Guitar Scales.

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

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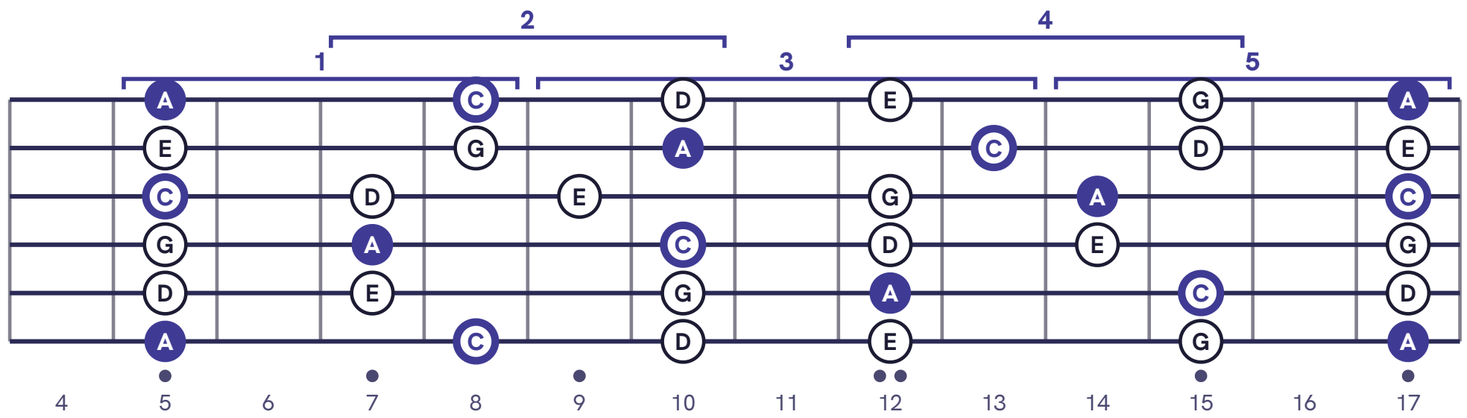
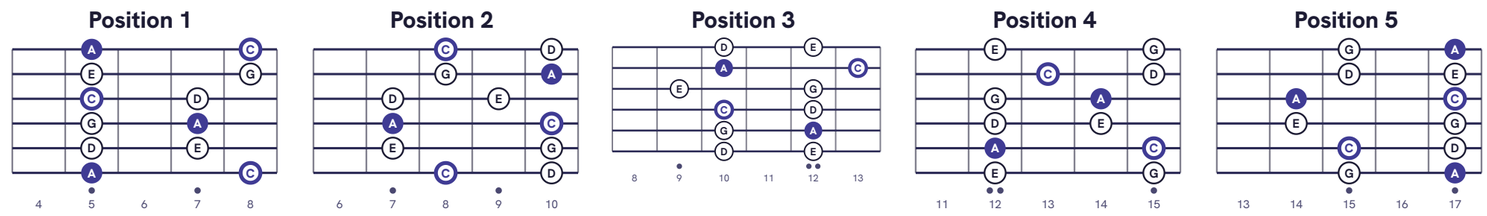
SCALES & KEYS

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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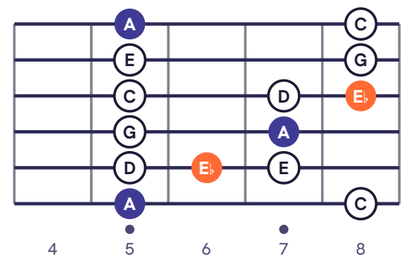
The Blues Scale

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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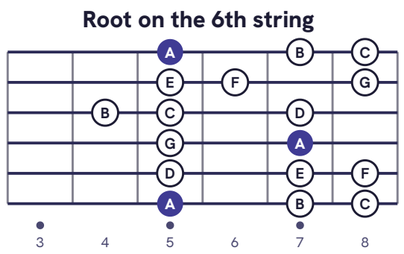
Natural Minor on the Neck

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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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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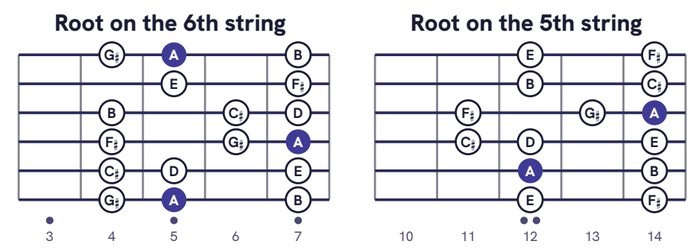
Major Scale Shapes

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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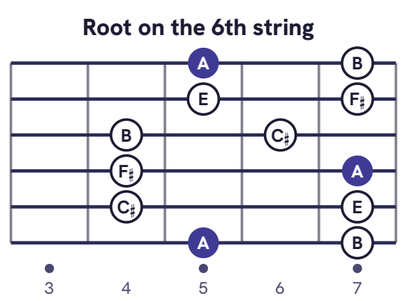
Major Pentatonic

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.

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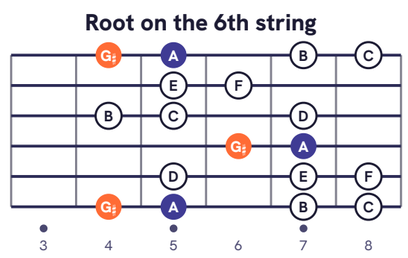
Harmonic Minor

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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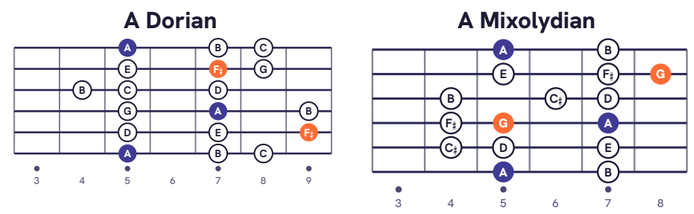
Two Modes to Try

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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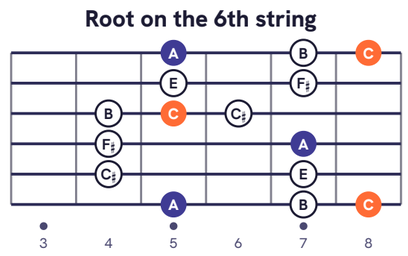
The Major Blues Scale

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.

PRACTICE TIP

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

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