

all scales in all positions for guitar a pocket reference for constructing and playing guitar scale

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All Scales in All Positions for Guitar: A Pocket Reference for Constructing and Playing Guitar Scales

Whether you're a beginner learning the first notes of a scale, a seasoned player chasing new melodic ideas, or a composer searching for fresh harmonic material, having a reliable, pocket sized reference for guitar scales is essential. Guitar scales are the building blocks of solos, riffs, and improvisation, and mastering them in every position on the fretboard unlocks a world of musical possibilities.

This guide is designed to give you a comprehensive, easy to read overview of all the major and minor scales, modes, pentatonics, blues scales, and arpeggios you'll need. It also explains how to construct each scale, shows you the most common position patterns, and offers practical tips for applying them in real world playing. By the end, you'll have a complete mental map of the fretboard and the confidence to improvise in any key, at any position.

Why Knowing Scales in All Positions Matters

Many guitarists start by memorizing the open position major or minor scale. While that's a good foundation, it limits you to a narrow range of notes and a limited set of licks. When you learn the same scale in different positions, you:

- Gain fretboard fluency – you can find any note you need without hesitation.
- Expand your melodic vocabulary – each position offers unique phrasing possibilities.
- Improve your intuitive improvisation – you'll know exactly where to land a note on a chord change.
- Build musical confidence – you're never stuck in one spot; you can move up and down the neck with ease.

Because the guitar has 12 frets per octave and a 6 string layout, there are 12 possible positions for each scale. However, most players use the first three or four positions (root on the 6th, 5th, 4th, or 3rd string) because they provide the most efficient patterns and the richest sound. Mastering those positions for every scale is the key to becoming a versatile guitarist.

How to Construct a Scale

Before diving into specific patterns, it's useful to understand the **formulaic nature of scales**. A scale is a sequence of intervals (whole steps and half steps). By knowing the interval pattern, you can build any scale on any root note.

1. Identify the root note – the starting point of the scale.
2. Apply the interval sequence – move up or down the fretboard following the pattern.
3. Map the notes to strings and frets – choose the most comfortable position.
4. Practice the shape – play the pattern slowly, then increase speed.

Below is a quick reference for the most common scale interval formulas:

- Major Scale (Ionian): W–W–H–W–W–W–H
- Natural Minor Scale (Aeolian): W–H–W–W–H–W–W
- Harmonic Minor: W–H–W–W–H–W+H–H

- Melodic Minor (Ascending): W–H–W–W–W–W–H
- Major Pentatonic: W–W–W+H–W–W+H
- Minor Pentatonic: W+H–W–W–W+H–W
- Blues Scale: W+H–W–H–H–W+H–W
- Dorian Mode: W–H–W–W–W–H–W
- Phrygian Mode: H–W–W–W–H–W–W
- Lydian Mode: W–W–W–H–W–W–H
- Mixolydian Mode: W–W–H–W–W–H–W
- Locrian Mode: H–W–W–H–W–W–W

Once you know these formulas, you can create a new scale by simply shifting the starting point. For example, if you know the major scale, you can form the Dorian mode by starting on the second degree of that scale.

Position 1 – Root on the 6th String

Position 1 is the most fundamental pattern because it places the root on the low E string. This makes it the easiest for beginners to play and the most common for many genres. Below are the standard shapes for the major, minor, and pentatonic scales.

Major Scale – Position 1

The major scale in position 1 follows this shape (root on 6th string):

- Root – 3rd fret, 6th string (E)
- Whole step – 5th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 7th fret, 6th string
- Half step – 8th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 10th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 12th fret, 6th string (octave)
- Whole step – 14th fret, 6th string
- Half step – 15th fret, 6th string (octave)

From the 6th string, you continue the pattern on the 5th, 4th, 3rd, and 2nd strings, maintaining the same interval sequence.

Minor Scale – Position 1

The natural minor scale in position 1 uses the same shape as the major scale but starts on the 8th fret of the 6th string (the minor root). The intervals are:

- Whole step – 8th fret, 6th string
- Half step – 9th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 11th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 12th fret, 6th string
- Half step – 13th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 15th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 17th fret, 6th string
- Half step – 18th fret, 6th string (octave)

Major Pentatonic – Position 1

The major pentatonic in position 1 is a 5 note scale with the following shape:

- Root – 3rd fret, 6th string

- Whole step – 5th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 7th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 10th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 12th fret, 6th string (octave)

Continue the pattern on the 5th, 4th, and 3rd strings as needed.

Minor Pentatonic – Position 1

The minor pentatonic in position 1 starts on the 8th fret of the 6th string:

- Root – 8th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 10th fret, 6th string
- Half step – 11th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 13th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 15th fret, 6th string (octave)

Blues Scale – Position 1

The blues scale adds a "blue note" (flattened third) to the minor pentatonic:

- Root – 8th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 10th fret, 6th string
- Half step – 11th fret, 6th string
- Half step – 12th fret, 6th string (blue note)
- Whole step – 13th fret, 6th string
- Whole step – 15th fret, 6th string (octave)

Position 2 – Root on the 5th String

Position 2 moves the root up to the 5th string, offering a higher register and a different tonal color. Many guitarists use this position for solos because it gives them access to the higher strings while still keeping the root in a comfortable hand position.

Major Scale – Position 2

In position 2, the root is on the 5th string's 3rd fret (C in the key of C major). The pattern looks like this:

- Root – 3rd fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 5th fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 7th fret, 5th string
- Half step – 8th fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 10th fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 12th fret, 5th string (octave)
- Whole step – 14th fret, 5th string
- Half step – 15th fret, 5th string (octave)

Proceed to the 4th, 3rd, and 2nd strings with the same interval sequence.

Minor Scale – Position 2

For the natural minor scale, start on the 5th string's 8th fret:

- Root – 8th fret, 5th string
- Half step – 9th fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 11th fret, 5th string

- Whole step – 12th fret, 5th string
- Half step – 13th fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 15th fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 17th fret, 5th string
- Half step – 18th fret, 5th string (octave)

Major Pentatonic – Position 2

The major pentatonic in position 2 starts on the 5th string's 3rd fret:

- Root – 3rd fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 5th fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 7th fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 10th fret, 5th string
- Whole step – 12th fret, 5th string (octave)

Minor Pentatonic – Position 2

Begin on the 5th string's 8th fret:

- Root – 8th fret, 5th string

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