

Left Hand Pressure Part 1: Shifting

It has come to my attention that a great deal of Left Hand (L.H) problems occurs during or after an upward shift. The tendency that most younger players have is to lift their fingers from the fretboard and keep pressing with the thumb during the shift. This causes a great deal of movement in the neck of the guitar. We tend to do this for reasons of security and keeping some part of the left hand on the guitar. When the neck moves around, our fingers have a task akin to “hitting a moving target”. To demonstrate the ease and accuracy of playing without a wildly moving neck, have your teacher or a friend hold the headstock of the guitar firmly while you are playing. You’ll notice that it is exceedingly easy to get around the fretboard.

What I outline here are exercises to help train your left hand to guide the shift. During the shift, the shifting finger should not lift off the fretboard, but should glide along the string with almost no pressure. The trick is going to be getting the thumb to not automatically push the neck forward and actually relieve pressure during the shift.

Lets start with a common shifting exercise:

Exercise 1:



Now, for exercise 2, when you shift, perform the notes after the shift (the A and the C#) as a muted note by not depressing the note with the first finger. During the shift, your first finger should glide along the string with no pressure being applied, and your thumb should not be squeezing as well. After playing the muted note, the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th fingers play normally.

Exercise 2:



You probably noticed that your thumb applied very little pressure during the shift. It was anticipating the “non”-note it was going to have to play with the first finger. The third exercise is similar to exercise 2, but after the muted note, we then apply a little pressure to the 1st finger to make a note.

Exercise 3:



You can also try shorter shifts using something based on exercise 2, a muted note followed by a normal one, traveling up the neck.

Exercise 4:



Experiment with this using any number of finger combinations. I'll have more on Left-hand pressure next time. Until then, don't press too hard, and “don't put your neck out there”

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