

THUMB LEAD WORKSHOP

WHAT IS THE “THUMB LEAD” TECHNIQUE IN AUTOHARP PLAYING?

This is an advanced technique for playing accurate melody, which *differs from pinching melody notes ...* as your THUMB DOWN STROKES now do the job of playing 1/4 beat MELODY NOTES. Your index finger plays the 1/8 beat melody notes (if any) in between 1/4 beat notes. It is a requisite to be able to play the I, IV, V scales easily, both up and down, which leads to your ability to play tunes, because you will know where to find the melody notes.

THUMB LEAD can be equally effective on both Chromatic and Diatonic harps. Comparing THUMB LEAD with “PINCH-PINCH” melody playing, you’ll find it has a more PUNCHY sound, while also being smooth flowing ... all with far less effort, energy, and less arm fatigue! A **pointed thumb pick** would be desirable, and can be done with most store-bought thumb picks. **THUMB LEAD can add “life” to the tunes you play!**

WHAT IS REQUIRED ON YOUR PART:

- Ability to play the scales easily, and make quick changes using your I, IV, V chords, which enable you to play more intricate melodies! (this is REALLY necessary, no matter what style of playing you decide upon!)
- And ... **PRACTICE ... PRACTICE ... PRACTICE ... PRACTICE ... PRACTICE ... PRACTICE ... !!!**

A FEW REASONS FOR USING THUMB LEAD:

- You can add an additional *playing STYLE*, and you can change from thumb lead to pinch as desired.
- You can play **FASTER TUNES** with less wear and tear on your right forearm muscles.
- You can change the **“VOICE” OF YOUR AUTOHARP ...**
To make more “banjo like” ... or, more “fiddle like” when playing melodies in higher octaves.
- You can play tunes with more **PRECISE MELODY**, and be heard when taking a break
- You can make your autoharp fit better into a **STRING BAND SOUND SPECTRUM ...**
Assuming you are playing with a guitar, fiddle, and a banjo ... it is important to “thin out” the sound of your autoharp so that the many strings don’t “muddy up” the overall group sound of the band.

THE THUMB LEAD TECHNIQUE (absorb this BEFORE “hands on” practice):

Your thumb pick hits every “quarter note” as accurately as you can. Your wrist rotates around so that your index finger pick can catch the quick 1/8th melody notes in between the 1/4 beat notes. Consider your 1/4 beat notes as a METRONOME! They are the notes you would tap your foot to. Your thumb only strikes downward (away from you), while your index finger only plucks toward you. *When a single melody note is meant to extend longer than a 1/4 beat, your thumb and middle finger drop to the lower strings and do a **rhythm fill**.*

HERE’S HOW TO PREPARE FOR PLAYING THUMB LEAD:

Use a thumb pick (as pointed as possible) and finger picks on your index and middle finger.

1. Make a **LOOSE FIST** with THUMB EXTENDED, and both finger picks *lightly touching palm*.
2. Swivel your wrist back and forth a full **180 degrees** with thumb extended, to get the “feel” of the motion. The effect is that your thumb is moving into “outer space” before coming back down again to strike strings! When your thumb pick strikes back down, the extra force can give you louder notes.
3. Be prepared to extend your index (or middle) finger pick to *catch 1/8th beat melody notes* as your thumb swivels away. At times you will alternate thumb and index back and forth, as the series of quick melody notes dictate. Note that your **LEFT HAND** may have to change chords quickly for the series of melody notes.

PRACTICING THUMB LEAD ... to gain ACCURACY and CONTROL:

A. 1/4 beat MELODY NOTES! *These are ONLY picked by the thumb down-stroke)*

1. MAKE A LOOSELY CLOSED FIST, with thumb pick extended.
2. In whatever key you'll play in, stroke the strings to determine the "do" or "1" note.
3. With a swiveling wrist, THUMB STRIKE THE "DO" NOTE 6X ... then the "re" note 6X, And continue going up the scale 6X per note. DON'T LOOK AT STRINGS ... DO BY FEEL.
4. Do the same thing DESCENDING DOWN THE SCALE, thumb striking 6X per note.
5. NOW go up the scale 3X per note, then down the scale 3X per note.
6. NOW do it 1X per note, going both UP and DOWN the scale.

Going UP the scale, REGARDLESS OF KEY, chords are **I - V - I - IV - I - IV - V - I**

Going DOWN scale, REGARDLESS OF KEY, chords are **I - V - IV - I - IV - I - V - I**

B. Now, let's add the 1/8th note beats in between the 1/4 beat thumb strikes:

Still keeping a loose fist and a swivel wrist, allow the pick on your index finger to strike the same note as your thumb strike. Alternate back and forth between thumb (T) and index (✓) on that note keeping thumb strike as your "metronome" beat. You can use your index (✓) or middle finger to pick the 1/8th notes in between thumb beats.

Try this exercise on varying single strings: T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ etc.

Going UP the scale, IN ANY KEY, chords are **I - V - I - IV - I - IV - V - I**

Going DOWN scale, IN ANY KEY, chords are **I - V - IV - I - IV - I - V - I**

C. NOW, TRY THIS EXERCISE: (→) = rhythm filler

T ✓ T T T T → T ✓ T T T T →
 I I IV I I V Brush V V IV V V I Brush
 HAP PY BIRTH DAY TO YOU, ----- HAP PY BIRTH DAY TO YOU -----

T ✓ T T T T T → T ✓ T T T T
 I I I I I V IV Brush IV IV I I V I
 HAP PY BIRTH DAY DEAR (YOUR NAME), ----- HAP PY BIRTH DAY TO YOU

REMEMBER: THE THUMB (T) ONLY STRIKES ON THE 1/4 BEAT!

Finally try the scales, *alternating between THUMB and INDEX*: **I V I IV I IV V I**

Here are some tunes we all know, with which to try THUMB LEAD MELODY:

FRERE JACQUES (Are You Sleeping, Brother John):

T T T T T T T T T T T → T T T →
 Are you sleep ing, are you sleep ing? Bro ther John, ----- Bro ther John?
 T ✓ T ✓ T T T ✓ T ✓ T T
 Morn ing bells are ring ing, morn ing bells are ring ing,
 T T T → T T T →
 ding ding dong, ----- ding ding dong.

CLEMENTINE:

T ✓ T T T ✓ T T T ✓ T T T ✓ T →
 In a ca vern, in a can yon, Ex ca va ting for a mine ---
 T ✓ T T T ✓ T T T ✓ T T T ✓ T →
 Lived a mi ner for - ty ni - ner, And his daugh ter, Cle men tine
 T ✓ T T T ✓ T T T ✓ T T T ✓ T →
 Oh, my dar ling, oh, my dar ling, Oh, my dar ling Cle men tine ---
 T ✓ T T T ✓ T T T ✓ T T T ✓ T
 You are lost and gone for ev er, Dread ful sor ry, Cle men tine

POLLY WOLLY DOODLE:

T ✓ T T T ✓ T T T
 Oh, I went down South For to see my Sal
 T T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T →✓→
 Sing Pol ly wo lly doo dle all the day -----
 T T T T T T T T T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T →✓→
 My Sal, she is a spun - ky gal, Sing Pol ly wo lly doo dle all the day -----
 T ✓ T →✓→ T ✓ T →✓→ T ✓ T T T T T →✓→
 Fare thee well, ---- Fare thee well, ----- Fare thee well my fai ry fay -----
 T T T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓
 For I'm going to Lou' si a na For to see my Su sy an na
 T T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T →✓→
 Sing Pol ly wo lly doo dle all the day

Opening first line for

WHISKEY BEFORE BREAKFAST: *(The numbers represent notes of the scale)*

T ✓ T ✓ T - T - T ✓ T ✓ T ✓ T
 1 2 3 4 5 - 5 - 5 6 5 4 3 2 1
 Chords: D A D G D D D G D G D A D

DIXIE ... thumb lead, in the key of "D"

Here's a tune where it REALLY pays to know how to play the I, IV, V scales! Watch for the II chord ... (E)

T = 1/4 beat THUMB DOWN STRIKE on melody string (found in the listed chords)

✓ = 1/8 beat melody string UP PLUCK using Index or middle finger / → = Rhythm fill

D D D D D A D G D D D D
T ✓ **T** **T** **T** ✓ **T** ✓ **T** **T** **T** **T**
 Oh, I wish I w - a s in the land of cot - ton,

G G G D G D G A D A D
T **T** **T** → ✓ **T** **T** **T** ✓ **T** ✓ **T** → ✓ →
 Old times there = are not for got ten, Look a way! ===

D D D D D A A D D
T ✓ **T** → ✓ → **T** ✓ **T** → ✓ → **T** ✓ **T** → ✓ →
 Look a way! === Look a way! === Dix - ie Land. ===

D D D D D A D G D D D
T ✓ **T** **T** **T** ✓ **T** ✓ **T** **T** **T** →
 I - n Dix - ie La - nd whe - re I was born ==

G G G D G D G A G A D
T **T** **T** **T** **T** **T** **T** ✓ **T** ✓ **T** → ✓ →
 Ear ly on one fro sty mor nin', Look a way! ===

D D D D D A A D D
T ✓ **T** → ✓ → **T** ✓ **T** → ✓ → **T** ✓ **T** → ✓ →
 Look a way! === Look a way! === Dix ie Land. ===

D D D D A D G G G **E** G A
T ✓ **T** **T** **T** **T** **T** **T** → **T** **T** → / → **T** **T** → ✓ →
 Oh, I wish I was in Dix - ie! == Hoo ray! === Hoo ray! ===

D D D A D G A G G D D D D A
T **T** **T** **T** **T** **T** **T** **T** → ✓ **T** **T** **T** → ✓ **T** **T** →
 In Dix - ie Land I'll take my stand, = To live and die = in Dix - ie, =

D D D A A7 D D D D A D
T **T** → ✓ → **T** **T** → ✓ → **T** **T** **T** **T** → ✓ **T** **T**
 A way, === a way, === A way down south == in Dix - ie!

Treat this song as a HOMEWORK PRACTICE LESSON! GOOD LUCK!