

This is a *very* short, brief, inadequate, introduction to playing blues on a guitar. Shown is a twelve bar blues in A because it's easy to get started. Have fun!

Rhythm

You've heard this rhythm before: "Bump ba-bump ba-bump ba-bump ba." This is one "bar". One very common form of blues is the "12 bar blues".

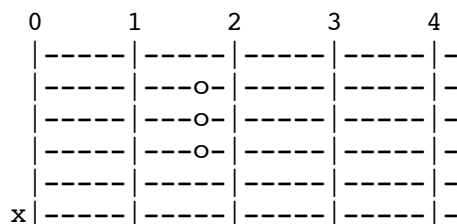
Chords

Play these three chords in the following pattern of 12 bars.

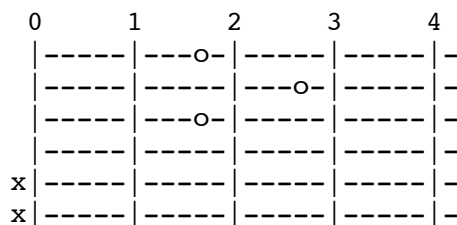
A A A A
D D A A
E D A E

In the diagrams below the six horizontal lines represent the six strings on a guitar. The bottom line is the lowest sounding string, the low E string. The top line is the high E string. The vertical lines represent the frets. I've labeled the fret numbers along the top with 0 representing the nut. The letter "o" represents where you would put your fingers and then strum all the strings together - except for the ones marked with an "x" in the left margin.

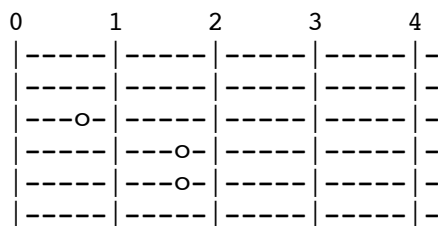
A



D



E



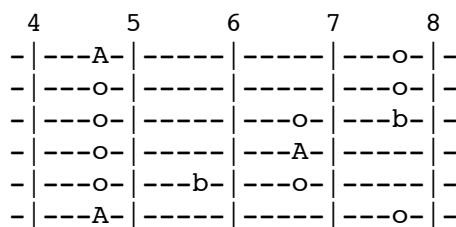
The Blues Scale

Now if you have a friend or a recording of the above chords you can play around with the following bunch of notes. Notice that the diagram starts with the fifth fret. This diagram shows where the notes are. Unlike in the chord diagrams above, you would play each note separately, one at a time. Start and come back to the ones labeled "R".

A: root note

b: blue note

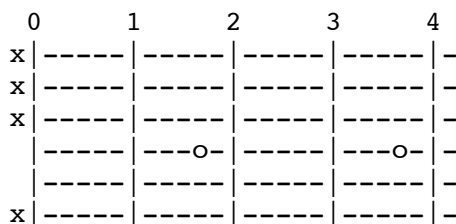
o: other note in the scale

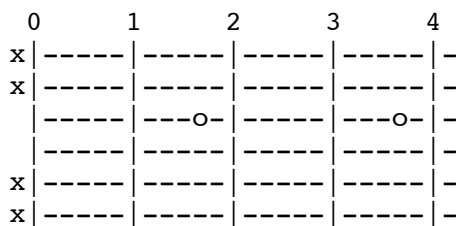
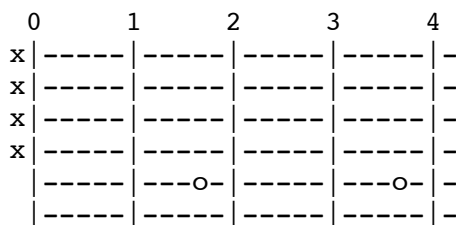


Dat Bass

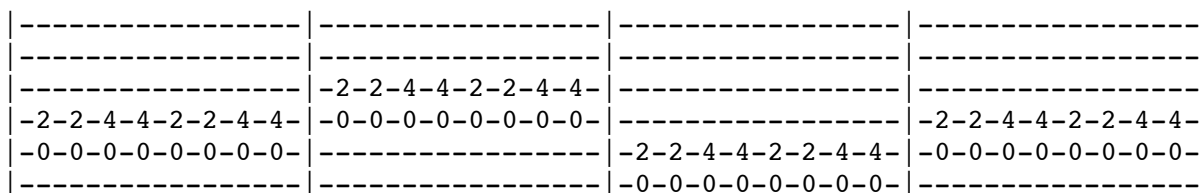
Here's a very simple bass line you can play over each chord. Remember that rhythm? Play two strings on each "bump da". 2, 2, 4, 4, etc. Alternate putting your finger on (before) the second fret and the fourth fret.

A

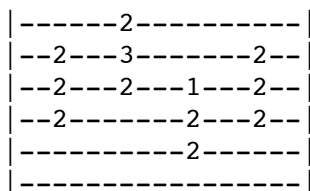


D**E****Tablature**

The diagrams above are sort of like pictures or cartoons of an actual fretboard (or parts of one). There's another diagraming technique known as tablature or TAB which is popular to show how to play tunes, riffs, etc. It also has six horizontal lines that correspond to the six strings of a guitar. Just as above the low E is the bottom line and the high E is the top line. But the vertical lines are *not* the frets. They divide the time into measures or *bars*). Numbers are placed along the "strings" to indicate where one should fret on that string to play a particular note. Then those notes are played in sequence. Here is the bass line above written in TAB:



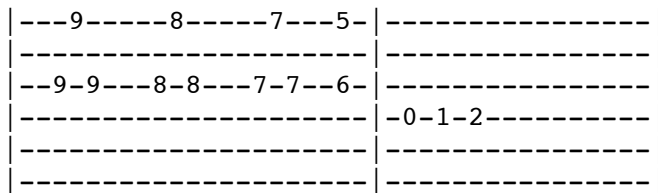
Here is TAB for the three chords A, D, and E played one after the other with another A on the end to make it sound nice and to match the bass TAB above.



Notice that the numbers on top of each other indicate the frets on their strings *and that they should be played at the same time*. So time moves left to right like in sheet music.

Turnaround

That last E chord at the end of our 12 bar blues is the "turnaround" chord. It makes us want to go back to the start. Often players will play a little melody also called a "turnaround" during the last two (or four) bars. Try this turnaround:



Notice the vertical line in the middle. This shows that there are two bars with four beats to each bar. (It does *not* represent a fret like in the first bunch of diagrams.) Let that last note ring a bit. Try it until it sounds right.

(End of Day One)

Dominant Seventh Chords

To blue things up a bit try using one or more of these seventh chords in place of some (or even all) of the regular major chords at the beginning.

A7

0	1	2	3	4		0	1	2	3	4
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
		o						o		
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
		o						o		
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
x						x				
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

D7

0	1	2	3	4
		o		
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	o			
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
		o		
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
x				
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
x				
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

E7

0	1	2	3	4		0	1	2	3	4
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
								o		
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
	o							o		
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
		o						o		
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
x						x				
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Scale Patterns

That blues scale we showed before can actually be played all over the neck. Here are five overlapping patterns that you can learn. The first pattern is what we saw above. Try playing all of these. It will take a significant amount of time to memorize them all. You don't have to do that yet, but you should know about them and try them out.

R: root note

b: blue note

o: other note in the pentatonic minor scale

```

- | ---R- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ---o- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ---o- | ----- | ---o- | ---b- | -
- | ---o- | ----- | ---R- | ----- | -
- | ---o- | ---b- | ---o- | ----- | -
- | ---R- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -

```

```

- | ----- | ---o- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ----- | ---o- | ----- | ---R- | -
- | ---o- | ---b- | ---o- | ----- | -
- | ---R- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ---o- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ----- | ---o- | ----- | ---o- | -

```

```

- | ----- | ---o- | ---b- | ---o- | -
- | ----- | ---R- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ---o- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ----- | ---o- | ----- | ---o- | ---b- | -
- | ----- | ---o- | ----- | ---R- | -
- | ----- | ---o- | ---b- | ---o- | -

```

```

- | ---o- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ----- | ---o- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ---o- | ----- | ---R- | ----- | -
- | ---o- | ---b- | ---o- | ----- | -
- | ---R- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ---o- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -

```

```

- | ----- | ---o- | ----- | ---R- | -
- | ----- | ---o- | ---b- | ---o- | -
- | ---R- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ---o- | ----- | ----- | ---o- | -
- | ----- | ---o- | ----- | ---o- | ---b- | -
- | ----- | ---o- | ----- | ---R- | -

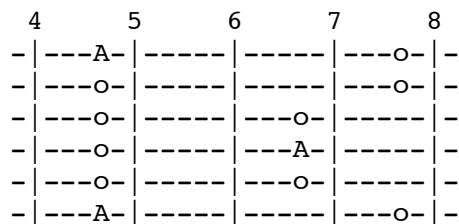
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Notice that I didn't label the frets. I also use "R" for the *root* or *center* of the scale instead of "A". That's because these patterns work with any root note. For example, if you play pattern one at the top of the neck that first column would be the open strings. That's the E blues scale. So now you can play the E blues scale anywhere along the neck.

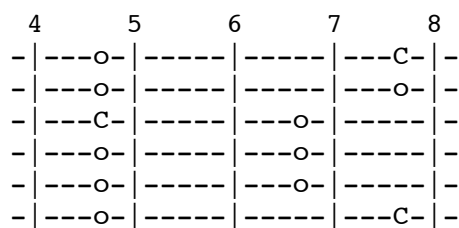
(End of Week One)

The Major Pentatonic Scale

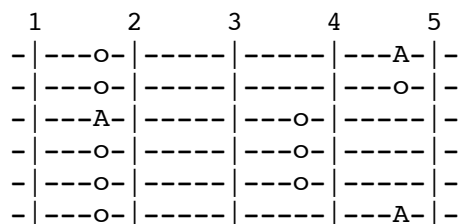
Now back to our A blues scale, but let's drop the blue note for now. This gives us the *A minor pentatonic* scale.



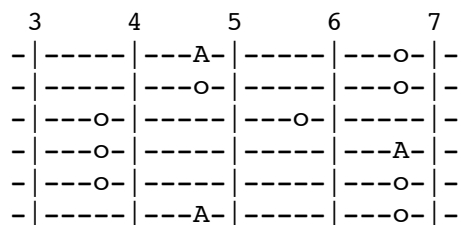
Next let's switch up the root and instead of starting and stopping on the As start and stop on the Cs.



That's the *C major pentatonic* scale. But we're playing blues in A. Here's where it gets tricky, but oh so cool. Remember our overlapping patterns? The exact same patterns all work as major pentatonic scales when you switch the root. So let's just slide down four frets and play an A major pentatonic scale.



Now go back up three frets and use pattern two to play the A major pentatonic scale *in fourth position*.

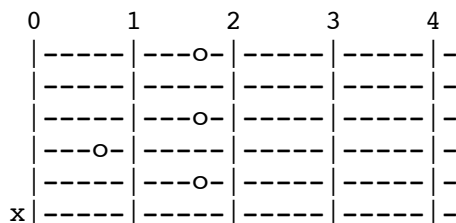


Now to really get going get your 12 bars in A backing track (maybe you recorded one earlier) and play that A major pentatonic over the bars with the A chords. Then switch to the *A minor pentatonic* on the D chord.

12 Bar Blues in E

Many blues tunes are in the key of E. You've already seen the E, E7, A, and A7 chords. Now we'll need a B7 chord.

B7



Using the same 12 bar pattern we get:

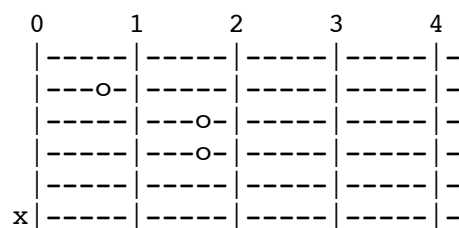
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E  E  E  E
A  A  E  E
B7 A  E  B7
```

Bar Chord Version

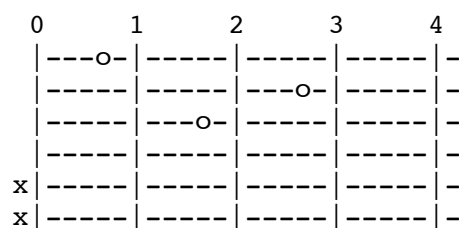
Some find this progression easy to play with *bar chords*. Your fingers stay in the same shape and you just move up to fifth and then seventh position. So start with the E chord, but don't use your index finger on the E chord. To make the A, *bar* the fifth fret by pressing your index finger down along all six strings. Then form that same "E shape" with your other fingers you form an A chord. Same deal with the B chord up two more frets to seventh position. For each of these chords you can lift that middle finger off of the D string to make the seventh chord.

Minor Blues

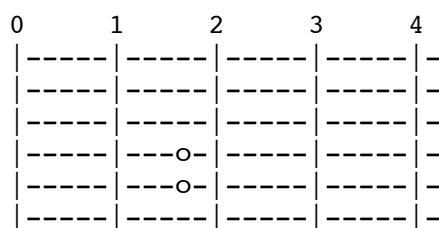
Am



Dm

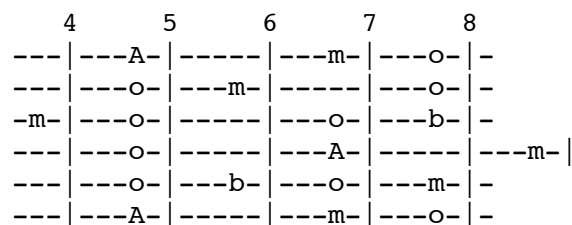


Em



Now try these chords instead of the A, D, E chords you started with. You can still use the blues scale for solos.

Notice: The A major pentatonic scale doesn't work now in a minor blues. *However*, adding other notes from the minor diatonic scale can work. I've marked those with small "m"s extending pattern one.



(End of Month One)