

Blues Approach for Guitar

Expanding the Pentatonic Scale

The single most versatile scale for playing all types of blues, and most other American folk styles for that matter, is the Minor Pentatonic. It's everyone's first B.B. King lick, or that catchy little phrase from "Back in Black", or those cool notes that put the "blue" in a bluegrass guitar solo.

If you want to sound good quickly in many situations the minor pentatonic is the scale to use, but it's just one of many possible sounds in the Blues. In this lesson I'm going to show you how to expand and add color to the minor pentatonic sound. But first of all, **use these charts to learn the minor pentatonic inside and out.** Its the one scale that can be used with every chord in almost any blues form. When that's under your fingers, we can start working with some of the trickier notes that add color to the minor pentatonic sound.

Before we continue, lets make sure you know the chord progression for the basic 12 bar Blues in E.

Each chord gets 4 beats

E7 / E7 / E7 / E7

A7 / A7 / E7 / E7

B7 / A7 / E7 / B7

In an effort to teach the Blues as simply and directly as it is played, I came up with a color-coded format which shows all of the most relevant notes in each position at once. It might look complicated at first but that's just because there are so many possibilities in the Blues. A good player knows all of them. He sounds genuine and uncomplicated only because he knows just what he wants to do and exactly how to do it.

Remember, the Blues is all about vocabulary. This lesson shows you what notes to play and when to play them, but in order to sound authentic you must incorporate them into a dialect.

If you've listened to a lot of blues you'll know what to do with the notes that we learn.. If you feel lost, **listen to more blues!**

...(and check out some of my blues vocabulary lessons)

Explanation of format:

The blue circles represent the minor pentatonic scale, which is the simplest approach to the Blues. The red circles are flat 5ths. Add them to the minor pentatonic and you get the "Blues Scale."







The yellow, green, and orange notes are the thirds of the chords used to play the blues (I7, IV7, and V7). The third is the most definitive note of a chord, so these notes are mostly used with the chords they belong to.

works with E7 (the I chord), but not with A7 (the IV chord.)

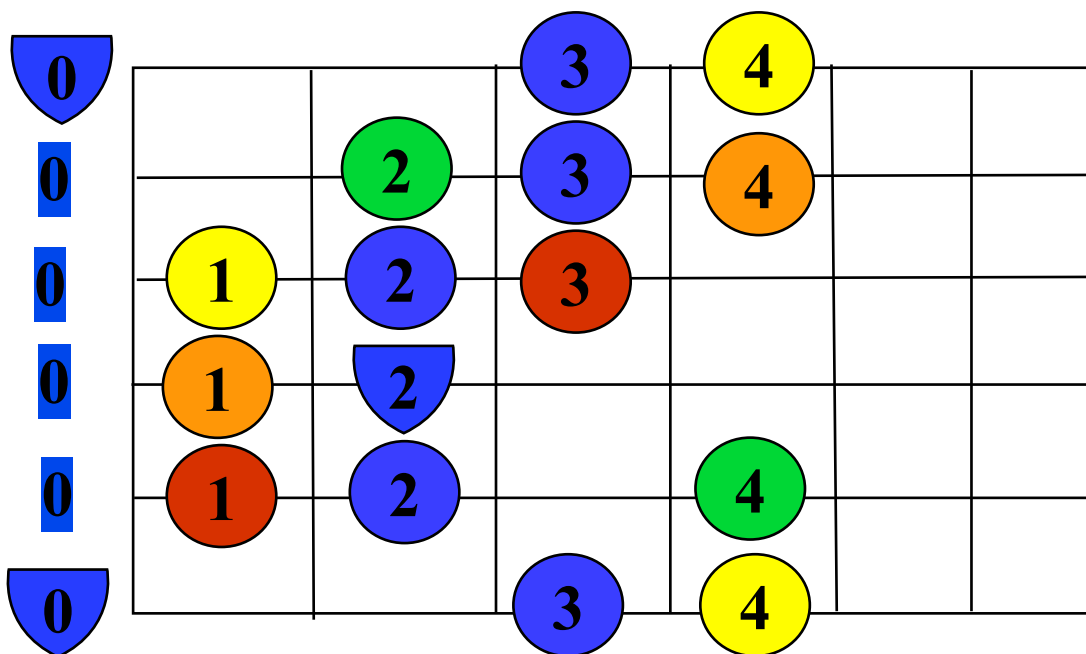
works with B7 (the V chord) but not with E7 and only as a passing tone with A7.


Therefore, you can't just play every note pictured in a diagram and get a scale that sounds cohesive, as you would with an ordinary scale fingering chart. Instead, the diagrams below are visual aids to help you understand and create music.

If you want one scale that works over the entire blues form, use the minor pentatonic scale or blues scale. The other notes are used in conjunction with these scales to emphasize the **chord changes** of the blues. Learn where they are and when they should be used, then create licks with them. On the other side of the coin, pick out some some licks by a player you like and figure out how they fit into this format. You'll find that most great Blues solos are a combination of the Blues Scale and 3rds of the chords in the progression.

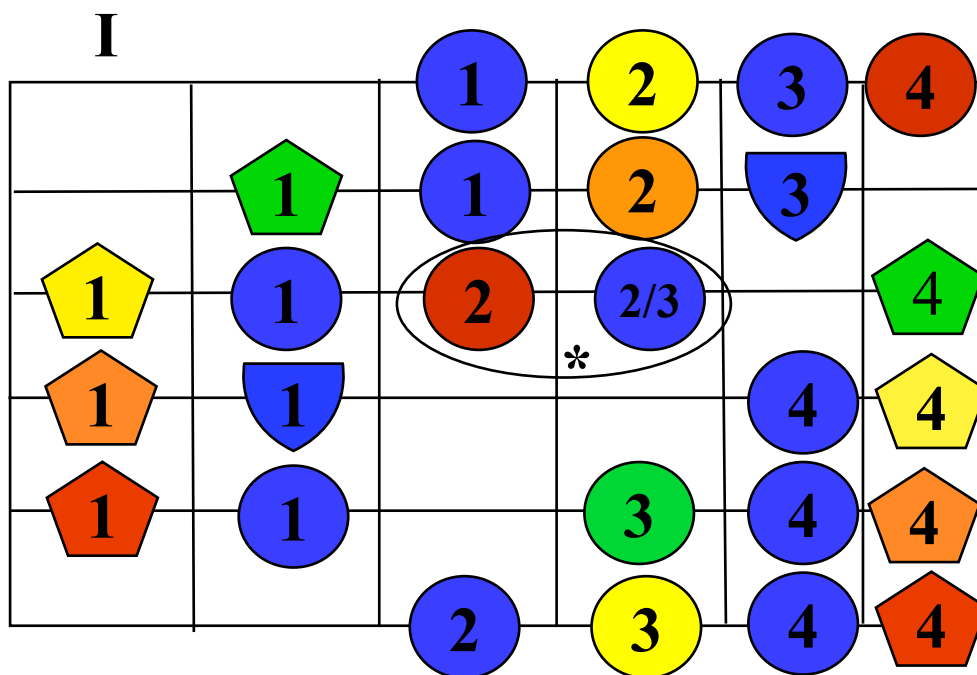
-  = root (E for Blues in E)
-  = minor pentatonic scale tone
-  = flat 5th (add to minor pent. To get the “Blues Scale”)
-  = third (G#) of the I chord (E7 in E Blues)
-  = third (C#) of the IV chord (A7 in E Blues)
-  = third (D#) of the V chord (B7 in E Blues)

Remember, the central idea here is the Minor Pentatonic scale. First of all, just get the blue notes under your fingers, always using the indicated fingerings. Stretch for the other notes when you want to use them, but keep your hand centered in the Minor Pentatonic pattern.

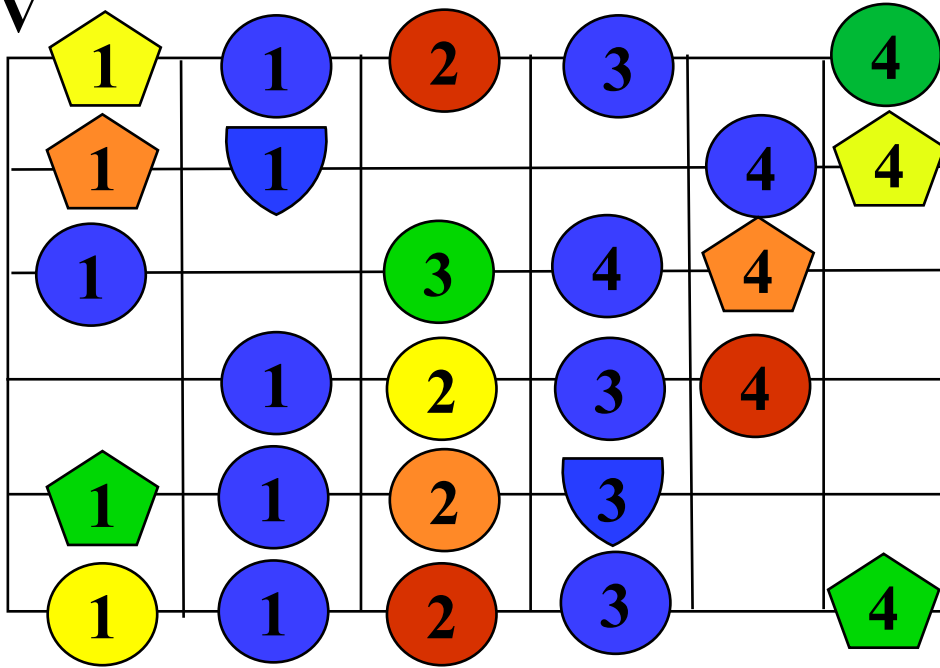


When one note occurs at two possible places in a position,  is used at both places.

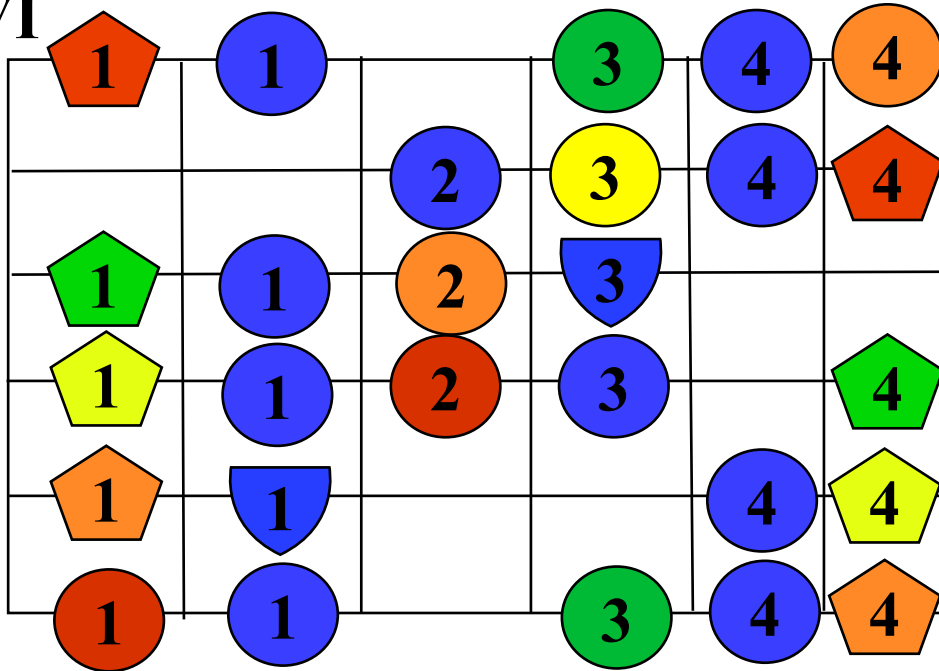
* The diagram below features a shift on the G string.
You can make the shift by sliding second finger or by shifting as you change strings.



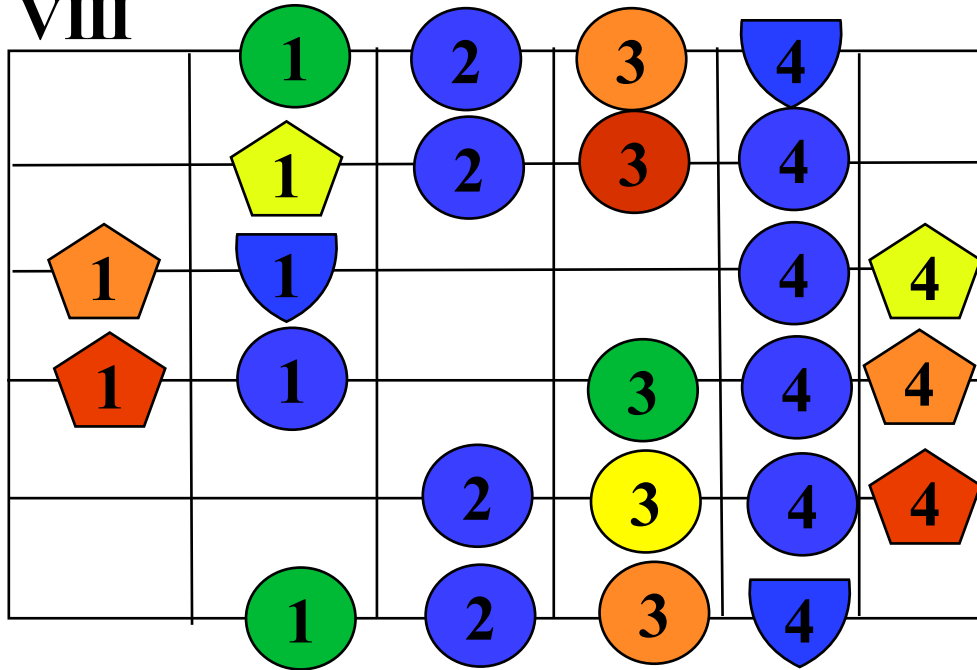
IV



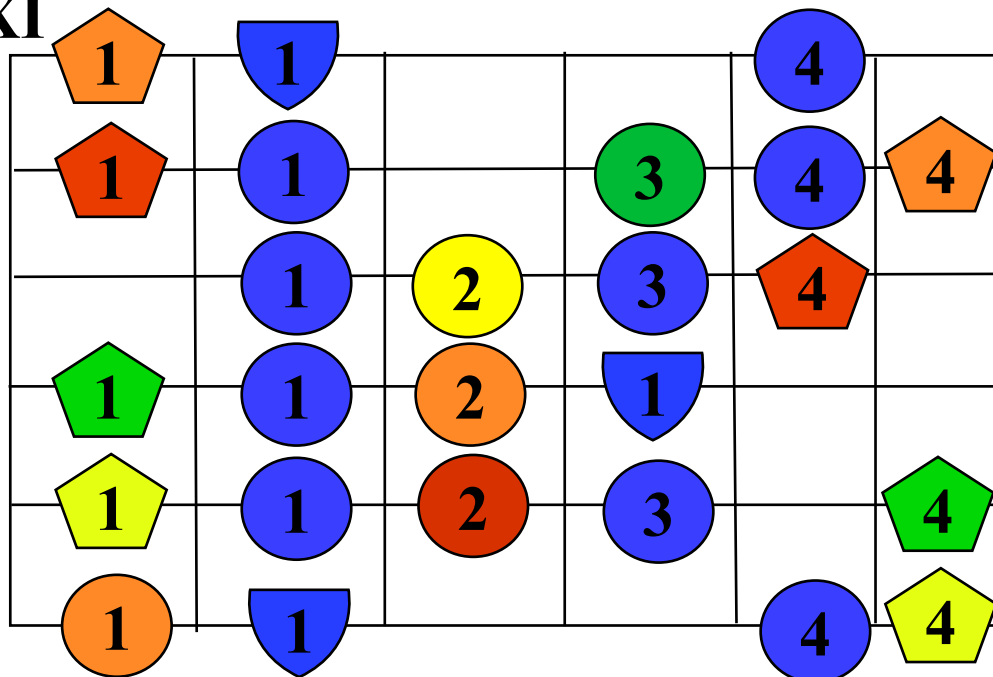
VI



VIII



XI



Here are all the notes we just learned from open to 12th fret.
 This should add perspective and help you get comfortable
 shifting from one position to another.

