

## Picks and Picking Techniques

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A widespread misconception among guitarists is that the left - or grasping hand is the decisive factor in guitar playing. The picking hand and the way it is struck only receive a rather marginal attention. But this view is wrong. This is also the reason why I will now go into more detail in this article about the different types of picking and even more about the choice of the plectrum, if you want to play with a plectrum:

### 1. Picking Techniques

There are many different techniques which have their advantages, disadvantages and characteristics. Of course it is almost impossible to learn all of them. A first decision is made when choosing the preferred playing style. But it is also possible to learn more than one technique during the course of development. This happens mostly when you want to learn a certain style.

#### 1.1. Fingerpicking

Here there are the most different picking techniques which I would like to introduce briefly:

**Classic :** This is where we play with our fingers. The special thing about this playing technique is that the fingernails of the striking hand are allowed to grow in order to have a better grip on the strings. Many classical guitarists have to take special care of their nails to prevent them from breaking or becoming brittle under the strain. The advantage of this technique is obvious. You have much more orchestral possibilities on the guitar. This refers mainly to independent movements of the thumb and the other fingers. For example, you can play a bassline independent of the chords.

**Flamenco :** The picking technique is very similar to the classical one. The main difference is that flamenco is played much more percussively. This is also the reason why flamenco guitars have an additional small board in the attack area. This board is very stressed by the percussive way of playing and can be replaced when it is too worn out without having to replace the whole guitar.

**Jazz :** Jazz guitarists do not have long fingernails. The point here is to get a softer sound with your fingers and to be able to produce a somewhat richer sound with fingerpicking than would be possible with a pick. Single notes are preferably played with the thumb. If you look at the octavated playing of Wes Montgomery, for example, an alternating stroke with the thumb is practiced to produce this typical sound.

**Steelstring Guitars :** In styles where the steel-string guitar is preferred, fingerpicking is played either with a special pick for the thumb only or for the whole hand. The picks are placed on the fingers and imitate the fingernails as they are used in the classical technique. The picks simply sound better on the steel-sided guitar than if you played with long nails. In addition, the nails on the steel sides would be stressed even more than usual.

**Touch Technique :** Here you strike the fingerboard with all fingers of your right and left hand and play the guitar like a pianist. The sound is only produced by pressing the string on the fingerboard. The advantage of this technique is the extended possibilities of expression, especially in the orchestral range. With the Touch Technique it is also possible to play chords with the gripping hand and to play melodies or solos with the picking hand. The disadvantage is that it takes a long time to learn the basic movements and this technique is not suitable for beginners because you have to know the guitar very well to really enjoy the advantages of this technique.

## **2. Work with a pic**

The most common way of playing the guitar and electric guitar is playing with a plectrum. Here you hold a small triangular or triangle-like connecting piece, preferably made of plastic, between the thumb and the index finger of the picking hand and strike the strings with it. The plectrum is usually held at a 90 degree angle to the thumb. When choosing a plectrum, one is always spoilt for choice because of the wide range of shapes, hardnesses and materials. There is also no rule which plectrum is the best. The decision is always personal. But what you should avoid is that you change the type of plectrum again and again (e.g. different hardnesses or shapes). This way you can never really get used to one way of playing and one type of plectrum and you will have difficulties to get a really well-founded striking technique. What is quite possible, however, is that you change the type and hardness of the plectrum in the course of time because you have developed your playing further. This kind of change is harmless. You should simply not change the plectrum every month.

There are the most diverse plectrums. To describe these would lead too far, but a short info to some features will be helpful for choosing the right plectrum:

### **Strength of the plectrum :**

There are different strengths from very soft to very hard:

Soft plectrums are preferably used with rhythm guitars because they produce a softer sound and make it easier to change chords. For solo playing very soft plectrums are not necessarily suitable because the control is made more difficult by the yielding of the plectrum. Exception : Pat Matheny : He uses a very soft plectrum and also holds it upside down.

Hard plectrums are more suitable for solo playing and rhythm playing with power chords. With a hard plectrum you have the optimal control for fast solo playing, but you have to make some concessions on the rhythm guitar or modify the attack technique a little.

In general it has to be said that in the end you have to adjust the plectrum to your individual playing style and if necessary make modifications to compensate for the disadvantages of a certain plectrum.

### **Different materials :**

Plastic ( most )

Wood

Horn

Stone ( gives a sensational sound for slow playing, not suitable for fast playing )