



ETAL

JIM

SCALE
IT!!!

**Using scales to
build your guitar
chops!!!**



SCALE IT!!!

Using scales to build your guitar chops!

by

James “Metal Jim” Donahue



2025

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About the author

James “Metal Jim” Donahue is a guitarist hailing from Massachusetts. Having played guitar since the age of thirteen, he has studied music independently, played and toured in musical acts, and has taught for over fifteen years.



Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my parents, Frank and Dellis Donahue for letting me enjoy the gift of learning and playing guitar.

Great thanks to my original guitar teacher, Andy Frazier. Thank you for your great patience and for teaching me how to play guitar. Inspiring me to play more than just power chords. Very happy to call you my teacher and friend!

To all the guitarists and musicians who have and still inspire me to play. Randy Rhoads, Yngwie Malmsteen, Dimebag Darrell, Steve Vai, Eddie Van Halen, Joe Satriani, Richie Blackmore, Zakk Wylde...too many to name!

Thank you to all the players that I have played with. From bands, acts, and others that I have shared the stage and rehearsal rooms with.

And to all the other teachers I have taken lessons from, to all the players I have asked for advice and expertise, and to all for giving me and sharing their knowledge. You have all made me a better player!

YOU ROCK!!!

Foreword

scales...Scales...SCALES!!!

Scales are essential in guitar playing. They help you connect the dots to make your music sound better when you are playing over a chord progression, they help you build up your technique, they help you understand playing further, and they are just fun!

We can noodle away on the chromatic scale for an endless amount of time, but when was the last time you heard a chromatic scale in a solo? Don't get me wrong, the chromatic scale is a great exercise to help you build up your guitar playing, but playing scales helps you further.

With this book, I have created a series of exercises that will not only help you remember what shapes to play the scales, but also great techniques to help build up your chops. We have three sets of scales: pentatonic, diatonic, and 3-note per string scales. As I tell all my students, start slow and build up speed, precision, and accuracy with a metronome. But also take the time to look at the exercises that I have made so you can remember the note arrangements, and also look for patterns.

Practice the scales and exercises slowly, and pay attention to the shapes, patterns, and note coordination so you can remember them.

Thank you for choosing this book, and have a great time!

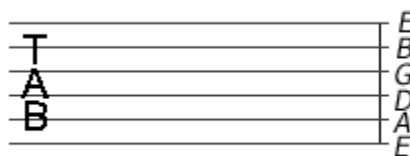
~James "Metal Jim" Donahue



Guide

How to read and understand guitar tablature.

Guitar tablature is the simplest form of how to read music or exercises on the guitar. The first line, the top line, is high E, and the bottom line is low E. The order of the strings on the guitar tablature is as follows:



If you pick up your guitar and place it in front of you like you were going to play it, rest it on your lap. If you are a right-handed player, make sure the headstock is pointed to the left, and if you are a left-handed player, make sure your headstock is pointed to the right. Look at the guitar on your lap; that is how guitar tablature is written. It will show what string or strings and what fret or frets you will play.

Above each of the guitar tabs are circled numbers that represent which fretting fingers you would be using:

① = use your 1st fretting finger

② = use your 2nd fretting finger

③ = use your 3rd fretting finger

④ = use your 4th fretting finger

Also, above each of the guitar tabs are marked:

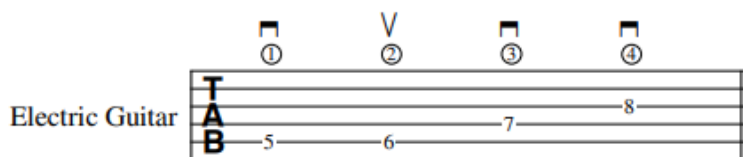
▮ = Downstroke

∨ = Upstroke

The downstroke means that you will pick the note of the string down.

The upstroke means that you will pick the note of the string up.

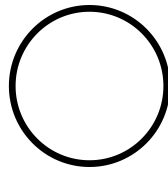
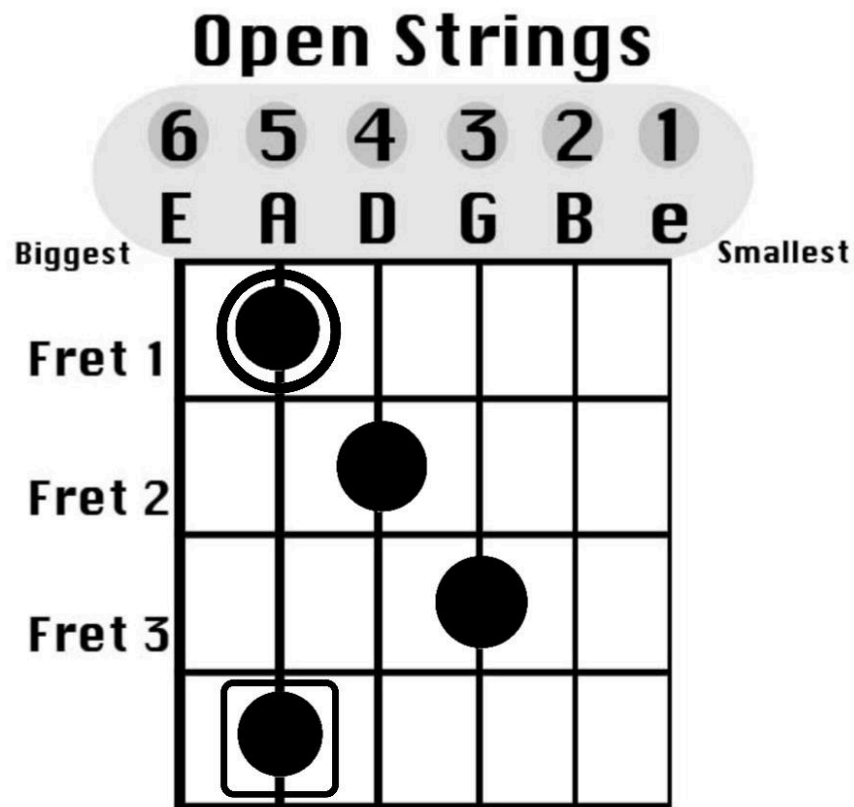
And the number or numbers on each string or strings means which fret or frets you will be fretting to pick.



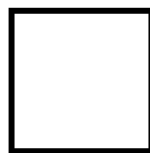
Guitar Shape Chart

I have also included guitar shape charts, which show the notes of the scales you will play. They are simple to understand and play.

Each shape will have black dots that will mean which notes you play, and there will also be a circle and a square that represent the root note. A circle represents minor and a square represents major.



= Minor



= Major

Warming Up

When you pick up your guitar, you should start with some exercises that help warm up your fingers. Instead of going off and playing fast and all over the place, start with a series of notes at a slow pace that are in the same position. From there, build up speed and move around when you are feeling more comfortable and confident.

Warm-Up Exercise 1 below is a great exercise where you start on the 5th position on the low E string and make your way to the other strings. You are utilizing all your fingers in different ways. When you are playing the frets of 5, 7, and 8, you can use your 1st, 3rd, and 4th fingers. When you are playing the frets of 7, 8, and 10, you can use your 1st, 2nd, and 4th fingers.

Warm Up Exercise 1

Warm Up Exercise 1

Electric Guitar

① ③ ④ ③

④ ② ① ②

3

El. Guit.

The image shows two staves of musical notation for an electric guitar exercise. The first staff is labeled 'Electric Guitar' and has a treble clef. It shows a sequence of notes on the low E string (5, 7, 8, 7) and then moving to the A, D, and G strings. The notation includes fingerings (① ③ ④ ③ and ④ ② ① ②) and a triplet marking (3). The second staff is labeled 'El. Guit.' and has a treble clef. It shows a sequence of notes on the high E string (10, 8, 7, 8) and then moving to the B, A, and D strings. The notation includes fingerings (① ③ ④ ③ and ④ ② ① ②) and a triplet marking (3).



"I never took lessons to play the drums. I never took lessons to play the guitar. I just sort of figured it out. I think that if you're passionate about something and you're driven and you're focused, you can do anything you want in life."

~Dave Grohl

Warm Up Exercise 2

[illegible]

2

El. Guit.

T 7-9-10-7-9-10 7-9-10-7-9-10 7-9-10-7-9-10

A 7-9-10-7-9-10 7-9-10-7-9-10 7-9-10-7-9-10

B

3 ④ ② ①

El. Guit. T 12 10-9 12 10-9
A 12 10-9 12 10-9
B 12 10-9 12 10-9 12 10-9 12 10-9 9 10 12-9 10 12-9 10 12

4


El. Guit.

T 9-10-12-9-10-12

A 9-10-12-9-10-12

B 9-10-12

5 ④②①

El. Guit. 
T 14 12 10 14 12 10
A 14 12 10 14 12 10 14 12 10 14 12 10
B 14 12 10 14 12 10 14 12 10 14 12 10 10 12 14 10 12 14

6

El. Guit.

T 10-12-14-10-12-14

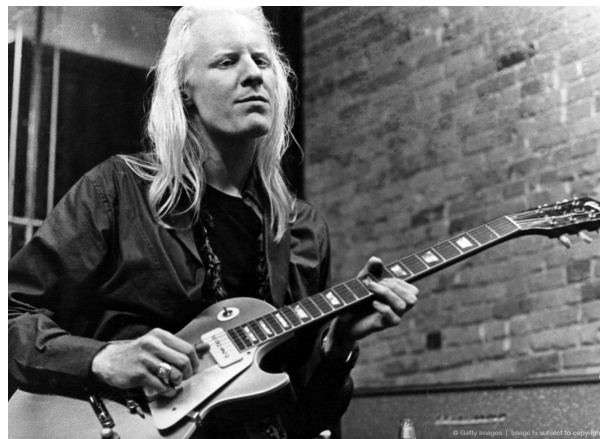
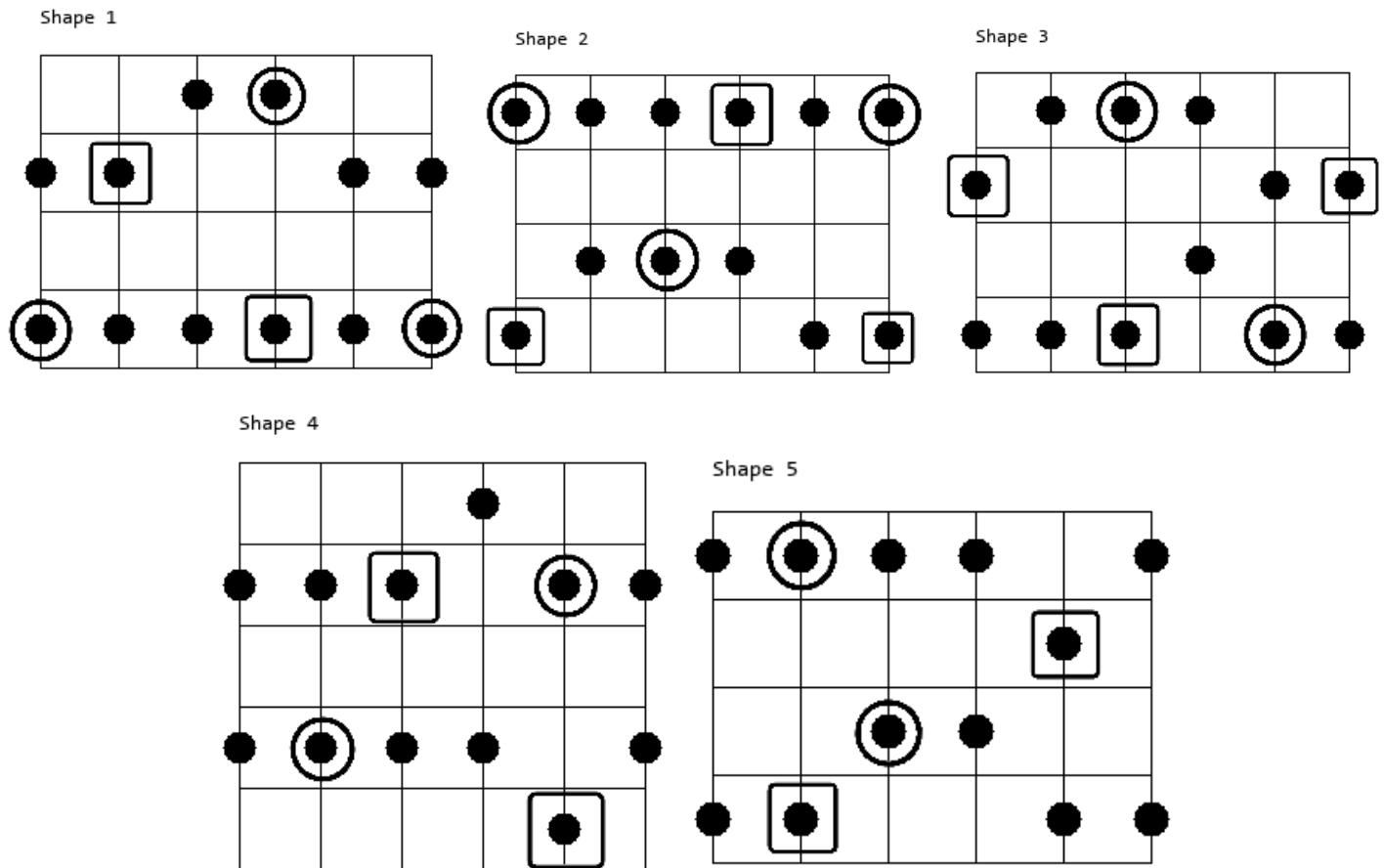
A 10-12-14-10-12-14

B 14-10-12-14

Scales. Pentatonic!

Now that we have done our warm-ups, let's get into scales. Let's start with the pentatonic scales. Pentatonic scales are a musical scale of five notes. These are great for beginners. See the figure below and memorize the shapes.

Figure 1



"I love playing guitar. It's the only thing I've ever really been great at."
~Johnny Winter

Now let's get into playing them with guitar tabs. I have each one of the shapes in tabs in A minor. A minor has all-natural notes, no sharps or flats.

Exercise 1

Exercise 1 is shape 1, starting at the 3rd fret of the low E string.

A minor pentatonic at 3rd fret

Electric Guitar

El. Guit.

Exercise 2

Exercise 2 is shape 2, starting at the 5th fret of the low E string.

A minor pentatonic at 5th fret

Electric Guitar

El. Guit.

Exercise 3

Exercise 3 is shape 3, starting at the 8th fret of the low E string.

A minor pentatonic at 8th fret

Electric Guitar

① ③ ① ④

T A B

8 10 7 10 7 10 8 10 8 10 8 10 8 9

5

El. Guit.

T A B

7 10 7 10 7 10 8

Exercise 4

Exercise 4 is shape 4, starting at the 10th fret of the low E string.

A minor pentatonic at 10th fret

Electric Guitar

① ③ ① ③

T A B

10 12 10 12 10 12 9 12 10 13 10 12 10 13 10 12

5

El. Guit.

T A B

9 12 10 12 10 12 10 12 10



"I've always been on a personal mission to save the guitar." ~Tom Morello

Exercise 5

Exercise 5 is shape 5, starting at the 12th fret of the low E string.

A minor pentatonic at 12th fret

[illegible]

5

El. Guit.

T
A
B

—12— —14— —12— —15— | —12— —15— —12—



“Guitar playing is just something that came to me and is really second nature now.”
~Dave Navarro

Guitar Tip # 1! Stop...Pause...Go!!!

When you are playing, you can play through notes fast, but you may run out of steam. After a bit, you can stumble and lose track of what you are playing. What should you do? Take a break. Not from the guitar, but from the notes!

When you are practicing scales, songs, and more, you can fumble over what you are playing and then start to get sloppy and miss notes. Not only should you take things slowly, but break things down into sections. Let me give you an example. Let's say you are trying to play the pentatonic scale at the 5th fret. Practice it where you will play the notes on the low E and the A, stop, pause for a beat, then play the notes on the D and G strings, stop, pause for a beat, and then the notes on the B and high E strings.

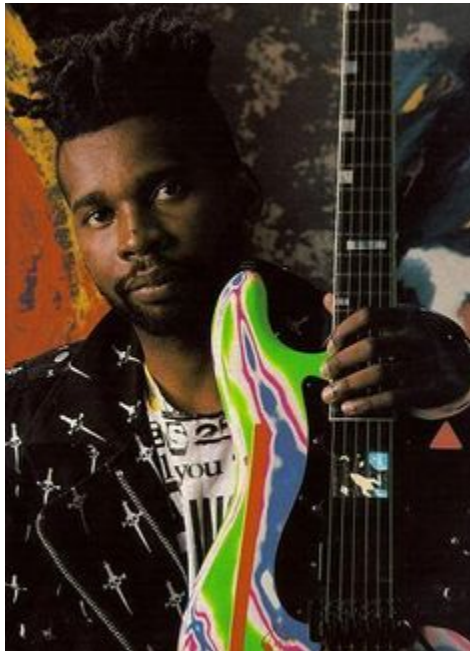
Stop...Pause...Go!!!

Electric Guitar

Pause

5 8 5 7 5 7 5 8 5 8

Practice this with scales, solos, songs, and more.



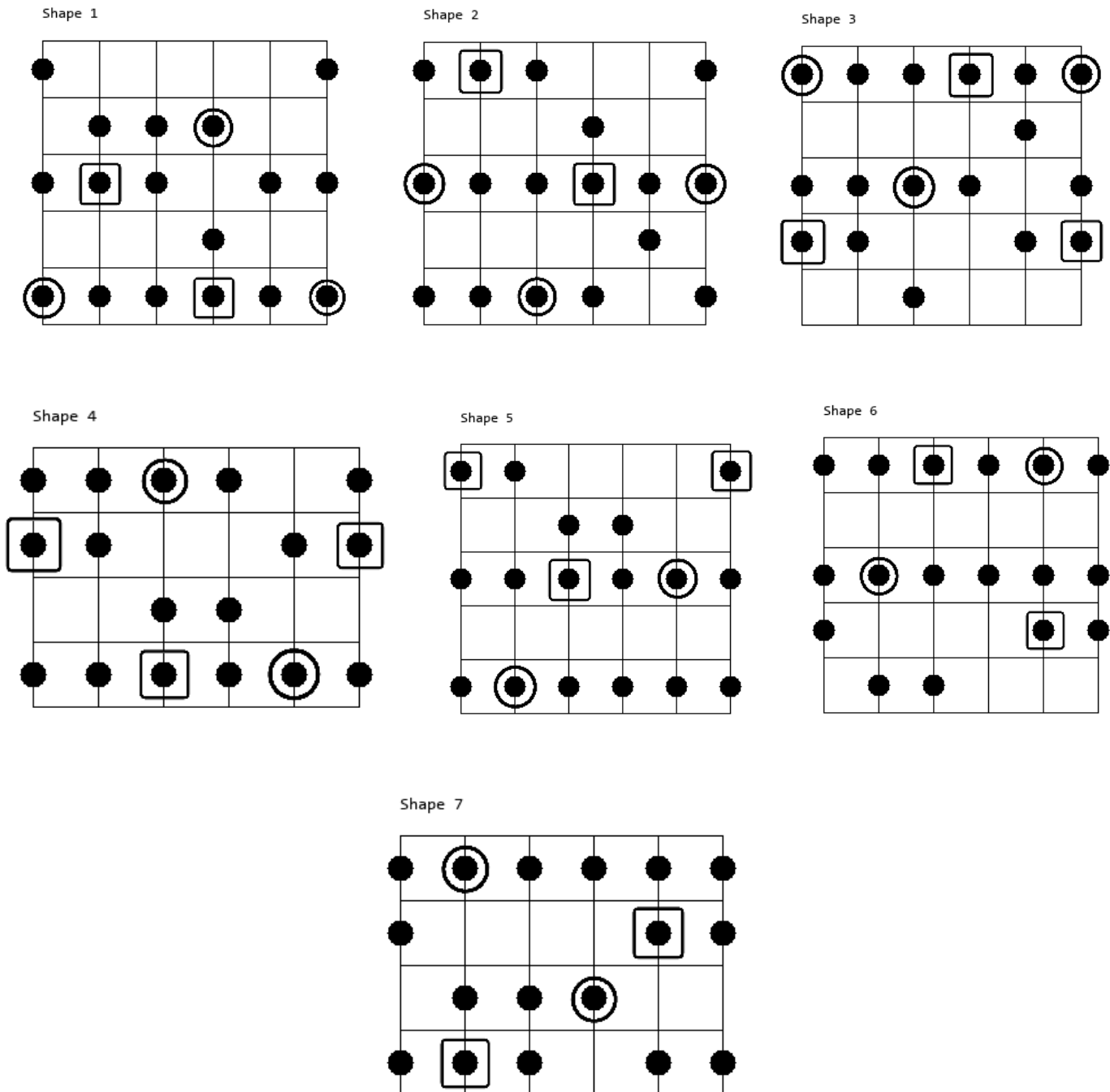
“As far as guitar goes, it’s weird to have such a challenging activity in my life for so long—I love it. It kicks my ass every day.”

~Vernon Reid

Scales. Diatonics!

Now let's move on to diatonic scales. Diatonic scales are made up of seven notes; on the guitar, they are two to three notes per string. See the figures below. Practice and memorize the shapes.

Figure 2



The tabs for diatonic scales are in A minor in the following exercises.

Exercise 6

Exercise 6 is shape 1, starting at the 1st fret of the low E string.

A minor diatonic at 1st fret

Electric Guitar

El. Guit.

Exercise 7

Exercise 7 is shape 2, starting at the 3rd fret of the low E string.

A minor diatonic at 3rd fret

Electric Guitar

El. Guit.

Exercise 8

Exercise 8 is shape 3, starting at the 5th fret of the low E string.

A minor diatonic at 5th fret

Electric Guitar

El. Guit.

Exercise 9

Exercise 9 is shape 4, starting at the 7th fret of the low E string.

A minor diatonic at 7th fret

Electric Guitar

El. Guit.

Exercise 10

Exercise 10 is shape 5, starting at the 8th fret of the low E string.

A minor diatonic at 8th fret

Electric Guitar

① ② ④ ① ② ④

T
A
B

8—10—12—8—10—12—9—10—12—9—10—12—10—12—8—10

El. Guit.

5

T
A
B

12—10—8—12—10—12—10—9—12—10—9—12—10—8—12—10—8

Exercise 11

Exercise 11 is shape 6, starting at the 10th fret of the low E string.

A minor diatonic at 10th fret

Electric Guitar

① ③ ④ ① ② ④

T
A
B

10—12—13—10—12—14—10—12—14—10—12—13—10—12

El. Guit.

5

T
A
B

13—12—10—13—12—10—12—10—14—12—10—14—12—10—13—12—10

Exercise 12

Exercise 12 is shape 7, starting at the 12th fret of the low E string.

A minor diatonic at 12th fret

Electric Guitar

	①	②	④	①	③	④
T						
A						
B	12	13	15	12	14	15

12 13 15 12 14 15 12 14 15 12 14 12 13 15 12 13

5

El. Guit.

T	15	13	12	15	13	12	14	12	15	14	12	15	14	12	15	14	12
A																	
B																	

15 13 12 15 13 12 14 12 15 14 12 15 14 12 15 14 12



"Many times in music, if you are given limitations, it expands the creativity."

~Jason Becker

Guitar Tip # 2! You do YOU!!!

When you are practicing and playing these exercises, you can do them in certain ways. You can alternate pick, you can economy pick, and you can use certain fingers to fret certain notes in certain ways.

Really, what I'm trying to say is that I'm not going to tell you how to fret and pick the notes in these exercises. Throughout these exercises, I'm only going to recommend how you can play, but if there is a certain way you like to pick and fret, then go to it.

Everyone has certain ways of how they do things. Not just with the guitar! When you walk, what is it, one foot in front of the other? But some people take longer strides, others step right down, whereas others have their toes first.

I'm a firm believer in alternate picking. A good majority of my playing is alternate picking: down, up, down, up, etc. But I'm not going to tell you that you have to alternate pick everything in your playing. There are some advantages to other kinds of picking, like economy picking, when the right series of notes comes into play.

Explore new ways of playing. There are plenty of videos on YouTube and websites with guitar-playing tips out there that you can learn from.



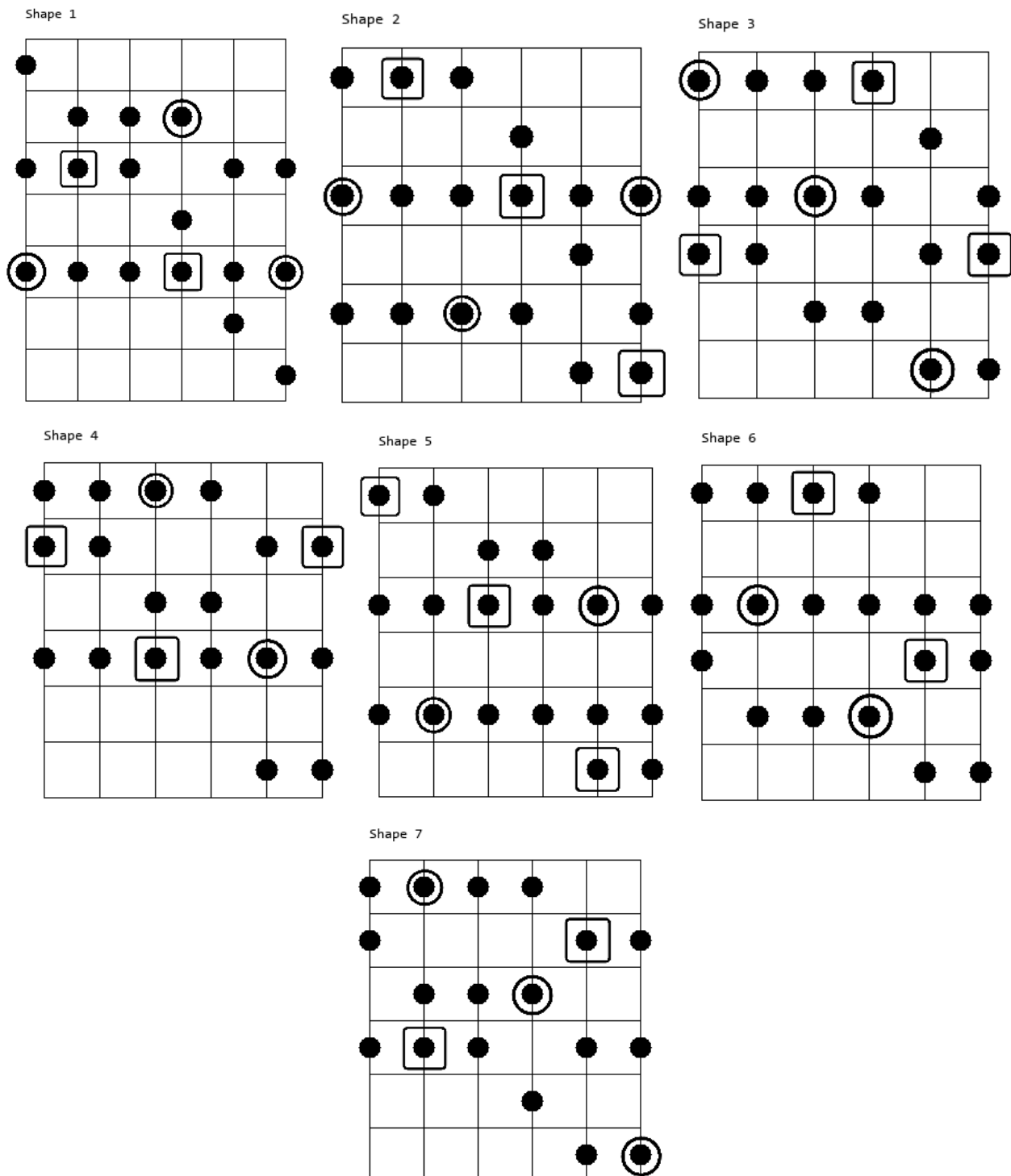
"To hell with the rules. If it sounds right, then it is."

~Eddie Van Halen

Scales. 3 note per string scales!

And we now have the 3 note per string scales. As in the title of what they are, they are 3 note per string. Practice and memorize the shapes.

Figure 3

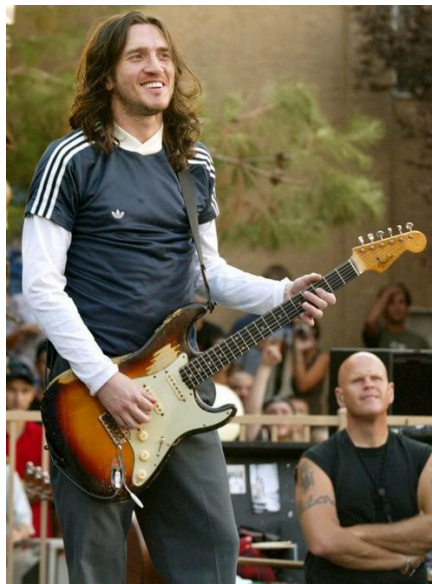
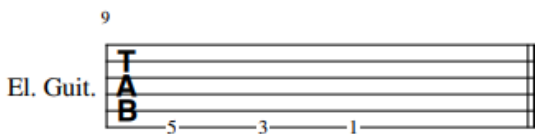
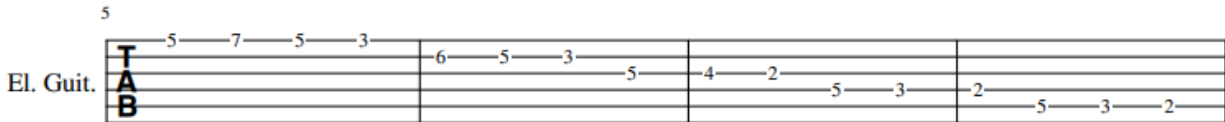
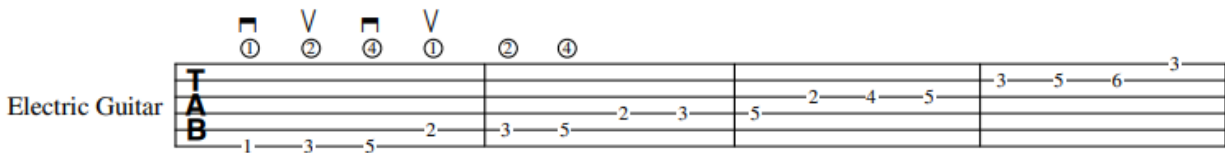


The tabs for the 3 note per string scales are in A minor in the following exercises.

Exercise 13

Exercise 13 is shape 1, starting at the 1st fret of the low E string.

A minor 3 note per string at 1st fret



“As long as you’re excited about what you’re playing, and as long as it comes from your heart, it’s going to be great.” ~John Frusciante

Exercise 14

Exercise 14 is shape 2, starting at the 3rd fret of the low E string.

A minor 3 note per string at 3rd fret

Electric Guitar

	①	②	④	①	②	④
T						
A						
B	3	5	7	3	5	7

3 5 7 3 5 7 4 5 7 5 6 8 5

El. Guit.

	5			
T	7	8	7	5
A	8	6	5	7
B	5	4	7	5

3 7 5 3

El. Guit.

	9		
T			
A			
B	7	5	3



"If you're playing, that's the most important thing."

~James Hetfield

Exercise 15

Exercise 15 is shape 3, starting at the 5th fret of the low E string.

A minor 3 note per string at 5th fret

Electric Guitar

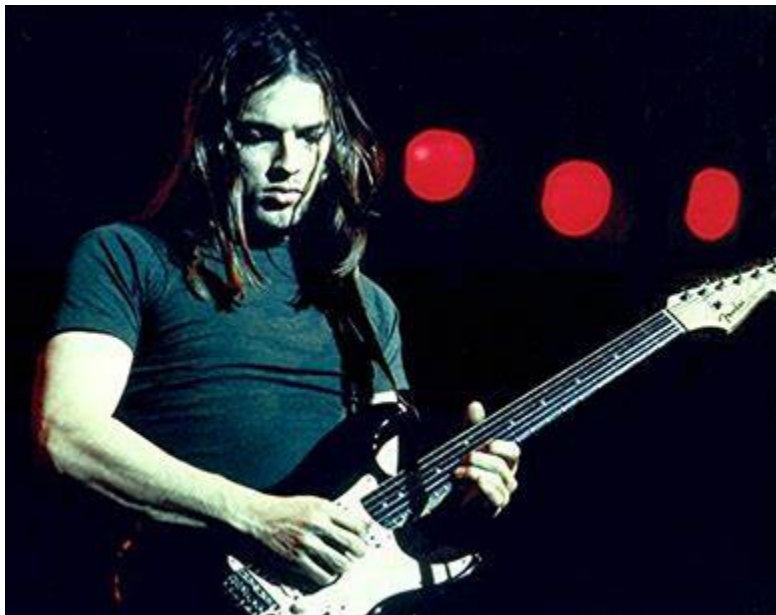
	①	③	④	①	③	④
T						
A						
B	5	7	8	5	7	8

El. Guit.

	5								
T	8	10	8	7	10	8	6	9	7
A									
B									

El. Guit.

	9								
T									
A									
B	8	7	5						



“When you strum a guitar you have everything—rhythm, bass, lead, and melody.”
~David Gilmour

Exercise 16

Exercise 16 is shape 4, starting at the 7th fret of the low E string.

A minor 3 note per string at 7th fret

Electric Guitar

5

El. Guit.

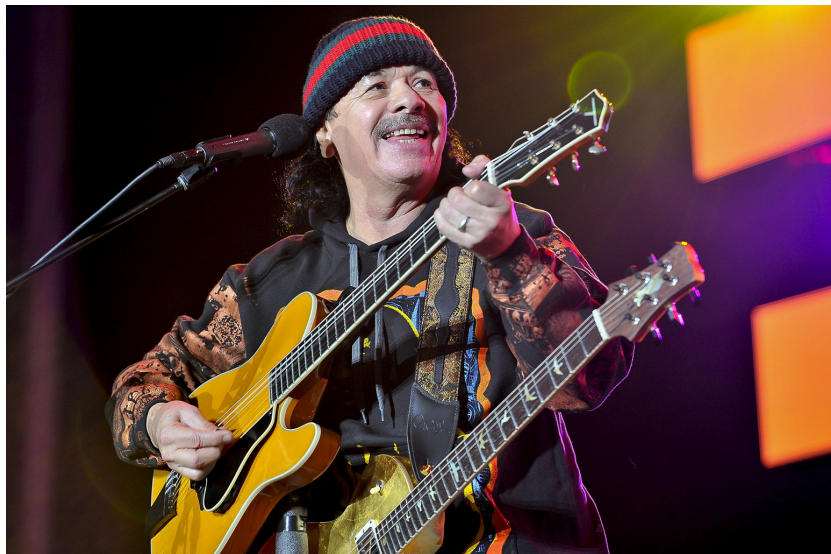
TAB

10—12—10—8—12—10—8—10—9—7—10—9—7—10—8—7—

9

El. Guit.

A musical staff for Electric Guitar. The first three notes are T, A, and B, stacked vertically on the first line. Below the staff, the fret numbers 10, 8, and 7 are written under the first, second, and third notes respectively.



"The guitar is your first wing. It's assigned and designed to unfold your vision and imagination."

~Carlos Santana

Exercise 17

Exercise 17 is shape 5, starting at the 8th fret of the low E string.

A minor 3 note per string at 8th fret

Electric Guitar

① ② ④ ① ② ④

T
A
B

8—10—12—8—10—12—9—10—12—9—10—12—10—12—13—10

5

El. Guit.

T 12—13—12—10

A 13—12—10—12—10—9—12—10—9

B —————12—10—8

9

El. Guit.

T
A
B

12 10 8



“Never give up on a good thing, never give up, never give up!” ~George Benson

Exercise 18

Exercise 18 is shape 6, starting at the 10th fret of the low E string.

A minor 3 note per string at 10th fret

Electric Guitar

	①	③	④	①	②	④
T						
A						
B	10	12	13	10	12	14

10 12 13 10 12 14 14 10 12 14 12 13 15 12

5

El. Guit.

T	13	15	13	12	15	13	12	14	12	10	14	12	10	14	12	10
A																
B																

9

El. Guit.

T																
A																
B	13	12	10													



"Every guitar I own gets used and has its purpose."

~Mark Knopfler

Exercise 19

Exercise 19 is shape 7, starting at the 12th fret of the low E string.

A minor 3 note per string at 12th fret

Electric Guitar

① ② ④ ① ③ ④

12 13 15 12 14 15 12 14 15 13 15 17 13

El. Guit.


TAB

5

15—17—15—13— | 17—15—13— | 16—14—12— | 15—14—12— |

9

El. Gut.



A musical staff for Electric Guitar (El. Gut.) with a treble clef. The staff has five lines. Fret markers are indicated by numbers 15, 13, and 12 below the staff. A black 'T' is on the first line (E4), a black 'A' is on the second line (A3), and a black 'B' is on the third line (B3). The 'A' and 'B' are highlighted with orange and black outlines respectively.



“My life has been a roller coaster ride, but somehow I’ve always been able to land on my feet and still play the guitar.”

~Ace Frehley

Guitar Tip # 3! Get another hobby!

Before I started playing guitar, I was and am a big fan of music. I listen to music, I go to concerts, and I collect music memorabilia like guitar picks and more. When I started playing guitar, I made it my life, my whole life. As I get older, music and guitar are still my life, but they are a part of my life. Your whole world doesn't have to be one thing.

Yes, music and playing an instrument are great. It is a great hobby to have, and for some out there, it is a great profession. But I think it is healthy to have other things in your life. Sometimes, too much of the same thing or only one thing is not a good thing. You can get frustrated, get in a rut, feel that it is weighing you down, and more.

Get away from it. Find something else. Find another hobby or project. Work on something else, and when you come back to the instrument, you can feel renewed and even better at it than before!



Building up your CHOPS!!!

Now that you have practiced and memorized all the scales: pentatonic, diatonic, and 3 note per string, it's time to put them to use with certain techniques and more.

Exercise 20

In Exercise 20, we have the pentatonic scale, shape 2, starting at the 5th fret of the low E string, and we will tremolo pick it. Tremolo picking is when you pick a note over and over at a very fast speed. Pick each note four times. Make your way up and down the scale.

Tremolo Picking A minor pentatonic at 5th fret

□ V □ V

Electric Guitar

5—5—5—5—8—8—8—8—5—5—5—5—7—7—7—7—5—5—5—5—7—7—7—7—

3

El. Guit.

5—5—5—5—8—8—8—8—8—8—8—8—5—5—5—5—8—8—8—8—5—5—5—5—

5

El. Guit.

7—7—7—7—5—5—5—5—7—7—7—7—5—5—5—5—7—7—7—7—5—5—5—5—8—8—8—8—5—5—5—5—



"One thing that you hope for when you want to be a musician is that you have that recognizable sound." ~Jerry Cantrell

Exercise 21

In this next exercise, you will pick each set of notes on each string twice and make your way up and down the scale. It is shape 4 from the diatonic scale. Start on the 7th fret of the low E string.

Picking each set of notes twice on each string A minor diatonic at 7th fret

Electric Guitar

□ V □ V

T										
A										
B	7-8-10-7-8-10	7-8-10-7-8-10	7-9-10-7-9-10	7-9-10-7-9-10	8-10-12-8-10-12	8-10				

2

El. Guit.

T	12-8-10-12-12-10-8-12-10-8																			
A	12-10-8-12-10-8																			
B	10-9-7-10-9-7																			
	10-9-7-10-9-7																			
	10-8-7-10										8-7									
											10-8-7-10-8-7									



**"Music is a necessity."
~Keith Richards**

Exercise 22

In this exercise, you will go back and forth, up and down. It is shape 1 of the diatonic scale. Start on the 1st fret of the low E string.

Up and down, back and forth
A minor diatonic at 1st position

 $\neg V \neg V$

Electric Guitar


T
A
B

1-3-5 2-3-5-3-2 5-3-1-3-5 2-3-5 2-3-5-3-2 5-3-2 5-3-1-3-5 2-3-5

3

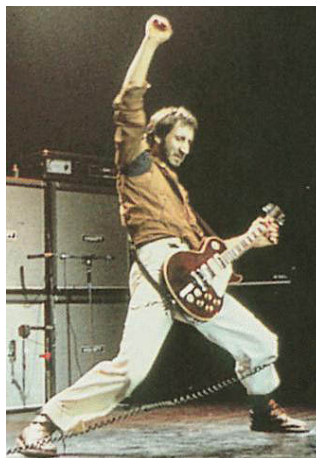
El. Guit. **T** **A** **B** 2-3-5 2-4-5 5-3-2 5-3-2 5-3-1-3 5 2-3-5 2-3-5 2-4-5 3-5-3 5-4-2

5

El. Guit. 

7

El. Guit. **T**
A -2 -5 -3 -2 -5 -3 -1
B



"I smash guitars because I like them." ~Pete Townshend

The DimeScale!!!

Exercise 23

Dimebag Darrell Abbott. One of the greatest guitar players to ever pick up the instrument. From Pantera to Damageplan and other acts in his musical career, he dominated the stage. His guitar playing is one of the best in heavy metal music. In the solo to "Cowboys from Hell", he has a series of notes that he plays that is a great combination known as the "DimeScale". Starting on the low E string, he plays the 11th, 12th, and 15th frets and continues the same frets as he goes onto each string.

Dimebag Scale!

Electric Guitar

T	11-12-15
A	11-12-15
B	11-12-15

2

El. Guit.

T	11-12-15-11-12-15
A	11-12-15-11-12-15
B	11-12-15-11-12-15

3

El. Guit.

T	15-11-12-15
A	
B	



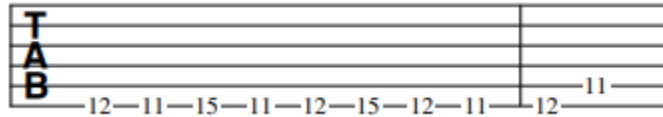
"Music drives you. It wakes you up, it gets you pumping. And, at the end of the day, the correct tune will chill you down." ~Dimebag Darrell

DimeScale pattern run!

Exercise 24

Let's take the DimeScale and play a pattern run with it!

Pattern



Dimebag Scale pattern run

[illegible][illegible]

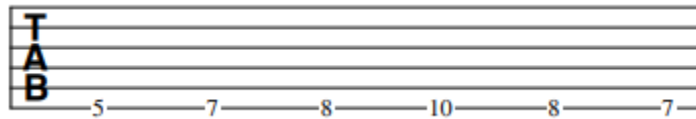
Guitar Runs!!!

In this next set of exercises, they are runs. A series of notes ascending and descending on the guitar. Before each full exercise, I have the pattern for each.

Exercise 25

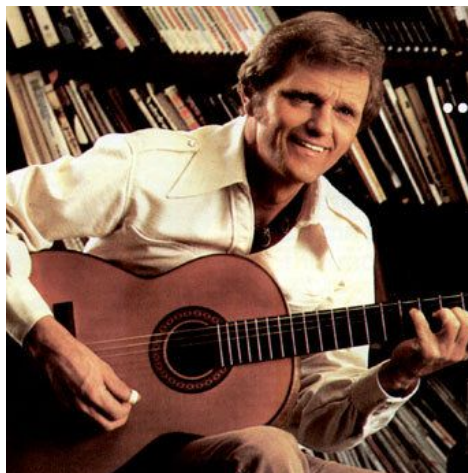
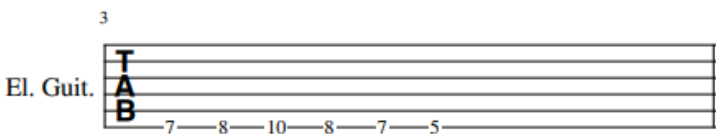
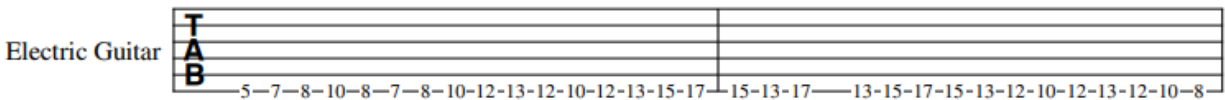
Start on the 5th fret of the low E string.

Pattern



Single String A minor run
Forward and back on low E string

□ V □ V



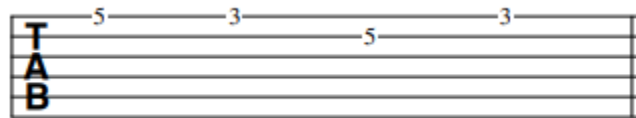
"Music is the most powerful thing on this earth, and it's hard to be angry when you are listening to music."

~Jerry Reed

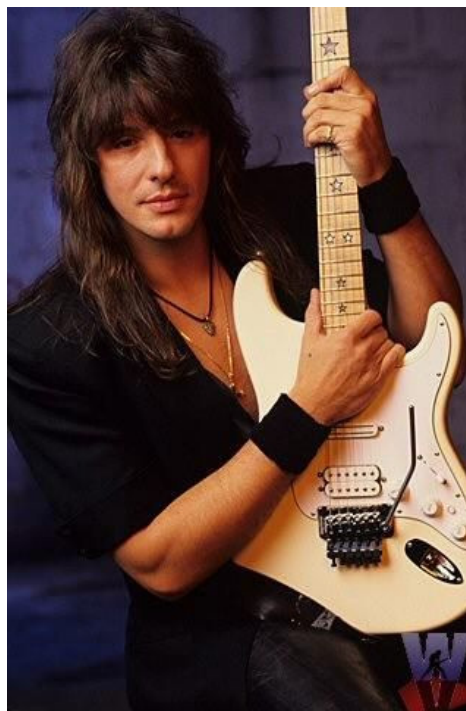
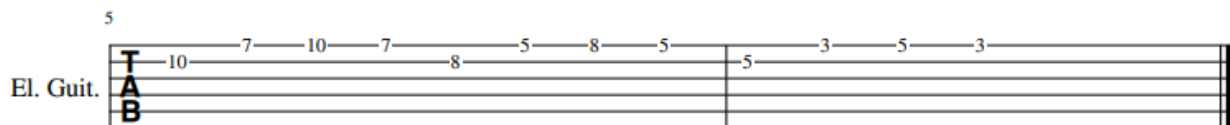
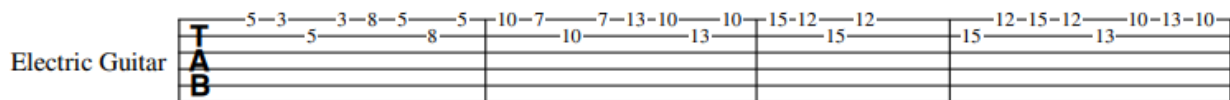
Exercise 26

Start on the B and high E strings on the 3rd fret.

Pattern



A minor run on B and high E strings



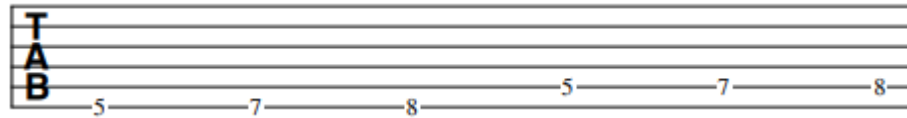
"I taught myself how to play the guitar, so I basically learned by a system of making mistakes."

~Richie Sambora

Exercise 27

Start on the 5th fret of the low E string.

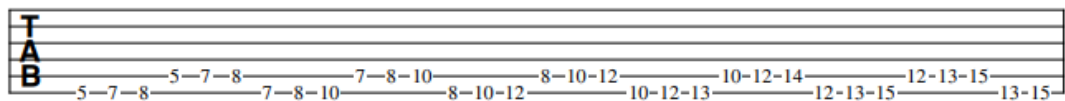
Pattern



A minor run on low E and A strings

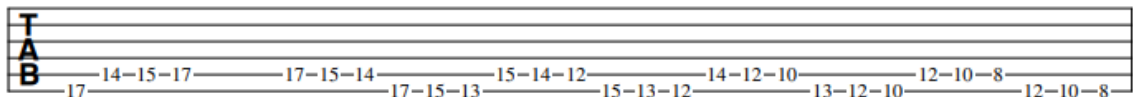
□ V □ V □ V

Electric Guitar



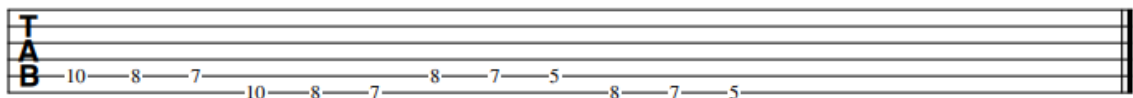
2

El. Guit.



3

El. Guit.

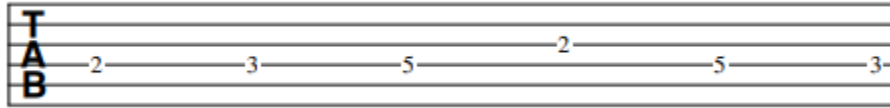


"It's part of me. It's hard to separate the guitar from me." ~Jimmie Vaughan

Exercise 28

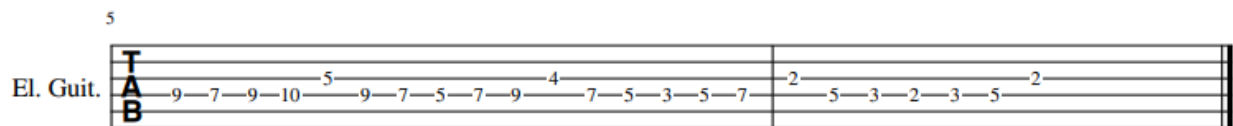
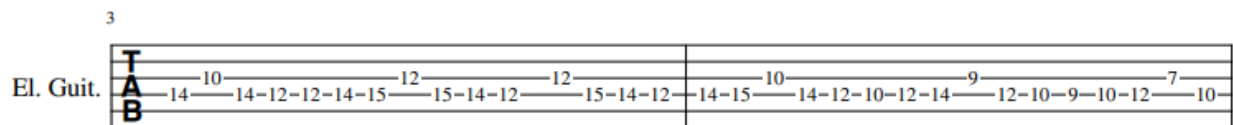
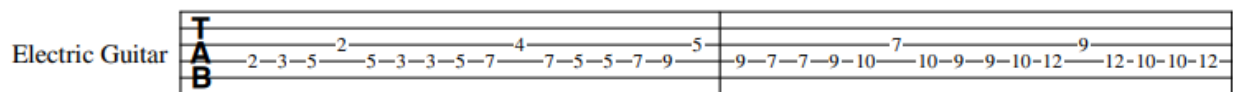
Start this next exercise on the D and the G strings at the 2nd fret.

Pattern



A minor run on D and G strings

□ V □ V



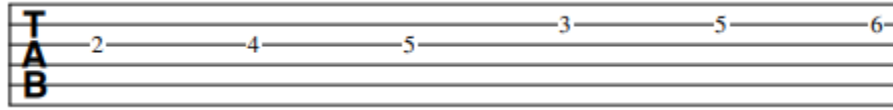
"I just love playing guitar, so that's what I'm going to do."

~St Vincent

Exercise 29

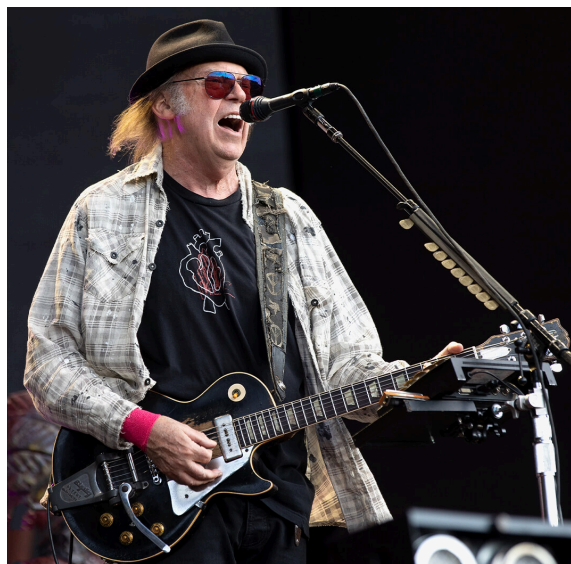
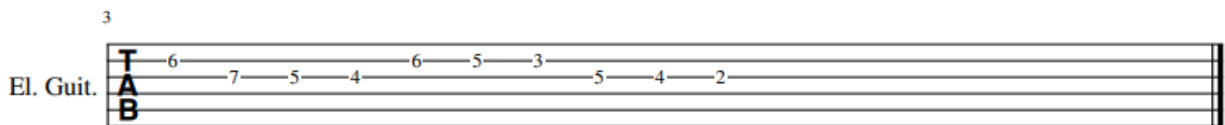
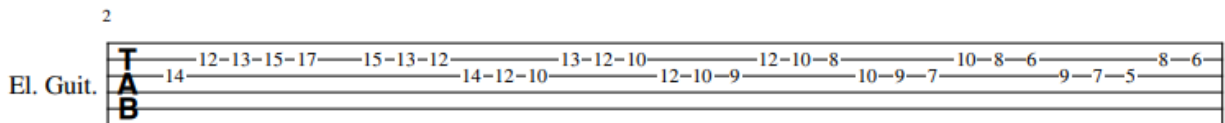
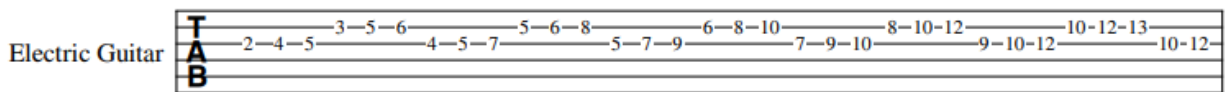
Start this exercise on the G and B strings at the 2nd fret.

Pattern



A minor run on G and B strings

□ V □ V □ V

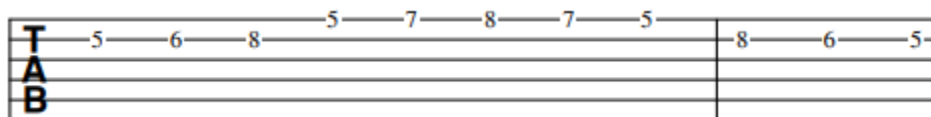


"If you wanna write a song, ask a guitar." ~Neil Young

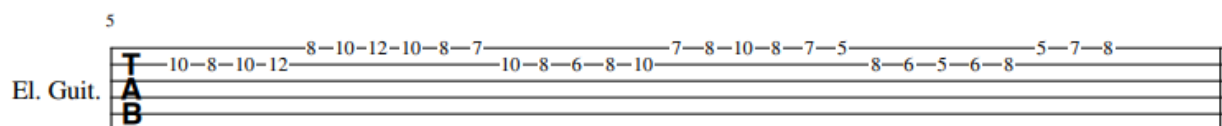
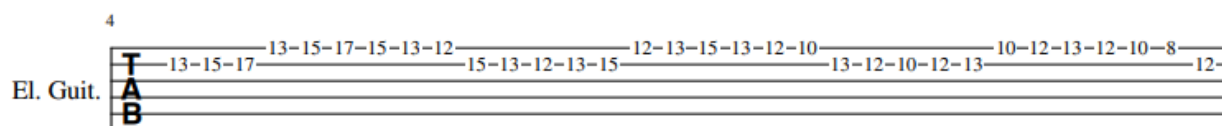
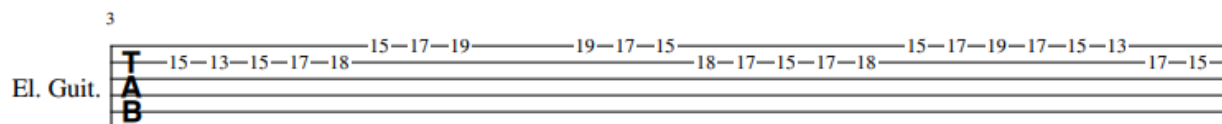
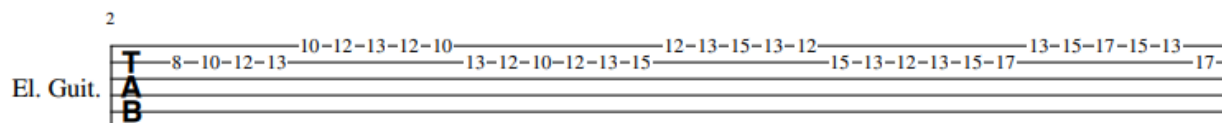
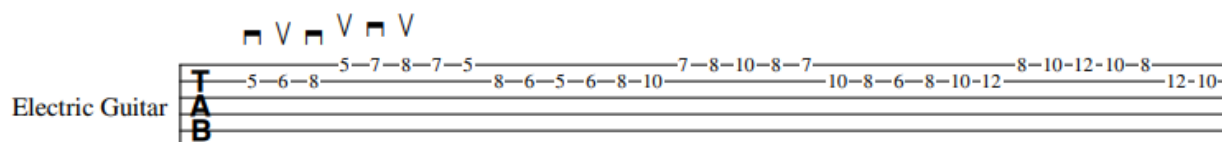
Exercise 30

Start this exercise on the B and high E strings at the 5th fret.

Pattern



A minor run on B and high E strings



CLOSING

As I wrote earlier, scales are an essential part of playing. They help you with your playing, they make what you are playing sound better, and they are fun! Get familiar with the shapes and exercises. Combine and mix things around with them. Tremolo pick a 3 note per string scale and plays the set of notes on one string twice on a diatonic. Get creative! There are endless ways of playing scales. Explore and have fun!

Have fun and keep it METAL!!!

Visit my website for lessons, music, and more at

www.metaljimrocks.com

