



How to Start Playing your Ukulele



The Ukulele

The ukulele comes in various sizes:



The choice of ukulele is up to the individual. It is recommended to start on either the soprano or the concert. The soprano is the traditional size that everyone associates with the ukulele. For those that play guitar it is often found they prefer the Tenor or Baritone ukulele but the choice is up to the individual.

As you go up the sizes, the frets (spaces between the lines on the neck) increase in number giving more range of notes. They also are spread a bit wider as you move up sizes.

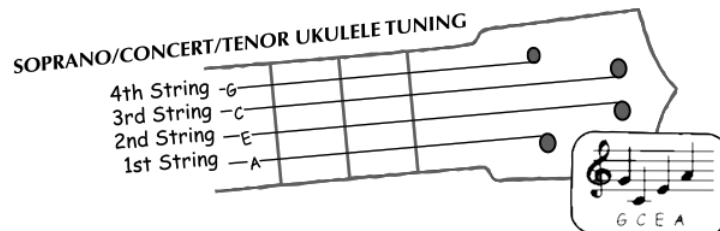
Tuning your ukulele

Each ukulele has 4 strings and must be tuned to a specific note. Most ukuleles are tuned in what they call a standard tuning (also known as C6 open tuning). The strings from top to bottom range from G-C-E-A.

The top string or fourth string of the ukulele is tuned to a G. The third string is tuned to a C. The second string is tuned to an E, and the first string or bottom string is tuned to an A. You will notice on most ukulele's that the 4th string is thinner than the 3rd string. This is due to the fact that the G is tuned at a higher octave than you would think. The tuning in pitch order takes the following format – 3rd (C), 2nd (E), 4th (G), 1st (A).

The Baritone ukulele is tuned differently to D-G-B-E

It is best to use an electronic tuner to tune up. These little devices clip onto the ukulele and change green once the correct note has been hit.





NOTE: Most importantly you must remember to tune your ukulele periodically. When a ukulele is played the strings will stretch making the ukulele out of tune. This is sometimes why some beginners give up. After every few songs or when you pick it up make sure it is in tune.

Holding your ukulele

How you hold your ukulele can vary depending on what size of ukulele you have. Typically the ukulele is placed near the elbow where the forearm holds in place. This allows your wrist to be loose and relaxed to strum the instrument.

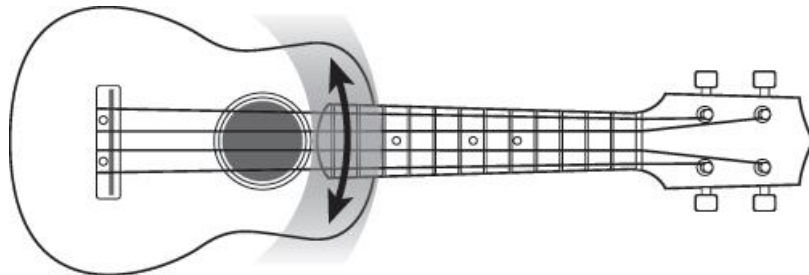
Some players prefer to have a strap attached and these come in either sling or guitar styles. If you do go for a strap, make sure the strap places the ukulele in a comfortable position that allows free movement for your wrist to strum.

Strumming the Ukulele

The Traditional strum

Traditionally the ukulele is strummed by using the index finger. Begin by holding or strapping your ukulele.

Place your right index finger (or pick) on the top string with your nail resting on it. Your index finger should be positioned on the fret closest to the base of the ukulele and not above the sound hole.



Take your finger and flick the wrist downwards. Your nail should make contact with each string as you strum down. Next flick your wrist up and use the flesh part of the finger as you come up. This is a full strum.

To get used to this just flick your wrist up and down ensuring that the right parts are touching the strings – nail down, flesh part up. Imagine having paint on your finger and you are trying to flick it off.

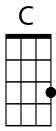
Using a Pick

Some players do prefer to use a pick, these come in various materials: felt, leather and plastic. Most prefer to use plastic as these are widely available. Which one you use is your preference as to which feels comfortable in your hand.

To hold the pick, place the pick in between your index finger and thumb. Do not grip the pick too hard as this can cause the pick to get stuck in the strings and not produce a full strum. Most strumming needs to be relaxed and come from the wrist.

Learning your first chords

The C chord



To play the C chord place your left ring finger onto the 3rd fret on the bottom string. Place your right index finger on the top string and strum down.

There should be a clear sound, if you hear buzzing then apply more pressure on the string with the left hand. This will feel hard at first but with practice your fingers will adjust. Try to keep your index finger relaxed as it passes the strings.

Your first song

Now you will use the C chord to play a song, the tune Row, Row, Row Your Boat. This whole song can be played using only the C chord.

Most music is set as 4 beats a bar. Don't worry about the terms at the moment, all you need to understand is to count 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 and continuing repeating. On each count strum down, try the following exercise using the C chord.

Exercise 1

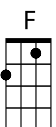
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓

Once you feel comfortable with playing this pattern we can add this to “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”.

Exercise 2

1	2	3	4
↓	↓	↓	↓
Row	row	row your	boat
Gently	down the	Stream	
Merrily	merrily	merrily	merrily
Life is	but a	dream	

The F Chord



To play the F chord, place your left index finger on the second string on the first fret. Next place your left middle finger on the top string on the second fret. While holding these strings, flick your wrist down. Again if you hear any buzzing or doesn't sound right press a little more on the strings and avoid touching the other two strings.

Try exercise 1 with the F chord and not the C chord. Repeat until you feel comfortable.

Next we shall combine the C and F chords and learn how to use both chords in a song and learn how to change smoothly to produce a small tune. This introduces a technique that is called “Muscle Memory”. This trains your fingers to move to chords without you thinking about where to place the fingers.

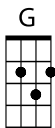
Exercise 3

[C]				[F]			
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
[C]				[F]			
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓

Keep practising exercise 3 until you feel comfortable with the chord changes from C to F and back to C. Take your time with the chord changes at first, go slow with the strumming if needs be.

Remember it is not a race, strum at a speed that feels comfortable for you to move smoothly from chord to chord. At this stage you are just training your “muscle memory” into remembering the movement and placement. In time you should be able to pick up speed.

The G Chord



The G chord can be a bit tricky as we start to use three fingers. To play the G chord place your left index finger on the third string on the second fret. Next place your left middle finger on the first string on the second fret. Now this next placement may feel out of place at first. Take your left ring finger and place on the second string of the third fret. Now press down and strum. This is the G chord.

Try exercise 1 by using the G chord.

Try the following exercise and remember it is about smooth changes not about speed. Count slowly to start and strum down on every count.

Exercise 4

[C]				[G]			
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
[F]				[G]			
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓

(Repeat)

The Up Strum

By now you should have the down strum that feels natural. Next we shall look at improving your strumming by adding an up strum.

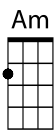
Hold your ukulele and place your fingers in the C chord position and strum down. When you complete the down strum flick your wrist up and make sure the fleshy part of your index finger touches the string. This should be even and should sound as one clean sound. This is a complete strum.

Try the following exercise using one, two, three and all of the chords you have learnt. When counting, note that the up strum is in between the count.

Exercise 5

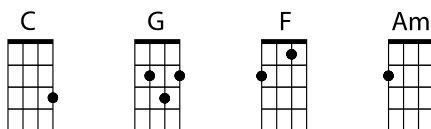
1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑
1	and	2	and	3	and	4	
↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	

The Am Chord (A minor)



The Am is a simple one finger chord. To play place your left index finger on the top string on the second fret. Now strum this using exercise 1.

Exercise 6



(Repeat with each chord)

1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑
1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑

Once you are comfortable playing these chords you should be ready to start playing popular songs from the 50's to modern day.

A key														
Bb key (= A#)														
B key														
C key														
Db key (= C#)														
D key														
Eb key (= D#)														
E key														
F key														
Gb key (= F#)														
G key														
Ab key (= G#)														