

Roadmap of the Notes on a Guitar

January 8, 2018 / 6 Comments / by Megan L.

Whether you want to learn how to improvise rock solos, play perfect classical etudes, or anything in between, knowing



the guitar notes on the fingerboard will be a huge help in your journey.

In this article, we'll show you how to memorize the notes on a guitar. We'll also teach you a few shapes to help you play scales and chords in any major key you want!

Guitar Notes for Standard Tuning

A great place to start getting to know the notes on a guitar is by memorizing the notes of each string played open. "Play open" means without holding down any of the frets.

If your guitar is [tuned to standard tuning](/blog/how-to-tune-a-guitar), these notes should be E-A-D-G-B-E,

starting from the lowest pitched string and moving up to the highest.

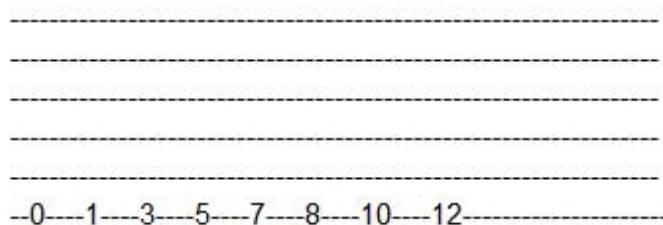
Memorize the sentence “Elephants And Donkeys Grow Big Ears.” This will help you remember the order of the open strings in standard tuning.

The guitar, like the piano, is based on a chromatic scale. In chromatic music, there are 12 notes in an octave, each a half step apart. Each fret on the fingerboard of the guitar raises the pitch of the string by one half step. If you were to hold down all strings on the 12th fret, the notes are the same as the strings played open, just an octave higher.

Guitar Notes on the E and A Strings

For many beginners, the notes on the E and A strings will be the most important notes to memorize. This is because these notes are the root notes for the most common movable chord shapes.

One way to think about finding the notes on a guitar is to think about each open string as the base note of a scale. Take a look at the guitar tab below to see what a scale looks like on the low E string:



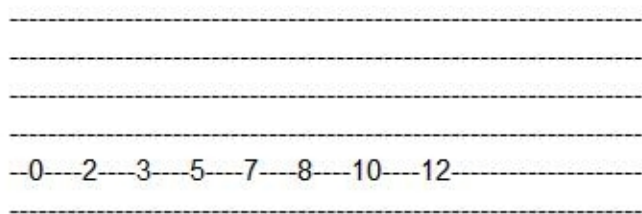
(If you need help reading charts like the one above, check out this [article on how to read guitar tabs](#) [blog/how-to-read-guitar-tabs-z01]).

Following this tab, you will play the notes E, F, G, A, B, C, D, ending with E an octave higher. These are

called “natural” notes. If you were playing the piano, these notes would be the white keys. Sharp and flat notes occur between the natural notes; on the piano, those would be the black keys.

Most natural notes on the guitar are two frets apart. The exception is the single fret intervals between E and F (open string and the first fret) and between B and C (seventh and eighth frets).

For another example, take a look at the natural notes in an octave on the A string:



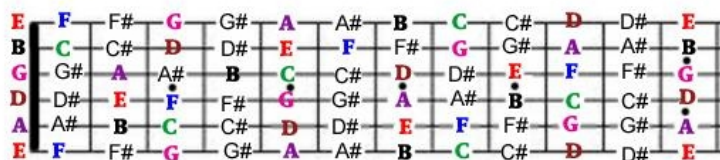
As you follow this tab, you will play the notes A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and A. Notice again that there is just one fret between B and C (the second and third frets) and between E and F (the seventh and eighth frets).

To memorize the guitar notes on the E and A strings, practice playing just the natural notes going up and down the strings. Say the name of each note as you play it. Repeat this a few times at the beginning of your guitar practice each day until you feel comfortable.

The Notes on a Guitar Fretboard

You can continue learning the natural notes on the guitar one string at a time following along with the diagram below. Note that this diagram shows sharp notes (ie. F#) but not flat notes (ie. Gb).

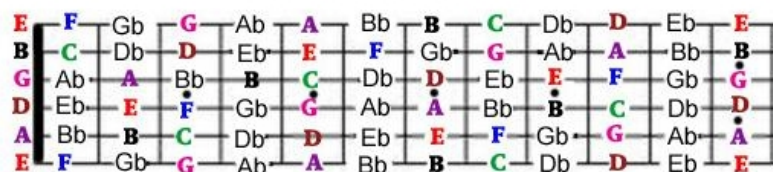
Guitar Fretboard



A sharp note is a half step higher than the natural note. A flat note is a half step lower. Depending on what key you are playing in, the same note may be referred to as F# or Gb.

Here's the same diagram, this time showing flat notes instead of sharps:

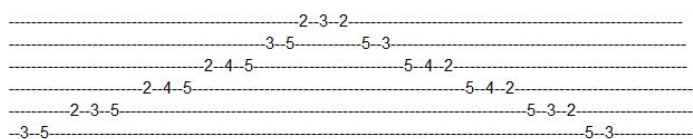
Guitar Fretboard Diagram Flat Notes



Practice Guitar Notes with Movable Scales & Chords

Simply memorizing each note on the guitar won't improve your playing very much. You also have to understand how the notes relate to each other! The layout of notes on a guitar may seem random, but these simple scale and chord shapes will help you to remember them.

Try this guitar tab for a scale in G major:

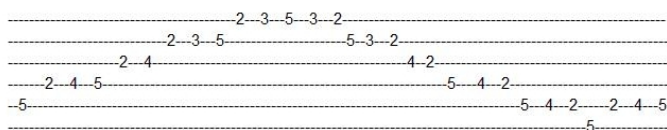


Notice that the scale starts on G, on the third fret of the low E string. For your left hand fingering, we recommend using your index finger for all notes on the second fret, your middle finger for all notes on the third fret, your ring finger on the fourth fret, and your pinkie on the fifth.

Now, try starting on the 4th fret and play this scale pattern again, moving each note up by one fret. Congratulations! You just played a scale in G# major. Even if you weren't able to name all the notes you just played, knowing the correct intervals ensures you're playing notes within the correct key.

Using the same fingering, you can play a scale starting with any note on the fretboard. The first note of this scale is the root note and determines the key of the scale. Practice this scale by moving it up and down the fretboard, one fret at a time.

Here's another movable scale pattern for you to practice, this time starting on the A string. This scale is shown in D major, but it can also be moved all over the fretboard.

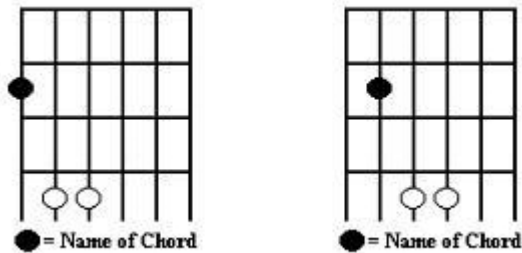


You can also learn chord shapes that can be moved around the fretboard. The simplest of these shapes are called "power chords."

To play a power [chord in F](/blog/f-chord-on-guitar-z01) with the root note on the low E string, place your index finger on the first fret of the E string. Next, use your ring finger to hold down the A string at the third fret and use your pinkie to hold the D string at the

third fret. Strum just the three strings you are holding down.

Maintaining the same shape with your left hand, move each finger up one fret. Strum only the strings you have fretted. Now you're playing a power chord in F#.



Now move each finger down one string, so that you are holding the second fret on the A string with your index finger and the fourth fret on the D and G strings with your ring and pinkie fingers respectively. Strum these three strings. You are now playing a power chord in B.

You can move this power chord shape up and down the fretboard as long as your root note starts on the low E or A strings. Remember, the root note is the note your index finger is fretting. This note will determine the key of the chord.

Now that you're more familiar with guitar notes, it'll be easier to learn [chords \[blog/2012/11/4-essential-guitar-chord-progressions-for-beginners/\]](/blog/2012/11/4-essential-guitar-chord-progressions-for-beginners/) and scales. You're one step closer to mastering your favorite [songs \[blog/easy-acoustic-guitar-songs/\]](/blog/easy-acoustic-guitar-songs/)! Remember to keep practicing, and good luck on your musical journey!