

#1

OPEN C

COUNT 1 2 3 4

There are 3 chord families in fingerpicking. The first step is to get your bassline moving like this. Play this over an open C chord, using only your thumb on your picking hand.

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 (+)

This is a very common fingerpicking pattern. The fingers on your picking hand are assigned to these strings: Thumb always plays the A and D string, middle finger plays the B string, and pointer finger plays the G string. Perfecting this step is essential before moving on. Make it sound even and play to a click.

#2

OPEN D

Now let's conform our pattern over the next chord family: open D. Let's start by just using our thumb on our picking hand, just like we did on the C chord.

Now let's apply our picking pattern to this chord family. The finger assignments are now: Thumb plays the D and G strings, pointer plays the B string, and middle plays the high E string. This should feel just how it felt over a open C, only now we're playing the highest four strings on the guitar.

#3

OPEN E

On our final chord family, our thumb makes a small change. It bounces from the E string to the D string. Notice that the A string is X'd out. That's because we don't play it on this chord family.

Here is the pattern applied to an E chord. It feels just like our original pattern, only the thumb of your picking hand now jumps over the A string. Your middle finger plays the B string and your pointer finger plays the G string.

**Finger Picking Basics continued**  
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"Which chords belong to which chord families?". Great Question.  
In general, the chord families are divided like this:

Family #1 = Open chords or bar chords with their roots on the A string (Like open A, open B7, open C).

Family #2 = Basically just open D, and open D minor

Family #3 = Open chords or bar chords with their roots on the low E string (Like open G, open E minor).

Of course there are exceptions in songs with inversions, and walking basslines (like Landslide by Fleetwood Mac).  
Use your ears!

At first, it's difficult to combine different chord families. The trick is to work slowly, and keep the tempo going.  
Below is a simple exercise to play a song with open C and open D.

Start like this. Make sure your fretting hand plays the correct chord, while your right hand plays simply over D.

OPEN C	OPEN D
T   1   1	0
A   2   2	0
B   3   3	0

Next try to keep the bassline going. Don't let the tempo stop!

T   1   1	2   2
A   2   2	0   0
B   3   3	2   2

Finally, try to get the whole thing rolling. Don't attempt this unless you've perfected this earlier steps!

T   1   1	2   2
A   2   2	1   1
B   3   3	0   0

Use this same approach to combine the other chord families. Always work slow. Remember also to focus on the volume of your thumb. To make fingerpicking feel good to the listener, the thumb should be confident and in time! Have fun :)