

Easy Speed Building Exercises via Chromatic, Pentatonic & Major Scale Patterns

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URL: <https://www.guitarchalk.com/easy-speed-building-drills-one/>

QUICK HIT: The process I used to work on build speed, housed in chromatic, pentatonic and major scale exercises.

I've never been great at developing speed on the guitar. Part of that is because I'm so comfortable as a rhythm player. I understand bass and beat, and tend to employ a very rhythmic playing style.

It's like a have a tiny little Danny Carey up in my brain playing drums whenever I'm playing guitar or bass. That comfort does not translate to speed. I can employ a lot of finesse and refined movement, but I've never been fast. A couple years ago, I decided to more intentionally work on my speed.

Here's the order of topics I worked through:

- Alternate Picking
- Tremolo Picking

- Chromatic-Based Exercises
- Pentatonic-Based Exercises
- Major Scale-Based Exercises (tetrachord patterns)

What I've found is that the best ways to train for speed are really simple and - to an extent - boring. But, I have improved *a lot* in this area, especially with my picking technique.

In this lesson I'll outline some of the exercises I used starting with the chromatic scale, then finishing up with the major scale.

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Handling Alternate and Tremolo Picking

Having a handle on alternate and tremolo picking should be considered a pre-requisite to practicing speed. The exercises in this article assume you've had some experience and an understanding of both, though if you want to brush up, here are a couple Guitar World articles that cover both concepts:

- [The Ins and Outs of Alternate Picking](#)
- [Getting Started with Tremolo Picking](#)

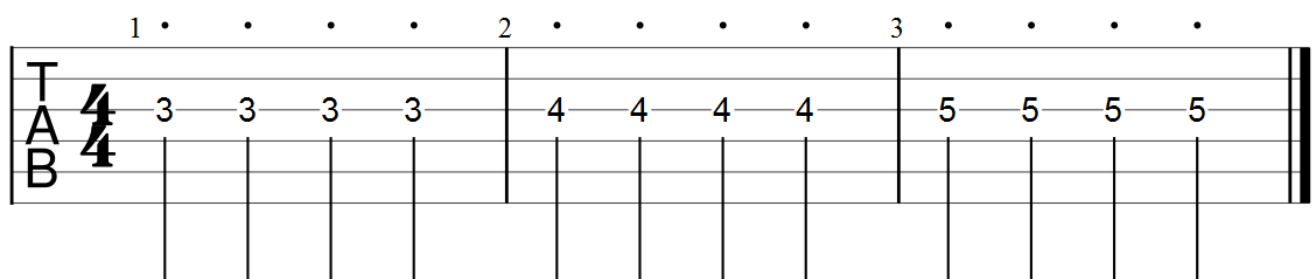
Improving right hand technique, especially with an eye towards speed, should be done before you work on what your left hand is doing.

Anytime I would practice tremolo or alternate picking - at least in the early stages - I would focus on playing really slowly with few notes.

As your picking abilities improve, you can then get into the exercises we'll cover here and start to add the left hand.

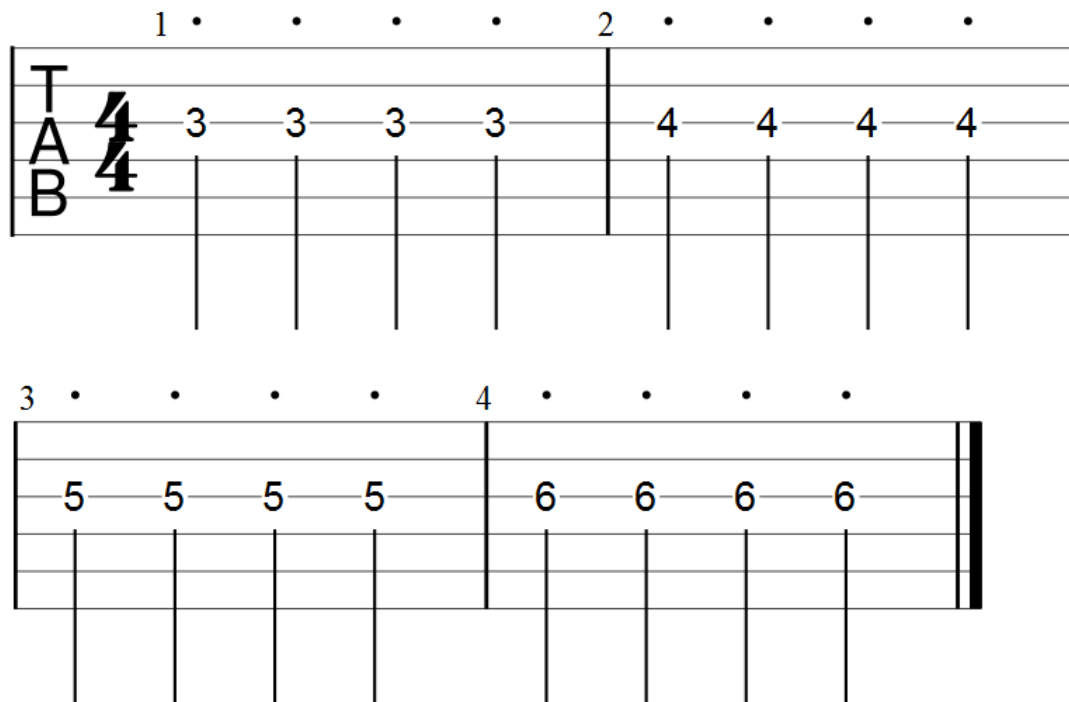
Chromatic Speed Exercises

Chromatic patterns simply refer to moving one half step at a time or, in guitar terms, one fret at a time. I started with three and four-note chromatic combinations, playing quarter and eighth notes for multiple measures, like this:



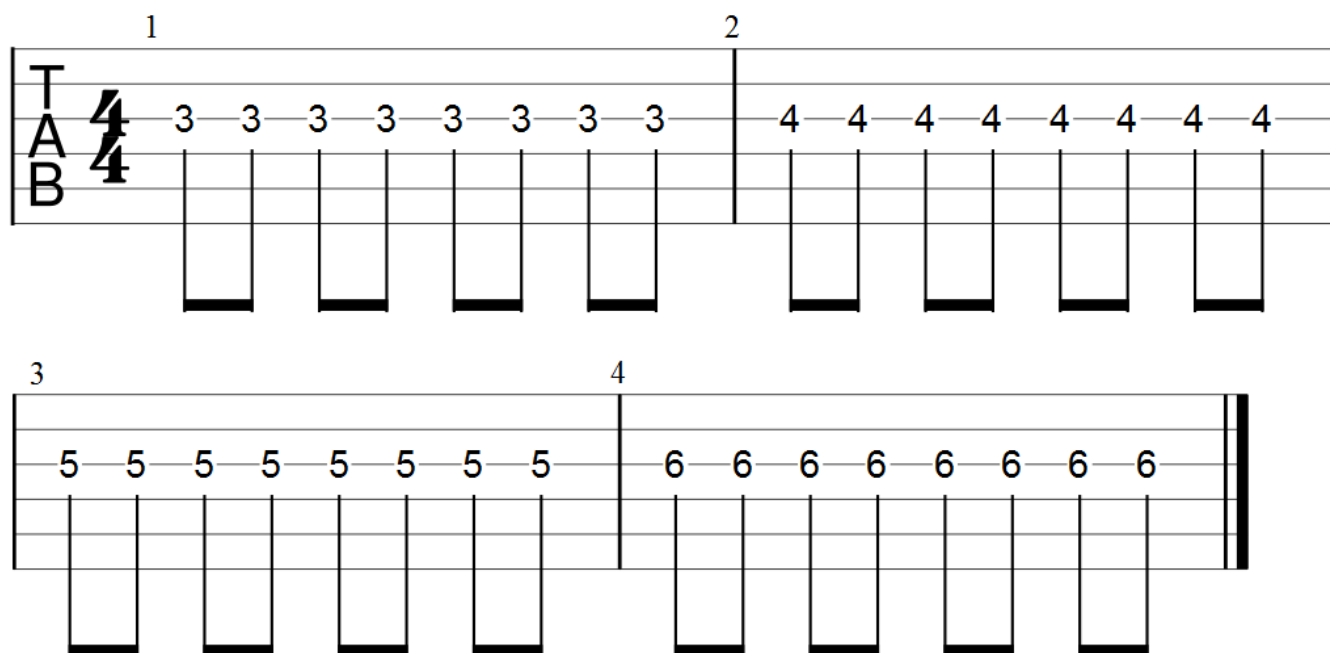
Start with a three-note chromatic exercise, moving up one semitone each measure. ([View Larger Image](#))

You don't have to add staccatos to each note, but it helps make each one more distinguished in the recording. Expand the exercise by adding a fourth note, giving you one for each finger.



We add a fourth bar of quarter notes (the sixth fret in this case) to expand the pattern and include our fourth finger. ([View Larger Image](#))

Now, instead of thinking in terms of speeding up tempo, lets just replace the quarter notes with eighth notes and use an alternate picking pattern to play two notes in place of where we were playing only one.



Replace each quarter note with an eighth note, keeping roughly the same tempo. ([View Larger Image](#))

Once you get comfortable with the difference in picking between quarter notes and eighth notes at this speed, you can start to vary the exercises a number of different ways. Here are the four simplest ways to change it up:

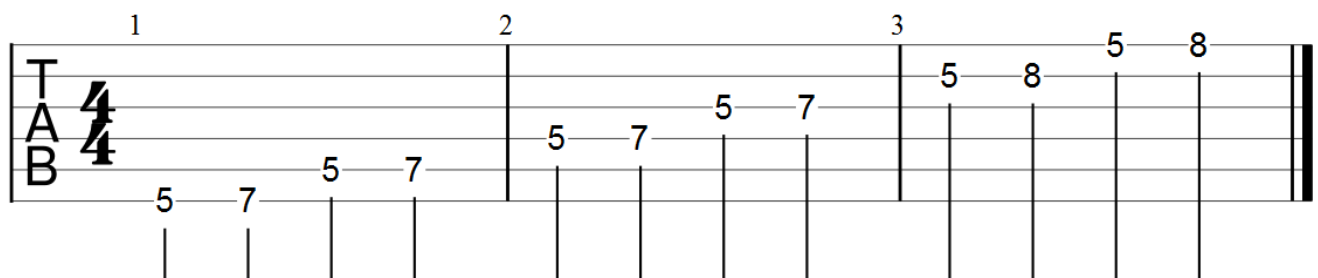
MODDING THE CHROMATIC EXERCISE

- Move the starting note to a different fret
- Move the starting note to a different string
- Change the tempo (speed up or slow down)
- Continue adding notes to the run (advance up or down the fretboard by adding bars to the end of the exercise)

I used some variance of the chromatic scale exercise for a long time, just to work on building chops and picking speed. It's *super helpful* for practicing tremolo picking, especially when you move into eighth notes. While the pattern itself isn't that exciting, it goes a long way towards getting your right and left hands ready for the more complex topic of pentatonic scale movement.

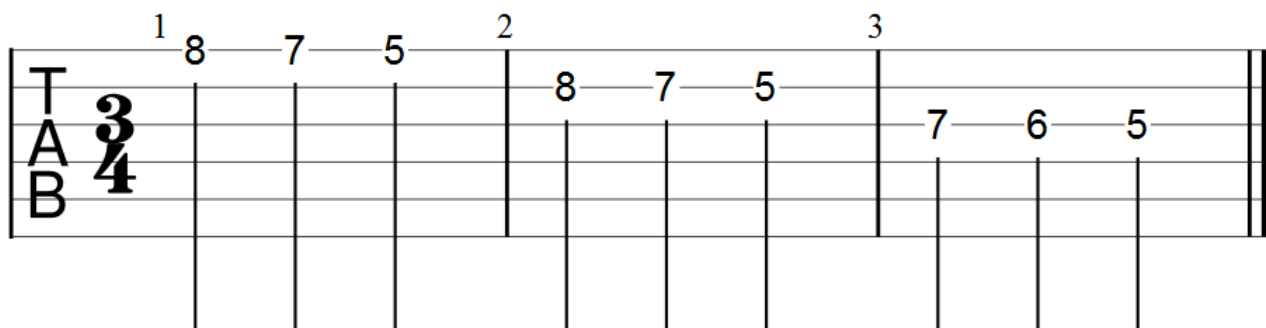
Pentatonic-Based Speed Exercises

After chromatic, the next pattern I used to work on speed were simple pentatonic scales. The easiest example is the minor pentatonic scale which, depending on the form, usually looks something like this:



Simple example of a pentatonic guitar scale segment. ([View Larger Image](#))

By making some small adjustments to this scale, we can come up with patterns that get our third and fourth fingers more involved in the movements.

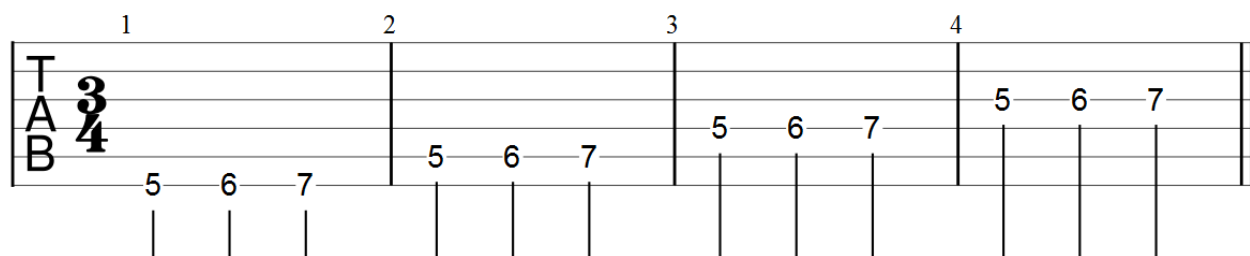


Using triplets and descending from the top of the minor pentatonic scale is a great way to exercise your fourth, third and first finger. ([View Larger Image](#))

Notice I've changed the time signature to 3/4 and I'm using triplets (three notes per measure) to walk down the minor pentatonic scale. This is helpful for building speed from the third to the fourth string, which is often a difficult transition to make quickly because you're moving from an unwound to a much thicker wound string.

As you can probably tell, there are a litany of ways to vary this and mix it up.

For example, we can start from the bottom of the scale and play up into the same pattern:

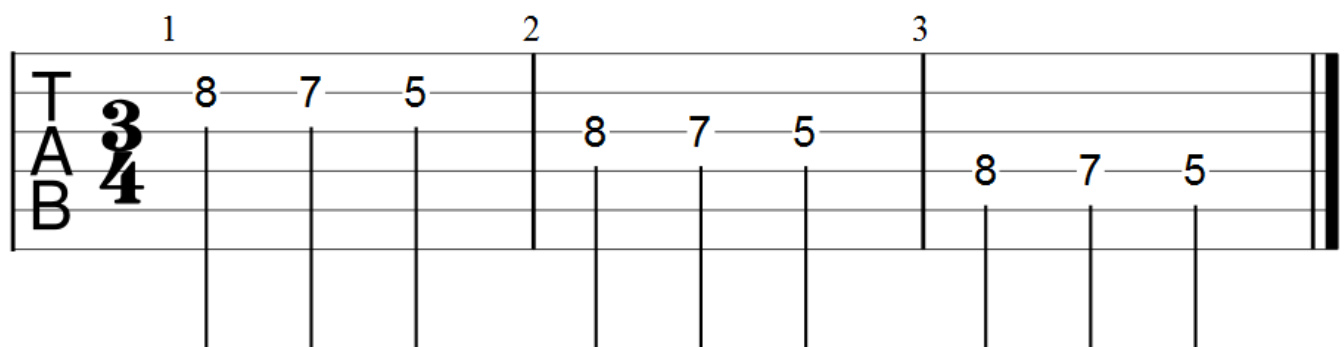


You can easily connect the exercise from bottom to top, then play through the full pattern. ([View Larger Image](#))

As you add notes, the scale becomes less of a *strict* minor pentatonic and more of a loosely formed exercise. However, you're still working with a pentatonic pattern and a line of notes that's inspired by the original scale shape.

To get comfortable with the tab and start building speed, I'd recommend working on small sections at a time.

For example, I mentioned that the transition from the third to fourth string is often difficult. If that's true for you, spend some time on *just* that section of the pattern:



Focusing on a particular area of the exercise. ([View Larger Image](#))

Once again, you can use the previous list of modding tactics to get more mileage out of the shape and continue to expand your speed exercises.

- Move the starting note to a different fret
- Move the starting note to a different string
- Change the tempo (speed up or slow down)
- Continue adding notes to the run (advance up or down the fretboard by adding bars to the end of the exercise)

Major Scale-Based Speed Exercises

Chromatic and pentatonic scales are two of the most common melodic patterns used when it comes to building speed. However, I've found that exercises based in the major scale are some of the most effective ways to build speed and are often under-utilized.

They also allow you to break patterns down into really simple melody lines called tetrachords, which are made up of two whole steps and one half step. To get the major scale, you have two tetrachords separated by one whole step.



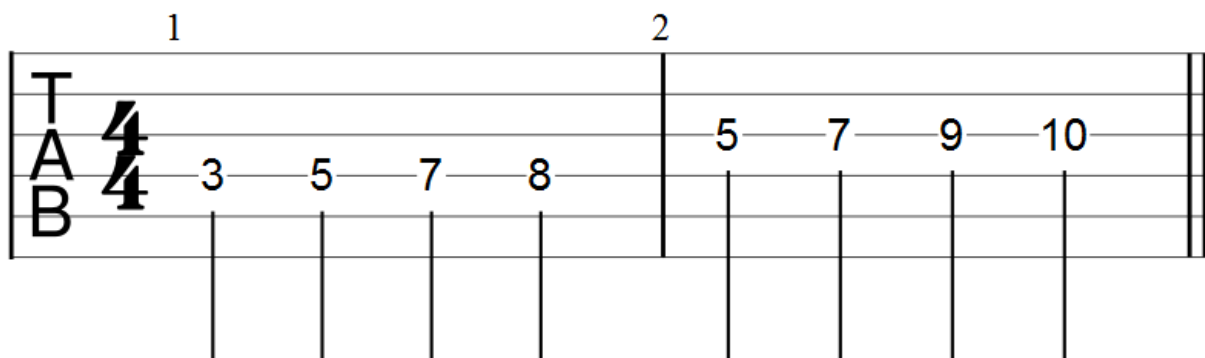
([View Larger Image](#))

Thus, we can start our speed-building exercise anyway on the fret board and implement this pattern.

For example, let's say you wanted to start on the fourth string at the third fret. We'd just start moving up in the whole and half step increments listed above:

A single tetrachord pattern can get our speed exercise started. ([View Larger Image](#))

To expand the exercise we can move the pattern up to the fifth fret on the third string and simply repeat it. You can hear the "doe-ray-me" tune in the audio sample:

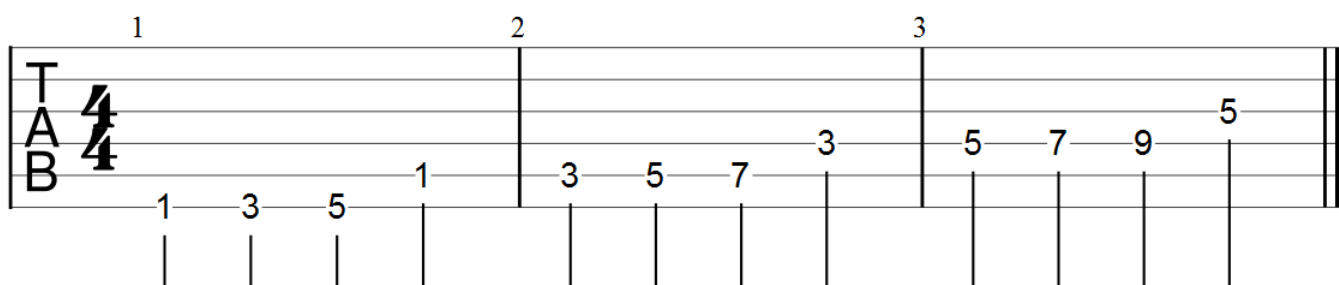


We repeat the tetrachord pattern on the third string. ([View Larger Image](#))

It's easy to hear the major scale in this pattern and to identify it as you go. You'll find that practicing melodic shapes like the one above stretches your third and fourth fingers and gets you out of the familiar boxed pentatonic shape in favor of a more open left hand position.

We can continue the process, either vertically (string to string) or horizontally (moving up or down to different frets).

Here's one more example:



Using additional strings and frets to expand the exercise. ([View Larger Image](#))

Playing These Patterns Faster

What I've showed you up to this point is a lot of structure, as well as methods for varying those structures. What's a little more difficult to explain is how to play these patterns quicker, short of going back to our original example of playing eighth notes in place of quarter notes.

You could also increase the tempo on your own.

Listen to the difference in the audio from the previous example at the following BPMs:

120 BPM:

145 BPM:

185 BPM:

235 BPM:

It helps a lot to hear what you're playing at different speeds before you start to try and speed up on your own. Aside from simply pushing yourself to the limit of how fast you're able to play, I would advise also taking speed drills with really small pieces of scales at a time.

With any one of the patterns we've already gone over, break them down even further, perhaps by finger, fret or simple three and four note groupings.

Use those segments to work on speed, then put them all together once you've covered each one individually.

It's not the most exciting way to practice, but it's simple, and it does help you play faster.

Questions and Comments

If you have questions about this lesson, comments or have additional thoughts, feel free to leave those in the comments section below. It's vastly easier for me to respond to you directly there, rather than through email. It also means that people who read this lesson in the future could potentially benefit from our dialogue.

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