

Douglas Niedt's

GUITAR TECHNIQUE

TIP OF THE MONTH

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



(Doug subtitled his Tech Tip as "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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It contains ALL of Doug's Previous
Guitar Technique Tips of the Month

DOUG'S
TEN
MOST
WANTED
LIST:

THE TOP TEN NASTY HABITS of Guitar Technique

This article will be the first in a series published from time to time, of common technical bad habits that can wreak havoc with your playing. They will be presented in no particular order of importance.

This month's despicable and foul NASTY HABIT:

Allowing Left-Hand Fingers to “Help” a Bar

By Douglas Niedt

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The nasty habit occurs while reaching for or holding a bar with the first finger. The guitarist places the second finger on top of the first finger to “help” it hold the bar tightly. Or, it can be a subtle in-the-blink-of-the-eye quick extension or straightening of the finger, taking it out of position. It can happen for a brief instant or last for several beats of a measure. It is commonly seen while a player holds or reaches for a full bar, but also happens when barring fewer than six strings. I see it in a wide range of playing ability, from late beginners through intermediate players.

Why It Matters

This is a big problem for three reasons.


1. Allowing the second finger to climb on to the barring finger puts the second finger out of position to play what is coming next.

 [Watch this gripping video clip as I play an example from Francisco Tarrega's *Adelita*, demonstrating this vile habit.](#)

Can't get enough of watching such revolting images?

 [Try this example from Villa-Lobos' *Etude #7*.](#)

2. This nasty habit can also distort the entire hand position, pulling other fingers out of position as well.

 [Watch this example from the well-known *Romanza*, also known as *Romance de Amor*.](#)

I know. You probably had to pull your eyes away from the screen during some of that.

 [Here is another distressing example of hand position distortion from Fernando Sor's famous *Study #5* in b minor.](#)

Have you no shame? You must live on the dark side if you want to watch this next video clip. This example from Villa-Lobos' *Etude #1* shows how this deplorable habit causes bad finger positioning AND hand distortion *at the same time!*

 [Go ahead, watch it if you must.](#)

These problems don't occur only on full bars. They can be a problem in smaller bars as well.

 [Watch this harrowing example from Carcassi's *Study #3*.](#)

This nasty habit is not always obvious. Instead of the second finger blatantly crawling on top of the bar finger, in a flash it might only make a very quick stabbing movement or straightening movement across the fretboard. But the end result is the same—the seemingly innocuous habit leaves devastation in its wake—missed notes, buzzes, frustration, and one angry guitar player miffed that he messed up the passage for the umpteenth time.



[Watch this poignant, heartbreaking example from Enrique Granados' *Spanish Dance #5*.](#)

3. Long term, this fault weakens your bar technique. You never fully develop the strength and independence of the muscles to properly execute bars.

Yes, you will still be able to play power chords and Neil Diamond songs, but don't hope for much more than that...

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How to Fix It

Defective bar technique is usually at the root of this bad habit. When a bar doesn't come out clearly due to faulty technique, the inclination is to "help" the bar with another finger. Bad bar technique includes using the thumb instead of the arms as the primary source of strength to hold the bar, incorrect thumb positioning, incorrect rear knuckle positioning of the bar finger, and incorrect bar finger positioning. Improving your bar technique will make it easier to cure this habit. [Go to my Vault and see my tech tip on barring for more information on correct bar technique.](#)

One quick fix for an unclear bar is to raise the back joint of the bar finger. This will help the bar come out clearly with less effort and possibly cure the problem of the second finger leaning towards or climbing on top of the bar finger.



[Watch this Oscar-nominated video clip as I demonstrate.](#)

Another relatively easy fix for this habit is to roll the bar finger to the right, up against the fret. This forces the second finger away from the bar finger. It can also potentially make the bar come out more clearly with a little less effort.



[Watch this stunning video clip. Definitely worthy of an Emmy nomination.](#)

Sometimes, simply being aware of the problem and monitoring the fingers allows a player to correct the bad habit.



[Try out this simple exercise and observe your second finger.](#)

Although it may seem I make light of this habit, it IS a definite problem that needs to be corrected. Fortunately, it is fairly easily corrected and you will see a pretty dramatic improvement in the ease and accuracy of execution of passages that use bar chords.

Plus, once you correct this detestable habit, you will find that people who once looked away when you played bar chord passages, or spoke in hushed whispers when you played bar chords, will commend you for your efforts to become more refined in your technique. You will now be welcomed as a valuable member of polite society, instead of being seen as a ne'er-do-well guitarist with revolting bar technique.

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