

# **SWEEP PICKING MASTERY SECRETS UNLOCKED: WHAT THE PROS DO TO SWEEP PICK CLEAN AND FAST**

**BY TOM HESS**  
[www.tomhess.net](http://www.tomhess.net)

# 5 Keys To Clean, Fast And Effortless Mastery Of Sweep Picking Technique

By Tom Hess

You are about to learn how to sweep pick fast, clean and effortless. To begin, here are two foundational principles that help you get the most from this guide:

Principle #1: Sweep picking is a very simple technique compared to most other techniques you play on guitar. Sweep picking only *feels hard* when you practice it incorrectly.

Principle #2: You don't need dozens of arpeggio exercises to get better at sweep picking. All you need is to master a few core concepts that make all of sweep picking licks feel easier to play.

**Note:** this guide assumes that you have some prior experience with sweep picking. If don't know how to sweep pick at all, [take guitar lessons](#) to learn this technique right from the beginning.

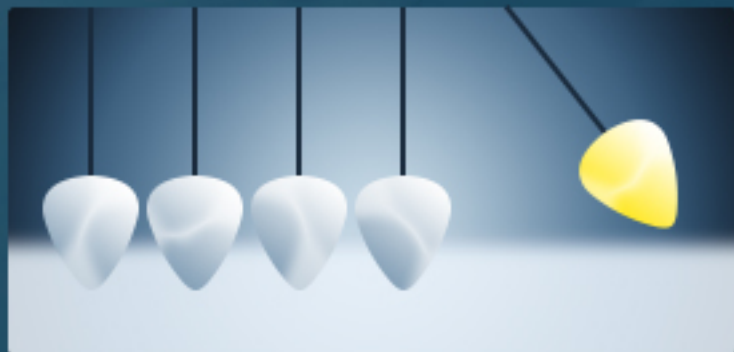
*"I like learning from Tom Hess because he just covers everything, things that you just don't think of."*  
- Simon Candy, Australia

Here are 5 core elements that make it easy to sweep pick clean & fast:

# 5 KEYS TO CLEAN, FAST AND EFFORTLESS MASTERY OF SWEEP PICKING

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## KEY #1: PICKING HAND MOMENTUM



Your pick must move in one seamless motion to ascend an arpeggio and one seamless motion to descend it. Don't let the pick stop between the strings.

## KEY #2: CLEAN FRETTING HAND FINGER ROLLING



You must learn to play notes across several strings, on the same fret, with the same finger without the notes ringing together.

## KEY #3: UNWANTED STRING NOISE CONTROL



You must learn to mute all noise from the strings that you are not playing.

## KEY #4: TWO-HAND SYNCHRONIZATION



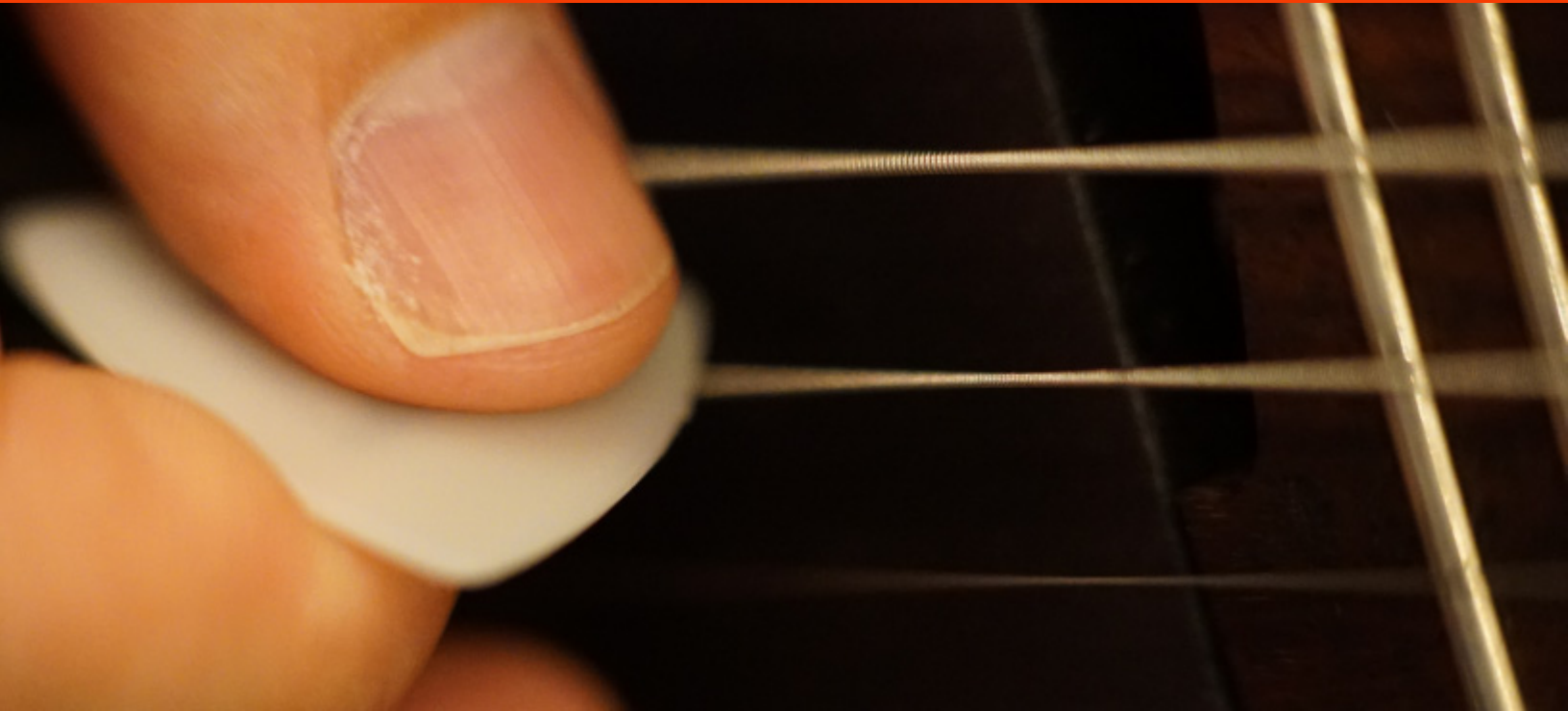
Your picking hand and fretting hand must strike every note at the exact same time. This is crucial for sweep picking fast and clean.

## KEY #5: KNOWING WHAT TO FOCUS ON WHEN YOU PRACTICE SWEEP PICKING



Track your progress with maximum sweep picking speed, two-hand synchronization, playing consistently, playing cleanly, articulating the notes clearly and combining sweep picking with other techniques. This tells you exactly what to focus on to master sweep picking quickly.

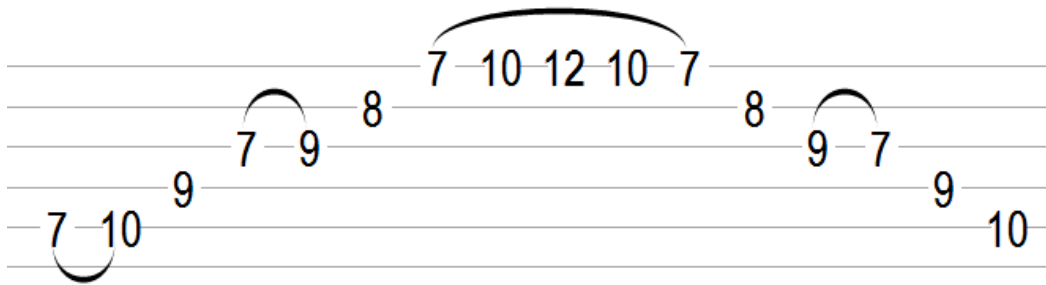
## Element #1: Picking Hand Momentum



When most guitarists play arpeggios, they let the pick stop between strings to play each note individually. This makes it impossible to sweep pick fast and clean. By having to *stop and start over* for each note, your picking hand will not be able to keep up with the fretting hand as the speed increases. This will cause your playing to fall apart.

Here is a quick test to find out if you are likely to suffer from this problem in your practicing (and not realize it). Look at the arpeggio below and decide how many pick strokes you think are required to play it.

**Important: Answer this question for yourself *BEFORE* moving to the next page!!!**



The correct answer is... 2 motions. If you hesitated for more than 2 seconds (or had to stop to *count* the notes), chances are high that you haven't yet mastered this element of sweep picking. Even if you answered the question correctly, but had to think and *figure it out* (vs. knowing it instantly), your picking hand motions are likely not perfect when you sweep pick.

Fact is, when you are sweep picking correctly, there are only 2 picking motions needed to play any arpeggio: a single motion down (to ascend the arpeggio) and a single motion up (to descend the arpeggio). This is true no matter what the arpeggio is, how many strings it is played on, or how many hammer ons/pull offs/tapped notes are added to it. The motions can be bigger or smaller, depending on how many strings the arpeggio is played on, but the *number* of motions never changes.

Don't worry about trying to practice the above arpeggio example. It's only included here to illustrate the point that no matter how difficult an arpeggio looks on paper, the picking hand motions for *all* arpeggios are identical.

To master this element of sweep picking, *look* at your picking hand when you practice and *focus* on not allowing your pick to stop moving when you play. This one change in your technique will greatly improve your sweep picking.

[Watch this video](#) to see me coach one of my online guitar students through the process of mastering this element of sweep picking.

## Element #2: Fretting Hand Finger Rolling



Many arpeggios you practice will require you to play several notes across multiple strings on the same fret with the same finger, like this:

1 3 3 1 1 1 4 1 1 1 3 3

The diagram shows a four-line musical staff with fret numbers and fingerings. The notes are: 12 (finger 1), 16 (finger 3), 16 (finger 3), 14 (finger 1), 14 (finger 3), 14 (finger 3), 17 (finger 4), 14 (finger 1), 14 (finger 1), 14 (finger 1), 16 (finger 3), 16 (finger 3). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 3, 3, 1, 1, 1, 4, 1, 1, 1, 3, 3. Below the staff are symbols for picking: a square for down-pick, five squares for up-picks, and five 'V' symbols for down-picks.

To play arpeggios like the one above, you must *roll* your fingers across several strings. The biggest problem most guitarists have when doing this is not knowing how to stop the strings from ringing (“bleeding”) together. [Listen to the arpeggio above](#). Note: it is first played sloppily (with the notes bleeding together on purpose) so that you can hear the wrong way to roll your finger. Then it is played cleanly so that you hear the correct way to roll your fingers.

To make your finger rolling consistently clean, keep in mind the following mental cues when practicing:

1. Do NOT treat rolling as a barre (as in playing barre chords). When you barre a finger across several strings, you will always have notes ringing together (which is exactly what you are trying to avoid!).
2. Visualize your finger as a banana. The first knuckle of the finger doing the roll must bend/collapse backwards (making your finger look like a banana). This will allow you to cleanly release pressure from the note you just played, while simultaneously fretting the next note on the same fret on a higher string. This is how you need to perform an ascending roll (from a lower in pitch string to a higher string). To descend a roll (from a higher string to a lower string), you reverse the motion so the first knuckle of the finger “uncollapses”.
  - a. To see this process demonstrated, watch [this video](#) where I teach one of my guitar students to perform finger rolling motion for arpeggios.
3. Do NOT rock your shoulder (or your wrist) back and forth when rolling across strings. To perform finger rolling motions cleanly *and* fast, only the finger must do the motions instead of the arm or the shoulder. Keep the fretting hand’s shoulder still when you sweep pick (do not move it up or down).



## Element #3: Unwanted String Noise Control



On top of cleanly playing the notes of the arpeggio, you must learn to eliminate noise from the strings that you are NOT playing. There are 2 highly effective ways of doing this:

1. Mute the lower in pitch strings by using your picking hand's thumb, like this:



As you sweep pick, the thumb literally slides up and down on the strings, muting all strings below the one you are playing. Because the thumb never breaks contact with the strings, there is no possibility for the lower in pitch strings to ring out. When you do this correctly, the thumb never interferes with the string you are playing, letting it ring clearly, while the other strings are totally muted.

2. Use the fingers not holding the pick to rest on the higher in pitch strings, muting them. Here is what this looks like:



When training to minimize string noise in your arpeggio playing, do 2 things:

1. Look at your *picking* hand when you practice, so that you are ingraining the correct muting techniques in your muscle memory.
2. Stay patient and give yourself time to unlearn the old techniques/bad habits and replace them with new (better) habits.

I teach these string muting techniques to my [online guitar students](#) to help them master lead guitar playing and play guitar faster & cleaner.

*"Tom Hess is one of the few guys that under-promises and over-delivers. In this day and age, there's not many people that actually do that."*  
- Kevin Downing, New Zealand

## Element #4: Two-Hand Synchronization



Most guitarists can't sweep pick cleanly and fast, because their hands are not in sync when they play arpeggios. Even if your hands are making correct motions separately (or at slow tempos), your playing will still sound sloppy at faster speeds when this element is lacking.

One effective strategy for solving this problem is to practice integrating tremolo picking with sweep picking.

To understand this concept, first learn the following common arpeggio:

1 4 2 2 2 1 4 1 2 2 2 4

V
V
V
V
V

Here is how to apply this approach into your practicing:

Step 1: Play this arpeggio, but use tremolo picking on each note, like this: [Hear it](#)

As you do this, make sure that the arpeggio stays very clean (particularly when you roll the middle finger across 3 strings). Use the exact same fingering and picking that you would if you were to sweep pick normally, only stop on each note to apply tremolo picking to it.

Note: it does not matter how many times you actually tremolo pick each note (so don't try to count your pick strokes). Somewhere in the range of 4-12 times per note is acceptable.

Practice this exercise several times to get warmed up until you can play it cleanly at a slow tempo.

Step 2: Now play only the note on the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string, using tremolo picking. ([Hear it](#))

Step 3: Play the note on the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string (once), followed by a hammer on to the 16<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string and stay on that note, playing

it with tremolo picking. After playing the 16<sup>th</sup> fret with tremolo picking several times, return back to the 12<sup>th</sup> fret. ([Hear it](#))

Step 4: Play the first 3 notes of the arpeggio above (12<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string, 16<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string and 14<sup>th</sup> fret of the D string), but stay on the 14<sup>th</sup> fret of the D string, playing it with tremolo picking. After playing the 14<sup>th</sup> fret of the D string with tremolo picking several times, descend back down to the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string. ([Hear it](#))

Step 5: Sweep up the first 4 notes of the arpeggio (up to the 14<sup>th</sup> fret of the G string) and stay on that note, playing it several times with tremolo picking. Your middle finger will be fretting the note with the fingerprint, because you are in the middle of a roll. Return with a descending sweep back to the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string. ([Hear it](#))

Step 6: Sweep up to the 14<sup>th</sup> fret of the B string and stay on that note, playing it with tremolo picking. As in the previous step, your middle finger will be fretting this note with the fingerprint. Return with a descending sweep back to the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string. ([Hear it](#))

Step 7: Sweep up to the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of the high E string and stay on that note, playing it with tremolo picking. Then return with a descending sweep back to the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string. ([Hear it](#))

Step 8: Finally, sweep up to the 17<sup>th</sup> fret of the high E string and stay on that note, playing it with tremolo picking. Then return with a descending sweep back to the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string. ([Hear it](#))

Here is the entire example, played without stopping: [Hear it](#)

Memorize this pattern and practice it until you can play it cleanly and accurately. Don't worry about speed for now - play it very slowly before trying to speed it up.

This practice approach will make you aware of any flaws that may exist in 2-hand synchronization of EVERY note in the arpeggio. When you become aware of the specific notes that are sloppy, it will be much easier to make

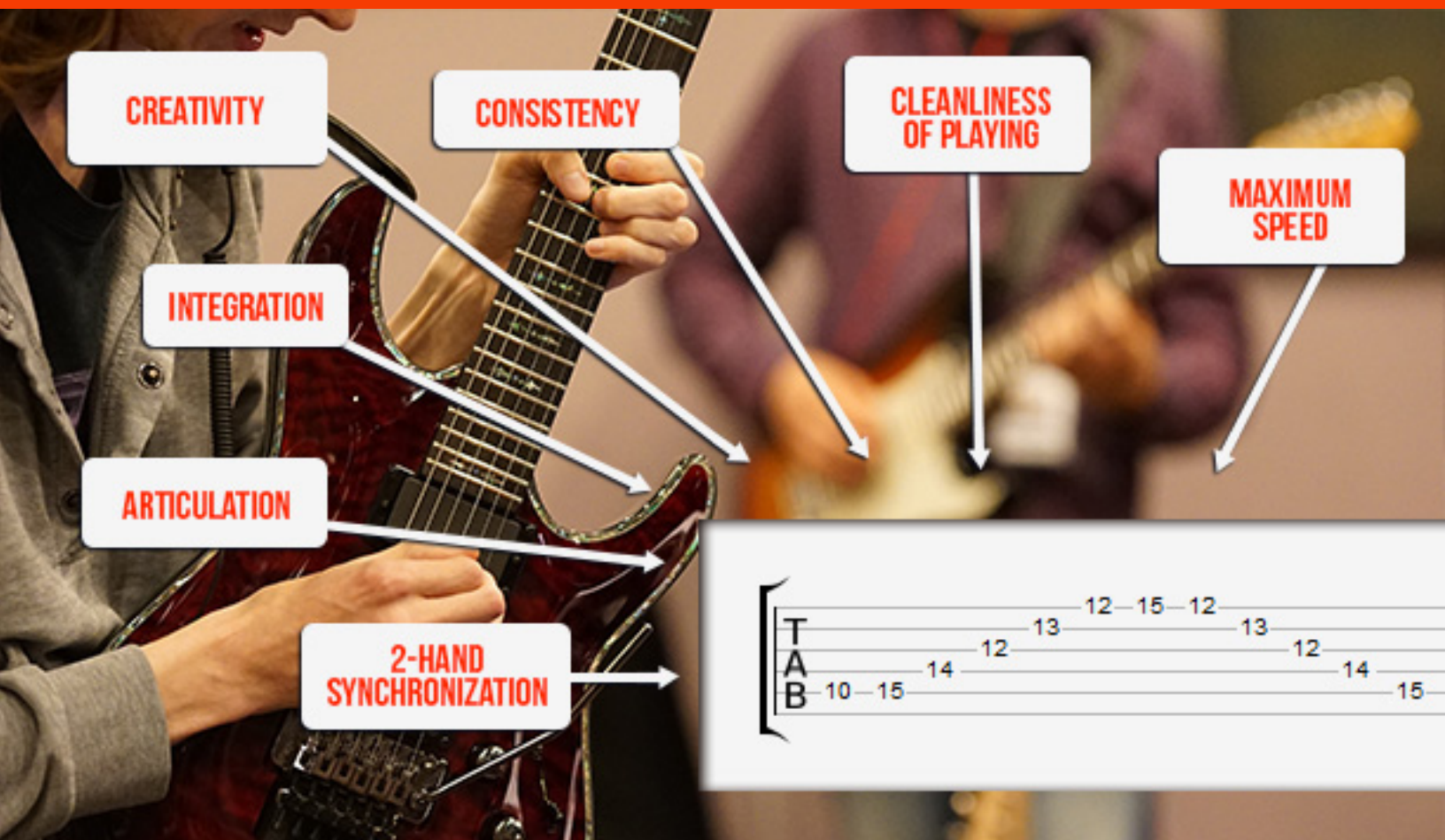
them clean. By integrating tremolo picking and arpeggio playing, your regular sweep picking will sound much cleaner (and feel a lot easier) when you go back to it.

As a (big) side benefit to practicing this concept, your arpeggios will sound extremely aggressive and intense when you get your tremolo picking + sweep picking up to speed. Here is an example of this technique at a faster tempo:

[Hear it](#)

Want to learn how to turn ordinary arpeggios into dozens of awesome sweep picking picks? Get this guide to [playing endless killer arpeggio guitar licks](#).

# Element #5: Knowing Exactly What Is Holding You Back From Mastering Sweep Picking



We've covered several of the most common elements that go into learning to sweep pick cleanly and fast. But there is one other thing you must be doing on an ongoing basis to tie all these elements together and move towards mastering sweep picking as quickly as possible. You need to actively track your progress with all the core areas involved in this technique, such as:



- Maximum speed - Your absolute top speed of being able to play a certain exercise 1-2 times.
- 2 hand synchronization - The top speed at which your hands are able to stay in sync for every note.
- Consistency - The top speed at which you can play a certain sweep picking exercise over and over without mistakes.
- Top speed of playing cleanly - this refers to your ability to sweep pick without notes bleeding together and without extra noise from the other strings.
- Your picking hand's ability to articulate the notes you play.
- Your ability to integrate (fluently combine) sweep picking with other techniques.
- Your ability to be creative with using arpeggios in your guitar playing.

Tracking progress with all these elements will tell you exactly what weaknesses hold you back from sweep picking the way you want. Instead of mindlessly playing hundreds of arpeggio exercises and simply *hoping/guessing* that your skills are improving, you will know in great detail what to focus on to make more progress.

That said, tracking your progress is similar to flossing your teeth - everyone knows they should do it, but few people *actually* do it consistently. To help you take all the guesswork from the process of tracking your musical progress (and to save you A LOT of time), use the [Guitar Playing Accelerator](#) to automatically handle this aspect of your guitar practicing.

# What You Should Do Right Now

You now know what to do to sweep pick fast and clean. The next step is to master all other musical skills that enable you to play guitar the way you want (even if you've been stuck for a long time).

I want to help you through this process, so you can finally become the guitarist you always wished you could be and impress all your friends with your incredible guitar playing. To begin, go to:

<https://tomhess.net/Guitar>

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Tom Hess taught me 10,000% more in the last 1 and a half years than I had learned in the prior 15 years before that.... I'm able to do things now that I thought I'd never be able to do, that were just waaaaaaay out of my reach.

- Scotty Woodward | Virginia, USA

It wasn't long after I started that I experiences enormous growth in my guitar playing & overall musicianship, more in 1 year than in the last 10+ that preceded it. - Ryan Mueller | Canada

Over the course of 3 years, I was able to go from a frustrated guitarist who struggled to play well to a pro, and I can't believe how much progress I was able to make in such a short period of time!

- Michael Gumley | Australia

Tom Hess helped me tremendously, I can do things on the guitar that I would never have dreamed of 5 years ago! - Ty Morgan | Arizona, USA

One word... RESULTS! - Freek Vanden Brouke | Belgium