

RIFFS AND PATTERNS

EVERY GUITARIST SHOULD KNOW

Riffs and Patterns Every Guitarist Should Know

There are certain “go-to” riffs that guitarists have used for thousands of songs. Here is an abbreviated run-down of some of the most common ones. Plus some examples of how to use the patterns on the guitar to create a longer idea out of a simple two string pattern.

Riff 1

This is a classic riff that is heard in everything from rock to bluegrass. Here is the basic riff in the open position in the key of C.

C

T
A
B

3 0 1 2 0 2 1

It can also be played in a variety of open keys. Here is the same riff played in G.

G

T
A
B

3 0 1 2 0 2 0

Try to play this riff in open A, E and D.

Here is a variation of this riff played without using open strings. Since it doesn't use open strings this variation can be played in other keys moving according to the root. The root shown here is in F.

F

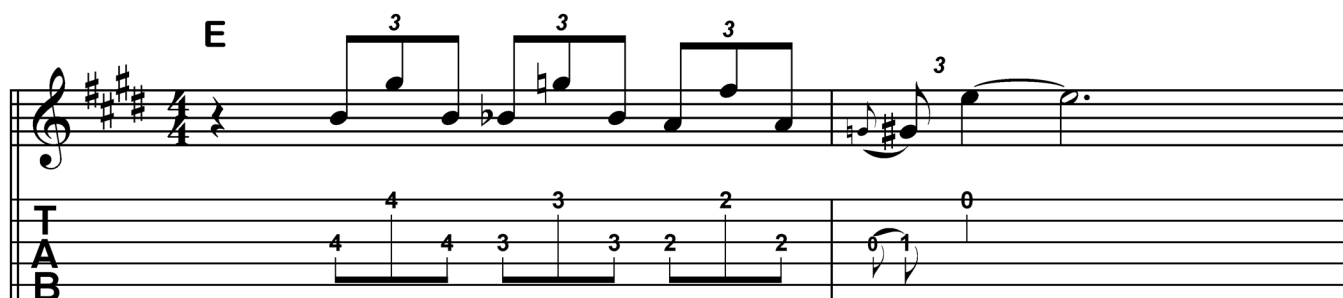
T
A
B

1 3 4 5 3 5 3 3 5 6 7 5 7 5 6 8 9 10 8 10 8 13

Riff 2

This classic riff uses a descending pattern in 6ths to resolve to the root. This riff works well for blues and country. Here it is shown in the key of E using the 1st through 3rd strings.

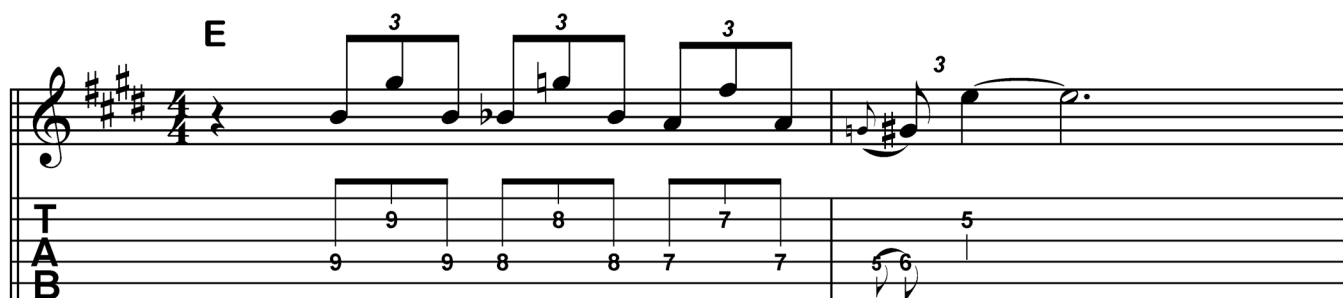
E



TAB

Here is the same riff in E using the 2nd through 4th strings. Notice how it now can be moved according to the root (E), since it doesn't use open strings.

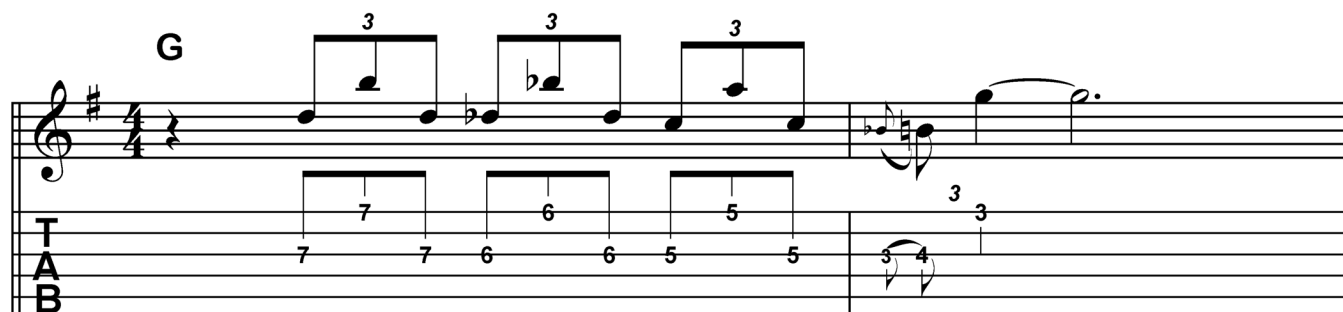
E



TAB

If we transpose this lick into the key of G and use the 1st through the 3rd strings we have another moveable form.

G




TAB

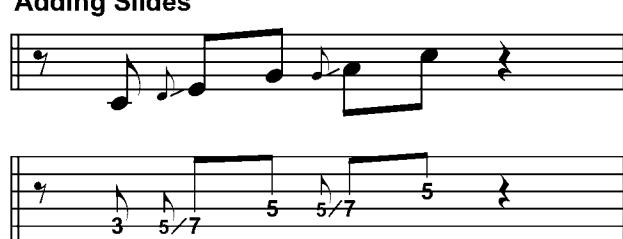
Riff 3 – Sliding Riff

Here is a great lick using slides that can be used in any key to create a long lick that can be endlessly varied. Here is the basic lick shown with a fifth string starting note in the key of C without slides and with slides.

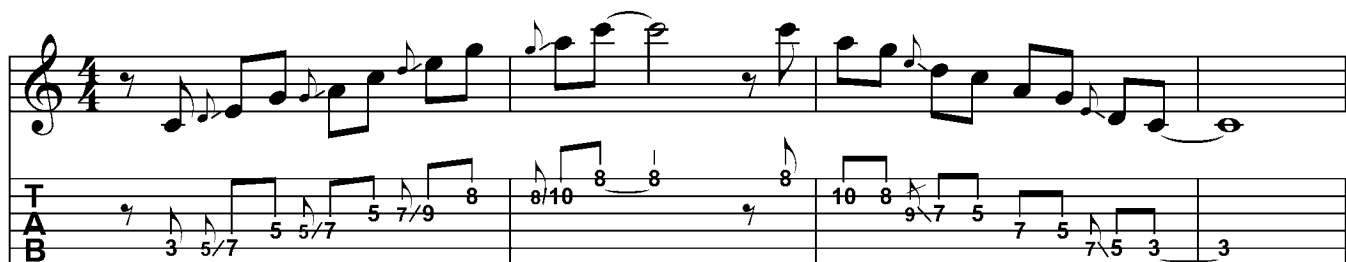
Normal



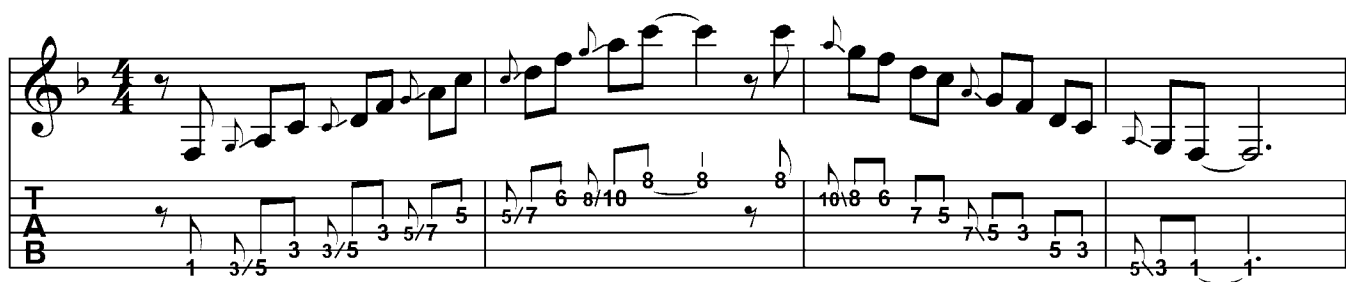
Adding Slides



This basic idea can then be expanded to create a two octave riff shown going up and down.



Now, almost the same finger pattern is used when starting the lick on the 6th string. Here it is shown in the key of F major and combines three octaves.



Relative Major and Minor: Two Uses for One Riff

Remember, certain major and minor keys are related and share the same key signature. So, all of these riffs can be used in a major context and then in a minor context for the relative minor.

For example...

- a riff in F major can also be used in D minor.
- a riff in C major can also be used in A minor.
- a riff in G major can also be used in E minor.

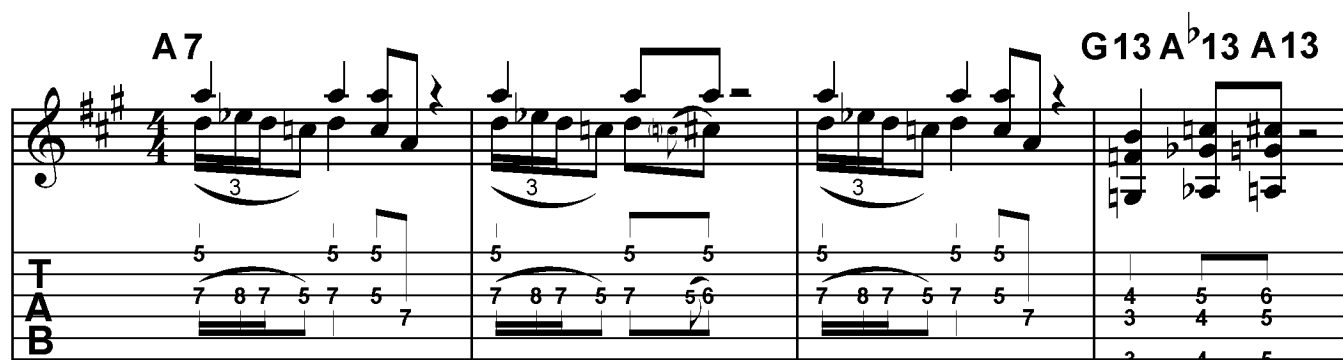
Riff 4 – Blues Double Stops

One of the techniques that make the blues sound like the blues is double stops. A double stop, or diad, is when you play a lick using two notes at the same time instead of single notes.

This is a simple riff in the key of A that works over an A7. Played in the 5th position with the root on the first string A.



This riff can be varied and expanded to something like this.



Let's Practice and Learn

This lick can also be used in a variety of playing situations.

- Play this riff over the relative major chord C major for a sweeter bluesy sound.

Practice playing the lick in a variety of keys and then practice with the relative major/minor of those keys.

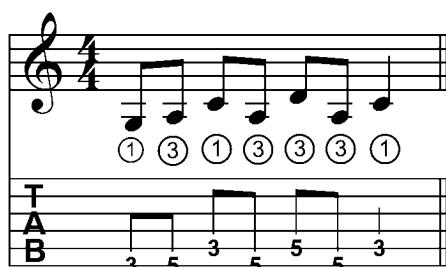
Finger Patterns and Positions

One simple melodic idea can be played in several different positions on the guitar using the same fingering.

Using common finger patterns to play riffs in many octaves on the guitar is very easy. Finger patterns that involve two adjacent strings can be repeated an octave up by moving up 2 or 3 frets and moving to the next string set on the fretboard.

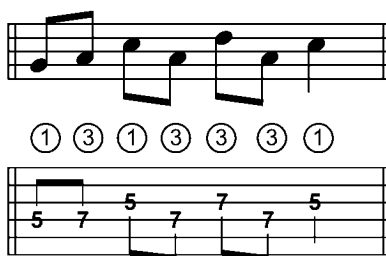
Here, the same finger pattern is used in all three octaves of these riffs. After you play the original riff on the 6th-5th strings, then move up two frets and play the same finger pattern on the 4th-3rd string set. From there you can move up three frets and play the same finger pattern on the 2nd-1st string set.

**6th-5th
String Set**



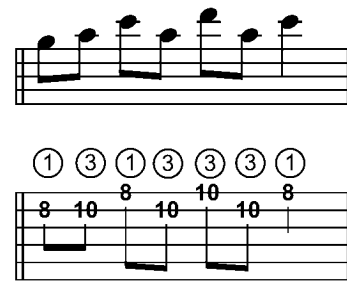
**Original Finger Pattern
Original Octave
3rd Position**

**4th-3rd
String Set**

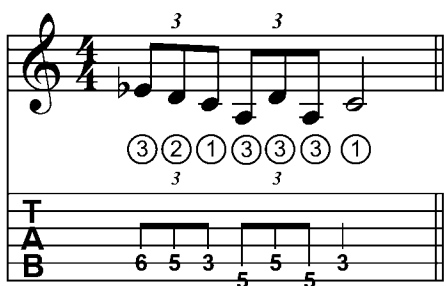


**Same Finger Pattern
One Octave Up
5th Position**

**2nd-1st
String Set**



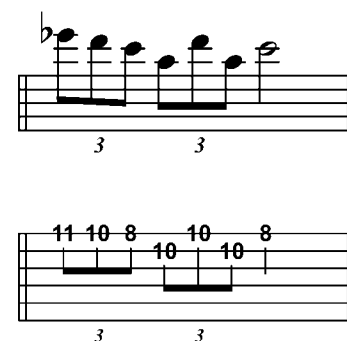
**Same Finger Pattern
Two Octaves Up
8th Position**



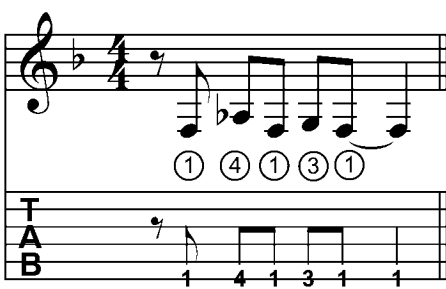
**Original Finger Pattern
Original Octave
1st Position**



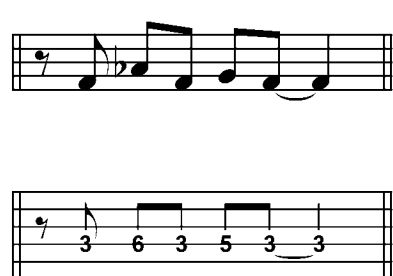
**Same Finger Pattern
One Octave Up
3rd Position**



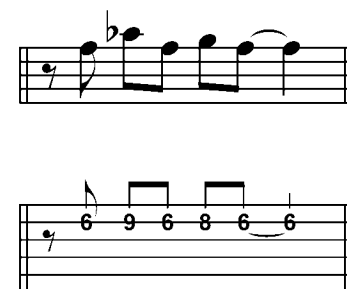
**Same Finger Pattern
Two Octaves Up
6th Position**



**Original Finger Pattern
Original Octave
1st Position**



**Same Finger Pattern
One Octave Up
3rd Position**



**Same Finger Pattern
Two Octaves Up
6th Position**