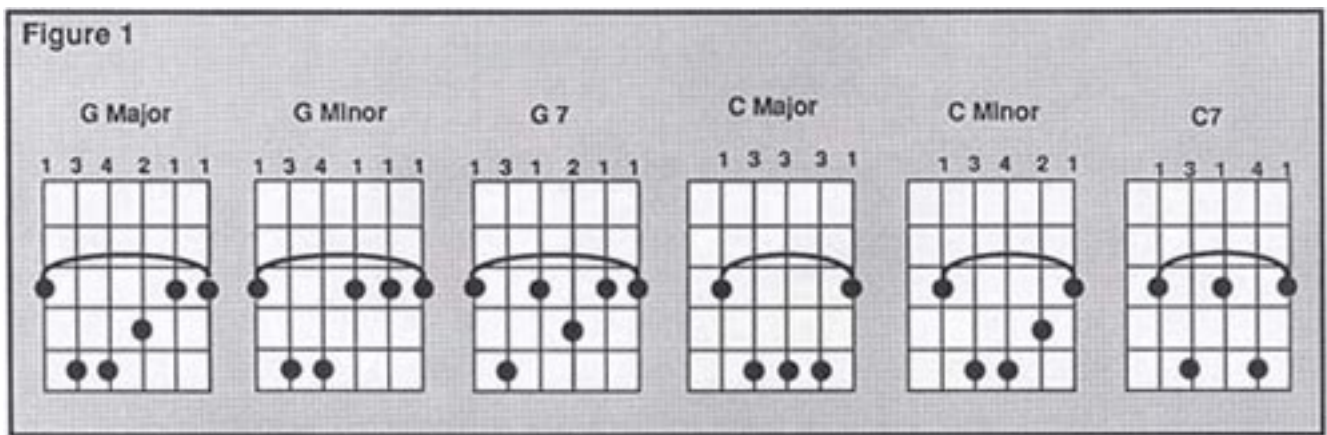


# Basics for Rock Guitar

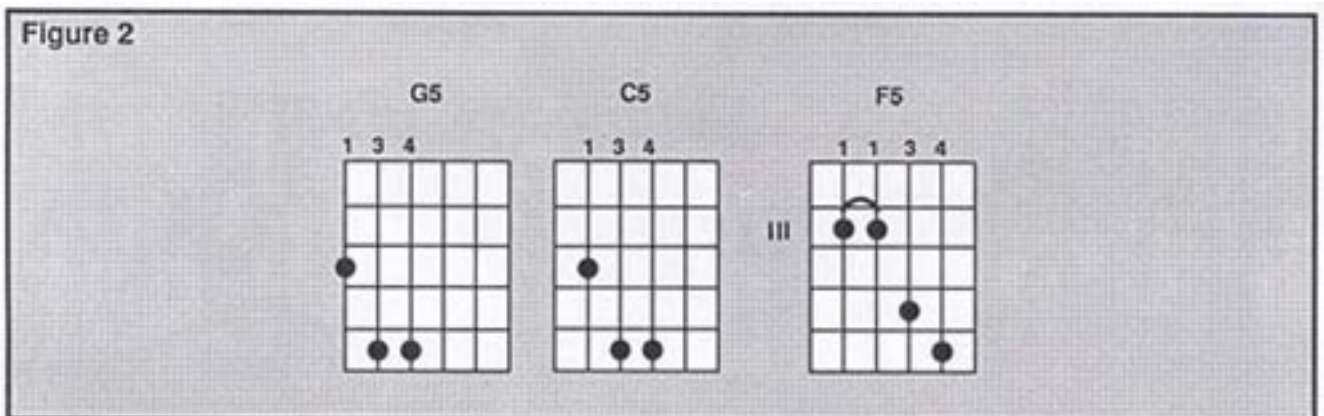
From *You Can Teach Yourself® Rock Guitar*, by William Bay and Mark Lonergan

One evening in 1971, a New Jersey music store owner taught me the three most important things that any budding rock guitarist can learn: 1) the barre chord, 2) the pentatonic scale, and 3) the “bent string.” Together with 4) the hammer-on and the pull-off, they provide the basis for just about every rock guitar style.

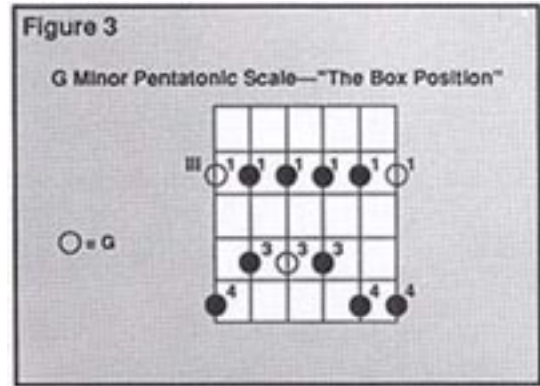
1) The barre chord is so named because one finger is used to “barre” several strings at once. The basis for virtually every rock rhythm guitar pattern from Chuck Berry to Eddie Van Halen, the barre chord uses no open strings and is therefore “movable” – a rhythm pattern using barre chords in the key of G (at the 3rd fret) can be transposed instantly to the key of A simply by moving the entire pattern to the 5th fret. Here are the basic positions:



All fingerings are in the 3rd position. If you are completely new to this, you may find these chords awkward (I certainly did, if that’s any consolation); but, with patience and practice, you will soon find them becoming quite easy to play. For many modern styles, you may find it desirable to play only the three lowest notes of the standard barre chords – technically, an octave with a perfect 5th inner voice and, unofficially, a power chord. Here are the three basic fingerings given in the 3rd position. They are designated as G5, C5, and F5 forms:



2) The pentatonic scale is a five-note scale that is probably the basis for more rock and blues solos than any five other scales combined. For our purposes, we will deal primarily with the minor pentatonic scale, which appears in many patterns on the fingerboard, undoubtedly the most important of which is the one in Figure 3.



This useful pattern is known as “the box position” obviously because the diagram showing its fingering looks somewhat like a box. As unassuming as it may look, however, this pattern is “home base” for an overwhelming majority of rock solos from the most basic to the most advanced. While many fine guitarists from Arlen Roth to Eddie Van Halen suggest playing the notes at the 6th fret with the ring finger of the left hand (because of its strength), I’m more comfortable using my pinky in normal circumstances and reaching up to the 6th fret with my ring finger only to bend strings. Like the barre chord, the box position is movable – in fact, it moves with the barre chord. The G box position is located at the 3rd fret, the A box position at the 5th, and so on.

3) The bent string is the wail, the cry characteristic of all blues-based music – and, therefore, of all rock guitar playing. Example 1 shows the proper technique for bending – place as many fingers as possible (usually three, but in many instances two will do) on the string and use them all to push it until it literally bends and the tone of the note you are playing becomes correspondingly higher. The number below the grace note (the tiny note with the line through its stem) indicates the fret played, while the number in parentheses indicates the fret at which the sound to which you are bending is located. I realize that sounds confusing, but take a look at Example 1:

**Example 1**

T	8	(10)	8	6
A				
B				

All you have to do to play it is smack three fingers down on the B string at the 8th fret, pick the note, then bend the string until you hear the same sound as the one that appears naturally at the 10th fret. It may take some time and practice before you’re able to hit the note right on the button every time or to hold it steady for a long period, but it is really much easier than it might seem at first. Also, try experimenting with finger vibrato – rocking the string just slightly back and forth for a quavering, emotional sound. You’ll hear this effect frequently in just about any rock guitar solo.

4) Examples 2 and 3 illustrate two related slurring techniques, the hammer-on and the pull-off, which help produce a smoother, more fluid sound and increase speed. To hammer on, pick the first note on a given string, then quickly strike the next note with sufficient force to make it ring without using your pick:

**Example 2**

L. H.	4	1	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1
	H		H H H		H H H						
T											
A											
B	3	5	2	3	4	5	2	3	4	5	1

The pull-off is pretty much the reverse of the hammer. Pick the first note, then quickly pull the fingertip from the string with sufficient force to cause the next lower note to ring:

**Example 3**

L. H.	4	1	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1	1
	P		P P P		P P P			SL			
T											
A											
B	5	2	5	4	3	2	6	5	4	3	2

Most rock guitarists seem to favor hammers and pull-offs over the alternative of picking every note (the technique preferred by many jazz players), and many of the licks included in this section of the book are designed to be played using hammers and pull-offs almost exclusively. But it's important to remember that, whatever the technique, playing smoothly and evenly is necessary. Even when playing a torrent of slurred notes, don't lose track of the beat and its subdivisions or your solos will sound chaotic.