

Pentatonic Scales

We have already seen how to improvise using a major scale over a major key, and a minor scale over a minor key. Now we will look at pentatonic scales.

The word pentatonic means five note, and they are simply cut down versions of the major and minor scales.

The Key of C major has the notes: C, D, E, F, G, A, B

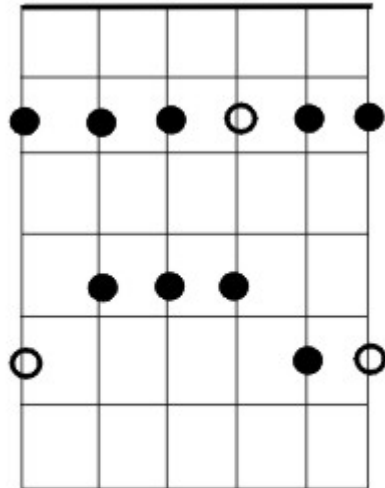
The C major pentatonic scale uses five of these notes: C, D, E, G, A

The A minor scale has the notes: A, B, C, D, E, F, G

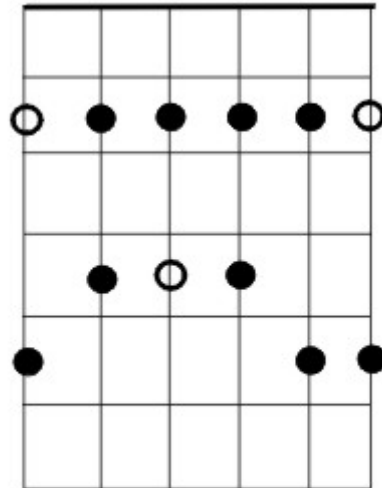
The A minor pentatonic has the notes A, C, D, E, G

These are the guitar patterns to play pentatonic scales:

The Major Pentatonic Scale



The Minor Pentatonic Scale



(remember - the white note is the root note - make sure that this note is on the key of the scale eg if you want to play the C major pentatonic scale, make sure that it's on a c note, if you want to play the A minor pentatonic scale, make sure that it's on the A etc..)

Using the scales

The Major pentatonic scale can replace the major scale when improvising. It can sound much better than the major scale in certain songs. It is often used in rock and country and western songs. If you are playing the guitar, try to bend the strings when using the scale to get a better sound.

The Minor pentatonic can simply replace the natural minor scale. However, more commonly it is used over a major key. If a song is in the key of C major, using the C minor pentatonic scale creates a bluesy sound. This doesn't work for every song in a major key - usually with those songs that are using the first, fourth and fifth chords of the key. If a song uses many more chords from the key than this, the minor pentatonic scale will not work. In short, if the music you are playing over has a blues or rock feel and is in a major key, try using the minor pentatonic scale. If it sounds wrong, use the major pentatonic scale.