APPLIED THEORY + GUIDED PRACTICE

Bass

Notes, scales, and improvisation

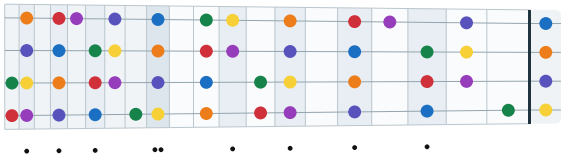
For experienced TAB players who want to understand the notes and create their own phrases.

STANDARD TUNING

E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest

LEFT-HANDED FRETBOARD



NOTES / CHORDS / RHYTHM / PHRASING

Eight applied-theory studies and six lessons with backing tracks.

LEFT-HANDED / AMERICAN ENGLISH

FOR PLAYERS WHO WANT TO UNDERSTAND

Inside this guide

Look up notes, practice scales, and work through the lessons.

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START WITH STUDY 1 **PAGES 19-32**

Play a phrase, understand its notes, and make your own choices.

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Marques & Co.

Your improvisation roadmap

You already play from TAB. Now connect your ears, note names, and musical choices.

01 From reading to choosing

STUDIES 1 AND 6 / PAGES 19 AND 24

Play the written phrase, identify its notes, and change the rhythm. In Study 6, remove the cues until you can invent an answer without TAB.

02 Understand what notes do

STUDIES 2-3 / PAGES 20-21

Learn half steps, whole steps, intervals, degrees, and triads. Play each idea before moving on. Connect the theory to skills your hands already have.

03 Separate three important ideas

STUDY 4 / PAGE 22

Tuning gives the open-string pitches; key gives the tonal center; the chord gives the current harmony. Familiar shapes do not replace listening.

04 Choose a scale from the harmony

STUDY 5 / PAGE 23

Check the key and chord symbols, start with a few notes, and target chord tones. A chord change does not always require a scale change.

05 Connect the neck

STUDY 7 / PAGE 25

Find the same note in different places and use shared notes to connect areas. A new shape does not mean a new scale.

06 Practice with fewer cues

STUDY 8 + PRACTICE / PAGES 26-32

Read a phrase, name its notes, vary it, and cover the TAB. Then follow the six backing-track lessons and record eight measures.

THE MAPS ARE REFERENCES, NOT A MEMORIZATION CHECKLIST

Start with Study 1. Look up notes on p. 4 and scale maps as needed. To go straight to a backing track, turn to p. 27. The keys are teaching examples, not a preferred style.

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How to read the diagrams

One consistent system of note names, colors, and degrees throughout the guide.

STANDARD TUNING

E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest

01 Read the neck

The nut is on the right. Frets increase from 0 to 20 toward the left, closer to the body. Fret 0 means an open string.

Top to bottom: G, D, A, E. The top line is string 1, the thinnest and highest-pitched string. The bottom line is the thickest and lowest.

One fret raises pitch a half step. Open-string notes return at fret 12, one octave higher. The double dot marks fret 12.

02 Read the symbols

Each natural note keeps its original color. Sharp and flat spellings share one white circle: one fret and one sound.

A black ring marks the scale tonic or chord root. R identifies it on small diagrams. Degrees such as 1, 2, and ♭3 describe intervals, not fingers.

♯ means sharp and ♭ means flat. The footer spells the notes of the scale. Chord roots follow the current chord; the tonic is the tonal center.

03 Use each diagram

The full map shows every chord or scale tone from fret 0 to 20. Small diagrams show an ascending octave, from R to R.

Start on the E or A string as labeled. Follow the degrees toward thinner strings, then reverse the route. Shift your hand when needed.

TAB still reads left to right in time. These neck maps have higher frets to the left. To transpose a fretted shape, move every note by the same number of frets.

NATURAL-NOTE COLORS

C D E F G A B

LEFT-HANDED PLAYING / CLEAN SOUND

Your right hand frets the notes; your left hand picks or plucks. Stay relaxed, fret just behind the appropriate fret wire, and mute strings you are not playing. Shift position instead of forcing a wide stretch.

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Every note on the fretboard

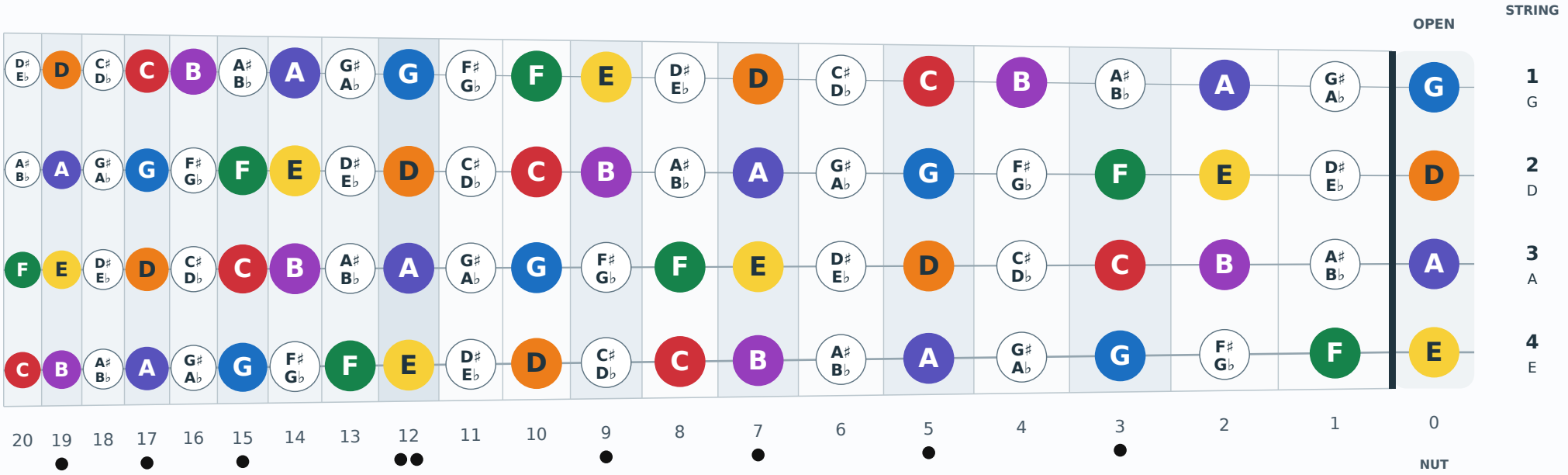
Complete reference · sharp and flat spellings share a fret

STANDARD TUNING

E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest

Higher frets and pitches ← toward the body



FOLLOW ONE NATURAL NOTE

C Red · D Orange · E Yellow · F Green · G Blue · A Indigo · B Violet

TWO NAMES, ONE PITCH

C♯/D♭, D♯/E♭, F♯/G♭, G♯/A♭, and A♯/B♭ share frets. Play each circle once.

12 FRETS = ONE OCTAVE

The shaded octave repeats the note names at a higher pitch. E-F and B-C are one fret apart.

FIND THREE ANCHORS

E string: E open, G at fret 3, A at 5. A string: A open, C at fret 3, D at 5.

Open strings, sounding pitch: E1 A1 D2 G2. Middle C = C4.

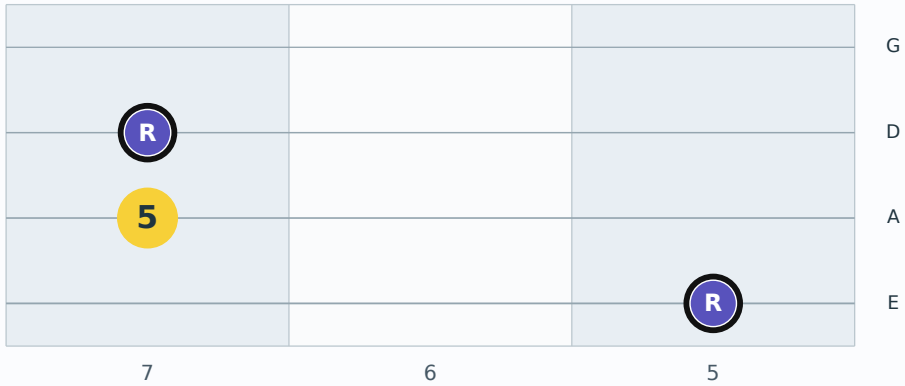
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Roots, fifths, and octaves

Three reliable anchors for building a bass line.

A / root - fifth - octave

Start: E string, fret 5 (A)

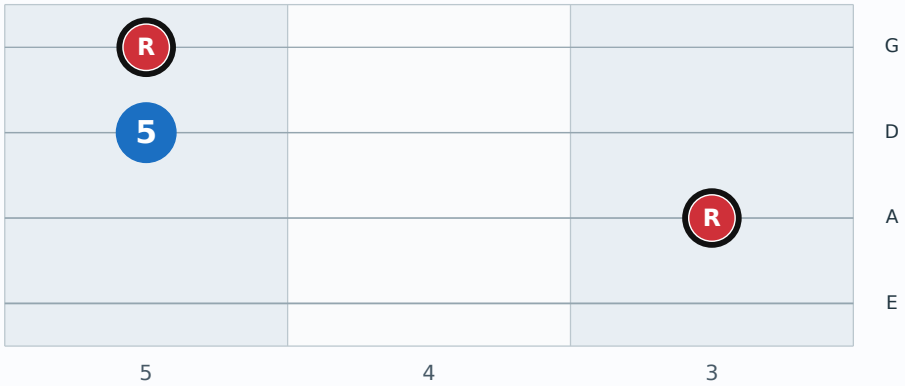


A → E → A

E: fret 5 / A: fret 7 / D: fret 7

C / root - fifth - octave

Start: A string, fret 3 (C)



C → G → C

A: fret 3 / D: fret 5 / G: fret 5

THE PATTERN IN STANDARD TUNING

With a root on E or A, the higher fifth is one string thinner and two frets higher. The octave is two strings thinner and two frets higher. On these left-handed maps, higher frets are to the left.

FOLLOW THE CURRENT CHORD

Perfect fifths fit common major and minor chords. Diminished or altered chords may need another fifth. The chord root changes with the chord and is not always the key's tonic.

TRY IT

Play A - E - A (octave) - E, one note per beat. Repeat four times at a steady tempo.

Perfect fifth = 7 half steps. Octave = 12 half steps above the root.

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Time and chord changes

A 4/4 exercise: one chord per measure. Start around 60 bpm.

READ TIME FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

These grids show time. Each cell lasts one quarter-note beat.

Am

1	2	3	4
A	E	A	E

A: E string, fret 5
E: A string, fret 7

F

1	2	3	4
F	C	F	C

F: E string, fret 1
C: A string, fret 3

C

1	2	3	4
C	G	C	G

C: A string, fret 3
G: D string, fret 5

G

1	2	3	4
G	D	G	D

G: E string, fret 3
D: A string, fret 5

01 / Start with roots

Play the root on beat 1 and hold it for four beats. Change notes at the start of the next chord. Then add fifths using the grid above.

02 / Control the silence

Play each note for one full beat. Then try a short note followed by silence. Mute the previous string when you play the next, and keep unused strings quiet.

03 / Add a fill

Keep three measures simple. In the fourth, play G - A - B - G as quarter notes and land on A for the next Am. The fill prepares the change.

LISTEN FOR THREE THINGS

A steady pulse. Clear note endings. The root arriving at the right time.

Use a drum loop and listen to the kick pattern. Timing, articulation, and clear harmony guide the bass line.

R marks a root or tonic. In a progression, target the tones of the current chord.

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C major triad

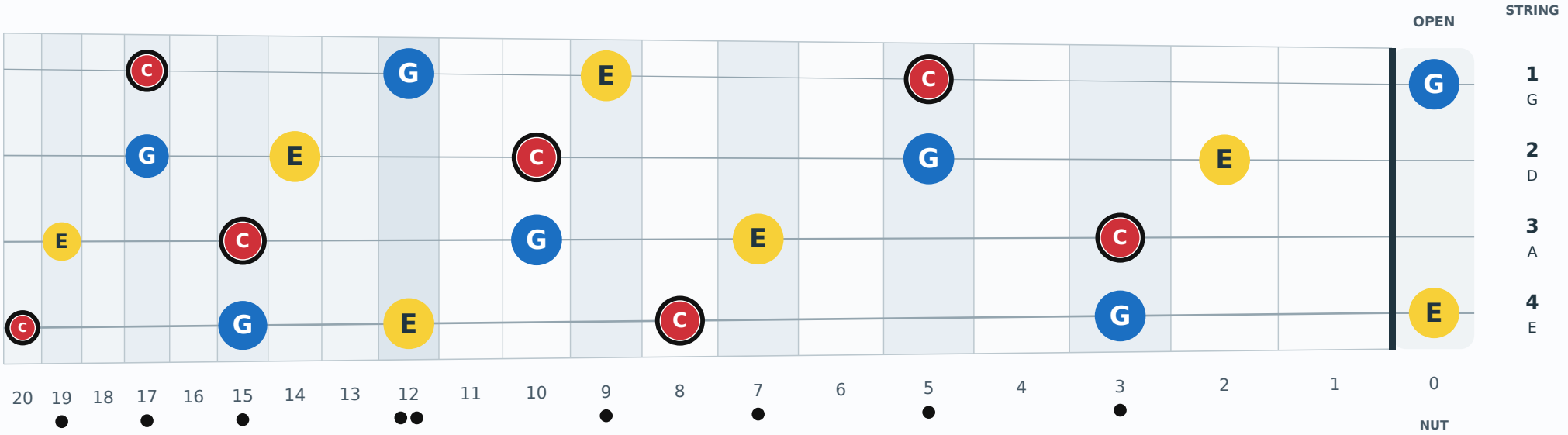
Three chord tones

FORMULA 1 3 5

STANDARD TUNING

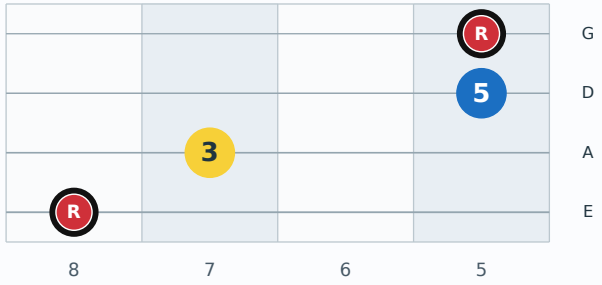
E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest



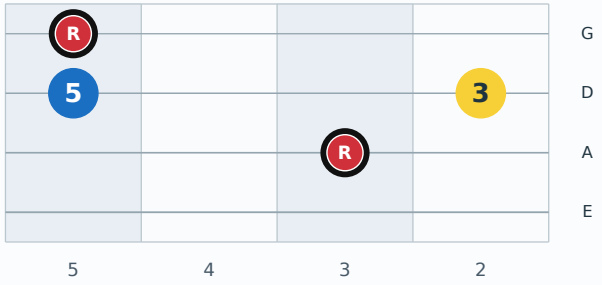
Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 8 (C)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 3 (C)



Play the chord one note at a time

Major triads use 1, 3, and 5. Add the octave, then descend along the route.

Play four quarter notes: 1 - 3 - 5 - 3. Change the chord.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

CHORD NOTES + DEGREES

C (1) E (3) G (5)

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

Root / tonic

Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT

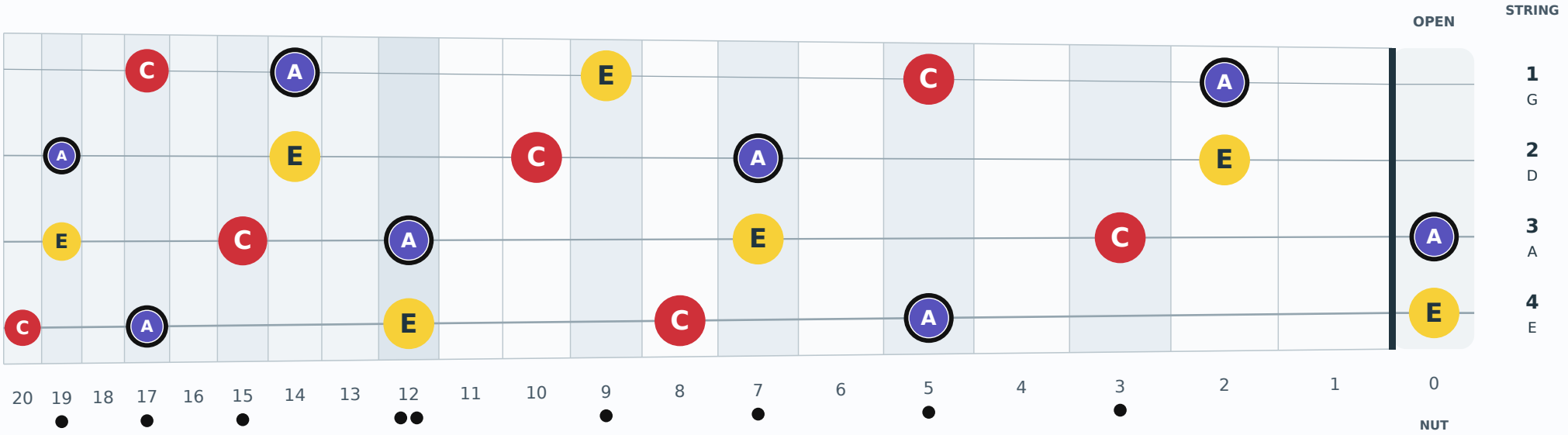
Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

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A minor triad

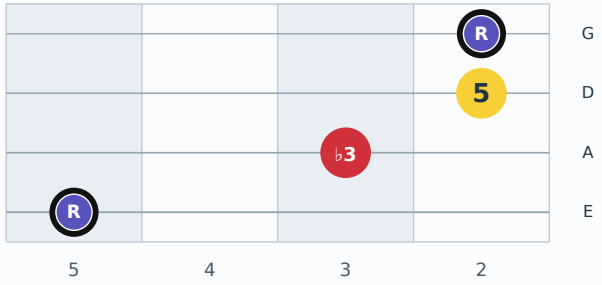
Three chord tones

FORMULA 1 ♭3 5



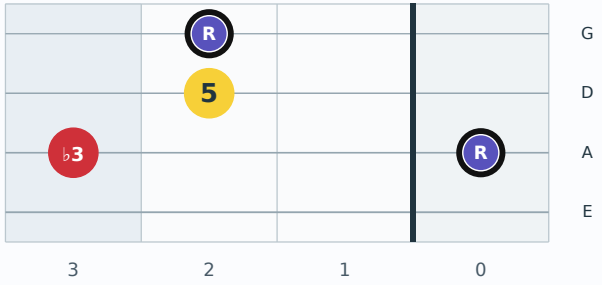
Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 5 (A)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 0 (A)



The third makes it minor

Minor triads use 1, ♭3, and 5. Compare the minor third with a major third.

Play four quarter notes: 1 - ♭3 - 5 - ♭3.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

CHORD NOTES + DEGREES

A (1) C (♭3) E (5)

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

Root / tonic

Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT

Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

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A minor pentatonic

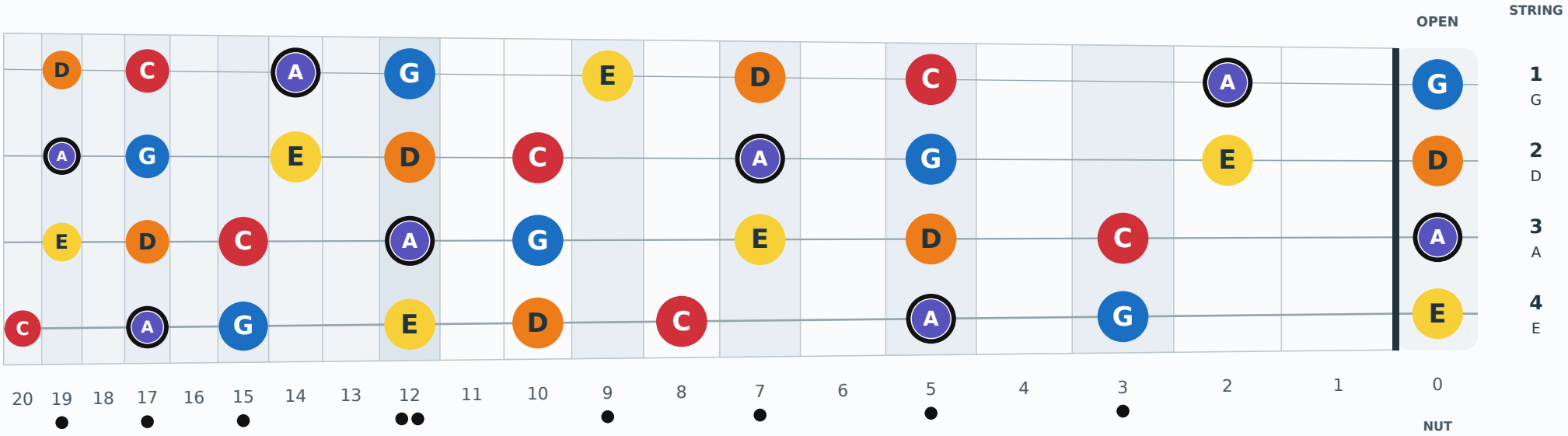
Five-note minor pentatonic scale

FORMULA 1 ♭3 4 5 ♭7

STANDARD TUNING

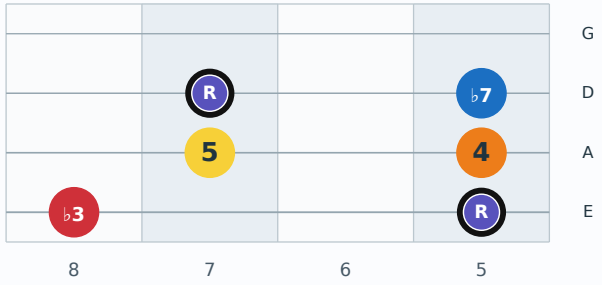
E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest



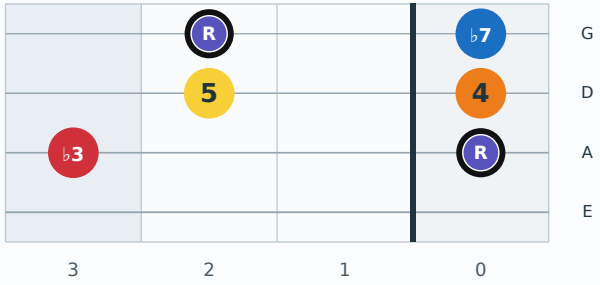
Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 5 (A)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 0 (A)



A few notes, many possibilities

Start with the root and fifth. Add ♭3 or ♭7 to a short phrase and end each note clearly.

The next page adds ♭5 for the minor blues scale.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

SCALE NOTES + DEGREES

A (1) C (♭3) D (4) E (5) G (♭7)

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

R **Root / tonic**
Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT
Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

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A minor blues

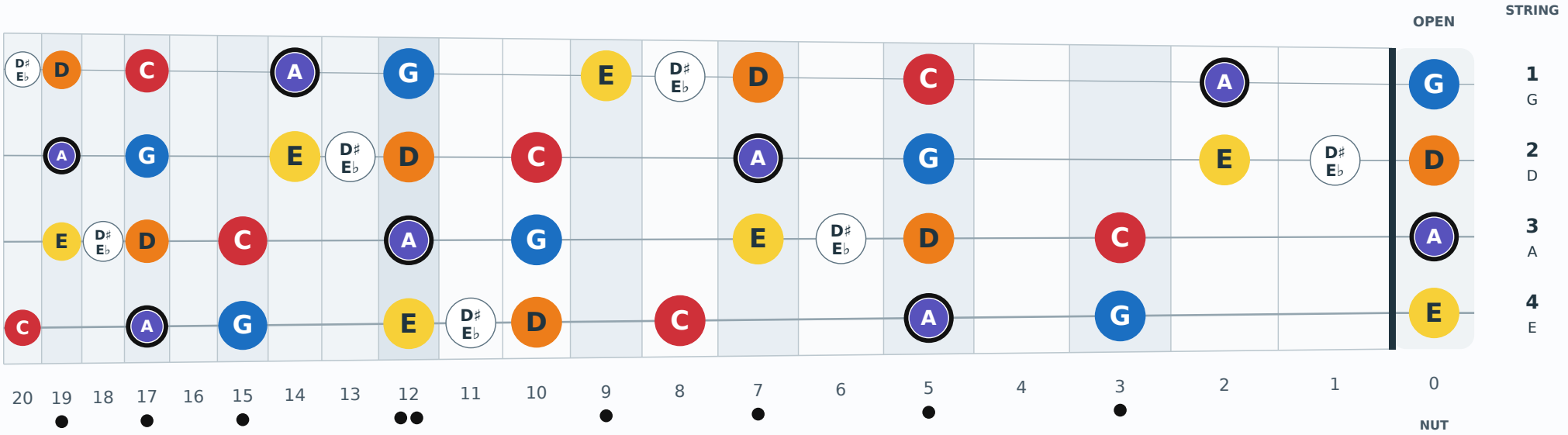
Minor pentatonic plus the blue note

FORMULA 1 ♭3 4 ♭5 5 ♭7

STANDARD TUNING

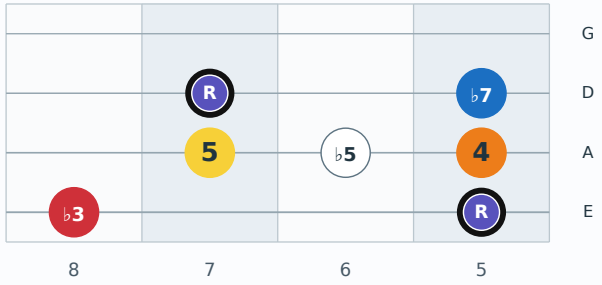
E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest



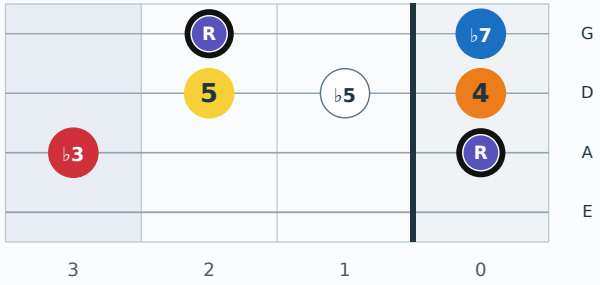
Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 5 (A)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 0 (A)



Use the blue note as a passing tone

Use ♭5 between 4 and 5. Hear the tension and resolve to a chord tone.

Avoid holding ♭5 as a resting note out of habit.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

SCALE NOTES + DEGREES

A (1) · C (♭3) · D (4) · E♭ (♭5) · E (5) · G (♭7)

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

Root / tonic

Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT

Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

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C major

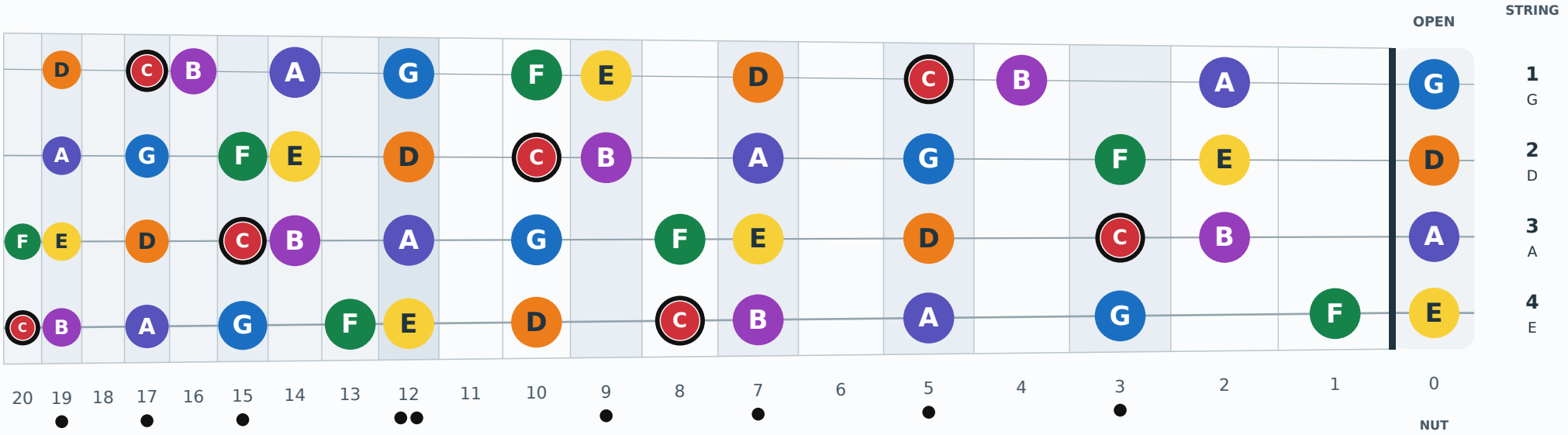
Seven-note major scale

FORMULA 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

STANDARD TUNING

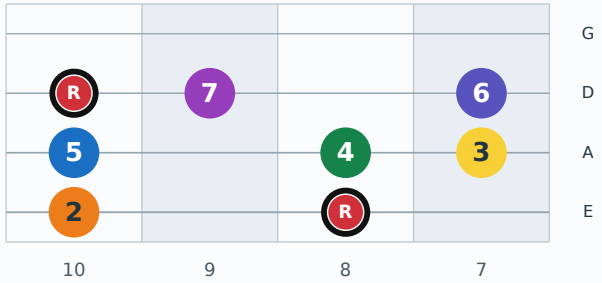
E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest



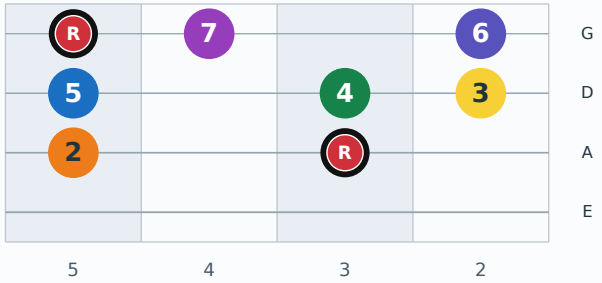
Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 8 (C)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 3 (C)



Bring out the major chord

Target 1, 3, and 5. Connect them with nearby scale notes and return to the tonic.

Compare this sound with the relative minor on the next page.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

SCALE NOTES + DEGREES

C 1 · D 2 · E 3 · F 4 · G 5 · A 6 · B 7

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

Root / tonic

Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT

Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

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A natural minor

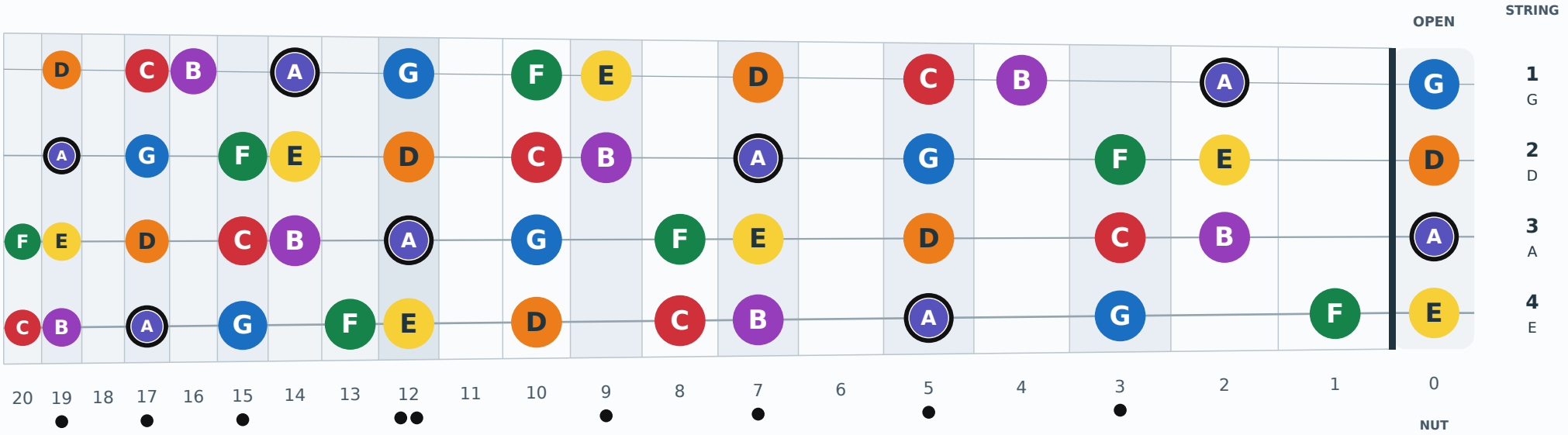
Seven-note natural minor scale

FORMULA 1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7

STANDARD TUNING

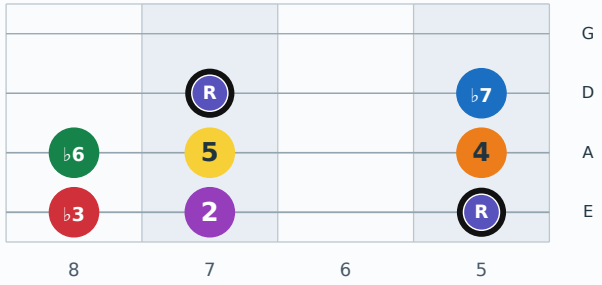
E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest



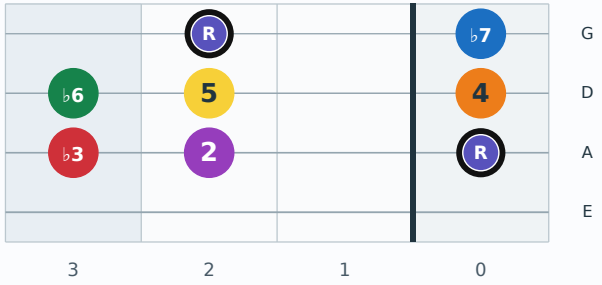
Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 5 (A)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 0 (A)



Hear the minor chord

Target 1, ♭3, and 5. Listen to ♭6 and ♭7 before adding them to a line.

The previous major scale has the same notes, with a different tonal center.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

SCALE NOTES + DEGREES

A (1) B (2) C (♭3) D (4) E (5) F (♭6) G (♭7)

Root / tonic

Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT

Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

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D minor pentatonic

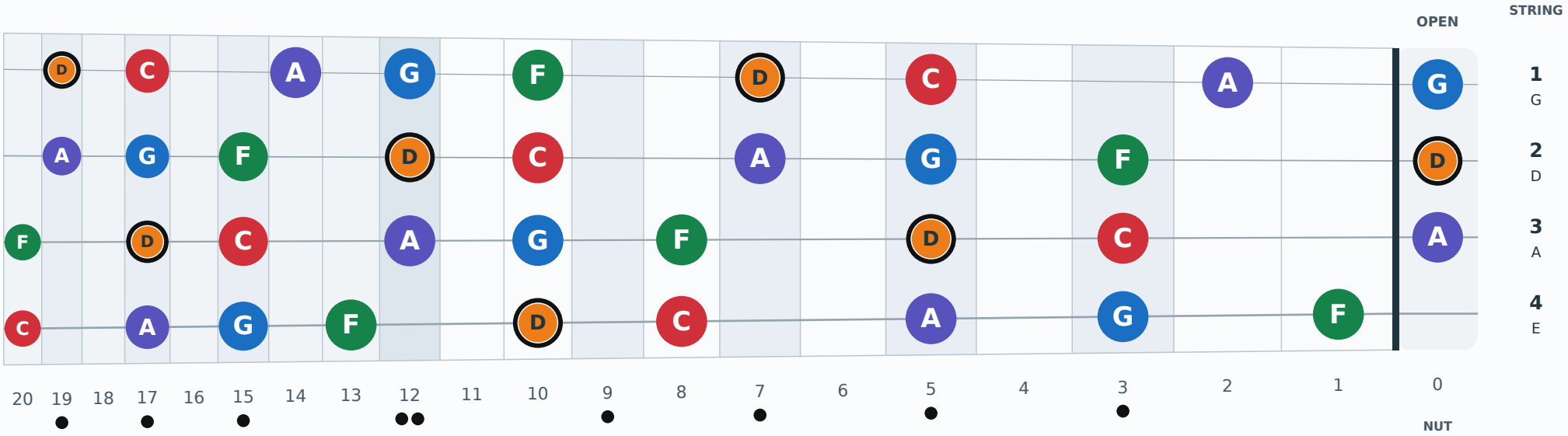
Five-note minor pentatonic scale

FORMULA 1 ♭3 4 5 ♭7

STANDARD TUNING

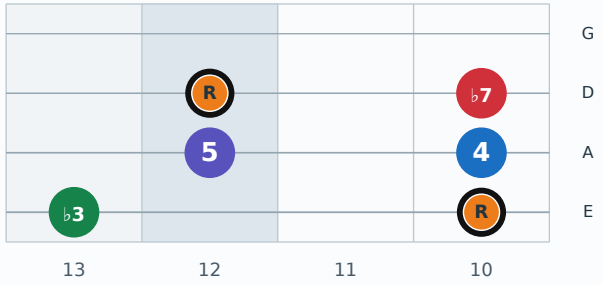
E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest



Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 10 (D)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 5 (D)



Create phrases in D minor

Use D, F, G, A, and C. Make short phrases and return to D over Dm.

At 105 bpm, follow the kick drum and the roots at each chord change.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

SCALE NOTES + DEGREES

D (1) · F (♭3) · G (4) · A (5) · C (♭7)

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

Root / tonic

Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT

Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

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D natural minor

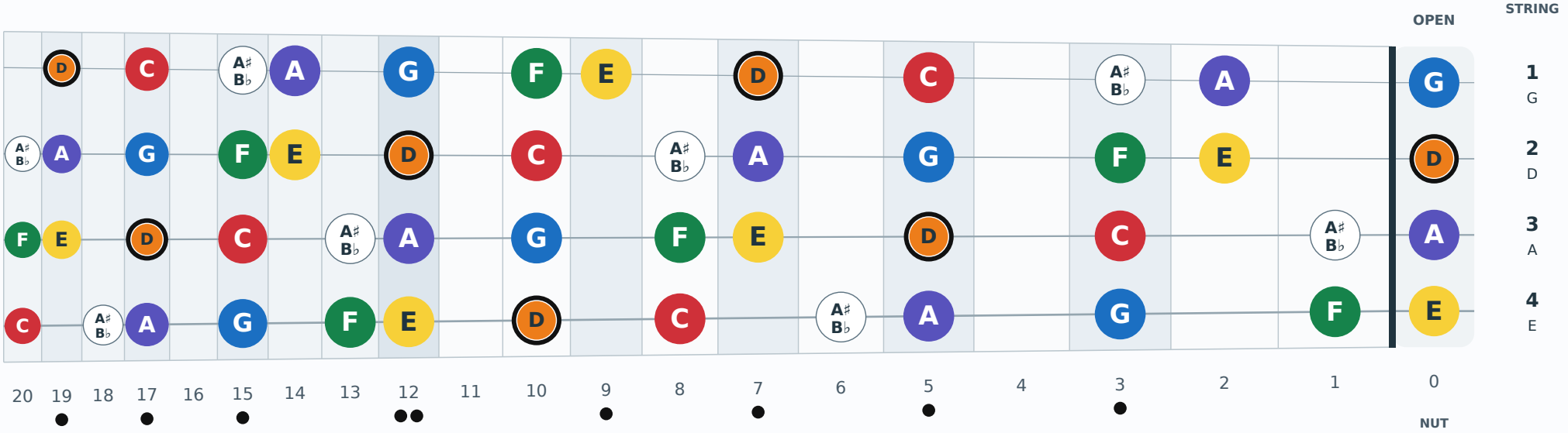
Seven-note natural minor scale

FORMULA 1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7

STANDARD TUNING

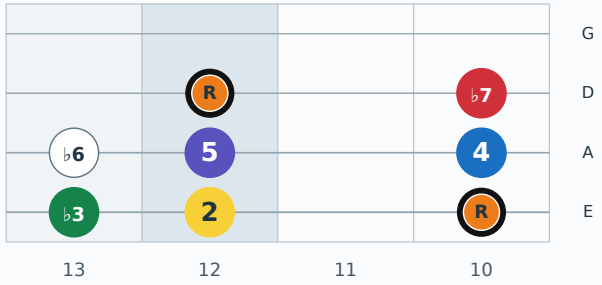
E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest



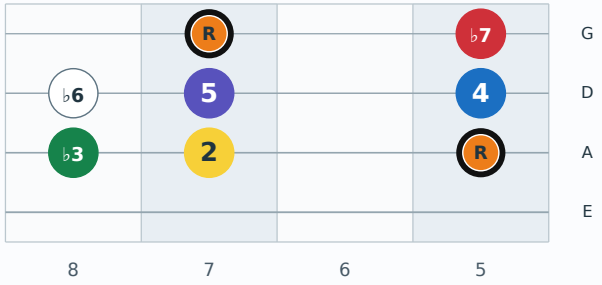
Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 10 (D)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 5 (D)



Expand the pentatonic

Add E (2) and B♭ (♭6) to the pentatonic on p. 13. Listen to each note against the chords.

Compare both scales. Target D, F, and A over Dm and follow the progression.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

SCALE NOTES + DEGREES

D (1) · E (2) · F (♭3) · G (4) · A (5) · B♭ (♭6) · C (♭7)

Root / tonic

Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT

Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

Tukany / Lucas Marques / CC BY 4.0

C major pentatonic

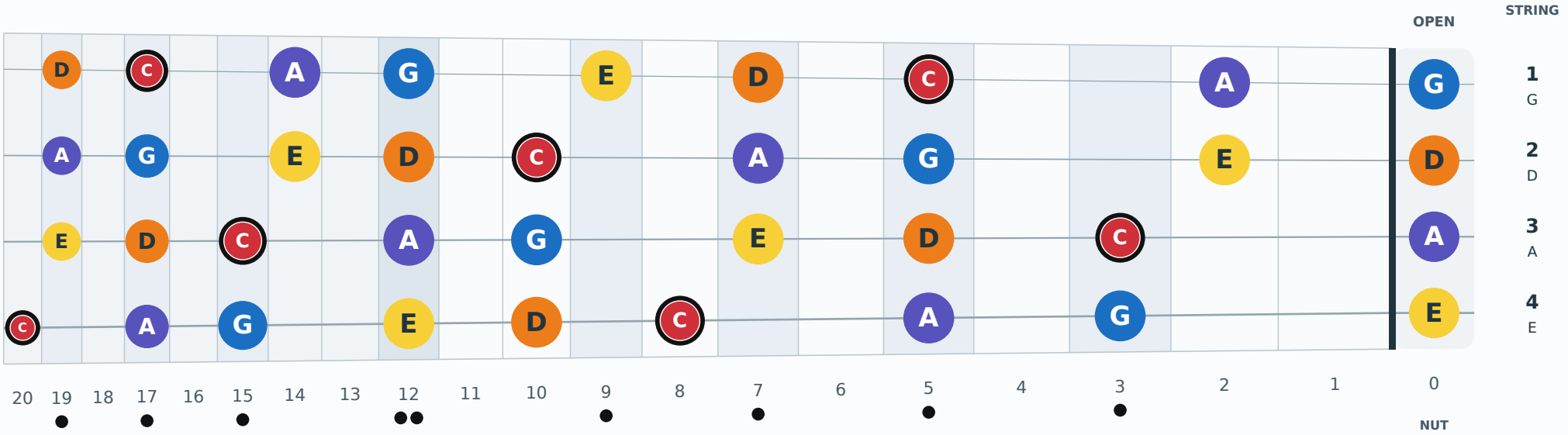
Five-note major pentatonic scale

FORMULA 1 2 3 5 6

STANDARD TUNING

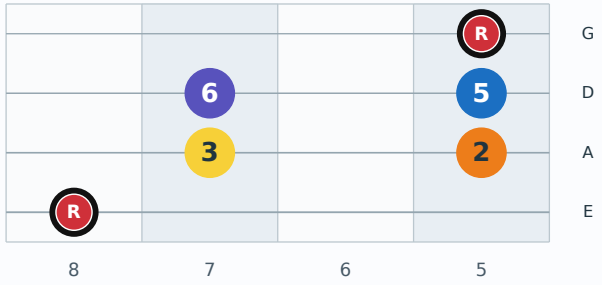
E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest



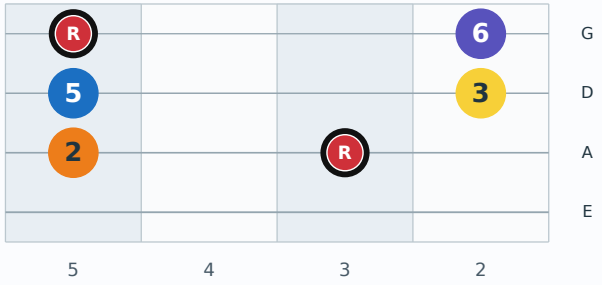
Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 8 (C)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 3 (C)



Hear a major tonal center

Use C, D, E, G, and A in C major. Bring out C, E, and G over C.

Compare with A minor pentatonic on p. 9: the same notes, a different center.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

SCALE NOTES + DEGREES

C (1) D (2) E (3) G (5) A (6)

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

Root / tonic

Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT

Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

Tukany / Lucas Marques / CC BY 4.0

D harmonic minor

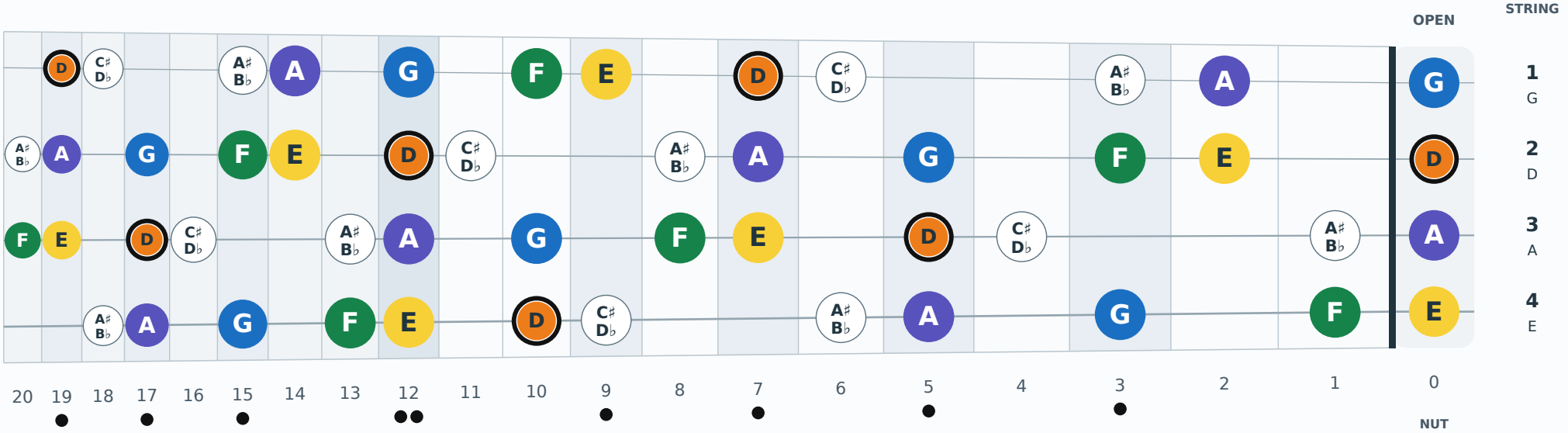
Minor scale with a raised seventh

FORMULA 1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 7

STANDARD TUNING

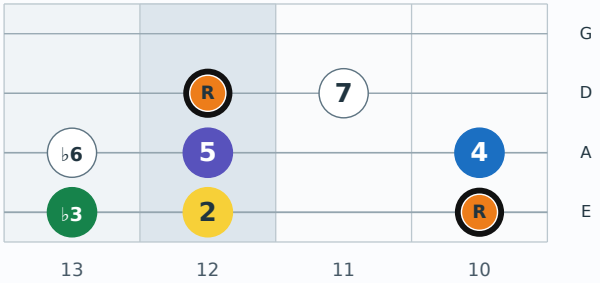
E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest



Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 10 (D)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 5 (D)



Hear the leading tone C♯

D harmonic minor replaces C with C♯. Play C♯ resolving to D.

Try it over A or A7 resolving to Dm. Compare natural minor on p. 14.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

SCALE NOTES + DEGREES

D	E	F	G	A	B♭	C♯
1	2	♭3	4	5	♭6	7

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

Root / tonic

Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT

Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

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D minor blues

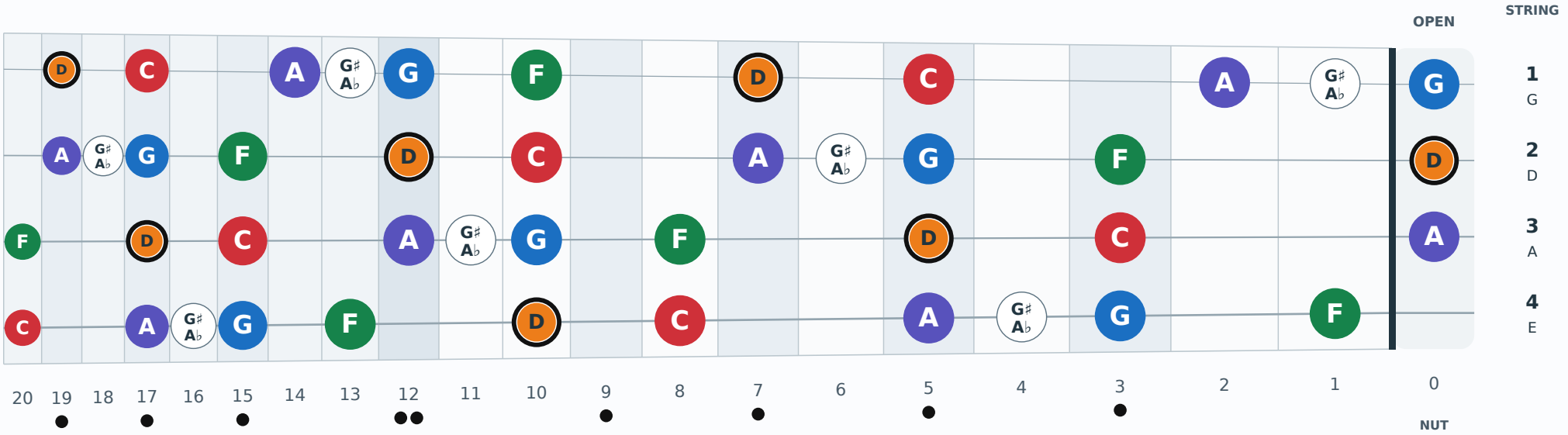
Minor pentatonic plus the blue note

FORMULA 1 ♭3 4 ♭5 5 ♭7

STANDARD TUNING

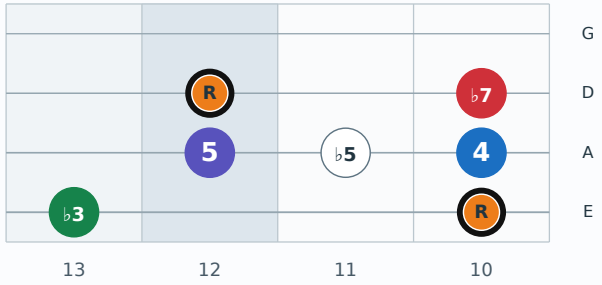
E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest



Root on the E string

Start: E string, fret 10 (D)



Root on the A string

Start: A string, fret 5 (D)



Use the blue note

Add A♭ (♭5) to the pentatonic on p. 13. Use G - A♭ - A as a passing figure.

Pass through A♭ and resolve to a chord tone. End the phrase clearly.

Small diagrams: one octave in degree order.

SCALE NOTES + DEGREES

D (1) · F (♭3) · G (4) · A♭ (♭5) · A (5) · C (♭7)

One fret = one half step · 12 frets = one octave.

Root / tonic

Black ring; R on small diagrams.

NUT ON THE RIGHT

Frets increase to the left. Degrees are not fingers.

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Put the scales to work

Choose notes by listening to the chords, rhythm, and points of rest.

SCALE / PAGE	NOTES	HOW TO TRY IT
D minor pentatonic Page 13	D - F - G - A - C	Create riffs and short phrases. Target D, F, and A over Dm.
D natural minor Page 14	D - E - F - G - A - B♭ - C	Add E and B♭. Follow the chord tones of each chord.
C major pentatonic Page 15	C - D - E - G - A	Use C as a point of rest in C major. Bring out C, E, and G over C.
D harmonic minor Page 16	D - E - F - G - A - B♭ - C♯	Over A or A7 resolving to Dm, hear C♯ move to D. Compare p. 14.
D minor blues Page 17	D - F - G - A♭ - A - C	Pass through A♭ between G and A. Resolve to a chord tone.

TRY IT AT 105 BPM / 4/4 TIME

Over Dm: D - A - D (octave) - A, one note per beat. Add a short scale passage. When the chord changes, follow its root. Prioritize pulse, note length, and muting.

Reference: chord tones in bass lines

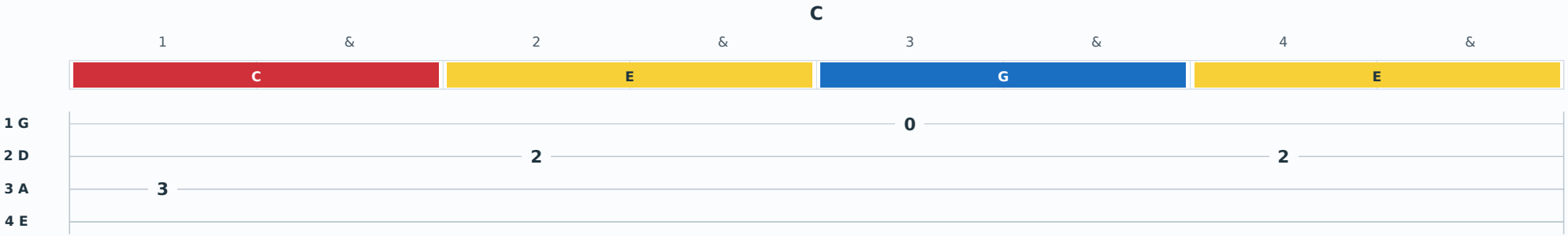
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From TAB to improvisation

Applied theory for experienced TAB players who want to create their own phrases.

You already know how to learn songs from tablature. Now connect what you play to the notes you hear and choose what comes next. You do not need to memorize every scale. Use the maps when a musical question comes up.

PLAY THIS PHRASE OVER C / ONE NOTE PER BEAT



Bars show note length; white gaps are rests. Numbers on the strings are frets.

LOOK BEYOND THE FRET NUMBERS

The notes are C - E - G - E. Over C, their roles are 1 - 3 - 5 - 3: root, major third, and perfect fifth. These are the notes of a C major chord.

MAKE ONE SMALL CHOICE

Repeat twice. Keep the notes and change only the rhythm. On the fourth pass, try a different note order and end on C. Listen to the effect of each change.

YOUR LEARNING PATH

1. Read the TAB. 2. Name the notes and degrees. 3. Change one choice. 4. Cover the TAB and play an answer. The six practice lessons begin on p. 27.

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Notes, intervals, and degrees

Applied theory for experienced TAB players who want to create their own phrases.

E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest

NOTES NAME PITCHES; INTERVALS MEASURE DISTANCE

The natural notes are A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. On one string, one fret is a half step; two frets make a whole step. After 12 half steps, the letter name repeats one octave higher.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
C	C♯ / D♭	D	D♯ / E♭	E	F	F♯ / G♭	G	G♯ / A♭	A	A♯ / B♭	B	C

Read this pitch chart from left to right: each step rises by a half step. E-F and B-C are already neighbors. A sharp (♯) raises a note a half step; a flat (♭) lowers it. Each paired name shares one fret.

A DEGREE DESCRIBES A NOTE RELATIVE TO A REFERENCE

1 / root	C → C	0 half steps
3 / major third	C → E	4 half steps
♭3 / minor third	C → E♭	3 half steps
5 / perfect fifth	C → G	7 half steps
8 / octave	C → higher C	12 half steps

Play C - E - G and say 1 - 3 - 5. Replace E with E♭: you get 1 - ♭3 - 5, the sound of C minor. Count frets on one string to check the distances.

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Scales, chords, and target notes

Applied theory for experienced TAB players who want to create their own phrases.

SCALE: AN ORGANIZED COLLECTION OF NOTES

C major: C - D - E - F - G - A - B

C (1) D (2) E (3) F (4) G (5) A (6) B (7)

The major scale has degrees 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7. Its steps are whole, whole, half, whole, whole, whole, half. Starting on C gives the seven notes above.

CHORD: NOTES THAT DEFINE THE HARMONY

A triad has a root, third, and fifth. Major: 1 - 3 - 5. Minor: 1 - ♭3 - 5. Diminished: 1 - ♭3 - ♭5. Playing chord tones one at a time makes an arpeggio.

In C major, take every other scale note: C, E, G. Repeat from each scale degree to get the diatonic chords shown below.

DIATONIC CHORDS IN C MAJOR / TRIADS

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
C	**Dm**	**Em**	**F**	**G**	**Am**	**B°**
C E G	D F A	E G B	F A C	G B D	A C E	B D F

In chord symbols, m means minor; a plain letter means major; ° means diminished. Uppercase Roman numerals indicate major chords and lowercase numerals indicate minor chords within a key. A chord's 1, 3, and 5 are measured from that chord's own root.

ONE SCALE, DIFFERENT TARGET NOTES

C - F - Dm - G shares the notes of C major. Try to play the root at each change, then add a fifth or third. F is degree 4 of C major, but the root of an F chord. A note's role depends on the reference.

Reference: diatonic chords

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Tuning, key, and chord

Applied theory for experienced TAB players who want to create their own phrases.

E - A - D - G

lowest-pitched string to highest

TUNING

The pitches of the open strings. It determines where notes lie on the neck.

KEY / TONALITY

The musical organization around a tonic: the tonal center or point of rest.

CURRENT CHORD

The harmony at this moment. Its root may differ from the tonic.

APPLY IT TO YOUR INSTRUMENT

Your bass uses E1 - A1 - D2 - G2. Every adjacent pair is a perfect fourth. The lowest open string does not determine the key of the track. The same four strings can play in any key.

A LISTENING EXPERIMENT

Play C - D - E - F - G - A - B. Listen to a track in C, then one in Am. Use the same notes, but end on C over the first and A over the second. Compare the feeling of rest.

EXAMPLE: C - Am - F - G

If the music resolves to C and uses these diatonic chords, the tonal center is C major. When Am arrives, the chord changes; a new scale is not required. Target A, C, and E over Am.

The first chord in a video does not prove its key. Check the key label, the chords, and where the music feels at rest. Relative major and minor share notes but have different tonal centers.

KEEP THESE IDEAS SEPARATE

Tuning locates pitches. Key establishes a center. The current chord guides your targets. Read chord symbols as sounding pitches unless transposition is explicitly stated.

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Which scale fits the backing track?

Applied theory for experienced TAB players who want to create their own phrases.

First check the key, whether it is major or minor, and the chord symbols. Use a small area of the neck. These choices are starting points for compatible harmony; a video title alone does not establish that.

MAJOR-KEY TRACK	Start with the major pentatonic on the tonic (1, 2, 3, 5, 6). Add 4 and 7 for the major scale. Example: G major = G A B C D E F♯.
MINOR-KEY TRACK	Start with the minor pentatonic on the tonic (1, ♭3, 4, 5, ♭7). Add 2 and ♭6 for natural minor. Example: E minor = E F♯ G A B C D.
CHORDS SHARE A SCALE	Keep the note collection and change your targets with the chord. Example: Em - C - Am - Bm fits E natural minor. Aim for the tones of each triad.
A NOTE OUTSIDE THE SCALE?	In Em - C - Am - B7, the symbol 7 adds a minor seventh: B7 = B D♯ F♯ A. Target D♯ over B7 and hear D♯ resolve to E. E harmonic minor includes this raised seventh.

IF YOU ARE STILL UNSURE

Play a few chord tones and listen. Resolve a tense scale note to a chord tone; do not assume each chord needs a new scale. Modal tracks and blues need choices that reflect their particular harmony.

Reference: harmonic minor

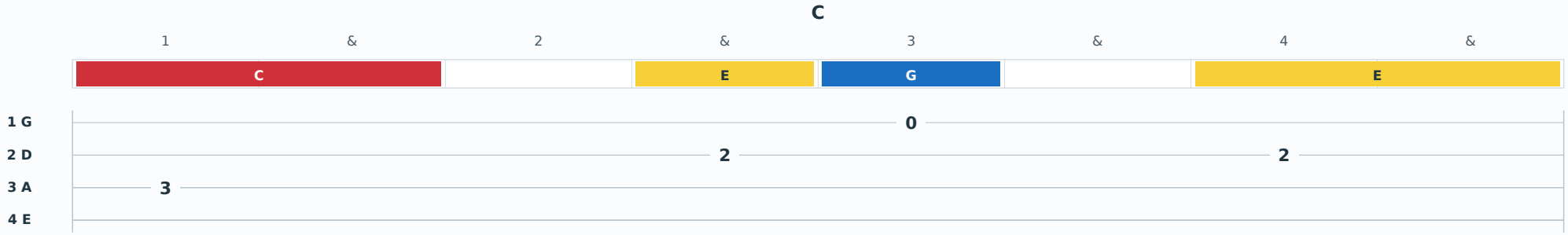
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Turn a written phrase into improvisation

Applied theory for experienced TAB players who want to create their own phrases.

Use a track with only C. Gradually remove the written cues. Repeat each level for four measures before moving on. Start with the phrase from Study 1.

LEVEL 1 / SAME NOTES, DIFFERENT RHYTHM



Bars show note length; white gaps are rests. Numbers on the strings are frets.

LEVEL 2 / NO FRET NUMBERS

Cover the TAB. Use C - E - G - E (1 - 3 - 5 - 3). Choose your strings and frets. Keep the rhythm you just played; use only the note names as cues.

LEVEL 3 / JUST A CHORD AND A TARGET

Look only at the C chord symbol. Your task: start each measure on C, fill in with E or G, and leave room to breathe. There is no required note sequence.

LEVEL 4 / CREATE AND ANSWER

Cover the note names, too. Sing an idea, play it, repeat it, and answer with a small change. Record eight measures. Identify your note choices and explain why the ending feels settled.

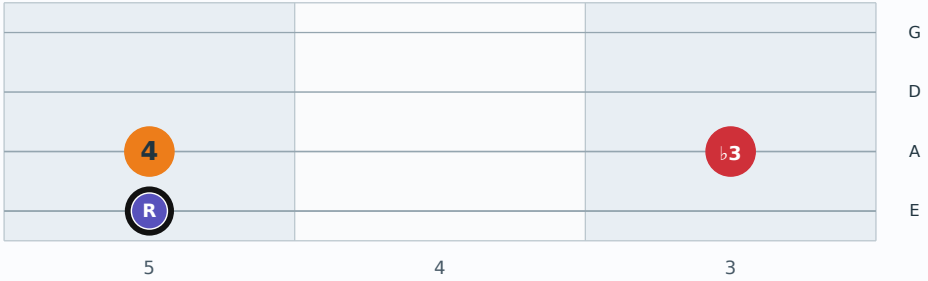
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Connect areas of the fretboard

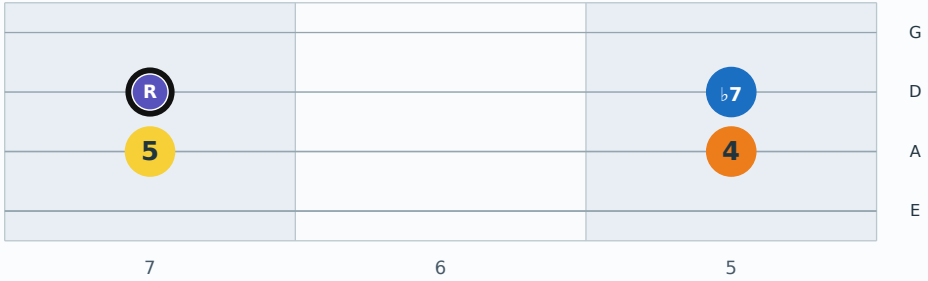
Applied theory for experienced TAB players who want to create their own phrases.

A pattern locates notes; changing areas does not change the scale. Play one octave of A minor pentatonic: A - C - D - E - G - A (1 - ♭3 - 4 - 5 - ♭7 - 8).

AREA 1 / A - C - D



AREA 2 / D - E - G - A



Areas 3-5 and 5-7 share D on string 3, fret 5. Use D as a connection point. These are fragments of one scale, not different scales. All notes here are fretted, so you can transpose the complete route.

FIND THE SAME NOTE SOMEWHERE ELSE

C2 can sound on string 3, fret 3, or string 4, fret 8: the same note in the same octave. Find both and compare. You can change the fingering without changing the phrase.

TURN THE SCALE INTO A PHRASE

Play the route upward once. Then use only three notes, repeat a motif, and leave rests. Connect the areas without interrupting the pulse. On the neck maps, higher frets are toward the left.

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Practice without relying on TAB

Applied theory for experienced TAB players who want to create their own phrases.

A 20-MINUTE PRACTICE SESSION

3 min Listen to the loop, name the chords, and locate their roots.

5 min Play a written phrase; name its notes and degrees.

5 min Cover the TAB, change the rhythm or ending, and repeat your version.

5 min Play eight measures using only the chord symbols.

2 min Listen to your recording and choose one thing to improve.

WHEN YOU GET STUCK, SIMPLIFY THE TASK

It sounds like a scale exercise	Use three notes. Repeat a rhythm and change only the ending.
I lose the chord changes	Say the chords and play only the root at each change.
The notes do not seem to fit	Check tuning, key, and chords. Use only the current triad.
I know the shape, not the notes	Name one note at a time and sing before playing.
I need the TAB to keep playing	Keep the rhythm and remove the fret numbers first.

Ready to move on: play eight measures with a steady pulse, follow the changes, repeat an idea, and vary it. Then explain one target note. Begin the six practice lessons on p. 27.

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Set up a backing track

Improvisation practice for experienced TAB players · examples in different keys

1 / Choose a simple backing track

Look for a track without bass (no bass / bassless). Start in C major with just a C chord. Check the chords in the description and choose a comfortable tempo, such as 70 bpm.

Find a C major backing track on YouTube

The QR code opens search results. Confirm the key and chords in the track you choose.

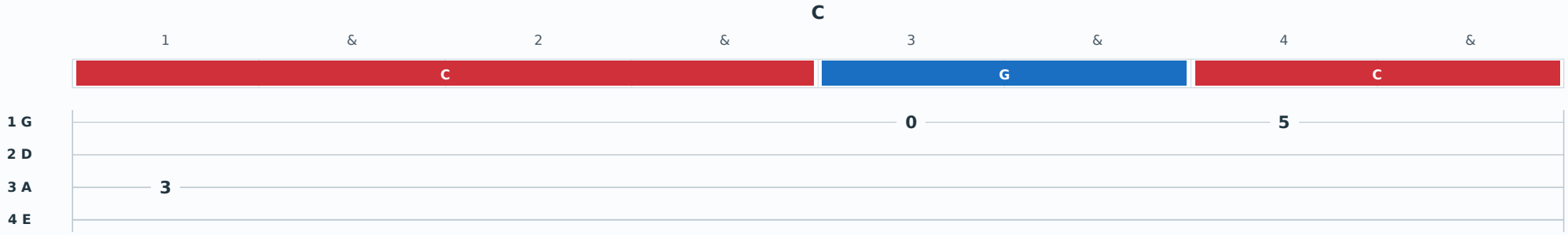
2 / Listen, count, and find C

Listen to two loops before playing. In 4/4, count 1, 2, 3, 4. Locate the beginning of each measure and keep counting through the rests.

3 / Use the sounding pitch

C is on string 3 (A), fret 3. Tuning does not determine the key of the music. Every position below uses standard tuning. TAB reads left to right, even in a left-handed guide.

YOUR FIRST MEASURE / KEEP COUNTING



Bars show note length; white gaps are rests. Numbers on the strings are frets.

YOUR TASK

Repeat for four measures. Make two new rhythms with the same notes. If the tempo is difficult, slow down the YouTube player and reestablish your count.

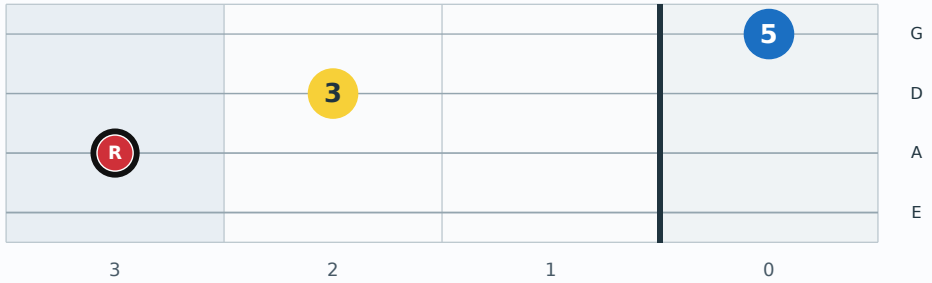
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Choose notes that fit

Improvisation practice for experienced TAB players · examples in different keys

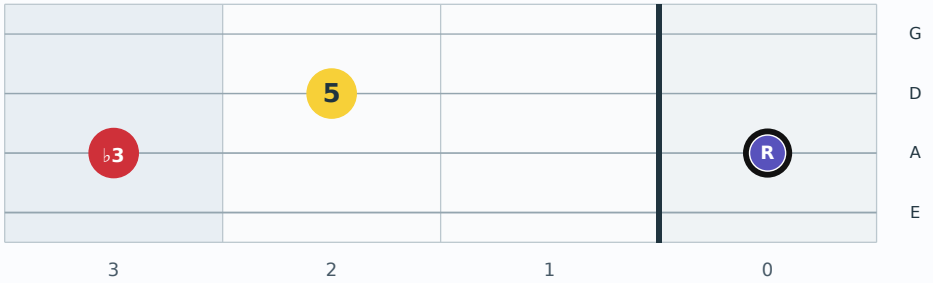
C / C major

C - E - G



Am / A minor

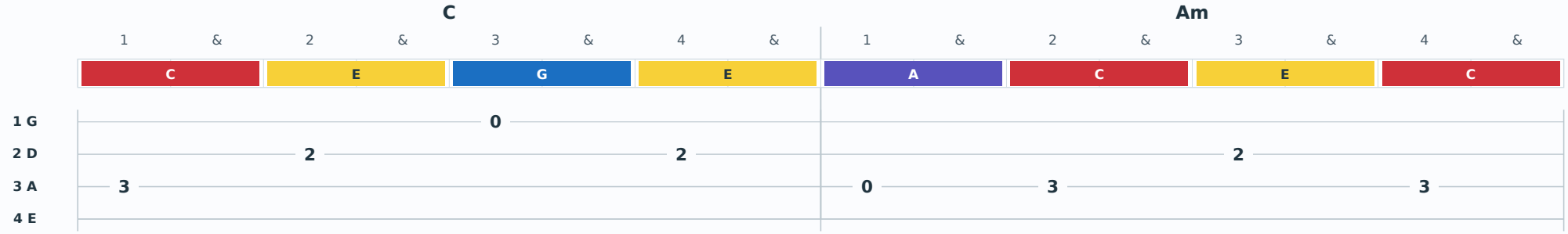
A - C - E



R = root; 3 = major third; ♭3 = minor third; 5 = perfect fifth.

C major and A natural minor share seven notes: C - D - E - F - G - A - B. Change your target notes with each chord.

TWO CHORDS / ONE MEASURE EACH



Bars show note length; white gaps are rests. Numbers on the strings are frets.

Start with C and A at the beginning of the measures. Then add thirds and fifths while keeping unused strings muted.

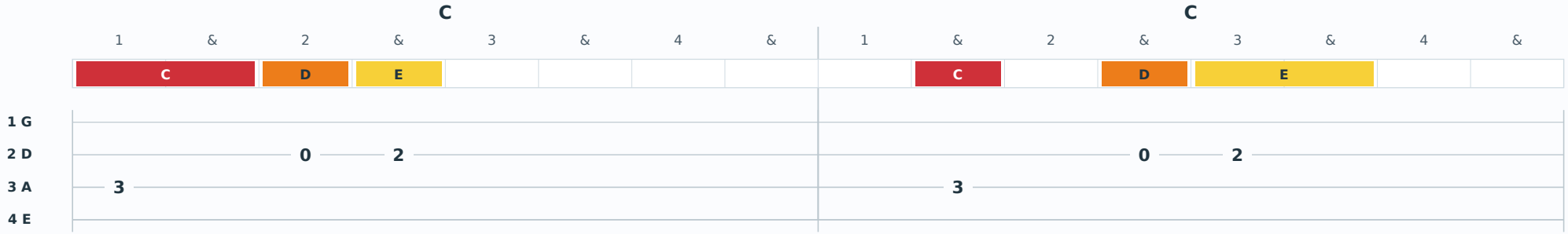
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Create phrases with rhythm and rests

Improvisation practice for experienced TAB players · examples in different keys

Over C, use only C, D, and E. Both measures keep the note order and change the rhythm. Count eighth notes as 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and.

SAME THREE NOTES / TWO DIFFERENT PHRASES



Bars show note length; white gaps are rests. Numbers on the strings are frets.

REPEAT AN IDEA AND CHANGE ONE DETAIL

Play the first measure twice. On the third pass, use the second rhythm. Then create a variation: a different rest, a longer note, or an accent.

RESTS HAVE DURATION, TOO

In the first measure, rest on beats 3 and 4. In the second, wait half a beat before starting and stop on beat 4. Keep counting and mute the strings when each note ends.

CALL AND RESPONSE

Make a two-beat phrase and leave two beats of space. On the next pass, answer with a small variation. Repeat for four passes and resist filling every rest.

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Marques & Co.

Follow the chord changes

Improvisation practice for experienced TAB players · examples in different keys

A practice progression in G major: G - D - Em - C. Each chord lasts one measure in 4/4. Use G - A - B - C - D - E - F♯ and adjust your targets to the current chord.

G

G - B - D

D

D - F♯ - A

Em

E - G - B

C

C - E - G

FOLLOW THE FORM / FOUR MEASURES



Bars show note length; white gaps are rests. Numbers on the strings are frets.

FIRST PASS: RECOGNIZE THE CHANGES

Count four beats per chord. Play G, D, E, and C as their measures begin. Say the next chord before the change and hear the loop return to its start.

NEXT: MAKE YOUR OWN VERSION

The TAB uses roots, fifths, and octaves. On the next pass, add a third from the chord boxes. Keep the groove and make a small fill in the last measure.

Find G - D - Em - C with displayed chords

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Play what you can sing

Improvisation practice for experienced TAB players · examples in different keys

1 / Give your ear a reference

Play C, let it ring, and sing the same note in a comfortable octave. Then sing your own three-note phrase.

2 / Find the phrase you sang

Find the first note, then search slowly for the next ones. Start on one string. Compare each attempt with the phrase you sang.

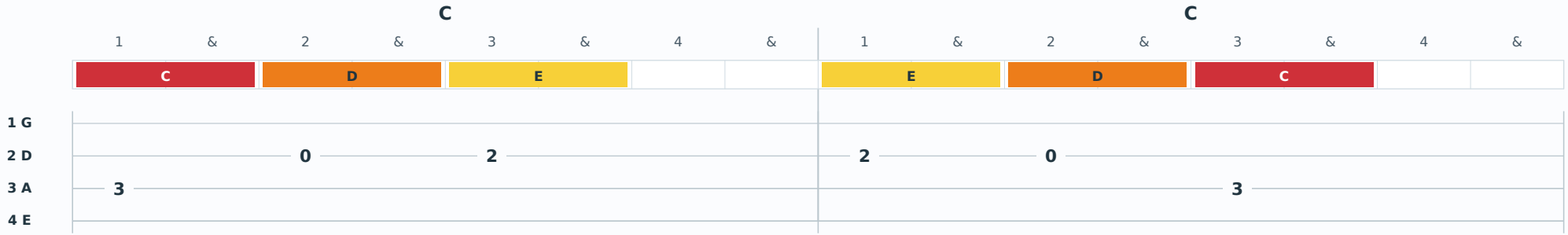
3 / Check after you try

Cover the TAB below. Sing C - D - E and find the notes. Then answer E - D - C. Find the pitches first, then add the rhythm.

4 / Listen within the track

Listen to one loop without playing. Sing the roots at the chord changes and find them on the neck. Check against a track that displays its chords.

CHECK YOUR ANSWER / REST ON BEAT 4



Bars show note length; white gaps are rests. Numbers on the strings are frets.

Record your voice and your attempt on the instrument. Do the notes match what you sang? Choose a short section, correct it, and repeat. Then invent another answer.

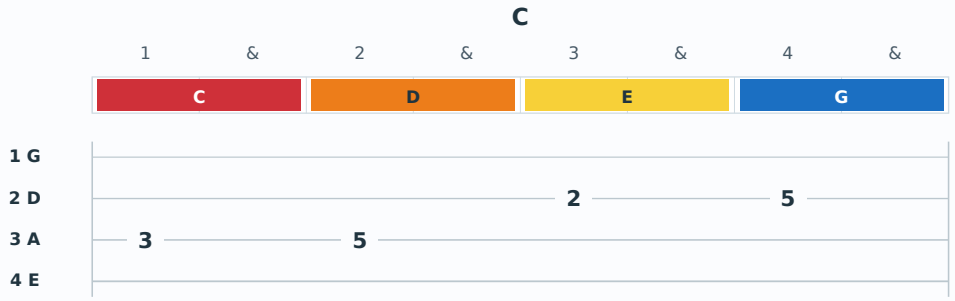
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Transpose and review your progress

Improvisation practice for experienced TAB players · examples in different keys

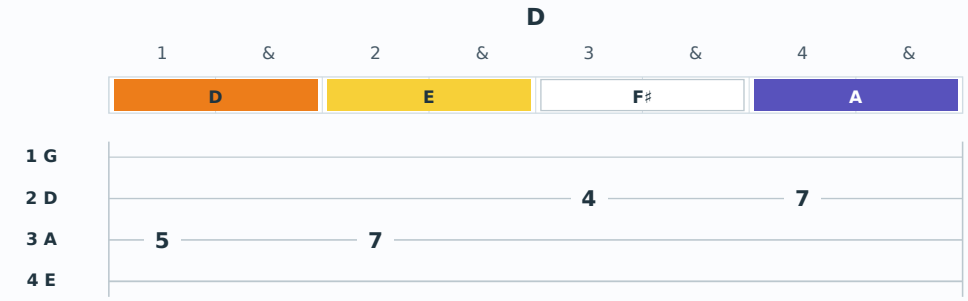
Separate examples: play the original motif over C major and the second over D major. The intervals stay the same because every fretted note moves up two frets.

ORIGINAL / C - D - E - G



Bars show note length; white gaps are rests. Numbers on the strings are frets.

TWO FRETS HIGHER / D - E - F♯ - A



Bars show note length; white gaps are rests. Numbers on the strings are frets.

All notes here are fretted: keep the same strings and add 2 to each fret number. On these left-handed neck maps that means moving left; TAB itself still reads left to right. Open strings need a new fingering when transposed.

RECORD 30 SECONDS AND LISTEN WITH A PURPOSE

- [ ] Did I keep the pulse?
- [ ] Did I leave space and listen?
- [ ] Did I follow the changes?
- [ ] Was the sound clean and controlled?

Track / key: _____ Section: _____ Next improvement: _____

SOURCES: **Chord tones** **Rhythm and note choice** **Ear and patterns** **YouTube playback speed**

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