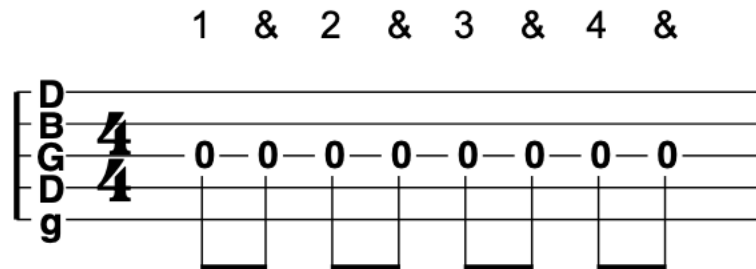


FUNDAMENTALS OF CLAWHAMMER BANJO

Defining attributes of clawhammer

- A two-finger style - thumb and either index or middle finger
- A finger-lead style - finger plays beats (1, 2, 3, 4); thumb plays offbeats (&s)



- A down-stroking style - finger plays beats by striking down on the strings with back of fingernail

The Basic Stroke (YouTube video demo: <https://youtu.be/arAgwK0gPpc>)

The finger and thumb do not operate independently (cf., guitar style)

Thumb is generally straight and fingers are curled in, but not clenched. Think of clasping a credit card as pictured below with the least pressure possible to keep it in place.



Eliminate all unnecessary tension from the shoulder all the way to fingers – DO NO HARM!

- Try not to twist or bend the wrist in such a way that it creates tension
- Forearm rests on the upper side of the banjo rim, or on the arm rest, and forms a fulcrum point (see picture above)

Banjo can be held on the thigh, or in the lap; whichever you use, the banjo should be in a stable position and not require the fretting hand to keep it in position

- Slight pressure from the forearm on the rim/arm rest usually does the job here
- You can also use a strap to stabilize the banjo

The arm/hand move up and down, with the fingers and thumb going along for the ride; this up-down motion must be a steady, metronomic motion

- Hand moves down → finger strikes string (ex, 1st string) and thumb simultaneously plants on some other string (usually the 5th string)
- Hand moves up → thumb releases from string it planted on and finger comes up with the hand and is positioned for the next down stroke

On the downstroke the finger sounds a melody note, and on the upstroke the thumb may or may not play an offbeat

- No offbeat note → thumb passively rises from the 5th string or whatever string it planted on
- Offbeat note → thumb more actively pushes off the string on the upstroke; thumb may flex a bit when doing this

There is also an in-and-out motion as the hand strokes down and up (actual motion is oblique to the banjo head, not just parallel to it)

- Downstroke → hand moves toward the banjo head
- Upstroke → hand pulls away from the banjo head
- This allows the finger to strike one string without inadvertently hitting other strings
- Exception: when executing a brush, the downstroke is parallel to the banjo head

As the finger strikes a string it should continue beyond the string before initiating the upstroke

- First string strike → finger keeps going and lands on the head, or stops past the 1st string just above the head
- Other strings → finger lands on the string below without sounding it (e.g., strike 2nd string then land on 1st string)

Double Thumbing (YouTube video demo: <https://youtu.be/D66P8Q3m8Xw>)

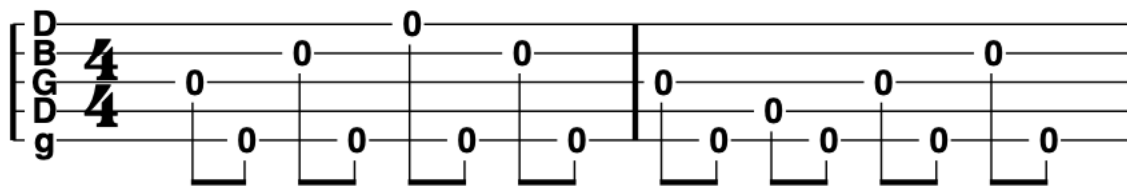
This is the fundamental stroke pattern of clawhammer playing

- All other patterns and rhythms are derivative (including the “bum ditty”)

Finger and thumb both sound notes, creating a stream of eight notes

Finger strikes any of the long strings; the thumb strikes, and sounds, the fifth string (see tab example below)

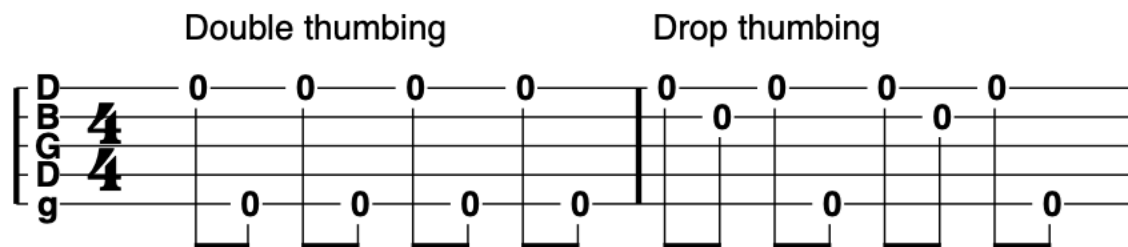
- Finger is playing melodies notes and thumb is playing drone notes
- Each eight-note pair can be called a “ditty”



Drop thumbing (YouTube video demo: <https://youtu.be/K9ltfPcjeMg>)

This is nothing more than a special case of double thumbing in which the thumb “drops” to, and sounds, one of the long strings, rather than staying on the fifth string

- The most commonly played string is the second string (see tab example below)

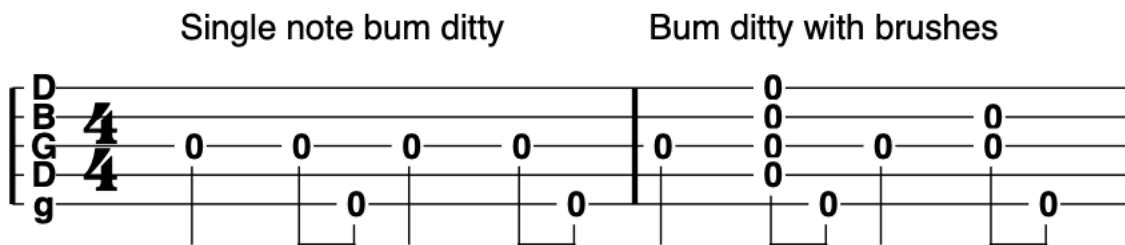


- The drop-thumb note can be an offbeat melody note, a harmony note or a drone note
- The drop thumb pattern illustrated above would be called out as “drop thumb ditty”

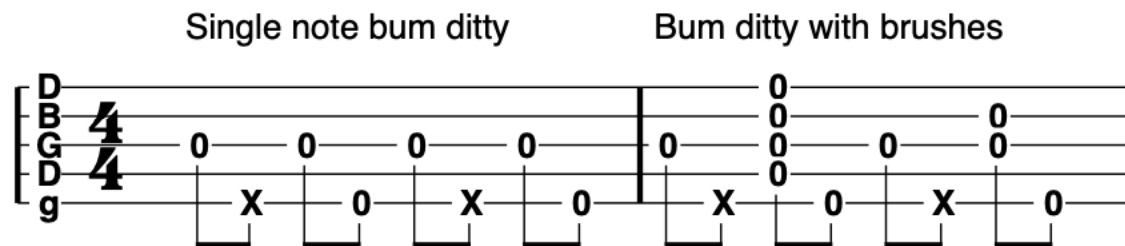
The Bum Ditty (aka, Boom Chucka) (YouTube video demo: <https://youtu.be/yRFlvU01pco>)

Many consider this the fundamental stroke pattern, but it can also be viewed as a derivative of double thumbing

- Consists of a quarter note (bum) followed by an eighth-note pair that ends on the 5th string (ditty); as the finger plays the “bum” the thumb still lands on the 5th string
- The “dit” can be a single note, a full brush, or a partial brush (see tab example below)
- The “bum” is a melody note with rare exception. The “dit”, if played as a single note, is usually a melody note, but can be a harmony note or a drone. The “ty” on the 5th string is a drone note.



- In reality, this is still double thumbing only with the offbeat note after the 1st and 3rd beats not being sounded (see tab below).



Each bum ditty comprises two full, down-up cycles of the “arm-hand metronome”. The rhythm is derived by not playing offbeats 1 and 3 while the arm maintains the double thumbing motion.