

RAINBOW GUITAR

How to play this music with a plectrum (or "pick")

General

For reasons of space, the right hand illustrations and markings in the Rainbow Guitar books are for playing with thumb and fingers. However, the material is just as suitable for pupils learning to play with a plectrum. Here are some simple tips to get you started.

Plectrum hold

To remind you of the basics, here are the pictures from the back of the first Rainbow Guitar book. Take a fairly firm hold of the plectrum - a common mistake is to hold it too loosely, with too much of it sticking out.

The right hand (for plectrum players)

From the front...



From the back...

The wrist is flat and low over the strings.



Basic downstroke

If you are playing fairly simple tunes, at slow to medium tempos, you can use a downstroke for every note. This is a good basic technique to master and encourages a loose wrist motion. This example (Book 1 p20) is marked in this way, using the usual sign for a downstroke (we borrow the sign traditionally used in violin music for a downbow).



The image shows a musical staff for the piece 'Pease Pudding Hot'. The staff is in treble clef and contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. A single downstroke sign (a small square with a vertical line) is placed above the first note (G4). A blue square icon is located at the end of the staff.

The “all down strokes” technique can be used for any of the pieces in the first Rainbow Guitar book, and some of the simpler Book 2 pieces as well.

Down-and-up strokes

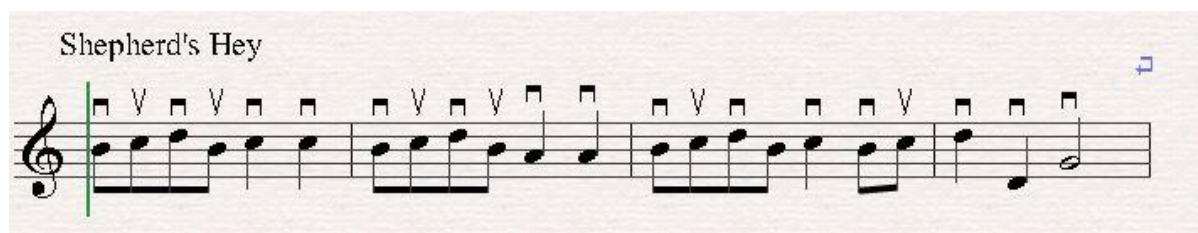
Once you are comfortable with “downstrokes only” you can start to introduce upstrokes. As long as the music has a simple metre, and not too much movement between bass and treble strings, then the simplest system is “downstrokes for notes which are on the beat, upstrokes for notes which are off the beat”

This example (Book 1 p8) shows this technique in action. The V sign is traditionally used in violin music for an up-bow, and we borrow it (just as we do the downbow sign) to mark pick directions.



The image shows a musical staff for the piece 'Wake-Up Call'. The staff is in treble clef and contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The notes on the beat (G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4) are marked with a 'V' sign above them, and the notes off the beat (F4, E4, D4, C4) are marked with a downstroke sign above them. A blue square icon is located at the end of the staff.

This approach makes a lot of sense both in terms of economy of motion, and in musical terms (the right hand marks time almost like a conductor). Here is the same technique applied to a tune with more melodic movement (Book 1 p27):



The image shows a musical staff for the piece 'Shepherd's Hey'. The staff is in treble clef and contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The notes on the beat (G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4) are marked with a 'V' sign above them, and the notes off the beat (F4, E4, D4, C4) are marked with a downstroke sign above them. A blue square icon is located at the end of the staff.

In Book 2 there are a couple of pieces using SYNCOPATED rhythms, where there may be several notes in a row which are off the beat. Applying the same general rule, we play these as successive upstrokes. Here is an example (Book 2 p28):



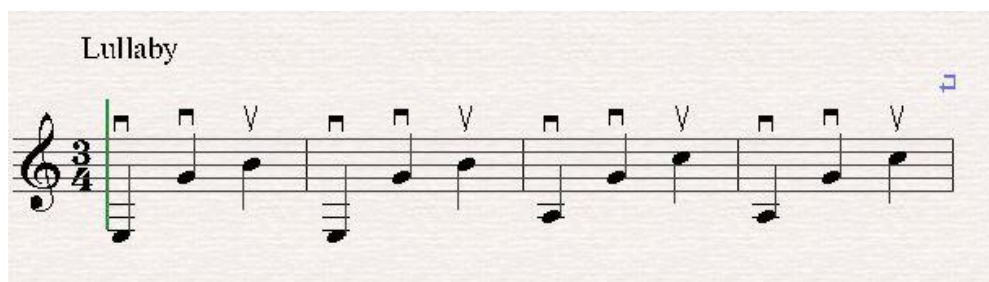
Wider string spacing

In Rainbow Guitar Book 2, there are many pieces which use both bass and treble strings (they may be melodies with bass strings as accompaniment, or they may feature broken chords). Of course, a fingerstyle guitarist is at an advantage here, using thumb for the lower strings and fingers for the upper. But the plectrum player should not be afraid of such patterns and they are usually not too hard with a little practice.

In this example (Book 2 p25), the obvious approach for the plectrum player is to make a wide down-up movement so that all the bass notes are downs and all the trebles are ups:



In my final example (Book 2 p26) it is easier and more natural to take two successive downstrokes in a "glide" movement, followed by an upstroke to take you back to the beginning of the next bar:



I hope this short introduction will give you the basics you need to approach any of the pieces in the Rainbow Guitar books. Although the real world is always more complex than a book, these techniques will also stand you in good stead in most real-life playing situations.

Hugh Boyde, October 2014