

‘Ukulele Basics for Absolute Beginners

Based on the traditional Hawai’ian method as taught by Mike Hammerman at the Old Town School of Folk Music. The traditional Hawai’ian pronunciation is “oo-koo-lay-lay.” The mainland American pronunciation is “yoo-koo-lay-lee.”

Holding the uke:

The traditional way to hold the uke is to tuck it into the crook of your right arm, as shown in the photo. Rest the head stock on your left hand.

If it’s easier, you can also place the uke in your lap like a mini-guitar. Many of the world’s top players hold the uke in their laps.

If your uke has a strap, go ahead and use it. Some of the world’s top players use straps to support their ukes.

(In the photo, the player’s left hand is making a C7 chord—see next page.)



Strumming the uke:

Arch your right wrist up and over the uke so that your pointer finger is over the twelfth fret (about where the fingerboard joins the body of the uke).

Extend your pointer finger, and stick out your thumb. Curl your other fingers in as if you’re using them to hold some coins.

Keep your pointer finger pretty straight, and *strum down* so that your fingernail passes lightly over the strings. *Strum up* so that the ball of your finger passes lightly over the strings.

Most of the strumming motion comes from your wrist—your arm barely moves.

It helps to count as you strum. For each down stroke, count from 1 to 4, then repeat. For each upstroke, count “and.” Like this:

DOWN UP DOWN UP DOWN UP DOWN UP DOWN UP DOWN UP DOWN UP etc.
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & etc.

OR...for a super easy strum, use the pad of your thumb to *strum down* on the count of 1 to 4. That is, skip the upstrokes, and just do downstrokes with your thumb.

Strum gently. No need to strum so hard you hurt your fingertip. The uke will make plenty of sound with a gentle touch.



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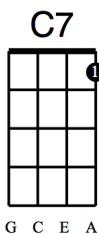
Left hand—Playing chords:

Finger numbering: index finger = 1 ... middle finger = 2 ... ring finger = 3 ... little finger = 4

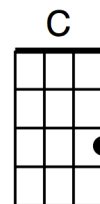


C7 chord

Index finger presses the A string (that’s the string at the bottom of the uke fretboard) just behind the first fret. Strum gently several times. If you hear any buzzing, or if one of the strings doesn’t make a sound, check and be sure your finger is in the right place, and is not touching any other string.



⇐ This is a standard chord diagram for the C7 chord.

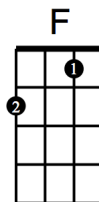


Also learn the C chord. ⇒



F chord

Index finger presses the E string (second from the bottom) just behind the first fret. Middle finger presses the G string (top of the fretboard) just behind the second fret. Again, strum gently several times to make sure your fingers are in the right place.

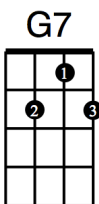


⇐ This is a standard chord diagram for the F chord.



G7 chord

Index finger presses the E string (second from the bottom) just behind the first fret. Middle finger presses the C string (second from the top) just behind the second fret. Ring finger presses the A string (bottom of the fretboard) just behind the second fret. Again, strum gently several times to make sure your fingers are in the right place.



⇐ This is a standard chord diagram for the G7 chord.

Yes, the G7 chord is hard at first. But keep practicing—you’ll get it!

Practice until you can change chords smoothly & easily. Start slow, and gradually build up speed.

Count as you strum (see previous page): “1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and” — or for the thumb strum, “1 2 3 4.” Once you learn the C, F, C7, and G7 chords, you can play hundreds of songs.