

*Beginning*  
**Mandolin**  
Instruction Course



with Audio Tracks, Tablature  
and Chord Diagrams

by Bradley Laird

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# MANDOLIN INSTRUCTION COURSE

*Lessons for Beginning Mandolin Students*

Written and Illustrated by Brad Laird

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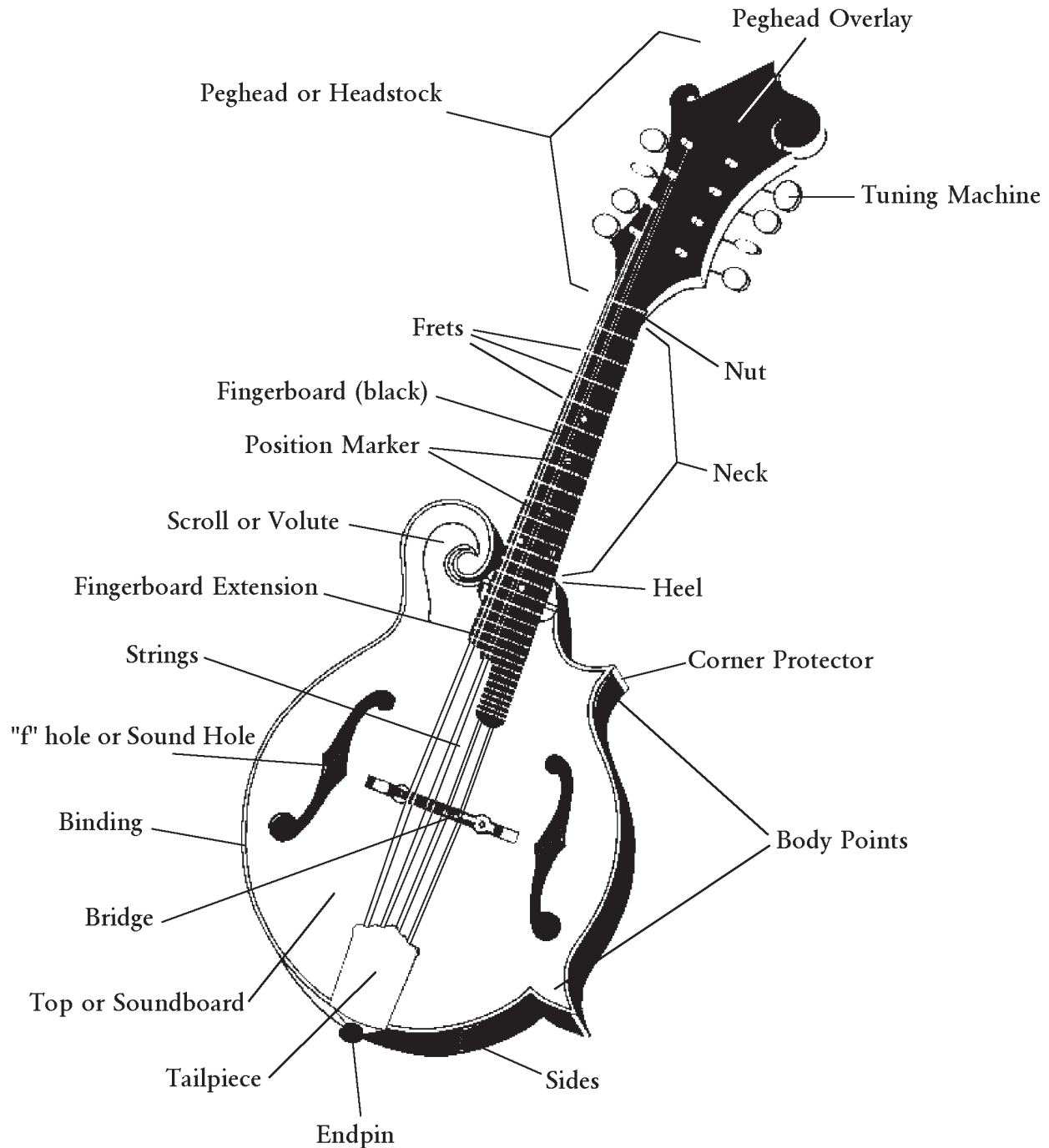
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# LESSON 1

## Getting Started

This illustration, borrowed from my book “The Mandolin Handbook”, should help you learn the names of the basic parts of a mandolin.



Please explore my book “The Mandolin Handbook” if you would like to learn more about the history of the mandolin, how mandolins are constructed, how to set up your mandolin for easier playing and better sound, and many other topics.

## **INTRODUCTION**

I wrote this book about ten years ago specifically for my own private lesson students and made it available on the internet but I never published it in a paper and ink format. Many readers of my books, “Mandolin Master Class” and “Mandolin Training Camp”, have asked if I have a beginning mandolin method book.

There are many good beginning mandolin books on the market, but I wanted to create something which taught certain important concepts right in the early stages. Most books teach how to tune, read tab and then set about teaching you ten or so tunes and some chords. In this book I do the same thing but I interject other important ideas as you are learning your first songs. I cover things such as “transposition” which most other beginning methods make no mention of. Learning about transposition early can really boost your ability to play in other keys and it points you in the direction of being able to improvise solos later.

I don't cover improvisation in this beginning course, but I lay the groundwork so that when you move along to studying “Mandolin Master Class” and “Mandolin Training Camp” you will not have that “deer in the headlights” look. You will already have been introduced to major scales, arpeggios, how chords are created, the chromatic scale, transposition, how to practice effectively, etc.

## **VIDEO REFERENCES**

No amount of written material can adequately explain how to hold the pick, how to tune, etc. I have already created video lessons which show how to do many things. Where appropriate, I will sometimes suggest that you watch a video which I created that illustrates some technique or concept. You will find links to the videos marked in this book. Nearly all of the videos referenced are viewable for free on the internet.

## **ABOUT THE AUDIO TRACKS**

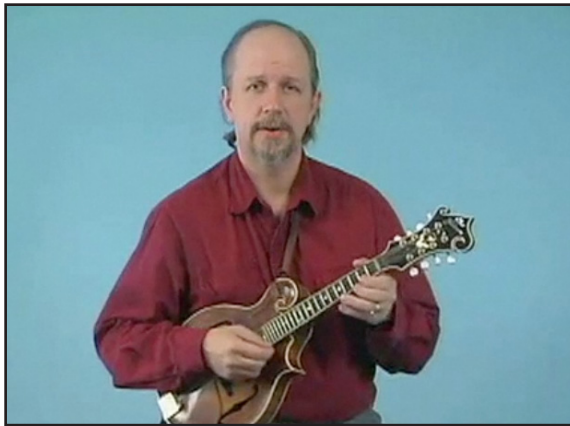
To ensure absolute accuracy I have created the audio tracks using the very software which I used to prepare the tablature. I have set the playback speeds slow enough that you can play along and verify that you are playing the correct notes.

In the event that your PDF reader will not play the embedded audio tracks, I have also included them as MP3 tracks in a folder which came with your download. You can use any MP3 audio player software (such as iTunes) to play the tracks.

One of the nice things about using the computer generated audio tracks is that the timing and pitch of the notes is very reliable and accurate. If you examine very many music instructional books you'll often find slight differences between the recorded versions and the printed versions. Using the software generated audio eliminates this.

## HOW TO HOLD THE MANDOLIN

Here is an image from my free video “Getting Started” showing how to hold the mandolin while playing. Notice that I am using a strap to support the instrument.



## HOW TO HOLD THE PICK

There are a wide variety of types of picks available for use when playing a mandolin. I encourage you to try many different types to see what works best for you. I personally like to use teardrop shaped celluloid picks.



Hold the pick in your left hand by grabbing about a 1/4” of the tip of the pick:



Then, raise your right hand up and form a loose curled fist. Insert the pick between the thumb and forefinger. Hold the pick loosely. Use just enough thumb pressure to keep from dropping the pick.

Here is how the pick is held when playing the strings:



*Note: These photographs are from the free mandolin videos which I filmed for [www.freemandolinvideos.com](http://www.freemandolinvideos.com) I invite you to explore all of the mandolin video lessons which you will find on their site.*

### Suggested Video

Please watch the free video called “Getting Started” and then come back to continue.

### ABOUT THE MANDOLIN AND THE STRINGS

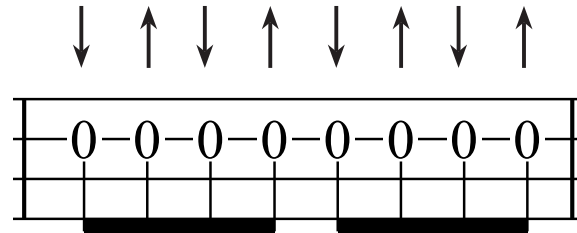
There are 8 strings on the mandolin. More correctly I suppose we should call them wires, but everyone calls them strings so I will too. The 8 strings are tuned in pairs. One pair, the thinnest of the group, is tuned to an E note. They are called the “E string.” Treat them like identical twins. They are tuned precisely to the same pitch and you play them as if they were one string.

Next we find the slightly fatter pair of A strings. They are tuned to an A note, of course. We call these two the second string.

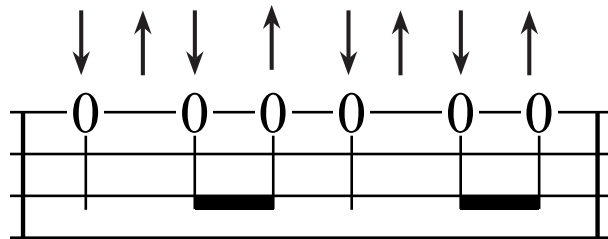
Next in line is the D string. It is also known as the third string. Of course, it is a pair of strings like all of the rest. The D string, you will no doubt notice, is constructed in a different manner than the A and E. It is a core of steel wound with a spiral of a copper-bearing metal. The purpose of this winding is to add mass to the string thereby slowing its vibration down. This results in a lower musical pitch when set in motion.

While here, let me explain a bit about how strings produce musical tones. A string, when attached at the ends, and left free to vibrate throughout its length, will oscillate back and forth when struck with a pick. The **length** of the string, the **tension** of the string and the **mass** of the string all act in concert to determine the resulting frequency of the vibration. Once set in motion, the vibration of the string imparts its energy upon the bridge and is then transferred to the sounding board (the top or face) of the instrument.

To be absolutely certain you understand this pick direction concept here is one measure of steady 8th notes with the pick directions marked for you. It's down-up four times.



Here is another measure showing the pick movement when playing quarters and 8ths together. Notice that there is an upstroke following the quarter note. The pick must be brought back up to the top before the pair of 8th can be played. This upstroke misses the strings--just barely-- but keeps the picking hand in motion in its steady down-up pattern.



Note that if that first note was a stand alone 8th note followed by an 8th note rest it would sound exactly the same and be played exactly the same way and with the same rhythm.

## EXERCISE 7 - REPEAT SIGNS

Measures enclosed by the repeat signs are played twice. The double bar with the dots is a repeat sign. The dots point inward to the enclosed section. To play this you would play measure one twice and then play measures two through four twice. Also notice that the stems can point up or down. They are written both ways and played the same.

A musical score for Exercise 7. It consists of two staves, Treble (T) and Bass (B). The first measure is enclosed in a repeat sign (double bar with dots). The second and third measures are also enclosed in repeat signs. The fourth measure is not enclosed. The notes are eighth notes and quarter notes. Above the staff, there are thick black bars under some groups of notes. To the right of the score is a rectangular box containing a play button icon, representing an audio track.

Listen to the audio track and follow along in your mind to be sure you understand how repeat signs work. These are also some useful pick control exercises, especially measure four! Use the metronome tracks to practice these at higher speeds.

# BASIC BLUEGRASS BACKUP

Here again is the song **Boil 'Em Cabbage Down** which you learned earlier. We are really only going to pay attention to the measures and the chord letters marked above the notes. These indicate which chords are used to play good sounding backup for this tune.

## BOIL 'EM CABBAGE DOWN



Two musical staves for guitar. The first staff has four measures with chords A, D, A, and E above them. The second staff has five measures with chords A, D, A, E, and A above them. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 below the notes.

Staff 1: A (4-4-4-4-4-4), D (5-5-5-5-5-5), A (4-4-4-4-4-4), E (2-2-2-2-2-2). Fingerings: 2 2 2, 3 3 3, 2 2 2, 1 1 1.

Staff 2: A (4-4-4-4-4-4), D (5-5-5-5-5-5), A (4-4-4-2-2-2), E (0-0-0-0-0-0), A (0-0-0-0-0-0). Fingerings: 2 2 2, 3 3 3, 2, 1.

As you can see the song uses the A, D and E chords. By the way, when you see a chord marked with a single capital letter like "D" that means D major. If it were minor it would be marked Dm. We'll get to minor chords later. But, just remember that a single capital letter means major. A = A major. C = C major. Got it?

To play the chords for this song, which are A, D and E, we can do it by using these two chord forms:

**A Major Chord**

**D Major Chord**

Turn to the next page and I'll explain how we are going to play 3 chords with 2 shapes!