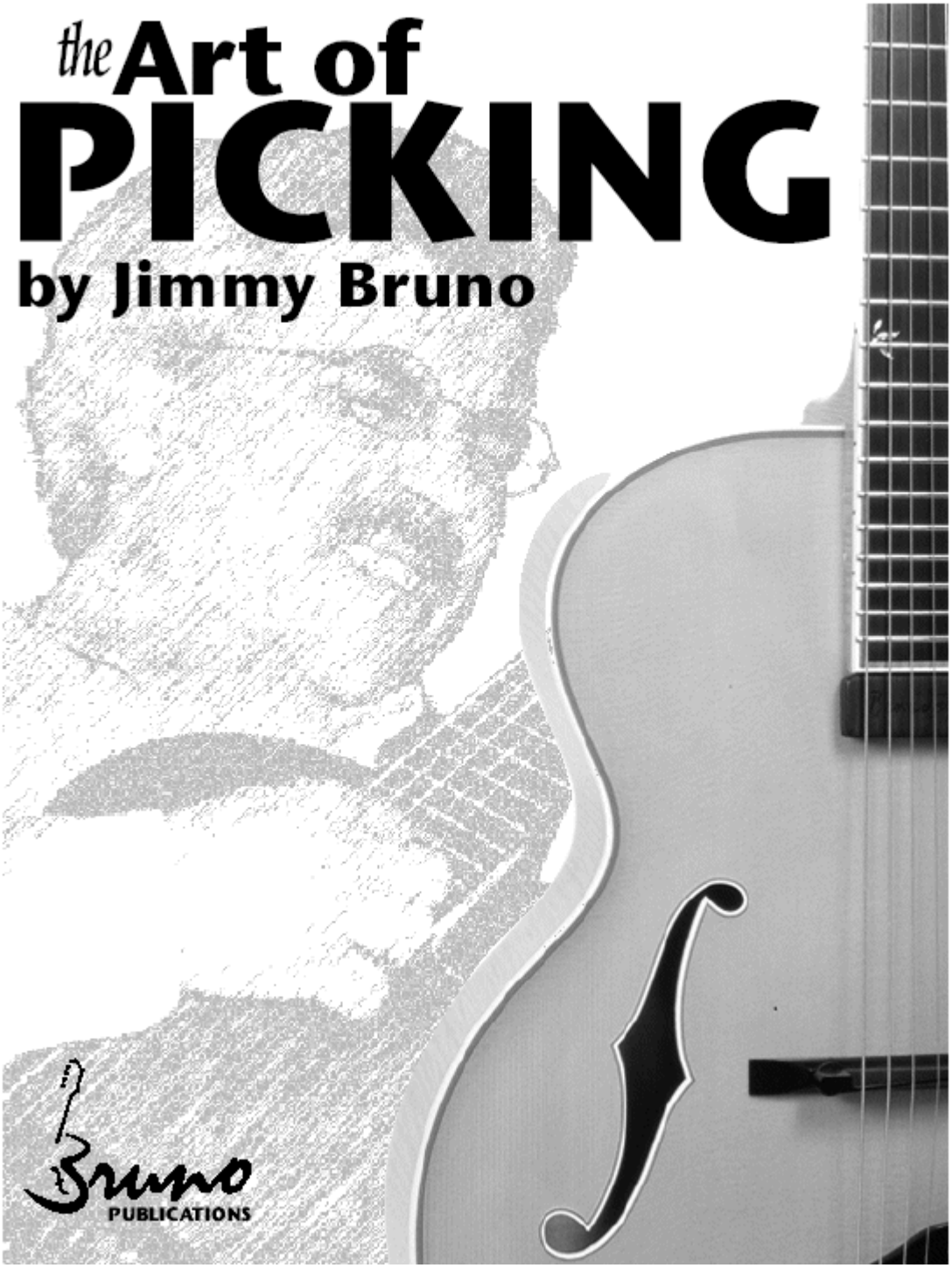
the Art of PICKING

by Jimmy Bruno



Bruno PUBLICATIONS

Acknowledgements

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A special thanks to everyone I have ever taught. Teaching has enabled me to formalize this whole concept.

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Introduction

When I first began to play jazz guitar, I listened mostly to guitarists, A few years later I was introduced to the music of Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson, as well as many other instrumentalists. I mention those four individuals because they had the most effect on my technique and musical style. After a few attempts to copy or imitate horn and piano lines, I soon realized the alternate picking technique, which I was using at the time, was not going to cut it. I had to find a better way to move the pick across the strings.

I discovered when two notes were not on the same string, the pick had to travel past the string that the second note was on and then reverse direction to come back up and play the note. That is a long way for the pick to travel. I found one concept or rule that causes the pick to travel the least amount of distance. The fundamental concept is:

- **When going to a higher string, use a down-stroke.**
- **When going to a lower string, use an up-stroke.**
- **When playing on one string, use alternate strokes.**

This technique creates a significant change in one's right hand technique or, I prefer the term "habit"; most guitarists have been using the alternate picking "habit" for many years. That habit is not easy to break. With a fair amount of practice and discipline you can break that habit and develop a much more efficient right hand technique.

The Right Hand

The right hand, wrist and elbow should always be relaxed and never tense or tight. The wrist should not move or tilt. The movement should come from the elbow. Do not touch the strings, bridge or any other part of the guitar with the fingers of your right hand. Your palm may rest lightly on the strings.

The Strokes

This technique creates the following strokes:

- Down-up: Everyone can do this one
- Up-down: A bit more difficult, especially keeping the accent strong. The goal is to make the up-stroke sound as strong and round as the down-stroke.
- In-between – stroke: This stroke requires the pick to move between two adjacent strings or non-adjacent strings. This stroke is difficult to master

- Consecutive down-stroke and consecutive up-stroke: When practicing this technique it is important to play the notes evenly and with an equal amount of attack. The tendency is to rush the notes that follow the initial stroke. An example would be two, three or four notes, each on an adjacent string, played with a single down or up stroke depending on the direction of the phrase. The consecutive up-stroke is harder to control.

I have attempted to cover most situations that a guitarist might encounter, but it is an impossible task to cover them all. Music and guitar have an infinite number of possibilities.

Symbols

⊓ = Down-stroke ∨ = Up-stroke

Some of the exercises require you to start the exercise with both a down stroke then an up stroke. See exercise 23 page 30.

If you follow the uppermost picking indicators, you will see that the 1st eighth note has an up stroke, the next eight note has a down stroke and the 3rd eighth note has an up stroke. It doesn't matter which way you start, by the 3rd or 4th stroke, you will be at the same stroke whether you started with an up or a down. You can see that by the 3rd stroke (an up stroke) you are in sync with the lower indicators where you started with a down stroke. Since there are only two strokes, this should be obvious. I recommend that you practice all the exercises starting with both strokes. There should be only a very slight difference in sound.

If you have been playing a long time, you will find it very difficult to change your picking technique or "habit". But all habits can be modified. It will take a little patience and a moderate amount of practice. At first, your technique will suffer. This is only natural since you are incorporating something that is foreign to your brain and hands. When this new picking technique becomes a habit, your speed and accuracy will improve. How long this will take, will vary with how much time you practice. I recommend you practice these exercise at MM 60 to 120, then increase your speed from there.

It is impossible to cover all the possible picking scenarios. Music has an infinite number of possibilities. I have attempted to describe the techniques that I use when improvising various phrases. The exercises are designed to take the student from point A to Z. It is not a good idea to skip around in this book

Check my web site www.jimmybruno.com for movies of a few of the exercises.

Hope you enjoy this book,

Sincerely,

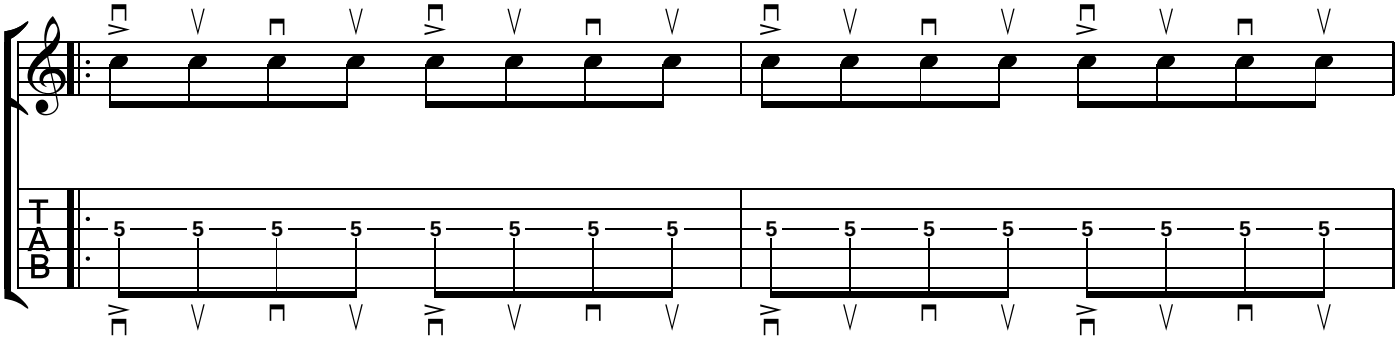
Jimmy Bruno

The Strokes

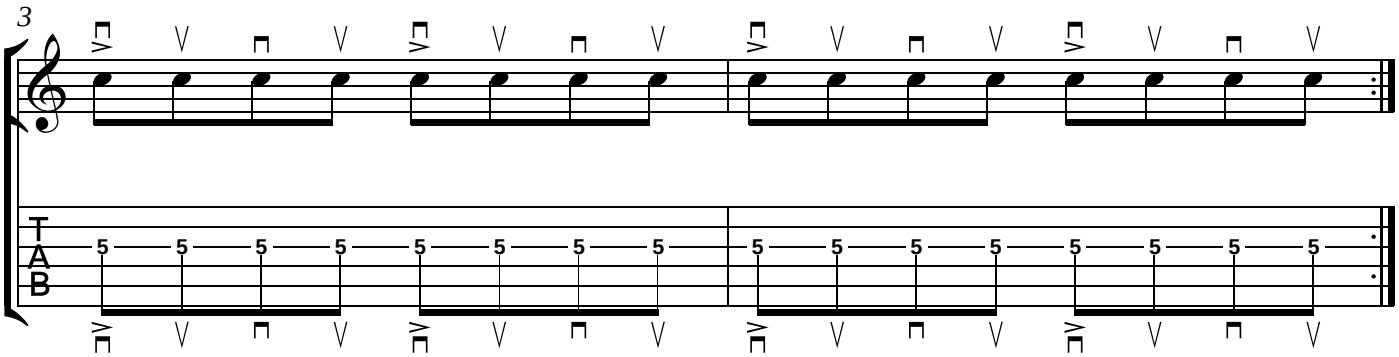
The down-up stroke

This is the most common stroke on the guitar.
Use this exercise to control your accent on the downbeats.
Apply to all strings.

exercise 1



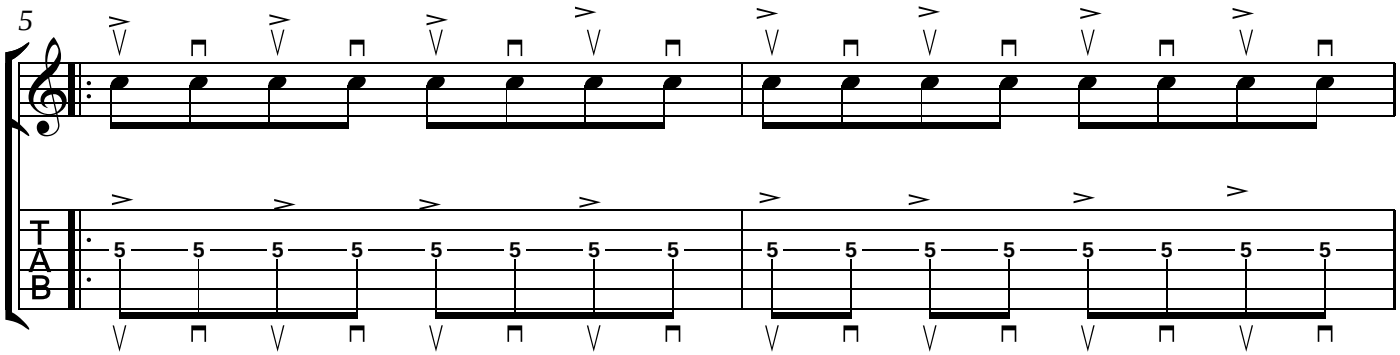
Practice keeping your wrist straight but not stiff. Remember: the movement is from the elbow.



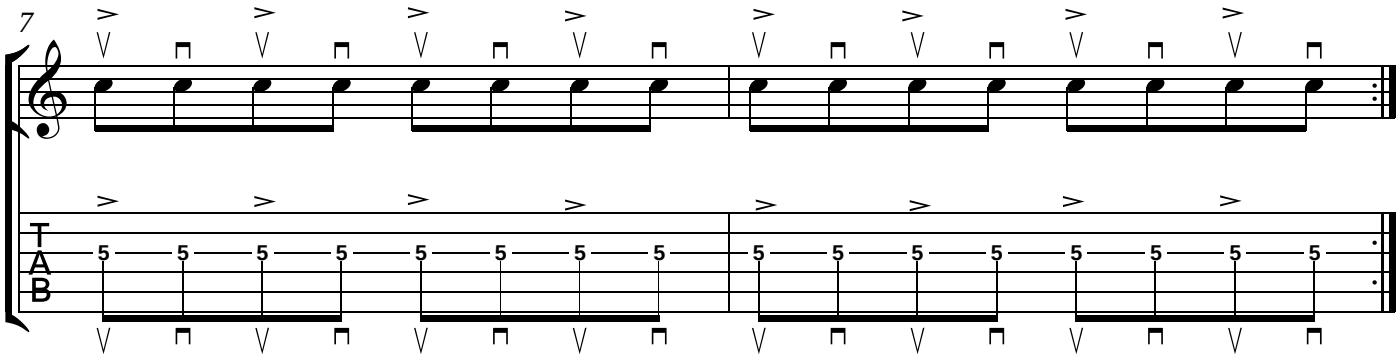
The up-down stroke

Use this exercise to control your accent on the downbeats but with an up-stroke.
Apply to all strings.

exercise 2



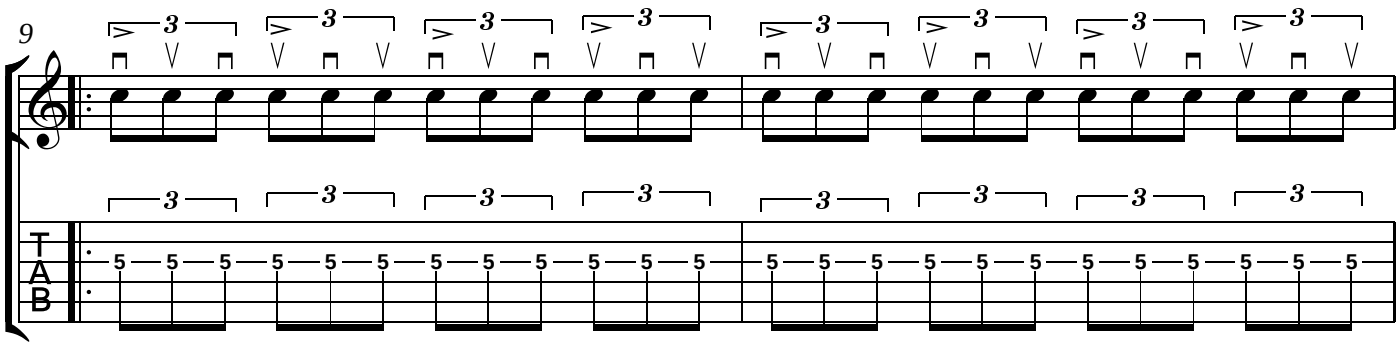
Do not touch the guitar with the fingers of the right hand.



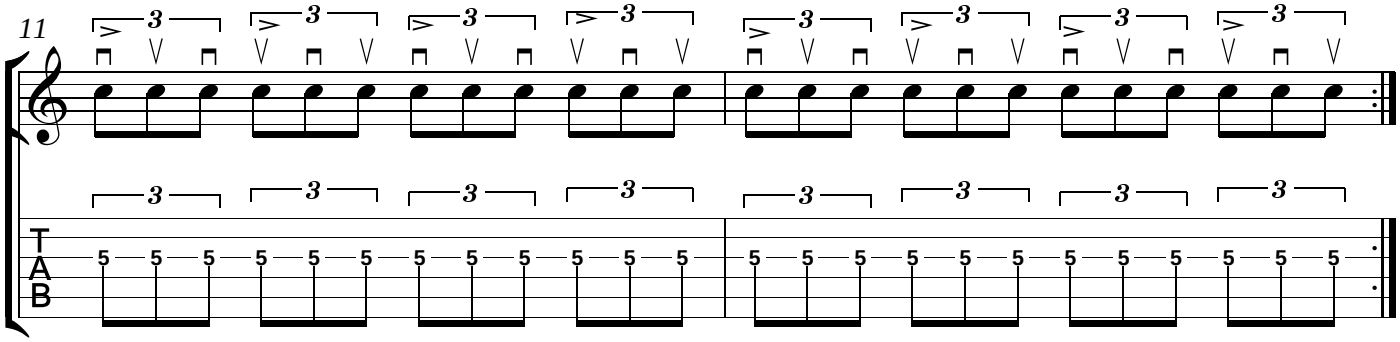
Mixed strokes

This exercise is designed to alternate the accents with a down-stroke then an up-stroke.
Apply to all strings.

exercise 3



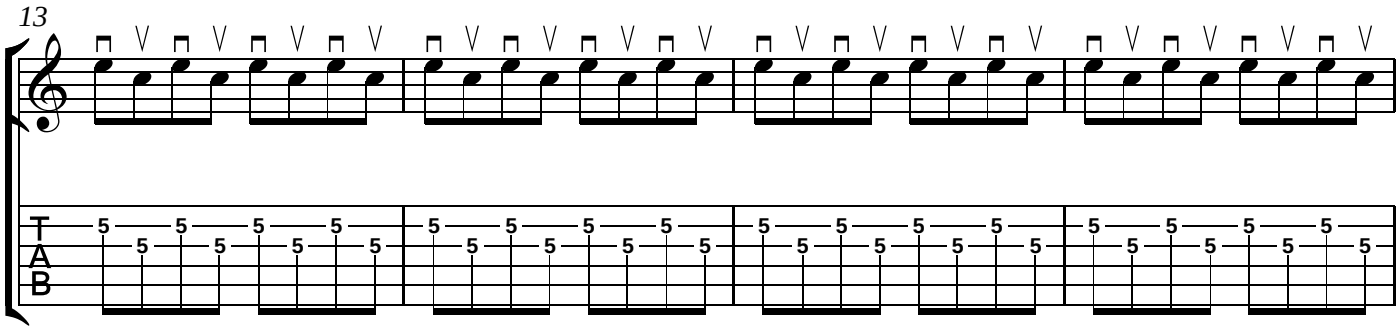
Do not touch the pick guard or strings with the fingers of the right hand.



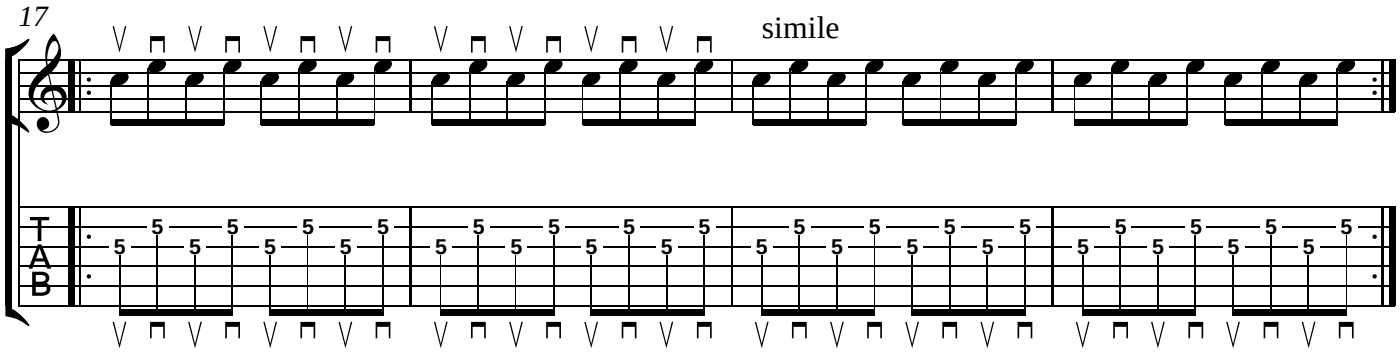
In between stroke

This is the hardest stroke to master. It involves going between two adjacent strings.
This is a critical part of your right hand technique. Take your time with this one.
Apply to any two adjacent strings using the double-stop of your choice. **Do not let notes ring!**

exercise 4



exercise 5

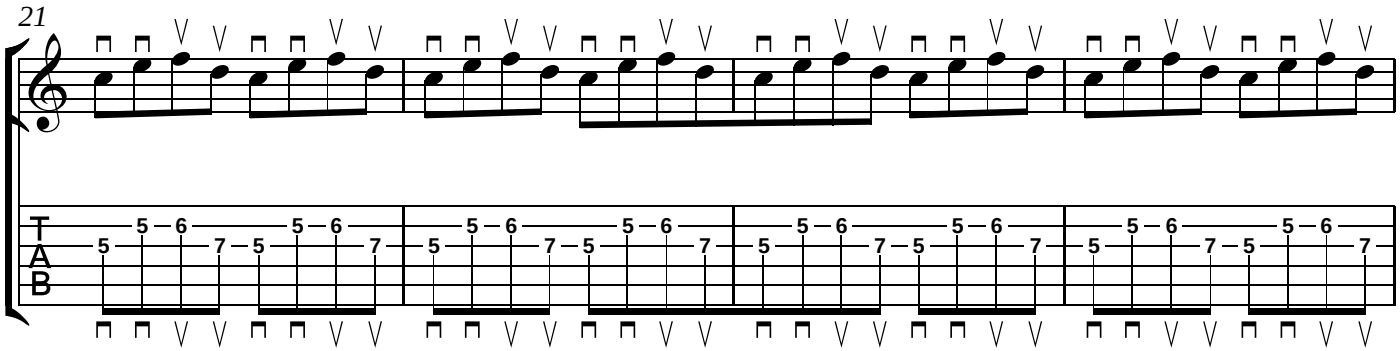


Consecutive Strokes

Consecutive "Down" to "up" strokes

This exercise gets more into the real world as this type thing occors in many jazz phrases.
Apply to any two adjacent strings using the double stop of your choice. **Do not let notes ring!**

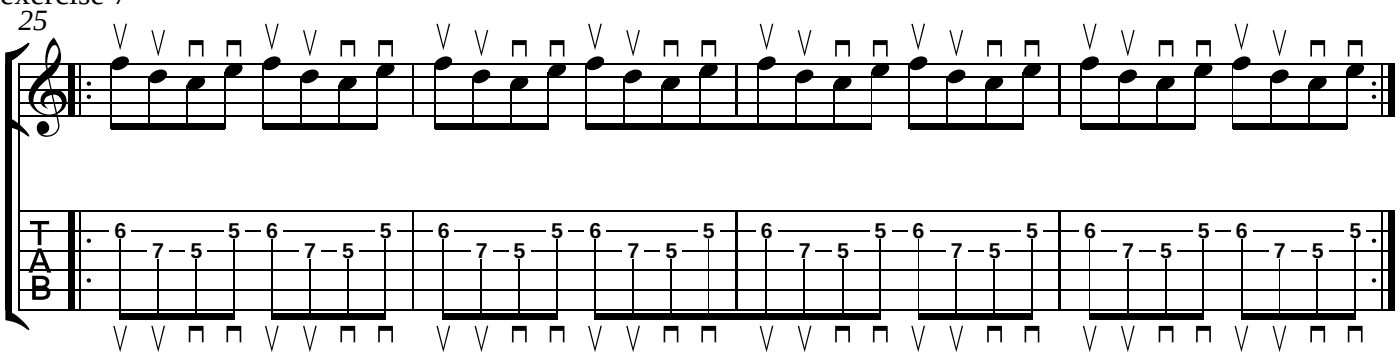
exercise 6



Consecutive "Up" to "Down" strokes

Same as previous exercise but in reverse. **Do not let notes ring!**

exercise 7

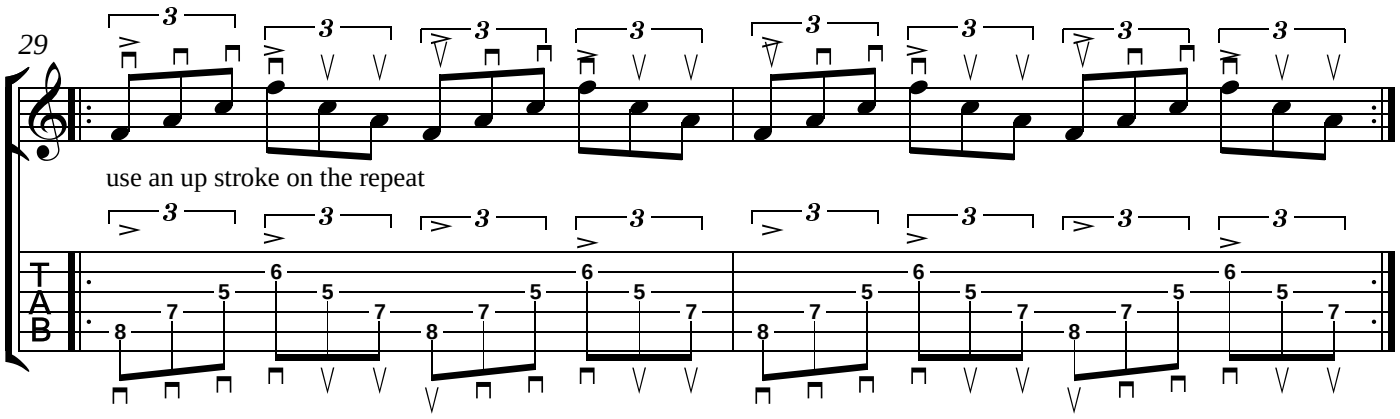


It is necessary to play the above exercises evenly . At this stage, precision of the 8th notes is more important than speed.

Triplets

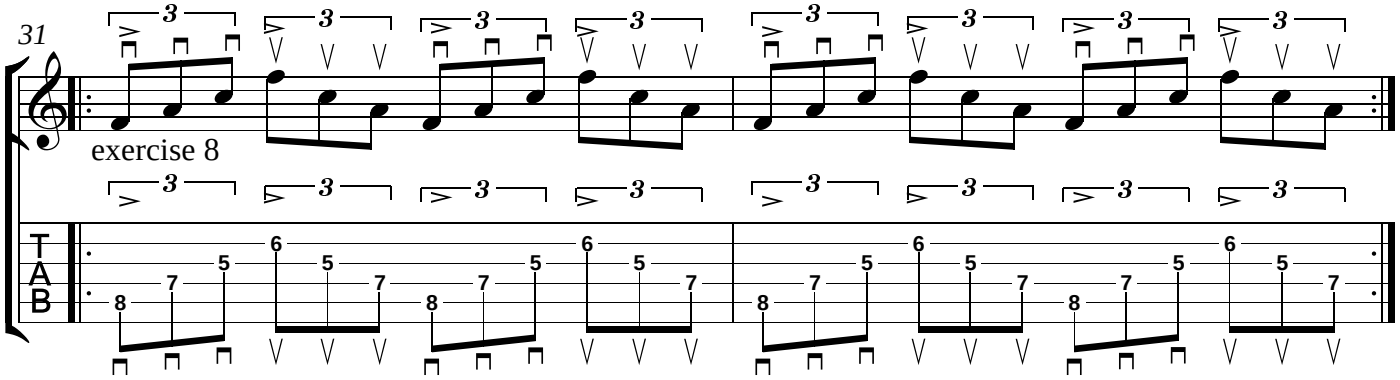
The following exercise uses a major triad with a triplet rhythm
I have found when playing triplets with a repeating pattern such as a triad or some other pattern, it is better to break the rule. Instead of playing the exercise like this,

exercise 8

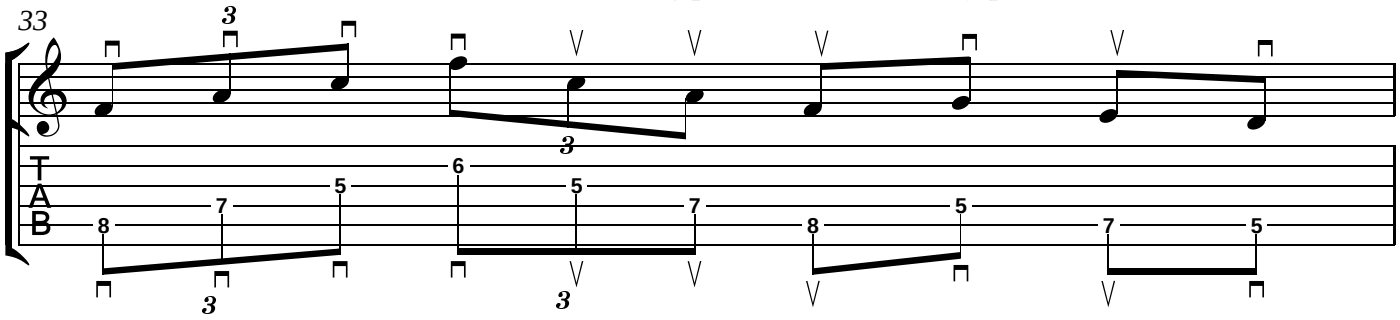


use three "down-strokes" followed by three "up-strokes". Apply to any three note chord on any three adjacent strings. This exercise is designed to practice three consecutive strokes in the same direction.

exercise 8

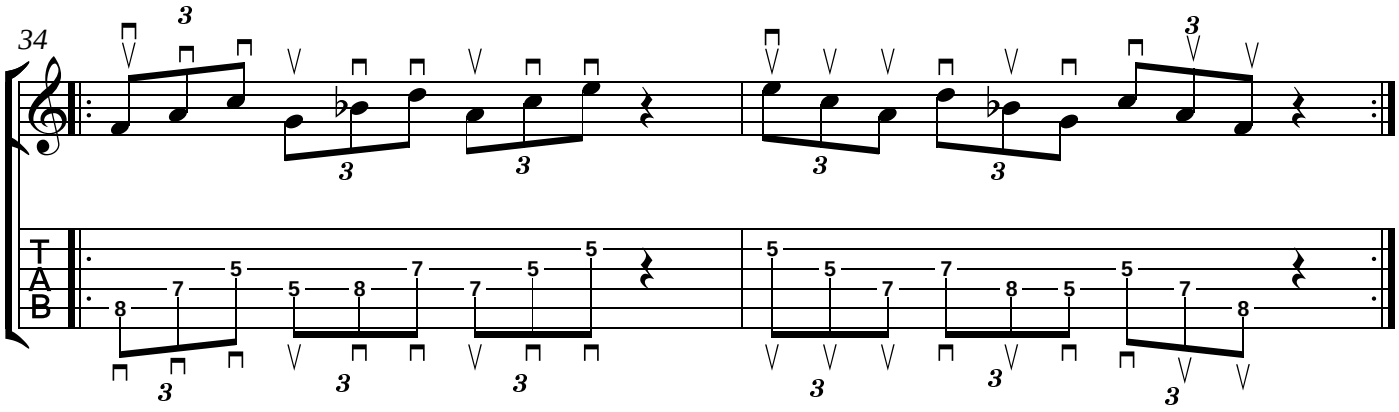


however, if I had to play a triplet phrase in the context of a line and not in an exercise, I would adhere to the rule. The following phrase illustrates my point.

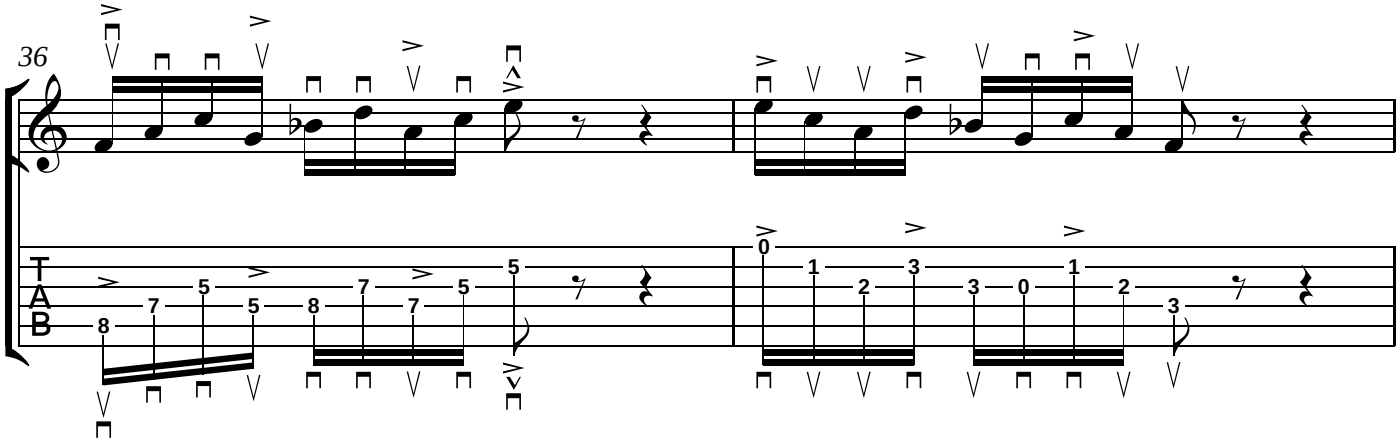


The next exercise illustrates triplets with the rule applied.
This is more likely to occur in a jazz phrase.

exercise 9



or like this with 16th notes. Pay close attention to the accents.

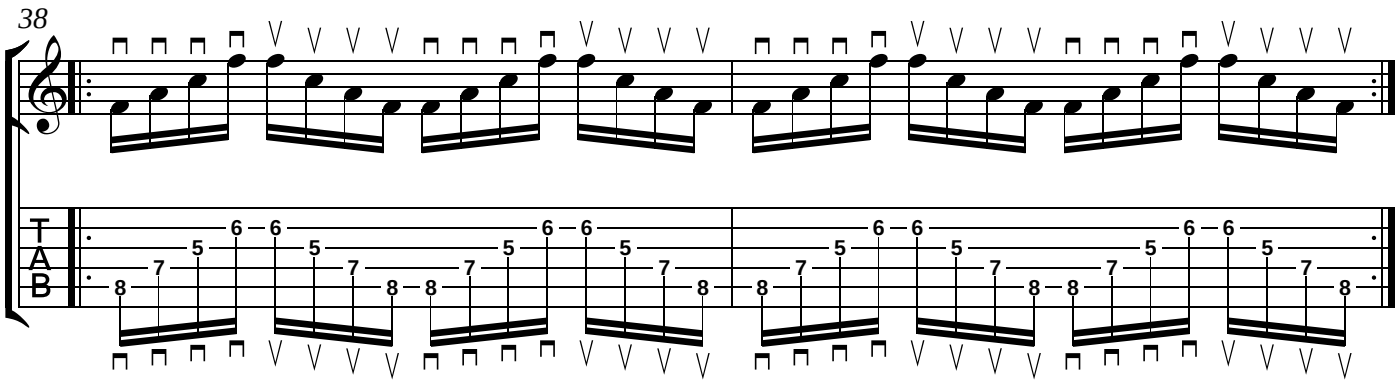


Sixteenth notes

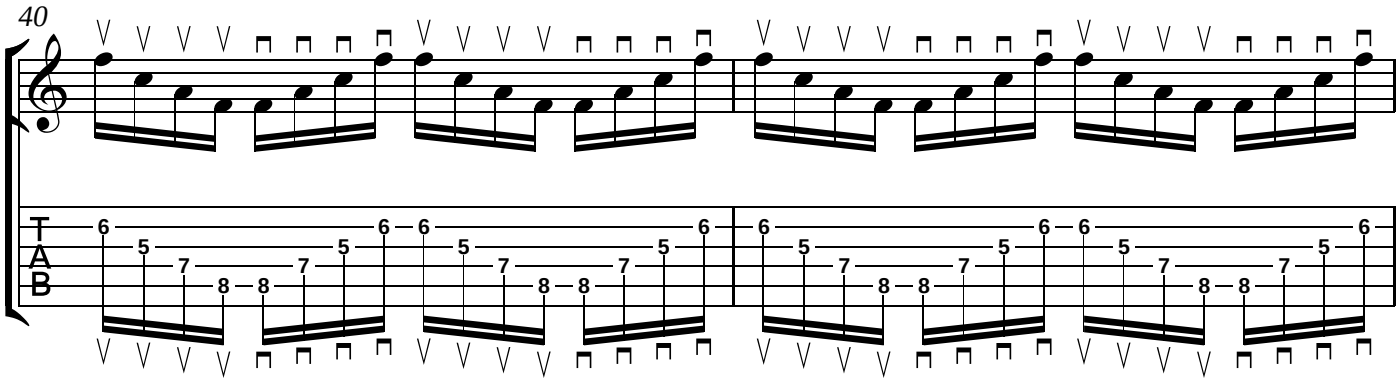
This exercise requires you to reverse direction on the same string. A common stroke that happens with repeated notes
Apply this exercise to any four note chord anywhere on the guitar.

.

exercise 10



exercise 11



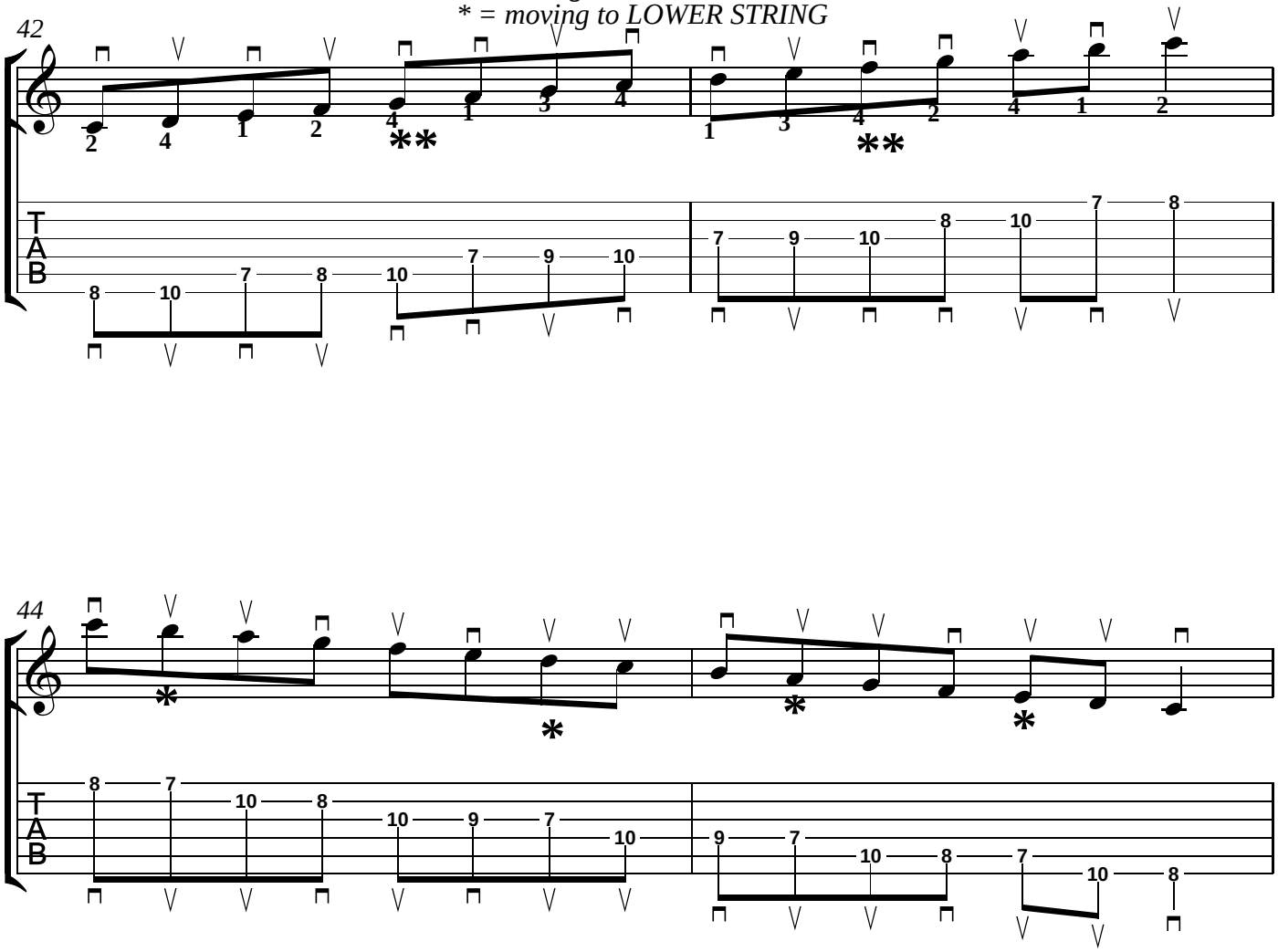
The Major Scales

Picking applied to Major scale fingering 6V2

Below are the six basic fingerings for the major scales. This will give you an idea how the rule works on any sclae or scale type passage..
For more info on these fingerings see my book "Six Essential Fingerings for the Jazz Guitarist" at www.jimmybruno.com

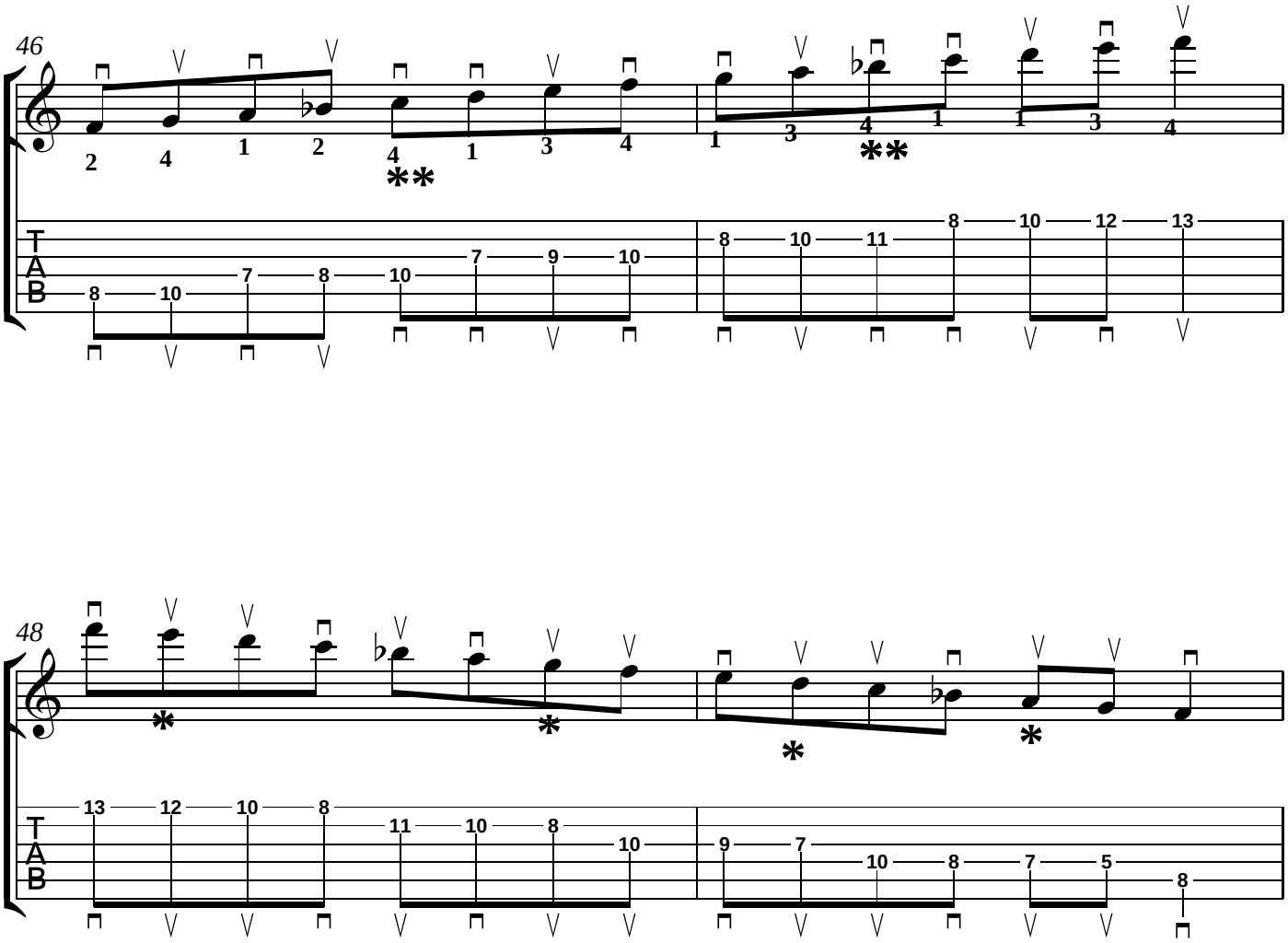
exercise 12

*** = moving to HIGHER STRING*
** = moving to LOWER STRING*



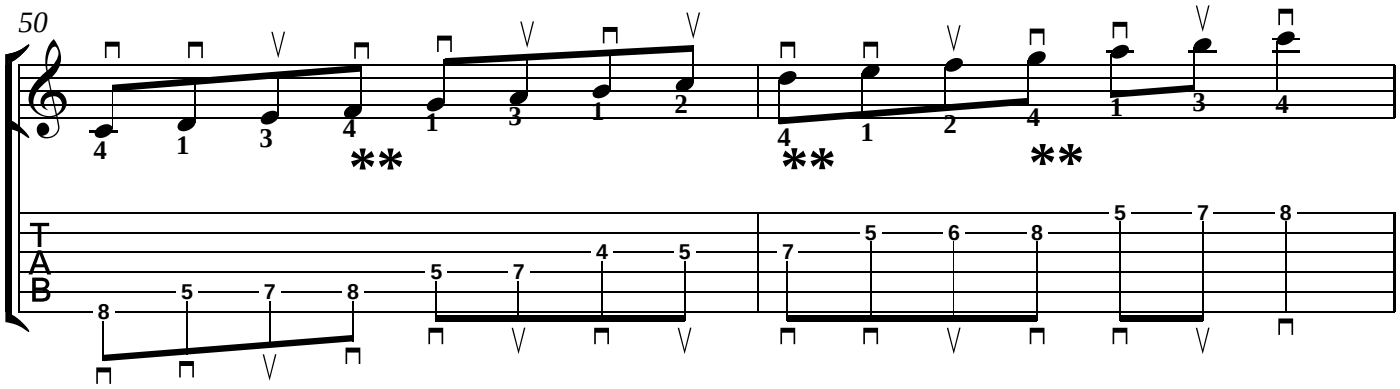
Picking applied to Major scale fingering 5V2

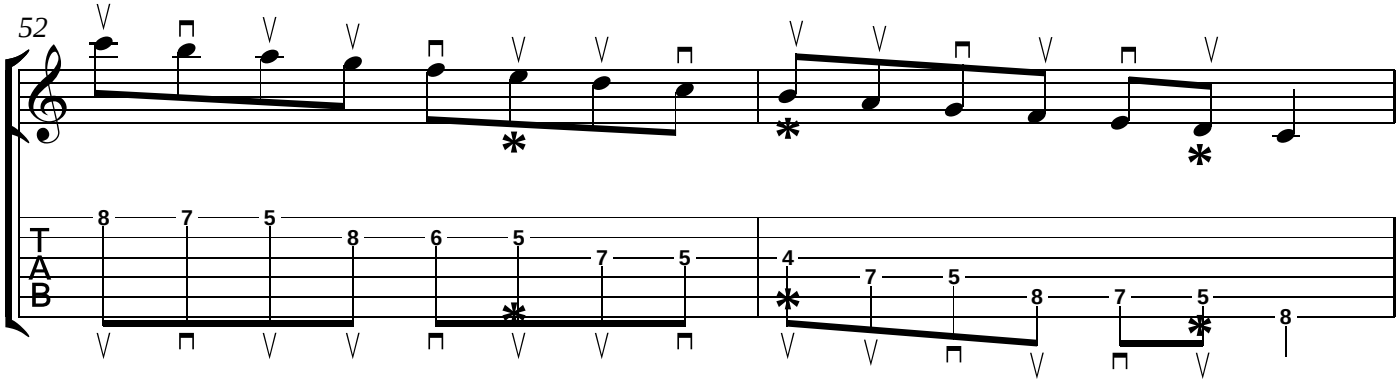
exercise 13



Picking applied to Major scale fingering 6V4

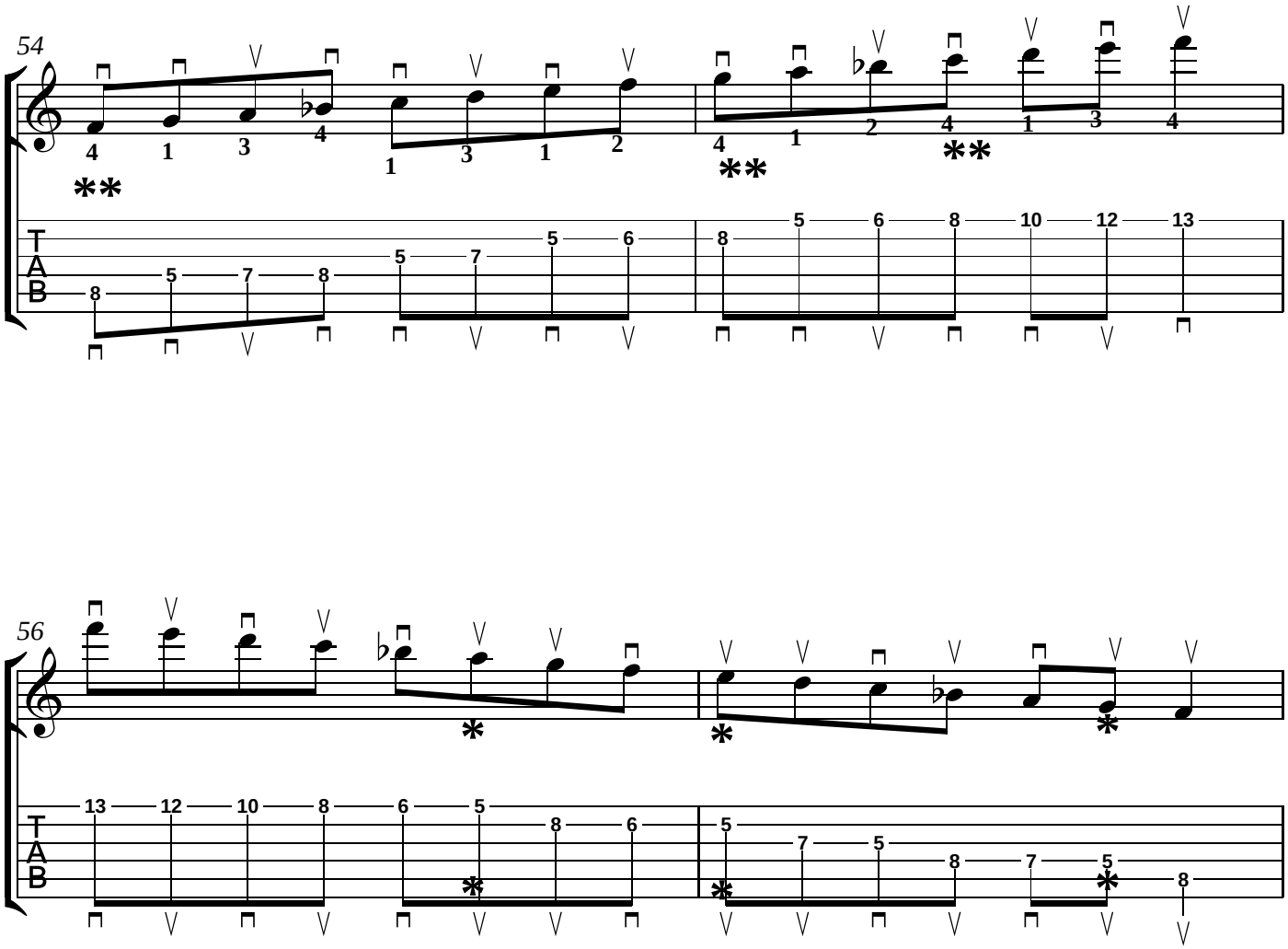
exercise 14





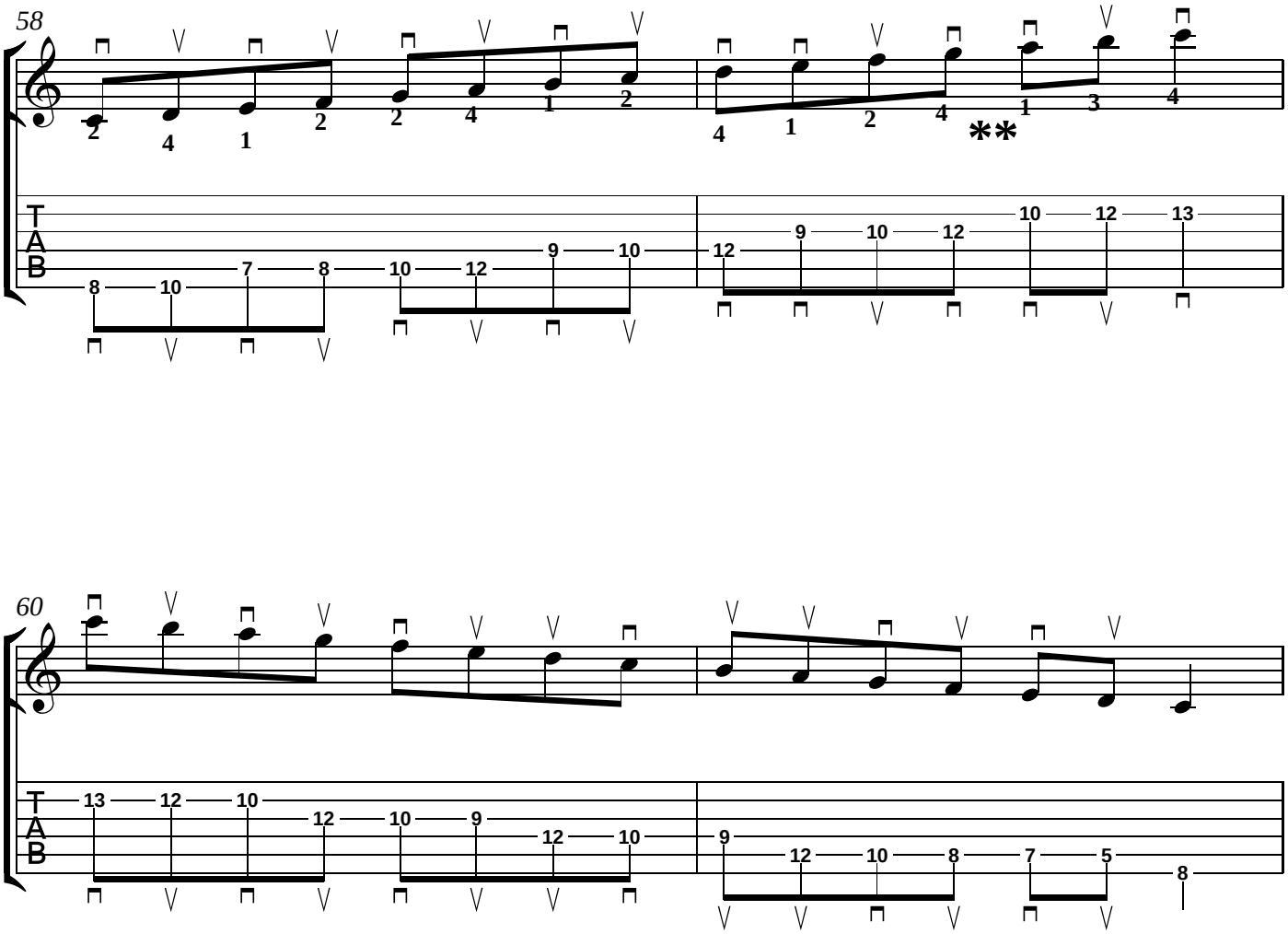
Picking applied to Major scale fingering 5V4

exercise 15



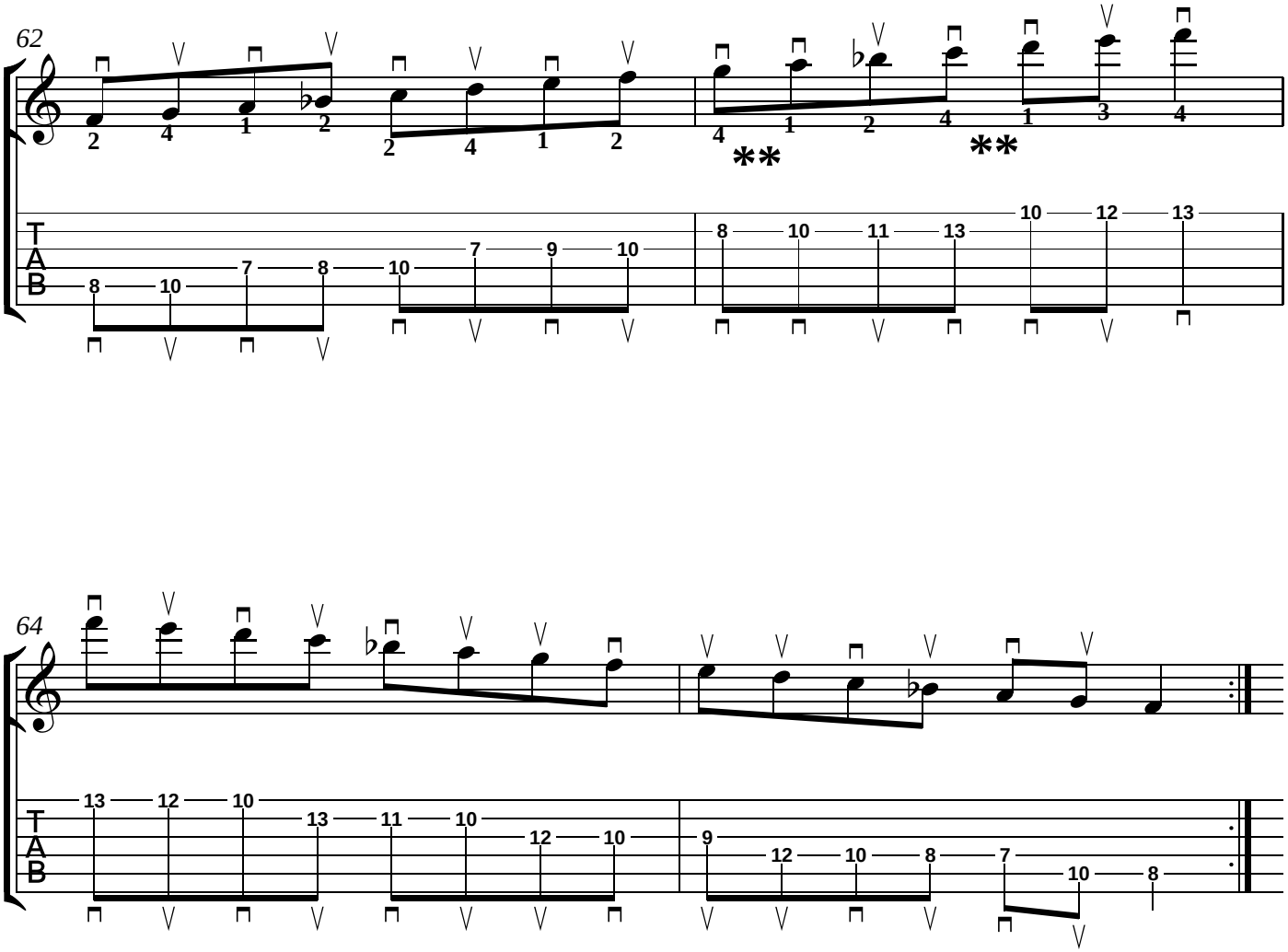
Picking applied to Major scale fingering 6H2

exercise 14



Picking applied to Major scale fingering 5H2

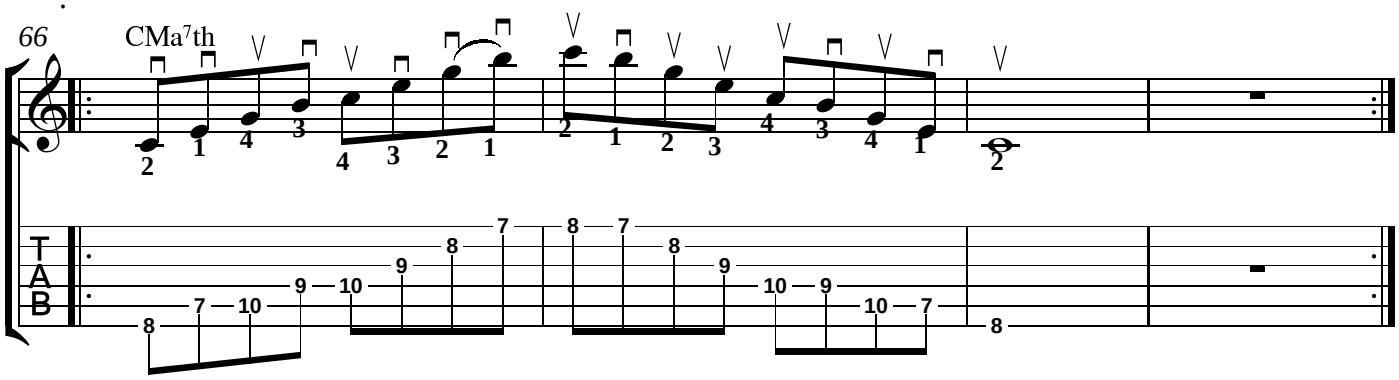
exercise 14

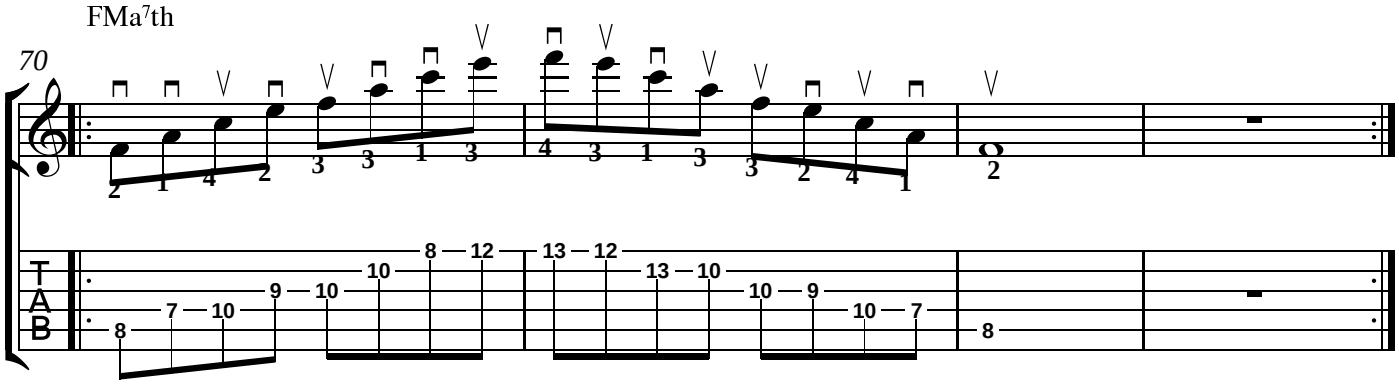


Arpeggios

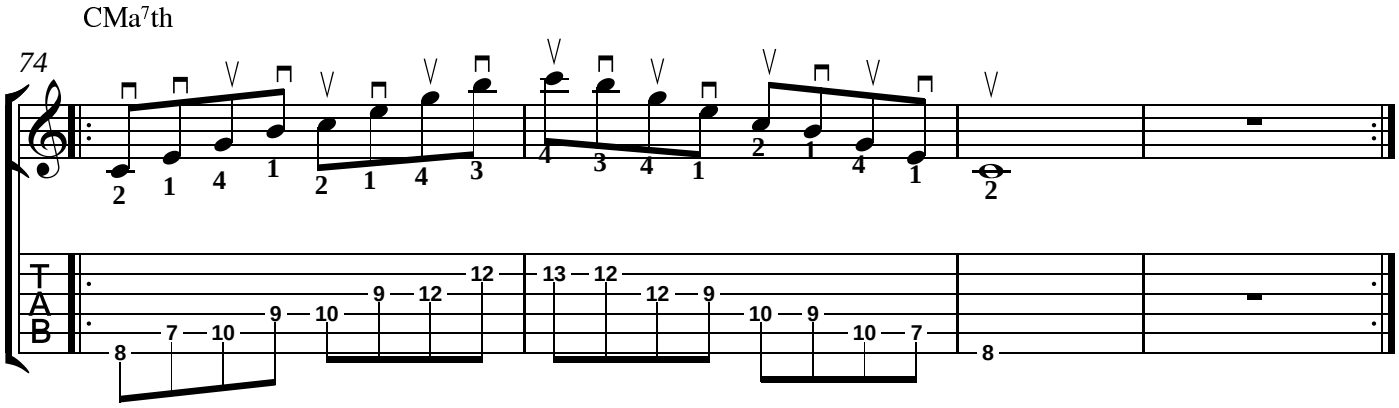
Although this is not a book about arpeggios, I feel it is important to include a few basic arpeggios so that you can see the picking method applied to arpeggios.
The difficulty with any arpeggio exercise , is keeping the notes from ringing. Articulatioin is more important han speed.

Major 7ths *vertical*

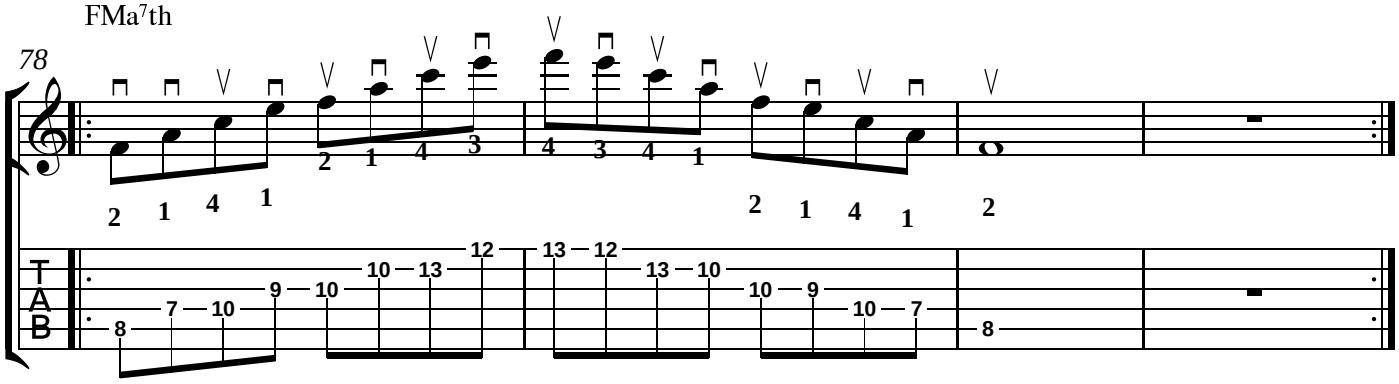




Major 7ths *horizontal*

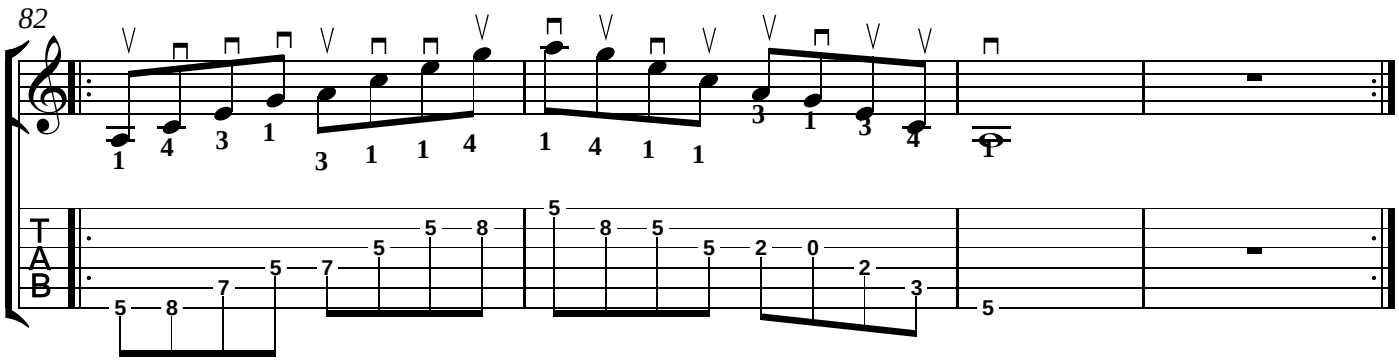


Major 7ths *horizontal*

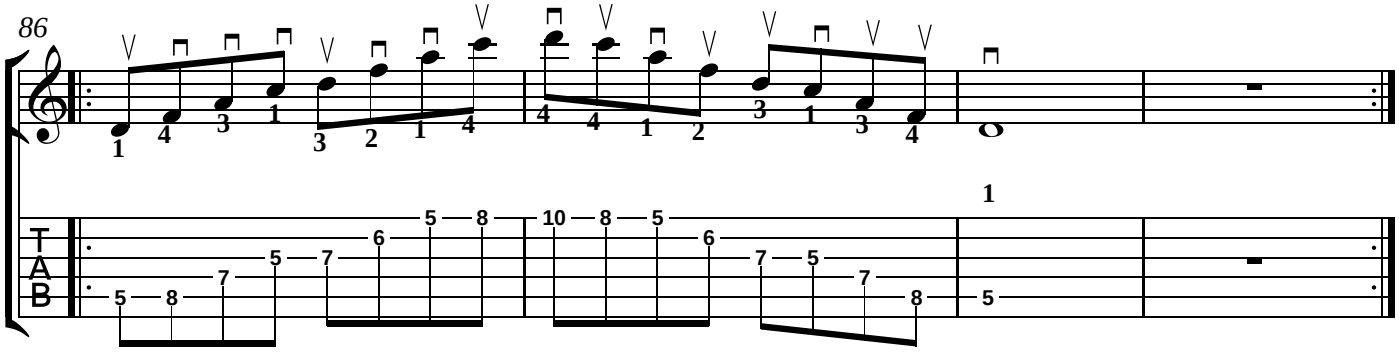


minor 7ths *vertical*

Amin7th

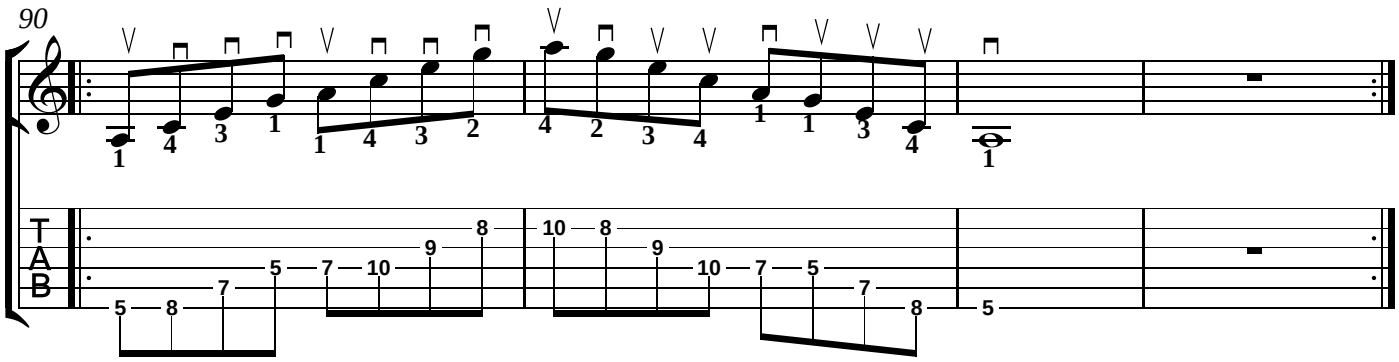


Dmin7th

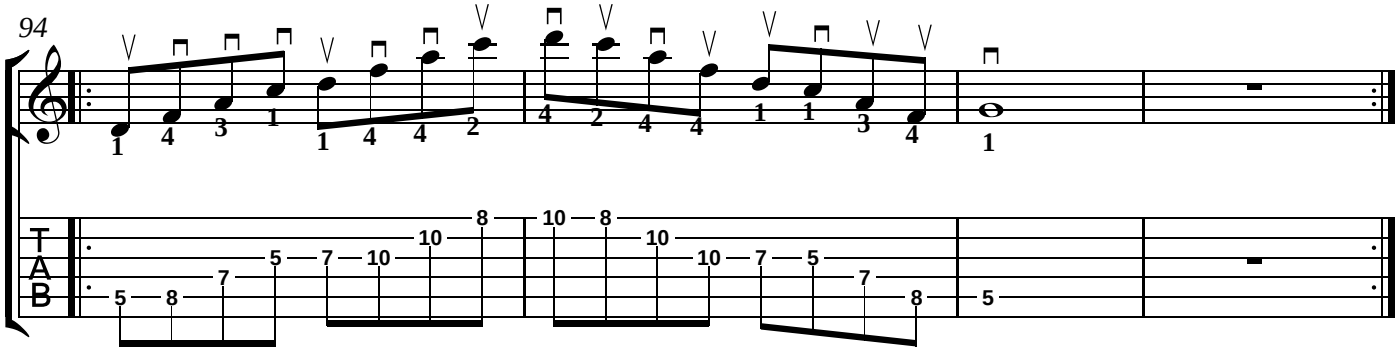


minor 7ths *horizontal*

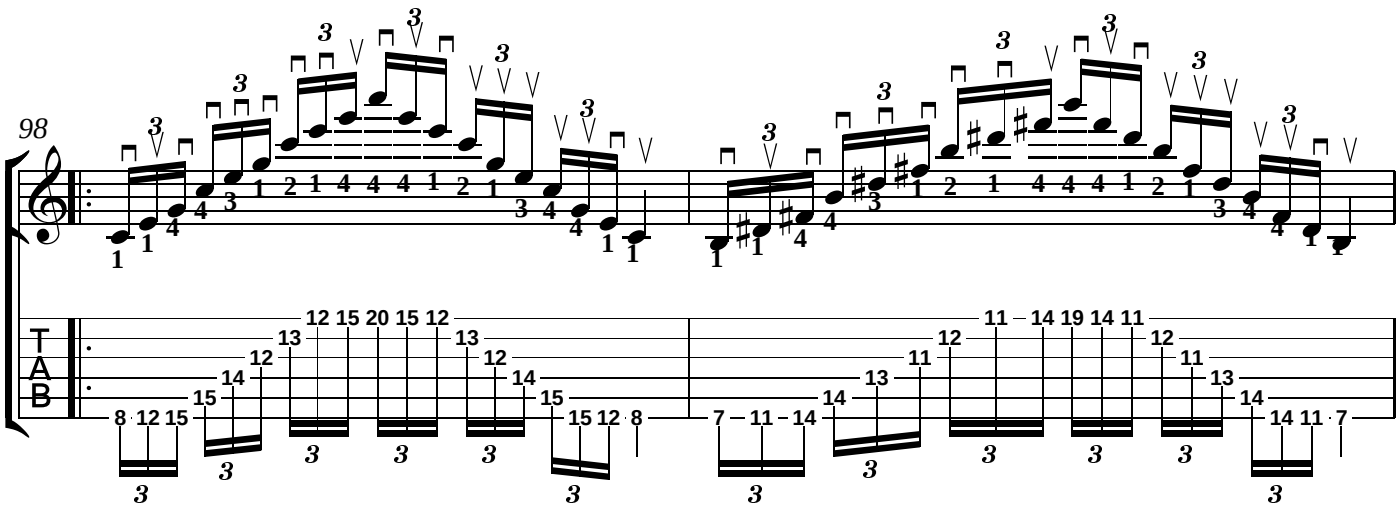
Amin7th



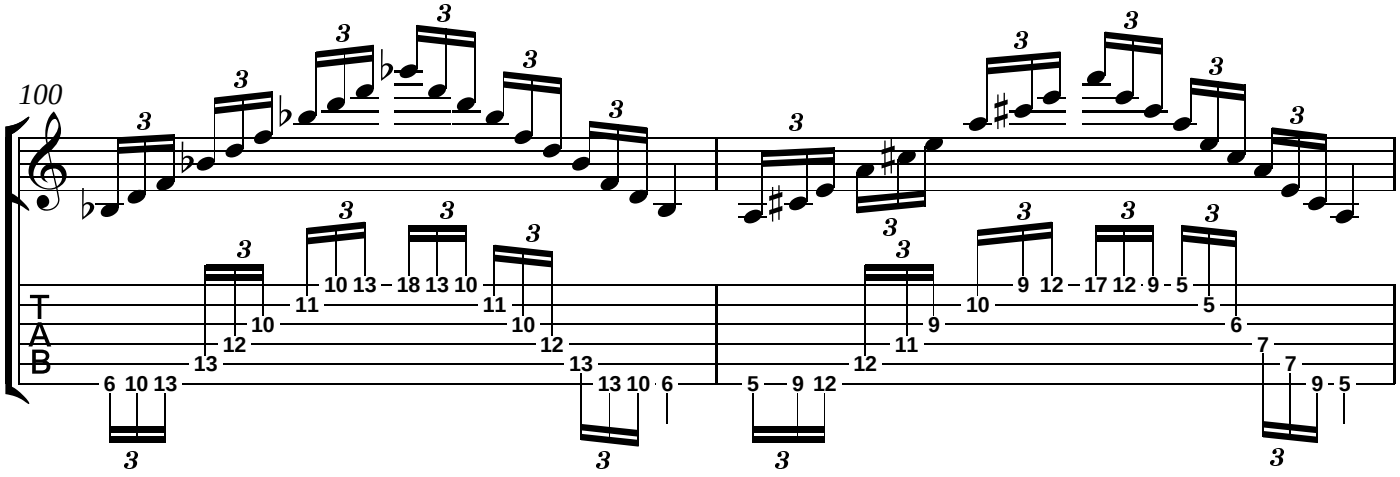
Dmin7th

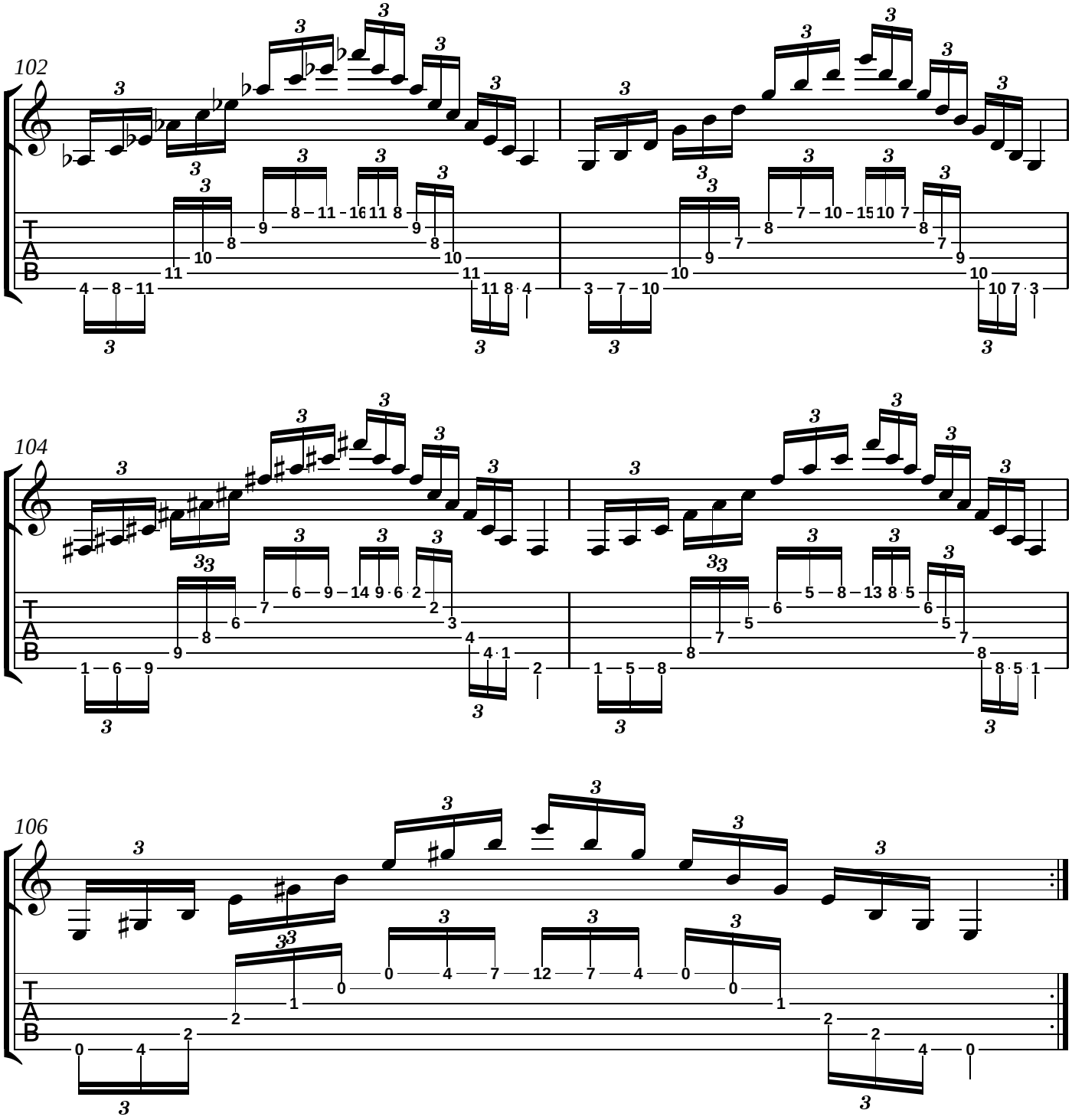


Major triad exercises: This makes a great warm-up exercise. It is very difficult to play with clean articulation. The result is well worth the time. This exercie alone will facilitate the separtion of notes with any phrase that contains an arpeggio or arpeggio fragment.

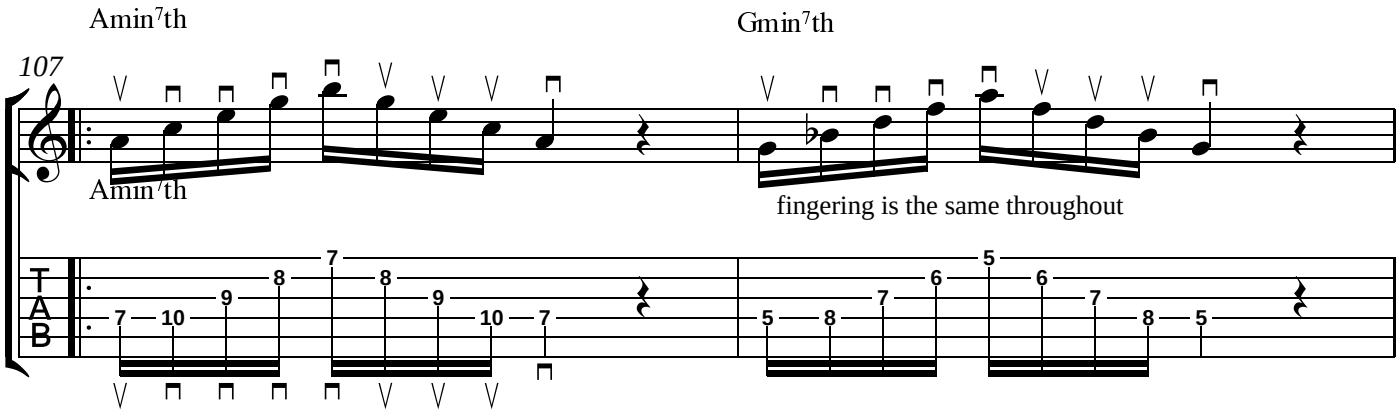


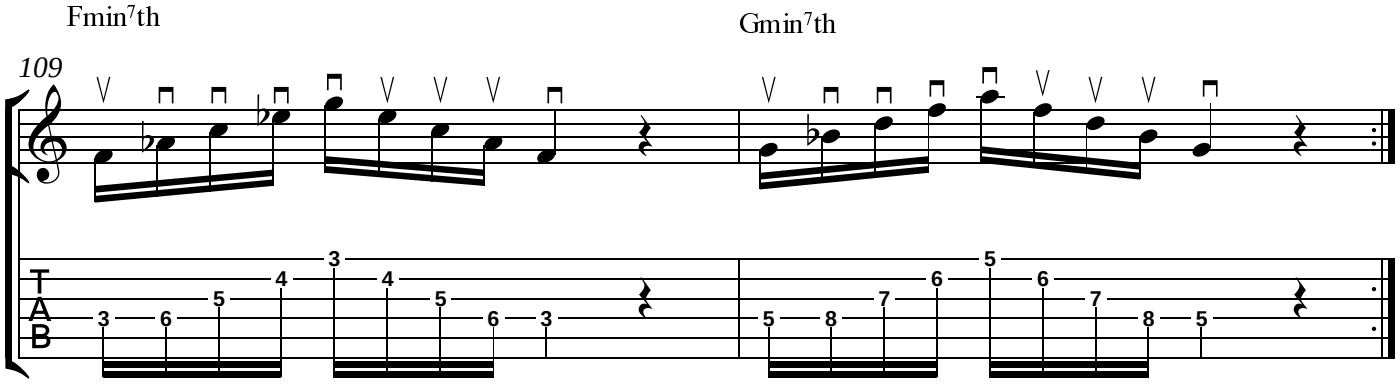
Fingering and picking is the same throughout.



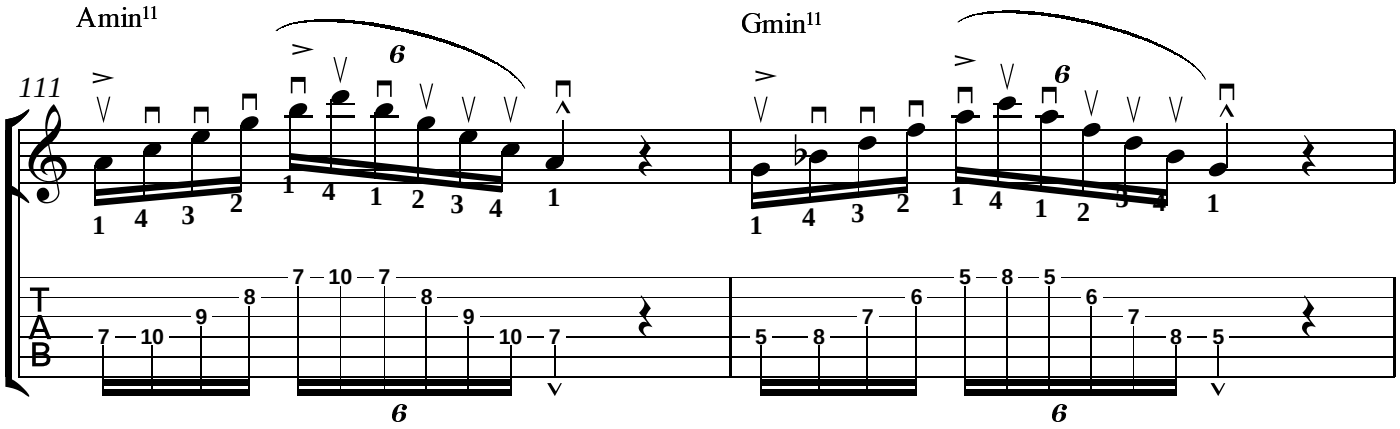

102
104
106
T
A
B

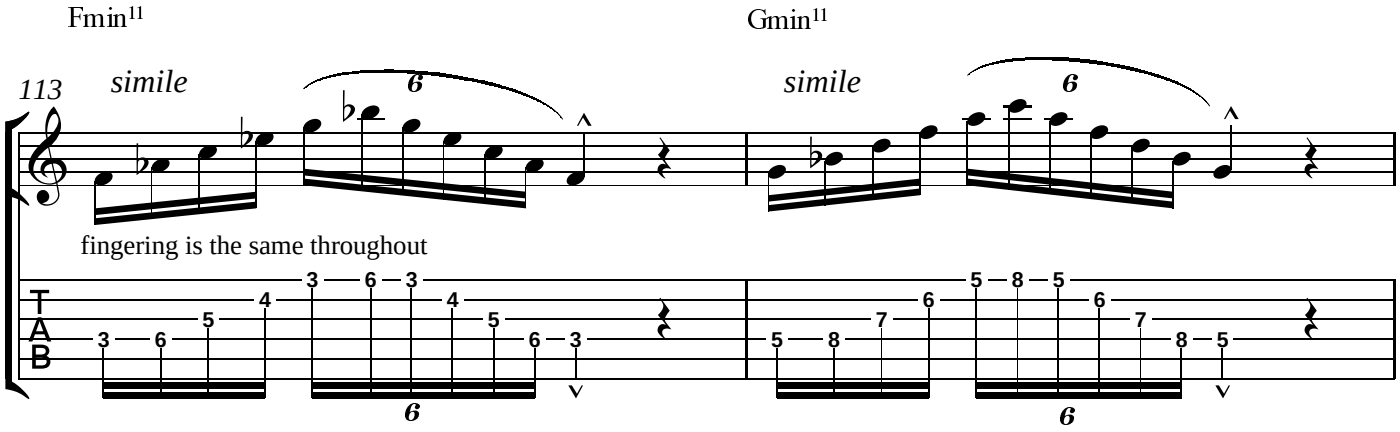
Minor 9 arpeggios: I have seen this referred to as sweep picking
I see no reason to make any distinction. Everything follows the rule:
Higher string = "down stroke" Lower string = "up stroke"



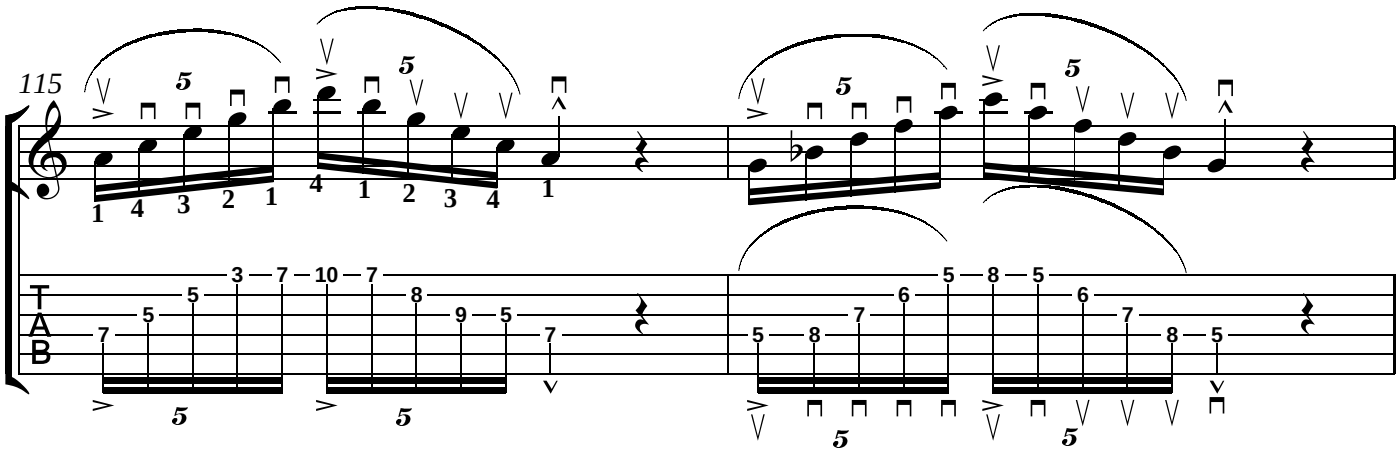


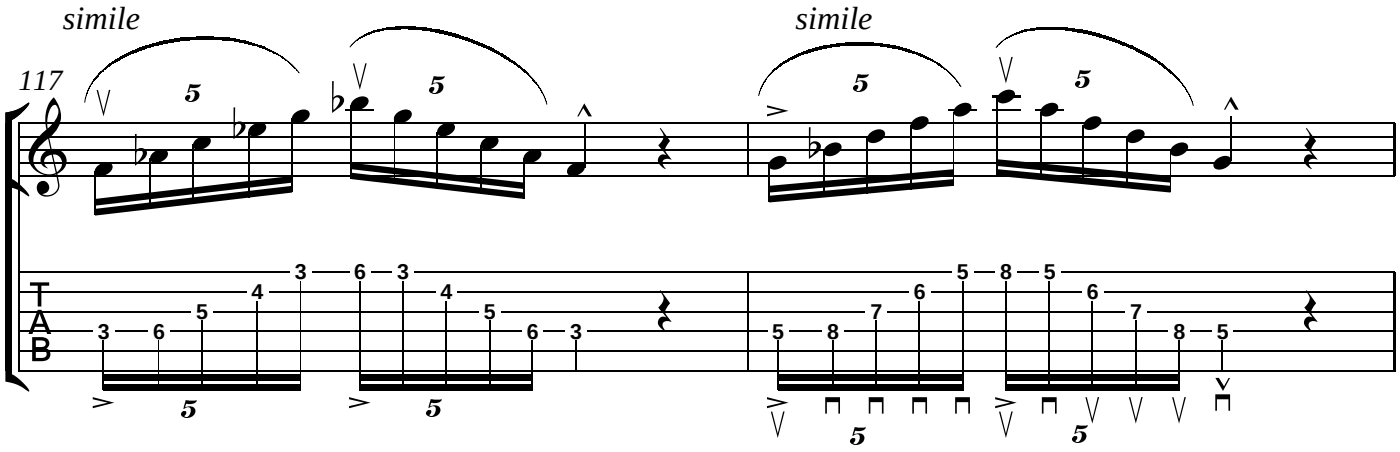
Minor 11 arpeggios: Because of the fingering it is possible to play 6 notes in one beat.(sextuplet) The fingering sets up the consecutive down and up strokes to go across four strings. Saxophone players and pianists use phrases like this.



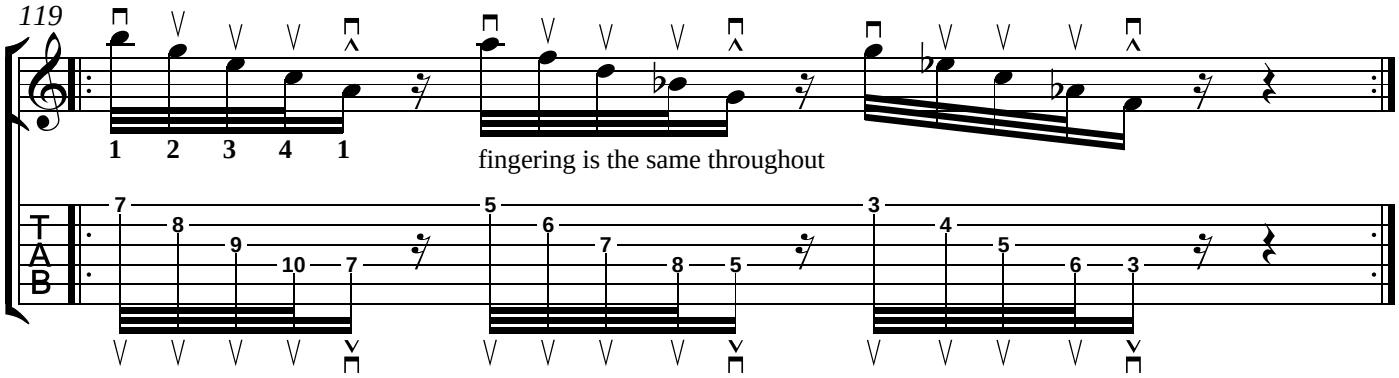


Minor 11 arpeggios: This is more of the same but with groups of quintuplets.





Minor 9th arpeggios: Below are several ways to pick this. Again, the fingering makes the speed possible.



I have found when there is a rest between phrases, it is possible to break the rule and use whatever stroke you please to start the phrase. Below I used an up stroke to start each phrase.

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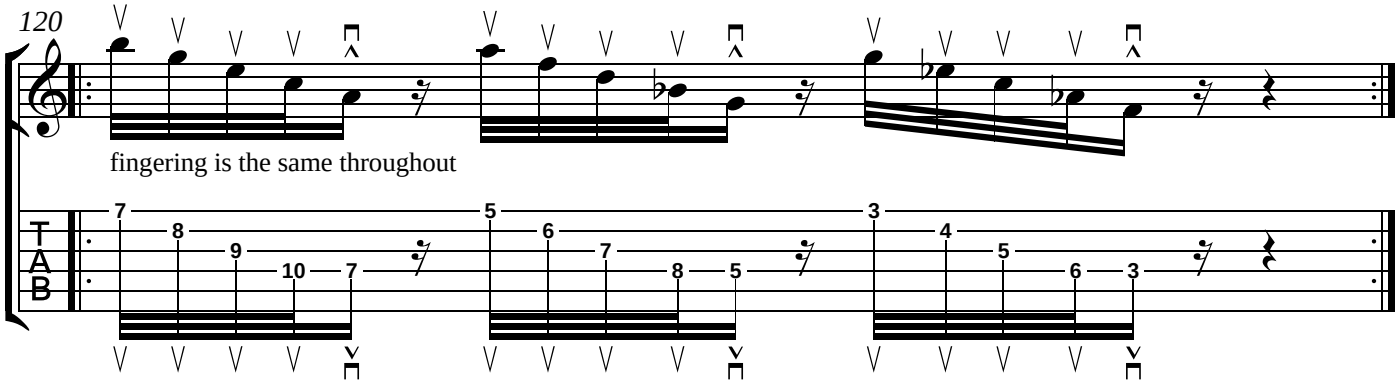

Try starting any phrase with both strokes, down and up. There should be only a slieght difference in sound.

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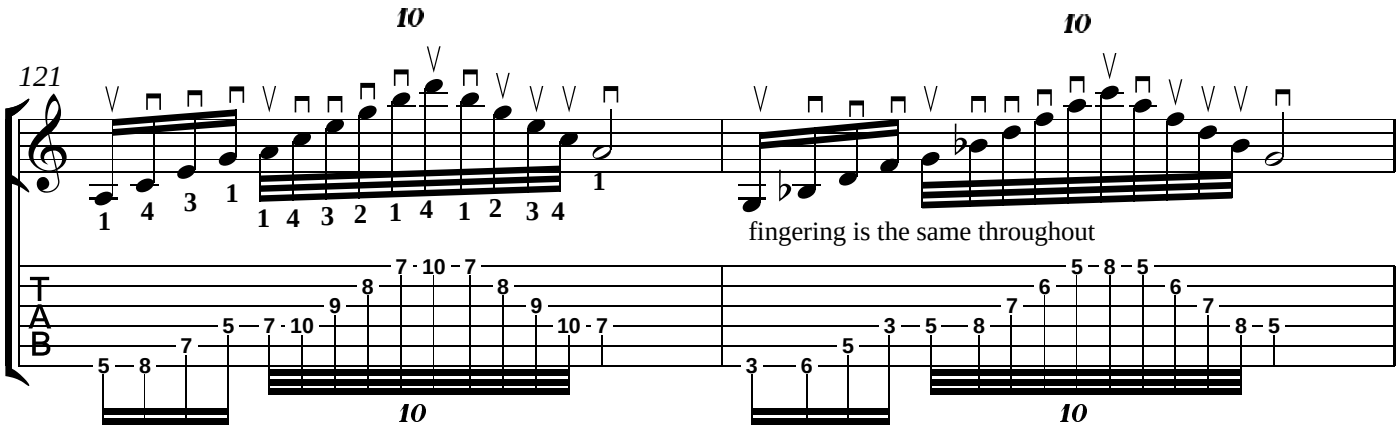
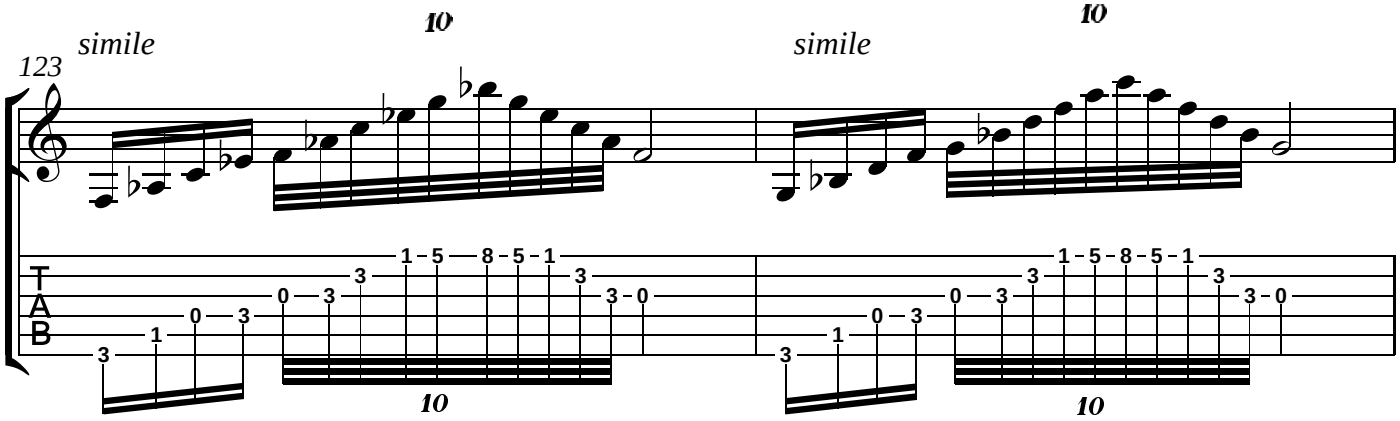
Minor 9th arpeggios:By using fingerings that place notes on adjacent strings, either higher or lower, these large two octave arpeggios become possible.





To illustrate all the possible arpeggios is beyond the scope of this book. The main point to remember is that the fingering will determine the picking. By placing as many notes of an arpeggio on adjacent strings, the easier the so called "sweep" becomes. I am not fond of that term; to me there is only one way to think about it: "When going to a **higher string** always use a **"down stroke"**, when going to a **lower string** always use an **"up stroke."**"" I often run across guitarists who become misled into thinking that picking for single lines is different than picking for arpeggios. You have to be careful to NOT let the **fingerboard** make the music. The music comes from inside; the picking mechanism described in this book is designed to make it easier for the music to be realized.

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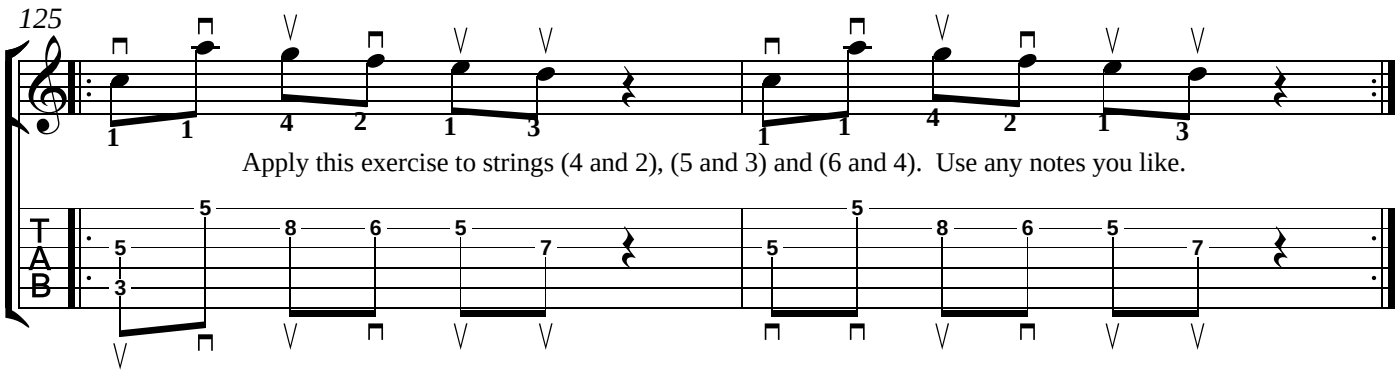
String Skipping

Skipping Strings

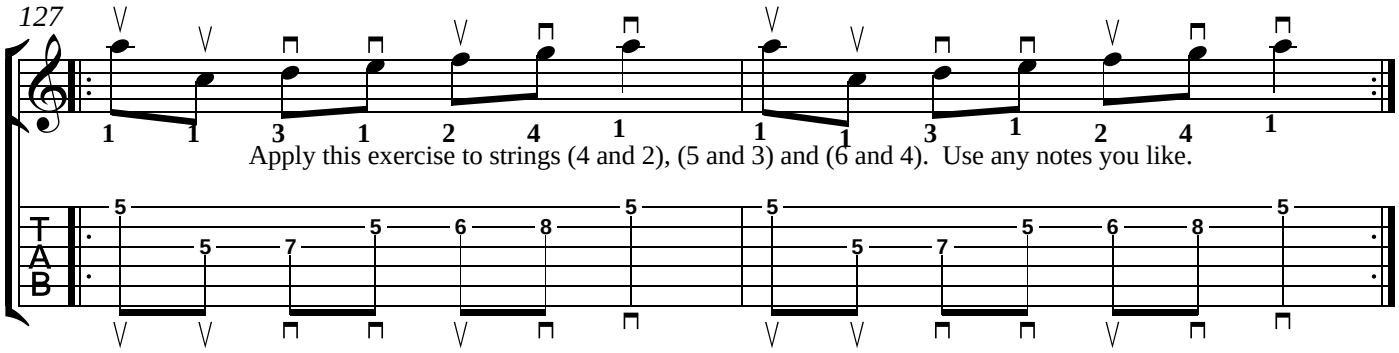
When skipping strings the same rule applies: When going to a higher string use a down-stroke; when going to a lower string, use an up-stroke.

exercise 14



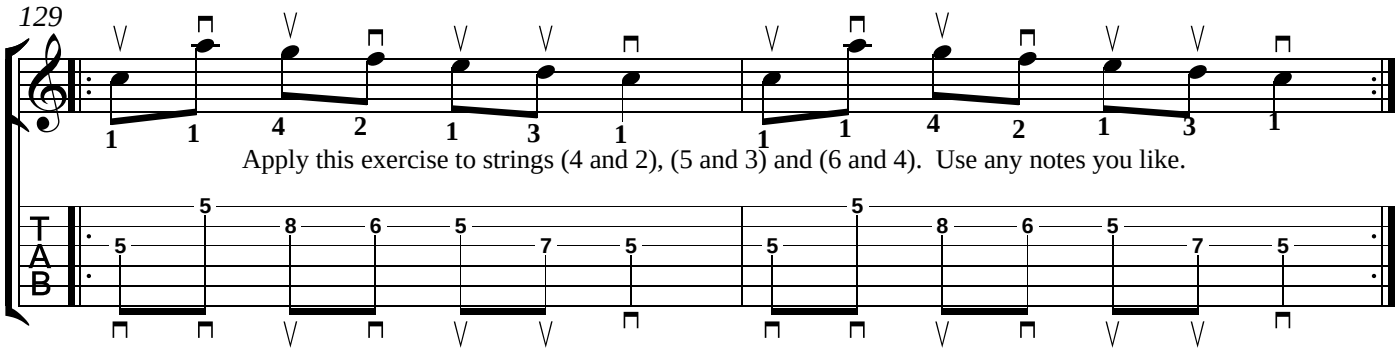
Here's the same thing in the opposite direction

exercise 15



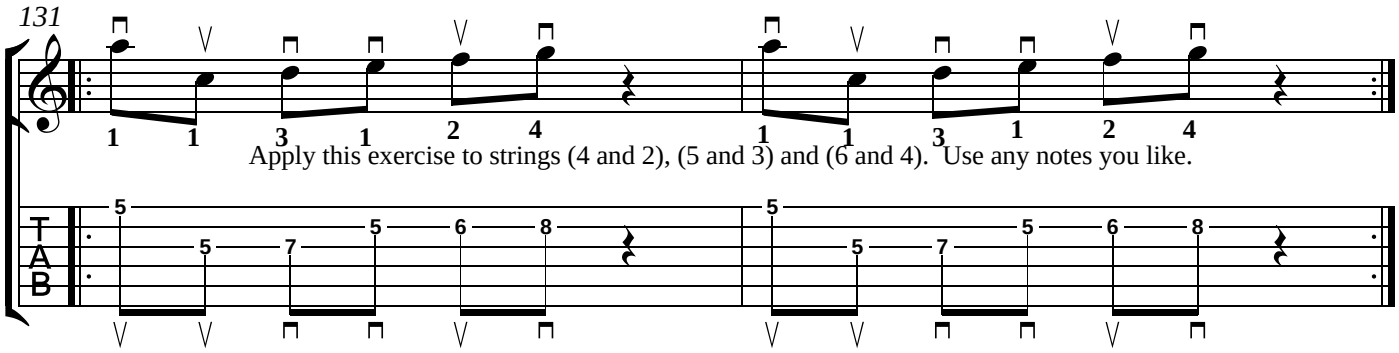
This exercise is a bit more difficult. It uses the same exercise but with the "in-between-stroke".

exercise 16



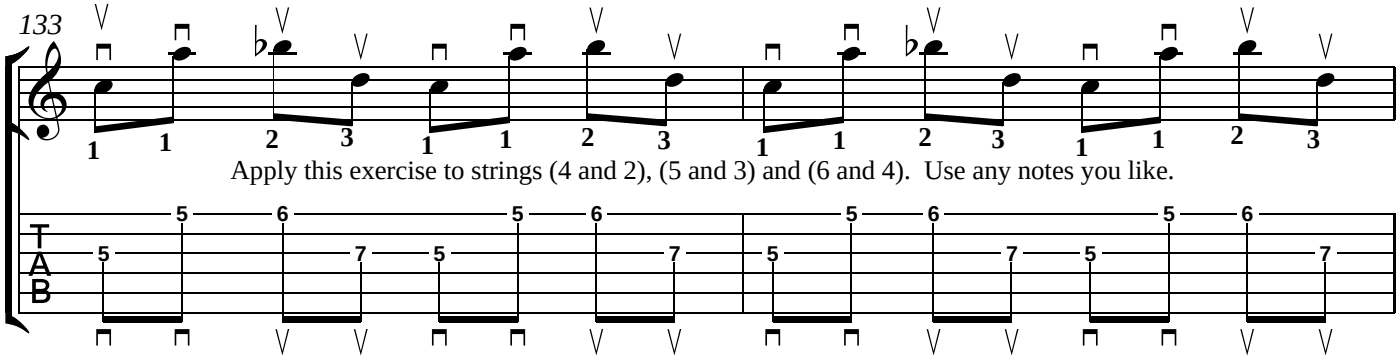
Here's the same thing in the opposite direction

exercise 17



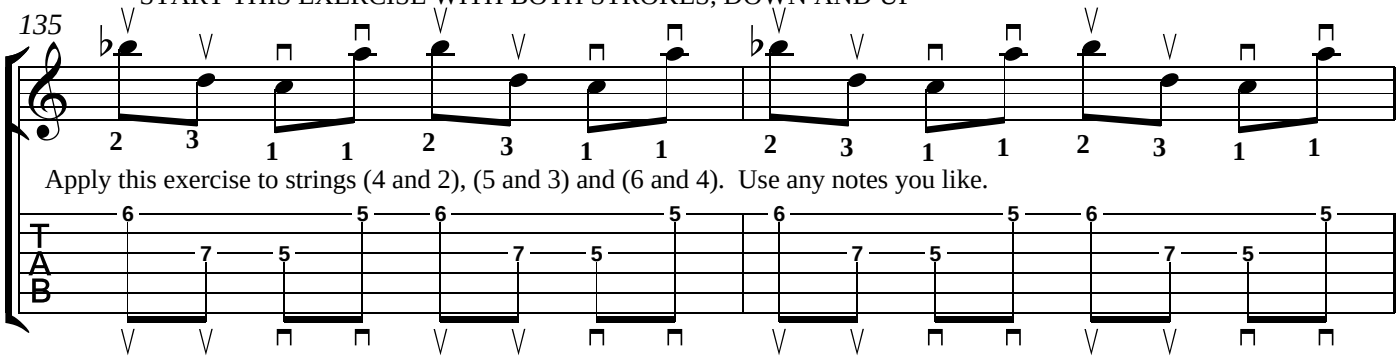
Consecutive down-up strokes with a string skip.

START THIS EXERCISE WITH BOTH STROKES, DOWN AND UP
exercise 18



Consecutive up-dwon strokes with a string skip.

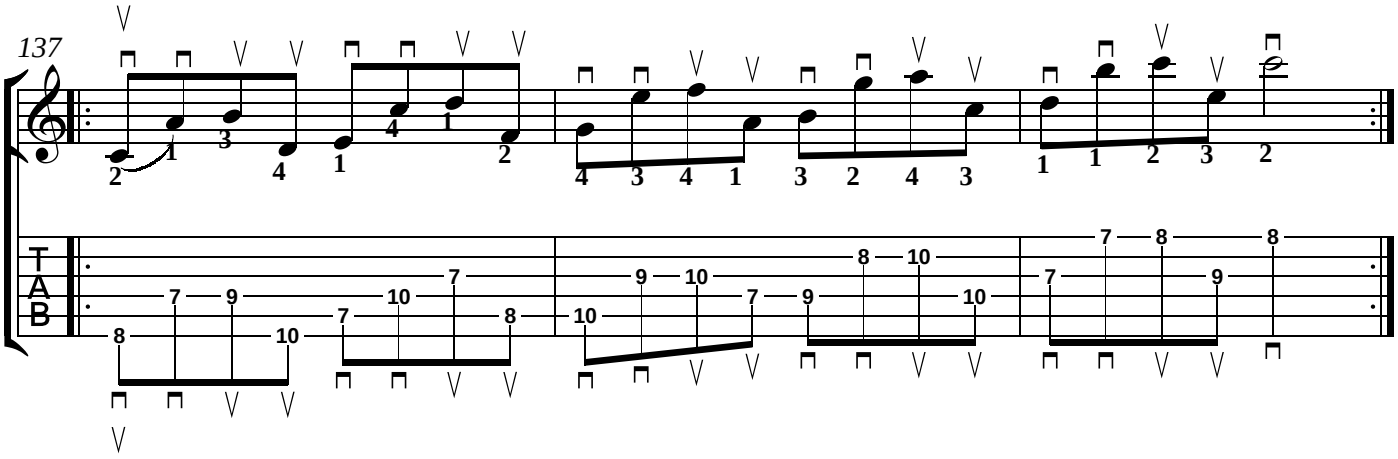
exercise 19
START THIS EXERCISE WITH BOTH STROKES, DOWN AND UP



Sixth with a string skip.

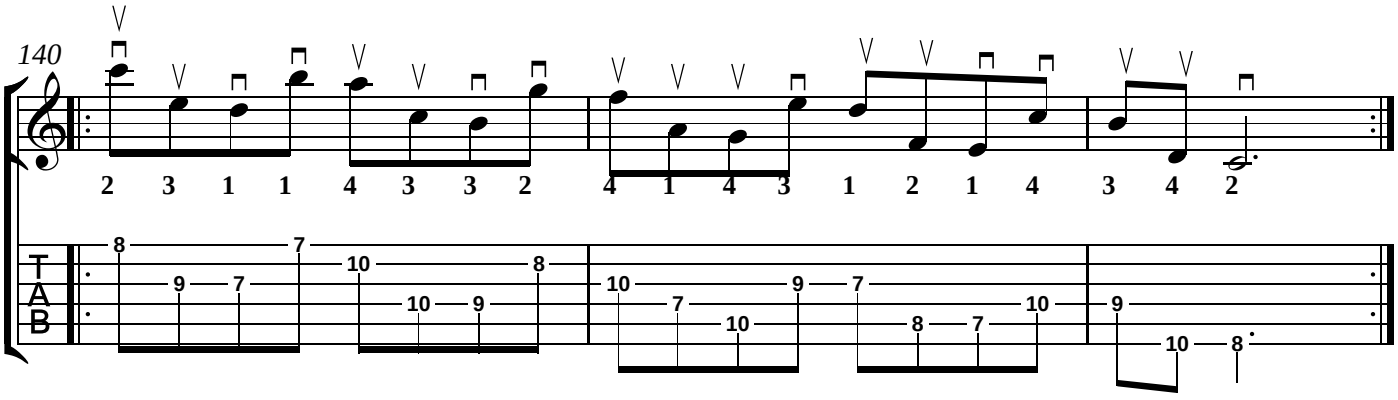
START THIS EXERCISE WITH BOTH STROKES, DOWN AND UP

exercise 20



START THIS EXERCISE WITH BOTH STROKES, DOWN AND UP

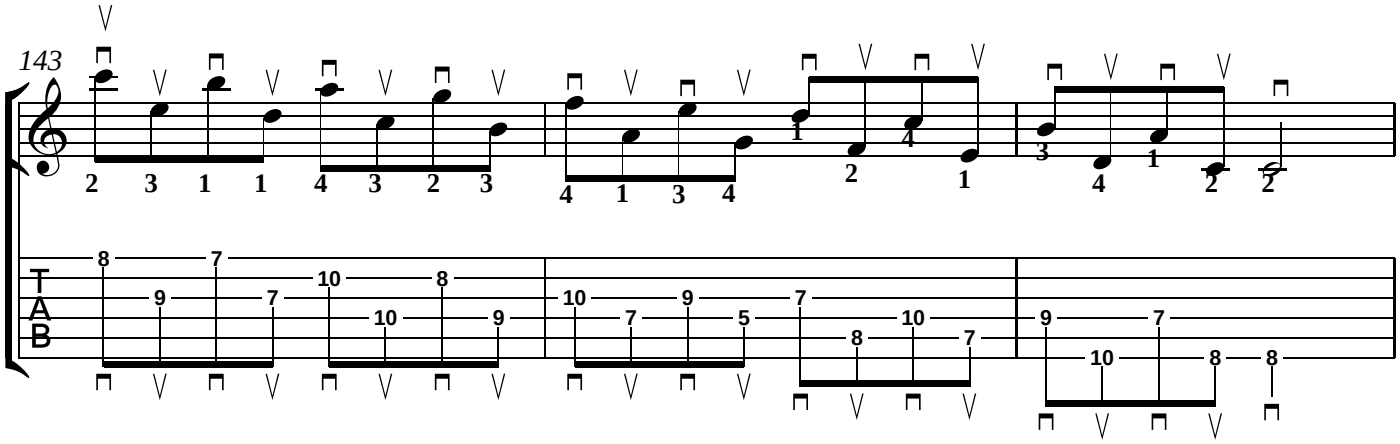
exercise 21



In-Between stroke with a string skip

START THIS EXERCISE WITH BOTH STROKES, DOWN AND UP

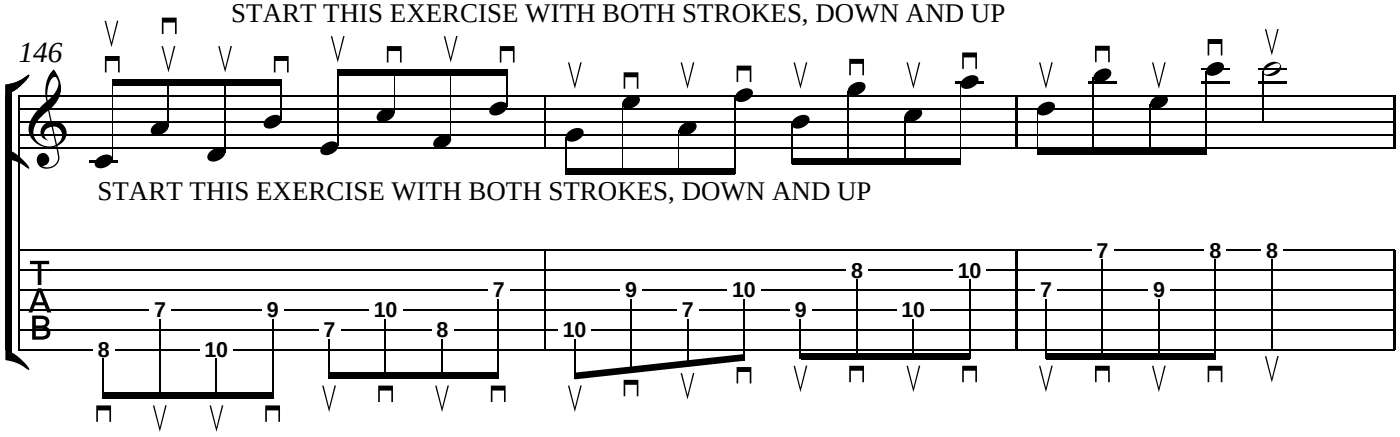
exercise 22



This exercise is very difficult to master. You need to put an accent on the "up-stroke" while skipping a string. It uses the "in-between" stroke with a string skip. You should also practice this with an alternate stroke. I find that when playing exercises like this it is easier to play them with alternating "down" - "up" strokes

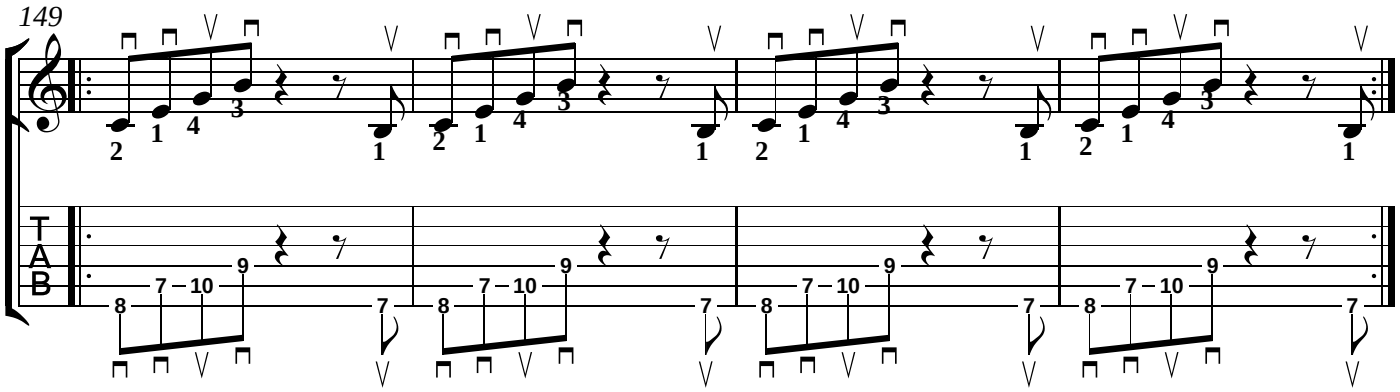
exercise 23

START THIS EXERCISE WITH BOTH STROKES, DOWN AND UP

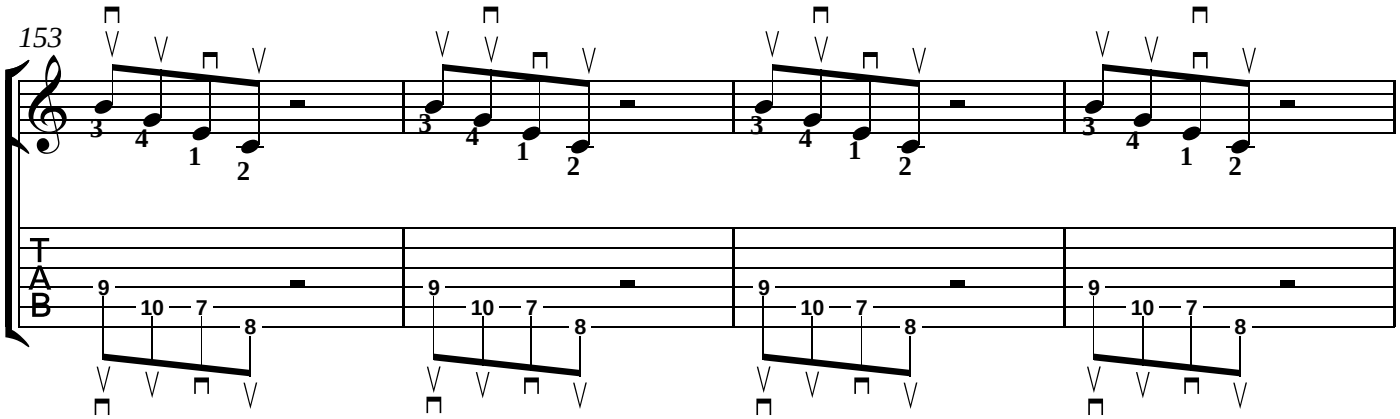


Be-Bop Phrases

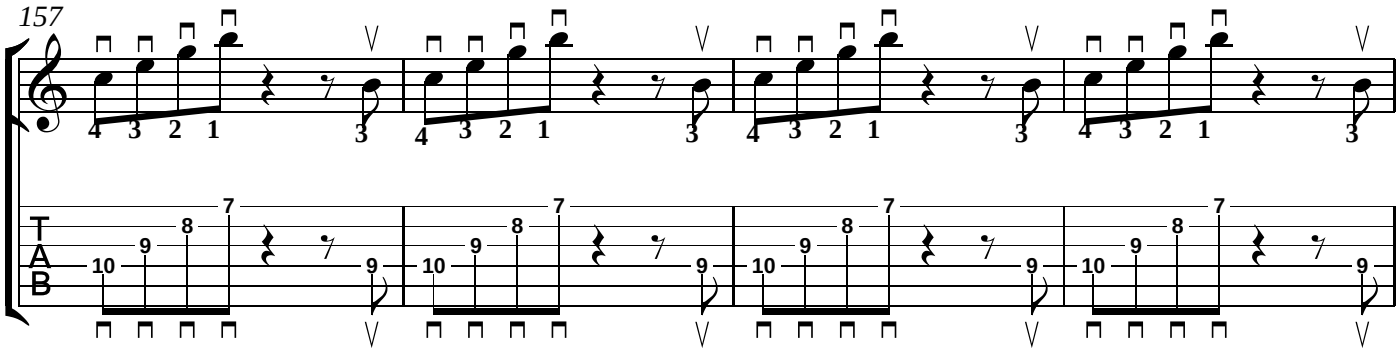
exercise 24



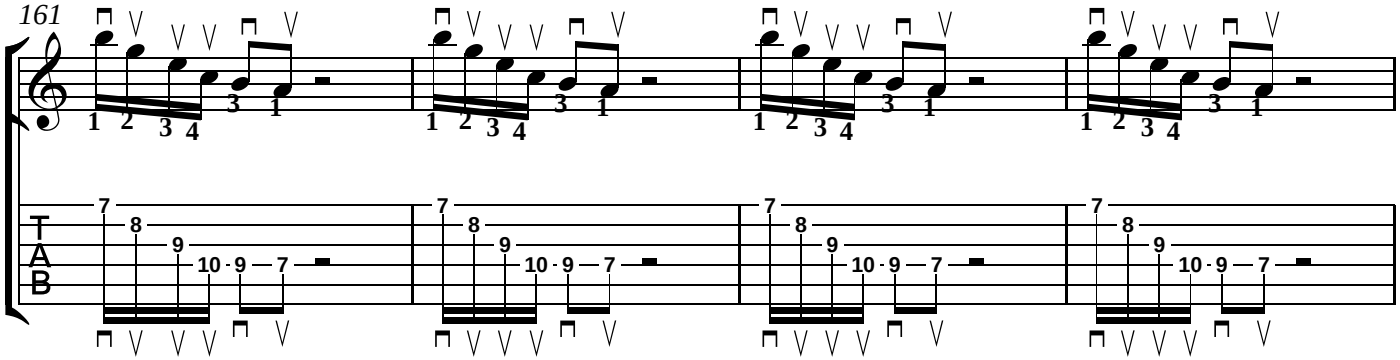
exercise 25



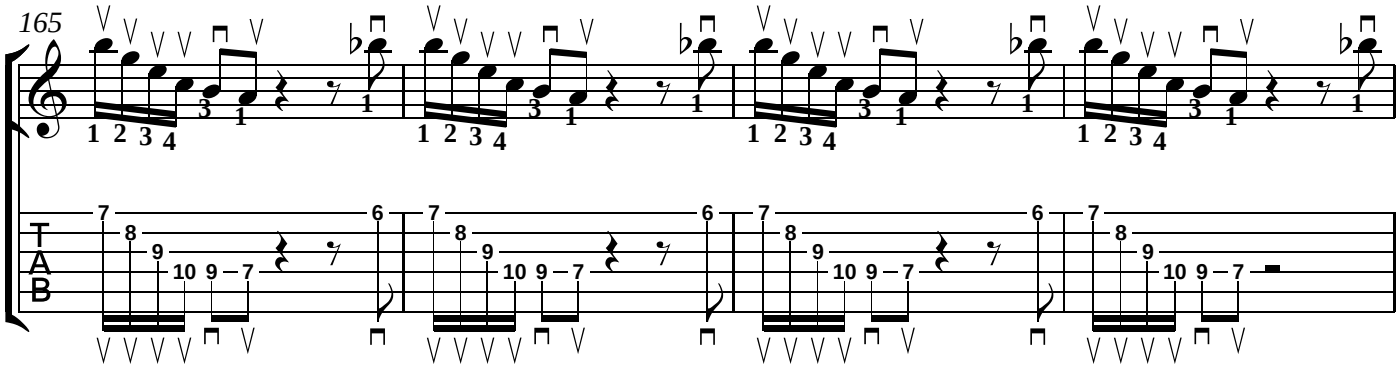
exercise 26



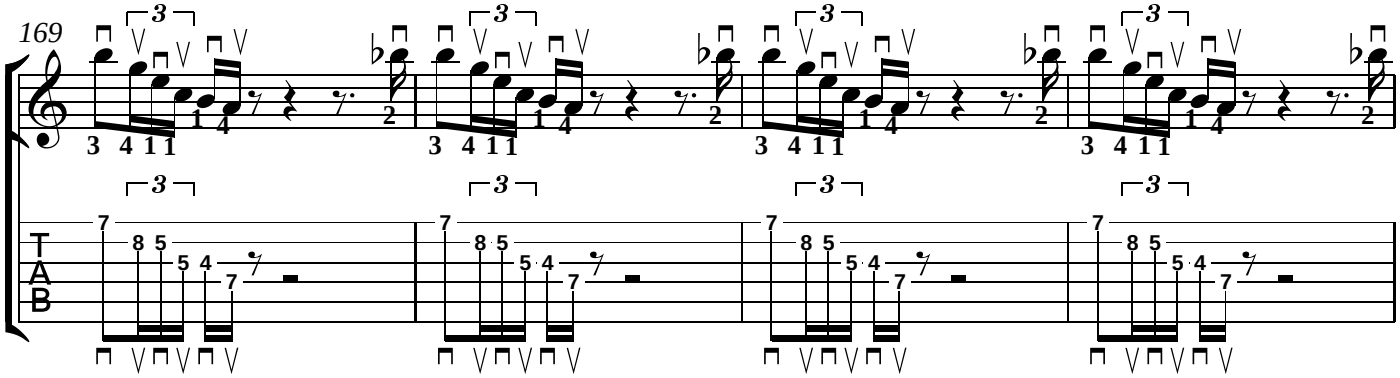
exercise 27



exercise 28

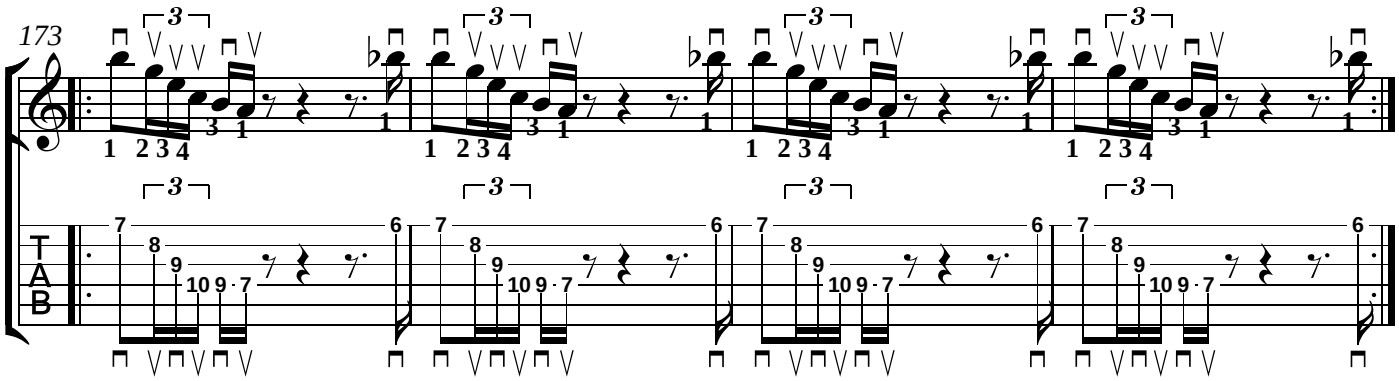


exercise 29

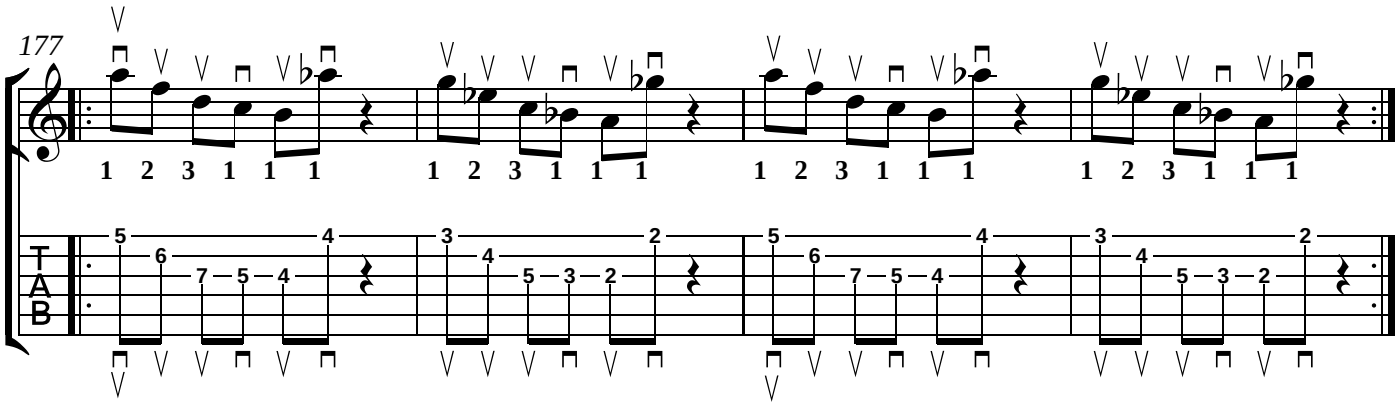


Here's the same phrase in the 7th position. This changes the picking considerably.

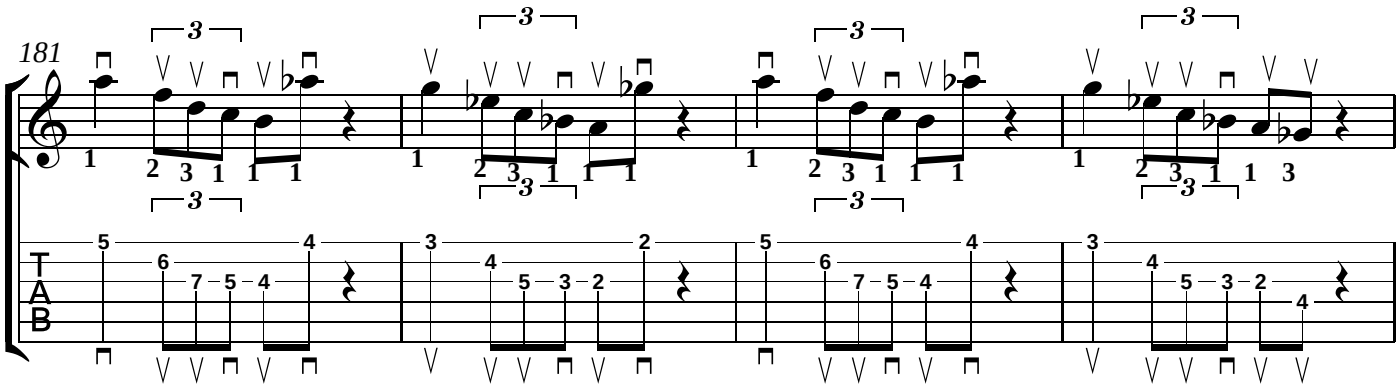
exercise 30



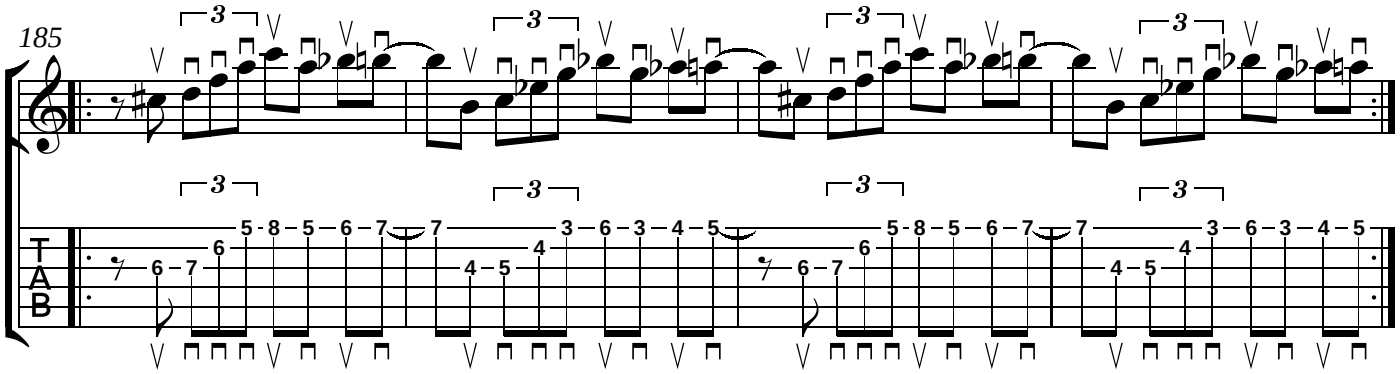
exercise 31



exercise 32



exercise 33

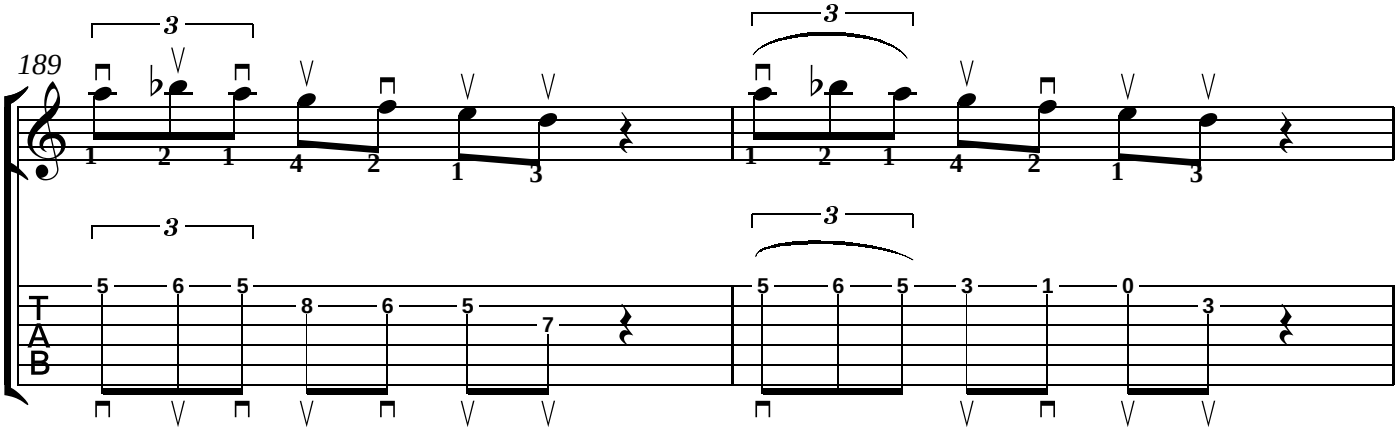


Slurred Triplets

exercise 34

1st example: Picked

2nd example: Slurred



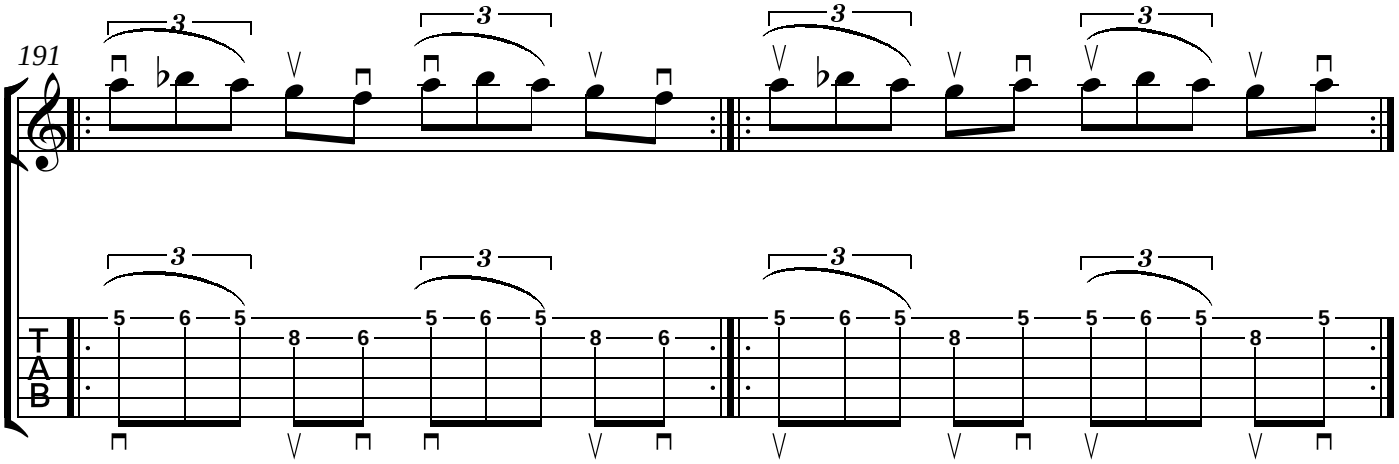
I prefer the 2nd example; it sounds more horn-like

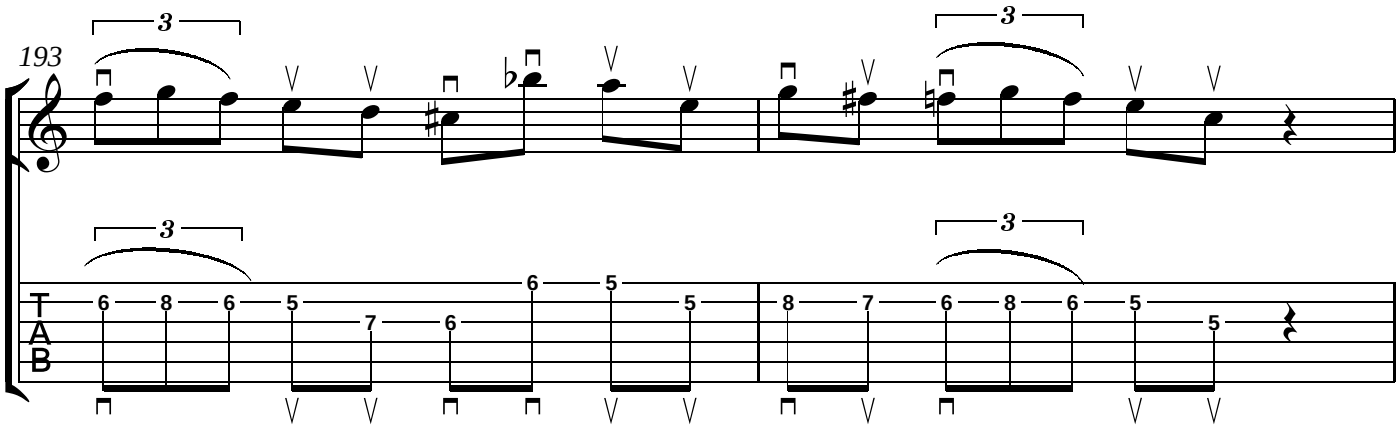
Learn how to slur triplets with a "down-stroke" and an "up-stroke"

exercise 35

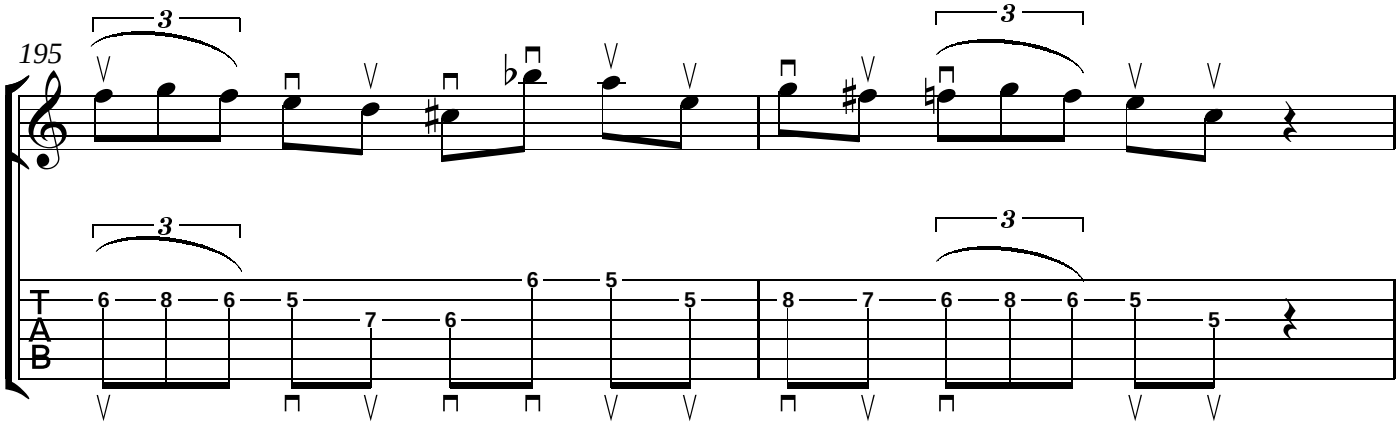
with the down stroke

with the up stroke



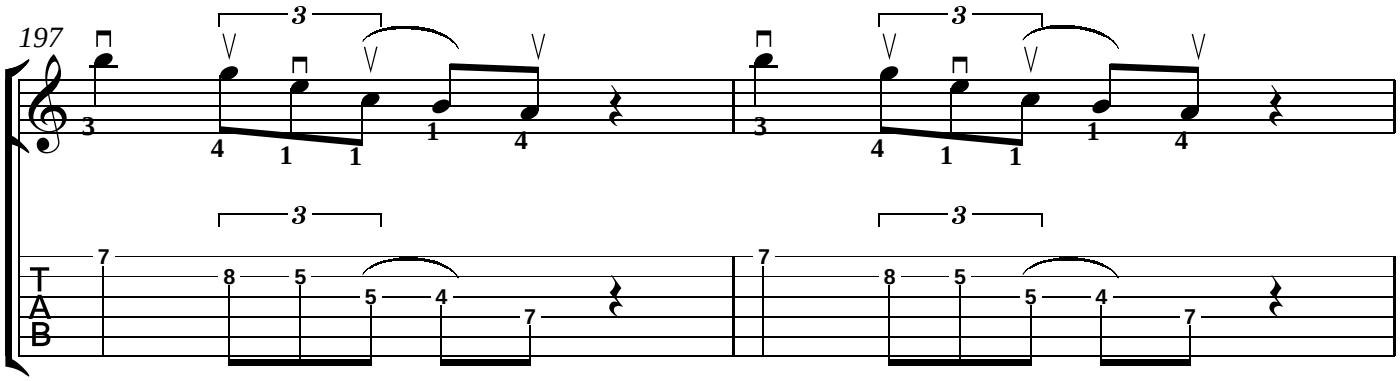


Same example starting with an "up-stroke"

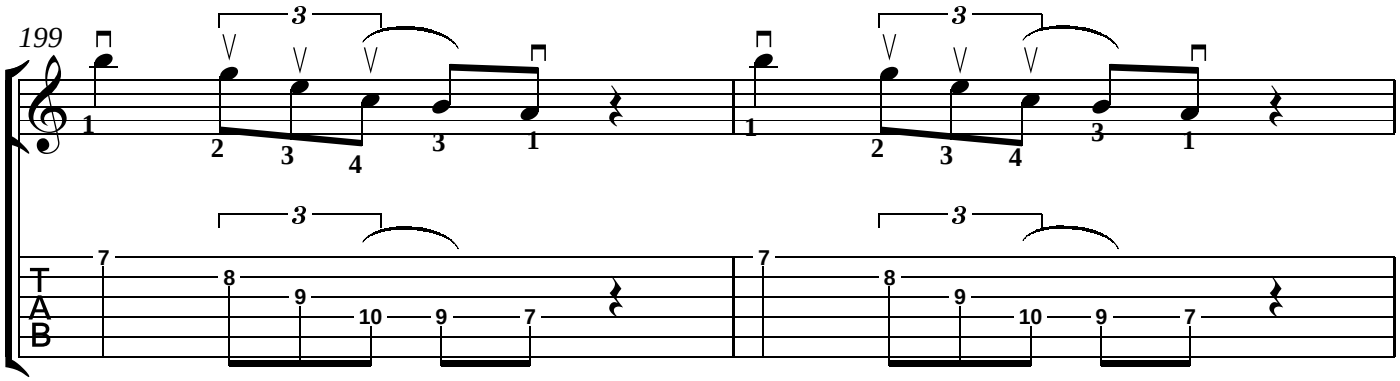


Articulations

I think of articulations as inflections. When someone is speaking not all the words have the same accent, volume, inflection etc. When playing lines you need to alter the inflection of the notes; not all the notes are long or short or accented. These inflections are accomplished by slurring notes. Pick one note and play two notes.
The following exercises illustrate this point . They are all typical be-bop phrases



The same phrase in a different position

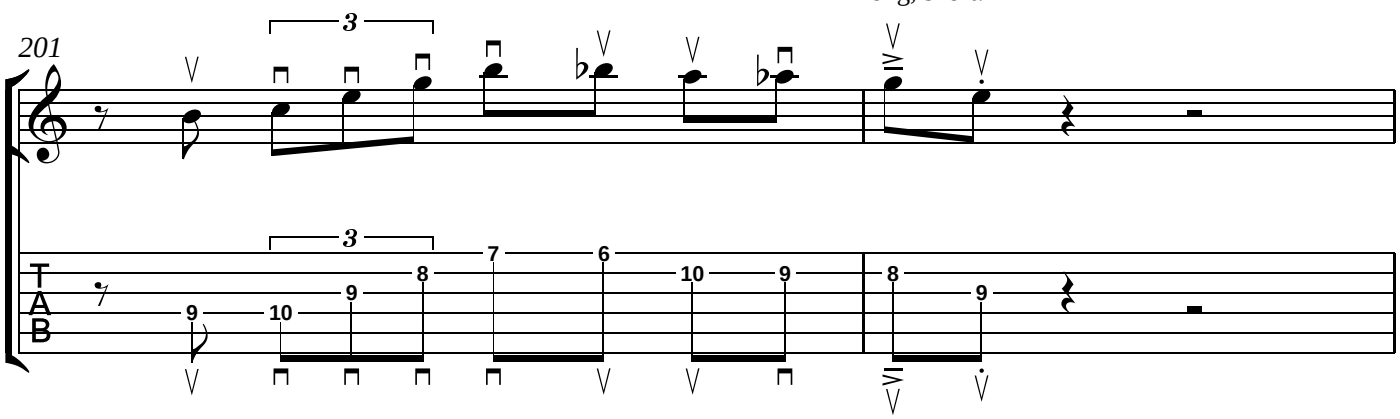


Here's a typical be-bop phrase.

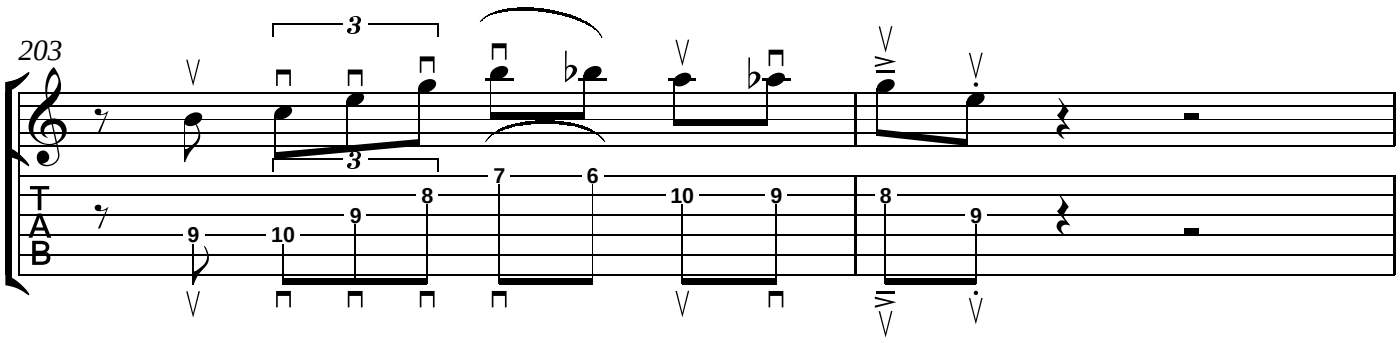
Notice how the different articulations effect the sound

Here is the phrase without slurs

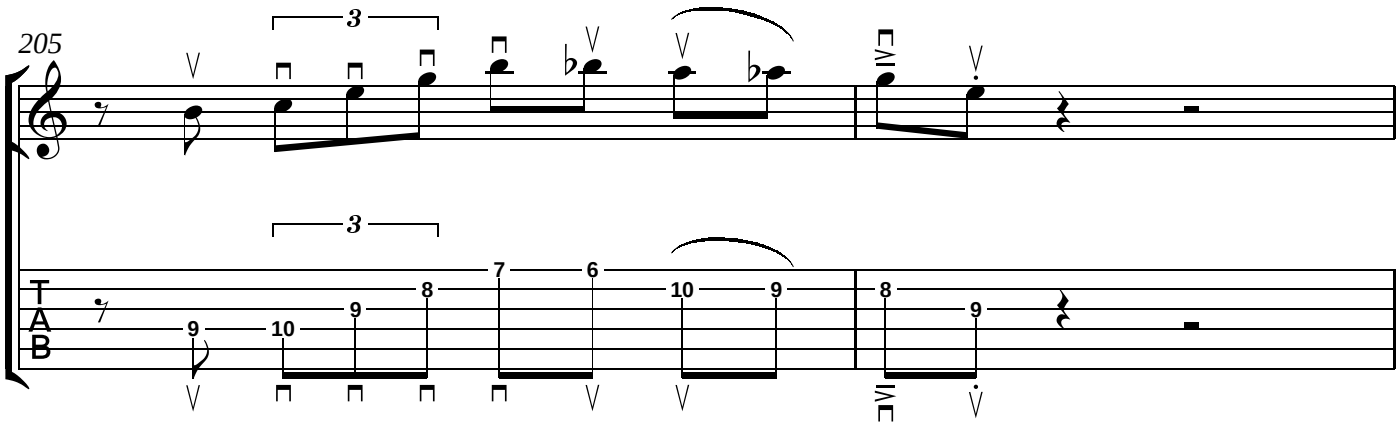
make sure you play these last two notes,
long, short.



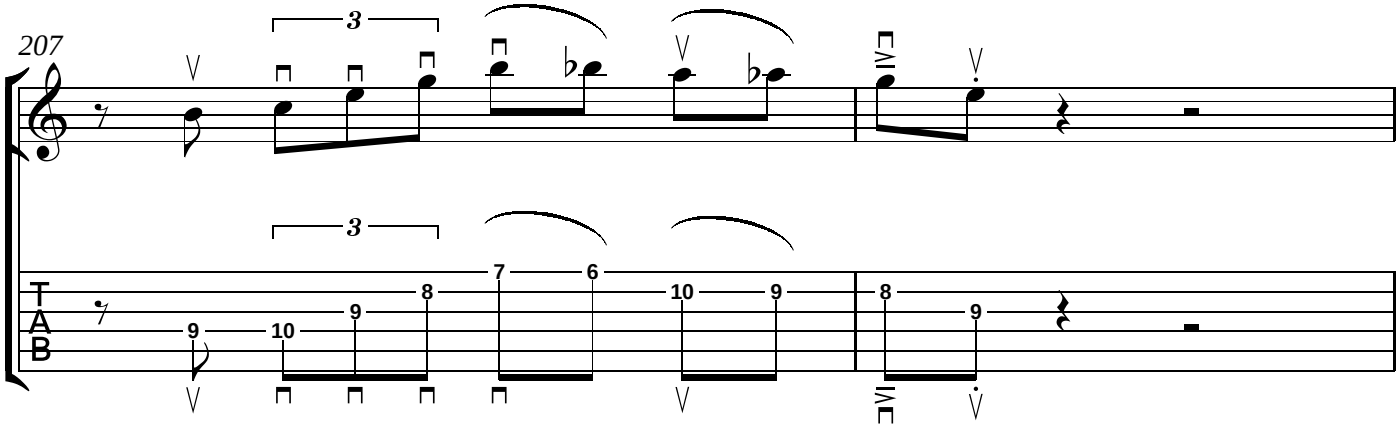
Here is the phrase with one slur



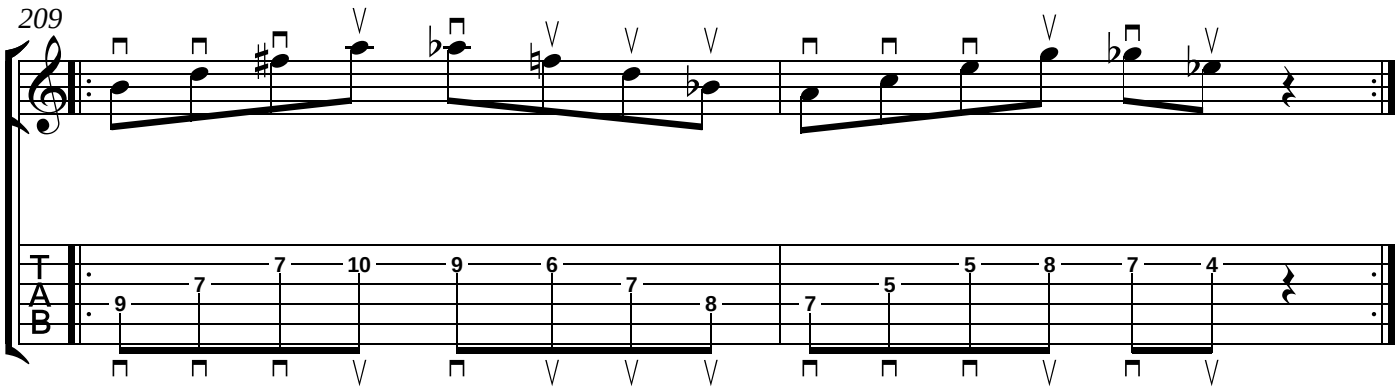
Here is the phrase with the slur moved to the next beat.



Here is the phrase with two slurs

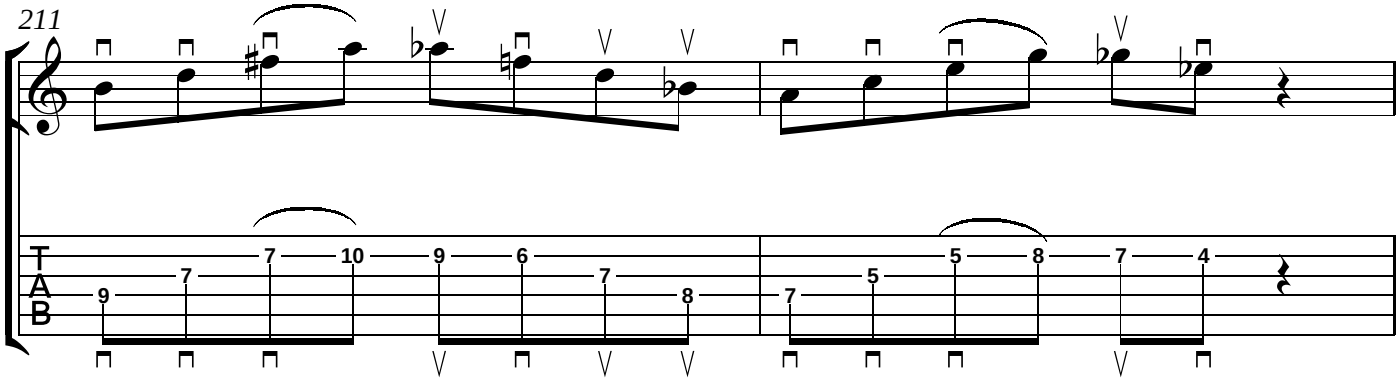


No slurs

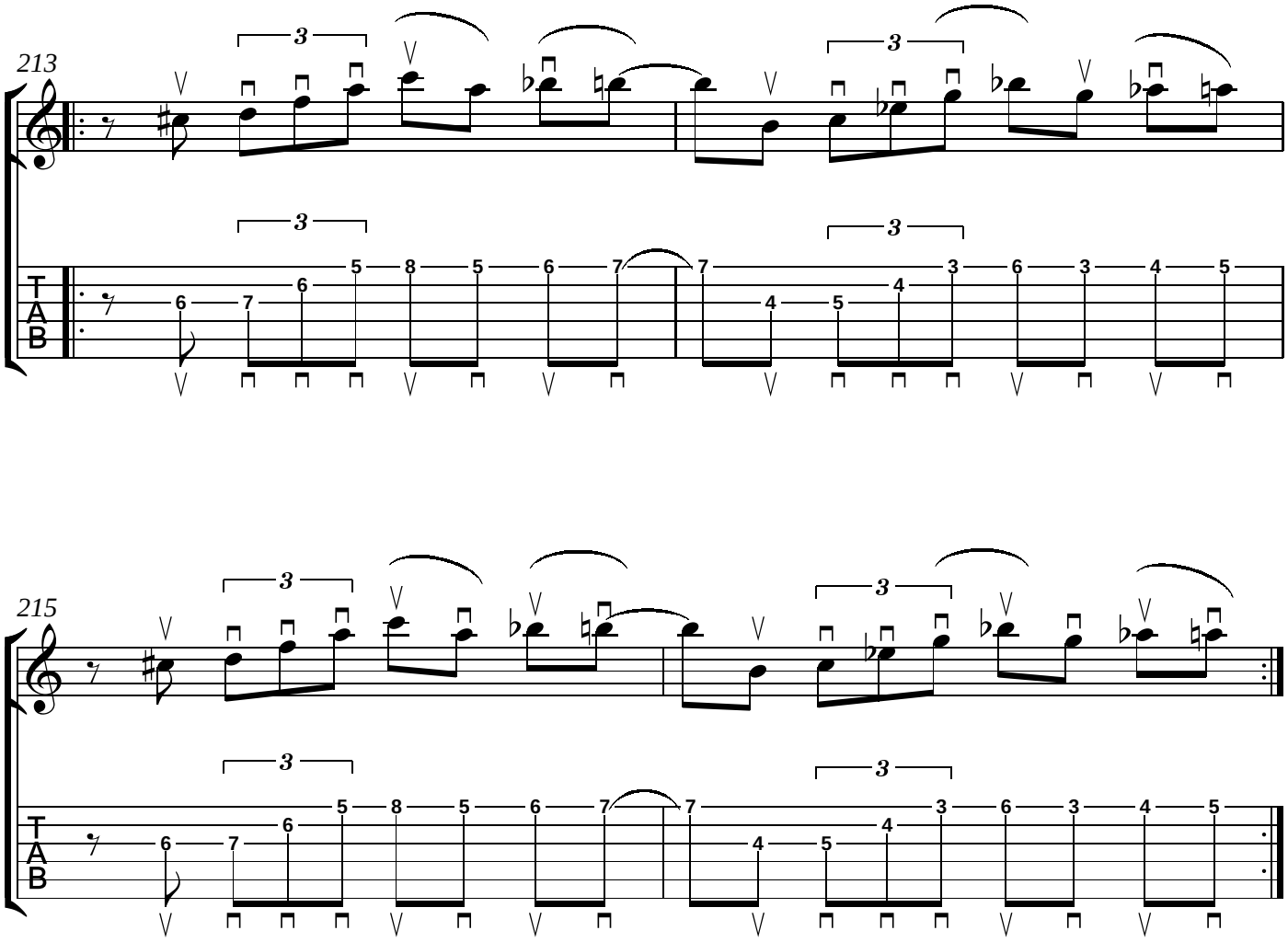


Try moving the slur over any two notes that are on the same string.

With slurs

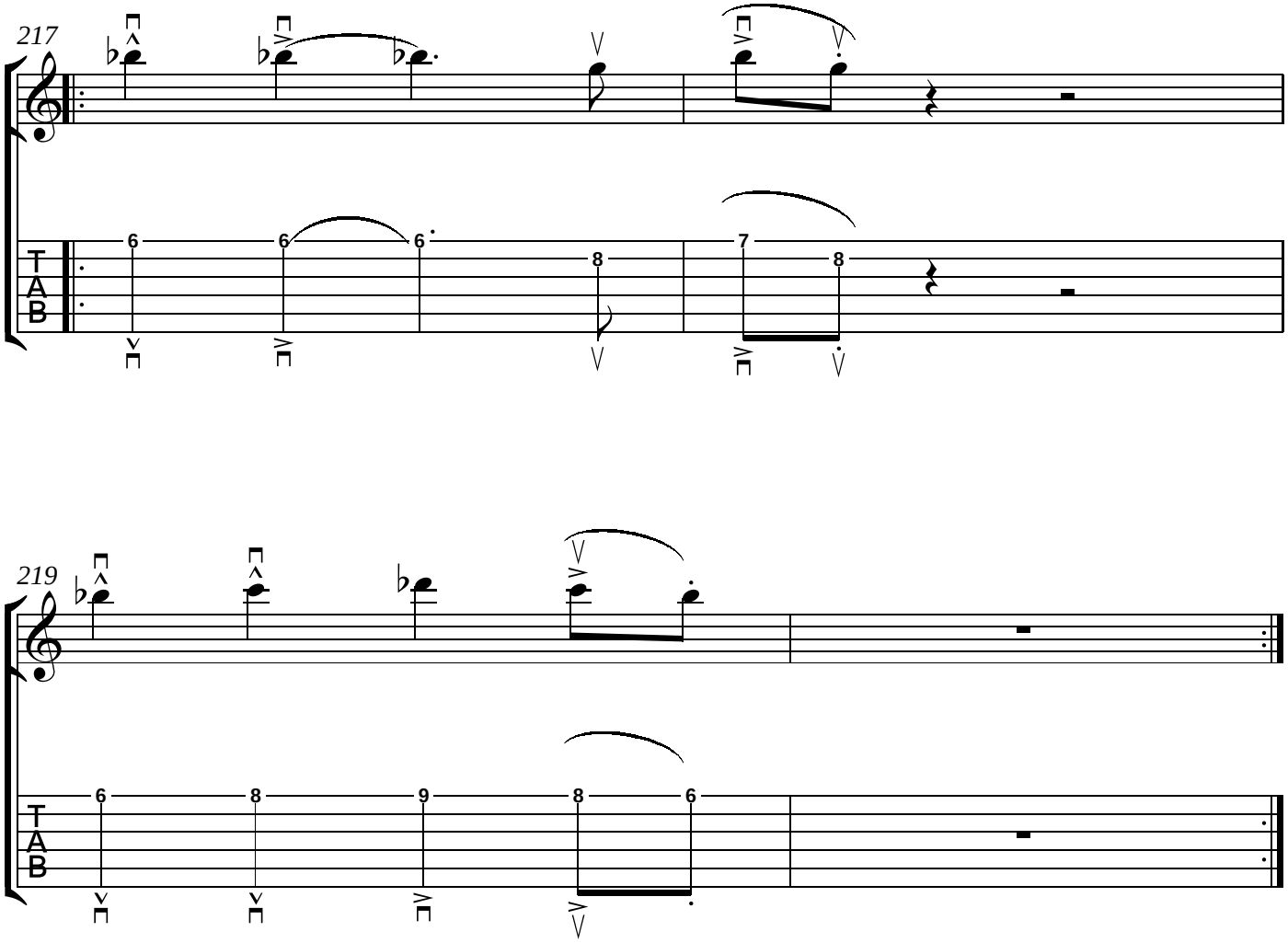


I've added a few slurs. Experiment adding your own slurs at different places

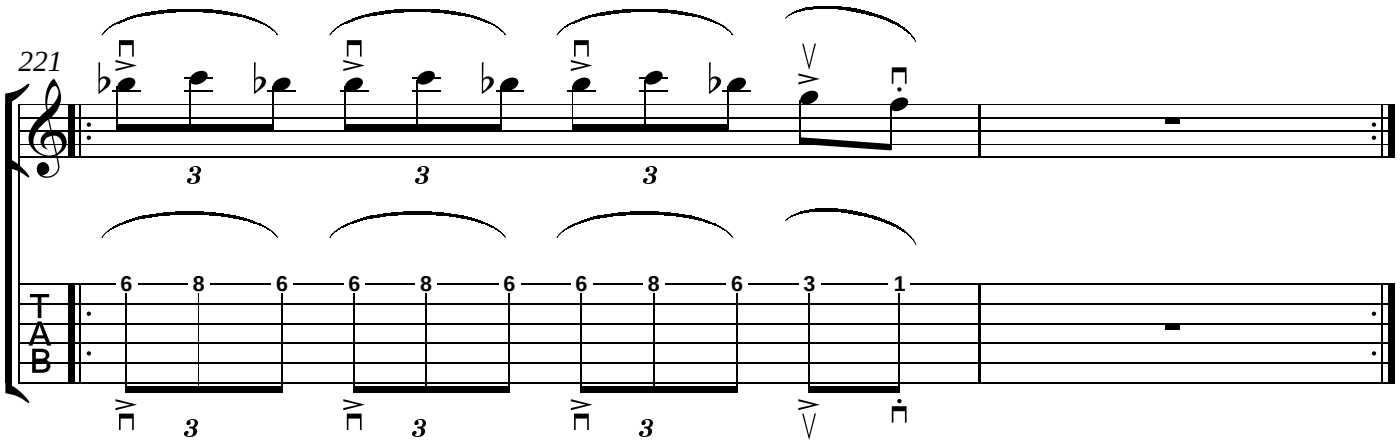


Breaking the rules

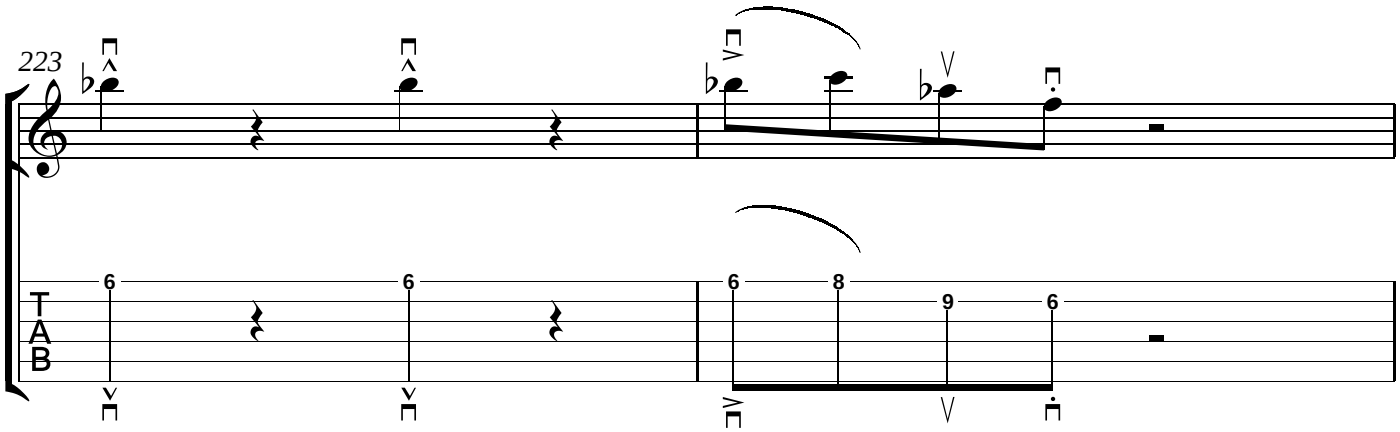
There are special circumstances where is may be desireable to break the rules. In the example below, I use consecutive down strokes to emphsis certain notes. This type picking is useful when you are trying to emulate a big band type phrase.



Here is the same type phrase with slurs.



When there is a rhythmic break between notes, you may want to use to down strokes.



Conclusion

Picking is a habit. Habits are hard to break but not impossible. The longer you have been playing, the harder it will be to change. With a moderate amount of practice and a lot of patience, anyone can improve their technique. The key is repetition. Do not overanalyze your right hand movements. After a short time, these strokes will become second nature. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to email me at jimmy@jimmybruno.com