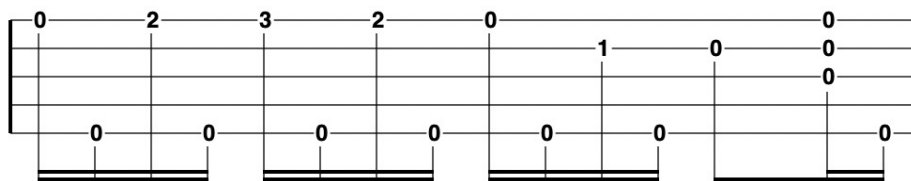


**Clawhammer Banjo Basic Technique Intensive with Ivan Rosenberg**  
**Class 4 – May 28, 2025**

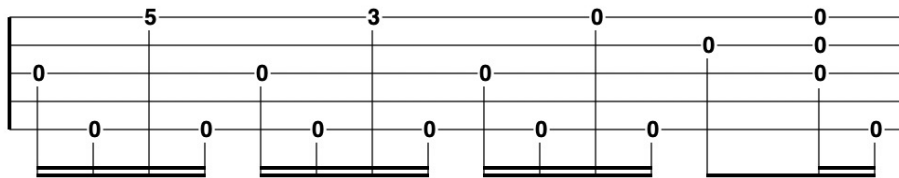
## **Double Thumbing**

We learned the mechanics of double thumbing in the first class, but now we'll start incorporating it into song arrangements.

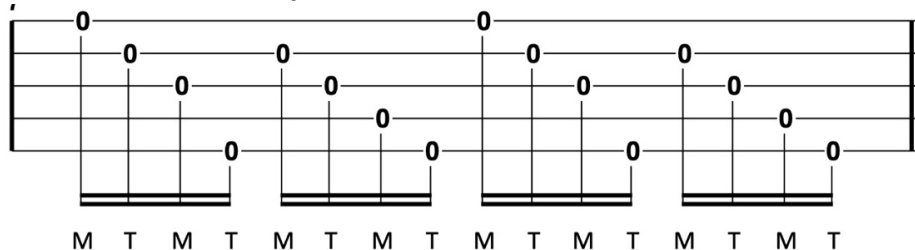
1) Double thumbing means using the 5<sup>th</sup> string on upstrokes between downstroke notes, e.g. this idea for the first phrase of Old Joe Clark (G major tuning). Remember you have to 'pre-load' the 5<sup>th</sup> string by engaging it with your thumb on the preceding downstroke.



2) We can also use double thumbing to **syncopate** the melody to the “and” of the beat, e.g. this idea for Cluck Old Hen (G modal aka “sawmill tuning” gDGCD) that we’ll learn today. Usually this takes the form of a lower non-melody chord root for the initial downstroke note (in this case an open 3<sup>rd</sup> string) and syncopating the melody note to the “and” of the beat (high string 5<sup>th</sup> fret > 3<sup>rd</sup> fret > open in this case):

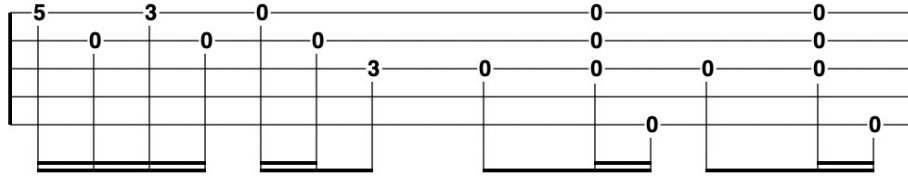


3) We can use double thumbing after a drop thumb for a “reverse roll” move—this is typically how you can sound three consecutive notes, high to low, on adjacent strings in the clawhammer style.



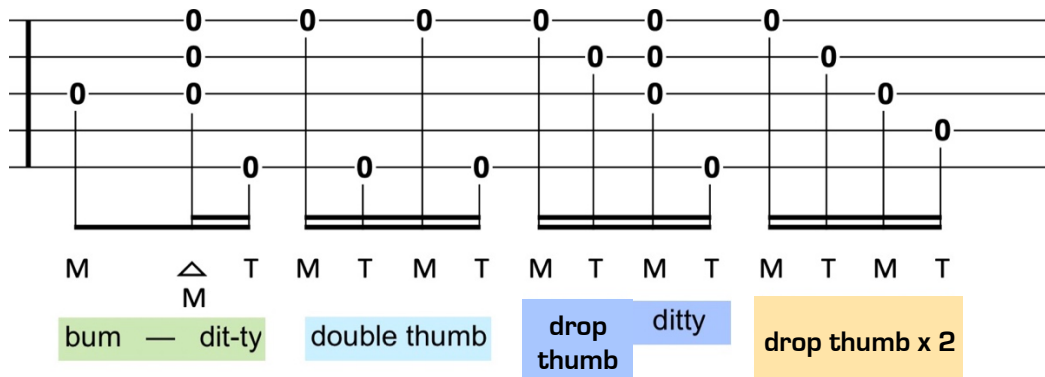
## Drop thumb

Drop thumb is typically used to get the second and/or fourth note in a series of four notes, e.g. this lick in G modal that could fit into any modal tune such as Cluck Old Hen, The Cuckoo, and the like.

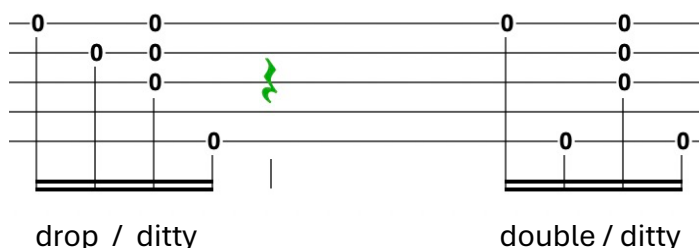


The only real difference between double thumbing and drop thumb is the string that gets played with the thumb. If it's the 5<sup>th</sup> string, it's business as usual for our thumbs and we call that double thumbing. If it's string 1/2/3/4, that's what we call "drop thumb."

If we want to compare both techniques rhythmically to the bum-ditty, just as we've been using hammer-ons, pull-offs, and slides to get a note in the 'gap' after the 'bum' in "bum ditty," we can use double thumbing or drop thumb to access notes that fall in this same rhythmic gap. Or we can use double thumbing or drop thumb to substitute two individual notes for the "ditty" half of the beat. Or we can do both! Here are four ways (there are many more) of playing a beat's worth of notes side by side for comparison. M here means middle or index, whichever you use, and I also used M as shorthand for the brush):



It's very common to play two notes of drop thumb or double thumb followed by a ditty:



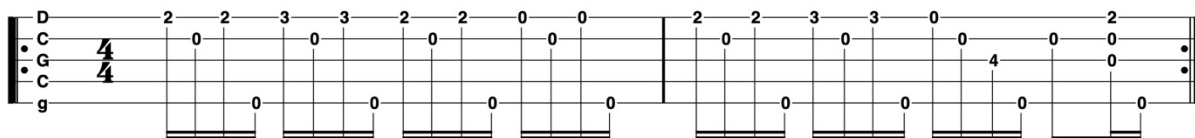
## The mechanics of drop thumb

Just like everything else in clawhammer, our thumb comes to rest on a string during a downstroke and leaves the banjo sounding the note (if we wish it to sound) on the upstroke, i.e. when our hand moves away from the banjo in a recovery motion. For drop thumb, you simply close up your “adjustable pliers wrench” hand shape so your thumb and striking finger are closer together. This will usually but not always be an adjacent string move.

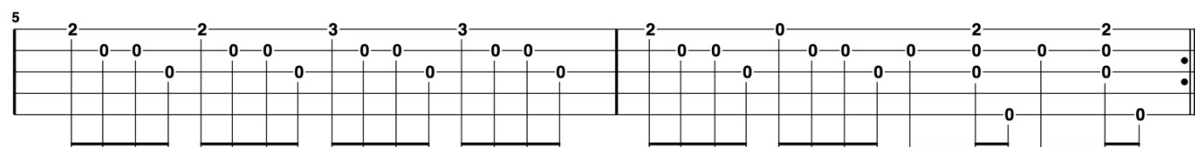
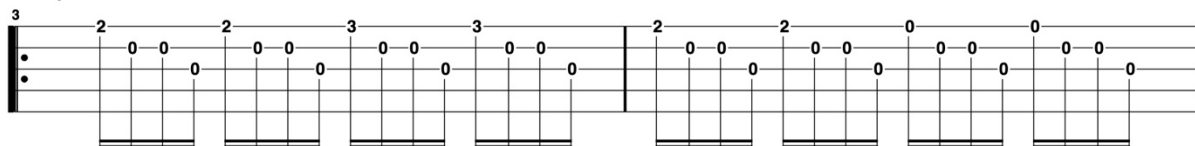
With drop-thumb, try not to involve the smaller muscles and joints of the thumb, and try not to engage muscles you’d use to pluck the string. In my opinion (I don’t have any data on how other banjo teachers feel about this), minimize/avoid tensing up and then loosening your thumb muscles each time you sound a drop-thumb note. The more you’re goofing around with your thumb muscles and joints with drop thumb, the harder it will be to build up speed. You can get away with sloppy drop thumb technique up to about 80 bpm. Any faster and thumb notes will be inconsistent, while at much faster tempos you’ll start missing strings and/or the rhythm will fall apart. The exception to this drop thumb advice, which I don’t recommend you try out until you’re already adept at drop thumb and can do it in your sleep, is “popping” the thumb note—giving it a bit of a pluck on purpose to accentuate the note. This can be a great technique when done intentionally and sparingly, but you don’t want it to be a habit.

### Drop thumb and alternate string pull off exercises (c) 2025 Ivan Rosenberg

#### Drop thumb exercise 1



#### Drop thumb exercise 2



The first system of the musical score for 'The Little Boat' consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' and the time signature is 3/4. The melody begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note Bb4. This is followed by a half note G4 and a half note F4. The system ends with a double bar line.

The first system of the musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is shown. It consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in a simple, folk-like style. The first measure contains a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The second measure contains a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F4. The third measure contains a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The fourth measure contains a quarter note B3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note G3. The fifth measure contains a quarter note F3, a quarter note E3, and a quarter note D3. The sixth measure contains a quarter note C3, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note A2. The seventh measure contains a quarter note G2, a quarter note F2, and a quarter note E2. The eighth measure contains a quarter note D2, a quarter note C2, and a quarter note B1. The ninth measure contains a quarter note A1, a quarter note G1, and a quarter note F1. The tenth measure contains a quarter note E1, a quarter note D1, and a quarter note C1. The eleventh measure contains a quarter note B0, a quarter note A0, and a quarter note G0. The twelfth measure contains a quarter note F0, a quarter note E0, and a quarter note D0. The thirteenth measure contains a quarter note C0, a quarter note B0, and a quarter note A0. The fourteenth measure contains a quarter note G0, a quarter note F0, and a quarter note E0. The fifteenth measure contains a quarter note D0, a quarter note C0, and a quarter note B0. The sixteenth measure contains a quarter note A0, a quarter note G0, and a quarter note F0. The seventeenth measure contains a quarter note E0, a quarter note D0, and a quarter note C0. The eighteenth measure contains a quarter note B0, a quarter note A0, and a quarter note G0. The nineteenth measure contains a quarter note F0, a quarter note E0, and a quarter note D0. The twentieth measure contains a quarter note C0, a quarter note B0, and a quarter note A0. The system ends with a double bar line.

We just learned how to approximate a reverse roll using drop thumb. For a “forward roll,” or three consecutive strings low to high, use an alternate string pull-off between downstrokes: strike a note, pull off a *different string* (usually an adjacent unfretted string) on the upstroke, and follow it with another downstroke to the next adjacent higher string. There are also other uses of alternate string pull-offs. Here are some exercises:

[illegible]

## New tunings: G modal and Double C

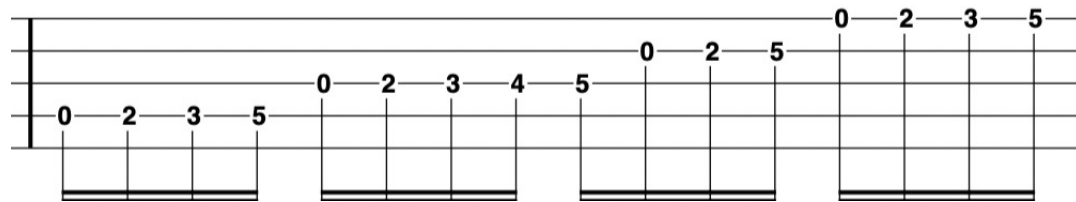
My favorite tunings for clawhammer are G modal, double C, and F. They have more sonorous brushes and are more prone to chords that sound in tune. We'll just do a brief introduction to G modal and double C for the remainder of this class, while also learning to incorporate double thumbing and drop thumb into our arrangements.

### Getting to G modal from G major tuning

To get into G modal (aka "sawmill tuning") from G major tuning, simply tune your 2<sup>nd</sup> (B) string up a semitone to C. Everything else stays the same. "Modal" tuning for our purposes means it contains no thirds, and it's the third that determines whether a chord is major or minor. Modal tunings convey an in-between feeling that's darker than major but not quite minor, and you'll find that both the flat (minor) third and major third can sound great in modal tunes.

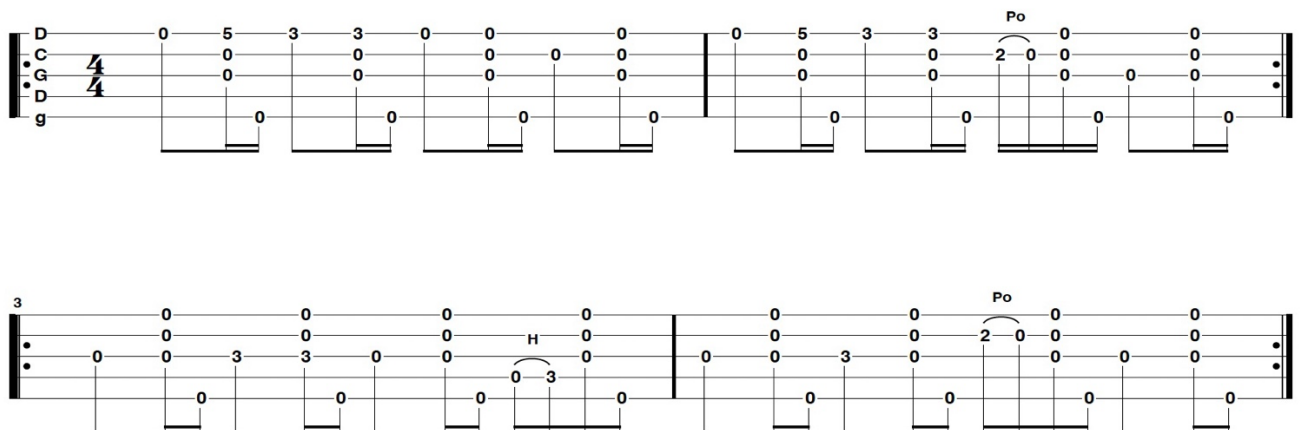
### Learning the fretboard in G modal tuning

A good way to learn G modal is to simply memorize where your fingers are mostly likely to go, and then if you need another note for a given tune, just add that to your note palate. Here's most of what you'll need in G modal up to the 5<sup>th</sup> fret.



It often sounds good in G modal to largely ignore the chord changes and just follow the melodies around. Let's not worry about the chords for now aside from the F chord: 3<sup>rd</sup> fret of 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> strings + 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of the 3<sup>rd</sup> string.

### Cluck Old Hen - basic melody bum ditty version © 2025 Ivan Rosenberg



### Cluck Old Hen - double thumb verse / drop thumb chorus © 2025 Ivan Rosenberg

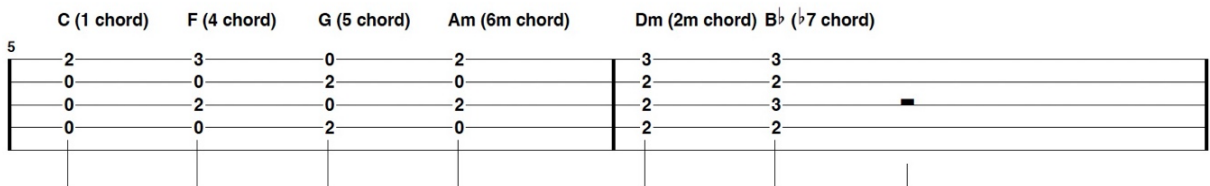
The musical notation is written on a four-line staff with a 4/4 time signature. The strings are labeled D, C, G, D from top to bottom. The bass line is labeled 'g'. The notation includes various fret numbers (0, 3, 5) and techniques like 'double thumbing' (indicated by green boxes) and 'drop thumb' (indicated by blue boxes). The piece is divided into a verse and a chorus by a double bar line. The verse features a sequence of chords and single notes, while the chorus introduces a 'drop thumb' technique. The notation is written in a simplified style, focusing on fret numbers and basic chord structures.

### Double C Tuning

From G modal, lower your low string from D to C and leave everything else as-is. We make our C chord by fretting the high string at the second fret.

(continued next page)

(c) 2025 Ivan Rosenberg



Low string: open/2/4/5  
3rd string: open/2/4/5  
2nd string: open/2/4/5  
1st string: open/2/3/5

They're not in the major scale, but they're very useful and oft-played notes in old time and other genres!

The games were our efforts to count consecutive clean notes, and to count our reasonably successful consecutive trips all the way through the ‘hammer slide pull” songs. I trust

everyone tried to improve and keep track of their progress to some extent, even if you didn't put anything on that Google Sheet. This being the case, all of you get a download of one of my banjo albums, the very descriptively titled "Clawhammer and Dobro," for making the effort to take this workshop series and devote some time and effort towards refining your technique. Here's a Dropbox download link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/956g35rgtzhz7mw7upokz/AOCNcrL2al9OMtX5tt5ygkU?rlkey=8t2uf89wdje3j5nyayetjjhpl&st=payms4h7&dl=0>

The "**Making an Effort to Objectively Quantify One's Progress Award**" goes to everyone who entered some data about their progress on the Google Sheets document— Bruce, Colin, John, Laurie, Mark, Martha, and Mary—thanks for being game to track your progress for the group, and I'll email you another album download link for that! Everyone who tracked their progress for more than a day showed clear improvement!

**Individual awards:**

- **Most consistent & dedicated practice (with big improvements!):** Martha C.
  - **Runners-up: most consistent & dedicated practice:** Mark L. and John W.
- **Most improved:** John W.
- **Beat the instructor one day (and was very close other days!):** Mary G.

**Prizes:** Martha, John, Mary, and Mark are getting one of my CDs in the mail: your choice of "Clawhammer and Dobro," "Oldies and Old Time," and "The Littlest Dobro" (with Frank Evans on banjo for that one) – I only have about a dozen of each left before they're officially out of print. Please email me which one you want along with your mailing address – thanks!

**More banjo stuff:**

**Adam Hurt's Clawhammer Tone Production class for Nashville Acoustic Camps:**

This took place late last year, and Adam generally doesn't post his old workshops for sale, but we arranged for this one to be available for a limited time just in case any of you are interested in further study of the finer points of clawhammer technique and getting the best sounds you can. As with my workshop series, you can download his class recording and keep it along with any accompanying materials forever. Adam is in my estimation tied with a just a few other folks for "best clawhammer player in the known universe," and his technique is unmatched. I haven't seen the workshop, but I have no doubt it's full of great information. <https://www.nashvilleacousticcamps.com/Previous-Zoom-Workshops.php>

Adam teaches Zoom workshop series for Nashville Acoustic Camps every so often, so practice up and get ready for them!

**My future clawhammer workshops:** I'm likely to do some Zoom clawhammer classes now and then on assorted topics. If you don't mind, I'll email you when I have clawhammer



classes/workshops on the schedule. Or, let me know if you want to be on my general email list – I send out about 10 emails per year on average, nearly all of them about instructional things, though mostly about Dobro-related instruction.

**Riley Loney's new album** – Riley is the local high school kid I told you about whose new album I recorded. Riley's mostly self-taught and has been at the claw for a few years, though much of the album is 2-finger picked old time banjo. If anyone wants to help him earn a little cash for his banjo efforts, you can download the album in the iTunes store. It's also available for streaming on Spotify.

- **Download:** <https://music.apple.com/us/album/the-mountain-boy/1810615744>
- **Stream:**  
[https://open.spotify.com/album/0jOfQmc7zRUr8CKnbtMdKv?si=nwQ6VVS6QFi6A\\_yPxVzHgQ](https://open.spotify.com/album/0jOfQmc7zRUr8CKnbtMdKv?si=nwQ6VVS6QFi6A_yPxVzHgQ)

**My clawhammer banjo and Dobro music:** all available on my Bandcamp page, including a couple albums with claw maestro Chris Coole. Chris handles most of the banjo on those, but we did occasional double-banjo tunes as well, and my unusual sounding resophonic clawhammer banjo is on a few of them. Most of my albums have some amount of claw, but “Clawhammer and Dobro” and “Oldies and Old Time” are the two claw-specific albums. Frank Evans plays banjo (claw and 3-finger) on The Littlest Dobro Vol. 1 and 2.  
<https://ivanrosenberg1.bandcamp.com>

### **Chris Coole's CDs and instructional DVD:**

Chris Coole's “Elements of Clawhammer Banjo” DVD is the best claw instruction I've seen in the DVD format, and he has a slew of incredible clawhammer music including many solo albums and his most recent band, Lonesome Ace: <https://chriscoole.com>

### **Romero banjos**

I have one of Jason's early banjos. Believe it or not, I got mine at a festival around 2003 or 2004 when Jason had a booth set up with about 10 banjos, most in the \$1100 to \$1400 range, and at the end of the weekend he'd sold zero of them. I picked out my favorite of the bunch and asked how much it was, and he said, “how much you got?” I won't tell you how cheap it was. Now his banjos have a five-year waiting list and a base price over \$5,000, but every now and then a “luthier's choice” or gourd banjo comes up for sale. It can't hurt to get on his email list just to see the photos of his incredible banjos, and y'all should definitely pick up music by Jason and his wife Pharis – I recorded their first few albums and actually fixed the two of them up in the first place, which was indirectly the best thing I ever did in music.

<https://www.romerobanjos.com>

<https://www.pharisandjason.com>

## **Straight Up Strings**

There are a lot of good banjo strings out there and I honestly haven't tried too many of them – I personally use (and have an endorsement with) Straight Up Strings – it's a great family-run string company by master luthier and string maker Roger Siminoff. Roger is also the author of *The Luthier's Handbook* and other renowned books. I put at least a hundred hours into my last medium set and finally changed them today, though I didn't really need to. Just so I could report to you about them, I tried the Straight Up Strings heavy gauge set today. They sound nice and round, but they're a little tight feeling and make a few techniques a little trickier, so if I can muster the willpower I'll switch back to medium before class. Everyone's different, but for me light gauge stings feel too slack, lack volume, tend to lack a strong fundamental note, and seem prone to intonation problems, so a medium set is usually the way to go for most people. If you're using light strings and sometimes feel they sound a little "flangy," for lack of a better and real word, try medium. By the way, there's a discount at Straight Up Strings if you get a 6-pack, which might last you for years...

<https://straightupstrings.com/products/straight-up-strings-for-banjo?variant=4290606405>

## **Thanks Megan!**

Big thanks to my dear friend Megan Lynch Chowning for hosting this workshop series. Megan is a superstar of acoustic music instruction and it's always a pleasure to work with her. You'll never meet anyone who's more dedicated to music education – thanks Megan!

## **Thank you!**

Thanks again for taking this workshop series, and I hope you got some valuable information out of it! I appreciate you being here!

Happy clawhammering!

Ivan

[www.ivanrosenberg.com](http://www.ivanrosenberg.com) (website I'm very slowly reconstructing)

<https://ivanrosenberg1.bandcamp.com> (all my music albums available here)

<https://www.patreon.com/ivanrosenberg> (if you want to learn Dobro)

<https://www.facebook.com/IvanRosenbergMusic> (Facebook music page)

<http://www.youtube.com/@IvanRosenberg> (YouTube page almost no one subscribes to)

**(c) 2025 Ivan Rosenberg**

[illegible]

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented on a five-line staff. The melody is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into two systems by a double bar line. The first system contains four measures, and the second system contains five measures. The notes are as follows:

- Measure 1: Quarter note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4.
- Measure 2: Quarter note G4, quarter note F4, quarter note E4.
- Measure 3: Quarter note D4, quarter note C4, quarter note B3.
- Measure 4: Quarter note A3, quarter note G3, quarter note F3.
- Measure 5: Quarter note E3, quarter note D3, quarter note C3.
- Measure 6: Quarter note B2, quarter note A2, quarter note G2.
- Measure 7: Quarter note F2, quarter note E2, quarter note D2.
- Measure 8: Quarter note C2, quarter note B1, quarter note A1.
- Measure 9: Quarter note G1, quarter note F1, quarter note E1.
- Measure 10: Quarter note D1, quarter note C1, quarter note B0.

The lyrics 'The Rose Tree' are written below the staff, aligned with the notes. The melody is a simple, folk-like tune that ends with a final cadence on a whole note B0.

The diagram shows a four-part vocal setting of the Gloria in excelsis Deo. It consists of four staves, each with a vocal line and a basso continuo line. The vocal lines are written in a simplified notation with notes and rests. The basso continuo lines are written in a simplified notation with notes and rests. The setting is in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The setting is in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The setting is in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'.

### Alternate string pull-off exercise 2

11

P P P P

### Alternate string pull-off exercise 3

P P P P

13

P P P P

15

P P P

Cluck Old Hen - basic melody bum ditty version © 2025 Ivan Rosenberg

4/4

g

0 5 3 3 0 0 0 0 0 5 3 3 2 0 0 0 0

Po

3

H

Po

Cluck Old Hen - double thumb verse / drop thumb chorus © 2025 Ivan Rosenberg

4/4

double thumbing

double thumbing

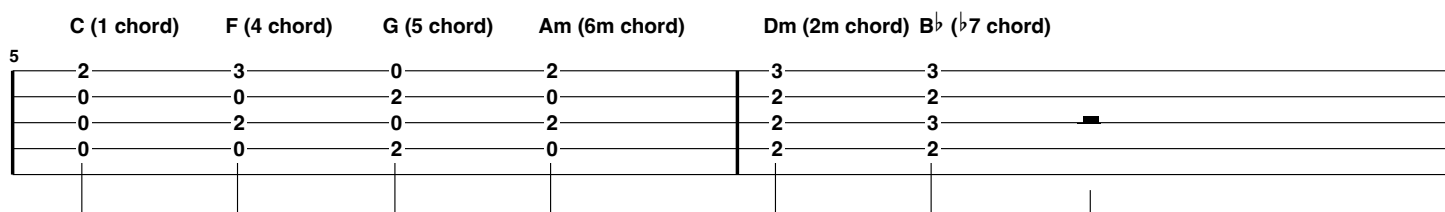
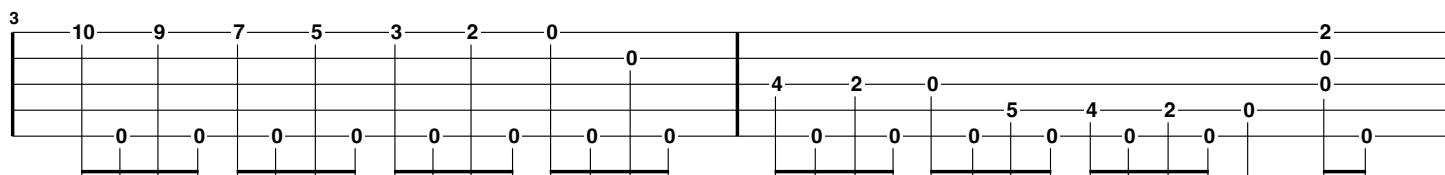
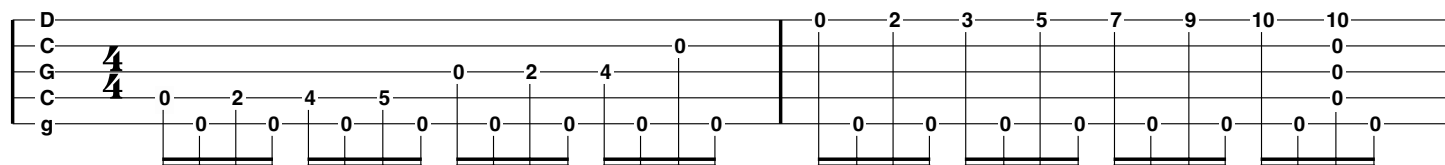
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drop thumb

drop thumb

# Double C tuning major scale and chords plus quick discussion of blues notes and key of Cm in this tuning

(c) 2025 Ivan Rosenberg



Here's an easier way to memorize where the C major scale notes fall between the open strings and 5th fret - one pattern for the lower three strings, slight pattern modification for high string:

Low string: open/2/4/5  
 3rd string: open/2/4/5  
 2nd string: open/2/4/5  
 1st string: open/2/3/5

Blues notes: this tuning has roots of the C chord on the 4th and 2nd strings and a 5th of the C chord on the 3rd string. From any root or fifth, three frets up is a bluesy note: 4th/2nd strings at the 3rd fret has C's flat third, and the 3rd string 3rd fret has C's flat 7. Or to put it more simply, look to the third fret on strings 4-3-2 for bluesy notes.

They're not in the major scale, but they're very useful and oft-played notes in old time and other genres!

It's beyond the scope of this workshop series, but Cm is a great key in this tuning. The Cm chord is made with open strings plus the 1st fret/1st string Eb note. That note, along with the open/3rd/5th fret notes on all strings, plus the 2nd fret on strings 4 through 2, will give you pretty much everything you need in Cm. I'm describing it this way instead of giving you new scales because this is the easiest way to learn a new tuning: just memorize these simple patterns for where your fingers go rather than reconceptualizing the entire fretboard for each new tuning.

Cm positions to memorize - open strings through 5th fret

Low string: open/2/3/5  
 3rd string: open/2/3/5  
 2nd string: open/2/3/5  
 1st string: open/1/3/5

# Buffalo Gals - Double C tuning with double thumbing (c) 2025 Ivan Rosenberg

4/4

C H

H

G

C Po

H

Strum-ditty  
with  
hammer-on

Double thumbing

3

H

G

Po

C

Double thumbing

5

G

C

Po

SI

←Double thumbing→

←Make G chord shape here→

7

G

C

Po

SI

←Double thumbing→

Make G chord  
shape

Two consecutive  
downstrokes,  
no thumb note



# Buffalo Gals - double C tuning with drop thumb (c) 2025 Ivan Rosenberg

4/4

C H G C Po H

Double thumb

1.

C

Double thumb drop thumb

2.

C

drop thumb P Alternate string pull off drop thumb drop thumb

G C

drop thumb

G C

two consecutive downstrokes no thumb note