the second string as low above the string as you can. Keeping "i" and "m" stationary, pluck the second string with the "a" finger. It takes muscle power or muscle tension to pluck the string. Tell the "a" finger not to follow through. Try to move no further than slightly above the third string. Immediately relax the finger. Release the tension in the finger. Empty the finger of its tension. If the finger is truly relaxed, gravity will pull it back to its starting position in front of the second string. The "i" and "m" fingers should still be stationary in position in front of the second string.

2. Keeping "i" and "a" stationary, pluck the second string with the "m" finger. Tell the finger not to follow through. Think small finger movement. Empty the "m" finger of its tension and it will fall back towards the floor. Stop it in front of the second string. The "i" and "a" fingers should still be stationary in position in front of the second string.

3. Keeping "m" and "a" stationary, pluck the second string with the "i" finger. Tell the finger not to follow through. Think small finger movement. Release the tension in the finger and allow it

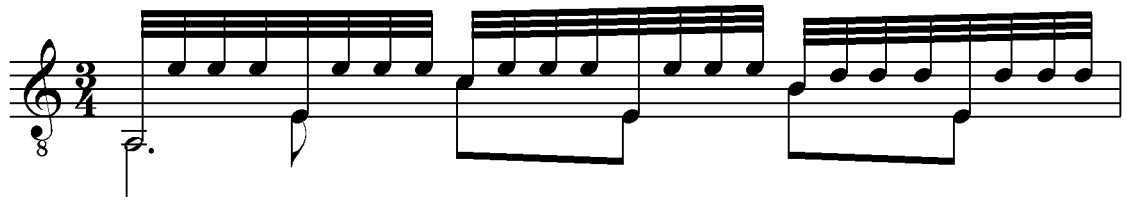
to return to its position in front of the second string. The “m” and “a” fingers should still be stationary, precisely in position in front of the second string.

Watch this stunning video clip to see the pluck-release technique:



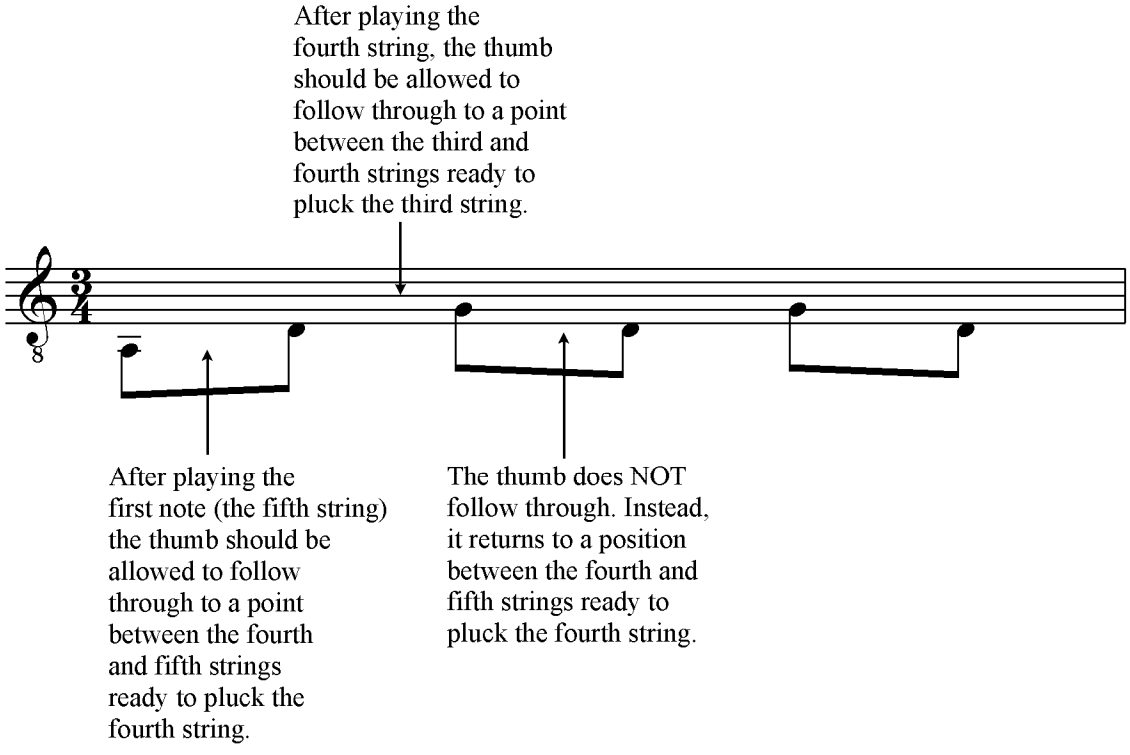
The thumb plays in a similar fashion. But its stroke is sometimes pluck-return rather than pluck-release. In example #1, let’s look at the first measure of Francisco Tárrega’s *Recuerdos de la Alhambra*:

Example #1



In this measure, the thumb is playing these strings:

Example #2



1.

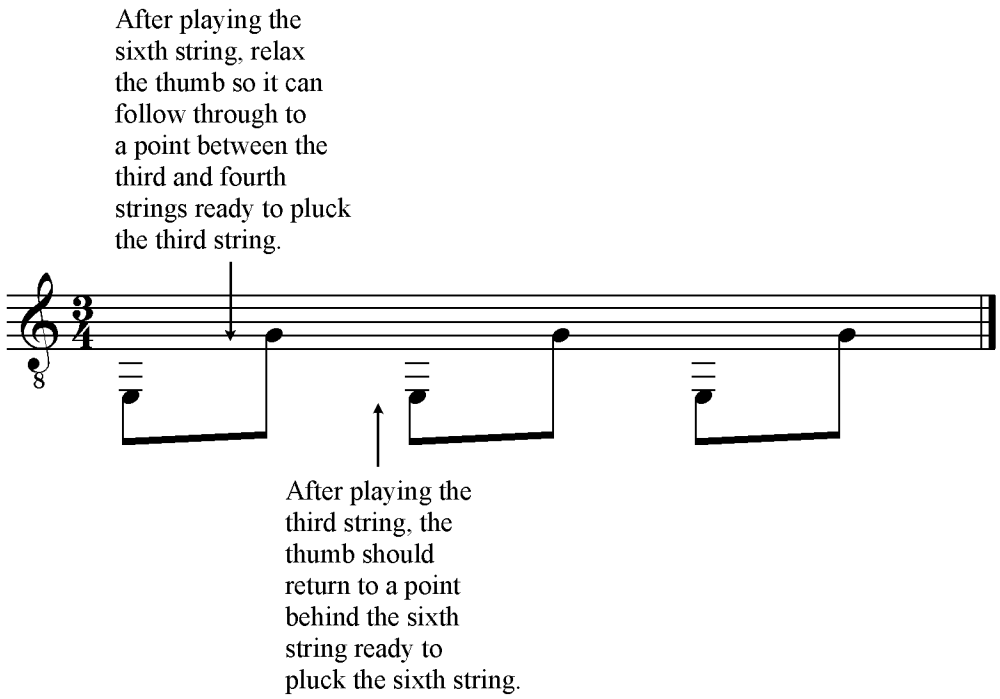
After playing the first note (the fifth string) the thumb should be allowed to follow through to a point between the fifth and fourth strings ready to pluck the fourth string.

2. After playing the fourth string, the thumb should be allowed to follow through to a point between the fourth and third strings ready to pluck the third string.

3. But, after playing the third string which string does the thumb play next? Yes, the fourth string. Therefore, the thumb should not follow through. Instead, it should return to a position between the fourth and fifth strings ready to pluck the fourth string. How does it do this? Not by relaxing. If it relaxed after playing the third string, it would follow through to the second or even the first string. That's the wrong direction! If it ended up above the second or first string, it would have to come back a great distance and "swat" at the fourth string. Instead, after playing the third string limit its follow through and consciously move it to a point between the fourth and fifth strings ready to pluck the fourth string.

Let's take the more extreme situation in example #3. Say the thumb had to play this pattern:

Example #3



After playing the sixth string, by all means relax the thumb so it can follow through to a point between the third and fourth strings ready to pluck the third string. But, after playing the third string, the thumb needs to return to a point behind the sixth string ready to pluck the sixth string. If the thumb relaxes after plucking the third string it will fall to a position around the first string which puts it totally out of position to pluck the sixth string. Therefore, after plucking the third string, consciously move the thumb into position behind the sixth string.

Watch me demonstrate this concept in the next video clip:



3. Use planting techniques for the "pami" pattern

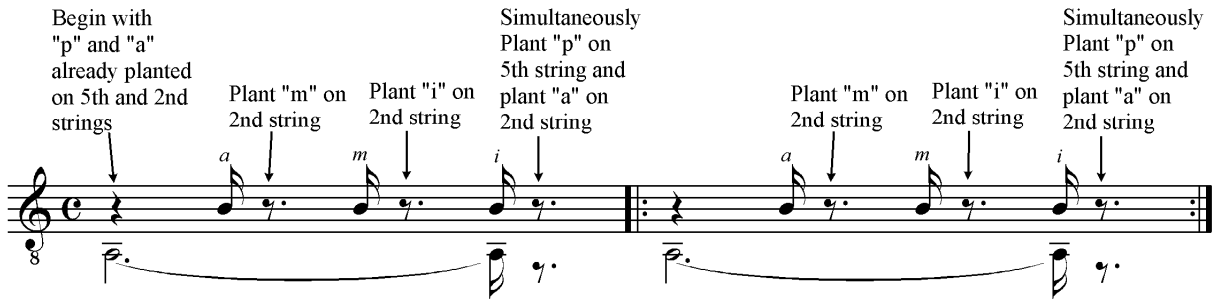
If you don't like the pluck-release method, planting techniques may help to keep your finger movements small. Planting may be done in three ways:

1. Plant the "a" finger as the thumb plays. Many people recommend this. It is said that if the "a" finger is planted it serves as a reference point for "i" and "m", increasing their accuracy. Also, having the "a" finger on the string keeps "i" and "m" closer to the string as well. Some say it aids in developing speed. It also aids in hand stability. And it certainly results in smaller movements of the "a" finger. One school of thought says that the planting of "a" is a practice technique for slower tempos and that as the speed is increased, the finger is no longer consciously planted. The other school of thought is that the plant is maintained even at high speeds. Try both and see what produces the best result for you. A downside of this technique is that the sound of the string is cut off every time the "a" finger is planted. Many prefer to have the sound of the note ring through as the thumb plays.

2. Plant "a" and "p" together. Plant them immediately after the "i" finger plays. This is said to result in even greater accuracy, speed, and stability. It also specifically helps to rein in extraneous movements of the thumb and preps the thumb to play the correct string. Once again, one school of thought says this is only a practice technique. The other school of thought says this plant is used even at final tremolo speeds.

3. Plant all four fingers. This one is more of a practice technique rather something to be used in actual playing. Here is how it works. Start with the thumb and "a" finger planted on their strings. The thumb plays. The "a" finger plays. Immediately after "a" plays, plant the "m" finger. This will cut the previously played note short (staccato). Immediately after "m" plays plant the "i" finger on the string. Again, this will cut the note just played producing a staccato. Pluck the string with the "i" finger. Immediately after the "i" finger plays, plant "p" and "a" simultaneously on the strings they will play next. This cuts off the note the "i" finger just played and cuts off the ringing bass string. At first, it is practiced at a snail's pace and will sound as notated in example #4:

Example #4



Again, this is a practice technique or strategy. It is not used in performance. It definitely helps limit the movements of the fingers. Each finger stroke pulls the next finger immediately into position. As the speed is increased the individual finger preparations and the resulting staccato become less distinct. As you approach tremolo tempo (MM=144+ for a quarter note) the staccato effect disappears altogether.

Watch me demonstrate these planting techniques in this video clip:



Having explained all this about planting, I must confess I use no planting at all in my tremolo. For me, planting has no effect on my speed, accuracy, or control of my finger movements. But I highly recommend that you try it. Everyone is different. What doesn't work for someone else may be the secret you've been searching for to unlock mastery of the tremolo. Try everything. Discount nothing.

MORE ABOUT THE THUMB

Once again, we have two schools of thought. One school says the thumb is always played free stroke. This makes sense from the standpoint that in a tremolo, the thumb usually plays the background accompaniment and should therefore be played quietly. The other school says the thumb should play rest stroke whenever possible because planting provides stability to the hand. They maintain that with practice, it is no problem to play quiet thumb rest strokes.

Most guitarists use thumb free stroke. However, as I will repeat many times, try both techniques to see which works best for you.

Keep the thumb quiet

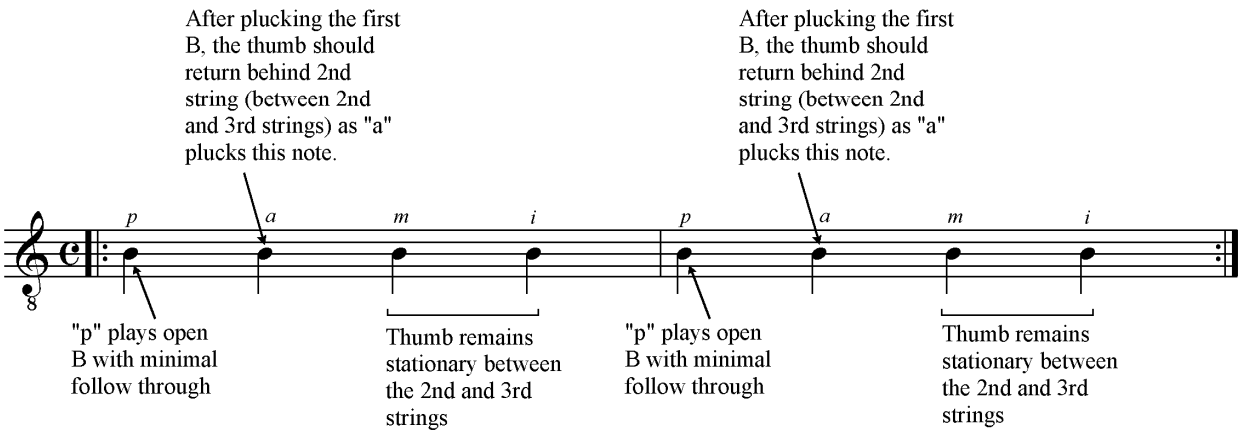
Although a few exceptions can be found, in most tremolo passages in the repertoire, the fingers carry the melody and the thumb plays the accompaniment. Therefore, when practicing any of the tremolo exercises in this article, it is important to train the thumb to play quietly. *As the speed of an exercise is increased, the thumb naturally will tend to play louder*. It becomes more difficult to curb this tendency at fast speeds. For this reason, when practicing these exercises at the recommended slow starting speeds, the thumb should play pianissimo or pianississimo. Then, as you reach tremolo speeds of MM=144+ the balance between thumb and fingers will be correct. Proper balance of volume between the thumb and fingers is an essential element of a good tremolo.

Training the thumb to anticipate its next position

As described previously, the thumb must always anticipate where it is needed next. After playing a string it should position itself behind the next string it is about to play. Obviously, this is important in order to help the thumb play accurately. It is also important so the thumb can play with minimal effort with small movements. A thumb that doesn't prepare precisely for the next string it is to play flails around wildly and can easily upset the rhythmic evenness and accuracy of attack of the "ami" fingers.

To train the thumb, let's begin with a tremolo on a single string as shown in example #5, playing very slowly:

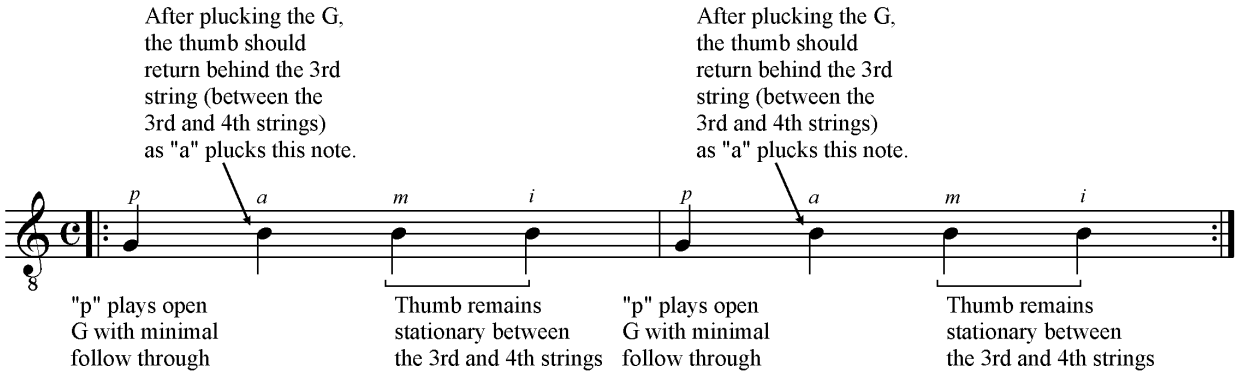
Example #5

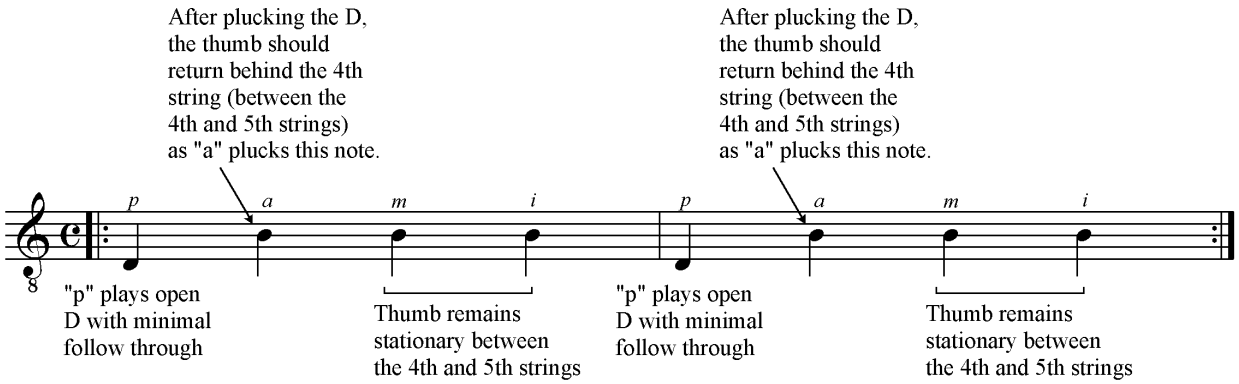


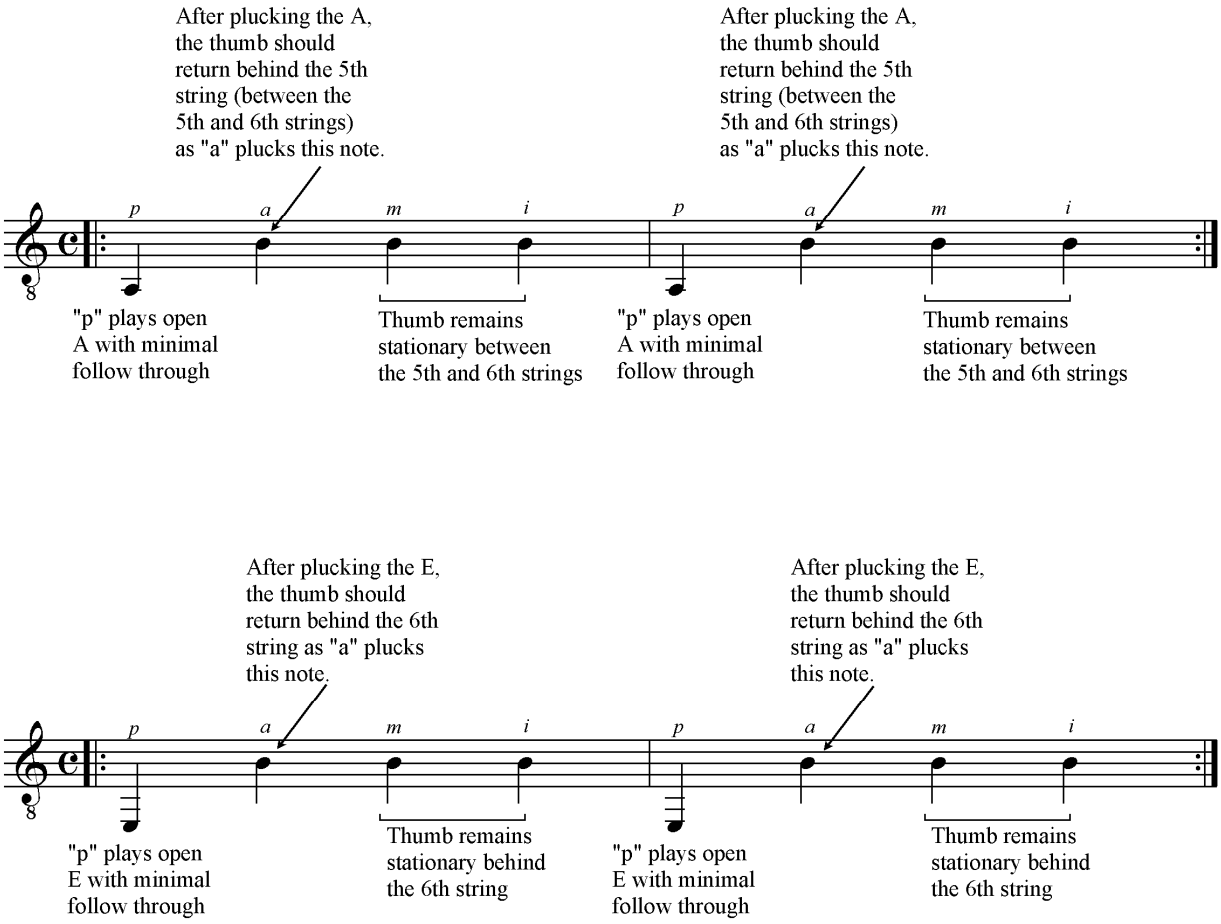
Because the thumb plays the second string repeatedly, it should pluck the string and bounce back behind the string ready to play again. Play the thumb stroke with minimal follow through. Excessive follow through results in the thumb having to scramble to return to position resulting in swatting motions. When should the thumb bounce back behind the second string? I prefer to position it as my “a” finger plays. Second choice would be as “m” plays. Positioning the thumb as “i” plays is a bit late, especially if the thumb has a big jump from say the third string to the sixth string.

After trying the single-string tremolo, try similar exercises with the fingers still playing the second string but with the thumb playing other strings, again practicing very slowly at first and then speeding up. As the distance between the string the fingers are playing and the string the thumb is playing increases, it becomes more difficult to control the thumb:

Example #6


After plucking the G, the thumb should return behind the 3rd string (between the 3rd and 4th strings) as "a" plucks this note.
After plucking the G, the thumb should return behind the 3rd string (between the 3rd and 4th strings) as "a" plucks this note.
p a m i
p a m i
"p" plays open G with minimal follow through
Thumb remains stationary between the 3rd and 4th strings
"p" plays open G with minimal follow through
Thumb remains stationary between the 3rd and 4th strings


After plucking the D, the thumb should return behind the 4th string (between the 4th and 5th strings) as "a" plucks this note.
After plucking the D, the thumb should return behind the 4th string (between the 4th and 5th strings) as "a" plucks this note.
p a m i
p a m i
"p" plays open D with minimal follow through
Thumb remains stationary between the 4th and 5th strings
"p" plays open D with minimal follow through
Thumb remains stationary between the 4th and 5th strings



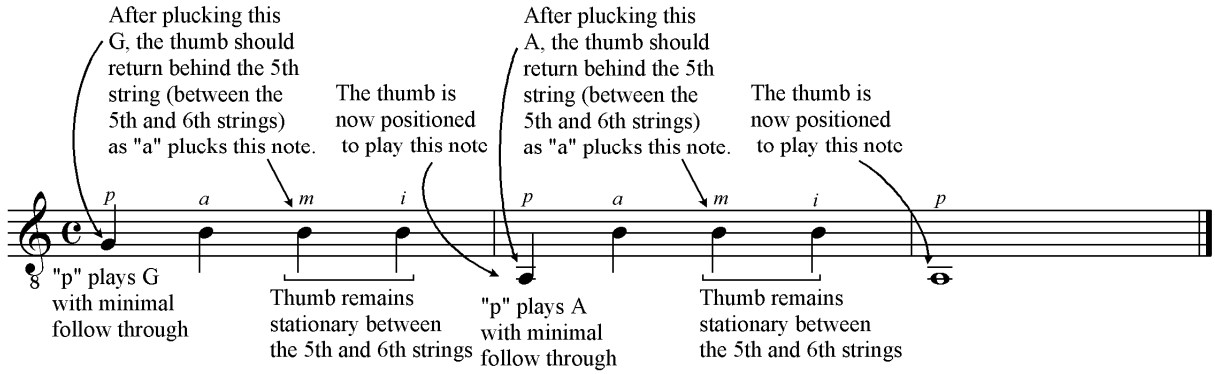
The preceding exercises will train the thumb to return to position after playing the same string repeatedly. Be sure the thumb remains stationary in position as “m” and “i” play the second string.

Watch this astonishing video.



Next, we must take on the more difficult task of training the thumb to position itself when playing on alternating strings. Let's begin with this exercise shown in example #7:

Example #7

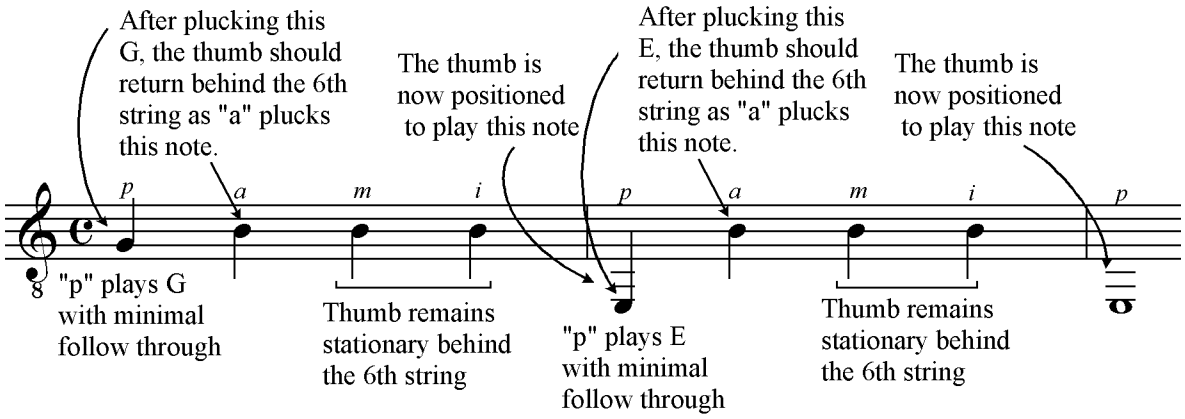


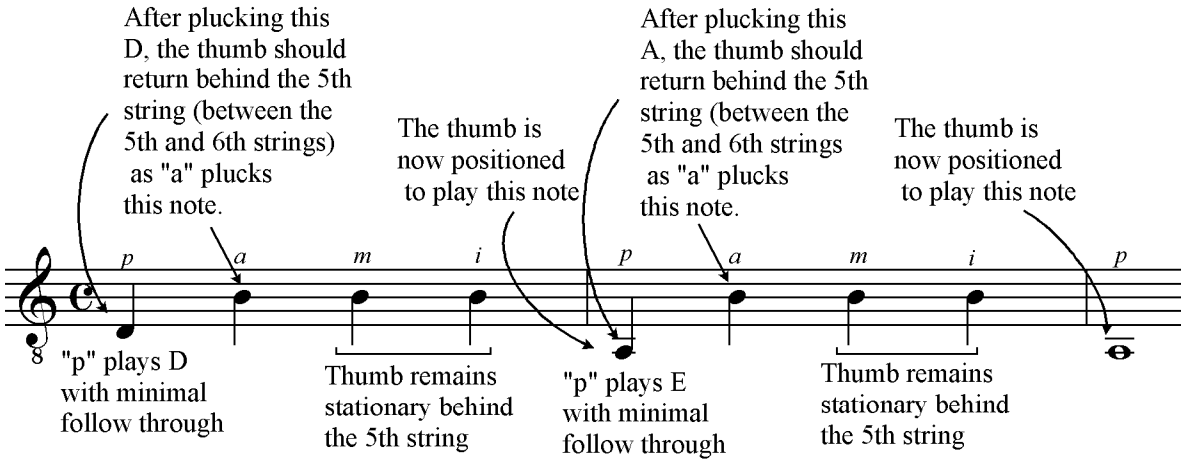
Here is what should happen. The thumb plucks the third string. As “a” plays the second string, the thumb should move into position between the fifth and sixth strings ready to pluck the fifth string. In the second measure, after plucking the fifth string, as “a” plucks the second string the thumb should return between the fifth and sixth strings ready to play the final fifth string in measure three. Be sure your thumb positions itself very low above the strings. Personally, I position my thumb so the thumbnail is between the strings, not above them. Be sure the thumb remains stationary in position as “m” and “i” play the second string.

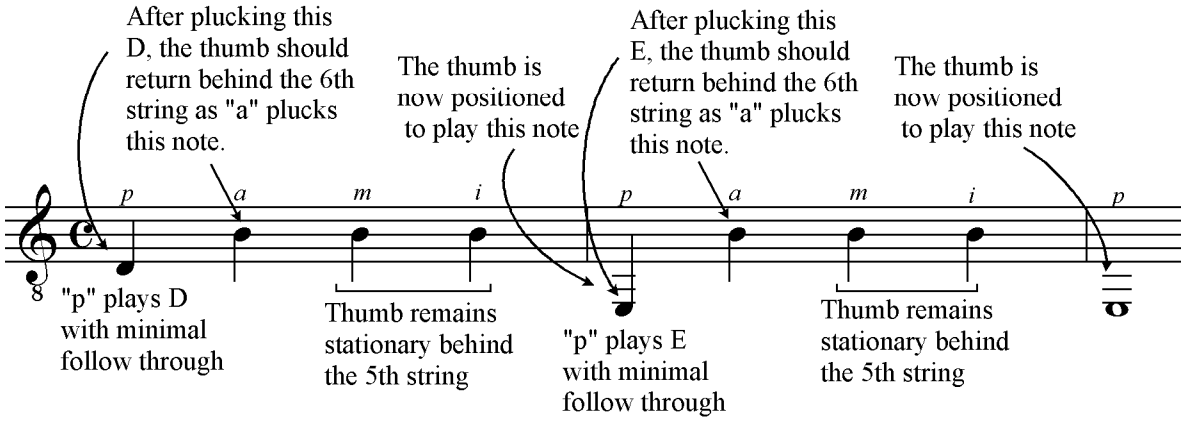
Begin slowly at first and gradually increase your speed.

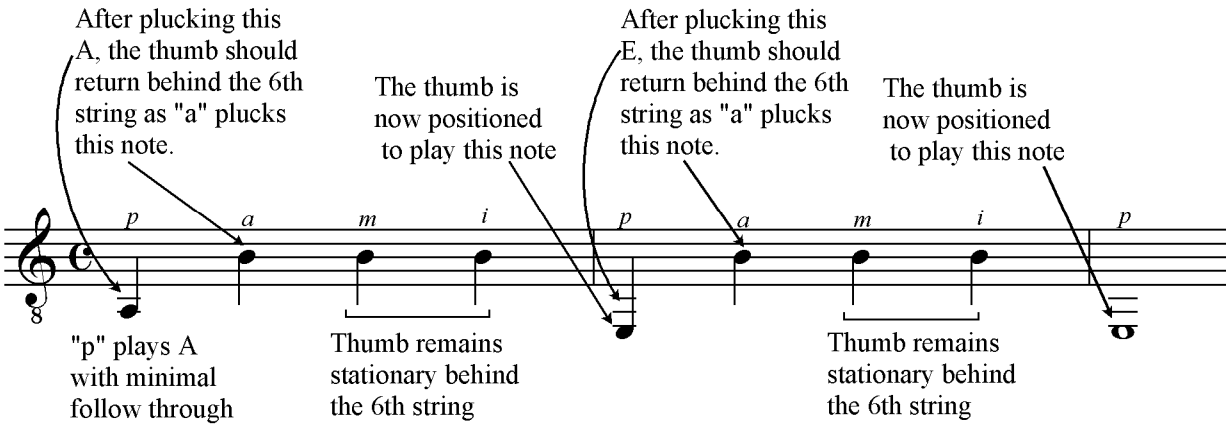
Practice the tremolo on the second string with all the combinations of descending thumb jumps including the most difficult, the third string to the sixth string.

Example #8


After plucking this G, the thumb should return behind the 6th string as "a" plucks this note.
The thumb is now positioned to play this note
After plucking this E, the thumb should return behind the 6th string as "a" plucks this note.
The thumb is now positioned to play this note
p a m i p a m i p
"p" plays G with minimal follow through
Thumb remains stationary behind the 6th string
"p" plays E with minimal follow through
Thumb remains stationary behind the 6th string


After plucking this D, the thumb should return behind the 5th string (between the 5th and 6th strings) as "a" plucks this note.
The thumb is now positioned to play this note
After plucking this A, the thumb should return behind the 5th string (between the 5th and 6th strings as "a" plucks this note.
The thumb is now positioned to play this note
p a m i p a m i p
"p" plays D with minimal follow through
Thumb remains stationary behind the 5th string
"p" plays E with minimal follow through
Thumb remains stationary behind the 5th string


After plucking this D, the thumb should return behind the 6th string as "a" plucks this note.
The thumb is now positioned to play this note
After plucking this E, the thumb should return behind the 6th string as "a" plucks this note.
The thumb is now positioned to play this note
p a m i p a m i p
"p" plays D with minimal follow through
Thumb remains stationary behind the 5th string
"p" plays E with minimal follow through
Thumb remains stationary behind the 5th string

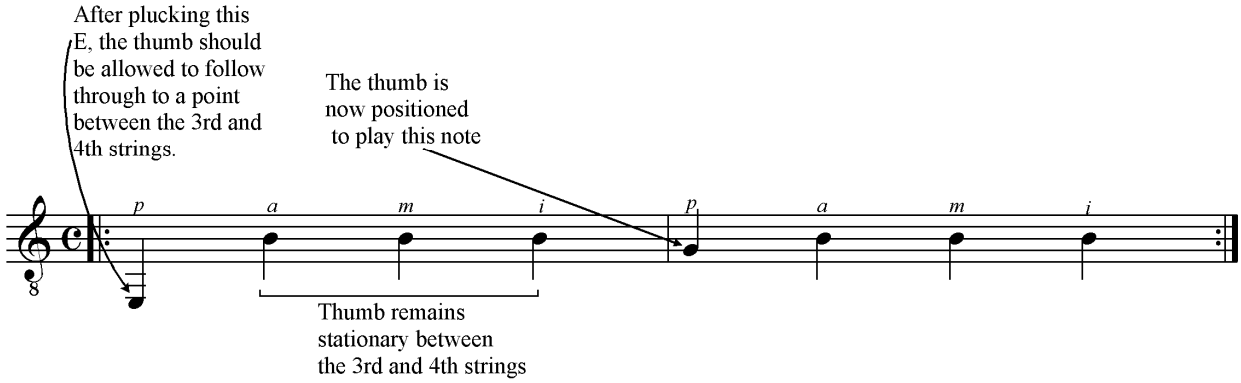


Watch this video.



Positioning the thumb when changing from lower to higher pitched strings as shown in example #9 is much easier:

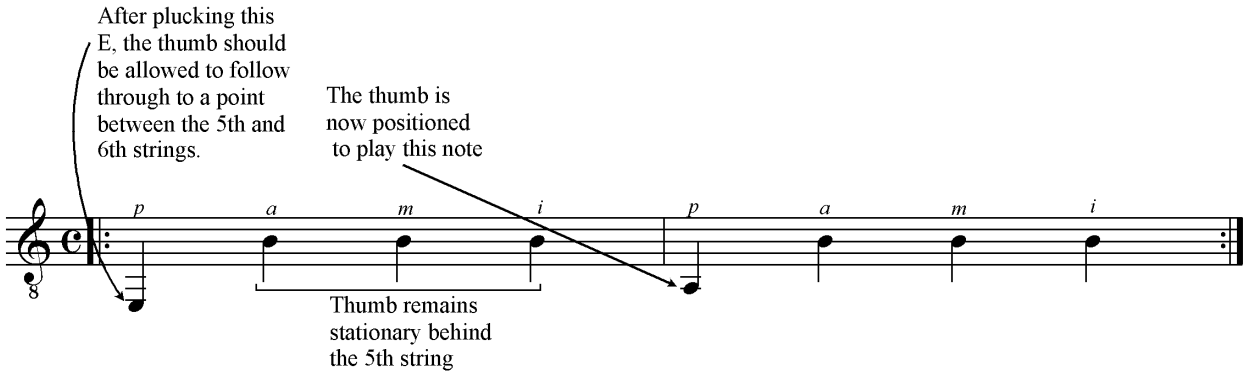
Example #9



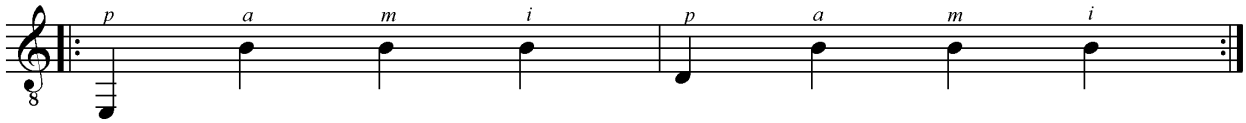
After the thumb plays the sixth string, simply allow it to follow through. Your challenge is only to stop the thumb's follow through when it reaches the point between the third and fourth strings so it is ready to pluck the third string.

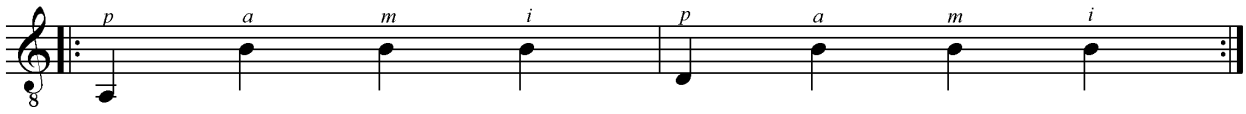
Practice the tremolo on the second string with all the combinations of ascending thumb jumps as shown in example #10:

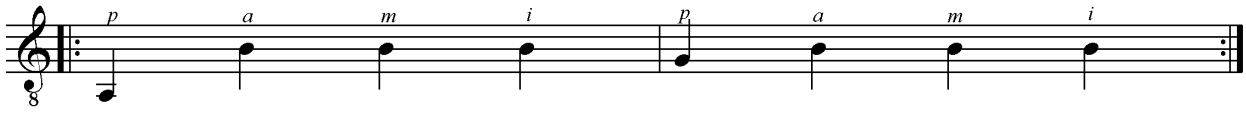
Example #10

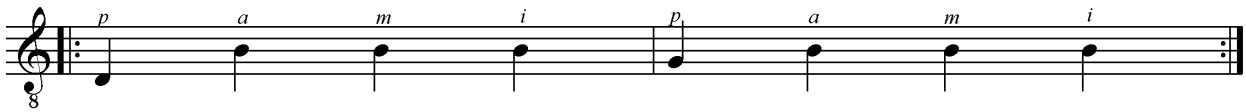


Follow the same principle in the rest of these exercises. Allow the thumb to follow through to a point behind the next string it is to play. Be sure the thumb remains stationary while "ami" play their notes.

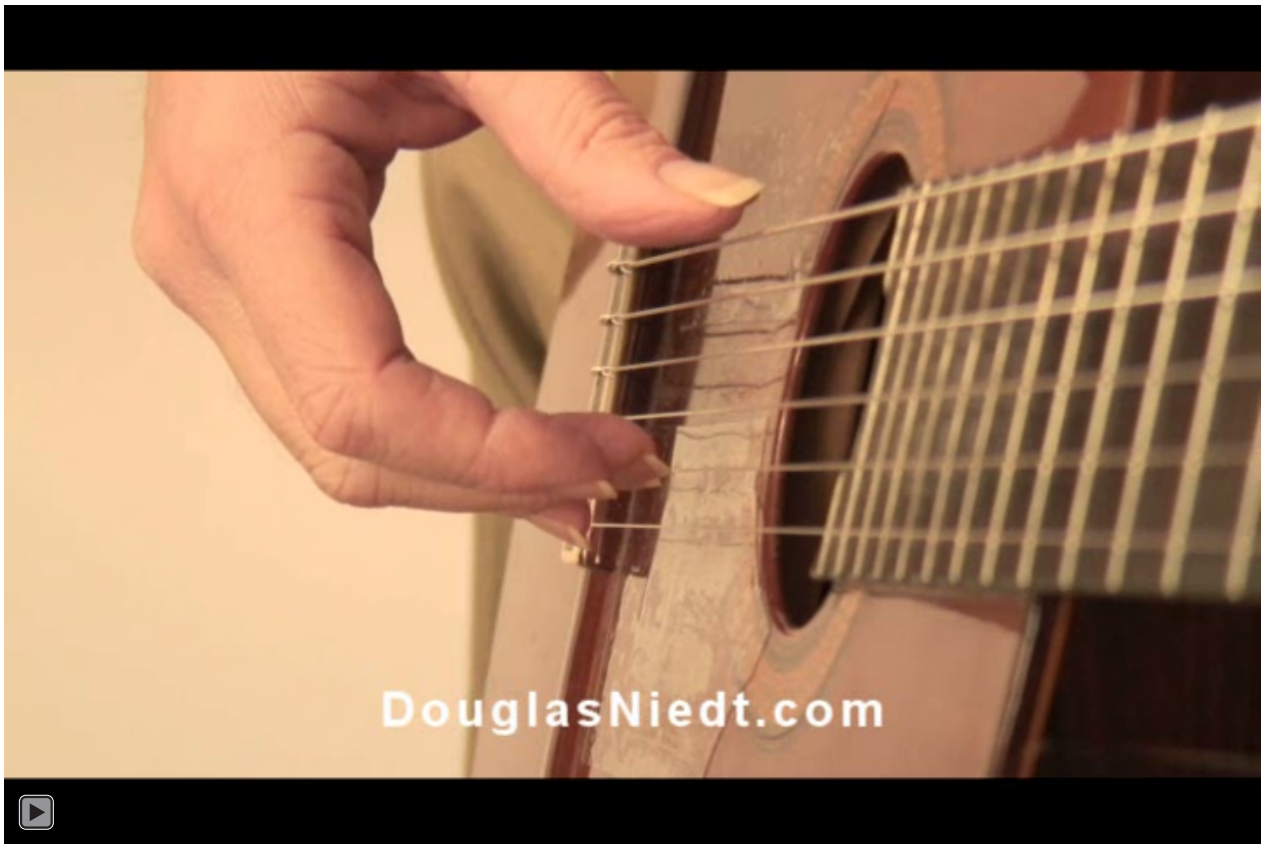






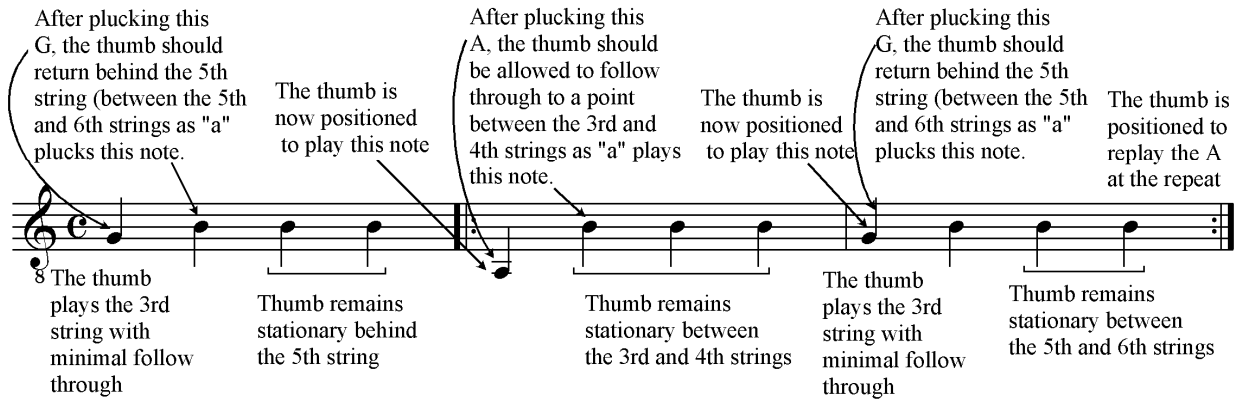


Watch this video:



The next step in the thumb's training is to alternate strings. Let's begin with the fingers playing the second string and the thumb playing the third and fifth strings as shown in example #11:

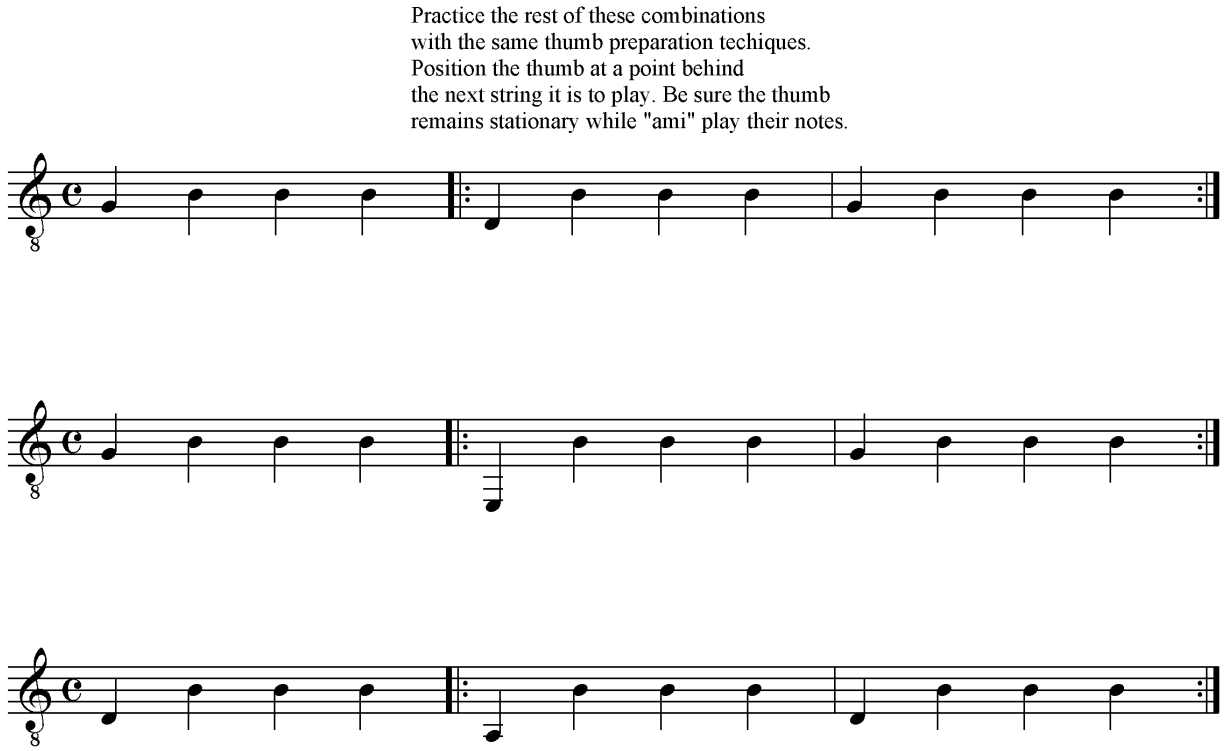
Example #11

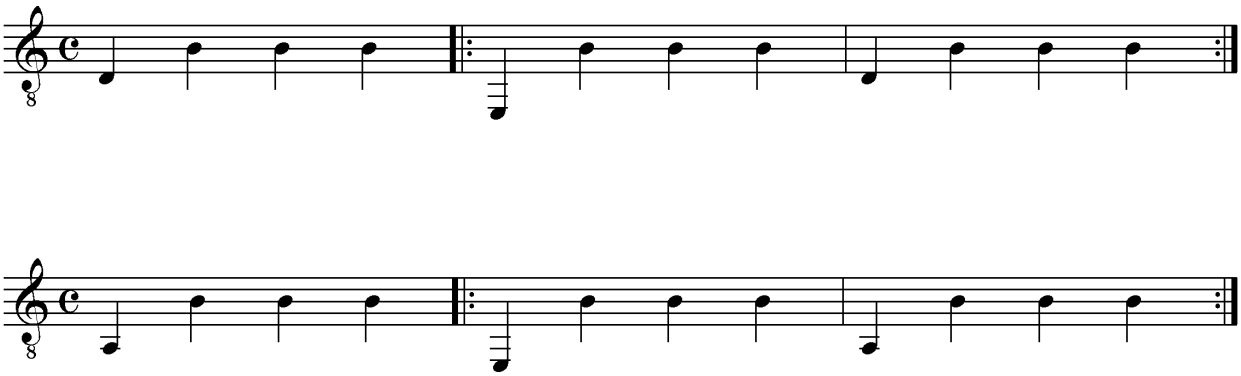


The thumb plays the third string. As “a” plays the second string, the thumb jumps into position between the fifth and sixth strings as “m” and “i” play. The thumb plucks the fifth string and follows through into position between the third and fourth strings as “ami” play. The thumb plucks the third string and the cycle repeats. Be sure the thumb remains stationary in position as “m” and “i” play the second string.

Try all combinations of the thumb playing alternate strings as shown in example 12:

Example #12





Watch this video:



You may be asking yourself, “With practice, I think I can train my thumb to position itself for the next string it has to play when I’m focused on it and playing these basic exercises. But how in the world will I do this when I change my focus and concentrate on my right-hand fingers and ultimately my left hand?” The good news is that if you practice these exercises enough, eventually the thumb will automatically position itself without conscious direction from you.

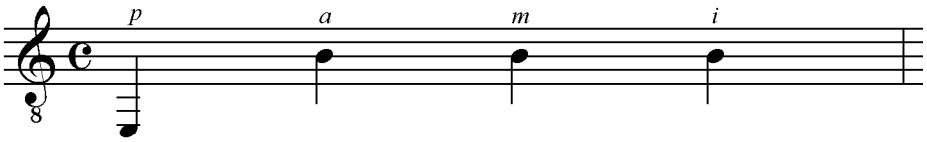
Maintaining independence of movement between the thumb and fingers

When the thumb plays, it is important that “a” “m” and “i” don’t move out of their parallel position between the first and second strings. If you watch your fingers as you slowly play the “pami” pattern, you will often see your “i”, “m”, or “a” finger move when the thumb plays.

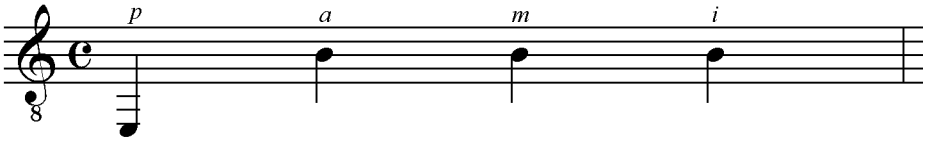
Try playing the sixth string with the thumb and the second string with “ami” to see if you have this problem. Play slowly. Watch the “i” finger first. Watch “m”. Then watch “a”.

Example #13

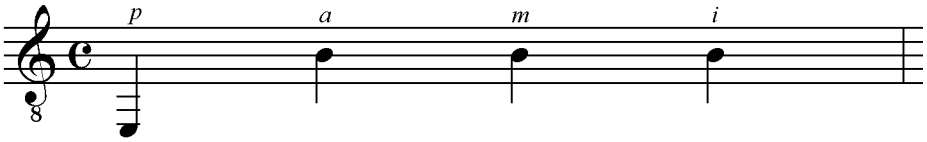
When the thumb plucks the 6th string, **watch "i"**. It shouldn't move.



When the thumb plucks the 6th string, **watch "m"**. It shouldn't move.



When the thumb plucks the 6th string, **watch "a"**. It shouldn't move.

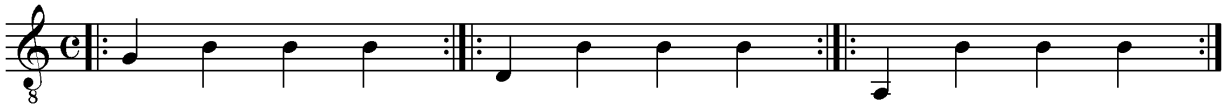


If a finger or fingers move, slow down and be sure the fingers are totally relaxed as the thumb makes its stroke. As the thumb plays, you may have to actually oppose the pull on the finger by pushing the finger forward (towards the floor) to train the finger.

Try the other string combinations shown in example #14:

Example #14

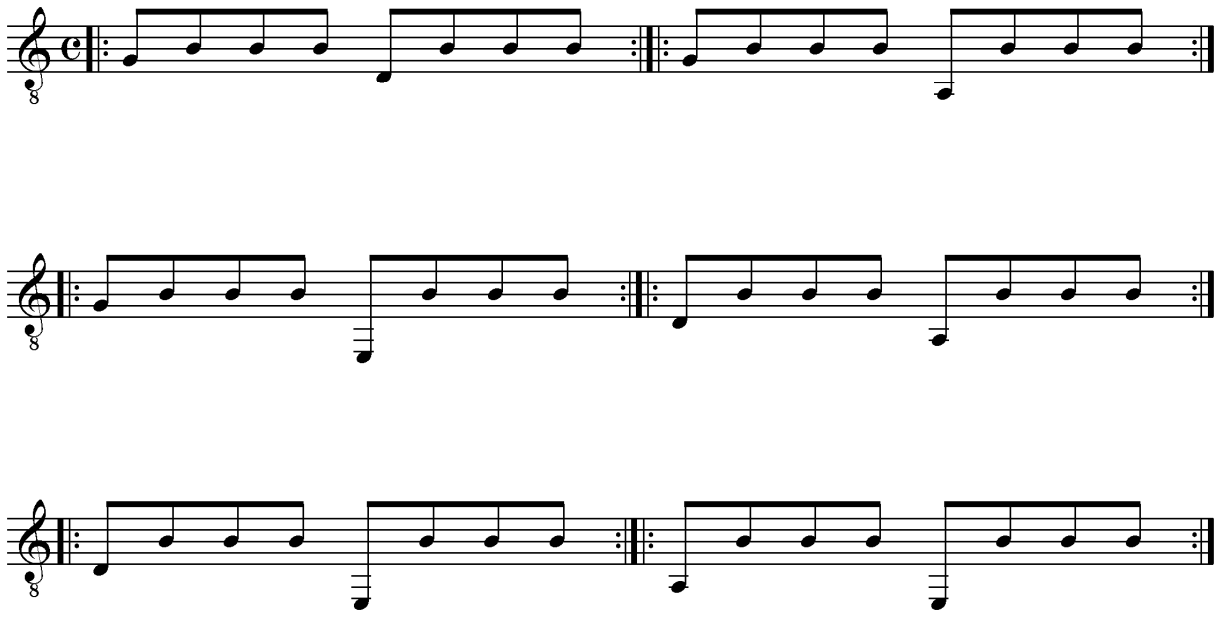
On each repeated pattern, as the thumb plucks, be sure "a", "m", and "i" don't move.



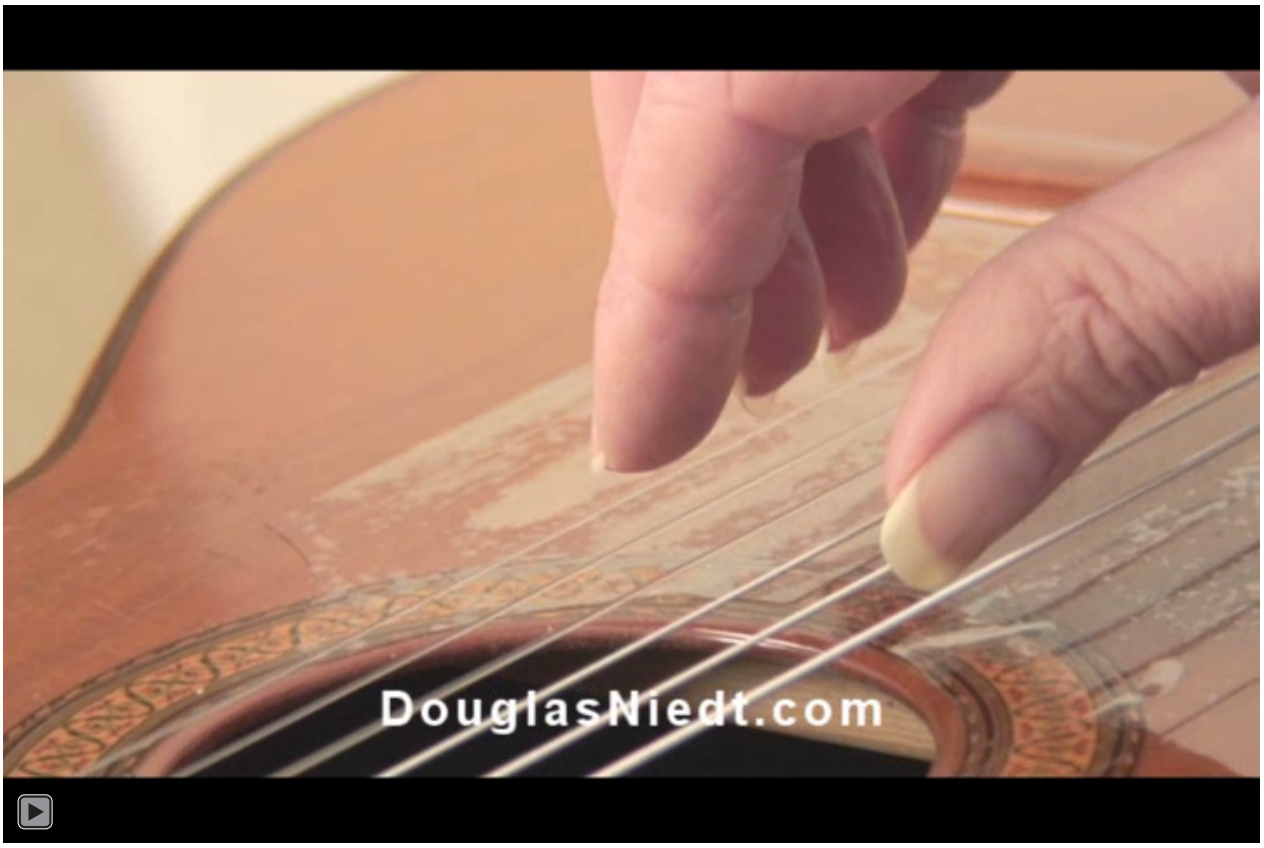
Then, try all the combinations of alternating strings shown in example #15:

Example #15

On each repeated pattern, as the thumb plucks, be sure "a", "m", and "i" don't move.



Now, watch the mesmerizing video:



BEFORE THE TREMOLO, "m-a" FINGER INDEPENDENCE

A major cause of an uneven tremolo is a lack of finger independence between "m" and "a". Unlike "i" and "m", they have little natural independence between them. One must work consciously to develop that independence. This is a problem for pianists and other instrumentalists as well. One of the best ways to develop "ma" independence is to practice the argeggio patterns "pmam" and "pama". Read my article for a detailed explanation of how to practice the patterns.

Do not skip over this step. Without good independence between “m” and “a” your tremolo will not be rhythmically even.

DIAGNOSTICS

Before we go on, I want to talk about diagnosing tremolo evenness problems. Most players can tell if their tremolo is off. The problem is that they or their teacher can’t figure out exactly what the problem is. I have to admit that I have misdiagnosed tremolo problems. When a tremolo is played at MM=144+, it is very difficult to hear if the rhythmic unevenness is between “pa”, “am”, “mi”, or “ip”. Or, if it is caused by accenting the wrong finger, or by a particular finger having a different tone quality from the others.

I used to record myself on a reel-to-reel tape deck and then play it back at half speed to figure out where the unevenness in my tremolo was. It worked pretty well, but of course when the tape was played back at half speed, the pitch dropped an octave and the sound quality deteriorated quite a bit making it difficult to hear details.

But, modern technology has come to our rescue. We now have computer programs that allow us to record our tremolo and play it back in slow motion (at any speed not just half speed) and at *real pitch* with far less deterioration in sound quality. These programs also allow us to video our right hand playing a tremolo, import it into the program, and play the audio AND video in slow motion, again at any speed we desire, to analyze finger movement problems.

Traditionalists may bristle at this and say, “Doug, c’mon. Sounds like you’re a mechanic analyzing my car’s engine problems.” Well, step into the 21st century; try out one of these computer programs, and save you or your students hours of frustration and trips down dead end roads.

Many computer programs can be found that will slow down the playback of music without changing the pitch. My favorite is “Transcribe!” Yes, the name includes the exclamation point—kind of like the musical, *Oklahoma!*. It is available as a download from www.SeventhString.com. They offer a 30-day free trial. The purchase price is only $50. It was developed and continues to be updated/improved by Andy Robinson, a guitarist.

Check out the website. If you’re a geek or a science guy you will find the explanations of how the program works fascinating. The mathematics required to do what Transcribe! does is amazing and very complex.

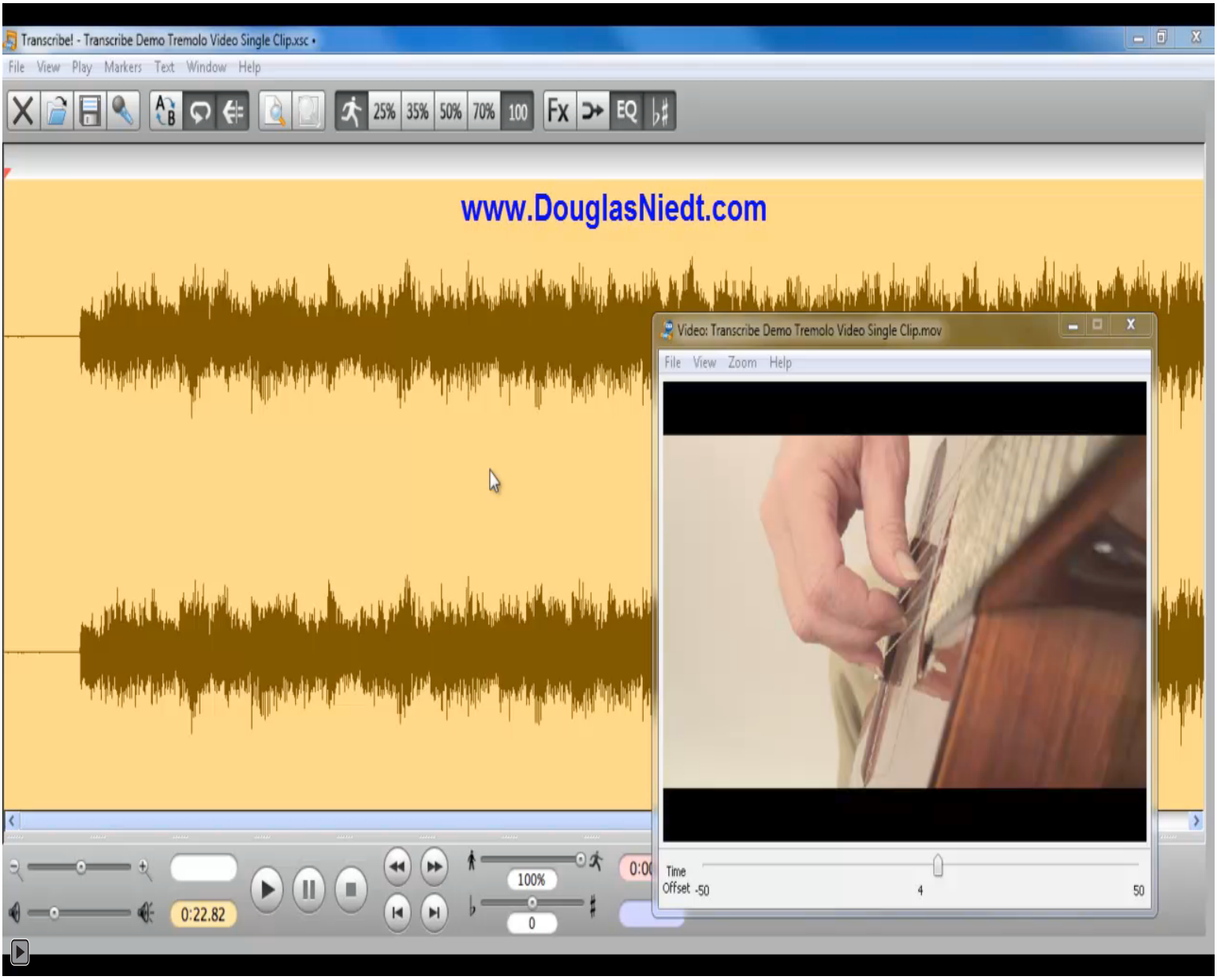
The best way to explain how this program works is with the following videos. PLEASE NOTE: Although I enthusiastically recommend the Transcribe! software program, I have absolutely no

financial or otherwise connection with it, and do not benefit in any way should you decide to try it out or purchase it.

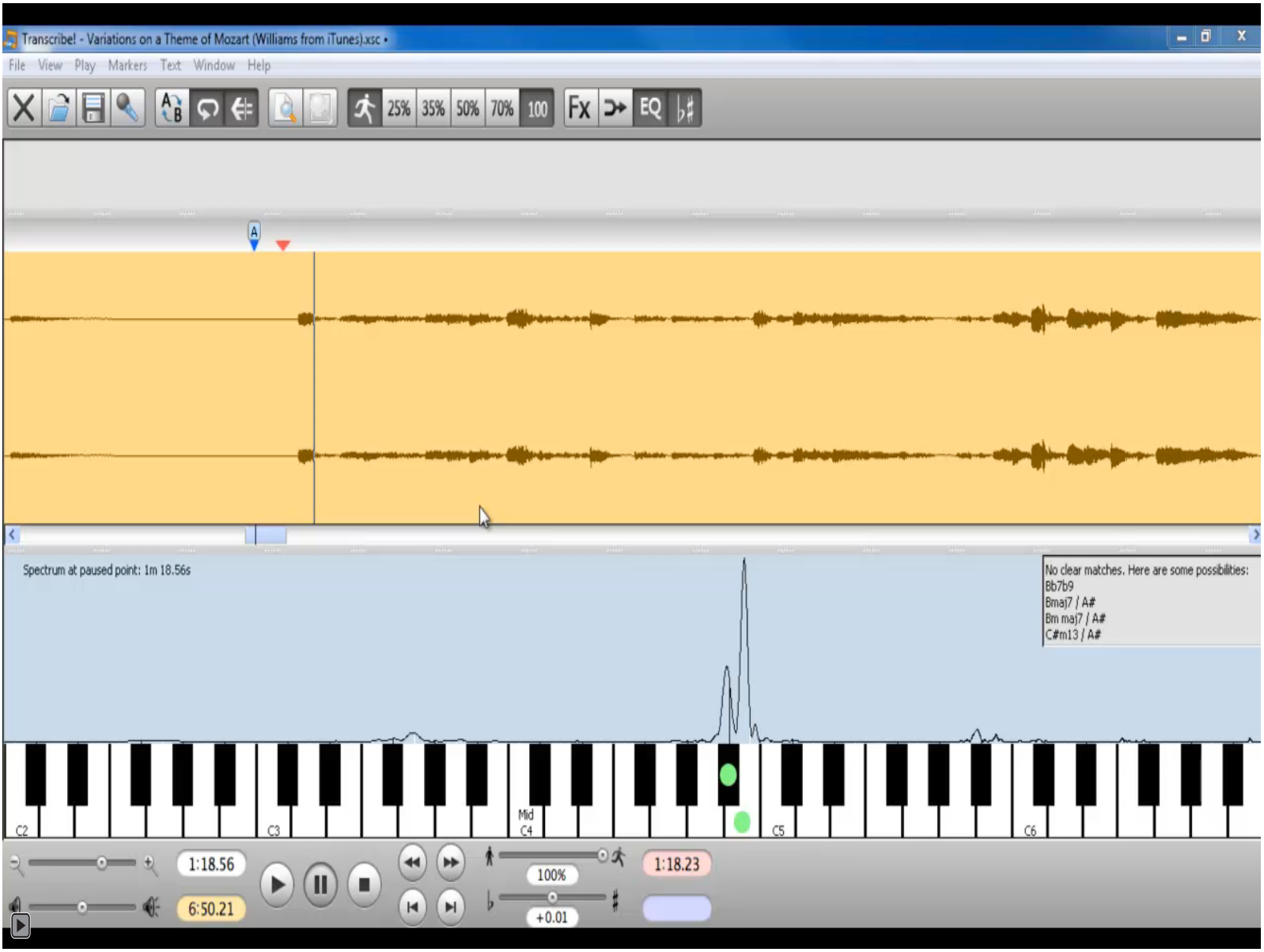
The first video clip shows the basic way you would use the program to improve your tremolo:



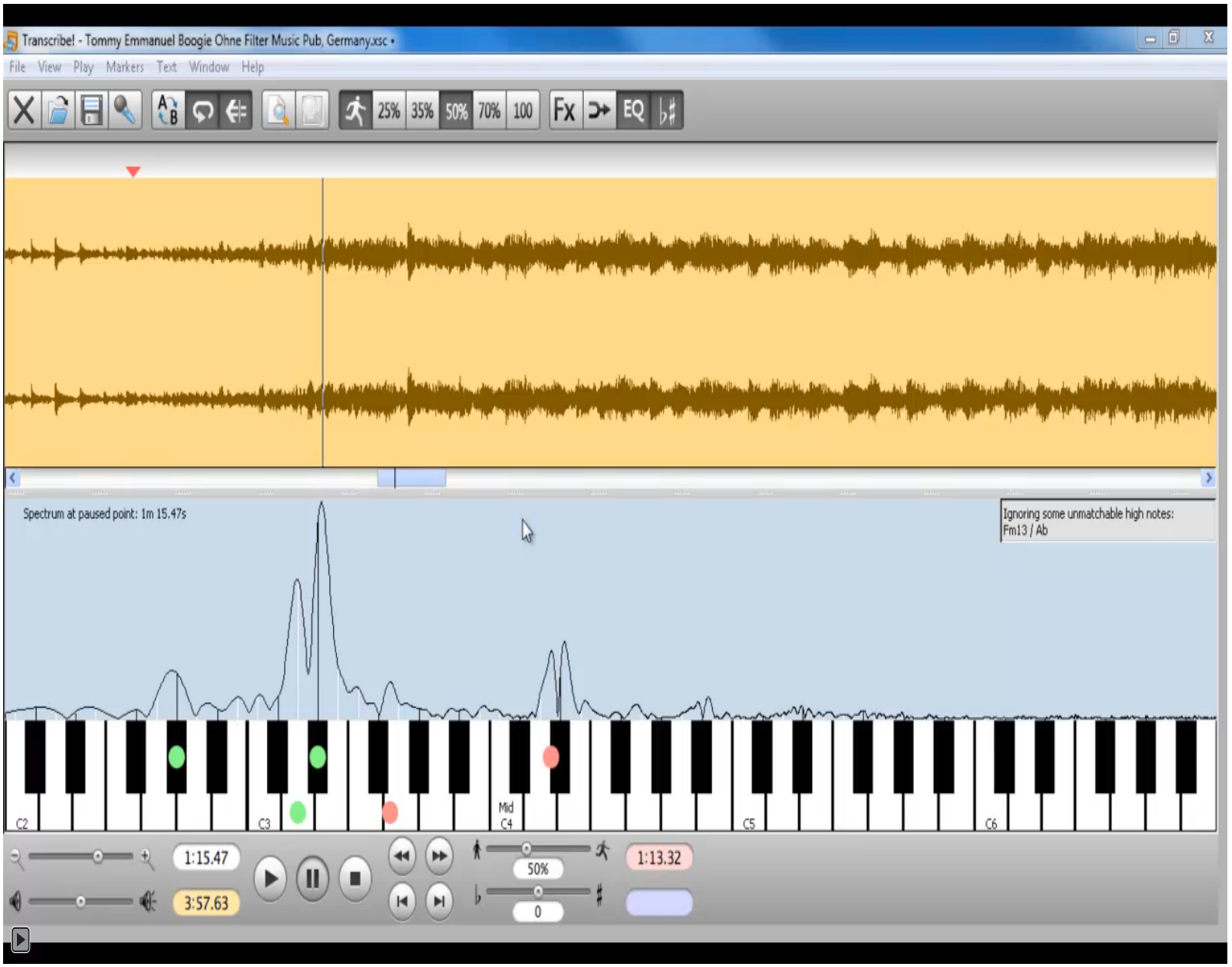
This next clip shows how you can use video in the program to improve your technique. It's amazing. Watch:



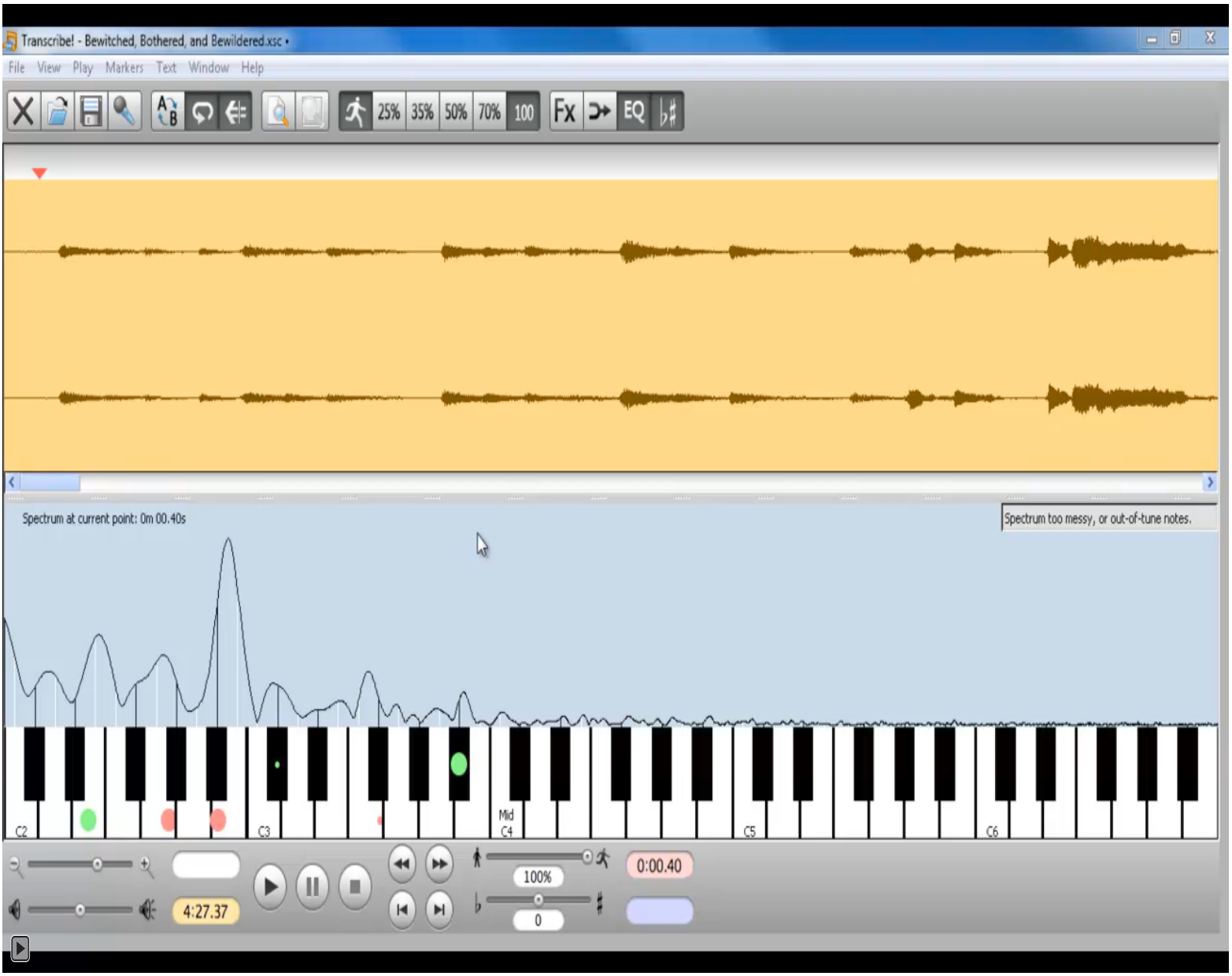
Now, watch how you can use Transcribe! to play along with and practice with another guitarist:



Stay with me here. Watch the next video clip explaining how to figure out unpublished music from a recording and steal fingerings from John Williams, Tommy Emmanuel, and David Russell.



Finally, watch how you can use Transcribe! to learn unpublished music for piano and other instruments:



PRACTICE STRATEGIES FOR THE TRADITIONAL "pami" TREMOLO

Everyone is different. A practice strategy that works for one person may not produce noticeable results for another person. That is why I have listed several strategies to try. Don't try to practice all of these at the same time. Try one or two at a time. Eventually, you may need to practice all of them. Other players may be able to skip a few or several.

All tremolo exercises can be practiced with and without a metronome

Using a metronome

When a metronome is used, it is important to always begin any exercise at a slow tempo. How slow? Slow enough that *you have total control over the exercise with zero finger and hand tension*. If you begin at too fast a speed, muscles will tense or clench. Even a small amount of tension in the playing mechanism will be amplified as you play faster and faster causing no end of problems. To be on the safe side, after finding the slow easy tempo at which you believe you are playing with no tension, subtract about ten beats-per-minute and begin there.

Start every day at your slow speed and increase the speed notch by notch (or in fives if your metronome is digital). Over a period of thirty to sixty minutes, increase your speed until your control falters. Do not graduate yourself to the next notch until you have complete control of the current speed setting.

Keep track each day of your starting speed and fastest speed. As you increase the fast speed, you will be able to increase your starting speed as well.

Meet or surpass your top speed every day. Keep track of your speeds. Write them down. This is precision work. Remember, never begin at too fast a starting speed that could produce tension in the hand or fingers.

Be careful. Increasing the speed too much too soon usually results in practicing the tremolo unevenly or with poor technique (large finger or thumb movements, fingernail clicks, poor thumb preparation, etc.) This negates any progress you made at the slower speeds. Bad habits and unevenness learned through bad practice habits are notoriously difficult to correct.

Slow-Fast practice

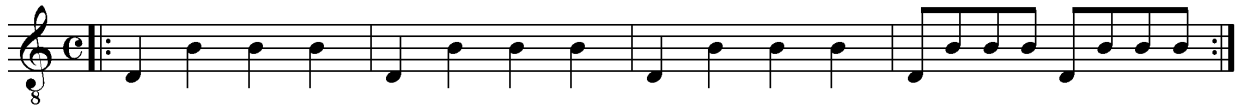
Doing slow-fast practice is also very effective and can be done with or without a metronome. While I wouldn't eliminate metronome practice, slow-fast practice without a metronome is a good supplementary method to use so you don't become metronome-dependent. Below is an illustration of the slow-fast practice technique. The number of slow cycles versus fast cycles can be varied as needed. More on this later.

Example #16

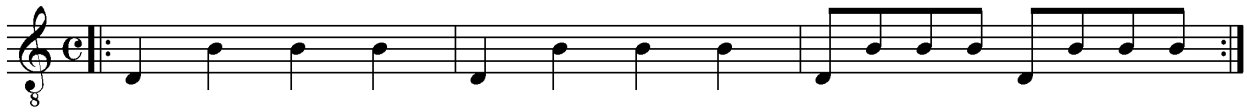
Slow-Fast Practice Combinations

Practice on various notes on the 2nd string
Practice at varying degrees of volume

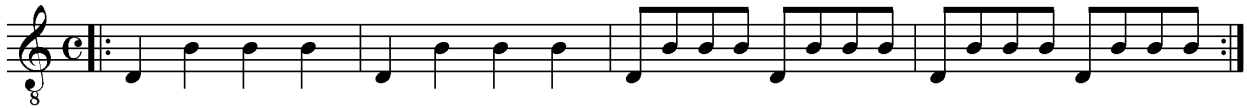
Three measures slow to one measure fast



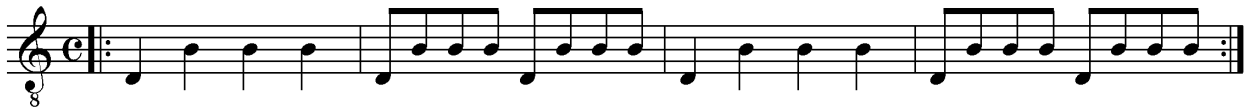
Two measures slow to one measure fast



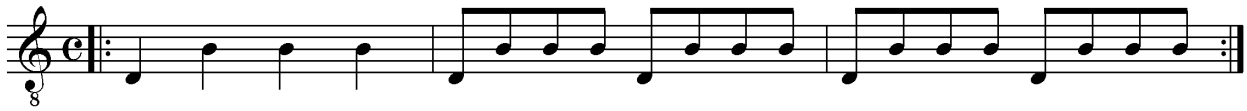
Two measures slow to two measures fast



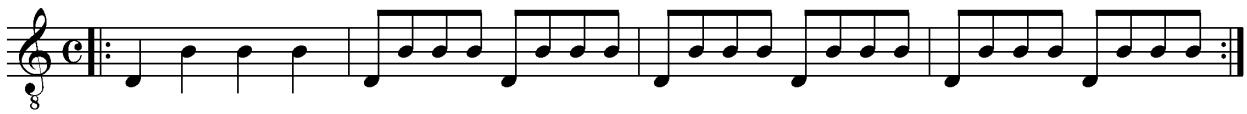
One measure slow to one measure fast



One measure slow to two measures fast



One measure slow to three measures fast



Practice in various areas of the neck

Be sure to practice all tremolo exercises at various frets. Do not practice only on open strings. Why? First, the string tension of an open string is very different from a note fretted at the eighth fret for example. It's important that the fingers experience and learn to be unaffected by varying string tensions when the left hand is brought into play. Second, you will practice most of these exercises on the second string. The open string is the same height above the soundboard as the first and third strings. However, as you ascend on a pressed down string, the string gets closer and closer to the soundboard than the first and third open strings. When that happens, the "ami" fingers' movements must become even more restricted to maintain accuracy of attack. The fingers literally have to reach deeper down or into the guitar (closer to the soundboard) to pluck the string.

Watch the video. This one is sure to go down in cinematic history.



Practice playing at loud and soft levels

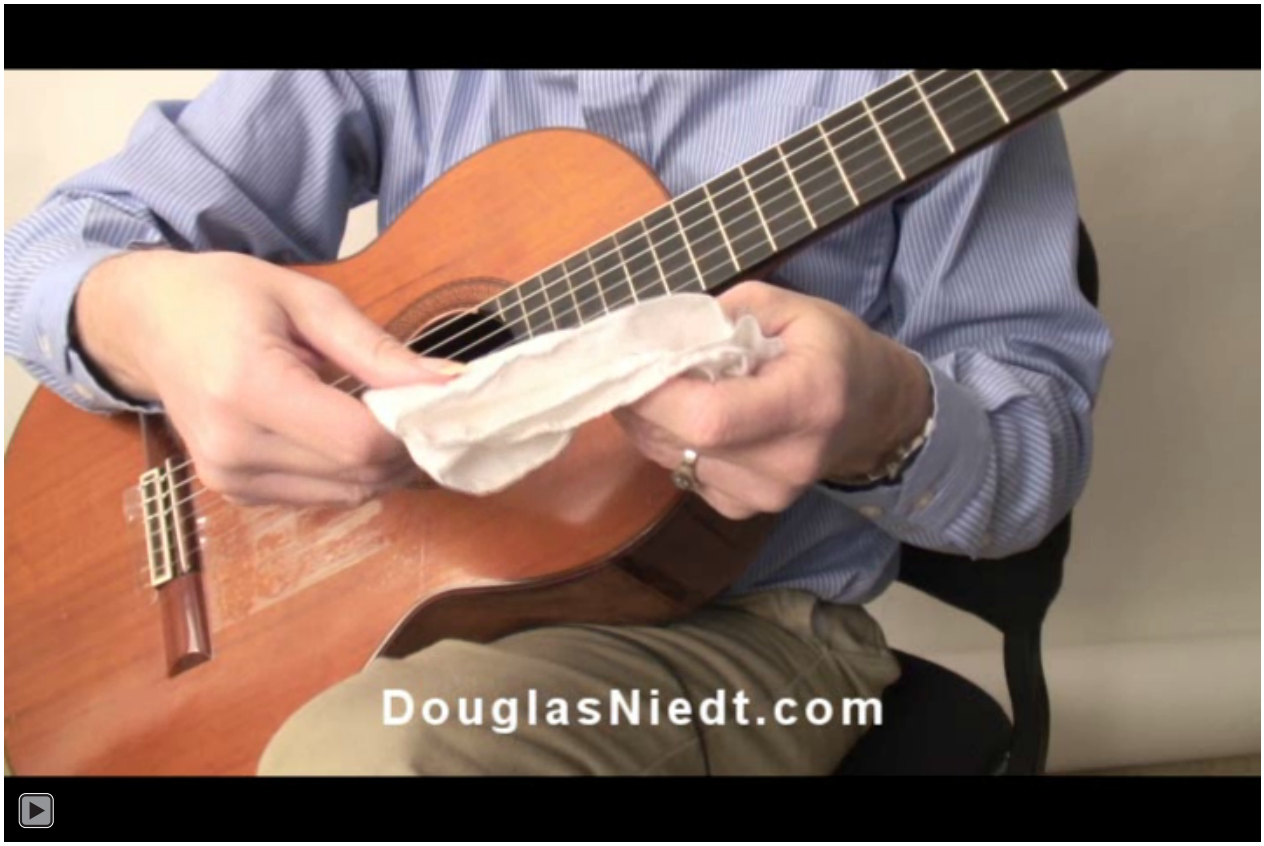
Remember, the tremolo is a musical technique. When playing repertoire, we must have the technical ability to play the tremolo at varying degrees of volume in order to play expressively. It is not to be played as a monotone mechanical exercise. I don't care how fast you can play a tremolo or how rhythmically evenly you can play it. If you play a piece such as *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* with a machine gun-like technical perfection without gradations of volume and speed, you will kill the piece. *You* should be shot.

Practice all the tremolo exercises in this article at normal volume, loud volume, and soft volume—three distinct levels. This will develop your right-hand touch. Practicing at different volume levels will increase your hand and finger strength and overall control. Also practice crescendos and decrescendos. Because one's tendency is to slow down at low speeds and speed up at high speeds, dynamics should be practiced with a metronome much of the time. The ability to vary the volume of the tremolo at will is an essential part of mastering this technique.

The Kleenex Trick

Another neat little practice technique is to stick a handkerchief or piece of Kleenex under the strings around the 17th fret to dampen the strings. Then practice your tremolo exercises. The percussive quality of the plucked string is emphasized, allowing you to hear the evenness of the rhythmic attack of your fingers more clearly.

You will be gripping your seat as you watch this one:


DouglasNiedt.com

End of Part 1.

Proceed to Part 2. I explain how to begin practicing the tremolo.

You are on DouglasNiedt.com



BE SURE TO VISIT DOUG'S "SECRET VAULT"

It contains ALL of Doug's Previous
Guitar Technique Tips of the Month