

# BASIC STRUMMING

*Holding the pick.* There are many ways to hold a guitar pick. In the most traditional method, hold the pick between the side of the tip segment of the index finger and the flat surface of the thumb (opposite the thumbnail). Try to extend the tip of the pick 1/4" or less from the thumb for fine control (many players prefer less than 1/8"). Bend the first finger so its tip points toward the base of the thumb. Holding the pick in this manner should allow light pressure between the thumb and first finger.

*The position of the pick in relation to the strings.* To produce the purest string tone, cause the strings to vibrate parallel to the frets, providing maximum clearance and minimum buzzing. Make sure that the pick is held in a plane perpendicular (90°) to the surface of the strings (or to the guitar top), to avoid "catching" the string on upstrokes. Pluck the strings with the tip of the pick. Keep the flat surface of the pick almost, but not quite parallel with the length of the string. Allow the tip of the pick to protrude just barely past the underside of the string (nearest the guitar body).

*Right wrist and hand position.* The shoulder, forearm, wrist and hand should be loose throughout. Apply light, evenly-distributed muscular tension throughout these parts of the hand and arm to support the pick "effortlessly".

The wrist should be slightly bent unless you are using part of the hand to mute. The upper forearm should serve as an "anchor" point against the upper edge of the guitar. The fingertips, side of hand (from the base of the little finger to the wrist), heel of hand, and side of the thumb can touch to judge distance, but don't anchor them. As you develop your personal technique, you may find yourself touching with various parts of the hand. Analyze your technique to make sure the habits you develop contribute to your control of the pick.

Many players rest the "pinky" side of their hand (between the little finger and the wrist) on the bridge while picking. While this provides stability for the right hand, it sacrifices the tone variation usually available by picking closer to the neck for bass tones or closer to the bridge for treble tones.

*Right wrist sweep.* A sweeping, continuous down-up motion of the wrist is used for strumming chords. Here is an exercise to familiarize you with this motion:

- Move your hand side to side with the same movement as if your hand were palm-down on a table.
- Mute the strings with your left hand and strum down-up alternately on two or three strings as a group; as you would a three note chord.
- Gradually widen the stroke until you are strumming on all six strings.

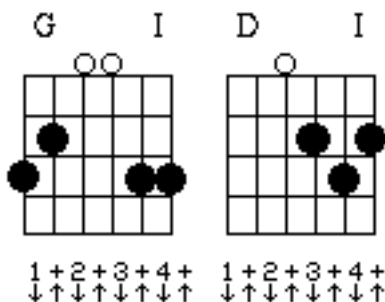
Note that when strumming alternately down-up on four to six strings, the wrist movement is so wide that it involves a distinct forearm rotation (view the protruding wrist bone nearest the thumb). The weight of the hand will aid the motion of the hand in strumming.

## Strict Down-Up Strumming

In *strict down-up strumming*, each series of continuous notes is strummed strictly (1) down-up-down-up, etc. or (2) up-down-up-down, etc. If you start with a downstroke, the picking order is down-up-down-up, etc. Starting with an upstroke would use the picking order up-down-up-down, etc.

You often pass the strings before strumming them to strictly continue the down-up motion. In theory, the wasted motion is acceptable in order to allow an uninterrupted continuous rhythmic motion.

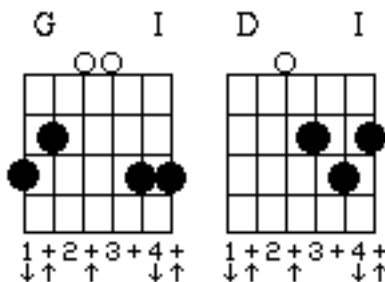
**Down-up strumming exercise.** Count evenly: “one - and - two - and - three - and - four - and,” as you strum down on the downward arrows and up on the upward arrows.



## Rhythmic Selection.

Many accompaniment and melodic rhythms can be played easily when your right hand assumes a continuous motion but you select when the pick contacts the strings. This may be applied to playing single notes or strumming chords.

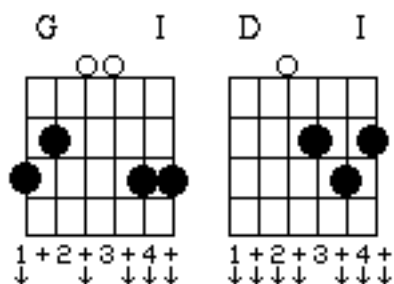
**Rhythmic selection.** Miss the strings where no arrow is shown.



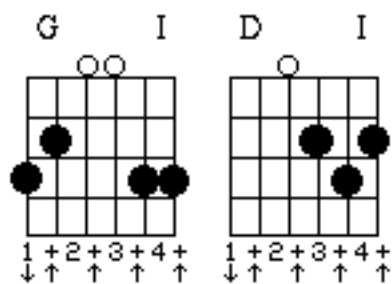
## Exceptions to Strict Down-Up Strumming

*Consecutive downstrokes* or *consecutive upstrokes* provide emphasis and a consistent tone.

**Consecutive downstroke exercise.**



**Consecutive upstroke exercise.**



---

## SETTING YOUR HAND

### **For the Fourth String**

Practice “setting” your hand with the thumb touching the sixth string so you can feel the position with which to hover the pick between the fifth and fourth string in preparation to strum a chord from the fourth string down, such as a “D” chord. This will enable you to miss the sixth and fifth strings.

### **For the Fifth String**

Likewise, learn to set your hand for an “A” chord, hovering the pick between the sixth and fifth strings, missing the sixth string.

### **For the Sixth String**

No setting is necessary to strum or pick the sixth string first, since you can stroke close enough to the guitar body to ensure that you contact the sixth string.