Fingerstyle Guide to "James Taylor" collection

There are only three melodies available in a fingerstyle song.

Low Melody – This melody usually focuses on the Low E string and A string, but depends on the chord being played. If a song calls for a D Major chord, the lowest 'technical' note that you can play without altering the D Major chord's need for three notes. In the case of D Major, the low melody would be the open A string. The low melody is not ALWAYS the root note of the chord, but can be thought of as such for ease of playing.

Mid Melody – This melody really goes back to the concept of the 'middle C' on a piano. The mid melody is the space filler found within a chord. It can be on a variety of strings, but usually it involves the A and D strings. Again, this depends on the chord. In the case of D Major, the mid melody would be the D string, even though it is the root. In the case of C Major, the mid melody could be ANY of the notes on the D and G strings.

High Melody – This melody is much easier to understand, because generally a high melody note falls in on the B and High E strings. Since in standard tuning both E strings are tuned to "E" (with the high E string being an octave of the low E) anything you EVER play on the Low E string can be duplicated on the High E string in unison – or in other words – together.

There are three melodies, and there are six strings on a standard guitar (assuming we are also tuned to standard tuning). Let's do the math:

You can assign these three melodies as a TEMPLATE (but it's not always necessary to follow this 100%) like this:

Low Melody Notes – Low E string and A string
Mid Melody Notes – D string and G string
High Melody Notes – B string and High E string

It's almost always a good idea to think of fingerstyle as being a roller coaster. You might have heard me mention this before. We want the low melody to set the tone, but we don't want to make it sound boring, so include the high melody for color.

To give the song a sense of flow, we assign the mid melody notes within each chord.

Here's the formula:

Low+ High Melody together → Mid Melody (filler) → Low and/or High Melody

This gives a nice and comfortable feel to the song. Notice though that I showed at the end "Low and/or High Melody" as an option. Here's why:

It all depends on the type of song you are performing. Often you'll find that if a song feels 'bright' or 'happy' then a high melody series of notes would sound good. However, if you have a song that seems 'dim' or 'sad' you might want to revert back to the low melody before moving back into the next progression. Because it is logical to ALWAYS start with both low and high melody at the beginning of

each chord progression, you'll never need to worry whether or not the song is going to be dull. Odds are it won't. If it does start to feel dull, then you can easily change the last "Low and/or High Melody" to the opposite of what the next chord will be.

Example

If we were to play the D chord as a high melody ending in this progression: G – C – D

You'll find that the transition from D back to G sounds great. However, if you were to play it as a low melody, the open notes from the D chord drone and dull the song down, even when you take such a bright chord as the G chord as your next chord choice. This is when experimentation comes into play, and the simple truth is there is NO way of really knowing what sounds good until you try it out based on the progressions at hand.

Fingers Used To Pick

Unless you are classically trained, there is absolutely no reason to worry about which fingers to use. The easiest way to think of how to use your fingers to pick a song out is by thinking of the arrangement of your hand itself.

You can almost always get by with your thumb playing the low melody notes and your 1st and/or 2nd fingers playing EVERY OTHER NOTE on the guitar. It might seem strange at first, but it will start making sense as you practice. Sometimes adding your 3rd finger just creates problems, not to mention adding your 4th finger. Since we are picking out the chords in the easiest way possible, you can honestly play every single song from this collection with your thumb, 1st, and 2nd fingers. If you CHOOSE to add more depth to a chord, begin working with your 3rd finger, but only after you are very comfortable.

Chords Picked Out In Tab

The following chords are ONLY simple template versions. Feel free to alter these as you wish as well as alter each chord based on your comfort level. I am just providing a very easy format to follow. With each chord you will see two notes at the end of the legend provided. While you don't need to follow the note values of quarter notes and eighth notes, in the case of the templates I provide, it is much easier to allow the last two notes of the chord you are playing to come out faster than the previous notes. In other words, the tab will show (1) the chord name (2) the basic picking and (3) how to round that chord out to move into the next chord.

Important: These patterns are NOT necessarily what I play in each song. These are guides for you to practice with. Your version probably won't be picked in the same way mine is, but I used the same concept of low, mid, and high melody note usage to come to the same conclusion. Always think of fingerstyle as a 'wave' or a 'roller coaster' full of lows, mids, and highs (or hills, descents, and resting zones) and you'll do fine.

These are ALL of the chords featured in the James Taylor DVD Collection:

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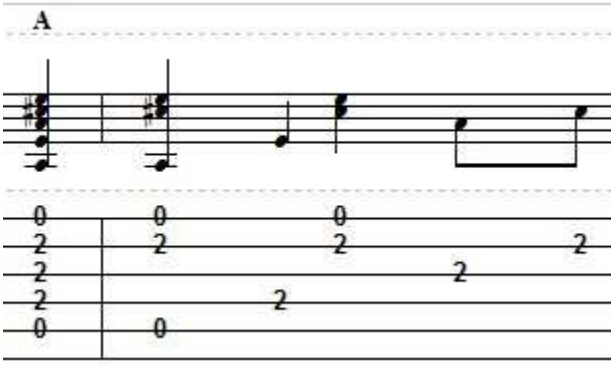

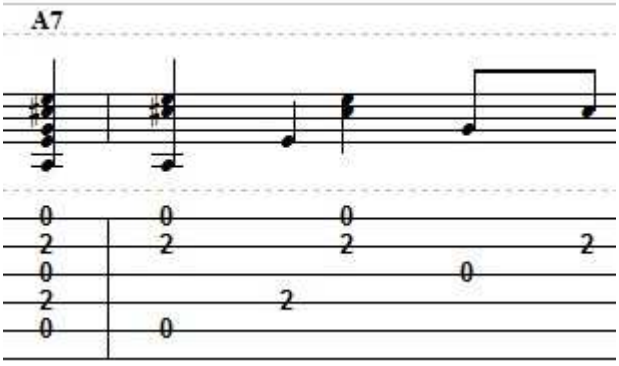

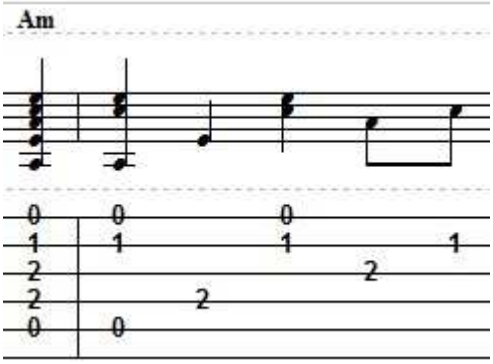

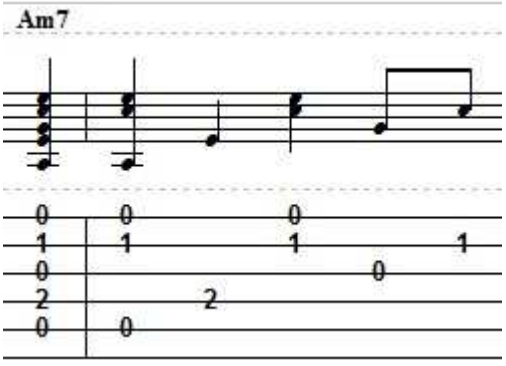

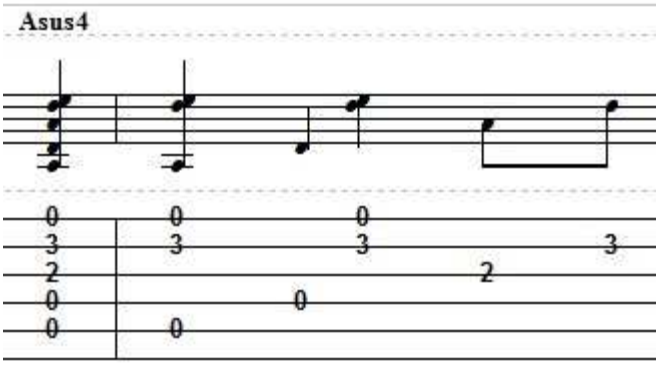

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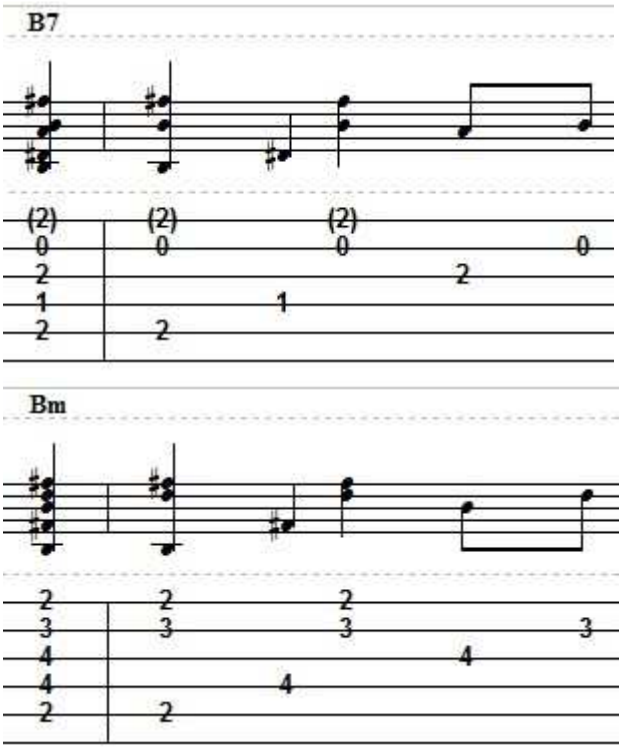

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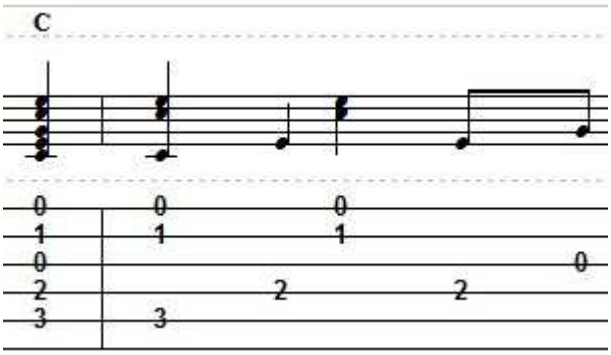

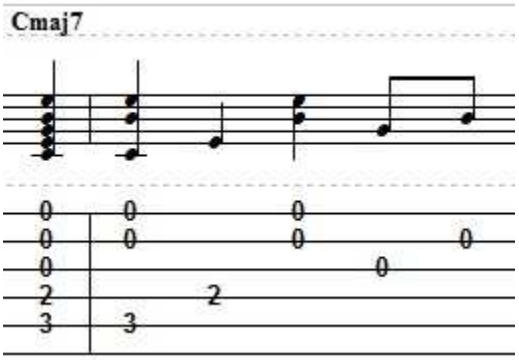

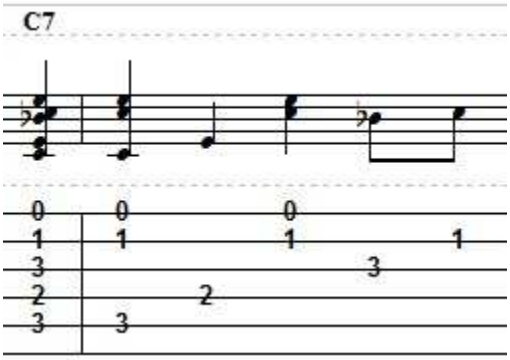

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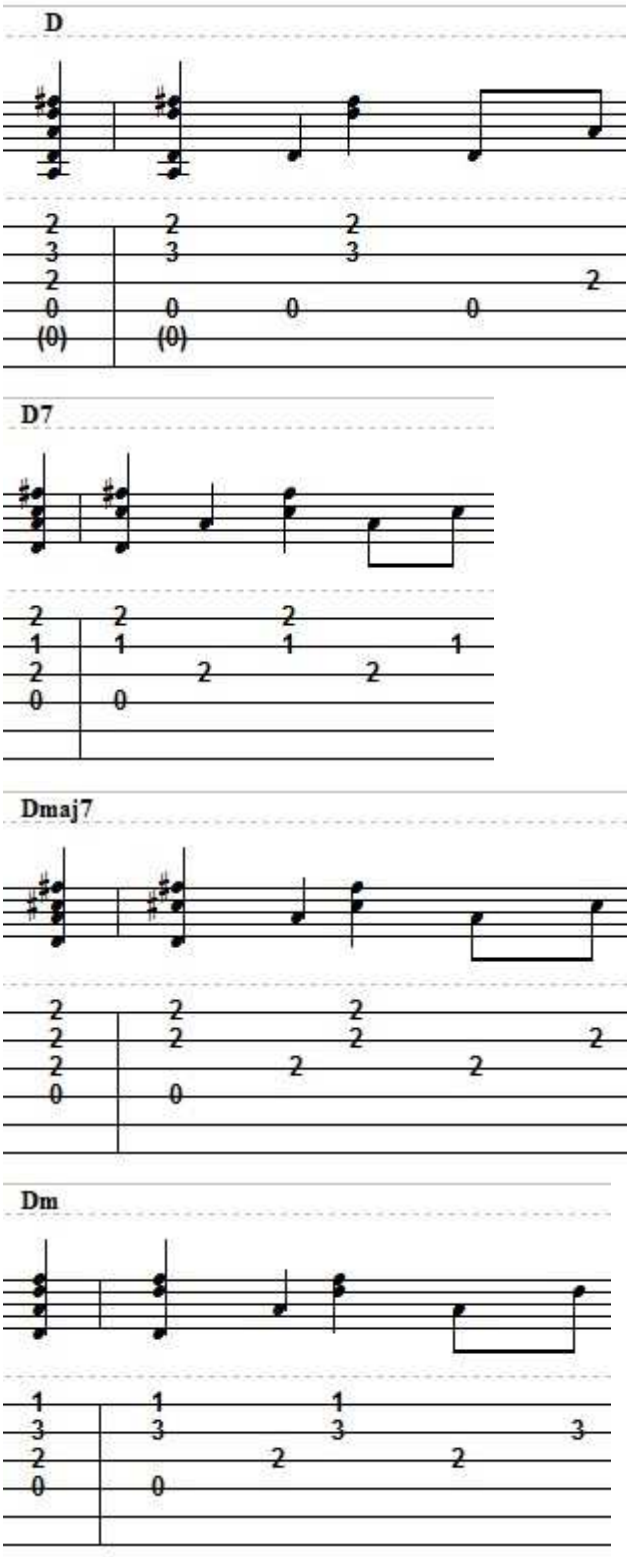
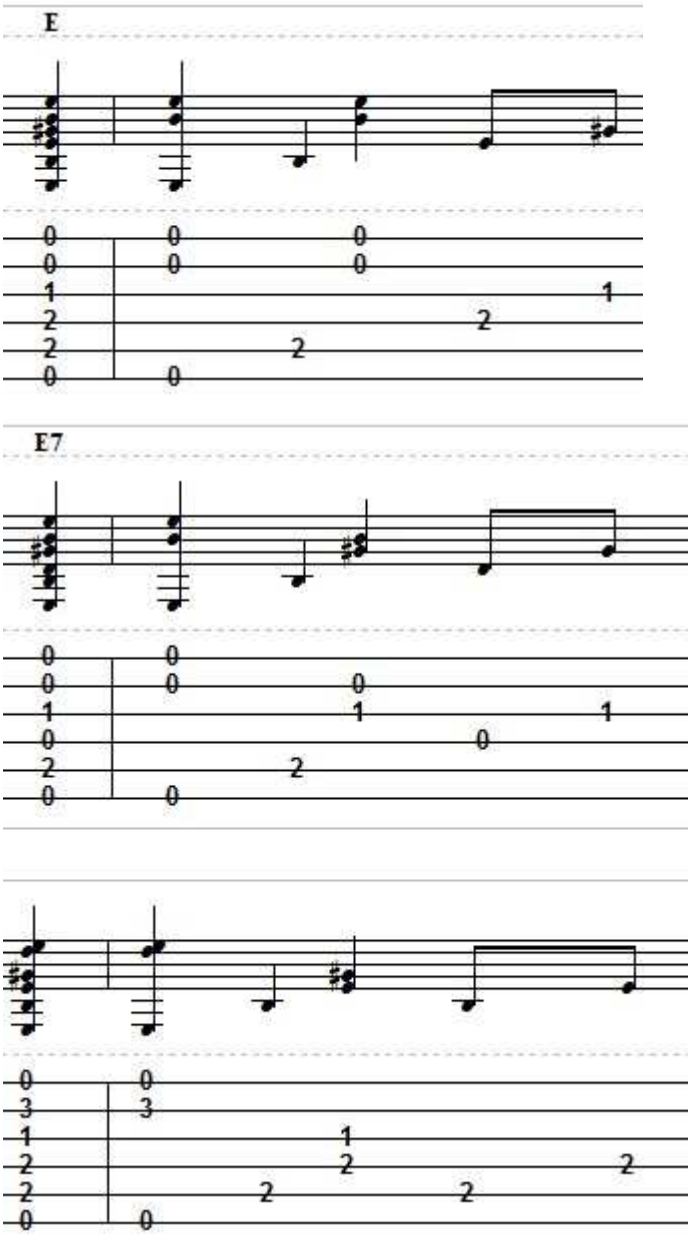
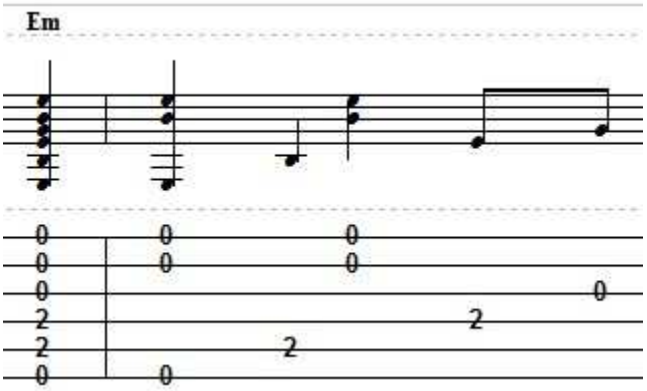


E Group (two E7 chords are shown):

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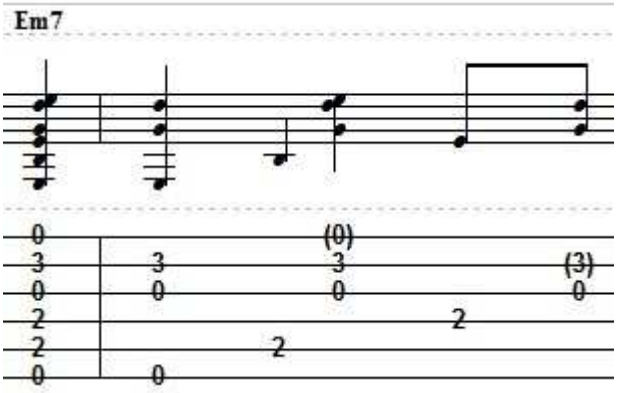
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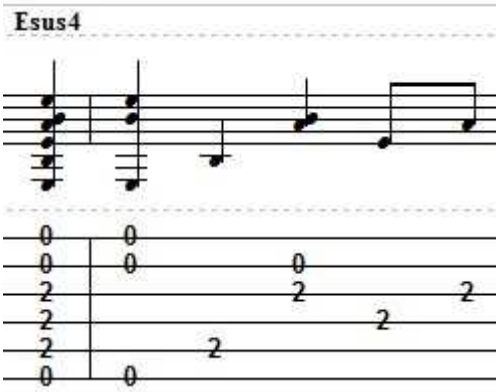
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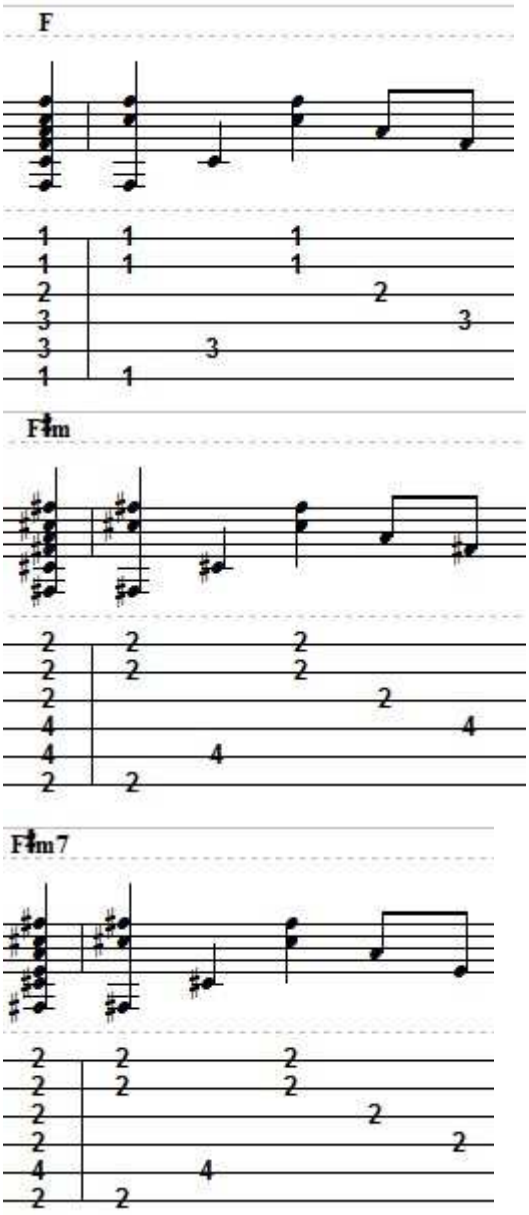

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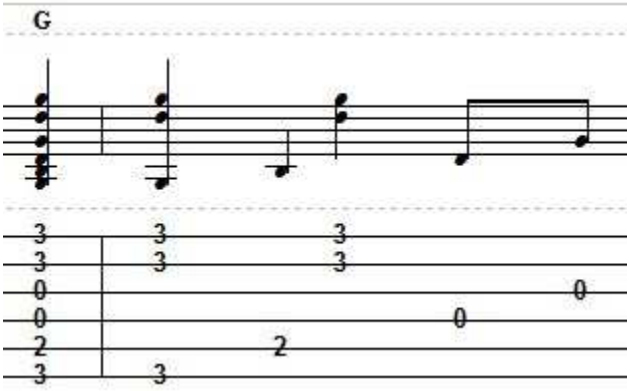
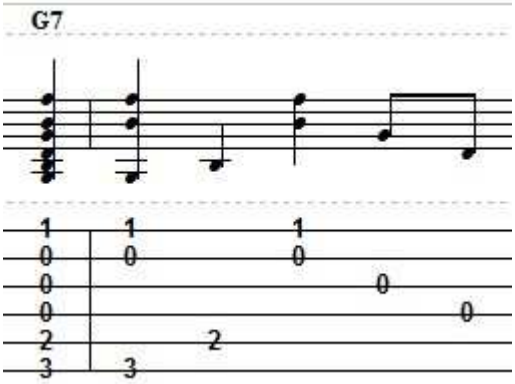
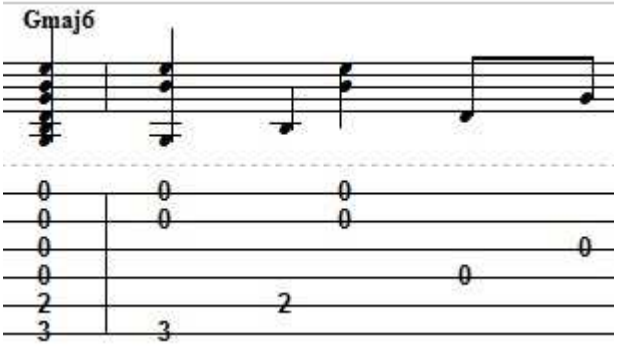
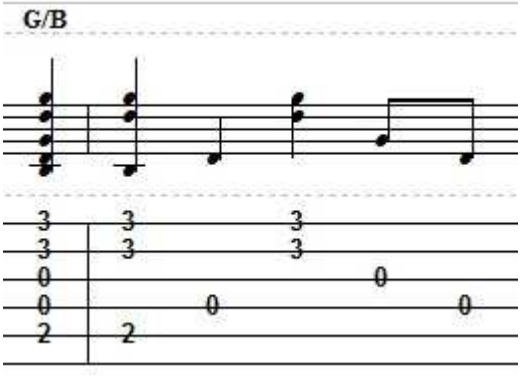
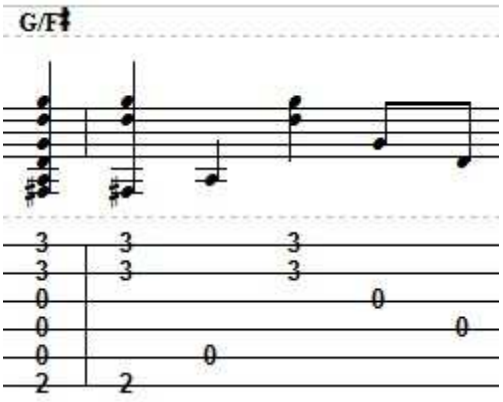






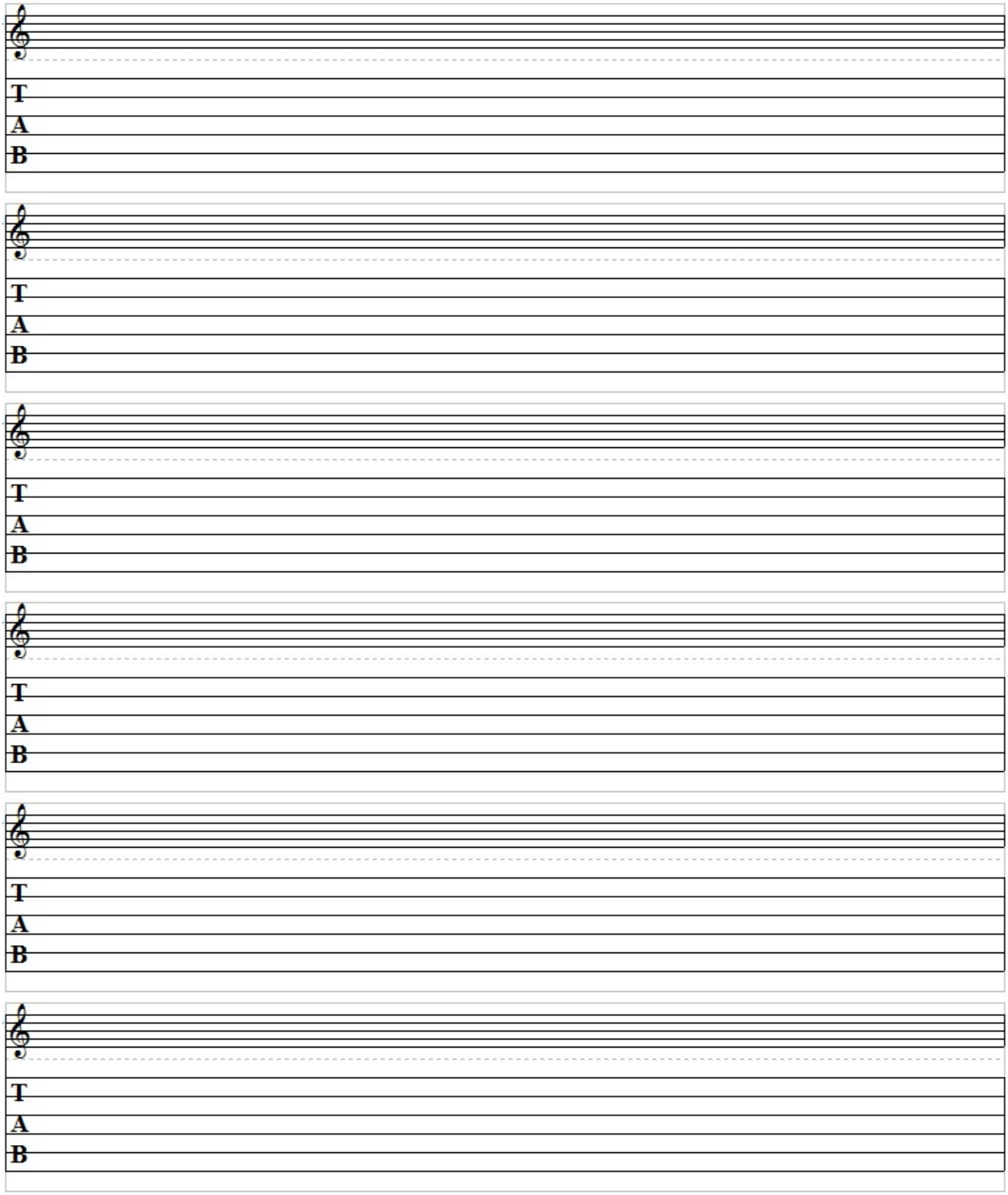




Final Thoughts

These chords are very common chords played in a ton of different songs (well, except the D/C# - I've only seen it in "Carolina In My Mind" personally) so they can be applied in any circumstance. I am also including below a page you can print out that will allow you to create your own patterns based on your comfort level. I hope you enjoy!

(Printout is further down the page)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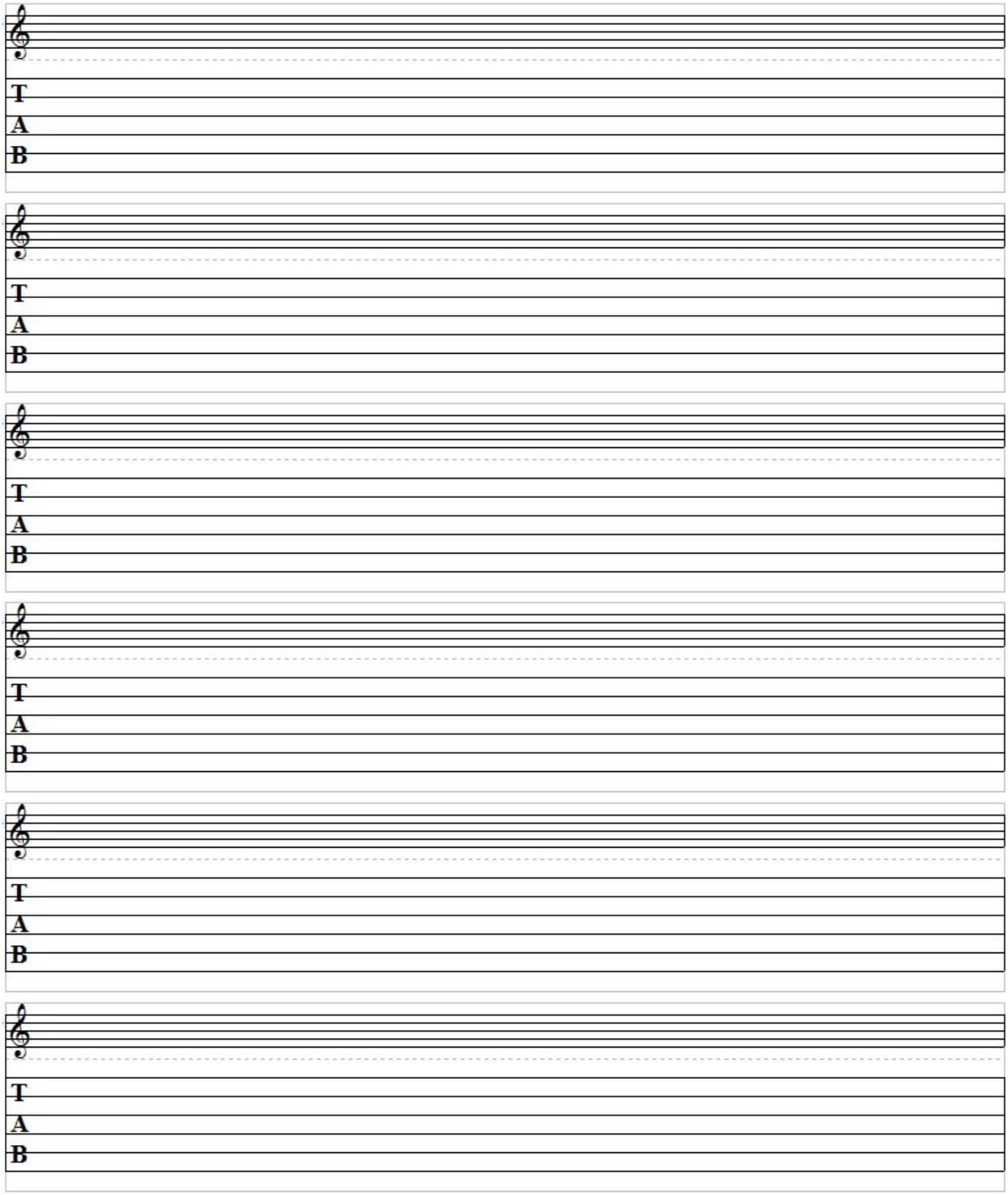
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