

RALPH'S BASIC MANDOLIN TIPS

I'm just a mediocre mandolin player. However, I do know how to move around the fretboard pretty well for chord changes and improvising in jams. Sometimes a beginner level player will ask me about what I'm doing. These are the "rules" I use when jamming. About the only things you need to know to apply these are:

- What's a 1, 4 and 5 chord
- How to find a specific note on the fretboard

If you have any comments or suggestions, email me at:
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I - Chord Changes

For all these changes, keep your fingers in the same position (fret wise) and only change strings. Works not only with full chords, but double stops and single notes also. You'll usually end up with an open string when you shift. To be safe, don't strike it (although for some chords it will be OK - try and see how it sounds). Even if you end up with a 2 note "chord", that's OK. (Note: Letters in () represent the 1, 4 and 5 chords in the key of G).

1 to 4	(G to C)	Shift one set of strings towards your head
4 to 1	(C to G)	Shift one set of strings towards your feet
1 to 5	(G to D)	Shift one set of strings towards your feet
5 to 1	(D to G)	Shift one set of strings towards your head

For this one, stay on the same strings and change frets

4 to 5	(C to D)	Two frets higher
5 to 4	(D to C)	Two frets lower

II - Basic Pentatonic Scale

This scale can be used in improvising over chord changes in bluegrass and country, particularly. Once you memorize it and know where to find the "root note" of a chord (R1 in the figure below) on the fretboard, you can play in any key! Just with this simple pattern and some judicious "jumping around" (i.e., don't always play notes in sequence) you can do some good sounding improvising. Also, many of the notes in a song melody you're trying to learn can be found in this pattern.

Example: The root note here (R1) is the G note, 3rd string, 5th fret. R2 is the root note an octave above R1. The other numbers are the note numbers in the pentatonic scale.

	R1	5	
	2	6	
	3		
		R2	

As you change chords in a song, then change where the root note lies for improvising over that chord. E.g., if you switch to a D chord, then R1 is a D note. See rules in section I on where the new root note will be in relation to the chord you're currently playing.

Hint: Why not start another basic pentatonic scale at R2?

III - Expanded Pentatonic Scale

The same as the above, but with additional strings used. If R1 lies on other than the 3rd string, not all additional strings shown are available (unless you have a highly unusual mandolin).

	R1	5	2
5	2	6	3
6	3		
		R2	5

III - Double Stops

Double stops are 2 notes played at the same time on different strings. Usually they are 2 notes from a chord. Here are some basic double stop positions. They are always on adjacent strings, so only 2 strings are shown here. Also, only the lowest fret used is shown. Just find the root note "R" on the fretboard for the chord you are in and use the relative spacing shown here. Look at a double stop and see how it fits into the expanded

pentatonic scale in section III. (Note: You might see some of these double stop names used in other mandolin documents. I didn't invent them).

Mini Double Stop:

3	
	R

Bar Double Stop

R	5

Short Double Stop

	R
5	

Long Double Stop 1 (Little "r" denotes chord root note. Not part of double stop; for reference only)

r	5
3	

Long Double Stop 2

	3
R	

When you're in one chord, move to a 2nd or 3rd double stop position for a varied sound. Play both notes at once, or alternate between them. Mix double stops in with single notes of the pentatonic scale.

Now, apply section I to the double stops as the chord changes. Move "R" to a different string (usually) or fret per the rules. E.g., in the key of G, when changing from G (the 1 chord) to D (the 5 chord), move your current R position one set of strings towards your feet, but on the same fret as the G chord.

IV - Apply Rules -

OK, now memorize the above and impress you friends at the next jam. ☺