

Ukulele Basics

Everyone who is right-handed strums the ukulele with their right hand. The left hand supports the ukulele on the neck near the nut

If you hold the string down on to the neck, as you move closer to the body of the ukulele the notes get higher. This is called playing up the neck.

The 1st string is nearest the floor.
The 4th string is nearest the ceiling.

How To Tune The Ukulele

You can tune a ukulele relatively to the other strings with “My Dog Has Fleas” but if you are playing with others you need to know the exact notes.

1st String = A
2nd String = E
3rd String = C
4th String = G

You can find help for tuning on the internet or tune to a piano but the easiest way to tune a ukulele is with an electronic tuner.

How To Hold The Ukulele

You can get a good sound out of a ukulele by holding it in many ways but if you choose a ‘lazy’ way and don’t make a good sound then I’ll complain. The best way is to hold the ukulele in front of you with the base of the ukulele in your right elbow. Support it with gentle pressure and the shape of the ribs mean that the neck moves forward. Gently put some counter-pressure on the neck with your left hand. Too much pressure and you are working too hard. Too little pressure and you drop the ukulele.

Strumming Technique

Gently make a light fist and touch your thumb and index finger together. Stroke the strings downwards with the nail of your index finger. Do this on every beat. If you stroke the strings upwards it is a softer sound as the pad of the index finger touches the strings first. This is the & in 1& 2& 3& 4&. The numbers are the downward stroke.

Rest Strokes (walking)

A rest stroke (or walking) is mainly used for making melodies stand out. It has the name ‘rest’ because after it has played the string your finger rests on the next string. Play the first string with the tip of your index finger immediately followed by the nail and then rest on the second string. Follow this on the same string with the middle finger. When you walk you use two legs. With this technique you use two fingers. If it helps you remember then think of playing the same note alternatively with middle and index fingers as walking on the spot.

Free Strokes (running)

A free stroke (or running) is mainly used for fingering, and when notes are played in quick succession you need a quick method of playing. In this technique the movement is from the finger joint only. The hand stays still. A small movement will mean the string is played and your finger will be ready almost immediately to play that string again.

A progression for practising free stroke is to designate digits to strings. The thumb takes the fourth string and plays with a downward movement. The index takes the third string, the middle takes the second string and the ring takes the first string. Practice playing any chord with the left hand and play strings 4,3,2,1 rhythmically with the designated digit. In classical guitar this is called an arpeggio and has its derivation in sounding like a harp.

Try strings 4,3,2,1 for any 4/4 rhythm (other patterns are available) and 4,3,2,1,2,3 for any 3/4 rhythm. These patterns often work well throughout slower songs.

Left-Hand Technique

The left hand (for right-handed players) gently supports the ukulele neck near the nut and is also used to press the strings against the neck. This makes the string shorter and changes the pitch of the note. Pitch is how high or low the note is. The shorter the string the higher the pitch.

In general:-

The first finger of the left hand looks after the first fret. The second finger looks after the second fret. The third finger looks after the third fret. The fourth finger looks after the fourth fret.

Left-Hand Exercise

Gentle pressure on the string presses it against the neck. The length of string is not from your finger but from the fret nearer to the body. Don't touch that fret because it won't sound good. You have to press between the frets.

Practice playing the open first string, walking or running. Then play the first fret with the first finger. For the next note add the second finger, then add the third finger and then add the fourth finger. Make sure you are adding fingers and not replacing them.

Then take away the fourth finger, then the third finger, then the second finger and then the first finger.

This is very good practice to let your fingers know where the frets are.