The Pentatonic Minor Scale

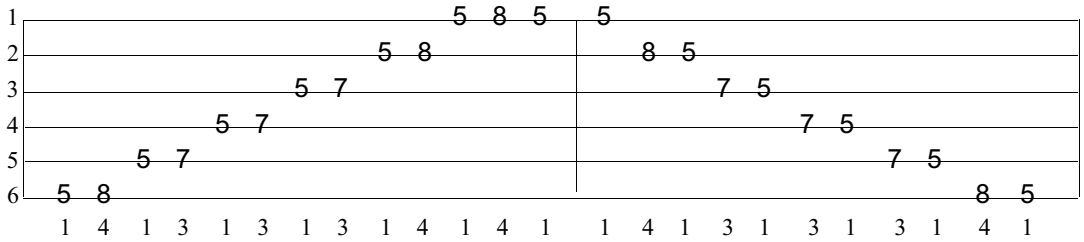
B.B. King, Jimi Hendrix, and Eric Clapton have all used the Pentatonic Minor scale for their own styles of playing.

When it comes to soloing, the primary scale used in most Blues and Rock songs is the ***Pentatonic Minor scale***. 'Pentatonic Minor' is the more official or 'academic' name of the scale, but most guitarists refer to it as simply the 'Blues scale'. In order to learn how to solo and improvise with Blues and Rock, the first step will be to become familiar with playing the Pentatonic Minor scale in a box pattern form.

Playing the Scale

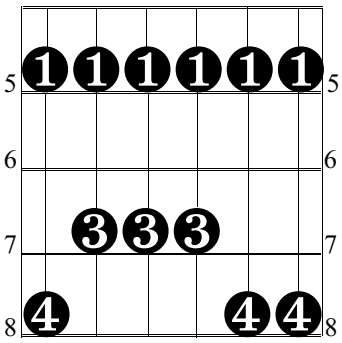
(*Use a pick*) The Tab below shows an example of how to play the Pentatonic Minor scale in ascending and descending order. The proper finger numbers to fret each note with are shown below each Tab. The initial focus should be on playing the correct notes with clarity rather than playing with speed. To get a proper sense of phrasing, let the last note played in each section ring or sustain.

Pentatonic Minor - Ascending **Pentatonic Minor - Descending**



Box Patterns

The diagram to the right shows the Pentatonic Minor scale in a *box pattern* form. A ***box pattern*** is essentially an 'aerial view' of a scale going across the six strings, with the sixth 'bottom' string being on the far left and the first 'top' string being on the far right. The finger numbers to fret with are shown in circles. All of the notes played from the previous section in ascending and descending order will 'fit' within this box pattern. Regardless of what scale or style of music is being played, guitarists will usually visualize various box patterns when soloing along the fretboard.



Fifth fret position

Associating Moods With Scales

One advantage to learning the Pentatonic Minor box pattern is that the intended 'Bluesy' mood of the scale can clearly be heard. ***Associating moods with scales*** develops the ability to learn songs and melodies 'by ear'. In time, by simply recognizing the mood of a guitar solo as being either Rock or Blues-based, a guitarist can associate that mood with the Pentatonic Minor scale and immediately begin to 'jam-along' or improvise with the track without having to rely on any sort of written notation.

Getting Fretting Fingers in Shape

For beginners, the primary objective early on is to develop finger strength and flexibility. Not only is playing the Pentatonic Minor box pattern a great exercise for the fingers, the same pattern will actually be used in many classic Blues and Rock guitar solos. Make sure all fingers are as close to the frets as possible when playing the pattern, especially when fretting with the third and fourth (*'pinky'*) fingers.