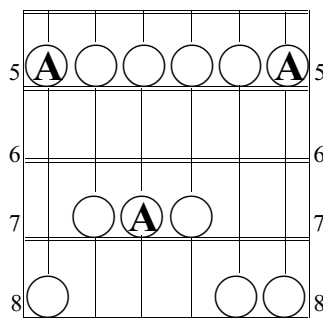


Phrasing/Root Notes

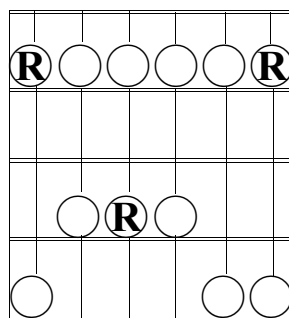
After learning a few standard Blues riffs, the next step will be to focus on *phrasing* these riffs. If a riff can be compared to a ‘musical sentence’, then phrasing is how ‘punctuation’ can be applied to a guitar solo. Without phrasing, a guitar solo will sound rambling and disorganized, in very much the same way as a ‘run-on sentence’ does with language. This lesson will focus on the foundation of phrasing technique: the *root note*.

Root Notes

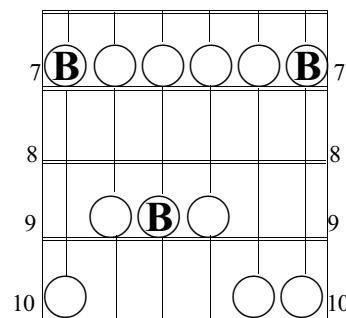
In the Key of ‘A’ Blues, ‘A’ would be considered the *root note* of that key. Within the standard ‘A’ Pentatonic Minor box pattern, there are three ‘A’ root notes located on the first, fourth, and sixth strings (*below left*). These fundamental root note positions on the first, fourth, and sixth strings (*below center*) remain the same for any key. In the Key of ‘B’ Blues for example, the three ‘B’ root notes would be located in the same root note positions, only two frets higher from the Key of ‘A’ Blues (*below right*).



‘A’ Root Notes
(Pentatonic Minor Scale)



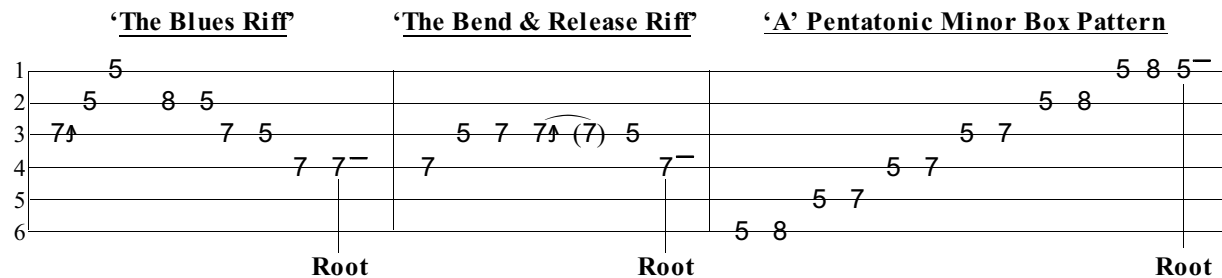
Root/Octave Pattern
(Any Fret Position)



‘B’ Root Notes
(Pentatonic Minor Scale)

Root Note Focus - Standard Blues Riffs

A *root note focus* establishes the mood or tone of a scale. Both the ‘Blues Riff in A’ and the ‘Bend & Release Riff in A’ each have a root note focus, with an ‘A’ root note being the last sustained note played in each riff (*below*). The ascending and descending riffs using the ‘A’ Pentatonic Minor box pattern (*Blues/Rock Soloing -1*) also begin and end on ‘A’ root notes. When combining these riffs, sustaining the root notes provides more space between riffs, which is essential to developing phrasing technique.



Summary

So far, the foundation for building a blues vocabulary has been set by learning some standard Blues riffs (*‘musical sentences’*), knowing how to phrase these riffs (*‘musical punctuation’*), and then combining riffs (*‘musical paragraphs’*).

Riffs	=	‘Sentences’
Root Notes	=	‘Punctuation’
Combined Riffs	=	‘Paragraphs’

Playing with Rhythm

This lesson will focus on taking the standard Blues riffs learned so far and playing them along with accompanying Blues rhythm tracks. The objective will be to hear how these riffs ‘blend’ or harmonize along with a backing rhythm played in the same key. This will be the first step in to what is often referred to as ‘*jamming*’, which is the classic combination of playing ‘lead’ guitar (*Blues riffs*) along with rhythm guitar.

Preparing To Play

The objective here will not be to actually improvise or be creative, but instead to simply hear how the standard riffs harmonize with a backing rhythm. For a beginner, playing riffs simultaneously along with a rhythm may throw off one’s concentration, so setting a pre-arranged ‘*running-order*’ of riffs beforehand makes things easier. A suggested ‘running-order’ of riffs in ‘A’ Blues is shown right. Rehearse the running order first before attempting to play along with a rhythm track.

‘Running Order’ of Riffs

1. ‘The Blues Riff’
2. ‘The Bend & Release Riff’
3. Play Up Box Pattern
4. Play Down Box Pattern

Playing With Blues Rhythm in ‘A’

All riffs played with the ‘A’ Blues scale will harmonize with the audio rhythm track in ‘A’ Blues. Simply repeat the suggested running-order of riffs (*previous section*) until the track ends. These standard Blues riffs are ‘winner riffs’, meaning they will sound good played at any speed as long as they are played ‘verbatim’ (*correct*) and with clarity. Also, the *timing* of when each riff is played will not initially be an issue as each riff will harmonize when played at any point during the rhythm track.

Root Note/Harmonized Ending

Most Blues rhythm progressions in ‘A’ will end with some type of ‘A’ chord. The audio Blues rhythm track in ‘A’, for example, ends with an ‘A7’ chord. For the soloist, playing an ‘A’ root note along with the final ‘A7’ chord produces a cohesive, *harmonized ending*. Of the three fundamental root note positions to play for the ending, the higher-pitched first and fourth string root notes ‘sing-out’ more compared to the lower-pitched sixth string root note, which may blend-in too much with the rhythm track. If the ending occurs while in the middle of playing one of the standard Blues riffs, simply abandon the riff and play a root note to produce a harmonized finish. Having a harmonized ending between the lead and rhythm guitars sounds better than having a lead guitar ‘meander’ around too long to finish a riff after the rhythm track has finished.

‘Mix & Match’ Riffs

Once the ‘running order’ of riffs can be played along with the rhythm track without difficulty, the next step will be to rearrange or ‘*mix & match*’ riffs in any preferred order one wishes to play. This will be one of the first initial steps to actual *improvisation*, because even though each individual riff should be played ‘verbatim’, the guitarist has the option to decide the ‘running order’ in which the riffs are played.

Rhythm Tracks In Other Keys

There are other rhythm tracks to practice ‘jamming along’ with in other keys. Not only are these rhythm tracks in different keys, there are also variations in strumming patterns and tempo with each track (*see right*). When played in the same key, the standard Blues riffs with ‘fit’ or blend in with either track.

Audio Tracks

- Blues Rhythm in ‘A’: (‘shuffle’)
- Blues Rhythm in ‘B^b’: (‘funk’)
- Blues Rhythm in ‘E’: (‘texas’)