

Lesson 6 – How To Find Notes On Your Guitar

DVD 1

In This Lesson: You'll learn a simple method for learning all of the names of the notes on your guitar. This skill is an absolute must for improvising.

I'd love to say this is the fun part, but I don't think anyone's going to like the idea that you simply **must** memorize the names of the notes on your guitar.

The reason is simple – if I say you're going to play a solo in the key of Bb, and you don't know where Bb is, you're sunk. If a tune comes up in the key of D, and you can't find D, you're sunk.

There is simply no way you're going to be the kind of guy that can just jump in and play with anyone, anytime, if you can't find the notes when you need them.

The problem is, most people just give you a diagram like the one below and say “go learn this.” Yeah, good times... that's about like watching grass grow.

So I'm still going to give you the chart of the notes, but I'm going to walk you through how you can learn them all, really well, in about 2 weeks. And on only about 5 minutes a day.

First, here's the chart. The left side is the nut of your guitar, the bottom line is the bottom string (the fat one, #6.)

	OPEN	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
E		F	F# G ^b	G	G# A ^b	A	A# B ^b	B	C	C# D ^b	D	D# E ^b	E
B		C	C# D ^b	D	D# E ^b	E	F	F# G ^b	G	G# A ^b	A	A# B ^b	B
G		G# A ^b	A	A# B ^b	B	C	C# D ^b	D	D# E ^b	E	F	F# G ^b	G
D		D# E ^b	E	F	F# G ^b	G	G# A ^b	A	A# B ^b	B	C	C# D ^b	D
A		A# B ^b	B	C	C# D ^b	D	D# E ^b	E	F	F# G ^b	G	G# A ^b	A
E		F	F# G ^b	G	G# A ^b	A	A# B ^b	B	C	C# D ^b	D	D# E ^b	E

So let's say you want to find a B on the 6th string. If you follow the 6th string line across to the right, you'll see that at the 7th fret is a B. If you need Db on the 4th string, you can follow the 4th string line across and you'll see that Db and C# share the 11th fret on that string.

One thing that is important is to have a good mental model of how notes work. In the musical alphabet, there are only 7 letters: A B C D E F G. After that, the letters repeat again.

Each pair of letters is *1 whole step* apart (WS). That means that when you go from A to B, you have traveled up *1 whole step* (1 WS.) If you go from G down to F, you have traveled down 1 whole step (1 WS.)

1WS on your guitar is 2 frets. So you'll notice in the diagram that on the 6th string, the A is at the 5th fret, and the B is at the 7th fret. They are 2 frets, or 1WS apart.

The note in the middle, 1 fret away, is called a half step (HS.) You'll notice that there are 2 funny symbols, the sharp (#) and the flat (b) symbol. Sharp means "raised 1 half step (HS)" while flat means "lowered 1HS." So you'll notice that between A and B there is an A#. That note is A raised 1HS. However, you could also say that note is B lowered 1HS, and therefore it can also be called Bb.

It is not important now that you worry about whether to call it Bb or A#. It really doesn't matter most of the time. As you'll see in a minute, there are some notes that we usually use the sharp name, and some that we usually use the flat name.

The last thing is that you might have noticed that there is no HS between B and C, and similarly there is no HS between E and F. Those are called the natural half steps, and there is only a HS (1 fret) from E to F and from B to C. On a piano those are the places where there are 2 white keys together with no black key in the middle.

Once you sort of understand how notes work in general, the diagram above helps to reinforce your "mental model" of notes and how they are organized. This helps a lot with what we're about to do....

The note learning exercise:

The goal here is to be able to play every note by name, on every string, without stopping, at 60 beats per minute (BPM) on a metronome.

Again, that sounds like a lofty goal, but if we do it one note at a time it's not hard.

You're going to work on the notes in this order:

C | G | D | A | E | B | F# | C# | Ab | Eb | Bb | F.

Day 1: Practice on finding all the C's. Go from the 6th string to the 1st and back, playing all of the C's that fall on or behind the 12th fret. Keep playing them until you can do them all at 60bpm on a metronome without looking anymore. You're now done for the day with this.

Day 2: See if you remember the C's... you probably won't. Look up the ones you don't remember and practice again like you did yesterday until you can play them all at 60bpm without stopping.

Day 3: Again, see if you can remember the C's. Today you might be able to, but if not, repeat Day 2. If you can, after you play the C's all the way through start over with the process on the G notes. Again, find all of them from the 6th to the 1st string and back, playing them all at 60bpm.

Day 4: Go through the C's again, and see if you remember the G's. You probably won't so go through the G's again.

Day 5: Now you'll probably remember all the C's and the G's, so start on the D's. You can see now how this goes.

Here's the cool part, when you get about halfway through, all the notes are only 1 fret away from a note you already know well. It's pretty easy to learn the Bb notes when you've been working on the B's for several days. So the process accelerates.

In my experience you can have them all done in 2-3 weeks and if you then spend another couple of weeks just running through them all, you'll never look back.

Good luck with it, and if you have any questions or comments you can reach me at griff@bluesguitarunleashed.com.

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