INDEX FINGER

The index finger, a/k/a pointer finger, is the most sensitive and nimble of the five digits. It is the only finger that can act as both a number (one) and a letter (the letter D in American Sign Language.) (**hover popup**)

Some researchers believe that pointing is one of the first ways that infants learn to understand other people’s mental states, and as such, it is a precursor to language. (link)

MIDDLE FINGER

*Digitus medius*

“Phallic since 700 B.C.”

Extending the middle finger, a/k/a flipping someone off or giving him the bird, has been considered an insult since at least ancient Greece. The Romans called it *digitus impudicus*, the “shameless finger.”

The single-finger salute was first documented in the United States in 1886, when Old Hoss Radbourn, a pitcher for the Boston Beaneaters, flipped off the cameraman during a team picture. (hover popup). Pretty much what you’d expect from a guy named Old Hoss. (link - http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-16916263)

RING FINGER

*Digitus quartus manus*

Why do people in most Western cultures wear wedding rings on the fourth finger of the left hand? Some say that the tradition stems from ancient times, when people believed that a vein ran directly from this finger into the heart. Others say that this story is a just marketing ploy by the jewelry industry.

Women usually have a longer ring finger than index finger; the reverse is true for men. The ratio of finger lengths (index to ring) is associated with prenatal exposure to testosterone. Studies have shown a link between the finger ratio and a number of traits, including schizophrenia, alcoholism, obesity, and academic performance. I’ll give you a minute while you look at your hand.

PINKY

*Digitus minimus manus*

The word “pinky” comes from the Dutch word, *pink*, for “little finger.” For centuries, children have sealed their promises by locking their pinkies together and making a “pinky swear.” The practice may stem from ancient East Asian mythology, which said that the gods joined soulmates together with invisible red strings on their little fingers.

Members of the Yakuza Japanese crime organization are often required to cut off portions of their pinky fingers as punishment for an offense.

THUMB

*Digitus primus manus*

“In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence.” – Isaac Newton

You can rotate your thumb across the palm of your hand and touch your ring and little fingers (at least I hope you can). No big deal, right? Wrong. Humans are the only animals that can do this. This move allows for precision gripping and led to the use of tools.

<http://www.eatonhand.com/hw/facts.htm>

DIGITS ABOUT DIGITS?