

READING 3

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Chapter 1: Exploring Second Position

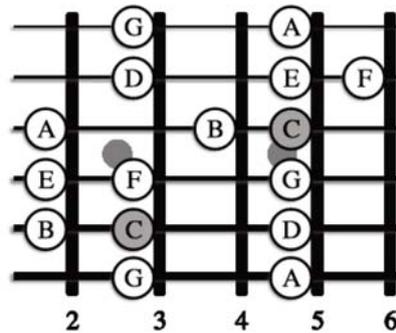
Previously in the Guitar Reading series, we focused on reading in open position in multiple keys and fifth position in C major. In this unit we will learn how to approach reading in second position, why and when you might need to read in this position, its advantages and disadvantages, and some of the key centers which are particularly well suited for it.

Playing in second position means your left hand remains in a relatively fixed location with your first finger at the second fret; each subsequent finger plays the adjacent fret. This means the left hand fingers play mostly in frets two through five. Occasionally, however, it is necessary to reach temporarily into an adjacent fret for a certain note (often in a particular key center).

Natural Notes

The following two diagrams show the natural notes in the second position. Ex 1.1 displays the notes on a fretboard, while Ex. 1.2 indicates their position on the staff.

Ex. 1.1



Ex. 1.2



Chapter 2: Second Position: Advantages/Disadvantages

There are certain advantages and disadvantages to playing in second position. Some of these depend on context: you will find that sometimes it makes more sense to play in second position than in open position; at other times, another position would be a better choice. Quite often, multiple positions are available as equally viable choices. The following are some of the main considerations to help you decide when to play a passage in second position:

Tone & Timbre

Playing in second position opens up new possibilities in tone (balance of frequencies) and timbre (quality of sound determined by the relative levels of harmonics), which are different from those that occur in open position, or positions higher up the neck.

Play the following exercise in open position, paying special attention to the sound.

Ex. 1.3



Play the exercise in second position this time. Use the fingerings provided and notice the difference in tone and timbre:

Ex. 1.4



Playing in second position can often yield a warmer, fuller sound. This is especially noticeable with notes at the fourth and fifth frets which would otherwise be open strings when playing in open position. Fretting these notes and playing others at a higher position on the fretboard on a thicker string produces a markedly different sound. This is often desirable in both solo and ensemble playing. On the other hand, however, certain tunings and situations call for more of an open, ringing or bright sound, best achieved with open strings ringing and notes fretted on lighter gauge strings closer to the nut.

Articulation & Control

Because the open strings are recreated at the fifth and fourth frets when in second position, you have greater control and additional possibilities for articulation for these notes. For example, since all notes are fretted when playing in second position you can now use vibrato on any or all of them. You now also have greater control over damping strings, determining note duration, and achieving certain articulations (such as staccato and slurs), using your left hand fingers.

Certain slurs are just not possible in open position. For example, it is impossible to hammer on to, or pull off from any open string. These, along with particular slides and bends, become feasible in second position. Conversely, some slurs which work well in open position or other positions are awkward or impossible in second position.

Ex. 1.5



Ease of Playing

Second position is a *closed* position, meaning there are no open strings; rather, all notes are fretted. This may cause greater fatigue in the left hand, especially on guitars with higher action or higher gauge strings. It can also seem less forgiving, and challenging to achieve a legato sound or a ringing, *campanella* effect (where notes are plucked on different strings so that one continues to sound while others are played).

Other considerations include the potential for added demand on the fourth finger of the left hand, and potential difficulties strumming or playing rhythm parts due to the lack of open strings, wide frets, and (in certain keys) awkward chord shapes.

Key Centers

Second position lends itself well to playing in certain keys, meaning that some scale patterns (either partially or in their entirety) fall naturally under the fingers. This can be a great advantage in reading, as it allows you to focus your attention on the notes on the page and allow your fingers to easily find the notes on the fretboard with minimal left-hand shifting.

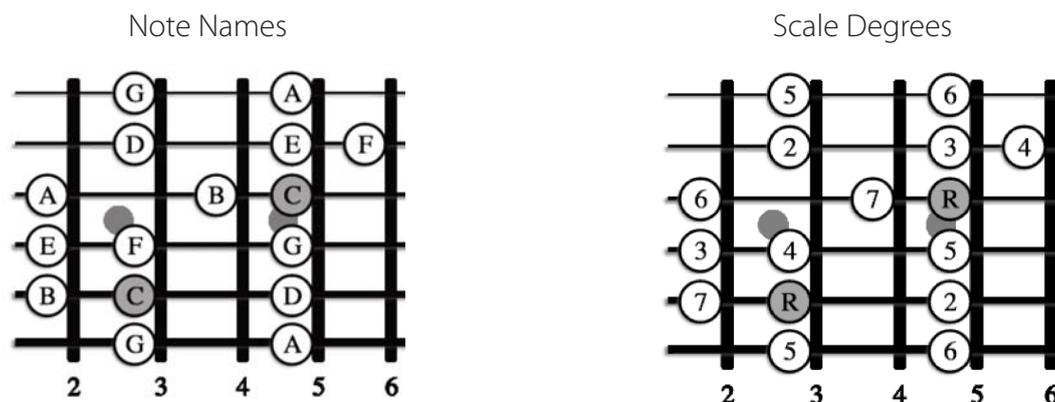
Conversely, it can be challenging to play in certain keys in second position. For example, $A\flat$, $D\flat$, $B\flat$, $E\flat$ are somewhat cumbersome, to varying degrees. Other positions along the fretboard will lend themselves better to these keys. In the following chapters, we'll examine in greater detail the key centers that function well in second position.

Chapter 3: Playing in Second Position, C Major

The two fretboard diagrams below show the notes in second position derived from the C major scale, rendered first as note names, then as scale degrees.

Ex. 1.6

C Major, Second Position



Play the following C major scale in second position, paying attention to left-hand posture and finger placement. Remember, your left hand fingers should be hovering over the fretboard, not curled into the palm. They should be spaced out one per fret rather than bunched together, and remain close to the strings rather than straightened out or pointing away from the neck. Keep them relaxed and ready to play.

Ex. 1.7



Read through the following exercises in second position:

Ex. 1.8



Ex. 1.9



Chapter 4: Real World Charts: Finger Picked Arpeggios

Many real-world charts will require you to perform finger picked arpeggios. Often these charts will only provide the chord progression along with the melody, but no specific pattern for the arpeggio/right hand:

Ex. 1.12

$\text{♩} = 100$

C G Am F C G F G

5 C C/E G Dm Am G F G
mp

9 C C/E G Dm Am Em F G

13 C G Am F C G F G
f

17 C G Dm F Am G F C

Here are some steps you can take to find a workable pattern:

- Look at the time signature and tempo of the song. This will give you some indication of which of the patterns in your repertoire you could possibly use as a base to start from.
- Are there stylistic indications in the score (e.g. pop ballad, folk song, country, etc.)? Certain styles have obvious rhythmic signatures or typical patterns that are commonly used. For example, if the composition is a medium/up-tempo country song in 4/4, you will most likely use a fingerstyle pattern with eighth notes and alternating bass.
- Look at the construction of the melody. The guitar accompaniment should support the melody. Analyze the rhythmic ebb and flow of the melodic construction; you want to avoid rhythm patterns that interfere with crucial aspects of the melodic rhythm.
- Take note of how many sections are in the composition (e.g. intro/verse/chorus/bridge). Often you want to add variation to a pattern when a section changes, or have a completely different pattern for various sections. The character of the sections or the orchestration will usually dictate this. One example may be a pop song that has a verse construction with medium intensity (low pitch range, long rhythm values) while the chorus construction has high intensity (high range, short rhythm values). Another example may be when a verse contains only vocals and guitar, while the chorus is orchestrated with bass, drums and maybe keyboards. You want to reflect these changes in character and orchestration with your choice of patterns.
- Once you have established a workable pattern, look for phrase endings and transitions between sections, as these are areas where you can add some variety to the pattern (similar to how a drummer would add a fill).

On the following page is an example of the annotations which should be added to the chart to make it “gig-ready” and repeatable. Some of these annotations reflect decisions which you might make on your own after carefully considering the aforementioned issues. Other decisions might be made in rehearsal, or after listening to audio reference material, etc.

Notice how the annotated version makes it easy to recall important elements of the song, the roadmap (sections and the order in which they occur), any necessary changes in fingerpicking pattern, dynamics, hits, etc.