

Matthaeus Weissel's Lute Tutorial

Translated by Sarge Gerbode.

To the Reader

Dear Gracious Reader:

I was caused and persuaded to write these instructions about lute tablature and fingering when I saw, first of all, how major mistakes in fingering are made by many [lutenists], even rather experienced ones, and secondly, because many who have a fairly good understanding of the lute lack the opportunity to always be able have a teacher and are thus thereby hindered and prevented [from playing better]. In order that not only those who are rather experienced on the lute and yet have bad fingerings, of which they lack a correct understanding, but also others who lack a teacher, may have more information on the lute in order to learn and make progress, I have written and published a careful and complete instruction on lute tablature and fingering, as I learned it in Germany and Italy from famous masters, an instruction the like of which (in my opinion) has never before been seen.

Although it borders on the difficult and laborious to describe these things completely and accurately, yet I hope, with God's help, to bring to light, through rules and examples, the most important and necessary things, such that all the rest will follow of its own accord and many will be served thereby.

Also, I have added several selected German and Polish dances, passamezzi, galliards, German villanellas, Neapolitanas, and fantasias, intermingled with several common and easy passamezzi, galliards, and several other little pieces (that in themselves are good and not to be rejected), so that this lute book might be useful, not only to those who are skilled, but also to students and the inexperienced.

May this poor, yet well-intentioned, work of mine please you and may the same be helpful to use.

A thorough and full instruction on lute tablature and fingering

On lute tablature

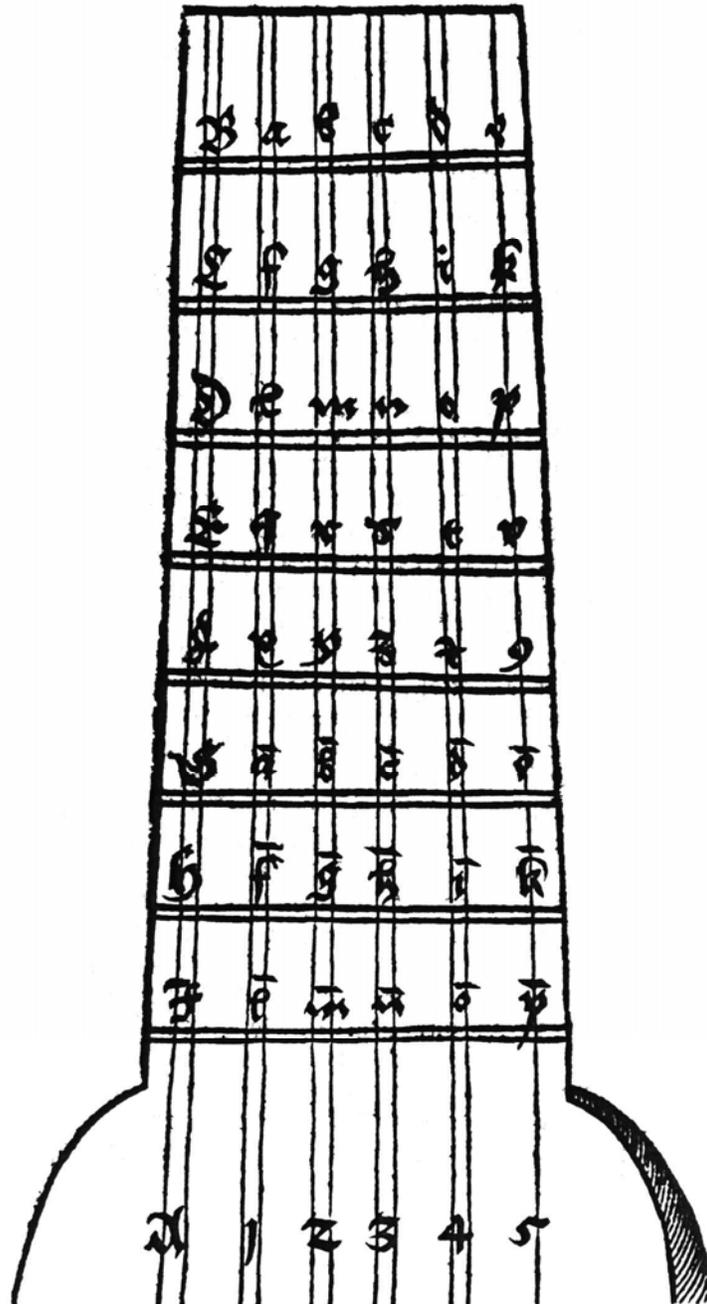
Tablature consists of two things: [symbols for locations on] the fingerboard [*Lautenkragen*] and rhythm notations [*mensur*].

On the Fingerboard

The lute is commonly strung with six strings, of which the coarsest is called the Great \mathfrak{A} or the great bombard [*Bomhart*]. Then there follow five more strings: The first is called the Prima, the second Secunda, the third Tertia, the fourth Quarta, and the fifth Quinta. And on the fingerboard are eight frets, and these are designated under each string with letters. The great bombard has its own series of capital letters, and these go lengthwise from top [closest to the nut] downwards, from \mathfrak{B} to \mathfrak{J} . The other five strings also have their letters, the whole lower case alphabet $a b c$ to z . There are two additions from Latin script, 7 and 9, so that the fifth fret may be complete. However, because three frets are left over, the same small letters are repeated from the beginning to p , but distinguished by a dash over them, so they may be differentiated from the others. These lower-case letters don't go down lengthwise [from the nut] as the upper-case notes go under the great bombard, but [crosswise] along the frets. Where these upper- and lower-case letters are placed in the tablature, you must finger them with the left hand, each in its own place, according to the skill of [correct] fingering. Further, the \mathfrak{A} with which the great bombard is indicated or symbolized and the five numbers which designate the other five [open] strings—each of which has its own name, namely: 1 2 3 4 5—this \mathfrak{A} and the five numbers are written on the belly of the lute under the fingerboard, each under its own string. And when you see them in the tablature, you must not stop them with the left hand but they must only be plucked open with the right hand.

This is a quick and simple instruction for the first part of tablature, namely the fingerboard: how the same, with its notes and numbers, is described and how one stops the notes. The [strings corresponding to] \mathfrak{A} and the numbers are not played stopped, but open, sometimes alone and sometimes together with various [other] notes (that need to be stopped).

The lute fingerboard with its letters and numbers



Several lutes, however, are strung with seven, sometimes eight courses, where the seventh is tuned the same as *f* and the eighth the same as *1*, but an octave below. Also, several (that use seven courses) tune the seventh course the same as *2*, but an octave lower, etc. But since this instruction is mainly directed toward students, I will confine myself to talking about six strings, because whoever has practiced well on the six-course lute can easily prepare himself for other [lutes] that have more strings.

On rhythm notations

To understand rhythm notations correctly, you must know the value of each note in vocal music. Six different vocal note values are commonly used in tablature. The first is called the breve and has a value of two whole beats. It is, however, very seldom used in tablature and is usually divided into two beats. The second, the semibreve, has a value of one whole beat. The third, the minim, has a value of two to a beat. The fourth, the semiminim, has a value of four to a beat. The fifth, the fusa, has a value of eight to a beat and the sixth, the semifusa, has sixteen to a beat. Sometimes a dot is placed next to these notes, and when there is a dot next to a note, the dot always has half the value of the note by which it stands. The breve and semifusa are never used with dots, and the semibreve very infrequently. The others, however, are often dotted in tablature, and the value of the notes with their dots is always half again as much as they would otherwise have when alone.

These notes are, however, displayed differently in tablature than in vocal music. The breve is displayed, or shown, by a dot over the chord in tablature, although such are seldom used. The semibreve is shown by a simple vertical line [*strich*] over it, the minim by a line with a single cross-stroke [*hacken*], the semiminim by a line with two cross-strokes, a fusa by a line with three cross-strokes, the semifusa by a line with four cross-strokes. But so that you may thereby better understand, I have placed each rhythm flag next to its proper [mensural] note. And they line up with each other as follows:

Note	Value	Value	Rhythm Flag
Breve	≡	Two beats	◆
Semibreve	◇	One beat	
Minim	◇ 	Two per beat	 └
Semiminim	◇ 	Four per beat	 └└
Fusa	◇ 	Eight per beat	 └└└
Semifusa	◇ 	Sixteen per beat	 └└└└

But when more than one of these are found next to each other, they are shown as strokes with cross-hatches through them (except the minim, which does not use cross-strokes) and are also used when they are next to each other for an entire beat.

Minims	2	
Semiminims	4	
Fusas	8	
Semifusas	16	

As for the dots, insofar as they are needed, they are written thus:

Semibreve		
Minim		
Semiminim		
Fusa		

Further, various other symbols are used in tablature, and rests, which are written or symbolized thus:

<i>Tempus imperfectus</i>	
Triple proportion	
Repetition	
Whole Rest	
Half rest	
Quarter rest	
Fermata	

The sign of *tempus imperfectus* has the value of a short beat¹ and is found in tablature, sometimes at the beginning of a piece, sometimes [at some point in the piece] after a sign of triple proportion. In the latter case, it indicates that at that point the triple proportion ceases and the piece should no longer be sung or played like a Sprung, but rather in its previous mode or manner². For in tablature, every piece is set in *tempus imperfectus* [unless indicated otherwise]. The sign of triple proportion means that what follows should be played in triple time, like a Sprung.

The repetition sign means to repeat what comes before. The whole rest means to halt or pause for a whole beat at that point. The half rest means that one should pause for a half beat at that point.

The quarter rest means that one should pause for a quarter of a beat at that point.

The fermata means that the piece is ending and the player should hold [the note or chord] at that point.

That is, in brief, how lute tablature should be properly understood. Now follows the second part of this instruction, namely the part on fingering.

On fingering

Fingering teaches one how to correctly apply both hands to the lute and which fingers one should correctly use for each note and to pluck each string. It is elegant and artful and must be learned with diligence and carefully cultivated. For many play the lute but few use correct fingering.

To learn and understand fingering correctly, however, one must first know what each finger of the hand is called. The hand has five fingers: the first is the thumb, the second the forefinger, the third the middle finger, the fourth the ring finger [*goldfinger*], and the fifth the little finger.

In order that fingering may be all the better and more reasonably happen or be accomplished, you must first take the lute in your hand in such a way that you hold and control the left hand with the thumb on the neck of the lute, such that the thumb does not protrude over the neck (for that is uncomfortable and bad form). Keep the thumb securely just behind the neck, also back and forth from time to time wherever the chords [*Griffe*]³ take it, now to the middle of the back of the neck and now to the sides. The hand is usually bent somewhat back from the neck. The right arm is not placed too high up, but almost in the middle behind the bridge, so that the hand is stretched out somewhat lengthwise, resting firmly on the little finger (which is placed on the lute and must be held motionless). And the forefinger plucks over the thumb, the thumb, however, being inside the hand. This is altogether better and more conducive to speed than if the forefinger, inside the hand, plucks under the thumb.

¹ That is, where the tactus is a semibreve.

² I.e., in *tempus imperfectus*.

³ Literally “grip”. I am using the term “chord” to denote any application of the left hand to the strings.

On left hand fingering

How to correctly finger each note⁴ on the neck, and how to hold the notes until they have finished sounding for their proper time.

First of all, you must realize and remember that in common chords, the forefinger of the left hand actually belongs on the first fret, the middle finger on the second, the ring finger on the third, and the little finger on the fourth. But this rule has very many exceptions; thus the fingers are often interchanged and are not used always on their own frets but also on other frets, as when the forefinger is used on the second fret, the middle finger on the first, the ring finger also on the second, the little finger on the third, etc. The same should be understood of the other frets, if your hand is moved up and you must play a chord in a higher position. One cannot provide any hard and fast rules about this, but must clarify such with examples. Also, from time to time you have to cover two notes next to each other at one fret with the forefinger, and sometimes you must place the forefinger over the fingerboard and stop not just one but two or three notes at the same time at one fret with the forefinger alone. The examples below will illustrate this.

Secondly, when you have stopped a chord, you must not lift any finger from the notes in the chord, but remain on the notes for the duration of the beat, so that the note finishes ringing at the right time, unless it is necessary to lift a finger for coloraturas [ornamental passages] or some such. This is so that the voices are not interrupted but keep their complete sound. But this is especially important to pay attention to in the bass, for if the bass notes don't sound for their full length, the piece is bare and has neither art nor beauty.

But so that you may fully understand all of this, I will illustrate fingerings on all frets with some examples, from the bottom right to the top, and place these before your eyes, so that the rest [of the fingerings] will come easily of themselves, and so that you will not lack anything if you will pay close attention. And I will begin with the easiest and most common chords.⁵

Examples of Left Hand Fingerings in Common Chords

The image displays musical notation for guitar chords. The top section shows fret numbers (p, s, k, o, etc.) and fingerings (4, c, g, etc.) for various chords. The bottom section shows a guitar neck diagram with fret numbers and fingerings for each note.

In the 1st chord, stop the *p* with the little finger, the *c* with the forefinger, and the *g* with the middle finger. In the 2nd, the *d* and *c* together with the forefinger, the *l* with the ring finger. In the 3rd, the *k* with the middle finger, the *n* with the ring finger. In the 4th, the *o* with the little finger, the *f* with the middle finger. In the 6th, the *d* with the forefinger, the *g* with the middle finger. In the 8th, the *c* with

⁴ I use the term “note” (where Waissel uses “*buchstabe*”) to indicate a position on the fingerboard, whether symbolized by a letter or a number.

⁵ For German tab challenged readers, I have inserted examples in French tab, with the fingerings as indicated in the text.

if it is too difficult for you to stop the 7 with the little finger and the 3 with the ring finger, you may stop 7 and 3 together with the little finger. In the 13th, stop the 9 with the little finger, and the 6 and 7 with the forefinger. In the 14th, stop the 9 and 7 with the middle finger, the 6 with the ring finger. In the last chord, stop the 6 with the little finger and the 7 with the middle finger.

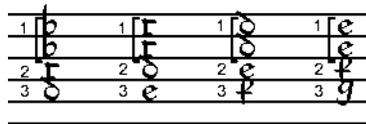
There follow several chords that are used on all the frets and that have the same pattern and fingering on all frets.

e f p v
 d i o t
 n s 3 z
 m r y 8



In the first chord, stop the e and d together with the forefinger, the n with the little finger, and the m with the ring finger. The same with the other three chords.

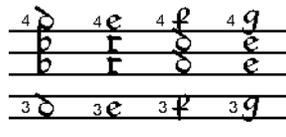
d i o t
 c 8 n s
 g m r y
 l q 8 a



In the first chord, stop the d and c with the forefinger, the g with the middle finger, and the l with the ring finger. The same in the other three chords.

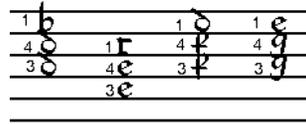
p v 9 z
 d i o t
 c 8 n s
 l q 8 a

BIII BIV BV BVI



In the first chord, stop the p with the little finger, the d and c together with the forefinger, the l with the ring finger, etc.

d i o t
 n s z c
 m r y B



In the first chord, stop the **d** with the forefinger, the **n** with the little finger, the **m** with the ring finger, etc.

Examples of the barre
 where the hand is bent somewhat downwards
 behind the neck, and the forefinger is placed
 over the fingerboard.

These chords are also used on all frets:

e B p v
 d i o z
 n s z c
 B C D E



In the first chord, place the forefinger over the **e**, **d**, and **B** and stop the **n** with the ring finger. The same with the other chords.⁶

d t o t
 n s z c
 m r y B



In the first chord, place the forefinger over the **d** and **B**. stop the **n** with the ring finger, and the **m** with the middle finger. The same with the other chords.⁷

⁶ In the last chord, above, the 7 should be a t.

⁷ In the 2nd chord, above, the top note should be an i instead of a t.

e	R	p	v
o	t	e	ø
s	z	c	ß
a	f	l	q

BI	BII	BIII	BIV
b	r	o	e
2 o	2 e	2 f	2 g
3 e	3 f	3 g	3 ß
b	r	o	e

In the first chord, place the forefinger over the e and a. stop the o with the middle finger, and the s with the ring finger, etc.

i	o	t	e
s	z	c	ß
m	r	y	ß
a	f	l	q

BI	BII	BIII	BIV
2 r	2 o	2 e	2 f
4 e	4 f	4 g	4 ß
3 o	3 e	3 f	3 g
1 b	1 r	1 o	1 e

In the first chord, place the forefinger over the a, stop the i with the middle finger, the s with the little finger, the m with the ring finger, etc.

o	t	e	ø
s	z	c	ß
m	r	y	ß
a	f	l	q

BI	BII	BIII	BIV
3 o	3 e	3 f	3 g
4 e	4 f	4 g	4 ß
2 o	2 e	2 f	2 g
1 b	1 r	1 o	1 e

In the first chord, place the forefinger over the a, stop the o with the ring finger, the s with the little finger, the m with the middle finger, etc.

9	e	R	p
o	i	o	t
m	r	y	ß
ß	c	D	R

BI	BII	BIII	BIV
4 f	4 g	4 ß	4 i
b	r	o	e
2 o	2 e	2 f	2 g
b	r	o	e

In the first chord, stop the 9 with the little finger, the o and ß with the forefinger, the m with the middle finger, etc.

These are the most important and essentially most of the three- and four-voice chords commonly used on the lute. If you will note these well, the others will doubtless come easily, and you will find it easy to do five- and six-voice chords.

On left hand fingering in runs [*Leüfflein*] and coloraturas

Here one must note that the forefinger is most commonly used on the first fret and the middle finger on the second. The ring finger, however, is used very seldom in coloraturas; in its place, the little finger is used on the third and fourth frets, since you normally need the ring finger in chords to take care of the holds, and the coloraturas are done more conveniently and comfortably with the little finger. See the following examples:

Examples of left-hand fingerings in coloraturas



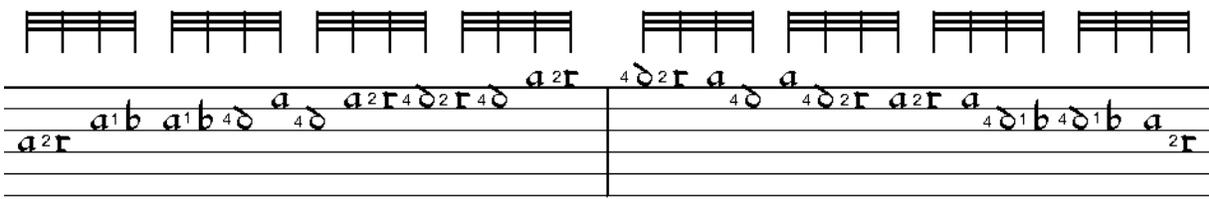
3h64 i64i t4it 5it5 | 8t5 8v5k0 9v85 85ti | 0i4n4n83



In this run, you need no more than two fingers: the middle finger on the second fret and the little finger on the third, fourth, and fifth. With the little finger, you move from *v* to *9* and back in the middle of it.



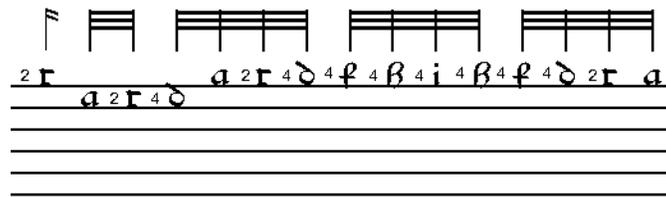
2g3c 3cn4 n4io iof8 | p8505oi4 i4ncnc3g



In this run, you use three fingers: the forefinger on the first fret, the middle finger on the second, and the little finger on the third.

Example in which the little finger must run up and down the chanterelle over several notes in coloraturas

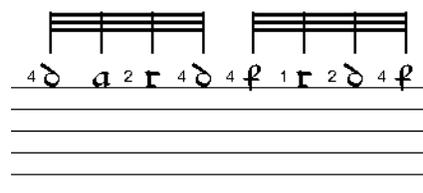




In this run, use the middle finger on the second fret, the little finger on the third, and anything past the third fret you must stop with the little finger running up and down.

Example of where you must use the forefinger on the second fret in coloraturas on the chanterelle





Stop the first *p* with the little finger, followed by the *k* with the middle finger, the *p* with the little finger, the *9* again with the little finger, the *k* with the forefinger, the *p* with the middle finger, and the *9* with the little finger.

There follows the hold: how from time to time in chords you have to hold notes with various left hand fingers until the notes have finished sounding, while still playing notes in coloraturas with the other fingers.

Above it was said that when you play a chord you should not lift any finger from the notes until the strings have completely finished sounding, unless it be absolutely necessary. So that this may be better understood, I will give and describe several examples of this.

Example of the hold in common chords⁸

In the first chord, stop the *c* with the forefinger, the *g* with the middle finger, and hold on the *g* until you have finished the run. You must stop the *i* in the run with the ring finger. In the second chord, you must hold on the *f*. Likewise in the sixth chord, you must hold on the *c* and *g* until you have plucked the 5. In the seventh chord, hold on the *f* until you have plucked the 5.

In the first chord, stop the *p* with the little finger, the *c* with the forefinger, the *D* with the ring finger.⁹ Hold the *D* until you have finished the run. In the second chord, hold the *n* until you have plucked the following *n*. In the seventh chord, stop the *h* with the middle finger, stop the following *g* with the forefinger and hold it until you have plucked the *n*.

⁸ In the French tab versions of these, I have inserted more fingerings than specified by the text, because these are the only ones that make sense or are even possible.

⁹ I think a better fingering for the first example would be

That would allow holding the upper note as well.

Other examples of the hold

1. $\text{f} \# \text{###}$ $\text{f} \# \text{###}$ $\text{f} \text{###} \text{###}$ $\text{###} \# \text{###}$
 $\text{f} \text{ncn} \text{3cn}$ $\text{f} \text{tit} \text{4it}$ $\text{4} \text{g} \text{b} \text{g} \text{b} \text{g} \text{b} \text{q} \text{b}$ $\text{noi} \text{4oi} \text{oi} \text{4i}$
 g 4 3 g
 p f f i

a a a a
 $\text{4} \delta \text{1} \text{b} \text{4} \delta \text{a} \text{1} \text{b} \text{4} \delta \text{a}$ $\text{4} \text{e} \text{2} \text{r} \text{4} \text{e} \text{a} \text{2} \text{r} \text{4} \text{e} \text{a}$ $\text{4} \delta \text{2} \text{r} \text{a} \text{4} \delta \text{2} \text{r} \text{4} \delta \text{2} \text{r} \text{a} \text{2} \text{r}$
 2 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 1 3 1
 3 1 2 4 e a

In the first example, hold the g and i with the middle finger and ring finger until the end of the coloratura. In the second example, hold with the forefinger on the f^0 , in the third, on the f with the middle finger. In the fourth, on the n and g with the ring finger and with the forefinger.

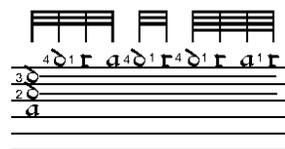
$\text{f} \text{###} \text{###}$ $\text{###} \# \text{###}$
 $\text{o} \text{h} \text{3n} \text{h} \text{n} \text{h} \text{3} \text{h}$ $\text{o} \text{p} \text{r} \text{s} \text{p} \text{r} \text{s} \text{p} \text{r} \text{s} \text{r}$
 n n
 f 2

$\text{4} \delta \text{2} \text{r} \text{a} \text{4} \delta \text{2} \text{r} \text{4} \delta \text{2} \text{r} \text{a} \text{2} \text{r}$
 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4
 1 a

In the first example, stop the o with the little finger, the n with the ring finger, the f with the forefinger; hold on the o and f .¹¹ In the second, stop the o with the little finger, the n with the ring finger, and hold on the n .

¹⁰ “ p ” in orig.

$\text{4} \delta \text{1} \text{r} \text{a} \text{4} \delta \text{1} \text{r} \text{4} \delta \text{1} \text{r} \text{a} \text{1} \text{r}$
 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4
 2 a

¹¹ I believe a better fingering for the last half of this example would be , as that would permit holding two notes instead of just one.

Examples of holds

 5 f q 2 g 2 q f
 i
 n
 |

f f ##
 k c n c g
 o
 n
 2

a r a e r
 2 1 3 1 2
 a r a e r
 1 2 3 4 1

In the first example, hold on the *i* and *n*, stop the *f* with the forefinger, the *q* with the little finger. In the second example, hold the *k*, stop the *c* with the forefinger and the *n* with the ring finger. You must stop the *g* at the end also with the forefinger.

f # ##
 5 9 v k v 9 l g
 o
 n
 |

f # ##
 D o i 4 i o l f l

a f e r e f
 1 4 4 2 4 4
 a f e r e f
 2 1 3 4 2 3

In the first example, stop the first *9* with the little finger, the first *v* also with the little finger, the *k* with the middle finger, the second *v* again with the little finger, the second *9* also with the little finger, and hold on the *9*. Stop the *l* with the middle finger and the *g* with the forefinger. In the second example, hold the *D* with the ring finger, stop the *v* with the little finger, the *i* with the middle finger, the *v* again with the little finger, hold the *v*, stop the *l* with the ring finger, and the *f* with the middle finger.

Examples where you must stop a note in advance with the forefinger and hold until the following note has been plucked.

The first example shows a sequence of notes: $\text{K9v9 v\bar{i}v9K9Kv}$ and $19\bar{i}v9K9v$. Below the notes are fingerings: $\begin{matrix} 4 \\ \lambda \end{matrix}$ and $\begin{matrix} 4 \\ \lambda \end{matrix}$. The second example shows a sequence of notes: $1\bar{i}v9 \bar{i}v9 \bar{i}v9\bar{i}v9$. Below the notes are fingerings: $\begin{matrix} 4 \\ \lambda \end{matrix}$ and $\begin{matrix} 4 \\ \lambda \end{matrix}$. The diagrams show the fretboard with a barre on the first fret.

In the first example, stop the v with the forefinger and at the same time the k with the little finger; hold the v until the end. In the second example, stop the v with the forefinger and at the same time the 9 with the middle finger; and hold the v until the end.

Examples where you must hold in a barre

The first example shows a sequence of notes: $\text{z et i e t e t i t}$. Below the notes are fingerings: $\begin{matrix} r \\ f \end{matrix}$. The second example shows a sequence of notes: $\text{K r \beta s z i t e t i z i z s \beta}$. Below the notes are fingerings: $\begin{matrix} i \\ s \\ C \end{matrix}$. The diagrams show the fretboard with a barre on the second fret.

In the first example, place the forefinger over the f ; stop the z with the little finger and the t with the middle finger. Hold the r and f . In the second example, place the forefinger over the k , i , and C , stop the s with the ring finger, the following t with the middle finger. Hold on the k , i , r , and C until the end.

The first example shows a sequence of notes: $\text{o i o z k e o i o i z n z i o z}$. Below the notes are fingerings: $\begin{matrix} r \\ f \end{matrix}$ and $\begin{matrix} r \\ f \end{matrix}$. The second example shows a sequence of notes: $\text{K9p\bar{i}eozozoz\bar{i}p9K}$. Below the notes are fingerings: $\begin{matrix} o \\ y \\ D \end{matrix}$ and $\begin{matrix} y \\ D \end{matrix}$. The diagrams show the fretboard with a barre on the second fret.

In the first example, place the forefinger over the *f*; stop the *o* with the middle finger, the *z* with the little finger, and the *t* with the ring finger. In the second example, place the forefinger over the *o* and *o*, stop the *k* with the little finger, the *h* with the middle finger, and hold the *o*, *h*, and *o*.

So much for left hand fingering.

When, however, the chords and coloraturas go further up past the frets onto the belly (where you must occasionally stop strings just as though frets and notes were there) you play them like the lower frets when the forefinger is barred. If you will mark this well and ponder the matter a bit, the rest will come of itself.

On ornaments [*Mordanten*]

Ornaments, also called “*Moderanten*”, are played with the fingers of the left hand. However, they are only used in chords of whole and half beats and in runs where four notes appear in one beat (as semiminims). In coloraturas, though, where eight or sixteen [notes] occur in one beat (as with fusas and semifusas), they are not used at all because of the speed. And it is well to note that no ornaments are ever used in coloraturas, except at the end on the penultimate note. Otherwise they should not be done in coloraturas at all. For the coloraturas must be sharp and pure, without any mordents, otherwise they would have no style.

However, ornaments serve to make lute playing lovely. They are done sometimes with the forefinger, sometimes with the middle finger, sometimes with the ring finger, and also sometimes with the little finger. They are done in such a way that the fingers with which the ornaments are played are placed on the notes in chords somewhat slower than the others and are moved up and down two or three times, just like trembling.¹² In some chords, also, the mordents are done with the little finger above the finger that has stopped the note. One cannot put down hard and fast rules for these things, but this will all come with time and practice. I just wanted to mention this for your information.

On right hand fingering

It has been stated above how you should place the right arm at the base of the lute, so that the hand is stretched somewhat lengthwise, resting on the little finger (which should be held in place strongly and securely on the belly). Now note further: if the chord has two parts, pluck it with the thumb and forefinger. If it has three parts, pluck it with the thumb, forefinger, and middle finger. If the chord has four parts, pluck it with the thumb, forefinger, middle finger, and ring finger. If the chord has five parts, pluck two parts, or two strings, at the same time with the forefinger. If the chord has six parts, pluck two strings with the thumb and two with the forefinger at the same time, and pluck the others with both the other fingers.

Sometimes two and sometimes also three strings must be plucked upward with two or three fingers without the thumb. This happens commonly where the chord has been completely fingered but the stroke is broken, and the bass must be plucked downwards with the thumb, but the other voices plucked upwards with two or three fingers. It also happens sometimes that the chord is first played completely, then afterwards is plucked upward with two or three fingers without the bass. But in coloraturas, only the thumb and forefinger are used, one after the other, the thumb striking downwards and the forefinger upwards. Yet sometimes at the beginning of the coloraturas, the strokes are broken and one must first pluck downwards with the thumb and afterwards upwards with two or three fingers. I shall give some examples of this.

¹² I think he means, not that the tempo is slower, but that you delay placing a finger on the string until you have already plucked it. You pluck first and then do a shaking motion to execute the ornament.

Examples where one must pluck upwards with two or three fingers

s	s	g		R	R	f
4	4			4	4	
c	c			3	3	
g				f		

a:	a:			r:	r:	
a:	a:			a:	a:	
b:	b:			a:	a:	
r	r			r	r	

In these examples the chords are plucked first as a whole, then upwards again with three fingers, and then the bass down with the thumb.

s	s		R	R
4	4		4	4
g	g		3	3
a			f	f

a:	a:		r:	r:
a:	a:		a:	a:
r	r		a	a
			r	r
a				

In these examples the whole chords are played first, then plucked again, upwards with three fingers.¹³

g	p	R	2		2	9	9	2
4	0				0	0		
c	n				3	3		

b:	r:				f:	f:		
a:	o:				o:	o:	a:	a:
b:	o:				a:	a:	a:	
r	a				a	a	a	

In these examples the bass is first plucked downwards with the thumb, and then the other three voices plucked upwards with three fingers. Afterwards three voices are plucked upwards and the bass plucked downwards in turn.

¹³ The last **f** in the example appears to be in error.

or chord] has a separate rhythm flag [*mensur*], pluck the note with the thumb, but if it does not have a separate rhythm flag [i.e., if it shares a tied or crosshatched rhythm flag with that note or chord] and starts right after it, then pluck it with the forefinger. But where a note or chord has its own rhythm flag and a dot is next to it, and after the dot a note with its own rhythm flag, then you must pluck the [second] note with the forefinger. But if after a dotted note there follow two notes of the same value or rhythm flag, then you must pluck [the first of these] notes downwards with the thumb. Sometimes it happens that in the middle of a coloratura the current note value ends and a different value stands over the next note. In that case, you must pluck downwards that particular note [before the change] with the thumb and the following note [after the change] also with the thumb.¹⁴ It also happens sometimes that one must play several bass notes in a row with the thumb. This happens only with the semiminims, that go four to a beat. The following examples will clarify these rules.

Examples of where you must begin coloraturas with the thumb

Examples of where you must begin coloraturas with the forefinger

¹⁴ This paragraph to this point is a little hard for to understand, so I have given here somewhat of a free translation. The word “*mensur*”, here, appears to mean “rhythm flag”, which could refer equally to a single flag or a set of tied or cross-hatched flags. The bottom line is that you use the thumb in a downward stroke for an accented (thetic) beat and the forefinger upwards for an unaccented (arsic) beat.

Examples of where you must pluck twice in a row with the thumb in coloraturas

Examples of where you must play several bass notes in a row with the thumb

How to tell if strings are true or false

Take a string as long as you need for the lute, grasp it at one end between two fingers of the left hand, likewise between two fingers of the right hand at the other end, draw it rather taut, and pluck it with the ring finger of the right hand. Look carefully along the length of the string. If it vibrates nicely, as if it were two strings, then it is good and proper for the lute. But if it vibrates in a muddled fashion and quavers as if there were three or four strings, it is false and unfit for the lute, since it will not hold pitch and can never be accurately tuned to the other strings.

How to tune the lute

- First tune the 5 as high as it will tolerate.
- Then tune the 2 an octave¹⁵ below the 5.
- Stop the 3 and tune the 3 to how it sounds.
- Stop the n and tune the 1 to how it sounds.
- Stop the f and tune the 4 to how it sounds.
- Stop the o and tune the 2 to how it sounds.

¹⁵ Should be “two octaves”.

Stop the g; the 5 should sound the same.

The bombards or coarse strings must be pitched an octave lower than the small ones next to them.¹⁶

Test of whether the lute is correctly tuned



This is how lute is correctly tuned: in other words, the strings are not false and the frets are correctly placed. And if you want to learn how to create something decent on the lute, then you must start by playing carefully, cleanly, and slowly.

End of this instruction

¹⁶ Weissel does not specify how many bass courses are doubled at the octave. Presumably, though, more than one are, since he uses the plural, here.