Bass Guitar Basics.

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

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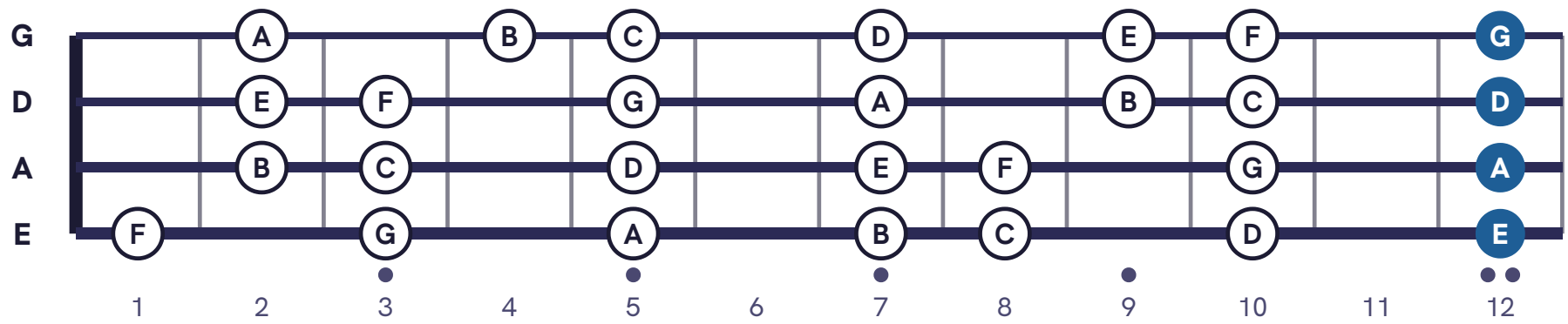
FOUNDATIONS

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.

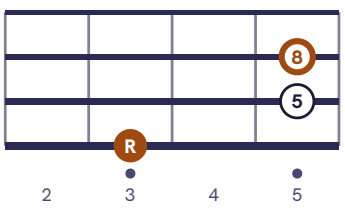
Learn the E and A strings first: most bass lines start on a note on one of those two.

CHORDS & HARMONY

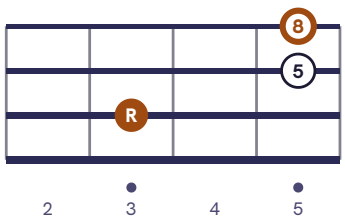
Root, Fifth and Octave

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

Root on the E string (G)



Root on the A string (C)



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

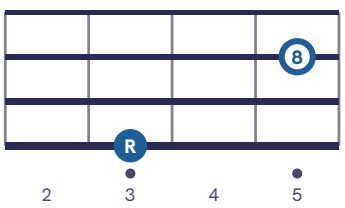
Play root, 5th, octave, 5th over a chord, then move the whole shape for the next chord.

FOUNDATIONS

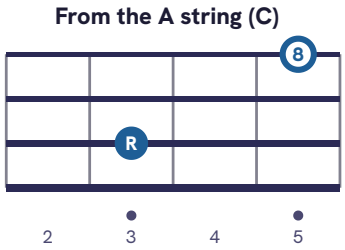
Octave Shapes

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

From the E string (G)



From the A string (C)



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

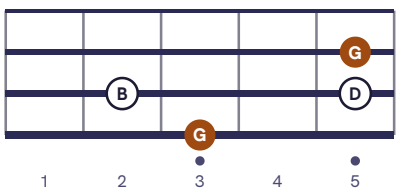
From the D or G string, go two strings down and two frets lower to find the octave below.

CHORDS & HARMONY

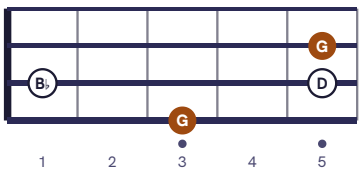
Major and Minor Arpeggios

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

G major



G minor



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

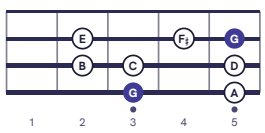
Over a G chord play the G major arpeggio; over Gm, the minor one.

SCALES & KEYS

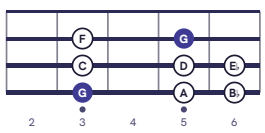
Bass Scale Shapes

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

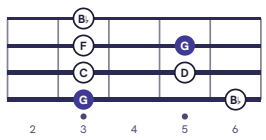
G major



G minor



G minor pentatonic



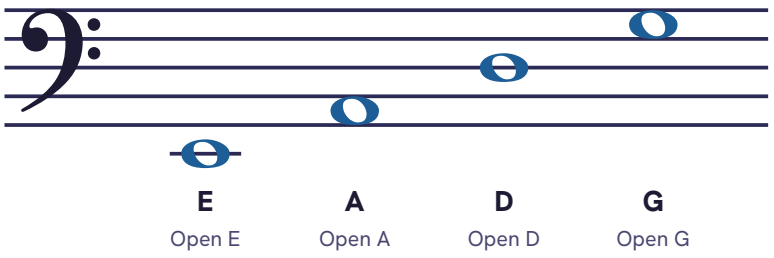
Solid dots: the root. Every shape is movable: put its root on another fret to change key.

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

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.

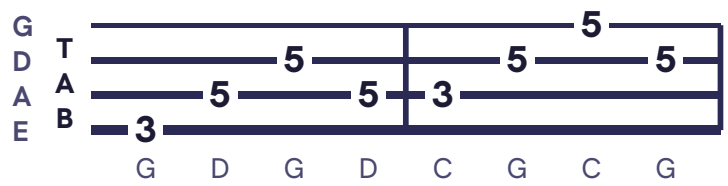
FOUNDATIONS

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.

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