

The Secrets of Learning the FRETBOARD

Achieve Instant Recall of All 138 Notes



Guitar Lesson World

by Patrick MacFarlane

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www.guitarlessonworld.com

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Learning the Fretboard Horizontally

When you learn the fretboard horizontally, you are learning it string-by-string. This section describes some of my favorite single-string exercises and how to use them effectively.

Ascending Single-String Notes

I teach the low-pitched strings first because they are often used for popular chord root notes. Once you know them, you can play some songs. Most teachers will teach the open notes and the 6th string notes first.

The easiest exercise is playing horizontally and ascending as shown in Exercise 1, which plays the named notes on the 6th string (low E string).

You will notice that I play the notes as half notes or quarter notes. I play half notes when the notes are a whole step apart. I play quarter notes when the notes are a half step apart. So, B to C and E to F are played with quarter notes.

You may be wondering which fingers to use and when to shift your hands. I start at 1st position so my index finger will play notes on the 1st fret, middle finger plays notes on the 2nd fret, ring finger plays notes on the 3rd fret, and pinky finger plays notes on the 4th fret. When I play the 5th fret (measure 3), I shift to fifth position, which places my index finger on the 5th fret. The other fingers play frets 6, 7, 8. Later, I shift to 10th position (measure 5), 15th position (measure 7), and 19th position (measure 9).

Exercise 1: Ascending Single-String Notes

mf

T
A
B

0 1 3 5 7 8 10 12 13 15 17 19 20 22

I always recommend playing the entire length of the fretboard. Some guitars, such as acoustic guitars, do not reach the 22nd fret. Play as high as you can with your guitar.

Practicing Tips

- Say the note name as you play it.
- Watch your hands and try to associate what you see, hear, and feel.
- Listen to the notes – try to hear the pitch differences.
- Feel the notes change under your hands
- Make sure you learn the notes on the frets with dots or inlays on them. Dots are useful for finding your position on the guitar quickly (especially when trying to learn while watching another guitarist).

Descending Single-String Notes

The next exercise reverses the process by playing the same notes, but in descending order. Guitarists practice ascending exercises the most, but descending lines can be just as interesting. Learning the guitar both ways will make descending lines second nature and set you apart from other guitarists. I recommend giving equal time to ascending and descending exercises.

For this exercise, I use the following positions: 19th, 15th, 10th, 5th, 1st. I start with my pinky finger for fret 22 and shift to 15th position when I need to play the 17th fret with my ring finger (measure 3). Similarly, I shift to 10th (measure 5), 5th (measure 7), and 1st position (measure 9).

Exercise 2: Descending Single-String Notes

The musical notation shows a descending line of notes in 2/4 time, marked *mf*. The notes are: 22 (pinky), 20 (ring), 19 (middle), 17 (ring), 15 (middle), 13 (index), 12 (index), 10 (index), 8 (index), 7 (index), 5 (index), 3 (index), 1 (index), 0 (open).

Measure	Fret
1	22
2	20
3	19
4	17
5	15
6	13
7	12
8	10
9	8
10	7
11	5
12	3
13	1
14	0

Ascending E-Form Major Chords

To build associations between single notes and root notes of chords, I recommend playing the E-form major chords rooted on the 6th string notes.

Exercise 3: Ascending E-Form Major Chords

Some guitars make it extremely difficult to play these chords at the higher frets. Play them as far as you can on your guitar. The goal of this exercise is to associate the root notes of the chord with the location on the guitar.

To make it easier, I recommend modifying the chords from major chords to power chords, by only playing the 4th, 5th, and 6th string notes of the chords.

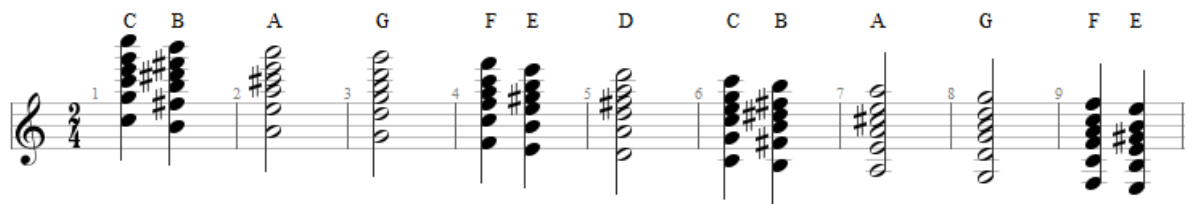
For those who know intervals and are curious about power chords, they consist of a root note and a fifth. In this case, the root is played on both the 6th and 4th strings. The fifth is played on the 5th string.

Descending E-Form Major Chords

Repeat the E-Form major chords in descending order without looking at notation.

I purposely omitted the notation for this exercise so you will think about the note names as you descend. This should be noticeably harder. Focus on the root note (lowest note) and repeat the chord grip in descending order.

Without notation, you must think more, but this skill is necessary when you need to find a chord.

Exercise 4: Descending E-Form Major Chords**Ascending Single-String Notes, Notation Only**

I've shown you ascending exercises with notation and tablature. Next we're going to eliminate the tablature so you must read notes, find the location, and play them.

There are two reasons for this exercise.

1. It forces you to find a note by name.
2. It helps you learn standard notation.

Exercise 5: Ascending Single-String Notes, Notation Only

You will notice that the pattern is the same as Exercise 1, but it is essential for instant recall, which is our goal!

If you have this sequence memorized, you will need to randomize the notes. You can rewrite the notation above. Another tip is to print the notation above and then write the note name, string, and fret on the paper. Since you can't play a pattern that way, it will help you remember.

You can find blank notation and tablature sheets in the resources section of Guitar Lesson World at

<https://www.guitarlessonworld.com/resources/blank-notation-and-tablature-sheet/>

Descending Single-String Notes, Notation Only

This exercise repeats the previous exercise, but uses descending notes. Feel free to play exercises 5 and 6 together. If you play them both, change the order so you aren't always ascending first.

Exercise 6: Descending Single-String Notes, Notation Only



Ascending Ladder Exercise (Skippers)

Ladder exercises are one of my favorite ways to teach the notes of the guitar because they change the order in which you play the notes. There are a lot of different ways to ladder notes.

Laddering is a technique that alternates between moving forward and moving backwards. My ladder exercises move up in pitch then down in pitch. This exercise moves forward by two notes then backwards by one note. Since you skip a note to move forward, I also call them skippers.

Ladder exercises or skippers are a unique way to practice scales, arpeggios, or any sequence of notes. I like to use them to break scale ruts. The following one is an ascending ladder exercise to help you learn the 6th string.

Exercise 7: Ascending Ladder

Descending Ladder Exercise (Skippers)

Next, we can descend using the same laddering pattern. This one is usually tougher to master, but it will reward you in the end.

Exercise 8: Descending Ladder

22-19 20-17 19-15 17-13 15-12 13-10 12-8 10-7 8-5 7-3 5-1 3-0

Ascending Single-String Octaves

When you play the guitar, you will often want to play up an octave. This allows you to play the same notes but at a higher pitch, which creates interest for the listener.

The exercise is played by ascending through the note sequence while playing each note and its octave.

Exercise 9: Ascending Single-String Octaves

0-12 1-13 3-15 5-17 7-19 8-20 10-22

Descending Single-String Octaves

Learning how to move down an octave is also important. Use the following exercise to practice descending octaves.

Exercise 10: Descending Single-String Octaves

mf

TAB: 22-10 20-8 19-7 17-5 15-3 13-1 12-0

Alternating Single-String Octaves

Try alternating the octaves by going up an octave then playing the next note (an octave up) followed by descending an octave. Repeat the pattern up the scale then reverse it to descend the scale.

Make sure you say the notes while you play this one. It is important to associate the note name with the played note.

Exercise 11: Alternating Single-String Octaves

mf

TAB: 0-12-13-1 3-15-17-5 7-19-20-8 10-22-20-8 7-19-17-5 3-15-13-1 0-12-0