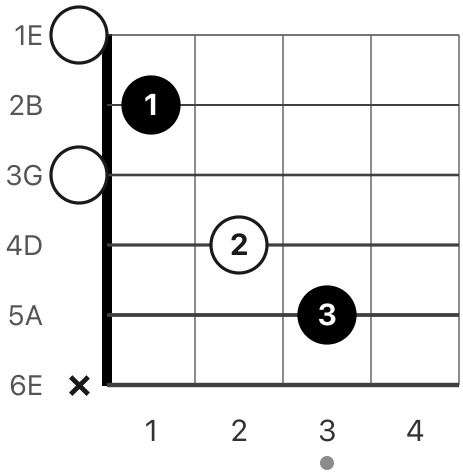
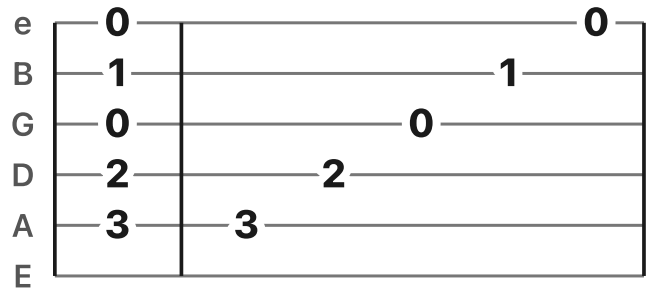
How to read tab

Six lines, six strings: the thin high e on top, the thick low E at the bottom, the same way up as the neck diagrams on this site. Each number is the fret to press on that string; 0 is the open string. Read left to right.

C chord · as a chord diagram `x32010`

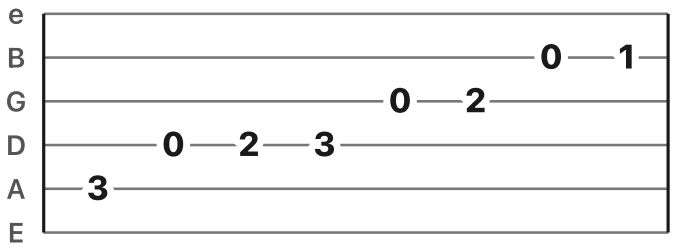


C chord · as tab



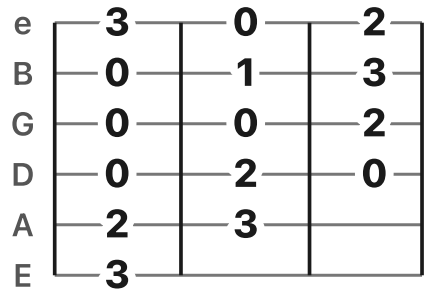
Numbers stacked straight up and down: play them together. Side by side: one after another. No number on a string (the low E here): don't play it.

One note at a time · C major scale



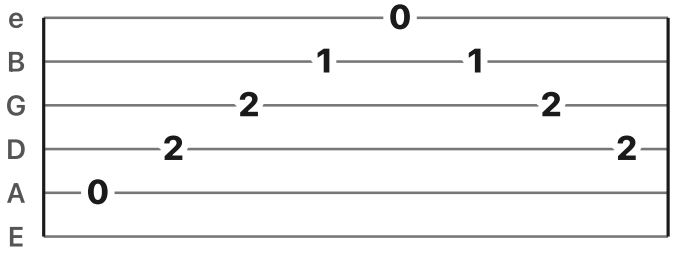
C D E F G A B C, from the 3rd fret of the A string up to the 1st fret of the B string.

Chords in a row · G, C, D



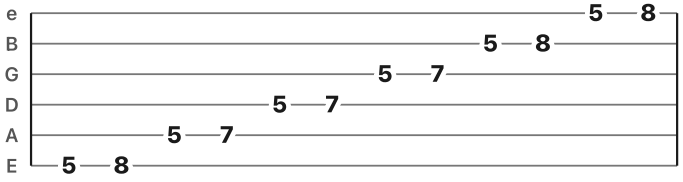
Each column is a chord: find the shape, then strum the strings that have numbers.

Picking a chord · Am, one string at a time



Hold the whole Am shape down and pick the strings one at a time: an arpeggio.

A scale pattern as tab · A minor pentatonic



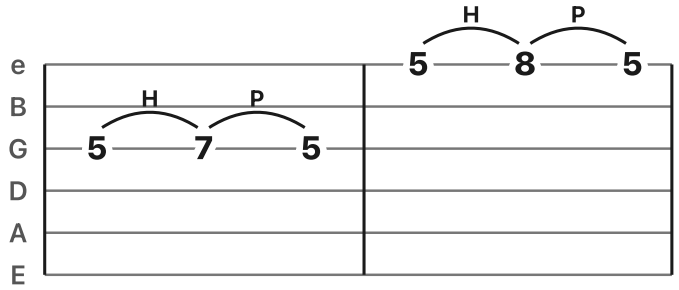
The same notes as Position 1 on the Scales page: a diagram shows where the notes are, tab shows the order to play them.

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Tab symbols · hammer-ons, slides and bends

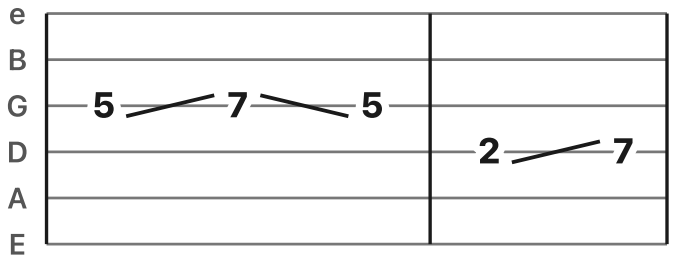
Printed tab draws the techniques; online tab types them as letters between the numbers (in brackets below).

Hammer-on (H) and pull-off (P)



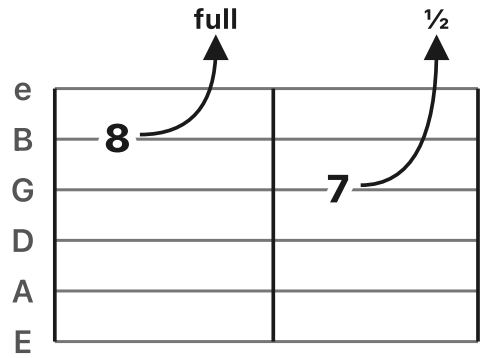
Pick only the first note. Hammer a finger down for the next one, or pull it off to sound the note below. (5h7p5)

Slide up and down



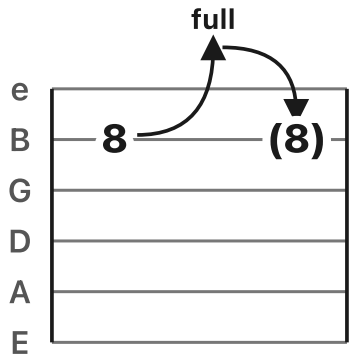
Pick once, keep pressing, and slide the same finger to the new fret. (5/7\5)

Bend



Push the string sideways until the note rises: full = a whole step (2 frets' worth), ½ = a half step (1 fret). (8b10, 7b8)

Bend and release



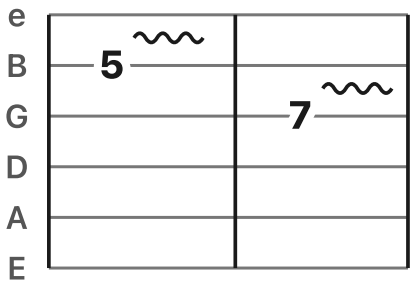
Bend up, then let the string back down to the note you started on, shown in brackets. (8b10r8)

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Tab symbols · vibrato, muting and harmonics

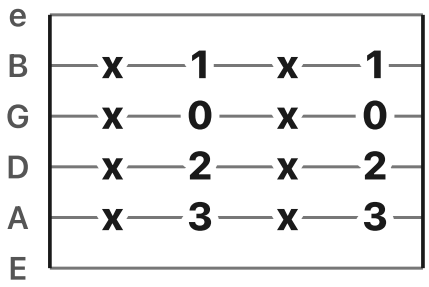
The marks that change how a note sounds, not which note it is.

Vibrato



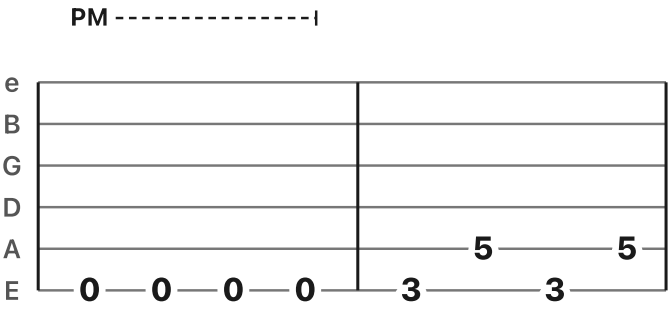
Shake the note: bend it a little up and down, over and over, while it rings. (5~)

Muted strings (x)



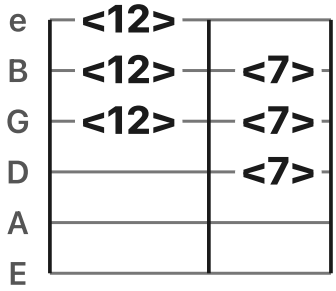
x = rest your fingers on the strings without pressing: the strum is a percussive click, not a note.

Palm mute (PM)



Rest the side of your picking hand on the strings by the bridge for the notes under PM: a short, thick sound.

Harmonics



Touch the string lightly right over the fret wire, don't press it down, and pick: a bell-like note.

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Using tab well

Tab tells you where to put your fingers. It doesn't tell you everything.

WHAT TAB DOESN'T SHOW

Rhythm. Most tab doesn't say how long each note lasts. Listen to the recording, and look for rhythm written above the tab (stems or note values); some tabs come with the music staff on top.

Fingers. Tab doesn't say which finger to use. Use one finger per fret in an area of the neck, and the shapes you already know from the chord and scale sheets.

TYPED ONLINE, IN PLAIN CHARACTERS

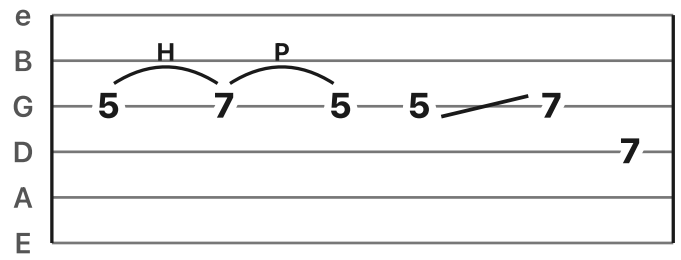
```
e|--------------------|
B|--------------------|
G|-5h7p5----5/7-------|
D|--------------7-----|
A|--------------------|
E|--------------------|
```

Dashes are the strings; the letters h, p and / stand for the curves and slants.

LEARNING A SONG FROM TAB

- **Listen first**, with the tab in front of you, until you can hum it.
- **Find the shapes:** most riffs sit inside a chord shape or a scale pattern you know.
- **A few notes at a time**, slowly, with the metronome. Join the pieces when each one is clean.
- **Loop the hard part** on its own, then put it back in.
- **Speed up** a little at a time, only when it's easy.

The same thing, printed



Same notes, same order: hammer-on, pull-off, slide up, then the 7th fret on the D string.

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