

## ~ The Right Way To Pick ~

Have you ever wondered if your picking technique is correct?

Have you tried comparing your picking hand position and motions to those of your favorite guitar players and felt frustrated when your hand didn't look or move exactly like theirs?

There are countless debates all over the internet about "what is the right way to pick" on the guitar or "picking with the wrist vs. with the forearm".

If you have read any of them, chances are that you probably walked away even more confused than before. Some people claim (using certain great guitarists as examples), that picking only from the forearm is the key to speed.

Others argue (using different players as examples), that picking from the wrist is better.

Still others say that since no two players are exactly alike in how they move their picking hand, it must be that everyone should just "stick to what comes naturally" or "not think about it", because "there is no right way to pick". So who is right here?

In this lesson, I will tell you the whole story about this topic. First, I want to clear up the misconceptions that many players have about this issue of finding the right way to pick on the guitar and then I will show you exactly how to move your hand correctly for picking on the guitar.

In the arguments mentioned above, none of the 3 points are entirely correct. There IS a "right" way to pick, but not in the way most guitarists understand it.

In order for your picking technique to be correct and efficient FOR YOU, the way you hold the pick and the way your picking hand moves on the strings should allow you to achieve certain technical objectives that result in great playing.

These objectives are:

- Ability to hold the pick firmly enough so that it doesn't fall out of your hand.

- Be able to make both downstrokes and upstrokes even in volume (dynamics).
- Ability to play without using a lot of extra tension.
- Achieving a good and consistent tone (that sounds good to you).
- (If necessary) transitioning quickly between picking and tapping.
- Avoiding extra unnecessary motion when you play (such as moving the pick out away from the strings while playing).

Here is a very important point: there are MANY ways to pick on guitar to achieve the above goals. Now you know why many great guitarists hold their pick and move their hands slightly differently from each other but still play great.

Now you also know how to tell “good picking technique” from “bad picking technique”. Good technique is an enabler for achieving all the goals above in your playing... while “wrong” or inefficient ways of picking get in the way of you achieving one or more of the objectives above.

*“But Tom, this is common sense stuff!! This is nothing new to me. I knew this already. Why are we wasting time talking about this? Why don’t you teach me something NEW or give me “exercises” to develop my technique?”*

First, there is a huge difference between “knowing” something and having truly mastered it. Mastery in this case means having reached ALL of your guitar picking speed goals. My job is not to merely “teach you things” (although it’s part of it of course) - it’s to get you to MASTER what you know and are learning, so that you become the guitarist you want to be.

Second, realize that *exercises* do NOT help you play better or pick faster. Only focusing on the right things while practicing and training makes you better. Of course I WILL give you lots of things to practice (don’t worry :) ). The reason why I’m giving you this lesson NOW is to prepare you for making the maximum progress possible with the exercises you will receive from me in future lessons.

By focusing more on achieving the things listed above, your hand will naturally arrive to the most ideal picking style and motions that will enable you to play well.

Your picking technique will be somewhat unique to your body type, your hand size, type, shape and size of the pick you use and even to the specific phrases and licks you play. However, regardless of these variables, your picking motions DO need to enable you to play whatever you want to play.

This is why it is important to focus on the things that truly matter (the bullet points above), and let your hand develop the appropriate picking motions.

All of that being said, there ARE specific guidelines that you should follow in your playing to enable you to improve your technique in the shortest amount of time and to discover the right style of picking for you. They are discussed below:

- When you are picking on a single string (or going back and forth between picking on two adjacent strings many times), you should pick primarily from the wrist.
- When you are moving your pick across several strings, your forearm/elbow is used to move the pick from string to string, and the wrist is then responsible for picking on each individual string when you arrive to it.

Because the wrist is so small and has a more limited range of motion than the forearm, it isn't a good part of your hand to be responsible for moving the pick over large distances from string to string. The role of the wrist is for controlling the pick motion on individual strings. The forearm is much bigger with a much greater range of motion, so it is easy to use it to move the pick from string to string.

Here is a short video that demonstrates the important forearm and wrist motions I discussed above and shows examples of each:

**[Watch the video](#)**

And here are some things NOT to do:

- Avoid moving the pick with the index finger and thumb while playing. This motion makes it difficult to control the pick and makes it hard to play with

anything other than very soft articulation.

- Don't anchor the fingers that are not holding the pick on the body of the guitar. This makes it very difficult to smoothly transition from picking to 2 hand tapping and back again to picking. Anchoring your fingers also makes it impossible to use them for muting extra string noise from the higher in pitch strings.

### **What should you do with this information?**

You should use the above to self-correct your picking technique while practicing. As you practice any picking exercise from now on, your focus should be on directing your picking hand to achieve the objectives listed in this lesson.

A byproduct of conscious focus on achieving the goals above will be arriving at the "right" picking technique for you.

When you practice something you cannot play as well as you want, instead of making arbitrary adjustments (e.g. randomly angling the pick a little more this or that way and hoping for the best, ask yourself: "in what way can I optimize my technique further to achieve the goals that perfect picking technique should enable me to achieve?"

Asking this question will guide you towards making the needed adjustments to overcome your guitar playing problem and make your picking technique more efficient.

With this foundation in place, you will be ready to approach practicing any and all exercises I will give you and get the fastest results from them.

Don't worry, we are NOT finished talking about picking technique or picking speed - this lesson is merely an introduction to the most fundamental concepts you should be thinking about RIGHT NOW. We are going to build upon this foundation with more advanced concepts in future lessons.

This lesson does NOT go into the [Practice Generator](#). Study it away from the guitar and use it to improve your picking technique & speed.