

Ukulele Method Book 1

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Exercises and Photos by
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Thanks to:

My beautiful wife Camille, every song I play is dedicated to you.

Pennie Guinn for helping me see the error of my ways.

Ukulele Method Book 1

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This Method

This method book is meant to be used as a complement to private lessons, but can offer a great number of insights into the ukulele for anyone looking to learn by themselves. This method won't promise unrealistic results in an astoundingly small span of time, or offer an in depth analysis of music theory, and how it pertains to the ukulele fretboard.

This book is meant to provide everyday people with the chords, notes, strumming patterns, essential techniques, and a working knowledge of basic music theory that will allow them to strum through songs, play at family parties, bring their ukulele with them wherever they go, and maybe even accompany them at a gig.

Chapter 1 - Getting Started

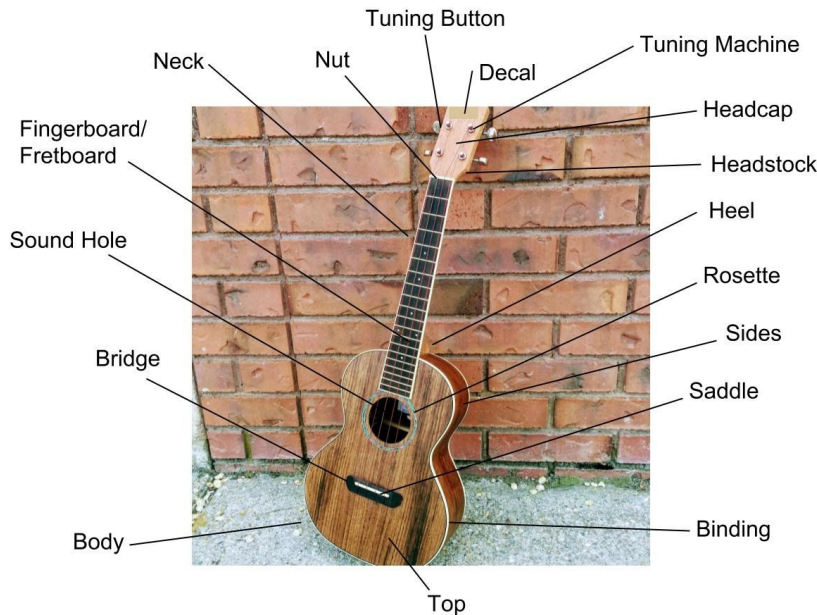
Practice

As I said before, this is not the method for someone looking for the quick fix with minimal practice. Music is an art form that requires patience and regular practice. As you make your way through this ukulele method I suggest devoting **10-15 minutes every day** to practicing the ukulele, and dedicating a full week to each Chapter or section. Every one of my students at some point or another has heard, or will hear me say, "That was 95% Perfect, let's go for 100% this time." Take the entire week (or more if needed) to get each lesson up to "100%." You only live once, why not do everything 100%?

Self-Assessment

Along with developing the discipline to adhere to a regular practice schedule, you'll want to regularly police yourself as your own greatest source for constructive criticism. As you move through this method regularly ask yourself questions like, "did that sound right?" Am I playing that the way it should sound?" and most importantly, "Was that **my 100%**?"

Parts of the Ukulele



Body- the large, often hollow part of the ukulele where the bridge attaches.

Bridge- the wood part that holds the strings in place, and attaches to the body.

Saddle- the often white part that is inlaid into the bridge, where most of the tension from the strings is stored. Often made from bone, plastic, or synthetic bone.

Top- the part of the body where the bridge attaches usually with the sound hole cut in it.

Sound Hole- this is where the vibrating air inside the ukulele is able to escape, and where the sound resonates from.

Heel- where the neck connects to the body on the backside of the instrument.

Rosette- circular decoration around the sound hole.

Binding- a decorative border on the edges of an instrument.

Headstock- the area opposite the body at the end of the neck where the tuners are.

Headcap- Front of the headstock often featuring a decorative laminate.

Tuners/Tuning Machines- machines that attach the strings to the headstock and control the tension and pitch.

Tuning Button- The button at the end of the tuning machine that allows you to turn the gears.

Nut- piece of bone, synthetic bone, or plastic, slotted to allow the strings to pass through. Point that holds the string tension on the neck.

Neck- the rounded wood piece that connects the body and the headstock.

Fingerboard/ Fretboard- the playing surface on the front of the neck, the fret wires are the wires inlaid into the wood, the frets are the spaces between the wires.

Tools

There are a few tools that should be used as a compliment to this book. A few are recommended, but some are essential to helping you develop into a solid ukulele player, and musician.

❑ Metronome

- ❑ Metronomes come in many shapes and sizes from the older trapezoid shaped units with the swinging pendulum to the newer electronic metronomes, to the even more recent innovation of smartphone apps. I personally prefer the smartphone apps, but try a few apps and see what you like. If you prefer to have a separate “tool” that lives in your ukulele case, that’s great as long as you use it!

❑ Tuner

- ❑ Recordings of the tuning notes for a ukulele can be found online, It’s great to dedicate the time to learn to tune by ear, but with the technological advances available today, it’s not always necessary to go through the frustration of trying to tune by ear as a beginner. Go to your local music store and ask for a “clip-on tuner,” (I prefer the clip on style) or search your smartphone’s app store for a free ukulele tuning app. By the time you read this, this section may be out of date, tuners change all the time. Just visit your local music store to see what’s new.

❑ Practice Sheet (see Appendix A)

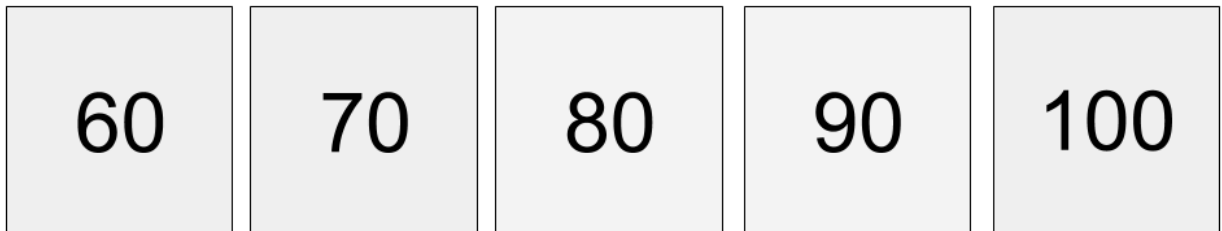
- ❑ Your practice sheet allows you to track your daily practice, lay out your lesson plan & goals and set out a clear path as you make your way through this book. On this sheet you can track the days you practiced and how long you practiced for, as well as which exercises you’re going to work on. You can record the song you’re working on, there’s even room for an instructor to assign listening examples. **Use the practice sheet, it will help!**

❑ 3 Ring Binder (optional)

- ❑ I highly recommend getting a 3 ring binder. Nothing fancy, just that standard kind with the plastic outside just as long as it has a pocket on the front and back cover, and has the standard 3 rings on the inside. I always keep my current practice sheet in the front pocket. Additional resources, and old practice sheets in the back cover pocket and all of the songs I’ve learned over the years on the 3 rings (in alphabetical order). This way you can go back and review songs easily and you don’t have to rely entirely on memory.

Ramping

One thing that sets my method apart from many others is my use of gradually increasing the speed of an exercise in a process I call “ramping.” Below most exercises in this book you’ll find a series of numbered boxes.



As you go through each exercise you’ll gradually increase your **metronome** to match the number in the box or *beats per minute (BPM)* and cross off the number in the box as you complete the exercise at that speed. When you reach the **Goal Speed** which in this case would be 100bpm you’ve completed the exercise!

Choosing Your Gear

A lot of method books will dedicate an entire page to choosing your ukulele. Just know that there are 4 basic sizes of ukulele,

- Soprano (smallest & most common),
- Concert (a little bit larger)
- Tenor, (larger still)
- and Baritone (largest of these 4 sizes)

This book will focus on the Soprano, Concert, and Tenor ukuleles, as these are the most common, and all 3 are tuned the same (G,C,E,A). The baritone ukulele is tuned to D,G,B,E, so exercises in this book will not apply to a baritone ukulele.

I can sit here and spill all of my knowledge of ukuleles into these pages, or you could exhaust yourself with extensive internet searches on the subject. My recommendation on the subject, however, is go to your local shop, and find the ukulele that speaks to you. It’s not necessary to buy the top of the line uke right off the bat. As a matter of fact, when I’m learning something new I like to reward myself with something nice upon the completion of a personal goal (i.e. completion of this book). You also don’t want to buy something cheap that will hinder your ability to play.

****Find something that is good enough quality to assist your learning process, and not hinder it, but save the high end model as a reward for reaching your goals****

Tuning the Uke

Before we get to tuning let's "name" the strings

Take a look at the strings, the one furthest away from you (closest to the ground when holding the ukulele in playing position) will be #1, the next one up is #2, then #3, and the one that's closest to you, or farthest away from the ground will be #4.

Your tuning notes are:

#4 - G #3 - C #2 - E #1 - A

Use your tuner to get each string tuned up or down until you find the correct pitch. If you have any trouble tuning your ukulele ask your teacher, or an employee at your local music store for help.

Tips for Tuning

- As you get close to the correct pitch make sure you make very small turns. Most students try to tune right up to pitch as quickly as possible and end up over and undershooting it. Just be patient and you'll get there faster.
- Always tune **up to** the correct pitch. Tune a bit flat, and then go up to your desired pitch, they equalize tension better that way.
- Ukuleles fall out of tune all the time! It's one thing you'll have to accept as a ukulele player. Be sure to practice tuning often, and get in the habit of tuning every time you pick up your uke.
- Come up with a phrase to help you remember your tuning notes. My personal favorites are **Good Cows Eat Ants**, or **Gorillas Can Eat Anything**

Reading Chord Diagrams

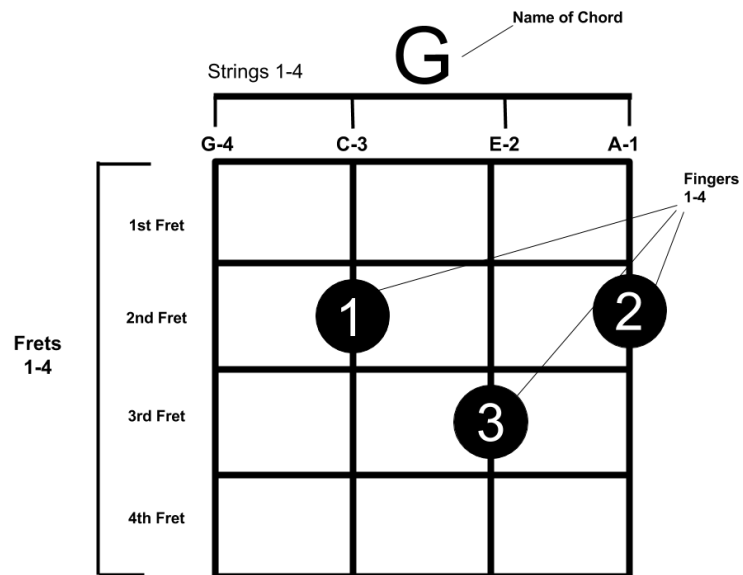
Strings

The **vertical lines** represent the strings of your ukulele.

The line that is farthest right represents the 1st string (A), and it moves left to the farthest left line representing your 4th string (G)

Frets

Frets are the spaces in between the **Fret wires** on your ukulele. This diagram represents frets 1-4 with **the space between each line being a fret**.



Fingers

Just like the strings and frets **each finger is represented by a number**.

- The **index finger** is your **1st**
- The **middle finger** is your **2nd**
- The **ring finger** is your **3rd**
- The **pinkie finger** is your **4th**

Putting it all together

As you slowly learn to read a chord diagram, don't try to jump into it head first. Take each new chord 1 finger at a time until you feel comfortable enough with reading them.

In the diagram above, start with the 1st finger and work your way to the third.

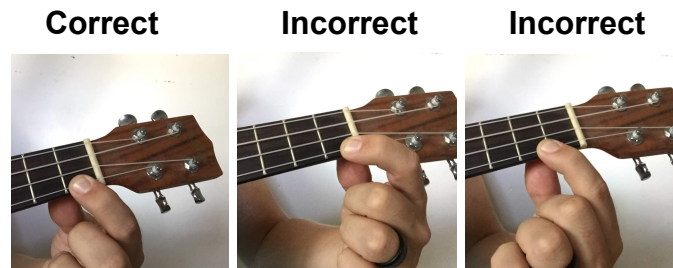
1. 1st finger, 3rd string, 2nd fret
2. 2nd finger, 1st string, 2nd fret
3. 3rd finger, 2nd string, 3rd fret
4. Strum the chord and make sure it sounds good!

Troubleshooting chords

Now is a great time to go over some finer points of making chords. Here are a few “rules” to adhere to when putting together your new chords.

Rule #1- Close, But Not Touching

Your finger should be just behind the forward fret wire of the fret you’re holding (forward fret meaning the fret wire that is closest to the body of the ukulele). The trick is to make sure you are not on top of the fret wire itself, or you’ll get a soft buzzing sound, or the wrong note all together.



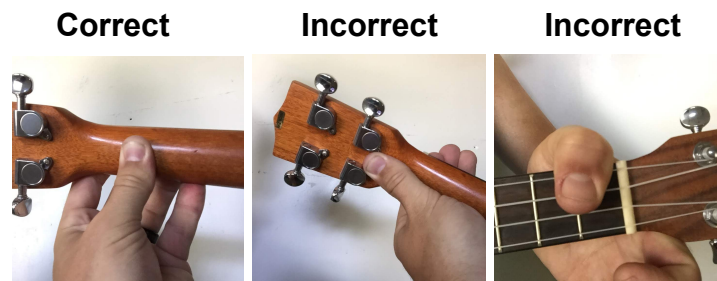
Rule #2- Tip Of Your Fingers

When you hold a chord down you should be contacting the string with the very tip of your finger (not the area opposite the fingernail, but the very “peak” of the finger). If you’re up on the tip of your fingers, your fingers won’t accidentally touch strings they’re not supposed to.



Rule#3- Thumb on back of neck

The thumb should be firmly placed on the back of the neck behind the center of the chord. If the chord isn’t working, try something different with your thumb.

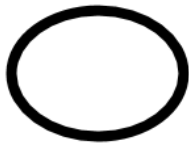


Rhythm

One of the major parts of playing music is time. Pieces of music are divided into bite sized portions called “measures” or “bars.” You can assign a number of “counts” to a measure depending on the song or exercise.

For right now we’ll look at measures consisting of 4 counts or 4/4 time.

There are different types of notes that sustain for different durations of time. The 3 that we’ll look at in this exercise are **whole notes, half notes, and quarter notes.**



Whole Note

4 counts



Half Note

2 counts



Quarter Note

1 counts

Whole notes- A whole note will sustain for 4 counts, or the *whole measure*. When strumming or playing a whole note, play the note on the 1 and leave it ringing for counts 2, 3, and 4.

Half notes- a half note sustains for 2 counts or *half the measure*. When strumming or playing a half note, play the note and let it ring for one additional count (i.e. strum on 1 let it ring through the two, strum 3 let it ring through the 4).

Quarter notes- a quarter note gets 1 count, so you’re able to fit 4 quarter notes into a measure in 4/4 time. If there are 4 quarter notes in a measure you’ll strum or pluck a note on each count. 1, 2, 3, 4.

Strumming rhythms

Strumming rhythms work very much the same way, but the notes look like “blockier” versions of their usual selves. When you see one of these you’ll strum all 4 strings.



Whole Note

4 counts



Half Note

2 counts



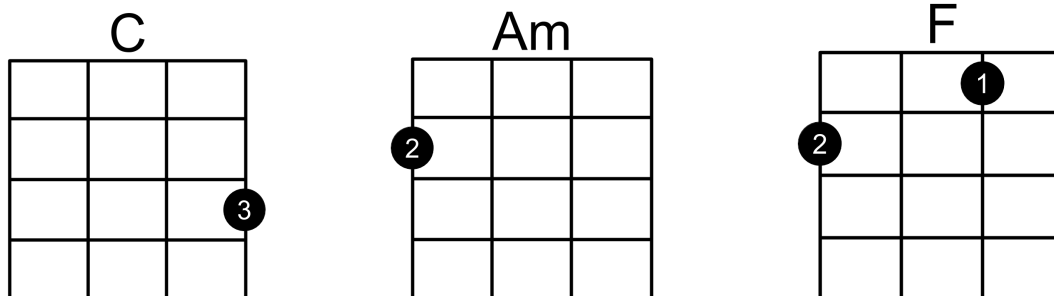
Quarter Note

1 counts

Chapter 2 - Strumming Basic Chords

Let's start with 3 basic chords and strum a few measures of music.

Below we have the chords C, Am (A minor), and F



Start by making and strumming each chord to be sure everything sounds okay.

When you've got each chord figured out, let's put them into a few exercises.

Tips:

-The symbol at the end of each exercise (two lines with the 2nd one bolded) signals the end of the song or exercise. That's how you know when to end an exercise, or end a song.

-Remember that the blockier looking notes we looked at in the last section mean that you **strum** the chords rather than just plucking a single string. In the exercises below **strum downward with your thumb** for each note. We'll switch up our strumming a little in some later exercises.

-Remember to ramp up the tempo as you go. In this exercise you'll start with your metronome set to 60bpm. When you complete the exercise at 60bpm without any mistakes, cross off the box that says 60 and move your metronome up to 70. Repeat until you complete the exercise at 80 bpm.



#1 Goal- 80bpm

C Am F C

4 | 4 | 4 | 4 ||

60 70 80

#2 Goal- 80bpm

C Am C F

4 | 4 | 4 | 4 ||

60 70 80

#3 Goal-80bpm

Am F C (C)

4 | 4 | 4 | 4 ||

60 70 80