



<http://uketalk.com/index.html>

ukulele information for ukulele fans, uke players and luthiers
ukulele bulletin board for discussion of ukuleles

Ukulele Playing Tips--The little things you need to know!

It's all about the tone- For discovering the best tone in your ukulele, make sure that as much area of the uke as possible is not pressed and damped against your arms and chest. Hold most of the length and width of the back of your ukulele slightly away from your body. Poise so that only the very back edges of the uke make contact with your body, leaving the wide open back of the uke free to resonate. This may mean tipping the uke up slightly, or it may be more comfortable to tip it outwards, as if you're beginning to point it at someone. (In most parts of the world, it is not a crime to point your ukulele at people).

Also be sure to not lay your arm across the front of the soundboard, as this will also prevent the wood from resonating freely in response to your playing. If you need to compromise for the sake of gravity and comfort, keep in mind that the top soundboard is the most important area of the uke when it comes to sound.

Speak up! Finding your ukulele's best voice has a lot to do with the tone tip just above, and it also can be affected by where and how you strum and pick your ukulele. Most ukuleles have a "sweet spot" located at the area where your fingerboard extends over the uke. In the case of ukes that don't have extended fingerboards, you'll generally find the sweet spot in the same area. Whereas this will probably be the warmest sound response, other effects are achieved by moving your strumming hand closer to the sound hole or even as far as the bridge. Listen to the differences and make them work for you for making your songs sound different from each other.

Tuning is a necessity, not an option- Electronic tuners can be purchased for under \$20 these days. No discussion necessary, just get one. But next, what if your uke or new strings can't get and stay in tune? It's probably not you; strings need to be well stretched before they'll cooperate.

Tune to pitch and strum for several seconds, retune and re-strum, repeat etc. Breaking in new strings varies among string brands and playing styles, but you should plan on allowing a few days for your new set to fully cooperate and stay in tune. You can assist the initial stretching by gently pulling the string a couple times and retuning. If your tuning pegs slip and won't hold the string, use a small screwdriver to gently tighten the screw at the end of the tuning peg. This may need to be done on occasion so always keep that small screwdriver handy.

Remember your graded school teacher "Sit up straight!" Good posture encourages good playing. Position and play in a relaxed manner and not tensed. Be sure your strumming wrist is as straight as possible. On your fretting hand, resist the temptation to wrap your entire hand around the neck. When possible, use your fingers and thumb like a clamp, from front to back. Often you'll find the neck must cradle in the palm of your hand, but be sure to not hold on tight (it won't get away). Work towards "effortless" playing. (Playing effortlessly is difficult; I do agree... what type of weird irony is that?)

"Vary your strokes!" This line comes direct from our [UkeTalk interview with Joel Eckhaus](#), a former student of string wizard Roy Smeck. When strumming your ukulele, you'll want to find as many ways as possible to make each song sound different. Here's a couple of my tricks, and we'll add more later: Each song has a certain rhythm that will make it sound right, and within that, you can add more strokes, subtract a few, and break up the rhythm in between verses with a little roll-

strum (use more fingers on the stroke) or chord choking (slightly release your tension on your fretting hand and keeping strumming).

Don't just play it- feel it! A good way to spice up your playing style is by adding a little vibrato to your notes. Instead of just holding the fretted note still, rhythmically wiggle your finger very slightly from side to side as you press down on the note. You'll hear a lovely vibrato effect (think BB King) that makes your playing a little more flavorful. Hints: This works well all over the fingerboard, but especially well on higher notes as it helps to sustain them longer. You can also use your vibrato effect on full chords. This is a little trickier to do, but sounds great and well worth the effort.

Extra benefit of adding a slight vibrato to your higher notes: If your uke is not enjoying perfect intonation in the higher register, tastefully wiggling the notes will slightly distract from the intonation error.

Make a list and check it twice! It's never too early or too late to start a list of the ukulele songs you play. Trust me; you will forget about some as you learn more. I like to categorize my list by standards, pop, folk/blues, TV/movie, etc.

Record your playing- A great way to recognize your best and worst playing is to record a few songs. No matter how good or bad you feel it is, keep it and listen a few weeks later and compare to your current playing. This will alert you to aspects of your musicianship that need attention. (Much better than having someone else mention it...)

What's my strumming hand supposed to be doing? The index finger is the main ingredient. You can just use that alone up and down to get the rhythm going. Then a roll strum; just brush the pinky, index finger and thumb of the right hand down across the strings, then up with just the index finger and repeat, make your hand act like you are going to pick up a round object like a ball or an orange, keeping it loose and relaxed at all times. Try to incorporate different rhythmic touches with a little bit of time, but go slow. Eventually you will pick up speed and vary the rolls and index finger to sound like quite an attack. Just be patient, take your time and think rhythmically. (*Thanks to Vincent Cortese for this description*).

"Practice makes practice perfect"- I love this line! I grabbed it from Dominator. To expand on that, Dominator explains "An amateur practices until they get it right and a professional practices until they can't get it wrong". Visit [Dominator's site](#) for more playing tips, ukulele tablature and mp3, and lots of good uke reading.