

Chord Workshop 2020 – Day 11: Intermediate Chord Relativity

At this point in the course you've seen the chart below and hopefully started memorizing at least some of the relatives:

Chord/ Scale	Relative Minor
C	Am
C#	A#m
D	Bm
D#	Cm
E	C#m
F	Dm
F#	D#m
G	Em
G#	Fm
A	F#m
A#	Gm
B	G#m

Chord/ Scale	Relative Minor
C = C - E - G	Am = A - C - E
C# = C# - F - G#	A#m = A# - C# - F
D = D - F# - A	Bm = B - D - F#
D# = D# - G - A#	Cm = C - D# - G
E = E - G# - B	C#m = C# - E - G#
F = F - A - C	Dm = D - F - A
F# = F# - A# - C#	D#m = D# - F# - A#
G = G - B - D	Em = E - G - B
G# = G# - C - D#	Fm = F - G# - C
A = A - C# - E	F#m = F# - A - C#
A# = A# - D - F	Gm = G - A# - D
B = B - D# - F#	G#m = G# - B - D#

It's a lot to remember, but you have all the time in the world. The most important ones that I personally recommend you remember are these:

C Major = Am | D Major = Bm | E = C#m | F = Dm | G = Em | A = F#m

Now, keep in mind that the = sign here doesn't technically mean that these chords are 100% the same thing. Unlike specific notes such as A# = Bb and C# = Db (where these notes ARE the same thing) these = signs really mean that they basically work together as relatives.

So, how might we USE these chords in a real world setting, right?
That's what you'll learn today.

First, let's take a basic chord progression run using C Major as our initial guideline. When you play the progression below, you'll find that it sounds great all on its own. However, if you were to play the relative minor progression over it, you'll find it sounds strange. This works both ways. The video will help you there. So, what you might be wondering is this . . . “Why do we learn relatives?”

It's not to play a simultaneous chord progression with another artist. In other words, a common misconception is that if a person is strumming a chord progression from the key of C Major using I – IV – I – V (C – F – C – G) then another musician can strum a chord progression of Am – Dm – Am – Em to accompany them. Yeah, that's not really how it works.

However, the key word here is strumming. Sure, you can pick out some Am notes over a C Major chord, but that's not the same thing, and it's highly likely that IF you make it sound good, you're really playing the relative tones of a given chord. The real point of relative chords are built on these two concepts:

Concept 1: Altering the mood of a given progression. Let's say you play C – F – C – G (I – IV – I – V) and find that you just don't feel it has enough mood to it. Maybe it's too happy or just bland. Well, this is where you start messing around with ideas. You can change the “feel” of it using a variety of concepts:

- I – IV - V

C – F - G
- I – vi – IV – V

C – Am – F – G
- ii – V – I

Dm – G – C
- I – vi – ii – V

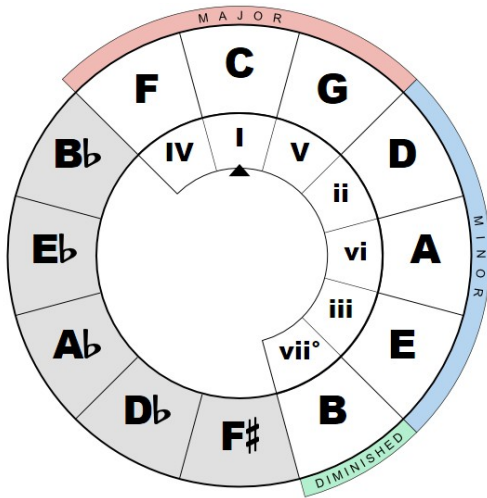
C – Am – Dm – G
- I – V – vi – IV

C – G – Am – F
- I – IV – vi – V

C – F – Am – G
- I – iii – IV – V

C – Em – F – G
- I – IV – ii – V

C – F – Dm – G



This is very much self-explanatory, but I went ahead and included the C Major Circle of Fifths chart for reference.

As with any previous installment, you're just plugging in the notes to make them chords based on the Roman Numerals.

We aren't using the B° chord, but we do have all of the other available chords to check out.

When you equate those to blocks as we have done in the past, you'll find the same result below.

C	D	E	F	G	A	B
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C Major	Dm	Em	F Major	G Major	Am	B°
I	ii	iii	IV	V	Vi	vii°

If NONE of those give you the mood you're looking for in terms of a given progression, then you can easily alter them as you see fit from the relative minor chord and get a slightly different overall set of chords, such as:

- i – iv - v

Am – Dm – Em
- i – VI – iv – v

Am – F – Dm - Em
- ii° – v – i

B° – Em – Am
- i – VI – ii° – v

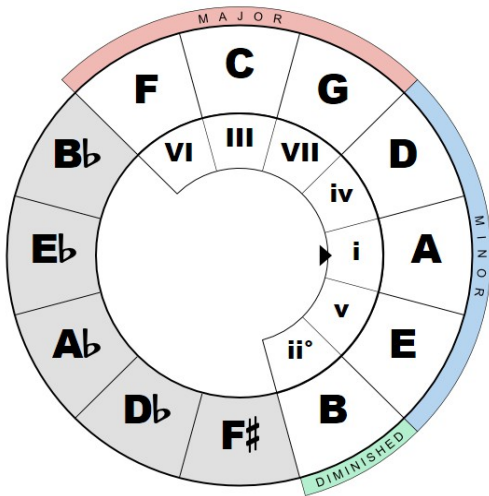
Am – F – B° – Em
- i – v – VI – iv

Am – Em - F – Dm
- i – iv – VI – v

Am – Dm – F – Em
- i – III – iv – v

Am – C – Dm – Em
- i – iv – ii° – v

Am – Dm – B° – Em



This time we are using the SAME formula “setup” to the far left. We just reflect the case sensitivity. You'll end up with all the same chords, but they will sound different in arrangement.

You're just plugging in the notes to make them chords based on the Roman Numerals.

We are using the B° chord to reflect the same formula, but it's not really required. It's just to relate the same concept.

When you equate those to blocks as we have done in the past, you'll find the same result below.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Am	B°	C Major	Dm	Em	F Major	G Major
i	ii°	III	iv	v	VI	VII

Chords in the I (i) – IV (iv) – V (v) will end up being relatives, which are indicated as respective colors between the table above and the table below.

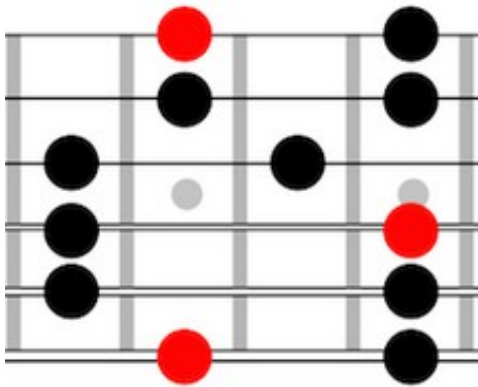
C	D	E	F	G	A	B
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C Major	Dm	Em	F Major	G Major	Am	B°
I	ii	iii	IV	V	Vi	vii°

However, once you go beyond those you'll find that the progressions don't really line up.

So, when you think of the first concept of progressions, you're really just trying to come up with a progression that sounds right to you in a given moment. There are no “correct” answers as it's all subjective. One progression might sound great to you throughout, and then there might be a spot or two (or fifty) that won't sound right to you. That's where you must decide how you want to approach a given progression. We'll cover extending/altering a given chord progression (such as Cmaj7, which is actually labeled as a Imaj7, etc.) later on. For now, I'd like to dive into the second concept – and THIS is where I think the real magic happens.

Concept #2: Relatives are very fun to use when comping/playing lead guitar. You don't have to do anything special. It's just the idea of hearing how each tone from the Major key (scale) works hand-in-hand with the relative minor key (scale) . . .

Your physical ability to play the passage below doesn't matter. All I want you to do is play the notes as they are shown on the tab. There's no tempo and there's not a single note value. It's just picking out tones on a per-string basis.



What's the first thing you notice? The red dots, right? Well, those are where you'll find the “key” you want to play in – and it's no different than the overall style of a given chord. In this case you'll find that the red dots (roots) are on the E strings and the G string. How about we think of this as being the C Pentatonic Major scale real quick.

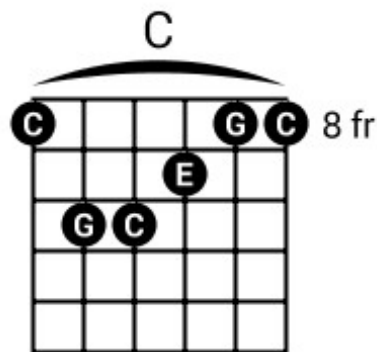
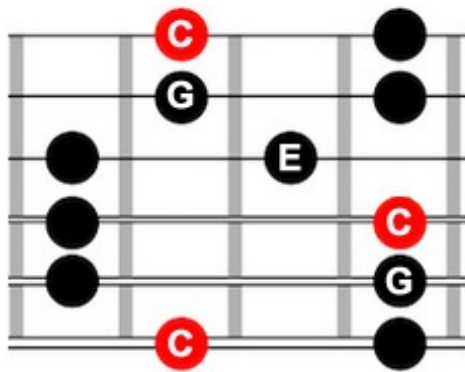
- Penta = 5 STABLE tones that come from the full Major or minor scale
- 3 of the 5 tones will be *in the chord* that comes from the scale
- 1 of the 5 tones will be the relative Major or minor note
- 1 of the 5 tones will be determined in a moment

If we are thinking of this being C Pentatonic Major, we should really label this diagram, right? I'll go ahead and tell you the notes we need to use, which are C – D – E – G – A. You can immediately recognize that C – E – G are the 1 – 3 – 5 of the C Major chord.

Obviously those dudes will be in there and work fine. You also (hopefully) know by now that the A note is the relative note of C Major. We'd think of it as an Am chord, but the A note is still in there. Thus, it MUST work. So, the one and only tone that we haven't fully addressed here is the D note. It's in the C Pentatonic Major scale, so it's stable.

All Pentatonic scales (Major or minor) are stable. They simply remove 2 of the 7 tones in a standard scale to guarantee those notes don't go all weird and sound somewhat dissonant (or unstable). That's all you need to worry about for now.

First we just have the tones that are part of the C Major chord itself, so that's C, E, G:



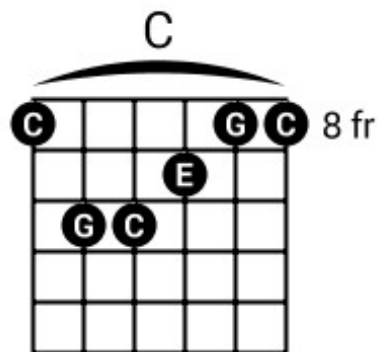
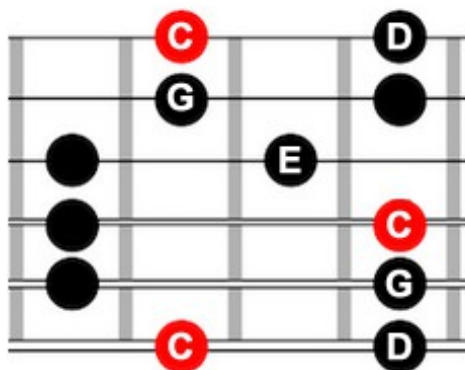
This should be very easy to notice as we are merely forming our famous **E Style C Major** barre chord.

Sure, the Pentatonic scale to the far left includes more notes, but the C Major barre chord is definitely obvious in there.

How do we find the rest of the notes?

The basic method is just counting each fret from the lowest to the highest strings until you land on a dot.

Based on the 12 notes in music, the C# would be after the C note. Well, we don't have a dot there. So, skip it. Instead, the next note will be a D note. You can place those on ANY available dot where there's a space. In this case it's the low E and high E strings.



From here on out it's just a simple plot point.

You'll be able to work forwards or backwards to get your notes.

If you look at the A string you'll find the G note. That's part of the C Major chord. Keep stepping back until you land on a dot.

Your result will be an E note.

(G → F#/Gb* → F – **E**) **easiest to use Gb since you're moving back*

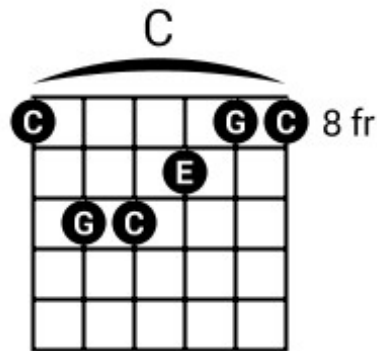
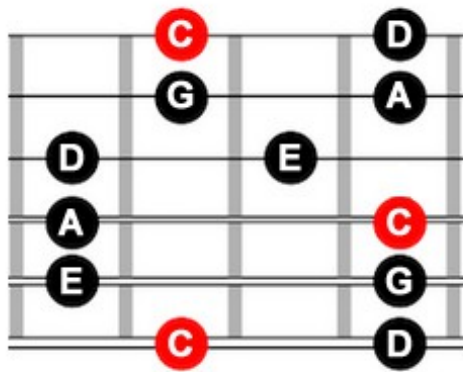
So, while this version of the C Major chord didn't include that E note on the 5th fret A string, it's still in the C Pentatonic Major scale. This is going to happen often. The good news is that if you know the chord shape and the notes used, all you do is plug in the notes that you can identify.

D string? You can count backwards from your C note and get A (C → B → A#/Bb* → **A**)

G string? You can count backwards from the E note and get D. (E → D#/Eb* → **E**)

B string? You can count forward from G and get A. (G → G#*/Ab → **A**) **easiest to use G# since you're moving forward*

Bam. That's your C Pentatonic Major scale. You only needed the 3 tones in the C Major chord to get all the notes it uses.



What else do you notice here? If you start from the low strings to the high strings, it's all alphabetical.

C – D – E – G – A – C – D – E – G – A – C – D

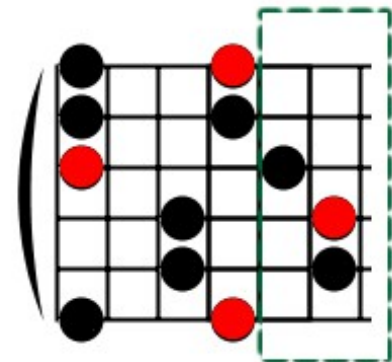
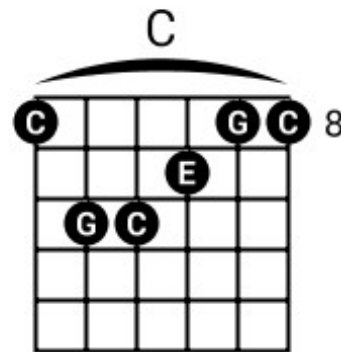
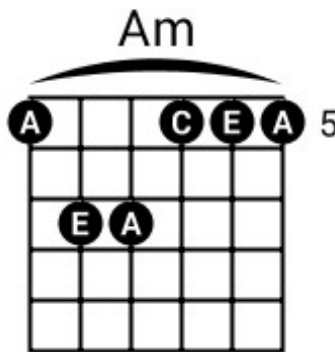
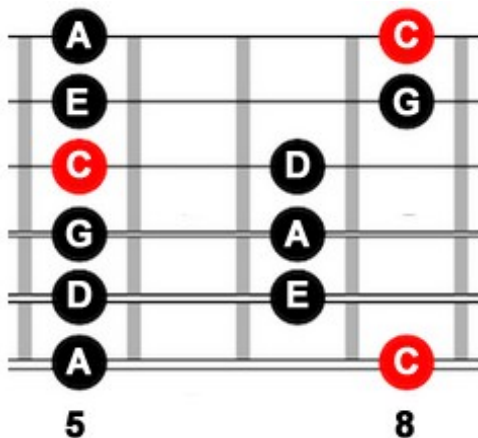
Yet we only have 5 tones.

You might have also noticed that I have labeled the chord diagram with the root note on the 8th fret to indicate C Major.

We'll do something with that in a moment. The next step might be to consider the relative chord of C Major. That's Am. It uses A, C, E – and all of those notes are also in the C Pentatonic Major scale. So, the pattern above is BOTH the C Pentatonic Major scale and the Am Pentatonic scale. The one and only differences are the red dots, which here indicate we are playing “in C” basically.

However, since all Pentatonics are considered stable, this C Pentatonic Major scale pattern can be played over a key of C Major chord progression OR a key of Am chord progression. Does that mean you only have to learn the scale pattern above to be able to play a phrase or comping pattern in either key? Yep. THAT is what I consider the real magic of chord relativity. It's not just chord relativity. It's also scale relativity.

You won't likely recognize the Am that is hiding in the C Pentatonic Major (Am Pentatonic) scale pattern above, but it technically is. We just won't usually play it the way it's seen above. Instead, we might consider another Pentatonic shape. It's the one I use pretty much always when I'm testing the “comp/lead” waters:



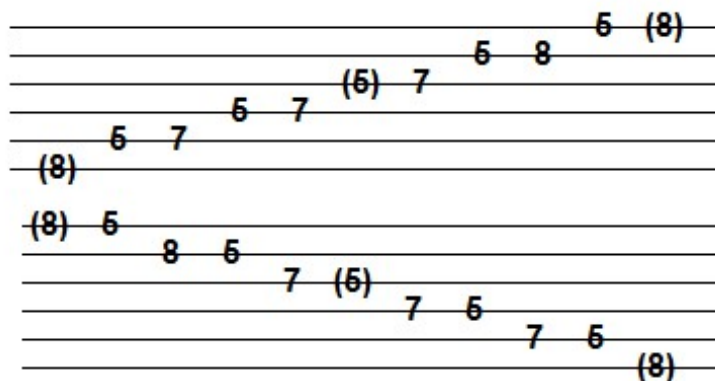
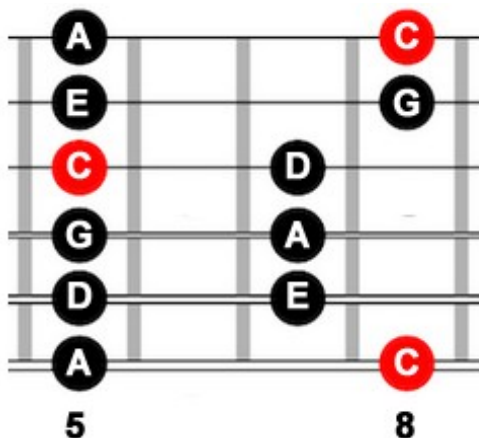
Notice that our overall pattern HAS changed somewhat. Or has it? Well, ok yes it has . . . a little. This particular diagram is showing you the “Am” side of things, but we still have our red dots on C Major. The reason is because we can play within Am (even in the key of C Major) and ultimately TRY our best to get back to our initial root of C. We don't have to do that, but it's generally a good idea.

What this is showing you is how to navigate within Am and C, with our overall goal being “mostly” in C. The Am barre chord here is an **E Style Am barre chord** because it uses the Em shape. You can also call it “Em style Am” but that's a mouthful. That specific chord is clearly illustrated in the Pentatonic scale pattern. Just look for any A – C – E arrangement and you basically have the Am. The C Major barre chord (E Style C Major) is included as a pickup point for the 8th fret. The Pentatonic pattern doesn't go all the way past the 8th fret, but it could. That's what you saw in the first Pentatonic diagram. It's also *partially* shown again in the dotted green box – but I just used the actual C Major chord there.

So, while you have 2 Pentatonic templates you CAN work with, you can use the last one from above and get both worlds. That's what I'll have you do today. Your goal will be to play that Pentatonic pattern from directly above both as a basic Major and minor run. This won't be hard at all – I'll be giving you the notes. The point here is to listen to how these tones work well based on relativity. After all, I did mention earlier that you don't really want to strum along with a Major progression and strum a relative minor – or vice versa – because it's going to sound strange. What you CAN do with relative chords/scales is listen to how the tones work very well with each other. The first one is going to be really easy, but I'm also going to throw you a massive curveball for fun. You'll get it, but it might take a moment.

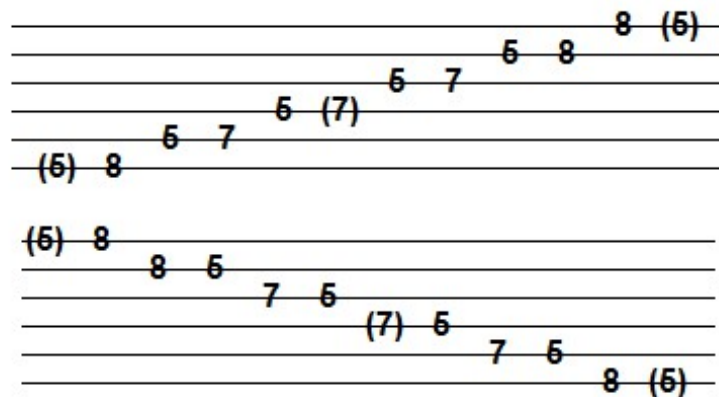
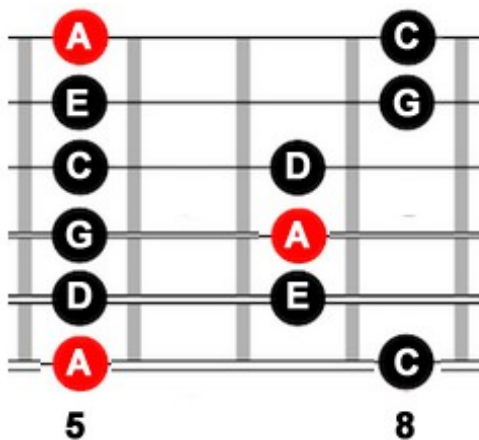
Here's the first example as a guideline. I don't care a single thing about fingerings, but you'll probably do best to use your 1st and 4th fingers for the bigger fret space movements. The ones with only one fret space between them are best played with your 1st and 3rd fingers.

#1a: Play the Pentatonic scale below over a backing track in Am but try to focus on the C tone:



#1b: Play the same scale below over a backing track in Am but try to focus on the A tone:

Hint: THIS time you'll want to think of the A root note this time!



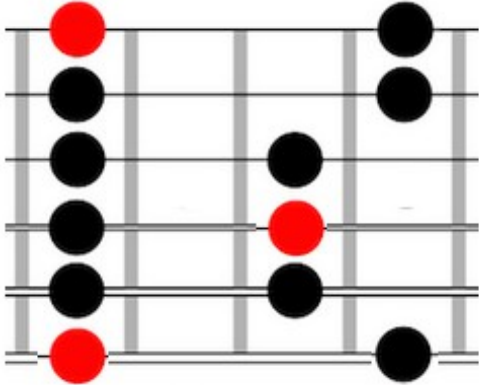
What you're going to find out here is that they both work simply because they ARE the same thing. Granted, one starts (and preferably ends) with a tonic/root based on the overall key, but even then both the “C” and the “A” notes work well together.

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I'll push you one step further below (still just using the same pattern template from above) and have you playing in NEW keys entirely. The fun part with this one is you'll just have dots. All you need to do is think of the stylization of the open Em chord and place the roots where they go!

#2: Play the Pentatonic scale below over a backing track in Dm and focus on the D tone:

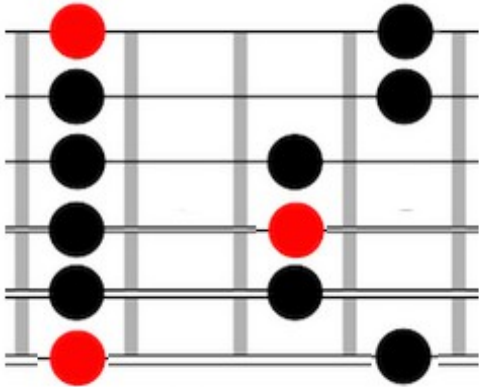
Hint: Use the D note on the 10th fret Low E string



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#3: Play the Pentatonic scale below over a backing track in D Major but try to focus on the B tone (for Bm):

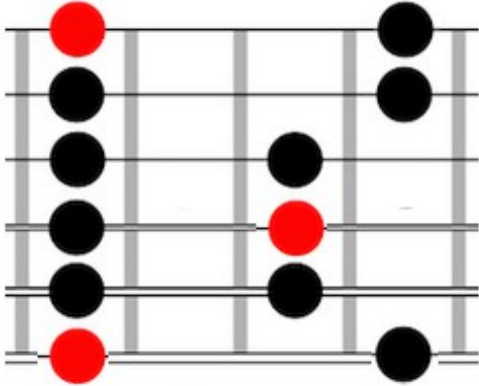
Hint: Use the B note on the 7th fret Low E string



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#4: Play the Pentatonic scale below over a backing track in B Major but try to focus on the G# tone (for G#m):

Hint: Use the G# note on the 4th fret Low E string



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