Guitar Scales.

The five pentatonic positions across the neck, and the scales that grow from them.

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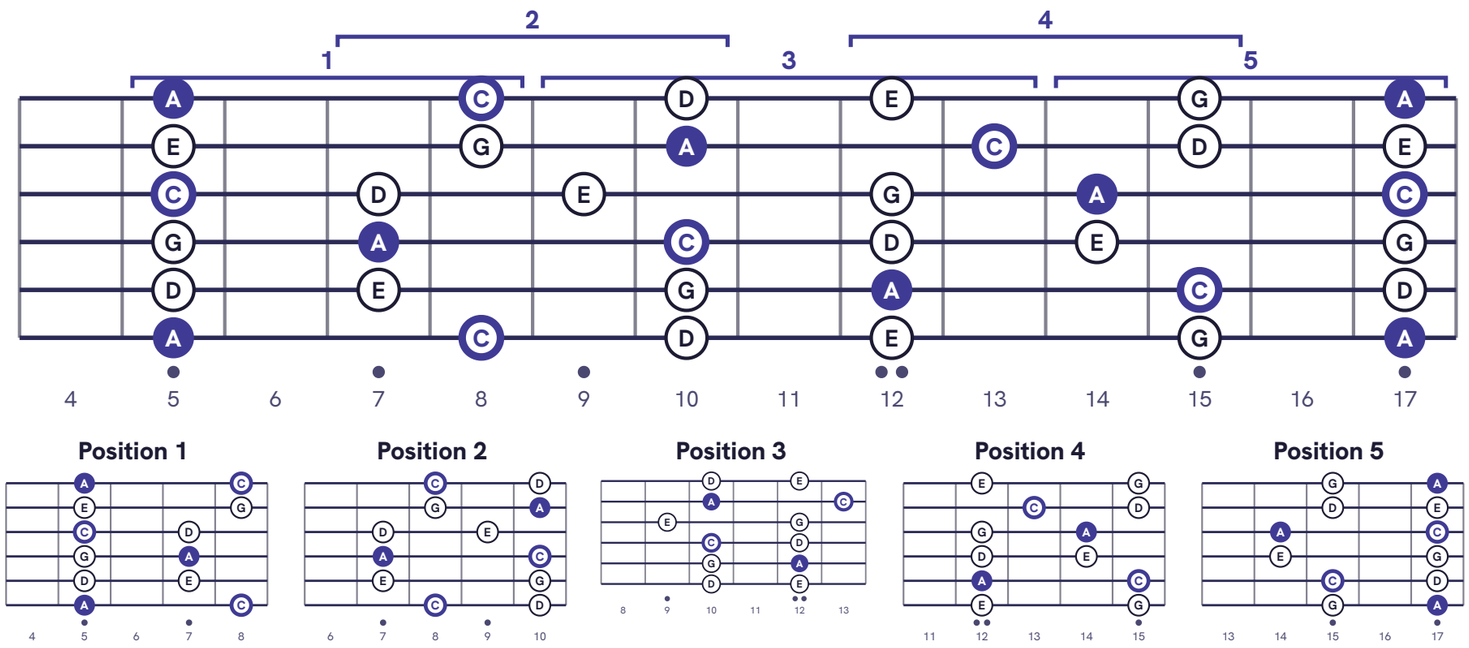
SCALES & KEYS

Pentatonic Positions

The five shapes of A minor pentatonic join up along the neck: the top of one shape is the bottom of the next.



Solid dots: A, the home note of A minor. Ringed: C, the home note of C major pentatonic, which uses the same notes.

Learn position 1 first, then add the positions either side. Move every shape up or down together to change key.

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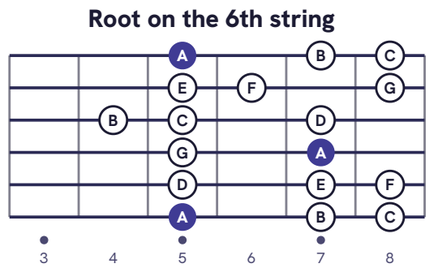
Natural Minor on the Neck

The natural minor scale: the five pentatonic notes plus two more, B and F.



Solid dots: A, the root. It has the same notes as C major, starting from A.

Compare it with position 1 of the pentatonic: the same shape with two notes filled in.

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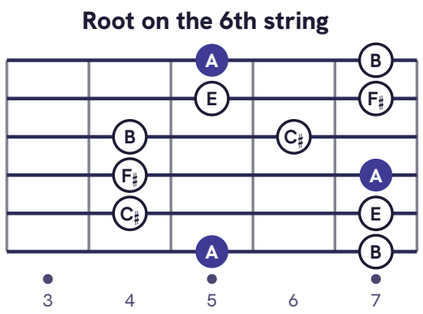
Major Pentatonic

The major scale without its 4th and 7th: five notes that sound happy and never clash.



Solid dots: A, the root. This is A major pentatonic, played from its own root.

The sound of country and pop solos. It is the same shape as minor pentatonic position 2, moved so the root is A.

PRACTICE TIP

Practise slowly. Speed comes from playing it right, not from playing it fast.

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Moving a Shape to Any Key

Every shape here is movable: put its root on the fret for the key you want.

6TH STRING (LOW E)	E	F	G	A	B	C	D	E
	open	fret 1	fret 3	fret 5	fret 7	fret 8	fret 10	fret 12
5TH STRING (A)	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
	open	fret 2	fret 3	fret 5	fret 7	fret 8	fret 10	fret 12

Sharps and flats sit on the frets in between: one fret up from G is G♯ or A♭.

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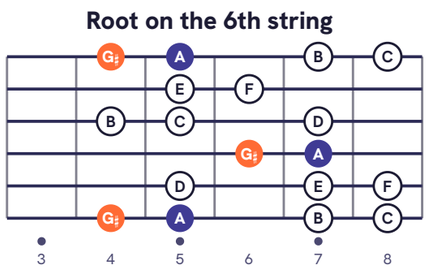
Harmonic Minor

Natural minor with a raised 7th, G♯: the gap it leaves gives the "Spanish" or neoclassical sound.



Solid dots: A, the root. Orange: G♯, the raised 7th.

Popular in metal and flamenco; try it over E7 resolving to Am.

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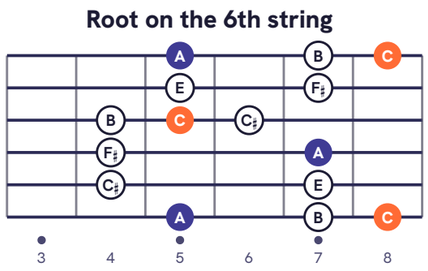
The Major Blues Scale

Major pentatonic plus one extra note, the flat 3rd: the sound of country and Southern rock.



Solid dots: A, the root. Orange: C, the extra note: slide from it up to C♯.

Use it over major chords and A7 when the minor blues sounds too dark.

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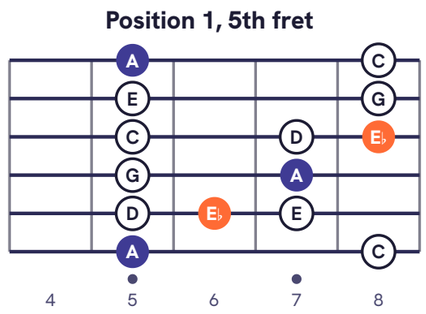
The Blues Scale

Minor pentatonic plus one extra note, the flat 5th: the "blue note" that gives blues its bite.



Solid dots: A, the root. The orange dots are E♭, the blue note: slide or bend into it rather than stopping on it.

Play it over a 12-bar blues in A (A7, D7, E7).

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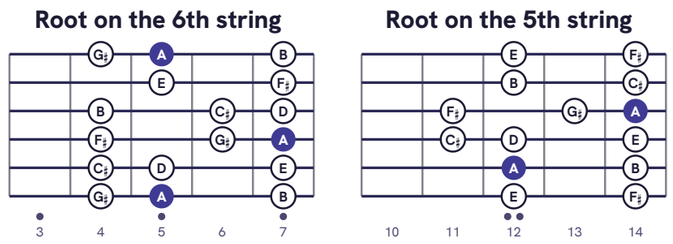
Major Scale Shapes

Two shapes cover most of the neck: one with the root on the 6th string, one with the root on the 5th.



Solid dots: A, the root. Both shapes are A major; slide either one to change key.

Play each from the lowest root up to the highest and back, slowly, one finger per fret.

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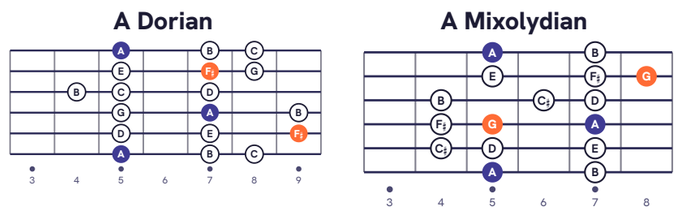
Two Modes to Try

Modes are the major scale started on a different note. These two are the ones guitarists use most.



Solid dots: A, the root. Orange: the note that gives each mode its sound (F♯ in Dorian, G in Mixolydian).

Dorian: minor with a brighter 6th, as in funk, rock and jazz solos. Mixolydian: major with a flat 7th, as in blues-rock and country.

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Which Scale Over Which Chord

Pick a scale that contains the chord's notes, and your solo will fit it. Shown in A; move everything together for other keys.

Am Minor chord	Minor pentatonic · Natural minor · Dorian
A7 Dominant 7th	Mixolydian · Blues scale (clash)
A Major chord	Major scale · Major pentatonic · Major blues
E7 → Am Minor key, V to i	Harmonic minor

A blues scale over A7 is the one deliberate clash: its C rubs against the chord's C♯, and that rub is the blues sound.

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