

The 4th Finger Approach to Guitar Technique: My Experience

How Do Those Great Guitarists Make the Left-Hand Look So Easy?

Early in my teaching career, I noticed many of my students had permanently pronated left wrists (the 3rd and 4th fingers are rotated away from the neck.) I quickly discovered that beginning students were able to keep the knuckles of the left hand parallel to the neck while playing an “F” on the first string (1st finger) but often struggled with the 3rd finger on “G”. The left-hand would pronate (and the left wrist would arch, ouch!) while the 4th finger would be off the guitar neck, making the 4th finger “G#” a clumsy challenge.

Some years ago I read in Anthony Glise’s seminal book, *Classic Guitar Pedagogy*, about Sor’s 4th finger approach (this was adopted by Aguado in the following decade). After I examined Sor’s method (early 1830’s, I believe), I found that Sor clearly indicated that the “D” on the 2nd string and the “G” on the first string should be played with the 4th finger, not the third. Since Sor’s guitar was most likely a smaller 630mm scale Lacote, and as he was one of the greatest guitarists who has ever lived, I doubt that he had difficulty reaching the 3rd fret with the 3rd finger. It seems to me that the only reasonable explanation for the 4th finger on the 3rd fret is to reduce the amount of pronation of the left-hand.

I tried this with a few students, young and old, and the problems with pronation were significantly reduced. Their hands stayed closer to the guitar neck and “G”, “D”, and “Bb” on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd strings, respectively, became simple. Finger exchange difficulties were more easily dealt with. The student shaves many months off their learning curve, too. I continued to use the 3rd finger on the third frets of the 4th, 5th, and 6th strings. After this success, I now teach Sor’s 4th finger approach for all my students, and use it myself.

Since there was no modern method edited with Sor’s 4th finger approach, I decided to create one. *The Conservatory Tutor* uses the 4th finger approach coupled with Joseph Urshalmi’s research in left thumb position. You can review *The Conservatory Tutor* on my site.