

THE MINOR PENTATONIC IN E: ONE SCALE, TEN USES

Bend, vibrato, slide, legato, riffs and improvisation, starting from position 1

Ten sheets to make a single scale say something: the E minor pentatonic, from the hand shape all the way to improvisation.

10 sheets · level 1 to 4 · at your own pace

WHY THIS PACK

A pentatonic scale is useless as long as it stays a ladder you climb up and down. This guide starts from position 1 of the E minor pentatonic — five notes, E, G, A, B and D, two per string — and shows ten different uses for it: running through it in both directions, making a note sing (bend, vibrato, slide, legato), crossing it with string skips, closing a phrase, then improvising. Every sheet stays in E so your hand has a single map to remember. The order is deliberate: first the shape (sheets 1 and 2), then the sound (3 to 6), then the movement (7 and 8), finally the playing (9 and 10). The classic trap is spending hours on the shape without ever asking it to say something.

THE 10-SHEET PATH

01 E minor pentatonic scale — position 1

LEVEL 2 · BLUES

The box: five notes, two per string, the basic shape for the whole guide.

02 Full round trip riff — E minor

LEVEL 3 · ROCK

Run through the box in both directions, in eighth notes, without slipping at the turnaround.

03 Whole-step bend calibration

LEVEL 1 · BLUES

Make a note sing: bend the string a whole tone, aiming by ear.

04 Controlled vibrato

LEVEL 2 · BLUES

Give a sustained note a voice: vibrato.

05 Slide between two notes

LEVEL 2 · POP

Link two notes without replaying: the slide.

06 One-string legato — hammer-ons and pull-offs

LEVEL 2 · POP

Chain notes without the pick: hammer-on and pull-off.

07 Wide exploration riff — E minor

LEVEL 4 · ROCK

Leaving the ladder: the same notes, with string skips.

08 Ending lick — E minor

LEVEL 2 · BLUES

Closing: a phrase that lands twice on the root.

09 Improvisation — blues in E, root note only

LEVEL 1 · BLUES

Improvising with a single note: the root, in rhythm over the progression.

10 Improvisation — rock in E minor

LEVEL 3 · ROCK

The whole scale over the Em-C-G-D progression: the box becomes a solo.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE PLAN

Week 1 — The box (sheets 1 and 2)

Position 1 of E minor in both directions: five notes, two per string. Always know where you are relative to the root.

Week 2 — Making notes sing (sheets 3 to 6)

Bend, vibrato, slide, legato: four expressive moves, each practised on notes of the scale.

Week 3 — Leaving the ladder (sheets 7 and 8)

The same notes with string skips, then an ending lick that closes a phrase.

Week 4 — Improvising (sheets 9 and 10)

First a single note over the blues progression, then the whole scale over Em-C-G-D, with the moves you have learned.

01 · E MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE — POSITION 1

Level 2

Blues

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/e-minor-pentatonic-position-1>

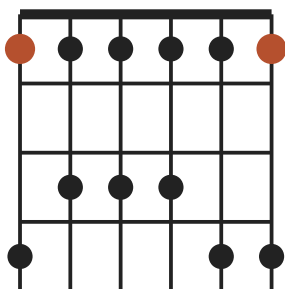
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

The box: five notes, two per string, the basic shape for the whole guide.

GUIDE TIP

Name the notes as you play them: E, G, A, B, D. Knowing the scale contains only these five notes means knowing what you can play safely.

FRETBOARD POSITION



Pentatonique Mi mineur — pos. 1

Position 1 of the E minor pentatonic is the first scale almost every blues and rock guitarist learns, for a simple reason: played open (frets 0 to 3), it has only two notes per string, one fingering to memorise, and its root sits on the low E string. It removes from the natural minor scale the two notes hardest to pitch accurately by ear (the half-steps), which is why you can improvise over it almost anywhere with no glaring wrong note. The diagram below highlights the E notes in colour.

TIPS

Go up and down slowly with alternate picking (one downstroke, one upstroke) from the start: that's the habit to build now.

One finger per fret, each finger staying close to its fret even when it isn't playing.

Name the root (E) out loud every time you play it - it's what resolves a phrase.

02 · FULL ROUND TRIP RIFF — E MINOR

Level 3

Rock

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/riff-e-full-round-trip>

ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Run through the box in both directions, in eighth notes, without slipping at the turnaround.

GUIDE TIP

Close your eyes for the second half of the riff: if you always know where you are relative to the root, the box is yours.

This riff runs the whole of position 1 of the E minor pentatonic in eighth notes: the first two bars climb from the low root up to the octave then back down, the next two reverse the trip. It's as much an exercise in knowing the box as in picking-hand control: you have to know at every moment where you are relative to the root, in both directions. The most common fingering slip is playing the highest note (or the lowest) twice in a row when you reverse direction.

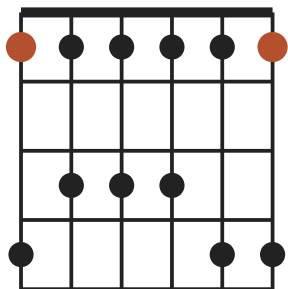
TIPS

At the turnaround, the extreme note isn't played twice: that's the thing to watch.

Work the descent as much as the ascent - most players descend less cleanly for never having isolated it.

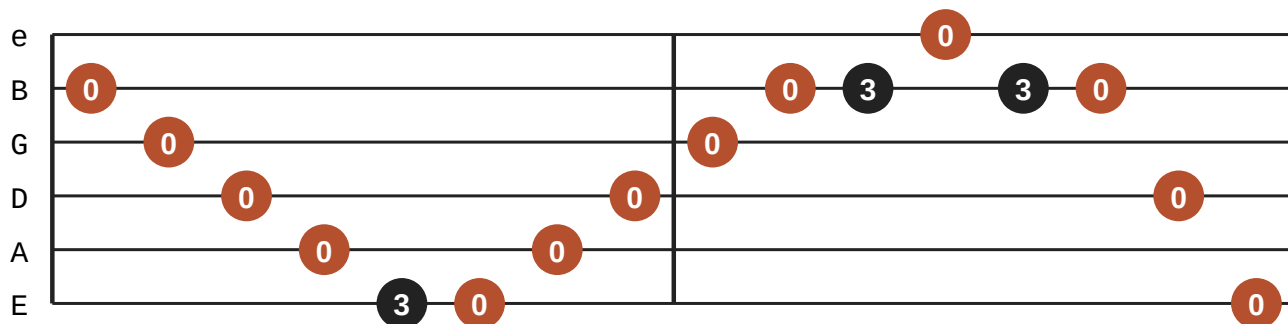
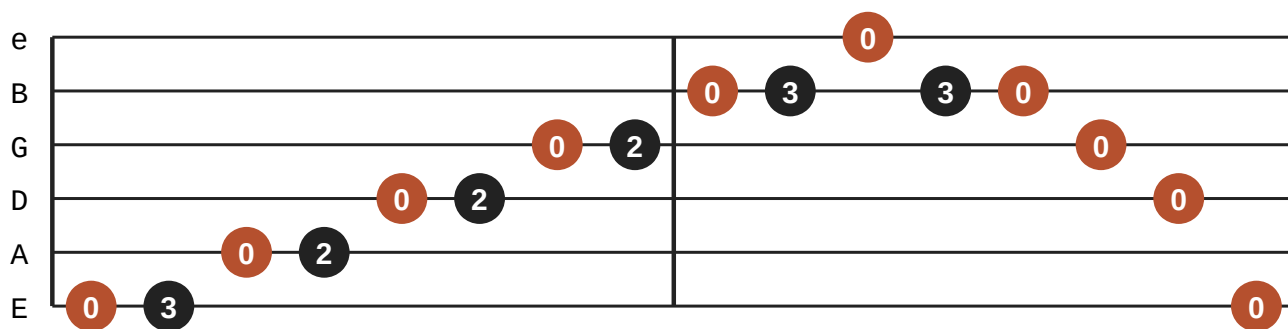
Slow metronome once the run is fluent, then steps of 5 to 10 BPM without ever sacrificing steadiness.

FRETBOARD POSITION



Pentatonique Mi mineur — pos. 1

TABLATURE



03 · WHOLE-STEP BEND CALIBRATION

Level 1

Blues

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/whole-step-bend-calibration>

ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Make a note sing: bend the string a whole tone, aiming by ear.

GUIDE TIP

In position 1 of E minor, fret 3 of the B string (D) bent up a whole tone reaches E, the root: it is the most natural bend in this scale.

A pure technique exercise, no chord or scale: on the B string, you play a note then push the string (bend) until you reach exactly the pitch of the note two frets higher — a whole tone. The catch: you're not allowed to play the target note as a reference, you have to hear it in advance and aim by ear.

TIPS

Check your accuracy by playing the target note right after the bend, two frets up on the same string: the pitch gap must vanish completely.

Push the string with several fingers (index, middle, ring lined up) and rotate the wrist, don't pull with the fingertip alone.

Hear the arrival note in your head before you start pushing.

04 · CONTROLLED VIBRATO

Level 2

Blues

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/controlled-vibrato>

ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Give a sustained note a voice: vibrato.

GUIDE TIP

Practise it on fret 2 of the D string: it is an E, the root, a note you can hold for a long time and on which a phrase ends well.

A single held note, made to oscillate slightly in pitch through small even movements, never going as far as a full bend. Vibrato is what separates two guitarists most clearly on a long note: too fast and jittery, it betrays tension; slow and even, it sings. The exercise isolates it completely, no chord, no scale, so you hear your own hand. The motion comes from the wrist rotating around the string, not the fingers pushing.

TIPS

Count one oscillation per beat, slowly: a slow, perfectly even vibrato is harder, and more useful, than a fast blurry one.

Return exactly to the starting pitch on every cycle: if the note creeps upward, it's a bend in disguise, not a vibrato.

Try the same move on several strings and frets: vibrato doesn't respond the same on a tight bass string and a thin treble one.

05 · SLIDE BETWEEN TWO NOTES

Level 2

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/slide-between-two-notes>

ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Link two notes without replaying: the slide.

GUIDE TIP

On the D string, fret 2 (E) and fret 5 (G) are two notes of the scale: a slide from one to the other opens the way to the next position.

A pure slide exercise, no chord or scale involved: on the D string, one note picked, then a slide with the finger up to a note two or three frets higher, without releasing pressure or picking the string again. The difficulty isn't the motion but sustaining it: the sound has to stay continuous from start to end of the slide, no dip or hitch, which needs steady pressure while the finger moves fret to fret by sliding rather than jumping.

TIPS

The arrival note should sound as loud as the starting note: if it fades along the way, pressure is easing off during the slide.

Slide slowly at first to feel every fret in between, then speed up without changing the pressure.

Practise the slide in both directions (up and down) separately: they don't need the same amount of pressure.

06 · ONE-STRING LEGATO — HAMMER-ONS AND PULL-OFFS

Level 2

Pop

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/one-string-legato-hammer-pull>

ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Chain notes without the pick: hammer-on and pull-off.

GUIDE TIP

On the A string, the open string (A) and fret 2 (B) are two notes of the scale: a hammer-on from one to the other is the first legato phrase of position 1.

A pure technique exercise on the A string: one note picked, then a hammer-on and a pull-off to the neighbouring frets without ever picking the string again. Unlike the slide (technique-slide-1corde), where the finger stays in contact with the string the whole way, here the sound comes only from the finger's impact as it drops (hammer-on) or the small sideways flick as it lifts off (pull-off) — two different motions to isolate before chaining them.

TIPS

The sound must stay audible with no pick on both the hammer-on and the pull-off: press harder and faster than usual as the finger lands or lifts.

Work the hammer-on alone first, then the pull-off alone, before chaining them into the same motion.

On the pull-off, the finger doesn't just lift: it flicks the string slightly downward as it leaves, or no sound comes out at all.

07 · WIDE EXPLORATION RIFF — E MINOR

Level 4

Rock

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/riff-e-wide-exploration>

ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Leaving the ladder: the same notes, with string skips.

GUIDE TIP

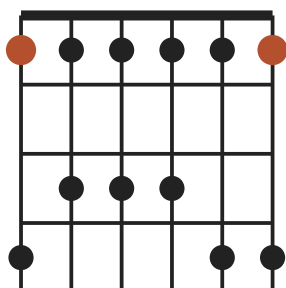
Keep your fretting hand still and only change the order of the strings: this checks that you know the box string by string, not just as an ascending line.

Eight bars that run position 1 of the E minor pentatonic two ways: first a full descent from the octave to the root then back up, then a string-skipping variation exploring the same area from another angle. The idea is to stop seeing the box as a ladder to climb up and down.

TIPS

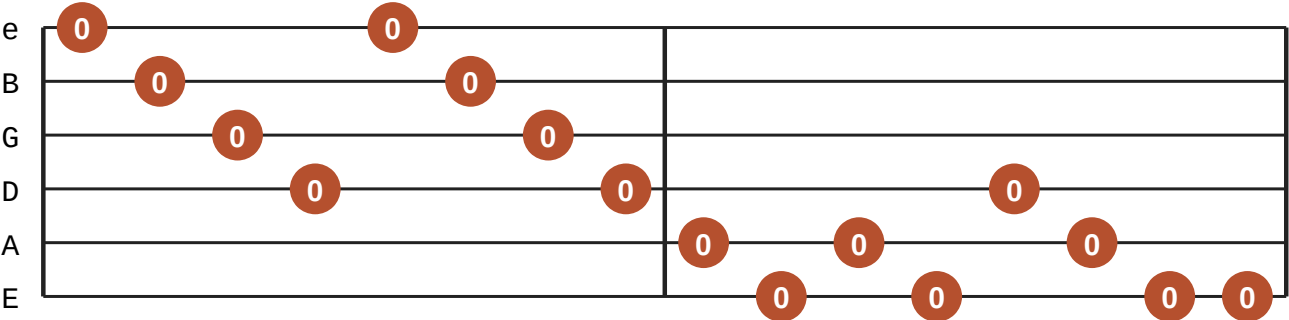
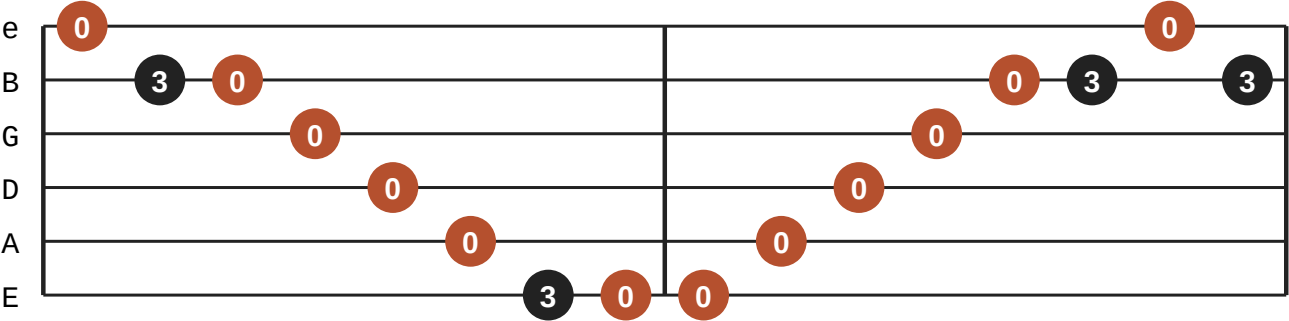
String skips are worked in the picking hand first, unfretted, naming the target string out loud.
Mute the skipped-over string with a flat fretting-hand finger, or it rings as soon as it's brushed.
Keep the exact same fingering as the linear part: the path changes, not the position.

FRETBOARD POSITION



Pentatonique Mi mineur — pos. 1

TABLATURE



08 · ENDING LICK — E MINOR

Level 2

Blues

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/ending-lick-e>

ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

Closing: a phrase that lands twice on the root.

GUIDE TIP

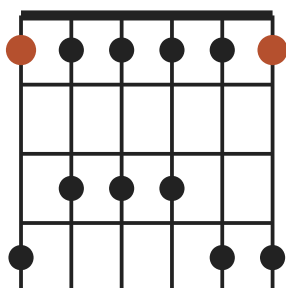
Play it right after the riff of sheet 7: an ending phrase only makes sense when it comes after something else.

A short one-bar melodic phrase that descends from the octave and lands twice on the E root. It's built to end a riff or a solo — once, at the very end — not to be looped like a riff. Nor is it a turnaround: a turnaround relaunches the grid by stopping on the tension, an ending lick resolves and concludes.

TIPS

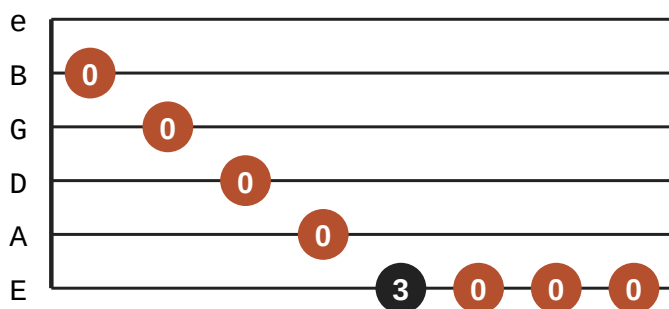
The phrase lands on the root, not on a tension note: that's exactly what makes it sound like done. Play it right after a riff or an improvisation, never on its own, to hear it in its real place. Slowing very slightly on the last two or three notes strengthens the ending effect.

FRETBOARD POSITION



Pentatonique Mi mineur — pos. 1

TABLATURE



~70 BPM

Vary only the rhythm and the length of the note (long, short, rest): with a single note, all the phrasing comes from rhythm.

TIPS

Don't try to "play a melody" yet: the only goal is staying exactly locked in with the grid while playing nothing but E, including through the A7 and B7 bars.

10 · IMPROVISATION — ROCK IN E MINOR

Level 3

Rock

~115 BPM

Online sheet: <https://guitarshelf.com/en/fiche/improvisation-rock-e-minor>

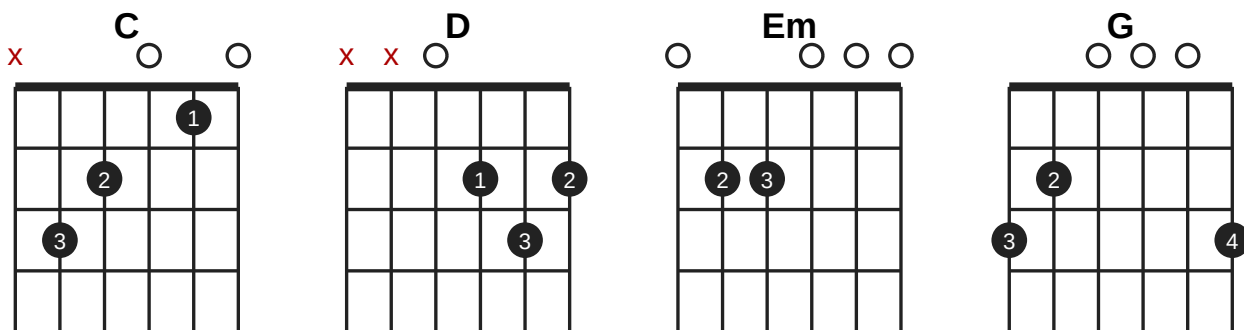
ITS PLACE IN THE PATH

The whole scale over the Em-C-G-D progression: the box becomes a solo.

GUIDE TIP

Reuse what the guide has given you: a bend, a vibrato on a long note, an ending lick. Improvising is choosing from what you already know how to do.

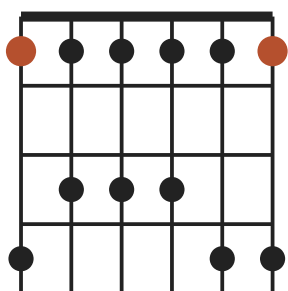
CHORDS



CHORD PROGRESSION

I	VI	III	VII
Em	C	G	D

FRETBOARD POSITION



Pentatonique Mi mineur — pos. 1

The E minor pentatonic scale (position 1) covers the whole Em-C-G-D progression: the E minor tonality stays the same throughout.

TIPS

Try landing on the E root right as the Em chord comes back around in the loop, to really feel the phrase resolve.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Print the sheets in order, or keep them as a PDF on a tablet near your guitar.
2. One sheet per session is enough: better to replay it for several days than run through all ten at once.
3. Note the date and the tempo reached on the back of each sheet: playing is refined by ear, but progress is measured with a metronome.
4. Once you've gone through all the sheets, the same path exists in other keys on the site to transpose what you've learned.

WHAT IS GUITARSHELF

Guitarshelf is a guitar exercise sheet site, free and with no account to create:

- A catalogue of sheets sorted by style, level (1 to 6) and exercise type (grid, riff, scale, technique...).
- A generator that creates a brand-new exercise sheet on demand, based on chosen criteria.
- A glossary and gear guides to understand the vocabulary and upkeep of the instrument.
- A personal songbook: build your own selection of sheets and export it as a PDF, like this one.

Continue the journey on <https://guitarshelf.com>