

Chapter 4

Guitar Notation

Music notation maps the pitch and duration of all the notes of a piece of music. Music notation, by itself, is universal: everyone who reads music can understand the notes in the example below. Most instruments have special additional notations which give information needed to play that instrument. Guitar notation has many elements. The most important are outlined below.



← Look at this example of pure music notation. Until guitar notation is added, there is no way to know which strings or fingering to use.

Guitar notation, added to music notation, shows what strings and fingers to use to play the notes. Guitar notation consists of symbols for left and right hand fingers, the guitar strings, and the *position* to play in.

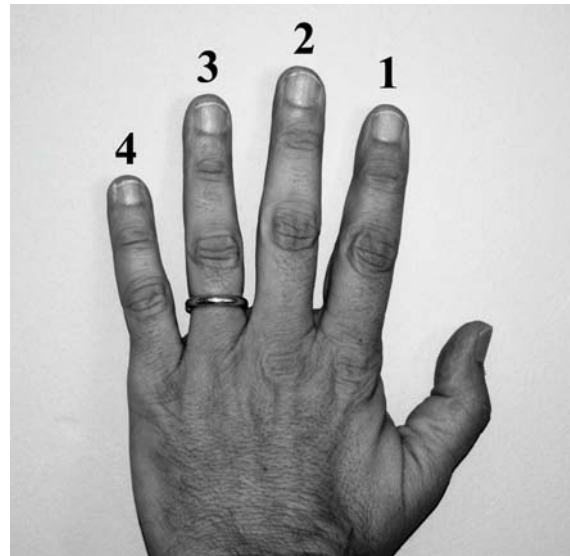
Left Hand Notation

Fingerings for the left hand are indicated with numbers:

- 1 = index finger**
- 2 = middle finger**
- 3 = ring finger**
- 4 = small finger**
- 0 = open string ***

* Open String

An *open string* is when the note to be played is plucked by the right hand *without* using the left hand. The sound made, of course, is the pitch that the string is tuned to. The notation for an open string is the symbol "0" → **0**

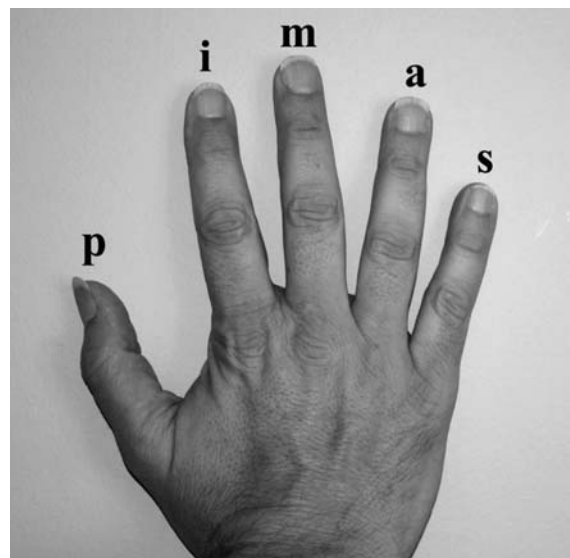


Right Hand Notation

Fingerings for the right hand are indicated with letters. They are derived from the Spanish words for the fingers, although we use the letter "s" for the small finger.

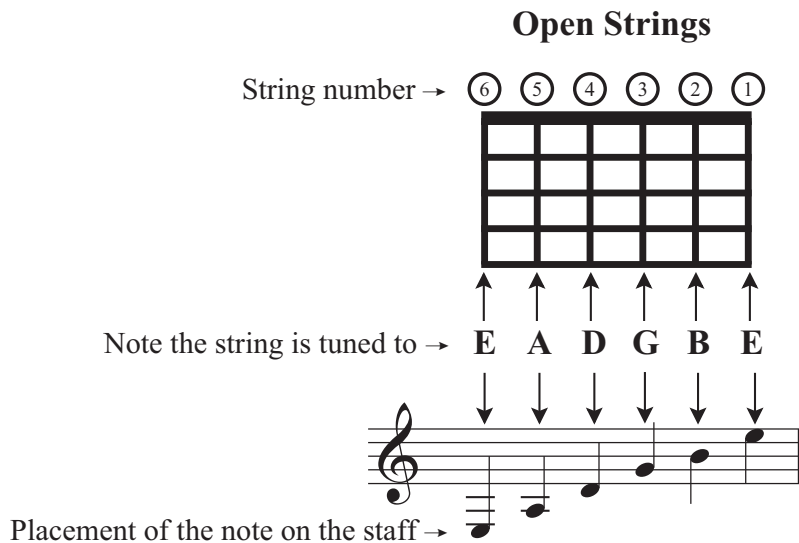
- p = thumb**
- i = index finger**
- m = middle finger**
- a = ring finger**
- s = small finger**

The small finger of the right hand is only used in flamenco music. Chapter 28, on [Flamenco](#), illustrates the *rasgueado* strum that uses the small finger.



String Notation

Each string is named by the *note* to which it is tuned and is numbered as follows: the high E string is called the 1st string, the B string is called the 2nd string, etc. When you see a circle with a number in it, that tells which string the note is to be played on. For example: ③ means to play the note on the 3rd string. Study the fretboard diagram below to see how this notation works:

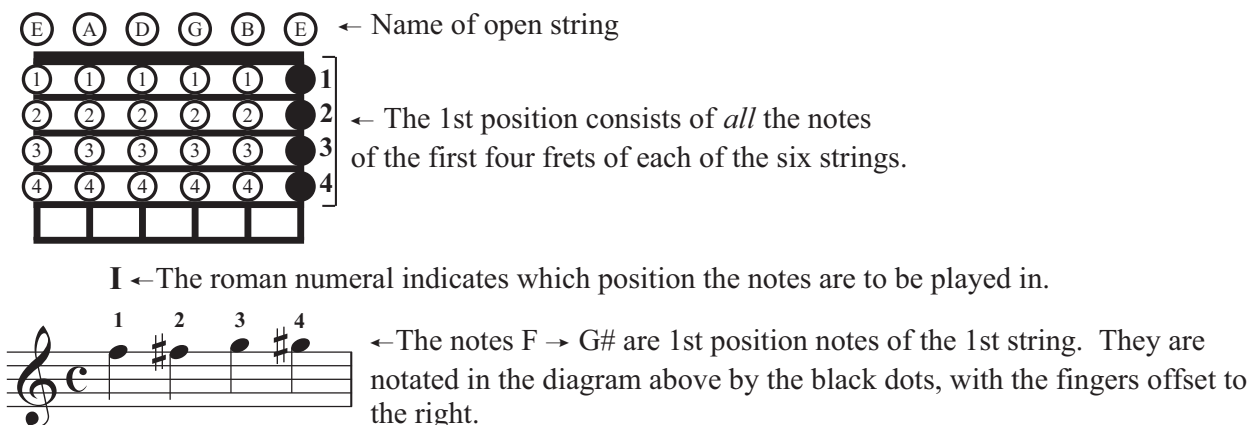


Notation of *Position* for the Left Hand

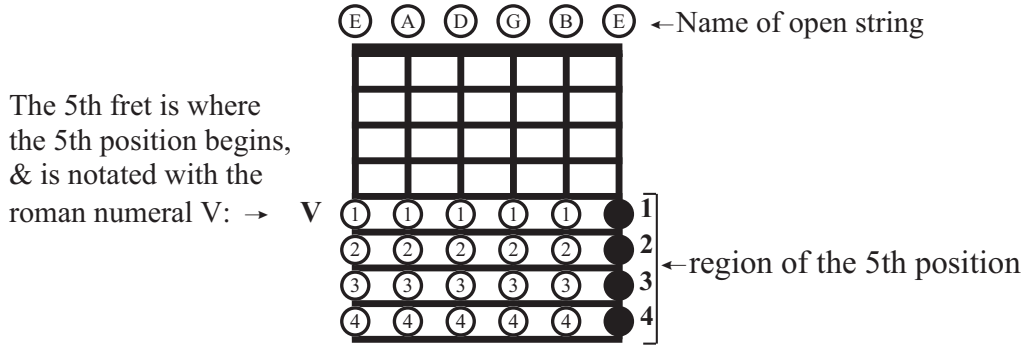
The term *position* refers to *where* on the fretboard your left hand is stationed. It is defined by which fret the left hand index finger is oriented to. When the index finger is playing the *first* fret of any of the six strings the hand is said to be in the *first* position. In the first position the left hand spreads each of its fingers, one for each fret, from the 1st to the 4th fret. As long as the 1st finger is oriented to the first fret of any string, that is the first position.

Roman numerals are used to indicate position. That is: **I = 1st position**
II = 2nd position, etc.

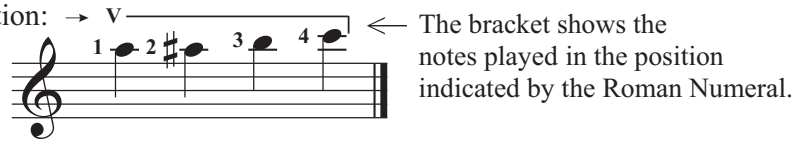
The "hollow" circles with numbers in the fretboard example below show where the fingers *can* be placed within the 1st position. The *region* of the 1st position notes is diagrammed below:



To further illustrate the concept of position, look at this diagram below of notes in the 5th position:



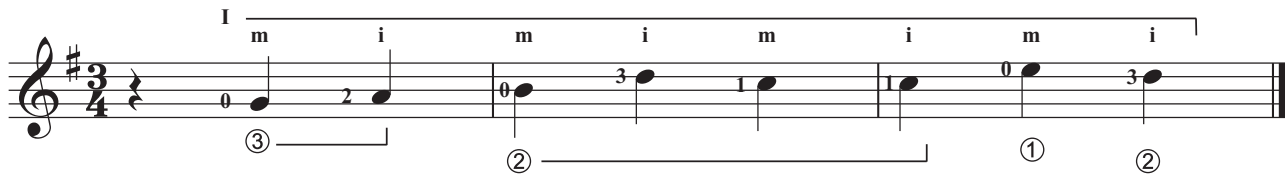
The notes A → C are played on the 1st string, starting in the 5th position: → V



At first you will be learning music almost entirely in the 1st and 2nd positions. Many novices assume that the higher positions are more difficult to play in. Actually, if anything, they are easier to play *once* you know the note locations. Higher positions are easier because the higher frets are closer together and the fingers do not have to stretch nearly as much along the horizontal axis of the strings.

For now, begin to work with the concept of position playing without trying to fill in every detail. Below are the first three measures of the melody of J. S. Bach's *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring*. Example one contains complete fingering notation for the 1st position. The 2nd example is notated for playing in the 2nd position.

Example 1: in the 1st position:



Example 2: in the 2nd position:

The 2nd fret is where the 2nd position begins, & is notated with the roman numeral II: → II

