

The Overlapping Tier System

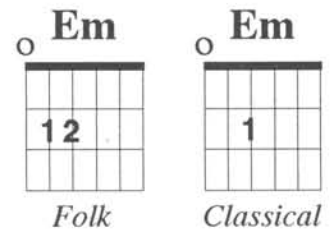
Sounds like some kind of crop rotation method. But, in fact, it is a term that I have invented all by myself, without checking with anybody, to describe the way that the fingers of the Picking Hand should be deployed across the strings of the guitar.

As we've already seen, the Thumb, **p**, is generally responsible for playing the three Bass Strings (6th, 5th and 4th), while the three fingers, **i**, **m** and **a**, are assigned to the three Treble Strings (3rd, 2nd and 1st, respectively). This is how we played our **Em** arpeggio.

But it turns out that it's just as common for the fingers to be shifted *up* one string in elevation, or *down* one string in pitch, so that **i** is stationed on the 4th string, **m** on the 3rd string and **a** on the 2nd string. Then **p** plays the 6th and 5th strings.

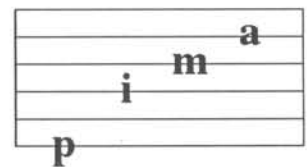
So we will find our fingers assigned to either one of two overlapping sets, or *tiers*, of strings. In other words, fingers **i-m-a** will find themselves assigned, in that order, to either strings **3-2-1** or **4-3-2**. I'd like to call the **3-2-1** placement the **Higher Tier** (higher with regard to the pitch of the strings, not their distance from the center of the planet) and the **4-3-2** placement the **Lower Tier**.

To play the **Em** chord in the Lower Tier, you'll actually have to do some work with the Fretting Hand, because that 4th string is now needed. How much work you do depends on whether you feel like wearing the classical or the folk hat, and I give you the two main possible fingerings to the right:



Now, we're trying to adhere to a very important basic tenet: *Adjacent fingers should be assigned to adjacent strings.*

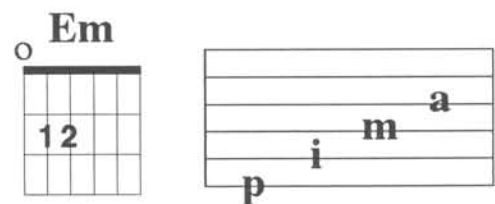
It would be a mistake to let just any finger play any old string that it wanted to. Chaos would surely reign and the strong (**i** and **m**) would push aside the weak (**a**).



We still call this **Arpeggio #1**, simply the Lower Tier.

When you start flying across the strings, you don't want there to be any doubt as to which finger is in charge of which string. Keep the fingers lined up and move them as a unit when switching between tiers.

There also exists what we may as well call the **Low-Low Tier**, where the three fingers line up on strings **5-4-3** and the Thumb takes the 6th string. This doesn't happen very often; not too many chords sound particularly good down in their nether regions (**Em** does.)



Folk and classical players finally agree!