

TWO BASIC EXERCISES

LEFT HAND: THE PENCIL STRETCH

- 1) Find an unsharpened pencil (or one just recently sharpened for the first time). This is important because it's got to be as long as possible.
- 2) Hold the pencil in your left hand fingertips; in other words, place your thumbtip on one side of the pencil, and your four fingertips on the opposite side.
- 3) Spread your fingers out along the length of the pencil, or as far as you can get them to spread out.
- 4) Make sure your thumb is bent backward, hitchhiker style. When you have it right, it should feel a little like your fingers are on a bass string and your thumb is in position behind it on the bass neck.

NOW..... BREAK THE PENCIL. ☺ (No, not like *that*.. the way you're holding it!)

Yeah, it's going to be hard to do, and it may take you a loooooong time to do it, but if you do this for 30-60 seconds just before you begin practice every day, you'll improve your strength enough to make you much more confident on the instrument. And you just might eventually break that pencil!

RIGHT HAND: MORSE CODE EXERCISE

This is a great way to develop alternate picking as well as the Rest Stroke technique. You can pick any string for this exercise; I prefer the A string. Your left hand isn't going to have much to do on this one, so let it hold onto a soda or a sandwich or something.

- 1) Start by playing the A string with your index finger, and then muting it with your middle finger. Your middle finger is now poised to play the A string. Go ahead and pick the string again, this time with your middle finger, and then mute it with your index. Simple process, right? Yep. The notes and the spaces should be about equal time; maybe a second long for the note, followed by a second or so of rest. Do this for awhile until it's comfortable; maybe 3-4 minutes.
- 2) Now for the Morse Code part. This time, play the string with one finger, and then *as soon as you are able* mute the string with the other finger. If you're quick enough, you should get a note that sounds like "dit". Again, the muting finger becomes the plucking finger, and vice versa. You should get the sound of "dit... dit... dit... dit..." from your string. Sometimes it helps to imagine the sound a clock makes when the second hand ticks hard. Another 3-4 minutes.
- 3) The final part of this exercise has you doing the same thing as above, but when your finger comes around to mute the string, don't; let it hang in front of the string, as close as you can get it, and without touching or muting the ringing string. Your notes will now sound like "daaah, daaah, daaah, daaah" instead of "dit, dit, dit". Do this for 4-5 minutes if you can.