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- Improve your strumming and chord changes
- Become a better fingerpicker



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for all of the exercises

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***Ukulele
Exercises***
FOR
DUMMIES
A Wiley Brand

by Brett McQueen

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Cheat Sheet

Introduction

Whether you've played ukulele for years or just started playing a couple of weeks ago, *Ukulele Exercises For Dummies* is a practice book for anyone who wants to become a better ukulele player. With hundreds of exercises and dozens of songs, you have a practice roadmap for improving your chops and becoming a more confident ukulele player. Through the exercises in this book, your fingers will come out stronger and more agile, and your mind will be sharpened and opened up to new and exciting ways of playing the ukulele through the different styles and techniques to which I introduce you.

One of the best parts of the ukulele is that it has such a relaxing, peaceful and joyful aura when played. Because the ukulele originates from Hawaii, some people say it carries the Hawaiian *Aloha Spirit*. It's hard to listen to someone play the ukulele and not crack a smile or grin from ear to ear (I dare you to try). In this way, this book isn't about rigorously practising an overwhelming amount of exercises; it's about equipping you to go from practice to playing those songs that carry the joyful spirit of the ukulele.

About This Book

Ukulele Exercises For Dummies isn't necessarily meant to be read from cover to cover like a normal book. The cool thing about this book (if I do say so myself) is that it's written so you can look over the table of contents and flip to the chapters that cover the techniques and aspects of playing the ukulele that interest you most. In fact, as you practise, you might choose several different exercises to practise at a time from multiple chapters.

At the same time the chapters of this book are organised and developed the way they are for good reasons. When learning about music, different concepts and ideas tend to compound and build on each other. This is only natural, and you should expect it. For example, in Part II 'Becoming a Better Strummer', [Chapter 3](#) addresses a lot of foundational ways of thinking and approaching the strumming exercises that come in [Chapter 4](#), 5 and 6. The goal throughout each part of the book is to develop and improve a particular aspect of your technique, so at times, there is a gradual but noticeable progression of growth throughout each chapter. In this way, if you do come across something that seems unfamiliar, flip a few pages back because it was most likely covered a little earlier. When later chapters pull on information taught in earlier chapters, I do my best to include a reference for you.

There are *a lot* of exercises in this book. The exciting thing about these exercises is that almost all of them are designed so you can come back to them even after you've 'mastered' the techniques. I say 'mastered' because I've been playing ukulele my entire life and I still use the exercises in this book in my practise sessions. These exercises will always assist as a way to challenge your fingers and improve your overall playing technique.

Because of the amount of exercises presented throughout this book, avoid tackling all of the exercises from a chapter in one sitting. It's best to take a couple of exercises from a chapter and spend time practising those for a day, week or month - however much time you need - before moving on. It's okay to mix and practise exercises from multiple chapters during your practice times, but if you do this, I recommend using a practice journal to write out the things you are practising to keep

track of your progress. In [Chapter 1](#), I discuss more about how to use a practice journal.

Overall, with this book, I want to help you unlock the parts to playing the ukulele that allow you to approach your playing more creatively and expressively, so you are able to go beyond the pages of this book and be more inspired as a musician and artist. To that end, along with the practice exercises, I include many songs in a variety of popular ukulele styles that you are able to learn and apply your skills.

Conventions Used in This Book

One of the most challenging aspects to learning and progressing at the ukulele can be sifting through the musical terms and lingo that gets thrown around. In this book, when I introduce an important, new term, I *italicise* the term and follow it with a definition. At the same time, there are a few common terms that show up over and over again that are worth going over since they can be confusing if you're a relatively new ukulele player.

For example, when I refer to your *fretting hand*, I'm talking about the hand that forms the chord positions and presses against the strings on the ukulele fretboard. If you're a right-handed player, your fretting hand is your left hand. If I refer to your *strumming hand* or *picking hand*, I'm talking about the hand that strums or plucks the strings. If you are a right-handed player, this is your right hand. For left-handed players, reverse hands.

All of the exercises in this book are written for a ukulele tuned in standard tuning: g-C-E-A. If I refer to the *top string* of the ukulele, I'm talking about the g-string, and

if I refer to the *bottom string* of the ukulele, I'm talking about the A-string. Additionally, if I refer to the *1st string*, I'm talking about the A-string; the *2nd string* indicates the E-string; the *3rd string* indicates the C-string; and lastly, the *4th string* indicates the g-string.

In the context of strumming the ukulele, the terms *down* and *up* refer to the direction to strum across the strings. Strumming down requires you to strum starting from the top string to the bottom string. Strumming up requires you to strum starting from the bottom to the top string.

The terms *high* and *low* are often used in this book to refer to the pitch and positioning of a note on the ukulele fretboard. When I say a note is played *high* on the neck, I mean that the note is played on the fretboard of the ukulele closer to the sound hole. If a note is played *low* on the neck, it is played closer to the headstock. Thus, notes played higher up on the fretboard are higher in pitch, whereas notes played lower on the fretboard are lower in pitch.

There are two separate ways to indicate which fingers are used for an exercise. The numbers 1-4 are used to indicate the fingers in your fretting hand - often used for chord diagrams and in certain music notation. The number 1 indicates the index finger, number 2 the middle finger, number 3 the ring finger and number 4 the little finger (or pinky). When referring to your picking hand, four letters are used. The letter *p* indicates you pluck the string with your thumb, *i* indicates the index finger, *m* indicates the middle finger and *a* indicates the ring finger. This way of identifying fingers is unpacked more in the pages ahead.

Lastly, in an effort to present the exercises, this book makes use of ukulele tab and notation, chord and scale

diagrams, and metronome markings, which are discussed and explained in more detail in [Chapter 1](#).

What You're Not to Read

Each exercise in this book is created and presented with as much necessary information as possible, so if you wanted, you could play the exercises without having to read the surrounding text. At the same time, the explanations surrounding the exercises often give you helpful pointers and help you understand what you're playing on a deeper level, which gives you the ability to take the concepts behind the exercises and apply them to actual pieces of music.

More importantly, be sure to listen to the audio demonstrations that go along with the exercises. The audio is the biggest aspect to this book. These audio recordings provide a demonstration so you can get a really good, quick idea for how the exercise should sound and feel when you play it. Additionally, you can use these audio examples to play along with me. Notice that I play all of these audio examples to a metronome so you can get an idea of how to practise with a metronome too, if you have one. In [Chapter 1](#), I talk more about using a metronome in your practice.

Foolish Assumptions

You don't have to have a lot of experience playing the ukulele in order to use this book. Throughout the book, I provide detailed explanations of the exercises to ensure you're up to speed with what's being presented. Still though, because this is a practice book, I try to spend less time talking and more time getting the ukulele in your hands with practice exercises. If you need

information on things like learning basic chords, tuning the ukulele, or buying a ukulele, I highly recommend checking out *Ukulele For Dummies*.

The biggest assumption I do make is that you have a soprano, concert, or tenor ukulele that is tuned in standard tuning (g-C-E-A). Unfortunately, if you have a baritone ukulele tuned to D-G-B-E, or if you tune your ukulele to another tuning, you will be unable to follow along with the majority of the exercises presented in this book.

How This Book Is Organised

There are three main focuses to this book: strumming, fingerpicking and learning the ukulele fretboard. Within each of these focuses, there are many different techniques to learn and explore. Depending on the technique, each part of the book can look a little different in terms of what kind of exercises are used. Check out the following descriptions to get a bird's eye view of how this book is organised.

Part I: Getting Started with Ukulele Exercises

I get you up to speed on the things you need to know to get the most out of the exercises in this book. If you've been playing ukulele for awhile, chances are some of this information will be familiar for you. In [Chapter 1](#), I recommend and explain the use of three different practice tools that make your practice sessions more productive. I also review how to read ukulele notation and tab, chord diagrams, scale diagrams and rhythm charts, which helps you easily follow along with the

exercises in this book. In [Chapter 2](#), you start warming up your fingers and hands with stretches, breathing exercises and strength-building exercises. You also pick up the ukulele and play through several practice exercises.

Part II: Becoming a Better Strummer

You strengthen your rhythm, timing and ability to find the right strumming pattern for any song. Because strumming is a form of rhythm, you learn how to count, feel and play to the beat. I teach you exercises that break down strumming into its simplest parts, and then, I show you how to add to these simple strumming patterns to make them more complex and interesting sounding for your listener. Throughout this part, you learn how to play more than a dozen songs in different styles. By the end of this part, you will be able to build your own strumming patterns that's right and fits for whatever song you're playing.

Part III: Becoming a Better Fingerpicker

There are a couple of different styles of fingerpicking on the ukulele. The first way is *rhythmic fingerpicking* ([Chapter 8](#)), where you fingerpick a repeating pattern that allows you to pick the chords and sing the melody of a song. The second way is *fingerstyle* ([Chapter 9](#)), where you take beautiful and intricate sounding classical guitar pieces and perform them on ukulele. The third way, which is another form of fingerstyle, is often referred to as *solo fingerpicking* ([Chapter 10](#)), where you fingerpick the melody of a song that is normally sung. Throughout this part, you practise a variety of picking exercises that

improve the speed, flexibility and fluidity of your picking hand.

Part IV: Mastering the Ukulele Fretboard

To master the ukulele fretboard means to learn the notes of the fretboard and how you relate those notes with one another in meaningful ways to play songs. In this part, you learn how to build major and minor scales across the neck of the ukulele (Chapters [11](#) and [12](#)), and then you see how those notes relate to one another by building chords in different positions across the ukulele fretboard ([Chapter 13](#)). This means you won't ever have to look at a chord diagram again. You also pick up some soloing techniques in musical styles like rock, blues and jazz ([Chapter 14](#)).

Part V: The Part of Tens

In case you're not familiar, in any *For Dummies* book, there is a special part of the book called the Part of Tens. This part breaks away from the exercises in the rest of the book to give you some extra, free-of-charge tips about improving your practice sessions ([Chapter 15](#)) and learning about how to take those steps to taking your ukulele skills and performing for an audience ([Chapter 16](#)). Both of these chapters include ten quick tips that you can apply to your ukulele playing today.

Accessing the Audio Tracks

Ukulele Exercises For Dummies comes with 256 audio tracks – each one an essential aid to mastering the songs, techniques and exercises that I cover in the book.

If you've purchased the paper or e-book version of *Ukulele Exercises For Dummies*, just go to www.dummies.com/go/ukuleleexercises to access and download these tracks. (If you don't have internet access, call 877-762-2974 within the U.S. or 317-572-3993 outside the U.S.) Each exercise in the book which ties into an audio track has the track number above it in a black box, so you'll always be able to match what you see on the page to what you're hearing.

Icons Used in This Book

In the left-hand margins of this book, you'll find the following icons:



This icon reminds you of important information that is essential to playing the ukulele. This is the stuff you never want to forget.



Every now and then I go a little deeper in my explanations of certain musical terms, techniques, or ideas. This icon indicates interesting information that is a bit more technical. Not essential, but you might find it interesting.



These quick pointers help make the exercises and songs easier to play or understand.



I use this icon to caution you of anything that could cause discomfort, pain or injury to you or your ukulele.

Where to Go from Here

Flip right over to [Chapter 1](#) if you need a refresher on some of the basics. To get your hands warmed up and ready to practise, start at [Chapter 2](#) for some stretches and exercises. If you are a relatively new ukulele player, after going over [Chapter 1](#) and 2, I recommend starting at Part II 'Becoming a Better Strummer' as this will get you playing some of the 'staple' ukulele songs right away. If you've been playing ukulele for awhile, or if you already have a pretty specific practice routine, skip around through the book to pick and choose exercises you'd like to add to your routine to improve different aspects of your technique.

Part I

**Getting Started with
Ukulele Exercises**





Go to www.dummies.com/go/ukuleleexercises to listen to audio tracks.

In this part . . .

- ✓ Learn three different practice tools to make your practice sessions more productive.
- ✓ Review ukulele tablature and the different sorts of diagram you'll come across.
- ✓ Pick up tips on how to warm up for practice.
- ✓ Pick up your uke and get started on practice.
- ✓ Go to www.dummies.com/go/ukuleleexercises to listen to audio tracks accompanying this book.

Chapter 1

Preparing to Practise

In This Chapter

- ▶ Looking at three essential practice tools
 - ▶ Brushing up on ukulele tab and notation
-

Many exciting exercises lie ahead in the coming chapters. With your hard work and practice, you're going to see amazing improvements in your ukulele playing, but before picking up your ukulele, take a moment to cover some essentials. In this chapter, you discover three helpful practice tools that enable you to get the most out of the exercises in this book, and you review how to read ukulele tab and notation, which allows you to easily follow along with the exercises I present in this book.

Equipping Yourself with the Right Practice Tools

While the following tools aren't necessary or required to enjoy the exercises in the pages ahead, they can make your practice times more productive and effective.

Tuning up with a chromatic tuner