



***BASS
TECHNIQUE
CONCEPTS***
OF John Patitucci

COURSE BOOK

SCOTTSBASSLESSONS.COM

BASS TECHNIQUE CONCEPTS *OF John Patitucci*

Overview



Join world-renowned bassist John Patitucci as he dives into the world of technique, or more directly, the idea of *music dictating technique*. In this course, we'll cover:

- Common fingerings and finger exercises.
- Changing positions around the neck.
- Connecting triad shapes and extended triad shapes.
- Articulation and touch.
- *Sound over Speed*.
- String-Crossing.
- Major and Minor Scales.
- And much more!

Grab your bass and get ready to get your fingers moving!

Lesson 01

Getting Started

Major Scale Fingerings—One Octave

We all have to start somewhere. In John's case, it was holding his Sears-brand short-scale bass guitar like a baseball bat and learning the classic Chicago song "25 or 6 to 4" by moving his fret hand up and down the fingerboard. But thanks to the intervention of his brother, his hand position changed, he learned the classical guitar *Segovia fingerings*, and the bass world was never to be the same.

By balancing your fret hand, and keeping your thumb *behind* the neck (roughly behind the second finger), the following fingerings for the major scale naturally develop. It's one of the first fingerings you may have used; everything is "lined up and it's easy to play". Let's look at the G Major Scale:

Example 01 One Octave Major Scale Fingering No. 1

N.C.(G)

3

continued →

LESSON 01 (continued)

But there are other places we can play the same scale. For example:

Example 02 One Octave Major Scale Fingering No. 2

N.C.(G)

1 3 4 1 3 4 2 1

T A B 3 5 7 3 5 7 4 5 5 4 7 5 3 7 5 3

Note that in the above fingering, you can instead use your second finger rather than the third finger, adding a shift as you move from the third to the fifth fret.

Major Scale Fingerings—Two Octaves

We can also play more than one octave on the fretboard. When playing two octaves, at some point you'll need to shift your fret-hand position as you move up the fretboard. Here's one approach:

Example 03 Two Octave Major Scale Fingering No. 1

N.C.(G)

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

T A B 3 5 2 3 5 7 4 5 7 4 5 7 9 11 12

SHIFT SHIFT

continued →

LESSON 01 (continued)

While that fretboard position and fingering is a great way to play a scale, what can be more important when soloing or improvising is the **sound** that you're producing. The same note can be played in different locations on the fretboard, each with its own tonality. Here's the same scale, incorporating just one shift in position:

Example 04 Two Octave Major Scale Fingering No. 2

N.C.(G)

SHIFT

T
A
B

3 5 7 3 5 7 9 10 12 9 10 12 9 11 12

Example 04 Two Octave Major Scale Fingering No. 3

N.C.(G)

SHIFT

T
A
B

3 5 7 8 10 12 9 10 12 9 10 12 9 11 12



"When I do anything fingering-wise, it's always based on sound, not expediency, not to make it easier, it's sound first."

LESSON 01 (continued)

Minor Scale Fingerings—One Octave

We can also find a simple fingering for the minor scale that's also "lined up and easy to play." Here's the G Natural Minor Scale:

Example 05 One Octave Minor Scale Fingering No. 1

N.C.(Gm)

The Dorian Scale

The **Dorian Mode** (Dorian Scale) is a Natural Minor Scale with a *major* 6th instead of a flattened 6th. In the G Dorian Scale, we raise the Eb (the $\flat$ 6th) up one half step (one fret) to E $\sharp$. Let's look at two fingerings:

Dorian Mode Fingerings

N.C.(Gm)

N.C.(Gm)

continued →

LESSON 01 (continued)

Although the notes are the same in the two Dorian examples, notice how they *sound* different. This is because of the string length that creates the notes—shorter string lengths in the first fingering (higher up on the fretboard); longer in the second (lower on the fretboard).

Homework

Play the same note on each string to hear the difference in sound. For example, play an open G on the first string, then on the 5th fret of the second string, then the 10th fret of the third string, and finally the 15th fret of the fourth string. Same note, different sound!



"When you can use the longer string length, use it."

"Sonically, it's foolish to play everything closed just because you're not thinking about sound."

Discovering Your Own Fingerings

You may find that the sound you're looking for might come from playing a note high up on the low (fourth) string, rather than further down on the neck on a different string.

Homework

Practice playing your scales on just *one* string.

Another way to find a good fingering, "start at the top (the highest note of the scale) and work your way backwards". Here's an E Major Scale:



"It's really about where you wanna end up. If you end up on an inefficient [fingering], it doesn't help you."

Example 06 Major Scale on One String

N.C.(E)

T													
A													
B	12	11	9	7	5	4	2	0	2	4	5	7	9

LESSON 01 (continued)

The Dominant Scale

Another useful scale John learned was the **Dominant Scale**, which is just the Major Scale with the 7th degree lowered by a half step (one fret):

Example 07 Dominant Scale

N.C.(G)

7th

Chord Forms/Chord Tones/Arpeggios

As John's (and his brother's) playing progressed, he was next introduced to chord forms, which are often referred to as chord tones, or more commonly **arpeggios**. They served as an introduction to *harmony*. The four basic arpeggios are the maj7, dominant 7, m7, and half diminished ($m7^b5$):

Arpeggios

Gmaj7 G7 Gm7

Gm7^b5 Gm7^b5 Gm7

continued →

LESSON 01 (continued)

Learning shapes that can be played anywhere on the fretboard, and recognizing the *sound* of each shape, is an invaluable tool to have in your bass “kit.” Looking at the last two bars of the previous example, we can take that minor 7th arpeggio and move it up (and down) the fretboard. The shape remains the same, but avoids any open strings:



“I learned that the patterns on the fingerboard help me memorize sounds... Once I learned a shape, I was ‘gone’ I ‘had it’—you could put [that shape] anywhere.”

Example 08 Minor 7th Arpeggio Pattern

Example 08 displays two systems of bass guitar notation, each showing a minor 7th arpeggio pattern across three measures. The notation includes a staff with a bass clef, a tablature line with fret numbers, and a string indicator (T, A, B).

System 1:

- Measure 1: **G[♯]m7**. Notes: G[♯]4, B4, D[♯]5, G[♯]4. Fret numbers: 4, 2, 1, 4. String indicator: T, A, B.
- Measure 2: **A[♭]m7**. Notes: A[♭]4, C5, E5, A[♭]4. Fret numbers: 2, 1, 4, 1. String indicator: T, A, B.
- Measure 3: **B[♭]m7**. Notes: B[♭]4, D5, F5, B[♭]4. Fret numbers: 2, 2, 4, 2. String indicator: T, A, B.

sim. (simulacrum) is indicated below the third measure.

System 2:

- Measure 4: **B[♭]m7**. Notes: B[♭]4, D5, F5, B[♭]4. Fret numbers: 4, 2, 1, 4. String indicator: T, A, B.
- Measure 5: **C[♭]m7**. Notes: C[♭]4, E5, G5, C[♭]4. Fret numbers: 2, 1, 4, 1. String indicator: T, A, B.
- Measure 6: **C[♯]m7**. Notes: C[♯]4, E5, G5, C[♯]4. Fret numbers: 2, 1, 4, 1. String indicator: T, A, B.

LESSON 01 (continued)

Jazz: The ii-V-I

Connecting shapes is another must-know skill for bass players. There's no better place to start than with the unquestioned "king" of jazz progressions, the **ii-V-I**.^{*} Using arpeggios, let's look at a **ii-V-I** in the key of D Major:

Example 09 ii-V-I in D Major

"Basic" V chord

Em7 A7 Dmaj7

T 7 5 4 7 6 7 5 7 4 5 5

A 7 5 4 7 6 7 5 7 4 5 5

B 7 5 4 7 6 7 5 7 4 5 5

Once you have the basic shapes of the **ii-V-I** under your fingers, a common variation to the progression is to alter the **V** chord (the A7 in this case). One common way is to add a flattened 9th:

Example 10 Altering the V Chord

b9

Em7 A7b9 Dmaj7

T 7 5 4 7 6 8 7 5 4 5

A 7 5 4 7 6 8 7 5 4 5

B 7 5 4 7 6 8 7 5 4 5

^{*}For more information regarding the number system for referring to chords, please see "FUNCTIONAL THEORY FOR BASSISTS, Vol. 1" in the SBL Course Library.

LESSON 01 (continued)

Finally, try “hopping around” as you play the **ii-V-I** arpeggios to give your bass line variety. Notice that the patterns apply in any key:

Example 11 Playing a ii-V-I Around the Fretboard

D Major

Em7 A7 Dmaj7

G Major (Version 1)

Am7 D7 Gmaj7

G Major (Version 2)

Am7 D7 Gmaj7

G Major (Version 3)

Am7 D7 Gmaj7

LESSON 01 (continued)

Example 11 (continued)

B $\flat$ Major

13

Cm7 F7 B $\flat$ maj7

8 6 5 8 8 7 10 8 6 5 8 7



Closing Thoughts

- Learn the forms in one octave in a 3-to-4-fret area on the fretboard.
- Practice until your hands *know* those shapes, so you'll never need to actively "think" about them again.



"My idea with learning the neck and learning technique at all was to get freedom so that I could get around on the instrument and play through sounds, and make the changes and not sound like I was just playing 'stuff.'"

Lesson 02

Articulation & Touch

Applying Technique

The difference between *making music* and just playing your bass is a result of **articulation** and **touch**. When playing notes, arpeggios, etc., there are a number of things to consider, including the note length, slides, hammer-ons and pull-offs, shakes, and many more. Take this simple one-string bass line:



*"Music dictates technique.
Not the other way around."*

Example 01

N.C.(Em)

The musical notation for Example 01 is a one-string bass line in 4/4 time. It consists of four measures. The first measure has a note on the 3rd fret (G) with a slide up to the 7th fret (B) and a bend. The second measure has a note on the 7th fret (B) with a slide up to the 12th fret (E) and a bend. The third measure has a note on the 12th fret (E) with a slide up to the 17th fret (A) and a bend. The fourth measure has a note on the 17th fret (A) with a slide up to the 22nd fret (D) and a bend. The fretboard diagram below the staff shows the fret numbers for each note: 0, 3, 7, 12, and an 'x' for a natural harmonium.

It's important that you're comfortable shifting up and down the fretboard. And let *musical considerations* drive your articulation, don't just add articulation for articulation's sake—try to make your bass lines “sing.”

Let's next look at a few exercises for you to work on specific articulations.

continued →

LESSON 02 (continued)

The following exercises incorporates hammer-ons and pull-offs. With the exception of the first note of the first and third measures, it's all your left hand; there's no right hand involved:

LESSON 02 Example 02 Hammer-ons and Pull-offs I

♩ = 62

N.C.(Em)

0 3 0 3 0 3 5 3 | 0 3 0 3 0 | 0 3 0 3 0 3 5 3 | 0 3 0 3 0

It's also important that you exercise your ring and pinky fingers, which are traditionally weak when it comes to hammer-ons and pull-offs:

LESSON 02 Example 03 Hammer-ons and Pull-offs II

♩ = 62

N.C.(Gm)

3 5 6 5 3 6 5 6 | 3 5 6 5 3 6 5 6 | 3 5 6 5 3 6 5 6

3 5 6 5 3 6 5 6 | 3 4 6 4 3 6 4 6 | 3 4 6 4 3 6 4 6 | 3 4 6 4

LESSON 02 (continued)

Common Mistake!

Don't believe that **time** is all in the right hand. No! The *left* hand has to play time, too. Otherwise, there's no time feel. Your hands must work *in unison*, or you'll miss the subtleties.



"There's a reason why in music, when we hear somebody play a melody [on bass] and it sounds like they're singing, it's because they're employing note length [and] articulation."

Major Triads

Although we've looked at arpeggios already, the basis of arpeggios are **triads**—groups of three notes that are the smallest harmonic groupings of notes. They're produced by "stacking" intervals of *thirds*—the Root, 3rd, and 5th. For example, in the C Major Scale, our notes would be C, E, and G.

Let's next look at some fingerings and articulations using major triads:

Example 04 Major Triads (with Open Strings)

♩ = 62

E A D G C F B $\flat$ E $\flat$

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
T								
A	0	2	2	4	0	0	2	
B	0	2	2	4	0	0	2	

continued →

LESSON 02 (continued)

Here's the same exercise using *closed* positions*:

Example 05 Major Triads (Closed) I

♩ = 62

E A D G C F B $\flat$ E $\flat$

T 1

A 0 2 2 4 0 5 7 5 2 5 5 2 3 5 5 2 5 3 2 3 5 3 3 0 3 1 1 1 3

B 0 2 2 4 0 5 7 5 2 5 5 2 3 5 5 2 5 3 2 3 5 3 3 0 3 1 1 1 3

Example 05 Major Triads (Closed) II

♩ = 62

E A D G C F

T 1

A 0 2 2 4 0 5 7 5 2 5 5 2 3 5 5 2 5 3 2 3 5 3 3 0 3 1 1 1 3

B 0 2 2 4 0 5 7 5 2 5 5 2 3 5 5 2 5 3 2 3 5 3 3 0 3 1 1 1 3

Consider practicing this string-crossing on its own!

Example 06 String Crossing

♩ = 62

C F

T 5

A 2 5 2 2 5 2 5 2 5 2 3 3 2

B 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 5 3 3

*Although played on a 5-string bass, the fifth string is ignored, so the low E note is played on an open string.

LESSON 02 (continued)

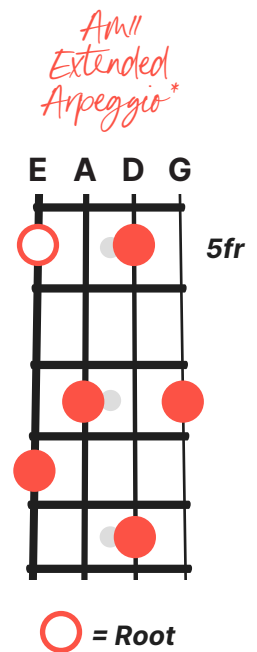
Tip

Fingerings are *not* always simple. It's up to you to work out what's the best way on the fretboard to accommodate all the notes you're trying to play. If you find the only way to play the notes is "awkward," *isolate those notes* and practice them on their own to develop your muscle memory.

Let's look at an extended Am11 arpeggio in the piece of music, and come up with a fingering. Start by working slowly to come up with a fingering that works for you. Here's one option:

Example 07 Extended Am11 Arpeggio

Am11



Consider breaking the pattern up rhythmically, too. For example:

Example 07 (Rhythmic Variation)

Am11

Experiment by placing *accents* (emphasis) on different notes as you play; first emphasize the sixteenth notes, then the dotted eighth notes—it "tricks" your hands into getting comfortable with the fingering.

*All fretboard diagrams reflect a standard 4-string bass guitar.

LESSON 02 (continued)

Two-Octave Fingerings for Major & Minor Triads

Major Triad

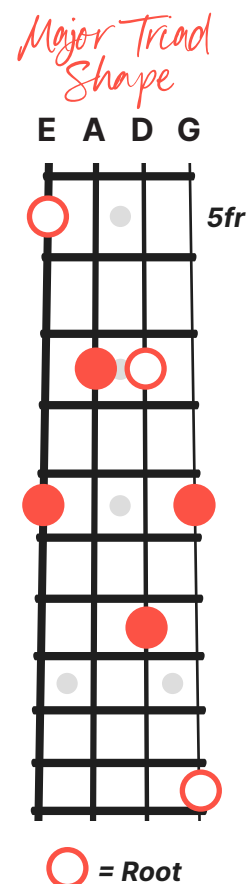
John teaches his students a pattern that covers a major triad over two octaves, and utilizes just the first and fourth fingers for the fingering. It's a moveable shape that can be played almost anywhere on the fretboard. Here it is in the key of A Major:

Example 08 Two Octaves Major Triad Shape

A

T
A
B

5 9 7 7 11 9 14



And as before, break up the rhythm to help get the shape under your fingers:

Example 08 (Rhythmic Variation)

A

T
A
B

5 9 7 7 11 9 14 14 9 11 7 7 9 5 5 9 7 7 11 11 9 14 14

continued →

LESSON 02 (continued)

Minor Triad

The **Minor Triad** pattern is similar to the major pattern, but contains a $\flat 3$.
Let's look at rhythmic variations using the minor pattern:

Two-Octave Minor Triad Shape

Am

T
A
B

5 8 8 7 7 7 7 10 10 9 9 14

*Finger 4 can alternatively be used.

Example 09 (Rhythmic Variation I)

Am

T
A
B

5 8 7 7 7 10 10 9 14 14 9 10 10 7 7 7 8 5

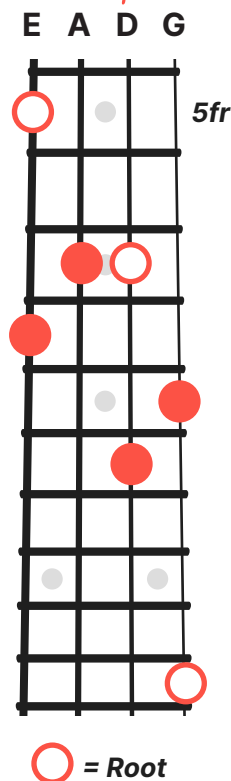
Example 09 (Rhythmic Variation II)

Am

T
A
B

5 8 7 7 8 7 7 10 0 7 10 9 14 9 10 9 10 7 10 7 7 8 7 0 5

Minor Triad Shape



Closing Thoughts

- For all exercises, start at a slow tempo to get the shape under your fingers, and gradually work up to a tempo that's comfortable. Regardless of that tempo, it's critical that you establish a *pulse* as you practice, and work to play at that pulse. Avoid the "convenient *rubato*" when practicing!

Lesson 03

Warming Up

Establish a Routine

Even the best professional athletes don't start a game without a solid warm up, and neither should you. And as your playing progresses, so too will your warm-up routine. But, any good warm-up routine should consist of:

- String crossing exercises.
- Scales.
- Arpeggios. } *Major, Minor and Dominant 7ths*

Be sure to mix things up by using different patterns!



"Arpeggios are the best thing."

String Crossing Exercises

It's important that you get your picking hand and fretting hand in sync. String-crossing exercises are a great way to make that happen. Use whatever plucking technique is most comfortable to you—alternating fingers, single-finger*, etc. Your goal should be an **even** sound, full and unhindered.

"Your picking technique should be sonically motivated choices. What sound does it sound like?"

Let's take a look at a simple E Minor Triad:

Example 01 E Minor Triad Shape No. 1

Em

Measure	T	A	B
1	0	3	2
2	7	2	3
3	0	3	2
4	7	2	3

*Listen to the playing of James Jamerson for what can be accomplished using just *one* finger.

LESSON 03 (continued)

Let's look at additional fingerings for the same triad. Notice the different *sound* that each produces:

Example 01 E Minor Triad Shape No. 2

Em

0 1 4 4 7 7 3 0 0 3 7 7 7 7 3 0

Example 02

Em

0 1 4 1 4 7 7 3 0 0 3 7 5 7 7 7 5 7 3 0 0 3 7 5 7

Tip

Let your fingering choices be motivated by the sound. Note that sometimes you'll want to play higher up on the fretboard and use the lower strings as opposed to lower on the fretboard and play the higher strings.



"Try to connect your technical 'things' with music."

LESSON 03 (continued)

Here are simple exercises* that alternate between Em and Am triads. Use these as a basis, but in your playing, mix up the fingerings, fretboard placement, and the rhythm and plucking techniques. The goal is **fluidity** as you play, and fret-hand/plucking-hand coordination:

Example 03

$\text{♩} = 62$

Em Am Em Am

4

Em Am Em Am

8

Em Am Em Am

*This exercise is an expansion of the first measure of the larger exercise presented in Example 05 on page 23 of this lesson.

LESSON 03 (continued)

Continuing as before, we can modify our fingerings in a number of ways:

Example 04

$\text{♩} = 62$

Em Am Em Am

5

Em Am Em Am

Next, let's look at the exercise in its entirety, and keep our fingerings on the low end of the fretboard, utilizing open strings:

Example 05

$\text{♩} = 62$

Em Am Dm Gm Cm Fm

7

Bbm Ebm Abm Dbm Gbm Bm

LESSON 03 (continued)

General Performance Notes:

- Play with feel throughout; don't play "mechanically."
- Each note should be even, but have some *weight*.
- Use open strings to shift position, if desired.

As an example, let's look a little deeper at Bars 11 and 12* of Example 05, and look at ways we can accommodate playing the notes of the triads. In Bars 1 and 2, we use the open string to shift position, and remain somewhat lower on the fretboard. Bars 3 and 4 stays in one position over the fretboard, and allows for the final B note to be played on the low string:

Example 05 Fingering and String Variations

The image displays two systems of musical notation for bass guitar, each consisting of a staff with a treble clef and a three-string bass line (T, A, B). The first system shows two measures. The first measure is for a Gbm triad (G2, Bb2, D3) and the second for a Bm triad (B2, D3, F#3). The first system uses open strings (0) and frets (4, 7) to play these triads. The second system shows the same two measures but with different fingering and string variations. The first measure for Gbm uses frets 2, 4, and 4 on strings T, A, and B respectively. The second measure for Bm uses frets 4, 5, and 7 on strings T, A, and B respectively. The notation includes fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4) and string numbers (T, A, B) to indicate the specific technique used for each note.

While these exercises may seem simple and easy, in actuality you're training yourself to make choices sonically, and also to find different fingerings. And this example only uses *minor* triads!

* John inadvertently refers to these measures as Measure 6.

LESSON 03 (continued)

Here's are the same notes, played in time and as eighth notes. Again, strive for fluidity and evenness in the notes:

Example 06

$\text{♩} = 62$

Em Am Dm Gm Cm Fm

4

Bbm Ebm Abm Dbm Gbm Bm

Perhaps add in some dynamics:

Example 07

$\text{♩} = 62$

Em Am Dm Gm Cm Fm

4

Bbm Ebm Abm Dbm Gbm Bm

LESSON 03 (continued)

Closing Thought

— When playing scales, triads, etc. — *make music with it!*



"Scale notes are just like colors on a painter's palette. You can put 'em in different orders and different shades; you can do different things with them... You should never get stuck playing scales the same way all the time."



