

Ukulele 101

101 Things Every Ukulele Player Needs to Know



HowToPlayUkulele.com

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Buying a Ukulele

If you play uke for long enough you'll discover the right answer to the question, "Which ukulele should I buy?" is, "All of them."

Deciding which ukulele to buy is tricky even for seasoned uke players. There are a huge number of different types and brands of ukulele. For first time ukulele buyers, it can be difficult to know where to start. In this section, I run through some of the things you might want to consider when buying a ukulele.

1. Where should I buy a ukulele?

Unless you live in Hawaii, dedicated ukulele shops are hard to come by. There are a few dotted around such as [Duke of Uke](#) in London. Local music/guitar shops will probably sell a couple of basic models. But for most people, if you want some real choice, the internet is probably your best bet.

There are a number of dedicated ukulele sites such as [Ukewarehouse](#) in the US, [The Ukulele Shop](#) in the UK and [RISA/Uke Surfer](#) and [Ukulele 24](#) in Germany.

However, the biggest choice is to be found on eBay. Buying on eBay can be a bit risky sometimes, but there are some ukulele sellers with good reputations. I don't think I've ever heard anything but glowing praise for [musicguymic](#) from anyone. All the instruments he sells, even the cheapest, are expertly set up. [ukulele4u](#) is another popular seller and usually has a wider selection of lower priced ukes.

One way to try out a variety of ukuleles before you buy is to search out a local group. Flea Market Music has a [big list of players and clubs organised geographically](#).

2. Which Size Ukulele Should I Buy?

There are four main sizes of ukulele: soprano, concert, tenor and baritone. Soprano, concert and tenor are all tuned the same (GCEA).

The smallest of these, soprano, is the classic ukulele and the one that most people start on - particularly children. They also tend to be the cheapest size.

My favourite size at the moment is concert as it has a bit more room for my fingers.

Tenor ukuleles are bigger still and tend to be the ukulele of choice for professional ukulele players.

Baritones are the biggest and are tuned differently to other ukuleles (the same as the highest four strings of the guitar). Because it's tuned like this, some uke players don't really think of it as a ukulele.

3. How Much Should I Spend?

There are a lot of [ukuleles for under \\$15 on eBay](#). These are usually playable and many people start out on these. However, they're often not set up ideally, which isn't handy for a beginner. Spending a little more will give you a much better instrument and will be more playable straight out of the box.

It's quite likely you already have one of these entry level ukes. If you do and you enjoy playing the ukulele, it's well worth upgrading to a slightly higher quality uke if you can afford it. It'll be more fun and easier to play.

4. What's the best ukulele for under \$50?

[Makala ukuleles](#) are your best bet if you're on a tight budget. As I mentioned before, if you [buy one from musicguymic](#) it will be properly set up (which makes it worth the small premium). It's also worth getting a decent set of strings to put on it (such as [Aquila](#)).

Another popular budget option is [Mahalo ukuleles](#). Their popularity stems mainly from looks, particularly the [Mahalo Flying-V ukuleles](#) and - insanely popular with girls of all ages - [pink Mahalos](#).

Just sneaking into this category, [Ukewarehouse](#) are selling [Lanikai LU21](#) sopranos for \$50. Which sounds like a good deal to me.

5. What's the best ukulele for under \$100?

[Kala ukuleles](#) mostly inhabit the \$200 - \$300 price range but also make [some lower price models](#). The [Kala KA-S Mahogany Soprano](#) with set up and strings for \$60 looks like a good deal to me.

In a similar price range in Europe, is the [Ashbury Concert](#) for £50. I have the [Koa version](#) and wouldn't be without it.

6. What should I bear in mind when buying on eBay?

As well as the usual eBay precautions such as checking the seller's feedback score (be wary of anyone with less than 97% positive feedback), there are a few other things worth bearing in mind.

Firstly, try to buy from an established ukulele dealer (such as [musicguymic](#) or [ukulele4u](#)) who know how to evaluate and describe ukes and have a good reputation.

If you're after a bargain, you may have to take your chances with less established sellers. These sellers may know nothing about ukuleles and may make honest - or not so honest - mistakes. You can usually judge from the description how knowledgeable they are. Have a very careful look at the photos. If they are poor quality, ask for better quality pictures or avoid the item all together. It's best to assume that if you're buying a vintage ukulele it'll have a few issues (such as cracks that may require fixing) and factor this into your bid. Newer instruments will tend to have fewer issues.

7. What sort of wood should a ukulele be made of?

Ukuleles made with different woods will create different tones. The traditional wood for the ukulele is koa – native to Hawaii. Koa wood is quite rare so solid koa wood ukuleles are expensive. An interesting alternative to koa wood is Australian Blackwood. It is from the species of tree as koa (acacia), [looks almost identical](#) and has a similar sound (some even say it's a better sound).

Mahogany is another popular wood for ukuleles.

However, almost all cheaper, beginner level ukuleles (less than \$200) will be laminated. This means that underneath a thin layer of the expensive wood is a very cheap wood (such as plywood). It will be the name of the expensive wood that you will read in the description. With laminated ukuleles, the main difference the type of wood makes will be aesthetic, it will make little difference to the tone.

You'll read many descriptions of ukuleles that don't clearly say whether it's laminated or solid. Unless the description of the uke specifically says 'solid' it's fairly safe to assume that it's laminated.

8. I'm left-handed, do I need to buy a left handed ukulele?

Many people who are left handed play the ukulele right handed without any difficulty.

Even if you don't want to do this, there's no need to buy a specific left-handed ukulele. Because there is little difference between the size of the strings, you can just reverse the order of the strings and turn the ukulele upside down.

9. What's better geared or friction tuners?

With friction tuners, the string is kept in tune by nothing more than friction. The tuning pegs will be sticking out of the back. Almost all older ukes will have friction tuners.

With older ukuleles, the friction is created between the peg and the wood. Modern ukes will usually have friction created by a screw that can be tightened to create a tighter fit (as in the photo) – so the string is more likely to stay in tune.



Geared tuners use a cog system to keep the ukulele in tune and have the tuners sticking out at the side.

There are many varieties of this tuner. They may look like the photo or they may be covered up.

There are advantages and disadvantages for both systems and there's lots of discussion between players which is best. Geared tuners are much more likely to stay in tune. Friction tuners, particularly cheap ones, can detune themselves when you strum hard and it can be difficult getting the string exactly in tune.

However, geared tuners are much heavier and more intrusive. Having geared tuners makes the uke very top-heavy making it less satisfying to play. A ukulele with friction tuners will feel more balanced.

According to some players, geared tuners can also have an effect on the sound – dampening it a little.

If you have top quality friction tuners, they'll perform as well as geared tuners. However, in the \$50 - \$100 range of ukuleles geared tuners are probably the better bet.

10. Should I buy a banjo ukulele?

Banjo ukuleles (or banjo ukes, or banjoleles) are a cross between a ukulele and a banjo. They have the same string setup as a ukulele and are a similar size. Like a banjo, they have steel strings and a banjo style body.



Very few ukulele players start out with a banjo uke. Those that do are usually banjo players or big fans of George Formby. They can be a little more difficult to get the hang of and are tougher on the fingers which makes them less suitable for beginners.

11. Should I buy an electric ukulele?

Electric ukuleles are great for two opposite types of playing – when you don't want to be quiet and when you want to be loud.

If you're playing gigs, you'll need some way to amplify the instrument. You don't necessarily need an electric uke for this. You could attach a pickup to your acoustic ukulele.

If you don't want to disturb others with your playing, electric ukes are great. Some models, such as the [RISA solid](#), give off very little sound at all unplugged.

Beginners will probably want to get an acoustic ukulele but will want to add an electric to their collection later on. Some look very striking such as the [Bugsgear Eleuke](#) and the [RISA Uke'Ellie](#).

12. What's a 'low-G' ukulele and should I buy one?

Most ukuleles have a 'my dog has fleas' tuning where the G string is higher than the C string – known as re-entrant tuning. This is very rare amongst string instruments, most have strings in order of lowest to highest. Some ukuleles are set up in this way – so that the G-string is the lowest on the ukulele. These are known as low-G or progressively tuned ukuleles.

Strings

13. Does it matter what strings I use?

Yes, strings can make a difference to how the ukulele sounds. If you have a cheap ukulele, the chances are it came with a low quality set of strings. Switching to a higher quality set of strings will improve the tone.

14. Which strings should I buy?

The two most popular makes of string are [Worth](#) and [Aquila](#). Both these strings are made out of materials that attempt to combine the best features of the traditional gut strings and the later nylon strings and have reassuringly space-age names. Worth strings are made of fluoro-carbon and Aquila from NylGut

My personal preference is Worths as they are sharper and punchier. Aquilas have a more rounded tone. You can get some idea of the sound of the different strings in [this video](#) with different strings playing the same song on similar ukuleles. But the best way to find out which suit you best is to try them out.

I have a real soft spot for KoAloha's crystal colored strings. They have a similar sound to Worths but, as the name suggests, they come in a variety of colours. The trouble is, they're hard to come by. They crop up [on eBay](#) occasionally. You can see me playing a set of [pink KoAlohas here](#).

15. How do I replace strings?

It's best to replace strings one at a time by loosening the string with the tuning pegs then releasing it at the other end. Take the opportunity to wipe down the fretboard, and clean around the areas you can't reach when the strings are on.

Most uke strings are held into place by a slot on the bridge (where the strings are attached to the main body of the ukulele). You tie a knot in the end of the string and thread it through the slot. The type of the knot you'll need depends on the size of the strings and slot. For the C and E strings you'll probably just need to make a loop and thread the string through once. The G and A strings might require larger knots. You can find some suggestions [here](#) or check out some [professional stopper knots here](#).

Some ukuleles have more complicated ways of securing strings. Some have a hole going through the bridge rather than just a slot. Thread the string from the neck end of the hole and pull a couple of inches out the other side. Pull it back towards the neck and loop it underneath the string.

16. How often should I replace strings?

The easy answer is when they start to sound and feel bad. That depends on a few things: how often you play, how aggressively you play, what your sweat is like.

I like to replace strings once every six months or so.

17. Do I need different strings for different sizes of ukulele?

Yes, you do. Each size of ukulele has a different length of neck so you need the strings that fit that size.

18. Do I need different strings for C-tuning and D-tuning?

No, you don't.

The most common tuning for the ukulele is GCEA (also called C-tuning) but many people prefer to tune two frets higher to ADF#B (D-tuning). Any good quality string will be quite happy in either tuning.

The only possible problem is that once they've been in D-tuning, the strings get stretched. They feel loose if you move them back to C-tuning.

19. Can I use guitar/mandolin/banjo strings on a ukulele?

Yikes, no! If your uke was designed for nylon/gut strings, steel strings will have too much tension and could do serious damage to your ukulele.

There are a few alternatives to dedicated ukulele strings. I've heard of impoverished ukulele using fishing wire as strings.

20. How do I make strings last longer?

There are a couple of easy things you can do to make strings last longer.

The easiest is to wipe your strings down with a cloth after playing (to stop sweat attacking the strings).

It's also worth checking for sharp edges on the bridge (where you attach the strings to the body of the ukulele), on the nut (at the other end of the fretboard) and the frets themselves. Sharp edges can wear away strings. If you find any, sand or file them down.

Ukulele Online

21. Where can I find tab and chords online?

I'm completely biased in this, but I'd recommend my site [Uke Hunt](#). You can find the [Tab and Chord section here](#) and the [beginners section here](#).

The biggest ukulele chord site on the net is [Ukulele Boogaloo](#). It has a huge selection but the quality is variable.

Here's a list of the most useful ukulele tab and chord sites:

[Akulele](#): Tab for classical and traditional pieces. Mostly advanced stuff.

[Beatles Ukulele Site](#): A fancy looking site where you can play along with pretty much every Beatles song.

[Big Muffin's Ukulele Tab](#): Classic pop songs presented as chords and simple melody.

[Brook Adams' Ukulele Pages](#): I really like this site. It's got a great selection of chords and tabs.

[Buke](#): This site is dedicated to the baritone ukulele but also has [a number of tabs for standard ukulele](#). The tabs are mainly classical and folk pieces and are handily arranged by difficulty.

[Chordie's Ukulele Collection](#): The ukulele section of [Chordie](#).

[Combative Ukulele](#): Simple chords for punk songs, particularly The Clash.

[Curt Sheller's Jazz Guitar Resources](#): Some nice ukulele arrangements particularly of Jazz tunes.

[Doctor Uke](#): Loads of chords for older songs for standard and baritone ukulele.

[Dominator Ukulele Tab](#): High quality tabs for solo ukulele from the likes of Aldrine Guerrero, James Hill and Daniel Ho. Almost all the tabs on this page are difficult to play.

[Eleuke Ukulele Lessons](#): Buggear's Eleuke site has [lessons for beginners](#) and some [intermediate tab](#).

[ezFolk Chords](#): Chords for traditional tunes. Most of the pieces are fairly easy to play There is also a section for [ezFolk's Ukulele Tab](#).

[Fleabag Songbook](#): Chords for a few classic tunes.

[Glop](#): French ukulele blog with tab and chords.

[Heftone](#): Brian Hefferan is one of my favourite ukulele players. This page has chords for a number of oldtime jazz tunes (even though it only says 'words') some of them very obscure.

JazzUkes: Mark Occhionero is a great player. He uses interesting chords and has some great arrangements for jazz songs. It's not suitable for beginners, but once you're familiar with the standard chords this is a great place to pick up fancy chords and learn how to use them.

John Pak: Lots of ukulele chords. [Part two is here](#).

King David Ukulele Station's Depot: Files from the users of the [French blog and forum](#). You'll have to hunt around a bit, but there are some gems in here. I particularly like [Goschenhobel's tabs](#).

Koalohe Ukulele Club Songbook: Chords for lots of Hawaiian-style tunes.

Let's Play Ukulele: The chords on this site are taken from a guitar site and have the ukulele chords automatically generated. This isn't entirely ideal – you'll often find chords missing or pieces of guitar tab or chords that are just completely wrong. On the upside, it does have the very nifty feature of taking your Last.fm profile and finding chords for the songs you've listened to.

Mike's Ukulele Page: Chords for indie songs.

Nalu Music: John King is one of the best ukulele players around. He has produced a few ukulele tab books but you can pick up a few tabs here for free. I should warn you, they are very difficult to play. I highly recommend you check out the rest of that site for its ukulele history.

New Zealand Arts Online: Chords for Maori and Samoan songs along with some advice for beginners.

Sacred Uke: Chords for religious songs.

Salem Ukulele Strummers Assn: A whole hat full of songs with easy chords.

Sheep Entertainment: As well as the very useful chord finder, this page has a number of songs you can play along with. Just click 'PLAY ALONG SONGS GO'.

Sonic Uke: Songbook of the guys from [Midnight Ukulele Disco](#).

Tropical Storm Hawaii: A huge collection of traditional Hawaiian songs along with a few simple chords. Also has [a tab section](#) but the quality isn't great.

TUSC Songbooks: Chords for the repertoire of the Taunton Ukulele Strummers Club.

U is for Ukulele: Some really simple beginner tunes.

UK Ukes: Visit their Music Room for chords.

Uke Farm's Chord Sheet Generator: A variety of chords for C-tuning, D-tuning and baritone ukulele.

Uke Muzik: Chords for more modern ukulele performers.

uke.se: It's in Swedish, which makes it hard to navigate. But there are tabs there.

Uke Thingy: A relatively new site with tab snippets.

Ukedom: Chord arrangements of songs from various genres.

Ukeland: Tab and chords from Ukeland members.

Ukulele Guild of Hawaii: Chords for traditional and modern Hawaiian songs.

Ukulele School: A few ukulele chords including *Hey There Delilah* and *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Ukulele Strummers' Songbook: More modern Hawaiian stuff. Mainly Israel Kamakawiwo'ole and Ka'au Crater Boys.

Ukulele Tabs: A German site with some very nice solo arrangements of popular songs. They are quite tricky though.

Ukulele/Tom: A more recent site with indie chords.

Ukulele Zoo: There are only a few tabs there, but they're good ones. Includes Super Mario Theme.

ukulele4ever: French ukulele blog with tabs.

The Ukulizer: Chords for English and Swedish songs. There's a very useful doodad on this site which can instantly transpose songs and switch between C and D tuning.

Waitswatcher Tabs: Pascal 'Waitswatcher' Fricke has covered a cartload of Tom Waits tunes. You can [download a double album of his arrangements here](#). Here you can find some of his tabs for ukulele. They're difficult.

Some ukulele performers put up chords and tab to their own songs such as [Tiki King](#) and the [New York Ukulele Ensemble](#).

There are also many sites that are not specific to the ukulele, but do have chords (you can just use a chord chart to find out how to play the chords on the ukulele). The biggest of these are [Chordie](#) and [Ultimate Guitar](#). Chordie has a widget on the right of the screen that will show you the chord boxes for ukulele (C-tuning, D-tuning or baritone). [The Guitar Guy](#) is good for jazz songs.

22. Where can I learn chord shapes online?

There are a number of places you can find chord shapes. [Sheep Entertainment](#) and [four string chords](#) both have useful interfaces for showing chord shapes on the ukulele. Be careful on the Sheep Entertainment site as the default is D-tuning. If you're using C-tuning make sure you click on 'soprano – C' first or you'll get the wrong chord shapes. If you prefer to download a program, try [Winchord](#).

This site makes transposing chord progressions easy. You just copy and paste the chord chart and tell it which key to transpose into.

To help you learn chord shapes, you can [download these flashcards](#) or [these flashcards](#) and print them out.

23. Where can I find ukulele lessons and tutorials online?

ezFolk has a big selection of [ukulele lessons here](#).

[Pineapple Pete's Uke School](#) has a number of lessons.

There are also many video ukulele lessons online. By far the best are those by [Aldrine Guerrero at lamhawaii](#) (you have to sign up before you can view the videos). He's a great player and can put lessons across very well. He's also got a new site [Ukulele Underground](#) which continues his series of video lessons and also has weekly one minute uke tips.

There are lots of [ukulele lessons on YouTube](#) but the quality varies greatly. Take everything you learn here with a pinch of salt.

There's also a free piece of software you can download [Uke-4-U](#) which teaches some basic ukulele chords.

24. What ukulele forums are there online?

There are plenty of ukulele forums around in a number of languages.

[4th Peg](#): Not very active but plenty of interesting and useful stuff in the archives.

[All Things Ukulele](#): Not a forum, but a Live Journal group. So long as you have an account, you can join in.

[ezFolk](#): ezFolk has forums dedicated to a number of instruments including the uke. It has a dedicated [beginners section](#).

[Flea Market Music](#): Many long time, slightly obsessed ukulele players hang out here. I would be there more often myself, but the way the forum works drives me up the wall.

[King David Ukulele Station Forum](#): The biggest francophone ukulele forum.

[My Dog Has Flea](#): A young French forum.

[The Uke](#): Not a very active forum but the [beginners section](#) is worth a read through.

[Uke Surfer \(RISA\)](#): Based around the [Uke Surfer Shop](#). Not very active. In German and English.

[UkeTalk](#): An offshoot of the [UkeTalk website](#). Site owner, [Richard Crossett](#) is always on hand with good advice.

[Ukulele Club](#): In Chinese.

[Ukulele Jam](#): A new forum. Not much action there as yet.

[Ukulele Cosmos](#): One of the biggest ukulele forums. You'll often find me on there.

Ukulele in the Classroom forum: The forum set up around James Hill and J Chalmers Doane's [Ukulele in the Classroom series of books](#). Aimed at teachers using these books.

Ukulele Underground: Aldrine Guerrero's forum. Based in Hawaii. Another forum I'm on regularly.

Ukulelekommissionens: In Swedish.

Ukulelenboard: The biggest ukulele forum in German.

Ukulelenurkka: Finnish forum (with an international section).

UkuleleWorld2: Forum connected to the [Ukulele World 2 shop](#).

The ukulele is very popular in Japan and there are a number of Japanese ukulele boards . Here's a smattering (translated into English by Google):

[NUA](#)

[Ukulele Afternoon](#)

[Kyushu Ukulele Family](#)

There are also a number of groups on social sites such as [Ukulele Nation on MySpace](#) and [Ukulele Disco on Last.fm](#).

25. Where can I hear ukulele music online?

[UkeFarm](#) pumps out ukulele music 24 hours a day.

The [UkeCast](#) is a regular podcast with news and tips as well as the latest ukulele tunes.

MP3 blogs regularly feature ukulele music. There's no fool-proof way of finding all of them, but [searching for 'ukulele' on elbo.ws](#) is a pretty good start.

KPFFK have a dedicated ukulele show [Ukulele Spotlight](#) that they make available for download. Each show they have guests playing live in the studio and it's always worth checking out. You can [check out their archive here](#).

There are hundreds of ukulele acts on [MySpace](#). The quality varies wildly, but there are plenty of hidden gems around.

26. How can I pick up a bargain on eBay?

A really useful way to pick up a bargain on eBay is to use [Fat Fingers](#). Fat Fingers searches eBay for common (and not so common) misspellings of the item you search for. Sometimes an item is listed so poorly no one can find it. Ukulele is a particularly difficult word to spell – [even writers have trouble getting it right](#). So, if you're lucky, you might be able to find a bargain.

27. What ukulele blogs are there?

4th Peg: The blog attached to the 4th Peg community focussing on ukulele related news.

A noob and his Uke: Chronicles of a ukulele beginner.

ChiyoDad Learns Ukulele and Guitar: A bit more guitar than ukulele, but the ukulele posts are definitely worth a read.

The Doifter: [Jonathan Coulton's](#) ukulele sidekick.

The Fluke Museum and **The Flea Museum**: Blogs dedicated to cataloguing the many variations of Flea and Fluke ukuleles.

Ginette Machin et son Ukulele: French ukulele blog (if you hadn't guessed). Get the less than perfect [Google translation here](#).

King David Ukulele Station: The biggest French ukulele blog. Even if you don't speak French, it's well worth checking out the links and trying to fathom the [Google translation](#).

La vidéo Ukulélé du jour: Another French ukulele blog. This time you don't need Google translation – it's a blog dedicated to ukulele videos.

Live Ukulele: Hawaiian blog with acts, tips and tabs.

UK Ukes: Luthier Pete Howlett chronicles his ukulele making.

Ukewarehouse's Weblog: The blog of the [Ukewarehouse store](#). Plenty of in depth product reviews.

Ukulala: A blog, “only for cool things on or about the ukulele.”

Ukulele and All That Jazz: Blog of ukulele performer Howlin' Hobbit. Often has interesting ukulele news, links and music.

Ukulele for the Masses: Ukulele links.

UkuLady's UkuUniverse: Blog of the [UkuLady](#) – who is completely off her nut. As well as being a ukulele superstar, she's the [voice of the teenage girl in The Sims](#).

Ukulele Ghetto: Confessions of a sufferer of Ukulele Acquisition Syndrome (UAS).

Ukulele Review: Reviews of ukuleles and uke accessories by Julie Strietelmeier of [The Gadgeteer](#).

Ukulele Revolution: Nipper of the [UkeCast's](#) blog.

Ukulele Tonya: Make sure you don't miss her [files section](#). A lot of useful information in there.

Ukulelia: The most venerable ukulele blog. Regularly has mp3s of new and exciting ukulele acts.

Ukebox: Steven Strauss's blog.

28. Which YouTube channels should I be watching?

[Bosko & Honey](#)

Bosko and Honey are a duo from Australia who have regular 'ukulele love-ins'. They're [touring the globe in 2008](#) meeting ukulele players and filming their travels.

Must watch: [Bosko and Honey with Rose Turtle Ertler](#).

[Earlyguard](#)

Earlyguard (Thomas Fruwacht) is a German musician. His primary instrument is the [RISA solid](#). What makes him interesting is that he's the first player I've heard who has developed a way of playing that is unique to the electric ukulele (rather than sounding like an amplified acoustic ukulele or an electric guitar).

Must watch: [Busy Bee](#) you can find the tab for it [here](#).

[GUGUG](#)

GUGUG are a Scottish duo who make ukulele covers of classic punk songs. Fin (the one with the beard) has his [solo YouTube channel here](#).

Must watch: [Blitzkrieg Bop](#).

[Heftone](#)

Brian Hefferan is involved in [many musical acts](#), but I can't get enough of his solo ukulele playing. He has a real knack for arranging tunes for the ukulele. You just have to check out his technique.

Must watch: [The Entertainer](#). Get the [tab here](#).

[Jaaaaaaa](#)

Julia Nunes won the [Bushman World Ukulele Contest](#) with her [cover of Survivor](#) and has plenty more excellent videos.

Must watch: [It's Raining Men](#).

[Mark Occhionero](#)

Mark '[JazzUkes](#)' Occhionero really knows what he's doing when it comes to chords. You absolutely have to watch his [JazzUkes Demonstrated series](#) for some great tips on how to use chords.

Must watch: [Little Grass Shack demonstrated](#).

[Maxevancejpn](#)

This channel has to be seen to be believed.

Must watch: [When You Were Young](#).

[NaluMusic](#)

[John King](#) is a ukulele virtuoso, teacher and writer. His technique is spot on.

Must watch: [Bach Prelude](#).

[sweetafton23](#)

Molly Lewis's [version of Britney Spears' Toxic](#) became an interweb smash after [getting picked up by Digg](#). Her [version of Jonathan Coulton's Tom Cruise Crazy](#) was voted Ukulele Video of the Year.
Must watch: [MyHope](#) and [Mr Fancy Pants](#).

[TheDesignmachine](#)

Has only started posting videos relatively recently but already has many worth watching.

Must watch: [Baby It's Cold Outside](#) with Seeso.

[Seeso](#)

Narcisco Lobo is an actor and musician from Chicago and has a great voice.

Must watch: [Use Me](#).

[ThessalyLerner](#):

Also known as the [UkuLady](#). Thessaly is a voice artist (she's the voice of the girl in The Sims) and is so funny she can make me laugh just by [clearing her throat](#). She specialises in songs about troubled starlets.

Must watch: [Oops](#).

[Trubbledjenius](#)

Jen Kwok is a stand-up comedian with a wickedly funny show Super Cute Sex Show but she also writes some killer serious songs.

Must see: [Desert & the Sea](#).

[ukuleleoversoul](#)

Aldrine Guerrero is one of the finest young ukulele players around.

Must watch: [Legend of Zelda medley](#).

[Ukulelezaza](#)

One of the best strummers around. You can pick up some [great strumming patterns from this video](#).

Must watch: [I Surrender Dear](#).

[Waitswatcher](#)

As his screen-name suggests, Pascal Fricke is a big fan of Tom Waits and his YouTube channel has many Waits covers.

Must watch: [Hoist That Rag](#).

[Wardsoft](#)

James Ward has been playing the ukulele since age 9 and it shows. He's primarily a George Formby style player and has all the Formby tricks down pat.

Must watch: [Five Foot Two/Rockin' the Uke](#).

WS64

Wolfgang Schneider teams up with Earlyguard for the duo [Earlywolf](#) and also has a real knack for arranging popular tunes for the ukulele.

Must watch: [Theme from Cheers](#).

wwelti

Wilfried Welti plays the ukulele in a very classical way. He is able to counterpoint (two melodic lines played simultaneously) on a single ukulele, or even [on two ukuleles at once](#). You can [download a number of his tabs on this page](#).

Must watch: [Gaillarde](#).

There are also videos regularly upload of players on a number of different channels. You should be subscribed to tags that include: [James Hill](#), [Jake Shimabukuro](#), [Roy Smeck](#) and the [Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain](#).

29. Where else can I find ukulele videos?

YouTube has the biggest selection of ukulele videos but there are other places around. [DailyMotion](#) is a site similar to YouTube and is more popular amongst French ukulele players (of which there are many). Also on a French theme, there's [Le Soir's Ukulele Sessions](#). Le Soir has regular sessions from indie acts. Some of them are associated with the ukulele (like [Jeremy Warmesley](#), [Thomas Fersen](#) and [Hermann Dune](#)) and others are not (e.g. [Great Lake Swimmers](#), [The Blood Arm](#) and [Calexico](#)).

Making A Good Sound

30. How can I hear how I sound?

When you're playing the uke, you are hearing a slightly different thing to people who are listening to you. You can get a better idea of what you sound like if you stand facing the wall or a door a few inches away. This bounces the sound right back at you. It's particularly worth doing if you're trying out a ukulele you're thinking of buying.

31. How should I hold the ukulele?

This question is answered in most beginners books, but they often leave out the most important part. I've seen it suggested that you should hold the uke by smushing it into your chest; that is entirely the wrong way to go about it. Being so small, it's easy to smother all the tone out of a ukulele. You want to be touching the ukulele as little as possible. You need to allow the front and back of the uke to vibrate as much as possible get as much tone and volume out of it as possible.

Watch how the masters like [Jake Shimabukuro](#) and [Roy Smeck](#) hold it. They have the uke angled away from the body and their forearm resting very gently on the corner of the uke. The area of the uke they are touching is very small and mostly limited to the corners.

Try it out for yourself. Go stand in front of the wall, really smother the ukulele and strum the uke. Now hold it away from your body completely and strum it. Hear the difference?

32. Where should I strum?

The place where you strum the uke has an impact on the ukulele's tone. If you strum close to the bridge (where the strings are tied on), then you'll get a very harsh sound.

Each uke has it's own 'sweet spot' but it's usually somewhere around the point where the neck meets the body.

33. Can I use a guitar pick?

It's much better if you don't.

The number one mistake guitar players make when transferring to uke is hacking away at the uke strings with a thumping great rhino's toenail of a pick. Guitar plectrums are far too hard for nylon uke strings (you can get away with it on steel strings) and as a consequence they make an unpleasant sound. If you have to use a pick, use the dedicated ukulele felt picks.

34. How can I look after my uke?

Ukuleles, being made of wood, are affected by humidity. They can warp or even crack.

Experts say the ideal humidity is between 45% and 65%. I must admit, that doesn't mean a whole lot to me.

If the atmosphere is wet, it can cause some problems but it's not too serious. You can counteract it by keeping your uke in its case. It's particularly worth giving your ukulele time to adjust if it's come from a humid climate (such as Hawaii). If that's the case, you might want to put a [silica gel pack](#) in your case to soak up the damp.

A much trickier problem is a climate that's too dry. If you live in a dry climate it may be worth investing in a [small instrument humidifier](#). You just put them in your ukulele case and it'll keep it safe. They're fairly inexpensive.

If you've got a cheap instrument you may not want to fork out for a humidifier but you can take basic steps to care for your uke, such as not leaving your uke on a sunny windowsill or near a heater.

Take a listen to [episode 222 of the UkeCast](#). It has a list of tips for looking after your uke (I did not know that sunscreen can damage ukuleles).

35. Why won't my ukulele stay in tune?

New ukulele strings can take a while to bed down – perhaps as much as a couple of weeks. You can take some of the springiness out of them by tugging them away from the body of the ukulele (so you're stretching them out). Tune up a string, pull it away from the body of the uke and gently tug it a few times. Play the string and see if it is still in tune. Repeat this process until the string stays in tune between tugs.

Another possibility is that the tuning pegs are too loose. If you buy a ukulele with friction tuners, there's a good chance you'll need to tighten them up. All you have to do is give the screw at the end of the tuner a quick turn with a screwdriver. Give it about a quarter of a turn and see if it holds. Keep giving it quarter turns until it does.

36. What should I wear when I'm playing the ukulele?

It's surprising what a difference clothes can make to how you sound. If you wear a big, fluffy sweater, it will absorb a lot of the ukulele's volume. You don't have to take it as far as the [Naked Ukulele Ensemble](#) though.

Also, it's de rigueur to [wear a hat when you're playing the ukulele](#).

Recording

37. What's the best portable recorder?

The [Zoom H4](#) has rave reviews from pretty much everyone who has used it. You can [read an in depth look at it here](#). As well as live recording, it has 4 track capability ([if you can figure it out](#)) and has plenty of effects.

A cheaper and simpler option is the [H2](#).

These devices are so popular they have [a busy forum dedicated to them](#).

38. What microphone should I get?

If your budget doesn't stretch to a dedicated recorder, the cheaper option is to use your computer. If you go this route, make sure the microphone you buy has a USB output. This will make it much easier to use.

You don't have to buy an expensive microphone to get a reasonable sound. I have a [Logitech Desktop USB Microphone](#) and use it more often than the [Samson C01U](#) I have.

39. What software should I use?

The Zoom H4 comes with [Cubase](#) and that is generally regarded as the best software around. If you [buying it alone](#), it'll set you back a few hundred dollars. However, there are free alternatives available that will fit most people's needs.

[Audacity](#) is very simple to use – you plug in the microphone, press the big record button and away you go.

Another free recording program is [Reaper](#). This has more features but is more complicated to use – I still haven't got the hang of it.

40. How far from the mic should I be?

Because the uke is a quiet instrument it's tempting to get right up against the microphone to get a decent recording volume. However, you'll get a better sound if you move back from the mic a little.

The general rule for all instruments is that the distance from the mic should be the length of the body of your instrument.

41. How can I put my music on the internet?

There are a number of ways to do this. The most popular way of putting your music on the net is to upload it to [Box.net](#). When you upload a file to Box.net you get a link that will take people to a page where they can either download or stream the mp3. Box.net is free for the basic account.

Another free service is [Fileden](#). With Fileden there is no intermediary page – people will be able to download your music straight from the page.

42. How can I sell my music on the internet?

Once you've got really good on your uke, you might want to try selling your music. There are a lot of services online that let you do this.

One option is [CD Baby](#). You can sell physical CDs and downloads through them. They'll produce the CDs and do all the distribution work for you. Signing up with them will also mean your tracks will be available on services like iTunes and Rhapsody.

If you're only planning on selling just digital downloads, [E-Junkie](#) might be a better option. Rather than charging a percentage of each sale as CD Baby does, it charges a flat rate per month (\$5 at the time of writing) and you can get it free for three months if you [use the code on this page](#).

If you want to go the Radiohead route and let people pay what they want for songs, you can use [SongSlide](#).

Fonts, Software and Other Downloads

43. How can I put ukulele chord charts in word processing documents?

[Chordette](#) is a really useful piece of kit. It has four fonts that you install like any normal font and a program that makes it easy to find the chord you're looking for.

A more low-tech solution is a chord stamp. The best I've seen are from [Ukelounge](#) – they're based in the UK but ship worldwide. Cheaper alternatives can be found on [Flea Market Music](#) and [eBay](#).

44. How can I make my own ukulele tabs?

[Power Tab](#) is a free program that lets you make your own tab for a number of fretted instruments (you just have to set it up for ukulele). There are a few places online where you can download ukulele tab in this format such as [Dominators tabs](#). The Power Tab site is difficult to navigate (it seems designed to make you click on ads by mistake) so [go straight to the source to download it](#).

Although it isn't free, I prefer to use [Guitar Pro](#) for to make my tabs. I find it much easier to use. It can handle Power Tab and midi files as well as Guitar Pro files. This makes it very handy for transposing non-ukulele music to the uke.

45. How can I get in tune with my computer?

If you don't mind using your ears, there are plenty of places that will play the notes for you to tune to. [This site](#) has my favourite layout.

If you don't have enough confidence in your ears, you could try [AP Tuner](#) (you'll need a microphone to use it – the quality isn't too important). The AP Tuner gives you a needle showing whether your string is too high, too low or just right. For the C-tuned uke, the notes should be G4, C4, E4, A4.

46. Where can I get a metronome online?

Metronomes are one of the most overlooked pieces of kit for ukulele players (or, indeed, any musician). Metronomes produce a steady beat so you can ensure that you stay in time throughout the piece. I really love those ticking, wooden metronomes, but they're not free and there are plenty of online metronomes that are.

You can find tons of metronomes online. [Metronome Online](#) has a groovy dial interface, but [TempoPerfect](#) is my favourite. It gives you lots of options for notes to emphasize (so you know which beat is the first note of the bar). If you need to construct a more complicated beat, [Weird Metronome](#) should suit you.

47. How can I improve my ear?

My former school music teacher (Mr Barnes - tall, lengthy face, insane hair) always used to say, "You don't play music with your hands, you play it with your ears." To which the idiotic class moron would respond by bashing the side of his head against the keyboard (yes, it was me). Anyhoo, Mr Barnes spoke the truth. How can you know what notes to play if you don't know what they sound like?

[Functional Ear Trainer](#) is a program to help improve your ability to pick out notes and, therefore, work out tunes. It plays you a chord progression in a certain key then plays a single note. You have to work out what that note is. It's an addictive little game.

48. Where can I get ukulele icons?

There are a bunch of cute little [ukulele icons here](#). There's also this comprehensive set of ukulele shapes in [this set of ukulele fonts](#).

Adjusting Your Ukulele

49. That sounds scary, should I do it?

If you've got a ukulele worth hundreds of dollars, it's best to let a luthier do that sort of thing. But if you've got a cheap uke, there's a limit to the damage you can do, it's good experience to have a little tinker around. There are some adjustments you can make to your ukulele relatively easily.

50. What is intonation?

If you've tuned your ukulele very carefully but it still sounds out of tune when you play, it may well be that you have an intonation problem.

Intonation is a measure of how close a note is to its true pitch. For example, playing the C-string at the seventh fret should be exactly the same as playing the open G-string. However, it is possible that it is off by a slight amount (even if the amount is too small to pick up by ear).

Don't be too quick to put problems down to intonation, though. First, make sure you're not pressing the strings down too hard. When you're testing your ukulele's intonation, only press down on the strings just hard enough to make them sound cleanly.

51. How can I measure how good my ukulele's intonation is?

First get the [AP Tuner](#) (or your own tuner if you have one) and tune your strings as close to 00.0 as you can get. The C-string should show C4 when it's in tune. Now play it at the seventh fret (be careful to only fret the note very lightly – just enough so it's clear). The tuner should show G4. If the number shown has a + sign next to it, the note is too sharp (too high). If it has a - sign it is flat (too low).

It's very unlikely to be dead accurate. The amount of difference that's worth worrying about depends on how you play and how willing you are to be out of tune. If you only play within the first five frets then it doesn't matter as much as if you're regularly playing further up the neck. If the highest fret you play regularly is less than + or – 10 or 15, then you needn't worry a great deal. If it's over 20, you might want to try to do something about it.

52. How can I improve my ukulele's intonation?

It's most common for notes to be sharp (the tuner shows a + value as you go up the neck). One common problem which causes this is high action. The action is the distance from the neck to the string. This should be about a credit card width's gap between the top of the first fret and the string.

Fixing this problem is fairly easy, but a bit nerve-racking. At the nut (the end of the fretboard before the tuning pegs) there is a groove for each string. You can lower the action by making the grooves deeper using a needle file. Take off only a tiny amount before testing it out (a couple of swipes). Raising it is a lot more difficult than lowering it.

You can do a similar thing at the other end of the uke. The bridge (the little bit sticking up that the strings go over before they're tied to the body) can be lowered by removing it and sanding down the underside so it sits lower in the groove. However, not all ukulele bridges are suitable for this.

53. How can I stop my ukulele buzzing?

This is the opposite problem. If your strings are buzzing, they are probably knocking against a fret. Try to locate the problem by finding out which string is buzzing. Play that string at different frets and find when it buzzes and when it doesn't.

If it's just one fret that it's buzzing on, it's an easy fix. Just file the fret down very slightly.

If you have a more general problem, it may be that the action is too low i.e. the string is too low down. To do this, you need to raise the bridge. Most ukuleles will have a removable bridge – just take off the strings and pull it out. How you raise it will depend what type you have. With the most common type, you can put a sliver of card or wood under the bridge to raise it.

A more makeshift method is to place a piece of card (like a piece of a matchbox) right underneath the strings at the bridge and nut.

Ukulele Accessories

54. How can I plug my ukulele into an amplifier?

If you have an acoustic ukulele and you want need to amplify it, you'll need to buy and install a pick-up. This can be done really easily with a transducer pick-up such as the [Dean Markley transducer pickup](#). These are small, round pick-ups that you stick onto the body of the ukulele. They sense the vibrations of the uke itself and amplify them. They cost around \$35-\$45 but you can usually find them cheaper [on eBay](#).

55. Do I need to buy a tuner?

If you're planning on playing in front of people, it's very useful to have a tuner you can carry around with you. The [Intelli Tuner](#) clips on to the end of the uke and picks up the pitch by vibration of the uke itself - avoiding any confusion with ambient sound.

It's a chromatic tuner i.e. you can tune to any pitch you want. This means that, as well as ukes, it can be used to tune guitars, mandolins, banjos etc.

The cheapest I've seen these advertised is [musicguymic on eBay](#).

56. What's a capo?

Sometimes you'll want to play chords that don't fit too well on the ukulele. For example, playing in the key of C# is very tricky. A capo (pronounced 'kay-poh' in the US or 'cap-oh' in the UK) acts like an extra finger by strapping across the ukulele's neck at a certain fret, making it easier to play the chords. They're very useful to have if you're accompanying someone who likes to sing in a key that doesn't fit naturally on the uke or if you like to learn by playing along with recordings.

They are also useful if you want to play in D-tuning but want to return to C-tuning without having the problem of loose strings. Placing the capo at the second fret is the same as being in D-tuning.

Dedicated ukulele capos are rare and [those that are around](#) tend to be not great quality. However, [mandolin capos](#) will work perfectly fine on the uke. If you already have a guitar capo, they'll probably be able to do the job – although they're not ideal and may get in the way when you're trying to play.

57. Do I need a strap?

With a little practice, it's not too hard to hold the ukulele by itself. But, you may like to have the added security of a strap. Most ukuleles do not have pegs that you can attach a guitar-like strap to. [Ukulele straps](#) (also known as thongs) work by going round your neck, under the uke and hooking into the uke's soundhole.

58. Can I play the ukulele with a guitar pick?

Guitar picks don't do any favours for you ukulele's sound. They sound too harsh on nylon strings. If you have steel strings, then guitar picks will be more suitable.

The biggest drawback with picks is that they restrict your strumming. Strumming patterns are one of the distinctive features of ukulele playing and can add loads of colour to your playing. The most entertaining ukulele strums use a combination of fingers and thumb which are impossible to recreate with a pick.

If you must use a pick, [felt picks](#) are made for the uke's more delicate disposition. You can even attempt to make your own. [Instructions here](#).

59. Should I buy a metronome?

Metronomes are a very good investment. If you mainly practice at your computer, there are a number of metronomes you can download for free (see question 46).

Real life metronomes come in two forms. There are the modern, digital metronomes. These are very compact, configurable and, depending on the model, fairly inexpensive. The other type is the traditional ticking metronome. The only real advantage of these is they produce a much more pleasing sound than the digital metronomes.

Practicing

60. How often should I practice?

The answer to this question (and every question in this section) is: it depends how good you want to be. There are rumours about naturally gifted musicians, but from what I've seen the best musicians happen to be the ones who practice most.

However much you choose to practice, it's best to keep your practice regular. It's better to practice thirty minutes every day than it is to practice for three and a half hours on a Sunday. And it's better to practice for three and a half hours every Sunday than it is to practice for an entire day every few months.

My, highly un-technical, approach is to practice until I want to stop. If it stops being fun, or at least engaging, then it puts me off playing in general. [John Williams](#) (the unbelievably good classical guitarist) and this to say on the subject:

“It's kind of 19th century tradition that practice should be hard work, leftover from the Victorian thing. I think this is a totally destructive idea. The essence of the thing is that the work should be enjoyable.... When people are learning instruments, they should be encouraged and advised: if they say they don't enjoy their practice, I always say, well, FIND a way to enjoy it.”

61. Do I need to warm up?

It's definitely a good idea to warm up before you play a gig. Your playing will be much smoother and easier if you do. You can find some ukulele warm-up exercises on [Iamhawaii](#) and [Doctor Trey](#).

Unfortunately, I'm not as diligent as this all the time. Warm-up exercises bore me to death and I get sick of playing before I even start. I usually start off by gently strumming a few chords then playing through a few pieces I know well.

62. What's the most important thing when practicing?

Do it **SLOWLY**.

A common mistake for beginners is to strum quickly through a chord, come to a chord change, stop completely, change chord, strum quickly through that chord and so on. It's much better to play as slowly as you need to in order for the chord changes to be smooth. You can gently work up speed from there.

It's very important to practice as slowly as you need to without making mistakes. Practicing works because of muscle memory. When you play something often enough, your muscles (really, your brain) will get to know what movements to make without thinking. If you're making mistakes (particularly if you're making the same mistake over and over) your muscles will remember the mistakes. It's much easier to play something perfectly and practice to work up speed, than it is to play it at the full tempo and try to iron out the mistakes.

63. How can I play faster?

I used to think playing fast meant wiggling your fingers around wildly and at great speed. Actually, it's about making your movements smaller. It's much easier to make your fingers move a shorter distance than it is to make them move faster and they will take a lot longer to tire out.

Practice lifting the fingers of your fretting hand off the string by as little as possible. Practice strumming just the width of the strings.

64. Do I need to use a metronome when I practice?

It definitely helps. Keeping a steady rhythm is very important – particularly when you're playing with others. However, I find using a metronome like eating my greens, I know it's good for me but I just want to skip it.

I try to have my metronome around (or started up if I'm at the computer) whenever I'm practice. Just so it can keep silently chiding me until I give in and start using it. The more you use it, the more natural it will be to play with it.

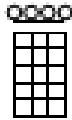
If you use the [Weird Metronome](#), you can program in some more exciting beats which makes using a metronome a bit more interesting and natural.

Chord Charts

65. How do you read ukulele chord charts?

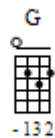
There are a few variations in how chord charts are shown. But, since they're a fairly intuitive picture of what to do, it's not hard to work out.

The type of chord chart I use shows the ukulele fretboard as if it's pointing upwards and facing towards you. The strings are the vertical lines (starting with G at the left) and the horizontal lines are the frets.



If you play left handed, you might prefer to think of it as a mirror image of the shape you make.

Chord shapes are shown by dots where each finger should go.

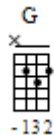


For this G chord, you play the C string at the second fret, the E string at the third fret and the A string at the second fret. Wherever there is a 'o' at the top of the string, that means the string is played open (it is not fretted at all).

The numbers at the bottom refer to the finger that you use rather than the fret. So a 1 would mean you fret that string using your index/pointer finger, a 2 would mean you use your middle finger and so on.

For example, the G chord. You fret the A string at the second fret with your second finger, the E string at the third fret with your third finger and the C string at the fourth fret with your first finger.

These fingerings are just suggestions. If there's another way of arranging your fingers that suits you better, use it. But try out the suggested fingering before you decide.



You'll sometimes see an 'X' at the top of the string. This means the string is not played at all. You might need to rest one of your fretting hand fingers against the string (without actually fretting it) to make sure it doesn't sound.



When a chord is played higher up the fretboard, the lowest fret played is indicated on the left hand side. In this example, the C and A strings are played at the seventh fret, the E string at the eighth fret and the G string at the ninth fret.

You'll also see that rather than a dot, there is a bar across the seventh fret. This shows that the first finger is 'barred' across the seventh fret i.e. it is pressing down all the strings.

66. Why are there different chord shapes for the same chord?

Each chord is made up of a certain set of notes. So long as those notes are included in the chord, it doesn't matter how they are played. This means chords have a large number of permutations and can be played all over the fretboard.

The make up of chords is a really big subject. If you want to learn more about it, check out my other ebook [How to Play Ukulele Chord Progressions](#).

Tab and Techniques

Muso types like to bemoan the rise of tablature (or tab) but it's been a way of representing music for hundreds of years. This picture shows tab for the Vihuela (an early guitar-like instrument) from the 16th Century.

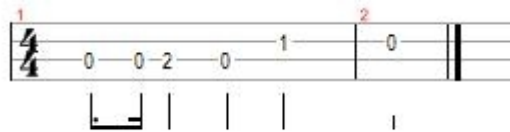
Tablature is used to represent music for a specific instrument and is an alternative to standard notation (the one with dots and lines).



Standard notation



Tablature has a couple of advantages. Firstly, it's much easier to learn to read than standard notation and much more accessible for those without formal musical training.



Tab

Secondly, it tells you on which string to play a particular note. This is particularly important on the ukulele as the strings are tuned so close together and the way in which you play them can change how easy it is to play a tune a great deal.

67. How are strings tabbed?

Each of the horizontal lines represents a string on the ukulele. However, they are upside down from what you might expect. The top line of the tab is the A string (the one that's closest to the floor when you're playing); the line below that is the E string; the line below that is the C string and the bottom line of the tab is G string.

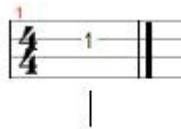
That takes a little getting used to. I think of tab as being from the perspective of the ukulele flipped up towards my head.



Left-handers will have to think of the uke pointing in the opposite direction.

68. How are notes tabbed?

The numbers that appear on the tab indicate which string to play and what fret to play it at (you can ignore the 4/4 at the beginning for now).



Here, the note is on the second line down representing the E string. You should play this string and only this string.

The number 1 indicates that the string should be played at the first fret. Playing the E string at the first fret gives us an F note.

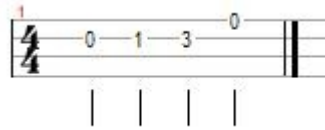


Open strings – ones played without fretting a note at all – are indicated by a 0. In this case the E string will be played without fretting a note.

69. How is a sequence of notes tabbed?

When notes appear one after the other horizontally in the tab, you play them in sequence – one after the other – and stopping them before the next note starts.

Example 1



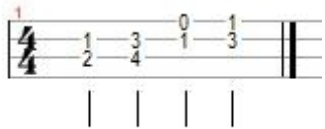
In this example, the E string is played open, then at the first fret, then at the third fret and, for the final note, the A string is played open.

You can hear this being played in Example 1.

70. How are notes that are played simultaneously tabbed?

When notes appear in the same position vertically, they are played at the same time.

Example 2



Here two notes are being played together each time. First, the C string is played at the second fret while the E string is played at the first fret.

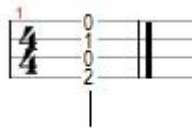
After that note, you play the C string at the fourth fret at the same time as playing the E string at the third fret.

It then shifts to a new pair of strings: E and A. The E string is played at the first fret and the A string is played open.

71. How are chords tabbed?

Whole chords can be written the same way.

Try to play the chord in this example.

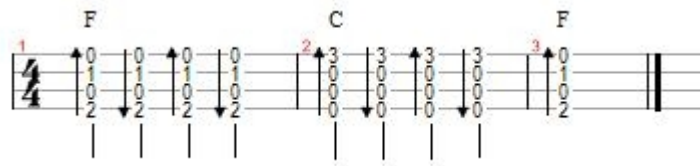


You should have the G string being played at the second fret and the E string at the first fret with the other notes ringing open. This creates the F-chord shape that you are probably familiar with.

72. How are strums tabbed?

When chords are being strummed, you will often see arrows in the tab.

Example 3



These arrows indicate which direction you should strum in. An up arrow indicates a down strum, and a down arrow indicates an up strum. Don't look at me, I didn't invent the system!

You can hear this being played in Example 3.

73. How are rhythms shown?

Tabs vary with how much information they give about rhythm. Some tab you'll see won't have any rhythm indicated at all and will expect you to get the rhythm by listening to a recording. Some will have a vague indication of rhythm given by the distance between notes. Some will have tab and standard notation with the standard notation giving the rhythm. And some will have rhythm lines on the tab.

Quite often you'll see ukulele tab accompanied by standard notation. In these, cases the rhythm will be shown on the standard notation only.

When you listen to a piece of music, you'll feel the pulse of the music. Clap along with any song and you'll be clapping out its beat. Each of these beats is known as a 'crotchet' or 'quarter note' and is written like this:

Example 4



The image shows two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The first measure contains four quarter notes (crotchets) on the G line (4th line), and the second measure contains four quarter notes on the B line (2nd line). The bottom staff is a guitar tab with two lines. The first measure has four '0's (open strings) on the first line, and the second measure has four '0's on the second line. A double bar line is at the end of the second measure.

The lines going up in this example can also go down. It makes no difference to how the note is played.

In the examples, there is a click in the background for each beat (quarter note). You can count along with these in your head (or out loud) as 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4.

Half notes (or minims) last twice as long as and are shown as a line with a hollow circle at the bottom (the first half of this Example 5). When you're counting these, only play every other number. In this example you'd play on the 1 and the 3 beats (1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4).

Whole notes (or semi-breves) last twice as long as half notes. They are indicated by a hollow circle without any lines at all (the second half of Example 5). These notes are only played on the 1 (1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4)

Example 5



The image shows two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The first measure has two half notes (minims) on the G line (4th line). The second measure has two half notes on the B line (2nd line). The third measure has one whole note (semi-breve) on the G line. The fourth measure has one whole note on the B line. The bottom staff is a guitar tab with two lines. The first measure has two '0's on the first line. The second measure has two '0's on the second line. The third measure has one '0' on the first line. The fourth measure has one '0' on the second line. A double bar line is at the end of the fourth measure.

Going in the other direction, notes that are shorter than half notes look like this:

Example 6



The first part of this example is quarter notes.

This is followed by a set of eighth notes (or quavers). These last half as long as quarter notes and look like two eighth notes connected by a horizontal line. These are usually counted '1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and'.

Eighth notes aren't always in pairs and you'll see single eighth notes singly where they are shown like this:



The final part of Example 6 shows sixteenth notes (or semi-quavers). These last half as long as eighth notes and are shown with a double horizontal line. These are usually counted '1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a'.

Again, these can be shown singly like this:



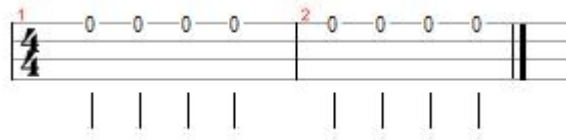
If you listen to the Example 6, you'll hear a click for each quarter note. There are two eighth notes for each quarter note and four sixteenth notes per quarter note. Get used to counting out the eighth and sixteenth notes by clapping them before you try to play them.

You can keep halving the length of notes (adding an extra horizontal line each time) but it's rare you'll see anything shorter than a sixteenth note in ukulele tab.

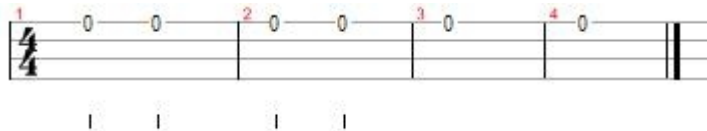
74. How is rhythm shown in tab?

Sometimes standard notation isn't shown along with the tab. In these cases, the rhythm is usually indicated on the tab itself. This method isn't quite so standardised. The system shown here is the one I use. Other systems may differ but will probably have similarities.

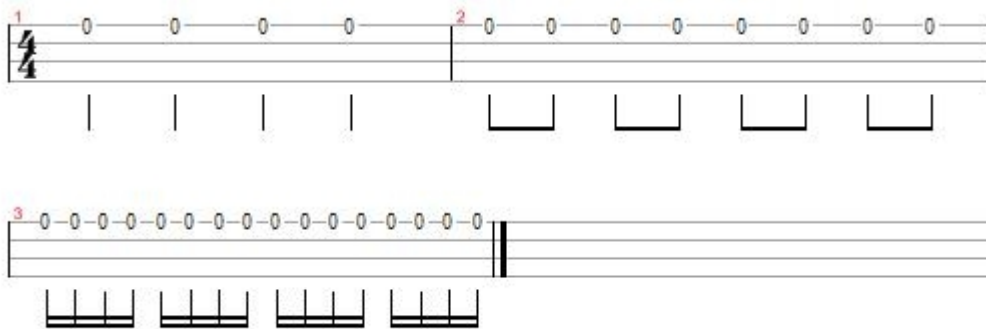
In tab, quarter notes are indicated by a line going down from the bottom. Example 4 would look like this when written in tab.



Half notes are shown with a shorter line under the tab and whole notes are shown with no line at all. Example 5 looks like this when written in tab.



Eighth and sixteenth notes are written in a very similar way as they are in standard notation. Example 6 would be written like this.



75. What are bars/measures?

You might have noticed in that vertical lines (known as bar lines) in the tabs dividing the music into sections. Each of these sections is called a bar or measure. This makes it easier to follow and easier to reference a particular part of the tab.

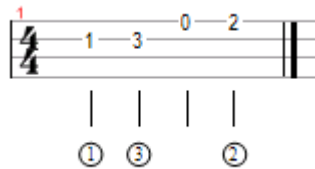
The length of the bars is determined by the two numbers at the beginning of the tab (known as the time signature). In every case so far, this has been 4/4 (four four time). That means there is the equivalent of four quarter notes in each bar. This could mean a half note and four eighth notes; or a quarter note, four sixteenth notes and four eighth notes; or any combination that adds up to four quarter notes.

Another common signature is 3/4 – known as waltz time. This means there are three quarter notes in each bar. It's very rare that you'll come across a time signature other than these.

76. How is fretting hand fingering shown?

The fretting hand (the left hand for right-handed players) is indicated by numbers in circles underneath the tab.

The index finger is 1, middle finger 2 etc. When strings are played open, no finger is indicated.

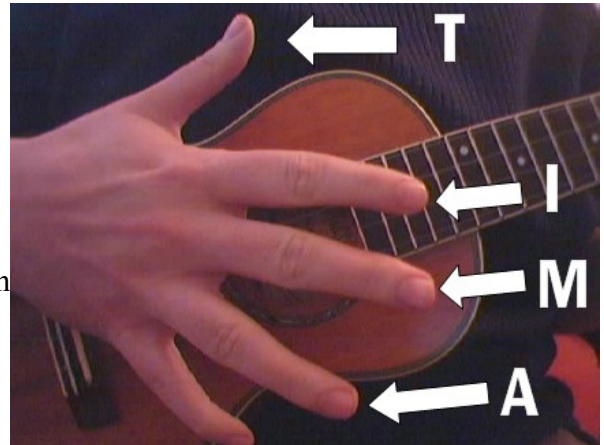


77. How is picking hand fingering shown?

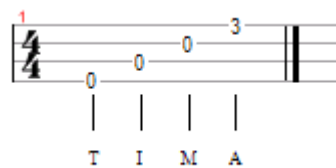
The tab for the picking hand is less intuitive.

T = Thumb
I = Index Finger
M = Middle Finger
A = Ring Finger

The finger names come, apparently, from Latin (indice, medius, annular).



These letters appear under the tab also.



78. How are repeats tabbed?

There are a number of ways that repeats are shown in tabs. The main way is with a set of double bar lines (one thick and one thin) and two dots.

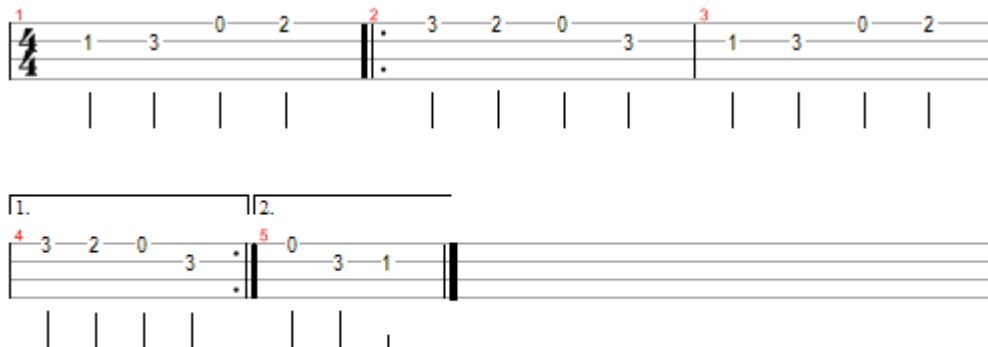
When you come across a set of these with the dots facing right, you skip straight past them. When the dots are facing left, you go back to the first set (where the dots are facing right) and play through again. The second time you reach the repeat sign, play straight through it unless it indicates otherwise (by say x3, x4 etc.).



In this example, you play bar one and bar two, then bar two again.

If there is no first set of repeat signs, go back to the beginning and play through again.

Sometimes you'll see sections at the end of each repeat blocked off like this:



Here you play the bar underneath the 1 section the first time round, follow the repeat sign as normal, then second time round you skip that bar and play the bar underneath the 2 instead.

So, you'd play bars:

1, 2, 3, 4, 2, 3, 5

The section under the 1 can be any number of bars – the idea remains the same.

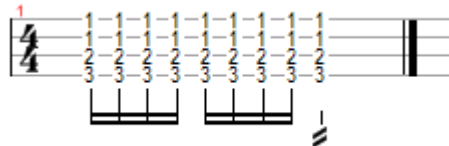
You can also have any number of alternate bars. If the section is repeated 4 times, there may be 4 different endings written. You just play these in sequence the same way.

Advanced Strums

79. What are tremelo strums and how are they tabbed?

Strumming the same chord over-and-over in a regular, quick tempo is known as a tremelo strum. These can be tabbed in a couple of different ways. They can be shown in the normal way (e.g. as a set of sixteenth notes) or as the total length of all the strums together with diagonal lines underneath the note.

Example 7



In this example, the first half of the bar and the second half are both played in exactly the same way. One diagonal line under the note indicates eighth notes, two lines denotes sixteenth notes and so on.

80. How are rasgueados played?

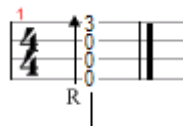
Rasgueados, or rolls, are a technique that entered ukulele playing via its Portuguese roots – they are particularly common in flamenco playing.

They are produced by strumming with each finger in quick succession. Hold your hand in a loose fist near the top of the strings. Flick out your pinky, strumming the strings. Then do the same with your ring finger, then middle finger, then index finger.

You can watch me doing it in the video for Example 8. First slowly, then at full speed.

Rasgueados are tabbed in a very similar way to usual strums. The only difference is an 'R' at the base of the strum.

Example 8



They are used to give extra emphasis to a strum.

81. How do you play dotted notes?

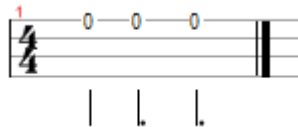
Often in tab you'll see dots after the note lengths.

In standard notation these dots occur next to the circle of the note:

Example 9



In tab, the dots occur next to the bottom of the line (you have to be careful as dotted quarter notes can be easily confused with eighth notes).



These dots increase the length of the note by half. For example, a dot after a half note would increase its length by quarter note i.e. it would last for three beats.

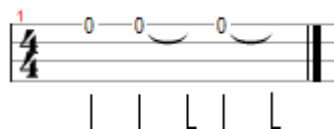
In example 9 it is a quarter note which is dotted. This means it last for a quarter note plus an eighth note.

82. How do you play tied notes?

When notes are tied together you add their lengths together. The tab for ties is an arch between the notes – the same as hammer-ons but in this case there is no note at the end of the arch.

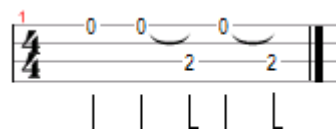
For instance, example 9 could be written using ties rather than dots. Here a quarter note is tied to an eighth note.

Example 9



Often ties will be used to show one note ringing into another.

Example 10



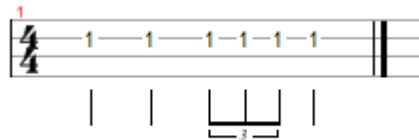
In this example, the open A string is left ringing while the C string is played. Quite often notes will be intended to ring into each other but there will not ties in the tablature. In this case, you should listen to the performance and decide what you think sounds best.

83. What are triplets?

With triplets, three notes are played in the space of two.

They are indicated by a bracket under the notes with a 3 in the middle.

Example 11



You can have any length of note in a triplet, but in this example it's eighth notes.

A triplet of eighth notes takes up the same amount of time as two regular eighth notes i.e. one 'pip' in the example.

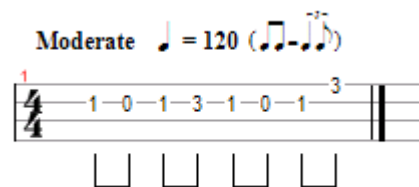
Make sure that your triplets are evenly spaced within the time.

84. What is swing time?

When a piece has a triplet feel throughout, it is said to be in 'swing time'. Swing time can be heard in musical styles from blues to Irish folk music to reggae. In swing time, the first half of each pair of eighth notes is played for longer than the second eighth note of the pair.

Swing time is indicated by this little equation in brackets at the top of the tab:

Example 12



Swing time changes the length of eighth notes. The first in a pair of eighth notes now takes up the amount of time of two eighth notes in a triplet. The second eighth note in each pair now only takes up one triplet eighth note.

Compare example 12 (in swing time) to example 12a (in straight time).

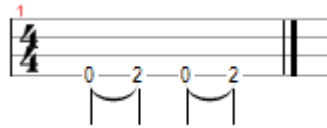
The technical explanation of this makes it sound more complicated to play than it is. Once you get the feel of a song, it becomes natural to play it and you'll be able to do it without thinking about it.

The 'moderate' and the 'quarter note = 120' at the top of the tab are both indications of how fast the tune should be played. It means that there should be 120 quarter notes per minute. This is what you should set your metronome to when you are playing at full speed.

85. How do you play hammer-ons?

Hammer-ons are produced by plucking a note on the uke then 'hammering on' a finger at a higher fret – making the sound of the higher note without picking it. You can watch this being done in Example 13.

Example 13



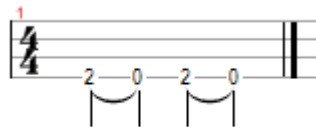
In tab, hammer-ons are shown by an arch between the two notes (with the second note always being higher than the first). These arches can appear above or below the notes themselves.

Here the string is being played open, then the middle finger hammers-on at the second fret (without the string being repicked).

86. How do you play pull-offs?

Pull-offs are the opposite of hammer-ons. They are produced by playing one note then lifting your fretting finger off the string so that a lower note sounds. You can watch it being done in Example .

Example 14



The tab for pull-offs is also the opposite of that for hammer-ons. Again, there is an arch between the two notes but this time the first note is higher than the second.

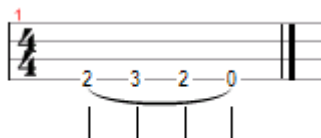
Here the string is being played second fret, then the middle finger pulls-off the string (without the string being repicked) to let the open string sound.

As you can see in the video, I'm not lifting my finger straight off the string but pulling it down slightly. This gives the string an extra boost in volume.

87. Can hammer-ons and pull-offs be used together?

You can have a combination of hammer-ons and pull-offs in a single run. In this case, there is an arch over all the notes that are produced by hammering-on or pulling-off rather than being picked.

Example 15



Here there is a hammer-on from the first to the third fret. This is followed by two pull-offs.

88. How do you play slides?

Slides are another method of moving between notes without re-picking the string.

Slides are produced by picking one note then sliding along the string to the new note. You can see it being done in example 16.

Example 16

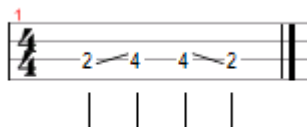


Slides are tabbed in a similar way to hammer-ons and pull-offs. They are shown with an arch between the two notes but they also have a diagonal line between the notes (an upward sloping line for slides up the neck and a downward sloping line for sliding down).

89. How are shift slides different from normal slides?

Shift slides are slightly different. As well as sliding up, the new note is re-picked. This is tabbed by removing the arch and just having the diagonal line.

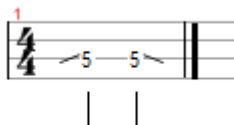
Example 17



90. How are slides into and out of a note tabbed?

Some slides do not have a definite start point or end point. These are indicated by the same diagonal line but with a number at one end only.

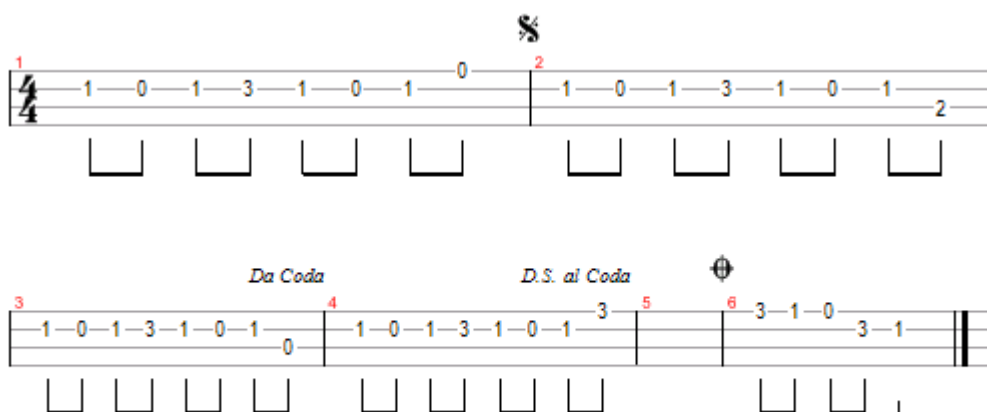
Example 18



In this example, the note slides in 'from nowhere' up to the fifth fret. Then the fifth fret is played again and then slides off to nowhere. These slides are performed quickly.

91. What are all those crazy squiggles on the tab?

There are a vast array of Latin scribblings, scrawlings, and Heroes style symbols that can be used to indicate repeats. Here are the most common.



Whereas the other form of repeats is fairly intuitive, this type is pretty indecipherable (unless you happen to be Da Vinci Code style symbol-detective).

The first time round, you can breeze past the symbols until you reach *D.S. al Coda* (short for da signo al coda). It means you have to go back to the strange looking squiggle (at the beginning of bar two) then you play through until you reach *Da Coda*. At this point you go to the little target symbol.

In this example you'll play bars:

1, 2, 3, 4, 2, 3, 6.

It is possible to get all sorts of double signos and double codas, but you'll probably never see these in ukulele tab. The only variation you might find is *D.C. al Coda* rather than *D.S. al Coda*. This means you go back to the start rather than going back to the sign.

Don't worry if you didn't get all of that. I still have to double check when I come up against this sort of repeat.

92. How are accented notes shown?

You accent notes by giving them an extra little oomph. This might be strumming harder to accentuate a beat or picking a note harder to emphasise the melody.

Accents are shown in tab with an arrow above the note or chord.

Example 19



93. How do you make dead notes?

Dead notes are clicks produced by strumming the uke while damping all the strings with your fretting hand. Lay your fingers gently across the strings. You should touch the strings just enough to stop them ringing but not enough to fret the note.

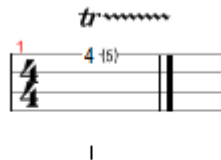
Example 20



94. How do you play trills?

Trills are produced by repeatedly hammering-on and pulling-off the same two notes. They are shown by the letters *tr* followed by a wavy line.

Example 21



In this example, the A string is played at the fourth fret then you hammer-on and pull off at the fifth fret repeatedly.

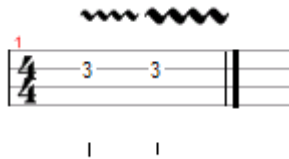
95. How do you produce vibrato?

Vibrato gives the note a shaky quality. This is used particularly when playing melodies as it emulates the way notes tend to be sung.

There are a couple of ways of producing vibrato. The classical technique is to slide your fretting finger back and forth within the fret you're playing. This creates a subtle vibrato. The blues/rock vibrato technique involves bending and releasing the string repeatedly. This can be used to create a much wider vibrato. You can see both these techniques being used in the video for Example 15.

Vibrato is tabbed by a wavy line. The bigger the waves, the wider the vibrato.

Example 22

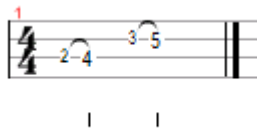


96. What are grace notes?

Grace notes are very short notes played before the main note and connected by an arch. They can be slides, hammer-ons or pull-offs.

They are indicated by a small number before the main note.

Example 23



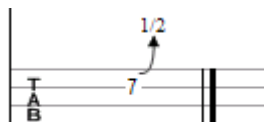
97. How do you bend a note?

Bends are fairly rare in ukulele playing but they do crop up sometimes.

Bends are produced by plucking the string and pushing it up (towards your head) or down (towards the ground). This raises the pitch of the note.

Bends are tabbed with an arrow curved upwards.

Example 24



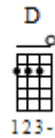
At the end of an arrow is a number. This shows how far upwards the bend should be. $\frac{1}{2}$ means you bend the note up half a step (one fret), 1 means you bend it up one step (two frets). In this example, we bend the note up half a step so that, once it's bent, it has the same pitch as a note played at the eighth fret.

It makes it much easier to bend the note if you wrap your thumb over the top of the neck.

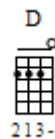
Easier Chords and Chord Changes

98. What's the easiest way to play a D chord?

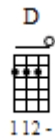
Even with my scrawny fingers, I find it hard to cram all my fingers onto the uke at same fret:



There are a few alternatives, try them out and see which you prefer.



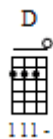
The first way still has three fingers, but arranging them this way round (first finger on the C-string, second finger on the G-string, third finger on the E-string) feels a little less cramped.



My favourite method is one I stole from, flamenco guitarist, Juan Martin. In this method, you cover the G and C strings with the upper third of your index finger and the E string with your middle finger.

You have to make sure that the rest of your index finger is angled away from the fretboard so that the E string rings clearly.

You can take this idea one step further and cover the G, C and E strings with your index finger (the way Aldrine Guerrero prefers). It's quite tricky to get your finger to bend enough so the A string rings clearly – I struggle to get it to sound cleanly.



Another option is to barre across all strings at the second fret. To do this, lay your index finger straight across the fretboard at the second fret and hold down all the strings. Strum down all the strings and make sure they are all sounding clearly. It takes quite a bit of strength to do this.

Once you've got the barre in place, use your pinky to fret the A string at the fifth fret.

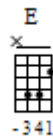


99. What's the easiest way to play an E chord?

The E chord is by far the one ukulele players are most keen to avoid. It has the same cramming problems as the D chord along with an extra finger to worry about.



Luckily, you don't have to play all the notes. In the usual E chord, the notes on the G and A strings are exactly the same. That means you can lose one of them without changing the sound of the chord at all. Like this:



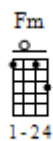
If you choose to do this, make sure you can't hear the G string. Avoid strumming it or, even better, stop it ringing by resting your middle finger (or the tip of your ring finger) on the string (touching but not fretting it).

If you're playing in the key of A (the key is the chord where the progression sounds settled – usually the last chord in the sequence), then you can use E7 instead of E and it will sound right.

Another alternative is to play the E7 shape but lift off your middle finger just enough to stop it playing but not enough for it to ring open. This takes out the '7' note in the chord making it just E.

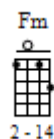
100. What's the easiest way to change from F to Fm?

Pretty much every chord dictionary will tell you to play Fm like this:

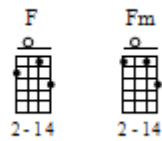


This is certainly the easiest way to play it by itself and in most chord progressions. However, when Fm comes after an F chord, it requires a big reorganisation of fingers. A move which a lot of ukulele players find tricky and can stop a chord progression dead in its tracks.

An easier way to play it in this situation is like this:



Here you slide your middle finger down a fret on the G string. You can make the transition easier by adding the A string, third fret in the F chord. Like this:



This means you'll only have to move one finger, one fret for the chord change.

101. Your own question.

If there's a question you think should be covered in this book – something every ukulele should know - but isn't send me an email and I'll do my best to answer it for you.

It might be a term people use all the time, a difficult chord or chord change, a certain technique, something in this book you didn't understand. I can't guarantee I'll be able to answer it, but I'll certainly do my best.

You can email me at:

help@howtoplayukulele.com

or

woodshed@ukulelehunt.com

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