

Douglas Niedt's GUITAR TECHNIQUE TIP OF THE MONTH

Yes, it's "Doug's Dirty Little Secrets"



I subtitled my Tech Tip "Doug's Dirty Little Secrets" after reading someone's posted message on a guitar web forum. The writer asserted that professional virtuoso guitarists all had secrets they kept to themselves and wouldn't tell anyone else, so no one would play as well as them!



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Guitar Technique Tips of the Month

Anchor Fingers

By Douglas Niedt

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One of my students recently returned from the excellent master class (part of the Bowdoin International Music Festival) given annually by Ricardo Iznaola in Bowdoin, Maine. Ricardo encouraged my student to make more use of the anchor-finger technique. It's a technique I began using unconsciously many years ago. But, no one ever mentioned it. It was never written about in books or magazines. Teachers never brought it up. Since I never heard anyone talk about it, I thought maybe it was a crutch, and I shouldn't use it. Finally, I heard Christopher Parkening remark in a master class that he used the technique. So, I finally felt vindicated. Since then, I've heard it mentioned a few times, but it seems to receive little discussion.

The anchor finger technique may be defined as placing a right-hand finger (usually the "a" finger, but sometimes the pinky or "m") on a string while playing other strings. Setting the right-hand thumb on the guitar or on a string while playing other strings with the fingers, is a more well-known use of the anchor technique. I will describe it later.

Be sure to place the anchor finger in ready-to-play position—string in contact with flesh and left side of fingernail. This is important, because many times, the anchored finger will eventually pluck the string on which it is set.



[Watch how it's done.](#)

The use of anchor fingers differs from the planting technique in that the anchor finger might not play the string on which it is anchored. Or, if it does play the string, it happens sporadically, not in a pattern. Planting on the other hand, is done with the express purpose to have the finger on the string as preparation to pluck the string. It is usually used as part of a pattern of execution such as, most commonly, an arpeggio.

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The Benefits of Using Anchor Fingers

1. Anchor fingers lend stability to the right hand, resulting in security and confidence. In situations such as public performance, the hand may shake from nervousness. The use of anchor fingers helps keep the hand steady, greatly increasing accuracy and confidence, thereby lessening performance anxiety.
2. At the same time they provide benefits such as stability and speed, anchors provide ancillary benefits such as string damping to clarify melodic lines or eliminate unwanted dissonances.
3. Increased right-hand stability often translates into increased left-hand accuracy.
4. The anchor finger serves as a spatial reference point, resulting in more accurate playing by the other right-hand fingers.
5. Speed.
6. Enhanced touch for better control of dynamics.
7. Control of tone color changes.
8. Improved tone quality
9. Provide stability for the execution of descending slurs ("pull-offs").
10. Provide stability for the execution of ornaments.
11. Provide spatial reference points and stability for execution of harmonics
12. Provide accuracy, security, and improved tone quality for strums with the thumb.
13. Provides stability for melodic passages executed by the thumb

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How It's Done

Ferdinand Carulli's *English Dance* provides a good example how the anchor finger technique works:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

Before playing a single note, the "a" finger is placed on the first string. That is the anchor finger. It stabilizes the hand, keeping the hand steady. It provides a spatial reference point. What I mean by that is, since "a" is on the first string, "m" and "i" can better feel where their second and third strings are.

In measure 4, we arrive at the high G on the second beat. Playing the correct string is simple, because the "a" finger is already on the string as the anchor. Plus, the tone quality should be excellent because the "a" finger anchor has already been set on the string on the left side of the fingernail and flesh—the sweet spot.

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At measure 5, the "a" finger is reset on the first string as the anchor. It remains there for the repeat. If continuing on to the next section, the "a" finger anchor is on the first string, ready to play the F on the first beat of measure 9.

Here is the entire piece with my indications for the use of anchor fingers:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

"a" STILL anchored on 1st string

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

Or

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

Or

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

Or

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

D.C. al Fine

As usual, it is much easier to show you how to use the technique than to describe it in words.

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[Watch as I demonstrate how to use anchor fingers on Carulli's English Dance:](#)

In a more advanced piece such as *Etude #7* by Matteo Carcassi, I would use anchors the same way:

The image shows three staves of musical notation for *Etude #7* by Matteo Carcassi, illustrating the use of an anchor finger on the first string. The notation includes fingerings (i, m, i) and annotations explaining when the anchor finger is placed, plucked, or reset.

- Staff 1:**
 - Annotation: "a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger
 - Annotation: "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string
 - Annotation: "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor
- Staff 2:**
 - Annotation: "a" STILL anchored on 1st string
 - Annotation: "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string
- Staff 3:**
 - Annotation: "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor
 - Annotation: "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string
 - Annotation: "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor



[Watch.](#)

Anchors Can Clarify the Melodic Line

One subtlety of the technique that must be taken into consideration, is exactly when to place the anchor finger on the string. Let's look at an example that on the surface seems simple and straightforward. Unfortunately, it's not. Here is Carulli's *Waltz in G*. I have indicated with hollow square note heads which notes comprise the melody:

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Using anchor fingers can produce this result:

Note how the use of the "a" finger anchor in measure 4 mutes the ringing open E from measure 3. This is a good thing—in classical period music of this type, we don't want the open E forming a dissonance against the second string D. But, note that there is a lack of uniformity in the rhythmic duration of the D to E to D. For many, that may be just fine. But, there are more possibilities.

To achieve a desired uniformity of sound, the melody notes in measures 2, 3, 4, and 6 could all be played as quarter notes. To do so requires that the open E in measure 3 be muted at the downbeat of measure 4. The solution? Place the "a" finger as an anchor on beat one of measure 4. It works out perfectly:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger -----

Lift B and D from previous measure

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, muting 1st string -----

Melody is quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8)

Melody is quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8)

Melody is quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8)

"a" STILL anchored on 1st string -----

Detailed description: This musical notation shows a sequence of notes on a staff. The first measure has a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/8 time signature. The notes are G4, A4, and B4. The second measure has a whole rest on the treble clef and a quarter note on the bass clef (D3). The third measure has a quarter note on the treble clef (B4) and a quarter note on the bass clef (D3). The fourth measure has a quarter note on the treble clef (A4) and a quarter note on the bass clef (D3). Annotations include: "a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger (pointing to the first measure), Lift B and D from previous measure (pointing to the second measure), "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string (pointing to the third measure), and "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, muting 1st string (pointing to the fourth measure). Below the staff, it says "Melody is quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8)" for each of the three measures. A dashed line separates this from the next section, which says "a" STILL anchored on 1st string. The second section shows the same notes but with a different fingering for the second measure, where the anchor finger remains on the first string.

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But, what if we want the melody to be completely sustained from note to note? If this is the desired effect, it is important not to place the anchor finger on the first string until beat two of measure 4. A completely sustained melody would be notated and executed as:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger -----

DON'T lift D from previous measure

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, muting 1st string -----

Melody equal to dotted quarter-note. (Receives 3 beats in 3/8)

Melody equal to dotted quarter-note. (Receives 3 beats in 3/8)

Melody is quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8)

DON'T lift D from previous measure

Detailed description: This musical notation shows a sequence of notes on a staff. The first measure has a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/8 time signature. The notes are G4, A4, and B4. The second measure has a whole rest on the treble clef and a dotted quarter note on the bass clef (D3). The third measure has a dotted quarter note on the treble clef (B4) and a dotted quarter note on the bass clef (D3). The fourth measure has a quarter note on the treble clef (A4) and a quarter note on the bass clef (D3). Annotations include: "a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger (pointing to the first measure), DON'T lift D from previous measure (pointing to the second measure), "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string (pointing to the third measure), and "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, muting 1st string (pointing to the fourth measure). Below the staff, it says "Melody equal to dotted quarter-note. (Receives 3 beats in 3/8)" for the second and third measures, and "Melody is quarter-note (2 beats in 3/8)" for the fourth measure. A dashed line separates this from the next section, which says "DON'T lift D from previous measure". The second section shows the same notes but with a different fingering for the second measure, where the anchor finger remains on the first string.



[Watch this video clip as I demonstrate these points.](#)

Fernando Sor's *Etude #2* (Segovia edition) provides an excellent example of how the use of anchor fingers can serve double duty—not only providing stability but helping to clarify the melody by damping unwanted ringing notes. If we want to play the melody note values precisely as written, we could use anchor fingers as notated here:

The image displays two musical staves from Fernando Sor's *Etude #2*. The top staff covers measures 1 through 3, and the bottom staff covers measures 4 through 6. The music is in 2/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. Annotations with arrows point to specific notes and techniques:

- Measure 1:** "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string (pointing to the first note).
- Measure 2:** "a" finger is placed as anchor on 1st string, which mutes previous open E (pointing to the first note).
- Measure 3:** "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string (pointing to the first note).
- Measure 4:** "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E (pointing to the first note).
- Measure 5:** "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string (pointing to the first note).
- Measure 6:** "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E (pointing to the first note).



[Watch.](#)

Anchors=Right-Hand Stability=Left-Hand Accuracy

If you didn't want to use anchors as extensively as in the preceding example with the resulting string damping (for some, it's too "dry" a sound), anchors could still be used at key points in the piece. Keep in mind benefit #2 listed above: increased right-hand stability often translates into increased left-hand accuracy.

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For instance, in Sor's *Etude #2* above, playing the ascending scale from measure 24 into 25 can be tricky. Using an anchor to stabilize the right hand gives the left hand more security, bringing much-needed stability to the passage:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string



[Watch how it works.](#)

Another example can be seen in measures 29-30. It is a difficult chord change for the left hand. But by anchoring the "a" finger on the first string, most of the difficulty for the right hand is neutralized. This allows total focus on the left hand. Because the right hand is stable, no right-hand tension is present that could transfer to the left hand to make its job more difficult:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

"a" anchor finger plucks 1st string

Lift 1st finger off of C# now, to go to 6th string low F



[I will demonstrate.](#)

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Speed

This benefit may be more of a byproduct of other factors, rather than inherent to the technique itself. I say this because some people say that although they use the technique for its many benefits, it doesn't seem to increase their speed of execution. Others say it does. Some players say the anchor finger resting on its string acts as a springboard and lends leverage to the movements of the other fingers and hand. It enables more efficient and synergistic use of all the mechanisms involved in playing.

What I think happens is that the increase in speed, real or imagined, is a result of the added stability, security, confidence, and accuracy the technique provides. You will just have to test it yourself. Do some A-B tests of your speed on various passages with and without using an anchor finger. But, don't try to test it until you are totally comfortable, confident, and at ease with using the technique.

I have found the technique to be very useful in *Leyenda* by Isaac Albeniz. In the opening measures, speed is not an issue, but even here, it's nice to have the added stability of the anchor:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger -----

Open B's
"i" or "m" or
alternate "im"

"a" STILL anchored
on 1st string -----

Several measures later, in the tremolo section, the anchor begins to lend some real benefits in stability and in my opinion, speed:

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

VII

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

VII

"a" is reset on 1st string as anchor

VII

"a" STILL anchored on 1st string



[Watch me demonstrate these sections of *Leyenda*.](#)

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Tone Quality, Dynamics, and Tone Color

The use of anchor fingers can improve your tone quality in a couple of ways. The most obvious is the same as in planting. If the finger is placed on the string before it has to play, plenty of time is available to set it precisely on its sweet spot--the left side of the fingernail and flesh. The other way tone quality is improved with the use of anchor fingers, is by the increased stability of the hand. With less extraneous hand movement and better spatial sense of where the strings are, the precision of placing the fingers on

their sweet spot is greatly increased. It is far more difficult to hit that precise spot if the hand is moving around (even a small amount) or a finger is not exactly certain where its target spot is on the string.

The same points apply to playing loud and soft. Having a finger anchored on a string provides an incredible amount of security when trying to play very quietly—especially if you are nervous and your hand is already shaking. When trying to play loudly, the tendency is to make bigger finger movements. The entire hand also tends to get involved with the act of playing loudly. It starts to jump around or make small extraneous movements. Not only does it become increasingly difficult to control the volume level, but accuracy plummets as the hand movement increases. The anchor finger will lessen hand movement. Sometimes it will eliminate it altogether. I think that in loud playing, the leverage element of the anchor finger also comes into play. The slight pushes and pulls of the anchor against its string seem to enable the other fingers to confidently dig in more to their strings for greater volume while still retaining accuracy.

How many times have you tried to change tone color by moving the hand along the length of the string only to mess up the passage because your fingers began missing the strings? Let's look again at Sor's *Study #2*.

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We would probably begin with a normal tone color. We could change to a bright tone color at the repeat of the melody at measure 9. Without an anchor, the right-hand fingers could easily lose their sense of where the strings are as the hand travels towards the bridge. But, with the "a" finger anchored on the first string, the problem is eliminated:

Normal tone quality--right hand at right side of soundhole (index finger over rosette)

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

"a" finger slides on first string toward bridge to guide right hand to the bridge

Bright tone quality--right hand is now playing close to bridge (sul ponticello)



[Watch as I demonstrate.](#)

For a simpler example, let's look again at Carulli's *Waltz in G*. A common way to learn to execute tone-color changes is to change the color at the repeats:

First time: normal tone quality--right hand at right side of soundhole (index finger over rosette)

On repeat: dark tone quality--right hand over soundhole or at fretboard (sul tasto)

"a" is placed on 1st string as anchor finger

"a" finger slides on first string toward bridge to guide right hand to the bridge →

Bright tone quality--right hand is now playing close to bridge (sul ponticello)

"a" STILL anchored on 1st string

"a" finger slides on first string toward fretboard to guide hand to sul tasto (dark) for repeat.

Once again, moving the hand toward the bridge for the bright tone color (called ponticello, which means at the bridge) without an anchor is very precarious. With the anchor, it is no problem.

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Incidentally, the term ponticello (pronounced pone-tee-CHELL-oh) is Italian for bridge. Technically, to indicate to play close to or at the bridge for a bright sound, we should say sul ponticello. Its opposite is sul tasto—to play on or at the fingerboard. For guitarists this is often interpreted to mean to play over the soundhole, and is sometimes indicated with the word dolce (sweet).



[Watch.](#)

Descending Slurs (Pull-offs)

At first, you might think a right-hand technique would have little to do with a technique executed almost solely by the left hand. But, one of the most common uses of the anchor finger is in conjunction with descending slurs, often referred to by guitarists as pull-offs. In my lengthy tech tip on slurs, I explained the use of the right-hand fingers as safety stops or safety blocks. See <http://douglasniedt.com/techtipslursmultipage3.html> for a detailed explanation. But briefly, when doing pull-offs on the 2nd through 6th strings, there is a danger of producing an unwanted note from the adjacent higher string as a result of the pull-off or snap movement of the left-hand finger. The technique used to prevent the unwanted note is a safety stop (some call it a safety block.) The safety stop is done by damping (muffling or muting) the adjacent higher string. Safety stops are often done by the right hand using anchor fingers. The *Saltarello*, from Six Lute Pieces of the Renaissance, edited by Chilesotti, provides a great example:

"a" is placed on 3rd string as anchor finger

"m" finger is placed on 4th string as anchor finger

"m" anchored on 4th string. plucks 4th string

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The anchor finger not only serves the purpose of muting the string to prevent unwanted noises, but once again, by providing stability and confidence in the right hand, lends additional confidence and accuracy to left-hand execution.

Ornaments

Anchor fingers can facilitate the secure and clear execution of ornaments. Anchors' secondary benefit of string damping makes ornaments sound cleaner. Here is a cross-string trill at the end of the first section of J.S. Bach's *Bourree* from *Lute Suite No. 1* (BWV 996). The use of anchor fingers makes execution easier and mutes an unwanted open G at the end of the trill:

"m" is placed on 3rd string as anchor, and mutes open 3rd string G

Anchored "m" finger plucks 3rd string

"a" is planted on 2nd string as anchor, muting open B



[Watch.](#)

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The opening of Bach's *Courante* from the same lute suite can be particularly troublesome. Once again, anchor fingers to the rescue. The anchor fingers give a sense of security and confidence from the very first note, provide a crucial spatial reference point, and damp an unwanted open G:

"a" is placed on 2nd string as anchor for duration of passage

(The "i"s and "m"s can be reversed)

(Optional restrike of G suspension)

Anchored "m" plucks 3rd string

"m" is placed on 3rd string as additional anchor and to mute 3rd string open G

Ornaments written out in approximate rhythmic values



[Watch this demonstration.](#)

Anchor fingers deliver similar benefits on trills consisting of hammers and pull-offs. Here is a passage from *Bianco Fiore*, the second of the *Six Lute Pieces of the Renaissance*:

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major, 3/4 time. The first staff contains measures 1-5, and the second staff contains measures 6-10. Annotations describe the use of the 'a' (anchor) finger on the first string to mute the open E string during trills and hammers.

Annotations for the first staff:

- "a" finger is placed as anchor on 1st string, which mutes previous open E
- "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string
- "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E

Annotations for the second staff:

- "a" STILL anchored on 1st string
- "a" anchor finger plucks 1st string
- "a" is reset on 1st string as anchor, which mutes open E



[I will show you.](#)

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Harmonics

As you are aware, the execution of any kind of harmonic requires delicacy of touch. They can be tricky to play well, even when practicing at home. In a high-pressure performance situation with shaky hands, passages of harmonics can be ruined by instability. Anything that can stabilize shaking hands and fingers is especially welcome.

The most commonly used anchor for playing harmonics is actually the thumb. In the well-known section of harmonics in Villa-Lobos' *Prelude No. 4*, the thumb, resting on a bass string, can serve as a stabilizer for the hand and spatial reference point for the fingers.

Rafaga, by Joaquin Turina, provides an excellent example of how an anchor finger can aid in playing natural and artificial harmonics in the same passage:

The image displays two staves of musical notation. The top staff shows a sequence of notes in 3/8 time, with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bottom staff is a detailed view of the first string, showing natural harmonics at the 12th and 7th frets, and an artificial harmonic at the 17th fret. Annotations include: 'a' finger is placed as anchor on 1st string, which mutes previous open E; 'a' STILL anchored on 1st string; Natural harmonics; 12th fret; 7th fret; 'a' finger anchor plucks artificial harmonic; Resulting pitch of harmonic; Held note; and Artificial harmonic 1st string, 17th fret.

In measure three, the anchor damps the first string open E. In measures 4 and 5, the anchor on the first string keeps the hand steady for the thumb to play the natural harmonics. In the final measure, the "a" finger travels lengthwise along the string toward the fretboard to guide the hand into position for the index finger to touch the first string at the 17th fret. The "a" finger is already on the first string to pluck it, producing the artificial harmonic.



[Watch this video demo.](#)

Strums

Anchor fingers perform several useful functions when strumming with the thumb. One function is to serve as a stop for the thumb. In the first of Chilesotti's *Six Lute Pieces of the Renaissance*, is a passage with two strums:

Set "a" on first string
as anchor before
beginning strum of
following chord

The musical notation shows a sequence of chords and a strum. The first measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note G. The second measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note B. The third measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note D. The fourth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note G. The fifth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note B. The sixth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note D. The seventh measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note G. The eighth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note B. The ninth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note D. The tenth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note G. The eleventh measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note B. The twelfth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note D. The thirteenth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note G. The fourteenth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note B. The fifteenth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note D. The sixteenth measure contains a G major chord (G, B, D) and a quarter note G. The notation ends with a double bar line.

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By placing the "a" finger as an anchor on the first string, the thumb will not overshoot its strum, accidentally playing the first string. If it did follow through too far and play the first string, it wouldn't sound, because the string is muted by the anchor.



[Watch as I explain.](#)

An anchor finger is very helpful in producing a strum with a good tone quality. The anchor stabilizes the hand and lends very fine control of the placement of the thumbnail on the strings and the angle and speed of the actual strumming motion. The melody to *Capricho Catalan* by Isaac Albeniz opens with a strummed chord. To ensure accuracy and a beautiful tone on this chord (the thumb must contact the strings at just the right spot), the "a" finger can be planted on the first string from the very beginning. The anchor, providing a spatial reference point, also helps the thumb jump accurately to the low A on the 5th string immediately after the strum:

Plant "a" on 1st string before beginning song. -----

"a" finger anchor aids execution of strum and helps thumb find 5th string bass note



[Watch.](#)

Thumb Stability

In the second movement of Joaquin Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*, the thumb has a passage where it plays the melody:

Place "ami" on first three strings as anchors -----

Reset "ami" as anchors -----

Reset "ami" as anchors -----

Reset "ami" as anchors -----

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By using anchor fingers on the treble strings, the thumb has better control and stability to play the melody with exquisite refinement.



[Watch.](#)

The Thumb As Anchor

One of the most common anchoring roles of the thumb is to serve as an anchor in the execution of scales and melodic passages played by the fingers. Players seem to fall into two camps on where to anchor the thumb. For fast rest-stroke scales spanning several strings, some players set the thumb on the rosette when they play the bass strings and on the sixth string when they play the trebles. Others let the thumb follow behind the fingers at a distance of two or three strings. If the passage only spans a few strings, the player will anchor the thumb wherever it is comfortable.



[Watch.](#)

Many times, the thumb is planted on the string it will play next after the scale or melodic passage. The opening of Francisco Tarrega's *Capricho Arabe* is a good example:

Set "p" on 4th string as anchor

Thumb is on 4th string to play G

The musical notation shows a scale starting on the 4th string (G) and moving up to the 6th string (E). A dashed line indicates the thumb is positioned on the 4th string as an anchor. An arrow points to the 4th string where the thumb is positioned to play the G note.

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In Fernando Sor's *Variations on a Theme by Mozart*, execution of the first several measures of Variation #1 is made easier by the use of the thumb as an anchor. It lends stability and confidence in the execution of the slurs and scales in the upper part, and helps keep the overall texture clean by damping bass strings:

Place thumb on 6th string as anchor

Thumb, anchored on 6th string, now plays 6th string

Place thumb on 5th string as anchor, but lean thumb back to mute open 6th string

Thumb, anchored on 5th string, now plucks 5th string.

Reset p on 5th string as anchor

Thumb, anchored on 5th string, now plucks 5th string.

Place p on 4th string as anchor

Thumb, anchored on 4th string, now plucks 4th string

Place thumb on 6th string as anchor

Thumb, anchored on 6th string, now plays 6th string



[Watch.](#)

I briefly touched on the use of the thumb as an anchor when playing harmonics with the other fingers. It can be especially useful in playing passages of artificial harmonics. Here is a passage from Enrique Granados' *Spanish Dance No. 5*. Anchoring the thumb on the 4th string would help guide the hand along the length of the string to execute the artificial harmonics –it would also position the thumb to play the 4th-string bass notes. Unfortunately, sliding the thumb along the length of the wound 4th string

produces too much string noise. Therefore, we have to anchor the thumb on the 3rd string instead, and move the thumb to the 4th string to play the bass notes:

Place thumb on 3rd string as anchor -----

Reset thumb on 3rd string as anchor -----

Melody in artificial harmonics. Notes produced sound one octave higher than written.

Right-hand harmonic. 5th string 19th fret

Reset thumb on 3rd string as anchor -----

Reset thumb on 3rd string as anchor -----

Thumb anchored on 3rd string, now plays 3rd string

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Once again, the thumb anchors the right-hand playing mechanism for added control of the very fine movements required to play this type of harmonic.



[Watch.](#)

Is There a Downside to Using Anchor Fingers?

The main difficulty in learning to use the anchor-finger technique, is that it takes quite a while to get used to. At first, it will seem to inhibit movements of the other fingers. Or, it will seem to be a lot of trouble for little benefit. But as with many things, once it is learned and becomes comfortable to use, you will wonder how you ever got along without it.

The other downside is that when using the "a" finger as an anchor on say the first string, a beginning or intermediate student will sometimes roll or lean their hand to the right. But with observation and reminders, it should be easy to correct.

Final Thoughts

When I began writing this tech tip, I thought I could crank it out in a page or two. But then I began thinking how I use anchor fingers. For me, it has become such an unconscious technique, that I didn't realize I used anchors in over a dozen ways in literally hundreds of pieces. It's another of those lesser-known techniques that will make a significant difference in your playing.

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