Starlin Guitar Method

Soloing Quick Start Guide

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Mark Starlin

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Soloing Quick Start Guide

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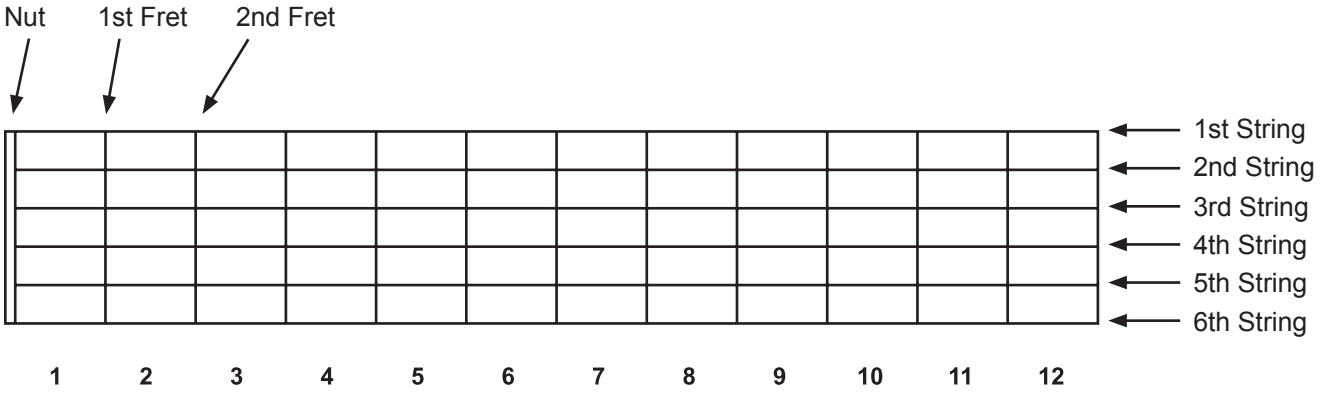
Fretboard Diagram

The diagram below represents the guitar fretboard. The left side represents the nut of the guitar and the vertical (up and down) lines represent the frets. The horizontal lines (side to side) represent the strings of the guitar, with the one on the bottom being the low E (the fat wound string) and the top being the high E string. Numbers below the fretboard are fret position numbers.



Fret Positions

Throughout this book you will hear phrases such as "Place your 1st finger at the 1st fret." The term "1st fret" actually means the space between the nut and the 1st fret. However, you will typically place your finger closer to the 1st fret than the nut. In the same way, the 2nd fret means the space between the 1st and 2nd frets, etc.

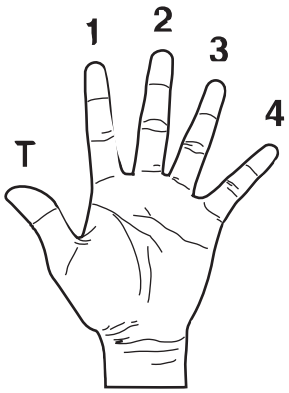
Guitar String Numbers

Guitar strings are numbered 1 through 6. The 1st string is the thinnest, unwound string. The thickest string is called the 6th string.

Finger Numbers

In order make to teaching easier, fingers are numbered:

Your thumb doesn't usually play notes. It is notated T.
Your index finger is called your "first (1st) finger" and is notated 1.
Your middle finger is called your "second (2nd) finger" and is notated 2.
Your ring finger is called your "third (3rd) finger" and is notated 3.
Your pinky is called your "fourth (4th) finger" and is notated 4.



Soloing

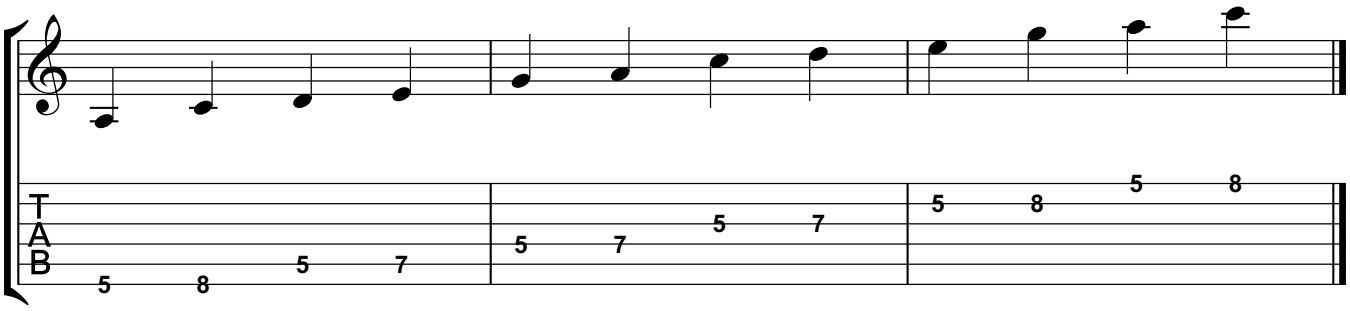
Introduction

Soloing (also called improvising or lead guitar) can seem like a mystery when you see someone's fingers flying around the fretboard of the guitar. But it can be learned. In fact, it is no more difficult to learn than any other aspect of guitar playing. However, like any musical ability, it takes time and practice to become skilled at it. This book will give you the tools you need to begin improvising on guitar. Your goal is to take these tools and begin to develop your own lead guitar "voice." Soloing is great fun. Let's begin.

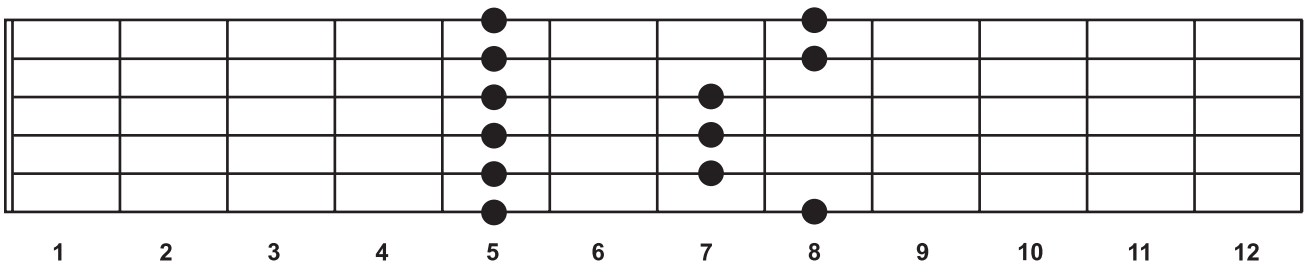
A Visual Approach

Most guitar players don't learn the theory of chord construction before they start playing chords. They simply learn chord shapes and where to play them on the fretboard. Later they learn the rules of chord construction. The same idea can be applied to lead guitar. Instead of first learning the notes on the entire fretboard, the theory of scales, modes, keys, and chords, this method begins by teaching you to "visualize" where to play on the fretboard using patterns. Once you have started enjoying soloing you can then learn the music theory behind it all to improve your understanding and increase your options.

Here is an example of a scale in standard music notation and guitar TAB.



Here is the same scale represented visually on a diagram of the fretboard. The dots show you where to place your fingers. I think you will find that this "visual" approach makes learning and memorizing scale patterns faster and easier.



Scale Basics

Before you begin learning scale patterns it is important for you to have a basic understanding of scales.

What Are Scales?

Scales are simply sets of notes that work together in a piece of music. There are a number of different scale types, but the most fundamental and important scale for guitarists to learn is the Chromatic scale.

The Chromatic Scale

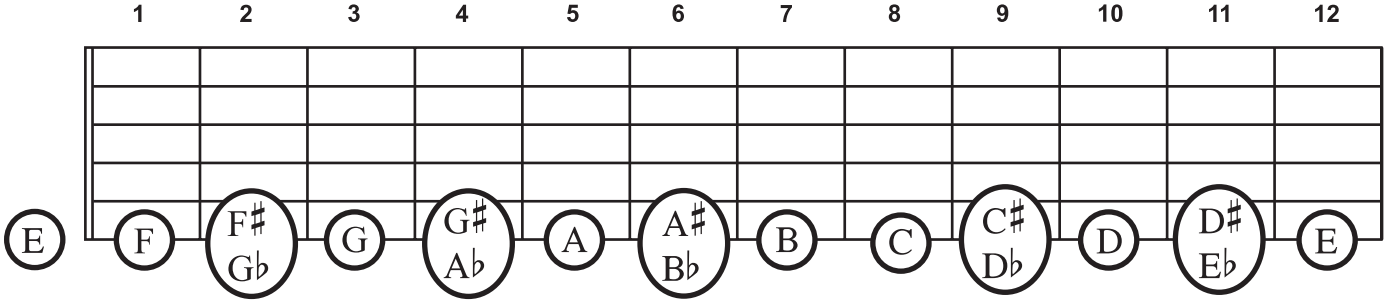
The guitar is a Chromatic instrument, so it is essential for guitarists to understand the Chromatic Scale in order to understand how music works on the guitar. The Chromatic scale is simply all the notes available in our system of music. You can think of it as the the alphabet of musical notes. Just as you need to learn the alphabet before you can hope to read words, you also need to learn the Chromatic scale to understand how the language of music works. The Chromatic scale will help you understand other scales, chords, and how to navigate the guitar fretboard.

The Chromatic scale is made up of twelve pitches (or notes.) The twelve notes that make up the Chromatic scale are called an octave. Each note in the Chromatic scale is one half step (one fret) higher than the previous note when moving up the scale, or one half step (one fret) lower when moving down the scale. The notes in the Chromatic Scale always follow the order below regardless of which note you start with. (The symbol next to the second A is a sharp symbol and the symbol next to the B below it is a flat symbol, so those notes are called “A sharp” and “B flat.”)

A	A♯	B	C	C♯	D	D♯	E	F	F♯	G	G♯
	B♭			D♭		E♭			G♭		A♭

Once you reach the G sharp (A flat) note you start with A again. Notice that the A sharp and B flat are the same pitch (a sharp symbol raises a note one half step and a flat symbol lowers a note one half step.) Also the C sharp and D flat, D sharp and E flat, F sharp and G flat, and G sharp and A flat. Also notice that there is no B sharp or C flat, or E sharp or F flat.

Now let’s look at how the chromatic scale applies to the guitar fretboard. The guitar has (commonly) six strings, each tuned to a different pitch. The fretboard is divided by frets that create new pitches when the guitar strings are held against them. Each fret is one half step higher in pitch than the one before it. So as you move up the fretboard, you are moving one pitch at a time up the Chromatic scale.



The 6th string played open is an E note. When you move up to the 1st fret, you are playing an F note. The F is the next note in the chromatic scale and is one half step (one pitch) higher than the open E note. Move up one more fret (2nd fret) and you have an F sharp or G flat note. The F sharp (G flat) note is the next note in the chromatic scale and is one half step (one pitch) higher than the F note. Move up one more fret (3rd fret) and you have a G note. The G note is the next note in the chromatic scale and is one half step (one pitch) higher than the F sharp (G flat) note.

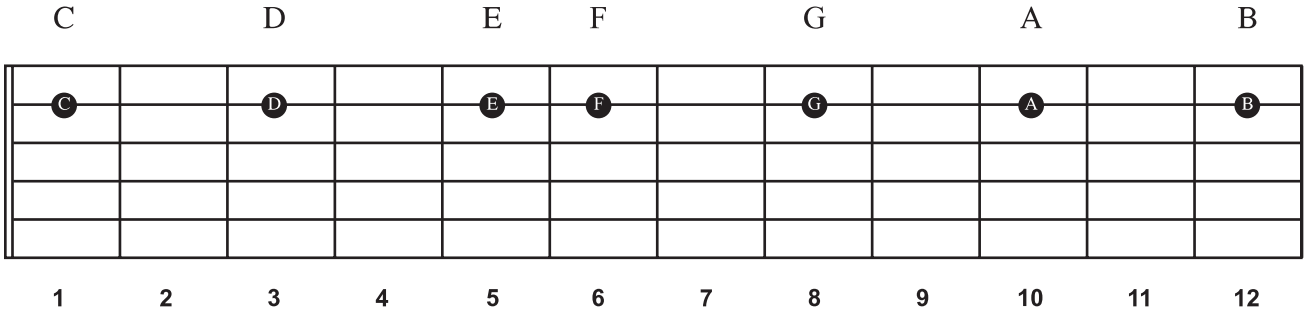
As you continue up the fretboard you move through the entire chromatic scale. When you reach the 11th fret, you have played an entire octave (all 12 notes in the chromatic scale.) At the 12th fret you start a new octave with an E note again. The same idea applies to all six strings. You just start with different notes for each string (5th string: A; 4th string: D; 3rd string: G; 2nd string: B; 1st string: E.)

Using the chromatic scale you can locate any note on the entire fretboard by simply moving one note at a time up or down the fretboard. For example, B notes are always two frets higher (in pitch) than the A notes. C notes are always one fret higher than B notes. D notes are always two frets lower (in pitch) then E notes. F notes are always two notes lower than G notes.

The Major Scale

Another scale that is important to understand is the major scale. The major scale is the fundamental scale on which our system of music is based. The major scale is a Diatonic scale, which means it has seven notes (or tones.) The distance between notes (or interval) always follows a set order (or formula.) The order is whole step - whole step - half step - whole step - whole step - whole step - half step. (W-W-H-W-W-W-H.)

If we build a major scale starting with a C note the result will be: C - D (whole step) - E (whole step) - F (half step) - G (whole step) - A (whole step) - B (whole step) - C (half step.) These seven notes give us the key of C. The key signature is named after the note the scale begins with, which is called the "tonic." Here are the notes in the key of C on the 2nd string.



These seven notes are the notes you will use to improvise in the key of C. Of course, you'll want to use more than one string to solo so I will be using five patterns to map the notes over the entire fretboard (for each key and scale type) using all six string.

All major keys are built using the major scale formula starting with each note in the Chromatic scale. The other scales you will be learning (Minor, Pentatonic, Blues) are based on the Major scale. That's all the music theory you need to understand to get started. Now let's have some fun.

Key Based Soloing

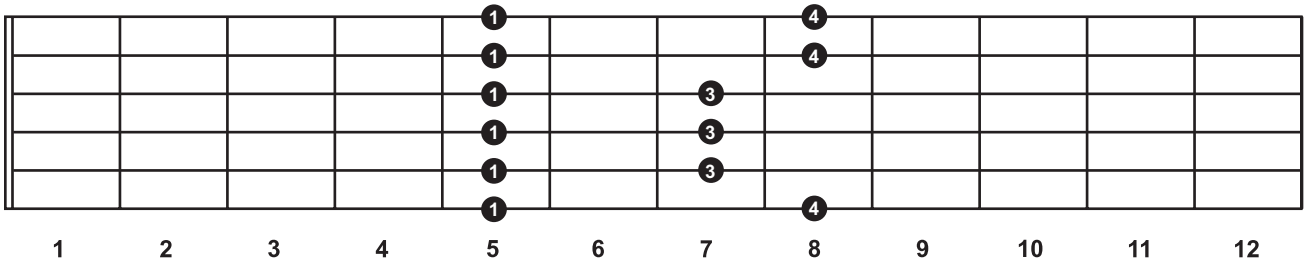
A key is the musical "center of gravity" or "harmonic center" of a song. It is determined by the chord progression and notes in a song. There are both Major and Minor keys. Major key chords are constructed using the Major Scale, and minor key chords are constructed using the Minor Scale.

Most (but not all) popular music (pop, rock, country, R&B) songs tend to stay in one key. This makes it easy to solo over them using the notes found in song's key. These notes (scales) can be represented on the fretboard as patterns, making them easy to learn. Patterns can be moved up or down the fretboard to work in any key. You will be learing five patterns for each scale type. These five patterns cover a 14 fret range and when repeated an octave higher and lower cover the entire fretboard allowing you to play anywhere on the fretboard in any key. Let's begin with the Pentatonic scale.

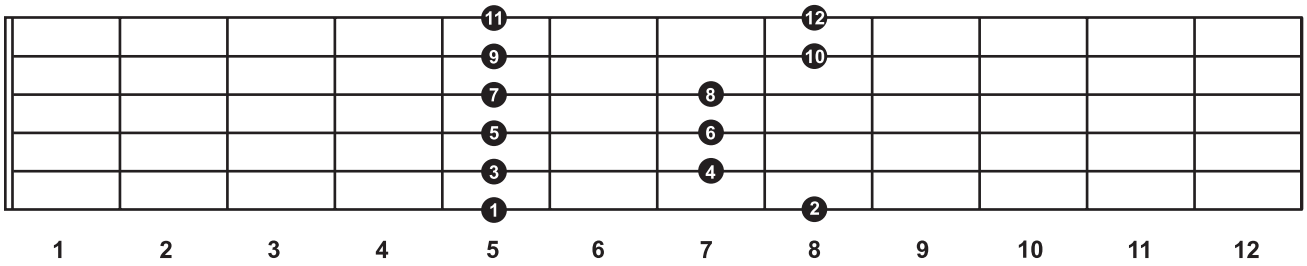
The Pentatonic Scale

The Pentatonic Scale contains five notes. Although it contains only five notes, many musicians have made a career out of the Pentatonic scale. The Pentatonic scale takes the Major scale (seven notes) and eliminates the half steps leaving five notes. This makes it easy to learn and a quick way to get started playing lead guitar. By memorizing the "pattern" of the Pentatonic scale, you will be able to play in any key by simply moving the pattern up or down the fretboard to fit the key. Here is the first Pentatonic scale pattern, which I will simply call Pentatonic Pattern 1. The numbers on the dots tell you which fingers to use when playing the notes on the fretboard, and the numbers under the fretboard are the fret numbers.

Pentatonic Pattern 1



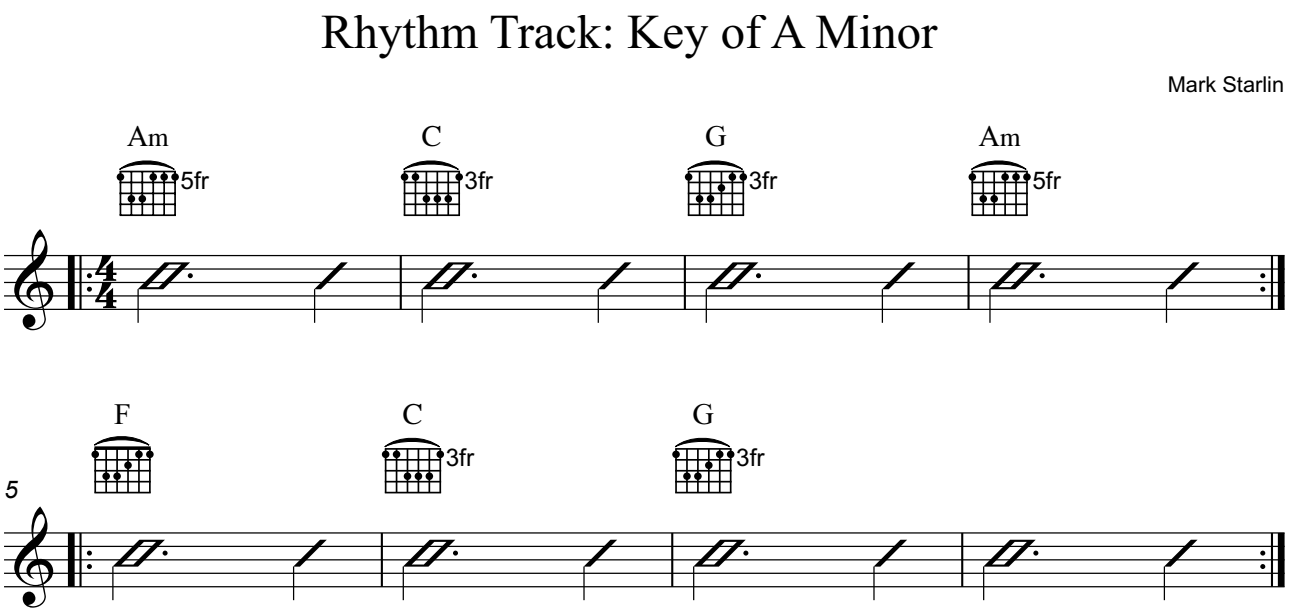
When memorizing the pattern, it is helpful to "play" the pattern and visualize how the pattern looks on the fretboard. Use the fingerings above and play through the pattern in the following order:



Once you have played the pattern from the bottom to the top, play it in the reverse order from the top to the bottom. Start slowly (we're not after speed yet) and keep this up until it flows smoothly. Visualize the pattern in your mind while you play. It should soon begin to sink into your memory.

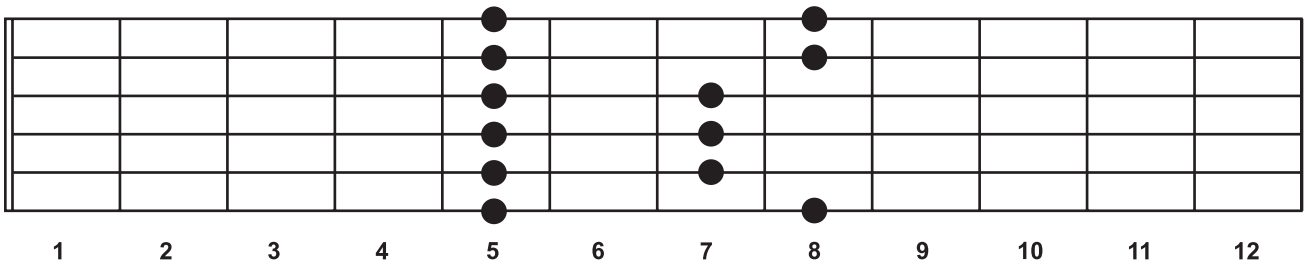
Playing With A Rhythm Track

Now take Pentatonic Pattern 1 and play it over a backing track. The rhythm track below will work well for Pentatonic Pattern 1 at the 5th fret.



This rhythm track is available at markstarlin.com. It is called: Jam Track 1 - Slow Cooker

Pentatonic Pattern 1



Begin by playing the pattern from the bottom to the top. Then go in the reverse order from the top to the bottom. The goal here is to try to match the tempo of the music. Listen to how the pattern sounds against each chord. Notice that the notes "fit" the backing track. This because all the notes in the pattern are contained in the key of A Minor. The chords are also made up of the notes in the key of A Minor so they sound good together.

Continue to play up and down the pattern while you memorize it. While this may not be the most exciting guitar solo ever, you have just taken the first step towards playing lead guitar.

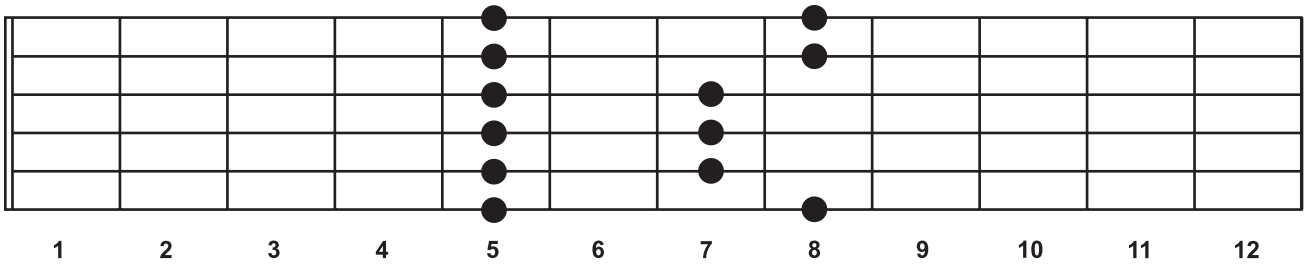
Key Based Soloing 2

Changing Keys

The first rhythm track you used was in the key of A Minor. At its current location (starting at the 5th fret), Pentatonic Pattern 1 contains only notes found in the key of A Minor: A, C, D, E, G. Obviously, not all music is in the key of A Minor. In order to play in other keys you can move the pattern up or down the fretboard until it fits the key of the music playing.

Below is Pentatonic Pattern 1 in the key of A Minor starting at the 5th fret on the 6th string:

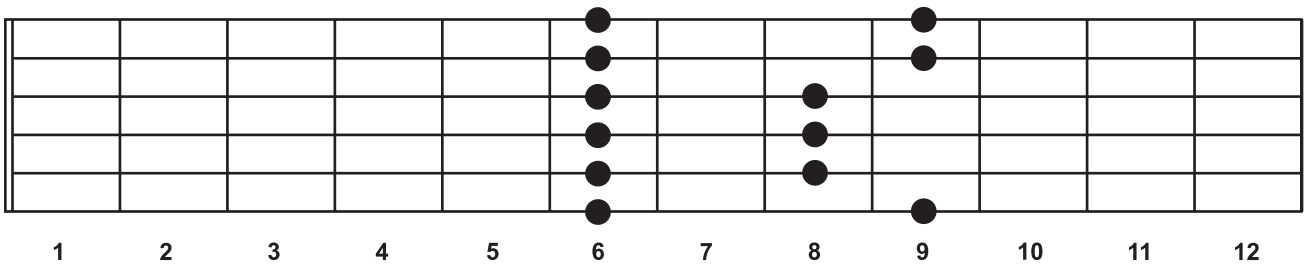
Pentatonic Pattern 1 - Key of A Minor



If you move the pattern up one fret (one half step) all the notes are raised one half step in pitch and the pattern is now in the key of A♯ Minor (or B♭ Minor) because the pattern now contains notes found in the key of A♯ Minor: A♯, C♯, D♯, E♯, G♯ (or B♭ Minor: B♭, D♭, E♭, F, A♭).

Note: A♯ is the same pitch as B♭, C♯ is the same pitch as D♭, E♯ is the same pitch as F, etc.

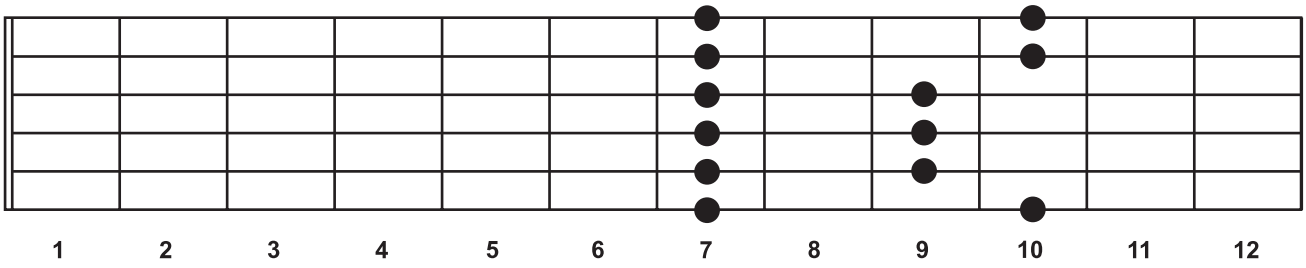
Pentatonic Pattern 1 - Key of A♯ Minor (or B♭ Minor)



Determining Keys A key is basically the musical "center of gravity" in a song and is based on a song's composition (chords or notes.) The key can often be determined by the chord or note a song resolves to (sounds correct ending with.) If a song ends with a D chord, there is a high probability that the song is in the key of D. Not always, but most of the time. Songs often start with the key chord also. Try improvising in the key of the last or first chord. If these don't work, try the other chords in the song until you find the correct key. Don't forget about minor keys. If a song ends with an A Minor chord, you may be in the key of A Minor. If the music you are playing is written in standard music notation, you can find the key by looking at the Key Signature next to the Treble Clef on the staff.

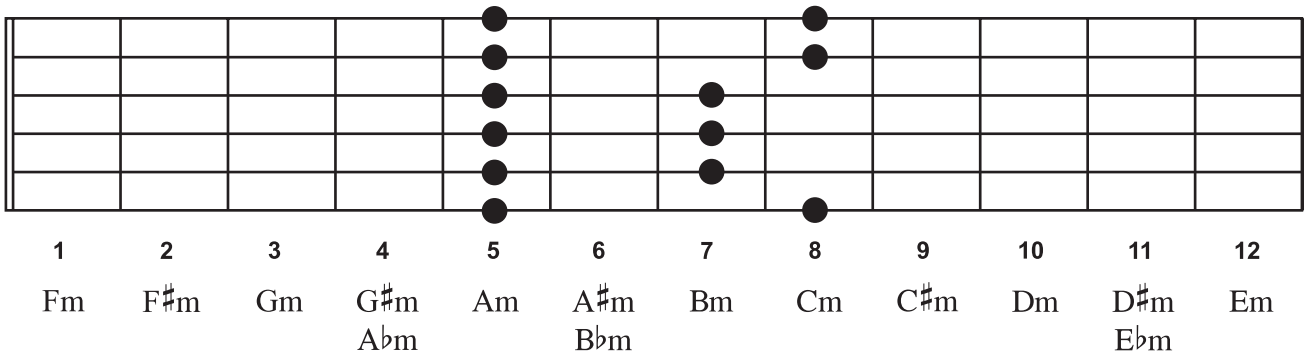
If you move the pattern up one more fret, it will be in the key of B Minor because the pattern now contains notes found in the key of B Minor: B, D, E, F♯, A.

Pentatonic Pattern 1 - Key of B Minor



Pentatonic Pattern 1 can be moved so it will work in any key. Just follow the Chromatic scale. Below is a diagram of what minor key Pentatonic Pattern 1 will be in at each fret (starting on the 6th string.)

Pentatonic Pattern 1 - Locations of Minor Keys



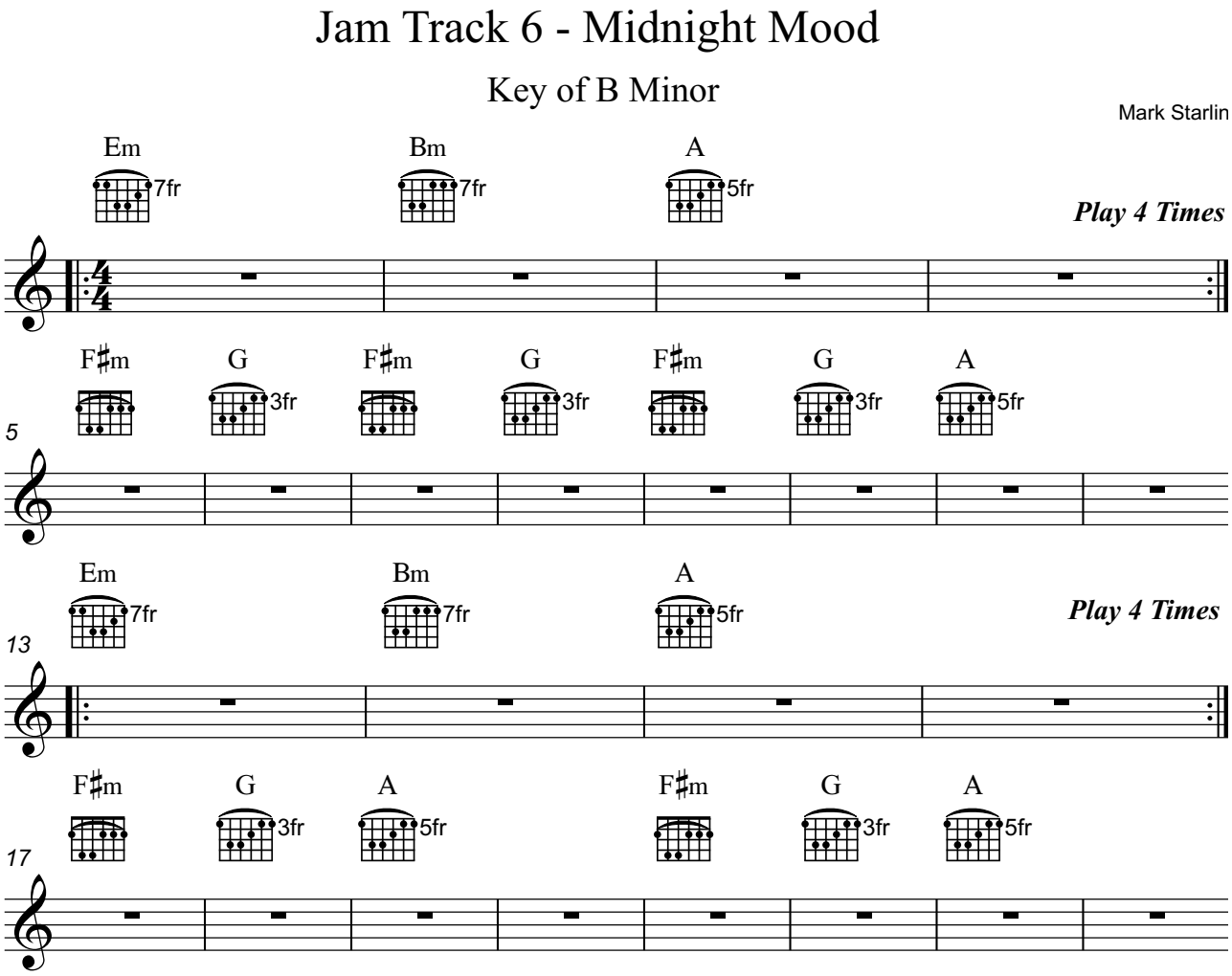
If you move the pattern from its current location starting at the 5th fret (6th string) to the 1st fret, you will be in the key of F Minor. If you move the pattern to the 3rd fret you will be in the key of Gm. Move the pattern to the 8th fret and it is in the key of C Minor.

The Chromatic Scale The Chromatic scale is made up of twelve pitches (or notes.) The twelve notes that make up the Chromatic scale are called an octave. Each note in the Chromatic scale is one half step (one fret) higher than the previous note when moving up the scale, or one half step (one fret) lower when moving down the scale. The notes in the Chromatic Scale always follow this order (regardless of which note you start with): A A♯ B C C♯ D D♯ E F F♯ G G♯ When you get to the G♯ note, you start with A again.

Note: Every sharp note has a flat note equivalent that shares the same pitch. An A♯ is the same pitch as B♭, C♯ is the same pitch as D♭, D♯ is the same pitch as E♭, F♯ is the same pitch as G♭, G♯ is the same pitch as A♭. So you can substitute flat notes for sharp notes in the Chromatic scale. They still follow the same order: A B♭ B C D♭ D E♭ E F G♭ G A♭

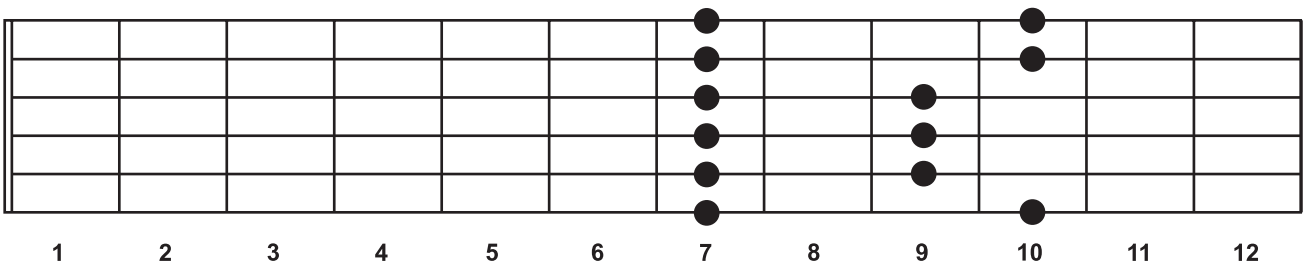
Improvising In A New Key: B Minor

Now that you understand how moving Pentatonic Pattern 1 allows you to use it in other keys, try some improvising in the Key of B Minor. The key of B Minor will begin on the 6th string at the 7th fret.



This rhythm track is available at markstarlin.com

Pentatonic Pattern 1 - Key of B Minor



Key Based Soloing 3

Major Keys

So far you have been playing in Minor keys. What about playing in a Major key? It works exactly the same way: using the same Pentatonic pattern to fit the Major key. Let me explain how keys works.

Relative Keys

Every Major key has a relative (Natural) Minor key, which shares the same notes and key signature.

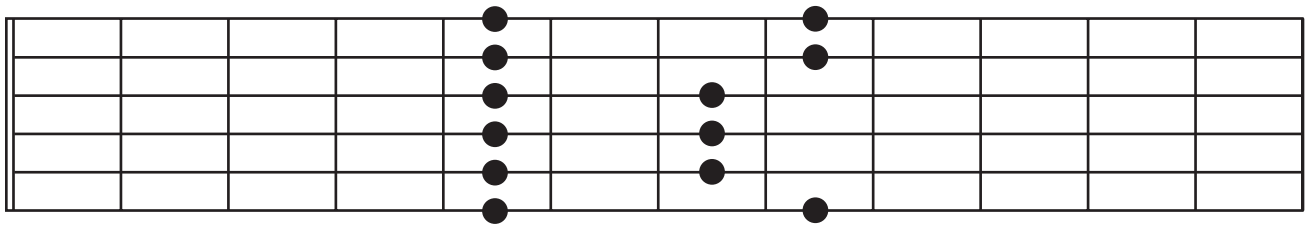
Major Key chords are constructed using the Major Scale. The chords for the key of C Major are built using the notes in the C Major Scale: C, D, E, F, G, A, B.

Minor Key chords are constructed using the Minor Scale. The chords for the key of A Minor are built using the notes in the A Minor Scale: A, B, C, D, E, F, G.

Notice that the notes in the C Major scale and the notes in the A Minor scale are the same. The only difference is C Major starts with a C note and A Minor starts with an A note. Since they share the same notes they are called "relative keys." A Minor is the "relative minor" key of C Major.

Since the relative Major and Minor keys share the same notes, they also share the same pattern and position on the fretboard. Below are the positions for Pentatonic Scale Pattern 1 for both the Major and Minor keys. Starting at the 5th fret the pattern works for both the C Major and A Minor keys. Starting at the 7th fret it works for the keys D Major and B Minor. Starting at the 12th fret it works for the keys G Major and E Minor. Etc.

Pentatonic Scale Pattern 1 Starting Locations For Major and Minor Keys



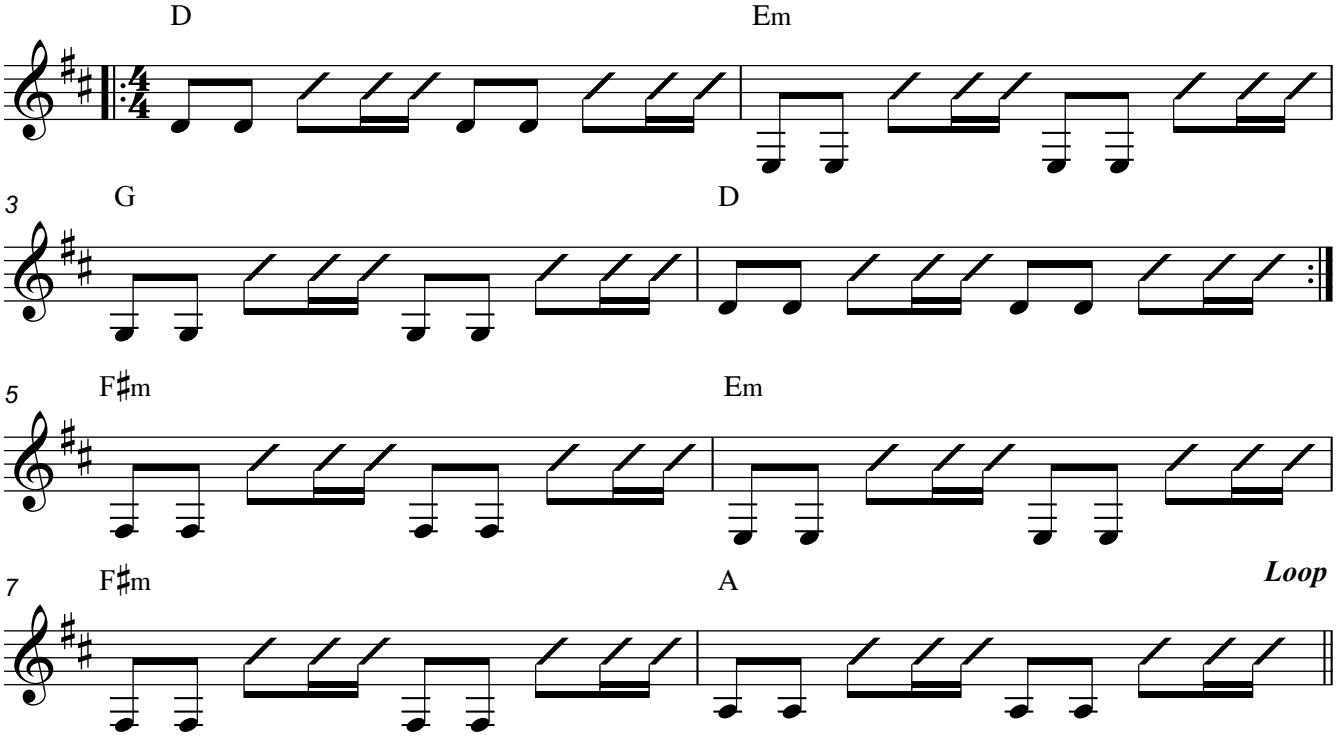
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
A♭	A	B♭	B C♭	C	C♯ D♭	D	E♭	E	F	F♯ G♭	G
Fm	F♯m	Gm	G♯m A♭m	Am	A♯m B♭m	Bm	Cm	C♯m	Dm	D♯m E♭m	Em

You can find the key signature for each of these keys in the Patterns section.

Improvising In A Major Key: D Major

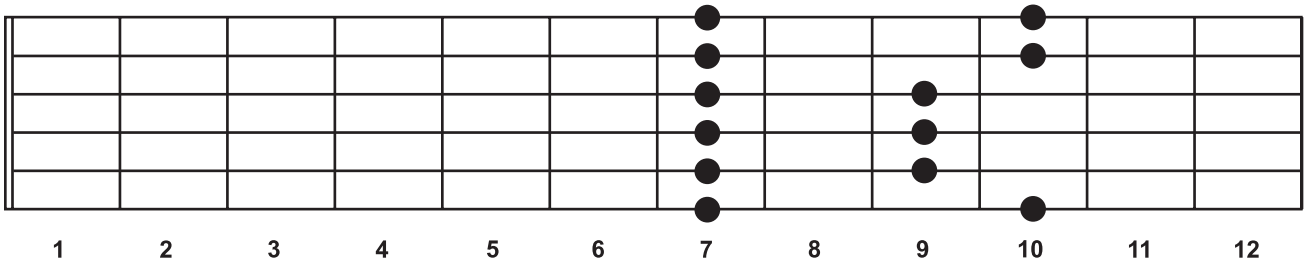
In the last lesson you improvised using Pentatonic Pattern 1 in the key of B Minor. If you look at the previous page you will see that B Minor is the relative minor key for the key of D Major. So you can solo in the key of D Major using the same pattern at the same location as B Minor. Since the rhythm track contains only chords, it is the chords that will determine the key of the rhythm track. In this case you will be improvising over chords in the key of D Major.

Rhythm Track: Key Of D (Major)



This rhythm track is available at markstarlin.com It is called: Jam Track 4 - Back Porch Jam.

Pentatonic Pattern 1 - Key of D Major



Try adding some of the techniques you have learned so far such as bending, hammer-ons, and pull-offs. Also remember to create phrases while you improvise.

Key Based Soloing 4

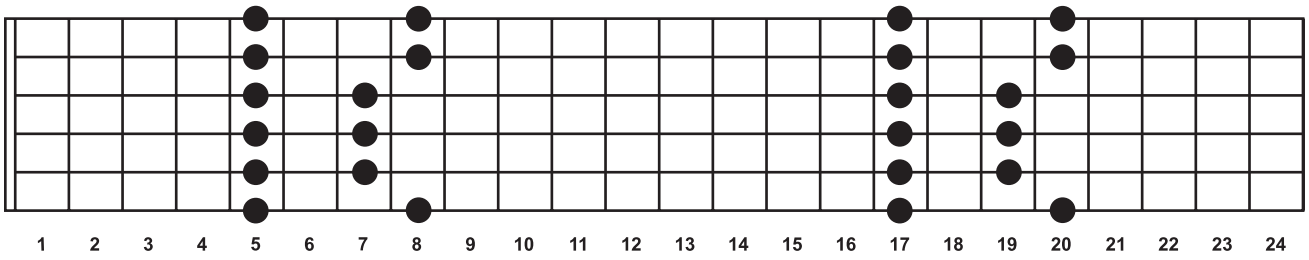
Playing Above The 12th Fret

The 12th fret on the guitar is the beginning of a new octave. For example, an open note on the 1st string is an E note. The 12 fret on the 1st string is also an E note — one octave higher. The 1st fret on the 1st string is an F note. The 13 fret on the 1st string is also an F note — one octave higher. Since all notes repeat one octave higher (12 frets), the same goes for our lead guitar patterns. They also repeat one octave higher.

Let's look at Pentatonic Scale Pattern 1 in the key of A Minor. It begins on the 6th string at the 5th fret. Knowing that notes repeat one octave higher, you now know that the pattern repeats itself beginning at the 17th fret on the 6th string — which is one octave (12 frets) higher.

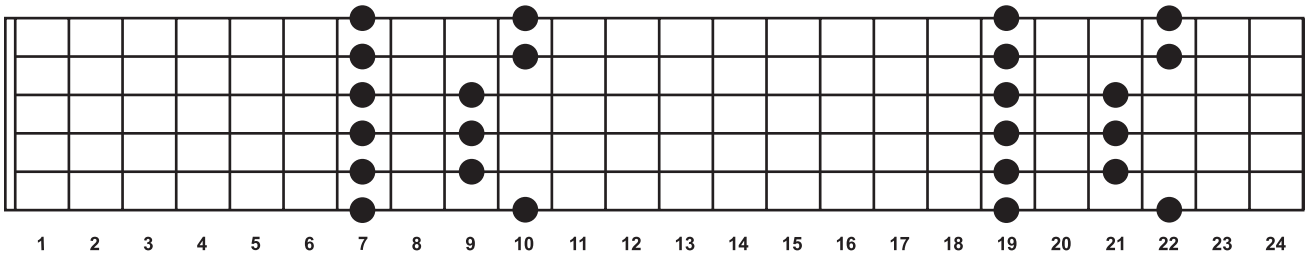
Here is a diagram of Pentatonic Scale Pattern 1 in the key of A Minor showing how it repeats itself an octave higher.

Pentatonic Scale Pattern 1 Key of A Minor



Here is a diagram of Pentatonic Scale Pattern 1 in the key of B Minor showing how it repeats itself an octave higher.

Pentatonic Scale Pattern 1 Key of B Minor



All the scales types: Pentatonic, Blues, Major, and Minor will work this way (repeating themselves one octave higher and lower.)

Key Based Soloing 5

The Blues Scale

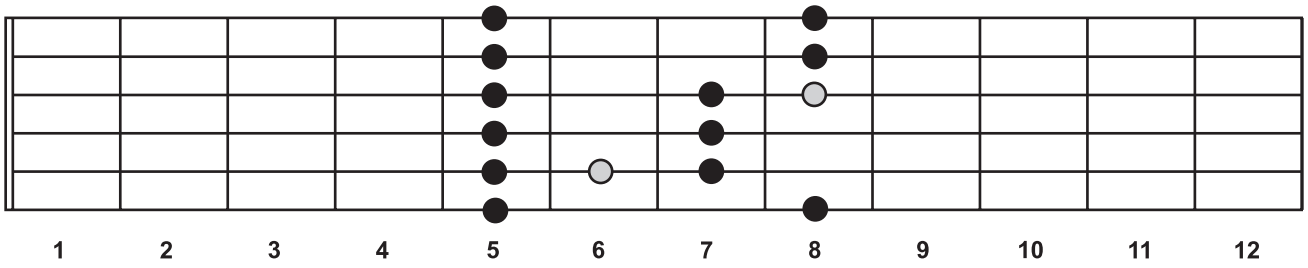
While the Pentatonic Scale works for all styles of music, by adding an extra note (and an octave of the note) we can give it a more bluesy flavor.

Chromatic Notes

Chromatic notes (or chromatic notes) are notes that are not found in the key of the music you are playing. These notes are played "in passing", or on the way to other notes and are also called "passing notes." They sound fine when played briefly, but should not be held for long. The note added to the Pentatonic Scale to create the Blues Scale is a chromatic (passing) note.

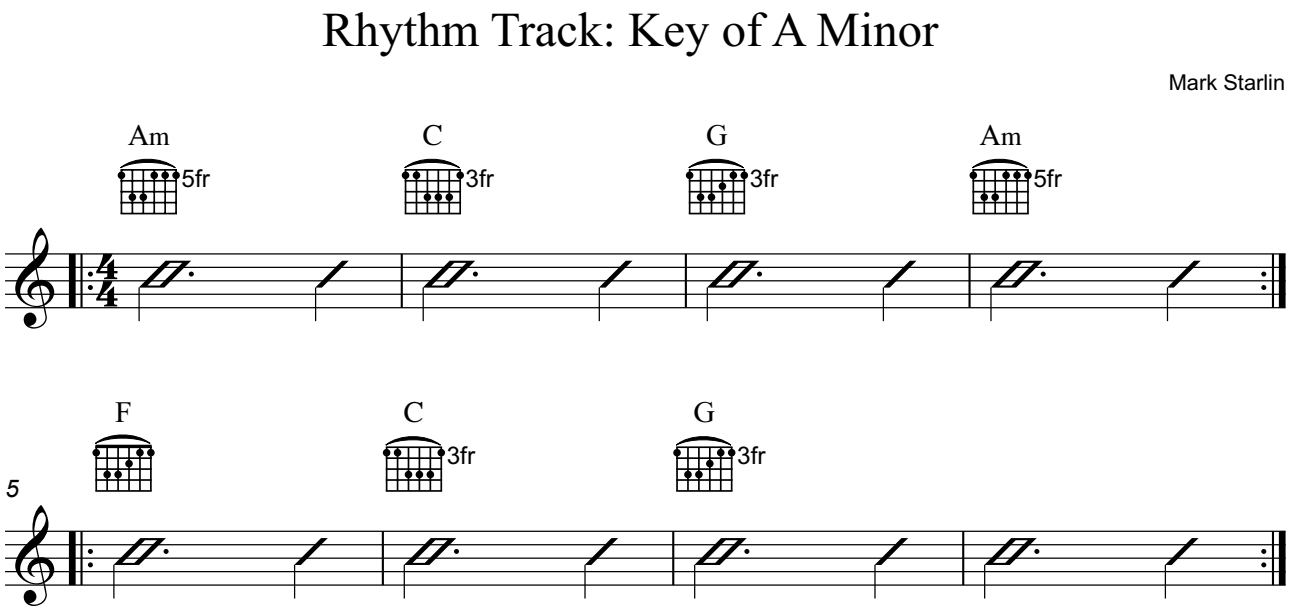
Now let's look at the Blues Scale Pattern 1. The extra notes are light gray to make them clearer. Remember to use these notes only in passing (don't hold them) as they are outside of the notes in the key.

Blues Scale Pattern 1 - Key of A Minor / C Major



Improvising Using Blues Scale Pattern 1 - A Minor

Try improvising using Blues Scale Pattern 1 and add the extra "blue" notes sparingly. And remember to use them in passing, not hold them.



This rhythm track is available at markstarlin.com. It is called: Jam Track 1 - Slow Cooker

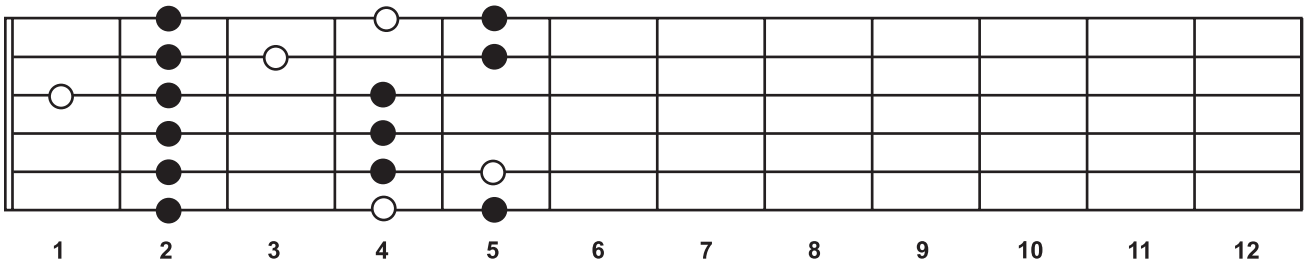
Key Based Soloing 6

The Major Scale

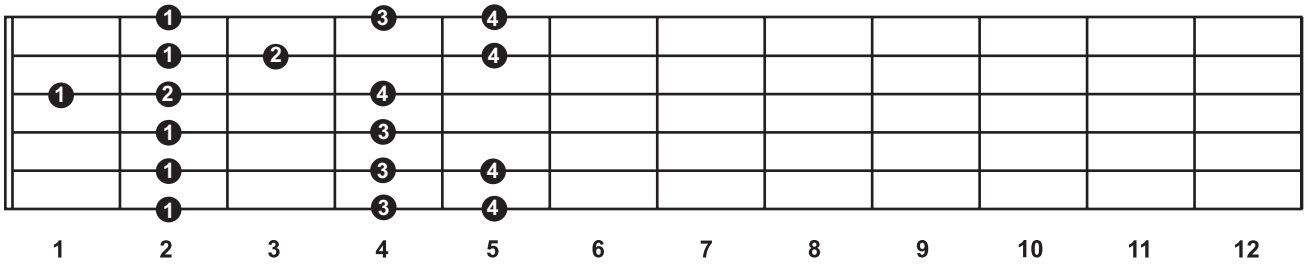
The Pentatonic Scale contains five of the seven possible notes in any key so it is somewhat limiting. By adding the two missing notes we have access to every note in every key and more options when soloing.

Below is Major Scale Pattern 1 in the key of A Major. The white notes are the two missing notes from the A Major scale not contained in Pentatonic Pattern 1.

Major Scale Pattern 1 - Key of A Major



The numbers on the dots below tell you which fingers to use when playing the notes on the fretboard. Notice you have to do some shifting of your hand when you get to the 3rd string. This is awkward at first, but you will get used to it. As an alternative, you can leave out the note on the 3rd string at the 1st fret and play the remaining notes with your 1st and 3rd fingers. Just remember that the note is there.



Improvising Using Major Scale Pattern 1

Now take Major Scale Pattern 1 and try some improvising. Use the same rhytm track, Key of A Minor, as you did for the Pentatonic and the Blues scales.

Scale Patterns

Major/Minor Scale Patterns

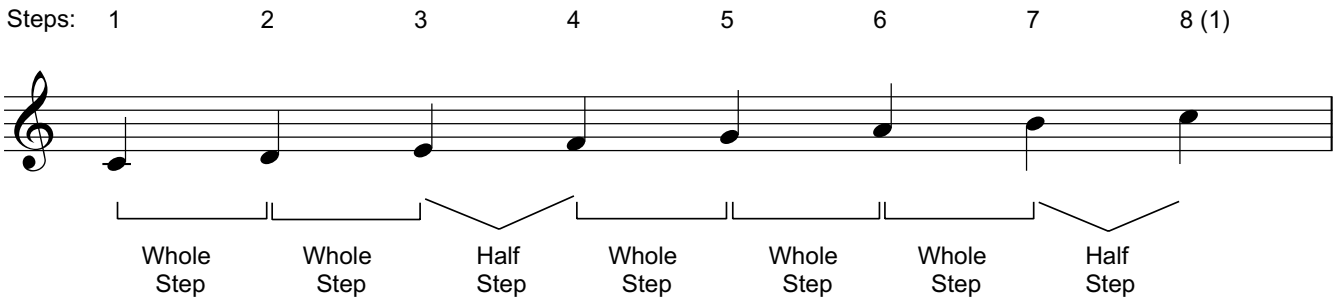
The Major Scale is the foundational scale in western music. It contains seven notes per octave. It is the scale our ears expect to hear. It is constructed following a set formula which is:

whole step - whole step - half step - whole step - whole step - whole step - half step

You may have heard singers sing "do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do." That is the Major scale. The ending "do" is the octave of the first "do."

If you build a major scale starting with a C note, the result will be; C - D (whole step) - E (whole step) - F (half step) - G (whole step) - A (whole step) - B (whole step) - C (half step.) Notice that there are no sharp or flat notes in this scale, which is the key signature for the key of C. The key is named after the note the scale begins with.

C Major Scale

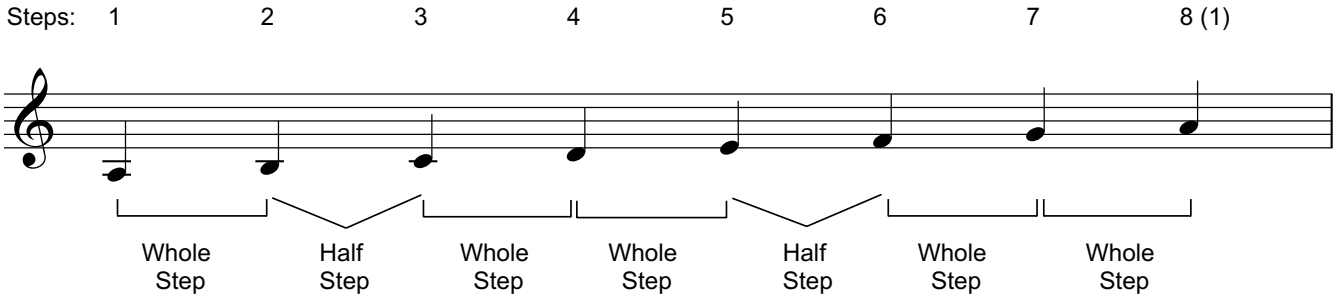


The steps (also called degrees) of the major scale are numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (1). The 8 is the octave of step 1. When you move from one Major Scale keynote to the next you are following the above order.

The relative (Natural) A Minor Scale follows a different order from keynote to keynote:

whole step - half step - whole step - whole step - half step - whole step - whole step

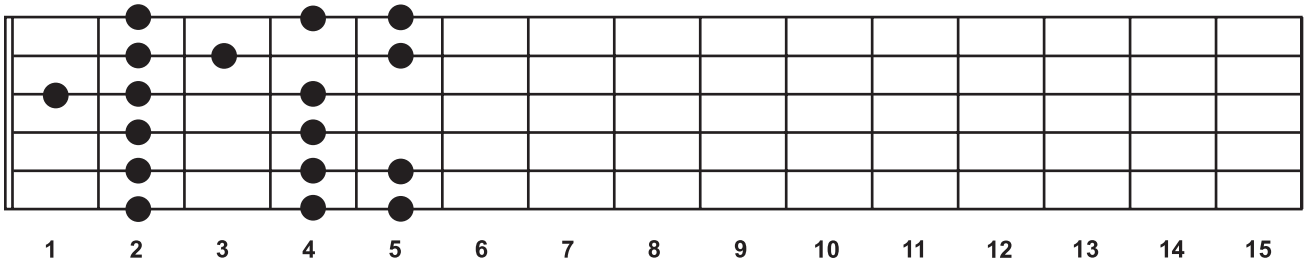
A Minor Scale



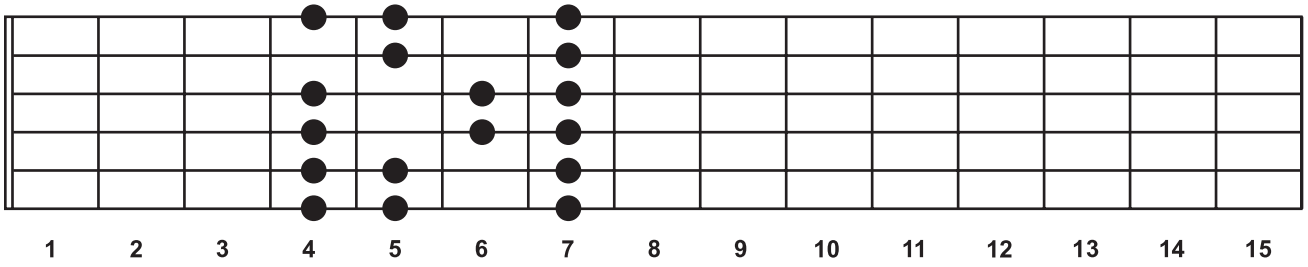
The Five Major/Minor Scale Patterns

Here are the five patterns for the Major Scale and relative Minor Scale (for the Key of A and F♯m.)

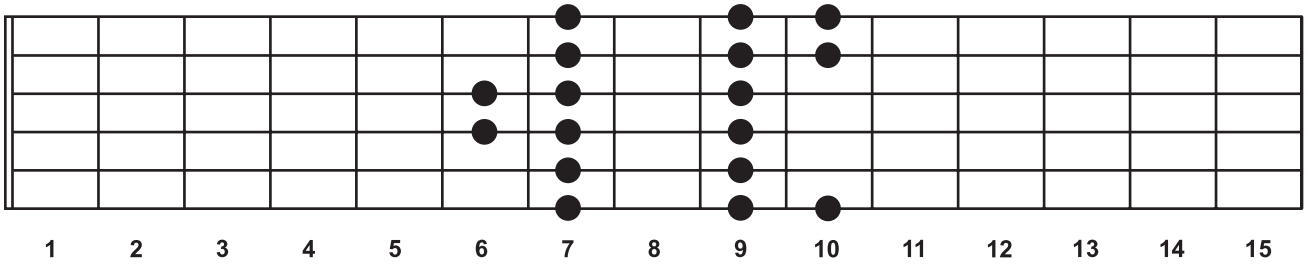
Pattern 1



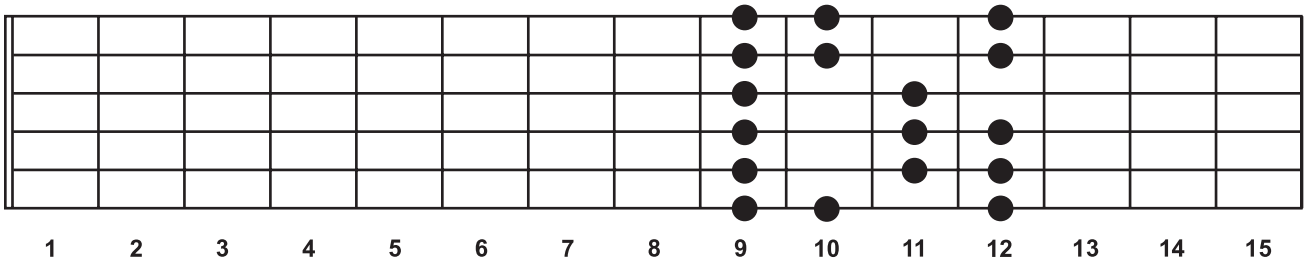
Pattern 2



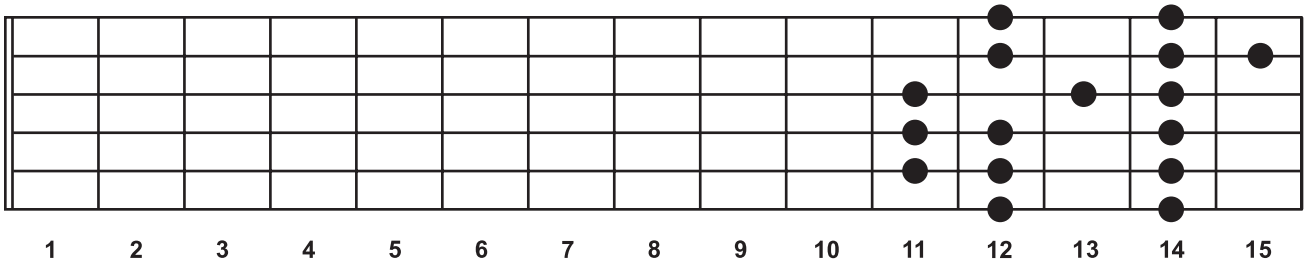
Pattern 3



Pattern4



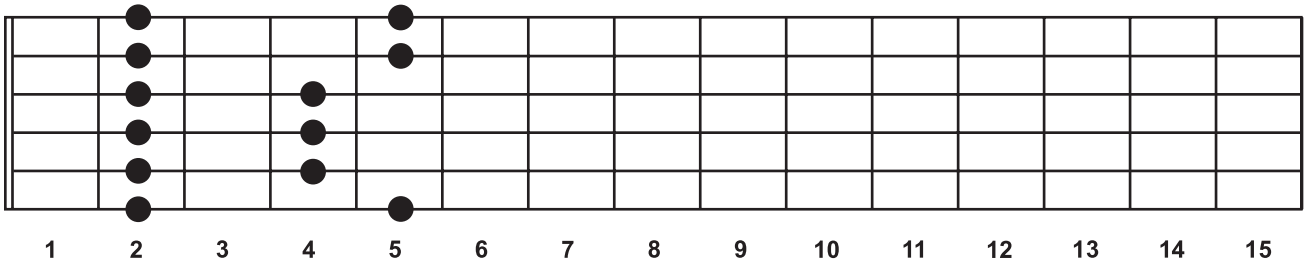
Pattern 5



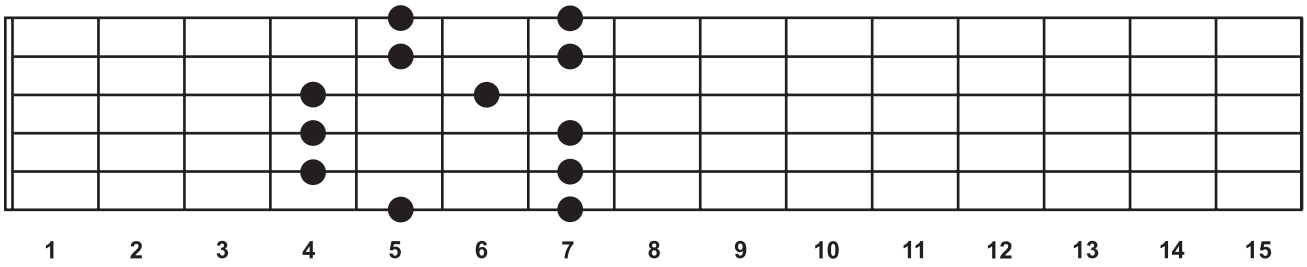
The Five Pentatonic Scale Patterns

Here are the five patterns for the Pentatonic Scale (for the Key of A and F♯m.)

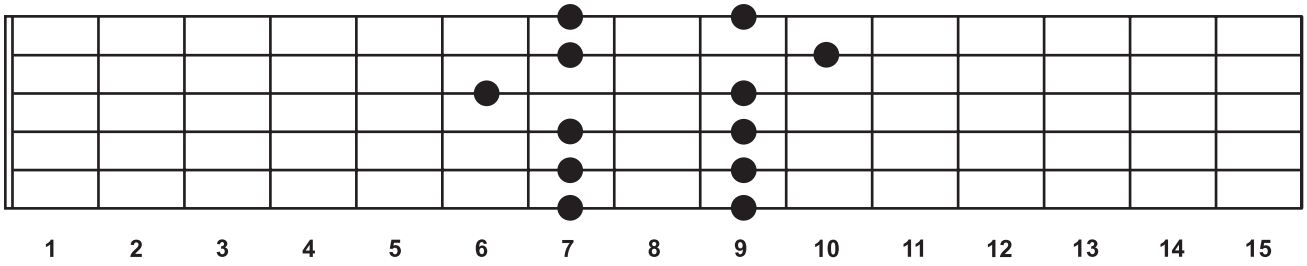
Pattern 1



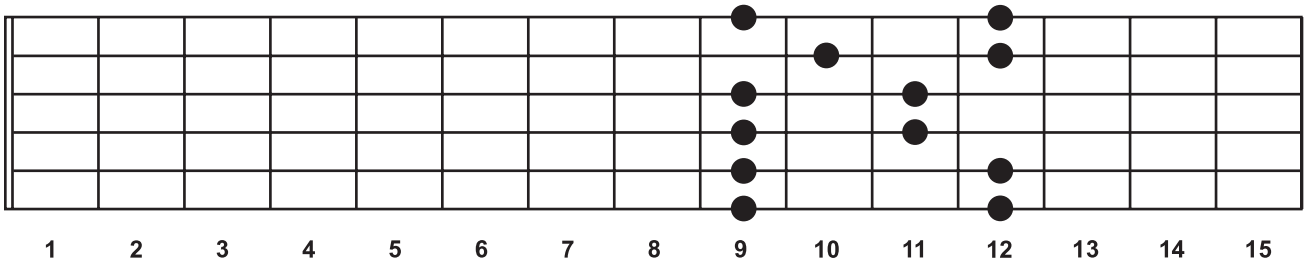
Pattern 2



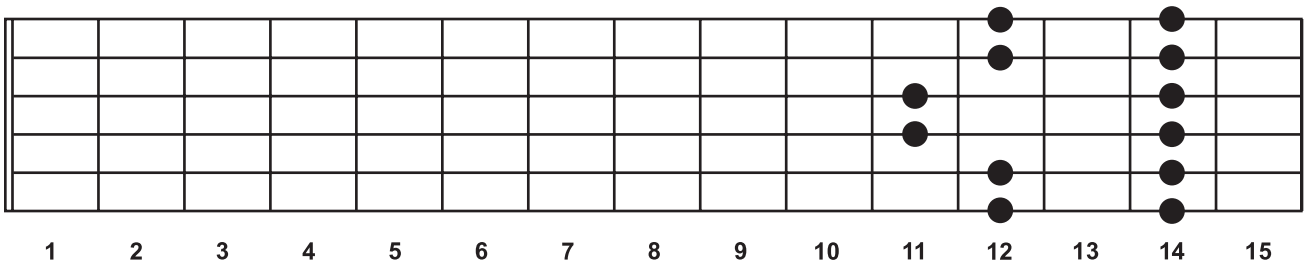
Pattern 3



Pattern4



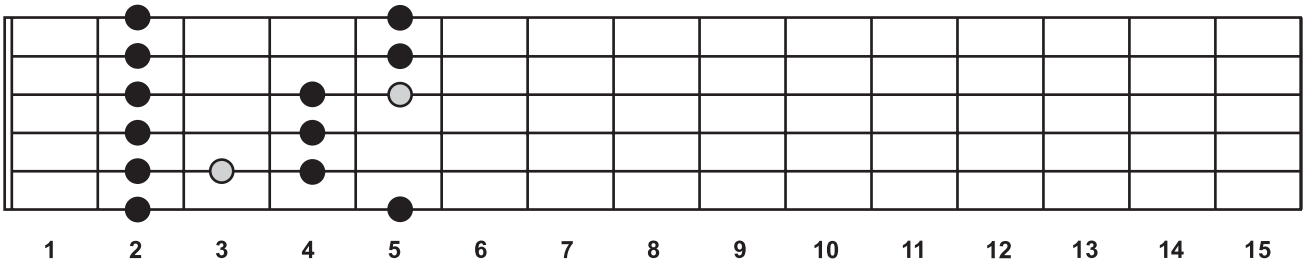
Pattern 5



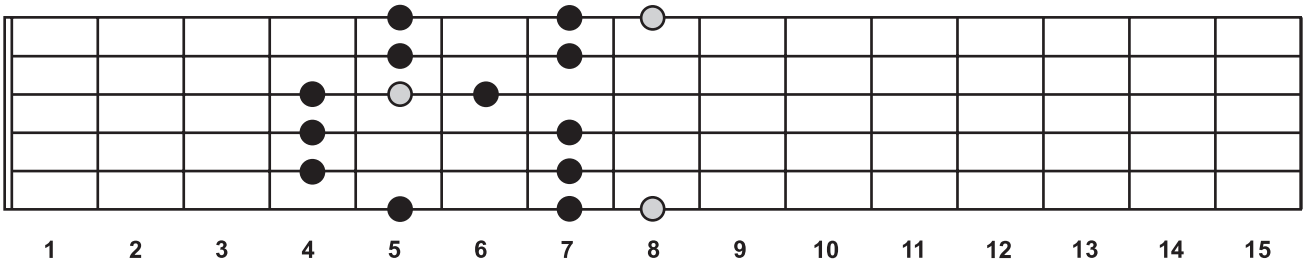
The Five Blues Scale Patterns

Here are the five patterns for the Blues Scale (Key of A and F♯m) with the "blue" note in gray.

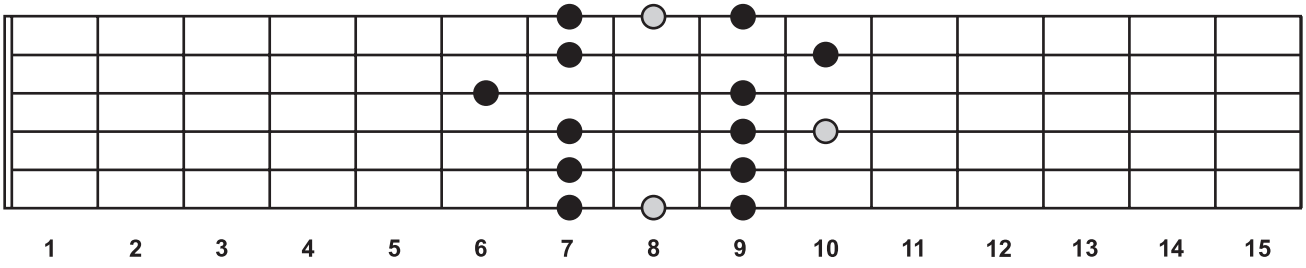
Pattern 1



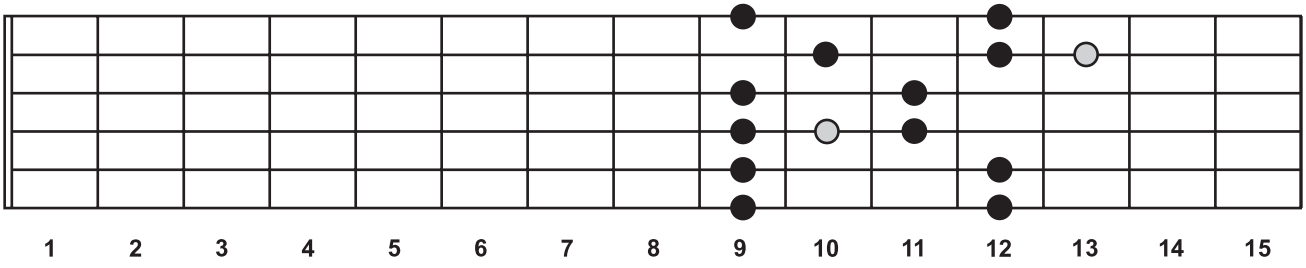
Pattern 2



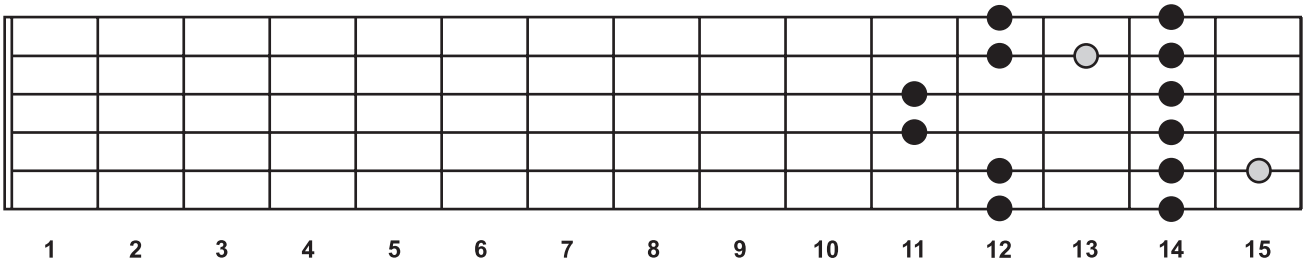
Pattern 3



Pattern4



Pattern 5



ScalePatterns For All The Keys And Scale Types

There is lots more to soloing than scales. There are also techniques and note choices to consider. But this guide will get you started.

And since this is a "quick start guide" I have not included the scale pattern for all the keys and scale types. You can find those and techniques in Starlin Guitar Method: Soloing & Techniques.
Availabe at markstarlin.com

Have fun.

Mark

Soloing Quick Start Guide

Free

Starlin Guitar Method
Soloing Quick Start Guide

This guide is compliments of Mark Starlin.
It will get you started on your way to learning how to creatively solo or improvise on guitar.

There is much more to learn but this guide will quickly get you playing solos and having fun.

I hope you enjoy it.

Check out my website for more guitar related stuff.

markstarlin.com

Thanks.

Mark Starlin