

# Improving Picado Technique, Part 2

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Welcome to the second of three articles covering the art of playing scales on the classical guitar. Last month we talked about the most basic and popular variant of the rest stroke: The traditional i-m or i-a alternation. This month we are going to cover a variation of that technique which is basically adding another finger to the right-hand pattern.

## Rest Strokes with Three Fingers

### a) Building stamina and practicing the accents on a single string.

Video 1

The image shows three musical exercises on a single string, each in treble clef. Exercise 7 is marked with a circled 6 and consists of two measures of eighth notes with accents. The first measure has fingerings 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4 and fingerings i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a. The second measure has fingerings 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4 and fingerings a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a. Exercise 3 consists of two measures of eighth notes with fingerings 1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 3, 2, 1 and fingerings m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a. Exercise 5 consists of two measures of eighth notes with fingerings 4, 3, 2, 1, 4, 3, 2, 1 and fingerings a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a, m, i, a.

*Recommendations and comments:*

- This technique is very effective and helps develop the endurance and relaxation needed to play a whole recital. Since the work is distributed among three fingers instead of two, the “engine” doesn’t get overheated.

- In this exercise, since we are playing 16<sup>th</sup> notes over a 4/4 bar using three fingers, it's important to be careful with the accents; in perfectly logical order, the accent changes to a different finger every 4 notes.

The following exercise is a variation of the previous one in 6/8. It's easier because the accents land on the same finger every time.

Video 2

③

8. *i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m*

3 *i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m*

## b) Shifting Strings

**First case:** When the scale goes from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> string.

Video 3

9. *i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m i a m*

4 2 1 4 2 1 3 1 4 3 1 4 2 1 4 2 1

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

Note that this scale presents a pattern of three notes per string on every string but the third. The idea is to start with the index finger (right hand) to facilitate string shifting. The index finger will always be in a better position to strike the next upper string than the others.

When the left-hand pattern breaks up, presenting two notes on a string instead of three, the fingering of the right hand should be **i-a**. That means that every time the scale presents three notes per string, the right hand will play **i-a-m** and every time the scales presents two notes per string the right hand will play **i-a**.

Be careful with the accents as playing with three fingers favours the triplet feel, which is not good if you are playing 16<sup>th</sup> notes on a 4/4 bar. Nevertheless, when the right hand pattern starts with the **i** instead of the **a**, the triplet feel could be easily avoided.

The following scale pattern presents just three notes per string and is in 6/8, so the accents always land on the same finger, in this case the index.

Video 4

① ..... ② ..... ③ ..... ④ ..... ⑤ ..... ⑥ .....

The **i-a-m** pattern of the right hand never breaks since the left hand presents three notes per string all the time.

Video 5

① ..... ② ..... ③ ..... ④ ..... ⑤ ..... ⑥ .....

This scale pattern presents three notes per string on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> strings, and two notes on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. Again, every time the scale presents 3 notes/string the right hand will play **i-a-m**, and if two notes/string- then **i-a**.

I prefer to use **i-a** instead of **i-m** every time the pattern presents two notes per string because it is more in accordance with the natural motion of this technique; however, if the player considers that **i-m** is more comfortable, then go ahead and play it that way.

**Second case:** When the scale goes from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> string.

Video 6

12.  $\{ \overset{>}{a} \ m \ i \} \{ a \ \overset{>}{m} \ i \} \{ a \ m \ \overset{>}{i} \} \{ a \ i \} \{ a \ \overset{>}{m} \ i \} \{ a \ m \ \overset{>}{i} \}$

1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 1 2 4 1 2 4

⑥ ..... ⑤ ..... ④ ..... ③ ..... ② ..... ① .....

The only difference here is that the right hand should start with the **a** finger due to its advantageous position in striking the adjoining string. Summing up, when the scale presents three notes/string the group should be played **a-m-i**; if two notes/string, then play **a-i**.

I prefer **a-i** instead of **a-m** when the situation is two notes/string because for most people it's easier to trigger the **a** after the **i** as opposed to the **m**. Note that the right-hand pattern has not changed in either of the two instances; that is:

**i-a-m** is the same as **a-m-i** : **(i-a-m)-i-(a-m-i)-a-m-...**

Remember the two simple formulas:

- 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> string = **i-a-m** if three notes/string and **i-a** if two notes/string.
- 6<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> string = **a-m-i** if three notes/string and **a-i** if two notes/string.

### Ascending and Descending Scale Passage

Video 7

13.  $\{ \overset{>}{i} \ a \ m \} \{ i \ \overset{>}{a} \ m \} \{ i \ a \ \overset{>}{m} \} \{ i \ a \ m \} \{ i \ a \ m \} \{ i \ \overset{>}{a} \ m \}$

4 3 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3

① ..... ② ..... ③ ..... ④ ③ ..... ② ..... ① .....

Practice the previous scale as a loop with the metronome set at a slow tempo, and then increase the speed gradually.

It's important to understand that this 3-finger technique is not a substitute for the rest stroke technique with two fingers (play and prepare). There are cases where both techniques could be used in a given passage, and others where one of them will fit and sound better than the other. The idea is to have a palette of options available in our hands to resolve any kind of difficulty within a passage.

