

Working on your Alternate Picking

I like working on Tremolo picking to get the arm moving naturally, and then work scales with the metronome.

Tremolo Exercise:

Slowly pick down and up on the 1st (E) string until the down and up strokes are even.....the down pick should not be heavier than the up pick or vice-versa....your picking arm should be relaxed....you really aren't moving from the elbow that much, but I like to visualize that that is where the motion starts...**NO TENSION IN THE ARM - STAY AS RELAXED AS POSSIBLE!!!** Your wrist should be loose and relaxed as well....no anchoring on the front of the guitar with your fingers...

Once you are even, try to bring the speed up slowly...try keeping it going for a minute or two at a stretch....repeat on every string...do this a little every day and you will see you "core" picking technique improve....you will find this will also improve your strumming...

Another way to work this issue is to play your scales with the metronome...

Take whatever scale you are practicing and work through it this way:

Set your Metronome at 60bpm - if you cannot play all of the subdivisions in time at this speed, slow it down! As you can execute these exercises cleanly, slowly bring up the speed....

These instructions do not assume that you know about divisions of time, so I apologize if they are a little basic.....

1. **Quarter Notes** - One pick stroke per metronome click
2. **Eighth Notes** - Two pick strokes per metronome click - count "1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and" with "1 2 3 4" being on the metronome click and the "ands" being in between metronome clicks.
3. **Triplets** - 3 pick strokes per metronome click - count "1 trip-let 2 trip-let 3 trip-let 4 trip-let" - if you start beat 1 on a down pick, beats 2 and 4 will start on up picks..
4. **Sixteenth Notes** - 4 pick strokes per metronome click - count "1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a"

I like having the students pick each subdivision 4 ways:

1. All Down Picked
2. All Up Picked
3. Strict Alternate Picking starting on a down pick (down up down up)
4. Strict Alternate Picking starting on an up pick (up down up down)

This seems to "even out" their down picks and up picks....

Try finding pieces of music that have long even streams of notes to use as examples...practicing scales and playing music in the real world are not the same. I learned two things in college the hard way:

1. Going up and down a scale with the metronome might make what you are playing cleaner, but it does not make you creative.
2. Music in the real world rarely goes up and down a scale the way that you practice it.....learning to play complete pieces of music is really the only way to cement your new technique...

Improving your right hand technique this way will also help your rhythm guitar playing...these exercises provide a "core" technique that can be expanded out to strumming chords and other rhythm guitar tasks...

Good sources of practice material could be beginning Bluegrass books, books with simple Classical Music...you can even try writing an exercise using the scales that you are practicing...it doesn't have to be genius musically, just something to work on!

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