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# BLUES GUITAR

101

Rhythm Chops

# Blues Guitar 101 – Rhythm Chops

**Essential Blues Rhythm Guitar Techniques**

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Published By: Guitar for Life LLC  
Cover Photo By: Twizzlebird Creative  
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# The Shuffle Rhythm

Before you learn how to play blues riffs, take a look at the most important aspect of blues rhythm guitar, the rhythm.

Not all blues is played with a shuffle feel, but it's a good place to start, as this rhythm is the foundation of many blues songs that you learn.

The shuffle feel is based on 8<sup>th</sup> notes, two notes per beat, where the first note is held a bit longer than the second note on each beat.

So, rather than playing even 8<sup>th</sup> notes, two equal notes on 1 beat, you play a longer first note and a shorter second note.

This is sometimes written, or taught, as triplets, three notes on each beat, but you only play the first and third notes.

So, rather than play, 1-trip-let, you play 1-let, holding the first note for both 1 and trip.

If this is confusing not to worry, it's written out and played for you below to get this shuffle sound into your hands and ears quickly.

Now that you know what a shuffle rhythm is, here's an example of a line played twice with a shuffle feel.

The first two bars are written as a triplet, playing quarter then 8<sup>th</sup> for each triplet.

Then, the second two bars play the shuffle rhythm in 8<sup>th</sup> notes, and the 8<sup>th</sup> = shuffle symbol is on top of the first bar of the second line.

This symbol is often used to indicate that you play in a shuffle feel if there's no written indication of how to play the music.

Notice that both lines sound the same, but the second line is much easier to read and follow on the staff and tab.

This is why the 8<sup>th</sup> = shuffle symbol and plain 8<sup>th</sup> notes are used instead of triplets; it's easier to read and gets the same result.

As you use the shuffle rhythm in a large part of this eBook, spend some time jamming along to the audio track and nail that rhythmic feel.

After you know what a shuffle is, how it's written, how it sounds, and can play it on guitar, move on to the next section.

### Audio Example 1

The image displays two musical examples for a guitar riff. The first example shows a treble clef with an A7 chord symbol. The melody consists of eighth notes with triplet markings over two measures. The guitar tablature below shows the fretting: 2-0, 2-0, 4-0, 4-0, 2-0, 2-0, 4-0, 4-0 in the first measure, and 2-0, 2-0, 4-0, 4-0, 2-0, 2-0, 4-0, 4-0 in the second measure. A legend indicates that a triplet of eighth notes is equivalent to a single eighth note with a triplet symbol. The second example is identical but without the triplet markings, showing the notes as a continuous eighth-note line.

## Essential Shuffle Riffs

Now that you know what a shuffle rhythm is and how it sounds, you can learn essential blues shuffle riffs on guitar.

There are 10 riffs in this section, 5 in open position to get you started, and 5 with barre chords to move around the fretboard in different keys.

These riffs can be used over any blues song you jam on, which you choose depending on the groove, tempo, and feel of the tune.

Some blues songs have specific shuffle riffs that you learn and play for that specific tune.

But, most of the time, the groove is up to your discretion as the rhythm guitarist.

Because of this, knowing a number of solid shuffle riffs gives you enough variety to fit into any blues tune you're jamming over.

### Shuffle Riff 1

The first example uses a straight shuffle rhythm, all 8<sup>th</sup>-notes, and focuses on one chord.

If you're new to shuffle riffs and groove, this is the best place to start.

While it may be easy on your fretting hand, getting this chord to have a solid shuffle feel takes time and focus in the practice room.

When you have this one-chord example under your fingers, take it to the blues in A chords below.





Play the riff over each chord separately, then bring them together over the backing track.

When ready, take this riff to other keys to take it further in your playing.

### Audio Example 5

The image shows a musical score for a guitar riff. It consists of a treble clef staff with a treble clef and a bass clef staff. The riff is divided into three measures, each corresponding to a different chord: A7, D7, and E7. The treble clef staff shows the notes of the riff: A7 (A, C#, E, G), D7 (D, F#, A, C), and E7 (E, G#, B, D). The bass clef staff shows the fretboard diagrams for each measure. The first measure (A7) has fret numbers 2-2-4-4-2-2-4-4 on the strings from high to low. The second measure (D7) has fret numbers 0-0-0-0-2-2-4-4. The third measure (E7) has fret numbers 2-2-4-4-2-2-4-4.

### Shuffle Riff 3

You now bring your pinky finger into play with an expanded version of the riff you just learned.

Here, you put your index finger on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret, ring finger on the 4<sup>th</sup>, and pinky on the 5<sup>th</sup> fret.

The riff starts off with two plucks/strums of the A-E chord, root and 5<sup>th</sup>, on beat one.

From there, you alternate playing the 6<sup>th</sup> (F#) and b7 (G) with the 5<sup>th</sup> (E) on the other three beats.

As you climb up these notes and frets, keep your index finger down on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret E note.

This acts as an anchor, holding your fingers close to the fretboard, and preventing your ring and pinky from pulling your hand out of position.

It's not a huge reach between these notes, but it's enough to lift your hand out of place if you're not careful.

Keeping your index down on the fretboard prevents that unwanted shifting from happening with this riff.

### Audio Example 6

A7

T  
A 2 2 4 2 5 2 4 2  
B 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Now that you can play this shuffle riff over A7, here it is over the I, IV, and V chords in an A blues progression.

Work the riff over each chord separately, then bring them together over the backing track to jam with it over the whole A blues form.

When ready, take this cool-sounding shuffle riff to other keys, and play it over backing tracks in those keys to expand it in your playing.





## Barre Chord Shuffle Riff 1

You now move on to barre chord shuffle riffs, which you use to move up the neck and into other keys.

Here, your index finger acts as the open string did in the previous four shuffle riffs.

It stays static on the root note of each chord, anchoring you and allowing your other fingers to create movement over that note.

The first riff is the same as the first open-position riff, only this time over a C7 chord and up on the 8<sup>th</sup> fret.

Here, use your index finger on the 6<sup>th</sup> string and your ring finger on the 5<sup>th</sup> string to play each note in the riff.

When you have this riff down, take it to other chords and keys by moving on to the example below.

### Audio Example 10

The musical notation for Audio Example 10 consists of two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a C7 chord symbol above it. It shows a sequence of eighth notes in a shuffle rhythm, starting on the 8th fret of the 5th string and moving up the neck. The bottom staff is a bass clef with fret numbers 10 and 8 written below it, indicating the fret positions for the notes in the riff.

Now that you can play this barre chord shuffle riff over C7, here it is over the I, IV, and V chords in a C blues.

Work the riff over each chord separately, and then bring them together over the backing track.

When ready, take this riff to other keys to take it further in your playing.

### Audio Example 11

The image shows a musical score for a guitar riff. It consists of a treble clef staff with a treble clef, and a guitar fretboard diagram below it. The riff is divided into three measures, each corresponding to a different chord: C7, F7, and G7. The fretboard diagram shows the fret numbers for the 6th and 5th strings. The 6th string is played with the index finger (I) and the 5th string with the ring (R) and pinky (P) fingers. The fret numbers are: C7 (10-10-10-10-10-10-10-10), F7 (8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8), and G7 (12-12-12-12-12-12-12-12).

## Barre Chord Shuffle Riff 2

Here, you bring the 6<sup>th</sup> into play as you use the root-5<sup>th</sup> chord on beats 1 and 3, then use the root-6<sup>th</sup> chord on beats 2 and 4.

Again, use your index on the 6<sup>th</sup> string, then alternate your ring and pinky fingers on the 5<sup>th</sup> string.

This takes time to get down, as the stretch between the ring and pinky might not be doable at first.

This is why you start this riff over a C chord, so you're higher up on the neck where the frets are closer together.

If it's still a challenge, move up to the 12<sup>th</sup> fret E chord, index finger on the 12<sup>th</sup> fret of the 6<sup>th</sup> string, and play the riff there.



## Barre Chord Shuffle Riff 3

The next riff uses three notes on the fifth string, the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and b7<sup>th</sup>, all played over the static root note on the sixth string.

Here, you hold down the 8<sup>th</sup> fret and use your ring to play the 10<sup>th</sup> fret, then pinky to play the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> frets on the 5<sup>th</sup> string.

Again, if this is tough to begin, take it higher up the neck where the frets are closer and move back down the neck from there.

Also, working on barre chords of any kind is hard on your fretting hand, especially your thumb.

If your fretting-hand feels tired or sore, stop for a minute or two, shake it out, and then come back to the riff.

It takes time to build endurance and strength with these types of riffs, so short, focused practice is key in the beginning.

After you build endurance, you can jam these riffs as long as you like.

But, in the beginning, even 10-15 seconds of the riff followed by 45-50 seconds of rest is a good place to start.

No point in hurting your hands just to learn a riff, take your time, rest when needed, and build your endurance slowly and safely.

## Audio Example 14

The musical notation for Audio Example 14 shows a guitar riff over a C7 chord. The riff is written in a single staff with a treble clef. The notes are: C4, E4, G4, Bb4, C5, E5, G5, Bb5, C6, E6, G6, Bb6, C7. The bass staff shows the fret numbers: 10-8, 10-8, 12-8, 10-8, 13-8, 10-8, 12-8, 10-8, 10-8, 10-8, 12-8, 10-8, 13-8, 10-8, 12-8, 10-8.

Now that you can play this riff over C7, here it is over the I, IV, and V chords in a C blues.

Work the riff over each chord, then bring them together to jam this riff over the whole C blues form.

When ready, take this shuffle riff to other keys and play it over backing tracks in those keys to take it further in your playing.

## Audio Example 15

The musical notation for Audio Example 15 shows a guitar riff over three chords: C7, F7, and G7. The riff is written in a single staff with a treble clef. The notes are: C4, E4, G4, Bb4, C5, E5, G5, Bb5, C6, E6, G6, Bb6, C7, F4, A4, C5, E5, F5, Ab5, F6, A6, C7, G4, Bb4, C5, E5, G5, Bb5, C6, E6, G6, Bb6, C7. The bass staff shows the fret numbers: 10-8, 10-8, 12-8, 10-8, 13-8, 10-8, 12-8, 10-8, 10-8, 10-8, 12-8, 10-8, 13-8, 10-8, 12-8, 10-8, 12-12, 14-12, 15-12, 14-12, 10-10, 10-10, 10-10, 10-10.

## Barre Chord Shuffle Riff 4

The final barre chord shuffle riff features a bend with your pinky finger on beat 4.

Though the bend is indicated at a 1/2 step, Eb up to E, it's more of a "pull" than a true bend.

It's tough to bend a 1/2 step with your pinky on the 6<sup>th</sup> string, especially on lower frets, so do your best.

The goal is to create a "growl" in that part of the riff, so pull down the bend as far as you can, then play the next note from there.

Depending on the key, you can bend it further on different parts of the fretboard, and that's ok.

Sometimes the effect of the bend is what you're going for, not the full bend itself, which is the case here.

### Audio Example 16

The image shows musical notation for a guitar riff. At the top left, there is a treble clef and a C7 chord symbol. The notation consists of a single staff with a series of eighth notes. The notes are grouped into pairs, with a barre indicated above the first note of each pair. The notes are: G4 (10th fret), A4 (10th fret), B4 (12th fret), C5 (12th fret), B4 (10th fret), A4 (10th fret), G4 (11th fret), F#4 (10th fret), G4 (10th fret), A4 (10th fret), B4 (12th fret), C5 (12th fret), B4 (10th fret), A4 (10th fret), G4 (11th fret), F#4 (10th fret). A 1/2 bend is indicated above the 11th fret note. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six lines. The fret numbers are: 10, 10, 12, 12, 10, 10, 11, 10, 10, 10, 12, 12, 10, 10, 11, 10. A 1/2 bend is indicated above the 11th fret note.

Now that you can play this barre chord shuffle riff over C7, here it is over the I, IV, and V chords in a C blues progression.

