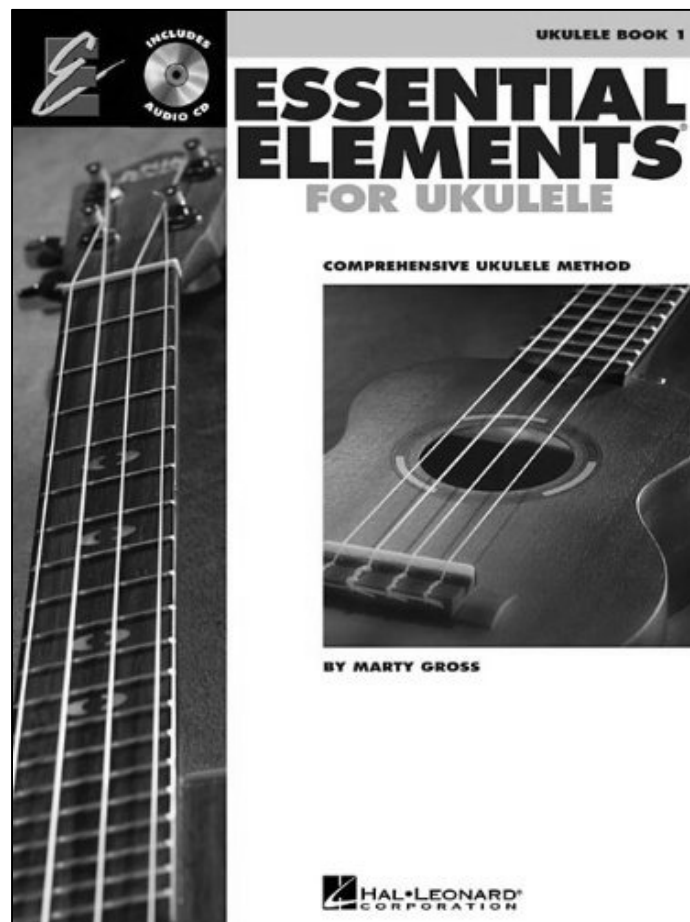


Ukulele in the Classroom

Marty Gross

Educator and Author of Essential Elements for Ukulele



Essential Elements for Ukulele
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Why Teach Ukulele in General Music

Marty Gross

www.teachukulele.com

- It is an accessible instrument on which students can gain momentum and have an immediate sense of success.
- It provides a hands-on, performance-based experience to teach the fundamentals of music in a meaningful context:
 - Chords and Progressions
 - Melody
 - Rhythm
 - Reading Standard Notation and Chord Symbols
- It offers a framework in which students can experience and discuss a variety of styles of folk and popular music.
- Ukulele playing supports singing and encourages students to gain confidence in their vocal ability.
- Teaching rhythmic strumming involves large, repetitive physical motions that provide a kinesthetic experience and promote internalizing of rhythm.
- It provides a platform through which teachers can introduce and develop concepts of intonation and tuning.
- Students can experience the basic physical and visual patterns of movement on the fingerboard that apply to all other stringed instruments.
- By dividing into groups to play melody and chords students can have a basic musical ensemble experience.
- Teaching ukulele provides additional opportunities to align your music curriculum with the National Standards for Music Education published by NAFME in June 2014. The hands-on nature of ukulele playing offers many possibilities for assessing progress toward those performance standards.
- Playing ukulele introduces students to a form of musical involvement that can be enjoyed as a lifelong pursuit. Whether they continue with the ukulele, or transfer their knowledge to another instrument, the ability to sing and play can open up positive personal and social experiences throughout their lifetime.

Choosing Ukuleles for Your Classroom

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Understanding the Sizes of Ukuleles

The size designation of a ukulele is determined by the “scale length” which is the distance from the nut at the top end of the fingerboard to 12th fret.

Ukuleles come in four common sizes:

- Soprano or Standard (13” scale length)
- Concert (15” scale length)
- Tenor (17” scale length)
- Baritone (19” scale length)

The soprano, concert and tenor all use the same tuning, called “C Tuning” or “Standard Tuning”. The strings are tuned to the notes **G C E A**. Because they share a common tuning the chord formations for these three sizes of ukulele are all the same and the instruments are interchangeable. We will look primarily at the soprano and concert sizes for classroom use.

The larger baritone ukulele normally uses a different tuning, called “G Tuning”. The strings are tuned to the notes **D G B E**. This is the same as the four highest pitched strings of a guitar. Because of that tuning the chord formations for baritone need to be different than on the other ukuleles. This makes it complicated to include baritones in a ukulele class. Because of the close similarity to guitar, baritone ukulele may provide a way to accommodate a student who would benefit from a slightly smaller and less complicated option when participating in a guitar class.

Choosing the Right Size Ukulele for Your Students

The two most common choices for classroom instruments are the soprano and concert size ukuleles. Either size can be used very successfully to teach basic playing skills. If you have the ability to spend a little bit more per instrument there are some reasons to consider choosing the concert size:

- Because of the slightly increased body size, the tone and resonance of a concert ukulele are usually superior to that of a soprano.
- Since the strings flex less the intonation of the concert instrument is generally more consistent and stable.
- Students with larger hands, or less dexterity, may be unable play the soprano successfully. Although soprano may work well up to about 5th grade, by middle school you will have some students who will physically outgrow the instrument. For that reason you may wish to have at least a few concert size instruments in your classroom set.
- Concert size is not too large and will work for smaller students as well. You cannot go wrong by purchasing ukuleles in this size.

Construction and Features

As you choose instruments to purchase you will need to consider musical quality, price and durability. You will want to look for these characteristics in the instruments you purchase for classroom use:

Laminated Wood Construction

Although solid wood instruments produce a better tone, they are significantly more expensive and require diligent care to prevent cracking and damage. The drastic changes in temperature and humidity that are common in school buildings could be devastating on these higher quality instruments. Laminated instruments are built of high quality plywood. The thin layers of veneer glued together create the body of a ukulele that is durable and stable. These instruments stand up well to awkward handling and changing environmental conditions.

Geared Tuning Pegs

The traditional, straight friction pegs that are installed on some lower quality ukuleles can be undependable and extremely touchy to use. Tiny movements of the tuning key can result in drastic changes in tuning. Do not compromise on this feature. In order to learn the fundamentals of intonation and chord sounds your students need to play on an instrument that can be properly tuned. Paying a little more for an instrument with geared tuners will help to ensure their success.

Number of Frets on the Fingerboard

Although more advanced players require a longer fingerboard, the simple 12-fret fingerboard found on many student ukuleles is sufficient for learning basic note reading and chord formations. Although there is no down side to having additional frets, it is unlikely that beginning players in a classroom situation will ever venture that far up the neck of the instrument.

Intonation

Check the intonation of the strings when they are depressed at the first three frets. If instruments play sharp in that range, whether due to construction or setup flaws, it can be virtually impossible to get the basic chord formations to sound in tune.

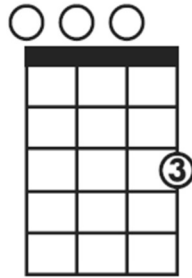
Where to Buy

Ideally your school has a working relationship with a reputable music store in your community that can help you to choose good ukuleles for your classroom. They should be willing to work with you on discounted prices if you are purchasing a classroom set of instruments. The principal advantage to buying locally is that you may need to rely on the store and their string technicians to check the setup of your new ukuleles and to service or repair them if problems or damage occur. There are dozens of online dealers who sell suitable ukuleles. Their prices can be very attractive but if you choose that option you may face more difficulty if your instruments need work immediately or in the future.

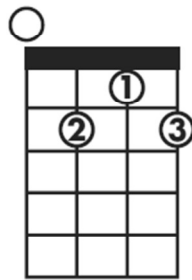
PLAYING CHORDS

Chords consist of three or more notes being played at the same time. Ukulele players often play chords to go along with singing. Press down the strings with the tips of your fingers. Strum by brushing your thumb in a downward motion across the strings. If your left-hand position is good, you will hear a clear tone from each of the four strings.

C Chord



G7 Chord



TRACK 4

4. HE'S GOT THE WHOLE WORLD IN HIS HANDS

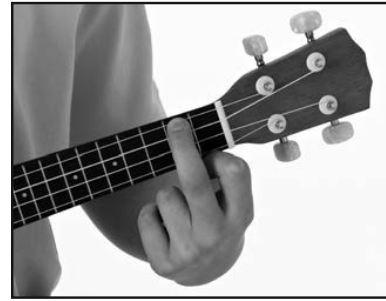
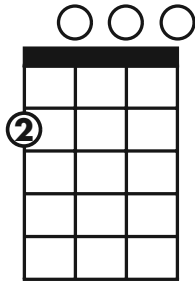
Traditional Spiritual

Musical score for "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" in 4/4 time. The score consists of three staves of music with lyrics underneath. Chord symbols C and G7 are placed above the notes. Strumming patterns are indicated by slashes (/) above the notes.

He's got the whole world _ in His hands. _ He's got the whole world _ in His hands. _ He's got the whole world _ in His hands. _ He's got the whole world in His hands.

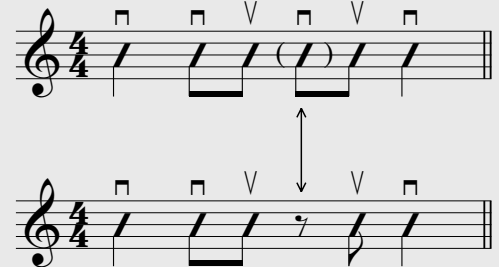
PLAYING CHORDS

Am
Chord

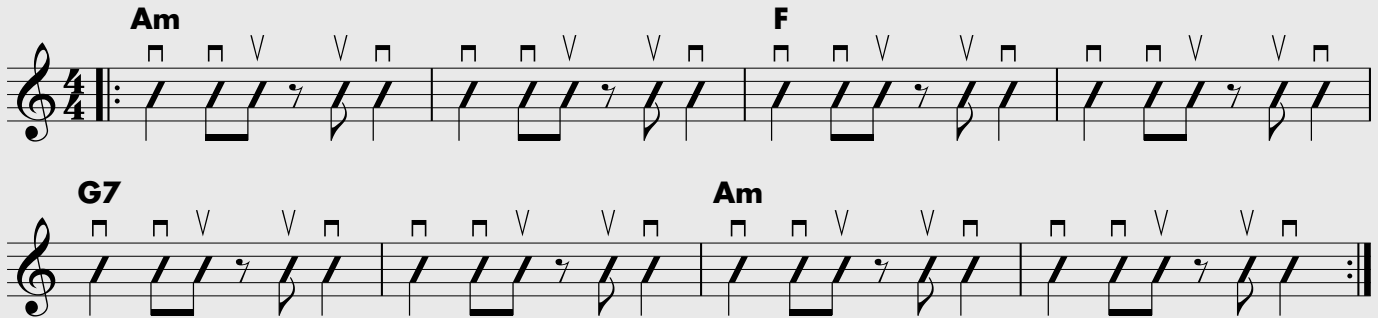


STRUM BUILDER 3

We will create a new strum pattern by leaving one downward strum out of the pattern that you have used on pages 8–10. Your right hand will continue to move up and down in even rhythm. On the third downstroke, however, you will pass over the strings without strumming them.

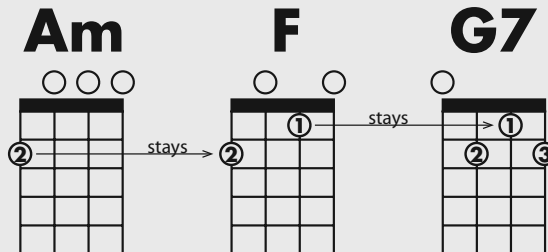


11. GIVE ME SOME SPACE Practice this strum as you use the new A minor chord.



Practice Tip

Without strumming, name aloud each chord in the exercise above as you use your left hand to finger the chord formation. Notice that your second finger does not move when you change from Am to F. Also, your first finger stays in place when you change from F to G7.



Try to keep the fingers of your left hand in place on the fretboard as much as possible. It will become easier to play chord changes when you eliminate extra movement, and it will create a smoother-sounding transition from chord to chord.

PLAYING CHORDS

Practice Tip

Use the strum you learned on the last page to play "Stand by Me." This song is based on a repeating chord pattern. Name the chords aloud as you practice the pattern; then go ahead and sing along with the chords.



TRACK 12

12. STAND BY ME – Chord Pattern and Strum



TRACK 13

13. STAND BY ME

Words and Music by Jerry Leiber,
Mike Stoller and Ben E. King

When the night has come, and the land is dark, and the moon is the
on - ly light we'll see. No, I won't be a - fraid, no I
won't be a - fraid. Just as long — as you stand, — stand by me. So,
dar - ling, dar - ling, stand — by me, oh, — stand by me. Oh,
stand, — stand by me, stand by me. —

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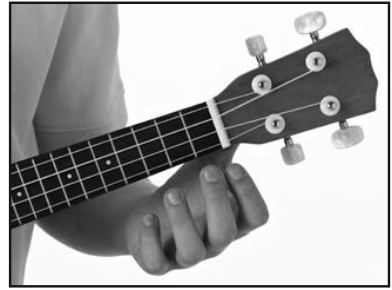
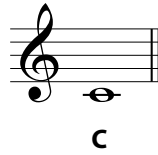
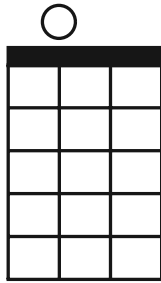
Using Your New Skills

Go back to page 7 and play "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" using the strum pattern that you learned here.

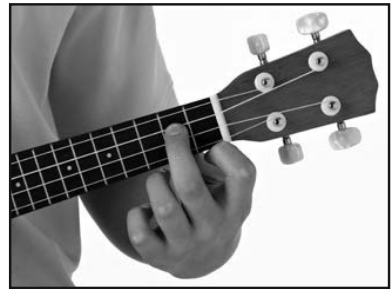
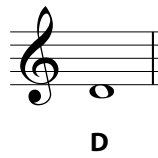
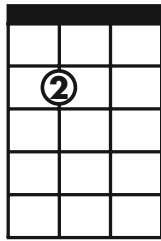
NOTES ON THE THIRD STRING

Let's play some single notes. We'll begin on the third string and start to build a series of steps we can use to play melodies. We will only pick one string at a time. Pick the string with a downward motion of your thumb or use a hard felt pick.

C
Open

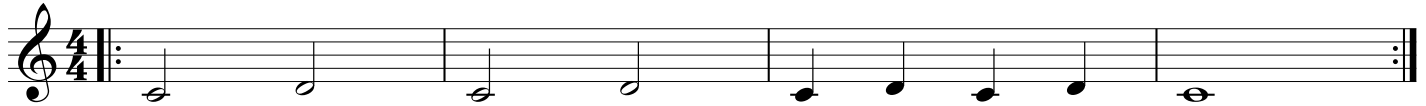


D
2nd Fret
2nd Finger



TRACK 18

18. BABY STEPS



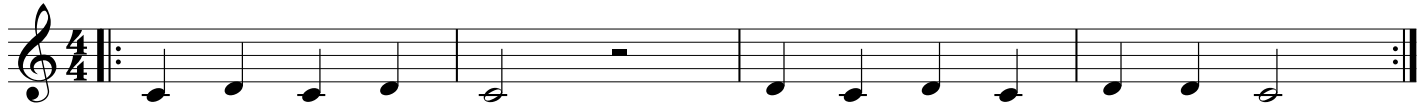
TRACK 19

19. FOUR OF A KIND



TRACK 20

20. BACK AND FORTH



ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS QUIZ – Chord Review

Play this chord pattern for your teacher. Keep a steady beat and play one downward strum for each slash mark.



C / / / / F / / / / G7 / / / / C / / / /

C / / F / / C / / F / / C / / G7 / / C / / / /

PLAYING NOTES

It's time to put together the notes you have learned on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd strings.



TRACK 38

38. ALL TOGETHER – C Scale



THEORY

3/4

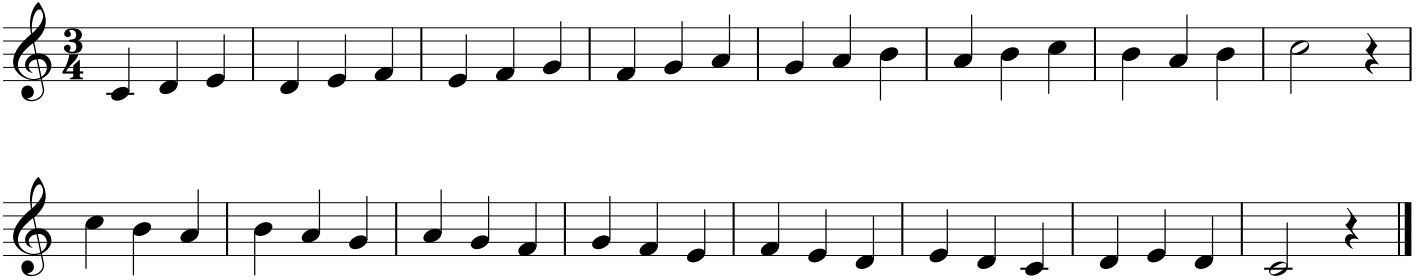
Time

Remember that the top number of a time signature indicates the number of beats in a measure, while the bottom number tells us what kind of note gets one beat. We will have three beats in each measure. A quarter note will get one beat.



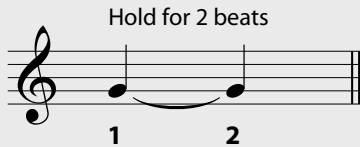
TRACK 39

39. SCALING THE HEIGHTS



THEORY

Tie



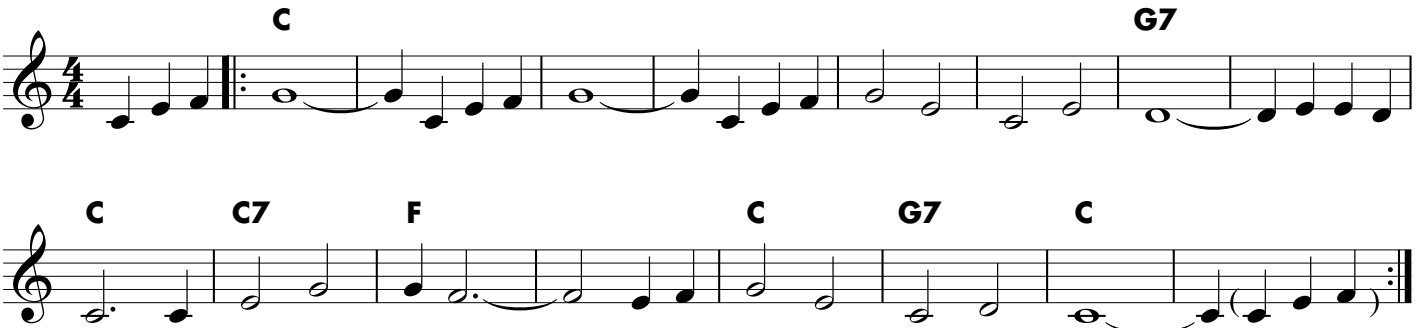
A **tie** is a curved line connecting two notes of the same pitch. Play one note for the combined counts of the tied notes.



TRACK 40

40. WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN

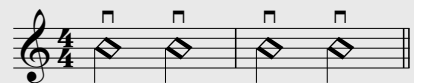
Traditional



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Practice Tip

Have half of your group pick the melody of "When the Saints Go Marching In," while the other half strums the chords. For a simple strum, use two downstrokes in each measure.



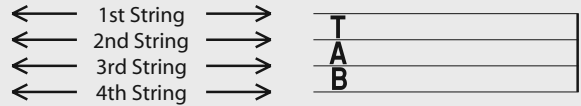
READING TABLATURE

Up to this point, we have been working on learning the symbols and vocabulary used in traditional music notation. We have used a five-line staff and a clef to tell us which notes to play. The basic ideas you have used while playing standard notation on the ukulele will apply to almost any other musical instrument that you decide to learn.

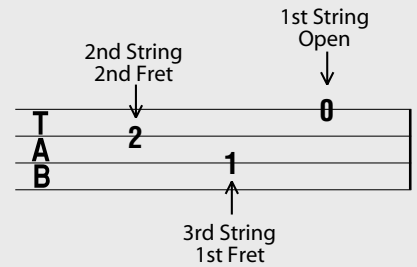
There is another method of writing music, called **tablature**, or **tab**, that is often used for instruments that have a fretted fingerboard, such as the ukulele, guitar, or banjo. Tablature is a map that shows you where to place your fingers on the fretboard in order to play the correct pitches. You may see tab used alone, or it may be connected to a traditional staff.

Each of the four horizontal lines of the tablature staff represents one string on your ukulele.

THEORY



In tab, numbers are used to indicate the fret at which you should depress the string. A zero (0) indicates an open string.



Let's see how some musical lines you already know would look written in tablature. Follow the tab as you play each example.



TRACK 61

61. C SCALE - Tab



TRACK 62

62. ROCKIN' ROBIN - Tab

Words and Music by J. Thomas

How am I doing? Check your own progress on the ukulele.

Name:	
Song:	

For each category circle the square that describes how you are doing.

	1	2	3	4
Reading Music	I am still working on following the printed music with my eyes while I play.	If I lose my place in the printed music I find it hard to figure out where we are.	If I lose my place in the printed music I can usually listen and figure out where we are.	I can follow the line of printed music with my eyes as I play. I always know where we are in the music.
Tempo	I am still working on keeping a steady tempo when I play this song.	I sometimes speed up or slow down when I play this song.	I can keep a steady tempo when I play this song with others.	I can keep a steady tempo when I play this song by myself or with others.
Chord Fingering	I am still working on learning the finger patterns for the chords used in this song.	I know some of the finger patterns for the chords used in this song. I can move slowly from one chord to another.	I know the correct finger patterns for all the chords used in this song. I need to practice moving from chord to chord.	I know the correct finger patterns for all the chords used in this song. I can move from chord to chord quickly.
Strumming	I am still working on the playing the down-up strum pattern for this song.	When I play along with others I can sometimes play the down-up strum pattern for this song.	I can play the down-up strum pattern for this song after I hear someone else play it.	I can play the down-up strum pattern for this song on my own or with others.