

In the Beginning

Tuning

Before we begin, let's pause for a moment and make sure you're in tune. The easiest way to do this is by tuning to a piano in the following manner:

If you find your notes are a little bit above (or sharp to) those of the piano, just tune down carefully until you reach the desired note. Likewise, if you're below (or flat), tune up.

Now you may not always have access to a piano, so pick up a pitch pipe at your local music store. Tune your third string to the G note of the pipe and then use this method to get the rest of your banjo in tune:

Match the fifth fret of the fourth string with the open third string (G).

Match the fourth fret of the third string with the open second string (B).

Match the third fret of the second string with the open first string (D).

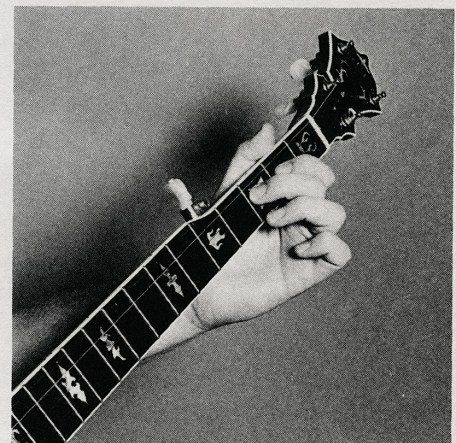
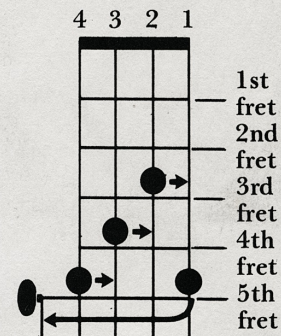
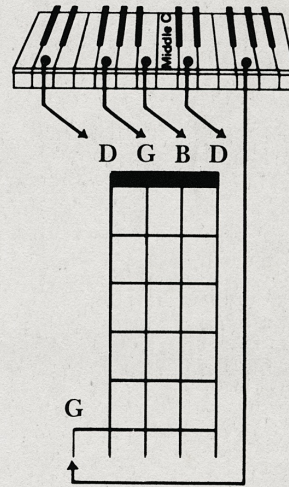
Match the fifth fret of the first string with the open fifth string (G).

In instances where you're playing with other people, you can always tune to them. Have them play a G, D, or B note, get in sync with that and tune the rest of your banjo in the way I described above.

Left Hand Position

A correct left-hand position is crucial if you ever hope to play with speed and accuracy.

Start by holding the banjo neck in the crook of your hand (between the thumb and index fingers). Now, without worrying about which strings you're pushing down, place your fingers firmly on the fretboard.



As you do this make sure your hand is relaxed. If it is you'll have a much easier time moving fluidly from position to position.

Another way to increase your speed and mobility is by keeping your fingers poised within close striking range of the strings. The shorter the distance between your fingers and the strings the faster you'll be able to fret the notes you want. When you are actually pressing down on the strings your fingers should hug closely to the next highest fret. This will help you avoid string buzz, one of the main obstacles standing between you and a good clean sound. You should also be sure you're not accidentally fretting two strings at the same time. For instance, in using your index finger to push down the third string at the second fret you may discover part of your fingertip or nail damping the fourth string at the same fret. If this is a chronic problem for you just keep your awareness focused on your fingers until the sloppy fretting clears up.

Once you have these points fixed in your mind you can move on to the next section.

