

Introducing Lead Guitar Playing

Lesson Objectives.

- Introduce the idea of playing individual notes as a **Scale**.
- Introduce and be able to play a **Minor Pentatonic Scale**.
- Learn individual techniques including: **Slides, Vibrato, String Bending** and **Curls**.
- Practise these techniques and combine them in playing **Licks**.
- Introduce and understand Guitar **Tablature** known as **Tab**.

Introduction to Lead Guitar

Up to this point in the course we have dealt only with rhythm guitar playing and chords.

With rhythm guitar we are usually accompanying or playing with other musicians with either a singer or another instrumentalist playing a solo lead part.

In **Lead guitar** playing we play the Lead part, either as an improvised **solo** or by playing a specific part written for, or by us.

To play lead parts well we have to develop several lead guitar techniques. We also have to learn sets of notes known as **Scales**.

This is the first time on this course where we will play one note at a time rather than several notes simultaneously, as we do in chords.

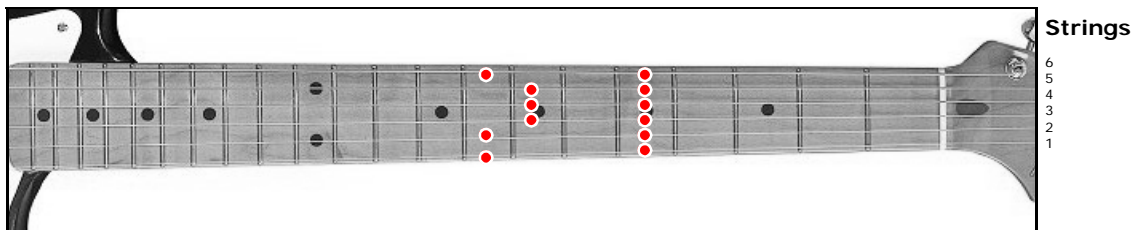
Playing Scales-Introducing the Minor Pentatonic Scale

Below is a diagram of the guitar fingerboard. The markings on the neck show where the fingers are placed as we play through the scale.

This scale is called a **Minor Pentatonic scale**. The reason for this name is that the scale has a minor sound similar to a minor chord and the word **Penta** is the Greek word for 5. This scale has only 5 *different* notes.

Figure 1 Minor Pentatonic Scale

4 3 (2) 1 **Fingering**
8 7 (6) 5 **Frets**



You can see clearly from Figure 1 above that there are more than 5 markings on the fingerboard. However, as previously said, there are only 5 different named notes.

Play this scale from the bottom (6th string) to the top (1st string and back again). You play two notes per string starting on the 5th fret each time, working up and then down the fingerboard. If you follow the fingering noted above the diagram you will notice that you play a finger per fret. However, let's watch the video to help us understand how to play the scale before we proceed further.

Example 1 Technique Store Minor Pentatonic Scale 
lesson019.techstore.01

Introducing Lead Guitar Techniques

Alternate Picking

Once the scale has been memorized try playing the scale in the exact same manner with the fretting hand but apply **Alternate Picking**. This means that the first note is picked with a down stroke, the second note with an upstroke and so on. Continue alternating between down and up picks until comfortable and smooth. Eventually this will feel completely natural.

When many guitarists begin lead guitar they want to pick in one direction only. This will slow you down later on when you want to play quicker passages of notes. It is therefore essential to develop this technique once you know the shape of the scale.

Technique Tips

Ensure that the notes are smooth. Do not pick too hard or aggressively as this will not create an even sound. It is essential that your hands are coordinated. This means that as the last note you played is still ringing you must pick the next note at precisely the moment you fret it, so there is no gap.

If you place your fretting finger on the next note before picking it, it will do one of two things.

- *It will either mute and stop the previous note, causing a gap before the next note is played, or*
- *create a double note by creating the first note when your finger lands and a further note when you then pick it.*

Both are undesirable. Strive for smooth, full, rounded, consistent notes at all times with no spaces.

Play the Scale Up and Down using the multimedia files, developing your fluency and timing. Remember you can adjust the tempo to enable you to develop the speed with which you can perform the exercise.

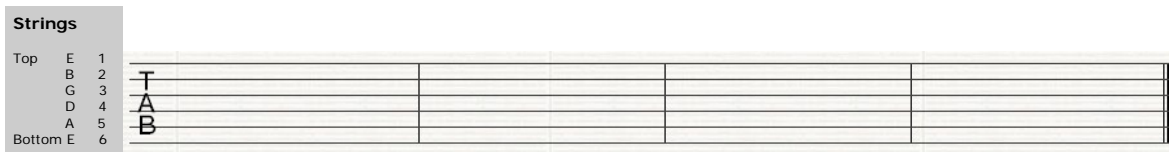
Do not play the first or last note twice in succession. Once you reach the top of the scale turn around and come back down.

Introducing Guitar Tablature (Tab)

When playing Lead guitar scales, licks and phrases, it is useful to see from a diagrammatical point of view exactly where we need to place our fingers on the fingerboard. Guitar Tab shows us how to do this.

Each line in guitar tab represents a guitar string and the strings are numbered 1-6, as can be seen in Fig 2 below.

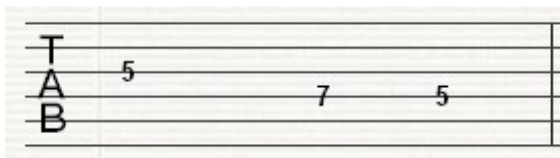
Figure 2 Guitar Tab showing string names and numbers.



Numbers are then placed upon the guitar strings to signify the fret upon which the note is played.

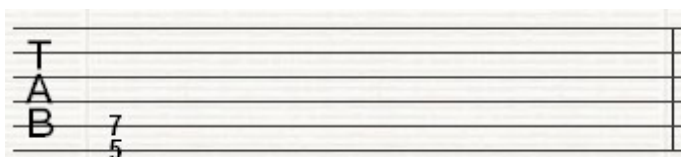
In the example below, Fig 3, we would put a finger on the 3rd string at the 5th fret to play the first note. The second note is played on the 4th string at the 7th fret and the following note is played on the 4th string at the 5th fret.

Figure 3 Guitar Tab showing fret positions.



When playing more than one note simultaneously the numbered frets are written above each other. Fig 4 below is a good example and demonstrates a chord of A5 in Tab.

Figure 4 Guitar Tab showing chord of A5.



Minor Pentatonic Scale Exercise One

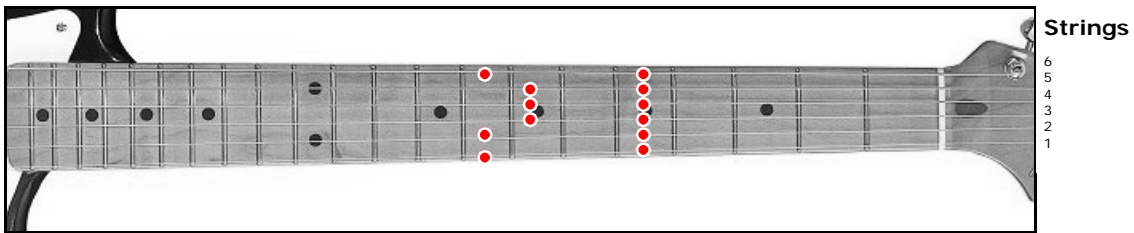
Now that we know how to technically play the scale and also read it in Tab, let's now practise the Minor Pentatonic Scale. Below is the exercise shown in notation, with Tab beneath together with the diagram of the fingerboard. Use the multimedia files to check your understanding and develop fluency.

Exercise 1
lesson019.igsilgp.01



Note that this exercise has a two bar count in.

4 3 (2) 1 **Fingering**
8 7 (6) 5 **Frets**



Slides

One of the difficulties in playing lead guitar is that we only have one hand to get around 6 strings and depending on the make of your guitar, between 21 and 24 frets. One technique which helps us get around the guitar quickly and smoothly is **Slides**.

To practise slides go back to the Minor Pentatonic pattern. Place your 1st finger on the 1st string at the 5th fret. Pick the note and slide up to the 8th fret and back down again in one motion. Watch and listen to the multimedia files firstly and then play along with the GuitarXtractor.

Exercise 2
lesson019.techstore.02



Note-There is no Analysis available for this exercise.

Slide practice and development

Repeat this exercise with all 4 fingers. Once you have used all 4 fingers on the top string move to the 2nd string repeating these exercises.

Carry this on down the scale sliding from the lower of the 2 notes (5th fret) in the Minor Pentatonic scale pattern on each given string to the higher note.

For example on strings 3, 4 and 5 you will slide between frets 5 and 7.

Do not press too hard. Pressing too hard slows down the fingers and prevents them from sliding over the fret markers smoothly. As always continue this exercise until comfortable.

String Bending

String Bending is a very commonly used technique and is one of the most exciting sounds in lead guitar.

When bending a string we take a given note and push it up (or down) to create the sound of a different note usually one or two frets higher than the fret we have our finger on.

The strings which are most commonly used in string bending are the 1st, 2nd and 3rd strings. We bend these strings up. Should we have a need to bend one of the lower 3 strings then they can be pulled down. (The 4th string may be bent up or down).

Of the top strings, the 2nd is easiest to bend, then the 3rd and then the top string. As we go higher up the fingerboard the strings become easier to bend.

String Bending Exercise

For practice we will again go to the Minor Pentatonic scale.

Place finger 3 on the 3rd string on the 7th fret. Place the 2nd finger on the same string on the 6th fret and then the 1st finger on the same string.

The reason for these extra fingers is to help bend the string. The first finger should also touch the 4th and possibly 5th string as you bend to stop them from vibrating.

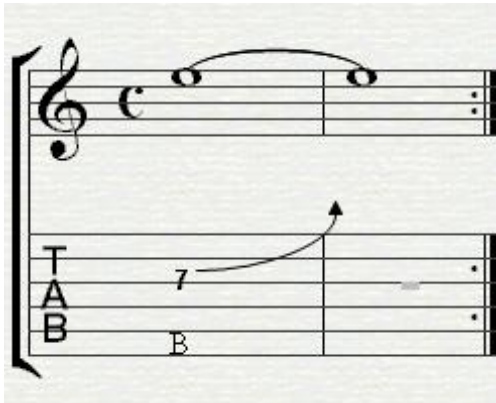
Before bending the string, play the 9th fret on the 3rd string to hear the note you will be bending to.

Now bend the 3rd string at the 7th fret and hold the note as long as possible until the sound fades. When this is comfortable practice bending the string and bringing it straight back down to its original pitch.

Exercise 3
lesson019.techstore.03



Note-There is no Analysis available for this exercise.



String bending is not an easy technique and much practice must be put in to perfect the technique. Experiment with thumb positions to find the most comfortable position for you. In most cases a higher Thumb position helps the fingers to bend the strings. A low thumb position can make it difficult to grip the guitar strings when bending.

Curls

Curls are a very expressive technique found in all forms of lead guitar playing from Blues through to Metal. A curl is similar to a string bend in execution but actually has a totally different job.

With a String Bend we create a different note to the fret on which we effect the bend. A Curl does not bend into a new note. It merely Curls away (higher) from its original pitch.

Take care to catch the guitar string with your picking hand before the curl reaches a new note.

When a Curl is played initially the note is stationary and then the string is bent to create the curling sound of the note. Before this note reaches its apparent destination a new note is played or the string is muted.

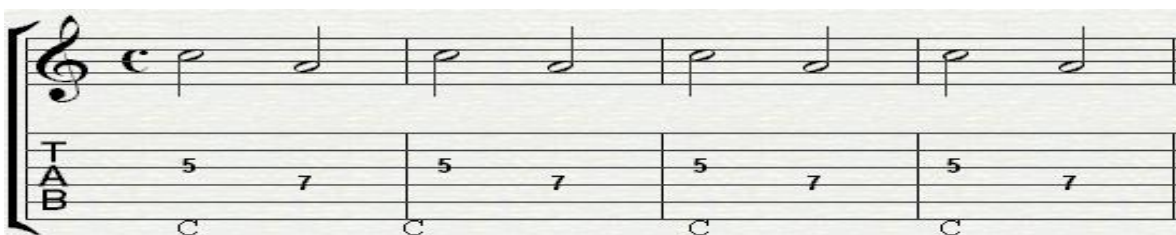
Have a go at the next exercise to develop your understanding and playing of Curls.

Exercise 4
lesson019.techstore.04



Note-There is no Analysis available for this exercise.

Figure 4 Curl



Vibrato

Vibrato is applied by all string players, cellists, violinists etc as well as guitarists. Vibrato is a technique employed to sustain a note and give it a warmer and fuller tone.

Vibrato is created in one of two ways. Classical guitarists normally roll the finger from side to side on the note creating a warm tone. This is not as common on electric guitar. On electric guitar we move the note up or down which slightly increases the pitch for a fraction of a second before bringing it back. The string is rocked back and forth to create this vibrato. The speed and width of the vibrato depends on the piece of music being played and indeed the specific guitarist playing it. Take care not to bend the string out of tune when applying vibrato.

Practice playing each note of the Minor Pentatonic scale with vibrato. Also practice this with each of the four fingers on the fretting hand. Watch our technique store video demonstrating the use of Vibrato.

Exercise 5 Vibrato lesson019.techstore.05



Note-There is no Analysis available for this exercise.

Musical notation for Exercise 5, showing a single note (G) with vibrato in the treble clef, and the corresponding guitar tablature (TAB) showing the 7th fret on the A string.

Applying Lead Guitar Technique and Introducing Licks

This last section now gives us an opportunity to put some of our newly learned Lead Guitar technique into practice. The last exercises of this lesson comprise of two musical phrases. These are often referred to in guitar playing terms as **Licks**.

The first lick has 6 notes in it and utilises a bend, a curl and vibrato.

Lick Study One

Exercise 6 lesson019.igsilcp.02



Note-There is no Analysis available for this exercise.

Musical notation for Exercise 6, showing a sequence of notes (B, C, D, E, F, G) with a bend and vibrato in the treble clef, and the corresponding guitar tablature (TAB) showing fret numbers (7, 7, 5, 7, 5) and a wavy line on the B string.

Lick Study Two

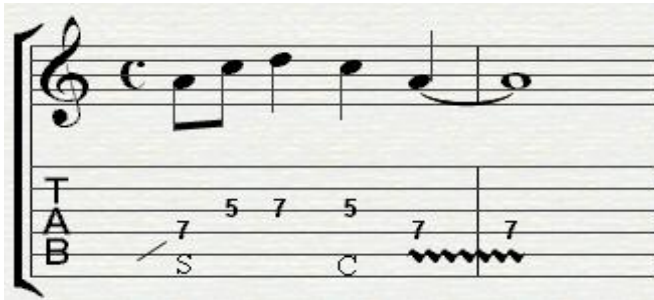
This second example utilises a slide as well as a curl and vibrato. Begin the slide from the 5th fret. The note on the 5th fret is not heard other than at the beginning of the slide.

As always use the multimedia files to help you make sure you are getting it right.

Exercise 7
lesson019.igsilcp.03



Note-There is no Analysis available for this exercise.



Further Development Grade 2 and beyond

We will be spending all of Grade 3 developing the skills you have learned in lessons 17, 18 and 19, so that you will be becoming a confident lead guitar player as well as a guitarist with a whole host of Rock guitar skills for playing rhythmic guitar as well.

For now though, you are going to solidify your skills in lesson 20 by learning to play a piece of music. As with Grade 1, this is the culmination of a grade's worth of study, plus of course the previous grades work and once you can read and play the piece you will have become more than a competent performer of your instrument.