

CHAPTER 2

Tremolo Picking

Tremolo picking means picking a note multiple times. It is a very easy and natural way for just about any player to alternate-pick at a relatively fast speed. You can practice this technique to build pick-hand speed and endurance, or to memorize scale/arpeggio fingerings, or use it to create solo ideas and riffs. Many players tremolo-pick scale patterns, ascending runs, arpeggios, metal riffs, etc.

TECHNIQUE

If I asked you to play a fast run in sixteenth notes, crossing all six strings, navigating several scalar patterns while alternate picking, that would be quite challenging. But if I said, “Just play straight up and down a scale fingering, playing each scale tone four times each while alternate picking,” that would be considerably easier. It is a way that just about any player can alternate with some degree of speed.

Tremolo Picking the A Minor Scale

Figure 2.1 illustrates playing up and down the A natural minor scale, picking each scale tone four times while alternate picking starting on a down stroke. With all of these studies/examples, it’s important to use a metronome to ensure playing everything evenly and in time. Plus, a metronome is an excellent device for measuring your progress and technical development.

This pattern is quite easy to alternate-pick, as you approach each new scale tone, as well as each string cross, on a down stroke. For almost all players, it is very natural. It’s also a way that even players just starting to develop their technical skill can play sixteenth notes at a relatively high speed.

All of these examples will help build pick-hand strength and alternate-picking consistency. They’re also very helpful to players who are just starting to use a metronome. Take note: in the next few examples, I’ve included several different fingerings for the natural minor scale.



♩ = 170

3

5

7

TAB

5 5 5 5 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 5 5 5 5 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7

9 9 9 9 5 5 5 5 7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5 6 6 6 6 8 8 8 8 5 5 5 5 7 7 7 7

8 8 8 8 7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5 8 8 8 8 6 6 6 6 5 5 5 5 7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5

9 9 9 9 7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5 8 8 8 8 7 7 7 7 5 5 5 5 8 8 8 8 7 7 7 7 5

FIG. 2.1. Tremolo Picking: All Strings

Tremolo Picking the A Minor Scale Using Single Strings

Figure 2.2 is a very useful study for tremolo picking up the A natural minor scale/Aeolian mode on the 1st string, then down the scale on the 2nd string. I've only illustrated the top two strings in this, but you could take this study up and down all six strings in A minor, or do it in varying scales/modes and keys, as well. It's a great way to see the scale up and down each string, all over the neck, as well as help your pick hand. Anytime you can practice something that improves technique, helps you gain knowledge of the instrument, and can be used as soloing/riff vocabulary, it's an excellent thing.



String 1 (Treble Clef): $\text{♩} = 170$

String 2 (Bass Clef):

String 3 (Treble Clef):

String 5 (Bass Clef):

String 7 (Treble Clef):

String 8 (Bass Clef):

The figure displays musical notation and guitar tablature for tremolo picking the A minor scale on strings 1 and 2. The notation is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 170 bpm. The scale is played in two directions: ascending on the 1st string and descending on the 2nd string. The tablature shows fret numbers for each note, with some notes marked with a '2' indicating a double fret or a specific technique. The strings are numbered 1 through 8, corresponding to the fretboard positions shown.

FIG. 2.2. Tremolo Picking on the A Minor Scale: Strings 1 and 2

Tremolo Picking in Triplets

In figure 2.3, the scale is once again tremolo picked, this time hitting each scale tone three times, in triplets. This is a bit trickier, because while alternate-picking this pattern, you're playing down/up/down then up/down/up. So at times, you'll be attacking each new scale tone on an upstroke in addition to also crossing over strings using an upstroke with the pick. A very useful way to sync up both playing and feeling triplets.



$\text{♩} = 168$

4

7

FIG. 2.3. Tremolo Picking with Triplets

Double Picking on the A Minor Scale

Figure 2.4 involves *double picking*—playing each note in the scale two times, but in sixteenth notes, rhythmically. It's a very cool violin type of technique that's great for right- and left-hand synchronization and useful in creating cool riffs and solo ideas. With this even figure, you're once again automatically approaching each new scale tone and string cross on a down stroke, so in many ways, it's like the first example: an easy way to pick alternately without even thinking about it. However, you'll definitely find this pattern considerably more difficult than figure 2.1. With only striking each note twice, it's tougher to sync up at faster tempos.

It's great to practice all these examples with and without palm muting, depending on your personal tastes and also how you'd like them to sound.



$\text{♩} = 168$

FIG. 2.4. Double Picking

TREMOLO AND DOUBLE PICKING FOR SOLOS

The upcoming examples display tremolo/double picking in a more riff/solo type of context. Hopefully, some of these will help you create your own tremolo-picking riffs, solo ideas, etudes, and drills.

Tremolo-Picked Riff

Figure 2.5 is a speed metal/black metal, extremely fast, tremolo-picked riff that uses one of my favorite scales, Hungarian minor. The Hungarian minor scale is constructed by sharpening both the 4th and 7th degrees of the natural minor scale: A, B, C, D[#], E, F, G[#]. Depending upon how it's used, it can be both Eastern and also somewhat evil sounding. The tempo marking on all these upcoming examples is just there to give you an idea of the speeds at which I play these types of exercises. Just concentrate on playing all the examples cleanly, evenly, and in time, and build up the tempo as your technique improves.



♩ = 188

4/4

T
A
B

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 8 8 8 8 7 7 7 7

3

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 0 0 0 0 4 4 4 4

FIG. 2.5. Tremolo-Picked Riff

Tremolo Picking through Arpeggio Shapes

Figure 2.6 involves tremolo picking through arpeggio shapes in triplets. This example is very classical sounding and involves the E harmonic minor scale, a natural minor scale with a raised 7th degree (leading tone): E, F[♯], G, A, B, C, D[♯]. The first arpeggio is E minor, then to a D[♯] diminished 7 arpeggio, then an A[♯] diminished 7 arpeggio, and lastly, returning to a small harmonic minor run. The arpeggio play combined with the tremolo-triplet picking makes this one a bit more involved, while crossing strings.



$\text{♩} = 192$

System 1:

Staff 1 (Treble): 19 19 19 15 15 15 17 17 17 16 16 16 12 12 12 9 9 9 9 9 9 10 10 10 7 7 7 10 10 10 9 9 9 9 9 9

System 2:

Staff 1 (Treble): 8 8 8 7 7 7 11 11 11 12 12 12 14 14 14 11 11 11 13 13 13 10 10 10 11 11 11 8 8 8 10 10 10 7 7 7

System 3:

Staff 1 (Treble): 12 12 12 9 9 9 11 11 11 8 8 8 10 10 10 7 7 7 4 4 4 7 7 7 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 11 9 8

FIG. 2.6. Tremolo Picking through Arpeggio Shapes

Double-Picked Solo

Figure 2.7 is a short, double-picked solo type of idea, combining the natural minor and blues scales. This one sounds especially cool with a heavier palm mute. It incorporates double picking down the scale in diatonic thirds (playing a tone in the scale then playing a note a diatonic third, two scale tones away) in measure 4 of the lick. Since there's less string crossing involved and the left-hand shapes are fairly easy, this one might not be as difficult to work up, speed-wise.



♩ = 152

System 1:

Measure 1: Treble staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Tablature: 7 7 | 5 5 7 7 5 5 7 7 7 7 7 7.

Measure 2: Treble staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Tablature: 8 8 7 7 7 7 5 5 7 7 4 4 5 5.

System 2:

Measure 1: Treble staff shows a triplet of eighth notes followed by eighth notes. Tablature: 5 5 7 7 5 5 7 7 5 5 7 7 7 7.

Measure 2: Treble staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Tablature: 9 9 10 10 7 7 9 9 5 5 7 7 4 4 5 5.

FIG. 2.7. Double-Picked Solo in A Minor

Neo-Classical Double Picking

Figure 2.8 is a Baroque, neo-classical double-pick, once again using the E harmonic minor scale. I first climb up the scale in groups of four notes and then descend in thirds, double-picking throughout. I'll have a much more detailed explanation of diatonic scale patterns in chapter 4, along with many cool ways they can be used for melodic sequences, soloing ideas, and chop building.



♩ = 126

FIG. 2.8. Neo-Classical Double Picking on the E Harmonic Minor Scale

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Single-String Climb

Figure 2.9 is a fast, single-string climb up the A minor scale. The pattern is in sixteenth-note triplets (six notes per beat) and a good example of how fast tremolo picking can be used as an effective soloing tool. While it's a fast run, since you're on one string for most of it, you might surprise yourself as to how easy this one might be for working up the tempo.



♩ = 132

FIG. 2.9. Single-String Climb on the A Minor Scale

FIG. 2.9. Single-String Climb on the A Minor Scale