



# A Practical Approach to the 7-String Guitar

by Dave Weiner

## Introduction...

It's July and at Mel Bay's GuitarSessions.com, that means it's 7-string month! So hello fellow 7-stringers! My name is Dave Weiner. This is my first time writing an article for Mel Bay so I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself. I'm 28; a graduate of GIT (the Guitar Institute of Technology). I've been playing guitar for about 19 years, 12 of those years have been on

the 7 string. I'm a Favored Nations recording artist. My first instrumental CD, ***Shove The Sun Aside***, was released in late March. I'm an Ibanez endorser and I've been playing, recording and touring in Steve Vai's band for the last 6 years.

When it comes to the 7-string, I see many articles and books written about the "20,000 Chord Shapes!" (in that Monster truck show "Sunday! Sunday! Sunday!" voice) and countless "Arpeggios and Scales" to play. However, it is hardly ever discussed how to practically approach the 7-string guitar and apply the theory and technique you already know from playing a 6-string. The difference really is minimal and the transition should be fairly easy. If you do know your theory, then you should be adjusted and back to playing music in no time. Only now, you're on your newly extended instrument (still talking about a guitar right??) and exploring the music world with new potential.

So, what I'd like to cover in this article is how to acclimate the new player and the long-time 6-string player to the 7-string, brush over some tips on how to adjust your theory and technique and demonstrate these tips by giving you some examples in typical music situations and also through my own music. Ready? Ok grab your gear and let's go!

## Getting started...

So the first thing you'll notice when picking up a 7-string is the width of the neck. It's definitely wider than any 6-string guitar, but if it's made properly, it shouldn't feel *that* much bigger. It should be comfortable. You don't want to overextend your muscles once you're playing your 7, so just hold the guitar and get used to the extra material in your hand. Doing some stretches before playing is always a good idea too.

To start getting acclimated with the 7th string, first let's tackle the mental side of things. A lot of players get a bit intimidated by that extra string, but really, it's nothing you haven't dealt with before. In standard tuning, that extra string is a low B. Just like you're used to having two E strings, now you have two B strings also. Let's start by reviewing your neck theory and move on from there.

## This old guitar...

Learning the guitar is like building a house. You need a solid foundation. That foundation is neck theory, i.e. knowing the notes on the neck cold. Everything you'll ever play on the guitar is made up of those notes, so it only makes sense to learn them to the point of instant recall.

## The voice in your head...

A basic and fast way to learn your neck theory is to simply go up and down each string saying the notes. That's right, talk to yourself. Play the note AND say it (I recommend this for all learning technique exercises). This makes your brain work twice as hard and will get the notes ingrained faster. Start on your high E, go up to your highest fret then back down to the open string. Repeat the same for all 7 strings.

Once you get to your low B string, you'll realize that you've previously covered this on your second string. It's like déjà-vu! You already know the notes on your high B string, so just translate it to the low B! There, the 7th string isn't such a mystery anymore, is it?!

## Technique...

The presence of the extra string is what interferes with most players' technique at first. This is an exercise that will get your hands used to including the 7 string and give you the feel for where each of the strings are in relation to your low B.

### Technique Example [7-string Technique Audio Example](#)

Now that we've got the feel for including the low B and have the theory of the extra string under our fingers, let's work on taking the scales and chords you're used to, and adapt them to the 7-string.

When I'm writing a song and want to extend or beef up my chords, scales, melodies, lead lines, etc., the first thing I do is include the 7th string. It instantly transforms what I'm playing into something that's not so common. It still gets the point across, but in a more original way. That should always be a very important part of writing.

I'm not going to dive into the theory side of chords and scales, (tell Mel Bay to have me write an article only on theory!), but here I'll show you a few of the chords and scales I use regularly on my 7-string.



E Blues Scale

12

0 6 7 5 8 5 6 7 5 7 5 7 8 4 7 5 8 5 6 7 6 5 8 5 7 4

15

8 7 5 7 5 7 6 5 8 5

G Minor Scale

19

8 10 11 8 10 11 8 10 7 8 10 7 8 10 8 10 11 8 10 11 10 8 11

22

10 8 10 8 7 10 8 7 10 8 11 10 8 11 10 8

I've recorded a few audio clips of these examples. The chords are in an A/B fashion so you can hear the difference. First, I played the chord played on a 6-string, then, the same chord on a 7. You can hear how the chord is instantly more dense and lush on the 7. Next I played the scales starting on the low B, extending to the high E and back again.

[Chord Audio Example](#) | [B Major Scale Audio Example](#)  
[E Blues Scale Audio Example](#) | [G Minor Scale Audio Example](#)

## Let's play...

Ok, so now you've started seeing how your old scales and chords can adapt to the 7. Let's take some universal music situations in various styles and play them using these newly tailored techniques on your 7-string guitar.

[Blues Audio Example](#) | [Jazz Audio Example](#)  
[Country Audio Example](#) | [Rock Audio Example](#)

Sounds pretty cool huh? The 7-string adds such a great dynamic! It takes a little practice, but before you know it you'll be finding new and exciting ways to play that will really enhance your style.

What's that you ask? What's my style? Well thanks so much for your interest! Here are a few audio examples of my 7-string playing from my CD, ***Shove The Sun Aside***.

[Long Run Audio Example](#) | [Monument Shine Audio Example](#)  
[Tourmaline Audio Example](#) | [Shove The Sun Aside Audio Example](#)

## In conclusion...

Well my 7-string friends, this is the end of the road for this session. We've covered some good ground, got adjusted to an extended-range guitar and applied its uses to many styles of music. I hope this article has shed some light on the musical diversity that can be achieved by playing a 7 string.

It's been a pleasure sharing my experience with you and I hope to do it again sometime soon!

Feel free to drop in on my website, [www.daveweiner.com](http://www.daveweiner.com) and say hi some time.

Happy playing!

Dave