

The Minor Pentatonic Scale

One of the most useful scales for guitarists is the minor pentatonic scale. As the name implies, a minor pentatonic scale is a five-note scale. It is used extensively in all styles of guitar, especially in rock styles. Below (left) is a major scale and a minor pentatonic scale. Notice that when compared to the major scale, the minor pentatonic scale omits scale steps 2 and 6, and flattens scale steps 3 and 7. Looked at this way, the pattern for a minor pentatonic scale is: 1, $\flat 3$, 4, 5, $\flat 7$.

However, when compared to a minor scale, the notes of the minor pentatonic scale are unaltered. (Below right) The only difference between a minor pentatonic scale and a natural minor scale is that scale steps 2 and 6 are eliminated. Looked at it this way, the minor pentatonic scale is like playing the minor scale (or five notes from it), even when you're in a major key. In other words, whether a song is in the key of say, G major or G minor, you can use the G minor pentatonic scale. Of course, you can also use other scales. It all depends on the style of the music and the sound that you want to achieve through that scale.

G Major Scale
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 G A B C D E F# G
 (3rd & 7th flattened)

G Minor Scale
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 G A B \flat C D E \flat F G
 (No notes are altered)

G Minor Pentatonic Scale
 G B \flat C D F \flat
 1 $\flat 3$ 4 5 $\flat 7$

G Minor Pentatonic Scale
 G B \flat C D F
 1 3 4 5 7

5 Minor Pentatonic Scale Patterns

Below are five patterns to the Minor Pentatonic scale. You can use these patterns anywhere on the fretboard. However, make sure the scale you play corresponds with the key of the song. For instance, the five patterns below are all G Minor Pentatonic scales, as indicated by the fret numbers below the pattern. If the song is in the key of G Major or G Minor, you would play these patterns at those locations.

The numbers indicate the fingering (not frets) and the circled numbers indicate the tonic (the first note in the scale). In other words, all the circled numbers below are G's. If we used pattern 1 (which is the most common pattern), we would begin the pattern on the 3rd fret, because that is where G is on the 6th string. In the key of A, we would begin pattern 1 on the 5th fret, since that's where A is.

Notice how the patterns overlap each other. For instance, compare the notes in the first two frets of Pattern 2 (frets 5 & 6) with the last two frets in Pattern 1 (frets 3 & 4). They're the same notes. The brackets indicate the overlap between all patterns.

PATTERN 1 (3rd Fret)
PATTERN 2 (5th Fret)
PATTERN 3 (7th Fret)
PATTERN 4 (10th Fret)
PATTERN 5 (12th Fret)

Below is an exercise using Pattern 1 of the G minor pentatonic scale. Use an alternating, up (v) and down (n) picking pattern.

Exercise using Pattern 1 of the G minor pentatonic scale. Use an alternating, up (v) and down (n) picking pattern.