



A JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY FOR MUSIC THEORY

MTO 31.3 Examples: Hottle, The Embodied Folk Guitar of Elizabeth Cotten

(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)

<https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.25.31.3/mto.25.31.3.hottle.html>

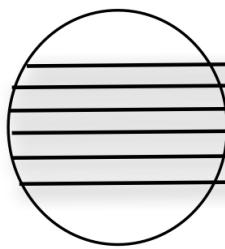
Example 1. Hand positions in normative right-handed guitar playing, shown while facing player

strings low to high



right hand

E
A
D
G
B
E



left hand

Example 2. The left-index-finger-closest-to-nut rule, as illustrated through common guitar chords in normative right-handed playing (clockwise from top left: C major, G major, E major, D major)



Example 3. From left: neutral wrist, extension, flexion, radial deviation, ulnar deviation



Example 4. Flexion and radial deviation of the left wrist in normative right-handed guitar technique



Example 5. Examples of common guitar chords that respect the neutral wrist preference by aligning the index finger with lower-pitched strings at the top of the instrument. From left: D major, A major.



Example 6. Examples of common guitar chords that violate the neutral wrist preference by aligning the index finger with higher-pitched strings at the bottom of the instrument. From left: C major, G major.

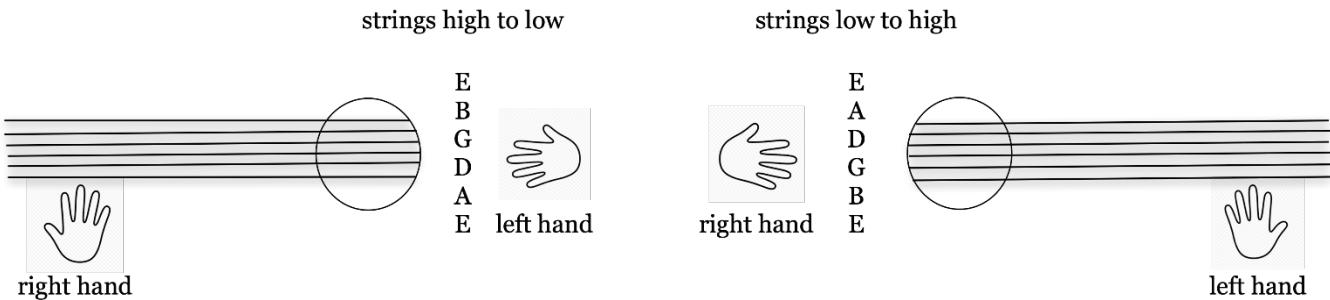


Example 7. Hand positions

Left: Cotten's guitar-playing hand positions, shown while facing player.

Right: hand positions in normative right-handed guitar playing, shown while facing player.

Compared to normative technique, the order of the strings is reversed relative to the hand.



Example 8. Comparison of Cotten's neutral wrist (left) with normative neutral wrist (right)

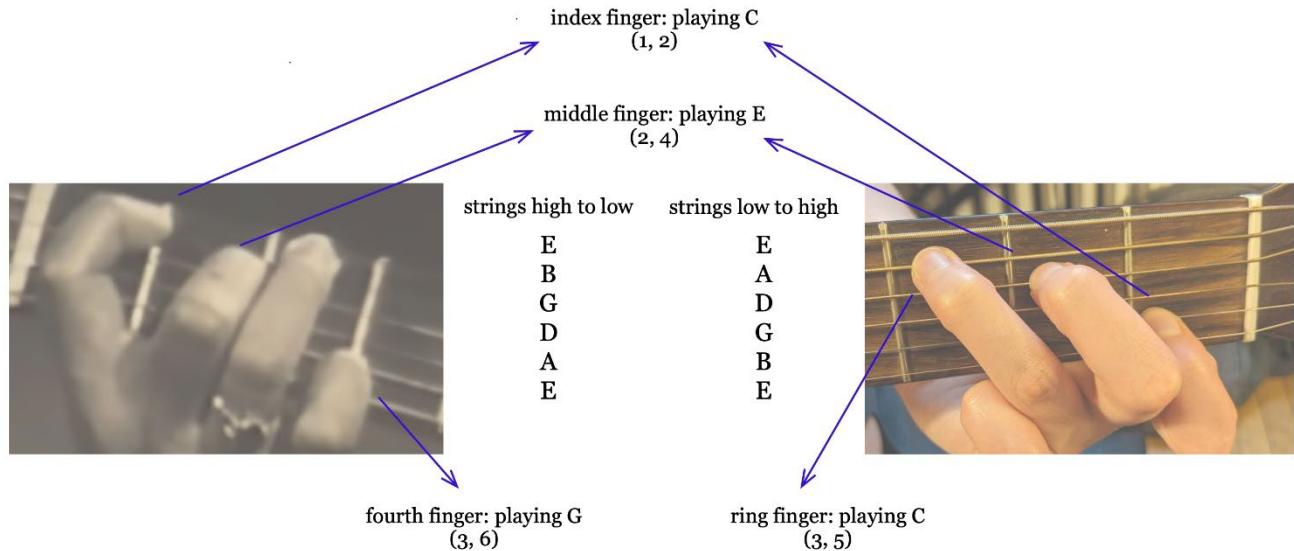


Example 9. C major fingering

Left: Elizabeth Cotten's C major fingering.

Screenshot taken from Cotten's "Freight Train" (1958, 2:01).

Right: Normative right-handed C major fingering.

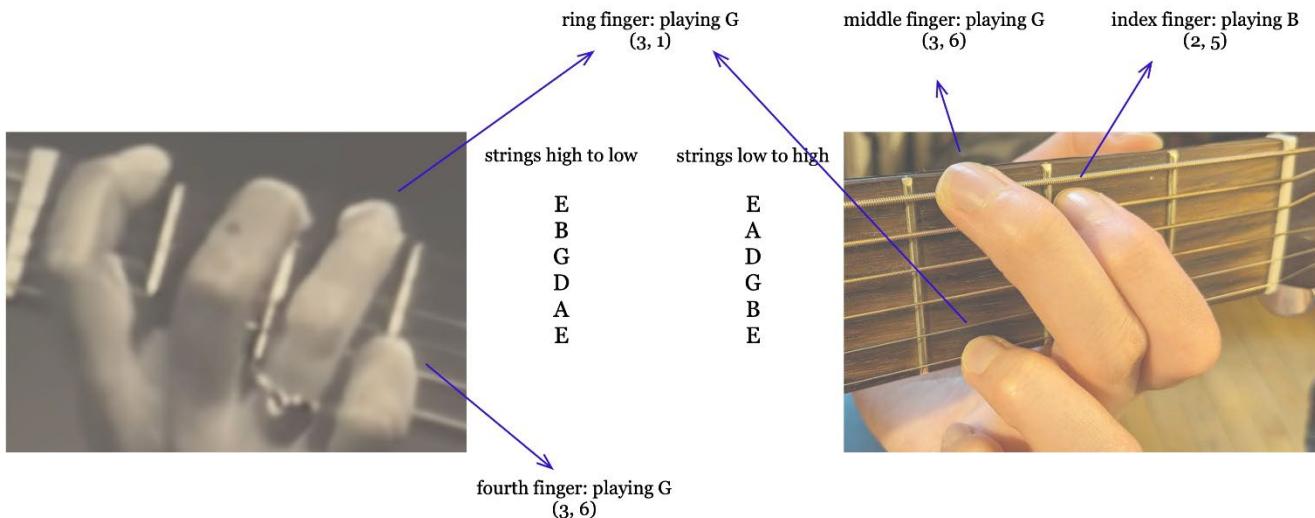


Example 10. G major fingering

Left: Elizabeth Cotten's G major fingering.

Screenshot taken from Cotten's "Freight Train" (1958, 1:57).

Right: Right-handed G major fingering.



Example 11. G major chord fingering

Left: Chord voicing transcription, tablature, and fretboard movement schematic for G major to G⁷ transition in normative practice. Numbers in red circles indicate temporal order of finger positions (see correspondence with red-circled numbers above transcription).

Right: Transcription, tablature, and fretboard movement schematic for Cotten's G major to G⁷ transition.

Left: Chord voicing transcription, tablature, and fretboard movement schematic for G major to G⁷ transition in normative practice. Numbers in red circles indicate temporal order of finger positions (see correspondence with red-circled numbers above transcription).

Right: Transcription, tablature, and fretboard movement schematic for Cotten's G major to G⁷ transition.

normative G major chord fingering

Left: Chord voicing transcription, tablature, and fretboard movement schematic for G major to G⁷ transition in normative practice. Numbers in red circles indicate temporal order of finger positions (see correspondence with red-circled numbers above transcription).

Right: Transcription, tablature, and fretboard movement schematic for Cotten's G major to G⁷ transition.

Cotten's G major chord fingering

Example 12. G major to D major transition

Left: Chord voicing transcription, tablature, and fretboard movement schematic for G major to D major transition in normative practice. Right: Chord voicing transcription, tablature, and fretboard movement schematic for Cotten's G major to D major transition in "Honey Babe Your Papa Cares For You" (1958)

Left (Normative practice):

Chord voicings (G major to D major):

- Chord 1: G major (3, 0, 0)
- Chord 2: D major (3, 2, 0)

Strings:

E	3	3
B	1	2
G	0	3
D	0	2
A	0	0
E	2	3

Right (Cotten's approach):

Chord voicings (G major to D major):

- Chord 1: G major (3, 0, 0)
- Chord 2: D major (3, 2, 0)

Strings:

E	3	3
B	1	2
G	0	3
D	0	2
A	0	0
E	2	3

int(-2,0)

Left (Normative practice):

Strings:

E		
B		
G		
D		
A		
E		

Right (Cotten's approach):

Strings:

E		
A		
D		
G		
B		
E		

Example 13. Formal layout of "Washington Blues," (Fuller and Cotten, 1992)

Formal section	Beginning timestamp
Theme	7:18
Variation 1	7:46
Variation 2	8:13
Variation 3	8:40
Variation 1	9:08
Variation 2	9:33
Theme	10:00

Example 14. Transcription, tab, select picking patterns, and select fretboard diagrams of the opening theme of "Washington Blues" (Fuller and Cotten 1992, 7:19–7:45). Transcription and tab are my own.

1

2

3

4

strings:
E
A
D
G
B
E

int(+2,0)

2

int(+2,0)

strings:
E
A
D
G
B
E

Example 15. Transcription, tablature, select picking patterns, and select fretboard diagram for first variation of "Washington Blues," (Fuller and Cotten 1992, 7:45–8:12)

1 2 3 4

8

T 4 - 8
A 4 - 9 10 8-8-10 0
B 3 8 10 10-10 10-10 0 2 3 3/8

half cadential motive from opening theme

T 10 8 2 3 3 3 0 0 0 9 8 10 8 0 2 1-1-3 4
A 9 9 2 2 2 0 0 0 9 9 9 10 9 0 2 2 2 0
B 10 10 3 2 0 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 0

cadential motive from opening theme

T 0 0 1 1 0 2 2 2 0 2 3 3 4 5 5 5 0 1 0 0 0 3 0 1 1 1 0
A 1 1 2 2 2 0 3 3 3 4 5 5 5 0 2 0 0 0 3 0 2 2 2 0
B 2 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 0

3 4

strings: E A D G B E

(M) (M) (M) (M) (M) (M)
(I) (I) (I) (T) (T) (T)

int(+5, 0)

2 1

3

strings: E A D G B E

P M I I

Example 16. Transcription, tablature, select picking patterns, and select fretboard diagram for second variation of "Washington Blues," part 3 (Fuller and Cotten 1992 8:12–8:40)

1

T 4 3 5 5 4 5 5 | 4 0 5 0 1 | 0 2 1 3 4 3 | 1
A 4 0 0 0 0 0 | 4 0 0 0 0 | 2 3 3 3 3 | 0
B 3 5 5 5 4 5 5 | 4 4 5 5 2 | 0 1 3 0 2 | 3 0 2

T 4 5 4 5 5 0 | 4 0 5 0 1 0 | 2 3 2 3 2 3 | 2
A 0 4 5 4 5 5 | 4 0 4 5 5 2 | 0 2 0 2 0 2 | 0
B 3 4 5 4 5 5 | 4 4 5 5 2 | 0 1 2 0 1 2 | 0

T 0 0 0 0 | 4 5 4 5 5 0 | 4 0 5 0 1 0 | 2 1 1 3 4
A 0 0 0 2 | 3 4 5 4 5 5 | 4 4 5 5 2 | 2 3 3 3 4
B 3 0 2 | 3 0 5 5 5 | 0 1 2 0 1 2 | 0 1

T 0 0 0 0 | 2 1 3 4 | 5 5 5 | 0 0 0 0 3 0 | 1 1 1
A 1 1 1 0 | 3 2 3 4 | 5 5 5 | 0 2 0 2 3 0 | 2 2 2
B 2 2 2 0 | 3 3 3 4 | 0 1 2 0 1 2 | 3 0

strings: E A D G B E

int(+1, 0)
int(-1, 0)

R M R M

1

strings: E A D G B E

Example 17. Transcription, tablature, select picking patterns, and select fretboard diagram for third variation of "Washington Blues," (Fuller and Cotten 1992, 8:40–9:05)