Fingering Principles

Good fingering is not a rule book. It is a plan that lets your hand play the same notes the same way every time, smoothly and without surprises. A few principles cover almost every passage you will meet.

START FROM A POSITION

Before you play, find the passage's **lowest** and **highest** notes. If they fit under five fingers, set the hand there: **one finger per key**, and the hand does not move at all. Here D to A fits exactly, so the thumb sits on D.
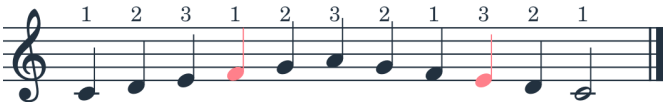
That is why the edition prints just **one** number. The first finger places the hand, and the position fingers the rest.



2 on E puts 1 on D … 5 on A
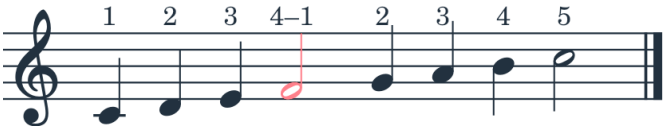
MOVING THE HAND

When a passage is wider than five keys, the hand has to travel. These three tools move it without a bump. The **coral** note is where each one happens.
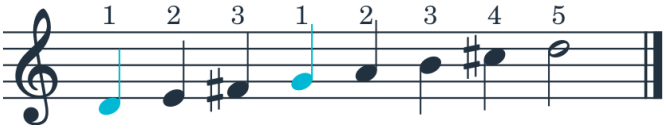


Thumb under, finger over

Going up, the **thumb tucks under** to F. Coming down, **3 crosses over** the thumb to E. Every scale works this way (Handouts 59 and 241–264).



Finger substitution

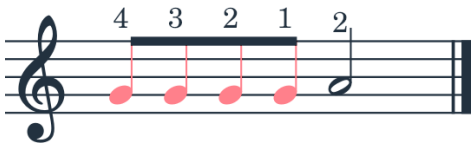
Play the F with 4, then, while the key stays down, **slide 1 onto it** and let 4 go. The hand moves up with no gap in the sound. Printed **4–1** on one note.



Thumb off the black keys

The thumb is short, so it belongs on a **white key**. In D major the **thumbs** land on D and G; the long fingers 3 and 4 take F♯ and C♯.

REPEATED NOTES, AND WRITING IT DOWN



A fresh finger for every repeat: 4–3–2–1.

Fast **repeated notes** speak more clearly when the fingers change on the key, like a drummer alternating sticks. The hand drifts a little up the keys, ready for the A. Slow repeats can keep one finger.

- **Decide, then keep it.** The same fingering every time is what makes a passage reliable.
- **Write it in pencil**, close to the note: usually above for the right hand; for the left, below or above (books do both).
- **Write only where it matters**: the first note, after a rest or jump, and wherever the hand changes position. Too many numbers hide the music.
- **Test it slowly.** If a passage keeps breaking in the same spot, the fingering is the first suspect.

Try it Take a piece you are learning and find three spots that keep tripping you up. For each one, ask: Can one position cover it? Where must the hand move, and which tool does it best? Is a thumb landing on a black key? Pencil in your answer, play it slowly five times, and keep it. More practice: Exercise 63, Write the Fingering.

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