

## Tapping 101

Howdy, folks, and welcome back!

*Author's note: This installment is an excerpt from my 'BT130 Tapping Level 1' course on MusicDojo.com. You can take the complete month-long course and study with me interactively online. Simply logon to <http://www.musicdojo.com> and register for a free account for more information.*

### Tapping Introduced

In this installment, I thought we would branch off a little and explore another facet of bass playing that can help to expand your creativity. We will explore the tapping technique in an introductory fashion, and I will present you with some objectives and exercises that will help you to become competent with this popular style of playing.

Tapping has become more and more prevalent a technique on the bass, especially among soloists, because of its flashy sound coupled with its potential for unique melodicism. If you have listened to any of my recordings before, you are probably already aware that I am a fan of the two-handed tapping approach. I have written several compositions that are based on this technique and its many variations. Compositions that utilize tapping have also been featured on albums by such bass greats as Billy Sheehan, Victor Wooten, Michael Manring, and Stu Hamm. This technique tends to have a lot of appeal among bassists because it features a great deal of rhythmic and percussive elements. By combining the tapping roles of both the right and left hands on the fingerboard, bass players can handle the task of performing the melody and harmony (and even the drum part!) simultaneously. This approach is usually referred to as 'two-handed tapping', and this is the term we typically associate with compositions and bass parts that are based on this technique.

Example 1 is a video of me playing the tune, "Fritter Boy", from my second album, "Balance". This is an example of a composition that demonstrates this two-handed tapping approach in detail:

#### **Watch Example Video 1 Now - "Fritter Boy"**

Example 2 is a demonstration of the tune, "Broken, pt. 1" from my "Evidence" album:

#### **Watch Example Video 2 Now - "Broken, part 1"**

Notice that in these examples, the bass parts have a unique sound quality to them that differs significantly from our more traditional plucking and fretting-derived lines. Although both of these excerpts were taken from stand-alone bass solos, tapping can also be used as a technique for creating basslines in ensemble settings.

## Practice Shed Objectives

Okay, now that you know what tapping is, let's learn how to do it! But first, let's talk about some key objectives:

-For first timers, the greatest challenge will be the development of your independence between the fretting and plucking hands. A couple of things you will have to be acutely aware of as you practice will be your accuracy and your cleanliness as you play through each exercise. I cannot overstate the need to strive for perfection here; If you practice in a sloppy fashion, you will subsequently *perform* in a sloppy fashion... This goes for all types of techniques, but will apply even more significantly here because of the greater potential for fret noise and disrupted phrasing.

-You have to learn to WALK before you can RUN. Translation: Start to practice each tapping exercise *very* slowly before increasing speed. The slower tempos you work at will reveal even more vividly any errors in execution or missed notes. Tapping should not sound like a cacophonous mess! Even though you are playing in a more forceful and percussive manner, you are still going for smoothness. One of the biggest shortcomings I identify in some less-experienced tappers' performances is their complete lack of dynamics. Even though you are tapping, you still have control over how hard or how soft you sound the notes!

-If you have read any of my articles before, you already know that I'm a stickler for using technique as a means to acquire greater capacity for musical expression, and NOT for just the sake of playing fast, repetitive, or hyperactive. In other words, once you have the technique down, then change your focus so that your new objective is to create a piece of music or unique phrase using that technique. (What good would your new tapping skills be if all you could do with them was play the major scale up and down the neck???)

Okay, so there's the rulez!!! Now let's have some fun...

## Basic Techniques

If you do not yet have any experience with tapping at this point, you are probably wondering how it's done in the first place!

In its most basic form, tapping is when you use the same fretting finger to simultaneously select the pitch and sound the note. The actual sounding of the note is accomplished by somewhat aggressively 'tapping,' or 'hammering' the string onto the fingerboard, as in Example 3.

## Watch Example Video 3 Now

Tapped notes are also sometimes referred to as 'hammer-ons'. Notice in the video example that the fretting hand can play these hammered notes on its own. This frees up your plucking hand to

hammer other pitches or chords, or to do some other complimentary rhythmic or melodic figure. See example 4.

### **Watch Example Video 4 Now**

This is the beauty of two-handed tapping; you can maintain complete independence between both hands to create some incredibly interesting parts.

### **Exercises 1a-1f: Tapped Fingering Permutations**

Now we are going to tap out fingering permutations with our fretting hand using a 1 finger per fret approach. Take care not to sound other open strings or pitches as you play each note. This is part of the initial challenge in learning to tap well. You have to keep things sounding as clean as possible! You may find that it is helpful to rely on other parts of your fretting hand to mute the strings that aren't being played as you move through the exercises. This can be accomplished by allowing your hand to 'rest' on top of the strings that aren't played as you tap. Experiment to find the hand position that is most comfortable for you.

***Important:*** Focus on maintaining the same volume for each finger as you tap! You may find early on that your pinky finger isn't as strong as the others... Listen carefully as you play, and try to equalize the levels of attack for each finger.

### **Exercise 1a: (Fingering Permutation 1-2-3-4)**

Starting by lining up your 1st finger with the 5th fret, with fingers 2, 3, and 4 lined up with the 6th, 7th, and 8th frets, respectively. Now sound out each note using only the tapping technique. Exercise 1a is demonstrated for you in the following video clip:

[exer1a.mov]

**Practice note:** Exercise 1a is performed in the video on a 5 string bass, but you can perform the same exercise on your 4 string simply by omitting the first 2 measures. On a 6 string bass, you would alternatively add the tapped notes on the C string, adding an extra 2 measures. Also note that the notation provided for 1a represents the exercise with the addition of the descending motion across the strings. This is a great way to work out with these permutations in a way that emphasizes movement in both directions.

Now try using the same approach for exercises 1b-1f. Make sure to play to a metronome or drum machine starting with very slow tempos as you begin to work through them.

**Exercise 1b:** (Fingering Permutation 1-3-2-4)

Exercise 1c consists of four systems of musical notation. Each system has a bass staff and a guitar staff. The first system shows a sequence of notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. The second system shows notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The third system shows notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The fourth system shows notes: G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 on the guitar staff.

**Exercise 1c: (Fingering Permutation 2-4-3-1)**

Exercise 1d consists of four systems of musical notation. Each system has a bass staff and a guitar staff. The first system shows notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. The second system shows notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. The third system shows notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The fourth system shows notes: G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 on the guitar staff.

**Exercise 1d: (Fingering Permutation 3-1-4-2)**

Exercise 1e: Musical notation for bass clef. It consists of four systems, each with a musical staff and a corresponding fingering staff below it. The notes and fingerings are as follows:

- System 1: Notes: G2, A2, B2, C3. Fingerings: 4, 3, 2, 1.
- System 2: Notes: D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. Fingerings: 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4.
- System 3: Notes: D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. Fingerings: 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4.
- System 4: Notes: D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. Fingerings: 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4.

**Exercise 1e:** (Fingering Permutation 4-1-2-3)

Exercise 1f: Musical notation for bass clef. It consists of four systems, each with a musical staff and a corresponding fingering staff below it. The notes and fingerings are as follows:

- System 1: Notes: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3. Fingerings: 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1.
- System 2: Notes: A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3. Fingerings: 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2.
- System 3: Notes: B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3. Fingerings: 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3.
- System 4: Notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. Fingerings: 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4.

**Exercise 1f:** (Fingering Permutation 4-3-1-2)

The image displays four systems of guitar notation. Each system consists of a bass staff (left) and a guitar staff (right). The first system shows a simple G major scale. The second system shows a G major scale with a flat (F major). The third system shows a G major scale with a sharp (D major). The fourth system shows a G major scale with a double flat (E major).

Now that you have gotten familiar with the feel of the ‘hammer’ technique, you can adapt it to any other musical forms that you know, such as scales or chords. Try ‘hammering through’ the following exercises, as well, using your fretting hand to tap out the notes as in exercises 1a-1f.

### Exercises 2a-2d: Major Scale-derived Tapping Patterns

Exercises 2a-2d are based on a simple G major scale. Practice each of them with a metronome or drum machine, starting at VERY slow tempos.

Here’s the challenge... Try to play each of these as LEGATO as possible... Legato means long notes that are connected with no space in between. This is very challenging to do with hammer-ons, so take your time and play slowly. Keep in mind that you will have to start the process of playing each successive note before you let the previous note go! This will also do wonders for your dexterity on the fingerboard.

#### Exercise 2a

The image shows the musical notation for Exercise 2a. It consists of a bass staff and a guitar staff. The bass staff shows a G major scale. The guitar staff shows a G major scale with tapping patterns indicated by numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

#### Exercise 2b

**Exercise 2c**

**Exercise 2d**

Next time around, we will build on our basic techniques and incorporate the next stage of two-handed tapping. Until next time, have fun, and practice hard!!!