

The Major Pentatonic Scale

The major pentatonic scale is a five-note scale consisting of five notes from the major scale. The intervals are 1, 2, 3, 5, 6. You do not play the 4th and 7th degrees of the major scale. This incredibly useful scale produces a sweet, happy, major sound and is utilized often in blues, rock, and other musical genres.

Major pentatonic often works over all the chords in major key when playing what *relates to all*. Also, utilize major pentatonic over most major type chords when treating each chord as a *separate event*.

You can locate major pentatonic scales all over the neck by going through the minor pentatonics. You won't have to memorize a whole new batch of scale shapes for major pentatonic. We will use the concept of major and relative minor to easily tackle major pentatonic scales across the neck.

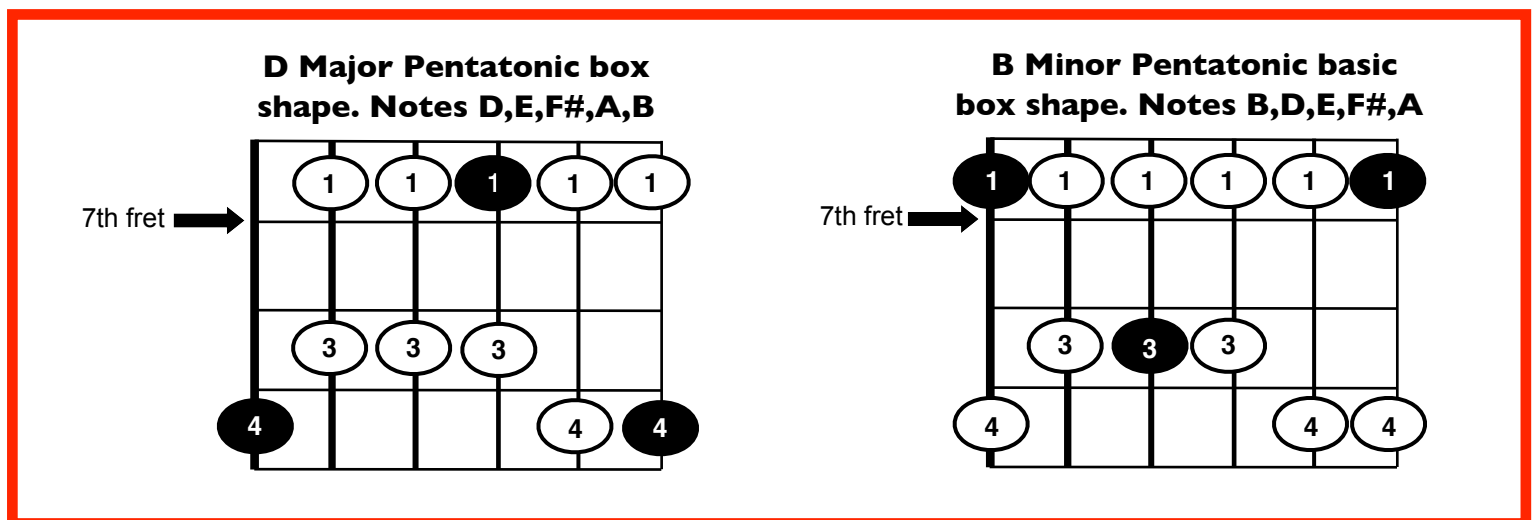
For every major key there is a relative minor key with exactly the same notes. We will use this to help find where these major pentatonic scales "live" on the fretboard. Minor pentatonic lives a minor 3rd, or three frets away, below the major pentatonic.

Illustrated below is the "basic box shape" D major pentatonic. Find it easily by using your fourth finger on the root note low E-string. It's relative minor, B minor pentatonic is illustrated on the right. D major pentatonic scales can also be viewed as B minor pentatonic scales. Both scales consist of the same notes D, E, F#, A, and B. There are lots of ways to look at these, personally I think of pentatonics more in terms of minor.

The starting and emphasis notes determine which scale you will be playing. D major pentatonic and B minor pentatonic consist of the same notes, just different starting and emphasis notes. It all comes down to what notes you are emphasizing, emphasis is critical.

Play both scales starting and ending with the roots. Listen how the major pentatonic is sweet and happy sounding when starting on and emphasizing the D notes. Play the same shape but start and end on the B notes and you get the darker, bluesy, minor sound. Same notes, just different start and emphasis points, and you have two very different sounding scales.

One scale gives you the sweet, bright, major sound while the other gives you the dark, bluesy, minor sound. Try playing minor pentatonic over minor chords and major pentatonic over major chords within the same jam track. Be sure to change scales as the chords change and listen for the sound differences between the major and minor, get lost in the fun.



The Major Pentatonic Scale - Key Points

The major pentatonic scale is constructed from five notes of the major scale. This is similar to how the minor pentatonic scale is constructed from five notes of the natural minor scale, (see below table).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	= major scale
1	2	3		5	6		= major pentatonic scale
1	2	b3	4	5	b6	b7	= natural minor scale
1		b3	4	5		b7	= minor pentatonic scale

Remember that you can find all the major pentatonics by going through the relative minor pentatonic scales. Just flip the minor pentatonic shapes to their relative major pentatonic and change emphasis notes. Here are all the major keys and their corresponding relative minors:

A major = F# minor	Bb major = G minor	B major = G# minor
C major = A minor	C# major = Bb minor	D major = B minor
Eb major = C minor	E major = C# minor	F major = D minor
F# major = Eb minor	G major = E minor	G# major = F minor

For that sweet major pentatonic sound utilize all of your minor pentatonic scales, but emphasize the root major. For example, when playing in D major pentatonic think of the relative minor B minor pentatonic. Just start and emphasize on the D notes, not the B notes, to sound major.

The blue note does not always apply to major pentatonic and, at times, can sound sour. Experiment with it and see how it sounds to your ears.

The major pentatonic lives three frets ahead of the minor pentatonic. For example, if you want to play in D major pentatonic put your pinky finger on the D note 10th fret low E-string. Using one finger per fret, the relative minor will always be three frets back.

Your first finger will always fall on the relative minor. In this case, the B note at the 7th fret of the low E-string. Find the relative minor of any major key using this device.

There is not much room for error when soloing in major key as sour notes can really stick out. You also can't slur passing tones like when using minor pentatonic.

Be careful with your note choices and let your ear help guide you. Practice these scales in all keys and listen for the sound differences between minor and major. Its all about the sounds and moods that these scales produce - stay creative and keep on rocking!

KEY POINTS:

For every major key there is a relative minor key with exactly the same notes.

When soloing in major key use major pentatonic over all the chords when playing what “relates to all”. Also use it over any major type chord when treating each chord as a “separate event”.

Find major pentatonic scales by going through the relative minor pentatonic scales. Memorize majors and their corresponding relative minors.