

Banjo — Workbook

This workbook turns the Banjo course into daily practice. Each section maps to one course module, moving you from setup and tuning through rolls, chords, and your first tunes. Work the exercises with your banjo in hand and a metronome running, and use the templates to track tempo gains and maintenance.

Meet the Banjo and Open G Tuning

Get the instrument set up, in tune, and comfortable in your hands before you play a note.

Exercise: Name the Parts Out Loud

Hold your banjo and physically touch each part as you name it. Repeat until you can do it from memory without looking. This builds the vocabulary you need for tuning and maintenance.

- Locate and name the head, bridge, tailpiece, tone ring, and fifth-string peg by feel.

- Identify which string is the first string and which is the fourth, and explain why the fifth string is special.

- Explain in one sentence why the high fifth string is treated as a drone rather than a melody string.

Worksheet: Open G Tuning Reference Card

Fill in the correct note for each string and the fretted-to-open ear check that confirms it. Keep this card with your banjo until the tuning is memorized.

Fifth string note

Fourth string note

Third string note

Second string note

First string note

Ear check 1: fourth string at fret 5 should match which open string

Ear check 2: third string at fret 4 should match which open string

Ear check 3: second string at fret 3 should match which open string

Checklist: Setup and Picks Ready Check

- Banjo is tuned to open G and all five strings ring as one clean G chord when strummed
- Strap is on and the neck sits at a 30 to 45 degree angle while seated
- Picking-hand pinky anchors lightly on the head behind the bridge
- Thumpick and two metal fingerpicks are fitted with blades angled just past the nail
- Fifth string was tuned up slowly and did not snap

The Foundation Rolls

Build a smooth, even picking-hand engine across the four core rolls and the pinch.

Exercise: Roll Evenness Drill

Play each roll on open strings only, two notes per metronome click at 60 BPM. Record yourself on a phone and listen back for any note that is louder, quieter, early, or late.

- Play the forward roll (T-I-M-T-I-M-T-M) for 16 measures without a stumble.

- Play the backward roll (M-I-T-M-I-T-M-T) for 16 measures with equal volume on every note.

- Play the alternating-thumb roll (T-I-T-M-T-I-T-M) for 16 measures.

- Listen to your recording and note which roll was least even, then give it extra reps.

Worksheet: Roll Pattern Map

Write out the picking-finger sequence for each roll and one sentence describing its musical feel and a tune or situation it suits.

Forward roll finger sequence

Forward roll feel and use

Backward roll finger sequence

Backward roll feel and use

Alternating-thumb roll finger sequence

Alternating-thumb roll feel and use

Forward-reverse roll finger sequence

Pinch description and when to use it

Checklist: Rolls Mastery Gate

- Forward roll is clean and even at 80 BPM
- Backward roll is clean and even at 70 BPM
- Alternating-thumb roll is clean and even at 70 BPM
- Forward-reverse roll plays smoothly within a single measure
- Pinch produces two clear notes struck at exactly the same instant

Chords and Fretting-Hand Technique

Lock in the G, C, and D7 chords and the ornaments that make rolls musical.

Exercise: Chord-Change Timing Drill

Set a metronome to 60 BPM, one chord per click. Strum and check every note rings before moving on. Focus on closing the gap between chords, not on holding each shape.

- Cycle G to C to G to C for two minutes with no break in the rhythm.

- Add D7 and cycle G-C-G-D7 cleanly for two minutes.

- Note which single chord change is your slowest and drill only that transition 20 times.

Exercise: Make the Ornaments Ring

Isolate each fretting-hand technique and repeat it until the second note rings as loudly as a picked note. Quietness means more decisiveness or finger strength is needed.

- Slide the second string from fret 2 to fret 4 thirty times, keeping pressure through the slide.

- Hammer-on from the open third string to fret 2 until the hammered note is loud and clear.

- Pull-off from the second string fret 2 to open with a sideways snap, not a straight lift.

- Choke the second string up a whole step and stop exactly on the target pitch.

Worksheet: Chord Shape Diagrams

For each chord, write the fret and finger for every fretted string and mark which strings are open. Note any string that buzzed and what fixed it.

G chord: which strings are fretted or open

C chord: string, fret, and finger for each fretted note

D7 chord: string, fret, and finger for each fretted note

Which chord buzzed most and the fix that cleaned it up

Target metronome tempo reached for clean G-C-D7 changes

Checklist: Fretting-Hand Readiness

- G, C, and D7 all ring with no buzzed or muted strings
- G-to-C and C-to-G changes happen in time at 60 BPM
- Slide, hammer-on, and pull-off each ring as loudly as a picked note
- The second-string choke lands accurately on its target pitch

Your First Tunes and Instrument Care

Read tablature, assemble two real tunes, and keep the instrument in playing condition.

Exercise: Tab Reading Sprint

Pull a free beginner tab for Cripple Creek from a site like banjohangout.org and decode it before playing. This proves you can read tab independently.

- Identify the time signature and how many eighth notes fall in each measure.

- Translate the first four measures into strings, frets, and picking fingers in writing.

- Mark every slide, hammer-on, pull-off, and choke symbol in those measures.

Exercise: Slow-Perfect Tune Build

Learn Cripple Creek and Boil Them Cabbage Down four measures at a time at half speed, then connect the chunks. Only raise the tempo after a clean pass.

- Play Cripple Creek's opening slide lick cleanly at half speed ten times in a row.

- Play Boil Them Cabbage Down all the way through at 70 BPM, keeping time through any mistakes.

- Log the fastest clean tempo you reached for each tune in the tempo tracker template.

Worksheet: Maintenance Setup Log

Record the current state of your instrument so you can hear and measure the effect of each adjustment. Head tap pitch near the bridge before adjustment

Head tap pitch after adjustment

Bridge position: does nut-to-fret-12 equal fret-12-to-bridge

Intonation check: do open, fret-12 harmonic, and fretted fret-12 match

String gauge set installed and date changed

Checklist: First-Tunes and Care Completion

- You can read a beginner banjo tab without help
- Cripple Creek plays cleanly at 100 BPM with the slide ringing
- Boil Them Cabbage Down plays through with smooth G-C-D7 changes
- Bridge is correctly placed and the instrument intonates in tune up the neck
- You changed at least one string one-at-a-time without losing the bridge position

Your Action Plan

1. Tune to open G and verify with all three fretted-to-open ear checks before every practice session.
2. Spend the first week on rolls only, open strings, building evenness at 60 to 80 BPM with no melody.
3. Add the G, C, and D7 chords in week two and drill the changes one chord per metronome click.
4. Introduce slides, hammer-ons, and pull-offs in week three, repeating each until it rings as loud as a picked note.

5. Learn to read tab by decoding a free Cripple Creek arrangement before attempting to play it.
6. Build Cripple Creek four measures at a time at half speed, then connect the chunks.
7. Add Boil Them Cabbage Down to practice the G-C-D7 progression inside a roll.
8. Raise tempo by only 5 BPM after each clean pass, working both tunes toward 90 to 110 BPM.
9. Log every practice session's tempo and minutes in the tempo tracker to see measurable progress.
10. Check head tension and bridge placement monthly and change strings when tone goes dull, one string at a time.

