

Lesson 6

Fingering for the Left Hand

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David Dempster

Course	Read & Play Music
Book 2	Read and Play Simple Tunes with Two Hands
Lesson 6	Fingering for the Left Hand

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LESSON 6:

FINGERING FOR THE LEFT HAND

Back in **Book 1**, when you started moving your hand around I introduced you to fingering. That allows you to move your hand around more smoothly so the music sounds better.

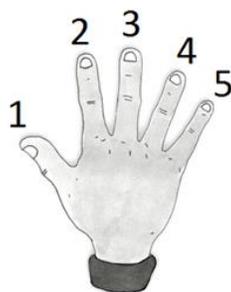
It will probably not surprise you to learn that we also use fingering for the left hand. Let's learn that now.

MUSIC THEORY

BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Recap: fingering for the *right* hand

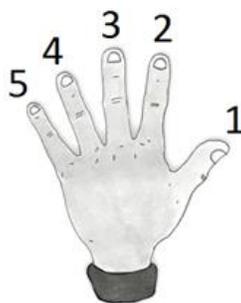
In **Book 1** of this course, you learned about fingering for the *right hand*:



Numbering of fingers of the right hand.

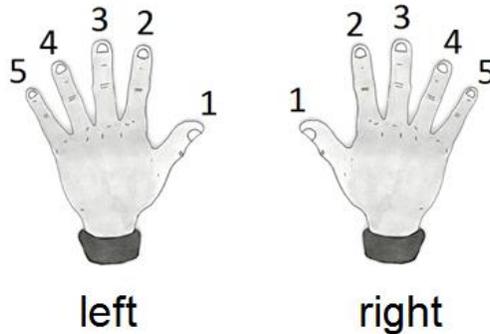
Fingering for the *left* hand

It is also useful to number the fingers of the left hand,. That will help you play smoothly. We number the fingers of the *left hand* like this:



Numbering of fingers of the left hand.

Here is the numbering for both hands so you can compare them:



Numbering of fingers of both hands.

As you can see, the numbering for the two hands is symmetrical:

- 1 for both hands is the thumb
- 2 for both hands is the index finger
- 3 for both hands is the middle finger
- 4 for both hands is the ring finger
- 5 for both hands is the little finger (pinkie)

This is easy to remember, because ‘1’ always means your thumb.

Now that you are playing with two hands, fingering becomes even more important. If you were fumbling around with your right hand, making a poor choice of fingers or playing everything with one finger, you would not be playing very smoothly. But if you were fumbling around with your left hand at the same time as fumbling around with your right hand, you would end up in quite a tangle. And not make much progress, and not have much fun.

So, let’s get used to left hand fingering now.

PRACTICAL

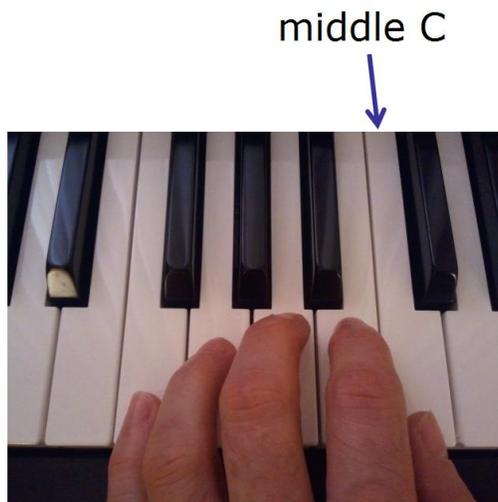
BUILD YOUR SKILL

Exercise 1: Get to know the finger numbers

The purpose of this exercise is for you to get used to which finger to use when you see fingering in music for the left hand.

1 5-finger position

1. Place your left hand in a 5-finger position with your thumb on middle C:



2 Play

1. **Read** the numbers shown below. As you read each number, **push down** the note under that finger to play a note, and then **release** it. For example, when you read the number ‘1’, push down the note your thumb is resting on. When you read the number ‘3’, push down the note your middle finger is resting on. Start slowly!!!

1 2 3 - 3 4 5 - 5 4 3 - 3 2 1

1 3 1 - 2 4 2 - 3 5 3 - 2 4 2

1 4 5 - 5 3 2 - 4 2 1 - 4 3 5

2 5 3 - 2 1 4 - 3 1 2 - 4 2 3

2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

Chat with David: Making a good sound



Music is all about sound.

In **Book 1**, you did some work on making a good sound by playing with curved fingers and playing rather firmly. How have you been doing on keeping playing like that?

In **Book 1**, you applied that to your right hand. It's time now to apply the same approach to playing with your left hand.

Play the last exercise again. Work at having the fingers of your left hand curved and playing firmly. Take it slowly.

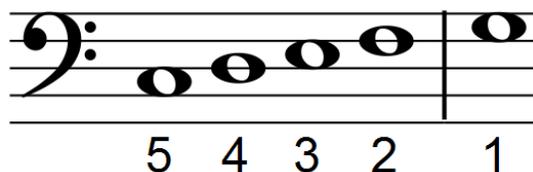
Then carry on and apply the same to the rest of these exercises. ■

Exercise 2:

Read and play with fingering, notes going up

1 Play

1. **Play** each note with the left hand finger indicated below it. The first note is fingered '5', so you play it with your left little finger. For this exercise, you'll find your hand is in a different 5-finger position from the previous exercise.



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

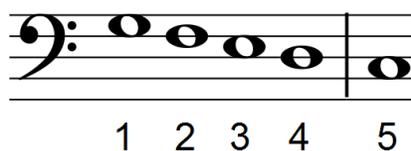
It is well worth spending some time practising this simple exercise, starting slowly. You may find that some fingers are weaker than others. Work at making each finger play its note with a definite, strong downward motion, so that all 5 notes sound equally loud.

Exercise 3:

Read and play with fingering, notes going down

1 Play

1. **Play** each note with the left hand finger indicated below it. The first note is fingered '1', so you play it with your left thumb.



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

Important: If you ever feel muscle strain, take a break. You're making your hands do things they haven't done before, and they may need a rest from time to time. The same goes if you feel strain in your shoulders or back: take a break.

Exercise 4:

Notes going up and then down

This is the same 5-finger position as the previous exercises.

1 Play

1. **Play** each note with the left hand finger indicated below it.



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

Exercise 5: More complex

The same 5-finger position, but with the notes jumbled.

1 Play

1. **Play** each note with the left hand finger indicated below it. Start slowly!



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

Exercise 6: Different position

This one uses a different 5-finger position. Your fingers still cover 5 adjacent notes, but they are not the same notes as in the previous exercises.

1 Play

1. **Play** each note with the left hand finger indicated below it. Start slowly!



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

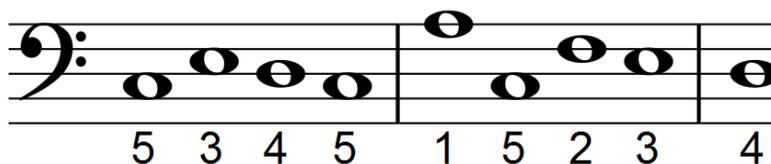
Exercise 7:

Stretch up

Here's your first exercise that breaks out of a 5-finger position. You'll find you have to stretch up (to the right) with your thumb.

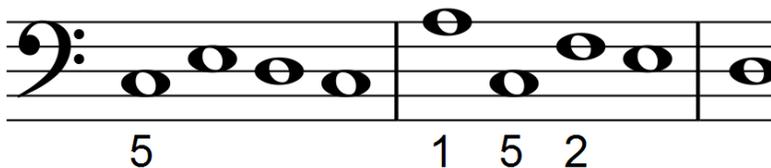
1 Play

1. **Play** each note with the left hand finger indicated below it. Start slowly!



2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

Remember what we learned in **Book 1** of this course about 'reducing the clutter'? The idea is to show fingering only at the points where the performer (you) must make a decision. Let's start applying that now. Here is that same music again, showing fingering only at decision points:



Here is what the above fingering means:

Start the tune with finger 5 (left little finger)

That establishes a 5-finger position for the next 3 notes

Stretch up to play the A with finger 1 (left thumb)

Stretch back down to play the C with finger 5 (little finger)

Play the F with finger 2 (index finger)

That puts you back into the original 5-finger position for the last 2 notes

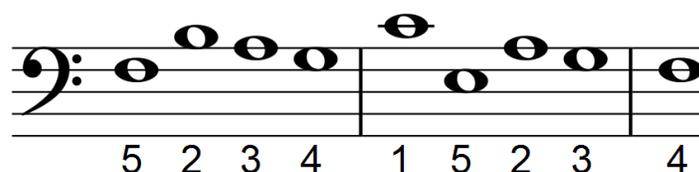
Tip: When you stretch up, you have to stretch by the right amount! Otherwise you'll play the wrong note. In the above exercise, for example, you have to stretch from lower C up to A. If you stretch too far, you may play a B or a middle C instead of an A. At first it will seem that you have to look at your hand to hit the right note. But with a very little practice you'll find you can get the feel of stretching from C to A without looking at your hand. That's good, because it means you can keep looking at the printed music. Give it a try.

Exercise 8: Stretch down

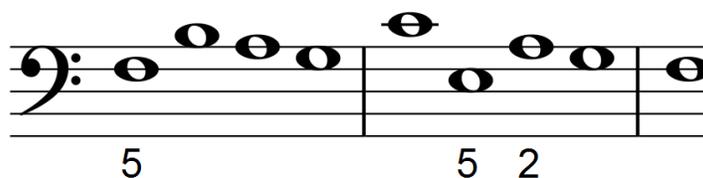
And now you'll have to stretch down (to the left) with your little finger.

1 Play

1. **Play** each note with the left hand finger indicated below it. Start slowly!



Here's that same exercise printed with reduced clutter:



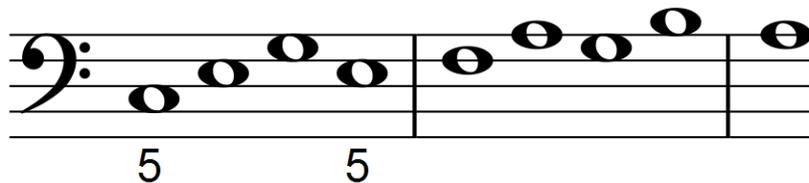
2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

Exercise 9: Scrunch together

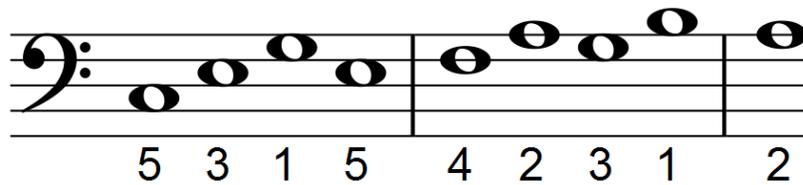
This one is the opposite. Instead of stretching, you'll need to scrunch your fingers together to play the 4th note. Then your hand moves into a new 5-finger position to play the rest of the notes.

1 Play

1. **Play** each note with the left hand finger indicated below it. Here is the reduced clutter fingering.



Here is the full fingering of the same exercise, so you can check you did it correctly. After starting with finger 5 (little finger) on the first note (C), you should have stayed in the 5-finger position and played the next 2 notes with fingers 3 and 1.

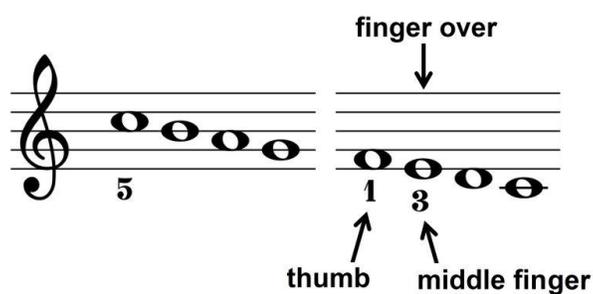


2. **Repeat** as needed until you can do it accurately and easily.

Exercise 10: Finger over

Right hand (recap)

As you learned in **Book 1**, when playing with the **right hand** the finger over technique is used for playing a series of **falling** notes. Play this now with your right hand:



With the right hand, 'finger over' is used for falling notes.

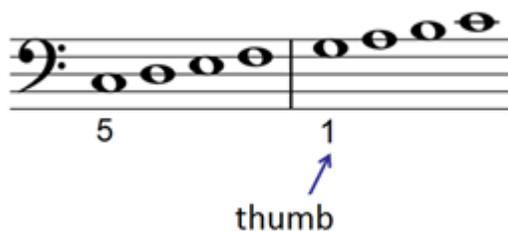
Left hand

With the *left hand*, it is the opposite: the finger over technique is used for playing a series of *rising* notes. We're going to see that now.

Do these steps, taking it very slowly at first:

1 Play first 5 notes

1. **Play** the first 5 notes shown below, starting with your left little finger (pinkie) on lower C, and ending with your thumb on G. That puts your left hand in a 5-finger position.
2. **Keep holding down** the G with your left thumb.

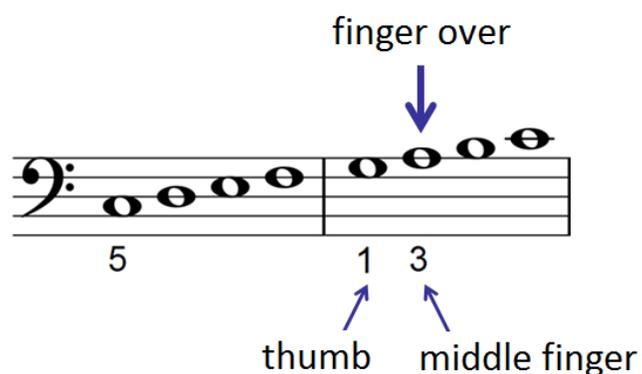


Position of your left hand when you've played the G.

Now we get to the tricky part! We'll break it down into 3 steps:

2a Reach over with your middle finger

1. Keep **holding down** the G with your left thumb.
2. **Reach over** with your left middle finger and place it over the A.



While holding down your left thumb, reach over with your middle finger.

2b Play the A

1. **Release** the G with your thumb.
2. At the same time, **play** the A with your middle finger.



Release the G and play the A.

2c Move to new 5-finger position

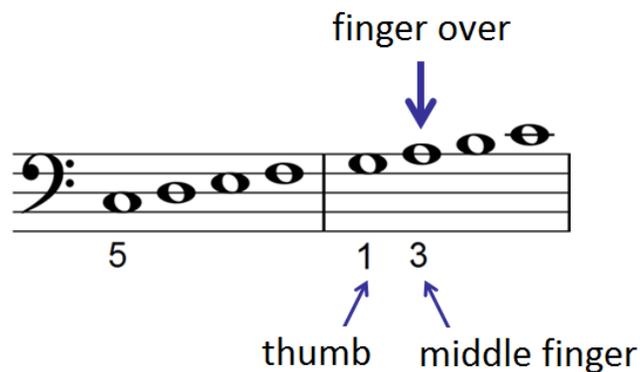
1. **Hold down** the A with your middle finger.
2. **Move your hand** into a new 5-finger position. (Your thumb will be over middle C.)



While holding down the A, move your hand into a new 5-finger position.

3 Play the last 2 notes

1. **Play** the B and middle C.



4 Repeat

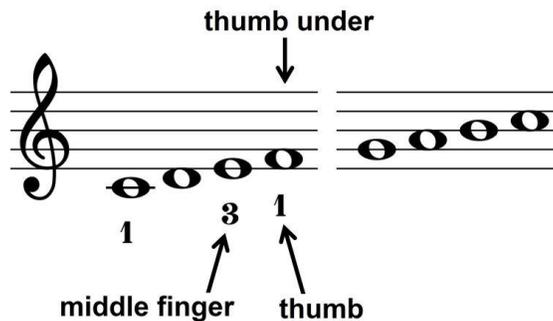
1. **Repeat** all of the above steps as needed until you can do the whole sequence accurately and easily.

It's worth spending quite a while on this exercise, as it is a basic technique of piano playing. Start it very slowly. Look at the pictures again if you need to.

Exercise 11: Thumb under

Right hand (recap)

As you learned in *Book 1*, when playing with the *right hand* the thumb under technique is used for playing a series of *rising* notes. Play this now with your right hand:



With the right hand, 'thumb under' is used for rising notes.

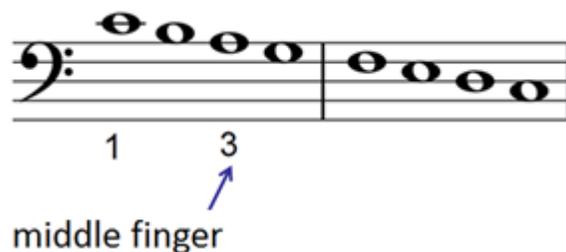
Left hand

With the *left hand*, it is the opposite: the thumb under technique is used for playing a series of *falling* notes. We're going to see that now.

Do these steps, taking it very slowly at first:

1 Play first 3 notes

1. **Play** the first 3 notes shown below, starting with your left thumb on middle C, and ending with your middle finger on lower A.
2. **Keep holding down** the A with your left middle finger.

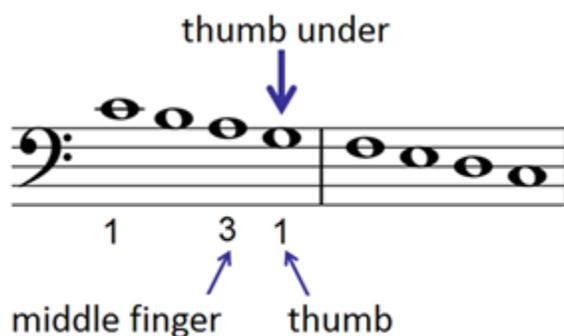


Position of your left hand when you've played the A.

Now we get to the tricky part! We'll break it down into 3 steps:

2a Reach under with your thumb

1. Keep **holding down** the A with your left middle finger.
2. **Reach under** with your left thumb and place it over the G.



While holding down your left middle finger, reach under with your thumb.

2b Play the G

1. **Release** the A with your middle finger.
2. At the same time, **play** the G with your thumb.



Release the A and play the G.

2c Move to new 5-finger position

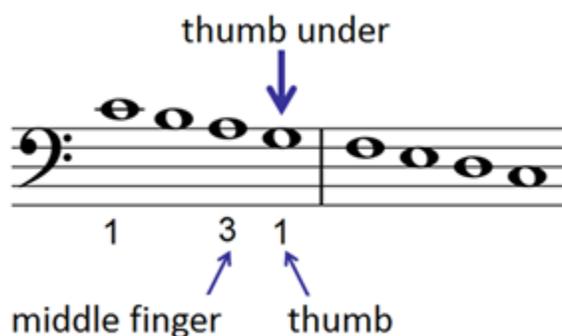
1. **Hold down** the G with your thumb.
2. **Move your hand** into a new 5-finger position. (Your little finger will be over lower C.)



While holding down the G, move your hand into a new 5-finger position.

3 Play the last 4 notes

1. Play F-E-D-C, ending with your little finger playing lower C.



4 Repeat

1. **Repeat** all of the above steps as needed until you can do the whole sequence accurately and easily.

The thumb under technique is another basic piano playing skill, and it's well worth spending some time on this exercise. Look at the pictures again if you need to.

Tunes for left hand with fingering

Here are the 4 tunes you played in the last lesson. But now we have fingering. I think you'll find that makes them easier to play, and also makes them sound better.

Tune 1:

A sea shanty

What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor



Tune 2:

A traditional English song

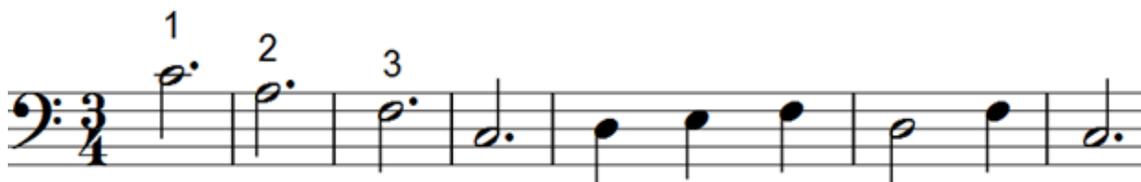
Scarborough Fair



Tune 3:

A popular song from the 1890's

Daisy, Daisy (Bicycle Built for Two)



Tune 4:

A traditional Appalachian song

On Top of Old Smokey



Chat with David:

Fun playing tunes



I hope you already played the tunes in the Book 1 Tunes booklet. If not, find it at the end of your Book 1 Course Materials page and have a go at playing them.

The Book 1 Tunes are for your right hand only. When you've completed **Book 2**, you'll find the *Book 2 Tune Album* for playing with your left hand and with both hands. That will be much more interesting! You'll have fun playing the tunes, and they will help you keep your new skills alive. ■

What's next?

With the skill you've developed in reading and playing music with your left hand, you are all set to dive into reading and playing with two hands.

An exciting moment!

To find Lesson 7, click the green box:

Go on to your next lesson



or go to your Book 2 Course Materials page at
www.dempstermusic.com