Holding the Mandolin

While sitting in an upright position, hold the mandolin with the neck tilted slightly upwards using the thigh and torso for support.

The *plectrum* is held between the thumb and the first joint of the index finger, loosely but securely. The hand is held in a loose open fist. When playing melody the movement should come from the wrist in fluid relaxed strokes and not the arm. The underside of the forearm can rest on the edge of the mandolin just above the bridge. These are general guidelines which the experienced mandolin player can stray from as he chooses to articulate certain ideas and movements. The pick should be fairly rigid. On mandolin a flexible plectrum produces a thin tone and limits volume.

The other hand is used to both support the neck of the mandolin and to note the strings. The neck is cradled between the thumb and first finger while the strings are noted by pressing down the strings with the finger tips just behind the frets. Generally the fingers should be arched with none of the joints locking or straightening out. Fret-board Finger positions:

Fret No. →	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
E String →	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C
A String →	A#	B	C	C#	D	D#	E	F
D String →	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	B
G String →	G#	A	A#	B	C	C#	D	E
Fingering →	**1st Finger**		**2nd Finger**		**3rd Finger**		**4th Finger**	

We can number our fingers 1-4 (index, middle, ring & little finger) excluding the thumb. Generally the first finger is responsible for noting the 1st and 2nd frets, the second finger the 3rd and 4th, the third finger the 5th and 6th and the fourth finger the 7th and 8th frets. Again at times these rules can be bent should you have to move quickly from one note to another or for better articulation or phrasing.

Tuning the Mandolin

Tuning is done by tightening or loosening the strings by turning the tuning heads. The eight strings of a mandolin are tuned in four double courses, each course referred to as one.

An electronic tuner can be used to tune a mandolin but it is of great benefit to learn how to tune by ear. To gauge an appropriate pitch a *tuning fork* can be used. This is a portable devise and reference which when tapped against a firm surface vibrates at 440 cycles per second producing an A note.

The second A string can be tuned to correspond with this note. When noted on the seventh fret each open string can be tuned the same as the next lower string.

Fret No. →	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
E String →			G		A			
A String →					D		E	
D String →		E			G		A	
G String →		A					D	

Another way of tuning is to build a comparison around the notes of a chord:

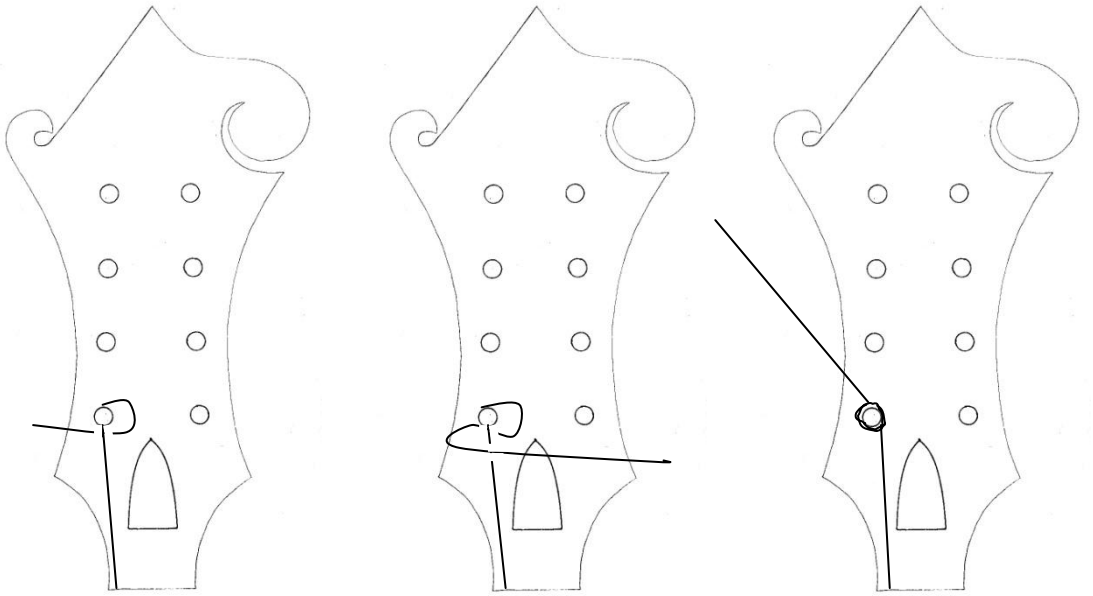
- Play the open G string simultaneously with the noted 5th fret (G) of the D string and compare
- note the second fret of the A string to play the B note (part of the G triad) and compare
- Add the high G note by playing the third fret on the E string and compare

This approach to tuning can be used over different chord structures right across the fret-board.

Changing Strings

When strings become old and worn the sound becomes dull and hard. Strings should be changed regularly, every two to three months depending on amount of play. When changing a full set of strings it is wise to replace them one course at a time, tuning up each time before removing another course. This maintains a level tension on the mandolin making it easier to keep the new strings in tune.

The strings are wound around the tuning head posts which are turned up or down by the tuning heads:



1. **2.** **3.**

1. Hook the loop or ball end string to the tailpiece and then run the string through the hole in the corresponding tuning post, leaving little slackness in the string. Bring the string around the post towards the middle of the peg-head and under itself where it first enters the tuning post.

2. Loop the end of the string back over towards the middle of the peg-head where it enters the tuning post.

3. Wrap the end of the string over the top of the tuning post and pull gently keeping the string taut. Turn the peg head so the string begins to wind to the inside of the post, locking around itself. Bring the string slowly up to pitch.