

## Learning the Ukulele Fingerboard

Most players struggle with learning the names of the notes of the ukulele fingerboard. There doesn't seem to be a pattern and notes repeat. There is an easy way and...

### ...it's easier than you think!

Most players know the names of the open strings for their tuning. In "C" tuning the open strings are named **G C E A**, no sharps or flats.

If you know the open strings (G C E A) you know fret (1) by sharpening the open strings: **G# C# E# A#**. You also know fret (12), which are the same G C E A. By flattening each note you get fret (11) **Gb Cb Eb Ab**.

A sharp raises a note one half step or one fret. A flat lowers a note one half step or one fret. A double sharp raises a note one whole step or two frets. A double flat lowers a note one whole step or two frets.

**Enharmonic Equivalents** - A note can have alternate names. Any one of the seven letters in the musical alphabet (A B C D E F G) can be sharpened (#), flattened (b), double sharpened (x) or double flattened (bb).

**E#** is the same pitch as **F**

**B#** is the same pitch as **C**

**Cb** is the same pitch as **B**

**Fb** is the same pitch as **E**

### Sharp, Flat and Natural Note Name Order

There are seven letters used in the musical alphabet, A B C D E F G and then starting over with A again. This A to A' is called one octave. These are the white keys of a standard piano. There are twelve notes in one octave making up the chromatic scale. The below chart shows the names of all the notes in the chromatic scale.



Natural Notes	A		B	C		D		E	F		G		A
<b>Sharps</b>		A#		B#	C#		D#		E#	F#		G#	
<b>Flats</b>		Bb	Cb		Db		Eb	Fb		Gb		Ab	
<b>Double Sharps*</b>			Ax		Bx	Cx		Dx		Ex	Fx		Gx
<b>Double Flats*</b>	Bbb	Cbb		Dbb		Ebb	Fbb		Gbb		Abb		Bbb

\* Although theoretically correct for proper chord and melody notation, the double sharp and double flat names are typically avoided in favor of a natural, flat or sharp equivalent. This is an ease of reading issue vs. theoretically correct notation.

## Reference Frets

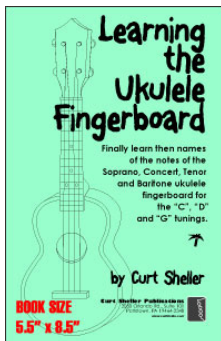
Beyond the names of the open strings **G C E A**, there are two more frets that can be memorized using the natural notes.

Here is fret (5) **C F A D**, no sharps or flats as well. So now you know twice a must as most players. Throw in fret (10) **D G B E** and you are bordering on becoming an expert ;-)

By sharpening all the notes of the open, fret (5) and fret (10), G# C# E# A#, C# F# A# D# and D# G# B# E# you have six frets memorized.

Fret (12) contains the same names as the open string. So, by flattening fret (12), (10) and (5) Gb Cb Eb Ab, Db Gb Bb Eb and Cb Fb Ab Db you now have 9 frets. Almost the whole fingerboard.

## *Learning the names of the notes of the fingerboard is easier than you think.*



### Finally learn the notes of the neck...

Beyond knowing the names of the open strings most ukulele players find it hard to learn the whole fingerboard.

If your goal is to finally learn the names of the notes on the ukulele fingerboard for your favorite tuning or all three common tunings, including the low tuning variations of each. Then "Learning the Ukulele Fingerboard" is your answer. "Learning the Ukulele Fingerboard" has a step by step approach to finally mastering the ukulele fingerboard.

Covers the three common ukulele tunings: "C", "D" and "G" tuning.

## Technique - Fretting Hand

### Developing Single Note Ukulele Chops

The fretting hand, left hand for right hand players and right hand for left hand players, is responsible for fretting single notes, intervals, triads and chords. Pretty much anything other than the open strings.

*“One day of practice is like one day of clean living. It doesn’t do you any good.” - Abe Lemmons*

Although I started life out left handed. I was converted to right handed in grade school. For the lessons and articles on my site I’ll assume the most of the world plays the ukulele right handed, fretting with the left hand and strumming with the right.

It is critical that you develop the finger strength and independence to explore your full musical potential. By developing great left hand technique you will be able to explore more challenging musical situations.

To develop this great left hand technique there is a series of graduated drills or finger gymnastics that will allow you to play at higher and higher levels and increase your the comfort zone of usable technique.

*Gymnastics is the performance of a sequence of movements requiring physical strength, flexibility, and kinesthetic awareness...*

### Finger Gymnastics

All exercises should be played SLOW with an even tone and volume. Speed comes from practicing accurate, slow and under control.

All exercises can be played with the fingers, thumb, pick or any combination of each.



## Finger Names and Numbers

There are probably some fancy names for the fretting hand like there are for the plucking hand used in classical guitar instruction - but I'll go with this easy to remember assignment of numbers to fingers that typically play notes.

**Finger 1** is your index finger or pointer finger

**Finger 2** is your middle finger

**Finger 3** is your ring finger

**Finger 4** is your pinky finger

*"I know you've heard it a thousand times before. But it's true--hard work pays off. If you want to be good, you have to practice, practice, practice."*  
- A.J. English

## One Note Finger Gymnastics

Taking each finger, one at time, play a single note on each string using the same fret for each. You should be able to do this using any fret. Apply only enough pressure to play the note cleanly. Anymore and it is a waste of energy.

### Finger One Gymnastics

Examples are shown in standard "C" tuning, g C E A. However, tuning does not matter and the exercises are tuning independent. They can even be played on an out of tune ukulele.

The exercises can be done at any fret. Example shown starting at fret (5) with the finger indicated above the note and TAB.



## Things to Watch for...

- **Keep your fingertips pointing to the strings.**

Regardless of which finger is playing at the time - each finger should remain pointing to the fingerboard and the strings at all times. Keep them hanging out over the fingerboard ready to go.

- **Don't move fingers more than needed.**

Fingers only have to come off the string just enough to not interfere other notes sounding.

- **Play right behind the fret.**

For single notes play right behind the fret. This position requires the least amount of physical effort to play a note. Any further from the fret requires more effort than necessary.

- **Thumbs Job?**

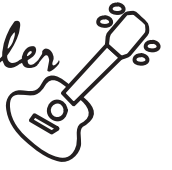
The thumbs main job when playing the ukulele is to support the fingers. Not to hold the neck of the ukulele up or hang your arm off the neck. Think of the process that is used to squeeze something between your fingertips and thumb. The position that offers the most support is right behind the dominant fingers 1 and 2 and behind of the neck.

A lot of technique has nothing to do with music and is simply what is the most biomechanically efficient way achieve the desired result.

## Finger Two Gymnastics

The image shows musical notation for an exercise titled "Finger Two Gymnastics". It consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains seven eighth notes, each with a "2" above it, indicating the second finger. The notes are: F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, and E5. The middle staff is a tenor clef with a "T" above it, and contains six whole notes, each with a "6" below it, indicating the sixth string. The notes are: F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a "B" below it, and contains six whole notes, each with a "6" below it, indicating the sixth string. The notes are: F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5.

Be sure to play all exercises ascending-descending and descending -ascending.



## Finger Three Gymnastics

## Finger Four Gymnastics

## 2, 3 and 4 Note Gymnastics

### *Two Note-Two Finger Model*

*“There is a right and a wrong way to do everything. If you practice eight hours a day doing something the wrong way, you will become very good at doing it the wrong way.” - Michael Jordan*



**🎸 Things to Watch for...**

The things to watch for with these 2, 3, and 4 notes gymnastics are the same as the one finger gymnastics, plus...

• **Don't move fingers more than needed**

If the next note is higher and on the same string keep the current finger down. An example would be when doing the two note exercise: 1 2. Keep finger one down while playing finger two. Move fingering one to the next string while playing finger two.

*"I learned that the only way you are going to get anywhere in life is to work hard at it. Whether you're a musician, a writer, an athlete or a businessman, there is no getting around it. If you do, you'll win—if you don't, you won't." - Bruce Jenner*

**All Possible Two Finger Combinations**

There are twelve possible two finger combinations. These can be played using the *Two Note-Two Finger Model* above starting on any fret.

1 2 ( <i>Above model</i> )	2 3	2 1	3 2
1 3	2 4	3 1	4 2
1 4	3 4	4 1	4 3

**All Possible Three Finger Combinations**

There are 24 possible 3 finger combinations.

123	231	213	321
124	234	214	324
132	241	312	421
134	243	314	423
142	341	412	431
143	342	413	432

Curt Sheller is the author of over 20 books on guitar, ukulele and music. A jazz guitarist and educator with over 40 years playing experience and 20 years teaching. Curt's [JazzGuitarResources.com](http://JazzGuitarResources.com) and [UkuleleResources.com](http://UkuleleResources.com) web sites are considered the top resource for jazz guitarists and ukulele players. Get a FREE subscription to Curt's newsletter.

Curt Sheller is available for clinics, workshops and concerts. Visit [CurtSheller.com](http://CurtSheller.com) for details.