

# AN APPROACH TO GUITAR FINGERING

BILL FRISELL

**Most of the method books** I've seen for guitar deal mostly with fingerings based on staying in a particular 'position,' or, less frequently, moving up and down individual strings. Here are some exercises showing fingerings for step-wise passages that will allow notes to sustain simultaneously wherever possible. This is something that's done easily on the piano—by holding down the sustain pedal or simply holding down the fingers. Getting smaller intervals (major and minor 2nds) to sound together on the guitar doesn't come so easily. The examples that follow make ample use of open strings and harmonics—you won't find many symmetrical patterns here.

I find this way of thinking interesting because it opens possibilities for dissonant or closely voiced chords not so commonly used on the guitar. It also will give a very different articulation for melodic passages. Hopefully, what's here will lead you on to other possibilities. There are many.

## Note:

Numbers above the notes refer to left hand fingers (1-4)

O = open string

Circled numbers below the note refer to the string

An X designates a harmonic; I've used only those found on the 12th, 7th, and 5th frets [Example 1]

All notes within a bracket should sustain together [Example 2]



Example 1. (3rd finger, 5th string,  
harmonic on the 7th fret)



Example 2.

As a general rule, you should hold your fingers down until it's absolutely necessary to move, so that as much of what you're playing as possible will ring simultaneously.

## Scales

### C MAJOR SCALE

1 2 3 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 3 2 1

⑤ ④ ③ ② ① ③ ② ④ ② ①

### G MAJOR SCALE

1 2 3 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 3 2 1

⑥ ⑤ ④ ③ ② ① ③ ② ④ ② ①

### B<sup>b</sup> MAJOR SCALE

4 1 2 3 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 3 2 1

⑥ ⑤ ④ ③ ② ① ③ ② ④ ② ①

### E HARMONIC MINOR SCALE

4 1 2 3 4 3 2 1

⑤ ④ ③ ② ①

## Chromatic Scale

⑥ ⑤ ④ ③ ② ① ③ ② ④ ③ ⑤ ④ ③ ②

③ ② ④ ③ ① ② ③ ②

③ ⑤ ③ ② ③ ② ④ ① ②

① ① ③ ② ① ① ② ③

## Exercises

1 0 4 1 0 4 1 0 4 1 0 4 1 0 4 1 ETC.

⑥ ⑤ ⑥ ⑤ ⑤ ⑥ ⑤ ④ ⑥ ⑤ ④ ⑤ ③ ④ ⑤ ④

1 0 4 0 4 1 4 1 0 1 0 4

⑥ ⑤ ⑥ ③ ⑥ ⑤ ⑥ ⑤ ④ ⑤ ④ ⑤

4 4 0 3 0 3 1 0 4 1 4 4

⑥ ⑤ ③ ④ ② ③ ② ① ② ① ④ ② ①

4 1 0 2 0 1 4 1 0 2 0 1

⑥ ⑤ ④ ⑤ ④ ⑤ ⑤ ④ ③ ④ ③ ④

4 1 0 2 0 1 4 1 0 2 0 1

④ ③ ② ③ ② ③ ③ ② ① ② ① ②

## Etude #1

0 1 4 1 0 4 1 4 1 4 0 4 1

① ② ③ ② ① ② ③ ③ ④ ② ④ ③

4 0 4 1 0 4 1 0 1 4 0 1 4

④ ② ⑤ ④ ③ ④ ③ ② ③ ④ ③ ④ ⑤

4 0 0 4 1 0 4 0 2 1 0 0

⑥ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑤ ③ ④ ② ③ ② ① ①

### Etude #2

Etude #2 is a piece in 3/4 time, marked with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score consists of five systems of music, each with a treble clef staff and a bass staff. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 in circles above the notes. Technical markings include slurs, accents, and 'x' marks on the bass staff. The first system has a key signature change to two sharps (F# and C#) in the second measure. The second system has a key signature change to one sharp (F#) in the second measure. The third system has a key signature change to one sharp (F#) in the second measure. The fourth system has a key signature change to one sharp (F#) in the second measure. The fifth system has a key signature change to one sharp (F#) in the second measure.

### Etude #3

Etude #3 is a piece in 4/4 time, marked with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score consists of three systems of music, each with a treble clef staff and a bass staff. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 in circles above the notes. Technical markings include slurs, accents, and 'x' marks on the bass staff. The first system has a key signature change to one sharp (F#) in the second measure. The second system has a key signature change to one sharp (F#) in the second measure. The third system has a key signature change to one sharp (F#) in the second measure.

### Etude #4

First system of Etude #4: Two measures of music in 4/4 time. The first measure contains notes with fingerings 4, 3, 2, 1 and a circled 1 below. The second measure contains notes with fingerings 2, 3, 1, 4, 1 and circled 5, 3, 2, 1, 3 below. Brackets and 'x' marks indicate specific fingering patterns.

Second system of Etude #4: Two measures of music in 4/4 time. The first measure contains notes with fingerings 4, 1, 3, 1 and circled 4, 5, 3, 2 below. The second measure contains notes with fingerings 1, 4, 2 and circled 1, 3, 4, 6 below. Brackets and 'x' marks indicate specific fingering patterns.

### Etude #5

First system of Etude #5: Three measures of music in 7/8 time. The first measure has fingerings 1, 1, 4 and circled 4, 4, 2 below. The second measure has fingerings 1, 2, 2, 1, 4 and circled 1, 1, 3, 1 below. The third measure has fingerings 1, 2, 3 and circled 1, 4, 2 below. Brackets and 'x' marks indicate specific fingering patterns.

Second system of Etude #5: Three measures of music in 7/8 time. The first measure has fingerings 4, 1, 4 and circled 3, 3, 4 below. The second measure has fingerings 4, 2, 1, 3, 1 and circled 2, 1, 3, 1 below. The third measure has fingerings 2, 1 and circled 4, 1 below. Brackets and 'x' marks indicate specific fingering patterns.

Third system of Etude #5: Three measures of music in 7/8 time. The first measure has fingerings 4, 4, 2, 2, 1, 2 and circled 4, 3, 2, 2, 1, 2 below. The second measure has a circled 3 below. The third measure has fingerings 0, 4, 1, 0, 4, 1, 4 and circled 4, 6, 5, 3, 5, 4, 5 below. Brackets and 'x' marks indicate specific fingering patterns.

Fourth system of Etude #5: Three measures of music in 7/8 time. The first measure has fingerings 0, 1, 4, 3 and circled 3, 5, 6, 4 below. The second measure has fingerings 0, 1 and circled 5, 6 below. The third measure has fingerings 3, 6, 2 and circled 4, 1 below. Brackets and 'x' marks indicate specific fingering patterns.