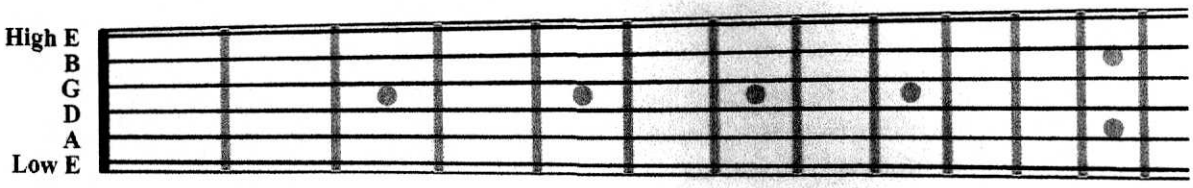
THE NOTES OF THE FRETBOARD

Although perhaps not as enjoyable as playing *Fretboard Freedom*'s 365 licks, the material in this section is just as important and beneficial. I learned long ago that, when one strives to be the best guitarist that he can be, the process is... well, not always "fun." That said, a conscious effort has been made to present this section's material in the most tolerable—yet effective—way possible. If this section wasn't vitally important to fully integrating the material from *Fretboard Freedom* into your own playing, we would bypass it altogether. But that's not the case.

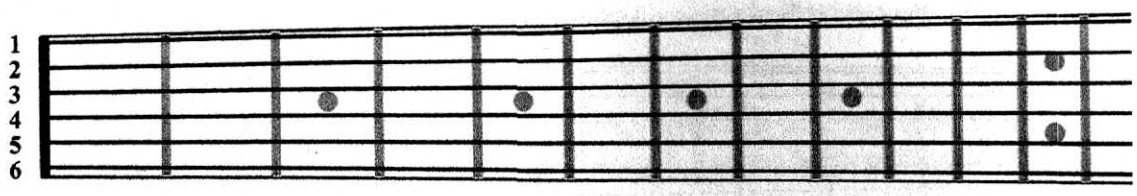
If I were to pick one event in my development as a guitarist that was most beneficial, it would be the time I spent learning the notes of the fretboard. While I was familiar with most of the notes of the low-E, A, and high-E strings (sixth, fifth, and first strings, respectively), the rest of the fretboard was a note-y abyss. With a dedicated and systematic approach to learning the rest of the fretboard, however, my playing improved exponentially in a matter of weeks, and I was better equipped to benefit from subsequent instructional material.

While learning the notes of the fretboard is not requisite to learning the material in *Fretboard Freedom*, I highly encourage you to dedicate a least a small portion of your practice time to getting acclimated to the notes on each string until you have a firm grasp of the entire neck. As you learn the notes, you can simultaneously work on *Fretboard Freedom*'s one-lick-per-day method. That way, the "grind" of memorizing notes and their locations won't deter you from getting to the fun stuff—the real-world musical examples.

Before you begin memorizing the notes of the strings in earnest, a quick tutorial on a couple of important details is in order. First, the notes of each string are as follows:



Note that, in guitar vernacular, the strings are numbered, 6 to 1, starting on the low-E string (closest to the ceiling), and finishing with the high-E string (closest to the floor).



Next, let's spend a little time on some basic music theory; specifically, we'll look at the *musical alphabet* and how it relates to the guitar. Unlike the 26-letter English alphabet, the musical alphabet consists of just seven notes: A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. When playing a scale or a melody, these seven notes are recycled, either in a higher or a lower *octave* (the distance, or interval, of eight notes). In music, an *interval* is the distance between any two notes, measured by half and whole steps. For example, in Western music, the *major scale* is constructed with the following combination of whole and half steps:

C Major Scale:

Scale Notes:	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Intervals/Steps:	W	W	H	W	W	W	H	
Scale Degrees:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8(1)

This intervallic pattern (whole–whole–half–whole–whole–whole–half) remains true for every major scale. As you probably noticed, natural half steps occur between two note pairs, B–C and E–F. When we begin the major scale on a different note, two new musical elements, *sharps* and *flats*, must be introduced to maintain the major scale's intervallic pattern. For closer inspection, let's take a look at two more major scales: G and F.

G Major Scale:

Scale Notes:	G	A	B	C	D	E	F♯	G
Intervals/Steps:	W	W	H	W	W	W	H	
Scale Degrees:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8(1)

F Major Scale:

Scale Notes:	F	G	A	B♭	C	D	E	F
Intervals/Steps:	W	W	H	W	W	W	H	
Scale Degrees:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8(1)

As you can see, in order to maintain the integrity of the intervallic pattern, specific notes of the G major and F major scales must be altered with either a sharp or a flat. In the case of G major, the F note must be raised a half step, to F♯, to maintain the whole-step relationship between the scale's 6th and 7th degrees. In the F major scale, the B note was lowered by a half step, to B♭, to maintain the half-step relationship between the scale's 3rd and 4th degrees.

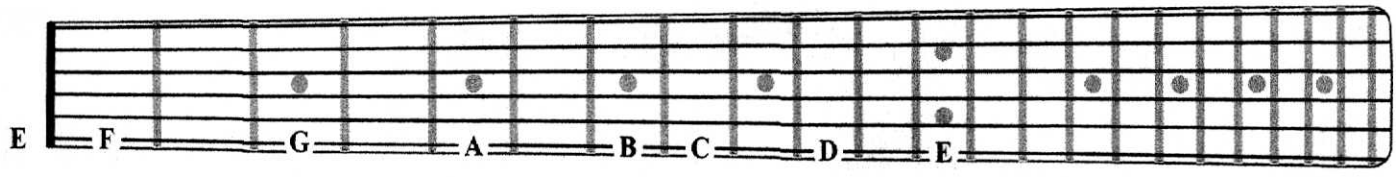
In short, the major scale is predominantly constructed with whole steps, with the only exceptions being the half steps that occur between steps 3–4 and 7–8. Also, due to the presence of sharps and flats, the total number of notes in the musical alphabet increases from seven to 12 (C, C♯/D♭, D, D♯/E♭, E, F, F♯/G♭, G, G♯/A♭, A, A♯/B♭, and B). Although the number of letters in the musical alphabet remains at seven, the total number of *notes* increases to a dozen, known as the *chromatic scale. (**Note:** The notes C♯/D♭, D♯/E♭, F♯/G♭, G♯/A♭, and A♯/B♭ are* enharmonic equivalents—*the note pairs have the same pitch, despite having different names.)*

If you remember anything from this brief music theory overview, make sure it's this: a natural half step occurs between the notes B–C and E–F. This knowledge will be of great benefit while memorizing the notes of the fretboard and while you work your way through *Fretboard Freedom*. What you'll quickly realize is that these half steps act as guideposts while you visualize and navigate the fretboard, although to a lesser degree than root notes and chord tones.

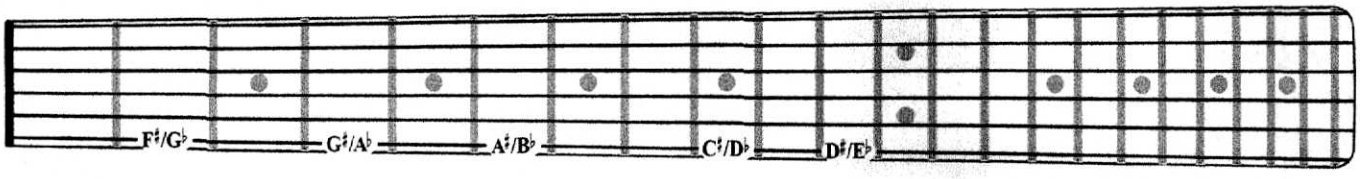
How should you approach fretboard memorization? I suggest isolating each string individually, spending a portion of your daily practice session on a specific string. For example, Monday could be spent on the low-E string, Tuesday on the A string, Wednesday on the D string, and so on. With seven days in the week but only six strings on the guitar, Sunday could be set aside for reviewing the entire fretboard. Fortunately, since both the first and sixth strings are tuned to the same note, E, you can simply transfer to the high-E string the notes from the low-E string! Let's get started.

MONDAY: THE NOTES OF THE SIXTH (LOW-E) STRING

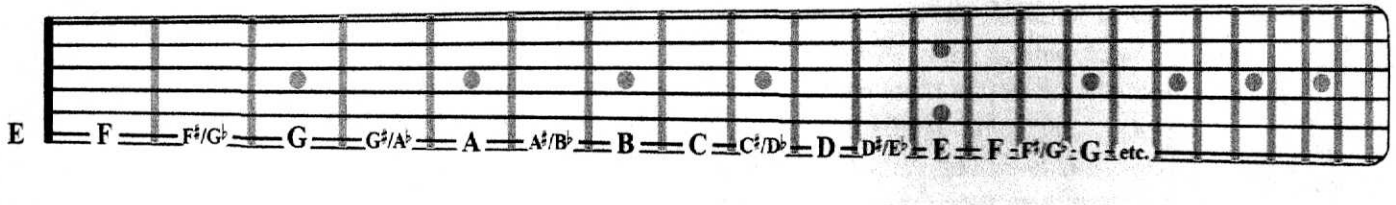
Try to set aside at least 30 minutes of your daily practice session for fretboard memorization, breaking the half hour into three ten-minute segments, which can be either continuous or broken up within your practice session. Use the first ten minutes to memorize the location of the "natural" notes (i.e., the notes with no sharps or flats) on the low-E string:



Next, spend ten minutes memorizing the remaining five notes of the low-E string, the notes that contain *accidentals* (i.e., the notes *with* sharps/flats), saying aloud the names of the notes as you play them:



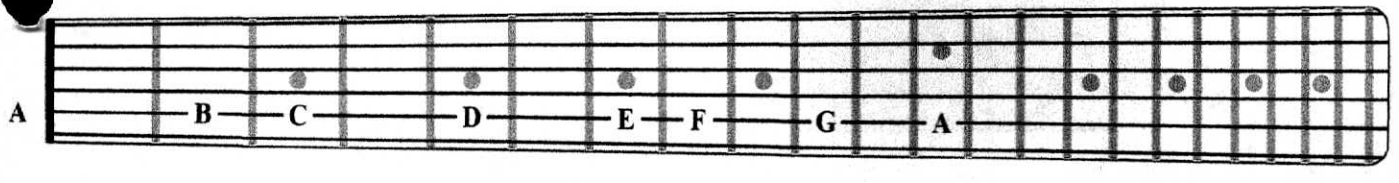
For the last ten minutes, pick random notes along the low-E string (A, F♯, D, B♭, C, etc.), saying aloud the names of the notes as they're played. Keep in mind that, once you reach the 12th fret, the notes repeat themselves, so don't limit yourself to the lower regions of the fretboard. On the contrary, be sure to pick notes that are located beyond fret 12, using the figure below as your guide:



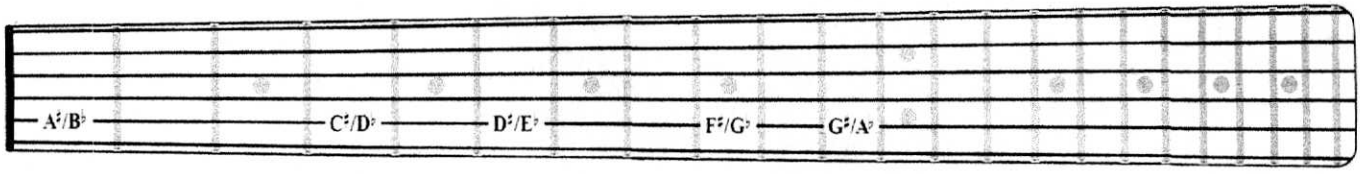
If you prefer a more systematic approach to memorizing every note of the low-E string, you can cycle through the notes of the circle of 5ths—C, G, D, A, E, B, F♯/G♭, C♯/D♭, A♭/G♯, E♭/D♯, B♭/A♯, and F. The *circle of 5ths* derives its name from the fact that each subsequent note of the cycle is the 5th scale degree—in this case, a perfect 5th—of the previous note's major scale (G is the 5th of C major, D is the 5th of G major, A is the 5th of D major, etc.). By cycling once through the circle of 5ths, you will hit every note of the string. Again, remember to say aloud the name of each note as it's played.

TUESDAY: THE NOTES OF THE FIFTH (A) STRING

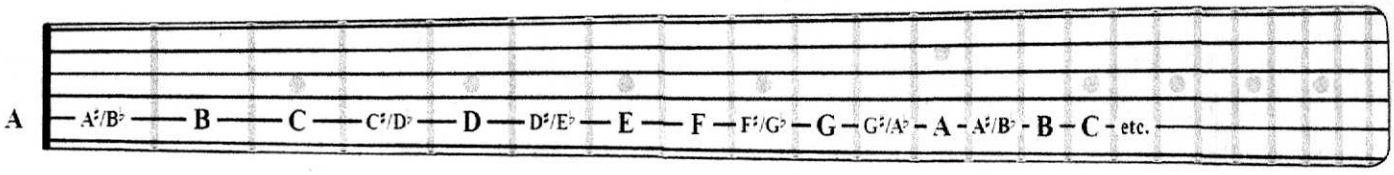
Just as we did with the low-E string, spend ten minutes memorizing the location of the natural notes on the A string, beginning with the open (A) string and working your way up to the octave A note at fret 12:



Once you feel comfortable with the location of the natural notes, move on to the five accidentals—A♯/B♭, C♯/D♭, D♯/E♭, F♯/G♭, and G♯/A♭—saying aloud their respective names as they're played:



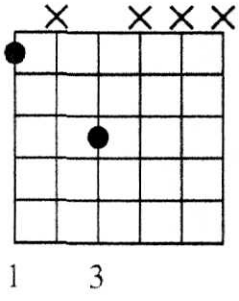
Now let's bring the two sets of notes (the naturals and the accidentals) together. Again, you can choose to either play the notes of the A string randomly or use the circle of 5ths as a guide: C, G, D, A, E, B, F♯/G♭, C♯/D♭, A♭/G♯, E♭/D♯, B♭/A♯, and F. Keep in mind that you are not relegated to starting on the C note every time; instead, try starting on the note that gives the string its name, A, and continue working around the circle (E, B, F♯/G♭, C♯/D♭, etc.).



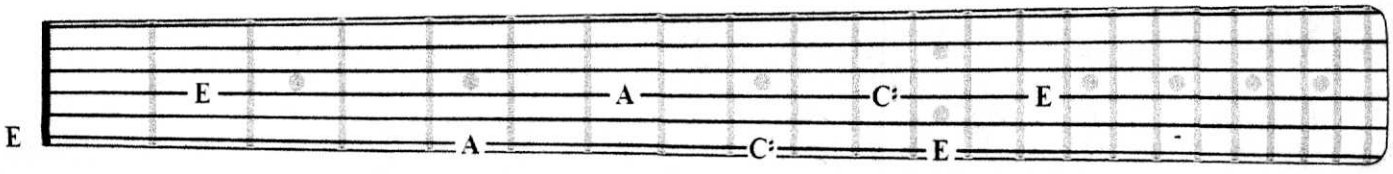
WEDNESDAY: THE NOTES OF THE FOURTH (D) STRING

Now that you're familiar with the notes on the low-E and A strings, memorizing the notes of the remaining four strings will seem less daunting because you can use the low-E string as a reference. In the musical alphabet, the note D is just one whole step (or two half steps) below the note E. Therefore, the notes of the low-E string are arranged on the D string in exactly the same order, just two frets (and one octave) higher. If you have a good grasp of the notes of the low-E string, you can use the following octave shape to quickly locate the notes of the D string.

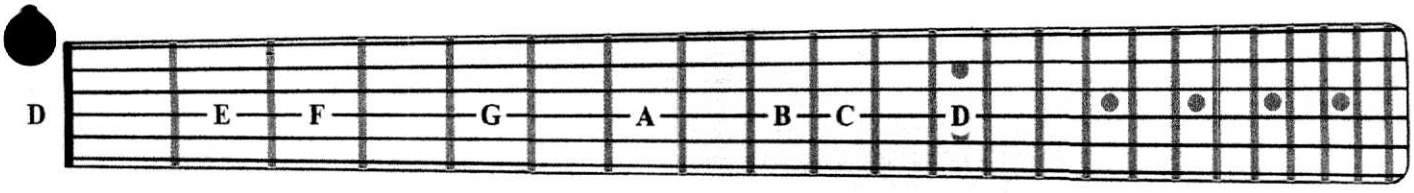
Octave Shape



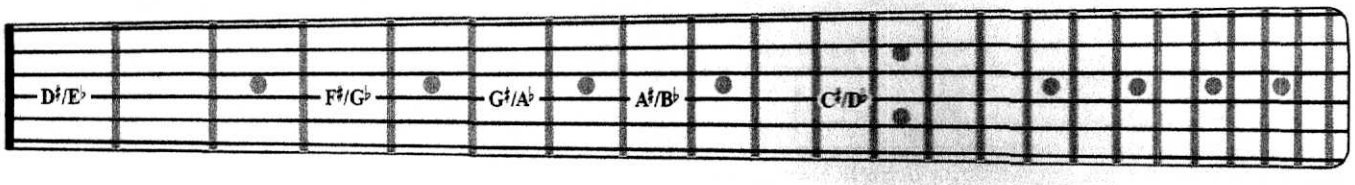
Here is how the octave-shape relationship looks along the fretboard, using select notes of the low-E and D strings:



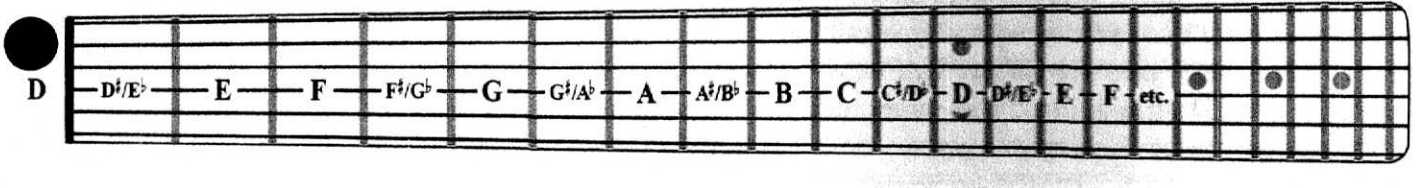
With the octave-shape reference tool at your disposal, it's time to memorize the seven natural notes, as located on the D string. Keep in mind, however, that the octave shape is simply a resource—if it doesn't work for you, feel free to disregard it. As always, don't forget to recite aloud each note's name as it's played.



After spending ten minutes on memorizing the natural notes, spend the same amount of time on the five accidentals, using the octave shape as a resource to locate each note. Even though fewer accidentals (compared to naturals) must be memorized, their mere presence can be intimidating. Nevertheless, be sure to give them equal attention.

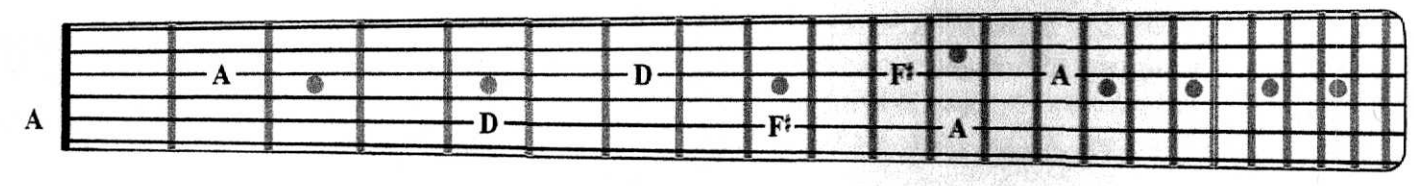


Once you feel comfortable with the locations of both the naturals and the accidentals, spend ten minutes mixing and matching the notes. Don't forget to use the resources that you have at your disposal—the circle of 5ths and/or the octave shape—to assist with the memorization process.

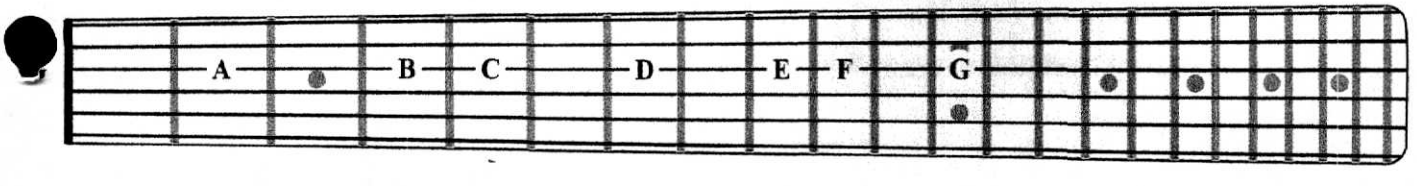


THURSDAY: THE NOTES OF THE THIRD (G) STRING

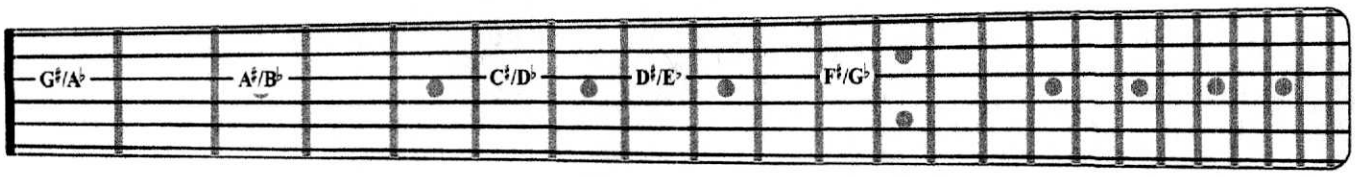
Next up is the third (G) string. Like the D string, the G string has its own reference string: in this case, A. The octave shape that was used to match notes of the low-E string with those of the D string can be transferred to the A and G strings. Simply use the notes of the lower (A) string to locate notes on the higher (G) string:



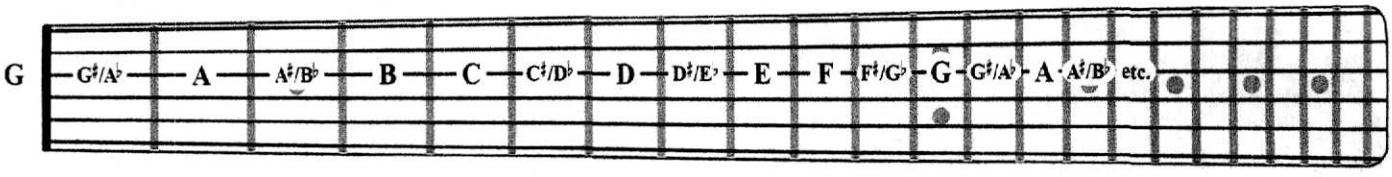
Now that you have the octave shape firmly under your fingers, spend ten minutes of your practice session locating the seven natural notes on the G string, remembering to name aloud the notes as they're played:



Spend an additional ten minutes on the third string's accidentals. As is the case with each of the six strings, the third string contains five such notes:

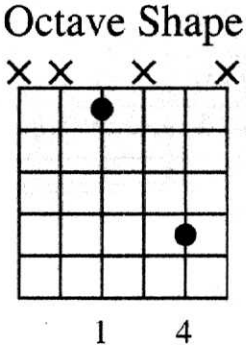


To complete your note memorization for the day, spend ten minutes on all of the notes of the G string, utilizing the available resources (the octave shape and/or the circle of 5ths) if you so choose, and making sure to include the notes beyond the 12th fret:

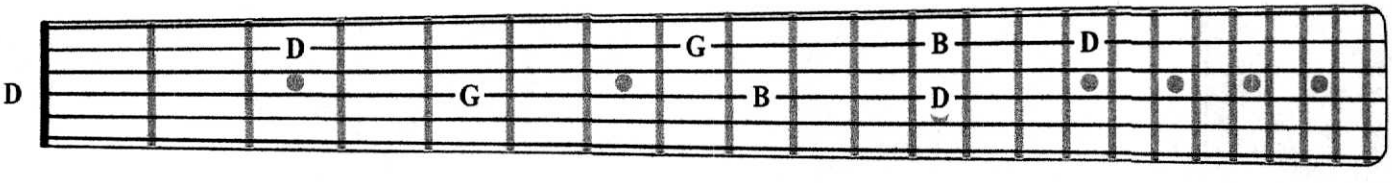


FRIDAY: THE NOTES OF THE SECOND (B) STRING

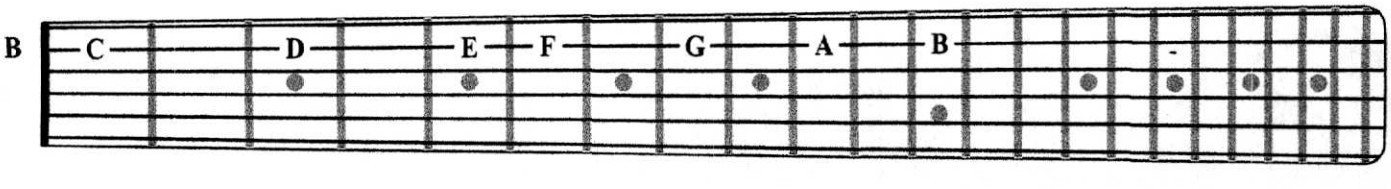
Due to the guitar's unique tuning system (all string pairs are tuned to perfect 4th intervals, except strings 3–2, which are tuned to a major 3rd), the octave shape that we used to assist with the memorization of the notes on the D and G strings cannot be used here. Instead, a new shape must be introduced:



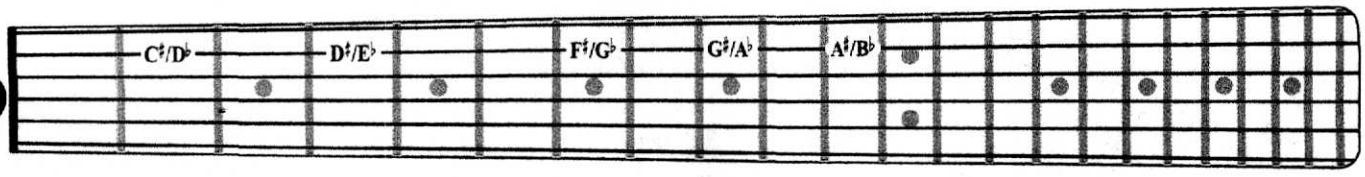
Here is how the octave-shape relationship looks along the fretboard, using select notes of the D and B strings:



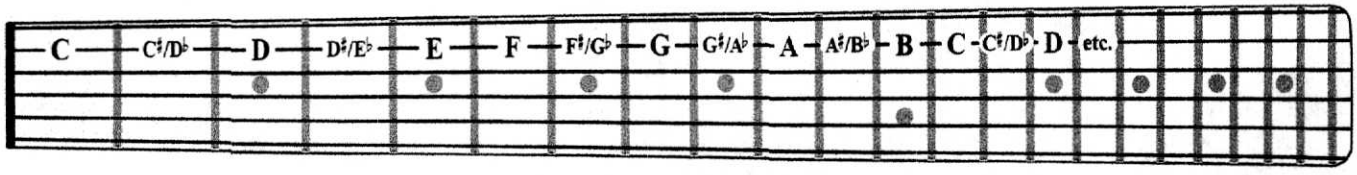
As you probably noticed, the notes of the B string, relative to the D string, are located three frets higher. And, as was the case with the previous octave shape, the notes of the higher (B) string sound exactly one octave higher. With that in mind, spend ten minutes memorizing the locations of the seven natural notes on the B string:



Next, put the new octave shape to work to help you locate and memorize the five accidentals on the B string:

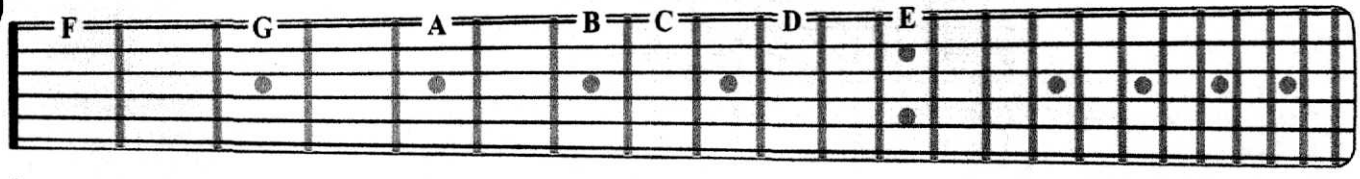


Finish up your B-string memorization by spending ten minutes moving up and down the fretboard, from the open B string to the notes beyond the 12th fret, naming aloud the notes as you go. Select the notes randomly or by cycling through the circle of 5ths—C, G, D, A, E, B, F♯/G♭, C♯/D♭, A♭/G♯, E♭/D♯, B♭/A♯, and F. If you get stuck on a note or two, simply use the octave shape to help you get back on track.

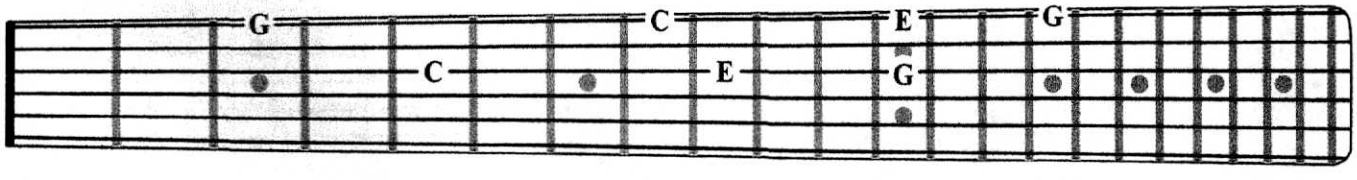


SATURDAY: THE NOTES OF THE FIRST (HIGH-E) STRING

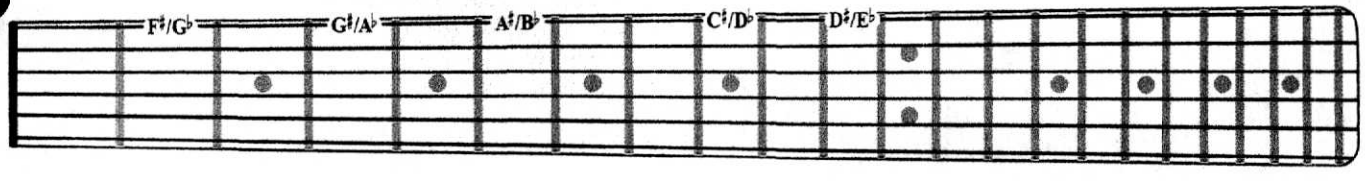
If you're already well-acclimated with the notes of the low-E string, then the notes of the high-E string should be nothing more than a review, as their locations are exactly the same as the notes on the low E. Nevertheless, spend ten minutes reviewing the seven natural notes on the first (high-E) string:



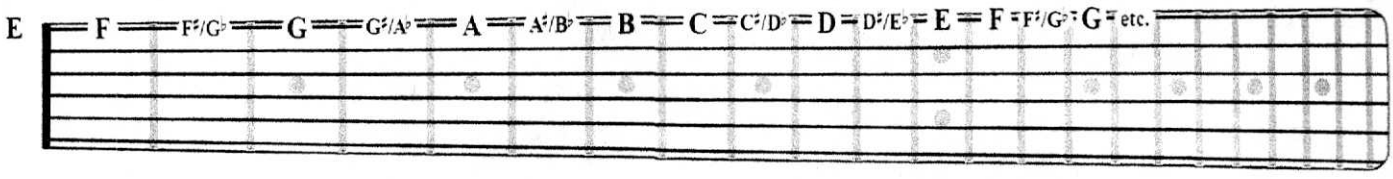
As a reference, the octave shape that was used to match the notes of the D string with those of the B string can be transferred to the G and high-E strings. Simply use the notes of the lower (G) string to locate notes on the higher (E) string. Select octave-shape notes are shown below but the octave shape can be used to locate any—and all—notes of the high-E string, as long as you're familiar with the notes of the G string:



As with the natural notes, the locations of the five accidentals on the high-E string are exactly the same as their locations on the low-E string. Spend ten minutes reviewing these notes:



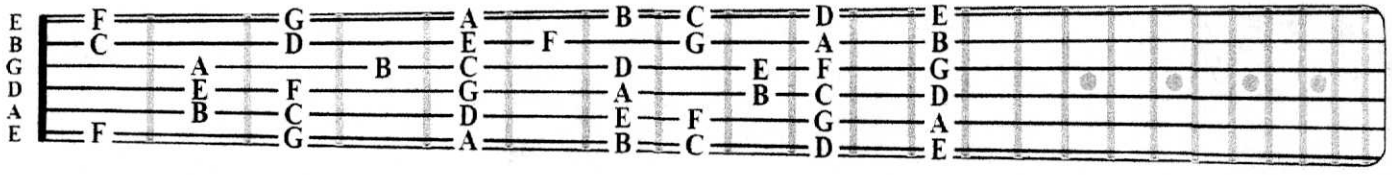
To reinforce the locations of the notes of the low-E and high-E strings, allocate ten minutes for reviewing the 12 notes (both naturals and accidentals) on the high-E string, using whichever selection method (random or the circle of 5ths) that works best for you. Also, don't forget to recite aloud each note's name as it's played.



SUNDAY: A DAY FOR REVIEW

As I mentioned earlier, learning the notes of the fretboard is vitally important and should be incorporated into every guitarist's practice session. Simply put, note memorization and retention will make you, the practicing guitarist, a better player. By having more familiarity with the fretboard, you will more fully comprehend and be able to implement all future instructional material. Therefore, it's imperative that you spend a portion of the last day of your practice week on reviewing the notes of the fretboard, giving extra attention to the areas of the neck that give you the most trouble.

In an effort to get you acclimated to visualizing the fretboard from a vertical perspective (up to this point, most of your memorization work has been from a horizontal perspective), the following figure contains the locations of the seven natural notes—C, D, E, F, G, A, and B—on all six strings, from open position to the 12th fret:



To prevent you from feeling overwhelmed by notes, accidentals have been omitted from the above figure. Plus, the lack of accidentals will enable you to fill in the blanks, an exercise that will improve your familiarity with both accidentals and with naturals.

Notice the overall fretboard arrangement of these naturals. For example, at frets 5, 10, and 12, every string contains a natural note. Similarly, at frets 3 and 7, five out of the six strings contain a natural note. Conversely, at frets 4, 6, and 9, the strings contain mostly accidentals. And fret 11 contains accidentals exclusively.

Don't feel obligated to memorize this last figure; instead, use it as a resource for learning every note of every string, from both a horizontal/linear perspective and a vertical perspective. Similarly, as stated at the beginning of this section, don't let the "grind" of memorizing the notes of the fretboard stop you from getting started with the 365 licks that follow. The daily memorization plan that was presented in this section is merely a suggestion. Your goal should be to find an approach that works best for you, spending an amount of time on memorization that doesn't adversely affect your motivation to practice the rest of the material in *Fretboard Freedom*.