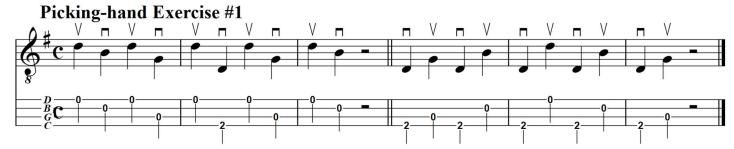
## Basic Picking-Hand Exercises by Ron Hinkle

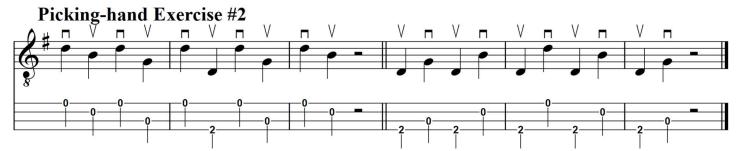
As I have learned more and more single-string jazz patterns on the plectrum banjo, I have become increasingly aware of the picking-hand intricacy required. While you can "get by" with haphazard, devil-may-care technique, some things just *require* more precise control. Compare this with the "bowings" that Classical violinists and cellists use; the first step in learning a new piece of music is in annotating the most-efficient bow movements (in pencil of course, as the next conductor may have a different approach!). This is high-level, exceedingly-difficult stuff; we banjoists can learn a thing or three from the Classical world!

Here are some exercises that I have been doing for a while to improve my picking technique and set myself up for success with jazz patterns. These will prepare you well for learning *Duo-Style* technique—the best picking-hand exercise I have *ever* found; try that one when you have these mastered. These are essentially lessons in down and up picking, and in skipping from string to string. It is naturally different from a tremolo, but will improve your tremolo technique as well.

Here is the first one; pay strict attention to the picking indications, and take your time. Start slowly and gradually build up your speed. You should of course use a metronome for all of these exercises (start at quarter note = 60 BPM). Play until you're comfortable with it:



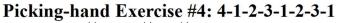
And now, #2; all I have done here is to switch the picking. The skill of skipping to an inside string with an up-stroke is essential to jazz improv technique. Start as slowly as you need to, and work up your speed. Strive for absolute accuracy; no fat-fingering or missed pickings allowed!

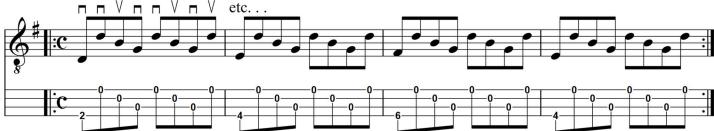


Next up is an exercise I used to do (back in my Army days); *Reveille!* You could think of this as a "wake-up call" (aka warm-up) for your right hand. I did not indicate picking because I want you do it both ways; *down-up-down-up* throughout, and *up-down-up-down* throughout. The *speed* is "however slow you need to" up to "as fast as you can play it." The important thing is picking consistency; stay with whichever pattern you start with all the way through. Bugle calls in general are a great exercise; if you want more variety, do a web search for "bugle call sheet music."



And lastly, here is the exercise I have spent the most time with in recent years. I have been working on a full-length composition using only this picking pattern; this is the first four bars of it. The working code name is "4-1-2-3-1-2-3-1" (the string numbers). Notice that the note on the 4<sup>th</sup> string changes; this is simply to add musical interest to what can be a boring exercise:





That's it for now. I will be posting other exercises as I complete them. I also hope to do a slow-motion video of my picking hand.