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GUITAR

ESSENTIALS

EASY GUITAR THEORY

Easy Guitar Theory

Learn music theory the fun and easy way.

mattwarnockguitar.com

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Matt Warnock Plays Koentopp Guitars
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About the Author

Introduction

Welcome to Easy Guitar Theory, great to have you here!

Learning about music theory is essential for any guitarist. From blues to rock to jazz and classical, music theory is everywhere on the fretboard.

While you may know that understanding theory is important, you may not know where to start.

Or, if you started learning theory, you might be confused about what applies to guitar, or why you should learn certain concepts.

The material in this eBook gives you the easiest and quickest explanation of essential theory concepts for guitarists.

Each chapter breaks down specific concepts in easy to understand fashion, and gives practical examples on the fretboard.

For this reason, you don't waste time learning theory that can't immediately be applied to the guitar or to your playing/writing.

Take your time with this eBook, use it as a reference or study it from start to finish, but stick with it.

Music theory can be confusing at first, but with the right presentation and musical examples, it becomes a lot clearer.

This eBook sets you on that pathway to understanding essential music theory and applying it directly to the guitar.

Cheers,
Matt

How to Use This eBook

As every reader comes to this eBook with different experience levels and musical tastes, there's no one-way to get through this material.

Though everyone is different, the approach to learning this material is the same.

Step One: Read a theoretical concept and understand it from a conceptual standpoint, write it out in 1 or more keys to solidify.

Step Two: Play the examples, in the given key and in other keys if appropriate. This is why no audio is provided, so you play each example.

Step Three: Run the exercises at the end of each chapter to solidify the concepts in that chapter.

Step Four: Do the theory quiz at the end of each chapter to see if you're ready to move on to the next section.

As well, because everyone comes to this eBook with different theory backgrounds, you don't have to work the book in chapter order.

If you're struggling with a specific theory concept, skip to that chapter and dig right in to mastering that theory.

If you're starting from scratch, or haven't studied theory in a while, start with Chapter 1 and work your way down from there.

The goal is to be able to understand, recognize, and apply all of the theory in this eBook over time.

So, take your time with this material, work on it a little everyday, or use this book as a reference to concepts when you encounter them.

Either way, have fun with this eBook and enjoy your journey to mastering music theory.

Guitar Notation

When learning music theory on guitar, the best place to start is with guitar notation.

Notation is used to write and read music for guitar, and is a mixture of notes, rhythms, and symbols.

As well, there are three main ways to write and read music on the guitar - tab, notation, and diagrams.

All three of those notation methods are covered in this chapter.

Even if you can read one or more of these notation methods, take a minute to review these items.

Everything in this eBook is written with either notation or tab, and so understanding how those work is essential.

Tablature

The first method of writing guitar music is the oldest of the bunch, tablature, or tab for short.

Tab has been used since the earliest written music for guitar and lute, though we often associate it with more modern writing styles.

When reading tab, you see six strings, the bottom line is the low E string and the top line is the high E string.

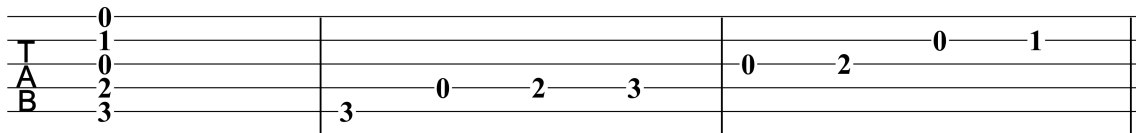
So the order, from lowest line to highest, is EADGBE, the open strings of the guitar.

From there, when you see a number, that's the fret you play on that string.

Here's an example of a chord and single notes written in tab.

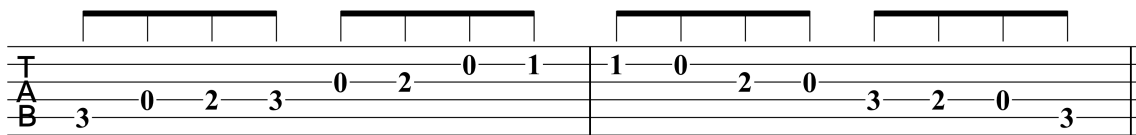
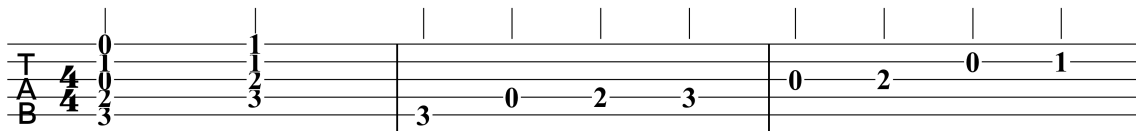
For the first bar, you place fingers on the fretted notes, 3-2-1, and leave the others open, 0.

In the next two bars, you play one note at a time, playing the 3rd fret on the A string, then the open D string, etc. for those measures.



To make tab more complete, some publications and composers add rhythms to the tab numbers.

Here's an example of tab with rhythms. It's not as easy to read the rhythms as notation, but it's better than no rhythms in the tab.



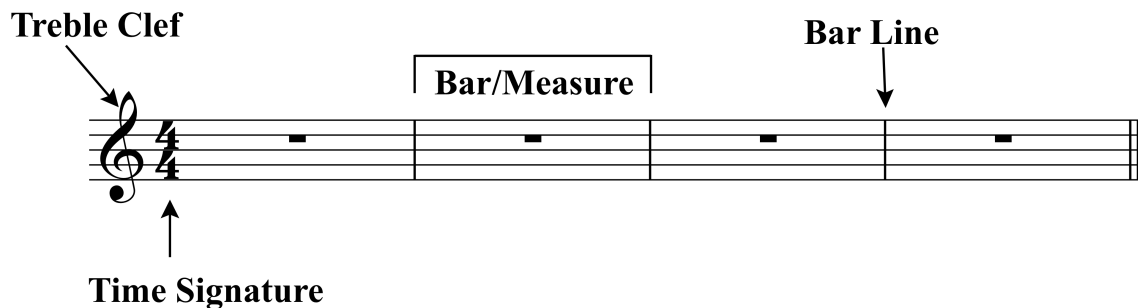
Standard Notation

The next way of writing and reading music for guitar you learn about is the second oldest, standard notation.

Standard notation uses a staff, mostly treble clef for guitar, and bars to tell you where and when to play notes in a song.

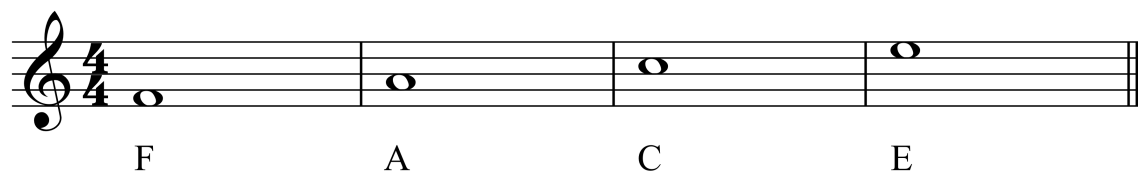
Here's how standard notation is set up for guitar.

For now, just learn the labels, and then as you proceed with this eBook, you unpack each of those labels in more detail.



Now that you know what standard notation is, you can learn about the names of the notes within, above, and below the staff.

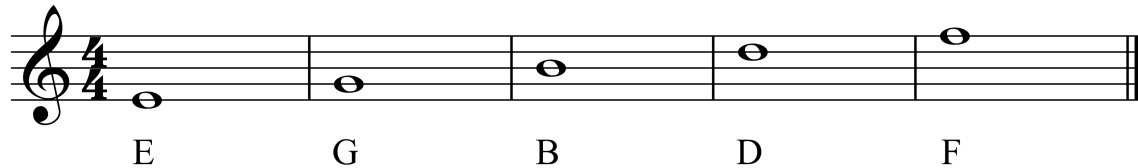
The notes within the staff on the lines spell the word FACE, which you can use to memorize those notes.



Here are the notes within the staff on the lines.

For notes on the staff lines, you use this saying to memorize the notes:

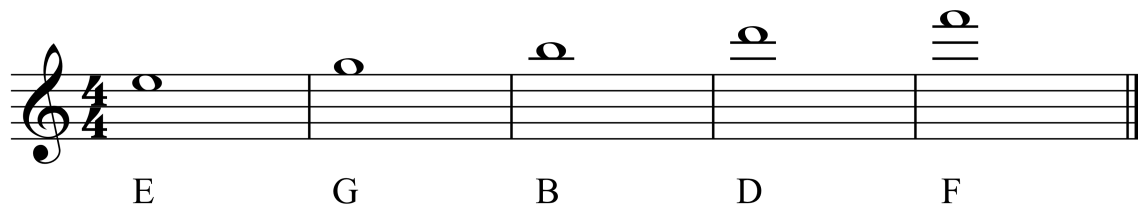
Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge



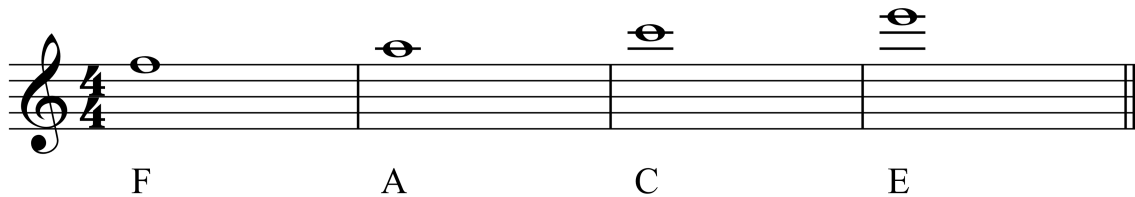
You now learn the notes on the spaces above the staff.

For above the staff spaces, you can use this saying to memorize the notes:

Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge



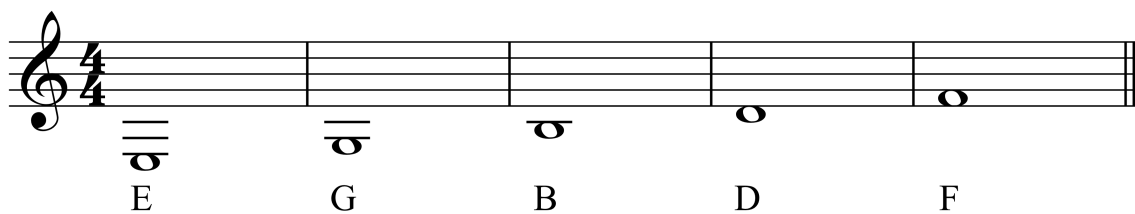
The notes above the staff on the lines spell the word FACE, which you can use to memorize those notes.



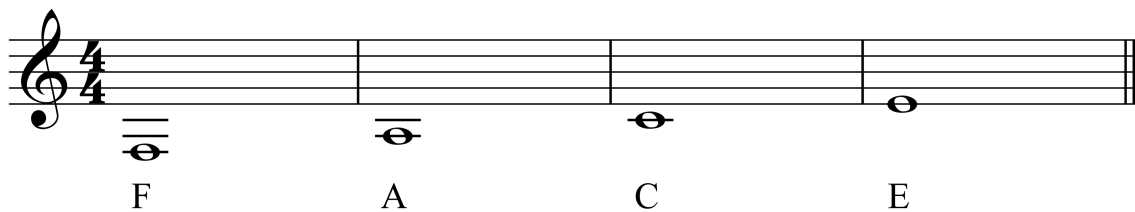
Here are the notes that fall below the staff.

For below the staff spaces, you use this saying to memorize the notes:

Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge



For the lines below, you use FACE to memorize those notes.



Combined Notation

One of the most popular ways to write guitar music is to combine staff notation and tab.

This way you see the notes, get the exact rhythms for those notes, and know exactly where to play them on the guitar.

When reading combined notation, look at both the staff and tab to get the full picture of the music you're playing.

The image shows a musical score with two staves. The top staff is a standard musical staff in 4/4 time, containing a melody of quarter notes. The bottom staff is a guitar tablature with six lines. The fret numbers are: 3, 0, 2, 3, 0, 2, 0, 1, 1, 0, 2, 0, 3, 2, 0, 3. A triplet '3' is written above the first three fret numbers (3, 0, 2). The tablature is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines, corresponding to the four measures of the staff notation above it.

Chord Symbols and Slashes

Outside of classical guitar, when a composer wants the performer to play a chord, they write a chord symbol.

There are a number of ways to do this, just the chord symbol, chord symbol with tab/notes, and chord symbol with rhythmic notation.

Different approaches are used for different musical situations, so knowing all three is helpful for any guitarist.

Regardless of the method used, when you see a chord symbol you play that chord on the guitar.

Unless the tab indicates a certain fingering, the shape of the chord is up to the performer.

Here's an example of chord symbols written over four bars of music, with the exact chords in the notes and tab below.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with four bars. Above the staff are chord symbols: C, F, G, and C. Below the staff is a guitar tab with three lines labeled T, A, and B. The fingerings for each bar are as follows:

Bar	T	A	B
1	0	0	3
2	1	2	3
3	3	0	2
4	0	0	3

Here you have chord symbols written over non-rhythmic slashes.

Those slashes indicate where you play these chords, but the strumming or plucking pattern is left up to the performer to interpret.

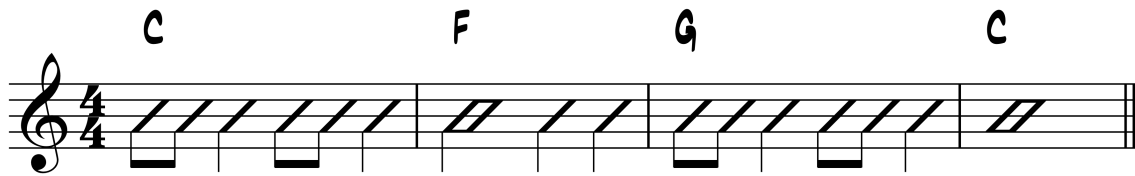
Non-rhythmic slashes are used when the composer wants to give the performer freedom in playing a section of chords. .

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with four bars. Above the staff are chord symbols: C, F, G, and C. The staff contains rhythmic slashes (diagonal lines) in each bar, indicating the timing of the chords.

Here you have chord symbols written over rhythmic slashes in the staff.

Those slashes tell you how to strum or pluck the chords written in the symbols above the staff.

Rhythmic slashes are used when the composer wants a very specific strumming pattern over a section of music.



Neck Diagrams

Neck diagrams are another popular way to transmit information between guitarists.

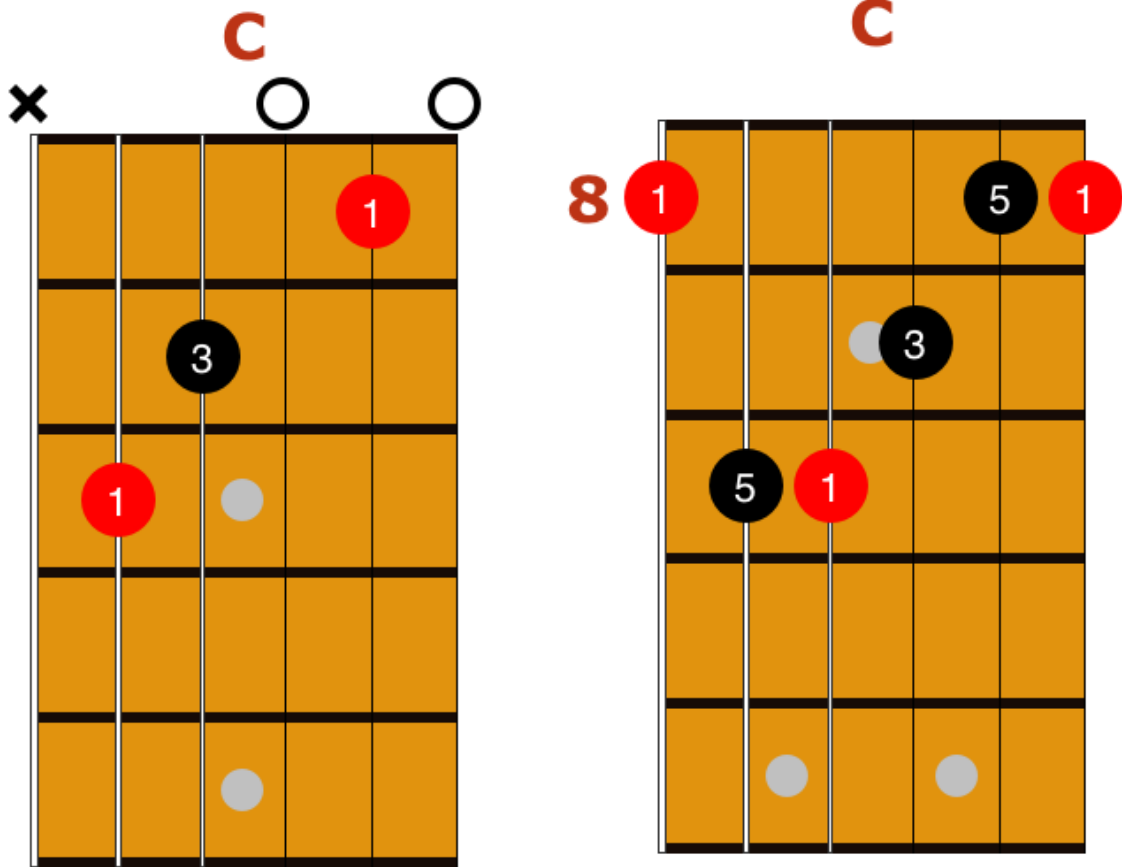
These diagrams show a fretboard with the notes of any device in circles on that fretboard.

The x means don't play that string, the O means open string, and the red note is the root of the device you're reading or writing.

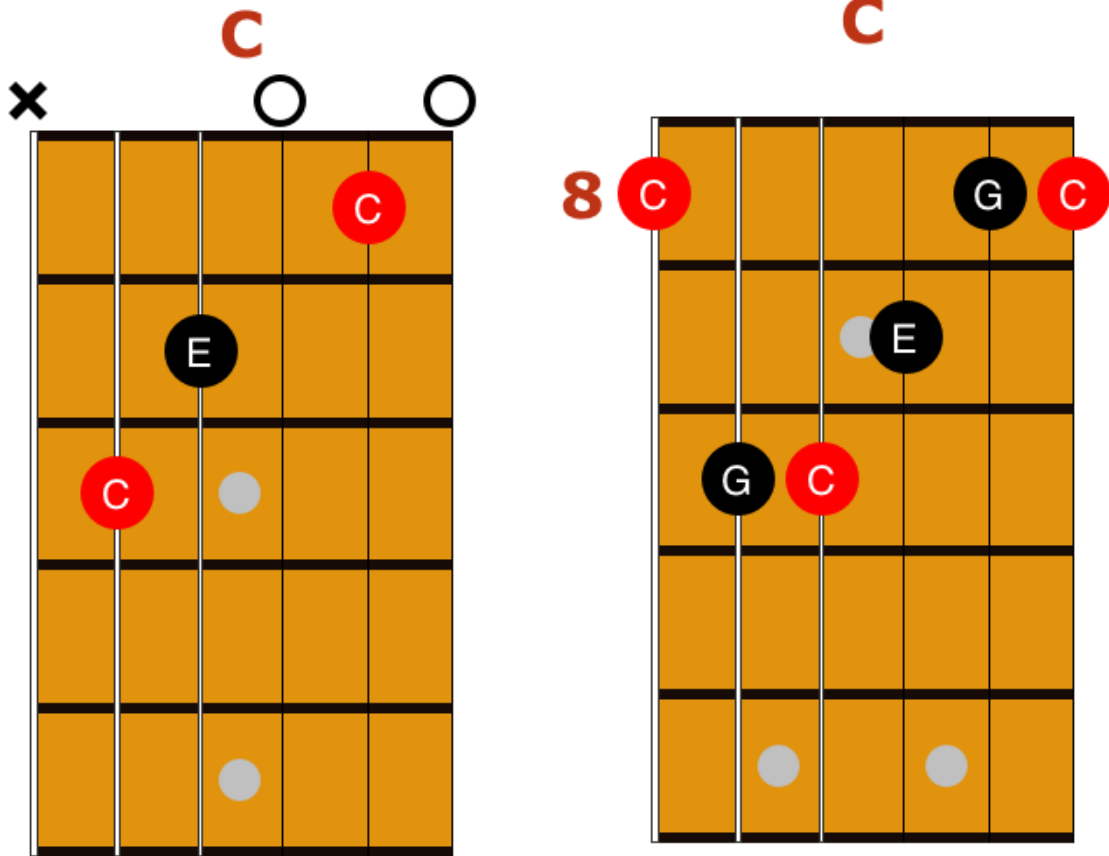
You can use the diagrams to show notes, intervals, or fingerings for any device written in this way, such as the chords below.

Here's a neck diagram that tells you what intervals are used to build the following chords.

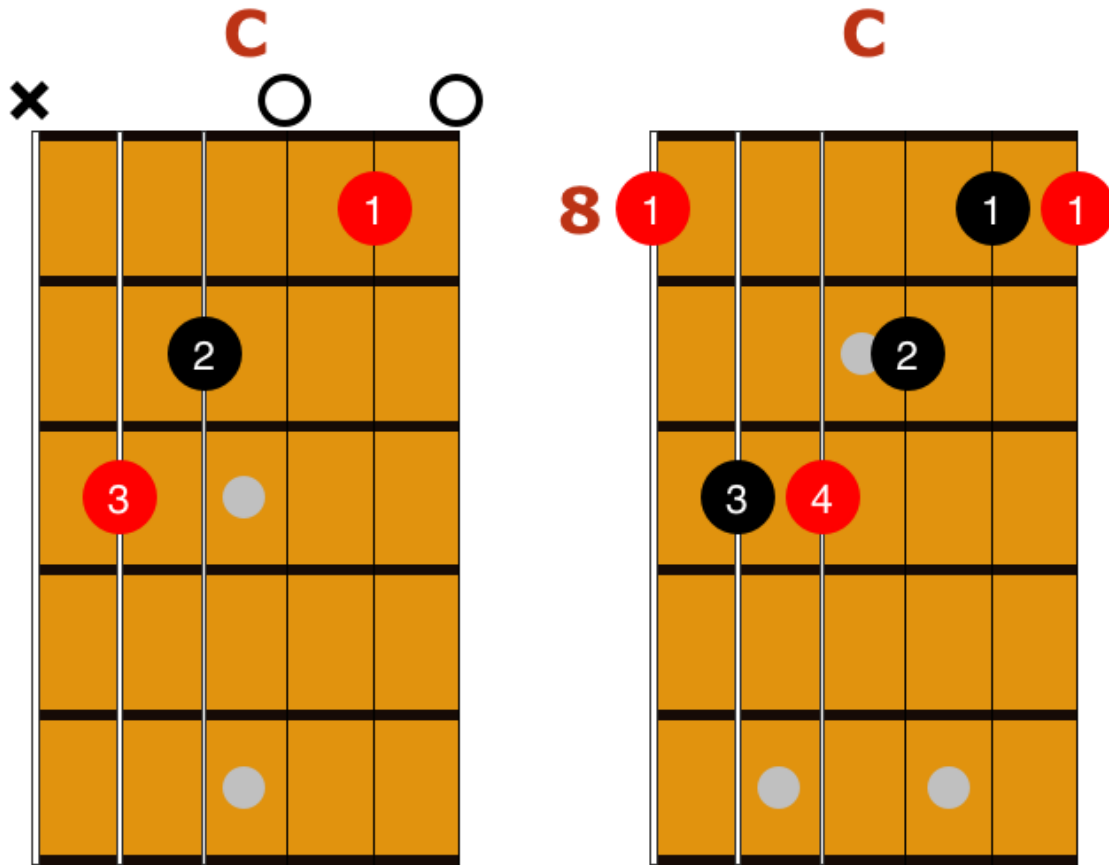
The number to the left of the diagram tells you the starting fret for that chord, or other device. Without a number, the starting fret is 1.



Here's a neck diagram that tells you what notes are being played in these chords.



Here's a neck diagram that tells you what fretting-hand finger to place on each note in the chord.

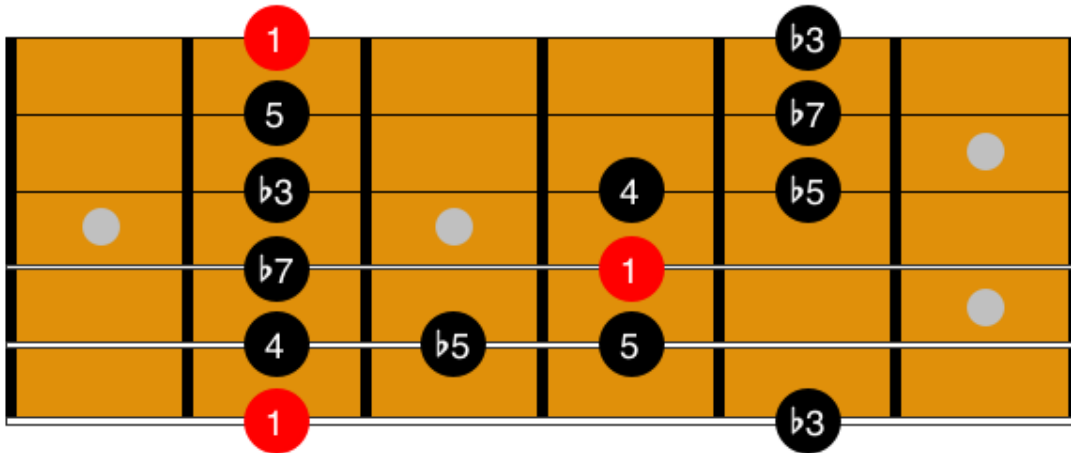


You also use neck diagrams to write out scales, as you see in these examples.

Again, you can use the diagrams to show notes, intervals, or fingerings for any scale written in this way.

Here's a neck diagram that tells you what intervals are used to build the following scale.

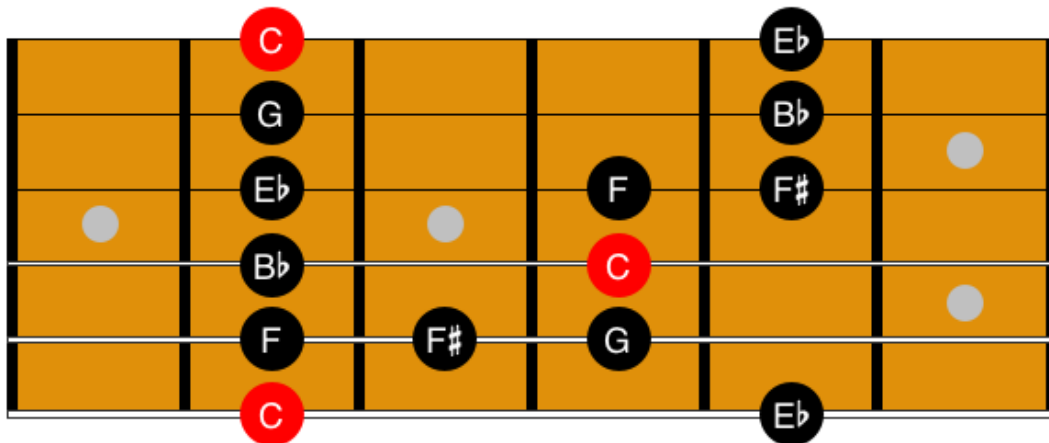
C Minor Blues



7

Here's a neck diagram that tells you what notes are being played as you ascend and descend the scale.

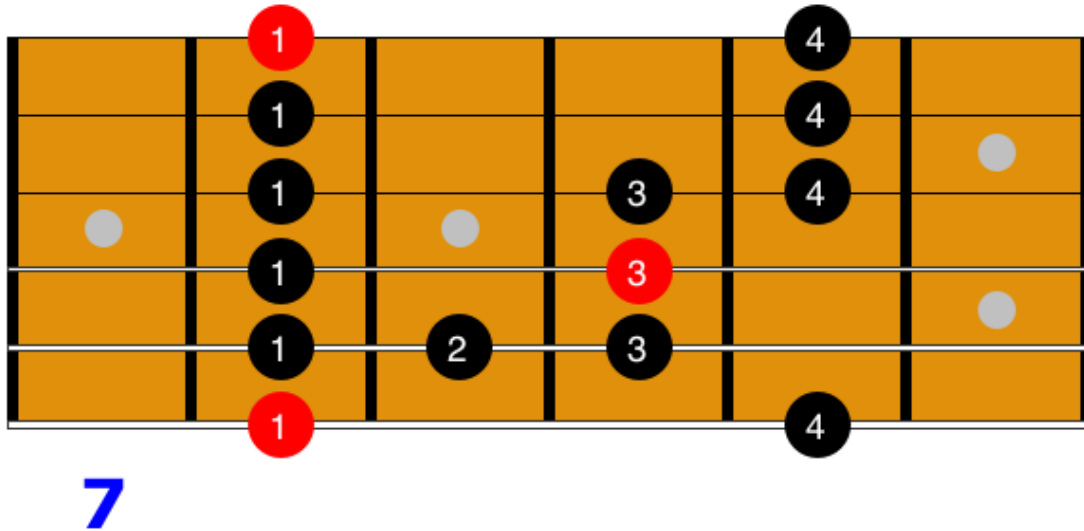
C Minor Blues



7

Here's a neck diagram that tells you what fretting-hand finger to place on each note in the scale.

C Minor Blues



Accidentals

Accidentals are used to raise and lower notes when writing music notation.

Because they're so commonly used, knowing what accidentals are and how they function is essential for any guitarist.

Even if you don't read standard notation, you'll come across #'s and b's when building scales or writing chord symbols, for example.

This means that understanding accidentals is essential learning for any guitarist.

Sharps

The first accidental you learn about is the sharp symbol, which looks like a hashtag, #.

When you see a sharp symbol you play that note one half step, one fret, higher than it's normal note.

This means that if you see C#, you play it one fret higher than a normal C note, which you can see in the example here.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The first measure contains a whole note C on the first line, with the letter 'C' written below it. The second measure contains a whole note C# on the first line, with a sharp symbol (#) to the left of the note and 'C#' written below it. Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with two strings labeled 'A' and 'B'. The first measure shows the first fret on the A string with the number '1' above it. The second measure shows the second fret on the B string with the number '2' above it.

The exceptions to the sharp symbol are E# and B#.

The reason for this is that if you raise E by a half step, you get F, and if you raise B by a half step you get C.

Because of this, you write or read F and C rather than E# and B# in most instances.

This just makes it easier to read and understand the notes in a sight-reading situation.

Double Sharps

Though double sharps exist, which you can see below, they're not very common in modern music.

If you ever see a double sharp, which is next to the C in this example, you raise that note by two frets, a whole step.

In this case, C double sharp is the same note as D, because D is two frets, a whole-step, higher than C.

Because of this, most writers just use the sounded note, so they write D rather than Cx to make it easier to read.

This isn't always the case, so it's important to know what a double sharp looks like and how to read it when you find it in a piece of music.

Flats

Flat symbols are used to tell you to play any note one half step, one fret, lower than that normal note.

This means that if you have Eb, you play it one fret lower than a normal E, which you can see in this example.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The first measure contains a whole note E on the second line of the staff. The second measure contains a whole note Eb on the second line of the staff. Below the staff, a guitar fretboard diagram shows the strings labeled T, A, and B. The first measure shows the 5th fret on the A string. The second measure shows the 4th fret on the A string.

The exceptions to the flat symbol are Fb and Cb.

The reason for this is that if you lower F by a half step, you get E, and if you lower C by a half step you get B.

Because of this, you write or read E and B rather than Fb and Cb in most instances.

This just makes it easier to read and understand the notes in a reading situation.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The first measure contains a whole note Fb on the second line of the staff. The second measure contains a whole note E on the second line of the staff. The third measure contains a whole note Cb on the second line of the staff. The fourth measure contains a whole note B on the second line of the staff. Below the staff, a guitar fretboard diagram shows the strings labeled T, A, and B. The first measure shows the 5th fret on the A string. The second measure shows the 5th fret on the A string. The third measure shows the 4th fret on the A string. The fourth measure shows the 4th fret on the A string.

Double Flats

Double flats are rare, but they exist.

If you see a double flat sign, that means you play that note a whole step, two frets, lower than written.

Here's an example of D and a Dbb note side-by-side for comparison.

A musical staff in 4/4 time showing two notes: D and Dbb. The D note is on the second line of the staff. The Dbb note is on the first space of the staff. Below the staff, the fretboard is shown with the D note on the 3rd fret and the Dbb note on the 1st fret.

Natural Sign

The natural sign is used to turn a flat or sharp back into a normal note, no sharp or flat.

Here are examples of that with both flats and sharps being reset back to their normal notes with a natural sign

A musical staff in 4/4 time showing four notes: Bb, B, C#, and C. The Bb note is on the second space of the staff. The B note is on the second line of the staff. The C# note is on the third line of the staff. The C note is on the second space of the staff. Below the staff, the fretboard is shown with the Bb note on the 3rd fret, the B note on the 4th fret, the C# note on the 6th fret, and the C note on the 5th fret.

Enharmonic Spelling

The last note concept you need to understand is called enharmonic spelling.

This is when this same note, as played on guitar, is spelled two different ways because of the key signature or if it's a chromatic note.

Here are two examples of enharmonic spellings, F# = Gb and Eb = D#.

Both of those notes are the same on the fretboard, F# and Gb for example are the 4th fret on the D string.

But, they're spelled differently depending on the key you're in, if you're in Gb minor that note is Gb, in F# major that note is F#, for example.

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The staff contains four measures of music, each with a single half note. The notes are: F# (first measure), Gb (second measure), F# (third measure), and Gb (fourth measure). Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram for the D string. The fretboard is divided into four measures corresponding to the notes above. The first measure shows the 4th fret with the letter '4' below it. The second measure shows the 4th fret with the letter '4' below it. The third measure shows the 4th fret with the letter '4' below it. The fourth measure shows the 4th fret with the letter '4' below it. The fretboard is labeled with 'T' for Treble, 'A' for Alto, and 'B' for Bass on the left side.

Time Signatures

Time signatures are important devices as they tell you how many notes and what kind of notes those are in each bar of music.

Without this information, you wouldn't know how long a measure of music was, making it impossible to play in time.

Every time signature is built the same, the top number tells you how many notes are in a bar, and the bottom is the length of those notes.

For example, if you see 6/8 as the time signature, that means you have six 8th-notes in each measure of music.

Here are examples of the most popular time signatures to memorize and learn to recognize when you see them in music notation.

Common Time

Here's an example of common time, which is a short form for the 4/4 time signature.

Notice that the first bar is written 4/4 and the second bar has the common time shorthand at the start of the measure.

Common time bars contain 4 quarter notes in each measure.

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system is a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The first measure contains four quarter notes with fingerings 1, 2, 3, and 4. The second measure starts with a common time signature (C) and also contains four quarter notes with fingerings 1, 2, 3, and 4. The second system consists of three staves labeled T, A, and B. Each staff contains four quarter notes, all with a fingering of 4.

Cut Time

Here's an example of cut time, which is a short form for the 2/2 time signature.

Notice that the first bar is written 2/2 and the second bar has the cut time shorthand at the start of the measure.

Cut time bars contain 2 half notes in each measure.

Musical notation for cut time (2/2). The first staff is a treble clef with a 2/2 time signature. The first bar contains two half notes with fingerings 1 and 2. The second bar starts with a cut time symbol (C) and contains two half notes with fingerings 1 and 2. The second staff shows guitar fretboard diagrams with 'T' above, 'A' in the middle, and 'B' below. The first bar has frets 4 and 4, and the second bar has frets 4 and 4.

2/4 Time

Here's an example of 2/4 time, which means that you play 2 quarter notes in each bar of music.

Musical notation for 2/4 time. The first staff is a treble clef with a 2/4 time signature. The first bar contains two quarter notes with fingerings 1 and 2. The second bar contains two quarter notes with fingerings 1 and 2. The second staff shows guitar fretboard diagrams with 'T' above, 'A' in the middle, and 'B' below. The first bar has frets 4 and 4, and the second bar has frets 4 and 4.

Waltz Time

Here's an example of 3/4 time, also called waltz time, which means that you play 3 quarter-notes in each bar of music.

6/8 Time

Here's an example of 6/8 time, which means that you play six 8th-notes in each bar of music.

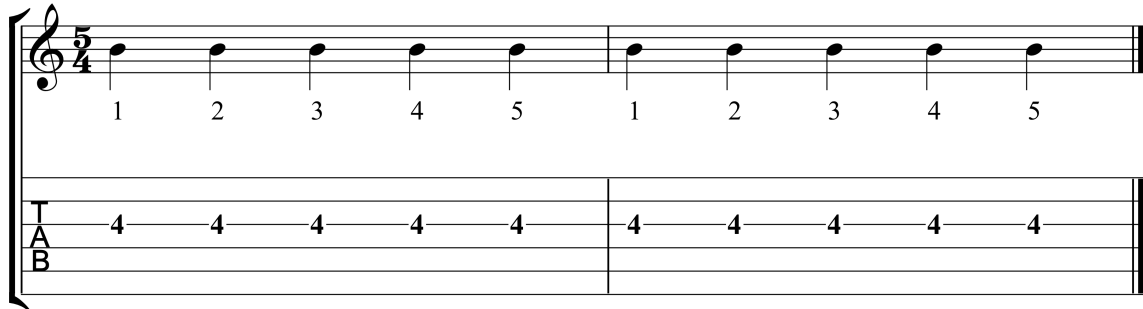
Odd Time Signatures

You will also come across odd time signatures, so it's important to understand how to read those signatures.

Any odd time signature is the same as a normal signature.

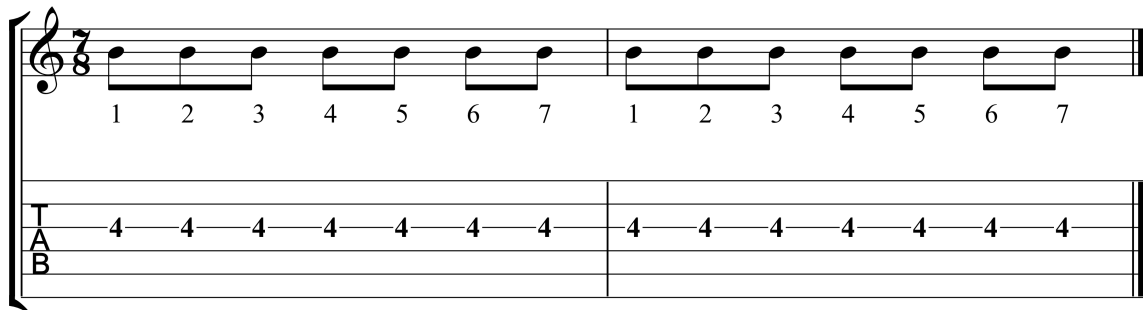
The top number tells you the number of notes and the bottom number tells you the length of those notes.

Here's an example of a 5/4 time signature, meaning you play 5 quarter notes in each bar.



The image shows a musical score for a 5/4 time signature. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a 5/4 time signature. It contains two measures of music, each with five quarter notes. The notes are G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5 in the first measure, and E5, D5, C5, B4, and A4 in the second measure. Below the notes are the numbers 1 through 5 for each note. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a 5/4 time signature. It contains two measures of music, each with five quarter notes, all of which are on the same string (the 4th string). Below the notes are the number 4 for each note.

Here's an example of a 7/8 time signature, which means that you play 7 8th-notes in each bar.



The image shows a musical score for a 7/8 time signature. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a 7/8 time signature. It contains two measures of music, each with seven eighth notes. The notes are G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, and F5 in the first measure, and G5, F5, E5, D5, C5, B4, and A4 in the second measure. Below the notes are the numbers 1 through 7 for each note. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a 7/8 time signature. It contains two measures of music, each with seven eighth notes, all of which are on the same string (the 4th string). Below the notes are the number 4 for each note.

Key Signatures

While you see sharps and flats when reading music, sometimes if a section or song is mostly in one key you see a key signature.

Key signatures tell you that every note in the key signature is sharp or flat in the music you're playing.

If you see a key signature with F#-C# in it, the key of D major, you play every F and C as F# and C# unless otherwise indicated.

Lastly, for every major key signature, which you see below, the relative minor has the same key signature.

The relative minor is the key that starts on the 6th note of any major scale, the Aeolian or natural minor note.

On guitar, you find the relative minor key by playing your pinky on the major key root, say D.

Then, using one finger per fret, the relative minor falls under your index finger, in D the relative minor is Bm.

That means that D major and B minor have the same key signature, F# and C#.

Apart from reading music, key signatures help you know what notes are in any major or minor scale.

If you need to know the notes in A major for example, and A major has 3 sharps in the key signature, then you can spell that scale easily.

A-B-C#-D-E-F#-G#

Now that you know how to use key signatures, here they are to learn and memorize in your studies.

Sharp Key Signatures

Here are the sharp key signatures in order of least sharps to most sharps.

There's also a trick to knowing the amount of sharps in any key signature, you just have to use the order of sharps to get started.

Here's the order of sharps as they're added to any key signature.

F#-C#-G#-D#-A#-E#-B#

There's also a saying that you can memorize to know the order of sharps in any key signature.

Father Charles Goes Down And Ends Battle

To figure out the amount of sharps in any key signature you look for the key you're in, say D, and the last sharp is a half step below that note.

So you subtract a half step from D and you get C#, that's the last sharp in the key signature.

This means that D has two sharps, F# and C#.

You can also use this formula to determine the key if you have the key signature.

If you have a sharp key signature, just look at the last sharp and add a half step to find the key.

So, if you have 3 sharps, F#-C#-G#, you add a half step to G# to get A, the key you're in with this key signature.

C G D A
 1 3 3 5

E B F# C#
 0 0 2 2

Flat Key Signatures

Here are the flat key signatures in order of least flats to most flats.

There's also a trick to knowing the amount of flats in any key signature, you just have to use the order of flats to get started.

Here's the order of flats as they're added to any key signature.

Bb-Eb-Ab-Db-Gb-Cb-Fb

There's also a saying that you can memorize to know the order of flats in any key signature, which is the reverse of the sharp saying.

Battle Ends And Down Goes Charles' Father

To figure out the amount of flats in any key signature you look for the key you're in, say Ab, and add one flat.

So you find Ab in the above order, Bb-Eb-Ab, and add one flat.

This means that Ab has four flats, Bb-Eb-Ab-Db.

You can also use this formula to determine the key if you have the key signature.

If you have a flat key signature, just look at the second last flat, that note is the key you're in.

So, if you have 3 flats, Bb-Eb-Ab, the second last flat is Eb, that's the key you're in with that key signature.

Musical notation for the first four chords: C, F, Bb, and Eb. The notation includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a guitar TAB below the staff. The TAB shows the fret numbers for each chord: C (1), F (3), Bb (3), and Eb (4).

Musical notation for the last four chords: Ab, Db, Gb, and Cb. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab), and a guitar TAB below the staff. The TAB shows the fret numbers for each chord: Ab (1), Db (2), Gb (4), and Cb (0).

Articulation

Now that you learned about notes and other note related markings, here are markings that tell you how to play those notes.

Because you don't always play notes with the same volume and picking attack, there are markings to tell you exactly how to play each note.

In this section you learn about slurs (hammers, slides, pull offs, etc.) as well as bends, picking, and other articulation markings.

Slides

Slides are written with a line between the slid notes, and sometimes *sl* is written above that line.

Here are examples of slides between two and three notes.

The image shows musical notation for slides. The top staff is a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The bottom staff is a guitar fretboard with strings T, A, and B labeled. The notation shows four measures of music. The first measure has a slur over two notes (4 and 5) with 'sl' above. The second measure has a slur over two notes (5 and 4) with 'sl' above. The third measure has a slur over three notes (2, 4, 5) with 'sl' above. The fourth measure has a slur over three notes (5, 4, 2) with 'sl' above.

Hammers and Pull Offs

Hammer-ons are written with a slur between two ascending notes and often, but not always, the letter *H* written over the slur.

Pull-offs are the same, except they connect two descending notes and the letter *P* is sometimes written over the slur.

For multiple hammers and pull-offs the slur marking is just extended over however many notes you want slurred.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The first two bars are marked with an 'H' (hammer-on) and the last two bars with a 'P' (pull-off). The notes are: Bar 1 (4, 5), Bar 2 (4, 7), Bar 3 (5, 4), Bar 4 (7, 4). Below the staff is a guitar tablature with strings T, A, and B labeled. The fret numbers are: Bar 1 (4, 5), Bar 2 (4, 7), Bar 3 (5, 4), Bar 4 (7, 4). Slurs connect the notes in each bar.

Bends

Here are examples of how bends are written in notes and tab.

The first two bars show bends up from a given note, with 1/2 meaning a half-step bend and full equaling a whole-step bend.

In the third bar you see a bend that goes up then back down all with one pick of the note.

In the last bar, you start in the bend, and then release the bend down to the written note.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The notes are: Bar 1 (4, 5), Bar 2 (5, 5), Bar 3 (5, 5), Bar 4 (5). The tablature below shows: Bar 1 (4, 5), Bar 2 (5, 5), Bar 3 (5, 5), Bar 4 (5). Arrows indicate bends: Bar 1 (4 to 5, labeled 1/2), Bar 2 (5 to 5, labeled full), Bar 3 (5 to 5, labeled 1 1/2), Bar 4 (5 to 5, labeled 1 1/2).

Picking

You will also see markings to tell you which direction to pick any note.

There are two markings, up picking and down picking, and here is how they look so you can recognize them when reading music.

The image shows a musical score for guitar in 4/4 time, illustrating three picking techniques. The notation is presented in a system with three columns: Down Picks, Up Picks, and Alternate Picking. Each column contains a staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. Below the staff, there are two lines of tablature labeled 'T' and 'B'. The first two columns have a '0' on the first line of the tablature, while the third column has a '1' on the first line and a '0' on the second line. The notes are quarter notes, and the picking direction is indicated by a small square (down pick) or a small 'v' (up pick) below each note. The first column shows four down picks, the second shows four up picks, and the third shows an alternating sequence of down and up picks.

Fingerpicking

If you play fingerstyle or any fingerpicked music, there are also markings to show you which finger to use on any note.

These are:

- P = Thumb
- i = Index
- m = Middle
- a = Ring
- c = Pinky

Here's an example of those markings under a line of music.

P i m a c P i m a c

T
A
B

2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

Dynamics

Dynamic symbols are used to indicate the volume for any note, chord, or section of music in a performance.

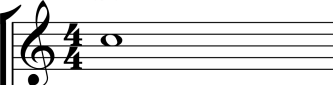
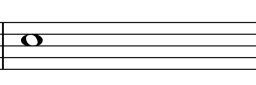
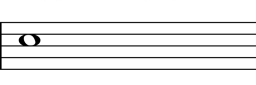
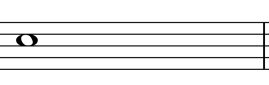
There are four basic dynamic markings that you need to understand, written here over a C note.

- *f* = Loud
- *mf* = Medium Loud
- *mp* = Medium Soft
- *p* = Soft

From there, you can have degrees of loud and soft, such as:

- *ff* = Very loud
- *fff* = Very, very loud
- *pp* = Very soft
- *ppp* = Very, very soft
- etc.

There are other volume markings that you might see when playing classical guitar, but for the most part these three are the most common.

Soft	Medium Soft	Medium Loud	Loud
			
<i>p</i>	<i>mp</i>	<i>mf</i>	<i>f</i>
T A B	1	1	1

The next example shows crescendo and decrescendo symbols being used to indicate volume in the performance.

Crescendo means to get louder during that section of the song, and decrescendo means to get softer.

Sometimes, as is the case here, you see exactly how loud to start and how loud to finish a crescendo or decrescendo.

But that's not always the case, sometimes you're just told to get louder or to get softer, and the volume level is up to you or the performer.


<i>p</i> <i>f</i> <i>mf</i> <i>ff</i>
Crescendo (Louder) Decrescendo (Softer) Crescendo (Louder)
T A B
8—10 7—8 10 7—9—10 7—9—10 8 10—7—8

Form Indicators

In this last section of the chapter you learn about symbols and markings used to indicate how you or the performer follows the form of a song.

Because song forms can be complicated, or have a lot of repeated material that doesn't need to be written twice, form markings are used.

If you play classical guitar, then you're used to seeing these symbols, and more, used to indicate how to read the form of a piece of music.

But, if you play rock, jazz, pop, blues, or other modern genres, these symbols might be new to you.

So, check these indicators out so that you never miss a repeat sign, a coda, or other important form marking when playing songs on guitar.

Repeat Signs

The first form indicator is the one that you're most likely to see in rock, pop, jazz, and other modern genres.

The repeat sign tells you to repeat a section of music.

In this example you see a two bar phrase. To play this phrase, you play bars 1-2, then you jump back to the start and repeat those two bars.

From there, you play on to the next section of the piece.

To write a multiple repeat, you simply put x's 3, x's 4, x's 5, etc. above the "end repeat" sign.

Start Repeat End Repeat

The image shows a musical score for a single repeat. The top staff is in 4/4 time with a treble clef and a repeat sign. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB with fret numbers: 3, 0, 2, 3, 0, 2, 0, 1.

Multiple Endings

If you want to write a repeat with a different ending for each repeat, you use the multiple endings lines along with repeat symbols.

Here, you play bars 1-2, going to the 1st ending sign in bar 2 the first time through.

Then, you go back to the beginning, repeat bar one and go to the 2nd ending the second time around.

You can have 2, 3, 4, etc. endings, with the same line on top, just a different number under each different ending of the repeat.

The image shows a musical score for multiple endings. The top staff has two endings labeled '1.' and '2.'. The bottom staff has fret numbers: 3, 0, 2, 3, 0, 2, 0, 1 for the first ending and 0, 2, 0, 1 for the second ending.

D.S. and D.S. al Fine

The next two form markings both deal with the D.S. symbol with two different endings from there.

In this first example, you play the four-bar phrase, then when it says D.S. al Fine, you jump back to the D.S. sign, the S looking thing over bar 1.

From there, you play until you see “fine” then you end the song.

D.S. symbols allow you to jump back to an earlier part of a section or song without using the repeat sign or 1st, 2nd, or 3rd ending signs.

The image shows a musical score for a four-bar phrase in 4/4 time. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first bar starts with a D.S. symbol (a stylized 'S' with a vertical line through it) over the first measure. The melody consists of quarter notes: D4, E4, F#4, G4 in the first bar; A4, B4, C5, D5 in the second bar; E5, D5, C5, B4 in the third bar; and A4, G4, F#4, E4 in the fourth bar. The word "Fine" is written above the second bar, and "D.S. al Fine" is written above the fourth bar. Below the treble staff are three guitar staves labeled T, A, and B. The fretting for the first bar is: T (0), A (0), B (3). The fretting for the second bar is: T (0), A (2), B (0). The fretting for the third bar is: T (0), A (0), B (2). The fretting for the fourth bar is: T (3), A (2), B (0). The piece ends with a double bar line.

Coda and D.S. al Coda

In this example, you play the four-bar phrase, then when you see D.S. al Coda, you jump back to the D.S. symbol over bar 1 of the phrase.

The D.S. symbol doesn't have to be over bar 1 of a phrase, it can be located over any bar in a section or song.

From there, you play until you see the coda symbol, the “target” like symbol over bar 3 of the first-four bars.

When you see a coda symbol, you jump down in the song to where you see the next coda symbol; here it's in the second line of music.

From there you continue to play the song.

Though here the coda symbol takes you to that last section right away, you often see "D.S. al Coda last time only" in modern music.

This means that you loop the song for as long as you want, then the very last loop you use the coda marking to finish the song.

4/4

D.S. al Coda

T
A
B

3 0 2 3 | 0 2 0 1 | 0 0 2 0 | 3 2 0 3

T
A
B

0 0 2 0 | 3 2 0 3

8va Symbol

The last item you learn about in this section isn't a form marking exactly, but it does show up a lot in modern guitar music.

The 8va symbol tells you that the line you're reading is played one octave higher than the written notes.

This is to make it easier to read really high notes on the staff.

Rather than struggling to read multiple ledger lines above the staff, you read notes in the staff, but play them one octave higher.

Here's an example of that symbol in action, where the second two bars are the same as the first, but easier to read with the 8va symbol.

The image shows a musical score with two staves. The top staff is a treble clef in 4/4 time. The first two bars contain notes on ledger lines above the staff. The second two bars contain notes on the staff, with a dashed line and the symbol '8va' above them, indicating they are to be played one octave higher. The bottom staff is a guitar TAB with fret numbers 17 and 19 in the first two bars, and 17 and 15 in the second two bars.

About the Author

Like many guitarists, I grew up listening to classic Rock and Blues, and I still love those styles of music.

But it's the improvisation I really love, and that's what drew me to Jazz. My love of Jazz has taken me from small town Canada around the globe.

I was able to study at three of the top Jazz programs in the world. Starting with McGill University, then Western Michigan, and finishing with a Doctorate in Jazz from the University of Illinois (UIUC).

It's also allowed me to teach over 5000 private Jazz guitar lessons. My students have ranged from complete beginners, all the way to Professors of Jazz at NYU, and everything in between.

I've also taught Jazz guitar, popular music, and music business at:

- Western Illinois University
- Western Michigan University
- University of Illinois
- Carleton University (Canada)
- Concordia University (Canada)
- The Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory
- University of Ouro Preto (Brazil)
- University of Sao Joao Del Rei (Brazil)
- University of Juiz de Fora (Brazil)
- Leeds College of Music (UK)
- University of Chester (UK)

My love of Jazz has also enabled me to play over 2000 gigs in 8 countries.

These gigs run from mostly empty coffee shops, to sell out concerts. I've even shared the stage with Jazz legends such as Randy Brecker, Stefon Harris, and Slide Hampton.

Some of my favorite gigs include shows at:

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

Jazz has been in my life for 20 years, and every day I'm glad I found this great music. Because of this, I want to share this love of Jazz and guitar with you. You never know where it'll lead you.