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BLUES GUITAR

101

Solos

Blues Guitar 101 – Solos

How to Build Exciting and Creative Blues Solos

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How to Use This eBook

Before you dive into this eBook, take a minute to understand how it's divided to get the most out of your time in the practice room.

There are two “halves” to this eBook, the first focuses on technical soloing devices, and the second half is about organizing those items.

Combined, these approaches teach you what notes to use in a blues solo, and then how to organize those notes just like your favorite players.

If you only learn what scales to use in your blues solos, but not how to organize those ideas, your solos sound like noodling.

If you focus only on organizational tools, your solos aren't always accurate in regards to note choice.

It's the marriage of these two approaches that gives you the best practice room experience with blues soloing.

Here's a brief outline of how to work on each half of this eBook to get the most out of your practice routine.

Part 1 – Building Blocks

In the first half of the eBook you review, or learn, about the four main building blocks of blues soloing.

- Minor Blues Scales
- Major Blues Scales
- Arpeggios
- Chords

These building blocks allow you to move on to the second half of the book where you learn how to create memorable blues solos.

Spend enough time to get these concepts under your fingers before moving on to the second half of the eBook.

You don't have to master everything in the first half before exploring the second half.

But, you do need to have enough material down to be able to solo over blues progressions before moving beyond the notes in your studies.

Have fun with this chapter as you set yourself up to move beyond the technical soloing devices into the organizational side of the blues.

Part 2 – Beyond the Notes

In the second part of this eBook you learn how to move beyond the note selection part of blues soloing.

Here you learn about phrasing, spacing, call and response, repetition, building energy, etc. in your solos.

These are the items that many blues guitarists know are important, but don't usually know how to tackle in their studies.

The material in this second half help you bring the notes you play to life, and you create memorable solos at the same time.

If you're already comfortable with blues scales and arpeggios, you can skip right to this section.

If you find this section tough to start with, go back to the first half and spend time reviewing the note choice material before going forward.

Soloing over blues progressions is fun for many guitarists, but if you don't have organization or direction in your solos they fall flat.

This section help keep your playing exciting, engaged, and interactive, everything you need to create solid blues guitar solos.

Blues Chord Shapes

As well as using scales and arpeggios, many great blues guitarists bring chords into their solos to build intensity and energy.

In this chapter, you learn 3-note chords, small shapes that are easier to add to your blues solos compared to larger grips.

Because they're only 3 notes, some of these chords don't have a root note.

Since the bass player is covering the root note, you can always drop the root out of any chord in a blues song and not miss it.

While rootless chords sound cool, they're tougher to visualize, as you don't have the root as a reference.

If you dig those chords, make sure to spend the time to be able to play them in different keys so you can use them effectively in your solos.

Have fun with these chords shapes, learn them in a few keys, and add them to your blues solos when comfortable over the backing tracks.

3 Note 7th Chords

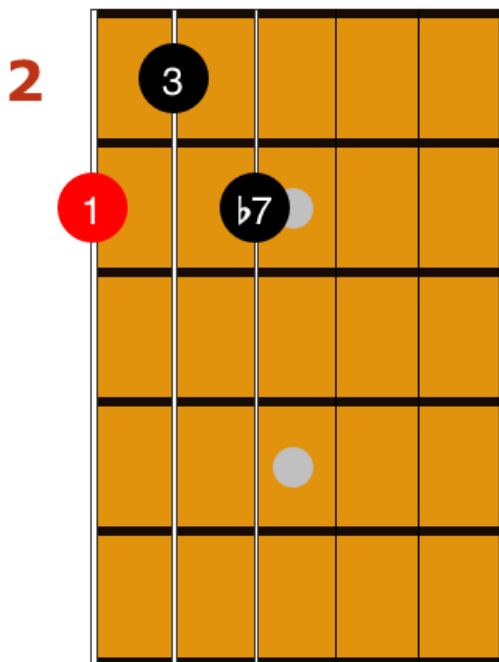
The first group of chords uses 1-3-b7 and 3-5-b7 to outline 7th chords.

Work these shapes one at a time as you add them to your vocabulary.

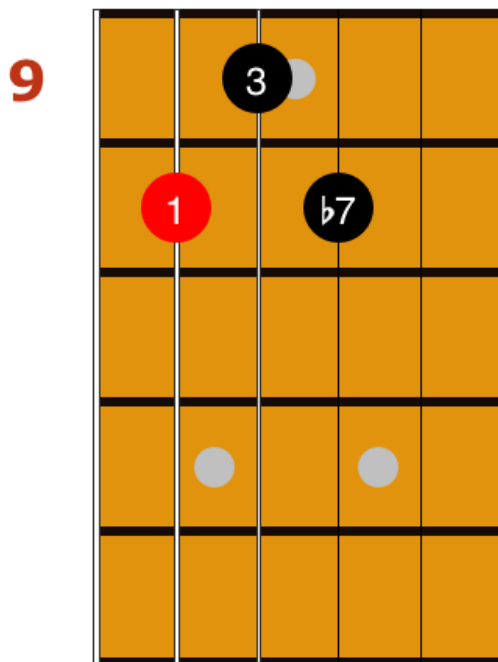
When ready, take them to other keys and then play them over backing tracks to expand them in your vocabulary.

Once you have a handle on these chords over the blues form, add them to your solos to take them a step further in your practice routine.

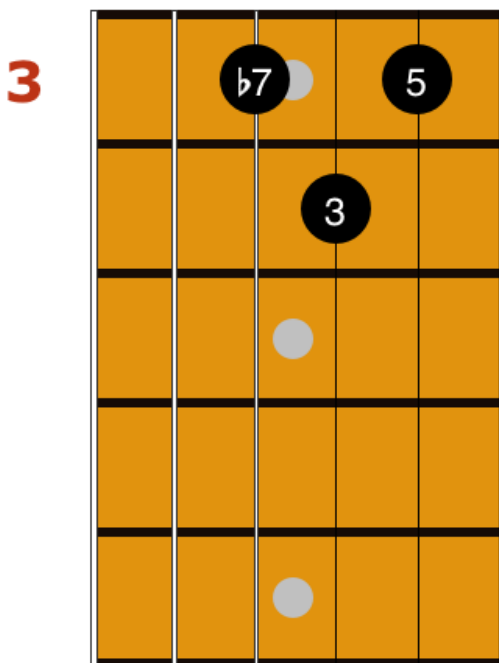
G7



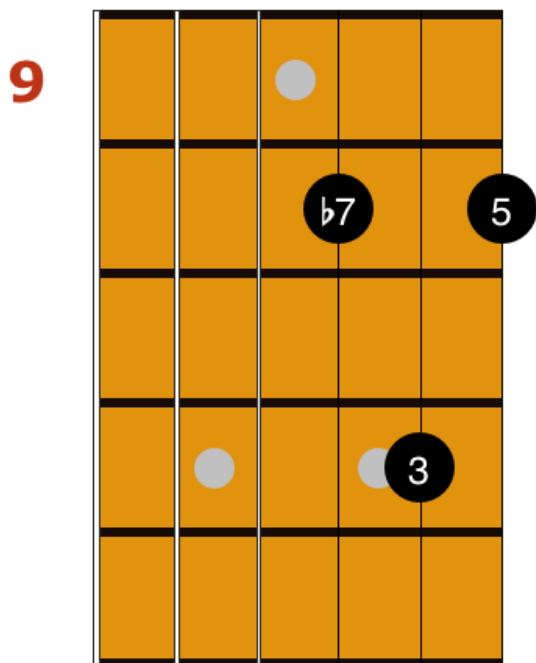
G7



G7



G7



3 Note 9th Chords

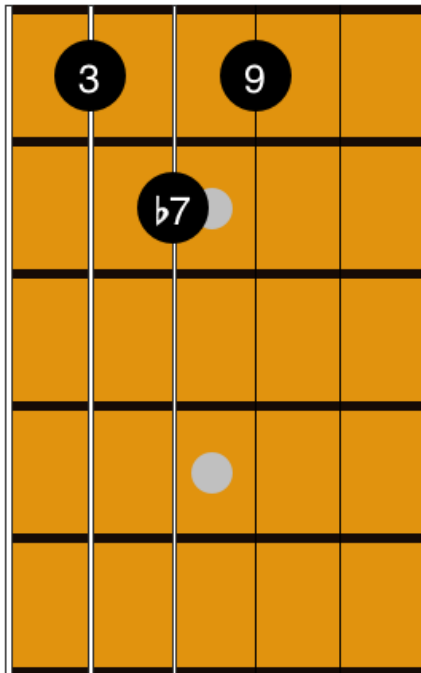
There are two types of 9th chords below, 3-5-9 and 3-b7-9, to explore in your playing.

9th chords sounds great over I7 and IV7 chords, but can be used over V7 chords as well, though 7#9 chords are more commonly used.

Learn the shapes below and then work them over a backing track as you expand on these chords in your playing.

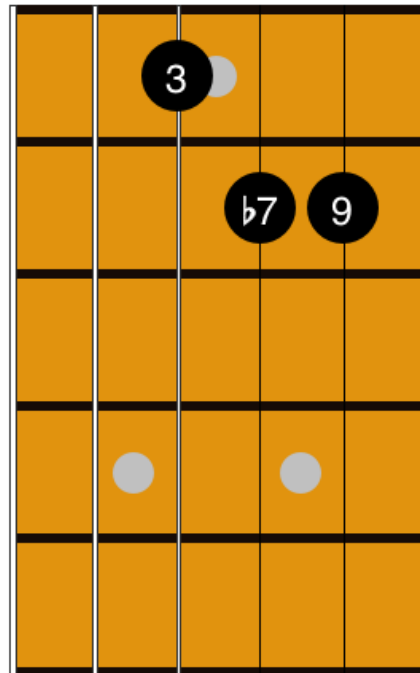
G9

2



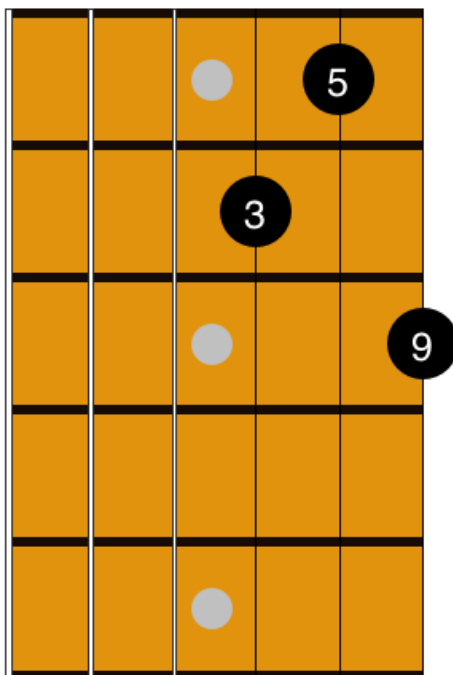
G9

9



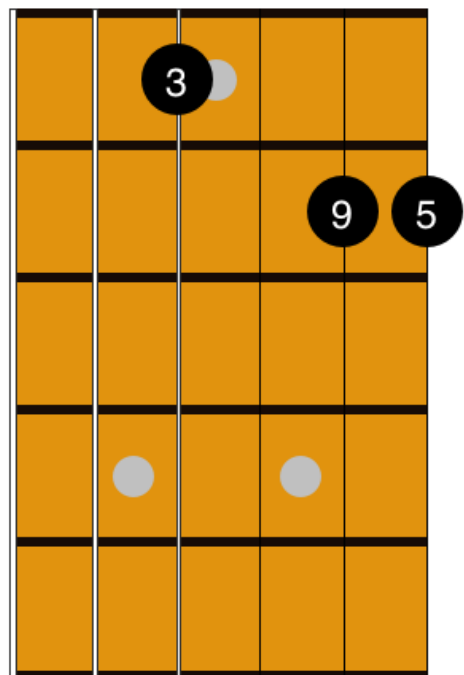
G9

3



G9

9



3 Note 7#9 Chords

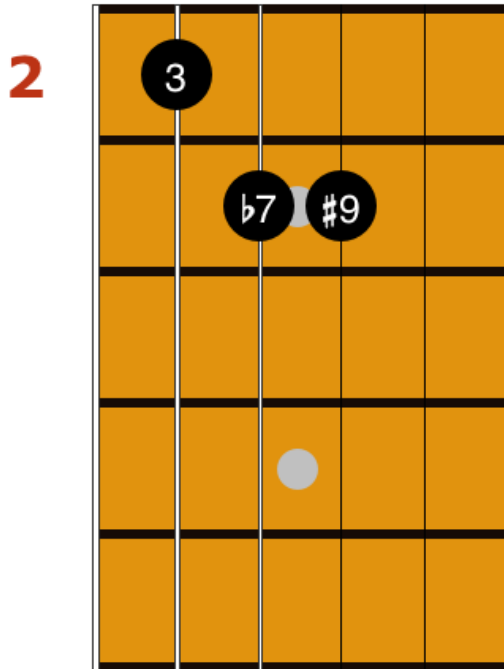
The last group of chords outline 7#9 sounds in your playing, and use the intervals 3-b7-#9, except the last chord which is 3-5-#9.

7#9 chords sound great over V7 chords, so over E7 in the key of A blues, but they can be used anywhere.

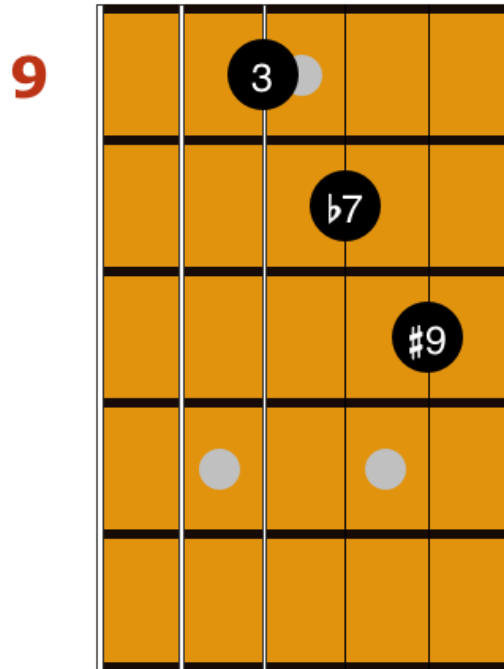
The #9 interval does create some tension, so be prepared to use and resolve that tension when adding these chords to your playing.

After you try out the chords below, play them over a few backing tracks to hear how they sound in a musical situation.

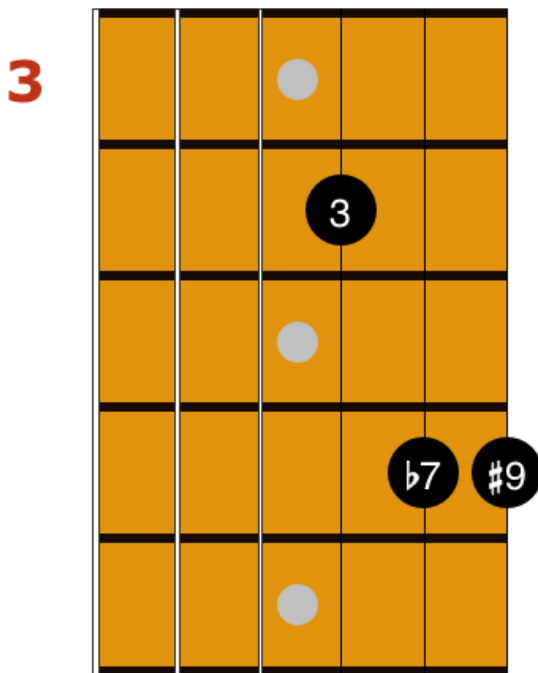
G7#9



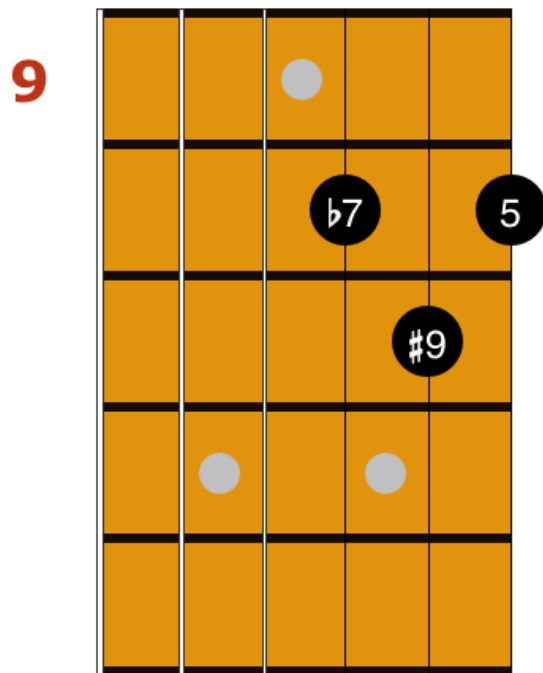
G7#9



G7#9



G7#9



Blues Chord Licks

After learning blues chord shapes on guitar, you can learn a few phrases that use chords in a soloing situation.

Each of these classic blues lines uses chords in different ways.

Learn each phrase in a few keys, then take these lines and concepts into your own solos to see how they fit into your soloing vocabulary.

The first chord lick uses a triplet riff to create a build up in the first bar, that's then released in the second bar.

After you play this lick over an A7 chord, take it to other keys and then add it to your blues solos to integrate this line into your playing.

Audio Example 13

The musical notation for Audio Example 13 is as follows:

Chord: A7

Staff 1 (Treble): 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet).

Staff 2 (Bass): 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet).

Staff 3 (Bass): 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet).

Staff 4 (Bass): 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet), 3 eighth notes (triplet).

The next line uses an A9 chord with a small bend on the upper note to reach up to the #9 in each chord.

Then, after a descending run you finish on an A9 chord in the lower register.

Bending notes within a chord is tough to do, but it's an essential concept when using chords in your riffs and solos.

After working this line in a few keys, experiment by adding bends to other chords in your vocabulary.

Audio Example 14

A7

7 5 6 7 5 6 7 5 6 7 5 6 5 7 5 6 7 6 5 3 4 5

The last line uses A7#9 chord shapes to create tension in this Stevie Ray Vaughan style line.

Remember, you can use 7#9 chords anywhere in a blues, though they fit most naturally on the V7 chord.

If you use them elsewhere, be prepared for the tension that the 7#9 chord creates, and then deal with that tension in your solos.

Work this line in a few keys, then take it to a full backing track as you expand on it in your practice routine.

Audio Example 15

The image shows a musical score for a guitar solo. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 7/8 time signature. The solo begins with a quarter rest, followed by an eighth note G4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, and an eighth note C5. The next measure contains a quarter note D5, a quarter note E5, and a quarter note F#5. The third measure features a quarter note G5, a quarter note F#5, and a quarter note E5. The fourth measure has a quarter note D5, a quarter note C5, and a quarter note B4. The fifth measure contains a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F#4. The sixth measure has a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The seventh measure features a quarter note B3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note G3. The eighth measure has a quarter note F#3, a quarter note E3, and a quarter note D3. The ninth measure contains a quarter note C3, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note A2. The tenth measure has a quarter note G2, a quarter note F#2, and a quarter note E2. The eleventh measure features a quarter note D3, a quarter note C3, and a quarter note B2. The twelfth measure has a quarter note A2, a quarter note G2, and a quarter note F#2. The thirteenth measure contains a quarter note E2, a quarter note D2, and a quarter note C2. The fourteenth measure has a quarter note B1, a quarter note A1, and a quarter note G1. The fifteenth measure features a quarter note F#1, a quarter note E1, and a quarter note D1. The sixteenth measure has a quarter note C1, a quarter note B0, and a quarter note A0. The solo ends with a double bar line. The chord progression is indicated by the A7 label above the first measure and the chord diagrams below the bass staff.

The bass staff shows the following chord diagrams for the A7 chord:

Measure	T	A	B
1	5-8	5	7
2	8-8	8-8	6-6
3	8-8	8-8	6-6
4	8-8	8-8	6-6
5	8-8	8-8	6-6
6	8-8	8-8	6-6
7	5	8-7-5	7
8	8-8	8-8	6-6
9	8-8	8-8	6-6
10	8-8	8-8	6-6
11	8-8	8-8	6-6
12	8-8	8-8	6-6
13	5	8-7-5	7
14	8-8	8-8	6-6
15	8-8	8-8	6-6
16	8-8	8-8	6-6
17	8-8	8-8	6-6

Solo With Blues Chords

You now take the blues chords from this chapter and use them to create a full solo over a blues progression.

After you can play this solo from memory, keep the single notes as is, but replace the chords with your own shapes.

Then, keep the chords as written and replace the single notes.

Finally, write your own blues solo using chords and single note concepts from this eBook to take things further in your playing.

Audio Example 16

A7

T
A
B

D7 **A7**

T
A
B

E7 **D7** **A7**

T
A
B

Blues Phrasing

Now that you know what to use in your blues solos, you learn how to organize your playing in the same way as legendary blues artists.

The first concept to address in your soloing workout is phrasing.

Guitarists are known for overplaying in our solos.

Because you don't have to breathe when you play guitar, you don't really ever have to stop playing.

And, many guitarists play non-stop lines in their solos, causing their playing to become predictable and probably boring.

To avoid this problem in your playing, and elevate your solos to the next level, you focus on phrasing exercises in this chapter.

Any of these exercises can be worked over any backing track, so play them over any and all backing tracks from this eBook.

Phrasing is something many beginner blues guitarists forget about in their solos.

But, it's a big part of the playing of your favorite blues artists.

Therefore it's worth spending time on in your practice routine.

Intro Phrasing Exercises

The first group of phrasing exercises follows the natural four-bar phrasing of the blues form in your soloing.


Because the blues form can be divided into three phrases of four-bars each, you begin by using those to break up your phrasing.

In the first exercise, you solo for two bars then leave two bars of silence in each four-bar phrase.


Put on any backing track from this guide and solo over it with this, and all exercises in this chapter, in your studies.

Make sure to nail each of these phrasing exercises even if they seem simple at your level of development.


These intro phrasing-exercises set you up to move on to the more advanced exercises in the last part of this chapter.



Solo _____ Silence



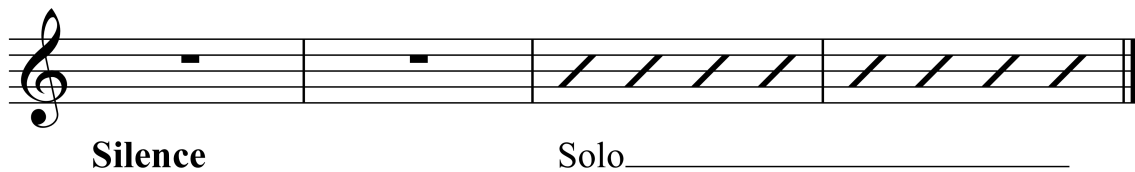
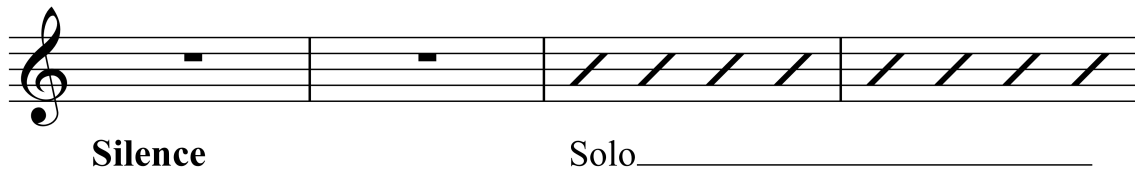
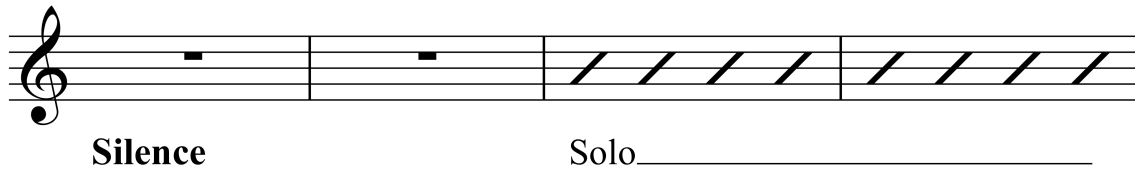
Solo _____ Silence



Solo _____ Silence

You now reverse the previous exercise as you rest in bars 1-2 and solo in bars 3-4 of each four-bar phrase.

When you have this exercise under your fingers, mix it up with the previous exercise to take your phrasing further.



In this exercise you solo in bars 2 and 3 of each four-bar phrase.

By doing so, you leave space at the start and end of each four-bar phrase in your blues solos.

This helps add breath to your solos and allows the band to react on either side of your lines.

Silence Solo _____ **Silence**

Silence Solo _____ **Silence**

Silence Solo _____ **Silence**

With this exercise you now solo for one bar, then rest two bars, then solo for a bar in each four-bar phrase.

This breaks up your lines in the middle of each four-bar phrase, as well as teaches you to solo over the phrase barriers.

Because you solo in bar 4, then bar 1, of each phrase, you start a line in bar 4 of one phrase and end it in bar 1 of the next.

This creates an unexpected phrasing outline that brings new levels of creativity to your playing.

Solo_____ **Silence** Solo_____

Solo_____ **Silence** Solo_____

Solo_____ **Silence** Solo_____


Intermediate Phrasing Exercises

You now move on to more challenging phrasing exercises that don't exactly outline the 4-bar blues phrase lengths.


The first exercise features a 3+2 phrasing outline.

Here, you solo for 3 bars, then rest for 2 bars, and repeat that phrasing combo for your entire solo.


Count along if needed and feel free to write out a solo using this phrasing outline before soloing with it in real time.



Solo _____ Silence



Silence Solo _____



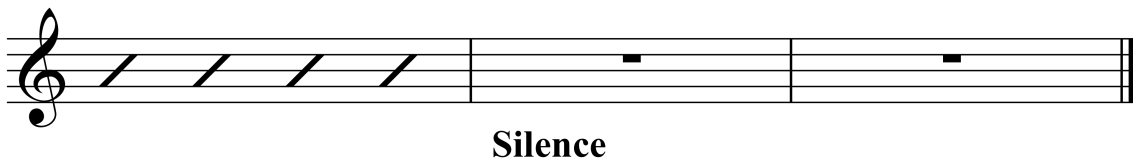
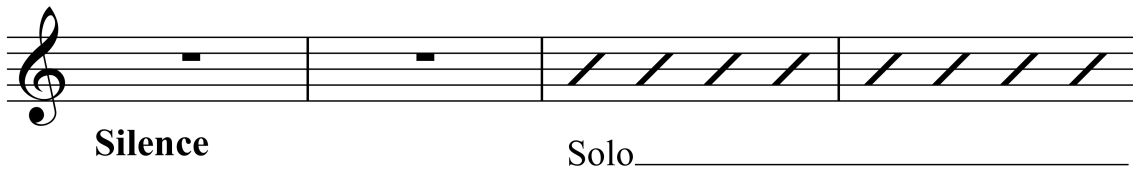
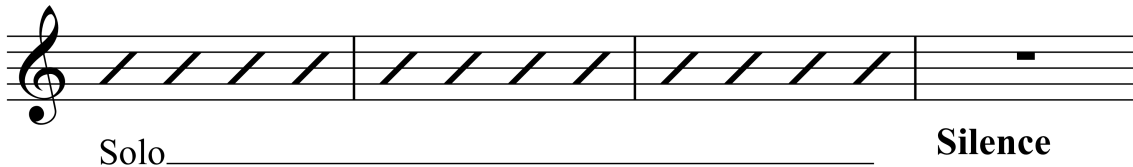
Silence Solo _____

With this phrasing exercise, you solo for 3 bars then rest for 3 bars.

This means that you don't use the four-bar phrasing of the blues as a guideline, you play over that phrasing with this exercise.

Make sure to count a long and go slow at first with this phrasing exercise.

Then, when you're comfortable with it, solo over any backing track with this phrasing outline as you take it to your real time solos.

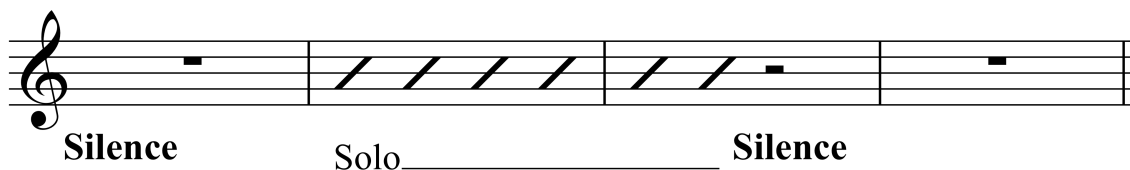
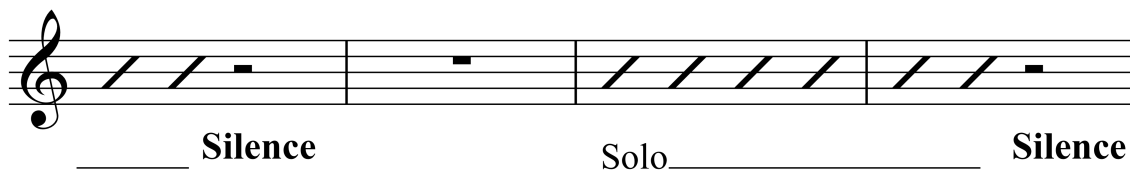


The final phrasing exercises are the toughest of the bunch, as you rest for 6 beats then solo for 6 beats.

This means that your phrases are 1.5 bars long, with both silence and your lines.

Count along, and write out the counting if needed, to really nail this phrasing over the backing tracks.

If it's helpful, write out a soloing study with this phrasing outline first, then work on soloing with this phrasing in real time.



Here's the reverse of the previous phrasing exercise, where you now rest for 6 beats then solo for 6 beats.

Go slow with this exercise, work it over backing tracks, and keep this chart in front of you as long as you need it.

Over time, you want to work towards soloing with this phrasing outline from memory.

If it's helpful, you can write a solo study with this phrasing outline before you create lines in the moment over backing tracks.

A musical staff in treble clef with four measures. The first measure contains a whole rest. The second and third measures contain diagonal slashes. The fourth measure contains a whole rest.

Silence **Solo**_____ **Silence**

A musical staff in treble clef with four measures. The first measure contains a whole rest. The second and third measures contain diagonal slashes. The fourth measure contains a whole rest.

Solo_____ **Silence** **Solo**_____

A musical staff in treble clef with four measures. The first measure contains diagonal slashes. The second and third measures contain whole rests. The fourth measure contains diagonal slashes.

_____ **Silence** **Silence** **Solo**_____

Blues Phrasing Solo

To finish your introduction to blues phrasing, here's a two-chorus solo that uses various phrasing concepts from this chapter.

After you learn to play this solo, with the audio example and backing track, write out your own solo with a focus on phrasing.

From there, your goal is to be able to solo over any blues tune and bring creative phrasing into your lines over that song.

Audio Example 17

A7

10 ^{full} 10 ^{1/2} 10-8 10-9 8 8 ^{full}

D7 **A7**

8 ^{full} 10 ^{1/2} 10-8 10-9 8 8 ^{full}

E7 **D7** **A7**

7 ^{full} 7-5 7 7 5 ^{full} 5 7-5 5 10 ^{1/2} 10-8 10-9 8 8 ^{full}

A7

T
A
B

D7 **A7**

T
A
B

E7 **D7** **A7**

T
A
B

About the Author

I grew up listening to rock, and I still love that music. But, it's soloing I really love, and that's what drew me to blues and jazz.

My love of blues and jazz has taken me from small town Canada around the globe.

I studied at three of the top jazz programs in the world, starting with McGill University, then Western Michigan, and finishing with a Doctorate from the University of Illinois (UIUC).

I've taught over 6000 private jazz guitar lessons, and my students range from beginners, to music Professors at NYU, and everything in between.

I've also taught jazz guitar, popular music, and music business at universities in Canada, the US, the UK, Brazil, and Nepal.

I've played over 2500 gigs in 8 countries and shared the stage with Randy Brecker, Stefon Harris, and Slide Hampton.

Some of my favorite gigs were at:

- Lincoln Center
- International Association for Jazz Education Conference
- NuJazz Festival (Brazil)
- Savassi Jazz Festival (Brazil)
- International Jazz Day Festival (Nepal)

Jazz and blues have been in my life for 20 years, and every day I'm glad I found these great genre.

Because of this, I want to share this love of blues and guitar with you.

You never know where it'll lead you.