

Playing In Keys

Musicians rely on a system of notes and letters to communicate musical ideas, and this system is a must-learn when it comes to Blues soloing. For example, if Carlos Santana was to ‘sit-in’ with Eric Clapton for an improvised ‘jam’, phrases such as ‘*Blues in B flat*’ will be used instead of finger and fret numbers. The following sections will explain how to play in ‘*Blues in B flat*’, as well as any other **key**, using the Pentatonic Minor box pattern.

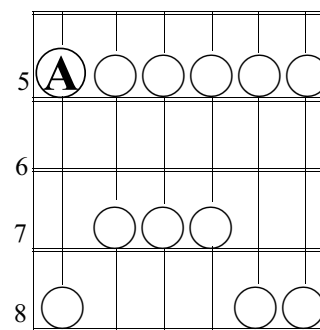
Have a Foundation

Before moving on to the following sections, make sure to have a foundation of guitar basics by knowing how to identify letter notes on the guitar (*Guitar Basics-3*) as well as knowing how to play the standard Pentatonic Minor box pattern (*Blues/Rock Soloing-1*).

Playing in Any Key

The Pentatonic Minor box pattern is *movable*, meaning the same pattern can be played along any fret position or **key** on guitar. All that needs to be known is the letter name of the bottom (*sixth*) string note that begins the box pattern to determine the key. For example, the Pentatonic Minor pattern played along the fifth fret position is in the *Key of ‘A Blues’* because the first note played (*sixth string/fifth fret*) is an ‘A’ note. (*see right*) Shifting the same pattern up one fret results in the *Key of ‘A# Blues’* being played. Remember that ‘A#’ and ‘Bb’ are two names or synonyms for the same note or key. If one guitarist says to play ‘*Blues in B flat*’, while another says to play ‘*Blues in A sharp*’, they are both asking for the same scale to be played.

‘A’ Pentatonic Minor



Fifth fret position
Bottom/sixth string = ‘A’

Method vs Memorization

Memorizing where all the letter notes are on the bottom/sixth string isn’t as important as having a *method* to find notes along the bottom string to determine the key. Starting with the open sixth string (‘E’), simply ‘count-up’ the string using the chromatic scale to determine the key for any Pentatonic Minor box pattern. With twelve total letter notes, there are twelve potential keys to play. Perhaps one fretboard position or note to memorize along the bottom string will be the ‘A’ note along fifth fret, which can act as a shortcut rather than having to start counting with open ‘E’ on the bottom string every time.

Sixth String Fret:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Sixth String Note:	‘E’	‘F’	‘F#’	‘G’	‘G#’	‘A’	‘A#’	‘B’	‘C’	‘C#’	‘D’	‘D#’	‘E’

Practice in Different Keys

Once the ‘A’ Pentatonic Minor box pattern (*fifth fret position*) can be played up and down at a pace that matches the audio/video example, the next challenge will be to play the box pattern along different fret positions or **keys**. For example, playing the box pattern along the first fret position (‘F’) will be a great exercise because the fretting fingers are required to stretch more in order to reach the frets. Playing the box pattern along the ninth fret position (‘C#’) is also beneficial because the frets are positioned closer together higher up the fretboard, which requires more focus in order to get clarity from each note played.