

# BASIC FRETTING TECHNIQUE

## FRETTING-HAND POSITIONS

The fretting hand can go through infinite forms. Any particular chord is ideally fretted with a slightly different hand form to accommodate what is played immediately before and after it. Every phrase of notes or chords requires that the hand move a little differently. For any particular phrase, each guitar player has their own unique and ideal way to perform the fretting. I'll discuss a few basic forms below.

### Classical Wrist Position

For wide spans in scales, arpeggios and chords, use the classical guitar wrist form. With the ball of the thumb on the center of the back of the neck (opposite the third and fourth strings), bend the wrist to turn the fretting-hand palm towards the forearm and spread the fingers.

To protect the fretting wrist is essential that the head of the guitar be kept high with this wrist position. Keep the head of the guitar raised enough that the neck is at 45° or more to the floor.

### Bending Position

Although you may not be bending notes (stretching one or more strings up and down a fret) for a while, you should start getting used to the form. It will also be useful in understanding the compromised position, which should be your most common fretting-hand position for now.

Keep the elbow against or close to the body. Bend the fretting-hand wrist to move the back of the hand towards the forearm slightly (30° to 45°). If you have trouble imagining this bending of the wrist, put your fretting hand palm right in front of your face and bend the hand away from you at the wrist, without moving the forearm.

Keep the base of your first finger touching the bottom of the fretboard and your thumb high enough that it is easily visible from the front of the guitar (see photos or videos of Hendrix, Clapton, Van Halen or Vai, etc. in performance). The fingers should be angled in such a way that the base of the index finger is one or two frets toward the head of the guitar from the tip of the finger. The bottom of the fretboard should be in line with (close to) the base of the index finger at one end of your hand, and at a point halfway between the base of the little finger and the heel of the hand.

### The Circular Or “V” Shape

The two extremes of the shapes the fretting hand thumb and index finger form are a circle or “v”. When fretting notes on the smaller strings, the thumb and index finger form a circular shape. When fretting the larger strings and especially when barréing, the thumb and index finger are in a “v” shape.

### “Choreographing” Your Fretting Hand Movement

Think of your fingers as dancers. Think of the places they fret notes as resting points in a dance. The fingers should work together gracefully. When they fret a chord where all of the notes are to be strummed at once, they need to move from their previous position in such a manner that they all arrive at their fretting points at precisely the same time.

When the fretting fingers play a sequence of single notes, the sequence forms a path. Each group of a

few consecutive notes (three to six, typically) moves through some sort of a path. Whatever the path is, move gracefully through it.

Consider a short phrase of three notes ascending the same string, using your index, ring, then little fingers. Think of fretting the three notes similarly as you would a chord, but don't fret them all at once. Instead, make a "wave" motion through the fretted with your fingers. "Hover" your fingers over the frets as you play the group of notes. As you are fretting the first note, begin moving the finger into place for the next note and relax the previous finger precisely when the next finger has attained full pressure against the string. Apply only as much pressure as is needed to sound the note clearly without buzzing or muting.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. It contains three quarter notes: G4, A4, and Bb4. Below the staff, the fingerings are indicated as 1, 3, and 4. To the left of the staff, the strings are labeled T, A, and B, each with a 4/4 time signature.

The next example is short phrase involving one note on each of four consecutive strings, forming a diagonal path. Again, think of using the fingers as you would fret a chord, but fret the little finger note with a smooth transition to the third finger, and so on. Think "wave". The chord shape is shown at the right of the phrase example.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. It contains four quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, and C#5. Below the staff, the fingerings are indicated as 4, 3, 2, and 1. To the left of the staff, the strings are labeled T, A, and B, each with a 4/4 time signature. To the right of the staff is a chord diagram for G7, showing a 4x4 grid with fret numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 in the second, third, and fourth rows respectively.

It may be a sequence of notes that keeps returning to the same note. In fretting the example below, cater to the positioning of the ring finger, while shaping the hand so each of the other notes can be fretted with minimal movement.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. It contains six notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, an eighth note B4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F#4. Below the staff, the fingerings are indicated as 3, 1, 3, 2, 3, and 4. To the left of the staff, the strings are labeled T, A, and B, each with a 4/4 time signature.

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## FRETTING TECHNIQUES

### Contacting The String

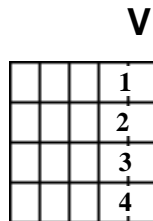
Fret notes with the fingertip pressing the string up against the edge of the metal fret (the edge nearest the headstock of the guitar). Exert just enough pressure. Contact the string to the fret at precisely the same time the pick touches the string, so that by the time the pick follows through, the note is clearly fretted. Fretting before picking is inefficient and impedes your ability.

### Spreading The Fingers

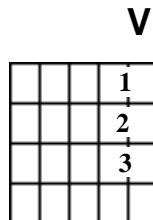
In playing single notes, keep the fretting-hand fingers both relaxed and spread out. Keep the fingertips hovering close (within a quarter inch) to four consecutive frets on the same string in line with points at which you would fret notes. Lay the first (index) finger's middle knuckle away from the rest of the hand, giving easier access to the notes one fret toward the headstock of the guitar. Although you won't be able to stretch as far, lay the little finger in a similar way to the right (left for left-handers). This is a "ready" position enabling you to reach any note you may need to on any string within a six fret range.

## FIRST HOVERING EXERCISE

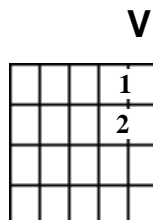
This exercise develops the posture of your fretting hand, training the fretting fingers to stay in ready position. First, place all four fingers on four consecutive frets and pick the second string, sounding the note fretted with the little finger (finger "4"):



Next, lift the little finger off the fretboard 1/4" or less, "hovering" the little finger over the fretting point it used earlier, keeping the finger very relaxed. Pick the ring finger note (finger "3").

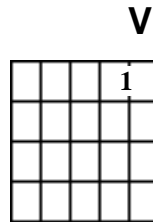


Now, lift the ring finger. Hover both of the free fingers over the fretting points they used earlier, with both of them relaxed. Pick the middle finger note (finger "2").



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Finally, lift the middle finger. Hover all of the free fingers over the fretting points they used earlier, with them relaxed. Pick the index finger note (finger “1”).



Repeat the sequence, trying each time to relax the fingers more and hover them closer to the fretboard. You'll probably have the most trouble with the little finger.

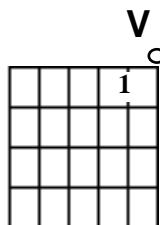
## CLOSENESS AND CLEARING EXERCISE ON TWO STRINGS

Versions of this exercise will be presented later on all six strings, with slurs, and in combination with the hover exercise. Like the hovering exercise, this one trains your fingers to stay close to the strings.

As you are playing this exercise, you may need to adjust the position of fingers with which you previously fretted in order to reach the next note you are fretting. If so, the next time you play the exercise, try to position the fingers when you put each down initially, so no readjustment will be necessary.

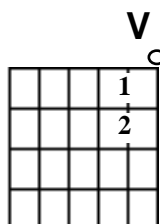
### Step 1.

Fret the note on the second string, fifth fret with the index finger (“1”). Strum it along with the first string open, as a chord. Make sure both notes are sounding clearly. Keep the free fingers relaxed and hovering over the fretboard. The middle finger (“2”) should hover over the point at which it would fret the sixth fret, the ring finger over its fretting point at the seventh fret and the little finger over its fretting point at the eighth fret. Make sure both notes sound clearly and are not muted.



### Step 2.

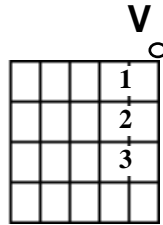
Leave your index finger pressing the string to the fifth fret and fret the next note with your middle finger (finger “2”). Strum it along with the first string open, as a chord. Keep the free fingers relaxed and hovering over their assigned points on the fretboard. Make sure both notes sound clearly and are not muted.



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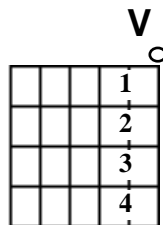
### Step 3.

Leave your index and middle fingers fretting their assigned frets and fret the next note with your ring finger (finger, “3”). Strum it along with the first string open, as a chord. Keep the little finger relaxed and hovering over the eighth fret. Make sure both notes sound clearly and are not muted.



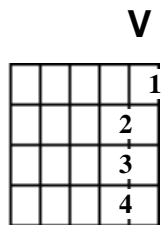
### Step 4.

Leave your first three fingers fretting their assigned frets and fret the next note with your little finger (finger, “4”). Strum it along with the first string open, as a chord. Make sure both notes sound clearly and are not muted.



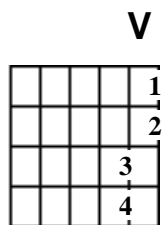
### Step 5.

Leave the middle, ring and little fingers fretting their assigned frets on the second string (sixth, seventh and eighth frets) while fretting the first string, fifth fret with the index finger (“1”). Strum the first two strings as a chord and make sure both notes sound clearly.



### Step 6.

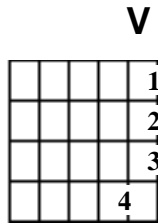
Leave the ring and little fingers fretting their assigned frets on the second string (seventh and eighth frets) and the index finger fretting the first string, fifth fret. At the same time, fret the first string, sixth fret with the middle finger (“2”). Strum the first two strings as a chord and make sure both notes sound clearly.



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### Step 7.

Leave the index and middle fingers fretting their assigned frets on the first string (fifth and sixth frets) and the little finger fretting the second string, eighth fret. At the same time, fret the first string, seventh fret with the ring finger (“3”). Strum the first two strings as a chord and make sure both notes sound clearly.



### Step 8.

Leave the index, middle and ring fingers fretting their assigned frets on the first string (fifth, sixth and seventh frets) and fret the first string eighth fret with the little finger. Pick the first string.

