



The pentatonic scale

The **pentatonic scale** is usually the first scale beginning guitarists know and use for improvising.

The **pentatonic** and **blues pentatonic scales** are used very frequently in rock, blues & pop music, but you hear them less frequently in jazz music and when you hear them it is usually on a modal tune or a jazz blues, but almost never on standards.

After we've learned the other scales that are useful for playing jazz, we tend to forget the pentatonic scale, but it's actually a very good device to add some variety to your improvisations.)

Let's start with the basics of the pentatonic scale. ☺

A pentatonic scale is any scale that contains **5 notes**. Any scale that contains 5 notes can be called pentatonic, but when people talk about pentatonic scales they refer to the **minor pentatonic** scale or the **major pentatonic** scale.

The **major pentatonic scale** consists of the 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 of the **major scale**. So C major pentatonic would consist of the following notes:

C Major Pentatonic Scale	C	D	E	G	A
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The **minor pentatonic scale** consists of the 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7 of the **natural minor scale** (the aeolian scale). So A minor pentatonic would consist of the following notes:

A Minor Pentatonic Scale	A	C	D	E	G
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You might notice that the **C major pentatonic scale** and the **A minor pentatonic** scale have exactly the **same notes**, just like the C major scale (ionian mode) and the A natural minor scale (aeolian mode) have the same notes. If you're not sure what **modes** are, you might want to check this other lesson: [The Modes](#).

Some advantages of the pentatonic scale:

- the fingering on the guitar fret board is simple.
- the pentatonic scale works well with techniques like pull offs and hammer ons.
- because the pentatonic scale has only 5 notes, it's quicker to change from lower to higher positions on the fret board (or reverse).
- the pentatonic scale can bring some variety in your sound, that is if you don't **overuse** it.

So, how do we use the pentatonic scale?

The obvious way of using pentatonic scales is playing them on modal tunes or on a blues, but they are also very useful to play over **chord changes**.

Here follows a list of **what pentatonic scale** you can play on **what chord**:

I'll do the first one with you so you can see how the list works:

The first entry in the list shows you which pentatonic scales you can use on major chords. 'I' means you can use the major pentatonic scale built on the root of the chord, which is pretty obvious. 'V' means you can use the major pentatonic scale built on the 5th note (compared to the root of the chord). So in case of a C major chord the pentatonic scales to use would be the G major pentatonic scale: G A B D E (5 6 7 9 3).

Chord Type	Chord Tensions	Major Pentatonic Scale	Note Functions
Major	6, 9	I	1 9 3 5 6
		V	5 6 7 9 3
	9, #11	II	9 3 #11 6 7
Minor	6, 9, 11	bIII	b3 11 5 b7 1
		IV	11 5 6 1 9
		bVII	b7 1 9 11 5
minor/major	6, 9	IV	11 5 6 1 9
Dominant	9,13	I	1 9 3 5 13
	b9, #9, b5, b13	bV	b5 b13 b7 b9 #9
Sus 4	9, 13	IV	4 5 13 1 9
		bVII	b7 1 9 4 5
Half Diminished	b6, 11	bVI	b6 b7 1 b3 11