

Beginners Guide to the Walkingbass®



Learning to play a new instrument can open up a whole new world of creativity. It certainly has for me.

The 3-string Walkingbass is an easy instrument to learn, yet it is capable of playing some very sophisticated music. This document covers almost everything you need to know in order to play the Walkingbass.

There are some tips in this guide which even experienced bass players might find helpful in making the switch from standard bass tuning to the open G tuning.

Please keep an eye on my website: www.konawalkingbass.com for the next installment of instruction. It will concern more advanced techniques and styles of playing.

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Lesson 1: Getting ready to play the Walkingbass

The Walkingbass is usually stored with its leg detached and folded up on the back of the instrument. Unscrew the 2 black knobs. Rotate the leg 180 degrees and attach the leg using the same two black knobs at the proper height for you: the nut, which holds the three strings at the top of the fingerboard, should be at your eye level as you hold the bass at an angle across your body. Make sure the two black knobs and the thumbscrew holding the foot peg onto the leg are snug. You will be able to see the dots along the side of the instrument. The small foot peg off the leg should be pointing to your right, with your right foot resting on it. This will keep the bass from moving around while you are playing. You will use the thumb, pointer finger, and middle finger of the right hand to pluck the strings of the bass, with your right elbow is held at a right angle.

Lesson 2: Your Amplifer

Not all amplifiers have the same types of tone controls, nor are they all designed to handle bass instruments. Generally speaking, an amplifier with a speaker under 10" in diameter will not perform as well as an amplifier with a speaker that is 10" or greater in diameter. An amplifier that is designed for bass instruments will do a better job for this purpose than an amplifier that is designed for electric guitars. When purchasing an amplifier to use with the Walkingbass, it is a good idea to visit a music store and ask to try a few different bass amplifiers with the instrument, until you find one which gives you the sound you like.

Since the acoustic pickup on the Walkingbass is very sensitive to a wide range of frequencies, it is important to use an amplifier which allows you to turn down all the *highs* and *mid-ranges*. You might also turn the lows up a little. This should allow the Walkingbass to produce a sweet, rich bass sound with very little "finger noise" as you move your hands around on the instrument. If you still hear finger noise, try hooking a 7-band bass equalizer pedal between the Walkingbass and the amplifier. These small devices are available at music stores, and allow you to fully control the tone and volume of your bass. Before turning on your amplifier, plug a standard guitar cord (with 1/4 inch phone jacks) into the bottom end of the Walkingbass and into the amplifier. When turning on your amplifier for the first time, it is a good idea to start with the volume turned down, and then bring it up to the volume at which you wish to play.

Lesson 3: Tuning the Walkingbass

The strings of the Walkingbass are tuned to an open G chord. The thickest (lowest) string is tuned to G. The middle string is tuned to B. The thinnest string is tuned to D. A chromatic electronic guitar tuner can help you tune your bass, although some may not be able to register the low G. If your tuner does not respond to the low string, lightly touch the string over the 12th dot, and play the harmonic. A tuner that has input jacks is usually easier to use than one that simply clamps on the bass.

Lesson 4: Thinking Like a Bass Player

Unlike the guitar, mandolin, or ukulele, the bass is not an instrument that is meant to be strummed. It is generally not used to play melodies either although a good bass player will jump at the chance to take a solo! A bass provides two very important components to a piece of music. It provides a steady rhythm, and it provides the other instruments with a strong low note upon which the higher notes can build. In effect, you, as the bass player are supporting all the other musicians that you play with. With your bass providing a strong foundation, other musicians or singers will naturally follow whatever rhythm you settle into, often without even noticing it. True, some people are born with a strong sense of rhythm, but most of us have to learn it. Fortunately, it is not hard to learn. Tapping your fingers, clapping your hands, or tapping your foot while listening to your stereo is an easy way to develop this part of your brain. Rhythm has just two parts; “on” and “off”. Either your hands are together on the beat, or they are apart, and either your foot is on the ground, or it’s not. How do you, as a bass player provide a nice “tight” rhythm? Either a string is vibrating (producing sound) or it is silent. The silence is as important as the sound!

Your skill as a bass player can improve quickly if you train your ear to listen. When you are playing music, listen to your rhythm. When you are not playing, you can also be training your ear. I listen to music in my home, in my car, at work, and I try to pay attention not only to the parts that the bass player is playing, but also to the interaction between the bass player and the other instruments.

I was playing with a group of ukulele players once, and noticed a woman watching us. She seemed to be softly mouthing the syllables; “Bum, bum, bum, bum” as we played. I asked her, “Are you a bass player?” She grinned and said, “Of course!” I occasionally find myself doing the same thing while driving in my car.

Thinking like a bass player means asking yourself, how can I play in order to support my fellow musician/s. Often this means keeping it simple and steady. A reliable bass player gives the whole group confidence.



Lesson 5: Playing a Basic Rhythm

There are two ways that you can keep your bass rhythm tight.

1) You make the string vibrate at the right moment by plucking it. Playing the Walkingbass, this is usually done with the thumb, middle finger, or pointer finger of the right hand.

2) You 'dampen' the vibrating string, making it silent by putting the plucking finger back on the string right after it's plucked.

A SIMPLE RHYTHM EXERCISE COUNTING TO FOUR:

Count slowly to yourself,

“One, Two, Three, Four, One, Two, Three, Four....”

As you count,

Pluck the G string with your thumb on “One”.

Dampen the G string with your thumb on “Two”.

Pluck the D string with your middle finger on “Three”.

Dampen the D string with your middle finger on “Four”.

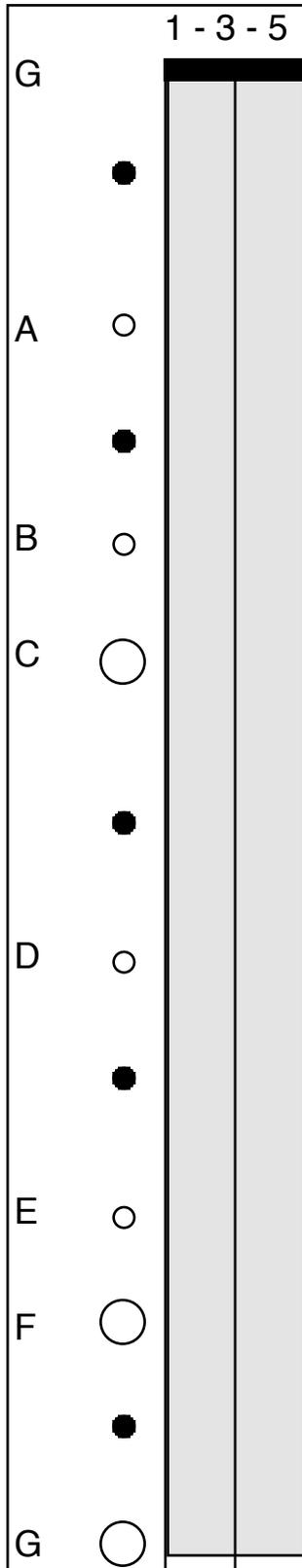
Continue to count until your rhythm becomes steady and strong. Try counting at different speeds. Practice this exercise often if you are just beginning to play the Walkingbass. Pay attention to your timing. Your fellow musicians will thank you!

This simple “One, Two, Three, Four” rhythm can be used to play along with many styles of music. Country, blues, bluegrass, rock, and Hawaiian, for example. Just about any music that you can tap your foot to.

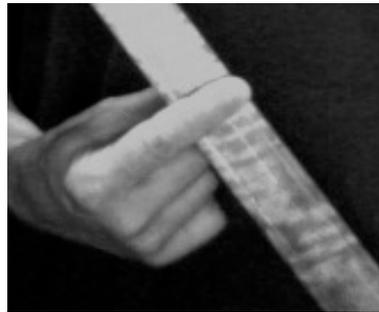
Notice that in this exercise the middle string is not played. It is one less thing to worry about and not needed at this point! Later we will work on a style that includes the middle string and uses a count of

“One, Two, Three, One, Two, Three...” , useful for waltzes.

Lesson 6: What is the Left Hand Doing?



Here is a representation of the front of the Walkingbass and the dots which you see down its neck. Also notice the letters that correspond to the dots. These letters indicate what note you will be playing if you are pressing your left index finger on the G string (the thickest string) at one of these dots and pluck it. Press your finger on the G string where the "A" dot is, pluck the string, and you will hear an A note. Press your finger over the "C" dot, pluck the string, and you will hear a C note. Now for the good news: If you lay your finger straight across all three strings at a dot ("bar chording"), you are not only playing a note, but all three notes in any major chord; the "one, three and five"! The classic and simplest bass accompaniment to music would be to pluck the G string and D string at any dot.



By positioning your finger up down down the neck, you can play any major chord. (You can play along with minors and 7ths this way, as well.)

You will notice that I have intentionally made the white dots which represent the C, F, and G notes larger than the other white dots. This comes in handy when playing in the key of C, one of the most common keys for guitar, 'ukulele and piano.

Try the picking exercise mentioned above, counting to 4. For the first count of 4, press your finger down over the C dot and play the 2 outside strings. This is a C chord.

For the next count of 4, press your finger down over the F dot, and play the 2 outside strings. This is a a F chord.

For the next count of 4, press your finger down over the G dot, and play the 2 outside strings. This is a G chord.

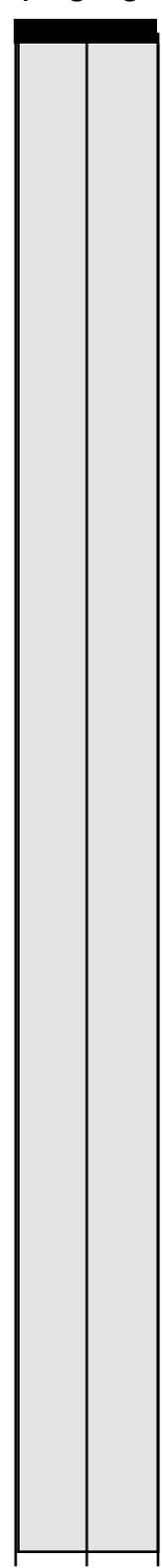
For the last count of 4, return to the C chord.

Repeat until you get the feel for changing chords smoothly.

Congratulations on learning to play in the key of C!

Training Wheels for Beginners: *I have seen beginners stick small pieces of tape on the sides of their basses and write the letters on them. This might seem like a good idea at first, but don't use this crutch too long, or you may become dependent on the it. It's better to learn the dot names, and really doesn't take long at all!*

Lesson 7: The Keys of G and A

<p>1 - 3 - 5</p>  <p>G ●</p> <p>A ○</p> <p>B ●</p> <p>C ○</p> <p>D ●</p> <p>E ○</p> <p>F ○</p> <p>G ○</p>	<p>In the key of C, you started with the C chord, moved your finger 5 dots down the neck of the bass to the F chord and then 2 more dots to the G chord.</p> <p>In the key of G, start with your left hand completely off the strings for a G chord. Begin counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”</p> <p>Move your finger 5 dots down the neck to the C position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”</p> <p>Move your finger 2 dots down to the D position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”</p> <p>And finally, take your left hand off the strings returning to the G chord position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”</p> <p>In the Key of A, begin with your finger in the A position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”</p> <p>Move your finger 5 dots down the neck to the D position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”</p> <p>Move your finger 2 dots down to the E position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”</p> <p>And finally, return to the G position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”.</p> <p>In all three of these keys, (G, A, C) the pattern is the same. Remember this pattern, as it is a shortcut that will come in handy.</p> <p>Practice the rhythm exercise in G, A, and C before going on.</p>
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Lesson 8: The Keys of D, E, and F

G	1 - 3 - 5	In the previous keys, you moved down the neck to find the related chords, first by moving 5 dots down, and then two more.
●	●	In the next three keys, we will instead start down the neck and move 7 dots up the neck, and then down two dots.
A	○	In the key of D , you start with your finger on the D position. Begin counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
●	●	Move your finger 7 dots back up the neck to the G position, (just take your left hand off the strings and you are there.) counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
B	○	Move your finger 2 dots down to the A position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
C	○	And finally, returning to the D position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
●	●	In the key of E , you start with your finger on the E position. Begin counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
D	○	Move your finger 7 dots back up the neck to the A position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
●	●	Move your finger 2 dots down to the B position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
E	○	And finally, returning to the E position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
●	●	In the key of F , you start with your finger on the F position. Begin counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
F	○	Move your finger 7 dots back up the neck to the B flat position, (the black dot between the A and the B positions) counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
●	●	Move your finger 2 dots down to the C position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
G	○	And finally, returning to the F position, counting “One, Two, Three, Four...”
●	●	No doubt, you see a pattern here too.

It would be safe to say that in ninety percent of the music in Europe and America, you will find the following to be true:

If the song is in the key of	It will probably contain these related chords
G	C and D
A	D and E
C	F and G
D	G and A
E	A and B
F	B flat and C

(These are the “1, 4 and 5” chords. Can you figure out what chords are in the key of B?)

Once you are able to keep a steady rhythm while moving between finger positions, and you have memorized and are familiar with the keys listed above, there is no reason not to learn how to play with other musicians. If you feel that you’re still not ready, you can begin by playing along with CD’s or other sources of music.

If you have a friend with a guitar or ‘ukuele, ask them to play a 2 or 3 chord song in any of the above keys. Chances are very good that you will be able to play along with them. Start with slow songs that have only a few chords in them. An old blues song, or a country western tune that you both know well might be a good place to start. Remember, your main job as the bass player is to keep the beat steady and to keep it going. (You’re “the glue” of the group!) You will be surprised how quickly you will catch on and how rewarding it is to play bass.

Lesson 9: Dealing with Minor and Seventh Chords

As you make the adventure into the world of music, you’ll quickly find that there are actually a lot of variations on the major chords. The two most common variations are the “Seventh Chord” and the “Minor Chord”. These are usually designated in song books by a small “m” or the number “7” next to the chord. For example, **E minor is written as “Em” and C seventh is written as “C7”.**

Rather than trying to learn to play the minor or seventh chords, *as a beginner*, you can get by with simply playing the two outside strings, and let the other musicians play the actual minor or seventh chord. It’ll work just fine.

Mahalo (thank you!) for taking the time to read this guide. I am always interested in hearing from other Walkingbass players, and can be reached by phone or email through my website: www.konawalkingbass.com

**Aloha,
Konabob Stoffer**