

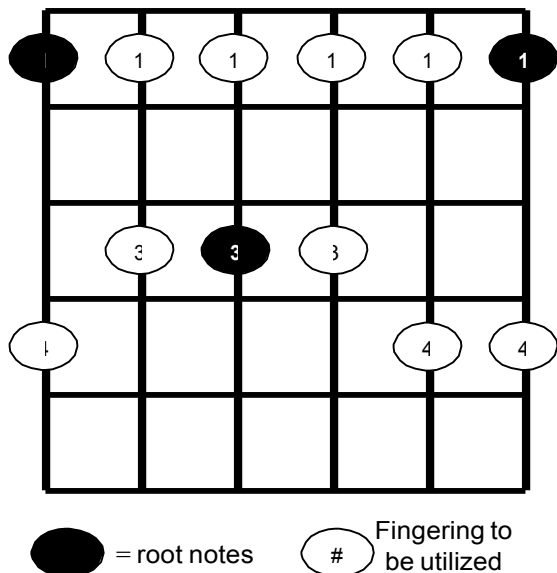
LEARN
TO PLAY

BLUES GUITAR

THE MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE

The Pentatonic scale is one of the most commonly utilized scales in just about all genres of music. Penta, is Latin for five, much like a penta-gram has five sides, Pentatonic scales are constructed from five notes. The Minor Pentatonic scale is constructed from five notes from the Natural Minor Scale, also called the Aeolian mode. The Minor Pentatonic scale is built from the five scale degrees of root, b3rd, 4th, 5th, and b7th. The scale illustrated below is what many call the basic “box” position and has its low root played with the first finger on the low E string. The root notes are illustrated with black circles and the numbers inside the circles indicate the fingering to be utilized when playing this scale. It’s important to learn this basic scale first, as we are going to build upon this scale in coming lessons and eventually you will need to learn this scale in all positions all over the neck and in all keys. Many other scale shapes and scale connecting links are diagrammed out in the coming pages.

Minor Pentatonic Scale Basic Box



Take your time and play the scale slow and in time, speed will come. Practice the scale utilizing the fingerings illustrated. Sound each note clean, with no string buzzes or overtones. As you move through the scale make a mental note of when you hit the three root notes, (illustrated with the black circles).

The key signature is determined by which root note is played. For example if you play this scale starting at the fifth fret on the low E string it is an A Minor Pentatonic scale consisting of the five notes A, C, D, E, and G. If you were to play this scale on the 8th fret it would be a C Minor Pentatonic scale consisting of the five notes C, Eb, F, G, and Bb.

Much like moveable bar chords this scale can be moved up and down the guitar neck and the root note will determine the key you are playing. Practice the scale in all keys.

This scale will form the building block of many concepts to come. You want to be very familiar with this scale pattern, but do not rely on it exclusively. We are going to build on this scale extensively. Soon we will be spicing it up and expanding it, making it a more fluid sounding scale that you can move laterally across the neck and not limited to box to box type lead playing.

Hip string bends when utilizing the above Minor Pentatonic scale: – bending strings is one of the most expressive things you can do on the guitar. You will want to get very proficient and exact with string bending, it’s an art. Always bend to a target note. When bending strings it is imperative that you are bending the notes in pitch. You don’t want to over bend or under bend notes, as they will then sound sharp or flat. Practice bending strings and then check the pitch by sounding the note you are attempting to bend to, your target note. This is a good self-check to ensure you are bending in pitch. Also practice string bending by plugging directly into an electronic tuner and watch the needle as you bend a note. See the progress as you bend the note and ultimately hit pitch. Keep doing it over and over till you feel the bend strength wise, and hear the bend in pitch.

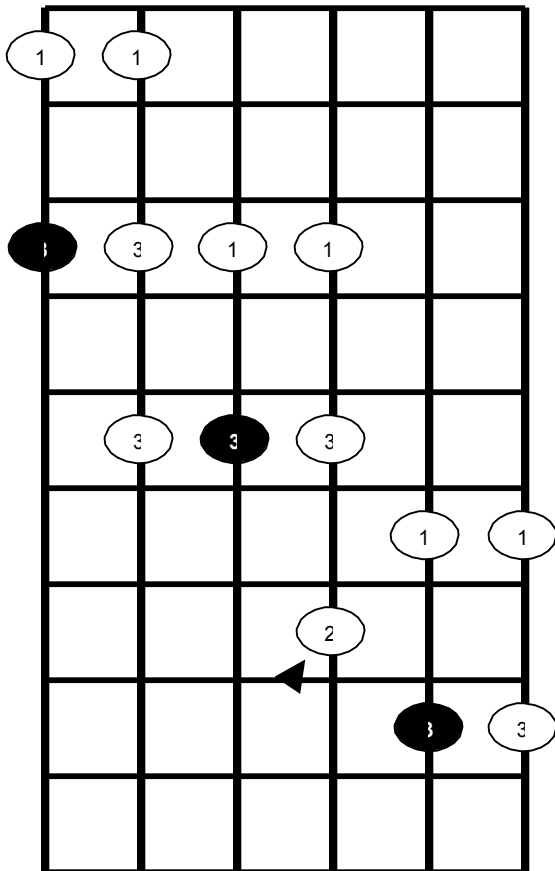
For purposes of this string bending exercise play the scale with a fifth fret root or A Minor Pentatonic scale, but once learned, practice the bends and scale in all keys.

1. Bend the b7th a whole step up to the root. Bend the G note at the 8th fret of the B string up one whole step to the A root note. You can also bend the same note an octave lower at the G note at the 5th fret on the D string up one whole step.
2. Bend the 4th a half step to the blue note - bend the D note on the 7th fret of the G string up one half step to the Eb note.
3. Bend the 4th degree a whole step to the fifth - bend the D note on the 7th fret of the G string up one whole step to the E note. The 4th or D note can be bent either a whole or a half step, try both.
4. Bend the b3rd a full step to the 4th – bend the C note at the 8th fret of the high E string one whole step to the D note.
5. Try a unison bend. Utilize your 4th finger to bend the G note on the 8th fret of the B string a whole step to an A note while playing the A note at the 5th fret of the high E string with your 1st finger.
6. Unison bend – Utilize your 3rd finger to bend the D note on the 7th fret of the G string a whole step to an E note while playing the E note at the 5th fret of the B string with your 1st finger.
7. Double stop bend – bend two strings a half step each with your 3rd finger. Bend the D note at the 7th fret of the G string one half step while also bending the F# note at the 7th fret of the B string one half step.
8. Double stop bend – with your 3rd finger bend the D note at the 7th fret of the G string a whole step while playing the G note on the B string with your 4th finger.
9. b3rd to major 3rd bend – bend the b3rd or C notes a quarter to a half step to the major 3rd. This is a very cool bend as the b3rd is a very ambiguous note in this scale. It sometimes will sound great as the b3rd but also as a major 3rd like when playing over a 7th chord. So this note has some play in it and you don’t have to be exact with the bend – play with it and you will soon be utilizing it all the time. Bend the note slow and put a hook on the end of it.

THE MINOR PENTATONIC EXPANDED I SCALE

Let's build on the minor pentatonic basic box shape scale that you learned in the previous page. We are now going to expand the scale two frets in each direction combining three of the box shapes, (all five box shapes are diagrammed out on page 12). We are still going to play the same five-note scale. However, the expanded scale exudes a much more fluid sound and sets up many additional and different combination runs and licks than just staying solely in the basic "box" shape. You certainly want to have all the pentatonic scales in the box patterns in your arsenal, but this expanded scale you will find really opens the pathways and lead guitar avenues a lot further. Commit it to memory and practice it in all keys. You will find yourself using these expanded scales all the time when playing in the pentatonics – they are invaluable.

Expanded I Minor Pentatonic Scale



Analyzing this expanded scale you can see part of the basic box pattern you learned in the previous page encapsulated in the middle of the shape. The shape is expanded two frets in each direction using the neighboring two boxes. Now you have a Pentatonic shape that **doubles** the fret span of the basic box pattern.

As always when learning a new scale, take your time and play the scale slow and in time. Sound each note clean, with no string buzzes or overtones. As you move through the scale make a mental note of when you hit the three root notes, (illustrated with the black circles). Practice the scale utilizing the fingerings illustrated. Notice the shift in fingering when you get to the G-string. There is a one – three – two finger combination. Utilize your second finger when playing the third note on the G-string as that will set you up for the two and three note combinations and licks to be played with the G, B, and high E strings. As always, you want to utilize the proper fingerings that set you up for the next lick, run, or chord.

Much like the first pentatonic scale in the basic box pattern the key signature for the expanded scale is determined by which root note is played on the 6th string. Play that note with your third finger. For example if you play this shape starting at the fifth fret on the low E string it is the Expanded I **A** minor pentatonic scale consisting of the five notes A, C, D, E, and G. If you were to play this scale starting with your 3rd finger on the 10th fret it would be the Expanded I **D** minor pentatonic scale consisting of the five notes D, F, G, A, and C. Practice this scale in all keys up and down the fret board.

For the G string pivot with your **second finger** for the 1,3,2 fingering combination

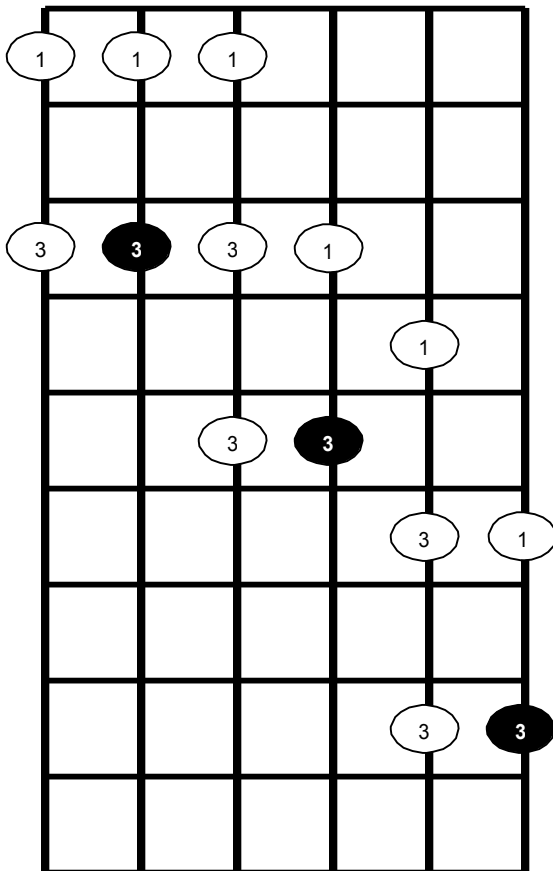
KEY POINT: You can grab these above two scales fast if you memorize the two above scales as:

1. Basic Box Position Minor Pentatonic Scale – 1st finger root on the low E string
2. Expanded I Minor Pentatonic Scale – 3rd finger root on the low E string

THE MINOR PENTATONIC EXPANDED II SCALE

Now that you are familiar with the Minor Pentatonic scale in the basic box position and in Expanded I form, lets learn the Minor Pentatonic Expanded II scale. This scale will have its root note on the 5th or A string and you can start with your 3rd finger. Illustrated below is the Expanded II Minor Pentatonic scale. With both Expanded scales and the basic “box” shape you can cover just about the entire fretboard. Practice these scales in all keys up and down the fret board. Commit them to memory, as you will find yourself grabbing them all the time.

Expanded II Minor Pentatonic Scale



Take your time when first learning this scale pattern, and play the scale slow and in time. Sound each note clean, with no string buzzes or overtones. As you move through the scale make a mental note of when you hit the three root notes, (illustrated with the three black circles). Practice the scale utilizing the fingerings illustrated and work up this expanded scale in all keys. Just use the first and third fingers to play the entire scale.

In this Expanded 2 scale the key signature is determined by which root note is played with the third finger on the on the 5th or A string. That is how you can find all the different scales quickly, by identifying the root notes. For example if you play this shape starting at the tenth fret on the low E string it is the Expanded II **A** Minor Pentatonic scale consisting of the five notes A, C, D, E, and G. This is due to the root note being played on the 12th fret of the A string – an “A” note. If you were to start this scale on the 12th fret of the low E string it would be the Expanded II **B** Minor Pentatonic scale.

KEY POINT: You can grab the above scales fast if you memorize the three above scales as:

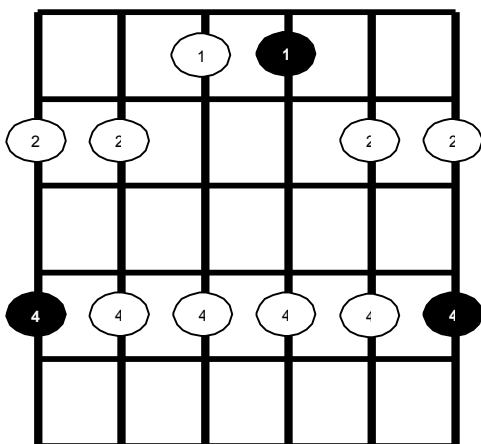
1. Box Position Minor Pentatonic Scale – 1st finger root on the low E string
2. Expanded I Minor Pentatonic Scale – 3rd finger root on the low E string
3. Expanded II Minor Pentatonic Scale – 3rd finger root on the A string

THE MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE – the 5 box scales

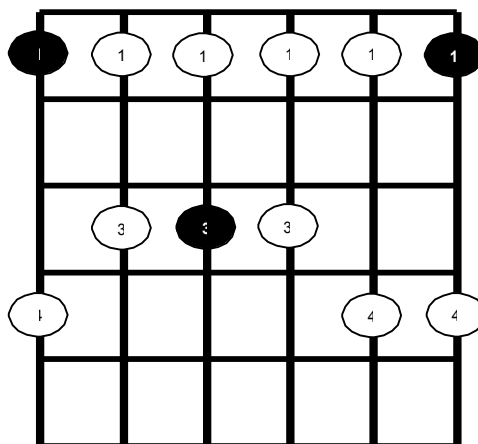
Illustrated below are five common box shapes for the Minor Pentatonic scale. I usually find myself playing the expanded I and expanded II scales more often, but you should know all 5 box positions so you can utilize the entire neck. Practice these in all keys and remember to make mental notes where the root notes lie. Start learning the scales below in the key of Am as they line up across the fretboard nicely and you can start the number 1 box with your 4th finger on the 5th fret of the Low E string on the A note.

Commit all the shapes and notes to memory and you will soon be gliding across the neck in Pentatonic heaven. Remember, it is critical to memorize what notes you are playing, not just the shapes. You want to be able to pick out and land on any given note depending on what chord changes you are playing over. Too many times guitarists just memorize shapes and forget what notes they are actually playing. So spend time learning the notes in all keys and you will benefit greatly with this extra work. These box shapes will give you many different riff ideas and runs. You will find them to be quite useful. Remember to practice and learn these scales in all keys and practice linking them together. Soon you will be able to see the entire fretboard mapped out as one large scale that travels up and down the entire neck.

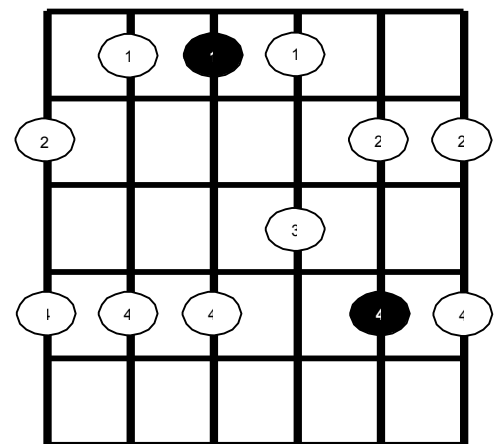
#1 box – in Am start with 4th finger on the 5th fret, low E string on the A note.



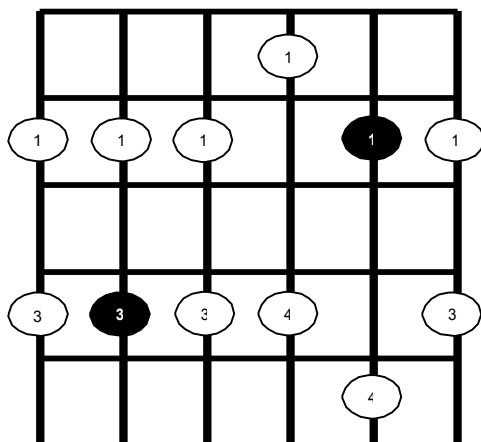
#2 box – in Am start with 1st finger on the 5th fret, low E string on the A note. (the basic box shape)



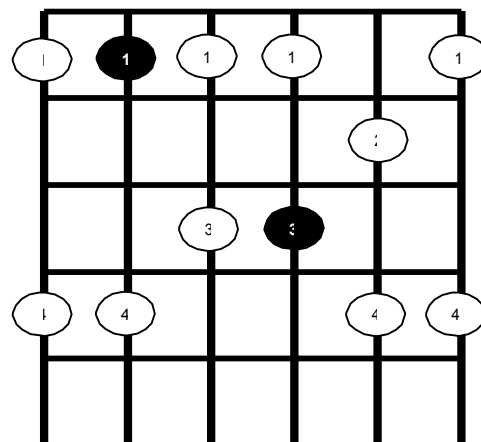
#3 box – in Am start with 2nd finger on the 8th fret, low E string on the C note. (these first three boxes make the Expanded 1)



#4 box – in Am start with 1st finger on the 10th fret, low E string on the D note.



#5 box – in Am start with 1st finger on the 12th fret, low E string on the E note. (these last two boxes and the first one combine to form the Expanded 2 shape)



THE MINOR PENTATONIC BLUES SCALE

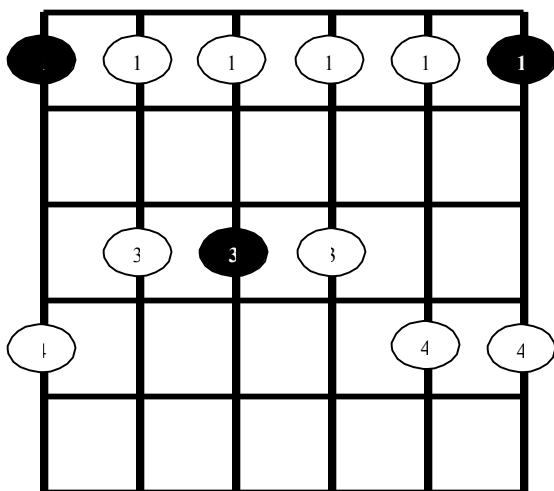
The Blues scale is basically the Minor Pentatonic scale, with one added note, the flatted 5th, or blue note. The b5 creates a certain amount of color and tension that is extremely useful. The blues scale is not solely utilized in blues music but rather is used in many musical genres including rock, country, jazz, pop, metal, punk, and more. Adding this scale to your lead guitar arsenal will definitely add a little “bluesy” color and texture to your playing. Use it pretty much whenever you play Minor Pentatonic scales. Now we will make it the Minor Pentatonic Blues Scale. This is the scale when you hear the term “blues scale” tossed around.

By adding the b5 note we now get the six-note scale constructed from the degrees of 1, b3rd, 4th, b5th, 5th, and b7th. The first illustration below on the left is the basic box shape Minor Pentatonic scale. Directly below that we add the b5th and now have the Minor Pentatonic blues scale. They only differ by one note, the b5th or blue note, illustrated in blue. The illustration below to the right is the Expanded I Minor Pentatonic Blues scale.

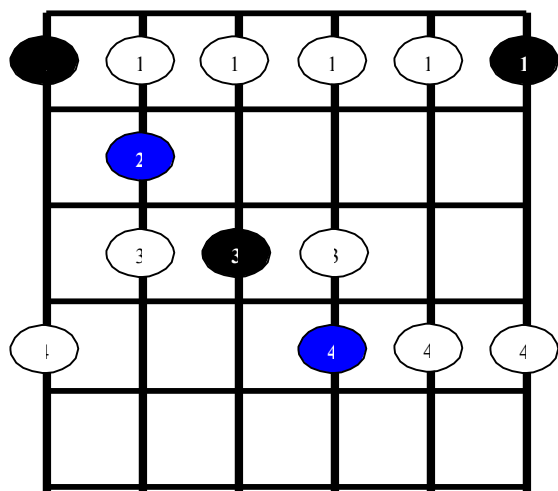
A common challenge with many students is that they always play and think of scales in box patterns and they stay in one box, then stop, move to the next box, then stop, and so on. This can have a real boxy and fragmented sound with lines that have no continuity. Students benefit greatly by learning to play ACROSS the neck by playing laterally. The ultimate goal is to see the entire neck as one big inter-connected scale. Then leave them all connected and just move the whole chunk back and forth as one chunk, to change key. These expanded scales will pull you out of the traditional boxes that can have a boxy sound that many players cant seem to leave behind.

As always, utilize consistent fingering and practice these scales in all keys and learn all the scales up and down the neck. Then apply them by practicing your soloing over the jam tracks. Make strong solo statements by emphasizing strong chord tones and root notes. Employ good phrasing and continuity, and play laterally across the neck. Rock on!

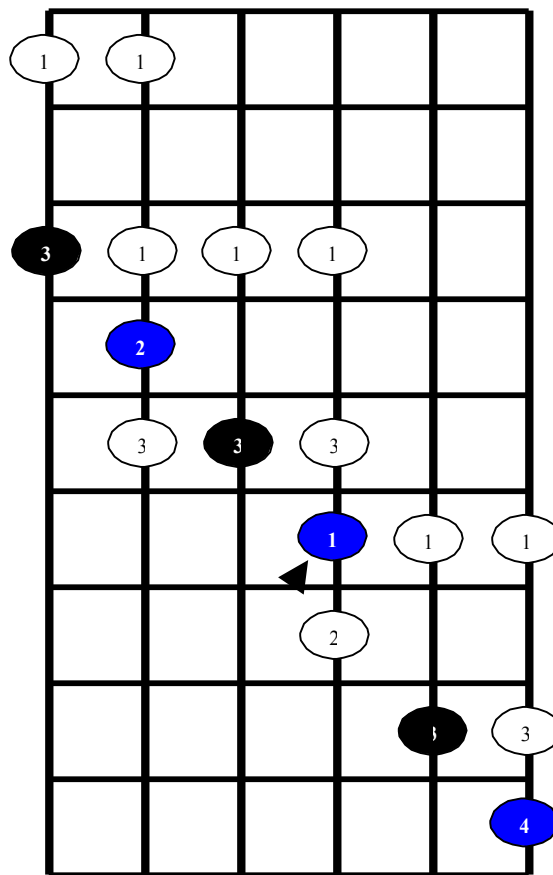
Basic Box Minor Pentatonic Scale



Minor Pentatonic Blues Scale



Expanded I Minor Pentatonic Blues Scale



When ascending the scale at the G-string pivot with your 1st finger playing 1,3 then 1,2. Then descending use a 3,2,1,1 finger combination on the G string

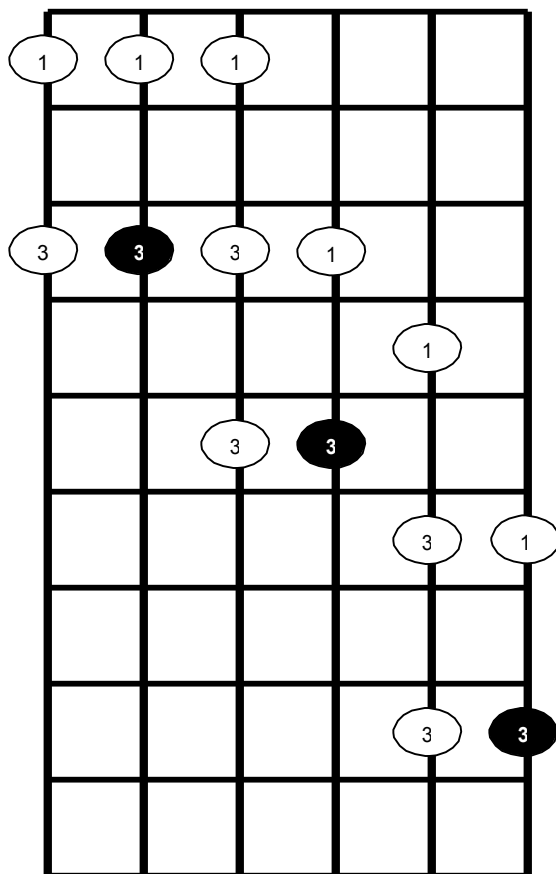
● = root note ● = blue note (b5)

THE MINOR PENTATONIC BLUES EXPANDED II SCALE

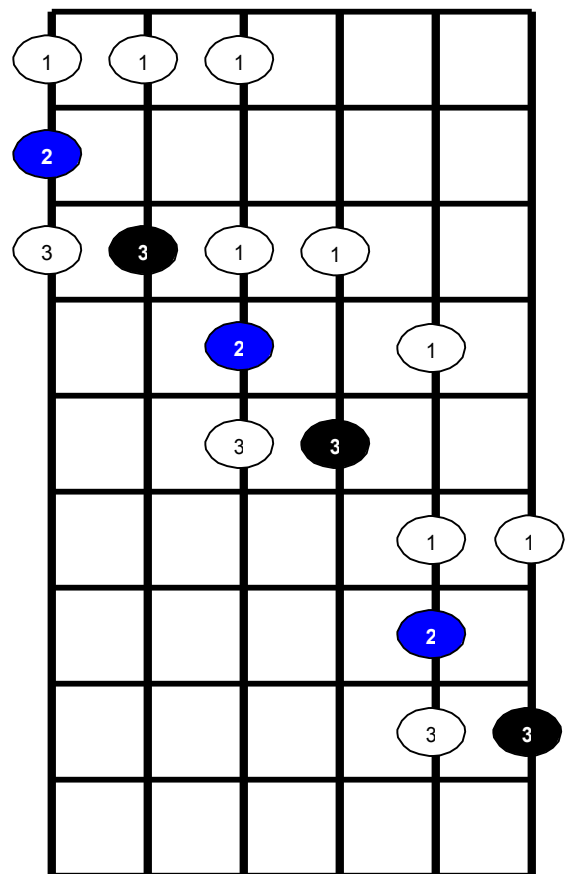
Let's continue to add the b5th, or blue note, to the Minor Pentatonic scale in the Expanded II scale. Below on the left is the Expanded II Minor Pentatonic scale. By adding the blue note we now get the Expanded II Minor Pentatonic Blues scale, as shown below on the right. There is only one note added to make the Blues scale. Examine the fingering carefully as it varies slightly between the two scales. The fingering shown below puts your fingers in the proper place on the fretboard to set up for the next part of the scale, or if playing a solo, the next lick. Remember it is crucial to always have your fingers in the right position, setting yourself up for the next lick or run. Practice the scales below in all keys.

When playing through these scales remember to make mental notes when hitting the root notes and the blue notes, as you may want to emphasize these notes in your lead lines - its all about emphasis! Also remember, as I always state, just don't memorize the fingering for scales or just the scale shapes. Take the extra time to learn the notes and intervals that you are playing in a given key. Taking a little extra time to do this will make you a much better musician in the long run.

Expanded II Minor Pentatonic Scale



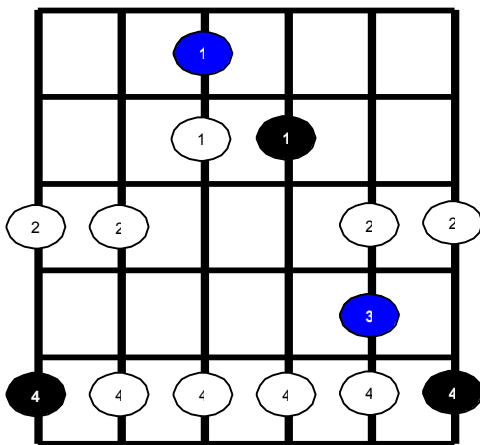
Expanded II Minor Pentatonic Blues Scale



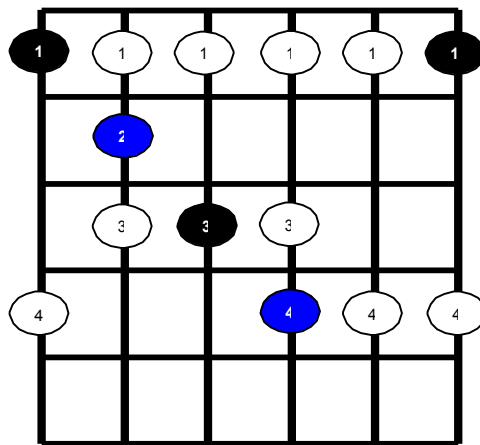
THE MINOR PENTATONIC BLUES SCALE – ALL FIVE BLOCK SCALES

Below are the five box shape Minor Pentatonic Blues scales. This now completes the entire neck in Minor Pentatonic Blues scales. All the holes and gaps are now filled and you want to work towards playing the Minor Pentatonic Blues scale over the entire neck. Practice the Blues scales in all keys and try and connect them with the rest of the shapes so you can play up and down the entire neck. Connect them in with the Expanded I and II Blues scales. Remember, try to see the connection points and the neck as one big scale and play laterally across it – not always just as all individual boxes.

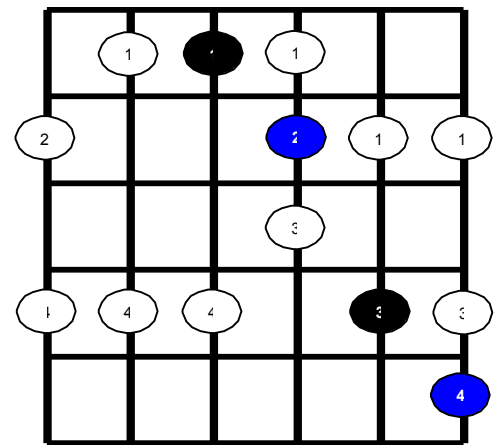
#1 box – in Am start with 4th finger on the 5th fret, low E string on the A note. Go outside for the blue note on the D string



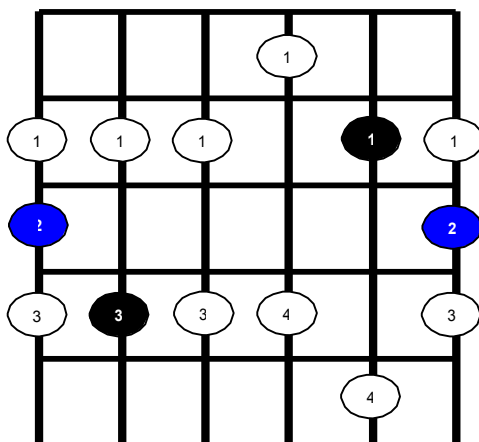
#2 “basic box” shape – in Am start with 1st finger on the 5th fret, low E string on the A note. Use 2nd and 4th fingers for blue notes



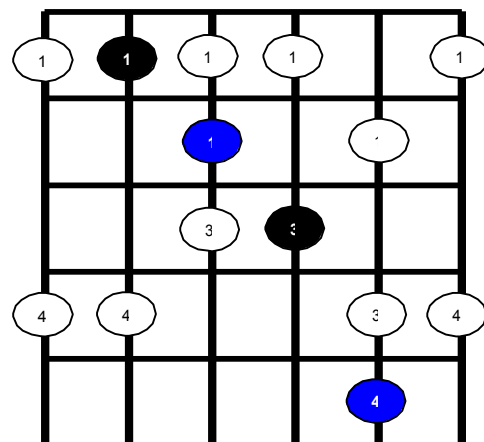
#3 box – in Am start with 2nd finger on the 8th fret, low E string on the C note. (the lower part of this box is that mini box in the expanded I scale)



#4 box – in Am start with 1st finger on the 10th fret, low E string on the D note. First three strings are first part of expanded II scale



#5 box – in Am start with 1st finger on the 12th fret, low E string on E note. (last two boxes and the first one combine to form expanded II scale)

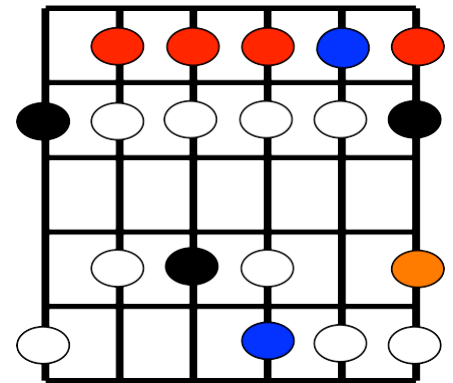


SPICING UP THE MINOR PENTATONIC BLUES SCALE

Now that you have learned some Pentatonic scales lets look at how we can spice things up a bit to add some more color and texture to your playing. Its not enough just to know the scale but you will need to take the notes and do musically interesting things with them. Think of guitar playing as speaking a language. We are going to turn our notes, or words, into sentences. This is what some refer to as phrasing - the way we connect and play our thoughts musically on the guitar. What's so important in great lead playing and improvisation is engaging your audience and drawing them into your playing. You want to speak to your audience musically in a way that is engaging and that they can comprehend. So it's so important that your musical thoughts and phrases make musical "sense". For instructional purposes we are going to use the Minor Pentatonic basic box shape to illustrate these techniques. In the illustration below the black ovals are the root notes, the white ovals are the other notes in the scale, and the colored ovals are the various notes we will discuss below.

1. Spice it up by doubling and tripling up on your notes. Don't always go from one note to the next to the next in straight eighth or quarter notes. You have to bust them up a bit to make them sound more interesting. Play the same note in rhythmic combinations. Ba.Ba.Ba...Ba...Bow – remember, if you can say it, you can play it! Feel the rhythm of the line, don't just play it straight – and say the phrase out loud if you need to. Then change around the rhythm. Get into an idea that you like and keep repeating it, perhaps playing it a little different rhythmically each time. Learn a rhythm or rhythmic phrase and then apply it to some of your favorite licks across all the strings. So when you are noodling around and get into a little cool idea – keep it – keep playing it – turn the rhythm around and exploit it and keep repeating the phrase. Remember rhythm, repetition, and melody are the keys!

2. Spice it up by slurring your notes with passing tones. Slide into your notes utilizing half steps passing tones. It is a great sound as you get the inference of the passing tone and then the target note. Do not hang on passing tones and don't try and bend or vibrato them – get on and off them quickly, just use them in passing. Bookend your passing tones with two strong scalar notes. For example, if you are playing a five-note Pentatonic scale, you can utilize the other seven notes as passing tones. Just remember to get and off them quickly and bookend them with strong notes that are in the scale. Try utilizing the passing tones in the diagram to the right. Slide from any note in red to the scale note one half step higher. The note in blue is the blue note, or b5, and makes a great note to use as a passing slide tone also. Double and triple up on these slides. These slurs will add some great color and interest to your playing.



3. Spice it up by adding the ninth scale degree to the Minor Pentatonic scale, (the ninth is illustrated above as the orange oval). This note sounds great and will work most of the time when using minor pentatonic adding much color to the scale. It is a great note to slide off, bend a half step, use in triplet patterns, and use in pull off and hammer licks. The outside sounding note will give you a little jazzy sound. So bend it a half step or slide from the ninth to the next note, the b3rd. It's a great sounding note! Also use the 9th on the G string – more cool licks!

4. Spice it up by slightly bending the b3rd on the G-string, (the b3rd is a white oval with an asterisk, “*”). The b3rd is a very ambiguous note, especially when playing the blues. It sometimes sounds best when played as a natural tone and sometimes sounds great bent up a quarter or half step depending on what chord its being played over or that you go to next in the progression. Pull that b3rd note down in a nice bend and really feel it. Slur in and out of it and you will find it will add a lot of texture to your playing. If you are playing in the box shape it is one of the few times where I like to bend with my first finger. It's an easy bend as you are only going up a quarter or half step so you don't need multiple finger strength to reach and hold the pitch. You can bend it slow or fast, but put a lot of feeling and passion into this bend and you will absolutely love the sound! One of the few bends where you have some leeway and don't have to bend it exactly perfect – anywhere in that quarter to half step range sounds great.

5. Spice it up with reverse slides – instead of always sliding a note up the fretboard try sliding down the fretboard. A real nice reverse slide is to slide the blue note one-half step back to the fourth. In the diagram above reverse slide from the blue oval with the asterisk back one half step. Really feel the slide and hear both notes. Repeat the slide two or three times in succession for a real cool riff. So try sliding in both directions not just limiting yourself to sliding up the neck.

THE MAJOR PENTATONIC SCALE

The Major Pentatonic scale is a five-note scale consisting of five notes from the Major scale. It is an extremely useful scale that has a very sweet major sound. At times full major scales may be inappropriate to play over a given progression, as they may sound a bit stiff. The major seventh note is a very "ifly" note, especially in rock music as sometimes it works and many times it doesn't. Defaulting to the Major Pentatonic scale for that major sound in many of these instances is a great idea and will give you a killer sound. You hear the major pentatonic scale used often in blues music.

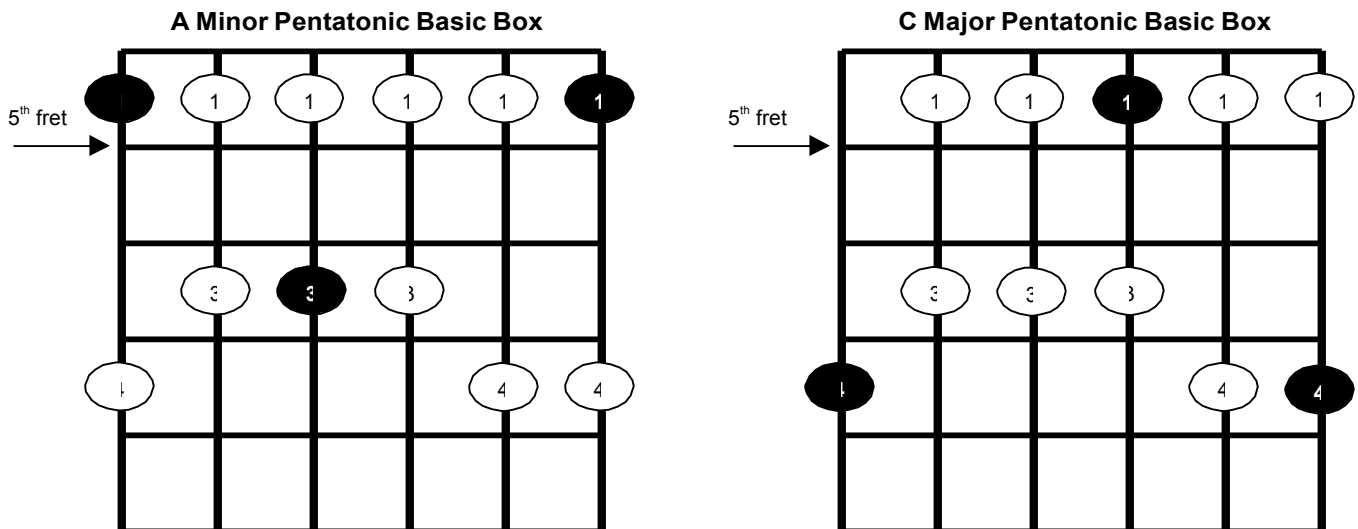
The five-note Major Pentatonic scale is derived from five notes from the Major scale similar to how the Minor Pentatonic scale is derived from five notes from the Natural Minor scale. The intervals of the Major Pentatonic are 1,2,3,5,6. You do not play the 4th and 7th degrees of the Major scale.

For many guitarists there's confusion surrounding the Major Pentatonic and it's relative minor, the Minor Pentatonic scale. The Minor Pentatonic is the relative minor of the Major Pentatonic and lives a minor 3rd, or three frets away, below the Major Pentatonic. For every major key there is a relative minor key. Both keys will have exactly the same notes. Refer to the handout on the circle of fifths on page 31 for a complete listing of every major key and its relative minor key.

Illustrated below is the "basic box shape" C Major Pentatonic and its relative minor, A Minor Pentatonic. C Major Pentatonic scales can also be viewed as A Minor Pentatonic scales. Both scales consist of the same notes C, D, E, G, and A. Your starting and emphasis notes determine which scale will sound. The confusion often comes because of the multiple names. C Major Pentatonic and A Minor Pentatonic are the same scale, just different starting and emphasis notes. Just like when playing utilizing the modes, it all comes down to what notes you are emphasizing - emphasis is so important!

Play both scales starting and ending with the root and listen to how the Pentatonic Major sounds very sweet and major sounding when starting on and emphasizing the C notes. Play the same shape but start and end on the A notes. Now you get the darker bluesy Minor Pentatonic scale. Same notes, just different start and emphasis points. One scale gives you the happy, major, Allman Brothers/BB King type of sound while the other gives you a darker, bluesy, minor type sounds.

Remember that you can get to all the Major Pentatonics by going through the relative Minor Pentatonic scales. So you don't have to learn any new shapes for Major Pentatonic if you already know your Minor Pentatonic scales. Just flip them to their relative Major Pentatonic.



If you know your Minor Pentatonic scales across the entire fretboard there is no need to learn any new shapes to play Major Pentatonic. You can get to those shapes from the relative minor Pentatonics. Learning more shapes would be redundant.

The blue note does not always apply to Major Pentatonic and often will not sound very good. So use the straight Minor Pentatonic scales and Expanded scales without the blue notes. There is not as much room for error soloing in major key either - bad notes really stick out. You also can't slur all those passing notes like we discussed when using Minor Pentatonic. So be careful with your note choices and let your ear help to guide you. So think of it like you have a bit more leeway in Minor Pentatonic than you have in Major Pentatonic.

For that sweet Major Pentatonic sound utilize all of your Minor Pentatonic shapes focused on emphasizing the root of the mode – the major. For example, when playing in C Major Pentatonic think of the relative minor, A Minor Pentatonic shapes that you have learned previously. Just start and emphasize on the C notes, not the A notes. You want to sound major so you have to emphasize the major root notes, not the minor ones. Practice in all keys and all positions up and down the neck.

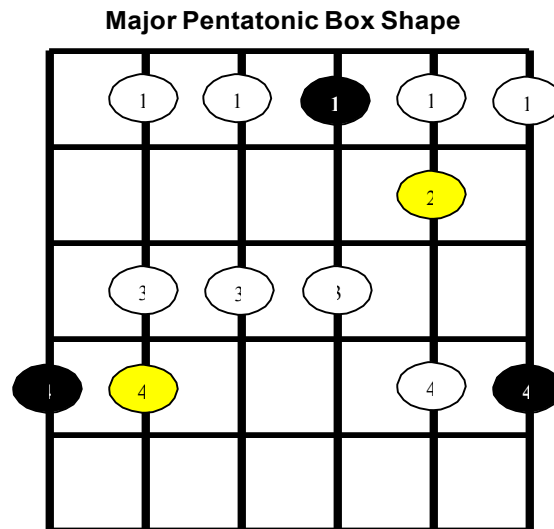
Major Pentatonic Sus4 Scales

A very cool way to spice up the Major Pentatonic scale is to add the fourth degree to the scale. Instead of it being a five-note scale it will now be a six-note scale. Adding the fourth degree makes it a **Major Pentatonic Sus4 scale**. The intervals of the scale are now 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Basically it's a major scale with the 7th degree left out. This scale works just about every time so try using it when playing in Major Pentatonic.

In the past lesson we discussed that the major 7th is a very "ifly" note. This is true especially in rock music as sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't depending on the underlying chords. What is great about the Major Pentatonic Sus4 scale is that it leaves that major 7th note out all together. This way you don't have to worry about it at all and you get the added bonus of a real sweet sounding Sus4 note added into the scale. Try this scale over simple major key jams and ballads at first to get the fingerings down and make sure make a mental note each time you pass through the root AND the Sus4 notes.

In the illustration below the root notes are in the black and the Sus4 notes are highlighted in yellow. This is the basic "box" shape that you have seen in previous lessons. As discussed above this Major Pentatonic shape can be viewed as the same notes as its relative Minor Pentatonic.

This scale gives you many additional lick ideas as you have three notes per string with the half step on the A and B strings in the shape below. A great bend is on the B string bending up to the Sus4 note with a nice half step bend with the first finger. Very sweet sounding bend.



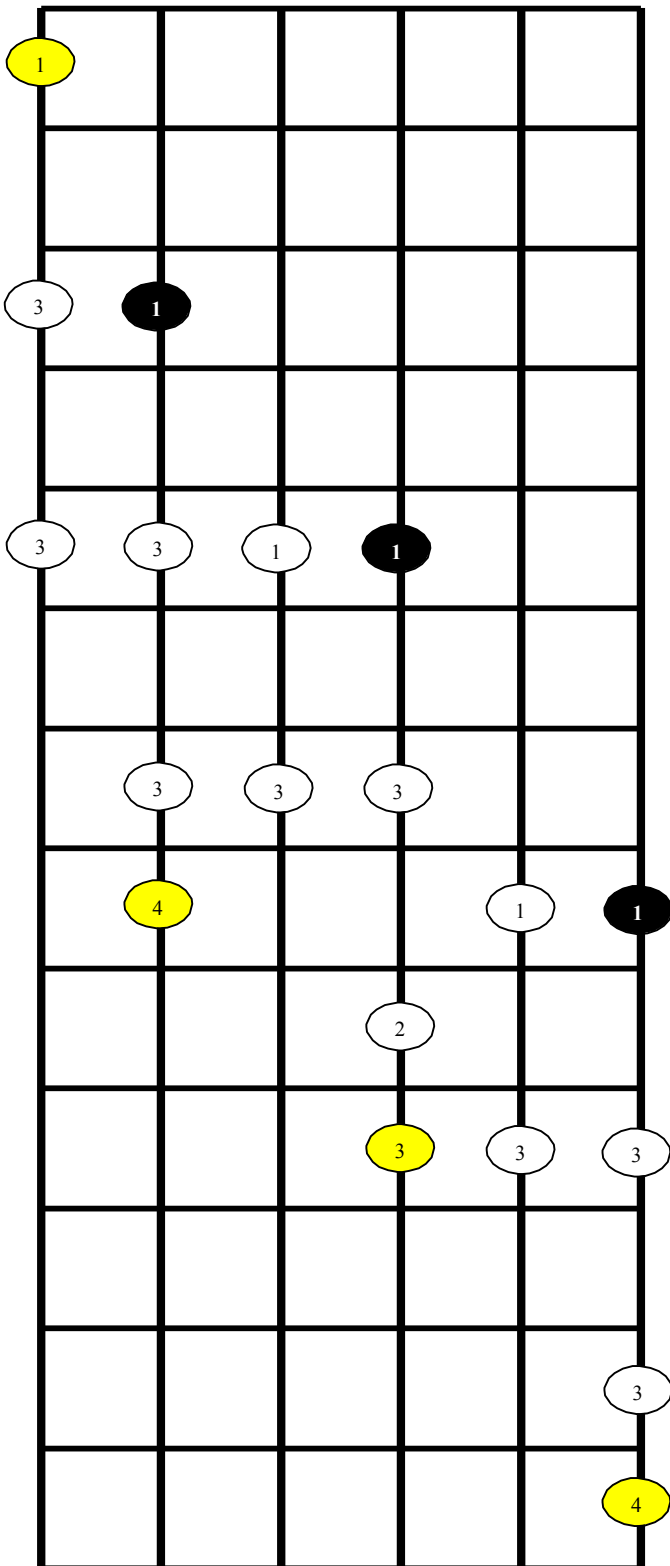
Example: Try playing a simple progression of C to F, two measures on each chord. That is a I major to a IV major change and its in the key of C major. Because we are in major key, instantly we know major pentatonic will work. So C Major Pentatonic would sound very good played over this progression. But for added spice play the C Major Pentatonic Sus4 scale.

If you analyze the chord changes in the key of C the 4th is an F. This change goes C to F. So the Major Pent Sus4 scale would be an awesome choice to play as it adds that F note.

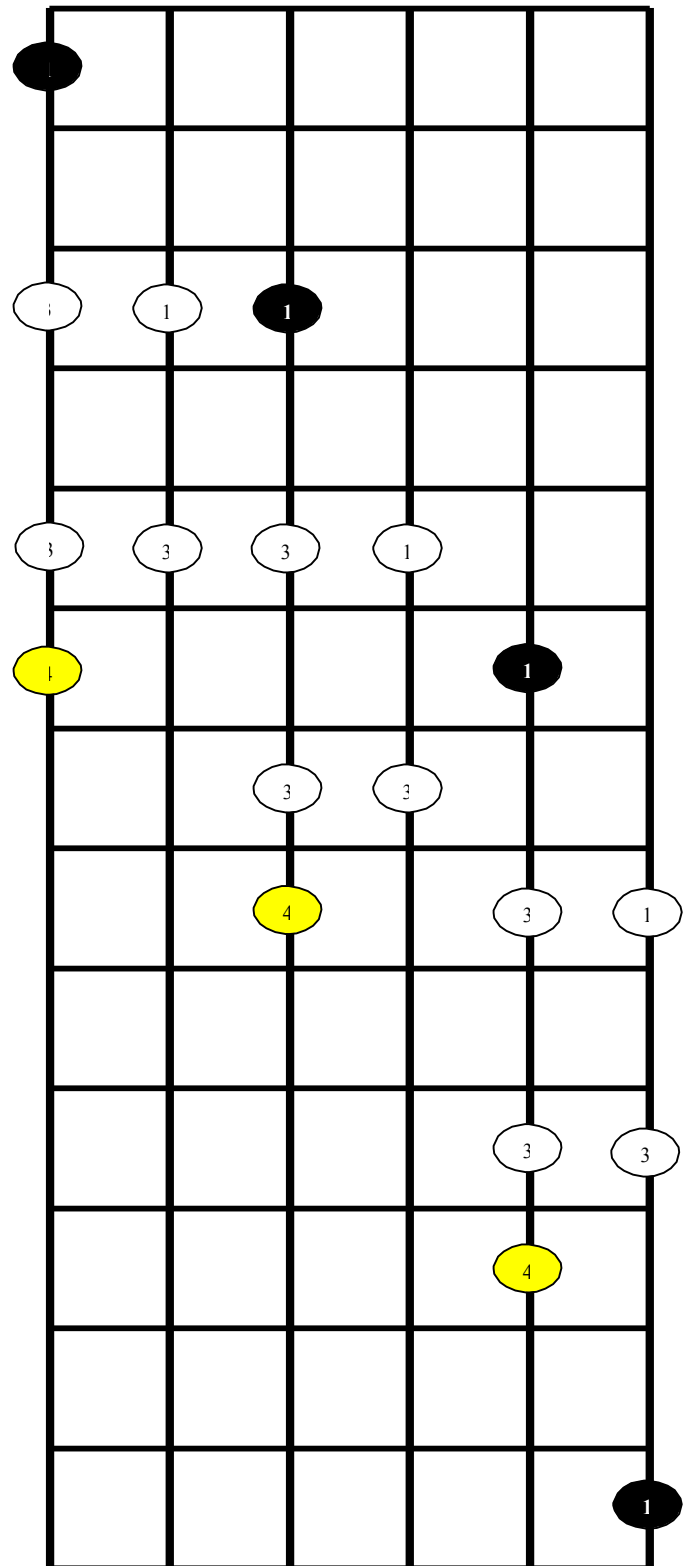
In fact you will often see I major to IV major changes, they are very common. That is why the sus4 scales are so useful. Try to feel when the change happens and land on the strong chord tones of the chord changes. The strongest landing notes on the C chord will be the notes in that chord, C, E, or G. The strongest landing tones on the F chord will be the notes making up an F chord, F, A, or C. Practice your timing landing on a different chord tone each time the change comes up. Learn the long form Sus4 scale links on the next page and work all the scales over the entire fretboard in all keys.

Major Pentatonic Sus4 scale links

Major Pentatonic Sus4 Expanded 1



Major Pentatonic Sus4 Expanded 2



Root notes in black



Sus4 notes in yellow

TOP TEN KEY HINTS TO GET YOUR PLAYING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

In my opinion there are certain principles that every guitar player should consider tackling to help evolve their playing to the next level. Some concepts and techniques are harder than others, and take quite a bit of work to get proficient. However, in the end you will be glad you took the extra time to learn the principles outlined below, as they will make you a better guitarist and a better musician. There are no real shortcuts here, it will be more work, and quite difficult at first, but in the end you will be a better musician if you take the time to nail these down. Go slowly at first and don't overwhelm yourself. These are processes that take time, remember that your playing is an evolution. Take stock in your playing and see if you are deficient in one or more of these areas and then really work hard on getting each up to speed. Keep honing your skills and refining your art and stay positive!

HINT 1: Use what you learn in lessons as templates – not isolated individual events

You want to be able to take what you are learning in lessons and apply it to real musical situations. Don't just learn a lick or an exercise and that is it – just that one isolated event. Use lessons as practical playing vehicles for you to practice and hone your lead guitar playing skills. Take what you learn in an individual lesson and try applying it to other jams, songs, and progressions in a musical context.

HINT 2: JUST DON'T LEARN LICKS.....LEARN FROM THE LICKS

I have seen it over and over and over. Too many guitarists spend way too much time on just learning licks and stopping there. If you just learn a lick here and a lick there then in the end you know a few licks – what good is that really? You want to LEARN FROM THE LICK – what scale is that lick from, how is it used, over what changes can it be played, over what chords can it be played, how can I vary that lick to turn that one lick into twenty licks, how can I use the lick in a musical context. That's what I mean – **LEARN FROM THE LICKS** - then you are arming yourself with the necessary tools to take your playing to the next level.

HINT 3: KNOW & ANALYZE THE CHORD PROGRESSION, knowing the key alone is not enough

I have seen this hold guitar players back time and time again. They focus solely on what key they are playing in and that is all they are tuned into. This can be very limiting as knowing just the key will only get you so far. Knowing what key you are playing in is important, but to fully develop your lead playing and improvisation skills you need to know more. You need to start examining the chords and progressions.

You want to know exactly what chords are in the progression and then analyze them to determine what scales, modes, and landing notes to utilize. In many instances you need to look at if there is a IV chord or V chord in a progression and are the chords major or minor. You need to know which notes make up the chords that you are playing over so you can use their respective chord tones as strong landing or emphasis notes. You will need to know the chords and their structure to fully understand and apply which mode you want to solo with.

KEY POINT: It's the chords that you are playing over that give you the full roadmap to what will work for soloing and improvisation purposes.

The key is only part of the equation – you want to start listening to and analyzing the chords underneath. At first, get in the habit of writing out the chord progression and thoroughly examining all the chords in the progression or song to get clear to all the soloing options. Consider this very methodical approach at first as training as it gets that solid musical muscle memory locked in. This way eventually your ear will be developed enough to take you to all the right notes – it just makes it easier and faster to get to that point following this structured plan. I have found that learning this methodical approach will get you there the fastest.

HINT 4: DEVELOP YOUR EAR

I always say, and will keep saying and repeating, one of the most important things that you can do as a musician is to **DEVELOP YOUR EAR**. This opens the door to amazing musical applications. Once your ear starts developing you will be able to hear strum patterns & rhythms and play them by ear without the worry of learning pattern ups and down strums. You will hear the color of chords and be able to discern major chords from minor chords from 7th chords and so on. You will be able to grab chords that give off a certain color or emotion that you may need for a given song when songwriting. You will be able to figure out and transcribe songs by ear. Your ear will also take you to those sweet sounding landing and emphasis notes and link the proper scale or mode to a given chord or set of chords. I can go on and on – develop that ear – its HUGE!

HINT 5: KNOW A LARGE CATALOGUE OF CHORDS

As a musician knowing a large vocabulary of chords is absolutely critical. Unless you want to be regulated to playing stock everyday A, D, and E all day long. Being able to play a lot of different chords proficiently and knowing how to embellish them is a difficult task, but so worthwhile. Knowing a large catalog of chords will open many doors and allow you to embellish and decorate your playing with all kinds of new musical melodies, rhythms, and endless song writing possibilities. Why play a stock, sterile, every day Aminor chord when you can play a much more interesting and harmonically rich Asus2, Am7, or Am9 chord. Embellishing chords is a great way to spark new ideas and infuse new life into old progressions and songs. Having chordal options makes it fun and exciting not only for the guitarist but also, and probably more importantly, for the listener.

HINT 6: KNOW HOW TO PLAY SOLID RHYTHM

Knowing a large catalog of chords is the first step. Next is being able to play solid rhythm. Music is more than just soloing, notes, and chords, it is also about rhythm and meter. As a guitarist you will be playing rhythm 90% of the time. So the misinformed players who thinks they can just concentrate solely on soloing and improvisation are in for a huge surprise first time they start playing with a band or jamming with other people. Your lead playing will pretty much only ever be as good as your rhythm playing. Your rhythm playing is huge so don't overlook it.

HINT 7: KNOW THE NOTES ON THE NECK

There is just no way around this one. Strive to learn the notes on the neck cold. You will always be a better musician and be able to speak the language of music if you take the extra time to learn the notes that make up each chord, scale, and the notes on the fretboard. This will also allow you to grab a needed note quickly at any time. Knowing the notes on the neck is a huge under taking, so make it a process to learn them over a period of time. Don't overwhelm yourself and try to get them all down in a week. Take things slow and learn one string at a time, then go to the next string. Utilize octaves to make the learning process a bit easier. Refer to the written lesson on page 7 illustrating the notes on the fretboard and the 12-note scale.

HINT 8: DON'T RELY SOLELY ON TABLATURE OR JUST LEARNING SHAPES

The problem with tablature and just learning scale shapes is that you don't learn the notes that make up the chords or the scales. Don't rely solely on tablature as then you are just learning finger position, fret numbers, and shapes. Try not to become too dependent on tablature. Tablature only tells you what fret number to play, it does not tell you the note that you are playing or the notes that make up the chords. Tablature is a fun way to learn songs if you don't read music so certainly use it and have fun with it, but don't fall into the trap of using it exclusively and not taking the time to develop your ear. Along with tablature learn the notes on the neck and what notes and what intervals make up each chord and keep developing your ear so you eventually wont need tabs.

HINT 9: JUST DON'T LEARN SCALES ALONE, ALSO LEARN HOW TO APPLY THEM

Too often players will learn dozens and dozens of scales, but they don't learn how to use them and when to apply them. Learning a scale by itself is not enough. Knowing when to utilize the scale and over which chords is just as important as knowing the scale itself. Knowing all the scales ever created in the history of music will do you absolutely no good unless you know how to utilize them and under which musical circumstances apply them into your playing. Learn the scale, but also learn how and when to apply it.

HINT 10: KNOW YOUR MAJOR SCALES COLD IN ADDITION TO THE PENTATONICS

This is invaluable for the lead guitar player. Knowing your major scales in all positions across the neck will help give you so many additional tools necessary for lead playing and improvisation. Too many players just stop learning scales after they learn the pentatonics. Again, why limit yourself? Knowing the major scales up and down the neck will be the springboard to knowing the modes of the major scale, relative major and minor, and many other important concepts. So learn those major scales in all positions. Don't stop after learning pentatonic scales, keep pushing into new territories and you will push yourself to that next level of lead guitar playing.

THE MINOR PENTATONIC BLUES SCALE OVER THE ENTIRE NECK

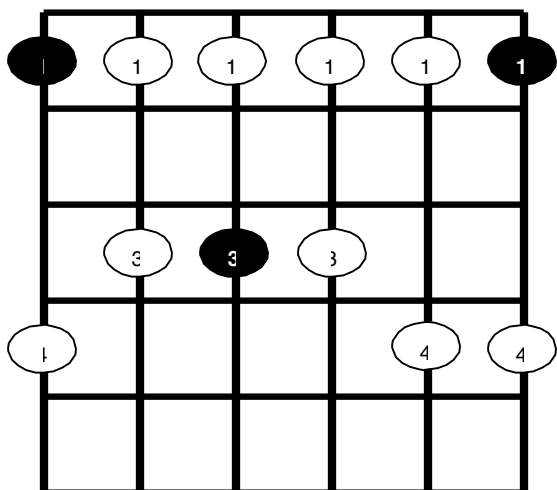
Lets think of the blues scale as basically a Minor Pentatonic scale, with one added note, the flatted 5th, or blue note. The b5 creates a certain amount of tension that is extremely useful. The blues scale is not solely utilized in blues music but rather has pretty much unlimited potential. Because it is I, IV, V based the blues scale is utilized is just about every other music genre from rock, pop, country, alternative, metal, jazz, swing, reggae – just about everything except for classical music as it is not I, IV, V based. Adding this scale to your bag of tricks will definitely add a little “bluesy” color and texture to your playing. Use it pretty much whenever you play minor pentatonic scales – so now make it the minor pentatonic blues scale and have the added color from the b5 note.

The Minor Pentatonic scale is a five-note scale constructed from the scale degrees of root, b3rd, 4th, 5th, and b7th. Make this the blues scale by adding the b5th to this formula and we get the six-note blues scale constructed from the degrees of root, b3rd, 4th, b5th, 5th, and b7th. The first illustration below on the left is the basic box shape minor pentatonic scale. Directly below that we add the b5th and have the minor pentatonic blues scale – you can see they only differ by one note, the b5th, illustrated in blue. The illustration below to the right is the Expanded I Minor Pentatonic Blues scale.

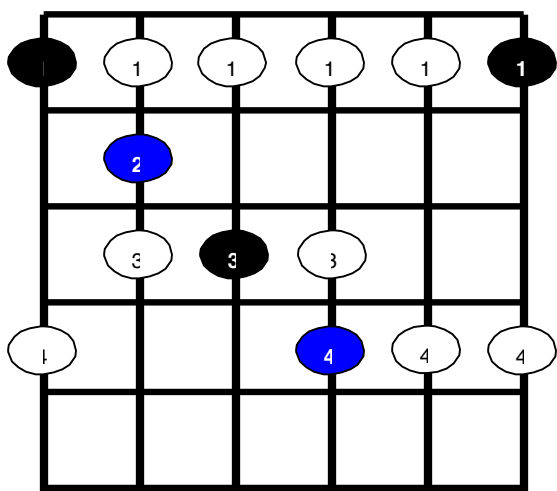
A common challenge I see with many students is that they always play and think of scales in box patterns and they stay in one box, then stop, move to the next box, then stop, and so on. This has a real boxy and fragmented sound with lines that have no continuity. What I have found is students benefit greatly by learning to play **ACROSS** the neck by playing laterally, not just vertically. In this lesson you will learn how to start connecting various boxes into EXPANDED SCALES. You will be combining boxes together and playing across the neck for a much more fluid sound. This will improve your phrasing and add continuity to your lead lines as you move across the neck and start connecting ideas, shapes, and patterns together. The ultimate goal is to see the entire neck as one big connected scale. Then just leave them all connected and just move the whole chunk back and forth as one chunk, to change key. These expanded scales will pull you out of the traditional boxes and that boxy sound that many players cant seem to leave behind.

As always, utilize consistent fingering and practice these scales in all keys and learn all the shapes up and down the neck. Then apply them by practicing your soloing over jam tracks. Make strong solo statements by emphasizing strong chord tones, employ good phrasing and continuity, and play laterally across the neck.

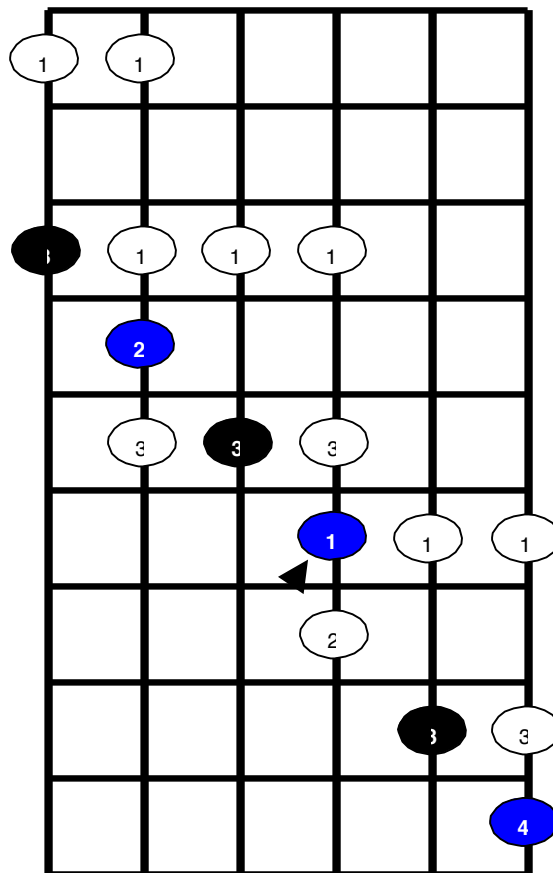
Basic Box Minor Pentatonic Scale



Minor Pentatonic Blues Scale



Expanded I Minor Pentatonic Blues Scale



When ascending the scale at the G-string pivot with your 1st finger playing 1,3 then 1,2. Then descending use a 3,2,1,1 finger combination on the G strings

● = root note

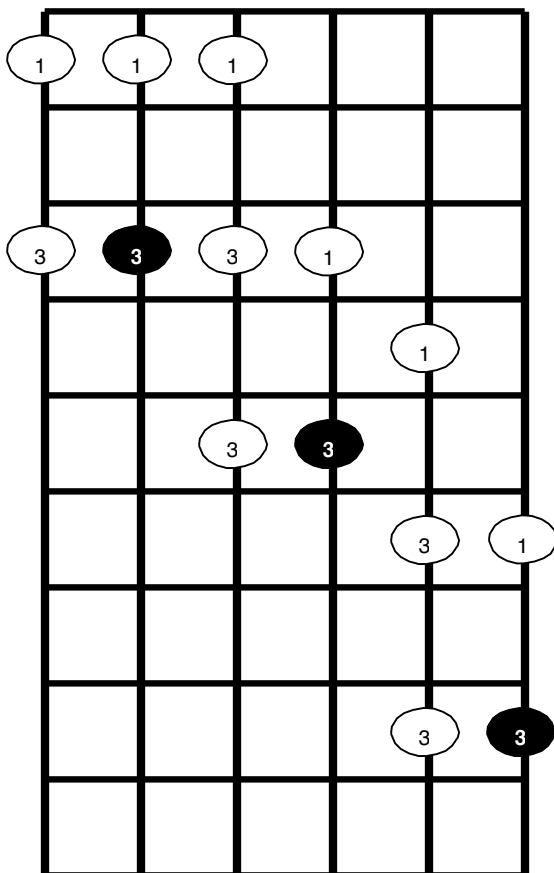
● = blue note (b5)

THE BLUES SCALE - EXPANDED II SHAPE

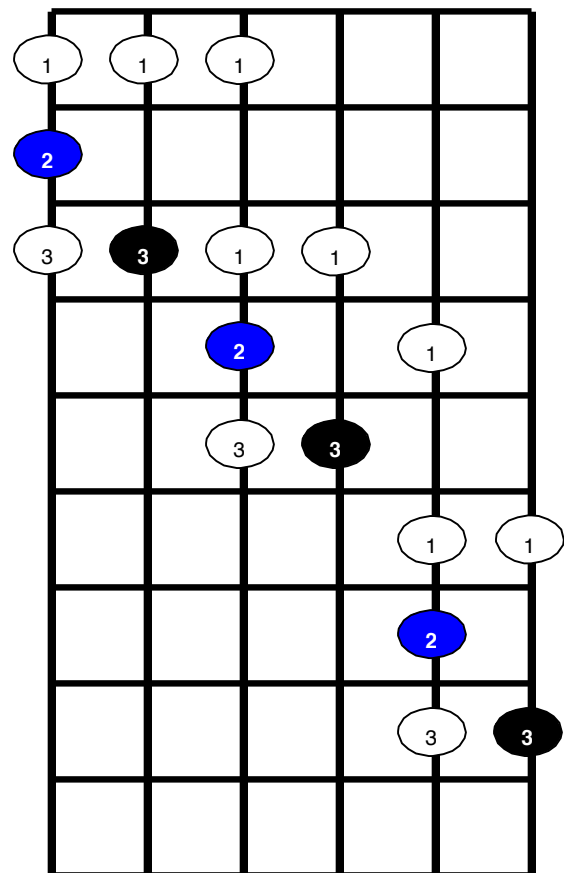
Let's continue to add the b5th, or blue note, to the minor pentatonic scale in more positions. Below on the left is an expanded II minor pentatonic scale. By adding the blue note we now get the expanded II minor pentatonic blues scale, as shown below on the right. There is only one note added to make the blues scale. Examine the fingering carefully as it varies slightly between the two scales. The fingering shown below puts your fingers in the proper place on the fretboard to set you up for the next part of the scale, or if playing a solo, the next lick. Remember it is crucial to always have your fingers in the right position setting yourself up for the next lick or run.

When playing through these scales remember to make mental notes when hitting the root notes and the blue note, as you may want to emphasize these notes in your lead lines - its all about emphasis! Also remember, as I always state, just don't memorize the fingering for scales or just the scale shapes. Take the extra time to learn the notes and intervals that you are playing in a given key. Taking a little extra time to do this will make you a much better musician in the long run.

Expanded II Minor Pentatonic Scale



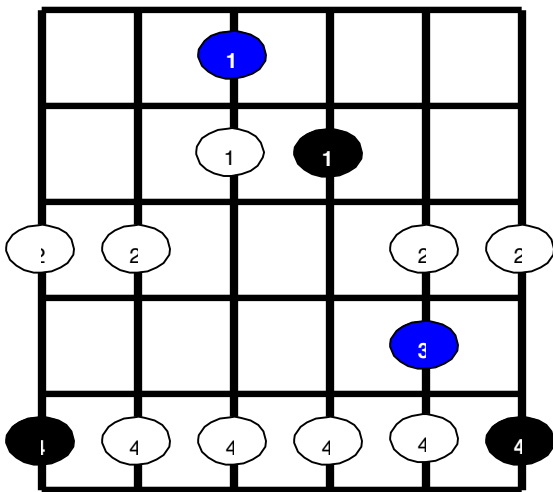
Expanded II Minor Pentatonic Blues Scale



THE BLUES SCALE – ALTERNATE BLOCK SHAPES

Below are the last two shapes to complete the entire neck in minor pentatonic blues scales. All the holes and gaps are now filled and you want to work towards playing the minor pentatonic blues scale over the entire neck. The alternate block shape I on the left depicts going “outside” the “box for the blue note on the D string. Practice both blues scales in all keys and try and connect them with the rest of the shapes so you can play up and down the entire neck. Connect them in with the Expanded I and II scales from page two of this lesson. Remember, try to see the connection points and the neck as one big scale and play laterally across it – not as all individual boxes.

Alt Block I Minor Pentatonic Blues Scale



Alt Block II Minor Pent Blues Scale

