

## As Simple as Chords Get! Introducing “Mini-Chords”

The Strumstick makes chords automatically as you finger any note on the first string. Later, you can also do more formal chords which correspond to regular chords on any instrument. They are not hard, but there is a really fun and easy in-between step people really like.

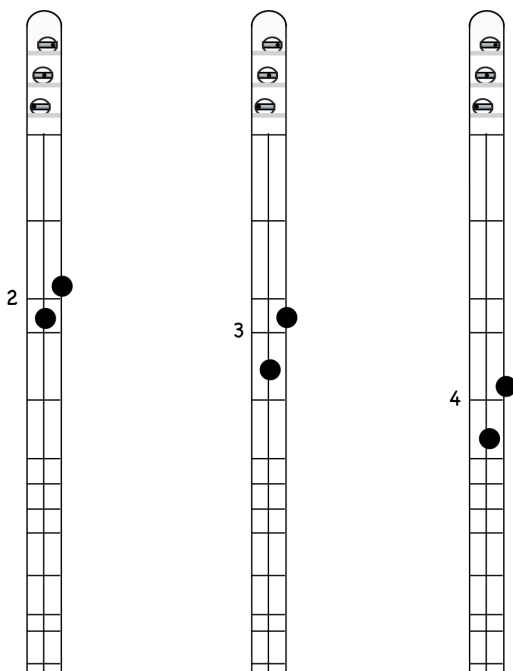
We call these *Mini-Chords* - very simple fingerings on the Strumstick that can be moved up or down the neck to create a different harmony at each fret. One fingering covers many possibilities!

Let's start with our first Mini-Chord, *shown below on the left, by the number 2.*

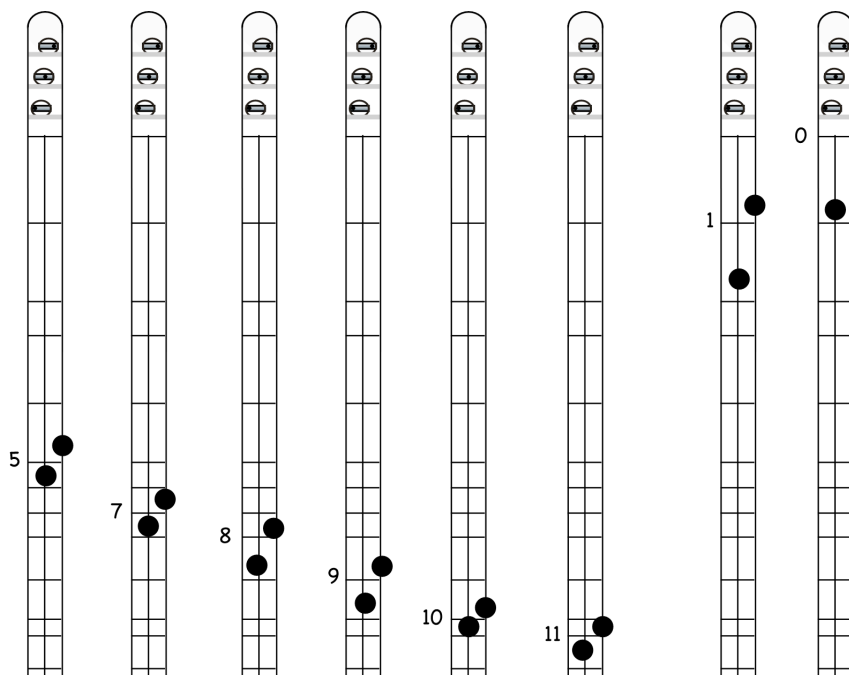
Place your first finger at fret #2 (on the 1st string), and your second finger at fret #3 (on the 2nd string). Strum.

*The little “2” marker is a guide to which fret your first finger is at.*

Then slide *both* fingers up one fret, to frets 3 and 4 (*middle picture, marked 3*), and strum again. Then slide up one more fret (right diagram, marked 4), and strum again. Each location makes a beautiful harmony.



The next diagram shows the rest of the sequence. Notice that after fret 5 we *skip* fret 6 and go to fret 7. (That is just for now.) Also notice position 1, and position 0.

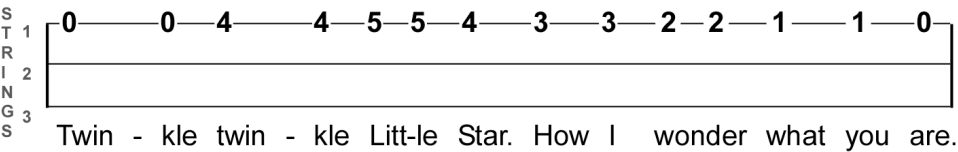


### For Best Results:

- **Press with the tip of each finger** (like the eraser on the end of a pencil)
- **Keep your hand and wrist loose and flexible**, so they can move to a position that makes your fingers happy.
- **Hold your fingers upright** to avoid muffling a string next to your finger.
- **Avoid temptation to twist the neck to face your eyes.** This makes it easier to see what your fingers are doing but it makes it very hard to keep fingers from touching adjacent strings. Keep the face of the Strumstick parallel with the front of your body.

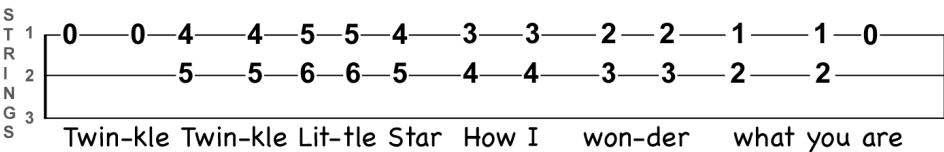
Here is how to use this Mini-Chord shape in a song.

Lets take Twinkle Twinkle as an example.  
*These diagrams show fret numbers and which string they are on.*

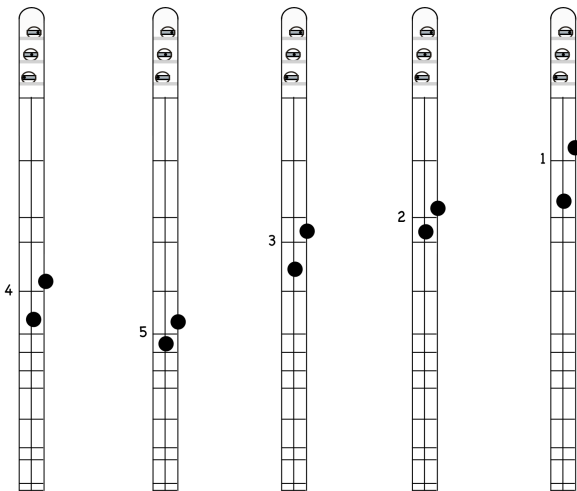


Play the melody with just one finger and strum all three, to get familiar with it.

Then try it with Mini-Chords. Whichever fret you play on the first string, use the first finger, and add in the second finger 1 fret higher (on the 2nd string). That would look like this: These are the same fingerings we saw on the previous page but shown a different way.



This uses Mini-Chords 4, 5, 3, 2, and 1 (we are not using the 0 Mini-Chord at the moment). Below are the Chord Diagrams for those fingerings.



Any time you are playing a melody, you can try a Mini-Chord as a substitute for fingering a single string.

Here are a couple examples - first play the melody alone, then play with some Mini-Chords added in.

*This notation is called Tablature, or TAB for short. The three strings are the horizontal lines, and the numbers placed on the strings are the fret # you would finger on that string. When you play the melody, it is your choice which finger to hold a note with.*

Strum all three strings

S	1	0	1	2	2	2	1	2	0	0	0	1	2	3	5
T	2	0													
R	3														
I															
N															
G															
S															

**You Are my Sunshine**, my only sunshine. You make me happy

5	4	3	2												

when skys are gray.

0	1	2	2	2	1	2	0	0	0	1	2	3	5		
0		3	3	3	2	3				2	3	4	6		

**You Are my Sunshine**, my only sunshine. You make me happy

5	4	3	2												
6	5	4	3												

when skys are gray.

With both songs, notice that at the zeros (“0”s) we are not fingering any Mini-Chord. We are still strumming all three strings though. You could strum just the notes of the melody, or strum a rhythm pattern, as you like. The rest of the melody to *You Are My Sunshine* is written out in *The Strumstick Family Songbook*. See [www.strumstick.com](http://www.strumstick.com)

With *This Land is Your Land*, again you should play the melody without the Mini-Chords to become familiar with how the song goes. Then try it with the Mini-Chords included.

Strum all three strings

0	1	2	3	3	3	0	1	2	2	0	0	2	1	1

**This Land Is Your Land**, This Land Is My Land From Cal - i - for - nia

1	1	0	1	2	2									

to the New York Is - land

0	1	2	3	3	3	0	1	2	2	0	0	2	1	1		
2	3	4	4	4	2	3	3	3							2	2

**This Land Is Your Land**, This Land Is My Land From Cal - i - for - nia

1	1	0	1	2	2									
2	2	2	3	3										

to the New York Is - land

You will find the whole melody to *This Land Is Your Land* written out in the *Strumstick Instruction Book* (which is included in an appendix at the back of this book). With both these songs, you should be able to figure out which Mini-Chord fingerings to use for the rest of the song.

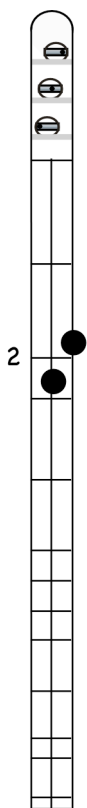
**Whatever note you are playing on the first string, add a note one fret higher on the second string.** That is the magic of the Mini-Chords: you do not have to memorize 10 different chords and their names. If you are playing a note on the first string, simply add a note one fret higher on the second string. Try this anytime... if you like it, keep it!

## Now, Two More Mini-Chord Fingerings

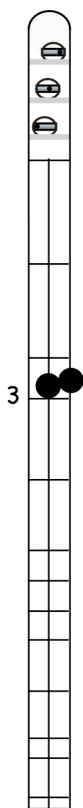
There are two other Mini-Chord fingerings that are very useful. These new ones will get a little bit more complicated; by all means mess around with the One-Fret Mini-Chords before moving on to these.

We need to name each basic Mini-Chord fingering shape, in order to talk about them. The previous one we learned has a one fret difference between the fingers, let's call that the "**One-Fret** Mini-Chord". The two new ones will be called: the "**Same-Fret** Mini-Chord" and the "**Two-Fret** Mini-Chord."

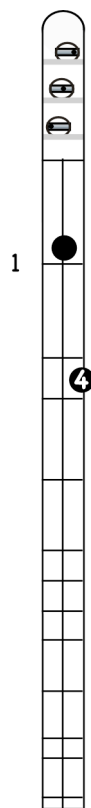
Here are all three fingerings:



**One-Fret**  
MiniChord



**Same-Fret**  
MiniChord



**Two-Fret**  
MiniChord

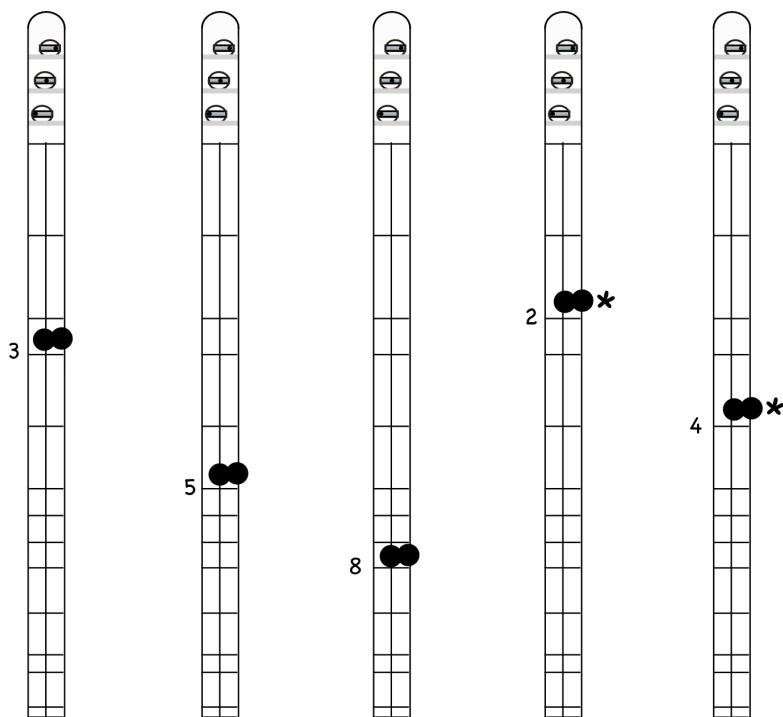
④ = use 4th finger

The **Same-Fret** fingering could be 1st and 2nd fingers, with 1st finger on the 2nd string. Or, you could use 1st finger to hold both strings (reach across a little to get them both). Try both ways, and use the one that is easier for you. *I recommend using the 1st finger for both notes.*

Notice that the **Two-Fret** fingering (next page) has your 1st finger on string 2, and we'll use your 4th finger on string 1.

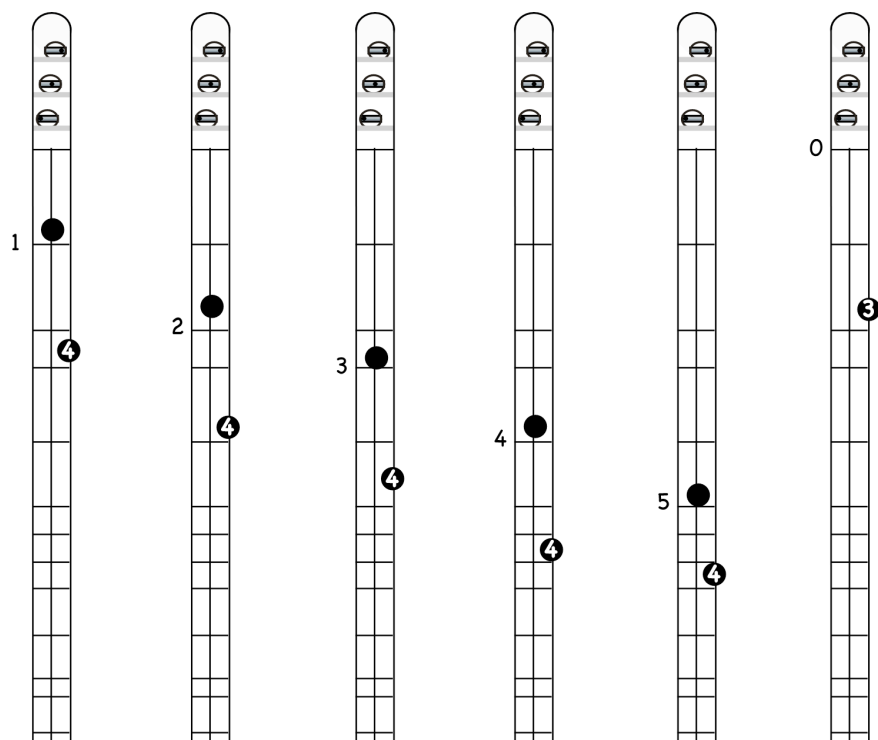
*(You can use your 3rd finger instead of your pinky if you like, but it is usually easier to use your 4th finger for this fingering.)*

## Here are the Same-Fret Mini-Chords



Notes: We are only going to use the Same-Fret Mini-Chord at a few fret positions. And two of them (at 2nd fret and at 4th fret) are optional and marked with an asterisk ( \* ) because they are a little more “jazzy” sounding. Use them if you like them. The important ones are 3rd fret, 5th fret, and 8th fret. That’s easy!

## Here are the *Two-Fret Mini-Chords*



Notice a few things:

- We are putting the guide number by the fret the 1st finger is at, but the 1st string note will be up two frets from there.
- Remember the Black Dot with a 4 in it suggests you use 4th finger for that note.
- **When we get to guide fret 4, the 1st string note is three frets up** (at fret 7), not two frets up (at fret 6). That is because of the presence of fret 6, the “extra” fret. *Try position 4 with your 4th finger at fret 6 instead of fret 7, and see what it sounds like.*
- Guide number 0 uses finger number three (Black Dot with 3 in it). We could use finger 1, 2, 3, or 4 in that situation, any would work.



Why do you think we might choose 3rd finger? Send us a note ([info@strumstick.com](mailto:info@strumstick.com)) if you have an idea about that.

### **There are three big advantages of using the Mini-Chords before diving into more formal regular chords.**

- One: they are easy to memorize; just three fingerings get used in many places on the neck.
- Two: they are easy to use; they connect to a melody note on one string, and really sound good. You get a lot for your efforts.
- Three: they are terrific training for how to use your fingers. In fact, many of the regular chords will be familiar from having done the Mini-Chords.

These Mini-Chords are one of the advantages of the “No Wrong Notes” setup of the Strumstick. Guitar just does not work this way. However, the experience you get with these Mini-Chords will give you a big boost if you take up guitar in the future.

### **The next Section will show you how to use the Two-Fret and Same-Fret Mini-Chords with some songs.**

We will also discuss how you can choose which Mini-Chords to play, for yourself, in whatever song you happen to be playing.

By the time you finish that section, you will be able to make some musical choices about which Mini-Chords you like to use best.

**On the next page is the song *You Are My Sunshine* again** (but the whole melody) with different Mini-Chords being used in different places. Some will be *Two-Fret*, some *Same-Fret*, some *One-Fret* Mini-Chords

**You Are My Sunshine**    Strum all three strings

uses two-fret, same-fret and one-fret MiniChords

(one-fret mini)

S T R I N G S	1	0	1	2	2	2	1	2	0	0	0	1	2
	2	0	2	3	3	3	2	3					
	3												

You Are my Sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me

(two-fret mini)	3	5	5	4	3	2	0	1	2	3	5	(two-fret mini)
	3	3	3	2	1	0				3	3	

(same-fret mini)    /

happy when skys are gray. You'll never know dear

(two-fret mini)	5	4	3	2	0	0	1	2		(one-fret mini)
	3	2	1	0	1	1	2	3		

how much I love you. Please dont take

(two-fret mini)	3	1	1	2	0					(one-fret mini)
	1			3						

my sunshine a- way

The *Same-Fret* Mini-Chord does not get used too often (only once in this song). The *One-Fret* gets used the most, and the *Two-Fret* a medium amount.

The *One-fret* and the *Two-Fret* Mini-Chords have a different sound, and they work nicely together.

**Here is another song (Shenandoah)** with a mix of *One-Fret*, *Two-Fret* and *Same-Fret* Mini-Chords.

# Shenandoah

Strum all three strings (Slowly and freely)

uses two-fret, same-fret and one-fret MiniChords

*(two-fret mini)*

S T R I N G S	1	0 — 0 — 0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 5 — 4									
	2	0 — — — — — 3 — 2									
	3										

Oh Shenandoah, I long to see you

*(two-fret mini)*

*(two-fret mini)*

8 — 7 — 5 — 4 — 5 — 4 — 2 — 4
5 — 4 — 3 — 2 — 3 — 2

A-a-way you rolling river

*(same-fret mini)*

*(one-fret mini)*

4 — 5 — 5 — 5 — 2 — 4 — 2 — 1 — 0
5 — 5 — 5 — 3 — 5 — 3

Oh Shenandoah, I long to see-ee you

*(two-fret mini)*

0 — 0 — 5 — 4
0 — 0 — 3 — 2

Away, I'm bound a-way

*(one-fret mini)*

*(one-fret mini)*

0 — 0 — 1 — 2 — 0 — 1 — 0
2 — 3 — 2

Across the wide Missouri

## Some Shenandoah Tips:

### **You Don't Always Have to Strum All Three Strings.**

I know that may contradict what we have said all along, but we are in the big kids' book now! We say "strum all three strings" so there is a harmony happening, and to make any rhythm you are playing sound smoother. But playing a beautiful melody like *Shenandoah*, it can sound really nice to have a mix of all three strings, single notes, Mini-Chords, sometimes rhythm, sometimes just the melody played by itself.

Try playing single notes once in a while (just pick the string the note is on) and other times strum all three. With the Mini-Chords, it makes sense to strum all three, to get the full effect.

Since *Shenandoah* is played freely, without a rigid rhythm, you may just be using down-strums (or single notes) as you go through it, but if you were doing a strumming rhythm, that is another thing that you can choose when to do and when not to.

As you can see, we are labeling where the One, Same, and Two fret Mini-Chords are used, as a convenience, but the notes in the TAB give all the information you need. Again, there is a mix of the three types.

**A big dramatic *tremolo strum*** can be very useful in this song.

Tremolo is moving the pick up and down across all the strings repeatedly. The tremolo strum sounds like chords played on flamenco guitar, or like a drum roll. Big drama, use sparingly, but it can be very effective when a note is held for a beat or two, so there is time to do the tremolo before the next note needs to be played. Try it at "Shenandoah," at the "-way" of "A-a-way", the "ver" of "River" and at last note of the song. The trick is to hold the pick firmly, and don't have the pick too deep into the strings. Keep it light and fast, but it does not have to be breakneck speed fast.

## How to Choose Which Mini-Chord to Use On Your Own

You can use Mini-Chords in just about any song. We have seen examples of each type of Mini-Chord at use in a few songs. How would you choose Mini-Chords if you were working on a song yourself?

**The best suggestion** is, look at the fret number that is the melody note (often the first string, but sometimes the second string). Suppose a song's melody note is at 1st string/3rd fret. There are several Mini-Chords that contain that note.

These three Mini-Chords all contain 1st string/3rd fret:

- One-Fret (with first finger at 1st string/3rd fret),
- Same-Fret (1st finger at 3rd fret on both strings 1&2) and
- Two-Fret (with 4th finger at 3rd fret on the first string)

*(See TAB examples below)*

That means at that point in your song, **try any one of those three Mini-Chords** and see which you like the sound of best. And you can always just finger the note, and strum all three without any Mini-Chords, too.

Experience shows that the One-Fret Mini-Chord that contains the melody note is usually your best bet to try first. But if Two-Fret or Same-Fret contain the note, give them a shot at it, too. Let your listening decide, that is what ultimately counts!

If the melody note is on the second string, the same idea applies. Use a Mini-Chord fingering that contains that note on the second string.

Remember that we gave you just a few Same-Fret Mini-Chords? Well, if your melody note is at a different fret than the main ones we suggested (3,5 and 8) go ahead and try a Same-Fret Mini-Chord anyway (at fret 2 or 4 or 1 or 7) and see how it sounds. To you. If you like it, use it! The jazzy or unusual sound may be just the spice a song needs.

So to summarize, you can use any Mini-Chord that includes your melody note, and see how it sounds. One-Fret is your go-to Mini-Chord, but test the others.

The TAB diagrams below illustrate choosing Mini-Chords for yourself.

**Choosing Mini-Chords Yourself**

Here is an excerpt from Beethoven’s Ode To Joy (from the 9th Symphony), a popular piece of music many know even if not classical music listeners. Even if you have never heard it, it is easy to figure out; it’s a beautiful simple melody.

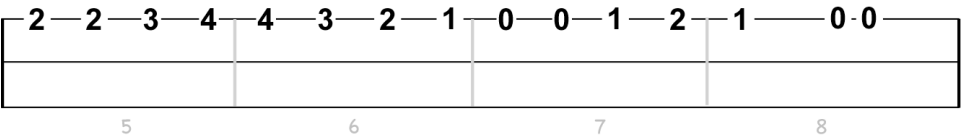
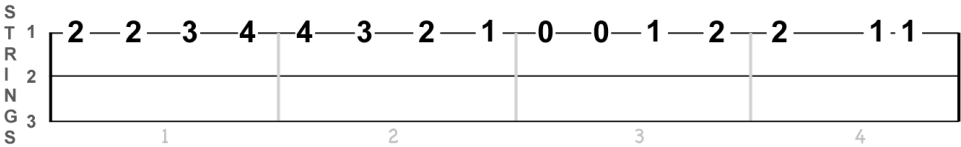
It is all even beats except for a little pause and then two quick notes at the end of each line.

Notice:

- We put *measure* lines in to break it into 4-beat groups (makes it easier to keep track of where you are).
- We also numbered the measures so we can identify them as we try different Mini-Chord possibilities.

First, the melody. Play the whole thing, or just the first two measures (also called “bars”), we will be working with them.

Excerpt from “Ode To Joy”, Beethoven.



Now lets look at measures 1 and 2. Here they are using the One-Fret Mini-Chords (labeled “1-fret” for short).

1-fret

A

2 — 2 — 3 — 4

3 — 3 — 4 — 5

4 — 3 — 2 — 1

5 — 4 — 3 — 2

1

2

(strum all three strings)

That sounds very nice, and was all 1-Fret Mini-Chords.

Let’s look at another possibility. By the way, the big letters **(A, B, C)** label three different ways of doing this. You just played Example A.

Here in Example B we are using 2-Fret Mini-Chords (labeled “2-fret”), except for the end of bar (measure) 2.

2-fret

1-fret

B

2 — 2 — 3 — 4

1 — 2

4 — 3 — 2 — 1

2 — 1 — 2

1

2

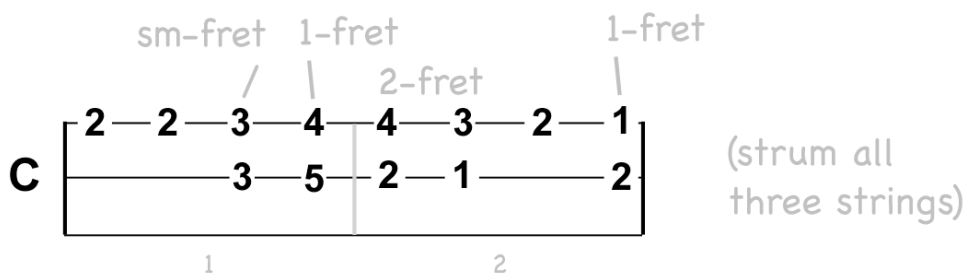
(strum all three strings)

In Example **B** we played a couple of “2”s just fingering the note and letting the Strumstick background strings create a harmony. Then we used 2-Fret Mini-Chords for several notes, then a single “2” (strum all three strings, unless you want to pick just the first string to play that note solo). Then the last note (“1”) at the end of bar 2 uses a 1-Fret Mini-Chord.

Try comparing Examples **A** and **B**, playing just bar 1 from each. They both sound nice, and there is a slightly different harmony happening with each.

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In Example **C** we are going to try still another combination of Mini-Chords. The melody notes (all on the first string) are exactly the same in these three examples; we are choosing Mini-Chords that contain the melody note each time. The label “*sm-fret*” is a short way of saying “Same-Fret Mini-Chord”



In Example C we used a Same-Fret at the note “3”, then a One-Fret at the next note “4”, and then a Two-Fret Mini-Chord at the next note “4” at the beginning of measure 2. And then end with a One-fret on the last note. How does it sound?

The point of these Examples is not that one example combination is better than another, they are all musically interesting, all pretty. The point is that you can usually have several choices which Mini-Chord to use at any given note.

It is worth noting that: **using several different Mini-Chord types (One-Fret, Same-Fret, Two-Fret) is more complicated** than just using the good-old One-Fret only. It is perfectly fine to stick with the One-Fret type, but the others are there if you are interested and want the variety they create.

**Please do write us ([info@strumstick.com](mailto:info@strumstick.com)) if you have any questions about playing and using the Mini-Chords.**

Here is the whole Ode to Joy excerpt with an assortment of Mini-Chords. This is just one way to do it. Happy Mini-Chording!  
The next section after this is regular chords (with real names!).



# Ode To Joy Excerpt with Mini-Chords

1-fret 2-fret 1-fret

S  
T  
R  
I  
N  
G  
S

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1-fret 2-fret 1-fret

5 6 7 8

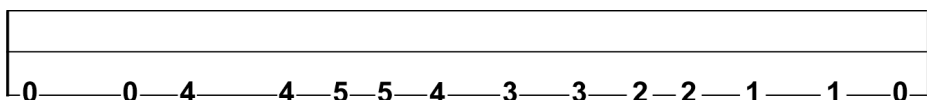
This uses One-Fret and Two-Fret Mini-Chords. In a few places they change frequently. Please notice: In measure 7 there are two optional notes in light gray ( 1 and 2 on the second string). You can play those two light gray notes, or don't play them. It is a bit more complex in an interesting way if you don't play the optional notes.

## Octave Pairs and swapping 3rd string/1st string

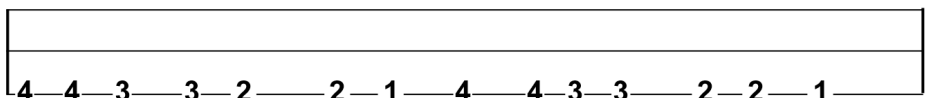
Here are two extra features for Mini-Chords. Octave Pairs and fingering 3rd string instead of 1st string.

Octave Pairs are holding the 1st string and the 3rd string at the same fret, with the 2nd string open. That requires two fingers, so we include it with Mini-Chords. It is more of a melody effect than a harmony. The diagrams and tab below show how this works. The basic idea is this: the 1st string and the 3rd string are tuned an octave apart. Octave notes are interchangeable, they are the same note but an octave interval apart. This is a relationship that makes no sense anywhere but in music by the way, just hang in there.

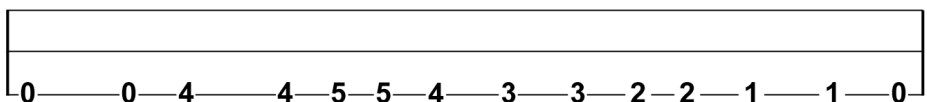
If you play “Twinkle Twinkle” fingering notes on the first string, you could just as easily play it fingering the same frets on the 3rd string (TAB below). Strum all 3 strings



Twin - kle twin - kle Litt-le Star. How I wonder what you are.



Up a-bove the world so high. Like a dia-mond in the sky.

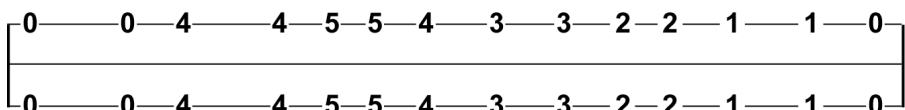


Twin - kle twin - kle Litt-le Star. How I wonder what you are

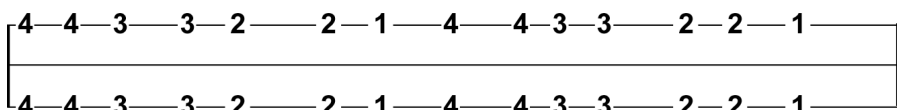
**Try Twinkle Twinkle with melody on 3rd string.**

And since that works, what would happen if we fingered 1st and 3rd string at the same time? This is called **Octave Pairs**. Strum all 3 strings

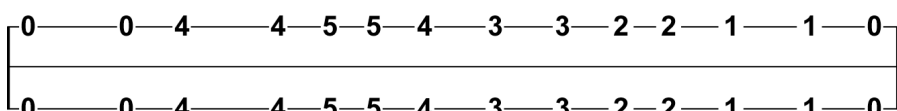
### Octave Pairs in Twinkle Twinkle



Twin - kle twin - kle Litt-le Star. How I wonder what you are.



Up a-bove the world so high. Like a dia-mond in the sky.



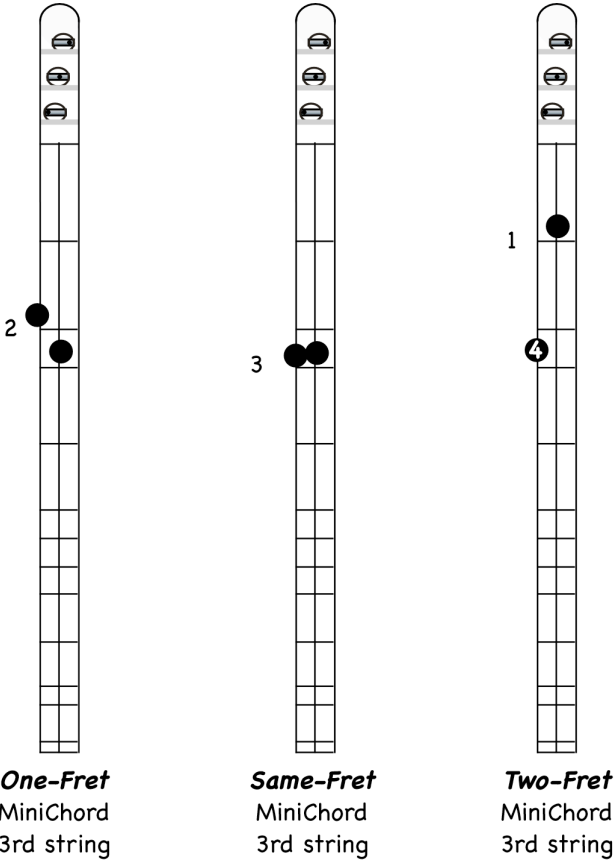
Twin - kle twin - kle Litt-le Star. How I wonder what you are

**Octave Pairs** really accentuate the melody by doubling it (there is now only one background note), and the octave interval has a cool sound to it.

**You can Try playing any song with the melody shifted to the third string, or as Octave Pairs.** These make some great variations! Simply said, if you have a note on the 1st string, you could play the same fret on the 3rd string, either as a substitute, or even at the same time.

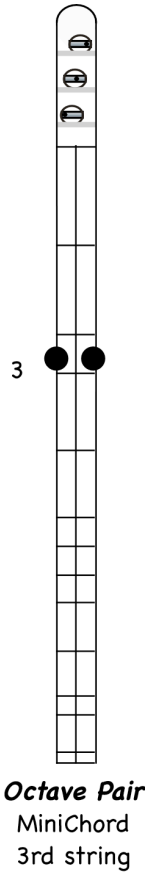
**Can Mini-Chords use 3rd string? Yes!**

Since the 1st string and 3rd string notes are interchangeable (for our purposes they are), then Mini-Chord notes on the 1st string should be swappable for notes on the 3rd string...and Lo and Behold! they are!



On the previous page are the three Mini-Chord fingerings shown with the 3rd string substituted for 1st string. That gives you a lot more possible sounds, without adding much more in fingerings to learn. We won't diagram all these at every fret , but you should try them just like you did the earlier Mini-Chord fingerings.

Here is the **Octave Pair fingering**, which we may consider another Mini-Chord (which is especially good for melody playing)



Any time you use a Mini-Chord, see what it sounds like if you play the 3rd string version. Any time you play a melody note, see what it sounds like as an octave pair at the same fret instead. The Mini-Chords give you a lot of harmony power, without a lot of complexity. With those under your belt, you are ready to look at more complex, named chord fingerings, in the next section. Good work!