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# **GRAB THIS PRESENTATION**



**[bit.ly/23uke](https://bit.ly/23uke)**

**ACCESSIBLE  
'UKULELE  
EXPLORATION**

**WITH MILES WILCOX**

**MMEA CONFERENCE 2023**

# **OUTLINE**

- **Introduction**
- **Setting Expectations**
- **The Basics of Playing**
- **Accessibility**
- **STATIONS: 1. Station 2. Hands-on 3. Ask Mr. Miles**
- **Helpful Resources**
- **Questions**

# **INTRODUCTION**

# ABOUT ME

## ➤ MR. MILES

- **BA in Music** : Bard College at Simon's Rock
- **Masters of Music in Music Education** : Boston Conservatory at Berklee
- **Berklee Institute for Accessible Arts Education**: Private Lessons, Music Class for Young Children, Rock Band, 'Ukulele Ensemble (2015–)
- **Newton Public Schools** : K-5 General Music including 'ukulele, chorus, band, orchestra (2020–)



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# LEARNING TARGETS

©I can explain the basics of playing the 'ukulele

©I can name at least 3 best practices for teaching accessible 'ukulele

©I can identify next steps in my 'ukulele learning & teaching journey



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***There will be time at the end  
for questions— feel free to  
raise your hand at any point!***

# **SETTING EXPECTATIONS**



# SETTING EXPECTATIONS

## HOW DO WE TREAT OUR INSTRUMENTS?

- **Pre-practice of handling delicate instruments: the egg test**
- **Establish Rest and Ready Positions first**
- **Attention Grabbers**
- **Logical consequences**
- **Allow students a chance to earn back an instrument that was taken away**
- **Durable instruments: Kala Waterman, made of plastic but NOT a toy**

# ATTENTION GRABBERS

TO BE TAUGHT BEFORE STUDENTS HAVE AN INSTRUMENT IN THEIR HAND

## Rest Position:

- Strings are quiet
- Right hand covering sound hole
- Strings face down on lap
- *Shave and a haircut, "two bits"* = "tap tap" sound hole
- "Instruments down in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1"

## Ready Position:

- Instrument in playing position, "body on belly"
- Left hand chord is set up
- Start in silence
- "Are you ready?" "Aye aye, captain!"
- "Ho'omakaukau" - "'Ae!"

# **THE BASICS**

# First of all, what do I call it?

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE HAWAIIAN AND AMERICAN PRONUNCIATIONS

\* Hawaiian: spelled with an 'okina

**'Ukulele : oo-koo-LEH-leh**

\* American: no 'okina, diphthongs

**Ukulele : yoo-kuh-LAY-lee**





How do you hold the 'ukulele?  
Under your arm, or in your lap.

# Two hands!

**Left hand  
pushes  
strings  
down on  
the  
fretboard**



**Right  
hand  
strums or  
plucks  
the  
strings**



# Left Hand

**Left hand  
pushes  
strings  
down on  
the  
fretboard**



# Left Hand con't

**Keep  
fingers  
round,  
press  
fingertips  
all the  
way down  
on strings**





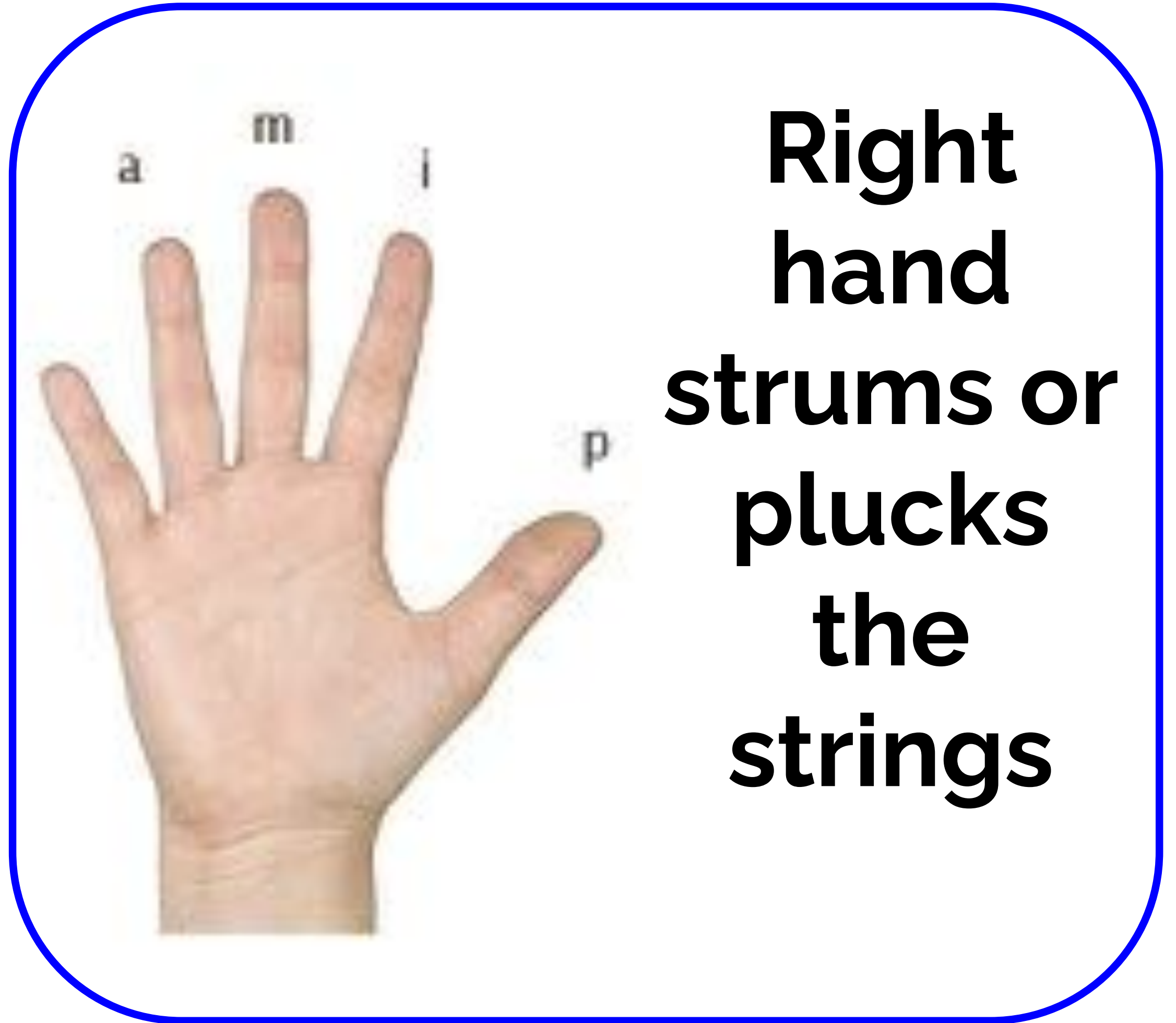
# LEFT HAND

**THIS HAND IS IN CHARGE OF MELODY & HARMONY:  
CHANGING NOTES**

- **Round fingers: make the letter C**
- **Look for lines on fingertips after pressing**
- **Touch only one string with each finger— no bar chords yet**
- **Thumb sits at the back of the neck, does not wrap and touch strings**
- **Fingers sit between frets “in the fret space”**
- **Left hand fingers “squeeze the strings”**



# Right hand



**Right  
hand  
strums or  
plucks  
the  
strings**

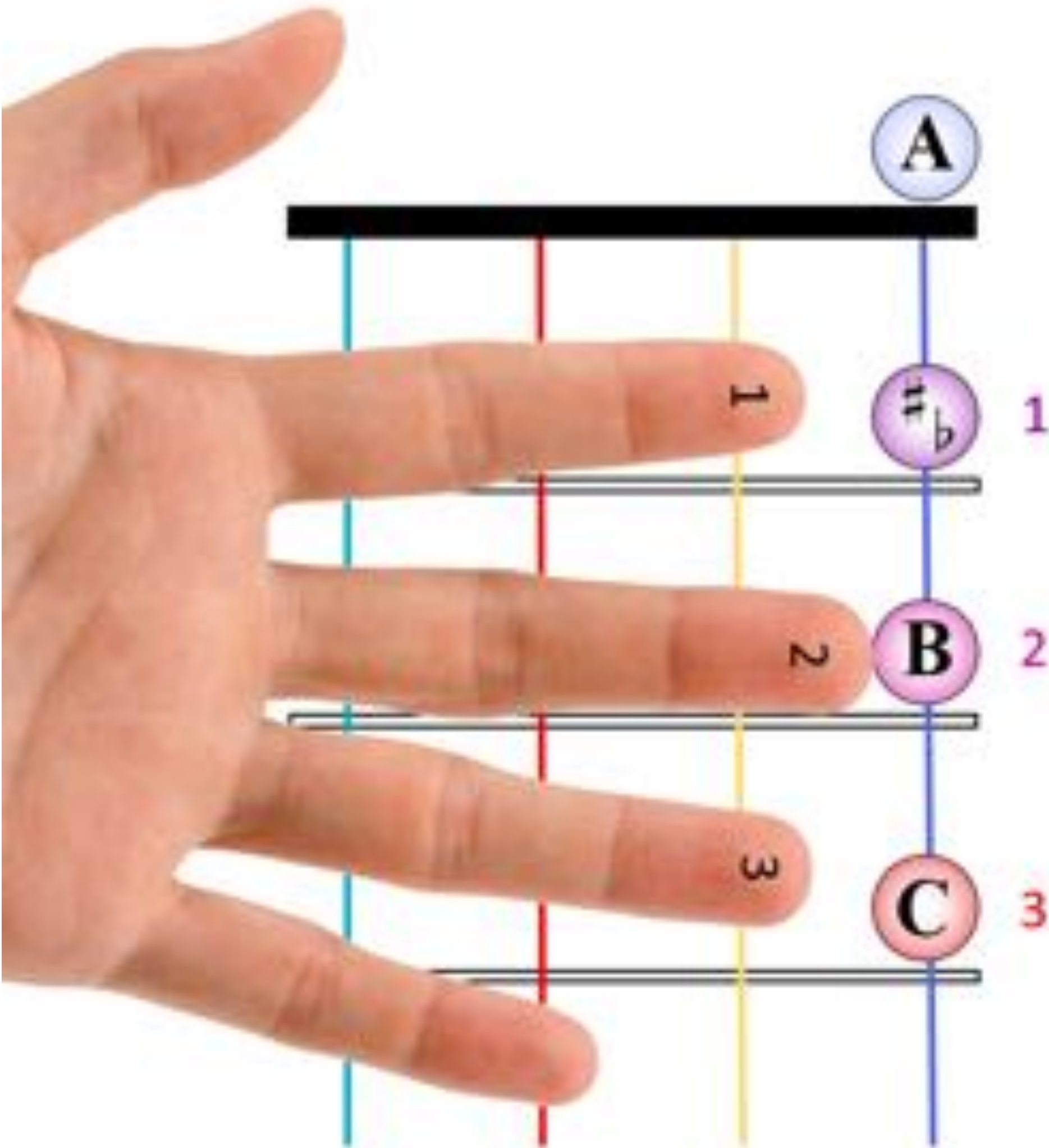
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# RIGHT HAND

**THIS HAND IS IN CHARGE OF RHYTHM & STEADY BEAT**

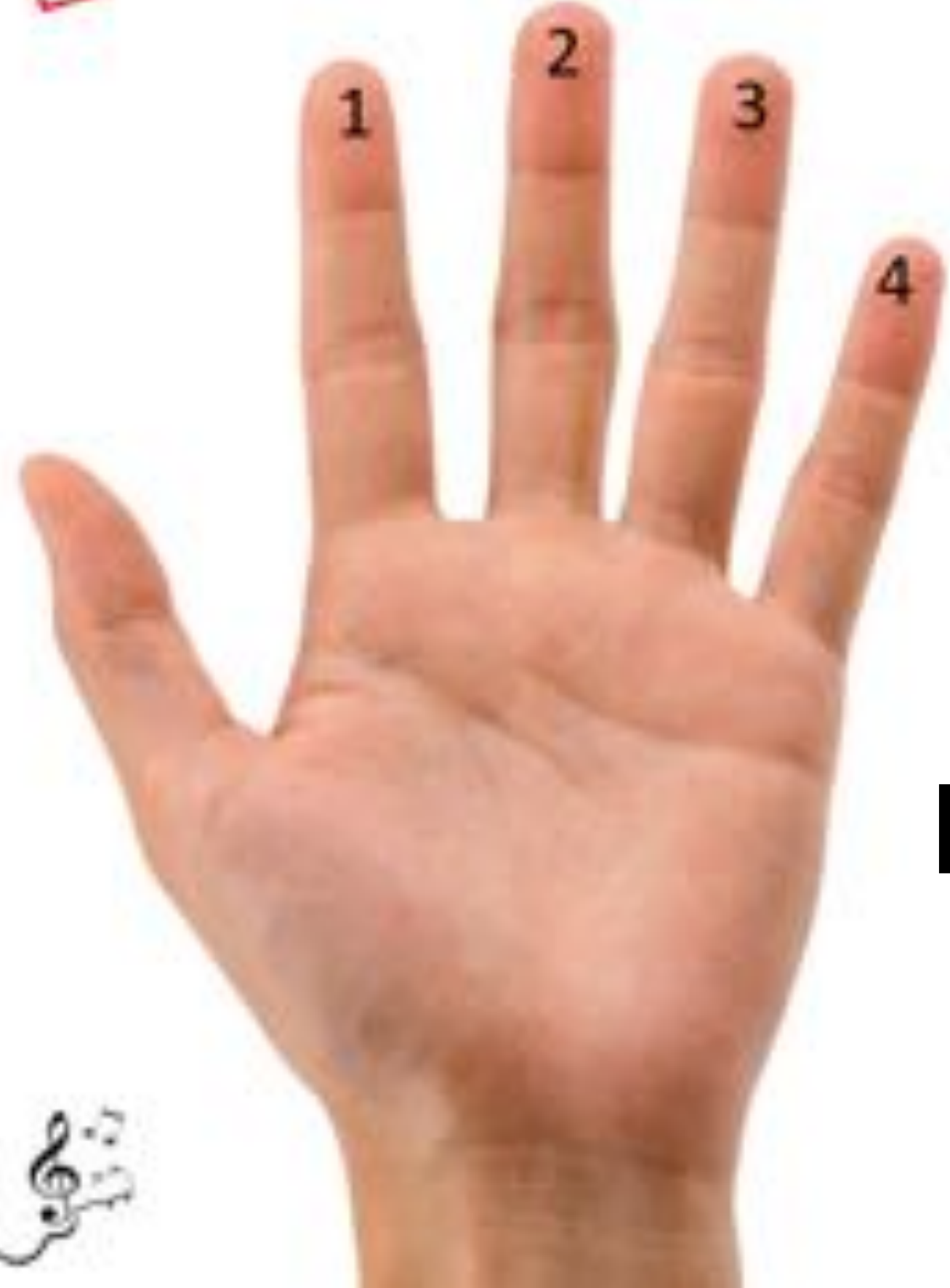
- **Plucking versus Strumming**
- **Use the sideways thumb for ease, offer choice to use pointer finger**
- **Gentle strums, follow through**
- **Down beats (quarter notes) on Down strum, upbeats on the Up strum**
- **Flexible wrist and elbow**





**"Batman Theme"**  
3-3 2-2 1-1 2-2  
3-3 2-2 1-1 2-2  
Strum, strum!

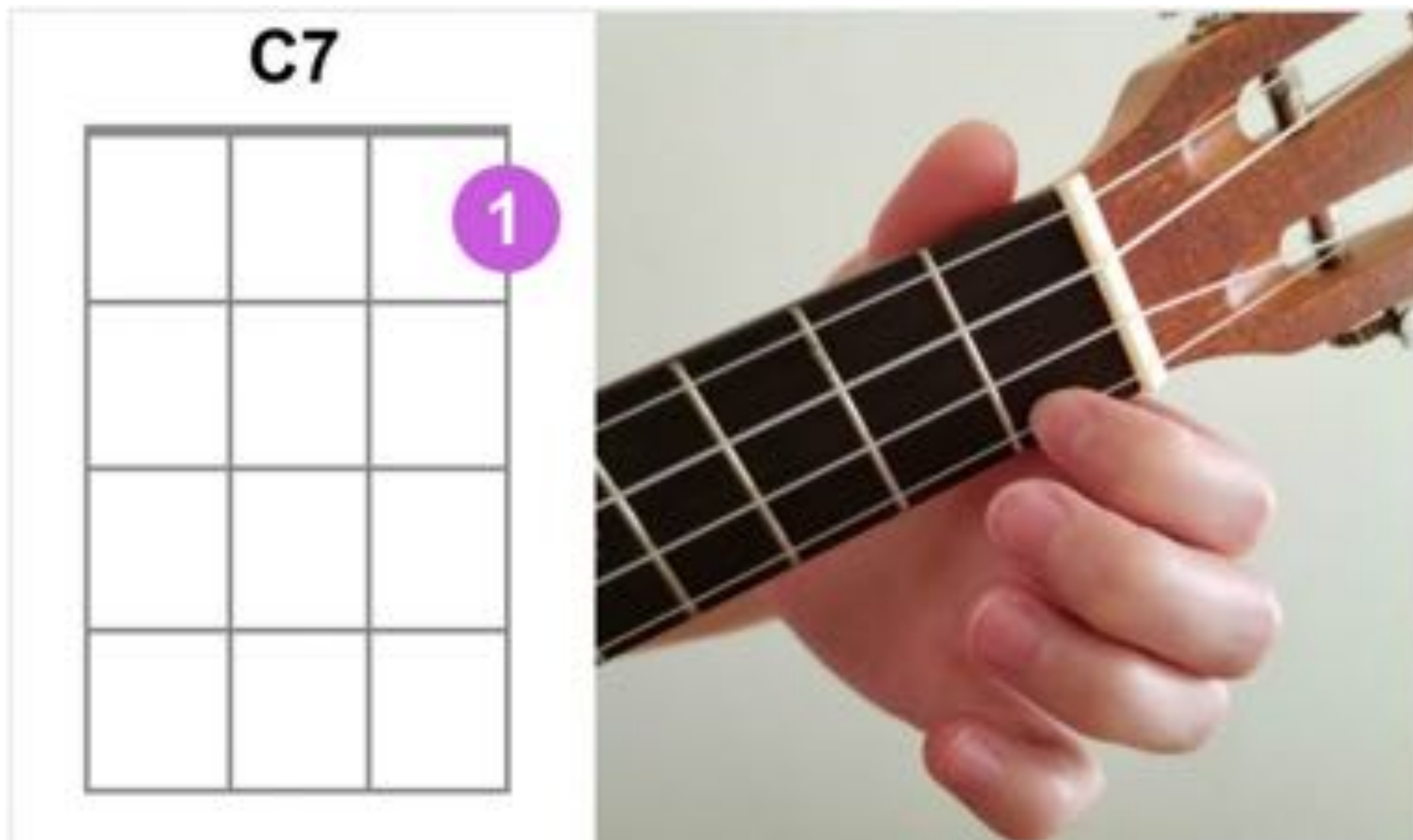
# BATMAN SONG



**In preparation of  
playing a C chord**

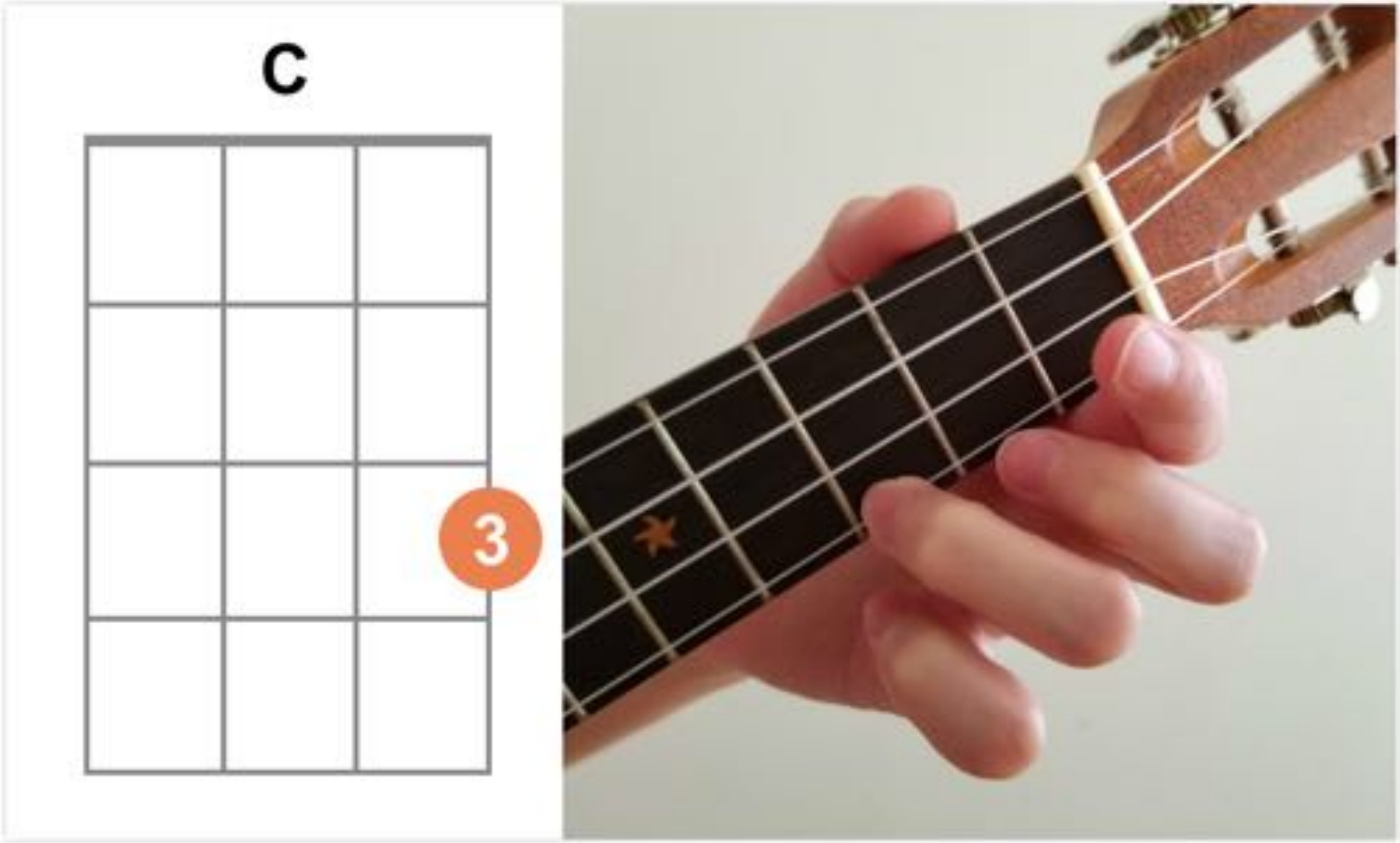
# C7 CHORD

First chord for easiest learning



# C MAJOR CHORD

First chord with more than index finger



**MAKING IT ACCESSIBLE**

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# **COLORED STICKERS**

**OFF AMAZON - 6MM**

**MARKING  
INDIVIDUAL CHORDS**





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# COLORED STICKERS

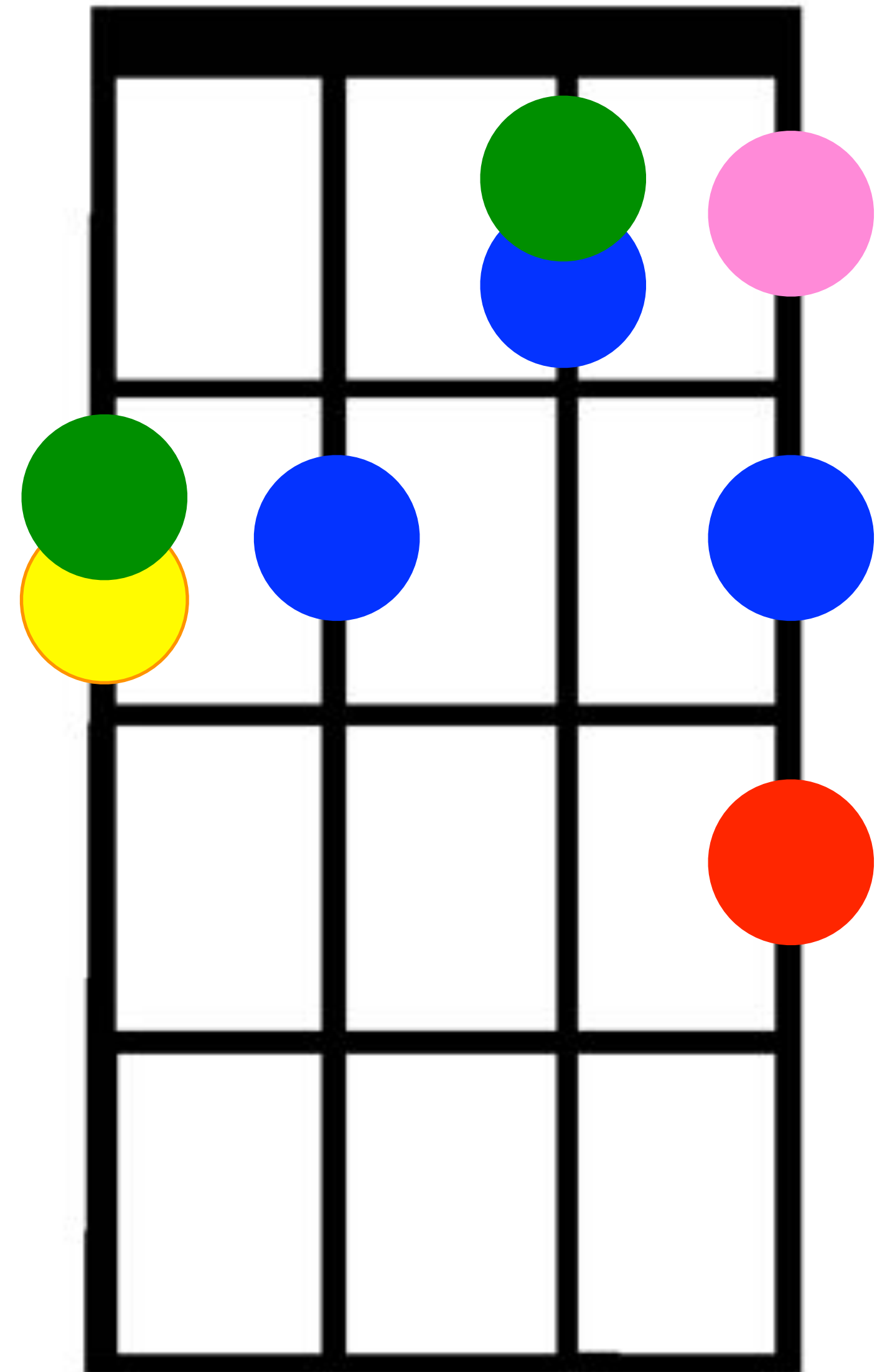
**C:** red

**C7:** pink

**F:** green

**Am:** yellow

**G7:** blue



# COLORED STRINGS

**GUITAR CENTER:  
\$7.99**

**may not be financially feasible  
for big groups, public schools,  
etc.**



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# **UKULELE PICKS**

**NOT the same as guitar picks**

**material should be softer than the strings**

**purchase: felt picks**

**homemade: fold an index card into a  
triangle and cover in masking tape**



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# FINGER PROTECTORS

**Made of silicon**

**Get short ones to allow fingers to bend**



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# DETUNING TO OPEN C TUNING

TUNE A STRING DOWN ONE WHOLE STEP TO G

**G - C - E - G**

**NO LEFT HAND**



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# **ADAPTIVE PLAYING POSITIONS**

**allow for lap playing**

**using a strap**

**thumb strums down**

**hands should still be mobile**



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# CHORD BUDDY

- A LAST RESORT -

works better on some sizes/models  
of 'ukuleles better than others



**SEQUENCING**



# CHORD SEQUENCE

WHAT ORDER DO YOU TEACH THE CHORDS IN? IT ALL DEPENDS ON WHAT YOUR GOALS ARE.

## EASIEST:

1. C7 chord
  2. C chord
  3. Modified \*F, Am
- 

4. F chord

## EASY:

1. C & C7 - Batman Song
  2. Am, F or Modified \*F
  3. G7
- 

4. G, Dm, Em, D7, E7, ...

# KEEP IT SIMPLE, SILLY!

DON'T FEEL LIKE YOU NEED TO TEACH LOTS OF CHORDS, OR A NEW CHORD EACH WEEK.

## For Easiest Learning:

Strumming & plucking open strings

Can detune A string down to G

## For Easy Learning:

Songs in C Major: C only

Songs in F major: F - C7 (or C)

## For Further Learning:

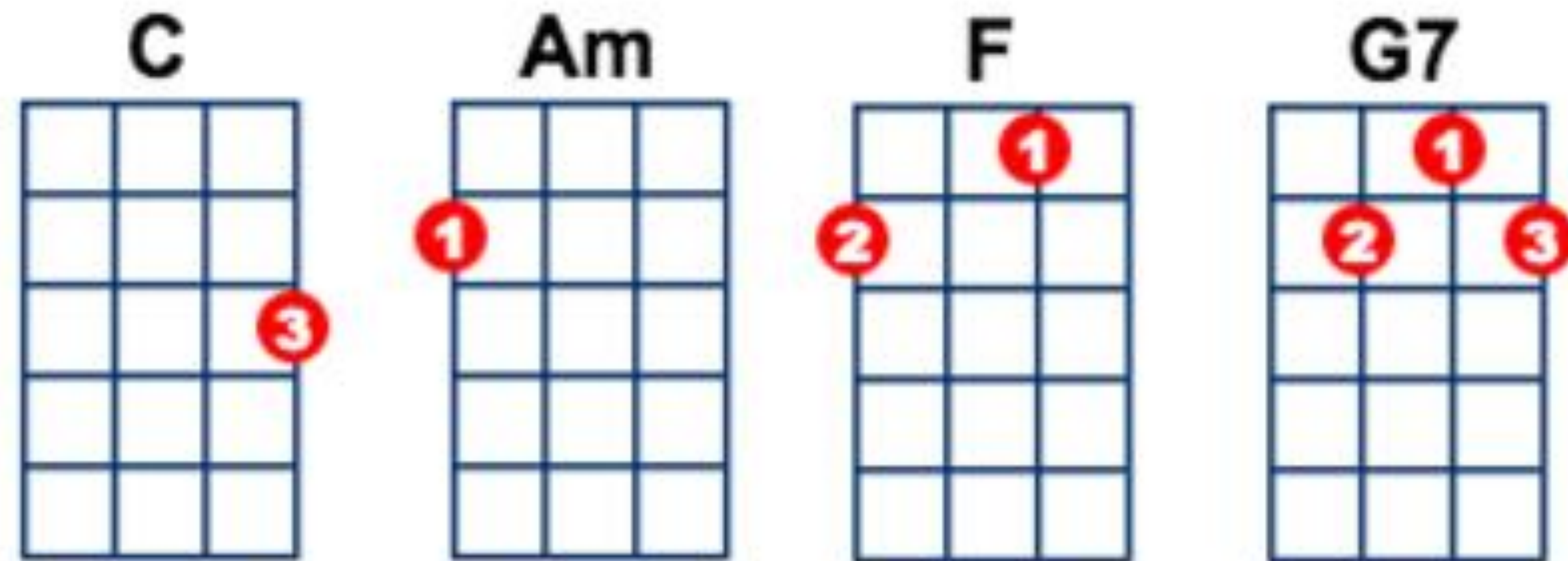
Songs in C major:

C - Am - F - G (or G7)

## Even Further Learning:

Songs in G major:

G - Em - C - D (or D7)



# ***FOUR MAGIC CHORDS***

**YOU CAN PLAY HUNDREDS OF SONGS WITH JUST THESE FOUR CHORDS!**

# SCAFFOLDING

EVERY STEP HAS PRE-KNOWLEDGE, AND PRE-STEP ACTIONS

- **Consider musical prior knowledge (steady beat, high/low, harmonic awareness, etc)**
- **Consider the physical actions involved in each step**
- **For changing from C7 to \*F, practice switching strings, going from “ground to chin”**
- **Pre-teach isolated concepts: strumming/plucking separately from left hand skills**
- **Pre-teach songs (melody, lyrics, even chord changes) before applying to instruments**

# ONE CHORD (I) SONGS

Students strum the tonic chord on a steady beat

Ideal for simple songs

**C** / / / /  
Row, row, row your boat,

**C Major**

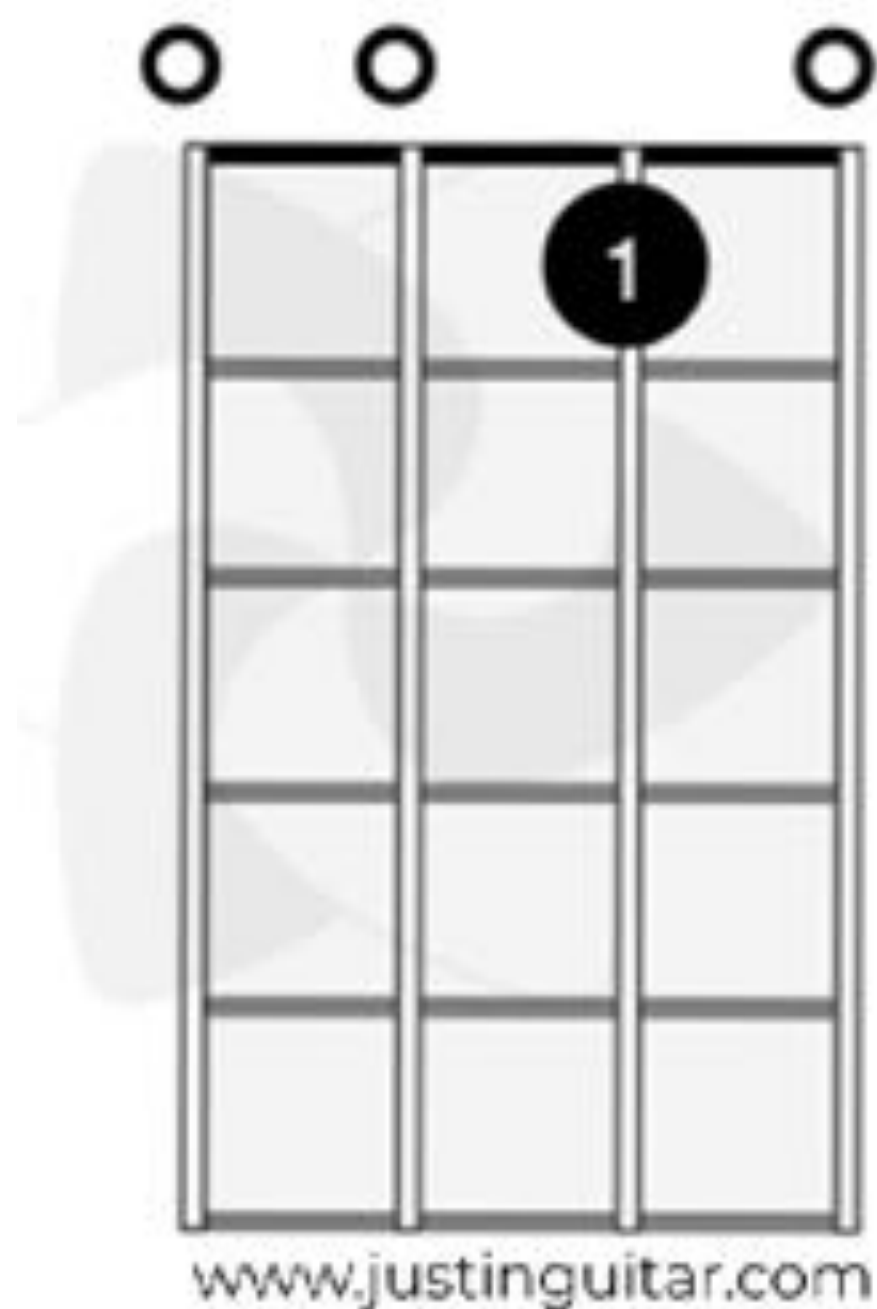
Visual Musical Minds

# MODIFIED F MAJOR CHORD

TECHNICALLY AN FADD9

ONLY ONE FINGER,  
EXACTLY ONE STRING  
AWAY FROM C7

Thanks Maria Doreste!

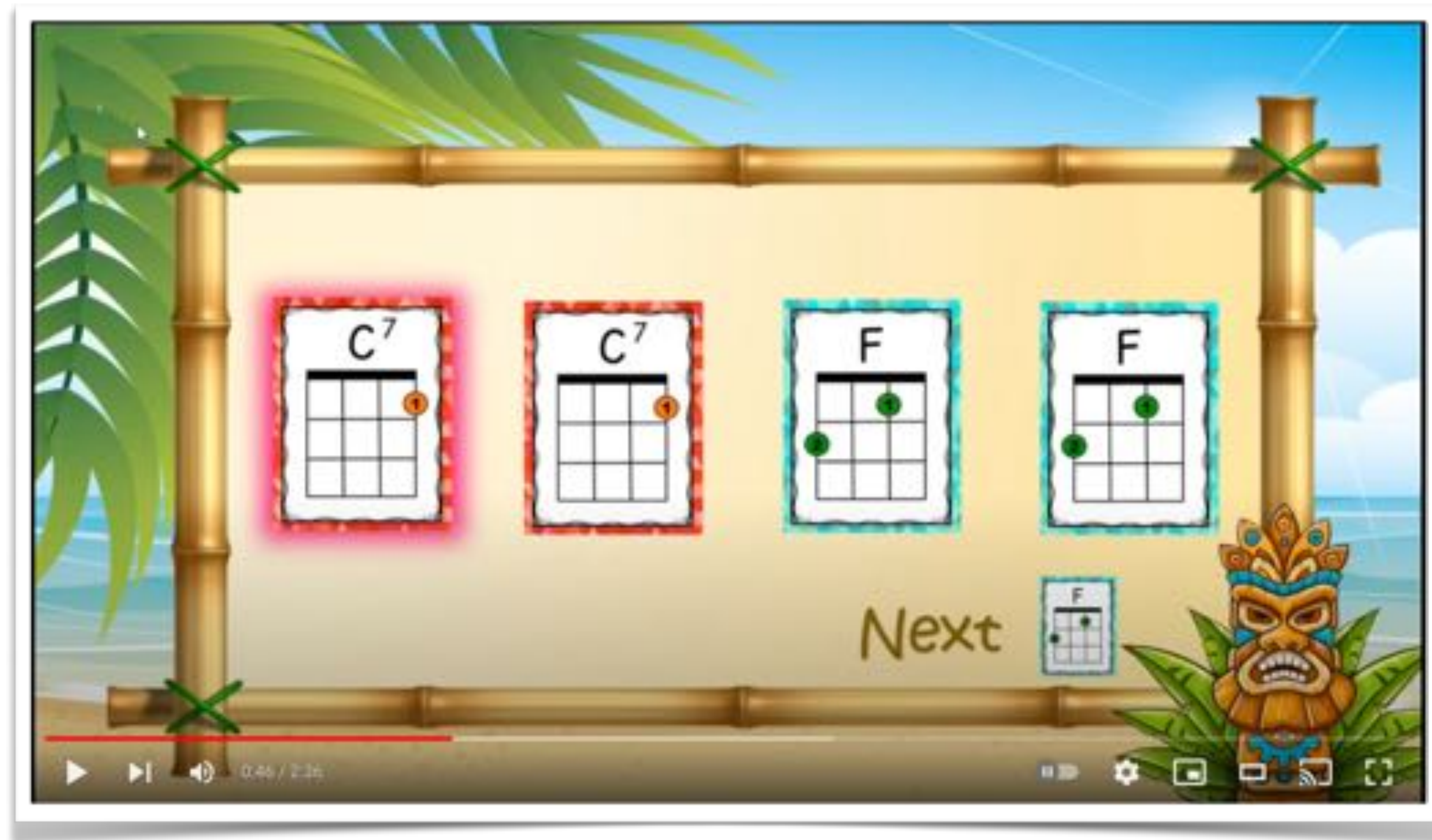


# TWO CHORD (I V) SONGS

Transpose to F Major (F & C7 or C) or C Major (C & G7 or G)

Simplify songs to I V

With pre-teaching, students can play chord changes by ear



# STRUMMING & RHYTHM READING CONNECTIONS



## Eight Favorite Strum Patterns



1

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

2

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

3

↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑

4

↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↓

5

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

6

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

7

↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

8

↓ x ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

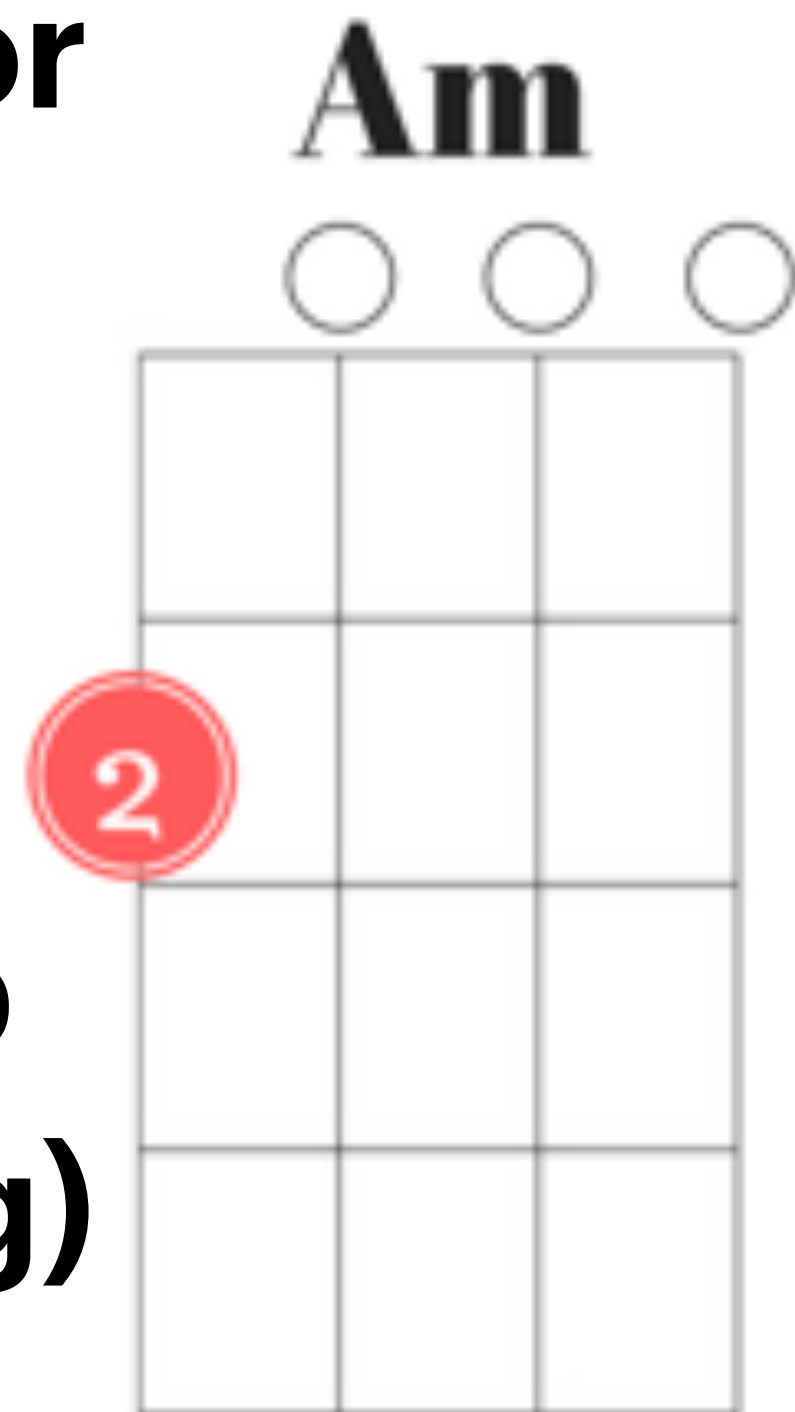




# A MINOR CHORD

Teach after C or C7,  
after modified \*F or  
before F

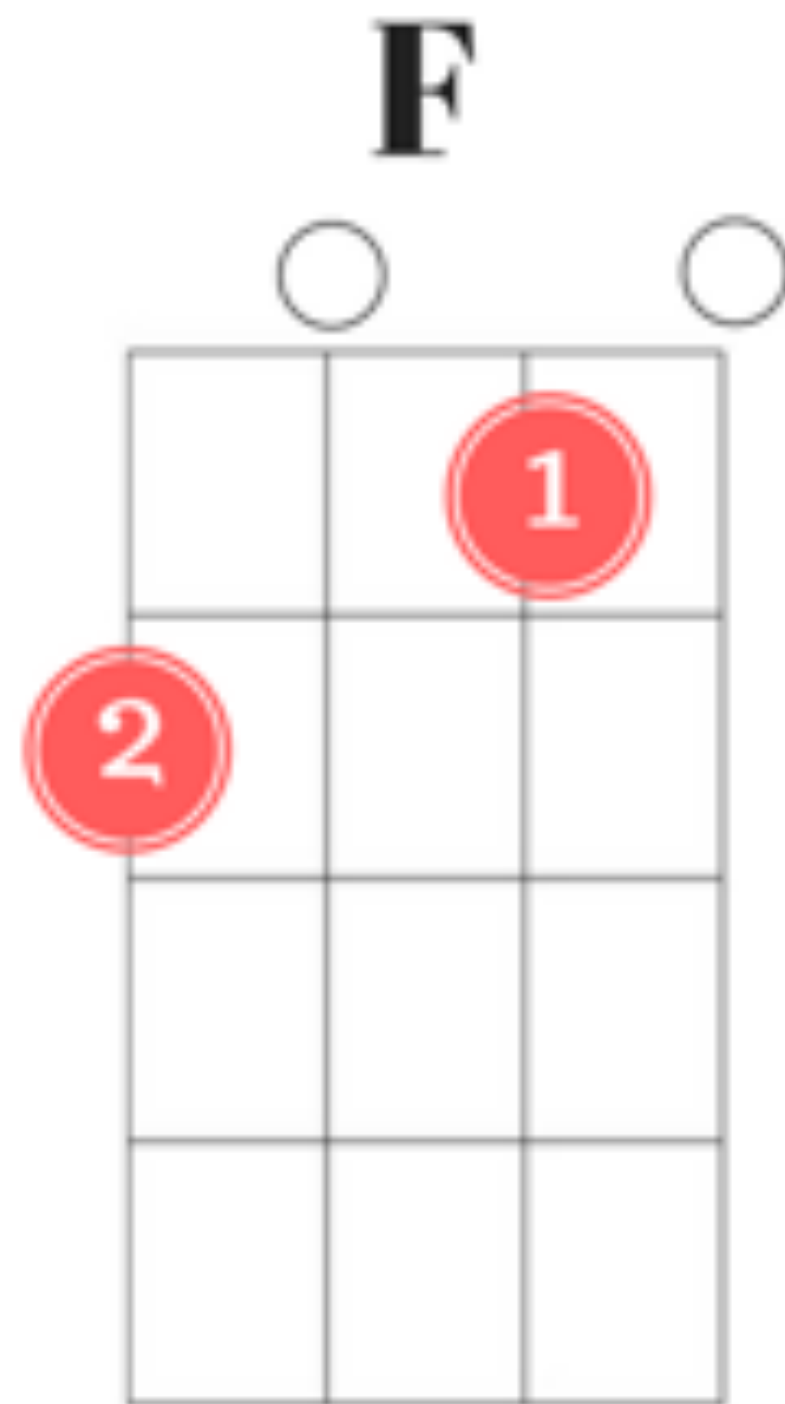
Practice “bunny  
fingers” and 2nd  
finger reaching up  
to the sky (G string)



# F MAJOR CHORD

For upper elementary students

Teach after Am  
so you can say,  
“F is A minor  
plus first finger  
on E”

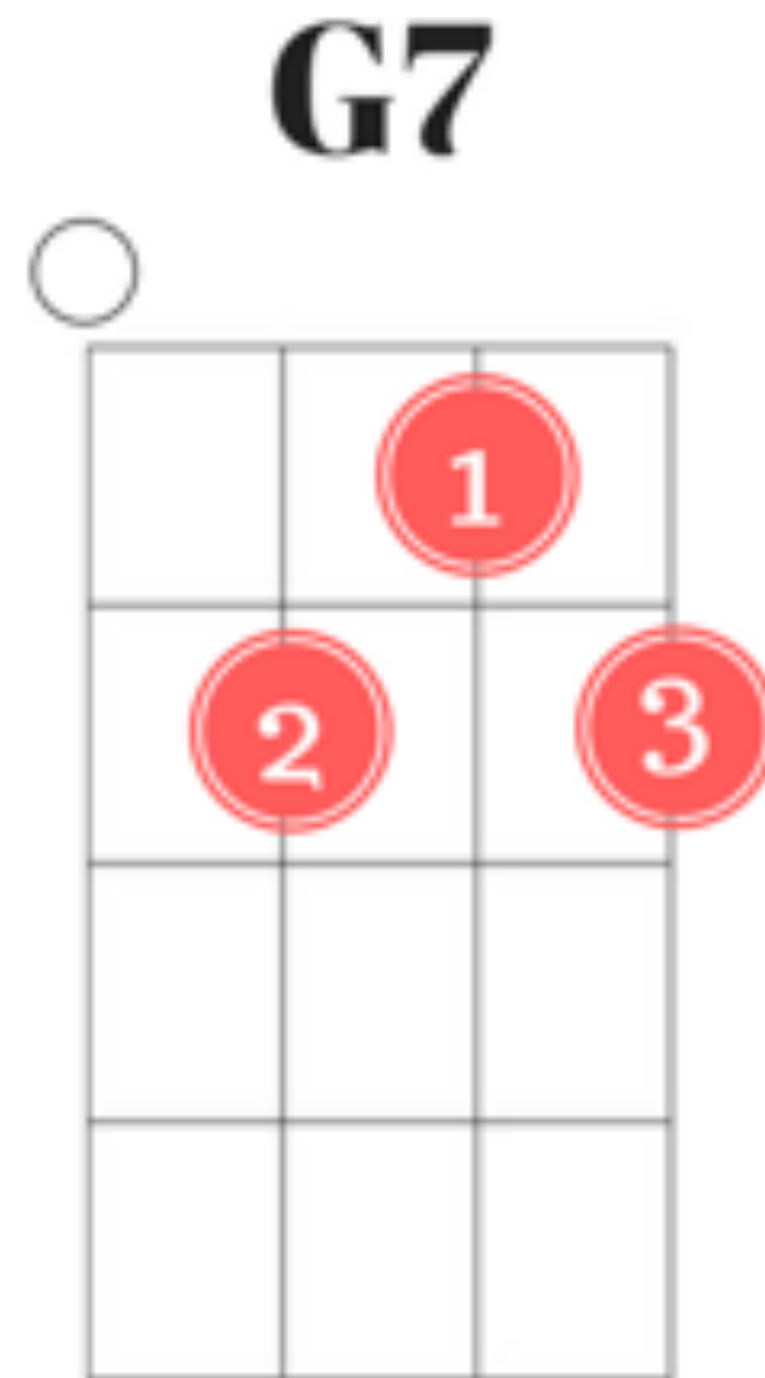


# G7 CHORD

Teach after F chord:  
1st finger stays in the  
same place

“Triangle Chord”

Teach before G  
 (“Upside down  
triangle”)



# TEACHING TIPS

Mistakes  
ARE  
PROOF  
YOU ARE  
TRYING

# TEACHING TIPS

- **Ensure students master a chord before moving on to the next chord**
- **Backwards-plan to decide what chords to teach first**
- **Be prepared to demonstrate “mirrored”**
- **Use “Match Me” games to pre-teach physical movements such as left/right, strumming, changing chords**
- **Students can tap strings with palm for unknown chords in a song**
- **Only teach “Lefty” when there is a LH disability & RH dominance**

**WHAT ARE YOUR STUDENTS'  
STRENGTHS?**



# **FOCUS ON ABILITY**

**WHAT SKILLS ARE STUDENTS ALREADY CAPABLE OF?**

- **Steady Beat**
- **Plucking or strumming**
- **Left or right hand dominance**
- **Aural, visual, kinesthetic preference**

# DIFFERENTIATION:

When I teach an 'ukulele ensemble of various levels

**Level 1: Strumming on One Chord**

**Level 2: Strumming Chord Progression**

**Level 3: Plucking Melody**

## Reggae Vibes

The image displays three staves of ukulele sheet music for the piece 'Reggae Vibes'. Each staff is labeled 'T A B' on the left side. Above the first two staves are chord diagrams for C major and F major. The first staff shows a simple strumming pattern on a single C chord. The second staff shows a strumming pattern across a progression of C and F chords. The third staff shows a plucked melody line with fingerings (1-2-3-4) and includes first and second endings, a double bar line with 'D.C.' (Da Capo), and a final chord diagram for C major.

MR. GRAY'S MUSIC CLASSROOM



# STEADY BEAT

## BUILDING ON EXISTING SKILLS

- Tap on strings
- Strum open C tuning
- “Chuck” with left hand muting strings



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# ADVANCED LEARNING

WHEN STUDENTS ARE READY FOR MORE:

- **Melodies**
- **Passing notes between chords**
- **Trickier strumming patterns, syncopation**
- **Add fingerpicking techniques**
- **Improvisation**





**MEETING  
STUDENTS  
WHERE THEY  
ARE**

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**Always have students leave a  
lesson or class feeling a sense  
of ACCOMPLISHMENT.**

# **HELPFUL RESOURCES**

# MR. GRAY'S CLASSROOM

PLAY-ALONG VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE





# UKULALIENS

PLAY-ALONG VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE

# UKE PLAY ALONG

PLAY-ALONG VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE





# UKUTABS

CHORDS AND TABS FOR POPULAR SONGS



**EASY SHEET  
MUSIC PDF |  
FREE  
POPULAR  
MELODIES  
FOR  
BEGINNERS**

**CAPOTASTIC**

**FREE EASY TAB MELODIES**

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***YOUTUBE IS A VAST  
RESOURCE, HERE ARE SOME  
PRE-SORTED PLAYLISTS:***

Where is Thumbkin? Where is Thumbkin?  
Here I am. Here I am.  
How are you today sir?

# EASIEST

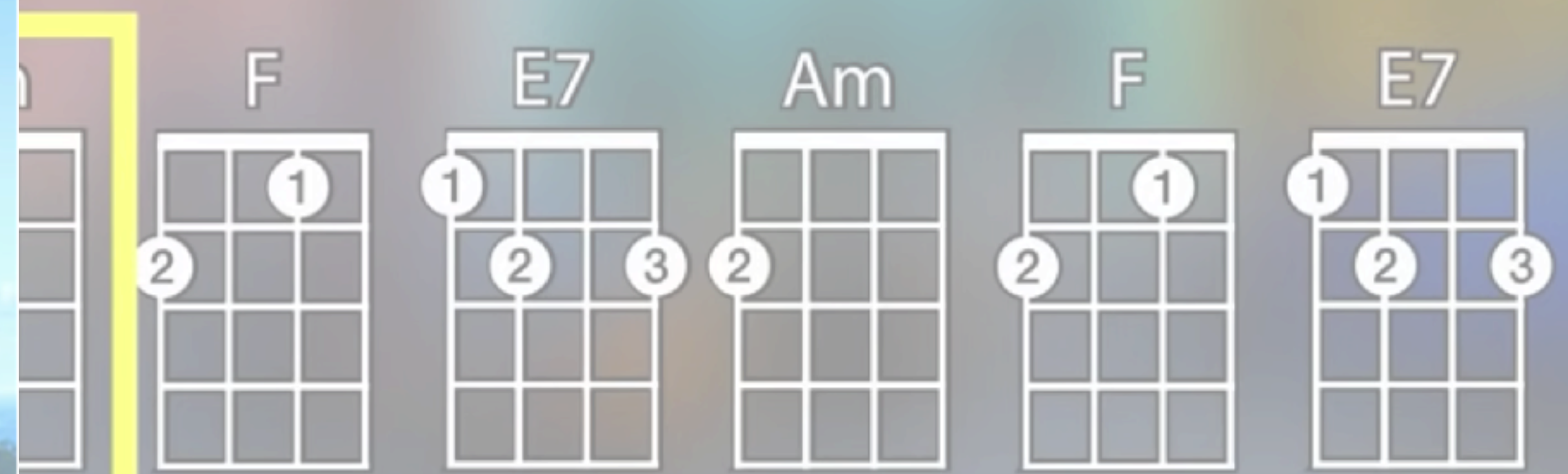


(At)lanta, na-na-na  
but my heart is in Havard  
There's somethin'  
bout his manners (uh hu  
Havard, na-na-na

# MORE

I have a dream  
I hope will come true  
That you're here with me  
And never willy

# EASY



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***ALWAYS PRE-TEACH  
PROGRESSION AND  
STRUMMING PATTERN***

# THREE STATIONS:

LET'S SPLIT INTO THREE GROUPS— 5 MINUTES AT EACH STATION:

## 1. EXPLORE MODIFICATIONS

Check out the various modifications Mr. Miles makes for students, including dot stickers and picks.

## 2. HANDS-ON: PLAY ALONG

Grab a uke and play along to the two-chord song "Iko Iko"  
Will you use modified 1-finger F\* chord?

## 3. ASK MR. MILES

Bring all your questions about playing & teaching the 'ukulele, accessibility, teaching students with disabilities, and more!

**GET IN TOUCH!**



**MILES WILCOX**

**[mwilcox2@berkeley.edu](mailto:mwilcox2@berkeley.edu)**

**[mileswilcox.weebly.com](http://mileswilcox.weebly.com)**

# LINKS

## Play Alongs and Resources:

Kala Ukuleles - <https://kalabrand.com/>

Ukulaliens Play Along Videos: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZjDV\\_1UEbVsAQA\\_q9tyTWw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZjDV_1UEbVsAQA_q9tyTWw)

Uke Play Along Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6jZYLoYuV1CxY4Stzm6mgg>

UkuTabs - Ukulele Tabs and Chords: <https://ukutabs.com/>

Easy Tablature Melodies: <https://www.capotastomusic.com/ukulele-sheet-music/tabs.htm>

Music with Mr. Gray - Ukulele playlist: [https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLn3HdYkrH7Jf26h\\_hBjiF4A5nl3X56V08](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLn3HdYkrH7Jf26h_hBjiF4A5nl3X56V08)

Diverse Music Learners: <https://diversemusiclearners.com/>

## Mr. Miles created playlists:

Easiest (C7, C, F, Am) : <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-2wj0W87IXoMZhdu10TTfoxtkhhXhAAG>

Easy (C, C7, F, Am, G, G7) : <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-2wj0W87IXqpKA6G3Y5JLaLgmvnFGF9L>

More (+ Dm, D7, Em, E7) : [https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-2wj0W87IXpZbgJSn0WV1EAz8pZ7\\_fSI](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-2wj0W87IXpZbgJSn0WV1EAz8pZ7_fSI)