

## Pentatonic Major Riffs

A *riff* can be described as a sort of ‘musical sentence’, and in order to improvise with the Pentatonic Major scale, a musical vocabulary needs to be developed by copying and memorizing collection of standard riffs. There are many riffs that have been passed on from generation to generation of guitarists, and some of these standard Pentatonic Major scale riffs will be presented in the following sections.

### ‘The Country Riff’

‘*The Country Riff*’ is named so specifically for this lesson, but this riff has been around for years and variations of it are heard in many classic songs. The example below is played in the Key of ‘G’ Major, using notes from the ‘G’ Pentatonic Major box pattern. ‘*The Country Riff*’ features both hammering and bending techniques. The next section provides a step-by-step approach.

#### ‘The Country Riff’

1		3		3		3		5 <sup>♮</sup>	5	3	3 <sup>♮</sup>
2		3 <sup>~</sup> 5		3 <sup>~</sup> 5		3 <sup>~</sup> 5				5	
3											
4											
5											
6											

1 3 1 1 3 1 1 3 1 3 3 1<sup>♮</sup>

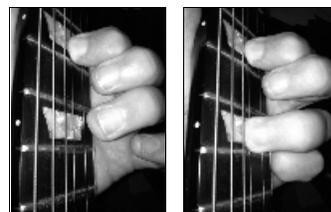
(2)  
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### Step-by-Step Approach

**‘Hammer-On’ Technique** The riff begins with a *hammer-on*, which involves plucking the second string/third fret, and while it is still ringing, an additional higher-pitched note is sounded by tapping or ‘hammering’ the third finger onto the fifth fret while the first finger remains anchored on the third fret (*see right*). In tab, a hammer-on is usually notated with a curve ( <sup>~</sup> ) in between the plucked and hammered notes. For this riff, try to flatten the first finger across the top two strings to play each three-note phrase or *triplet* with more speed.

**Bending Bending** technique is applied to the first string/fifth fret. In Tab, a bend is notated with a curved arrow ( <sup>♮</sup> ). Use the first, second, and third fingers together to push or bend the third string toward the bottom strings (*see right*). The first and second fingers are additional *support fingers* for bending, and are shown in ( ) below the Tab. Using multiple fingers prevents the string from slipping, and also produces better tone. Make sure the fretting fingers are curved or arched in order to get better tone. For added ‘country’ effect, try muting the fifth fret immediately after the bend before playing the next note.

#### Hammer/Pull-Off



Keep the first finger ‘planted’ while the third finger ‘hammers’

#### Multiple Fingers



The key to maximizing tone and control is to use multiple fingers when bending. For this riff, the first and second fingers act as support fingers for the third finger while bending.

### More Riffs

The 'Descending Riff' below features a hammer-pull off combination. The curve above the note indicates the first note is plucked, followed by a hammered note two frets higher that is released or 'pulled-off' back to the original note. The result being that three notes are sounded while only the first note is actually plucked.

For the 'Doublestop Riff', keep the first finger flattened across the top two strings.

<u>'Descending Riff'</u>			<u>'Doublestop Riff'</u>							
1	3		3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
2	5	3 5 3	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	3
3		4 2 4 2								
4		5 5 <sup>-</sup>								
5										
6										
	1	3	1 3 1	3	1 3 1	4	4 <sup>-</sup>			
			1 1 1			1 1 1				
			1 3 1 1 1			1 3 1 1 1				

### Play The Riffs 'Verbatim'

Try to copy all of the previous riffs '*verbatim*', meaning a note-for-note replication of the tabs and audio/video examples. Copying these standard riffs will develop the ability to learn and to copy other riffs 'by ear' without having to rely on written notation. Most of the legendary guitarists never had the advantage of using videos or even Tab notation to learn riffs. Instead, they would constantly listen to and literally wear out records learning and copying riffs by ear.

### Combining Riffs

Practice *combining riffs* by following one riff with the other, as well as going up and down the Pentatonic Major scale box pattern (*Pentatonic Major Scale -1*) along with the riffs. This provides a few options in becoming familiar with playing the box pattern when practicing.

### The Riffs Are Moveable

The same concept that applies to moveable box patterns will also apply to riffs. All of the previous riffs are *moveable*, and can be played along any fret position or *key*. For an additional challenge, try playing the riffs in combination together in different keys. For example, the Key of 'F#' Major (*along the second fret position*) requires the fretting fingers to stretch more. The Key of 'D' Major (*along the tenth fret position*) requires more focus in order to get clarity because the frets are positioned closer together, especially when applying hammering and bending technique.

### 'Flat' vs. 'Minor' Terms

Is there such a thing as the '*B flat Pentatonic Major Scale*? The answer is yes. Many beginners tend to confuse the terms '*flat*' with '*minor*' and '*sharp*' with '*major*'. The terms '*flat*' and '*sharp*' describe *notes*, while the terms '*major*' and '*minor*' are used to describe *scales* and *chords*. The two descriptions sometimes need to be combined together when naming the letter key of a scale, so the '*B*' Pentatonic Major box pattern is played along the seventh fret, while the '*B<sup>b</sup>*' Pentatonic Major box pattern is played along the sixth fret.