



THE THREE TYPES OF BLUES YOU NEED TO KNOW

Types of Blues

The blues is one of the most versatile chord progressions you are going to play as a guitarist. It's just 12 bars of I-IV-V but it can be varied in an infinite amount of ways to create amazing music.

Even with infinite creative variety, blues chord progressions can be grouped into three main types – 12 Bar Basic Blues, Jazz Blues, and Minor Blues

This lesson will give you a general overview of these three main types of blues chord progressions.

Let's get started!

12 Bar Basic Blues

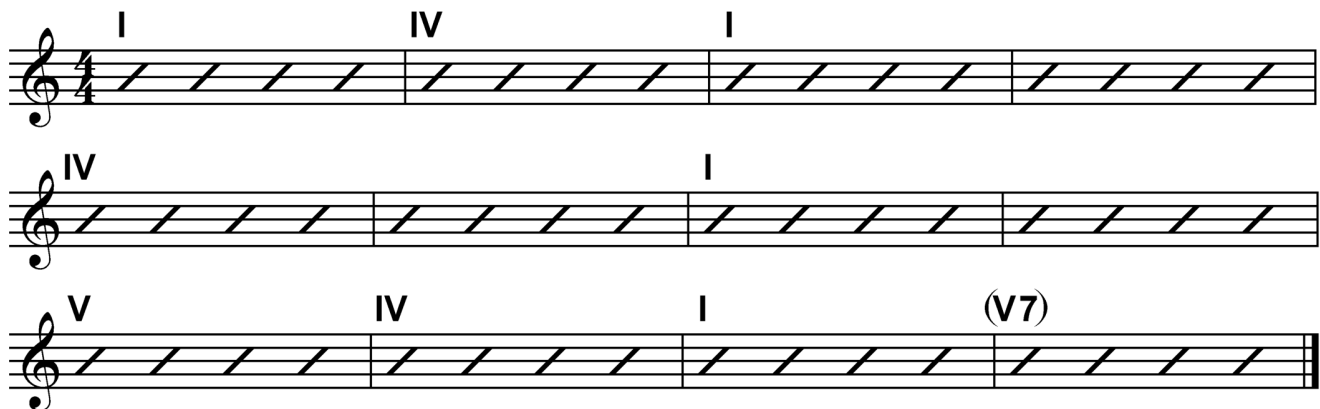
Here is the blues progression in its basic form – shown in roman numerals to indicate the chord relationships in any key.

Measures 1-4: Establishes the one (I) chord. Often, going to the four (IV) chord in bar 2 then back to the one (I) chord.

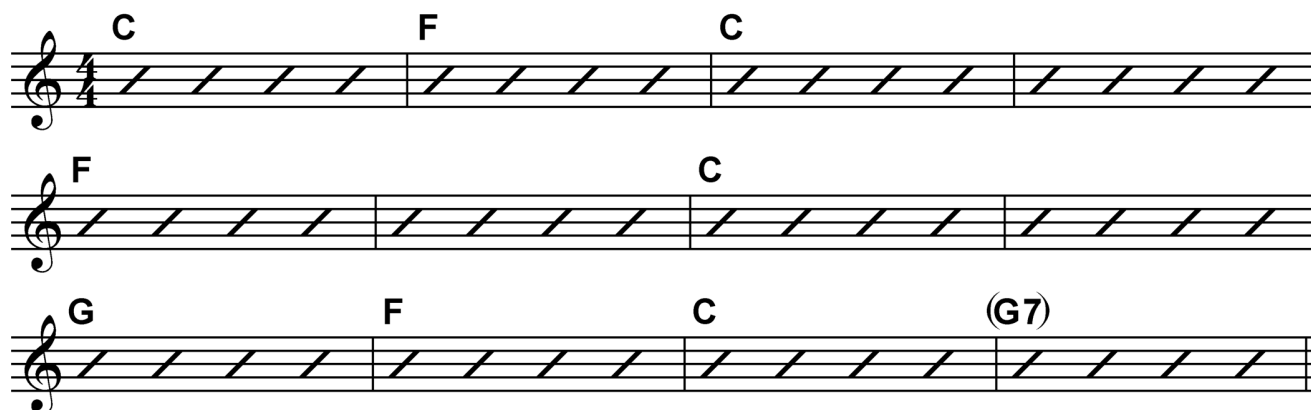
Measures 5-6: Moves to the four (IV) chord.

Measures 7-8: Moves back to the one (I) chord.

Measures 9-12: Lastly, the five (V) for a bar, four (IV) for a bar, then back to one (I) with an optional five (V) as a turnaround to begin the progression again.



If we put this blues progression in the key of C, it would look like this...



This is the standard 12 bar blues chord progression. There is a lot of variation that individual songs might do, but this is the fundamental progression.

Any serious guitarist should be able to play this progression by memory in any key.

Jazz Blues

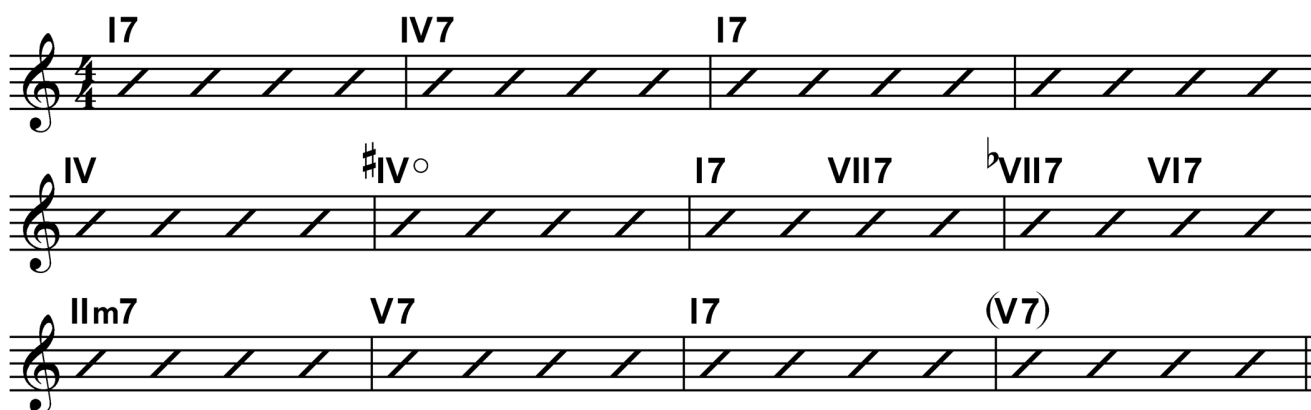
One of the most popular blues variations involves some other chords. This progression is common in Jazz. (All chords shown below are four-note “seventh” chord versions.)

Measures 1-4: Begins with the one (I) chord going to the four (IV) chord in bar 2 then back to the one (I) chord.

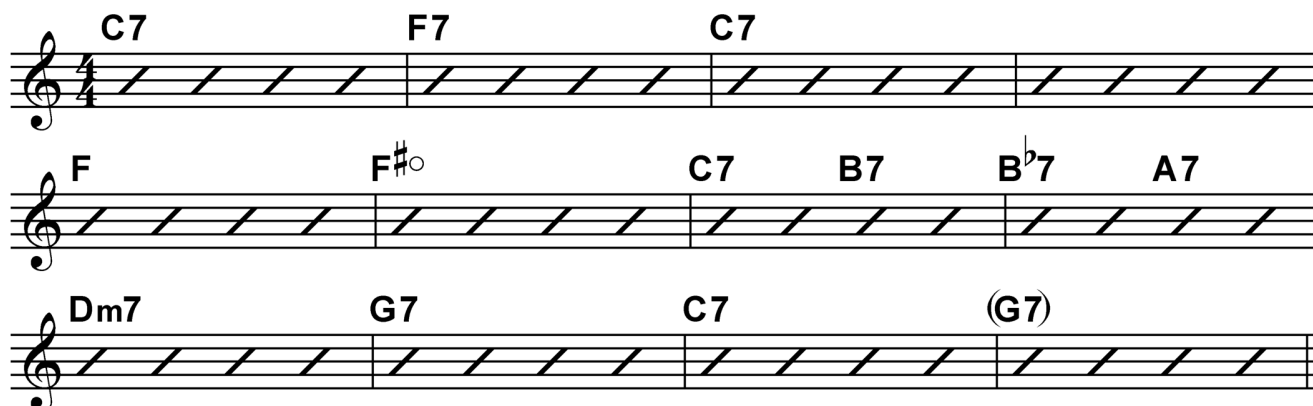
Measures 5-6: Moves to the four (IV) chord. An optional #IV diminished chord can be added in bar 6. (Think of this as a variation of the four (IV) chord.)

Measures 7-8: Goes back to the one (I) moving down in half-steps to the dominant chord on the 6th. (Think of this as the five (V7) of the upcoming two (ii) in bar 9.)

Measures 9-12: The last four bars are a two-five-one usually followed, in Jazz, with a variety of elaborate turnarounds before the progression begins again.



Here is the same progression shown in the key of C.



In Jazz, each chord will have a variety of embellishments added to it.

For example, the C7 may appear as a C13 or the G7 may be a Gaug7. Recognize these as just embellishments – the function of the chord remains the same.

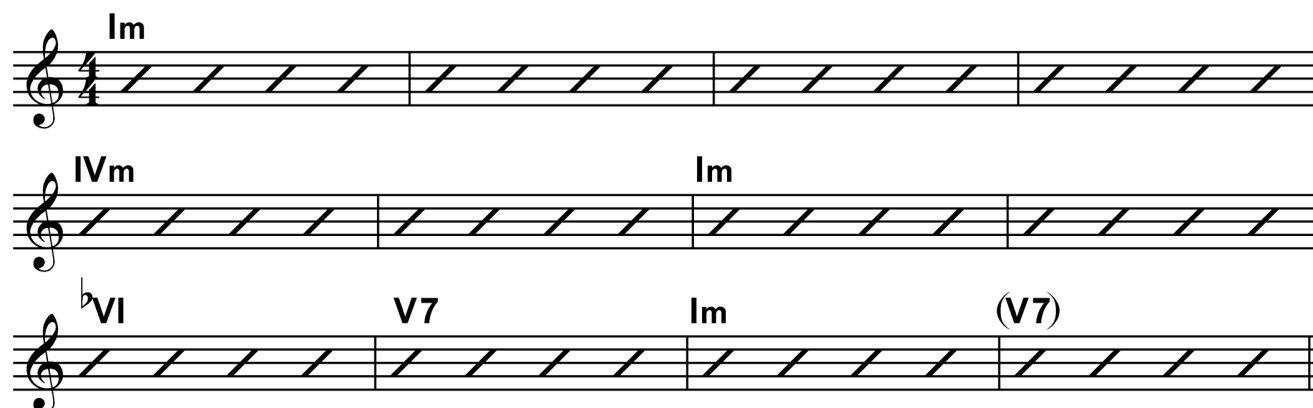
Minor Blues

One of the most creative versions of the blues is the minor blues progression. Notice in the example below, that the one and four chords are minor, but the five chord remains major.

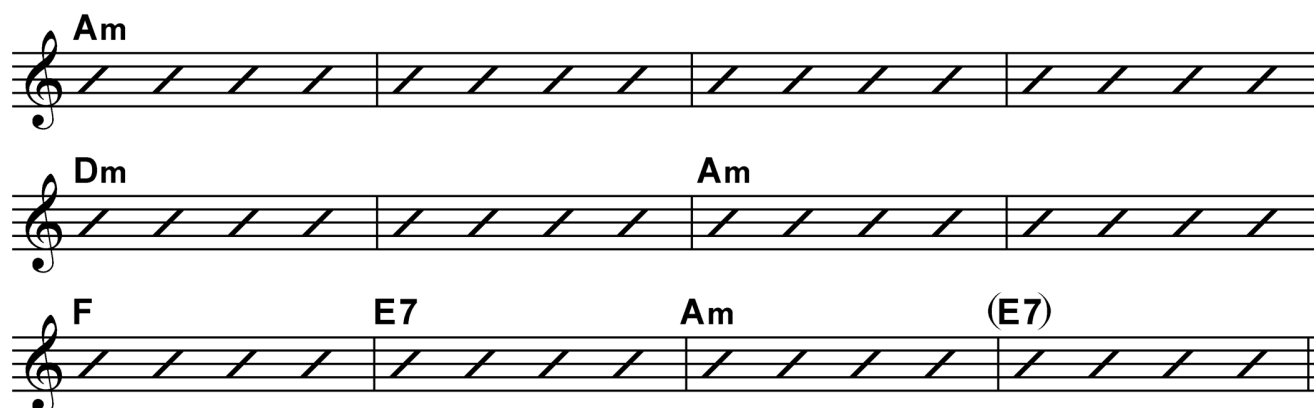
Measures 1-4: Establishes the one minor chord.

Measures 5-8: Moves to the four minor chord for two bars followed by the one minor chord for two bars.

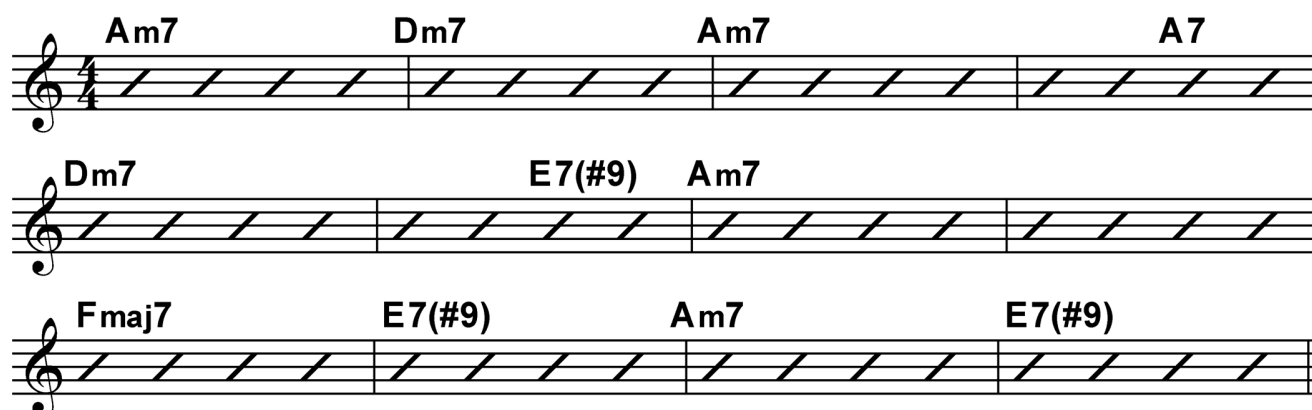
Measures 9-12: The last four bars are highly varied but generally involve the flatted six chord played as a major, followed by the five dominant 7 chord. Then ending on the one minor chord.



Here is the same progression shown in Am.



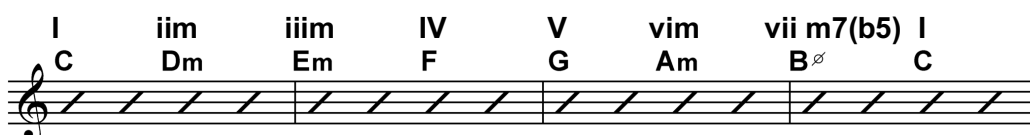
A more advanced variation of this progression might be...



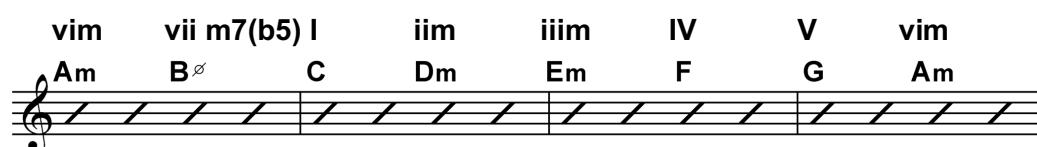
The Harmonized Major and Minor Scales

Here is a helpful way to think about major and minor chord relationships.

In the key of C, here are the chords in C major.




Now, start the sequence of chords on Am (the relative minor) of C. (Same chords - same pattern.)



Now, look at the same sequence of chords but think of it from the perspective of the key of A major.

im	iim7(b5)	bIII	ivm	vm	bVI	bVII	im
Am	B \emptyset	C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am



Notice, from the perspective of A, the one, four and five chords are MINOR.

The chords on the flatted third, flatted sixth, and flatted seventh steps are MAJOR.

The chord on the second step is a m7(b5) or half-diminished.


Keep in mind, this is the exact same chord progression as we started with in C, but we are thinking of these chords from a different perspective.

Playing in Am with these chords works - but ends up sounding modal. So, in practice, we make one important change.

Since, dominant 7th chords sound so great on the five chord, let's change the five chord to a dominant 7th (major triad with a b7th).

We now end up with this progression...

im	iim7(b5)	bIII	ivm	V7	bVI	bVII	im
Am	B \emptyset	C	Dm	E7	F	G	Am



This final progression is the typical way we analyze chords in minor.

The one and four chords are MINOR.

The flatted third, flatted sixth, and flatted seventh step chords are MAJOR.

The two chord is a HALF-DIMINISHED.

And the five chord is a DOMINANT 7TH.

(I realize that might be farther into music theory than you might be interested in but that is the reasoning behind the chord relationships in minor keys.) Learn all you can. – Steve