



with Kevin Downing

The Five Minor Pentatonic Scale Shapes

Scale Pattern #1

Fingers 1 4 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 4 1 4

Scale Pattern #2

Fingers 2 4 1 4 1 4 1 3 2 4 2 4

Scale Pattern #3

Fingers 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 4 1 4 1 3

Scale Pattern #4

Fingers 1 4 1 4 1 3 1 3 2 4 1 4

Scale Pattern #5

Fingers 2 4 2 4 1 4 1 4 2 4 2 4

Scales are the building blocks of music and the pentatonic scale is the life blood of many modern genres of music. Listen to any of your favourite rock songs and you will hear that many riffs and solos use this favoured scale as a base source for ideas.

The word penta is Latin for the number five and the word tonic means tones – so a pentatonic scale is a five-note scale. Plenty of the world's top players have made careers out of using it; however, many amateur players don't know all the pentatonic scale shapes on the fingerboard very well. This lesson is going to change that.

Through the daily practice of scales a thorough knowledge of the fretboard will be gained and you'll notice a steady improvement in your technique as well. There are five standard scale shapes that people tend to play and educators call them Pattern 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5.

The shape most people will learn first is Pattern #1 in the music diagram above. This scale shape is easy enough to play and memorise, but many never learn the other shapes of the scale which restricts their ability to express themselves musically on the guitar. If

you don't know Pattern #1 yet – learn it now.

Here is the best way to learn the scales:

- Make sure to follow the fingerings exactly as written. The fingerings are written between the music notation and tablature.
- Begin the scale at the bottom, play through to the top and back down again. Only play the top note once.
- Play very slowly to start. Speed isn't important – having good synchronisation between your two hands and brain are more important at this stage.
- Play each note cleanly with no buzzing or mutes. If you are not playing cleanly it is a sign you need to slow down.
- Pick each note in an alternating down up fashion. If you are playing finger-style, then use an 'l, M and M, A' picking style.
- Try to keep an even tempo. Better still, use a metronome.
- Remember if you practice in a sloppy fashion – that is how you will play on stage or in front of your friends.
- Play each pattern beginning at the lowest possible place on the neck and play

chromatically through to the highest fret possible.

- Make a visual pattern in your mind of the fingerings – for example, the front row of notes in Pattern #1 is the back row of notes in Pattern #2. The front row of notes in Pattern #2 is the back row in Pattern #3, and so on.

The scale I have notated here is the G minor pentatonic scale and the notes in it are G, Bb, C, D, and F. It is just those five notes repeating themselves through each of the scales. Notice that each scale pattern begins on one of the five notes along the fret-board.

Once you have Pattern #1 memorised and you can play it at a moderate tempo, begin to learn Pattern #2. Once you have Pattern #2 memorised and can play it at a moderate tempo, then begin on Pattern #3 and so on.

To gain a thorough knowledge of the pentatonic scale it's best to play them in all keys. Begin with F at the first fret and continue along the neck. When you get to A at the 5th fret be aware you can begin the scale on Pattern #5 at the 3rd fret, and when you get to C you can also begin the scale on Pattern #4 at the 3rd fret.

Once you know all the shapes of this scale, all over the neck in every key well, it is time to learn how to use them – which will be the subject of a future Guitar Cool column. Have fun practising these scale patterns.

Thanks to the people who have contacted me recently – your feedback and questions give me many ideas for future articles and lessons.

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