Hubert Sumlin guitar technique: fingers only lick chart

Thumb and index, no pick. Standard tuning. Exercises 1 to 3 in E, 4 to 6 in A. Exercises in his style, not transcriptions.

How to read the tab: dots are the string lines and numbers are frets; only the strings used are shown. The top line counts eighth notes. **T** = thumb, **i** = index, **P** = pinch (two strings at once), **s** = slide into the note, **b** = small bend (a quarter step curl), **~** = vibrato, **>** = accent.

Shape chart (top four strings, D G B e)

E at the 12th fret: D14 G13 B12 e12. **E7**: B string to 15.
D at the 10th fret: D12 G11 B10 e10. **D7**: B string to 13.
A at the 5th fret: D7 G6 B5 e5. **A7**: B string to 8.
The pinky adds the flat seventh on the B string.

Exercise 1: the stomp pulse

Open low E, thumb only, like a heartbeat. Softer on the and in bar 2.

```
   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &
G |.....................|.....................|
D |.....................|.....................|
A |.....................|.....................|
E |0.....0.....0.....0.....|0..0..0..0..0..0..0..0..|
   T     T     T     T      T  T  T  T  T  T  T  T
   >           >            >           >
```

Exercise 2: one chord drone, high melody

In the style of Smokestack Lightnin'. Thumb keeps the E; index plucks in between.

```
   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &
e |...3.....0.............|...3.....0.............|
B |.............3.....0..|.....................|
G |.....................|.............2.....0..|
D |.....................|.....................|
A |.....................|.....................|
E |0.....0.....0.....0.....|0.....0.....0.....0.....|
   T  i  T  i  T  i  T  i   T  i  T  i  T  i  T  i
```

Exercise 3: leave space, then answer

Bar 1 is silent: sing a line. Bar 2: index barres, slide into the 15s from one fret below.

```
   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &
e |.....................|15....12....15....12....|
B |.....................|15....12....15....12....|
G |.....................|.....................|
                         i     i     i     i
   (sing or hum)         s           s     ~
```

Exercise 4: thumb brushed shapes

In the style of the Killing Floor intro. Brush down with the side of the thumb; the pinky adds the seventh, then lifts.

```
   E     E7                D     D7
   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &
e |12....12.12.12....12....|10....10.10.10....10....|
B |12....15.15.15....12....|10....13.13.13....10....|
G |13....13.13.13....13....|11....11.11.11....11....|
D |14....14.14.14....14....|12....12.12.12....12....|
   T     T  T  T     T      T     T  T  T     T
   A     A7
   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &
e |5.....5..5..5.....5.....|
B |5.....8..8..8.....5.....|
G |6.....6..6..6.....6.....|
D |7.....7..7..7.....7.....|
   T     T  T  T     T
```

Exercise 5: sixths over the open A

In the style of the Killing Floor riff. Pinch the sixths, thumb the open A in between.

```
   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &
e |9.....9.....7.....5.....|9.....9.....7.....5.....|
B |.....................|.....................|
G |9.....9.....7.....6.....|9.....9.....7.....6.....|
D |.....................|.....................|
A |...0.....0.....0........|...0.....0.....0........|
   P  T  P  T  P  T  P      P  T  P  T  P  T  P
   s           s     s      s           s     s
```

Exercise 6: get in, get out

A curl, a wide vibrato, a long slide (aim high, not exact), then stop. The rests count.

```
   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &   1  &  2  &  3  &  4  &
e |......5.................|.....................|
B |8....................|.....................|
G |.....................|2........14.............|
   i     i                 i
   b     ~~~      rest     s  ..... ~~    rest
```

Tempo log

Date	Exercise	bpm	Clean? (yes or no)	Note

Tips

1. Start slow. 60 to 70 bpm, click on each beat, a gentle swing is fine. Speed up only when every bar is clean and relaxed. No time targets.

2. Listen first. The records swing and push in ways tab cannot show.

3. Look after your skin. No pick means your thumb and index take the wear. Keep sessions short, and stop if the skin gets sore.

Listen to (Howlin' Wolf)

Smokestack Lightnin' (1956)
Spoonful (1960)
Shake for Me
Killing Floor (1964 session)
Hubert Sumlin, About Them Shoes (2005)

Song map

Killing Floor is a 12 bar blues in A (A7, D7, E7). Smokestack Lightnin' sits on one chord, nominally E major, with blue notes that make it sound minor.

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