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# BLUES GUITAR

101

Chord Shapes

# Blues Guitar 101 – Chord Shapes

**Essential Blues Chord Shapes and Rhythms**

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# Glossary of Terms

Music has a language all its own. To help you understand the material in this book, here are common musical terms and definitions.

**Bar/Measure:** This is the unit of measurement when talking about musical form. For example, the blues form is 12-bars long. You can use bar or measure interchangeably as they mean the same thing.

**Chorus:** This is slang for one time through a song. So, if you play one time through a 12-bar blues form, that's one chorus of blues.

**Chromatic:** Notes or chords that are outside the given key or diatonic progression. Used to create tension and interest in blues songs.

**Diatonic:** Notes or chords that are found within the given key or diatonic chord progression. Used to resolve chromatic tensions.

**Double Stop:** Two notes played at once on the guitar.

**Form:** Term used to describe the length of a song. For example, blues is a 12-bar form. Popular music often uses the AABA form, etc.

**Riff:** Term used to describe a short musical idea on guitar, can be melodic or harmonic. Also described as a lick, groove, line, or phrase.

**Tonic:** Describes the root note of the key you're in, or the resolution chord of the key you're in. If you're in the key of C, the tonic note is C, and the tonic chord is C major.

**Turnaround:** The section of a song that uses single notes or chords to turn the song back around to the tonic chord, or to the top of the form.

# How to Use This eBook

Welcome to Blues Guitar 101 – Blues Chords, great to have you here!

Before learning these shapes, progressions, riffs, and rhythms on guitar, take a minute to learn how to best study this material.

Here's some background on how the book is put together and how to get the most out of your time spend on this material.

## How to Learn These Chord Shapes

When you first learn any new chord shape in this eBook, it's presented out of context with the other chords in that key.

This gets the shapes and sounds of each chord under your fingers and in your ears before you apply it to chord progressions.

Once you can play each new chord in that key from memory, move on to learning the 3 progressions in that key using those chords.

There are three keys used in this eBook, A, G, and E, which gives you a broad sense of how these chords fit on the fretboard.

As well, there are three common blues progressions for each key, standard, turnaround, and quick change.

Make sure to run any chords you learn through all three keys, and through all three progressions in each key.

This gives you the most in-depth learning experience when it comes to getting these shapes onto the fretboard and into your playing.

## Adding Rhythm to the Chord Charts

As you progress through this eBook, you notice that the chords are written in a plain and static rhythm.

This allows you to quickly and easily learn any new chord shape within the context of the different blues progressions.

After you can play any chord progression in this eBook, jam it along to the backing track and add your own rhythms.

Listen to the bass and drums on the backing tracks and improvise rhythms that fit what you hear in the rhythm section.

As well, the last chapter of this eBook focuses on famous rhythms that you can learn and add to your rhythm playing.

Either way, make sure to add rhythm to the chords to get the most out of those shapes in the practice room and on the bandstand.

## Mixing and Matching

Once you learn two or more of the progressions and shapes below, mix them together as you jam them over the backing tracks.

Sometimes you want to use only one set of chord shapes or qualities in your blues rhythm playing, but that's not always the case.

Over time you find that mixing barre chords, open chords, extended chords, 4-note shapes, and chord riffs is the best way to go.

So, as you progress through this material, mix new shapes with shapes you already know to see how they fit together in your playing.

Last but not least, have fun!

Learning to play blues chords takes time and effort, but it's also tons of fun in the practice room.

Enjoy your time spent with this material, it provides you with everything you need to play blues rhythm guitar at a jam or on a gig.

# What Are Blues Chords?

Before you dig into the material below, here's a quick primer on the chords and progressions you use when playing blues rhythm guitar.

These aren't every variation or option you use when playing blues guitar, but they make up the bulk of the chords you see.

Because of this, take a minute to review this material before you take these shapes and progressions onto the guitar.

## I-IV-V Chords

Blues chord progressions normally have three chords, referred to as a I-IV-V (1-4-5) progression.

This is because the three chords in a blues progression are built from the first, fourth, and fifth notes of the key you're in.

These chords make up all, or most, of the chords in a 12-bar blues progression, and therefore are essential to know on the guitar.

Here's a fretboard pattern that you can use to grab the I7, IV7, and V7 chords in any key on the guitar.

When playing the I7 root on the 6<sup>th</sup> string, the root for IV7 is always the same fret but one string higher, towards the floor.

From there, the V7 chord is always two frets higher on the same string as the IV7 chord.

Here's how that looks in the key of G. After you play this example, find the chords for the I-IV-V in any key on the guitar for practice.



1      4      5      I7      IV7      V7

T  
A  
B

3      3      5      3      3      5  
3      3      5      4      5      7  
3      3      5      3      3      5

Here are the 1-4-5 notes and chords for a blues in G with the I7 chord root on the 5<sup>th</sup> string.

Again, memorize this pattern so that you can quickly and easily grab the chords for any key of the blues in your playing.

1      4      5      I7      IV7      V7

T  
A  
B

10      8      10      10      8      10  
12      8      10      12      9      11  
10      8      10      10      8      10

## Dominant 7<sup>th</sup> Chords

In blues, you mostly use dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords and their variations/extensions when playing rhythm guitar.

Dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords are built by taking a triad, like the open C below, and adding a b7 interval on top of the 1-3-5.

When doing so, you produce a four-note chord with the intervals R-3-5-b7, which you can hear in the second half of the example below.

Play both chords back to back to hear and see how that one note makes a big difference between the C and C7 chord shapes.

### Audio Example 1

The image shows musical notation for two chords: C and C7. The notation is presented in two systems: a standard staff with a treble clef and a guitar-specific staff with a bass clef. The C chord is shown in the first system, and the C7 chord is shown in the second system. The guitar staff includes fret numbers for each string (T, A, B) and a barre line across the top strings. The C chord has fret numbers 0, 1, 2, 3 for the T, A, B strings respectively. The C7 chord has fret numbers 0, 1, 2, 3 for the T, A, B strings respectively. The notation also includes a rhythmic pattern of R 3 5 R 3 for the C chord and R 3 b7 R 3 for the C7 chord.

Here's an example of a C barre chords and a C7 barre chord side by side to compare how they sit on the fretboard.

Again, notice that the C7 chord has one note different; the root on the 3<sup>rd</sup> string has been lowered 2 frets to the b7.

This produces the C7 chord shape in a barre position. Play both back to back to hear and see the difference between these two shapes on guitar.

## Audio Example 2

The image shows musical notation for two chords: C major and C7 dominant. The notation is in 4/8 time. The C major chord is shown in the first measure, and the C7 dominant chord is shown in the second measure. The notes for C major are C4, E4, G4, and C5. The notes for C7 are C4, E4, G4, Bb4, and C5. Below the notation are fretboard diagrams for the guitar. The C major diagram shows the 5th fret on the 5th string, 5th fret on the 4th string, 5th fret on the 3rd string, and 3rd fret on the 2nd string. The C7 diagram shows the 5th fret on the 5th string, 3rd fret on the 4th string, 5th fret on the 3rd string, 3rd fret on the 2nd string, and 3rd fret on the 1st string.

## Dominant 7<sup>th</sup> Chord Extensions

You also learn chord extensions in this eBook, where you add notes above the 7<sup>th</sup> to any dominant chord.

In this book you focus on three extended chords, 9, 7#9, and 13, the three most common extended blues chords.

Here's an example of a C7 chord with three extended chords next to it, all built from the original C7 shape.

You can see that all four chords sound like C7, but the extended chords have different colors compared to the original shape.

When playing blues rhythm guitar, you don't always have to use chord extensions, but they're an option.

Experiment with these extended chord shapes, get them under your fingers and into your ears, and try them out over blues songs.

While you won't use them on every blues song or progression, they do add interest when you choose to use them in your playing.

### Audio Example 3

The image displays musical notation for four chords: C7, C9, C13, and C7(9). The top staff is in 4/8 time with a treble clef. The bottom staff shows guitar fingerings for the Tenor (T), Alto (A), and Bass (B) positions. The chords are arranged in four measures, each with a chord symbol above the staff and fingerings below.

| Measure | Chord | T | A | B |
|---------|-------|---|---|---|
| 1       | C7    | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| 2       | C9    | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 3       | C13   | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| 4       | C7(9) | 4 | 3 | 3 |

# Blues 4-Note Chords

You now move on to learning 4-note chords on the top-4 strings over blues in A, G, and E chord progressions.

These 4-note chords are higher on the strings, allowing them to cut through a band clearer than barre or open 7<sup>th</sup> chords.

As well, these chords have a lighter sound to them compared to the bass heavy sound of barre chords.

This also allows you to use these chords in a band with bass, piano, organ, or a second guitarist, and still be heard in the mix.

While these cool-sounding shapes are fun to play and add to your blues rhythm playing, they're harder to transpose than barre chords.

This is because the root isn't the lowest note, as it is with barre chords, so you have to see the root on the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> strings with these shapes.

Though it's tough to see those higher root notes, as you visualize those notes you learn the fretboard at the same time.

That's a practice room win-win situation, and one that will take several elements of your playing to the next level.

So, enough talking, time to learn and jam with 4-note blues chords in three different keys over 9 different blues progressions.

## Key of A

The first set of 4-note chords you learn are for a blues in A chord progression, A7, D7, and E7.

Because the root note isn't always the lowest note in the shape you're playing, these chords take time to get used to on the fretboard.

To help you out, the root for A7 is on the 1<sup>st</sup> string, for D7 it's on the 2<sup>nd</sup> string, and for E7 it's on the 2<sup>nd</sup> string.

From there, you move those chords around the same way that you move barre chords around the fretboard.

The exception here is that you need to see the root on the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> strings to find the chord you're on.

For example, with the A7 shape, to play it as C7 you play it with the top note on the 8<sup>th</sup> fret of the 1<sup>st</sup> string.

Then, for the D7 shape, to play it as F7, you play the 2<sup>nd</sup> string note on the 6<sup>th</sup> fret, the note F.

Here are fingerings for those chord shapes, make sure to memorize them and play them clearly before moving on to full progressions.

### Audio Example 28

The image shows musical notation for three chords: A7, D7, and E7. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The chords are represented by whole notes on the staff. Below the staff are three guitar strings: Treble (T), A, and Bass (B). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 on each string.

| Chord | Treble (T) | A | Bass (B) |
|-------|------------|---|----------|
| A7    | 5          | 5 | 5        |
| D7    | 5          | 3 | 4        |
| E7    | 7          | 5 | 6        |

Here are four-note chords over the standard blues progression in the key of A to study, memorize, and add to your playing.

### Audio Example 29

**A7**

**D7** **A7**

**E7** **A7**

Here are four-note chords over the turnaround blues progression in the key of A to study, memorize, and add to your playing.

## Audio Example 30

**A7**

5 5 6 5

5 3 5 4

5 5 6 5

5 3 5 4

**D7** **A7**

5 3 5 4

5 5 6 5

5 3 5 4

5 5 6 5

**E7** **D7** **A7** **E7**

7 5 7 6

5 3 5 4

5 5 6 5

7 5 7 6

Here are four-note chords over the quick-change blues progression in the key of A to study, memorize, and add to your playing.

The chords have been reversed, so you now start with A7 on the 2nd-string root and play the closest chords from there.



# Audio Example 31

**A7**                      **D7**                      **A7**

|   |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|
| T | 12 | 10 | 12 | 12 |
| A | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| B | 11 | 10 | 11 | 11 |

**D7**                      **A7**

|   |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|
| T | 10 | 10 | 12 | 12 |
| A | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| B | 10 | 10 | 11 | 11 |

**E7**                      **D7**                      **A7**                      **E7**

|   |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|
| T | 12 | 10 | 12 | 12 |
| A | 12 | 10 | 10 | 12 |
| B | 12 | 10 | 11 | 12 |

## Key of G

The next set of chords you learn are the 4-note chords for a blues in G chord progression, G7, C7, and D7.

Here are fingerings for those shapes, make sure to memorize them and be able to play them clearly before moving on to full progressions.

### Audio Example 32

The image shows musical notation for three chords: G7, C7, and D7. The top staff is in 4/4 time and shows the chord voicings. The bottom staff shows the guitar fingerings for each chord.

| Chord | Fingering (T, A, B) |
|-------|---------------------|
| G7    | 3, 3, 4, 3          |
| C7    | 3, 1, 3, 2          |
| D7    | 5, 3, 5, 4          |

Here are four-note chords over the standard blues progression in the key of G to study, memorize, and add to your playing.

## Audio Example 33

**G7**

TAB

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |

**C7** **G7**

TAB

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 |

**D7** **G7**

TAB

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 |

Here are four-note chords over the turnaround blues progression in the key of G to study, memorize, and add to your playing.

## Audio Example 34

**G7**

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| T | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| A | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| B | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |

**C7**                      **G7**

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| T | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| A | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| B | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 |

**D7**                      **C7**                      **G7**                      **D7**

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| T | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| A | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| B | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Here are four-note chords over the quick-change blues progression in the key of G to study, memorize, and add to your playing.

The chords have been reversed, so you now start with G7 on the 2nd-string root and play the closest chords from there.

# Audio Example 35

Chord progression: G7, C7, G7, G7

|   |    |   |    |    |
|---|----|---|----|----|
| T | 10 | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| A | 8  | 9 | 8  | 8  |
| B | 9  | 8 | 9  | 9  |

Chord progression: C7, G7, G7, G7

|   |   |   |    |    |
|---|---|---|----|----|
| T | 8 | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| A | 9 | 9 | 8  | 8  |
| B | 8 | 8 | 9  | 9  |

Chord progression: D7, C7, G7, D7

|   |    |   |    |    |
|---|----|---|----|----|
| T | 10 | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| A | 10 | 9 | 8  | 10 |
| B | 10 | 8 | 9  | 10 |

## Key of E

The last set of chords you learn in this section are the 4-note chords for a blues in E chord progression, E7, A7, and B7.

Here are fingerings for those chords, make sure to memorize them and play them clearly before moving on to the full progressions.

### Audio Example 36

The image shows musical notation for three chords: E7, A7, and B7. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The bottom staff is a guitar fretboard with strings labeled T, A, B. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-7.

| Chord | T | A | B |
|-------|---|---|---|
| E7    | 7 | 5 | 7 |
| A7    | 5 | 5 | 6 |
| B7    | 7 | 8 | 7 |

Here are four-note chords over the standard blues progression in the key of E to study, memorize, and add to your playing.

## Audio Example 37

**E7**

7 7 7 7  
5 5 5 5  
T 7 7 7  
A 6 6 6  
B 6 6 6

**A7** **E7**

5 7 7 7  
5 5 5 5  
T 5 5 5  
A 5 5 5  
B 5 6 6 6

**B7** **E7**

7 7 7 7  
7 7 8 7  
T 7 7 7  
A 8 8 8  
B 7 7 6 6

Here are four-note chords over the turnaround blues progression in the key of E to study, memorize, and add to your playing.

## Audio Example 38

**E7**

T 7  
A 5  
B 6

**A7**                      **E7**

T 5  
A 6  
B 5

T 7  
A 5  
B 6

**B7**                      **A7**                      **E7**                      **B7**

T 7  
A 7  
B 8

T 5  
A 6  
B 5

T 7  
A 5  
B 6

T 7  
A 8  
B 7

Here are four-note chords over the quick-change blues progression in the key of E to study, memorize, and add to your playing.

The chords have been reversed, so you now start with E7 on the 1st-string root and play the closest chords from there.



# Audio Example 39

**E7** **A7** **E7**

|   |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|
|   | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| T | 12 | 10 | 12 | 12 |
| A | 13 | 12 | 13 | 13 |
| B | 12 | 11 | 12 | 12 |

**A7** **E7**

|   |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|
|   | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| T | 10 | 10 | 12 | 12 |
| A | 12 | 12 | 13 | 13 |
| B | 11 | 11 | 12 | 12 |

**B7** **A7** **E7** **B7**

|   |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|
|   | 14 | 12 | 12 | 14 |
| T | 12 | 10 | 12 | 12 |
| A | 14 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| B | 13 | 11 | 12 | 13 |

# About the Author

I grew up listening to rock, and I still love that music. But, it's soloing I really love, and that's what drew me to blues and jazz.

My love of blues and jazz has taken me from small town Canada around the globe.

I studied at three of the top jazz programs in the world, starting with McGill University, then Western Michigan, and finishing with a Doctorate from the University of Illinois (UIUC).

I've taught over 6000 private jazz guitar lessons, and my students range from beginners, to music Professors at NYU, and everything in between.

I've also taught jazz guitar, popular music, and music business at universities in Canada, the US, the UK, Brazil, and Nepal.

I've played over 2500 gigs in 8 countries and shared the stage with Randy Brecker, Stefon Harris, and Slide Hampton.

Some of my favorite gigs were at:

- Lincoln Center
- International Association for Jazz Education Conference
- NuJazz Festival (Brazil)
- Savassi Jazz Festival (Brazil)
- International Jazz Day Festival (Nepal)

Jazz and blues have been in my life for 20 years, and every day I'm glad I found these great genre.

Because of this, I want to share this love of blues and guitar with you.

You never know where it'll lead you.