

Power Chords

Power Chords are chords that use only the root and 5th steps of the major scale.

For example, if you take a C major scale and remove all of the other scale tones, you will be left with the root and 5th. When I combine these together it's called a power chord. Or more formally a C5.



So, power chords contain only two pitches – but these two pitches can be played in multiple octaves.

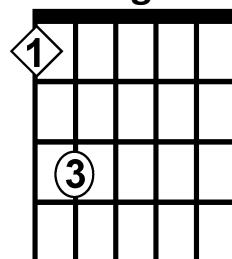
If we move to the key of F, an F power chord contains the root and 5th in the key of F, an F and a C.

Since power chords do not have the third they can be used in major or minor settings.

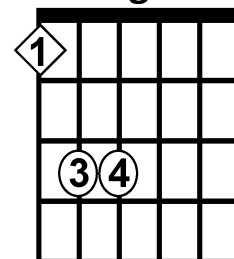
Power chords with roots on the 6th or 5th strings are typically played in these two forms.

(The root of the chord is indicated by the diamond.)

**Power Chord
2 String Form**



**Power Chord
3 String Form**

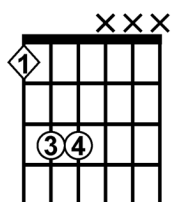


Power Chords: Moveable Forms

These are the four shapes of moveable power chords with their roots on various strings.

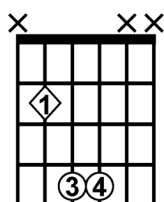
**6th String Root
Power Chord**

F5



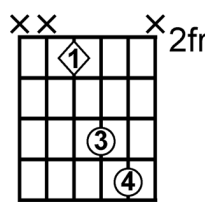
**5th String Root
Power Chord**

B5



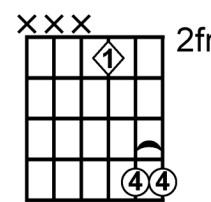
**4th String Root
Power Chord**

E5



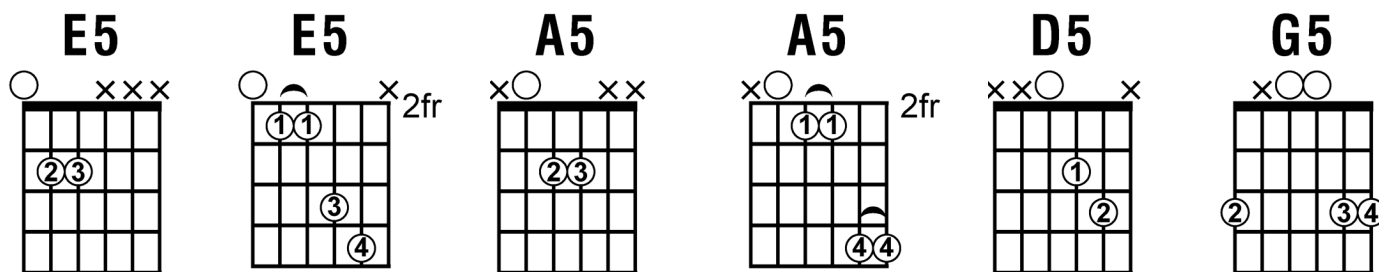
**3rd String Root
Power Chord**

A5



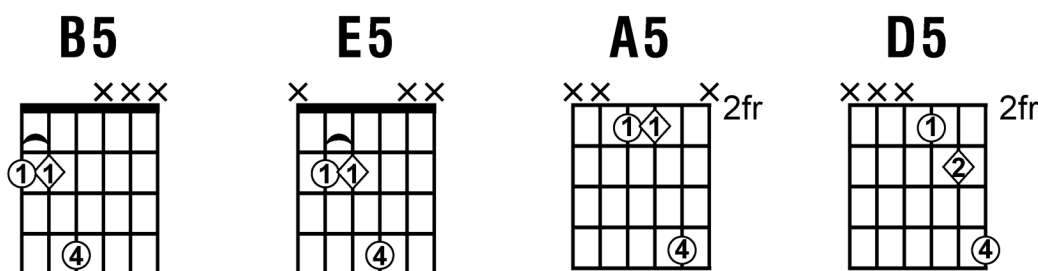
Power Chords: Open Forms

Power chords can also be played with open strings. Here are common open form power chords.



Power Chords: Inverted Forms

Power chords can also be played inverted with the 5th as the lowest tone, instead of the root. Inverted forms put the root above the 5th in the voicing – usually in between the 5ths. These get a less stable sound but work well when combined with nearby forms.



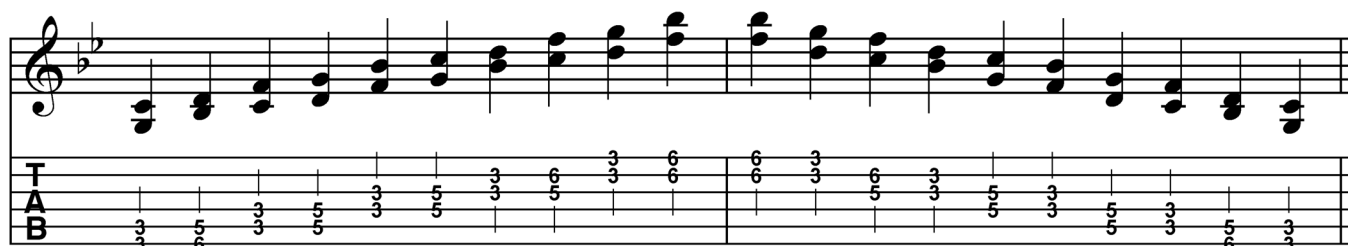
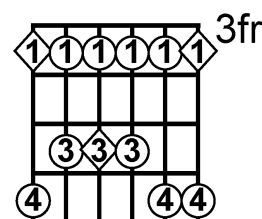
Double-Stops: Two Note Combinations

Double stops (also called diads) use two note combinations on adjacent strings to move between scales or chords.

Here is a G minor pentatonic scale form.

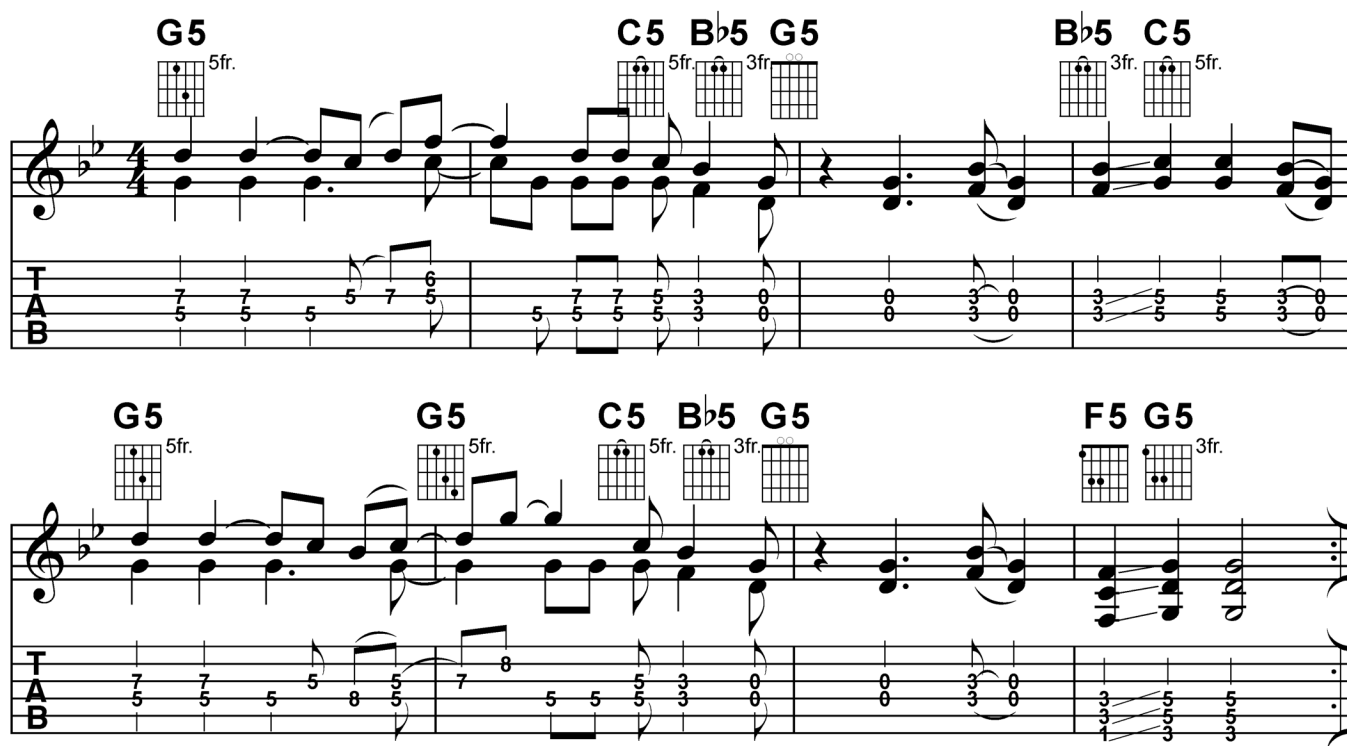
Below is the G minor pentatonic scale played as diads (two note chords).

G Minor Pentatonic Scale



Power Chord Double-Stops: “Money for Nothing” Lick

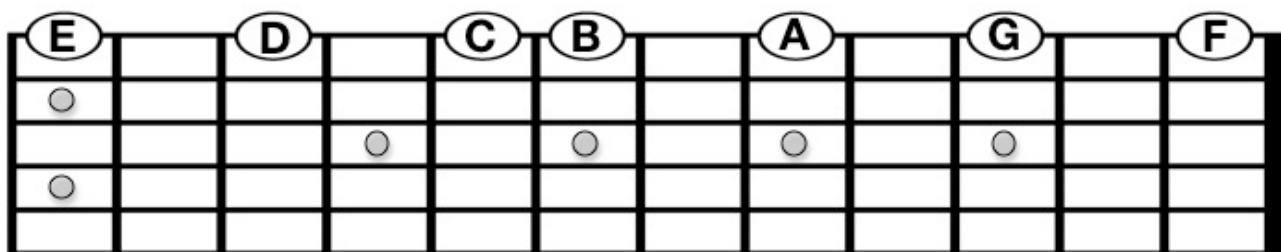
In the classic Rock song, “Money for Nothing” by Dire Straits, the legendary Mark Knopfler mixes power chords, double-stops and hybrid picking to create one of the most iconic guitar lines of all time.

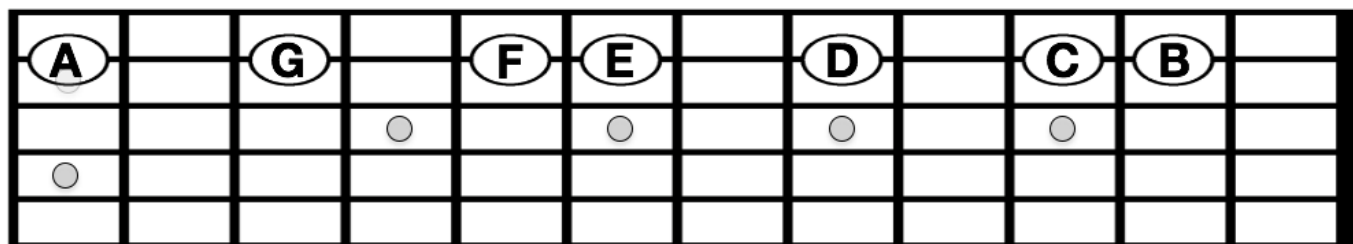


Notes on the 6th & 5th Strings

Power chords typically have a root on the 6th or 5th strings so it is helpful to have the notes on the 6th and 5th strings memorized.

Here are the notes on the 6th and 5th strings. Notice where they relate to the dots on your guitar.





Let's Practice & Learn

Practice Challenge 1: Form 6th string barre chords (2 and 3 string versions) on these sixth string notes – G, C, F, Bb, D#, Ab, Db, F#, B, E, A and D.

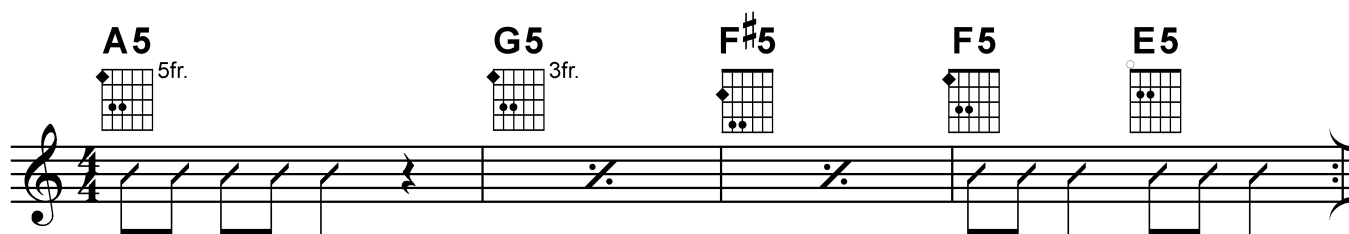
Practice Challenge 2: Form 5th string barre chords (2 and 3 string versions) on these fifth string notes – B, E, A, D, G, C, F, Bb, D#, Ab, Db, and F#.

Practice Challenge 3: Find power chords on both the 6th and 5th strings through all of the keys.

Power Chord Practice

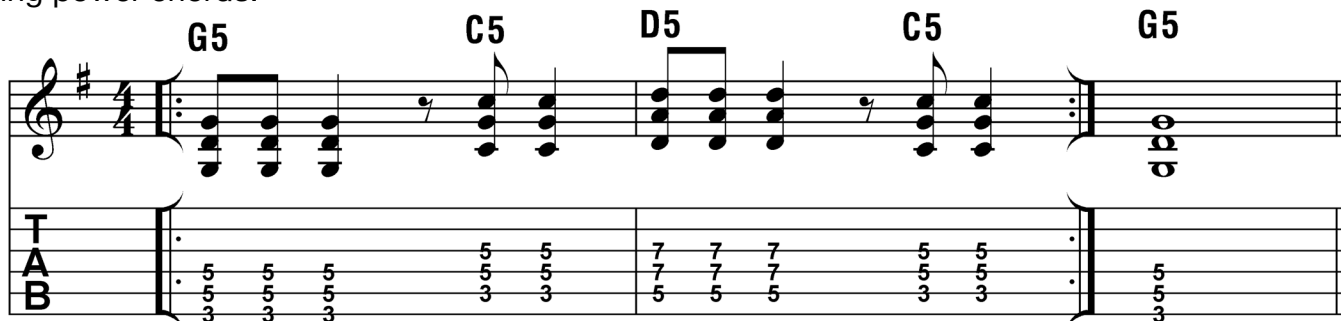
Exercise 1: Power Chords on 6th String

Play with power chords (3 string version) with various roots on 6th string.



Exercise 2: Power Chords on 6th & 5th Strings: "Louis, Louis" Riff

This is a riff from the 1963 early rock hit "Louis, Louis" by The Kingsmen using a mix of 6th and 5th string power chords.



Exercise 3: Two Finger Power Chords: “You Really Got Me” Riff

This riff from the 1964 British rock hit “You Really Got Me” by The Kinks uses 6th string two-finger power chords.



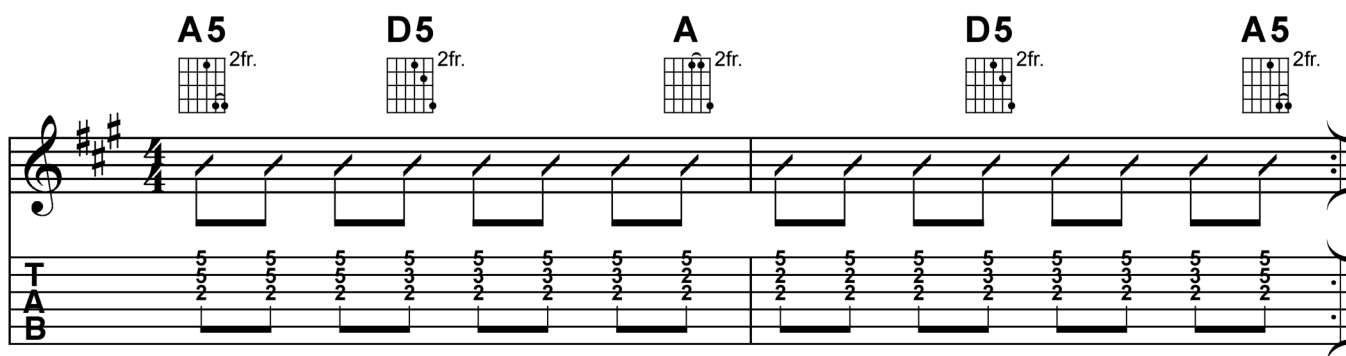
Exercise 4: Power Chords and Inverted Power Chords

Here is an example of using inverted power chords to move between the I and IV chords.



Exercise 5: High Power Chords and Inverted Power Chords

Here is a typical example of using high voiced power chords and inverted shapes.



You can use this type of progression along with distortion and a heavy delay set to a dotted quarter to get a U2 sort of guitar part.


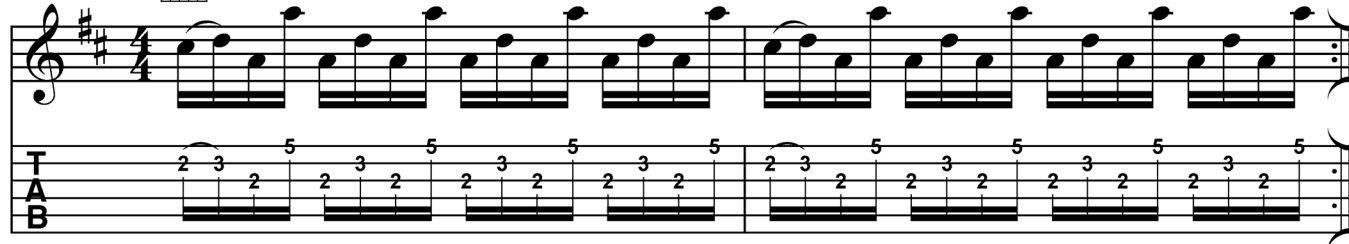
Rolling Power Chords

Exercise 6: Rolling Power Chord Lick

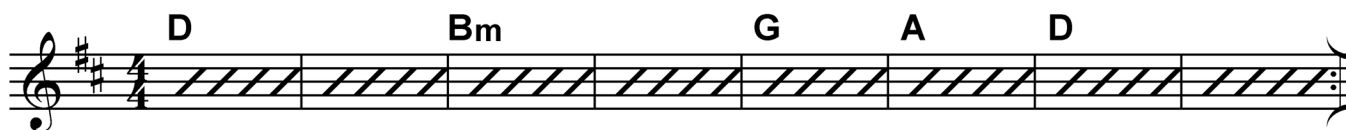
An inverted power chord (with the root on the middle string) combined with a simple hammer-on can be used over a variety of chords in a key creating a wonderful drone guitar part.

Here's the basic lick....

D5

Try using this lick over this progression. Listen for how the notes sound different over various chords.



More Classic Rock Power Chord Riffs

Ted Nugent's 1977 song "Cat Scratch Fever" was listed #32 on VH1's Top 100 Rock Songs of All Time. It opens with this iconic riff using power chords and double stops.

