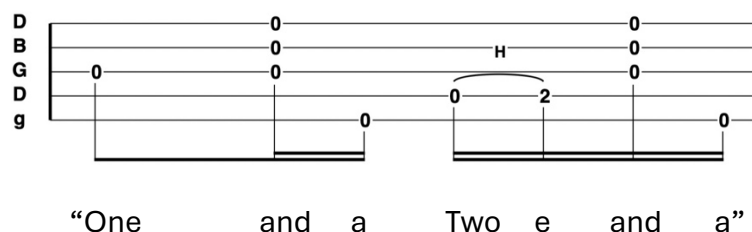


Fretting notes

- Use your fingertips (not flat fingers) to get clear notes
- Try to position your finger right by the fret of the note you're playing—three benefits:
 - cleaner note
 - easier to press down
 - notes may be more in tune especially if you have high action (and in cases of third and sixth notes, which tend to be a little sharp already on fretted instruments)
- Economy of motion:
 - For consecutive notes on a string, leave fingers down when possible, e.g. if playing open > 2nd fret > 4th fret, play 2nd fret with index and leave it down, and then add ring finger for 4th fret
 - Keep fingertips in proximity of the strings before fretting and don't lift fingers up too high after a note
 - Don't lift fingers up high before hammer-ons, and don't pull them away very far after pull-offs
- Location of fretting hand thumb:
 - You can't go wrong with the bony first joint of your thumb at roughly the middle of the banjo neck, or just above the center of the neck.
 - Most good players tend to have their thumb more or less in line with whatever their index and middle fingers are doing in terms of fretting notes, and roughly in the middle of any chord shape that's being formed.
 - Whether you change position of your thumb on a given move depends on what's immediately next. For example, if you're sliding from the 2nd to 4th fret but returning immediately to the second fret, there's no need to shift your thumb, but if you're sliding from the 2nd to 4th fret on your way to doing something at the 5th fret, it probably makes sense to shift your entire hand position to the 4th/5th fret area.

Hammer-on basics

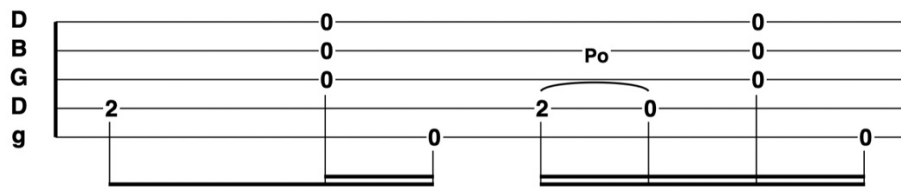
- Give the string a good, solid knock with the fingertip near the fret
- These almost always occur in conjunction with an upstroke motion from the right hand/arm, e.g. after the “bum” in the “bum-ditty” pattern. As such, practice them as a two-handed move: right hand claw does downstroke > left hand finger does the hammer-on at the exact same time the claw hand does an upstroke



Clawhammer Banjo Basic Technique Intensive with Ivan Rosenberg
Class 2 – May 14, 2025

Pull-off basics

- A pull-off is essentially a left-hand pluck of the string, usually (but not always) to an open string
- More often than not you'll do a pull-off with your index or middle fingertip
- Pluck the string with an efficient motion (not too far from the string) that's towards your palm (don't just lift up your finger)
- Pull-offs usually fall in the same place as hammer-ons, so practice them in context: left hand frets a note at the same time the claw hand does a downstroke > left hand pulls off at the same time the claw hand does an upstroke move (in this case the upstroke does *not* sound the fifth string)

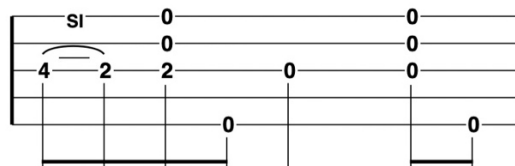


Slide basics

- As you may have guessed, slides usually go in the same rhythmic location as hammer-ons and pull-offs
- When doing a slide across multiple frets, push a little harder at the beginning of the slide and again when you get to the destination fret to create the nicest sounding slide that best conveys the sound of the full interval. For me it's a "push at the start and again at the end" move (see class recording for demonstration).



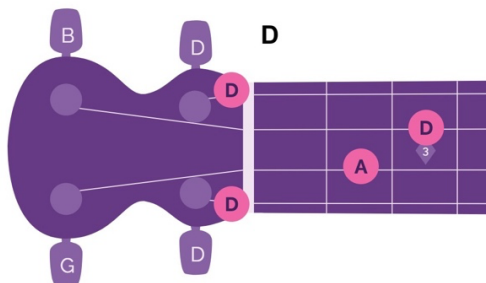
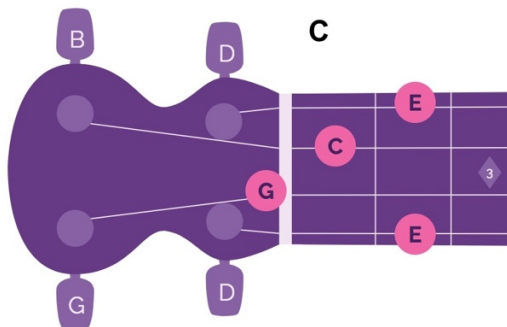
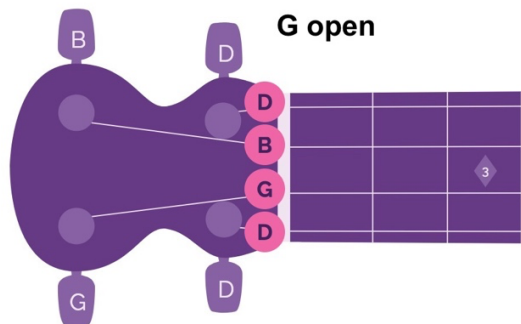
Slides work in both directions, e.g. you could also slide from the 4th to 2nd fret:



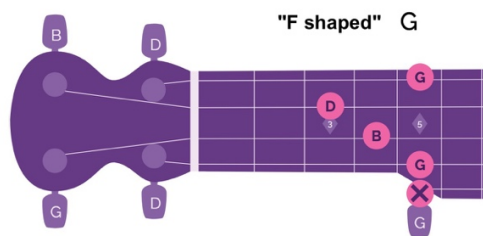
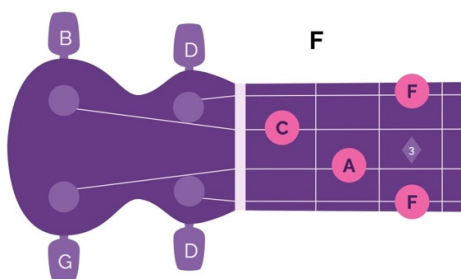
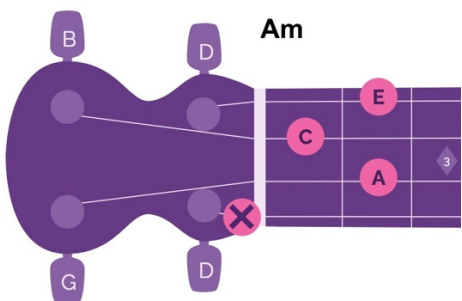
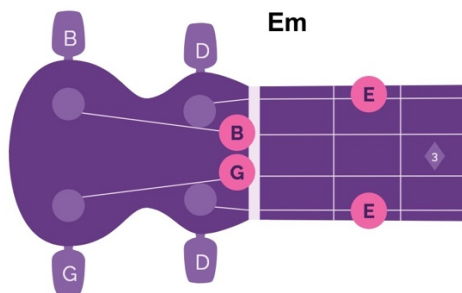
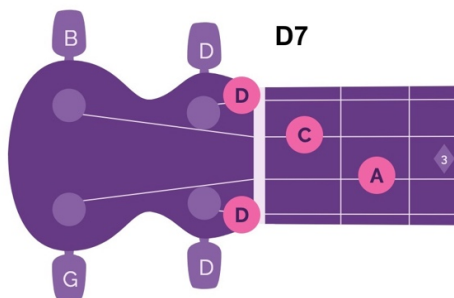
We'll look at more hammer-on, pull-off, and slide technique and usage next week.

Basic chords for G major tuning

If you look online, you'll find spiraling chord diagram charts that show every permutation of every extended chord imaginable. Those sorts of charts present too much information you'll never use. For now, just start with the easiest chord shapes available within the first five frets for the chords you're most likely to encounter in this tuning, and learn more chords as you need them. In the diagrams below, a note over the nut indicates an open string that's part of the chord.



Clawhammer Banjo Basic Technique Intensive with Ivan Rosenberg
Class 2 – May 14



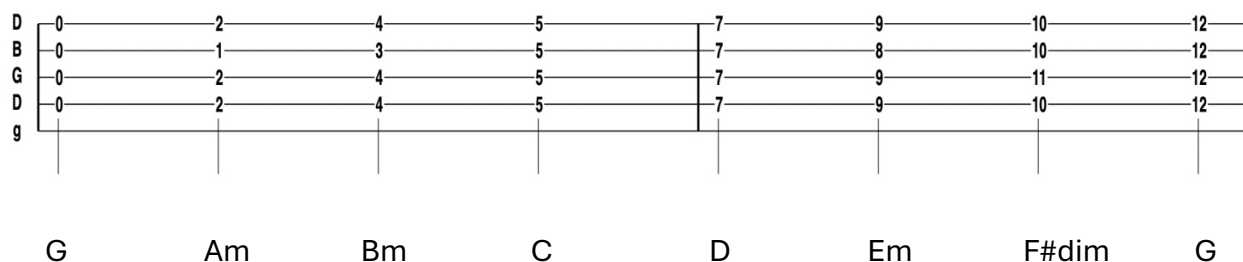
(Diagrams made using chord generator from purplebanjo.com)

Learning the fretboard in standard G tuning

First, I should mention that for clawhammer banjo, we often change tunings, and you don't necessarily need to know the names of all your notes on the fretboard given that most of what we'll do in this style will take place within in the first five to seven frets. For a given tuning, you can usually just memorize the chords you need (which along with the open strings will cover most melody notes). That said, it's really easy to learn where all the major scale notes fall in standard G tuning, and I have the most straightforward method imaginable, so let's learn the G major scale in G tuning.

Learn G major scale note locations using chord shapes

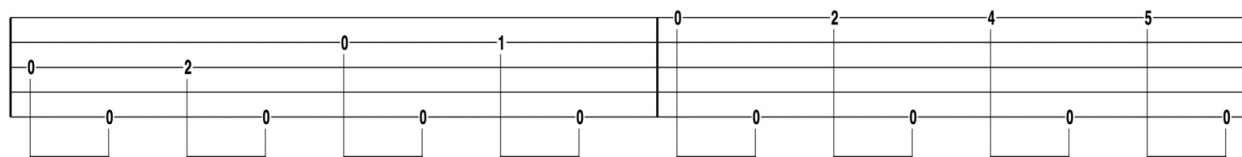
- Each major key has a corresponding major scale
- The G major scale notes are GABCDEF#. Each of these notes is the root of a corresponding chord that's in the key of G



Above are the chords that are in the key of G, each with the root on the 3rd (G) string. They make for an easy pattern: straight line across the non-thumb strings for open/5th fret/7th fret, minor shape with root on the 3rd string at frets 2/4/9, and half-diminished with a root on the 3rd string (technically the shape I'm using is "diminished" and doesn't have the additional note required to make it half-diminished – don't worry about that and just learn the shape).

Anyway, it's just three shapes to make all these chords, and if you memorize their locations, these shapes cover every instance of a G major scale note all the way up the fretboard (the pattern repeats starting at the 12th fret).

The G major scale patterns you may know use the same notes. Learning chord shapes as a shortcut to learning scale note locations provides a bird's-eye overview of the fretboard topography, while scale patterns are like a trail map, showing you particular routes to take. For example, here's an easy route through a G major scale with double thumbing:



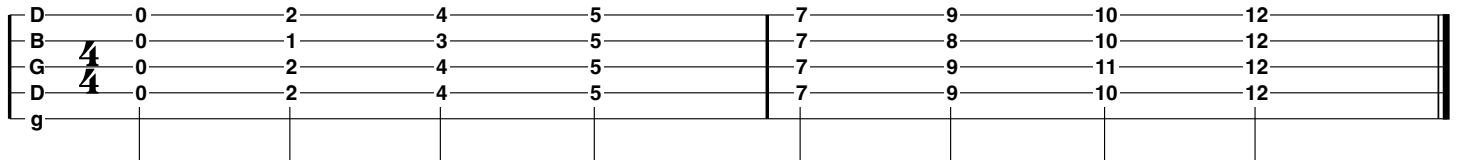
Where to find some blues notes

We also play notes in this tuning that are not in the major scale, especially blues notes. In this tuning, you'll find the flat 3rd and flat 7th notes of G at the 3rd fret (see class recording). These notes are elsewhere too, but it's worthwhile to memorize that if you're feeling bluesy, you'll find much of what you're looking for at the 3rd fret in this tuning (and any other tunings that have roots and fifths as open strings).

You can play more notes than these!

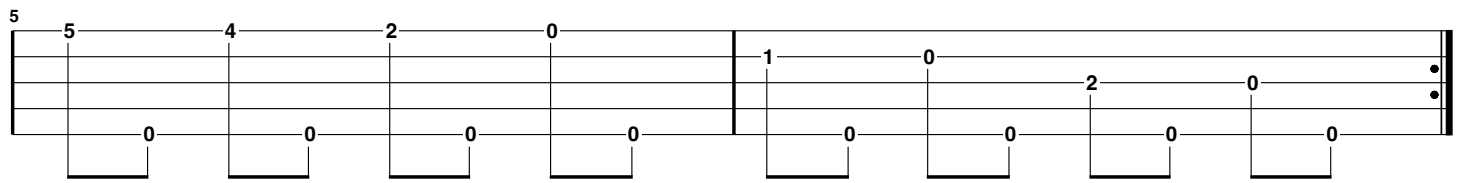
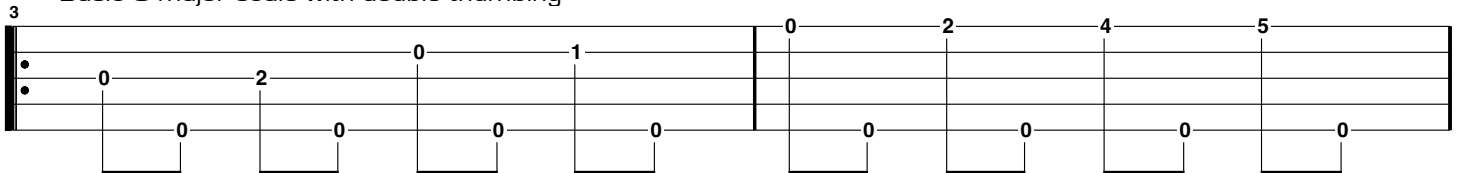
Keep in mind that you can approach any note with a leading tone from one fret behind as long as you do it like you mean it! For example, if your target note is the 4th fret/3rd string, you can lead into it with the 3rd fret/3rd string. This is a sound you hear all the time in both old time and bluegrass banjo – see class recording for a demonstration. This is usually done as an ornament, e.g. a one-fret grace note slide or as a hammer-on.

G major tuning - chords in the key with root on G string + basic G major & Em scales

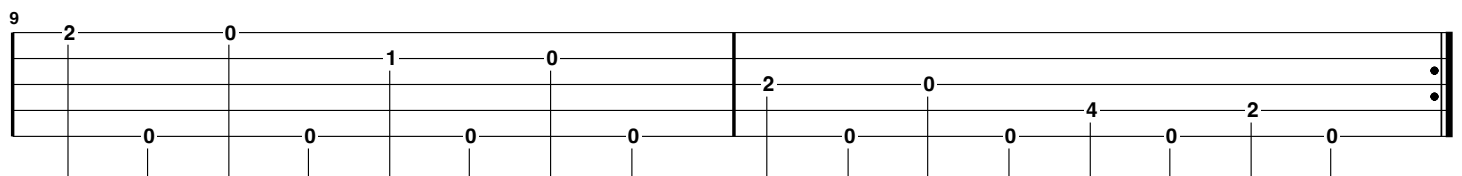
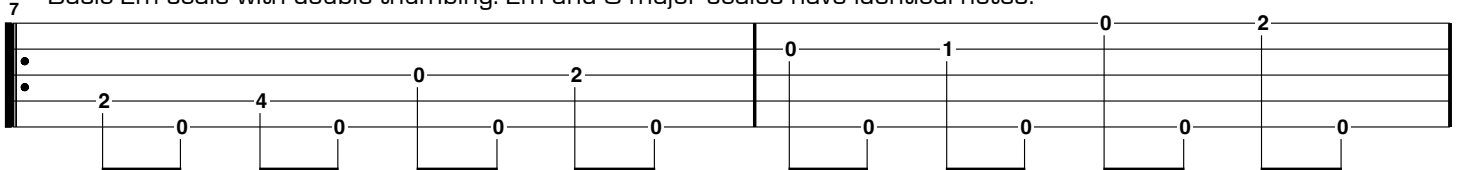


Use these chord shapes (the chords in the key of G with roots on the G string) as a shortcut to learn major scale note locations

Basic G major scale with double thumbing



Basic Em scale with double thumbing. Em and G major scales have identical notes!



"The Hammer Slide Pull Song" © 2025 Ivan Rosenberg

4/4

D 0 H 0 Sl 0 Po 0

B 0 H 0 0 0 0 0

G 0 0 0 2 2 2 4 4 2 0 0

D 0 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

g 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

M B T M B T M B T M B T

Po 2 0 0 Po 0 Po 0 0

2 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0 Po 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

M B T M B T M B T M B T

3

0 H 0 Sl 0 Po 0

H 0 0 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 2 2 2 4 4 2 0 0

0 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

M B T M B T M B T M B T

Po 2 0 0 Po 0 Po 0 0

2 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0 2 0

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

M B T M B T M B T M B T

Po

44

3

Clawhammer Picks

Do you need a pick? If you're getting pretty good tone and volume without a pick and aren't jamming in loud situations, you probably don't need one, and for this class, if you don't truly need a pick, don't use one—we want to get the 'feel' of good claw technique, which includes the sensation of a rest stroke on the back of our fingernail. Once you have that down, you can find a 'nail helper' that hopefully still allows you to feel good technique being executed.

But some of us just can't grow and maintain the nails we need for this style. I much prefer the pick-less sound and feel, but if I were playing clawhammer in a band or in loud jams, I'd probably opt for some way to get louder. A pick is one option that can help, and reinforcing your fingernail is another. Let's start with nail reinforcement options.

One option is to have **acrylic nails** put on at a nail salon. This is what Chris Coole does, and I tried it once prior to recording my "Clawhammer and Dobro" album. I loved the tone and the feel for clawhammer but hated having them when I wasn't playing banjo—acrylic nails are a commitment. If you do get them, have them shaped more or less like a regular fingernail, extending just enough for clawhammer without getting in the way during your non-banjo life. Some players (Lukas Pool is one of them) have taken to using a **piece of nail-shaped ping pong ball** affixed to the fingernail using some kind of two-sided sticky material. I might try this sometime. Another option would be press-on nails (I don't know anything about these – sorry).

I've had some luck with a few kinds of **regular fingerpicks turned backwards** with the blade straightened out, but none are brands that are currently in production. Generally they have one thing in common: a more rounded blade that's shaped more like a fingernail than the average fingerpick. If I do use a pick, I just use one fingerpick for the downstroke note without any other picks for the brush fingers, but many clawhammer players use two (maybe more?) picks. Here's a non-exhaustive list of some picks that look good and which I'm likely to try out sometime:

- **Ernie Ball picky pick:** a regular very cheap fingerpick you'd wear backwards that has a very precise pointy end – Adam Hurt is rumored to like these.
<https://www.elderly.com/products/ernie-ball-picky-pickies-fingerpick>
- **Joel Hooks banjo thimble (made for clawhammer – lots of happy customers):**
<https://banjothimble.com/banjo-thimbles>
- **Perfect touch clawhammer pick:** these look perfect but they're currently unavailable – I emailed to see if/when they might be back in stock and will let you know if I find out. I love the design.
https://www.perfecttouchpicks.com/perfect_touch_clawhammer_pick.html
- **ProPik clawhammer pick** – this looks like a great option, and I'll surely try them sometime: <https://www.elderly.com/pages/search-results?q=propick%20clawhammer%20pick>

Clawhammer Banjo Basic Technique Intensive – Class 2

Clawhammer Picks

Here are a couple of clawhammer picks I didn't like personally, but that doesn't mean *you* won't like them:

- **Fred Kelly “freedom” pick (too bulky for me – got in the way of my claw hand form):** <https://www.elderly.com/products/fred-kelly-freedom-finger-pick-678?variant=26854341050432>
- **Cling Pro Frailing pick:** really interesting design and I had high hopes, but I thought the plastic was too thin/brittle and it was a challenge to get it sitting consistently on my fingernail. But I might try the brass version sometime. Cling Pro is a Canadian company that I really like – they make some innovative pick designs, many geared towards those who have finger issues such as arthritis and even partial amputations. <https://www.clingpropicks.com/store/frailing-pick>