

Old Time Banjo / Frailing Lesson #2

A. Frailing

At this point you should be feeling pretty comfortable with the basic up-picking strum, and particularly ringing the fifth string after every chord you brush. Keep practicing this!

Frailing, as opposed to up-picking, involves picking the string down in a “knocking” motion with the index finger, instead of “picking” it up. To do this, hold the right hand in a loosely clenched fist, with the thumb extended out, and the index finger slightly extended forward of the other fingers.

Knock *down* on the string with the nail of the index finger to sound it. You need a somewhat longer fingernail to do this. Then brush the chord with the other fingers, and follow it with the thumb on the fifth string, exactly in the same way you’ve been doing it.



This may seem awkward at first, but with repeated practice this will prove to be a much smoother and pleasing sounding way of playing. This is the first step toward more intricate clawhammer styles of old time banjo playing.

B. Hammer-Ons

This technique involves sounding the string with the left hand instead of the right, which increases the number of notes that can be played. With the right hand index finger pick the string to be played, then quickly “hammer” your left hand finger onto the fret to sound a higher note. Follow that with a brushed chord and fifth string sequence as usual.

The rhythm this gives us is now Bump-a-Dit-ty, Bump-a-Dit-ty rather than Bump-Dit-ty, Bump-Dit-ty. Try this in the first part of *Fly Away*, below. The “H” below the tab refers to the note to be hammered-on, and shows which fret it should be hammered on to. Pay attention to the hammer-on in the third measure.

The tablature consists of five staves (D, B, G, D, G) and a sequence of rhythmic and technique indicators below. The notes are as follows:

Staff	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4	Measure 5	Measure 6	Measure 7	Measure 8	Measure 9	Measure 10
D	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
B	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
G	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
D	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
G	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0

Below the staves, the following sequence of indicators is provided:

I B-T | B-T | I-H B-T | B-T | I B-T | I-H | I B-T | B-T

(A note on fretting with the left hand: the fingers are placed just right behind the fret, pressing tightly on the fingerboard, not on the fret, to sound the clearest note possible.)

C. Mountain Minor Tuning

There are many different ways to tune a banjo in the old time styles of playing. More than fifty have been discovered! Most old time banjo players commonly play in at least three or four.

The next tuning we will learn is a very common one, and easy to get in to from the Open G tuning of **g D G B D**. It is called the Mountain Minor or Sawmill tuning.



Simply raise the second string up a half step from the “**B**” to a “**C**”. The second string played at the 2nd fret should now match the first string played open. (Remember, in the Open G tuning it matched at the 3rd fret.)

The strings are now tuned to **g D G C D**. This tuning gives a very beautiful and airy kind of sound to the banjo, for minor and modal tunes in the key of G. (Capo at the 2nd fret for the key of A.)

D. Pull-Offs

Another way of sounding the string with the left hand, besides the hammer-on technique, is with a pull-off motion.

To do this, pick an already fretted string with the right hand index finger to sound a note, then quickly pull your finger off the string where you were fretting it, to sound a lower note. You sort of give the string a "flick" with your finger as it comes off the fret board. Brush a chord and thumb the fifth string, as always, to complete the sequence.

The rhythm here is also Bump-a-Dit-ty, Bump-a-Dit-ty. Here are some runs to practice in tablature, in the Mountain Minor tuning. The "P" under the tab refers to the string being pulled off, usually (*but not always*) to the open "0" position. Play the last measure carefully to get it tight.

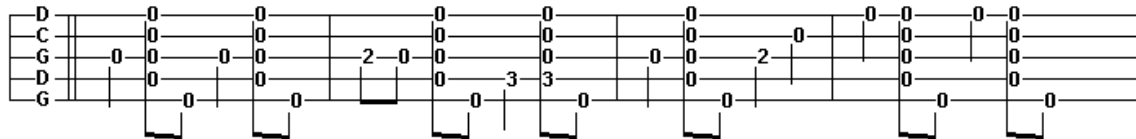
The tablature diagram shows five strings (D, C, G, D, G) with fret numbers and pull-off indicators. The sequence of notes is as follows:

String	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4	Measure 5	Measure 6	Measure 7	Measure 8
D	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
G	2-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	2-0	0-0	0-0	2-0
D	0	0	3-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	3-0	0-0
G	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3

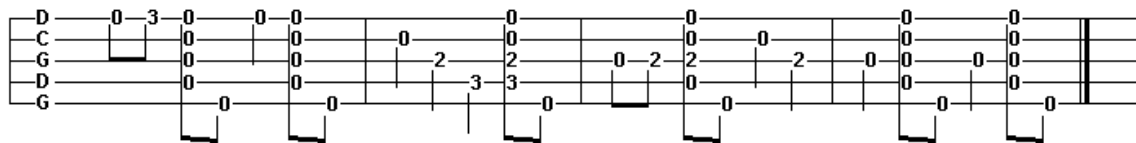
Below the tablature, the technique labels are: I-P B-T I B-T I-H B-T I B-T I-P B-T I-P B-T I-P I I B-T

E. Shady Grove

This famous tune is in every banjo pickers repertoire. It's in the Mountain Minor tuning. Watch the chord in the 6th measure; you can use the index and middle finger to fret it. Just leave your finger down after sounding the note the first time and the chord will be easy to make.



I B-T I B-T I-P B-T I B-T I B-T I I I B-T I B-T



I-H B-T I B-T I I I B-T I-H B-T I I I B-T I B-T

Shady Grove my true love, Shady Grove I say,
Shady Grove my own true love, it's now I'm go'in away.

Wish I had a horse in a pen, corn to feed him on,
all my friends stand'in around, feed him when I'm gone.

First time I saw my true love, she's stand'in in the door,
shoes and stock'ins in her hand, bare feet on the floor.

Peaches in the summertime, apples in the Fall,
If I don't get my own true love, won't have none at all.