

I hope everyone had a pleasant holiday. If you haven't made a New Year's resolution perhaps a mando-related resolution is in order. My mandolin resolutions for this year are:

1. Diligently work on improving my tremolo. I make this one every year and, like a dieter scarfing down a bag of donuts, I have failed every year to put in the time to make any significant improvement. So, tremolo improvement is back on the list for this year.
2. This year I am going to change my strings more frequently. I am getting the fret job that I have been putting off.
3. I resolve to turn the metronome on more frequently.
4. I am going to choose a couple of "pieces" and really stay focused on them rather than jumping around from tune to tune without really accomplishing anything. It is so easy to stay the same and so much harder to improve. This old dog is going to learn some new tricks this year.

So, 2006, here we come...

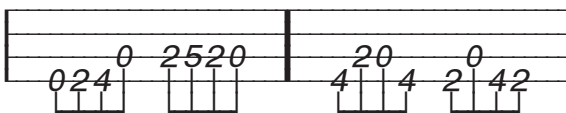
*Bradley Laird  
Rex, Georgia*

## Using Your Mental Capo

In both of my books I have made a pretty big deal out of encouraging you to learn to transpose musical ideas, scales, and songs into other keys. But, I wonder how many of you are actually doing it. It does take time but when you reach an understanding of how transposition happens you will be glad you put in the effort.

My second book, [Mandolin Training Camp](#), has a large series of exercises all written in the key of G. I dedicate a couple of pages in the book to explaining how to transpose the exercises, and any other musical phrase, into other keys. To get you started on that path, if you haven't started already, I am going to do some of the work for you.

On page 63 of [Mandolin Training Camp](#) there is an exercise with the catchy title of "7.3" It is in the section dealing with pentatonic scale notes. Here are the first two measures of that exercise as they appear in the book:



Play that 2 measure example a few times until you get the idea of how it sounds in your head. OK, those 2 measures start on a G note and use nothing but notes of the G pentatonic scale.

Next, starting with your left hand index finger on the 1st fret of the 4th string (a G#/Ab) play the identical "lick" up one fret. Simply add one to every number in the tablature and you will find the locations of all of the notes of the new G# version of the lick.

That is the essence of transposition. The "distance" (the size of the intervals) between each note remained the same but the starting note changed.

The fingering required is different, however, since you now have no open strings to assist you.

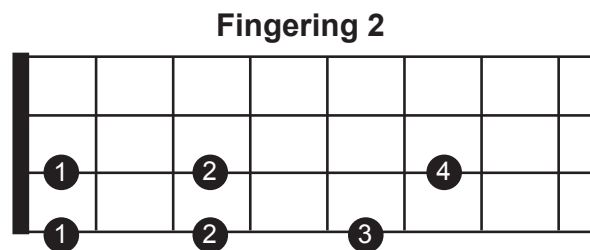
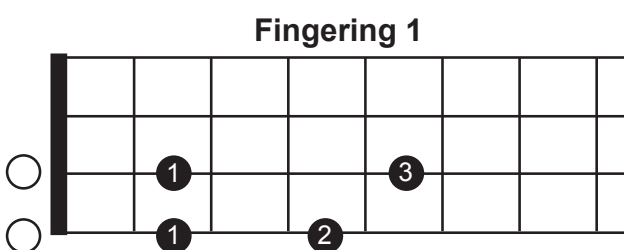
OK, enough of that for now. I suggest in [Mandolin Training Camp](#) that it is a good idea to begin the work of transposing the entire set of exercises into all 12 keys. (And then, of course, practice them until you can play them.) Probably most people don't do it. But, let me tell you, if you want to see your understanding of the instrument increase exponentially, transposing is one of the best tools you can employ. To get you started, turn the page, as I have done some of the work for you...

## 18 Transposed Versions of "The Lick"

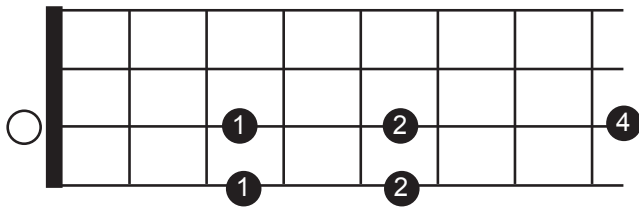
Don't let the looks of this overwhelm you. If you study it a while and read the other information I lay out, this will start to make sense in big way. Look at the last two measures. That will seem easy when you begin to understand what is happening here. And when it does, no key and no area of the fingerboard should terrorize you ever again. By the way, this is not meant to be played straight through. Take each 2 measure "lick" and learn it well, then move on.

### Fingering Charts for the Above Transposed Exercise

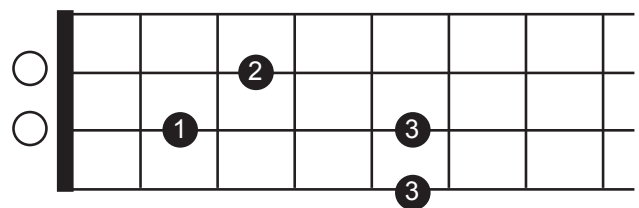
Each 2 measure exercise is accompanied by a note which tells you which fingering to use. Below are the 4 fingerings used. If you get nothing else from all of this, do take notice that by using the EXACT same fingering you can play the exercise in many keys. G is just like D. Bb is just like F. Etc. OK, here are the fingerings. The numbers indicate which left hand finger to use. You will notice that these charts look a lot like the ones found in [Mandolin Master Class...](#)



### Fingering 3



### Fingering 4



## Closing Thoughts on This Transposition Exercise

If you play with these enough you will soon realize that there is more than one way to play them. For example, anytime you are using fingering 3, with its handy open string, you could also be using fingering 2 with its not-so-handy closed strings.

This lowly 2 measure example should serve to educate you to the possibilities. Transposing is not all that hard in concept. I teach a bluegrass group lesson 2 nights a week where an entire “beginner/intermediate” group comes to my house and we work together to help them get rolling with bluegrass. The other night a new tune was suggested and one of the students asked, as if there were no other choices, “Is that in G or A?” We have all been there. My first tunes on a mandolin were all in A. Then came D and G. I lived in those keys for months and months fearing what lay beyond those comfortable boundaries. Gradually we learned a few tunes in E and B. Then an F tune. Those B, Bb, or F tunes scared me senseless when I was starting out because I didn’t yet understand the rational and organized beauty that exists in the design of a mandolin fingerboard. Explore and you will discover that it all really does make sense and the next time someone kicks off a tune in F# you will dive in with confidence. Then mischievously watch the faces of the hapless banjo pickers as they plot their next move.

And now, in the spirit of transposition, I offer up a tune which you probably already know. The well-worn session favorite Red Haired Boy. Only this time I have transposed it into the key of E. The day before my wedding I was sitting on the balcony of my hotel room overlooking the town square in Dahlonega, Georgia when the idea came to me to play it in this key. Realizing that it is in some ways easier than the “A Version” and certainly a refreshing change to the ears. I also discovered that you can pop it up one string and motor right along in the key of B. For the sake of novelty I have changed the title to something more fitting.

## Green Haired Boy

Traditional  
Arranged by Bradley Laird

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