

Playing In Keys

Musicians need to rely on a system of notes and letters to communicate musical ideas, and the basics of this system are a must-learn when it comes to soloing. For example, if any guitarist was to join the Eric Clapton or Carlos Santana on stage for an improvised ‘jam’, phrases such as ‘*Key of B Minor*’ will be used instead of finger and fret numbers. The following sections will explain how to play in the ‘*Key of B Minor*’, as well as any other *key*, using the Minor scale box pattern.

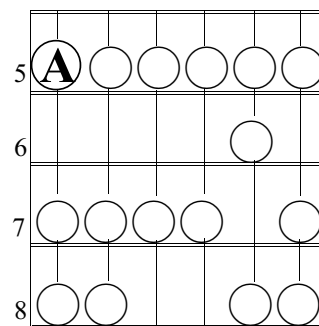
Have A Foundation

Before moving on to the following sections, make sure to have a foundation of guitar basics by knowing how to identify letter notes on the guitar (*Guitar Basics*) as well as knowing how to play the standard Minor scale box pattern (*Natural Minor Scale - 1*).

The Minor Scale in Any Key

The Minor scale box pattern is *movable*, meaning the same pattern can be played along any fret position or *key* on guitar. All that needs to be known is the letter name of the bottom (*sixth*) that begins the box pattern to determine the key. For example, the Minor scale box pattern played along the fifth fret position is in the Key of ‘A’ Minor because the first note played (*sixth string/fifth fret*) is an ‘A’ note. (*shown right*) Shifting the same box pattern up one fret results in the Key of ‘A#’ Minor being played. Remember that ‘A#’ and ‘B b’ are two names or synonyms for the same note or key. If one guitarist says to play in ‘B flat Minor’ while another says to play in ‘A sharp Minor’, they are both asking for the same scale to be played.

‘A’ Minor Box Pattern



Fifth fret position
Bottom/sixth string = ‘A’

Method vs Memorization

Memorizing where all the letter notes are on the sixth/bottom string isn’t as important as having a *method* to find notes along the bottom string to determine the key. Starting with the open sixth string (‘E’), simply ‘count-up’ the string using the *chromatic scale* to determine the key for any Minor scale box pattern. With twelve total letter notes, there are twelve potential keys to play. Perhaps one fretboard position or note to memorize on the bottom string will be ‘A’ along the fifth fret, which can act as a shortcut rather than having to start counting with open ‘E’ every time.

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|---------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Sixth String Fret: | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Sixth String Note: | ‘E’ | ‘F’ | ‘F#’ | ‘G’ | ‘G#’ | ‘A’ | ‘A#’ | ‘B’ | ‘C’ | ‘C#’ | ‘D’ | ‘D#’ | ‘E’ |

Practice in Different Keys

Once the ‘A’ Minor scale box pattern (*fifth fret position*) can be played at a pace that matches the audio/video example, the next challenge will be to play the Minor scale box pattern along different fret positions or *keys*. For example, playing the box pattern along the first fret position (*‘F’ Minor*) will be a great exercise because the fretting fingers are required to extend more in order to reach the frets. Playing the box pattern along the ninth fret position (*‘C#’ Minor*) is also beneficial because as the frets are positioned closer together higher up the fretboard, more focus is required in order to get clarity from each note played.