
BASICS

Left fourth finger

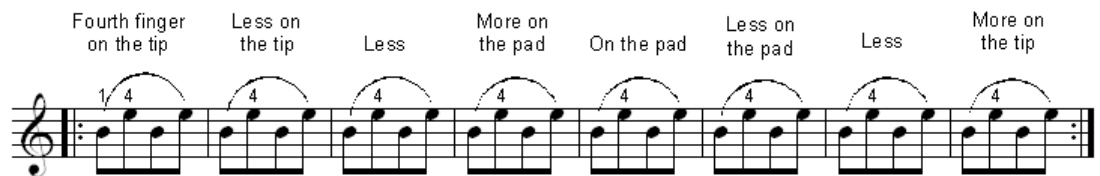
Many players find that the fourth finger feels weak in comparison to the other fingers in all the different actions of playing – shifting, trilling, vibrating and so on. The simple solution is to keep up a continual program of agility exercises for the fourth finger. They double as potent warm-up exercises, and therefore do not even require extra practice time, and are the fastest way to produce an excellent fourth finger.

Tip or pad

If you place the finger on its tip, the finger naturally curves (Fig. a); if you place it on its pad, it naturally straightens (Fig. b). Placing the fourth finger more on its pad may produce a ‘juicier’ vibrato than the fingertip gives, so there may be many times, if it doesn’t matter if the finger is a little straighter, when you deliberately choose more of the pad.

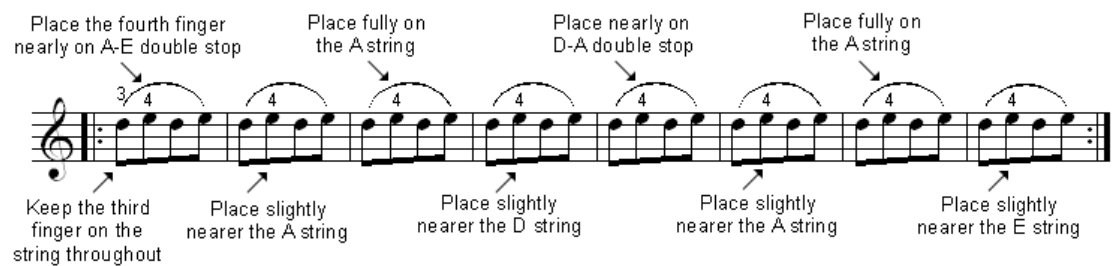
Placing the fourth finger more on its tip helps to ensure that the shape of the finger on the string, and the shape when it is lifted off the string, remains much the same. It also helps ensure that the finger moves correctly from the base joint rather than from the middle joint.

- Sensitise the finger by changing gradually between dropping more on the tip and more on the pad:



Aiming the finger

Players sometimes need to develop a better aim, as they lower the fourth finger, to ensure that the tip of the finger contacts the string in the middle of the finger. It is a horrible feeling when the finger slightly misses the string, and ends up too near to the adjacent string on either side.

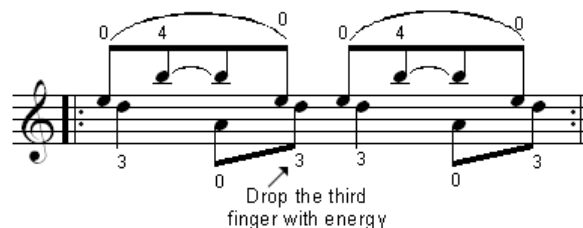


- Ensure that you do not allow the finger to straighten at any stage. Keep it curved throughout and keep playing on the tip of the finger. Simply adjust how near the tip is to the E string or to the D string.

Independence

It is a common fault that the fourth finger is not independent of the third finger but moves with it, e.g. pulling down (sometimes underneath the neck) as the third finger drops onto the string. Simple exercises can improve this rapidly, so that the fourth finger remains unaffected by the actions of the third.

Example 1



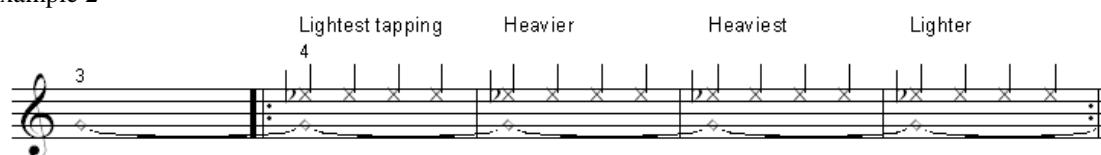
- Keep the fourth finger rounded, without changing its shape as it drops onto the string or lifts from it.
- Drop the third finger with exaggerated speed and impact; lift the fourth finger exaggeratedly quickly.

Placing the fourth finger on its tip makes the finger naturally curve

Placing the fourth finger on its pad makes the finger naturally straighten

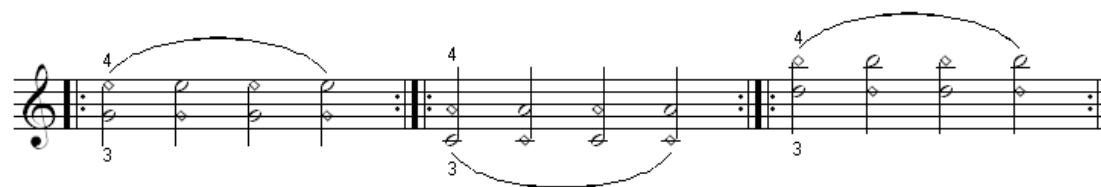
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Example 2



- Playing the harmonic with the third finger, keep the finger curved and as light as possible.
- Without playing the A string, silently tap the fourth finger up and down on the string (shown as x-notes).
- Keep the finger curved, and contacting the string on the tip.
- Begin with the lightest possible contact with the string. Gradually drop the finger faster and with more impact until you are striking the A string quite heavily; then gradually lighten the impact back to the starting point.
- Throughout, ensure that there is no reaction whatsoever in the third finger as the fourth moves up and down.

Example 3



- For the purposes of the exercise, keep both fingers as upright and rounded as possible.

Reaching up exercise

Use this exercise as a quick warm-up before playing scales.

Players who do not have large hands often find that when playing the descending scale, and reaching from a low first finger to a fourth finger on the next string (e.g. first finger B^b on the A string, to fourth finger A on the D string), it seems a long way to have to reach with the fourth finger.

This exercise exaggerates the distance and makes it feel much easier for the fourth finger to reach the actual note it will play in the scale:



- Increase the reach of the fourth finger by opening the hand at the base joint, particularly being careful not to squeeze the first and second fingers together.
- Keep the fourth finger curved throughout.
- Make sure that the entire hand remains soft, relaxed and free throughout. Keep releasing the thumb.

Sliding exercise



- Repeat the same pattern on the other strings, beginning in a higher position and working down to 1st position.