

# How To Travis Pick

## 4 Simple Patterns For The Fingerstyle Guitarist

With Audio  
Included



Dan Thorpe

How To Travis  
Pick: 4 Simple  
Patterns For The  
Fingerstyle  
Guitarist

by

Dan Thorpe

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# Introduction

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**Travis picking** is a wonderful and distinctive style of fingerpicking that takes its name from the great **Merle Travis** who popularized this style of playing in the 1940s and 50s.

He didn't invent the style but he made it very popular amongst roots, traditional, folk, country and even some rock musicians.

There are lots and lots of songs that use this style of picking and you'll see a list of some of those later on in the book.

Get good at Travis picking and you'll be well on your way to becoming good at fingerpicking.

If you have ever read my blog and watched any of my lessons at [Guitar Domination](http://guitardomination.net), you will know how much I love to fingerpick. I was once not really very good at it.

I didn't really know what my fingers should be doing and I didn't

have any awareness of specific Travis style patterns.

This really hampered me when I tried learning how to play some fingerpicking songs.

I remember attempting Ralph McTell's classic number — [`Streets of London`](#).

I remember not getting very far with it because my picking hand was all over the place.

### **That changed when I learnt to Travis Pick.**

Travis picking quickly became the backbone of my fingerstyle guitar playing and I quickly realised how many songs actually used this style.

There is, of course, a lot more to fingerpicking than just Travis picking, but it is a great place to start.

Before we get stuck into the four Travis picking patterns in the book, **let's first find out exactly what Travis picking is.**

The most distinctive thing about Travis picking is the **alternating**

**bass** combined with picking on the higher strings.

If that sounds confusing at all, fear not. It is actually very simple and I'll show you how to Travis pick in the simplest way from the very first example.

There are four examples in this book. The first is simple and each one gets slightly harder, but not too hard!

Each example has an **A section and a B section**.

The A section features **no 'pinch'** and the B section features a **'pinch'** on the first beat.

When we get to the examples, you'll discover all four examples in detail, along with what a 'pinch' is, how to play it, and you'll hear the patterns in action via the audio 'playalongs'.



# Essential Tips To

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# Get You Started

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If you have never Travis picked, or indeed fingerpicked before, then the following will help you get started...

## Viewing The Tab

Viewing images clearly on a Kindle can be notoriously difficult. Therefore, if you are reading this book on a Kindle, you may need to double click on the image or pinch it to expand it so you can see the tab clearly. Also, depending on your Kindle you may need to turn the Kindle 90 degrees.

If you find this still doesn't work and you can't see the tab clearly, you can [download just the tab here](#) as a PDF and print this out and keep it next to you while going through the book.

If you are reading the PDF version of the book, you can zoom in to see the tab clearer.

## The Patterns

Each of the **four patterns** in this book comes with both a **slow version and a fast version** of the audio so you can hear the patterns in action and play-along with them.

The patterns are one bar in length and are played for four times on each chord in the audio playalongs.

That means you will get:

**- 4 bars of G**

**AND**

**- 4 bars of C**

...on each recording.

When learning the patterns, it's very important to follow the exact rhythm. Three out of the four patterns have six plucks, but these plucks are in a different order and, most importantly, use different rhythms.

It's these rhythms that give each of the patterns its own unique flavour.

In the real world you may find that you only play one bar (or maybe two bars) on each chord before changing, but **whenever you are learning something new with your picking hand it is useful to practice it on one chord for a longer period of time (i.e. four bars).**

Doing it this way will give you less things to think about.

Look at it this way, if you were to change chord every bar AND be learning these patterns, then that is a lot to think about.

Each of the patterns is taught with **bass string plucks** played with the **thumb** and **G string** plucks played with the **index finger**.

This is done for simplicities sake and to keep things consistent to make it easier for you to learn.

Once you have learnt the patterns, feel free to swap the **G string plucks** for **B string** or **high E string** plucks. Doing so will add more flavour to the patterns.

This is highly encouraged for you to get the best out of these patterns.

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Go to <http://guitardomination.net> for more free articles and guitar resources

## [The Audio Playalongs](#)

Also, don't forget **the audio is designed for you to play along** with, so listen to the fast version first and then try and playalong with the slow version.

You can either stream the audio or download all sixteen tracks in one handy zip file so you can store them and listen to them on your computer using your favourite media player.

The descriptions have already been done for you too. So just 'unzip' the folder and then press play.

[Click HERE to download or stream the audio for this eBook](#)

Go through each Travis picking pattern as many times as it takes to **get comfortable playing them and as soon as you feel reasonably comfortable try playing along with the recordings.**

This will ensure your timing, accuracy and tone will be up to the highest standard.

# Terminology

To avoid confusion throughout this book I will refer to the fingers and strings of the guitar in a certain way.

## Strings

The six strings of the guitar will be described as their **open string notes** and NOT their string number.

**6 = Low E**

**5 = A**

**4 = D**

**3 = G**

**2 = B**

**1 = High E**

You may call the low E the “sixth string” but I will describe it as the “low E” string.

This makes it easier for most students to understand.

## *Fingers*

Throughout the book, I will describe the fingers of both the fretting and picking hands by their names and not their numbers.

**Thumb**

**Index**

**Middle**

**Ring**

**Pinkie**



## *Which fingers pick which string?*

Generally, when fingerpicking the:

**Thumb plays the bass strings (low E, A and D)**

**Index finger plays G string**

**Middle finger plays B string**

**Ring finger plays high E string**

Follow this guideline throughout and you'll find that being consistent with the above will yield better results.

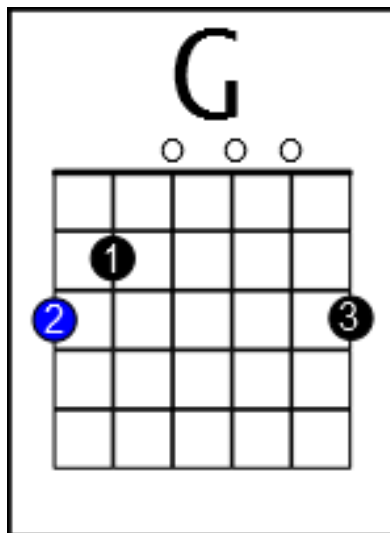
Let the fun of Travis picking begin...

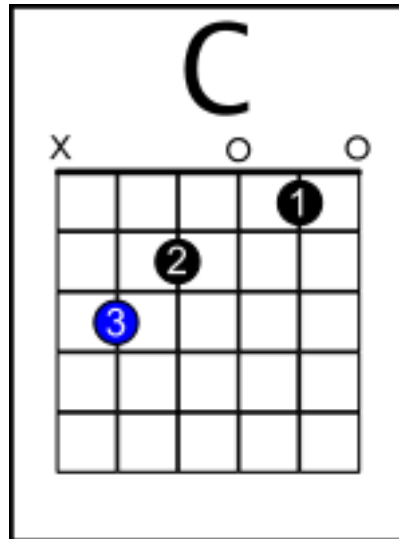
## Chords Used In This Book

For simplicities sake, instead of showing you these patterns on lots of chords, I will simply show you them on two chords.

These two chords are **G Major** and **C Major**.

I have chosen these two chords as they are two of the most popular on the guitar and almost everybody knows them!



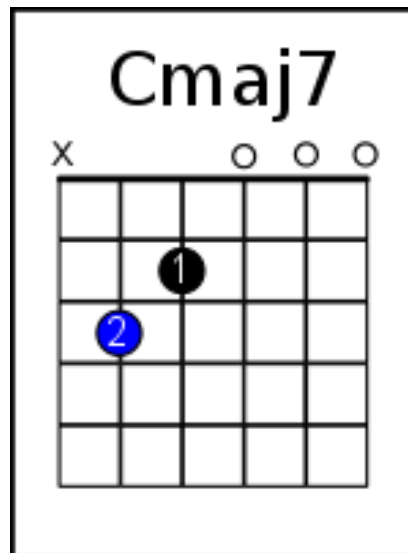


## *An Easy Alternative to C Major*

For many beginners, changing from **G Major to C Major** can be quite difficult.

Therefore, for these examples in this book you can play a C Major 7 instead of C Major while learning the patterns.

The examples I have given you don't actually feature picking on the B string which is the string that makes these two chords different from each other.



If you choose to use the **C Major 7**, then changing from **G Major** is much easier.

You can simply, move your **index** and **middle** fingers from the **low E string** and **A string** for the **G Major** chord to the **A string** and **D string** for the **C Major 7** chord.

(Also, remember you need your ring finger for the G chord).

# Pattern #1

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**Pattern #1** is a very simple pattern that is designed to get you started Travis Picking properly.

Just because it is simple, it doesn't mean it won't sound good!

This pattern features just *four plucks per bar*.

# Pattern #1a

Ex.1a

G

*mf*

4x

C

4x

4x

4x

T  
A  
B

3 0 2 0 3 0 2 0

## The G Major chord

The above features **four** plucks. To get started first play the shape for the **G Major chord** as shown earlier on in the book.

To play one bar of the pattern, follow these steps...

**Step 1** - The first pluck is a **root note** played with the **thumb** and this pluck is played on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret of the **low E string**.

**Step 2** - Follow that up with a pluck on the **open G string** with the

index finger.

**Step 3** – Now comes the *alternate bass note* which is played on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of the **A string** with the **thumb**.

**Step 4** – Follow that up once again with a pluck on the **open G string** with your **index finger**.

## The C Major chord

Follow the same steps as above but because the root note of the C Major chord is on the **A string**, we simply shift the thumb plucks to the string above.

In other words, the thumb plucks for these Travis picking patterns occur on strings:

- *Low E and A for the G Major chord*

- *A and D for the C Major chord*

# Pattern 1b

The alternate version of this pattern which we will call 1b is exactly the same as version 1a, but this time we are adding a **pinch** on the first pluck of each bar.

Ex. 1b

G C

4x 4x

4x 4x

T  
A  
B

3 0 0 2 0 3 0 0 2 0 3 0

To play the pinch, simply pluck the **high E string** with your **ring finger** at the same time as you pluck the **low E string** (for the G chord) or **A string** (for the C chord) with your **thumb**.



Take your time playing this pattern and have fun with it.

It is a basic Travis picking pattern but it is still **very useful to learn.**

Once you get comfortable with it, try increasing the speed and playing it with a variety of chords!

When you have learnt the pattern, feel free to change which of the treble strings you pluck.

For example, whenever there is a pluck on the **G string**, you can instead pluck the **B string** or the **high E string**.

*[Remember, you can click here to listen to or download the audio for this eBook.](#)*

# Pattern #2

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**Pattern #2** is a more intricate pattern that focuses more on the bass strings so you can really feel and hear 'that Travis picking sound.'

This pattern features *six plucks per bar*.

# Pattern #2a

Ex.2a

The image shows a musical score for a guitar exercise. It consists of two systems of notation. The first system is for a G major chord, labeled 'G' and '4x'. The second system is for a C major chord, labeled 'C' and '4x'. Each system includes a treble clef staff with a treble clef and a guitar tablature staff with a bass clef. The tablature for the G chord shows fret numbers 3, 2, 3, 2, 0, 0. The tablature for the C chord shows fret numbers 3, 2, 3, 0, 2, 0. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The exercise is labeled 'Ex.2a' and 'G' and 'C'.

## The G Major chord

The above features **six** plucks. To get started first play the shape for the **G Major chord** as shown earlier on in the book.

To play one bar of the pattern, follow these steps...

**Step 1** - The first pluck is a **root note** played with the **thumb** and this pluck is played on the **low E** string.

**Step 2** - Now comes the **alternate bass** note which is played on

the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of the **A string** with the **thumb**.

**Step 3** – Now we play another **root bass note** which is played with the **thumb** and this pluck is played on the **low E** string.

**Step 4** – Follow that up with a pluck on the open **G string** with the **index finger**.

**Step 5** – Now comes another **alternate bass** note which is played on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of the **A string** with the **thumb**

**Step 6** – Follow that up with another pluck on the **open G string** with the **index finger**.

## The C Major chord

Follow the same steps as above but because the root note of the C Major chord is on the **A string**, we simply shift the thumb plucks to the string above.

In other words, the thumb plucks for these Travis picking patterns occur on strings:

**- Low E and A for the G Major chord**

**- A and D for the C Major chord**

# Pattern 2b

The alternate version of this pattern which we will call 2b is exactly the same as version 2a, but this time we are adding a ***pinch*** on the first pluck of each bar.

Ex.2b

G C

4x 4x

TAB

3 0 0 2 0 3 0 2 3 0 2 0

4x 4x

To play the pinch, simply pluck the **high E string** with your **ring finger** at the same time as you pluck the **low E string** (for the G chord) or **A string** (for the C chord) with your **thumb**.

This is a really cool pattern that **focuses on the bass** quite a bit.

Once you have learnt all four patterns in this book you could **combine a couple of patterns for your own songs or arrangements.**

For example, this pattern may sound good for a verse, as it focuses on the lower notes. You may then want to play another pattern that focuses on the treble strings for your chorus.

The choice is yours.

First, get comfortable playing this pattern at both a fast and firstly a slower speed.

*[Remember, you can click here to listen to or download the audio for this eBook.](#)*

# Pattern #3

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**Pattern #3** is a little more interesting from a rhythmic point of view and is probably a little more usable than the previous two patterns.

This pattern features *six plucks per bar*.



# Pattern #3a

Ex.3a

G 4x C 4x

TAB

3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2

## The G Major chord

The above also features **six plucks** but it uses a different rhythm and picking order to pattern #2.

To get started first play the shape for the **G Major chord** as shown earlier on in the book.

To play one bar of the pattern, follow these steps...

**Step 1** – The first pluck is a **root note** played with the **thumb** and

this pluck is played on the **low E** string.

**Step 2** – Now comes the ***alternate bass*** note which is played on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of the **A string** with the **thumb**.

**Step 3** – Follow that up with a pluck on the open **G string** with the **index finger**.

**Step 4** – Now play a ***root note*** with the **thumb** and this pluck is again played on the **low E** string.

**Step 5** – Follow that up with another pluck on the **open G string** with the **index finger**.

**Step 6** – Finish the pattern with another ***alternate bass*** note which is played on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of the **A string** with the **thumb**.

## **The C Major chord**

Follow the same steps as above but because the root note of the C

Major chord is on the **A string**, we simply shift the thumb plucks to the string above.

In other words, the thumb plucks for these Travis picking patterns occur on strings:

***- Low E and A for the G Major chord***

***- A and D for the C Major chord***

# Pattern 3b

The alternate version of this pattern which we will call 3b is exactly the same as version 3a, but this time we are adding a **pinch** on the first pluck of each bar.

Ex.3b

The image shows musical notation for 'Ex.3b'. It consists of a treble clef staff and a guitar tablature staff. The treble clef staff shows a G chord (G4, B4, D5) and a C chord (C4, E4, G4). The guitar tablature staff shows fret numbers: 3, 0, 0, 2, 3 for the G chord and 0, 2, 0, 0, 2 for the C chord. A '4x' mark is placed above the first note of each chord, indicating a pinch technique. The tablature staff is labeled 'T', 'A', and 'B' on the left side.

To play the pinch, simply pluck the **high E string** with your **ring finger** at the same time as you pluck the **low E string** (for the G chord) or **A string** (for the C chord) with your **thumb**.

Although this pattern has six plucks just like pattern #2 and #3, **it has a different rhythm.**

It also **finishes on a bass note** which makes it a little different and more interesting.

You can use this pattern for a whole song or use it to break up a song if it primarily uses another Travis picking pattern.

As always, get comfortable playing this pattern at the slower speed on the playalong recording.

Once you are able to play it at the slower speed, try it at the faster speed and then try any tempo you like!

*[Remember, you can click here to listen to or download the audio for this eBook.](#)*

# Pattern #4

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**Pattern #4** is a more syncopated Travis picking pattern that follows the rhythm which I call `The Ultimate Strum` pattern.

If you know that strum pattern, see if you can recognise its rhythm in this pattern.

This pattern features *six plucks per bar*.

# Pattern #4a

Ex.4a  
G

4x C 4x

4x 4x

T  
A  
B

3 2 3 3 0 2 0 3

## The G Major chord

The above features **six** plucks but with a different rhythm and picking order to patterns #2 and #3.

To get started first play the shape for the **G Major chord** as shown earlier on in the book.

To play one bar of the pattern, follow these steps...

**Step 1** – The first pluck is a **root note** played with the **thumb** and

this pluck is played on the **low E** string.

**Step 2** – Follow that up with a pluck on the open **G string** with the **index finger**.

**Step 3** – Now comes the ***alternate bass*** note which is played on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of the **A string** with the **thumb**.

**Step 4** – Follow that up with a pluck on the open **G string** with the **index finger**.

**Step 5** – Follow that up with a ***root note*** played with the **thumb** and this pluck is played on the **low E** string.

**Step 6** – Finish the pattern with an open **G string** with the **index finger**.

## The C Major chord

Follow the same steps as above but because the root note of the C



Major chord is on the **A string**, we simply shift the thumb plucks to the string above.

In other words, the thumb plucks for these Travis picking patterns occur on strings:

***- Low E and A for the G Major chord***

***- A and D for the C Major chord***

# Pattern 4b

The alternate version of this pattern which we will call 4b is exactly the same as version 4a, but this time we are adding a **pinch** on the first pluck of each bar.

Ex.4b

The image shows musical notation for 'Ex.4b'. It consists of a treble clef staff and a TAB staff. The treble staff shows a G chord (open strings) and a C chord (open strings). The TAB staff shows the fret numbers for each string: 3, 0, 0, 0, 0 for the G chord and 0, 0, 2, 0, 0 for the C chord. There are repeat signs and '4x' markings at the beginning and end of each chord section.

To play the pinch, simply pluck the **high E string** with your **ring finger** at the same time as you pluck the **low E string** (for the G chord) or **A string** (for the C chord) with your **thumb**.

Out of all four of the fingerpicking patterns in this book, **this one is the most syncopated.**

Syncopation is when we **play on the `off-beat`** rather than `on the beat` .

Although the pattern isn't majorly syncopated, **the groove it creates is lovely** and very applicable.

If you know lots of songs that use the **`Ultimate Strum` pattern**, and you want to create your own fingerpicking arrangement of the song, instead of strumming, use this pattern. It will sound great.

[Remember, you can click here to listen to or download the audio for this eBook.](#)

# How To Adapt These Patterns For Everyday Use

Below are multiple ways you can adapt these patterns for your own songs, arrangements or general day to day use.

## *Combine different patterns*

Try combining the patterns. For example, play one bar of pattern 2b and then follow that up with one bar of pattern 3a.

Combining patterns like this can help you create some really unique super-patterns!

### [Change which treble strings you pluck](#)

Try swapping some of the treble strings, so instead of plucking the **open G string** with your **index finger** you can play the **B string** with your **middle finger** or you can play the **high E string** with your **ring finger**.

You can also change the `pinch` note that is shown in the `b` versions of the examples.

So, instead of plucking the **low E string** and the **high E string** for your pinch, you could pluck the **low E string** and the **B string**, or the **low E string** and the **G string**.

There are lots of different variations you can create with these patterns and don't forget you can use lots of different beautiful and lush chords too.

## *Songs that use Travis Picking*

You can create your own Travis picking arrangements of pretty much most songs you know – especially if it`s a strumming song.

Simply take the chords and instead of strumming them, apply one of the above Travis picking patterns (or any others you know) and take it away.

Music is about fun, joy and freedom. Enjoy applying Travis picking to your favourite songs. It`s a great way to practice the technique.

Below is a small list of classic Travis picking songs.

**Kansas - Dust in The Wind**

**Bob Dylan – Don` t Think Twice It`s Alright**

**Fleetwood Mac – Never Going Back Again**

**Simon & Garfunkel - The Boxer**

**Mark Knopfler – Postcards From Paraguay**

**Pearl Jam – Just Breathe**

**Merle Travis – Nine Pound Hammer**

**Eddie Vedder – Guaranteed**

**Chet Atkins – Jam Man**

**Richard Thompson - 1952 Vincent Black Lightning**

The above is just a short list. There are loads more!

Keep your ears peeled and you` ll hear lots of songs that you have heard before in a new light as you will now think to yourself:

“Oh, that sounds like Travis picking, I think I`ll learn that one”.

That`s what I did.



## [A Final Note](#)

If you haven't already, make sure you play along with the recordings for all the examples and the four patterns in this book. Go [here](#) to download or stream the audio.

I hope you enjoyed this short but highly effective eBook.

Learn and master each of the **four Travis picking patterns** and your fingerpicking guitar skills will be better for it.

If you want some much more in-depth fingerpicking tuition, check out my highly acclaimed eBook `Fingerstyle 101`.

It is currently for sale here for a low price.

(ON sales page, state it is free for EGIC members with the link.)

Be the best guitarist you can be.

Thank you and I wish you all the best!

***Dan Thorpe***

## ***Guitar Domination***

*Email me at [hq@guitardomination.net](mailto:hq@guitardomination.net) for any questions or just to let me know how you get on.*

*I love to hear how these techniques help you to achieve your guitar playing dreams.*

# Other Useful

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# Resources

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Click the links below to download or playback the audio/files mentioned in this book:

[Listening to the examples](#)

[The audio examples](#) (for playback and/or download).

Other resources available from the author...

**Dan Thorpe** currently has two web sites:

[Guitar Domination](#) – A free resource for all guitarists to learn and enjoy from.

[Elite Guitarist](#) – A selection of courses aimed at making you the absolute best guitarist you can be.

These range from strumming, chord changes, essential beginner guitar skills and more.

Click the links below for more details:

[Elite Guitarist Inner Circle](#)

Do you want to **become a better guitarist**, have more fun with the instrument, learn the most exciting songs AND get direct support from me? If yes, then take a look at the [Elite Guitarist Inner Circle](#).

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## **Fingerpicking Classics: Learn The Most Stunning Songs On Fingerstyle Guitar**

Features 14 of the best fingerpicking songs (from 60s folk to modern pop).

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[Bryan Ledgard](#) for his photo titled [`Jed Grimes`](#)