



The Bar Chord Brochure

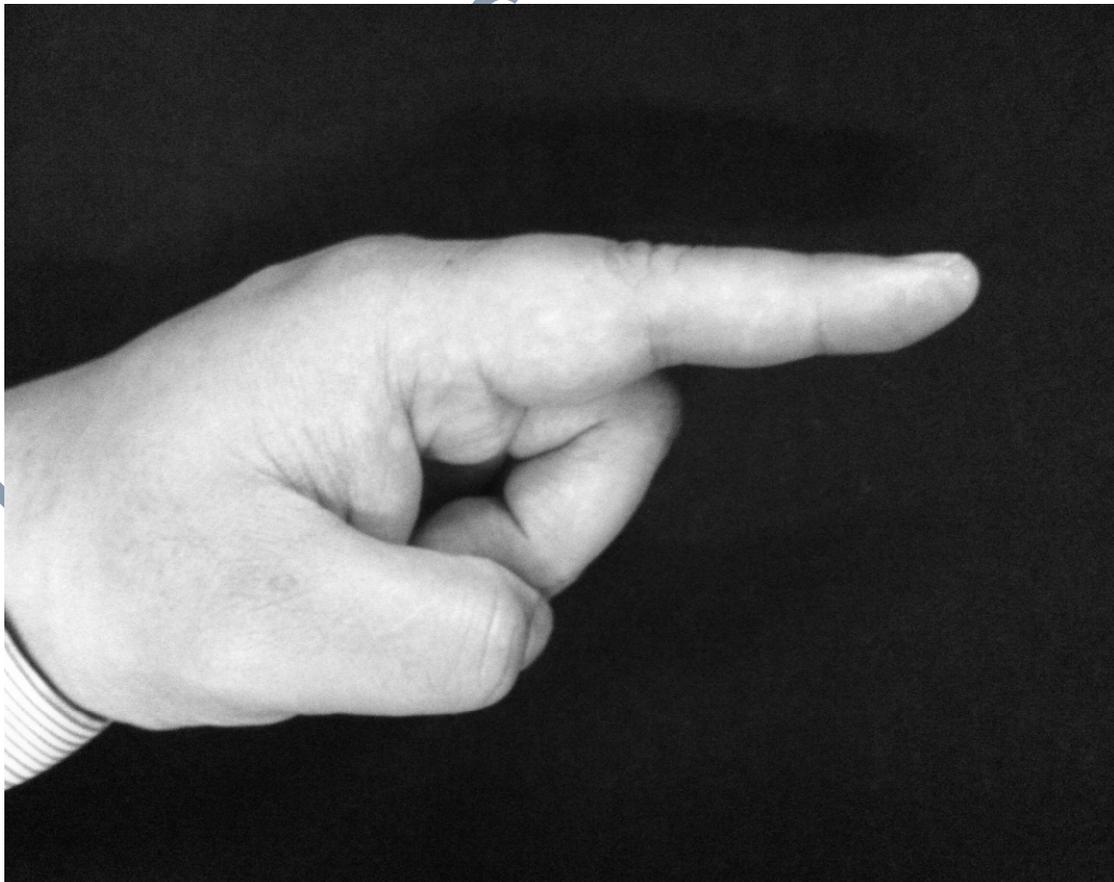
What is a bar chord?

To put it simply, a bar chord is a chord where one finger holds down multiple strings. For the purposes of this brochure, we will look at a bar chord where the bar does the same job as the nut (the piece of plastic or bone that the strings pass over near the top – the headstock – of the guitar). If we are using standard tuning then the strings are tuned in a way that makes it as easy as possible to play simple open chords (C, G, D, A, E) with only a few fingers.

If we want to move these simple chord shapes up and down the neck, they would only be correct if the nut was to move with them. We can simulate this by using a bar to act as the nut. This will make it possible to move our simple chord shapes up and down the fretboard. If you are familiar with a capo then the best way to describe the bar is to say that it does the job of a capo.

The best part of the finger

What is the best part of the finger to use when we form a bar? Most people use the fleshy part of the finger but if you look at your fingers, you will soon realize that this is not really the best part for the job. The best part is the side of the finger (as shown below), because the side of the finger is straighter and does not have as many creases on the side of it. This will provide the best surface to hold the strings down.





The joint

This is a very important part of the technique as this is what will allow you to use your other fingers to hold down the other notes that form the chords. When you press the side of the finger against the neck to form the bar, it will naturally force the other fingers away from the strings. This will make it harder to fret the rest of the notes used in the chords.

To combat this problem, you need to make sure that the middle joint of the first finger is near the bottom of the neck, as shown in the picture below.





Now you have the joint in the correct position you need to bend it, while at the same time keeping the rest of the finger straight. This will then enable the other fingers to get closer to the strings, as shown below.

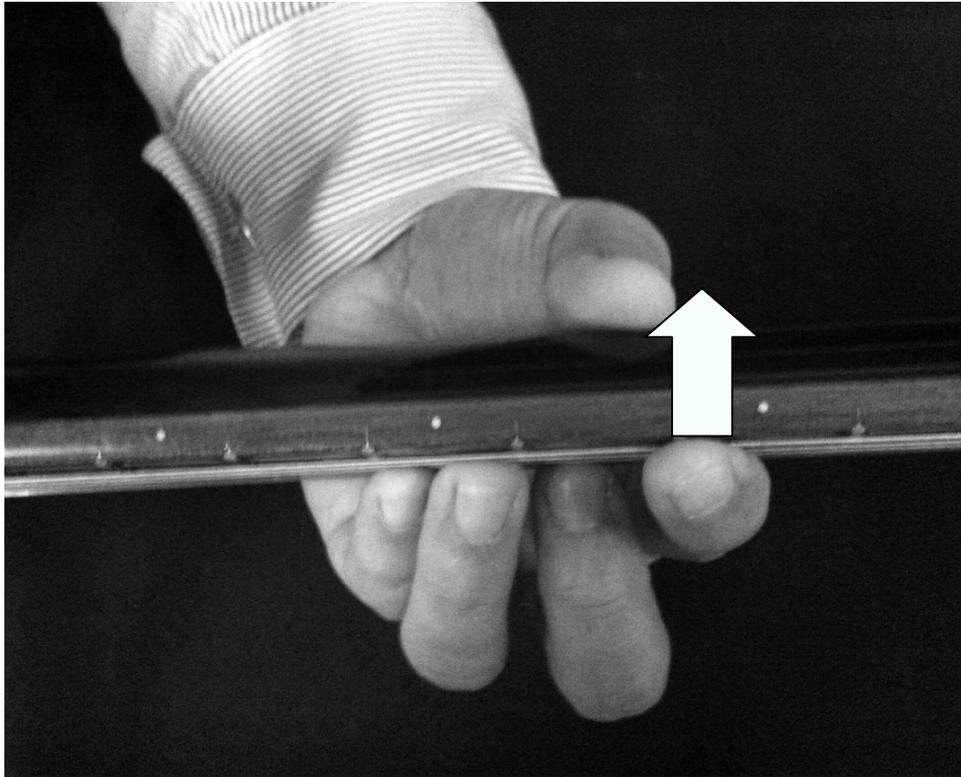


Having your joint positioned near the bottom of the fretboard will also put your finger in a better position to play the bar with the tip of the finger near (or on) the 6th string. This will give the finger more leverage when pressing down the strings.

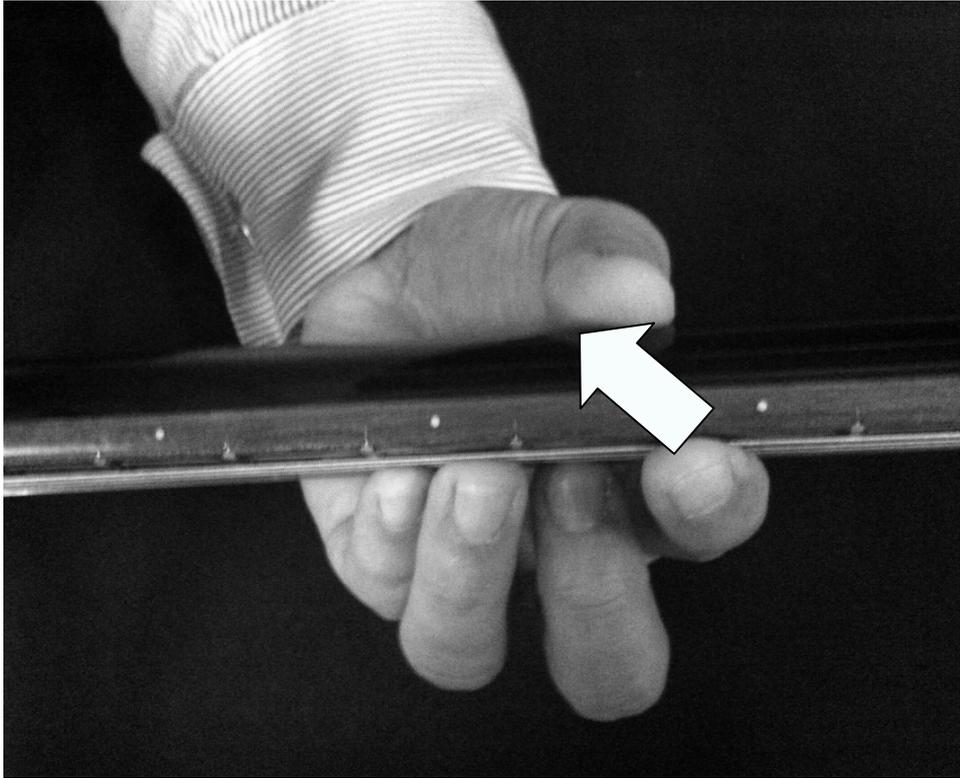


How to apply pressure

This is the key to playing the bar chord without struggling. Most people apply pressure by pushing back towards back of the neck (like in the picture below).



But the pressure should be pulling towards you.



You should be trying to pull the strings toward you and you should feel them being pulled into the fret.

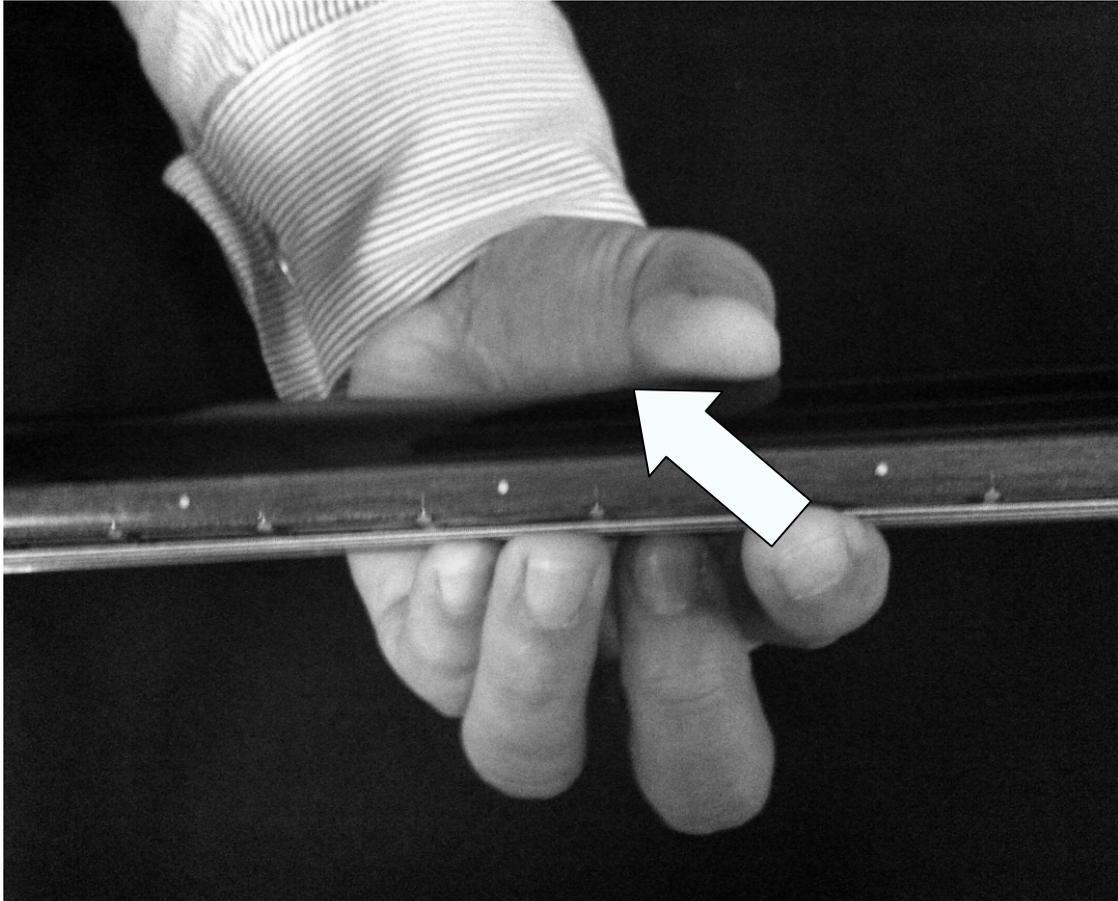
This technique prevents the hand from twisting and allows the other fingers to play more easily. It will also enable you to hold the bar down without having to use a lot of force.

In Practice

First put finger in a bar on any fret – try the fifth to third fret because it will be easier to push down. Make sure your finger is positioned so that when you bend at the middle joint it will be just at the bottom of the fretboard.



Keep the top two sections of your finger straight and practice this until you can be sure that all the notes are ringing clearly. Experiment with your thumb position as well to ensure your thumb is giving you adequate support. Then turn your finger on its side and pull towards the fret at a 45 degree angle – making sure that you are still keeping the top sections of your finger straight.



You will feel when your finger hits the fret. When this happens, bend your finger at the middle joint to bring the palm of your hand closer to the neck.

You must remember to keep the top two sections of the finger straight – although it is tempting, do not bend at the top joint! Doing this correctly will bring your fingers into the best position to play the rest of the chord.

Position the other fingers slowly, one at a time and make sure you hold the first finger position each time you place a new finger. Make sure you can maintain the bar shape. It is important not to force your fingers to hold a position - be relaxed and it will be much easier.

Once all fingers in position, the key thing to remember is don't push back straight through the neck – pull at a 45 degree angle. Pull the finger towards yourself and 'slam' it into the fret.

This method should not require a lot of hand or finger power – when perfected you should be able to play any bar chord without even using your thumb, as there is so little pressure being applied.