Bass Guitar Basics.

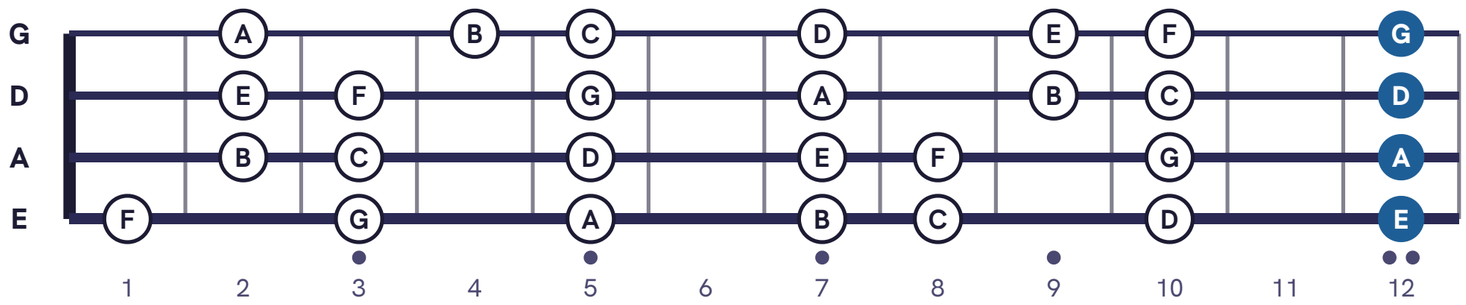
The notes on the neck, bass clef, root–fifth patterns, scales, arpeggios and bass tab.

Free printable · 18 × 24 in

FOUNDATIONS

Notes on the Bass Fretboard

Standard bass tuning, low to high: E A D G, the same as a guitar's lowest four strings, an octave lower.



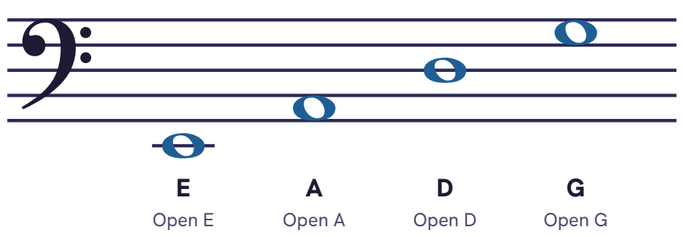
Natural notes are named; sharps and flats sit on the frets between them (E–F and B–C have none). At the 12th fret (coloured) each string is back on its own note, an octave up.

Learn the E and A strings first: most bass lines start on a note on one of those two.

FOUNDATIONS

Bass Clef and the Neck

Bass music is written in bass clef. These are the four open strings as they appear on the stave.



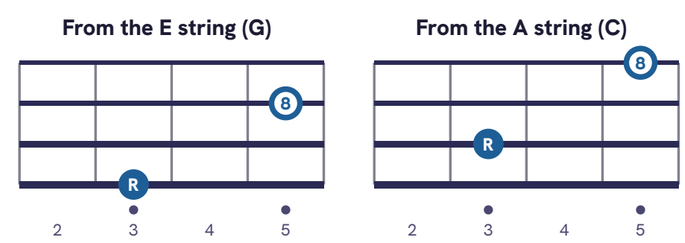
Bass sounds an octave lower than written: the open E is written on the first leger line below the stave.

Each line or space up is the next letter, so you can find any written note from these four.

FOUNDATIONS

Octave Shapes

The same note an octave higher is always two strings up and two frets higher.



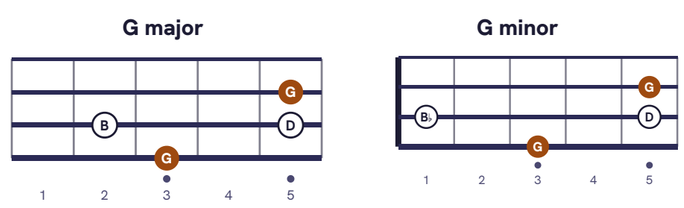
R = the note you know, 8 = the same note an octave up. Use it to find any note fast.

From the D or G string, go two strings down and two frets lower to find the octave below.

CHORDS & HARMONY

Major and Minor Arpeggios

An arpeggio plays a chord one note at a time: root, 3rd, 5th and octave. Walk them to outline the chords.



Solid dots: the root. The only difference is the 3rd: one fret lower for minor.

Over a G chord play the G major arpeggio; over Gm, the minor one.

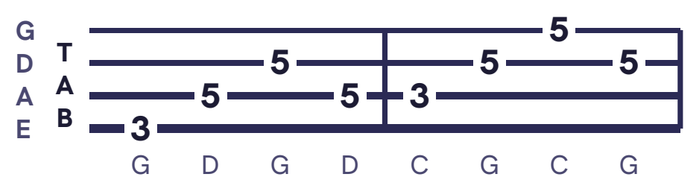
FOUNDATIONS

Reading Bass Tab

Bass tab has four lines, one per string, with G at the top. A number is the fret to press; 0 is the open string.

Read left to right. Lines are strings (G D A E, top to bottom); numbers are frets.

Root–fifth line in G, then C

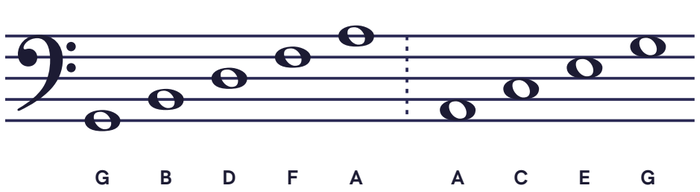


This pattern is root, 5th, octave, 5th over G, then over C: the shape on the left of the root-fifth section.

FOUNDATIONS

Bass Clef Note Names

The lines and spaces of the bass clef, from the bottom up.



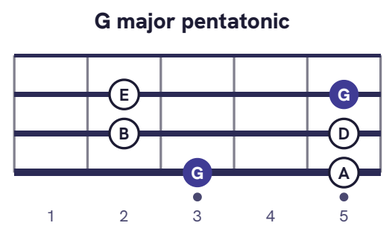
Lines: **Good Boys Do Fine Always** · Spaces: **All Cows Eat Grass**

The bass clef's two dots sit either side of the F line: find F there and step up or down.

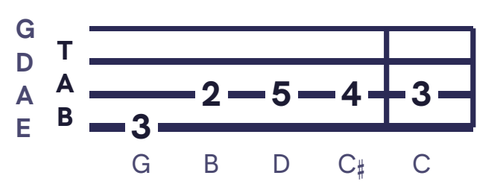
SCALES & KEYS

Major Pentatonic and Approach Notes

The major pentatonic is five notes of the major scale that always sound right over a major chord.



G to C, with an approach note



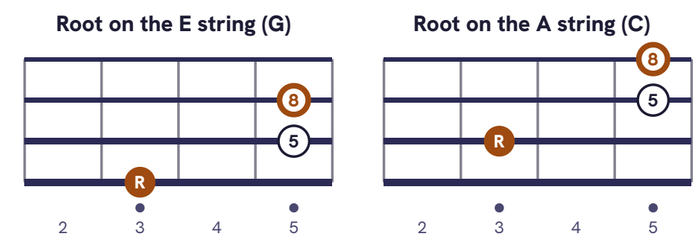
An approach note is one fret above or below the next chord's root: here C♯ leads into C.

Use one on the last beat before a chord change, from above or below.

CHORDS & HARMONY

Root, Fifth and Octave

Most bass lines are built from three notes: the root (which names the chord), the 5th and the octave.



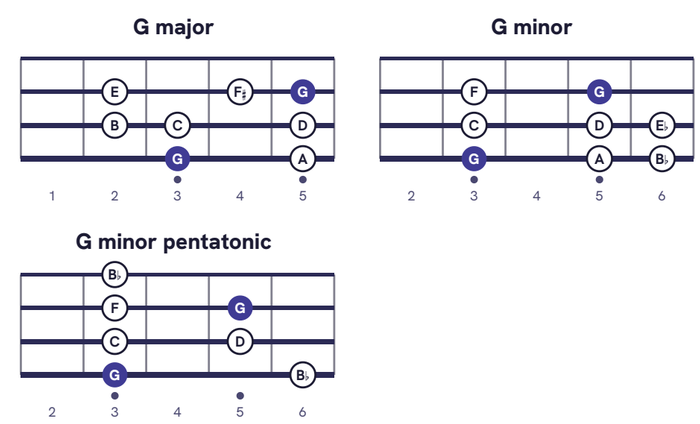
R = root, 5 = the 5th, 8 = the octave (the same note, higher). The shape is the same on any fret.

Play root, 5th, octave, 5th over a chord, then move the whole shape for the next chord.

SCALES & KEYS

Bass Scale Shapes

Three scales in one position each, one finger per fret: the shapes bass lines are made from.



Solid dots: the root. Every shape is movable: put its root on another fret to change key.

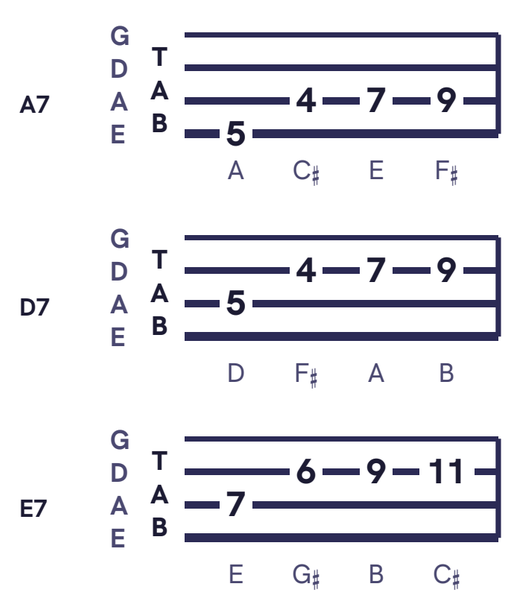
Play each from the lowest root up to the highest and back, slowly and evenly.

CHORDS & HARMONY

Blues Bass Line in A

A classic blues line: root, 3rd, 5th and 6th, one shape moved to each chord.

One bar each of A7, D7 and E7



Play four notes per bar. The shape is the same for every chord: move it to the new root.

The 12-bar blues: play the line for the chord in each bar

1 A7	2 A7	3 A7	4 A7
5 D7	6 D7	7 A7	8 A7
9 E7	10 D7	11 A7	12 E7

Then try it walking back down (6th, 5th, 3rd, root) every other bar.

trebly

Read it. Write it. Hear it.

Free note-reading games and lessons at **trebly.fun**

Make your own poster
trebly.fun/posters