

7 - Playing Scales on the Guitar

Just as there are *patterns of sound*, there are also *patterns of fingering*. The standard guitar fretboard allows easy access to at least one octave's worth of scales (12 frets), so the patterns we need to use will include all the appropriate scalar notes within those same 12 frets. Further, since the sound-patterns we hear are the same in every key, *the finger-patterns should also be the same in every key*. And, as it turns out, they are. They've just *seemed* different to earlier generations of guitarists because they assumed you should always start from the lowest note on the guitar when you learn a key. **However, the truth is that all keys have basically the same fingering patterns.** What makes them *appear* to be different is the standard assumption that one normally wishes to start a key at its lowest possible pitch—somewhere near the nut of the guitar. **This makes the fingering patterns appear to be different because the nut is essentially replacing one finger on the fretting hand when striking open strings.**

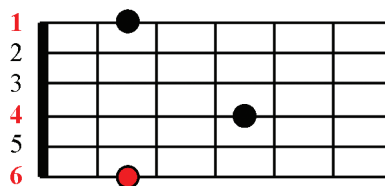
To understand scales on the guitar, we must first understand (and memorize) the pattern of roots & octaves of any given note on the guitar's fretboard. For example, how long would it take you to figure out where all the *F*'s are on the guitar? If it takes you more than a few seconds, you need to learn what we're discussing next—the *Chunk System*. **The Chunk System explains the fretboard and scalar patterns in a way that is logical and easy to understand for both beginning and experienced guitarists.**

Scales can typically be physically played in different ways: *laterally* (vertically across the strings), *linearly* (up and down the length of a given string), and *diagonally* (across and up and down the strings). We shall examine the "lateral" forms, as they are the most important, and will lead to a better understanding of the others.

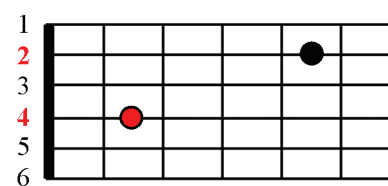
Rules of the Chunk System:

- ◆ There are 5 basic chunks which are the same for all keys.
- ◆ Each chunk is comprised of either 4 or 5 adjacent frets.
- ◆ **Each chunk overlaps the next, but always in the same order (called the *chunk circle*).**
- ◆ Each key will start on the guitar fretboard with one of the 5 chunks according to the configuration of root and octave(s). {See "Examples..."}.
- ◆ Each chunk has its own pattern of root and octaves that distinguish it from any other.
- ◆ Lastly, all 5 chunks hooked together end-to-end will constitute a *chain*.

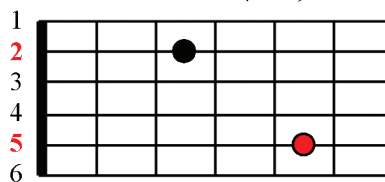
Chunk 1 (6-4-1)



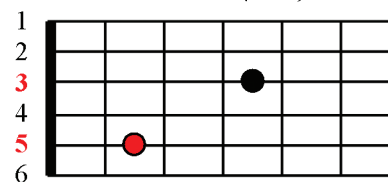
Chunk 2 (4-2)



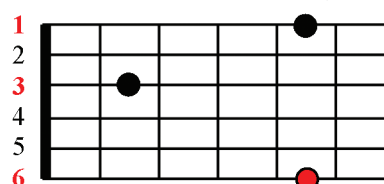
Chunk 3 (5-2)



Chunk 4 (5-3)



Chunk 5 (6-3-1)

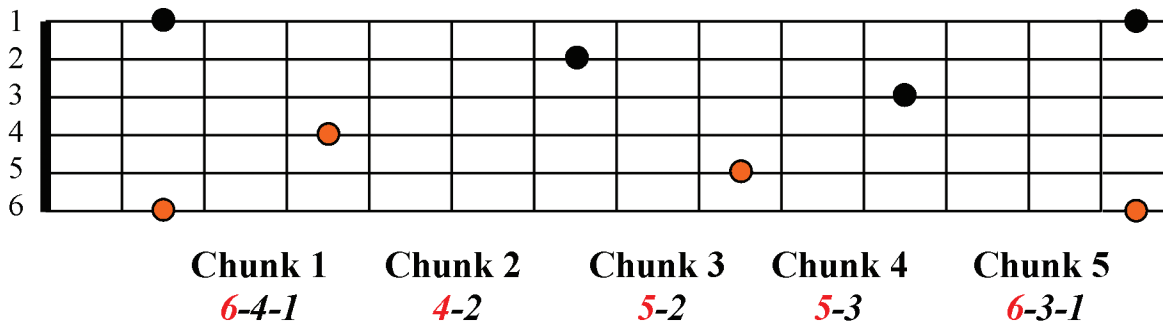


Please notice that:

- ◆ **Chunk 1** has its root on the 6th string, and octaves on the 4th and 1st strings (**6-4-1**).
- ◆ **Chunk 2** has its root on the 4th string and one octave on the 2nd string (**4-2**).
- ◆ **Chunk 3** has its root on 5th string and one octave on the 2nd string (**5-2**).
- ◆ **Chunk 4** has its root on 5th string and one octave on 3rd string (**5-3**).
- ◆ **Chunk 5** has its root on the 6th string, and octaves on the 3rd and 1st strings (**6-3-1**).

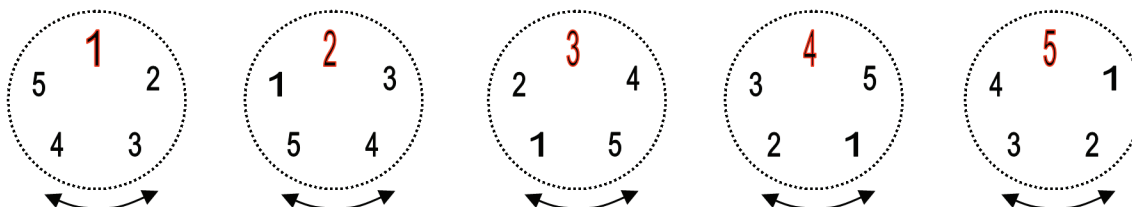
Put together, all 5 chunks look like this (in order of “closed” root chunks 1-5):

“Chain” form (Root & Octave Pattern)



Author’s Note: These patterns of root & octave placement are the same for *all* scales and *all* keys. The most important thing to remember about these movable chunks is that *they form a circle that resets its starting-point* dependent upon the key.

Chunk Circles

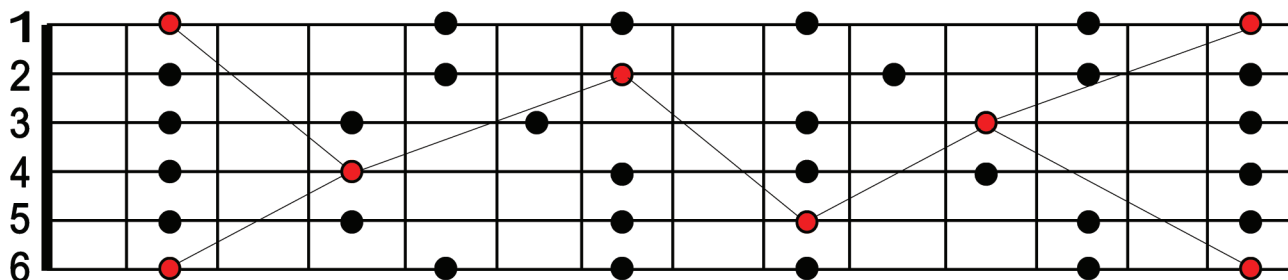


There are 5 basic patterns of fingering that comprise all the Major and minor keys. The easiest way to understand these patterns is to consider only the *closed* (fretted) fingerings, first. These patterns of “closed” fingerings are *movable forms* in that they can each be moved anywhere on the fretboard. These moveable forms can be used to produce any of the 7 different modes. **The most important difference between one pattern and another is which bass string the root will fall on (6th, 5th, or 4th).**

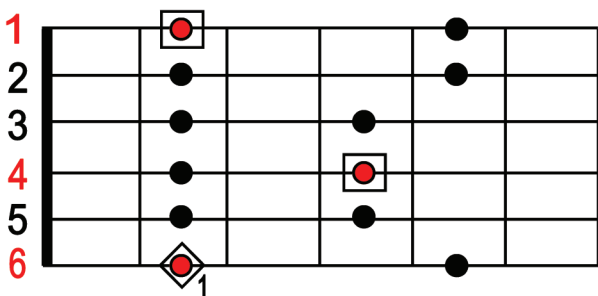
“A chain is only as strong as its weakest link”. This means that your familiarity with any one part or section of music will determine your success with the whole piece. This is a strong reason for wanting to master the entire fretboard. After you master each of the individual chunks, learning the whole fretboard (the “chain” form) will be easier.

Note: "Pentatonics" (meaning "5 tones" or "5 intervals") are shortened versions of the Major and minor scales. Two scalar degrees are missing in each case. **Minors are missing the 2nd and 6th scale degrees.** Pentatonics are great to "jam" with, being simpler to use. **Diamonds indicate the root of a chunk, squares indicate the octaves, and the number indicates the best finger with which to start the scale.** Always start the scale on the root with the finger-number.

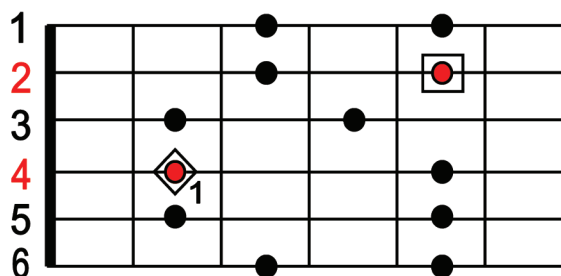
Minor Pentatonic Scale Chain-form



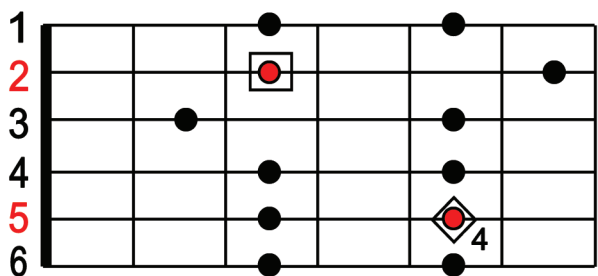
Minor Pent. chunk 1 (6 - 4 - 1)



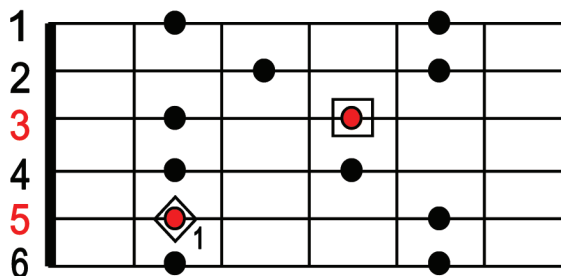
Minor Pent. chunk 2 (4 - 2)



Minor Pent. chunk 3 (5 - 2)



Minor Pent. chunk 4 (5 - 3)



Minor Pent. chunk 5 (6 - 3 - 1)

