

MUSICAL SYMBOLS

Music consists of two basic elements: **rhythm** and **pitch**. Pitch is notated using a set of lines (and spaces) called a staff. The higher a note appears on a staff, the higher its pitch; the lower a note appears, the lower its pitch. At the beginning of the staff is a clef sign. Bass music is written in the bass clef or “F clef.”

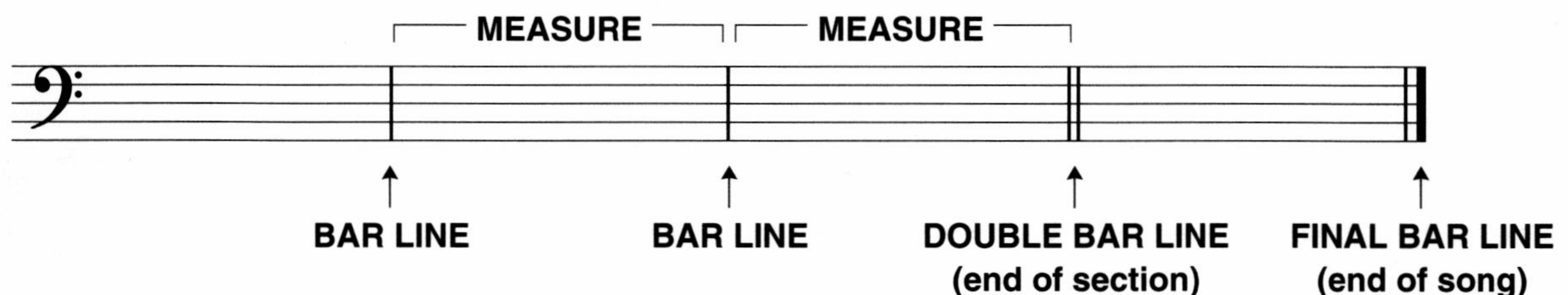


The two dots in the clef sign surround the line on which the pitch “F” is written; hence the term “F clef.”

The musical alphabet uses the letters **A, B, C, D, E, F**, and **G**. After G, the sequence repeats starting with A. In bass clef, the notes written on the **lines** of the staff are G–B–D–F–A. You can remember this sequence as “Good Boys Do Fine Always.” The notes on the **spaces** are A–C–E–G. “All Cows Eat Grass” may help you remember this.

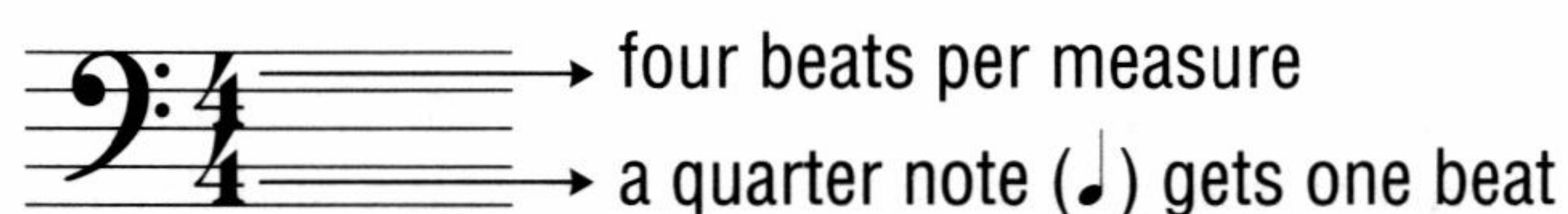


Rhythm, the other basic element of music, is notated using **measures** (also known as “bars”), which contain a set number of beats (the pulse of the music). Each measure is separated from the next by a **bar line**. A double bar line is used to show the end of a section of music. The final bar line is used to show the end of a piece of music.



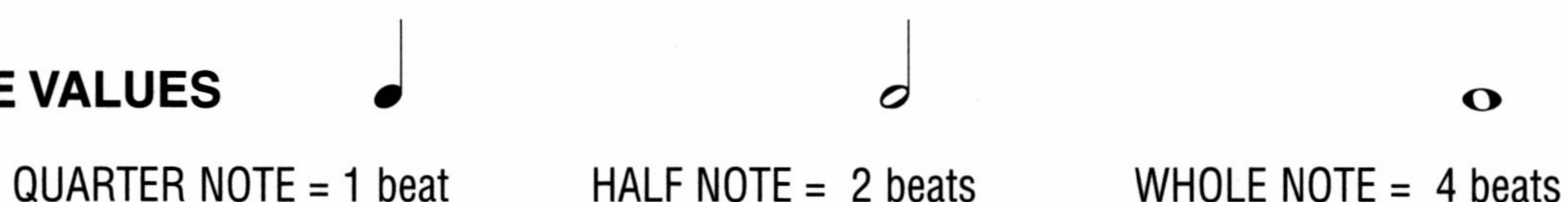
The number of beats in each measure is indicated by the **time signature**, which appears at the start of a piece after the clef sign. The time signature looks like a fraction. The top number tells us how many beats there are in a bar, and the bottom number tells us what type of note is to be counted. Most of the examples in this book will be in 4/4 time.

TIME SIGNATURE



In the first part of this book, you will see three different kinds of note values. They are:

NOTE VALUES



RIGHT-HAND TECHNIQUE

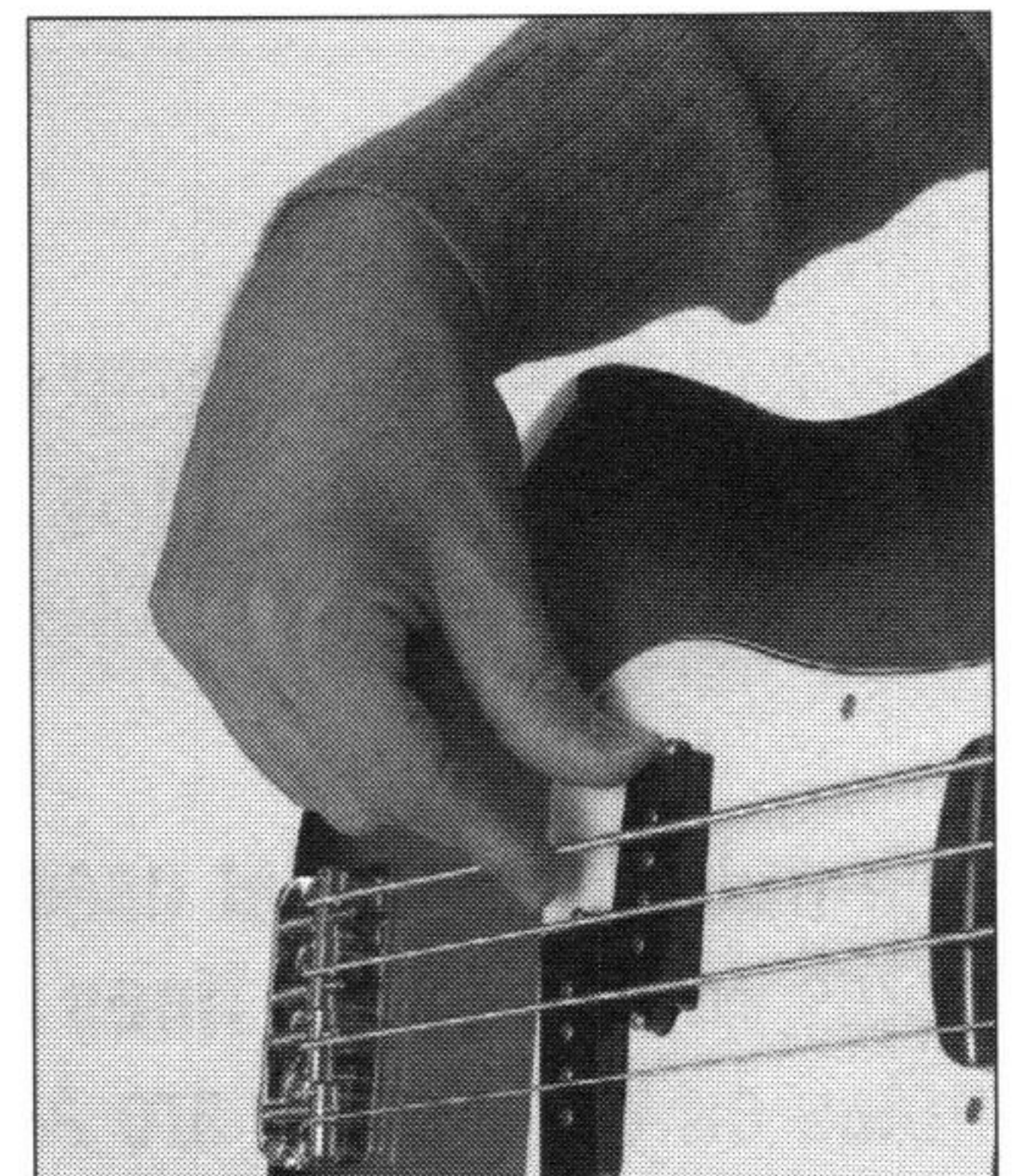
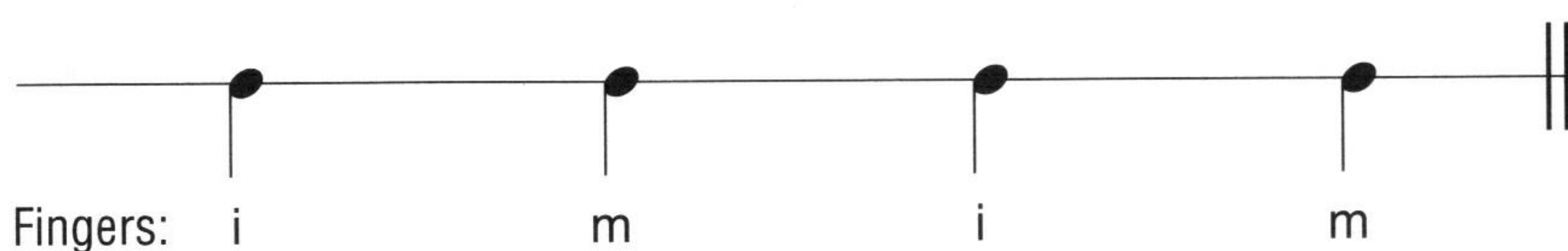
FINGERSTYLE

The most common approach for playing electric bass is fingerstyle—i.e., using the index (i) and middle (m) fingers of the right hand to play the strings. The fingers give you a warm, full sound that can be controlled easily by developing touch sensitivity.

- Let your fingers hang comfortably, straight over the strings; don't curl them.
- Start by resting the tip of the thumb gently on the pickup.
- Using the fleshy pad of your finger, place it on top of the string.

E STRING

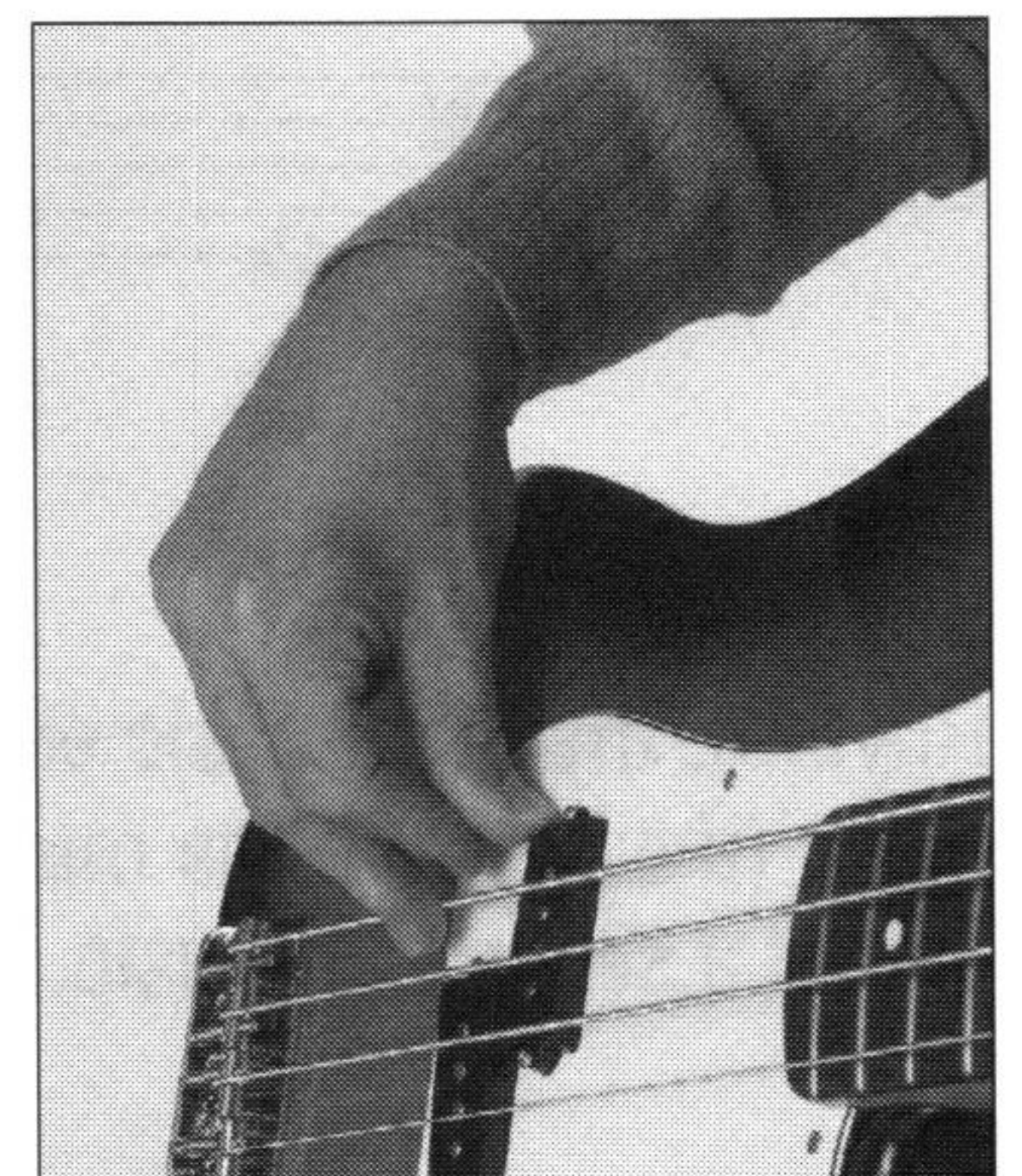
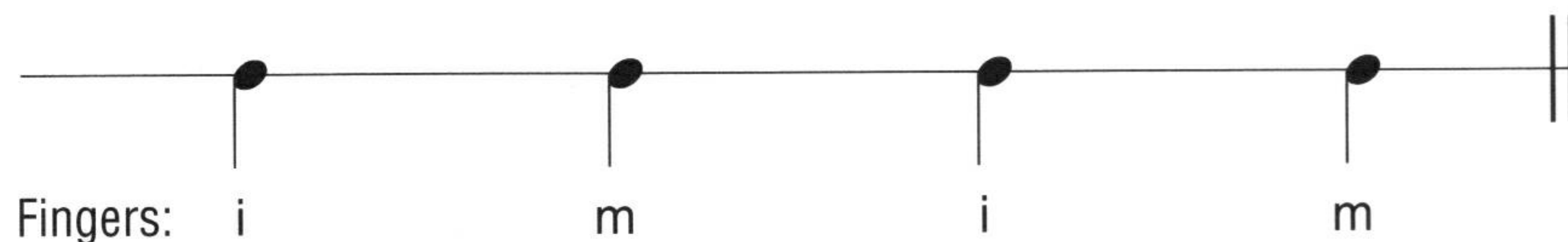
Gently push down and across the top of the E string, letting your finger come to rest against the pad of the thumb. Alternate strokes between the index and middle fingers. Repeat this until you feel comfortable. Play lightly; too much force will give you a distorted sound.



right-hand position

A STRING

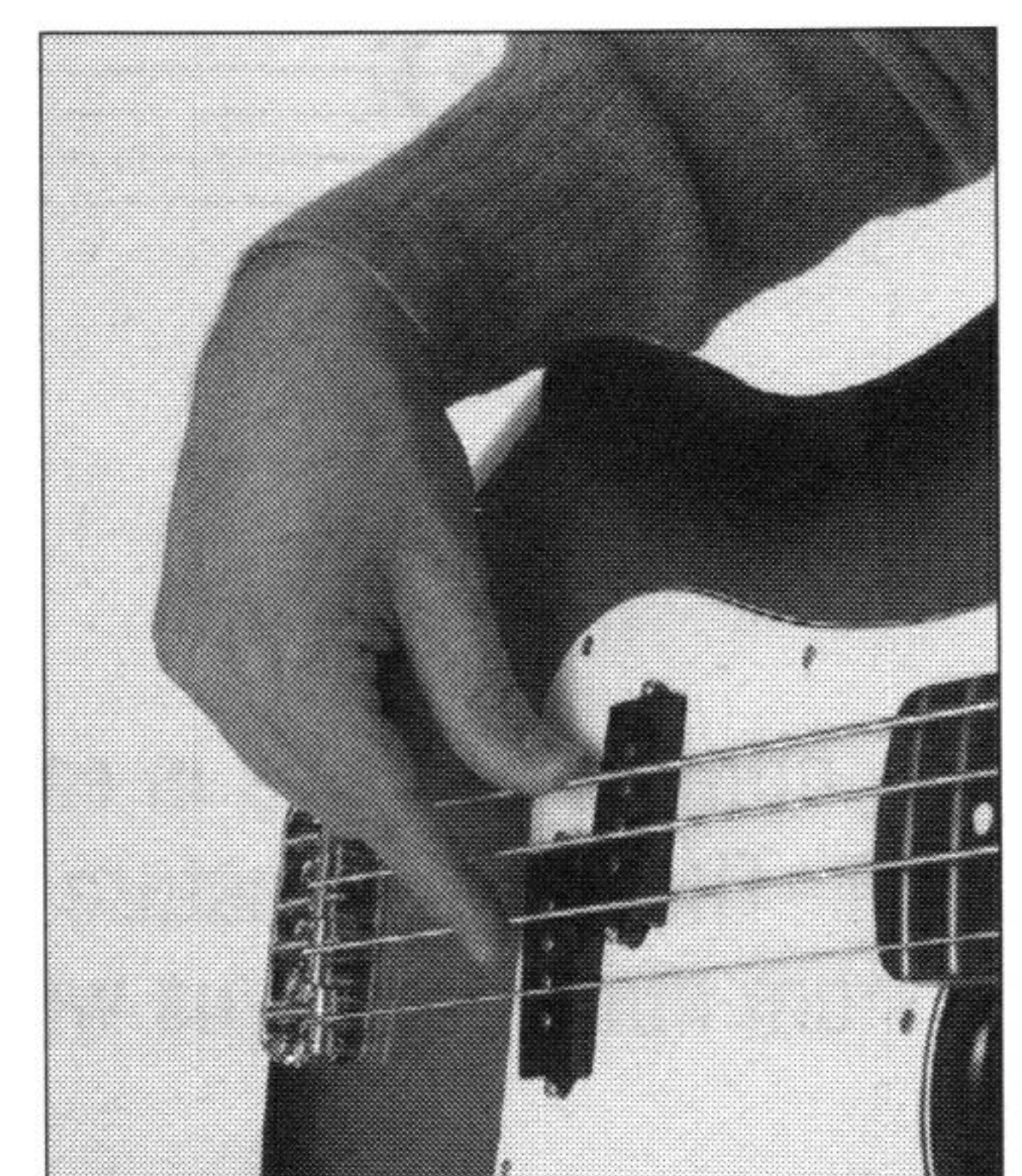
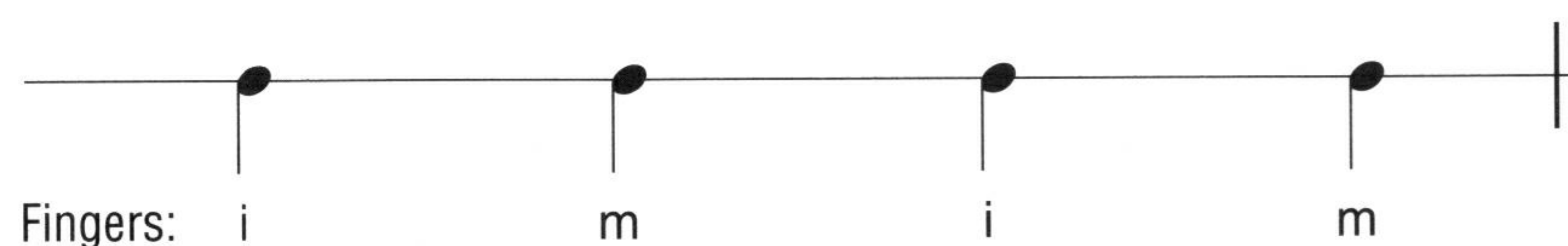
Move your finger to the A string. Push down and across the string, letting your finger come to rest against the E string at the end of the stroke. Alternate fingers; repeat several times.



end of fingerstroke

D STRING

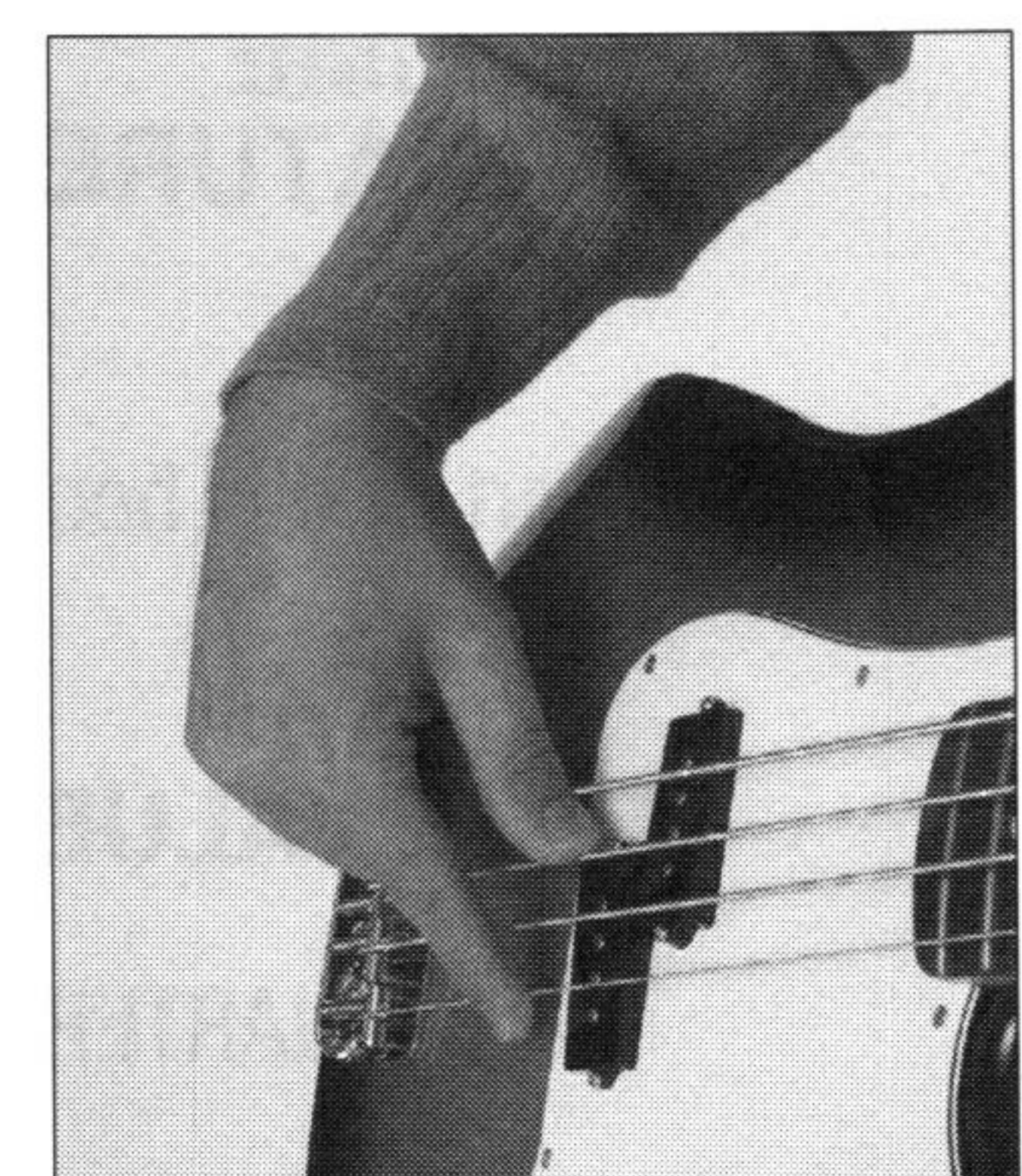
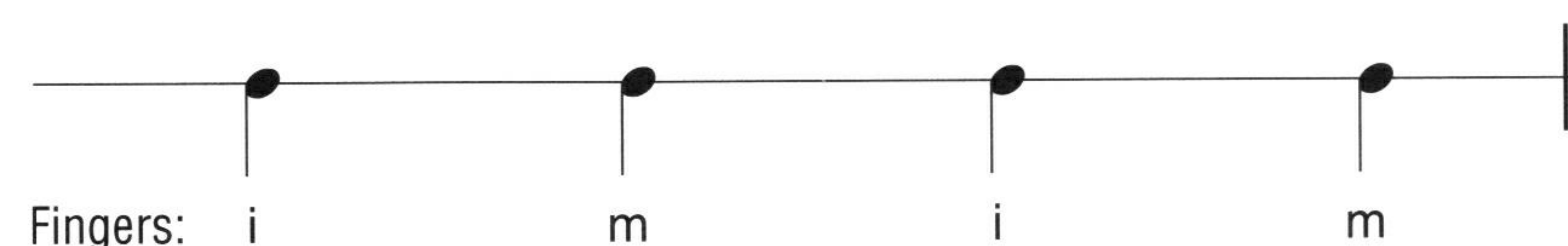
Drop your thumb to the E string. Move your finger to the D string, push down and across, letting your finger come to rest against the A string. Alternate fingers and repeat.



muting the E string

G STRING

Drop your thumb onto the A string, and make it lean against the E string. This mutes both strings to prevent unwanted ringing. Put your finger on the G string. Push down and across the string, letting your finger come to rest against the D string. Alternate fingers and repeat.



muting the E and A strings

TIP: As you alternate fingers, place each finger down for the next stroke just slightly ahead of time, to mute the previous note. This will give you a more controlled bass sound.

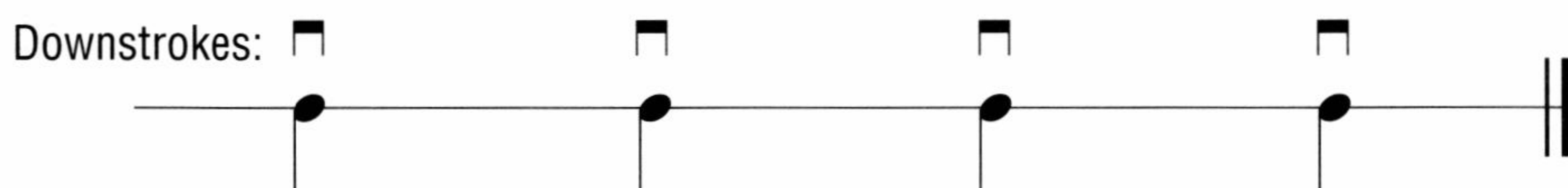
PICK STYLE

Pick style produces a clear, distinct sound, and is a very popular technique for playing rock bass. While most bassists tend to use their fingers, pick style is a good skill to have.

The thickness of the pick will affect the tone: A thin pick may be too floppy to produce a strong tone; a heavy pick may not be flexible enough. See what gauge feels right to you.

- Curl your index finger and place the pick on it, letting just the tip stick out.
- Place your thumb over the top of the pick, holding it securely—but not too tightly.
- Make sure the pick is flat against the string; don't use the edge of the pick.
- Rest your pinky against the face of the bass, or on the lower edge of the pickup.

The pick can be used to play **downstrokes** (▣) and **upstrokes** (▤). The downstroke has a strong attack and works well for hard rock. Play the previous examples again, this time with a pick, using downstrokes (▣). Use a light wrist motion with a little bit of forearm movement.



TIP: To get a full sound from each string, make sure the pick connects fully; let the pick “travel through” and come to rest against the next string after the stroke. Be careful, however, not to play too hard (especially on strings D and G); overplaying can make the string “flap out,” producing a weak tone.

NOTE: While you will eventually develop a preference, it's important to play both fingerstyle and pick style to be a well-rounded bassist. Readers are encouraged to learn fingerstyle first—as it presents many unique challenges to the beginning player—and then, at a later time, to try pick style. Any example can be played either fingerstyle or with a pick.

LEFT-HAND TECHNIQUE

Now it's time to start using the left hand. The fingers are numbered 1 through 4 as shown.



1-2-4 FINGERING SYSTEM

The 1-2-4 fingering system allows us to keep the hand relaxed and comfortable, particularly when playing in the lower regions of the bass where the frets are farther apart. Start with the pad of your thumb in the middle of the neck; make sure it doesn't stick up over the top. The thumb is positioned between the first and second fingers.

- Place your first finger directly behind the 1st fret of the E string, pressing down lightly.
- Place your second finger on the 2nd fret.
- Place your fourth finger on the 3rd fret.



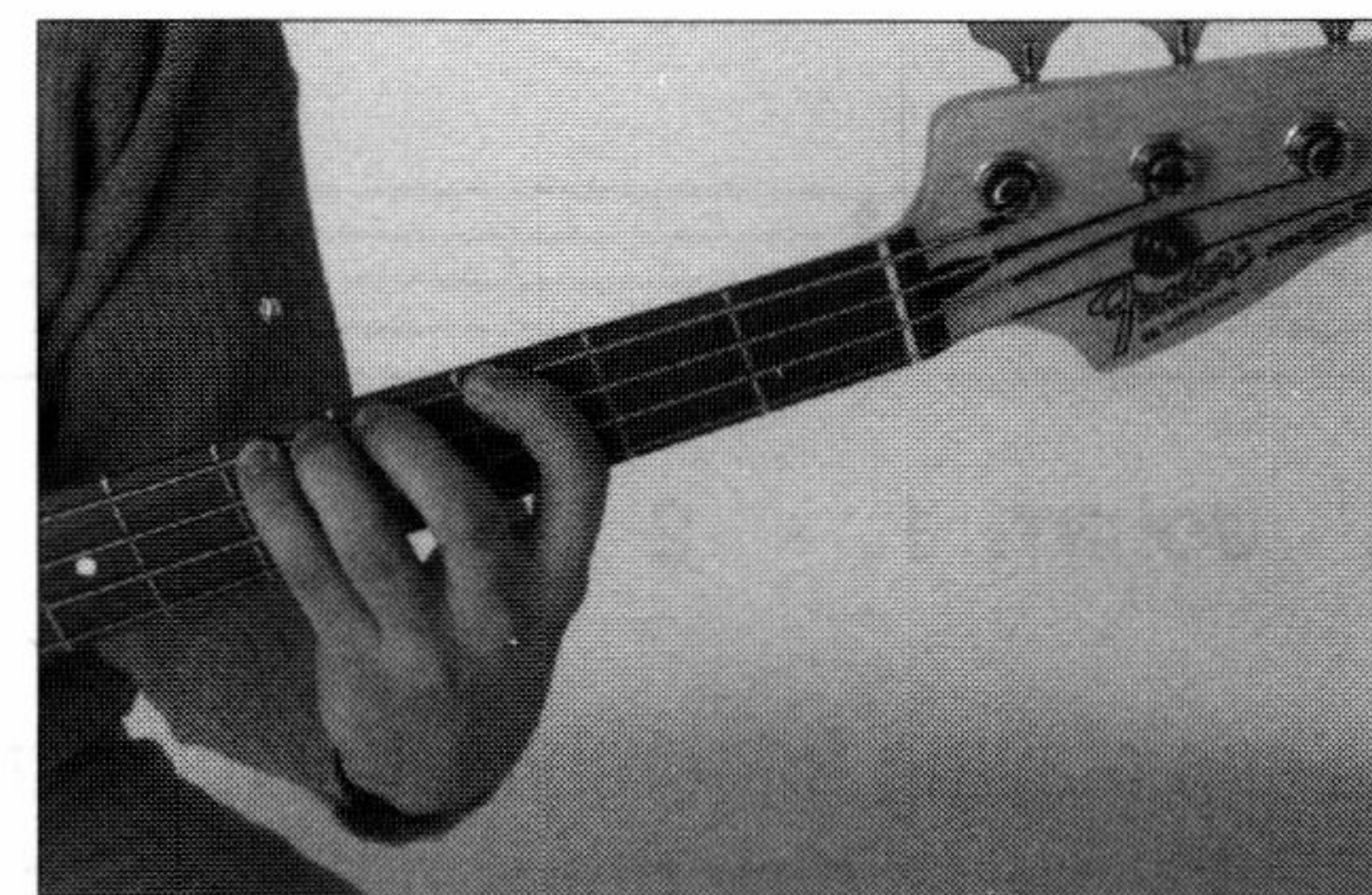
1st position

Notice that we have access to three frets—this is called a **position**. We'll study three playing positions in this book: 1st position (with the index finger at the 1st fret), 2nd position (with the index at the 2nd fret), and 3rd position (index at the 3rd fret).

TIP: Keep your left hand relaxed when you play. Never forcibly stretch your hand or hold a position that feels strained.



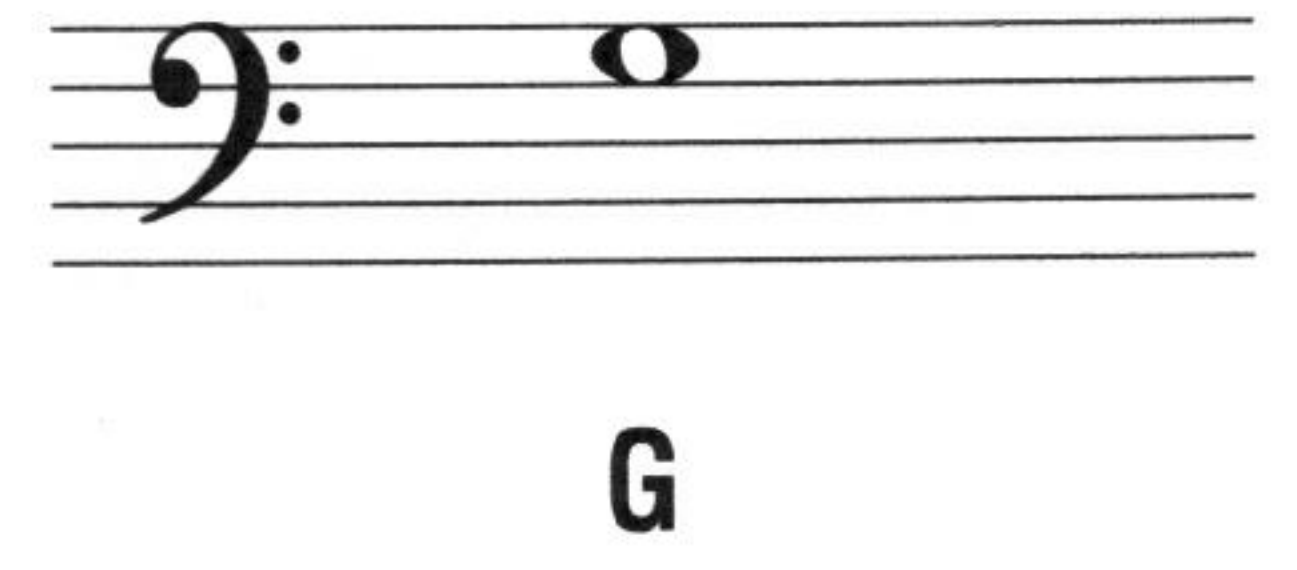
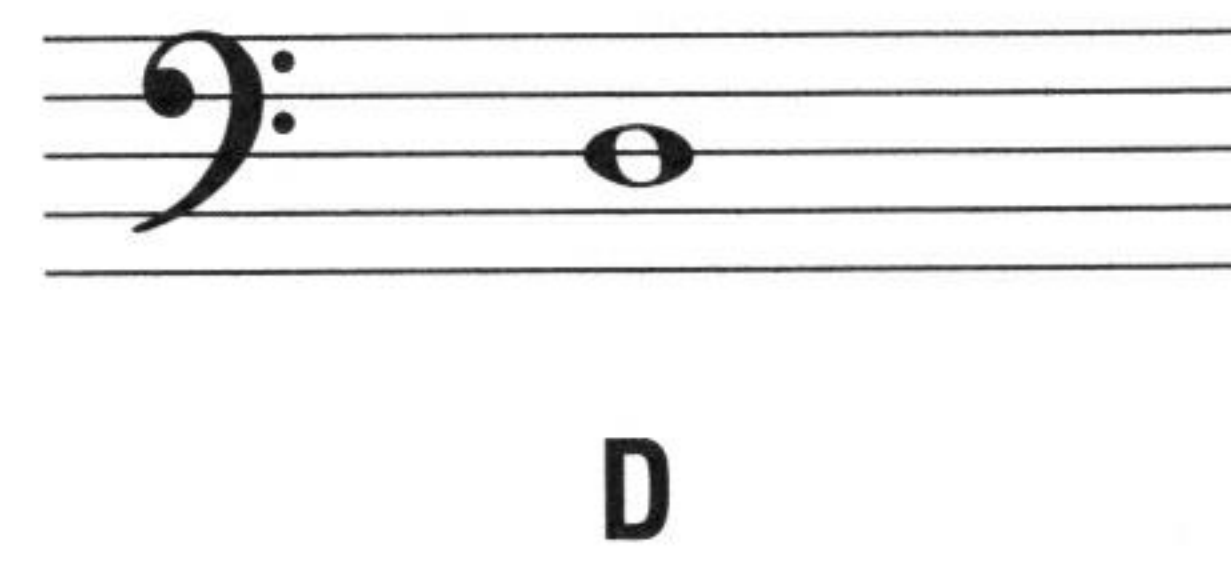
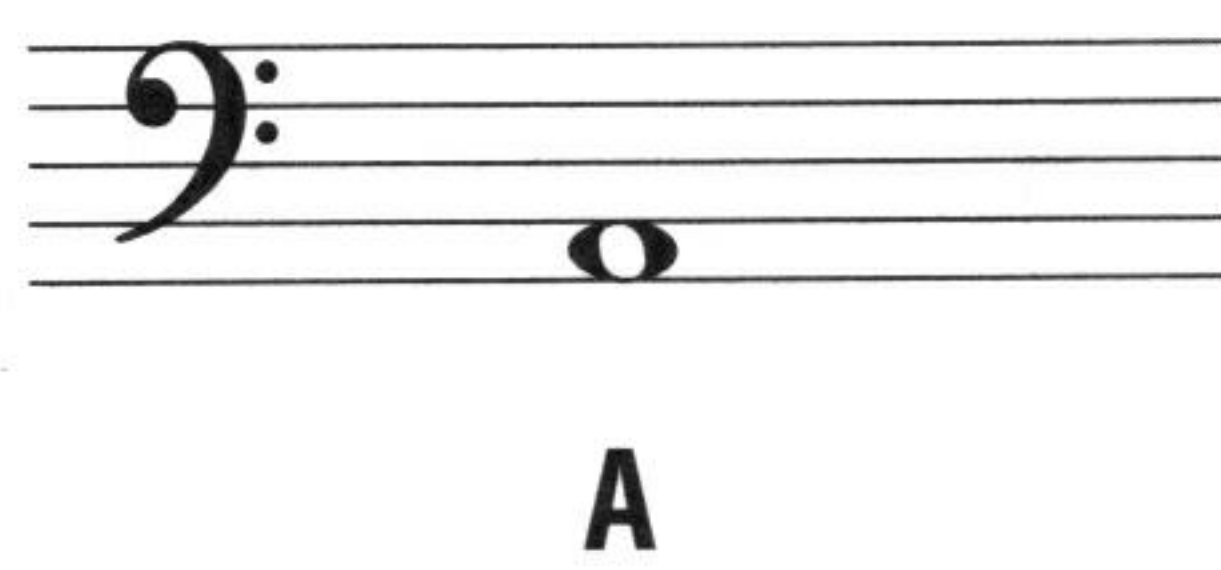
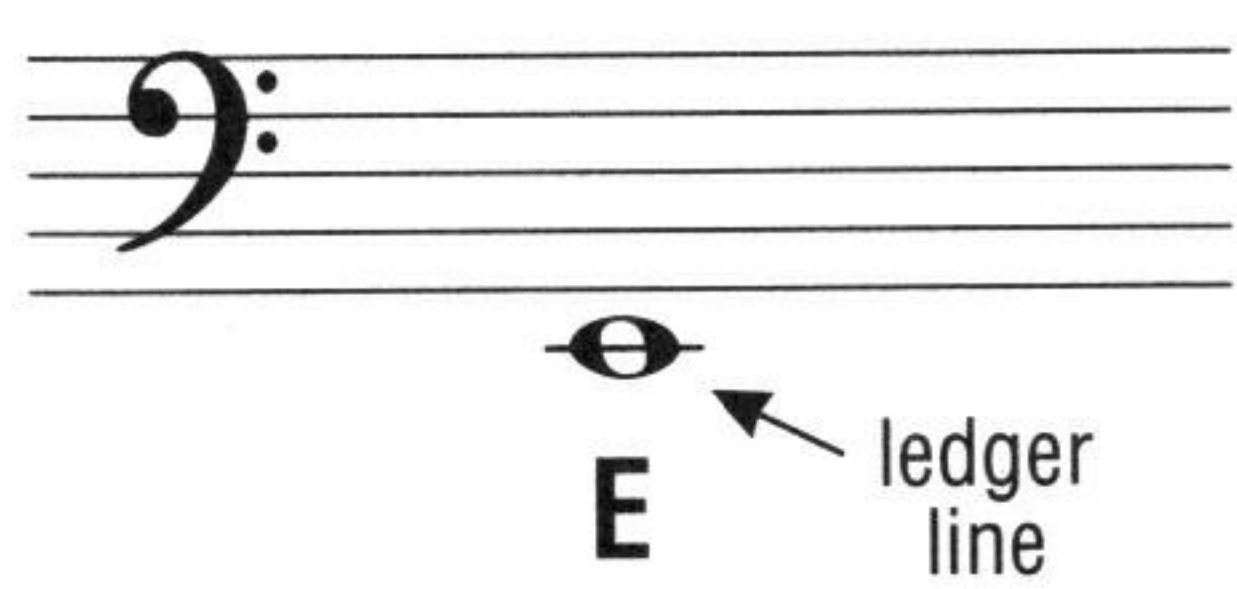
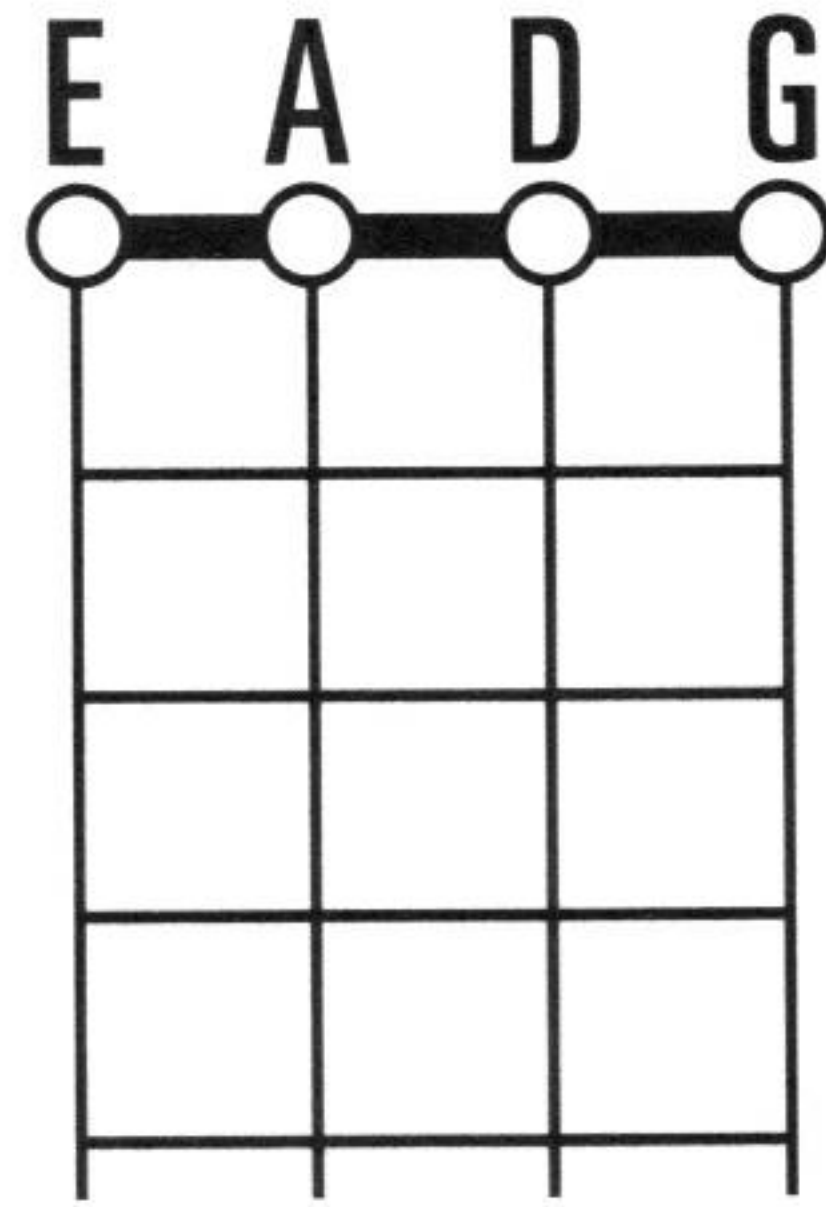
2nd position



3rd position

OPEN-STRING EXERCISES

The following exercises are played on the open strings and will help you with basic rhythms, fingerstyle technique, and crossing the strings. Here are the notes for the open strings as written on the staff.



The open E string is written on an added line below the staff, called a **ledger line**.

Each exercise below is played on a single string. Count the rhythms out loud at first, and then play them. As you play, concentrate on alternating between index (i) and middle (m) fingers, as shown.

E STRING

1
 COUNT: 1 2 3 4 1 - 2 3 - 4 1 2 3 - 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4

The exercise consists of four measures. The first measure has four quarter notes (i, m, i, m). The second measure has a half note (i) followed by a quarter rest, then a half note (m) followed by a quarter rest. The third measure has a quarter note (i), a quarter note (m), a quarter note (i), and a quarter rest. The fourth measure has a half note (m) followed by a half rest.

A STRING

2
 COUNT: 1 - 2 3 4 1 2 3 - 4 1 2 3 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4

The exercise consists of four measures. The first measure has a half rest, then a quarter note (i), a quarter note (m), and a quarter note (i). The second measure has a quarter note (m), a quarter note (i), a quarter note (m), and a quarter note (i). The third measure has a quarter note (i), a quarter note (m), a quarter note (i), and a quarter note (m). The fourth measure has a half note (i) followed by a half rest.

D STRING

3
 COUNT: 1 2 3 - 4 1 - 2 3 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 1 2 3 4

The exercise consists of four measures. The first measure has a quarter note (i), a quarter note (m), a quarter note (i), and a quarter rest. The second measure has a half note (m) followed by a half rest, then a quarter note (i) followed by a quarter rest. The third measure has a half note (i) followed by a half rest. The fourth measure has a quarter note (m), a quarter note (i), a quarter note (m), and a quarter note (i).

G STRING

4
 COUNT: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 1 - 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 - 4

The exercise consists of four measures. The first measure has a half rest, then a quarter note (i), a quarter note (m), a quarter note (i), and a quarter rest. The second measure has a quarter note (m), a quarter note (i), a quarter note (m), and a quarter note (i). The third measure has a quarter note (i), a quarter note (m), a quarter note (i), and a quarter note (m). The fourth measure has a quarter note (i), a quarter note (m), a quarter note (i), and a quarter rest.

When playing fingerstyle, the most important thing to remember is to alternate fingers. Once you get used to it, this technique allows you to play notes quickly and easily. You may begin your alteration with either finger—index or middle. Try playing the above exercises again, beginning with “m” instead of “i.”

Now let's try playing on more than one string. These exercises move *up* the open strings. Continue to alternate fingers as you move up from one string to the next. Remember to let your fingers "travel through" on each stroke.

5

i m i m i m i m i m i m i m

COUNT: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

6

i m i m i m i

COUNT: 1 - 2 3 4 1 - 2 3 - 4 1 - 2 3 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4

THE RAKE

When moving *down* a string, use the same finger to play both strings—this is called the **rake technique**.

i m rake m i

The idea is to use as little effort as possible to get from one string to the next. The rake actually helps keep your right hand relaxed as you move down to the lower string.



Try these exercises moving down the open strings. (Use your left hand to mute the higher open strings.)

7

i m i i m m i m m

COUNT: 1 - 2 3 4 1 - 2 3 - 4 1 2 3 - 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4

8

i m i m m i m m i m i m m

COUNT: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 - 2 3 4 1 - 2 3 - 4

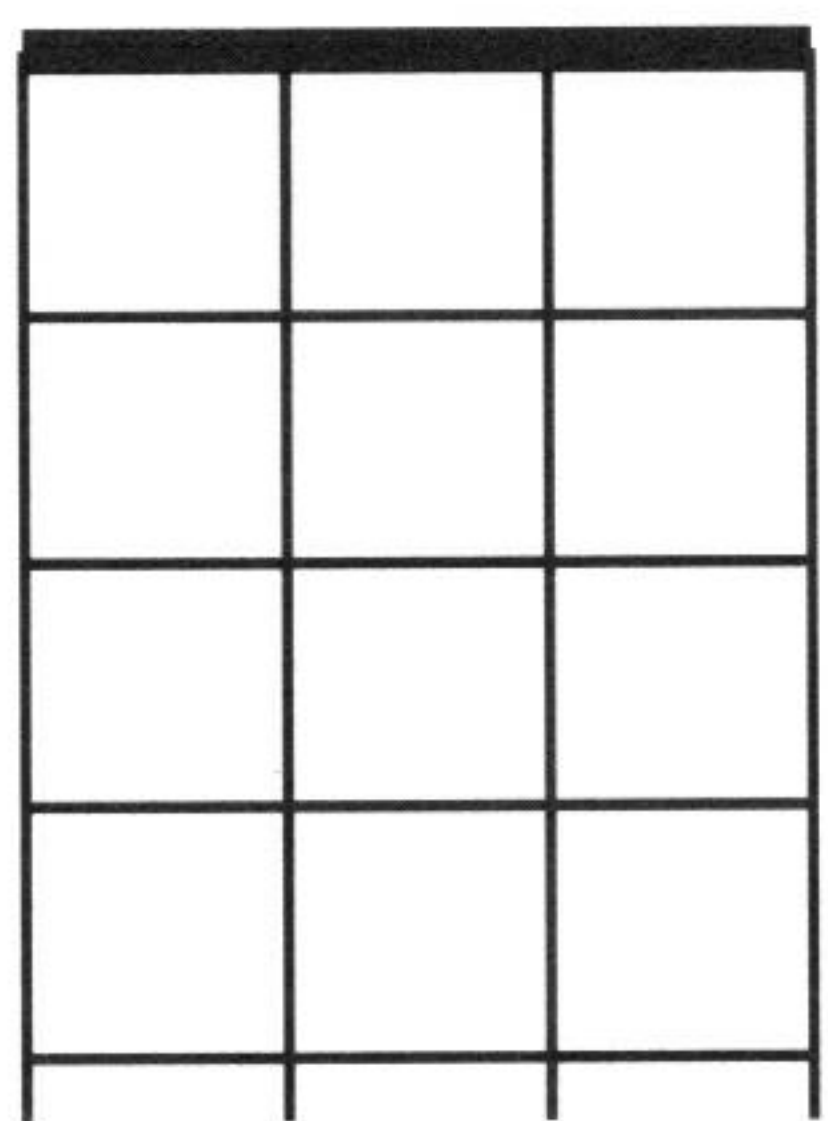
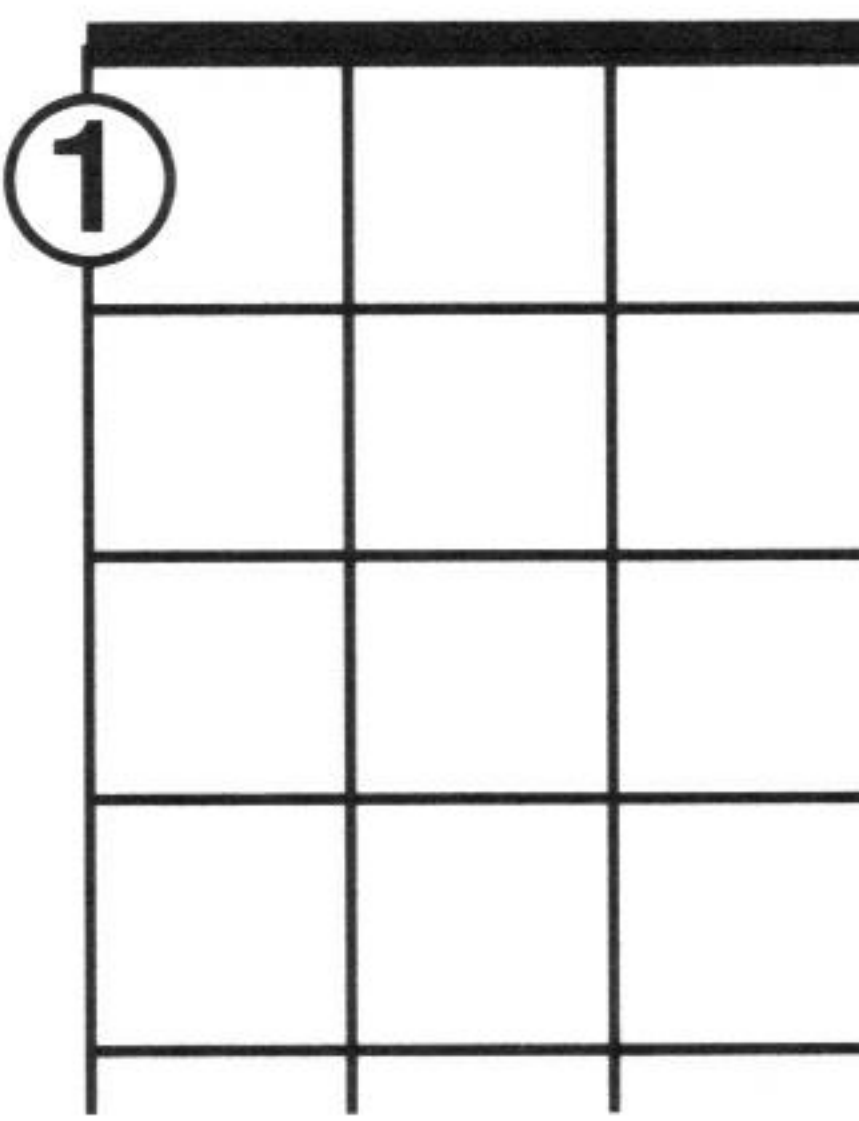
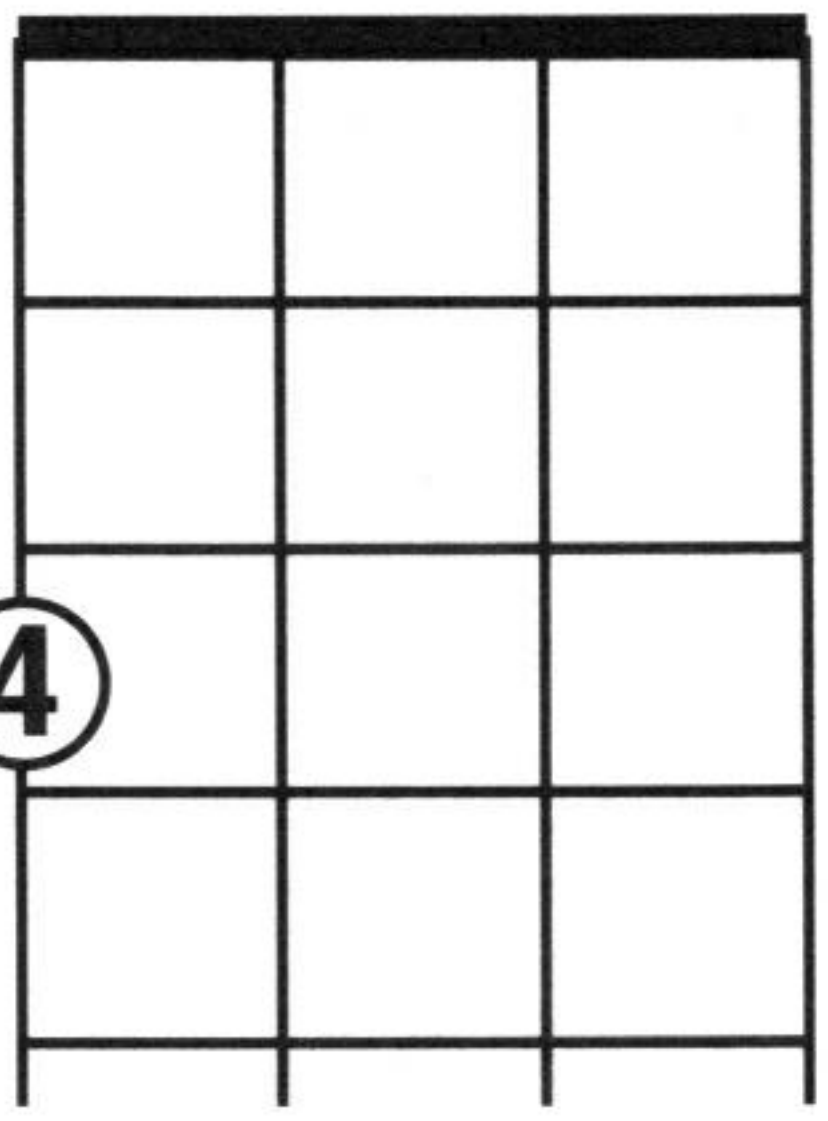
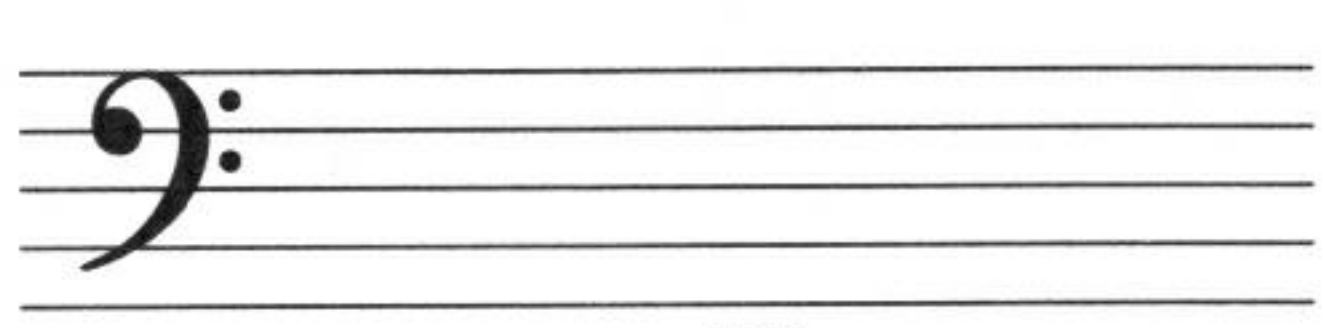
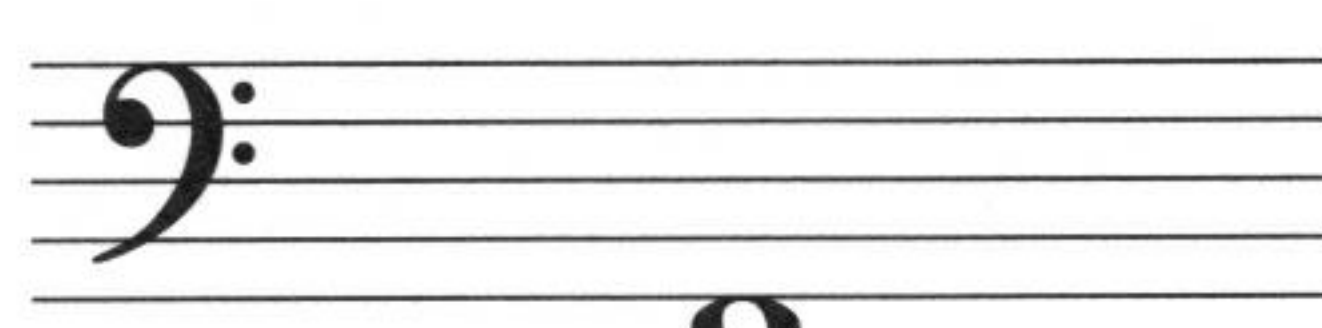
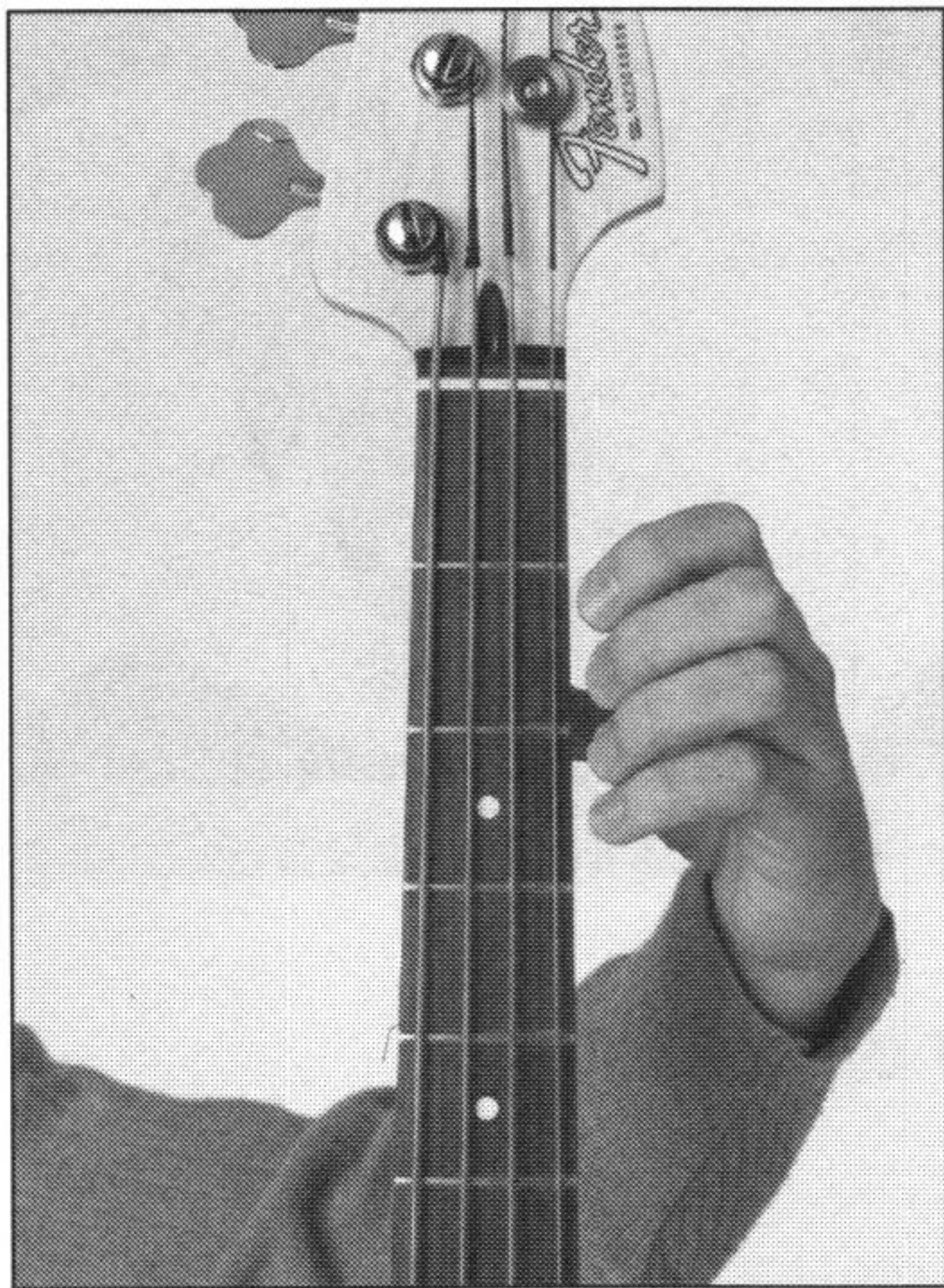
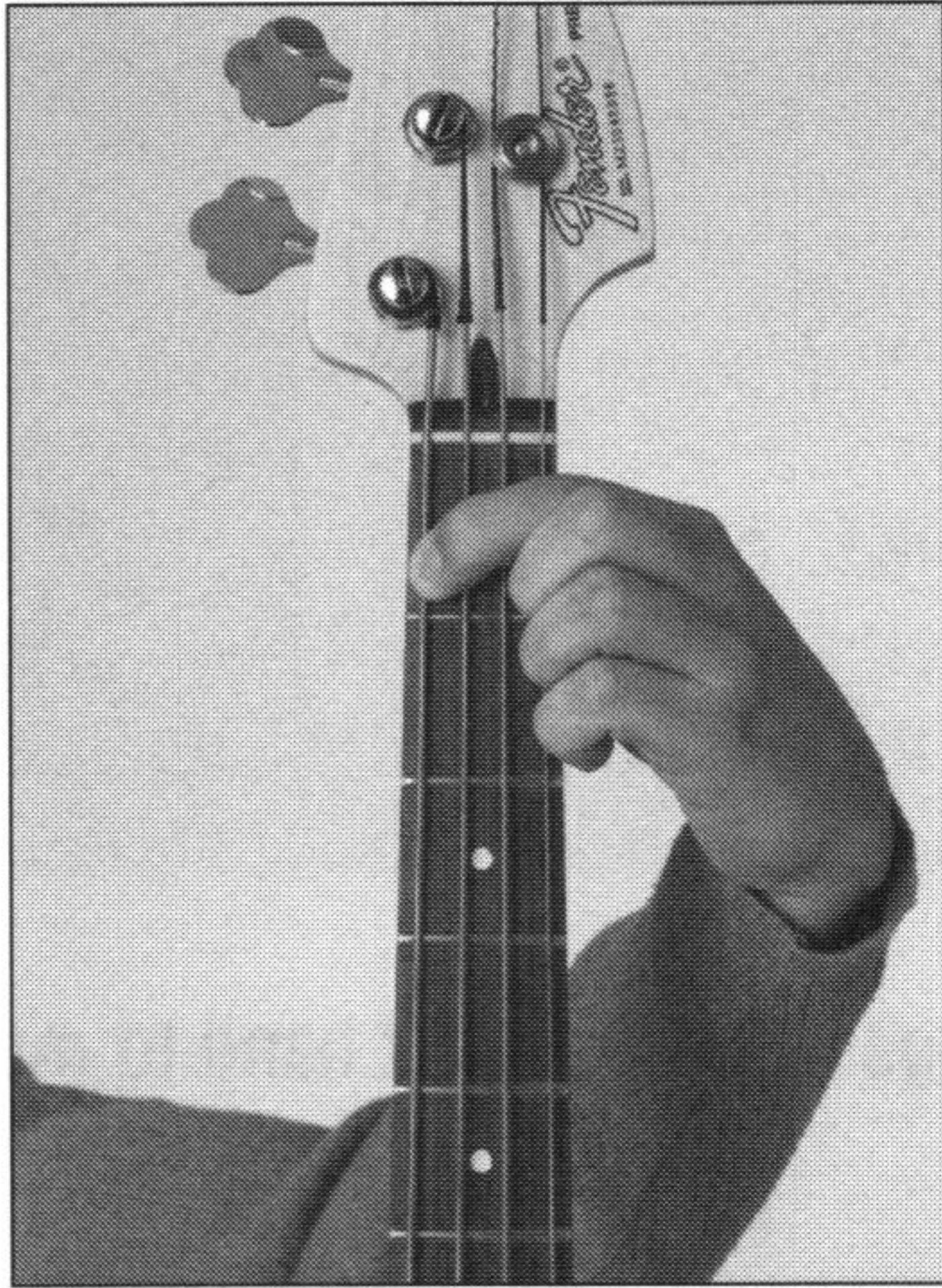
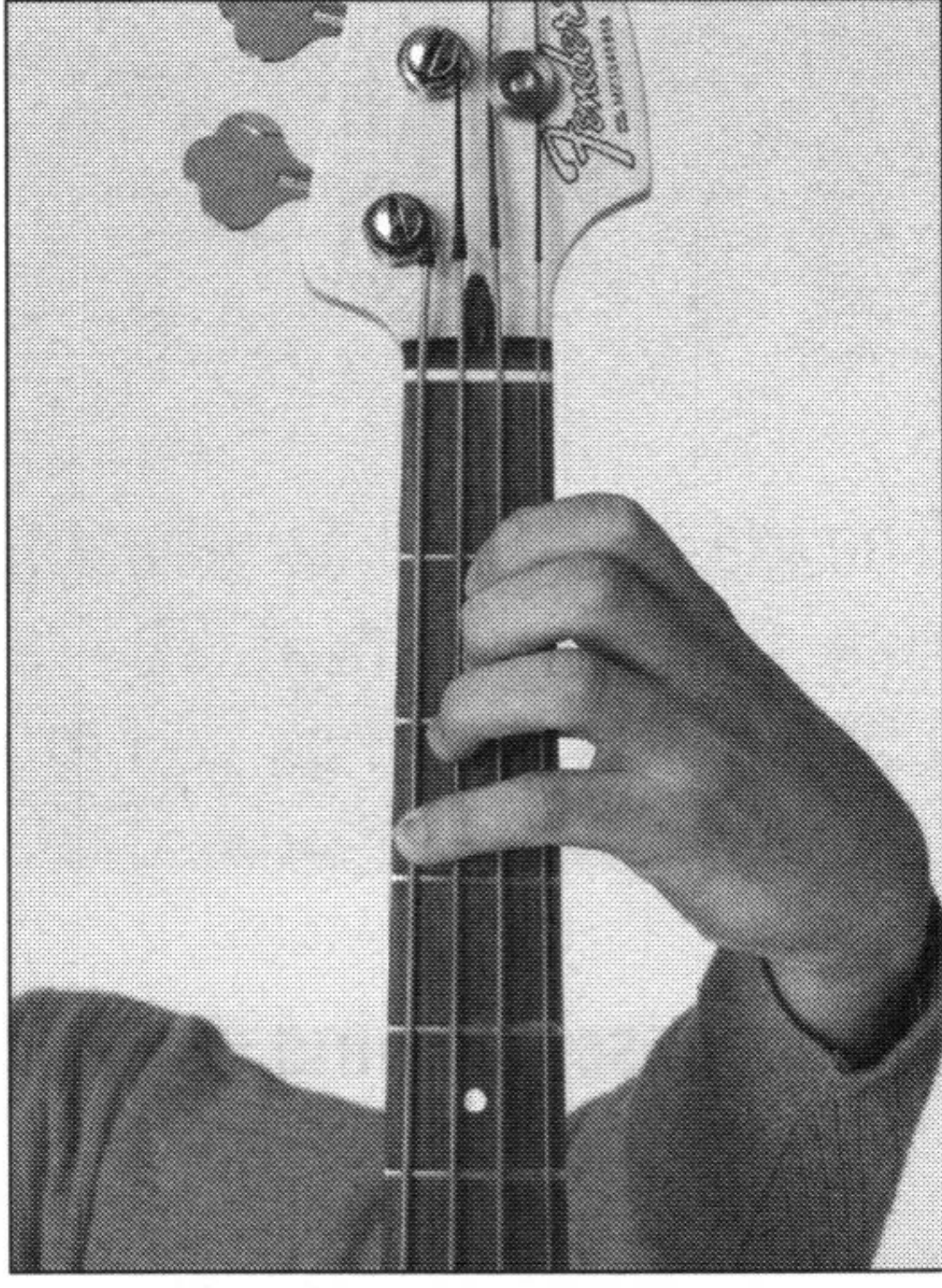
This example mixes ascending and descending motion through the strings. It starts on "m," but you could also switch and begin with "i." Remember: When crossing to a higher string, alternate fingers; when crossing to a lower string, use the same finger (the "rake technique") on both strings.

9

m i m i m i m i i i m m

COUNT: 1 2 3 4 1 - 2 3 - 4 1 2 3 - 4 1 2 3 - 4

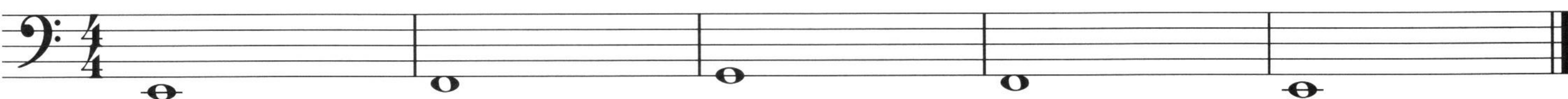
NOTES ON THE E STRING

E  ↑ OPEN	F  1	G  4
 OPEN E	 1st FRET F	 3rd FRET G
		

These notes are in **1st position**, with the first finger of the left hand on the 1st fret. Here are a few tips:

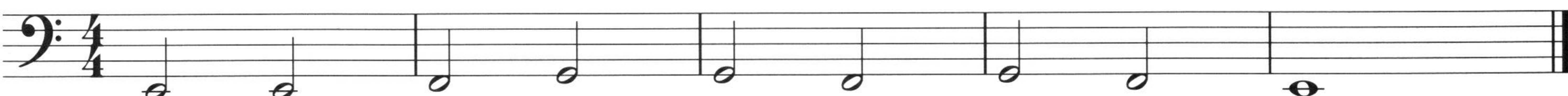
- Place your finger directly behind (not on top of) the fret.
- Experiment with different amounts of pressure; it takes less than you think.
- Keep each note ringing until you're ready to play your next note.

10



COUNT: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4

11



COUNT: 1 - 2 3 - 4 1 - 2 3 - 4 1 - 2 3 - 4 1 - 2 3 - 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4

12



COUNT: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 - 4

Say the names of the notes out loud while you play, like “E... F... G... F... (etc.)”. Remember to alternate i and m fingers in the right hand as you play.

13



COUNT: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 - 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 - 2 - 3 - 4

This example skips a space when going from E to G.

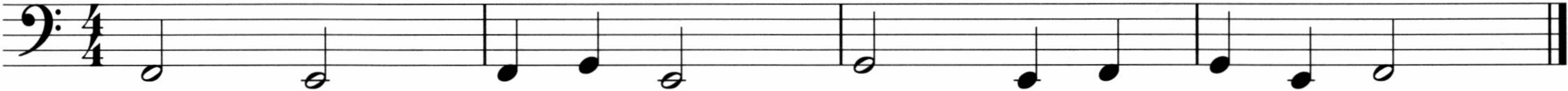
14



COUNT: 1 - 2 3 - 4 1 - 2 3 4 1 - 2 3 4 1 2 3 - 4

Practice keeping the count going on your own.

15



COUNT: 1 - 2 3 - 4

This next example is 8 measures long. When you reach the end of the first line, continue on to the second line without a pause. The count-off for the track is two measures long: “1... 2... 1, 2, 3, 4...”



TRACK 2

LITTLE ROCK

16



COUNT: 1 2 - 3 4



TRACK 3

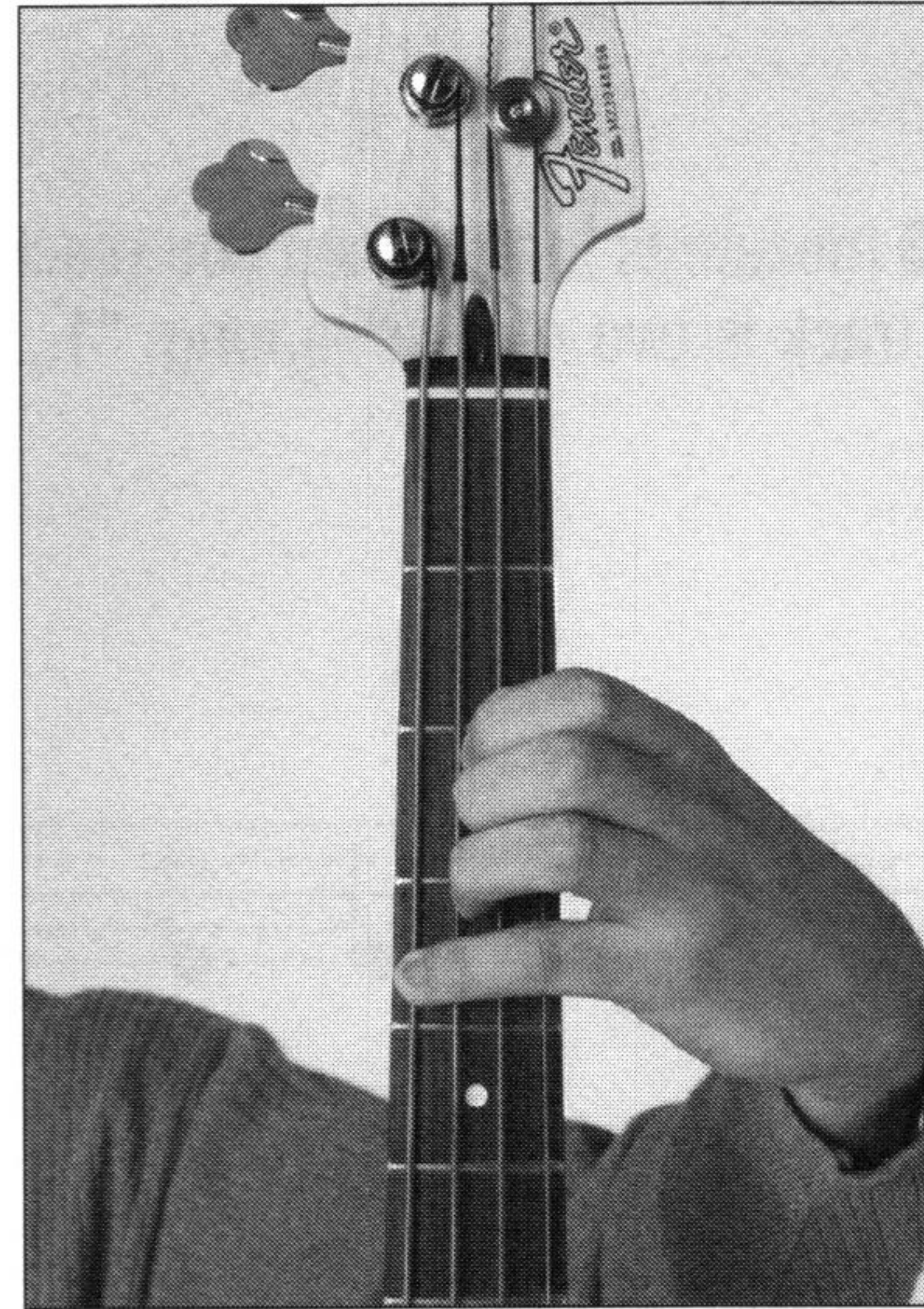
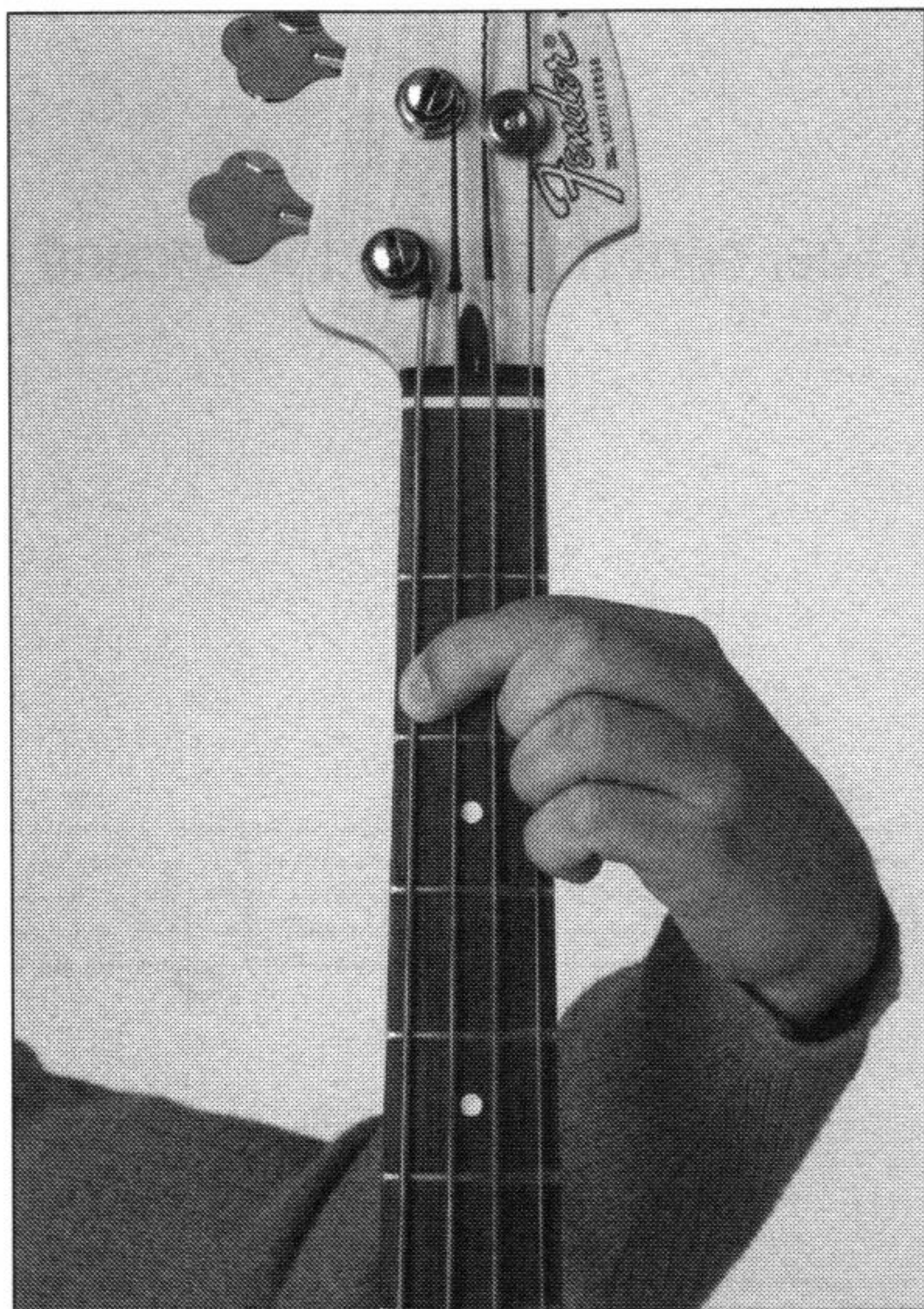
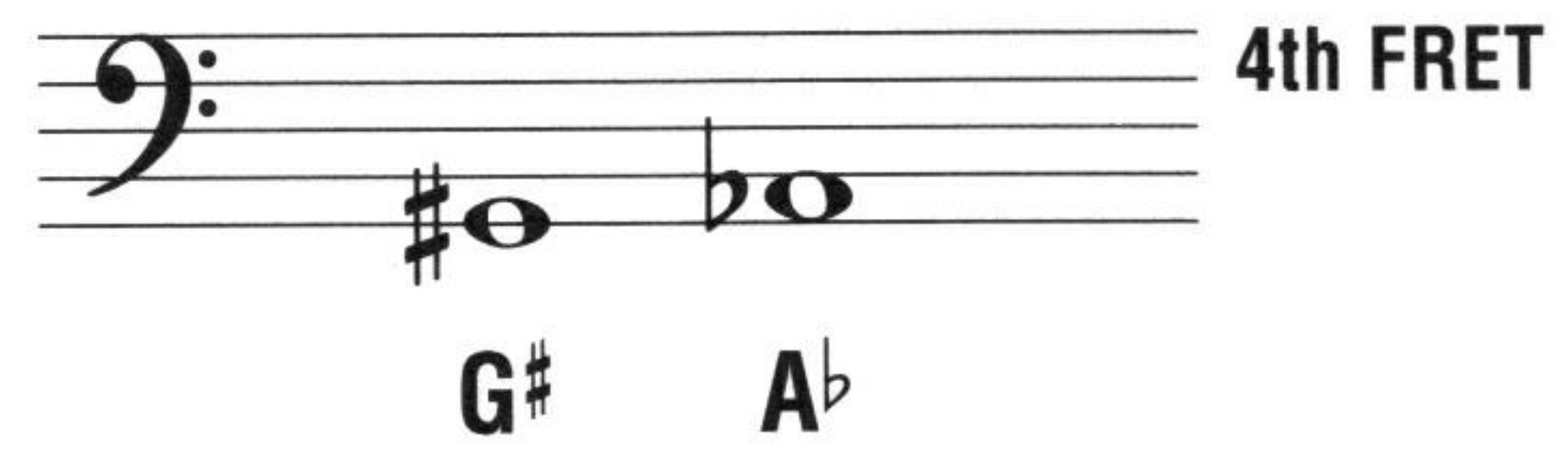
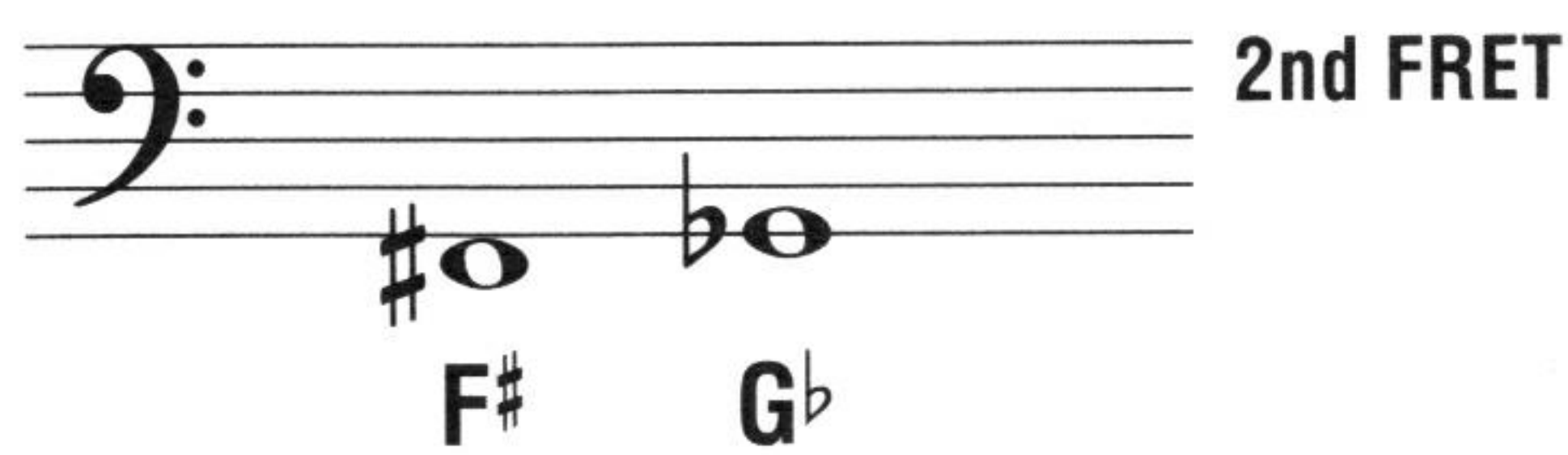
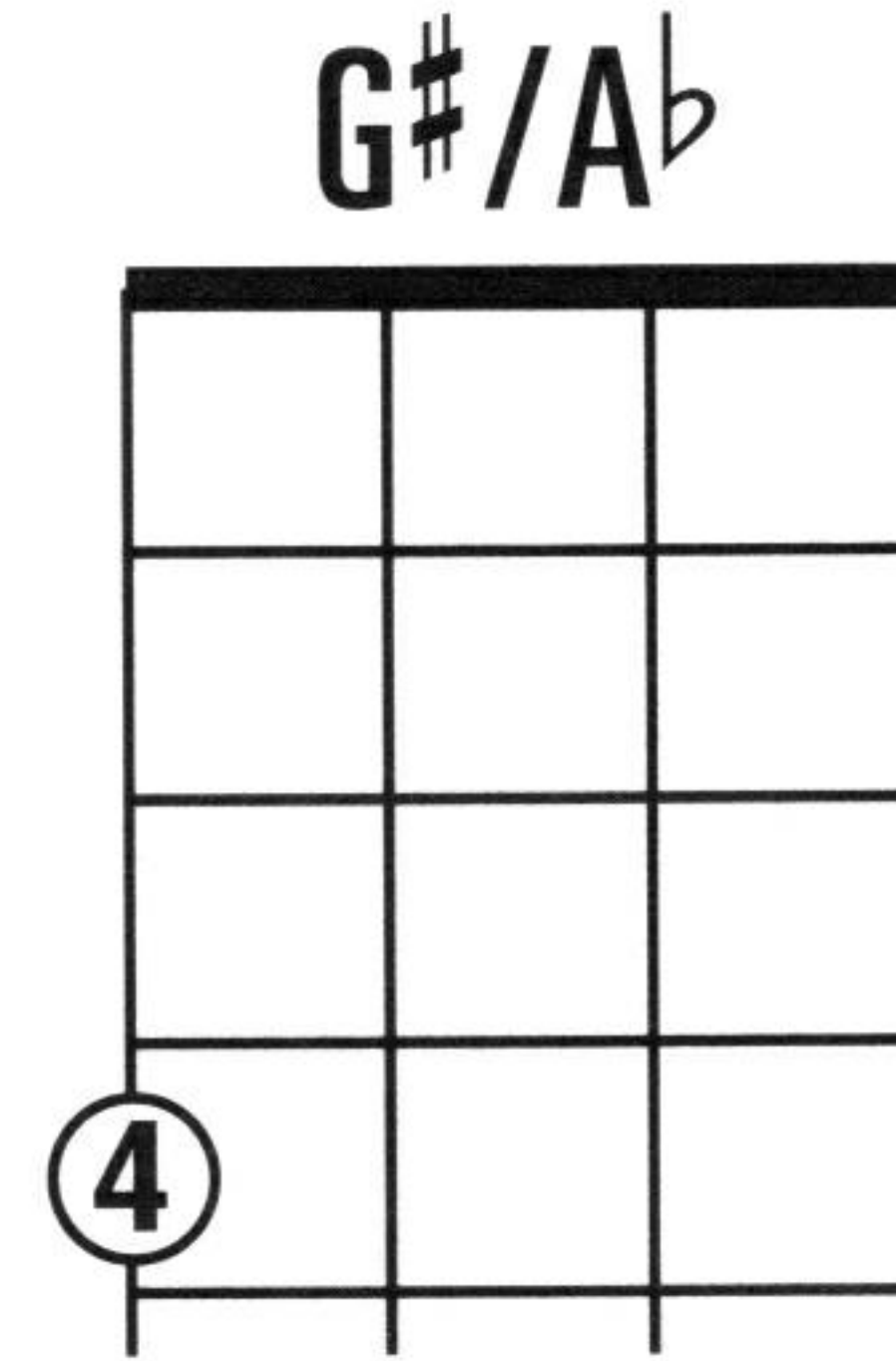
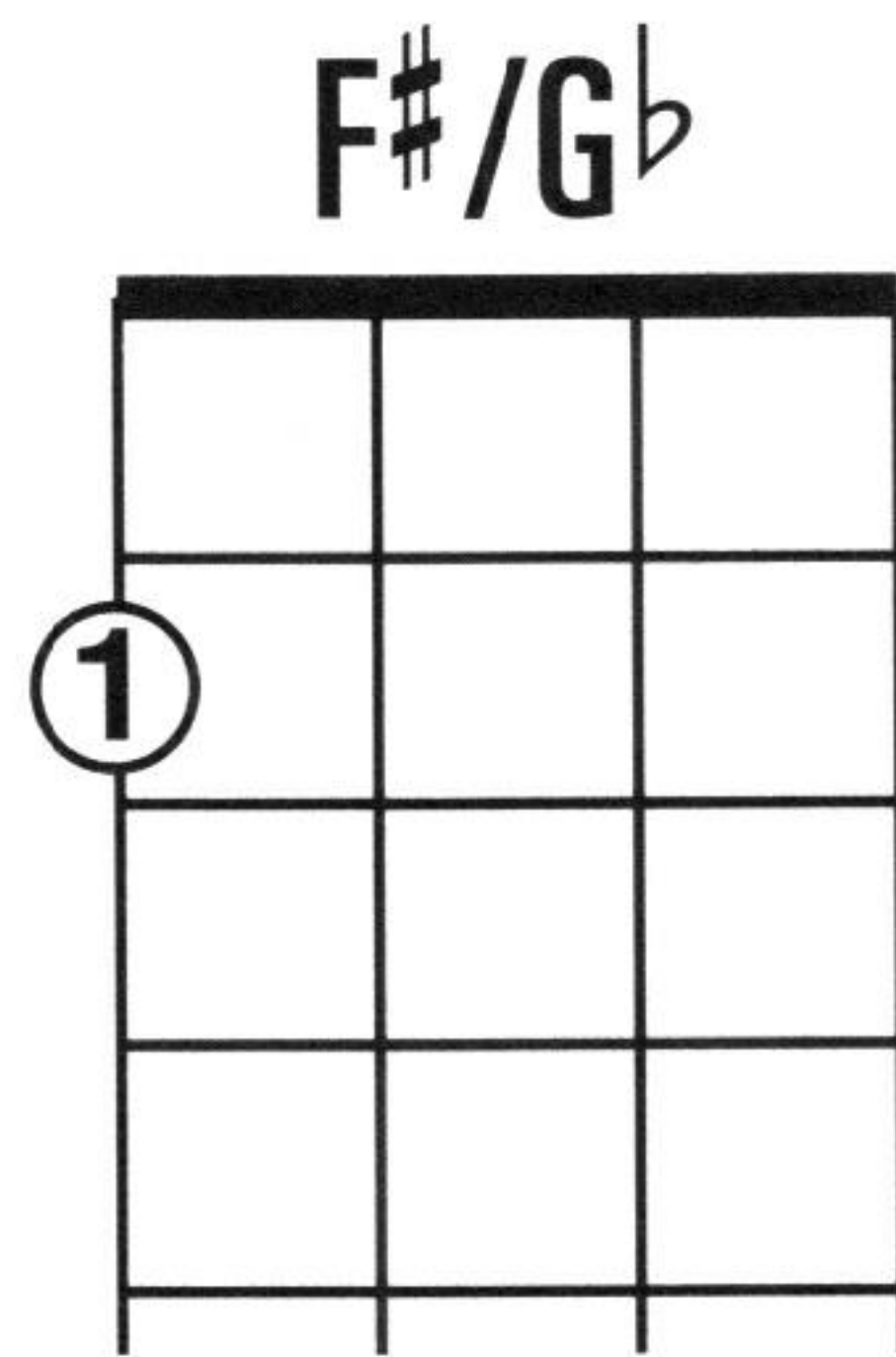
KINDA FOLKY

17



MORE NOTES ON THE E STRING

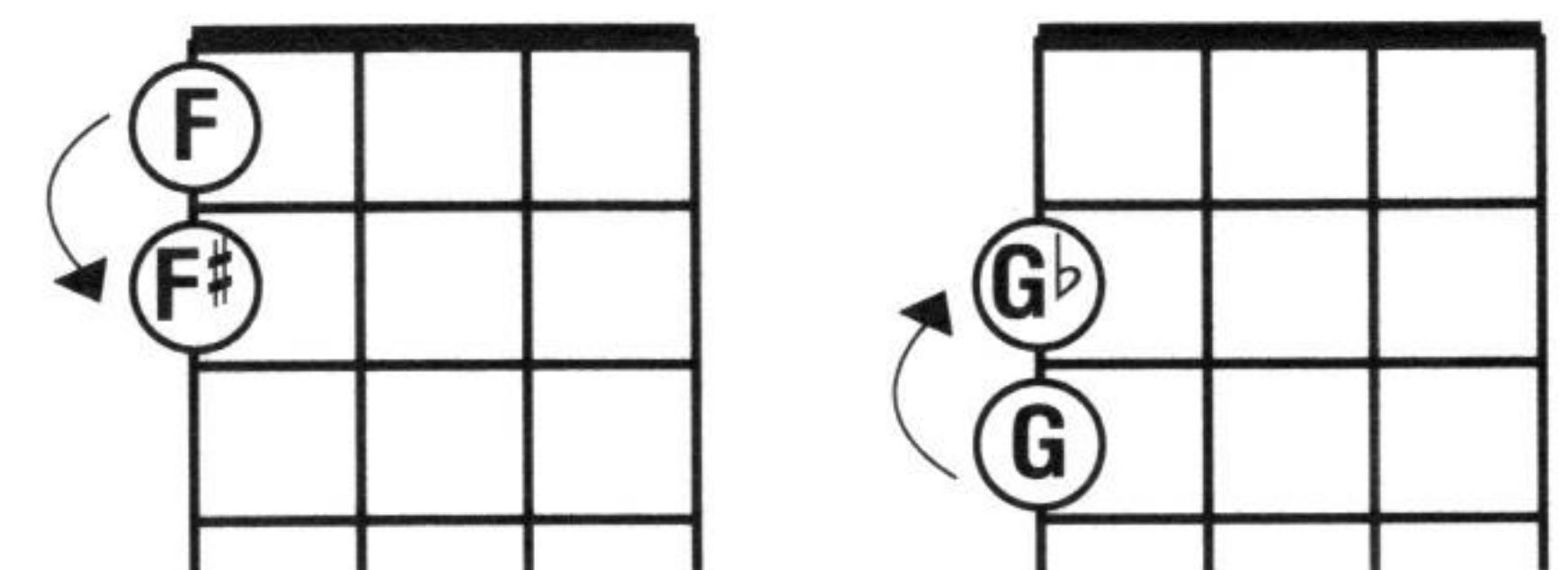
These notes are shown in **2nd position**, with the first finger of the left hand on the 2nd fret.



Why does each note above have two different names? Read on...

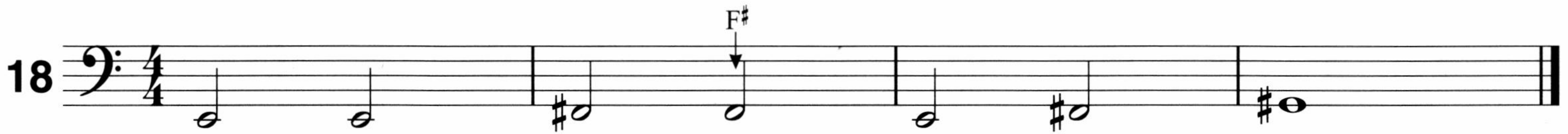
So far, the notes you have learned have all been **natural notes**—they have a letter name, and that's all. Notes that occur in between natural notes have names with sharps (#) or flats (b) next to them.

- When you go up one fret from a natural note, its name becomes **sharp** (#). For example: Play 1st fret F, then move up to the 2nd fret. That note is called F-sharp (F[#]).
- When you move down one fret from a natural note, the name becomes **flat** (b). For example: Play 3rd fret G, then slide down to the 2nd fret. That note is now called G-flat (G^b).



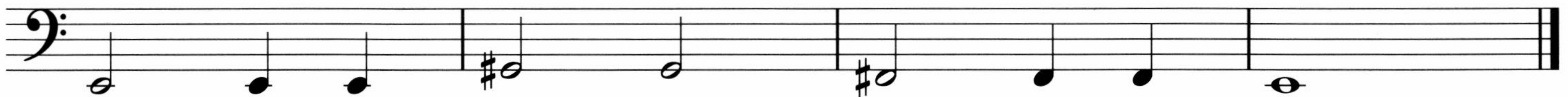
You just noticed that the 2nd fret on the E string has two different names: When you move up from F, we call it F[#]; when you move down from G, we call it G^b. That is called an **enharmonic equivalent**.

In written music, a sharp (#) or flat (b) placed in front of a note affects every note on the same line or space in that measure. It is automatically cancelled out in the next measure.



TRACK 4

LOOKIN' SHARP



A **natural sign** (♮) cancels a previous sharp or flat. In this example, the G natural is played with the second finger.



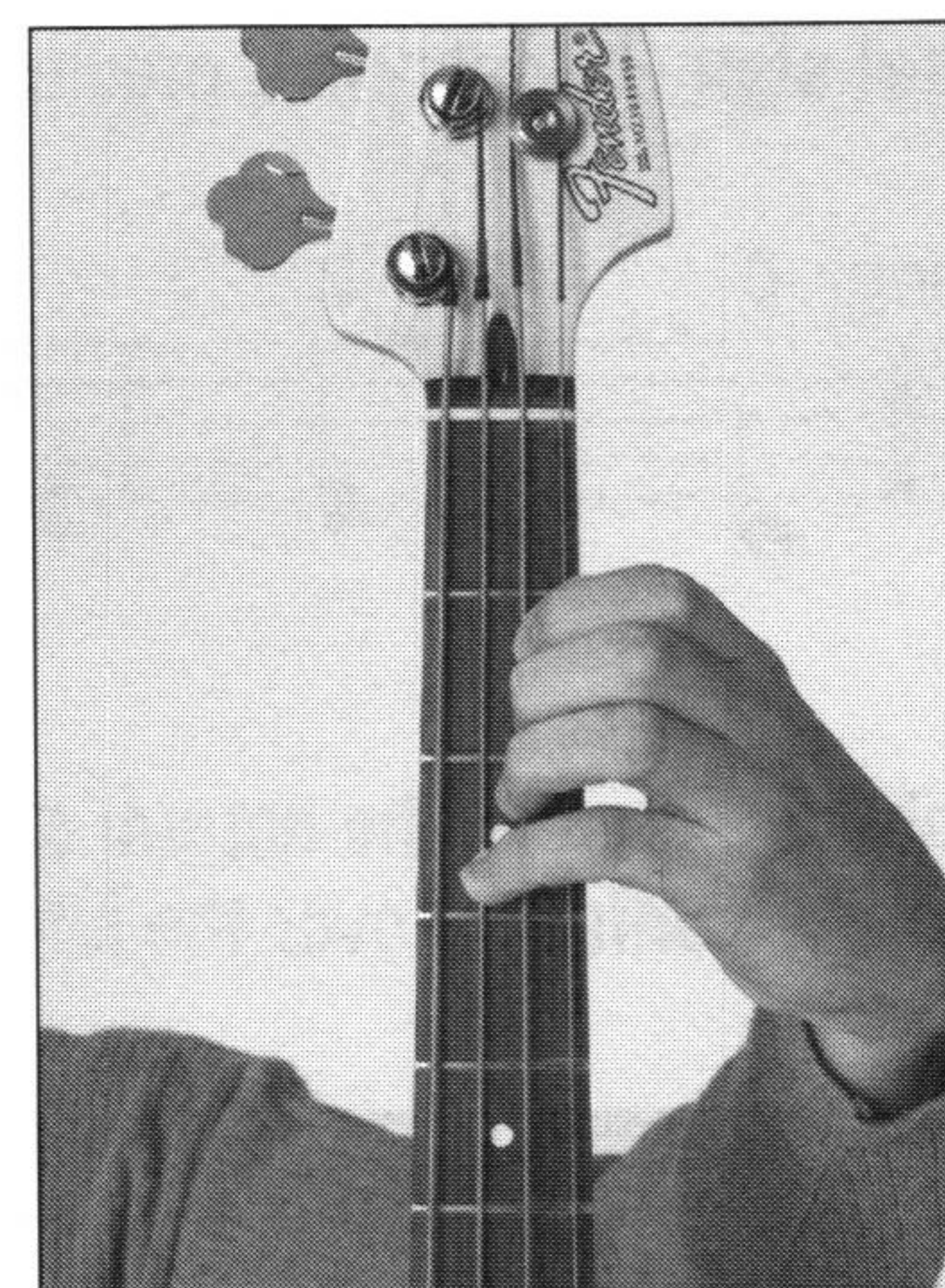
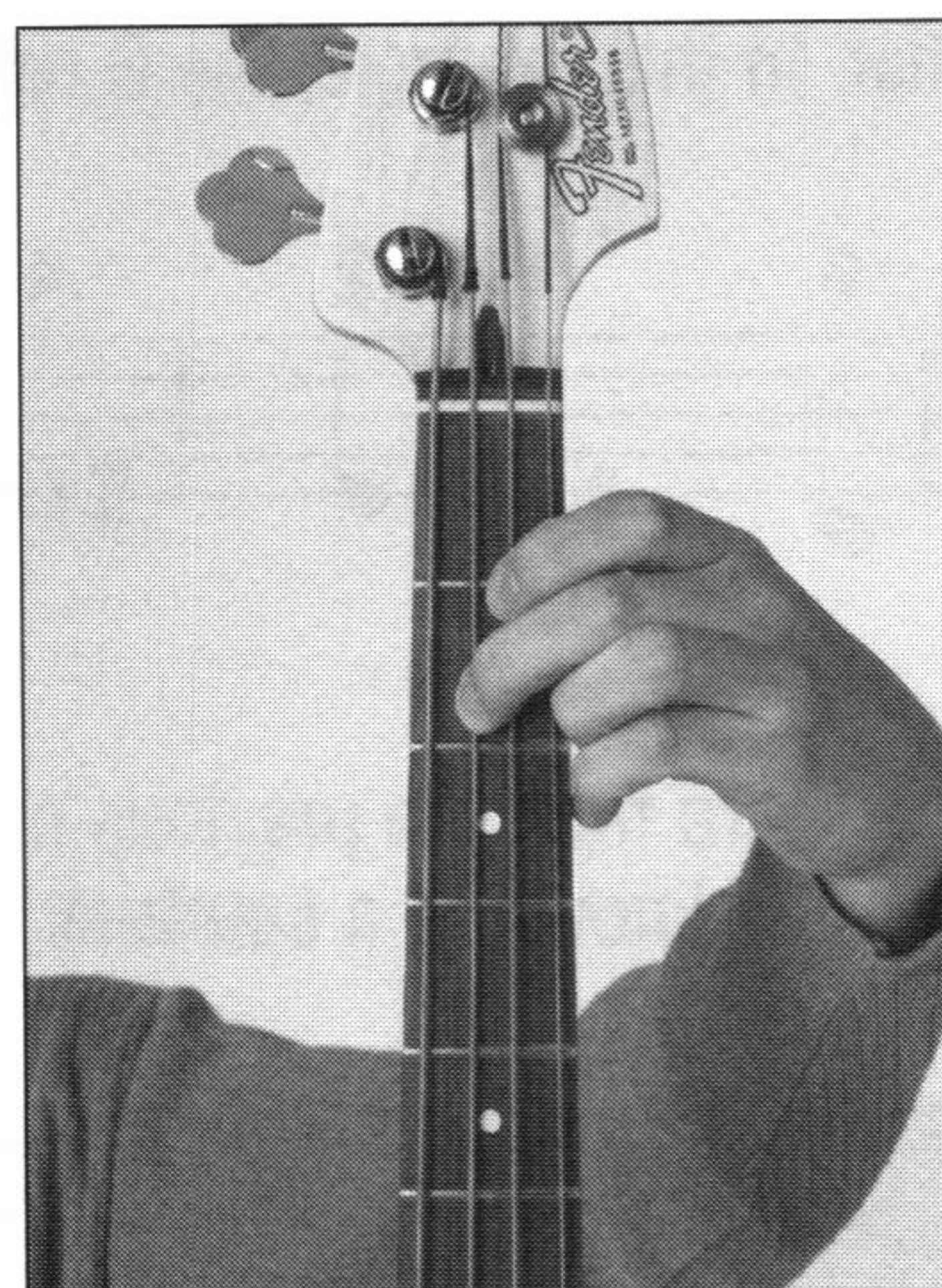
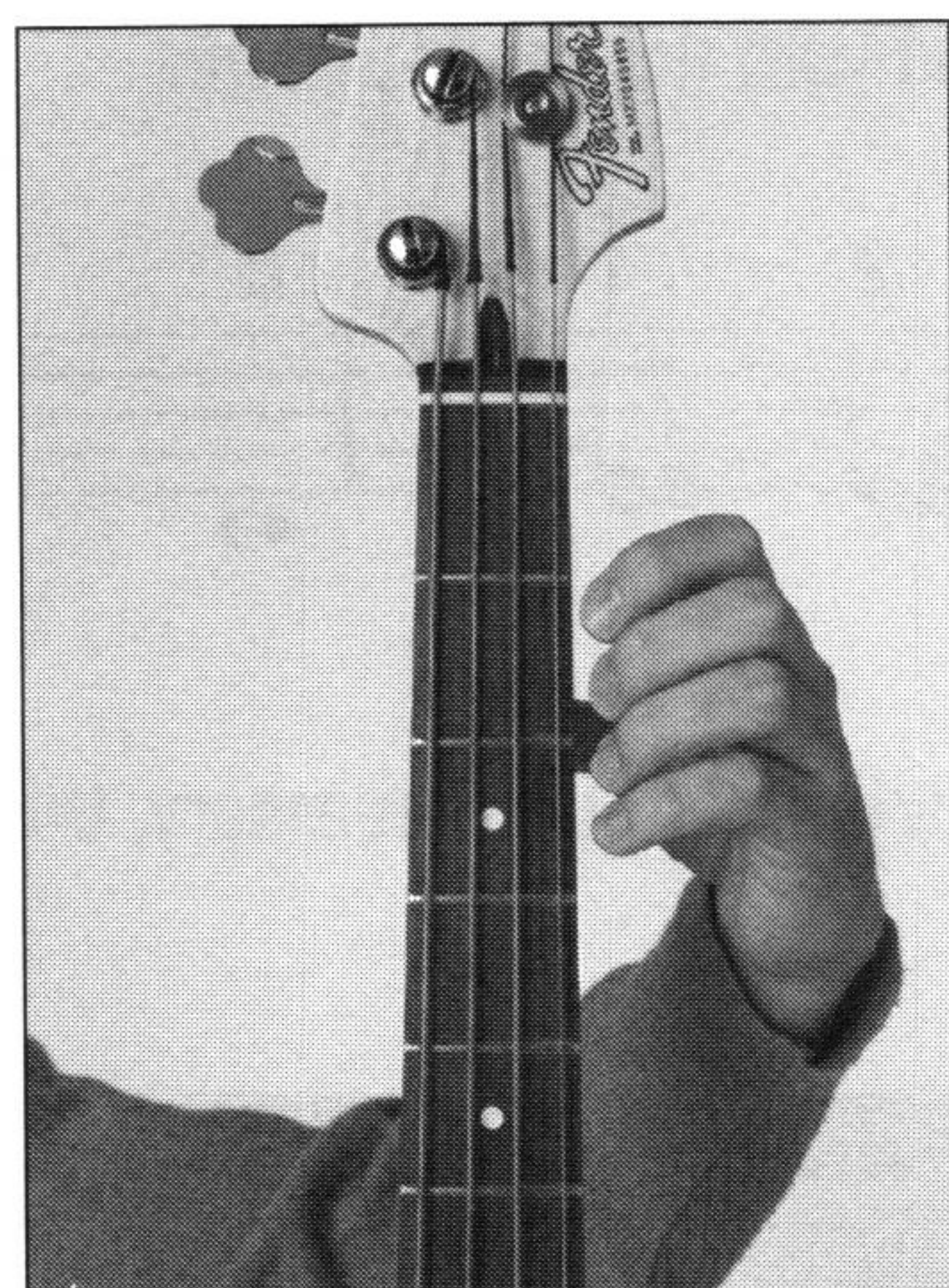
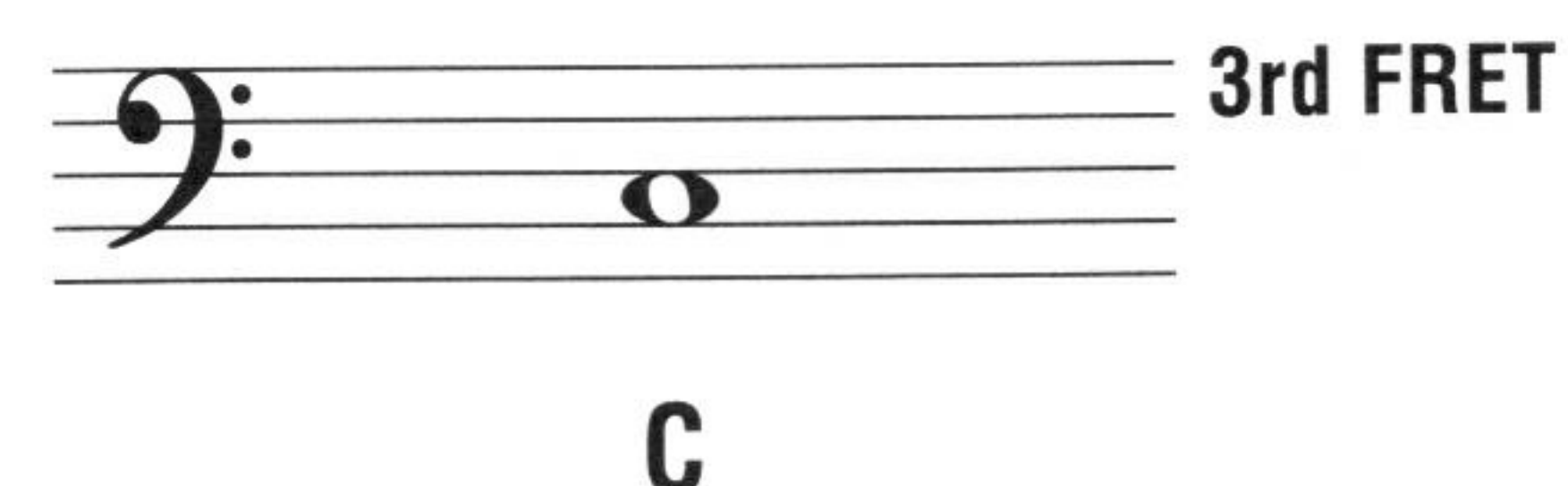
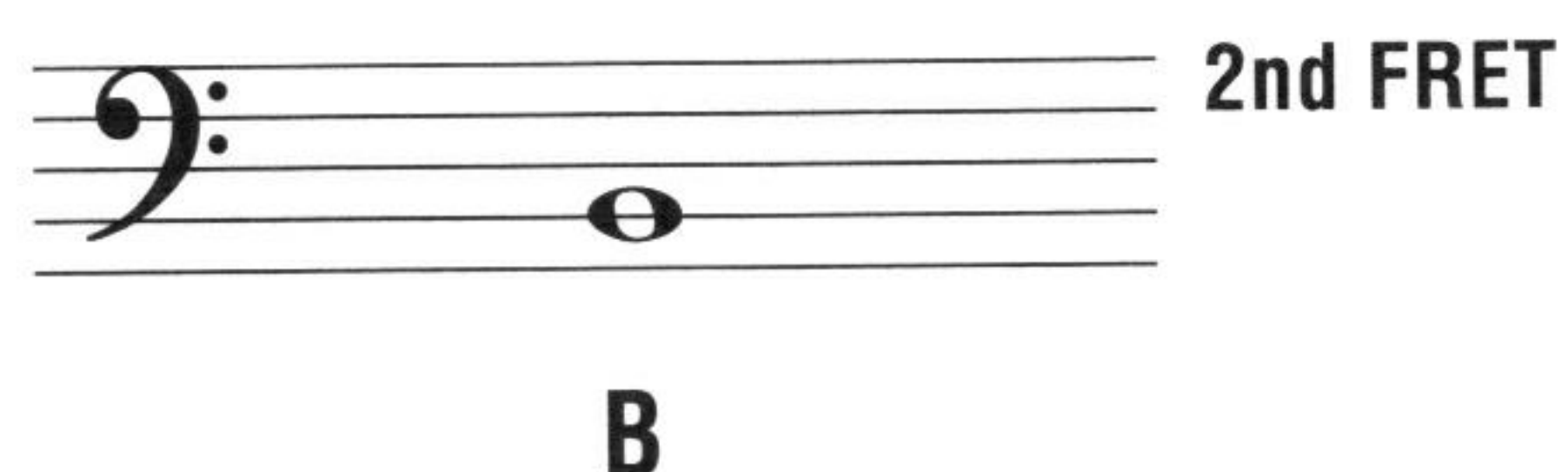
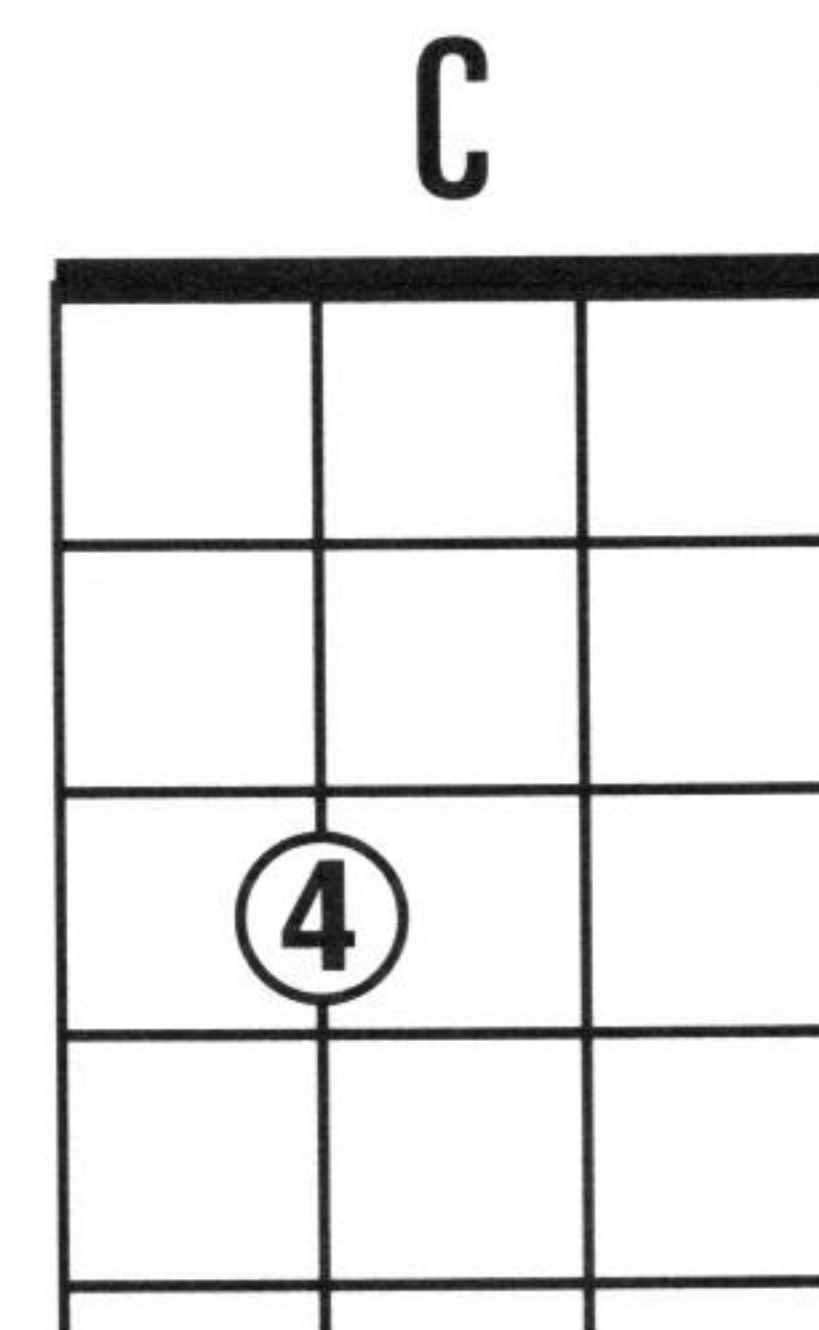
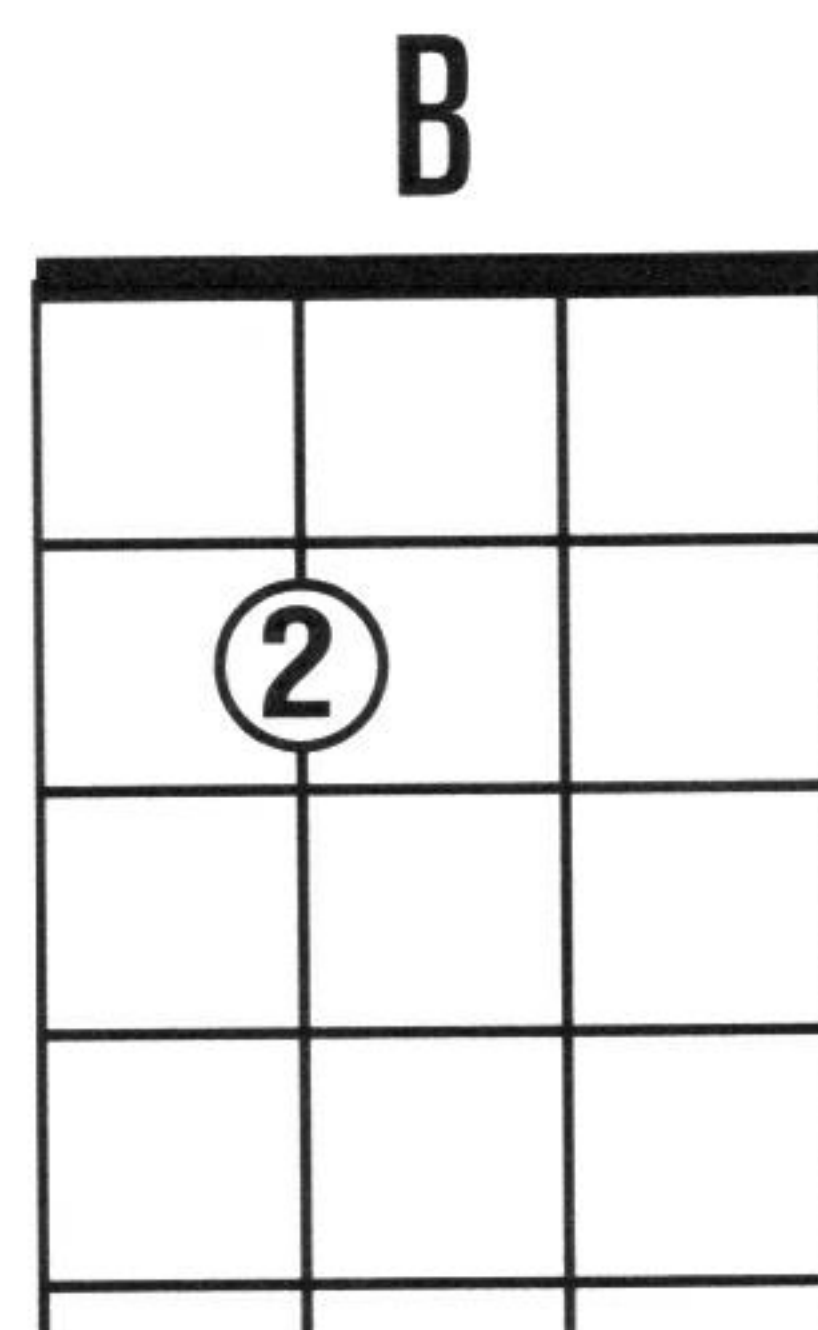
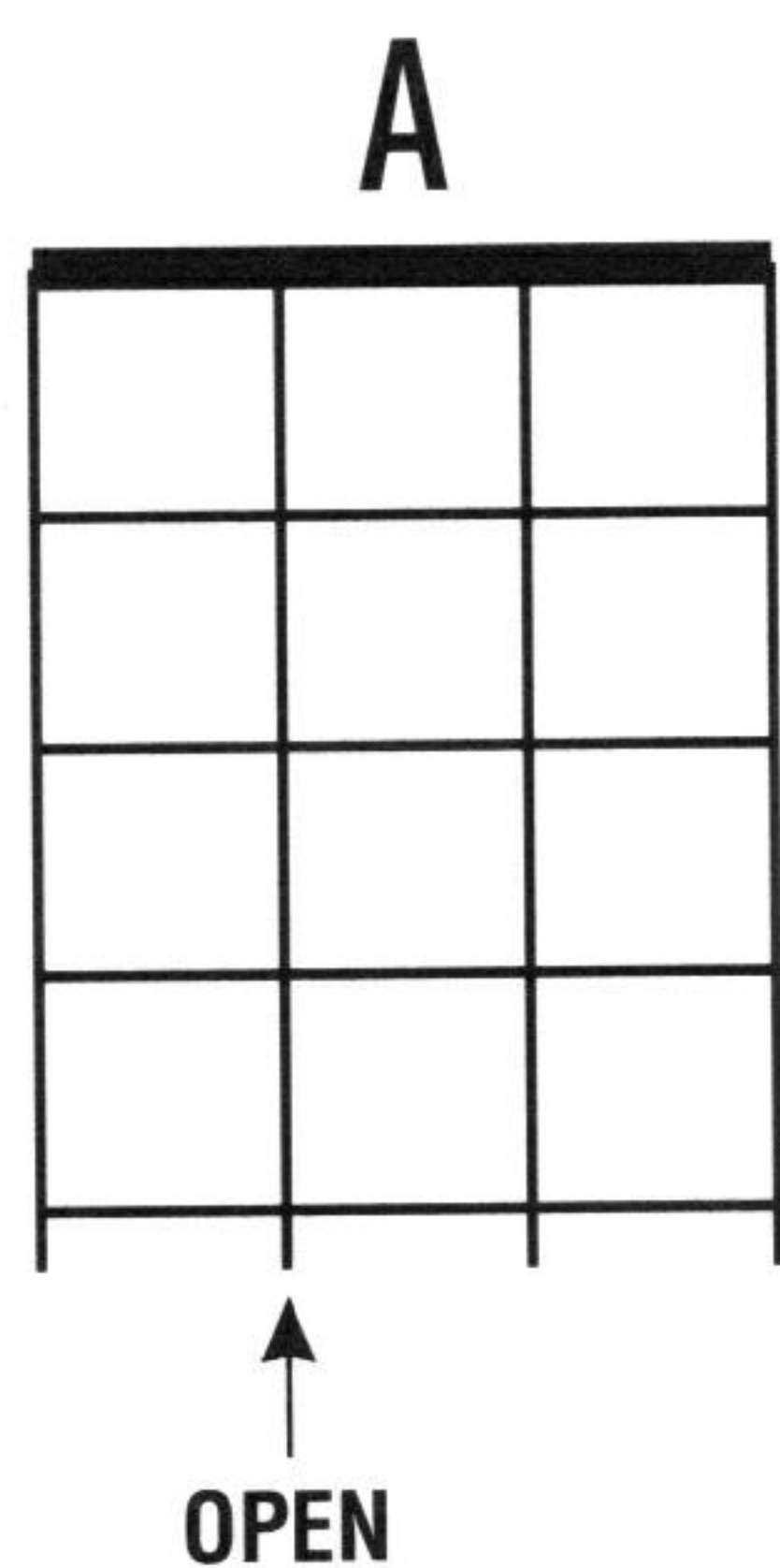
In the above example, the natural sign “cancels” a sharp from the previous measure. Though not strictly necessary, this helps to avoid any confusion over the intended pitch. This is known as a **courtesy accidental**.

THE SHIFT

In order to play *all* the notes on the E string comfortably, you need to learn how to shift from 1st position to 2nd position. You can shift on any finger: Play the first note, then lighten up on the pressure and slide your hand up or down one fret. Try the following examples, each of which shifts using a different finger.



NOTES ON THE A STRING



These notes are in 1st position. Remember to say the note names out loud as you play.

