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Whether you're self-taught or already in a guitar lesson program, you already know that learning your scales (or at least some) will help you better understand your guitar and develop as a player. But where should you start? Let's take a look at some of the first guitar scales you should learn.The Top Guitar Scales to LearnBefore we jump into which specific scales you should focus on, it's important to address a question that a lot of self-taught guitarists have: how do I learn and use scales? After all, staring down a scale diagram for the first time can be intimidating.One of the most helpful things you can do is break the scale into smaller parts, or "boxes." Focus on mastering one box at a time. You may find that a lot of repetition helps here — the goal is to be able to play without thinking.But even if they're incredible at playing scales, plenty of guitarists don't know how to use them to improvise. And with improvising, the best way to get better at it is to practice it. A lot.The catch is that you need to practice with someone else (or a backing track). You can easily find backing tracks online. For example, this acoustic rock backing track (this video) is in the key of C major. So you could practice using the C major scale to improvise over it. You also could use the A minor pentatonic scale to improvise over it, as A is the relative minor of C.Of course, if you live close to other musicians, practicing with them can be a lot more fun. Playing in live settings can do a whole lot for both your abilities and your confidence in guitar.1. The Minor Pentatonic ScaleMost guitar teachers ask their students to start out learning the minor pentatonic scale. This scale tends to be easier to start memorizing because there are five "boxes," or pentatonic patterns. And learning this scale gives you a strong foundation as a player — the minor pentatonic is part of many blues and rock songs.Some resources recommend learning the minor pentatonic scale in a specific key or two. However, if you want to be a well-rounded and versatile player, it's a good idea to be able to play all five minor pentatonic boxes in as many keys as you can. This isn't as hard as it sounds. Once you get a feel for the location of root notes within each box, you'll be able to instantly know where you need to go on the fretboard.It's helpful to know that the five pentatonic boxes repeat as you go down the neck. After the 12th fret, they start to repeat again. Once you're comfortable with the pentatonic boxes, you can start to connect them. This can be an especially difficult skill to master, so don't feel bad about spending time improvising within each individual box before attempting to connect them.Of course, learning other players' approaches to learning the scale can support your own learning. Check out this useful video where guitarist Ayla Tesler-Mabe breaks down her approach to the minor pentatonic scale. If this is the first scale you're learning, don't give up! Your first scale is almost always going to be the most difficult to master.But once you're more familiar with the fretboard and with thinking in terms of scales, learning other scales should be easier.2. The Chromatic ScaleThe chromatic scale probably isn't the most exciting one to learn on the list. However, it can help make you a better improvisational guitarist. This scale moves from one octave to another. So if you start on a low G, you would end on a G that's an octave higher (or vice versa).It's not terribly interesting, but it serves the very important purpose of helping you learn the location of notes on the fretboard. Many guitarists struggle with truly understanding the fretboard — that's why so many of us seem limited to memorized licks and chord progressions.The chromatic scale is also helpful when it comes to learning the musical alphabet. The scale goes continually through the alphabet. So if we start on an A, it goes in this order: A, A# (or B flat), B, C, C# (or D flat), D, D# (or E flat), E, F, F# (or G flat), G, G# (or A-flat), A. If you haven't yet learned the musical alphabet, you might be surprised to see that there are no sharps or flats between B and C or between E and F. Practicing the chromatic scale (and naming the notes as you do) can help you internalize these nuances.So how do you actually practice the chromatic scale? As this resource shows, playing it in the open position isn't too difficult. You play frets 1-4 one at a time on the low E string and then do the same with the A string and the D string.Only play up to the third fret when you drop to the G string. On the B and high E strings, go back to playing frets 1-4. Especially if you're a beginner, you can work on playing with musicality (and even building your speed) with the chromatic scale.Though the chromatic scale isn't the most musical on the list, it does have another use that makes it especially valuable — it's a great warm-up tool or dexterity exercise. Playing the chromatic scale serves as a warmup for your right and left hands. And if you ever struggle with coordinating your hands, running through the chromatic scale a few times each day should help you improve.3. The Blues ScaleRemember when we said that learning scales gets easier after you master the minor pentatonic scale? That holds especially true with the blues scale. In fact, the blues scale is identical to the minor pentatonic scale except for one thing — it includes a flattened fifth.The flattened fifth can add considerable tension to a piece. Don't think that you only need to learn this scale if you're a blues player, though. After all, rock and later styles of music arose from blues.Once you have a handle on the minor pentatonic, it's a good idea to work on the blues scale. This scale is a great intermediary before you start jumping into the more complex patterns of the major scale and its modes. It lets you practice adding one more note to a pentatonic before you start practicing scales that usually incorporate three notes per string.Although there's only one note of the difference between the blues scale and the minor pentatonic scale, the flattened fifth has a noticeable impact on the scale's overall feel. This great video lesson (below left) takes you through both the blues scale and the minor pentatonic scale.It's important to note that the tonic of each pattern in both the minor pentatonic and blues scales is exactly the same — the flattened fifth added to each one is truly the only thing that changes.The blues scale can be a lot of fun to play once you're reasonably comfortable with it. You can technically play it over any type of music, but playing over 12-bar blues is where the blues scale really shines. Even if the phrase "12-bar blues" is unfamiliar to you, you've almost certainly heard this shuffle-like rhythm in blues or old rock songs.Check out this helpful 12-bar blues backing track (video above right) in the key of A. Once you're ready to start improvising with the blues scale, this jam track (and other 12-bar blues tracks) is a lot of fun to play!4. The Major Pentatonic ScaleDepending on the exact guitar program you follow, you may have been asked to learn the major pentatonic scale before the minor pentatonic. But just learning the difference between the two can be a challenge at first. After all, the notes look the same when you look at the scale diagrams of each.That's because they are! The difference between the major and minor pentatonic scale changes depending on what key it's being played relative to. The primary pitch of the scale you're using is called the tonic. This is the same concept as a root note in a chord.The concept of the major and minor pentatonic scale having the same patterns can still be a bit confusing, but understanding the concept of relative minors can help. Every major scale has a relative minor scale. The relative minor scale will have the exact same notes. They just resolve in different places. As an example, the relative minor of the C major scale is A minor. So we know that the C major pentatonic scale is the same as the A minor pentatonic scale. So how do we know what to call it?If you are playing the scale over a chord progression that's mostly C major, you would call it the C major pentatonic scale. But if it's being used over a mostly A minor progression, it would be the Am pentatonic scale. Sometimes, it can be clearer to hear something explained in video form — this video lesson tackles the difference between major and minor pentatonic scales.The real challenge here is understanding and remembering where the tonic is when playing over a major or a minor chord. This can take some time to learn. But the good news is that plenty of guitarists — even accomplished players — primarily work within the pentatonic scales. That's not to say you shouldn't learn more, but mastering both the minor and major pentatonic scales is a huge accomplishment.5. The Major Scale (The Ionian Mode)Some music teachers view the pentatonic scales as being what are effectively skeletal forms of the major scale. And even though the major scale looks like a real challenge, it's well worth the time it takes to understand. When you grasp the major scale, you'll have a much better understanding of music theory.The major scale differs from the chromatic scale in that it only includes 7 notes instead of 12. So the C major scale would be C, D, E, F, G, A, B. The major scale can be played in several different modes, some of which you may have heard of.The Ionian mode is the first mode of the major scale, and the names "Ionian mode" and "major scale" can be used interchangeably. The Ionian mode/major scale can also be played in different keys using patterns similar to those used for the pentatonic scales. Check out this video lesson for a demo and an introduction to playing this useful scale.6. The Mixolydian ModeThe Mixolydian mode is another of the modes of the major scale — specifically, the fifth one. And just like with the minor pentatonic scale and the blues scale, the Mixolydian mode is very similar to the Ionian mode. However, the Mixolydian mode has a minor (flattened) seventh note, giving it a blues-influenced feel.It's commonly used in jazz, blues, and even pop songs. Like the Ionian mode of the major scale, the Mixolydian mode is more complex than the pentatonic scale. This website lets you get a look at the fretboard diagram for playing the Mixolydian modal scale in the key of G. For a visual guide to playing this modal scale on the guitar, check out this video lesson.7. The Natural Minor Scale (The Aeolian Mode)Not to be confused with the minor pentatonic scale, the natural minor scale (also known as the Aeolian mode) is one of the most commonly-used scales in rock and pop music, but you can also find it used in a decent portion of metal music.It has a character that's less distinct than that of the Mixolydian or minor pentatonic scales, but that also makes it a highly versatile scale. To get the natural minor scale, you simply take the major scale and start it at the sixth degree.It's worth noting that the natural minor scale is the easiest of the three main minor scales: the other two are the harmonic minor and melodic minor.Like the major scales, the natural minor scale involves five different patterns. However, those patterns are somewhat more complicated. This video lesson shows you some iconic rock and metal riffs that were largely built around the melodic minor scale. Let those riffs inspire you to dive into this remarkable scale!8. The Melodic Minor ScaleMinor scales bring a dark yet nuanced character to just about any style of music. And among the minor scales, the melodic minor is one of the most versatile. However, it isn't typically used in your standard pop song. But if you're ready to make your playing especially expressive, this is a great scale to add. The melodic minor scale also has the advantage of being compatible with various chord types.It will work with dominant seventh chords, minor seventh chords, and more. As this video lesson teaches, the melodic minor scale only differs from the major scale by one note. It has a flattened (minor) third.That flattened third is largely responsible for its somewhat dark sound. Depending on how you use the scale, it can sound downright eerie and unsettling. So how do you start learning it? Like most scale types, the melodic minor scale has seven patterns you'll need to master. This sample guitar lesson shows them to you.As a general disclaimer — if you're looking for new scales to add to your repertoire, ensure you have a thorough knowledge of the pentatonic and major scales (or at least the major scale) and how to use them. Many of the melodic minor patterns have three notes per string, making it harder to improvise with them and/or to connect patterns.Need Some Help?Even if you do learn to play some of the guitar scales on your own, you may find that moving from scales to improvising on the fretboard is a real challenge. That's where experienced instructors come in. And you don't even need to leave your home to get top-quality instruction! Signing up for an online guitar course (or several) can make a big difference in your playing and keep you moving forward.Final ThoughtsWe hope that now you know better where to start with learning (or continuing to learn) guitar scales. Do you have any valuable insights? Is there a scale we left out? Please tell us in the comments, and don't forget to like and share if you found it useful! Using scales to make music is more than just choosing the right one. But how does one go about practicing scales, and should you bother?Using my favourite analogy, if music is a language then scales are alphabets. With our English alphabet we can make words from many languages, though each will have quirks particular to its dialect. Other languages are narrower in use, the Mkhedruli language of Georgia for instance, which can be understood in much more limited areas. In music, the major scale can be used in many different styles and ways, whereas a more exotic scale like the Phrygian Dominant is usually used in a specific situation. Bear with me while we take it a step further… You may like If you become fluent in English, does it mean you can speak French or German, which uses (mostly) the same letters? No, it's the combinations of letters that changes, and the pronunciation. Some scales fit well in a specific style and others in a more general sense, but people who master one style often find it leaves an 'accent' when they try to play others. The point is that the words matter the most. You can't travel somewhere new and start saying the alphabet. Yo learn words and phrases and with them you would be communicating. In music, the words are the licks and phrases. Play a blues lick and people know you're 'speaking' blues. But play a minor pentatonic up and down, and it could be anything.Yes, the analogy has holes when you keep prodding it, but it's a great way to develop your strategy for learning music. When I was the admissions guy at The Guitar Institute, some young dude would come in and show that they knew all the scale patterns… but couldn't make music if their life depended on it. And I met others who knew no scales at all, but knew a handful of licks that they could use well. They were making music!So, licks and phrases – learn them! Great poets use the same words we all use, they just put them together in more beautiful ways. If they made up their own language nobody would understand it. Egdhtg hdgft wrreyu chzhn. Get my point?All the latest guitar news, interviews, lessons, reviews, deals and more, direct to your inbox!So why would guitarists practice scales at all? Well, there are a few good reasons. To understand the grammar of the language, it will help to know the alphabet. Learning scale patterns will help you change and manipulate licks, extend them, be curious with them. It's study, for the mind, more than the fingers.If you want to express ideas you hear in your musical imagination then practicing scales can help build a map for your fingers to find the sounds that you hear. I would recommend using the major scale for this, paying attention to the sounds and intervallic relationships in the scales. But exploring in this way is more like improvising within a framework of a scale, and exploring, trying things out, and listening. But I know you see people playing scales up and down with a metronome. I did that for years too, but if I could take all those thousands of hours back and focus on making music instead, I would, in a heartbeat.If you want to practice scales in a way that might help you make melodic statements, I recommend practicing scales in intervalsUsing a metronome can be very helpful for developing the synchronicity of your two hands, and can help (to a lesser extent) with the mapping and mental pattern development. It can also help develop your time feel and subdivisions. But if you want to practice scales in a way that might help you make melodic statements, I recommend practicing scales in intervals. Melodies generally follow chord tones, and chord tones are (mostly) stacked in 3rds. If you practice playing scales in 3rds you are training yourself to play more melodically, naturally finding the chord tones and extensions of the names you land on. You're training your fingers, mental maps and musical imagination. But practicing only that would probably make you a very tedious player. So I'd advise also exploring 4ths, 5ths, and melodic sequences. When I practice scales there are days I start with one run up and down a scale pattern. Then I go in 3rds (usually four times) then a couple of times on 4ths and 5ths to encourage my fingers to head to less common intervallic jumps. Then I'll often explore a melodic sequence, a number sequence applied to a scale. Number the degrees of a scale starting with 1 on the root and going up as high as you can in that pattern. A melodic sequence like 1-3-5-7-6-5-4-3 is good – it ascends a diatonic arpeggio and descends the scale. Then I'd do the same pattern starting on the 2nd scale degree - 2-4-6-8-7-6-5-4, then from the 3rd etc.Another favourite is reverse alternate 3rds, so the numbers would be 1-3, 4-2, 3-5, 6-4 - going up a 3rd, up to the next scale tone and then down a 3rd, up a scale step, etc. There are a bunch of other common sequences on my website if you get stuck for ideas.Melodic patterns are IMHO the best way to explore scales. I still hold that learning licks and phrases provides the most benefit, but working on scales feeds your fingers, brain and musical imagination. Have fun! This post may contain affiliate links. As an Amazon associate, Google associate as well as associate for other programs, Guitar & Music Institute may earn commissions from qualifying purchases.Welcome to our comprehensive guide on guitar scales for beginners. Whether you're just starting out or looking to build upon your existing skills, mastering guitar scales is essential for your musical journey. In this article, we'll explore the basics of guitar scales, the importance of practicing them, and introduce some essential scales for beginners.Learning guitar scales can greatly enhance your playing ability. By practicing scales, you'll develop finger strength and dexterity, become more familiar with the notes on your fretboard, and gain the foundation needed to create beautiful melodies. With dedication and consistent practice, you'll soon be able to effortlessly navigate the guitar fretboard.Beginner guitar scales are designed to help you start off on the right foot. We'll introduce you to some easy guitar scales for beginners, such as the E minor pentatonic scale and the A minor pentatonic scale. These scales only contain a few notes and can be played across open strings and specific frets, making them perfect for beginners to grasp.To make your learning process even more efficient, we'll provide you with fretboard diagrams, allowing you to visualize finger placement accurately. This visual aid will ensure that you are playing the correct notes and help you progress faster.At GMI Guitar Shop, we offer a wide range of free and paid guitar books and downloads to support your learning journey. Whether you're seeking beginner guitar lessons, learning techniques, or searching for introductory guitar scales, we have the resources you need to succeed.Key Takeaways:Mastering guitar scales is essential for beginners to develop finger strength, dexterity, and familiarity with the fretboard.E minor pentatonic and A minor pentatonic scales are great starting points for beginners.Using fretboard diagrams can help beginners accurately place their fingers on the guitar.Practice regularly and use resources like books and downloads to enhance your learning experience.With dedication and persistence, you can master guitar scales and improve your playing ability.What is a Guitar Scale?Guitar scales are organized sequences of notes played in an ascending or descending order. They help build finger strength and dexterity, making you more familiar with the notes on your fretboard and providing a framework for creating melodies.Practicing guitar scales is essential for beginners to develop their skills and improve their playing ability. By incorporating scales into your practice routine, you can enhance your finger strength and dexterity, which will help you play more complex guitar pieces.Moreover, scales introduce you to different combinations of notes and patterns on the fretboard, allowing you to become more familiar with the instrument and navigate it more effortlessly. This familiarity with notes and the fretboard is crucial for creating melodies, improvising, and composing your own music.Scales serve as a foundation for understanding music theory and composition. By mastering scales, you gain a deeper understanding of how music is structured and how different notes interact with each other.So, whether you are a beginner or an experienced guitarist, incorporating guitar scales into your practice routine is essential for developing your skills, improving your finger strength and dexterity, becoming familiar with notes on the fretboard, and creating beautiful melodies.How to Play Common Guitar ScalesAs a beginner guitarist, it is important to learn and practice common guitar scales to enhance your playing skills. These essential scales for beginners will not only help you develop finger strength and dexterity but also improve your familiarity with the fretboard. To ensure accurate finger placement, it is crucial to utilize fretboard diagrams while practicing these scales.Common Guitar Scales for BeginnersThere are several common guitar scales that every beginner should learn:E minor pentatonic scaleA minor pentatonic scaleC major scaleG major scaleE harmonic minor scaleEach scale has its own unique fingering pattern that can be played across different positions on the fretboard. By mastering these common guitar scales, you will be able to expand your musical repertoire and play a variety of songs with ease.To help you visualize and understand these scales better, here is a fretboard diagram depicting the E minor pentatonic scale:Practice these scales regularly, using the provided fretboard diagrams as a guide. Take your time to memorize the finger placements and gradually increase your speed and accuracy. With consistent practice, you will soon become comfortable playing these essential guitar scales for beginners.The Pentatonic ScaleThe pentatonic scale is a fundamental concept in music theory, particularly in rock and blues genres. It is a versatile five-note scale that forms the foundation of countless riffs, solos, and melodies. Both the major and minor pentatonic scales are widely used in various musical contexts.The Major Pentatonic ScaleThe major pentatonic scale is derived from the major scale by removing the fourth and seventh degrees. This results in a set of five notes that create a bright and uplifting sound. It is commonly used in rock music to craft memorable guitar solos and catchy melodies. Here is a diagram of the major pentatonic scale in the key of C:NoteFretC – string 68D – string 610E – string 57G – string 510A – string 47The Minor Pentatonic ScaleThe minor pentatonic scale is derived from the natural minor scale by removing the second and sixth degrees. This scale has a bluesy and soulful sound, making it an essential tool for guitarists in blues music. Here is a diagram of the minor pentatonic scale in the key of A:NoteFretA – string 65C – string 68D – string 55E – string 5 7G – string 45The pentatonic scale is an excellent choice for beginners because it only consists of five notes, making it easier to memorize and navigate on the guitar fretboard. Additionally, its versatility allows you to explore different musical genres and adapt to diverse playing styles. Incorporate the pentatonic scale into your practice routine to develop your musical vocabulary and enhance your improvisation skills.The Major ScaleThe major scale is a fundamental seven-note scale widely used in music theory and composition. It serves as the backbone for countless songs and melodies, making it an essential scale for any aspiring musician. Learning and understanding the major scale is vital for grasping key relationships and developing skills in musical composition.One popular major scale for beginners to start with is the C major scale. This scale contains no sharps or flats, making it relatively simple to comprehend and play. The C major scale is often one of the first scales taught to beginners due to its straightforward pattern and the absence of accidentals.Another significant major scale to learn is the G major scale. Unlike the C major scale, the G major scale features one sharp note, which should be duly noted while practicing. Familiarizing yourself with the G major scale expands your understanding of different scales and key signatures.Major Scale FingeringWhen playing the major scale on your guitar, it's crucial to employ proper finger placement. Below is the fingering pattern for the C major scale:NoteFretFingerC – string 531 (index finger)D – sting 4open0 (no finger)E – string 422 (ring finger)F – string 433 (index finger)G – sting 3open0 (no finger)A – string 322 (second finger)B – sting 2open0 (no finger)C – sting 211 (index finger)Remember to practice the major scale with a metronome, gradually increasing your speed as you become more comfortable. Incorporate different rhythmic patterns, such as eighth notes and triplets, into your practice routine to further develop your musicality.ConclusionGuitar scales are an essential part of your journey to learning and mastering the guitar. As a beginner, incorporating scales into your practice routine can help you develop finger strength and dexterity, improve your understanding of the fretboard, and lay a solid foundation for creating melodies and improvisation.By dedicating regular practice sessions to mastering guitar scales, you can elevate your playing and take your guitar skills to the next level. Consistency is key – make sure to set aside time each day or week to focus on your scale exercises. With persistence and patience, you'll see progress and improvement in your playing.Guitar scales are organized sequences of notes played in an ascending or descending order that help you build finger strength and dexterity. They also make you more familiar with the notes on your fretboard and provide a framework for creating melodies.Some common guitar scales for beginners include the E minor pentatonic scale, A minor pentatonic scale, C major scale, G major scale, and E harmonic minor scale. Each scale has its own unique fingering pattern and can be played across different positions on the fretboard.To play guitar scales, it is important to practice using fretboard diagrams to ensure accurate finger placement. Start by familiarizing yourself with the fingering pattern of the scale and then practice playing it slowly and accurately. Over time, increase the speed and work on playing the scale across different positions on the fretboard.The pentatonic scale is a popular five-note scale that is commonly used in rock and blues music. It is a versatile scale that can be used for riffs, solos, and melodies. The major pentatonic scale is derived from the major scale, while the minor pentatonic scale is derived from the minor scale.The major scale is a seven-note scale that is commonly used in music theory and composition. It is the basis for many songs and melodies. The C major scale is a popular scale for beginners to learn because it contains no sharps or flats, making it easier to understand and play. The G major scale is another important scale for beginners to learn, as it has one sharp note that should be noted.Guitar scales are an essential part of learning to play the guitar. They help beginners develop finger strength and dexterity, improve their understanding of the fretboard, and provide a foundation for creating melodies. By practicing and mastering these scales, beginners can elevate their playing and take their guitar skills to the next level.For more in-depth guidance on guitar scales and techniques, check out our latest free and paid guitar books and downloads at gmiguitarshop.com.Source LinksThis post may contain affiliate links. As an Amazon associate, Google associate as well as associate for other programs, Guitar & Music Institute may earn commissions from qualifying purchases. Have you ever wondered what makes guitar playing so special? Have you ever wanted to take your guitar playing to the next level? Learning guitar scales may be the answer.In this article, we will explore the benefits of learning guitar scales, various types of scales, how to practice them, and even how to use them to write music.Let's dive in and explore all the possibilities that learning guitar scales can open up!Short AnswerLearning guitar scales is an important part of becoming a better guitar player.Scales help you to understand the key of a song and can help you come up with better chord progressions and solos.Additionally, practicing guitar scales can improve your technique and accuracy when playing.So, while you don't need to learn guitar scales to play the guitar, you may find that it helps you become a better player.Benefits of Learning Guitar ScalesLearning guitar scales can be an invaluable tool for any aspiring guitar player.Not only do they provide a framework to help you gain technical proficiency, but they can also be used to explore improvisation, create chords, and compose melodies.When learning guitar scales, you will develop a better understanding of music theory.This understanding can help you become a more creative and versatile player, as you will gain the ability to construct chords and melodies from the basic building blocks of music.You will also learn how to improvise and create solos based on the scales you know.Learning guitar scales will also help you develop the technical skills required to play the instrument.Scales help you increase your dexterity and accuracy on the fretboard, as well as your ability to switch between different chords and notes quickly.Finally, learning guitar scales can help you become a more well-rounded musician.When you understand the basics of scales, you can then branch out and explore different styles of music.You can learn how to play blues, jazz, country, and more, all based on the scales you know.In conclusion, learning guitar scales can be an invaluable tool for any aspiring guitar player.Not only can they help you gain technical proficiency, but they can also be used to create chords, improvise solos, and explore different styles of music.Scales provide a great foundation for any aspiring musician to build upon, and can help you become a more creative and versatile player.Different Types of Guitar ScalesGuitar scales come in a variety of shapes and sizes, each with its own unique sound and purpose.Some of the most common guitar scales include major and minor scales, the pentatonic scale, the blues scale, harmonic minor, melodic minor, and the whole-tone scale.Major and minor scales are the most basic scales in music.Major scales have a bright, cheerful sound, while minor scales have a darker, more sorrowful sound.The pentatonic scale is a five-note scale that can be used to create melodies and guitar solos.The blues scale is a six-note scale that has a distinct bluesy sound.The harmonic and melodic minor scales have a more complex sound, and the whole-tone scale has an eerie, dreamy sound.No matter which scale you decide to learn, its important to practice each scale in different keys.Doing so will help you understand the relationship between notes and chords, and develop your overall musicianship.You should also practice the scale in different rhythms, including eighth notes, triplets, and sixteenth notes.This will help you develop better timing and coordination on the guitar.How to Practice Guitar ScalesPracticing guitar scales is a great way to improve your guitar playing.It can help you to develop more technique, understand music theory, and explore improvisation.There are many different types of scales you can learn, and each scale is composed of several notes.It's important to learn how to practice each scale in order to get the most out of it.To practice guitar scales, start by learning the notes of the scale.Memorizing the notes will help you understand the scale and make it easier to create melodies and solos.Once you've memorized the notes, try playing each scale slowly and in different patterns.This will help you get a better understanding of the scale and how it sounds.You can also practice guitar scales by combining them with other scales and using them to create chords.This will help you to understand the relationship between the notes and how they all work together.Additionally, it can help you to develop your improvisation skills and give you a better understanding of how scales fit into songs.Finally, it's important to practice guitar scales in different keys.This will help you to understand how the scale works in different musical contexts and will also help you become more familiar with the notes of each scale.Practicing scales in different keys is a great way to challenge yourself and take your guitar playing to the next level.Basic Guitar Scale TheoryWhen it comes to learning guitar scales, there are a few basic concepts that every guitarist should understand.First of all, scales are sequences of notes that can be used to create melodies, chords, and solos.A scale is typically made up of eight notes, and each note is a part of a specific key.For example, the key of C major consists of the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, and C.When playing a scale, you must start on the root note (in this case, C) and then move up through the other notes in the sequence.As you move up the scale, you will reach what is known as the octave, which is the same note as the root but at a higher pitch.Guitar scales can be divided into two main categories: major scales and minor scales. Major scales, such as the C major scale, are composed of a pattern of tones and semitones. Minor scales, such as the A minor scale, are composed of a pattern of whole steps and half steps.When playing scales, it's important to understand the concept of intervals.An interval is the distance between two notes.For example, the distance between C and D is a whole tone (or two frets on the guitar).The distance between C and E is a whole tone plus a half step (or three frets on the guitar).Understanding intervals is essential for playing scales correctly, as it helps you to identify the notes in the scale.Additionally, when playing scales, you must be aware of the notes in the scale as well as the intervals between them.This will help you to know when to move up or down the scale, as well as when to change keys.Learning guitar scales is an essential part of the journey for any aspiring guitar player.It can help you to improve your technique, understand music theory, explore improvisation, and compose melodies, chords, and solos.With a bit of practice, you'll soon be mastering guitar scales in no time.Advanced Guitar Scale TheoryAdvanced guitar scale theory is a deep and complex topic, and it is often a source of confusion for beginners.To fully understand the nuances of scale theory, it is important to have a good grasp of the basics.This includes understanding the differences between major and minor scales, the different types of modes, and the concept of intervals.Major and minor scales are the two primary types of scales.The major scale consists of seven notes (or intervals) and the minor scale consists of six.Major scales have a happy, uplifting sound while minor scales have a more somber, melancholic sound.It is important to understand the differences between these two types of scales as they are used in different musical situations.In addition to major and minor scales, there are also different types of modes.Modes are essentially variations of the major and minor scales.Common modes include the Dorian, Lydian, Mixolydian, and Phrygian modes.Each mode has its own unique sound and can be used to create interesting musical passages.Intervals are another important concept to understand when learning guitar scales.Intervals refer to the distance between two notes.For instance, a major third interval is the distance between two notes that are three notes apart.This is an important concept to understand as it allows you to create interesting melodic passages and chords.Finally, it is important to understand the concept of arpeggios.Arpeggios are simply chords that are played one note at a time.This creates a more melodic sound than playing a chord all at once.Arpeggios are often used in jazz and classical music to create interesting musical passages.Learning guitar scales is an essential part of becoming a well-rounded guitar player.By understanding the basics of major and minor scales, modes, intervals, and arpeggios, you will be able to create interesting and unique musical passages.This will help you to become a better musician and allow you to explore improvisation and composition.Improvising with ScalesImprovising with scales is one of the most important parts of learning guitar.Scales provide a framework for exploring a variety of sounds and create a structure for improvisation.With scales, you can create melodies, chords, and solos that sound musical and interesting.Using scales to improvise can open up a whole new world of sounds and possibilities for your playing.Scales provide a great starting point for improvisation because they are built off of patterns of notes that sound good together.Knowing the notes in a scale and the intervals between them allows you to find notes that sound good together quickly and easily.This makes it easy to create melodies, chords, and solos that sound musical.Another great thing about improvising with scales is that it teaches you about music theory.Learning the notes in a scale and the intervals between them gives you an understanding of how music works and how different keys and scales sound.This understanding will help you become a better musician and allow you to create more interesting music.Finally, improvising with scales helps you become a better improviser.Being able to move freely between different scales and keys allows you to explore different sounds and find the right notes for any given situation.This will help you develop your improvisation skills and become a more versatile player.In conclusion, learning guitar scales and using them to improvise is an essential part of becoming a better guitar player.Scales provide a framework for exploring different sounds and understanding music theory.They also help you become a better improviser by allowing you to move freely between different keys and scales.So if you're looking to improve your guitar playing, learning guitar scales is an essential part of the journey.Writing Music with ScalesWhen it comes to writing music, scales are an essential tool for any guitar player.With scales, you can craft melodic lines, create chords, and build solos.They can be used to explore different musical styles, from classical to jazz to metal.Scales are a great way to understand how music is constructed.By learning to recognize and play different scales, you can begin to understand how melodies, chords, and solos are constructed.This can help you create your own musical ideas and explore various genres.Scales can also be used to compose original melodies.Knowing the notes of a scale can help you write a melody that is within the scale.This will ensure that the notes you use are in harmony with each other.It can also help you create interesting melodic lines by playing notes outside of the scale.Chords can also be created with scales.By understanding the notes of a scale, you can create chords that are in the same key as the scale.You can also use scales to create complex chord progressions.This can help you create a more interesting sound, and give your music more depth.Once you've mastered the basics of playing scales, you can start to explore improvisation.Improvising with scales can help you create unique solos.You can use scales to explore different musical styles.By understanding the notes of a scale, you can create a solo that is harmonically pleasing.Learning scales can be a great way to improve your guitar playing.Scales provide a framework to help you develop technique, understand music theory, and explore improvisation.Whether you're a beginner or an experienced guitar player, learning how to play guitar scales will help you become a better musician.They can also be used to compose melodies, create chords, and craft solos.For any aspiring guitar player, learning guitar scales is an essential part of the journey.Final ThoughtsLearning guitar scales is an essential part of any guitarist's journey.Not only do scales provide a framework for developing technique and understanding music theory, they also allow you to explore improvisation and craft melodies and solos.With a little practice and dedication, you can become a more proficient player and take your guitar playing to the next level.So, go out and start learning guitar scales today! For many people who pick up the guitar for the first time, learning scales are often not at the top of their priority list. This is normal and as a beginner guitarist, there is other, more important, foundational knowledge that should first be acquired. However, the point when you start learning scales as a guitarist is when you know you're getting serious about playing. Learning guitar scales is a fantastic way to practice your technique and theory. Scales also come in handy for a variety of purposes such as: Writing music Improvising/jamming with others Understanding how music is made Learning guitar scales is like anything else, it takes time. However, understanding not only the importance of scales but also how/when to use them is vital. That being said, if you want to take your playing and knowledge to the next level, learning how to use scales in a creative way is what you need to master. This article is going to cover various aspects of guitar scales including everything from what exactly is a guitar scale to teaching you some of the most popular scales that exist. Before diving straight into learning guitar scales and how to play them, it's important to learn a little more about what a guitar scale actually is. As we've covered in a previous post regarding learning the notes on the guitar fretboard there are 12 notes in Western music. A scale is simply a manner of ordering a particular combination of those 12 notes in a way that sounds good. To put it in real-life terms, think of guitar chords as words and scales as the alphabet. Knowing the alphabet allows you to put letters together to make words. Therefore, you have much more creative freedom and range to work with. Similarly in guitar, knowing scales gives you the knowledge needed to build upon an existing foundation (i.e. a chord progression) or create something entirely new (i.e. a chord derived from a scale). There are many variations of scales that exist and they can be used for many purposes, which we'll cover in more detail in the next section. One of the most important things to know before jumping into guitar scales blindly is knowing why they are important. Knowing this gives you a greater respect for guitar scales. Heck, maybe even those who think they don't need to learn scales will reconsider after learning why they are vital if you want to advance in guitar. I've already mentioned a few reasons at the start of this post why it's important to learn scales, however here are a few more reasons explained in greater detail First off, learning guitar scales is a great practice to improve your finger agility. Running up and down each scale time after time will help your finger muscles grow strong and will also enable them to move faster as you progress. Being able to move your fingers faster will help for a variety of reasons such as chord changes, faster soloing, etc. Scales play a huge role in how solos are made. Knowing your scales and knowing how to use them will allow you to become comfortable in soloing over a particular chord progression in any key. Scales will also help you understand the solos that you listen to. Have you ever heard a solo and thought to yourself, "how did they come up with that?". A good solo is part creativity and part knowing the basics behind guitar theory. Once you know your scales and become comfortable with them, you'll be able to solo up and down the fretboard with much greater ease. Scales are essentially the foundation of chords. As was explained in my guitar chords chart article, a C major chord is created by taking the C major scale and selecting the first note, skipping the next, taking the next, skipping the next, and taking the next. These 3 notes from the C major scale create the C major chord. This process (in different variations) is used for creating chords from scales. Knowing your scales can increase your ability to write music as you'll have a set of rules for what sounds good together and what doesn't. Chord progressions can also be derived from scales which can help you in the writing of a song. Similar to soloing, scales can also help provide you with ideas for licks and riffs that will help complement a song. Read Next: 43 Easy Guitar Riffs This reason won't make you a better guitar player, however, I believe that knowing your scales will give you a better appreciation for music. As you'll know more about music theory, you'll realize that there is a certain amount of structure to creating a piece. The wonderful thing with music though is that it doesn't always have to follow a predefined structure. You may create something that shouldn't "in theory" sound right, however, sounds great when play a certain way. Remember, you should know the rules before you start breaking them. Depending on the style of music you play, it may not be worth it for you to learn certain scales. Of course, the more scales you learn the more familiar you'll be with playing various types of music. However, no one wants to put time and effort into learning something they'll never use. That's why the following list outlines the scales that you can safely use in various genres of music. That's not to say that a scale not defined for a genre in the list below won't work, rather this list contains scales commonly used in the following genres. If right now you're only interested in a certain genre of music, learn the scales that work best with that genre first. Rock – Major/minor pentatonic, major scale, natural minor scale, blues scale Metal – Depends on the type of metal, however learning the following scales is a good start: Chromatic scale Minor pentatonic Natural minor scale Jazz – Depends on the type of Jazz played, however, the following scales are commonly used: Mixolydian Major scale Bebop Harmonic minor Melodic minor Whole tone scale Chromatic scale Diminished Blues – Blues scale Country – Major pentatonic, blues scale Ska / Reggae – Major scale, natural minor scale Easy listening – Major pentatonic, major scale As previously mentioned, think of the above list as a starting point for learning guitar scales. This should help you decide which ones you want to learn first, however, no genre is specifically limited to the associated scales. A genre is not defined by the scale you use but rather by the time signatures, chord progressions, how it's arranged and played, etc. This section will cover the most popular guitar scales that you should learn as both a beginner and intermediate guitar player. I wouldn't recommend starting to learn scales right off the bat as a beginner guitar player. Start off with a few basic chords and get a few songs under your belt before you start diving into scales. If you're a beginner, I would recommend checking out the post I wrote on how to play guitar. That being said, the beginner's section contains 3 important scales to learn while the intermediate section contains another 4 scales. Whether you're a beginner, intermediate, or advanced, all of these scales are important and should be eventually learned to help further your playing ability. We'll start off with the beginner scales. The following 3 scales are quite essential for all guitarists as they are versatile and amongst the easiest scales to learn. The diagram shown for each scale below was created for the key of A (all A notes in the diagrams are highlighted in green). However, you can use the exact same patterns for different keys, therefore the patterns are moveable. For example, the minor pentatonic example below shows that pattern 1 starts at fret 5 on the low E string. Therefore the root note, in this case, is A. However, if we wanted the root note to be F, then we could take the same pattern and start playing it from fret 1 (aka. the F note) on the low E string. The minor pentatonic scale is a fantastic first scale to learn. It is a 5-note scale and is usually played over chord progressions that start with a minor chord. The example below shows where the patterns would be played if you were to use A as your root note. To help visualize the above diagram a little better in terms of patterns and how each should be played, reference the tabs below. Pattern 1 Pattern 2 Pattern 3 Pattern 4 Pattern 5 The patterns for this scale and all additional scales are also shown in the guitar scale chart further down. Referencing the chart should help you better visualize what each pattern should look like. The major pentatonic scale is another 5-note scale and is used to play over chord progressions using major chords. This scale contains all the same pattern shapes as the minor pentatonic. The difference lies in the positioning of the patterns. Think of it as if all patterns moved back one position. F or example, pattern 1 in A minor pentatonic now corresponds to pattern 5 in A major pentatonic. Pattern 2 in A minor pentatonic corresponds to pattern 1 in A major pentatonic, and so on. The blues scale is often easily learned after the minor pentatonic as it contains the same patterns but just includes an additional note. The additional note is what gives the scale that signature blues sound. The diagram below shows the pattern placements for the blues scale in the key of A. Again, the green dots represent the root note while the blue dots represent the additional notes that were introduced with the blues scale. Read Next: 12 Beautiful Blues Chords You Need to LearnRead Next: 12 Bar Blues Songs The following scales are slightly more advanced. They have more notes within the scale itself and their patterns are different than the 3 scales mentioned above. Once you are comfortable with using the pentatonic and blues scales, move on to learning the major scale and natural minor scale. The two additional scales provided (harmonic and melodic minor) are more focused towards jazz players, however, are great to have in your toolkit. The major scale is arguably the most important scale you can learn. It is used widely in many types of music and understanding it will help you better understand how chords are created along with other theory-related concepts. The formula used for creating the major scale is: whole step

different than the scale diagram format that we have been looking at so far, which has the strings represented vertically and the frets horizontally. Let's add the notes of the Major scale based on the shape that we have been looking at so far. Here is the G Major scale. As you can see from this entire fretboard diagram, our original Major scale shape only allows us to cover one small area of the fretboard, in any given key. So what's the solution? The solution is to learn each scale in five different positions. By learning the scale in five different positions, we will cover the entire fretboard. Which brings us to CAGED. In a nutshell, 'CAGED' is just a way of saying five different positions. There is an explanation behind what each of the letters mean, and we'll go through it, but for what it's worth, I don't think the explanation is important. If you just remember that the word CAGED means five positions, you've basically got what you need. But here's the explanation. The individual letters of CAGED (C-A-G-E-D) can each be played as basic guitar chords. You're probably already familiar with these. If we take away the open notes and arrange these shapes so that they are all in the one key, the shapes get distributed (more or less) evenly across the fretboard. For example, the key of C: We have put them all in the same key (key of C), so they're now all technically C chords, but you can still associate the shapes with their original labels (C, A, G, E, D). We could arrange the shapes so that they're in another key. For example Eb. Again, what we're left with is five different positions across the fretboard. So how does this relate to scales? Well, as a general rule, if we learn any scale in five different positions, we will cover the entire fretboard, just like in the chord examples above. Since we've been focusing on the Major scale, let's keep going with that. Here are five different ways of playing the Major scale (five different shapes): The above five images are five different ways of playing the same scale (Major scale). This means that if you play each of the above shapes and keep the root note the same (for example, 'G'), you will cover five different positions of the fretboard. This is probably easiest to understand visually. Here are the five shapes again, as well as their placement on the fretboard. For this example, we will choose the key of G (all root notes are G): We could technically go through each of the above five shapes and associate each one with a letter from the word 'CAGED', but as I mentioned earlier, that's not important. The important thing is that you understand the following. CAGED = five positions. One thing to keep in mind is that even though each of the shapes uses the same root note as a starting point (in the above example, 'G'), we are using different G notes across the fretboard. Which brings me to another point. You need to have a strong knowledge of the guitar fretboard if you really want to explore scales. In a nutshell, playing scales involves learning shapes, knowing what they're called (Major scale, Lydian scale etc.) and being familiar with the fretboard, so that you can play them in specific keys. While you don't necessarily need to know every note of the scale as you're playing it (just remember the shape), you do need to know what the first note is, so that you know what key you're in. Now that you understand the importance of five positions (CAGED), you can choose a scale and start practising it. Before you do that though, we need to expand on our example Major scales that we looked at before. In the example scales that we've looked at so far, we have played scales over one octave. That simply means that each scale has started from a root note (the root note depends on where you choose to play the scale) and finishes on the same root note. Here's an example of what this looks like using the C Major scale: However, when we use the CAGED system, we play scales in positions. By only playing one octave inside a given position, we're leaving out extra notes (in different octaves) that occur in these positions. Let's take the first Major scale that we looked at: You can see from this picture that there are notes inside this position that don't actually get played, if we limit ourselves to one octave. The solution isn't just to play the scale over two octaves, as this still won't cover all of the available notes in the position. The solution is learn the scale by covering all of the available notes in any given position. Like this: What this basically tells us is that for this particular Major scale shape, these are all of the notes that are part of the Major scale. The beauty of this approach is that we can limit ourselves to one octave if we want... ...Or we could play the scale over two octaves: But for the sake of covering all of the notes in the position, I recommend the following process: Start from the lowest root note Ascend through each note of the scale until you reach the highest note available in the position Descend until you reach the lowest note available in the position Ascend back to the original lowest root note. Here's the Major scale shape, with each of these things annotated. The beauty of this approach is that you start and finish on the same note (root note), yet you cover every note available in the position. Here's how this would look if we played the above shape, starting on the 5th fret (A Major scale). The reason why it's important to cover all of the notes in a given position is that when we improvise, or solo (we'll cover this later), we want to be able have the option of using all of the notes available to us in a given position. If we only learn one octave (or even two), we're leaving notes out. So what we want to do now is go back to our five original one-octave Major scale shapes, and see how they look when they include all of the available notes, for each shape. If we play these five shapes in the key of G Major, it will look like this: By playing each of the five shapes while making the root note for each shape G, we get five different positions of the G Major scale that cover the entire fretboard (12 frets). The five shapes in the above image have been arranged in order. Your aim should be to play one shape after another, and move higher up the fretboard with each shape. The first shape should be followed by the second shape, and then by the third, and so on. One thing to keep in mind however, is that the fifth shape leads back to the first shape. Therefore, the five CAGED shapes are actually best represented as a cycle: Thinking of the five shapes as a cycle allows you to do two things. You can keep going beyond the twelfth fret, by the going back to the first shape. It also means that the starting shape can change, depending on the key that you've chosen. For a given key, I always recommend starting with the lowest possible shape (lowest fret) and then moving through the other four shapes from there. Otherwise, you'll end up starting high up on the fretboard, and moving higher, until you're in an unpractical position. For example, let's say you want to play the five D Major scale positions, and you start from the same shape that we started with when we played the G Major scale: If you started with this shape, you would have to start on the 10th fret. The next four shapes would then move higher and higher up the fretboard. While this is theoretically possible, it's impractical. A much better approach is to start with the lowest possible shape for D Major (try not to use open strings). In the key of D, the first shape (lowest possible) would be the following Therefore, our five positions would look like this (starting shape is circled). This process might take a bit of getting used to. Remember, it requires that you have a pretty solid understanding of the notes along the fretboard, or can at least figure them out on the spot. The root notes for each of the shapes are the navigation points for playing the scales in specific keys. The good news is that if you find this confusing, you can simply go to the scale library (at the bottom of this page) and start playing through different keys by reading through the tabs and notes for specific scales and keys. It's amazing how much easier it is to comprehend something when you're actually playing through different examples. Another great practice technique with scales, is to use patterns. Scale patterns add an extra level of technical and cognitive difficulty to the process of mastering scales. A scale pattern is simply a numerical rearrangement of the notes of a particular scale. The Major scale, for example, has seven notes, which can be represented by the numbers 1 to 7. A common pattern is the following. This is how it would look for the G Major scale (G – A – B – C – D – E – F# – G): Here's another example. Here's how it looks (again with the G Major scale). There are many different possible combinations. Some patterns (such as the first example) sound quite musical and can be used when improvising. Apart from the musical benefits of learning patterns, they're also a great way to demonstrate that you have really mastered a scale. Sometimes, when we're practising a scale over and over, we can convince ourselves that we've mastered the scale, but have only really developed muscle memory (which is important) of the scale being played from start to finish. But mastering scales involves being able to move freely between different notes of a given scale. You should be able to visualise the entire scale without necessarily playing the notes. By learning patterns, you're forced to know the scale at a deeper level, and be familiar with the scale as whole. Remember, you can (and should) come up with your own patterns. It's a great way to challenge yourself. Think you've mastered a scale? Come up with a pattern and test yourself! Everything up until this point has been aimed towards playing and learning scales. This is for a good reason. Scales are a lot easier to understand if you can already play them. Just like other things on the guitar, such as chords, I always encourage students to play scales and then start exploring how they're used, rather than getting to bogged down in theory and not actually doing any playing. That being said, it's important to explore and understand the purpose of scales. Why do we learn scales? Are they just glorified finger exercises that have an interesting kind of sound? Do they help us learn the fretboard better? Do we use them to write music? The truth is that there are actually numerous reasons why we learn scales. Guitarists use scales for improvising and constructing solos. Each scale has a unique sound, or mood, which fit over certain chords. This is an overly simplified summary of how scales are used when soloing, but it is a good starting point. The Major scale, for example, works well over Major chords. The Lydian mode also works well over Major chords, but has a brighter sound. The Major pentatonic scale has a folky/bluesy vibe, which works effortlessly over Major chords. As I mentioned, this explanation is deliberately over simplified. But it outlines a very important principle. Scales can be used over chords and chord progressions. The best way to experience this is to practise improvising over one-chord vamps. A one-chord vamp is a backing track that includes one chord and loops continuously (usually for a very long time). Here's how to practise using a scale and a one-chord vamp: Choose a scale. Find an appropriate backing track. Practise playing the scale and improvising, using the notes from the scale. You can easily search YouTube for backing tracks. Just type a chord in to the search bar, as well as "backing track", and you will get hundreds of results. The thing I love about this process, is that it's a great way of really getting to know a scale, in a fun and challenging context. Scale practice can sometimes feel very monotonous, but when you use backing tracks, you can turn scale practice into a kind of jam session. You can spend time simply playing through the chosen scale itself, and you can mix that up with free improvisation within the scale. While I highly recommend putting on a vamp and jumping in the deep end, you will eventually find that even though you have become very familiar with a particular scale, you feel your improvising sounds a bit 'scalish' and boring. This is where licks come in. A lick is simply a short, musical phrase, usually based on a particular scale. Think of it like a musical sentence. For example, here is an E minor blues scale played over one octave. Here is a lick, based off the e minor blues scale: Learning licks on the guitar is like learning phrases in a foreign language. While learning grammar and singular words is important, real conversation happens when you put it together in full sentences. The same goes with improvising. We can and should learn scales, but we can turn these scales into meaningful music, by learning licks. Because licks are just short musical phrases, if you learn enough of them, they will eventually come out naturally when you're jamming and improvising. Sometimes they will come out exactly as you've learnt to play them, but the real power in learning licks is that you will eventually be able to modify them, join them together, change them slightly or completely, so that when you're improvising, you reach a point where you feel like you're creating something completely new. So how should you go about learning licks? Learn other people's licks. Create your own licks. Both of these processes are an essential part of developing fluency with a scale. The easiest place to start is to learn licks that have already been created by someone else. You can find licks in books, or on the internet. Alternatively, you can simply listen to a guitar solo that you like, and transcribe the licks that you hear within a solo. Let's do some example licks with the A minor blues scale. The A minor blues scale is one of the most used scales for guitarists. It works well over the A minor chord and as the name suggests, has a bluesy sound. Here are five A minor blues licks: You should try playing these licks. As you can hear (if you play them), they capture the sound and 'vibe' of the scale, but they don't sound like scales, they sound like musical phrases. Once you have learnt some licks for the scale that you are working on, you should go back to your one-chord vamp and practise using the licks while improvising. Remember, to get the most out of the licks, you need to experiment with them. Play them in their basic format first, but them modify them as you're improvising. Creating your own licks, based on notes from a scale that you are working on is an important and valuable process. Firstly, it's an exercise in musical composition. By deliberately crafting musical phrases, you are developing your creative skills as a musician and guitarist. In short, if you can't create a lick when you have time to think and revise, how are you expected to do it on the fly, when improvising? The other benefit to creating your own licks, is that it gives you more material to work with. It sounds simple, but the more licks you compose for a given scale, the more fluent you will be with that scale, when soloing. This is a topic that could be expanded upon immensely. As we discussed earlier, when looking at CAGED, you should learn each scale in five different positions. That means you should also learn licks for each of the five positions of a given scale. You can also use licks to help move from one position to another. Let's say you want to move between two different positions when improvising, using the A minor blues scale. One way that you can develop this ability is to learn licks that transition from one shape to another, like the following: We could explore the concept of licks and improvisation much further. We haven't talked about changing from one scale to another, or even how to actually figure out which scale works over which chord, but that's beyond the scope of this lesson. There will be links at the end of this lesson to some related topics. So far, we've looked at scales in isolation. For example, the Major scale is a scale you can use over Major chords. The minor pentatonic scale works well over minor chords. You understand how CAGED works and how to practise scales in positions. You could simply dive into the scale library and start playing scales every spare minute of the day. But there's one really important thing that we need to cover. The Major scale is the master scale, from which all other scales can be derived. Here's another way of putting it. If you become really familiar with Major scales, you can figure out every other scale by modifying the Major scale. Here's why. The notes that are in the Major scale tell us the notes that are in a given key. For example, the notes in the C Major scale are... C – D – E – F – G – A – B Therefore, the notes in the key of C are: C – D – E – F – G – A – B The notes in the Bb Major scale are: Bb – C – D – Eb – F – G – A Therefore, the notes in the key of Bb are: Bb – C – D – Eb – F – G – A Major scale notes give you the notes in a key. For this reason alone, you should become familiar with Major scales and the notes in each one. There are only twelve to learn (not including enharmonically equivalent scales – for example Ab is the same as G#). Here's a chart of the 12 Major scales with each scale's notes: Because Major scales are so important, we actually use them as a reference point, when discussing other scales. For example, let's look at the natural minor scale. Earlier, we looked at the natural minor scale, based on its interval sequence. Here's another way we could look at it. The natural minor scale contains the following: As mentioned earlier, these 'b's are the symbol for 'flat'. So the same thing could be written like this As you may have guessed, this tells us how to play the natural minor scale, using the Major scale as a reference point. This is actually a much more common way of referring to scales than looking at the intervals inside a scale (although that's an easier way to get started). When we see the word 'flat' (or the symbol 'b'), this simply means that we lower a note of the Major scale by one semitone (remember that thing?). Let's do an example. The F Major scale contains the following notes: F – G – A – Bb – C – D – E As we just looked at, the natural minor is made up of the following 1 – 2 – b3 – 4 – 5 – b6 – b7 Therefore, the F natural minor scale contains the following notes: F – G – Ab – Bb – C – Db – Eb Here's a visual example showing how we got there: Let's do another example. The Major pentatonic scale contains the following: This is an interesting example, because none of the notes of the Major scale are altered, but only some of the notes (of the original Major scale) are included. The A Major scale contains the following notes: A – B – C# – D – E – F# – G# Therefore, the A Major pentatonic scale contains the following notes Becoming familiar with Major scales is super important. Using the Major scale as a reference point also implies certain characteristics of other scales. For example, the harmonic minor scale contains a 'flat 3'. Not only do we know that the 'flat 3' refers to the 3rd note of the Major scale being lowered by a semitone, but we can learn to understand how that 'flat 3' sounds and behaves. The inclusion of a flat 3 is what gives a scale (or chord) its minor qualities. As another example, a 'flat 2' that exists within a scale will generally have a dark, dissonant sound. As a general guide, you can think of all scales as being alterations of the Major scale. Notes from the Major scale can be included, excluded or altered to form another scale, with each inclusion, exclusion or alteration having a specific characteristic. Earlier, we looked at a list of scales based on intervals. Here is a list of those same scales, with scale degrees included: As a tip, the easiest way to explore the concept of producing scales by referencing the Major scale is to start off by using the C Major scale (C – D – E – F – G – A – B) as the reference scale. Because the C Major scale contains no sharps or flats, the process of altering notes is a lot easier. There is obviously a lot of information on this page, and each subheading could be expanded on immensely. It's easy to feel overwhelmed. But that's the nature of learning and applying scales. It's not a topic that you master in a day, a year or even a decade. Scales are an endless source of musical development. Learning new patterns, new licks, connecting different scales together, applying scales to different musical contexts. The possibilities are literally endless. With all that being said, here is the growing scale library that is available on this site, followed by some extra scale related lessons. As mentioned earlier, sometimes the best thing to do when you're feeling confused by theoretical scale concepts, is to actually take your focus away from the theory and simply practise playing the scales themselves. That's where the scale library comes in... Here is the scales library, containing links to specific guitar scales. If you want the notes and tabs for the Db Mixolydian mode (for example), you can visit that page and jump right in. A lot of people visit this page just so they can find the notes/tabs for a specific scale that they are looking for. There is a lot of information on this page about scales. But some of the individual topics covered (plus a few more) are explored in greater detail in the individual lessons below. As soon as you progress beyond the beginner stages of learning guitar, and you hear more and more musicians talking about scales and modes, the inevitable question pops up, something along the lines of - do I need to learn guitar scales in order to become a decent player?This commonly asked question implies an awareness of the amount of work involved in mastering scales. At first glance, it can appear overwhelming. Many guitarists, understandably, want the easiest path possible to attain a decent level of competence with their instrument. Fine.In that case, no, you do not NEED to learn guitar scales. There are countless songs, even entire albums, which could have easily been written without any knowledge of scales.Just the other day I was listening to a relatively new artist, Darwin Deez - a prime example of an original, creative musician whose guitar based music requires zero scale knowledge. That's just one example of many musicians, old and new, whose creativity has clearly not been limited through lack of this knowledge (or at least an apparent lack of its use).But wait! Scales are not something you should be so hasty to dismiss. While it's true learning scales takes a fair amount of time and persistence, don't assume it's beyond your capability. Don't limit yourself unnecessarily. Don't overlook the benefits of learning them.Let's examine the likely outcomes of two types of guitarist - one who chooses to learn scales and another who chooses not to learn scales. If You Choose to Learn Scales... You'll find it easier to create musical, fluid solos - Scales allow you to visualise a group of related intervals/notes in various positions on the fretboard, known as patterns. Once these patterns are committed to memory, they give you a road map for your solos, meaning there's less chance of wandering aimlessly into dissonance or hitting "bum" notes. You won't need to tread so cautiously around the guitar neck, as the scale will show you which notes are part of the implied harmony of a piece of music.Your improvisation skills will develop faster - Linked to the above point, knowing where to go on the fretboard will give you the confidence to create musical phrases on the fly. Scales are not a magic bullet for this, but knowing them certainly takes a lot of the time consuming trial and error out of creating phrases that "say" something meaningful. As time goes on, you'll find it easier to connect scales to their related chords and progressions.Speed & timing will come more easily - knowing where to go on the fretboard is half the battle when it comes to developing speed and good timing. Once you memorise a scale pattern and don't have to think too much about where to go, you can get to work on your muscle memory and developing physical confidence with moving from one note to the next, in time and at varying speeds.Scales help you see note relationships - As you learn scales, you soon realise they can be used as the scaffolding for building elements such as chord shapes and arpeggios. Many scales share common intervals, so you'll start to see common patterns occurring as you learn them. For example, a 1 3 5 major arpeggio can be found within several scales used over major chords. Similarly, that same relationship can be used to build major chord shapes, which leads naturally to understanding chord inversions - something that might seem too complex without that scaffolding to help you see them.Your lead technique will improve - While knowing scales won't make bending strings, legato, sweep picking, tapping and other lead guitar techniques physically any easier, it will help you apply them more intelligently in your solos. For example, if you know scales, you'll think "I can bend from the minor 3rd to the 4th" to create the expression you want. You'll know where to apply a hammer on/pull off. You'll have clear target notes for your bends and slides, meaning less guess work and less chance of... oops... hitting a bum note. If You Choose Not to Learn Scales... You may as well sell your guitar and give up now - Just kidding.You'll gravitate towards rhythm playing - Scales are not essential for playing lead/solos, but it's true that without them, you'll gravitate more towards techniques that don't require that knowledge such as strumming and picking chords - the backbone of a lot of music. That doesn't mean you'll create inferior music - look at the funk genre as just one example of many - this was built around a strong emphasis on rhythm and groove, chunky chords and chord phrasing. No scale knowledge required there, just a good sense of timing, momentum and pick hand attack.You'll have more time to explore chords - Many guitarists spend so much time developing their knowledge of scales and lead technique, becoming exceptional soloists, but ask them to play a few chords and they'll resort back to those open position "cowboy chords" we learn as beginners. Nothing wrong with that as such, but there are so many beautiful, unusual and vibrant chord voicings to be discovered all over the guitar neck. It takes just as much time to build your chord vocabulary as it does scales, and many guitarists find it difficult to manage their time for learning both. Inevitably, those who do try to learn both have to compromise somewhat. Focus 100% on chords, and your music can be just as spine tingling as the most epic solo, just in a different way.You'll focus more on writing songs, not solos - OK, that might be a slight generalisation! But as mentioned before, the backbone of a good song is often its chord progression, lyrics and vocal melody. While scales can be useful for embellishing melody in songs, many beautiful, heartfelt songs consist purely of chords and rhythm. All the melody can come from the vocals and other musicians with whom you collaborate (recommended).Your playing skills will be specialised - Specialising in a certain musical role, such as rhythm or lead, can help focus your craft as a musician. Don't feel like you have to master everything, because this can easily lead to becoming a "jack of all trades", which is not in of itself a terrible thing, but excelling in one particular style or technique can make you truly stand out from the crowd. You can still play an indispensable part in a band without knowing scales, or much theory for that matter. It's unlikely you'll audition yourself for the role of "lead guitarist" in a band if you don't know scales, but not every band is looking for that. Most bands simply want fresh, original ideas and that comes from somewhere much deeper than simply knowing scales.You will still be able to play lead! - It will perhaps just be more understated and based purely on what sounds right to the ear. Some music is more suited to linear, subtle melody. You may find this comes naturally, if you can hum a melody and find the notes on the fretboard by ear. For this reason, ear training is something I would recommend all musicians work on, and the good thing is it does indeed come naturally with time. The Bottom Line I hope the above has given you some perspective on the need (or lack thereof) to learn scales to become a creative, skilled and respected guitarist.On a personal note, I chose to devote (a lot of) time to learning scales and theory, and I feel I'm a better musician because of it. But if I really think about it, in reality I've just become better at using scales! Without that knowledge I would have surely found other ways to express myself on guitar, and directed more of my energy into elements such as chords and rhythm playing (finger picking, for example, is one area I have neglected).My advice would always be to monitor your progress on guitar closely, in relation to your long term goals as a musician. If you at any point feel hungry for something new, to get those creative juices flowing again, try introducing scales into your practice time and see if they can offer you any fresh ideas. I guarantee they will add a new dimension to your playing.A final word of warning about scales...Unfortunately, too many guitarists learn a few scale patterns and then struggle to use them in a musical and meaningful way. There's more to learning scales than simply where to play them on the fretboard. For a proper head start with scales, I highly recommend the Guitar Scale Mastery course by Craig Bassett. Using his system will not only help you learn scales in less time, but it will also show you how to use them intelligently and creatively in your music.Whichever path you choose to take - scales or no scales, I wish you all the best in reaching your goals as a guitarist. Above all else, be yourself on guitar! Home > Scales > How to Learn Guitar Scales: 8 Easy Steps Learn guitar scales in 8 easy steps with this free National Guitar Academy guide. (If you enjoy this article, check out our Master Guide: How To Play Lead Guitar.) Guitar scales decoded: A simple explanation, at last! Step 1: Understand the basics Step 2: The Major Scale Step 3: The Minor Scale Step 4: The Major Pentatonic Scale Step 5: The Minor Pentatonic Scale Step 6: The Blues Scale Step 7: Learn how to diagnose keys Step 8: Understand the huge importance of root notes (If you just want an easy scale to solo with, scroll down & read about the Minor Pentatonic Scale. If you're going to learn scales properly, read on.) So, why learn guitar scales? Ok, let's dive in! Over 100,000 guitar-learners get our world-class guitar tips & tutorials sent straight to their inbox: Click here to join them Get our best guitar tips & videos . Scales cause a lot of confusion for guitar learners, so we must clarify a few things before looking at the different scale patterns. Why is it important to learn guitar scales? Scales are the foundation of all lead guitar work and make it easy for you to crank out awesome single-note melodies. When people learn scales, they unwittingly cross a 'bridge' and start understanding music theory. This makes you a significantly better guitarist because you begin to understand the instrument truly. When should I learn guitar scales? It's never too early or too late on learning scales. They are beneficial to know at any stage of your guitar journey. I prefer total beginners to focus on guitar chords, but I would never discourage anyone who wants to learn guitar scales from doing so. This is valuable stuff. . Ok, so what is a scale? A scale is a series of steps between two fixed musical points. These two fixed points are always the same note but in different octaves. We call these points "root notes". How we get from the lower root note to the higher root note is called 'a scale'. Listen to this example. (I use two G notes in this example, but it could be any note. The principle remains true for ALL musical notes.) Audio Player . It's hard to understand which scales work with which keys. So we created a cheat-sheet! A key and scale-finder that you can use again and again. Get your personalised guitar-learning plan Get a custom guitar-learning plan here: Click here for GuitarMetrics™ Guitar scales are basically just 'patterns of notes' You could play 12 notes between the lower root note and the higher root note. (This is a full octave.) Think of it as a ladder with 12 'rungs'. The ladder represents the octave. The 1st and 12th rung are always there, always in the same place, but the rungs pattern can change. The pattern of the rungs on the ladder represents the different scale patterns. Because there are 12 'rungs' (AKA 'notes'), we can choose to combine lots of different patterns and permutations. I often see people trying to practise scales overwhelmed by the number of patterns, but thankfully it's straightforward. There are only a couple of scale patterns that 99% of guitarists need to know, and we will run through them here. Can you read chord & scale diagrams? To understand what's coming next, you need to be able to read chord diagrams (AKA 'chord boxes'). If you can't do this yet, read this article: How To Read Chord Boxes In 60 Seconds All of the scale diagrams in this guide follow this layout: Ok, you came here to practise scales on the guitar, so let's look at our first scale! The Major Scale It is essential to understand how this scale works because its pattern is the yardstick by which we describe any other musical sound. Every chord and scale is named by how it compares to this scale. This is the best starting point if you want to practise guitar scales. Moreover, it is a bright and happy sounding scale. It's uplifting, sweet and optimistic. Box 1 of the major scale looks like this (we'll talk about 'boxes' later on): Did you spot the three root notes here? Well done! Like most other scale boxes, this one covers TWO OCTAVES. Scales are moveable patterns A crucial point you must know while knowing scales is that scale patterns are MOVEABLE. What dictates the tonality of the scale is where you BEGIN playing it. If you start playing the above pattern on the 5th fret (so the root note on the left is on the 5th fret of the 6th string), you will be playing the A Major Scale. If you play the same pattern from a starting position two frets higher (starting on the 7th fret), you will be playing the B Major Scale. . A scale's root note is the hero note. Use it lots. In every scale, there is a root note. The root note is what names the scale. In the A Minor Pentatonic Scale, the root note is A. In the E Major Scale, the root note is E. The root note is the hero note. It's the note that will sound best and give a sense of resolution to the riffs, licks and solos that you play. Finish your phrases on the root note to make what you played sound 'right'. The Minor Scale The other scale you must know if you want to learn scales is the Minor Scale. There are three different types of minor scales: The Natural Minor Scale (you must know this scale) The Harmonic Minor Scale (this is an incredible scale, and it would be good if you learn this, but it's not essential) The Melodic Minor Scale (you don't need to know this scale) When people talk about "the minor scale", they almost always refer to the Natural Minor Scale. That's the 'main' version of these three minor scales. The Minor Scale is much cooler than the Major Scale The Natural Minor Scale provides a counterpoint to the Major Scale. If you're playing scales, you need to understand the mood they create. This scale sounds sad and melancholy, and the contrast from the Major Scale is stark. But of course, we need both! (Yin and Yang. Light and dark. Batman and the Joker, etc.!) I think the Natural Minor Scale is much cooler than the Major Scale. It sounds more interesting and evocative. But perhaps best of all, it gives us the foundation for the Minor Pentatonic Scale and Blues Scale, which are the most fun scales for most guitarists. (We'll cover both of these scales later in this guide.) Clearly, I'm not alone in liking the Natural Minor Scale because this scale provides the foundation for almost all rock and blues lead guitars. (Playing a solo on a minor scale over major chords just sounds fantastic. I've been doing it for years, and it gets more and more fun as time goes by!) The Natural Minor Scale looks like this: Technically, this scale 'ends' on the root note at the right, but people tend to add on the two notes on the far right. (These notes are from the start of the next octave.) I use all of these notes because they all sound good. The Harmonic Minor Scale This is only a little bit different to the Natural Minor Scale. Here we sharpen the penultimate note to make the pullback to the root note. This creates an exotic-sounding 3-step interval. Try it! Top tip: When soloing, you can blend these two minor scales and play a 'hybrid' scale like this: . The Melodic Minor Scale In more traditional forms of music, that 3-step interval isn't welcome. So we add an extra note to smooth the ascension. This creates the 'melodic minor scale'. (AKA Jazz Melodic Minor Scale.) It looks like this: Unless you want to learn jazz, this is a pretty niche scale. Most guitarists won't need to know it. . Major and Minor Pentatonic Scales So far we've covered the two pillars of music scale theory: the Major Scale and the Minor Scale. These two scales are fundamental and you need to be aware of them, but most intermediate guitarists play these two scales in a simpler and abridged form. The Major Pentatonic Scale is the Major Scale in abridged form. So instead of playing the full major scale pattern like this: The Major Scale We play a simpler version, like this: The Major Pentatonic Scale Can you see that we simply removed two notes from each octave? (4 notes in total.) I often see guitar learners mistake thinking the Major Scale is a totally different scale from the Major Pentatonic Scale. No, the Major Pentatonic Scale IS the Major Scale, just in a simpler form. Similarly, the Minor Pentatonic Scale is the Minor Scale in abridged form. So instead of playing this: The Natural Minor Scale We play this: The Minor Pentatonic Scale Can you see how all we've done here is remove two notes from each octave? (4 notes removed in total.) So if you learn how to play the Major Scale and the Minor Scale, you already 'know' how to play their pentatonic versions. You just need to get accustomed to leaving those two notes out in each octave. Box 1 of the Major Pentatonic Scale looks like this: This isn't the easiest scale to solo, so most intermediate guitarists use box 1 of the Minor Pentatonic Scale for most of their lead guitar work. If you take only one thing away from this lesson, it should be to learn this pattern: Minor Pentatonic Scale (Box 1) The Minor Pentatonic Scale is the best scale to learn if you want to learn scales to play solos and lead guitar. In a moment, we'll look at one of the coolest scales of all, the Blues Scale. Before we do, let's have a quick chat about 'boxes'. (If you're playing scales, you need to know this.) . Join over 100,000 guitar learners and subscribe to our guitar-tips-by-email service. (It's free.) We'll send you a series of lessons that will move you to the next level of your guitar journey. Learn how everything fits together quickly, easily and effectively. We share ninja tips (for instant fun!) but also timeless fundamentals that will deepen your understanding. Get our best guitar tips & videos Our Guitar Courses To become a better guitarist click here to see our guitar courses Get your personalised guitar-learning plan Want us to make a guitar-learning plan that is customised to you? Click here for GuitarMetrics™ Continue reading on page 2: Page 1 Page 2 Page 2 The guitar neck is long and the notes overlap from one string to the next. There is no way we can memorise all the patterns in one go. To make life easier for ourselves we divide all scales on the neck into 5 segments to make things more manageable. You can play every scale in each segment. We call these segments 'boxes'. For example, with no boxes, this is what the full neck diagram looks like for the E Minor Pentatonic Scale. This is overwhelming! So we do what we always do. We simplify. We break this long pattern into 5 shorter patterns. These 5 smaller patterns are called 'boxes'. So for each scale, we have box 1, box 2, box 3, box 4 and box 5. (After the 12th fret, the 5 box patterns repeat again.) As you can see, the boxes overlap. The right side of box 1 is the left side of box 2. And so on. From a music theory point of view, the notes in all 5 boxes follow the same musical pattern. They are the same scale. But when these notes are laid out across the guitar fretboard the fives boxes look very different from one another. They all share the same musical 'DNA', but their appearance is different. That means we have to learn multiple patterns to play the same scale in different positions on the guitar neck. Don't worry about learning boxes 2, 3, 4 and 5 right now. Just focus on box 1 for each scale. Master box 1 of each scale before attempting others In this article, to keep things simple, we've just used box 1 for each scale. This is how you should approach this too. This is by far the best way to learn guitar scales. Just learn box 1's for now, but know that there are 4 more boxes for every scale. You can move onto these in the future! Ok let's look at my favourite scale of all, the Blues Scale. This is why we learn guitar scales! The Blues Scale The Blues Scale is a very close relative of the Minor Pentatonic Scale. It sounds awesome in most rock, indie, country and blues scenarios. It looks like this: The Blues Scale One of the coolest things about the Blues Scale is that you can often play it over both major and minor keys. It won't work over every chord progression, but it does work over lots. It's a versatile scale. If you're trying to learn guitar scales this is a huge boost, because it makes everything easier. . Keys If you want to learn guitar scales because you intend to play lead guitar you need to know this: The easiest way to play lead guitar that will sound "good" is to play notes from a scale that matches the song's key. This is so important I'm going to re-type it!! The easiest way to play lead guitar that will sound "good" is to play notes from a scale that matches the song's key. So if the key of a song is C Major, you will sound awesome if you play a riff or solo with notes from the C Major Scale. In this example, the key and the scale match. Voila! We have harmony. How to work out the key of a song The easiest way to work this out is to look at the first and last chord of the song. (They're often the same chord.) 99% of the time the key of the song will be one of those two chords. A key-finding example So for example, let's say the first chord of the song is A minor. This means that you can play any note from the A Minor Scale (or the A Minor Pentatonic Scale) and it will sound good. Some notes will sound better than others, but none of them will sound 'bad'. Let's look at another example Let's say the first chord of the song was E major. You could play any note from the E Major Scale (or the E Major Pentatonic Scale) and it would sound good. Depending on the track, you may also be able to play the E Minor Scale, or the E Minor Pentatonic Scale too. If it's a rock track, the E Blues Scale might also work. NINJA TIP: You can often play a minor scale over a major key. This will often sound good. This does not work as well the other way around! Try it and you'll HEAR the difference. . How to practice scales When we learn guitar scales the first thing we need to do is commit the scale pattern to memory. The easiest way to do this is to break the scale into bite-sized chunks. So first of all, focus only on box 1 for the scale. The notes of all boxes cover two octaves. So we can make things even easier by just focussing on the first octave of box 1. So the easiest way to learn guitar scales is to 'split' the scale boxes into octaves 1 and 2. An example of how to learn a guitar scale Let's use the G Major Scale as an example. Box 1 looks like this: To begin with, focus on learning the first octave. This is the distance from the first to the second root note. In this box, for this scale, the first octave spans strings 6, 5 and 4: After you've memorised this, move onto the second octave, which spans strings 4 to 1: Important point: Note that the last note of octave 1 is also the first note of octave 2. There are 8 notes in each octave, but there are not 16 notes in total across two octaves. There are only 15. Why learn this way? To learn guitar scales we have to break things into bite-size chunks. It just makes things faster. This octave-splitting method might not seem necessary for box 1 of easy patterns like the Minor Pentatonic Scale, but for more complicated scales/boxes with more elaborate patterns this approach can make things a lot more manageable and allow us to learn guitar scales quickly and more reliably. . Here's an important piece of technique Remember to use one finger per fret, like this: It's ok to use the pads (the fingerprints) to play notes when you play lead guitar. This is something that should be avoided at all costs when playing chords, but when we're trying to learn guitar scales it's ok to adapt our fretting technique. In fact, it's flat out beneficial! Learn slowly and correctly to embed good muscle memory When we learn guitar scales it's very important to learn slowly AND correctly. You must resist the urge to play fast. Playing slowly and correctly is the best way to embed muscle memory. Playing quickly leads to mistakes, frustration and twitchy muscle memory. That's not what we want. Practice ascending and descending the scales, but also try doubling back on yourself in different amounts. For example: ascend two notes, then descend one, ascend two, then descend one (and so on). Then try ascending 3 and descending one. These are useful ways to learn the scales rote, but of course let's not lose sight of the final aim here which is to develop a sense of musicality. Nothing will improve your ability to learn guitar scales and play lead guitar more than jamming. It is essential that you play the scales over MUSIC. Don't become the classic bedroom guitarist. The type of people who simply learn guitar scales and patterns in isolation. No! You need to develop a feel for these patterns. Play the scales over backing tracks (YouTube is filled with them) and reach out and connect with other musicians who live locally to you. Playing with other musicians is transformative for your progress as a guitarist. Jam exercise – Try this backing track Hit play on the backing track below and play jam with some notes from the E Minor Pentatonic Scale: Take our 60-second quiz & get your results: Take The Quiz Join the world's best online guitar school Get your own personalised guitar learning plan (customised just for YOU). World-class online guitar courses. Learn at your own pace. Community Campus & Learning Forum - A friendly community! Connect with our team & students. 😊 Beginner Song library with chordsheets, tabs and tips. (Songs suitable for all levels!) Regular live streams, seminars and Q&A sessions - Learn from world-class guitar educators. Get all your questions answered! Click here to learn more about National Guitar Academy membership Cool Guitar T-shirts 😎 Look cooler! Check out our merch: Click here to see our merch store Want free guitar tips and video lessons delivered to your inbox? Join over 100,000 guitar-learners and subscribe to our guitar-tips-by-email service. (It's free.) We'll send you a series of lessons that will move you to the next level of your guitar journey. Learn how everything fits together quickly, easily and effectively. We share ninja tips (for instant fun!) but also timeless fundamentals that will deepen your understanding. Get our best guitar tips & videos Continue reading on page 2: Page 1 Page 2 Guitar scales are the building blocks for writing songs, creating solos, and even composing good chord progressions. Learning how to use guitar scales will not only help you improve your guitar skills, but it will help you become a better musician. In this guide, I will answer the most common questions guitarists have about scales, how to learn them, how to use scales, how to practice scales, and more. Important: I know that many guitarists aren't interested in learning music theory. In this guide, I will explain scales in the simplest way possible that doesn't rely on an understanding of music theory. Even if you know nothing about music theory, by the end of this guide you will know enough to start using scales in your playing. After you read this guide, check out these useful scales resources: What Is A Guitar Scale? Before we start looking at how to learn, practice and use guitar scales, let's look at a basic definition of scales: A guitar scale is a selection of notes that work well together that you can use to write music. Different types of guitar scales (eg: Major, minor, Pentatonic) use different selections of notes and change the feel of music you can write. The above definition gives you a basic understanding of what scales are without needing to know about music theory topics such as intervals. A scale is basically a bunch of certain notes that work well together and can be used to build chord progressions, write riffs and solos. As mentioned above, there are different types of guitar scales and each type of scale can create a different type of vibe, feel, or color for a song or solo. Here are some examples of different types of guitar scales you're likely to come across: Major scale Minor scale Pentatonic scale Blues scale Modes You've probably heard of the above scales and may even know a couple of scale patterns. For now, don't worry about modes and focus on learning the basic scales such as the Major scale and Pentatonic scale. Once you understand these scales, it will be easier to learn the modes. A guitar scale is a selection of notes that work well together and each type of scale uses a different selection of notes. For example, here are all the notes in the 'A Minor Pentatonic' scale highlighted on a fretboard (if you don't know how to read the below scale chart, skip to the next section then come back): If you only play the above notes and don't play any other notes, you're playing the A Minor Pentatonic scale. Here are the notes for the C Major Scale: It should be clear that this scale uses a very different selection of notes. This means that the C Major scale will sound very different when compared against the A Minor Pentatonic scale. The Major scale uses more notes than the Pentatonic scale, which means it gives us more notes to choose from when playing or writing music. For now, just remember that each type of guitar scale uses a different selection of notes. How to Read Guitar Scale Charts Throughout this guide, I'll include scale

the minor natural has the same notes and 2 more, thus I have more options when improvising my solos. These 2 notes are among the more dissonant in the scale, thus giving me more opportunity to create a melody by resolving dissonance into consonance)Major scale (same reasons as for the minor natural scale, applied to major keys)Harmonic minor scale (With a simple alteration to the natural minor scale you'll get a somewhat Arabic sound that tends to sound great in Heavy Metal music)The modes (to expand my horizons and be able to play modally).Among others, a scale that is missing is the melodic minor scale. The reason is that its Jazzy flavor doesn't appeal to my musical needs. So is the whole tone scale whose sound doesn't enable me to express myself the way I want.Also, after 25 years of playing guitar, I'm still learning new scales. For instance, lately, I'm experimenting with using the diminished scale for my solos.And the reason I learned the diminished scale and started using it isn't to get one step closer to learning "all guitar scales" possible.It was to get myself out of a plateau where my solos were kind of sounding similar to each other. I wanted to try a different flavor and use it in different contexts. To jog my mind into coming up with new things.(Read more about overcoming plateaus if you're an advancing beginner or intermediate guitar player)If you learn all guitar scales above in just one position, you will still be limited in your choices.While it's true that the chromatic scale includes all 12 different notes in music, those same notes are repeated at different octaves over and over again.In order to understand this, pick the open low E string on your guitar. Now put your finger on the 12th fret and pick that note.It's still the note E, just repeated an octave higher.You may notice that the E note on the 12th fret does not sound exactly the same as the open E. And it doesn't, since it's an octave higher. But try playing the note on the 11th or 13th fret and compare them to the same open E.They sound much more different, don't they?Now, if you learn a scale like the minor pentatonic in just one position, like this:You're only limited to the notes that fall within a couple of octaves that happen to lie within the range of that position – excluding all the other notes.You can still write a great solo staying in one position, but in general, you want to have the option to move up and down the neck at will.This means that every scale pattern should be learned in a different position so that you have a wider range of notes you can choose from every time you play.Learning a scale in different positions may not be enough for you to be able to move up and down the neck at ease.You also need to connect these different scale patterns. This is not a very easy task but in this article I show you a creative way you can go about it.In this lesson, I've tried to convince you that you don't need to learn all the guitar scales in the book.And…That there's much more to learning a scale than memorizing its pattern up and down.In this lesson, I'll show you the process of learning a scale and milking it – before moving to the next.PS: Is there any topic related to guitar theory, practice, or songwriting you would like me to write a detailed lesson on? Leave me a comment below. You may consider giving a donation, by which you will be helping a songwriter achieve his dreams. Each contribution, no matter how small, will make a difference.#s3gt_translate_tooltip_mini { display: none !important; } Ever wondered what scales are and why they are such an important component of guitar theory? In the following article, we're going to answer some of the most common questions around the topic of guitar scales including: What scales areWhy they are important for guitaristsThe different types of scalesWhat are step patterns and scale degree formulasHow to read scale charts and diagramsWhich scales guitarists should learnThis article is the second of a series on guitar theory. If you haven't read the first article on 'how to learn all notes on guitar', while not strictly necessary, may help clarify some of the information below.So what are scales exactly?Scales are any set of notes ordered by pitch. They are the building blocks for melody and harmony. The major scale is the most important and is used in comparison to define all other scales. Understanding step patterns and scale degree formulas is key to understanding scales and their role in music. Guitarists should learn the major and minor scales, pentatonic minor, and pentatonic major scale along with the blues scale.Scales are a fundamental aspect of guitar theory (music theory for guitarists), and while music theory can appear complicated, scales simply consist of any set of notes, provided they are arranged in order of pitch e.g. from low to high (ascending scale) or high to low (descending scale), generally within a given octave and then repeating the same pattern across octaves.Another way of interpreting scales would be to consider them as defining how an octave can be divided into steps.There are two reasons guitarists should understand and practice scales.Firstly, there's music theory.If you are learning guitar scales and understand guitar scale theory e.g. how specific notes relate to one another and how this relates to chords you will have a better understanding of music.This is useful when it comes to improvisation, developing your ear e.g. recognizing notes and intervals (the distance between notes), songwriting, and communicating with other musicians.Secondly, practicing scales is useful for developing muscle memory and dexterity and over time will be the backbone for developing good single note technique, alternate picking, and ultimately speed.The first note of a scale is known as the tonic and this defines the key (also referred to as the "key" note). For example, if you play the major scale, starting on B as per the example below:B – C# – D# – E – F# – G# – A#You would be playing the B major scale. If you started a half step up on the C you would be playing the C major scale, or if you followed a different pattern you would still be playing a type of C scale as it is defined by the tonic.C – D – E – F – G – A – B Note C Major does not contain accidentals (sharps or flats)The tonic often referred to as the root note (technically the two terms indicate different things) or starting note defines the key. So, if your tonic is the 1st fret of the 6th string and you followed the pattern above you would be playing an F major scale, if you started on the 3rd fret it may be the G major scale depending on the notes you play next.It can be useful to think of the tonic as the note the other notes revolve around. Our ears expect that a melody will resolve e.g. keeps coming back to the tonic. This build-up of tension and release is a key element of writing music.What's the difference between the Tonic and Root Note?Tonic refers to melody, root refers to chords.They are often the same but the two terms mean different things. For instance, the tonic is the note a scale, melody, or section of a melody that the piece of music begins and resolves on.Some people refer to this as the 'home note' and our ears come to expect the melody to resolve on this note or keep coming back to this note.The root is simply the root note of a chord e.g. This is often the first scale degree or first note of the corresponding major scale. The root note, however, isn't always the first note of a chord, as chords are often inverted meaning the third or fifth degree is the lowest note. Otherwise, the terms 'root note' and 'tonic' could be used interchangeably, and often are.Western music consists of 12 notes:When these 12 notes are divided (in much the same way the scale length of your neck is divided up by frets) and assembled in order of pitch they form the chromatic scale, also referred to as the 12 tone scale.The chromatic scale is the 'master scale' that all other scales are built from and each note is separated by a semitone e.g. A – A# is an interval of a semitone, as is B > C.Because the chromatic scale includes every available note in the western music system it's rarely used in a practical sense. Because it includes all available notes it lacks structure or definition, as it is often the notes we leave out that define the music we are playing.A better way to look at the chromatic scale is that it can be used to build other scales, with this in mind it can be useful to consider the chromatic scale as the 'musical alphabet'.Chromaticism, for example, means to play notes separated by a semitone that are outside of the given scale e.g. non-diatonic.In the spoken and written word, we extract letters from the alphabet to form words and sentences to communicate ideas. In music, the 'musical alphabet' is the chromatic scale, and notes can be extracted from it which can then be used to create musical ideas in the form of a melody (single notes) or harmony (chords).There are many different types of scales, and within each category, different subcategories exist. We can break them into the following based on the notes included:Scale nameNotes per octaveChromatic12Octatonic8Heptatonic7Hexatonic6Pentatonic5Tetratonic4Tritonic3Ditonic (not to be confused with a Diatonic scale – a scale consisting of 5 natural notes and two accidentals e.g. sharps or flats)2Monotonic1Most of the scales relevant to guitarists consist of between 5 (Pentatonic) and 7 (Heptatonic). For example, both the major and minor scales are heptatonic, while the pentatonic major and minor consist of 5 notes. 8 (Octonic) note scales are also used, however mostly in jazz.Diatonic scales (not to be confused with ditonic) refer to the construction of a specific type of scale rather than the number of notes included within it.For example, diatonic scales are constructed from 7 notes (heptatonic) that contain 5 whole step intervals and 2 half step intervals, with the two half step intervals being separated by 2-3 whole steps. Major scales are diatonic scales, as they contain 5 whole steps, 2 half steps, and the 2 half steps are separated by 2 whole steps.If we look at the C major scale, we see this in action:RootWhole StepWhole Step Half StepWhole StepWhole StepWhole StepHalf StepCDEFGABCKeep in mind, that the C major scale doesn't include accidentals (sharps or flats) and the final C is a repeat of the root note, meaning while there are 8 notes written above, the scale only contains 7 notes from start to finish.We can construct and understand how scales are constructed in one of two ways, either by the step pattern or by the scale formula.Step patterns refer to the order of whole and half steps in a given scale, written as 'W' for whole step and 'H' for half step. As guitarists, we can think of steps in relation to frets e.g. a half step is equal to 1 fret, and a whole step is equal to 2 frets.The major scale step patternW – W – H – W – W – W – HThe A major scale consists of the following steps (repeating on the A an octave higher): Using the table below and the scale patterns for the major scale (W-W-H-W-W-W-H) we can construct major scales in all keys, as the pattern remains the same. The difference in notes included in each scale is defined by the tonic or starting note.RootWhole StepWhole StepHalf StepWhole StepWhole StepWhole StepHalf StepA Major ScaleABC♯DEF♯G♯AB Major ScaleBC♯D♯EF♯G♯A♯BC Major ScaleCDEFGABCD Major ScaleDEF♯GABC♯DE Major ScaleEF♯G♯ABC♯D♯EF Major ScaleFGAB♭CDEFG Major ScaleGABCDEF♯GWhy do some scales use sharps, while others use flats or a mix of both?While technically using either would be understood, in diatonic scales notes are not repeated e.g. we do not use A and A♯ or B♭ and B. Take the F Major scale example above, we could have used an A♯ instead of Bb, but by using the Bb all seven letters are represented in the scale.Scale degree formulas use numbers to compare to specific notes of the major scale. This is why it is such an important scale. Scale formulas allow us to use the major scale as a parent scale, or reference for all other scales and modes. To put it simply, these formulas tell us which notes are the same and different from the notes of the major scale.For example, the formula for the major scale is 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. The individual numbers are referred to as scale degrees. Intervals are based on these degrees, starting from the first note. For example, the interval between the first two notes is a major second, while the interval between the first three notes is a major third.We'll use the C major scale as an example again, as it contains only natural notes e.g. no sharps or flats:Scale Degrees1234567Scale NotesCDEFGABIntervalsUnisonMajor 2ndMajor 3rdPerfect 4thPerfect 5thMajor 6thMajor 7thAs you can see the scale degrees align with the intervals.For example, the 2nd note is a major second while the third is a major third. By changing the intervals we change the scale. For example, if we flatten the 3rd note of the C major scale above to E♭ it becomes a minor third. This does not apply to perfect 4ths and 5ths, which are neither major nor minor by nature. When raised a half step they are 'augmented' and 'diminished' if lowered a half step.Intervals are useful, up to a point. While there is more that could be discussed it's useful to remember that the scale degrees of the major scale aligns with the major intervals and the scale degrees of the minor scale align with the scale degrees of the minor scale, for example:The scale formula for the minor scale is: 1, 2, ♭3, 4, 5, ♭6, ♭7This means we use the first and second note of the major scale, while the third note is flattened by a half-tone (equal to 1 fret on the guitar fretboard) which means the major third is flattened and is now a minor third.We then use the 4th and 5th notes without changing them and flatten the 6th and 7th a half step, making the major 6th a minor 6th and the major 7th a minor 7th.Knowing what we now know about scale formulas, in simple terms this means we can build a minor scale from a major by flattening the 3rd, 6th, and 7th notes, as per the example below.Major Scale 1234567Minor Scale Formula12♭345♭6♭7Major Scale NotesCDEFGABMinor Scale NotesCD♭EFG♭A♭BI have listed the scale formulas for the minor, minor pentatonic, and blues scales below which tend to be the most utilized by guitarists depending on genre.Major Scale1234567Minor Scale12♭345♭6♭7Major Pentatonic12356Minor Pentatonic1♭345♭7Blues Scale1♭34♭55♭7Remember pentatonic scale only contains 5 notes compared to 7 for the major and minor scales.Why do you see flats and sharps written before and after natural note names?When composing music the accidental (the sharp or flat note) is written before the note. When simply written down or spoken we say the name of the note first followed by the sharp or flat.Why does the C major scale contain no sharps or flats?As we know from discussing step patterns, the major scale consists of the following step patterns and corresponding notes as shown below in the table. As it happens, using the step pattern for the major scales beginning on C results in no accidentals being included in the scale. You have probably seen a scale diagram before. They are similar to chord charts and simple to understand once you know how they are laid out.In the diagram below the scale diagram is shown in horizontal format and like most scale diagrams covers two octaves. You will also see scale diagrams in vertical format, however, the same rules still apply.G Major ScaleFirstly, scale diagrams contain 6 horizontal lines (depending on their orientation) with each line representing a guitar string, with the bass notes on the bottom and treble notes at the top. In the case of a vertical scale diagram, the low E will be displayed as the line furthest to the left.The lines running vertically represent the frets, again this will be shown horizontally if in vertical format.The dots represent the notes that make up the scale. In the example above the white dots show the tonic, in this case, G.Some scale patterns also include numbers representing fingers as the suggested finger to use to play the specific note. Keep in mind, that there are as many ways to play scales as there are chords, depending on if you prefer to stay within a fixed position (caged system) or want to play higher up the neck (3 notes per string method) or another pattern containing the notes of the scale.The caged system takes its name from the fact that it utilizes 5 open major chord shapes: C, A, G, E, and D which can then be moved up or down the neck to create different chords, provided the index finger is positioned where the nut would otherwise be if you were playing within the first four frets.The caged system is a way of visualizing chords and scale shapes relative to the fretboard using set patterns contained within a 4 fret position (occasionally 5) that can be moved up or down the neck changing the chord or tonic being played.If you incorporate barre chords into your playing, you are already using the CAGED system when playing a chord progression, the most common being the root 5 A and root 6 E shape.For example, if you play an open A shape on the 4th fret while barring the 2nd fret with your index finger you are playing a B chord. An E chord shape on the 5th fret with the 3rd fret barred would therefore be a G.The CAGED system is useful because it can help unlock the guitar neck, and allows you to do a great deal with basic moveable shapes.I've covered the CAGED system here but for the purpose of understanding how it relates to scales, it's important to know the scale patterns utilized fit closely to the corresponding chord shapes, making it simpler to visualize how these relate to each other. This also makes it easier to play extended chords e.g. adding a 9th scale degree for example.The patterns will also be contained within 4 frets, with one finger assigned to each fret. Each pattern can be moved, which changes the key.For instance, the diagram we used earlier for the G major scale can be transposed to A simply by moving the entire pattern a whole step (2 frets) higher up the neck.A Major Scale – Caged SystemWe'll be using the CAGED system to demonstrate scale patterns for most of the remainder of this article as it makes a good starting point for beginners new to music theory, but other patterns including the 'three notes per string' method are also widely used and useful.As the name implies, this system incorporates three notes per string. Its main benefit is it allows the guitarist to extend past just the two octaves the CAGED system allows for.G Major Scale – 3 Notes per stringIt's up to you which method you use. For those new to guitar, I'd recommend the CAGED system as this will make the most sense visually in how it relates to chords.The three-note per string system is arguably better for more advanced players who want to utilize the length of the neck in their lead playing and their fingers are more adjusted to the longer stretches required. It can also be a more practical way to visualize notes of the scale in relation to chords.There are 6 scales every guitarist should learn, to begin with, these are: The Major ScaleThe Natural Minor ScaleThe Minor Harmonic ScaleThe Minor Pentatonic ScaleThe Major Pentatonic ScaleThe Blues ScaleI've provided scale diagrams for each below, along with TAB. For the sake of consistency, I've listed all scales in the key of G but all patterns used are movable as the tonic of the scale is always the first note shown.If you are interested in music theory in any capacity, the major scale is the first scale you should learn as it is the most important in music. It consists of 7 notes (heptatonic) in total and uses the following note intervals:The major scale step patternW – W – H – W – W – W – HIf you recall the section on 'step patterns' this should begin to make sense, and you may also recognize the major scale as diatonic. Remember, regardless of where you shift the pattern the intervals between notes remain the same.G Major Scale Pattern (caged position)G Major Scale Tab (caged position) The natural minor scale is often referred to as simply the 'minor scale' or 'aeolian mode' (we'll cover modes in a future article). Understanding the minor scale will allow will help you to build other minor scales including the harmonic minor scale and the melodic minor scale which only differ slightly.The minor scale also contains 7 notes (heptatonic) but differs in the fact that the 3rd, 6th, and 7th steps are flattened by one semitone or fret.The natural minor scale step patternW – H – W – W – H – W – WG Natural Minor Scale Pattern (caged position)G Natural Minor Scale Tab (caged position)The harmonic minor scale, also known as Aeolian ♯7 is exactly the same as the natural minor scale except the last scale degree is raised by a half tone, as indicated by the 1 1/2.The harmonic minor scale step patternW – H – W – W – H – W+H – HG Harmonic Minor Scale Pattern (caged position)G Harmonic Minor Scale Tab (caged position)Unlike the major and minor scales which contain 7 notes, Pentatonics use 5 notes. We already know 'tonic ' refers to the key note. Penta in Greek means 5, hence Penta + tonic refers to a '5 note scale'.Penta (5) + Tonic (note) = 5 note scaleThe difference between the major and major pentatonic is the removal of the 4th and 7th notes. They are synonymous with rock and country and would have to be the most played of all.Removing the two notes (4th and 7th) removes the half steps and as a result more dissonant (disharmonious) intervals.The major pentatonic scale step patternW – W – W + H – W – W + HG Major Pentatonic Scale Pattern (caged position) G Major Pentatonic Scale Pattern (caged position)Just as the major pentatonic contains 5 notes from the major scale, the minor pentatonic contains 5 notes from the minor scale, leaving out the 2nd and 6th notes respectively. The minor pentatonic can be heard throughout rock and blues and for most guitarists is the most common scale they will use.The minor pentatonic scale step patternW+H – W – W – W+H – WG Minor Pentatonic Scale Pattern (caged position)G Minor Pentatonic Scale Tab (caged position)The blues scale utilizes 6 notes (hexatonic) and is almost identical to the minor pentatonic, with the addition of the 'blue note' or diminished 5th. (Added in blue below) As the name implies it works particularly well over a 12-bar blues chord progression.Blues scale step patternW + H – W – H – H – W + H – WG Blues Scale Pattern (caged position)G Blues Scale Tab (caged position) Modes are diatonic scales (7 pitches, with 5 whole steps and 2 half steps), defined by their step pattern and root note, just like other scales. However, guitar modes, are mostly seen as variations of a scale, the most common being described by their starting position relative to the major scale. For example, if we take the major scale and start on note 2 we have the structure of the Dorian mode. As the Major scale has 7 scale degrees, there are 7 modes of the Major scale including Ionian (which starts on the root so is equivalent to the Major Scale). Dorian (starting on the 2nd scale degree), Phrygian (starring on the 3rd scale degree), Lydian (starting on the 4th scale degree), and Mixolydian (5th scale degree), Aeolian (6th scale degree, aka the minor scale), and lastly Locrian. The Major scale is the scale most commonly used as a reference for other scales and chords. As a result, it's the most important scale to learn and is often used in this capacity e.g. we describe the minor scale as having a flattened third, this means in comparison to the Major scale the minor scale's third scale degree is flattened a semitone. This terminology is also applied to chord theory e.g. minor chords feature a flattened third (minor third interval) while Major chords feature a major third interval.For one, they allow us to look at music within a given structure e.g. scales are organized sets of notes that work together, as opposed to the chromatic scale which is just a complete list of notes. Scales are also foundational in terms of developing an understanding of melodic composition when writing riffs and/or solos. Practicing scales also helps develop dexterity and master techniques such as alternate picking.Scales are similar to a list of ingredients when preparing a meal. The scale contains the notes that would be 'within key' for a particular piece of music e.g. the sound good together. Notes and chords within different keys can be used as tools e.g. a passing chord will often contain notes, not in key, however, in many cases this is a deliberate action to increase tension before the music resolves to a more stable chord or note.Scale length is the distance between the nut and bridge of your guitar e.g. the length of guitar string suspended and able to freely vibrate when plucked. This affects the tension on the strings, which has an effect on the guitar in general but is not directly related to guitar scales.I'd recommend learning the Major scale first if wanting to gain a better understanding of guitar theory but in most cases, guitarists will learn the minor pentatonic scale first as it is a very common scale on the guitar. I have a full article here that will teach you how.I hope the information above helps explain exactly what scales are and why they are so important for guitarists for both gaining an understanding of the fretboard as well as building finger dexterity through practice.We'll cover the topic of scales in more detail in coming articles including, the use of alternate picking and some of the different scale patterns available and modes and how they relate to scales.In the meantime, if you have a question or something to add why not leave a comment below and join the conversation. Beginning to learn scales on the guitar and wondering what the difference is between major and minor scales, and more.... Read Article Learn how to read guitar scale charts. A straightforward explanation with plenty of examples. Click here to read more. Read Article Minor scales are known for their emotional depth and versatility. They can convey a wide range of feelings, from introspection.... Read Article