

BLUES BOXES

with the

MAJOR AND MINOR

ROOT NOTES.

by **Griff Hamlin**

Blues Boxes WITH THE Major & Minor Root Notes.

One of the most common sticking points with people learning to solo in blues is this concept of switching between the major and the minor blues sounds.

My goal with this report, and the accompanying videos, is to hopefully help you with your mental model of the blues and pentatonic scales, how they go together, and how you can mentally “see” them easier.

I like to think of soloing and improvising in levels. I also believe there are mechanics – how to play something. And there are “what to play” concepts. You might see me refer to these things as “**hows**” and “**whats**” so you’ll know what I mean.

So let’s look at these levels as I think of them:

The Highest Level – 100% Whats

At this level, you never consciously think about how to play anything. You are able to look at music as a whole and to decide what you sound you want to hear at any given moment – and you are able to rely on your fingers to play whatever you imagine.

I don’t know anyone personally who plays in this state 100% of the time. I, and many professional guitarists I know, live here 90% of the time or more, and only venture out of it when we want to challenge ourselves with new sounds or concepts that we haven’t completely learned yet.

The Lowest Level – 100% Hows

Technically speaking, this would be a beginner who cannot play a note. But for our purposes I’m going to define this level as someone who has skill on the guitar, but is just starting to learn and memorize scales and patterns for soloing. Nothing is committed to memory yet, and whenever a student at this level solos, it basically sounds like a scale.

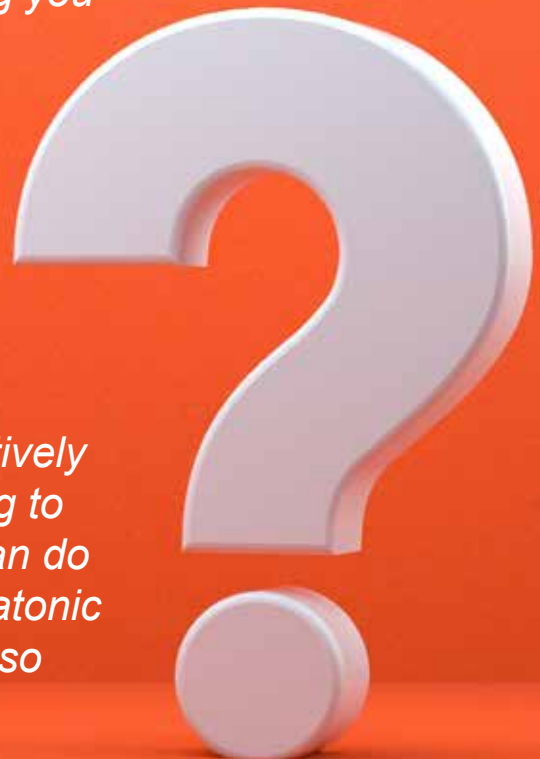
Where are you? You are probably somewhere in between, most people are.

You might have a couple of scales memorized and you can play them, but when it comes to improvising you sometimes get lost.

Those times when you get lost are the hows getting in the way because you're having to divert your energy from what to play to remember how to play something.

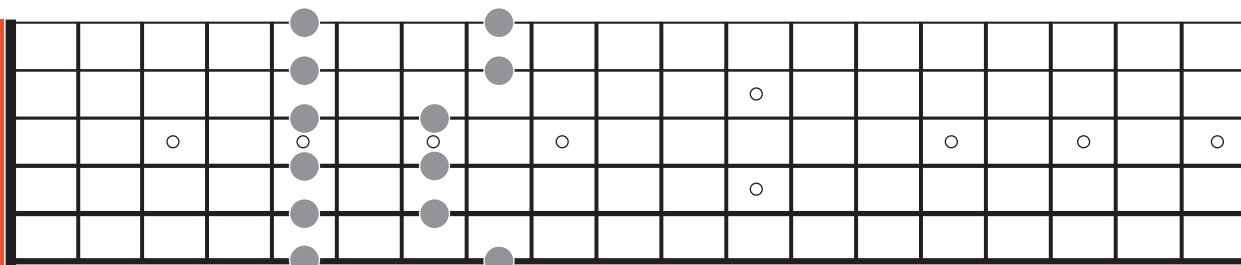
Pentatonic and Blues scales are effectively equivalent. For the most part, I'm going to deal with pentatonic scales, but you can do blues scales instead if you want. Pentatonic scales are cleaner as far as diagrams so they're a little easier to work with.

Before we get started, here are the 5 pentatonic boxes in the way I look at them...

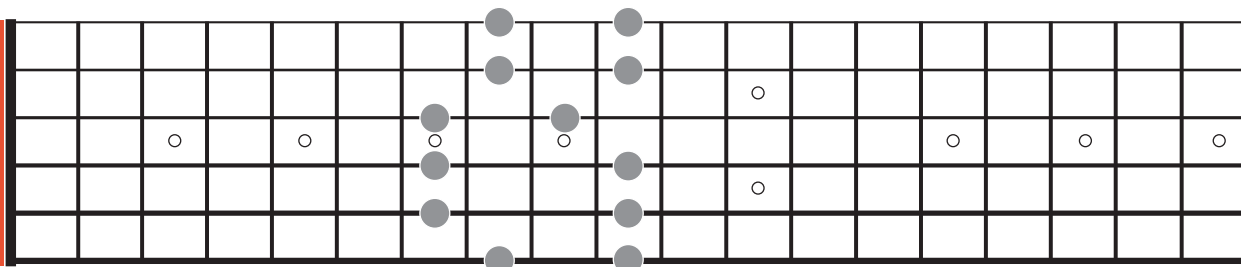


Pentatonic Boxes – Key of Aminor/Cmajor

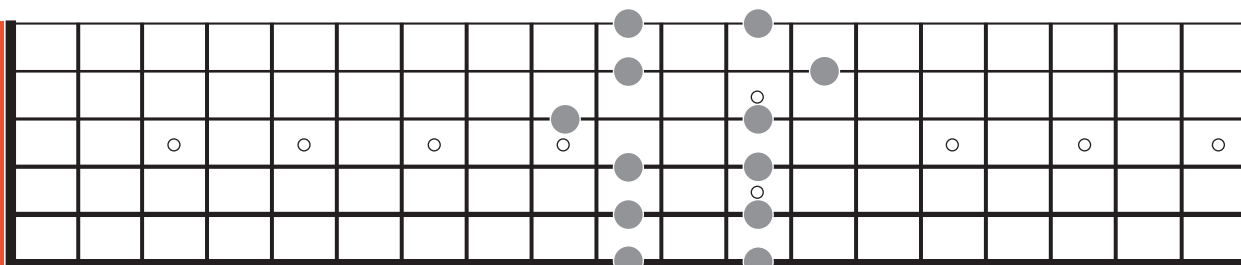
BOX 1



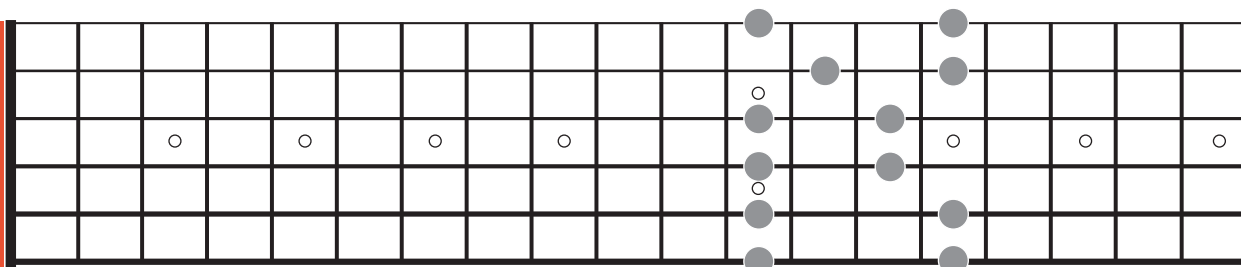
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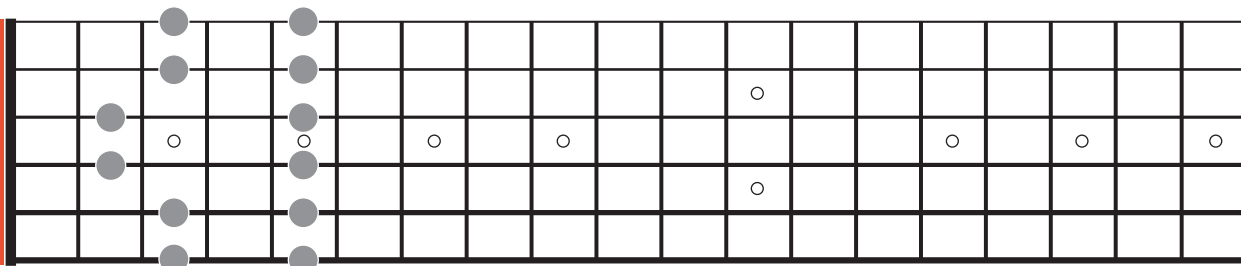
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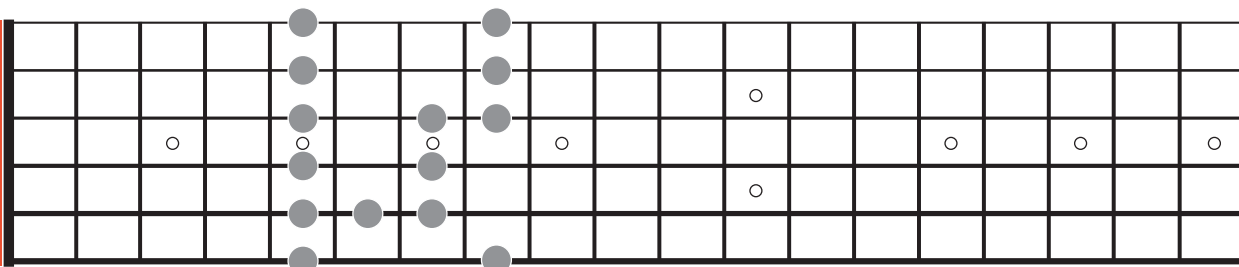
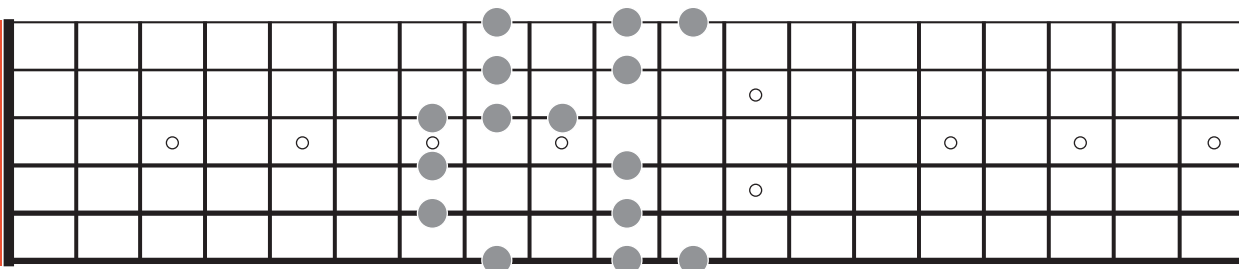
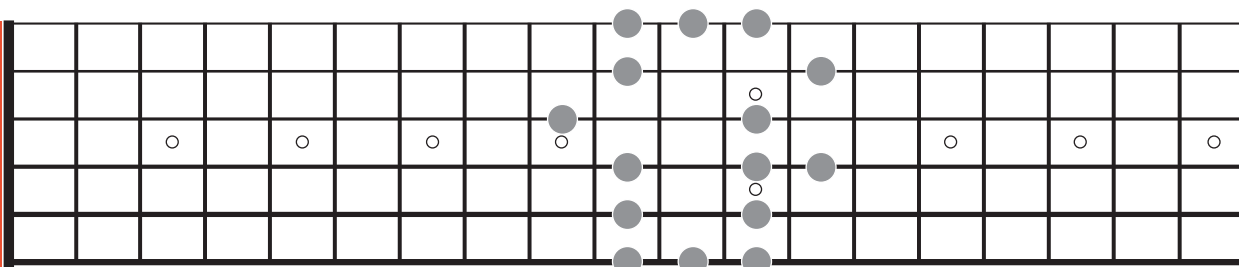
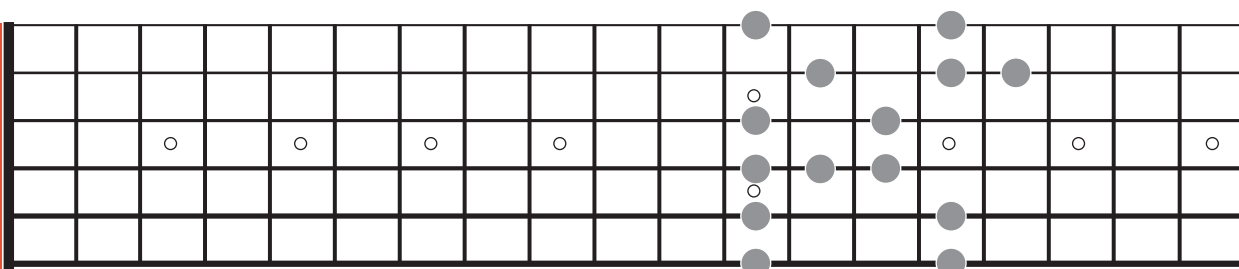
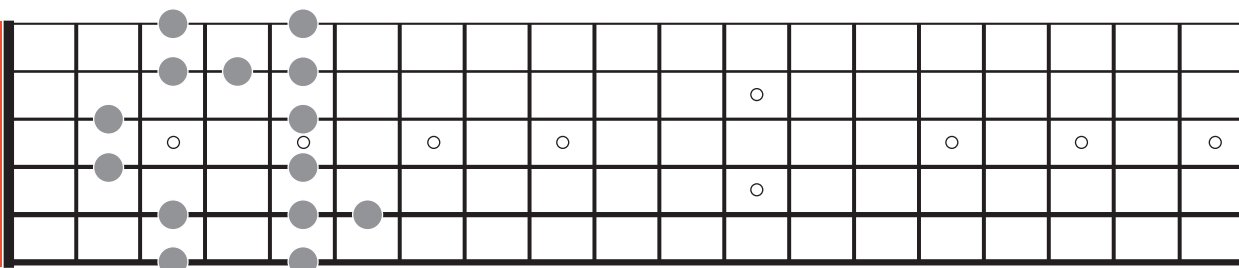
BOX 4



BOX 5



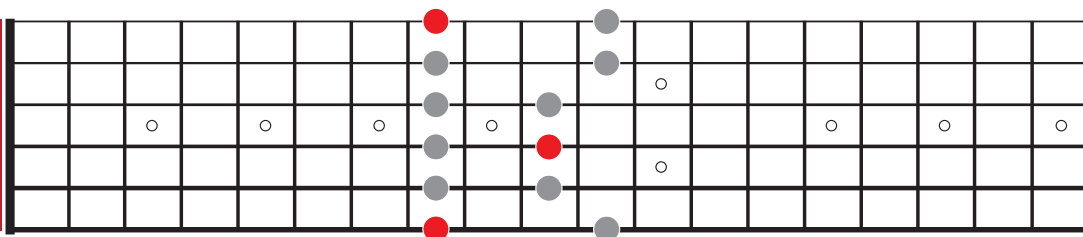
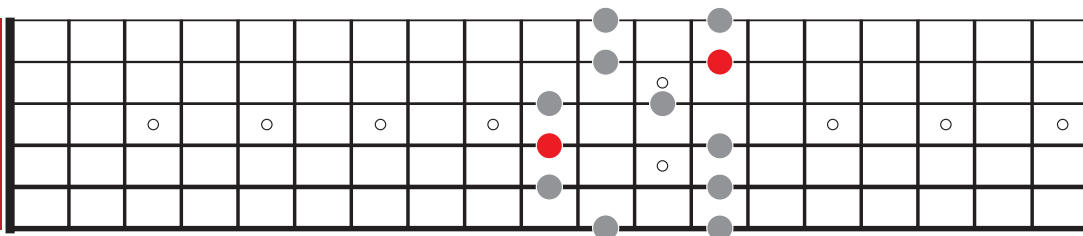
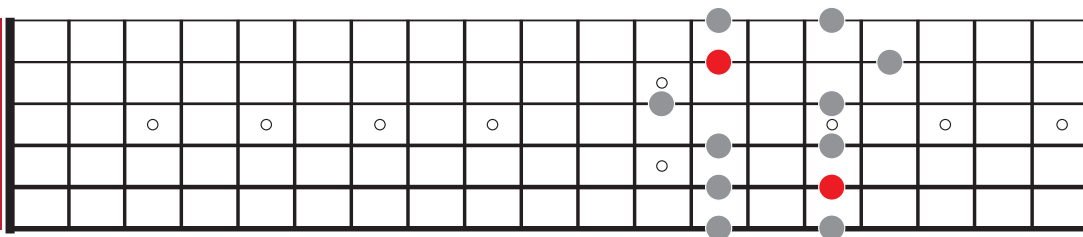
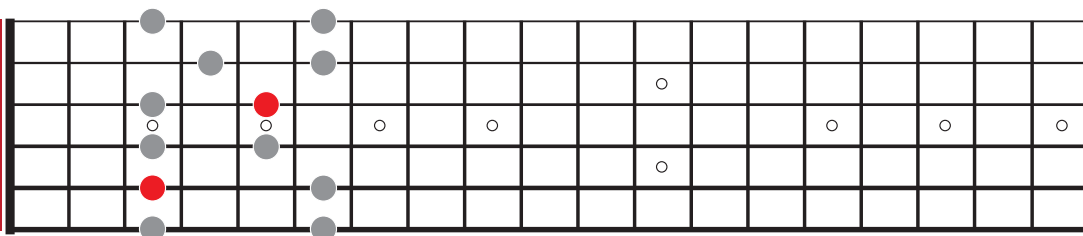
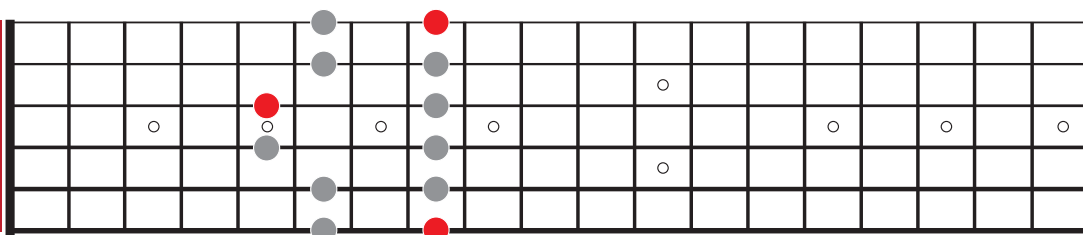
And next we'll need the blues boxes just so you can see....

Blues Boxes - Key of Aminor/Cmajor**BOX 1****BOX 2****BOX 3****BOX 4****BOX 5**

You Want To Play All 5 Boxes In The Key Of “X” Minor.

All 5 boxes fit together – all the time – no matter what. The lowest note of box 2 is always 3 frets above the lowest note of box 1. The lowest note of box 3 is always 2 frets above the lowest note of box 2, etc.

So let’s look at all 5 boxes in the key of C Minor. These will be the same boxes as before, but now we’ll label the root notes in **Red**.

BOX 1

BOX 2

BOX 3

BOX 4

BOX 5


You Want To Play All 5 Boxes In The Key Of “X” Major.

Again – all 5 boxes fit together the same, no matter what. The same 5 boxes we used for C minor are also the 5 boxes of Eb Major because C minor and Eb Major are what we call relative.

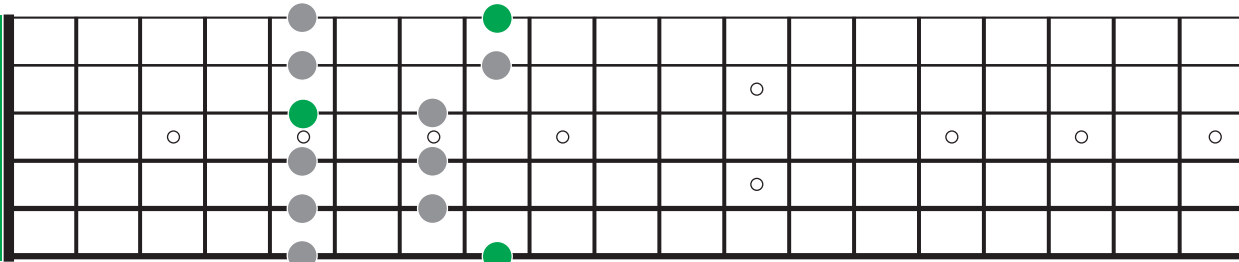
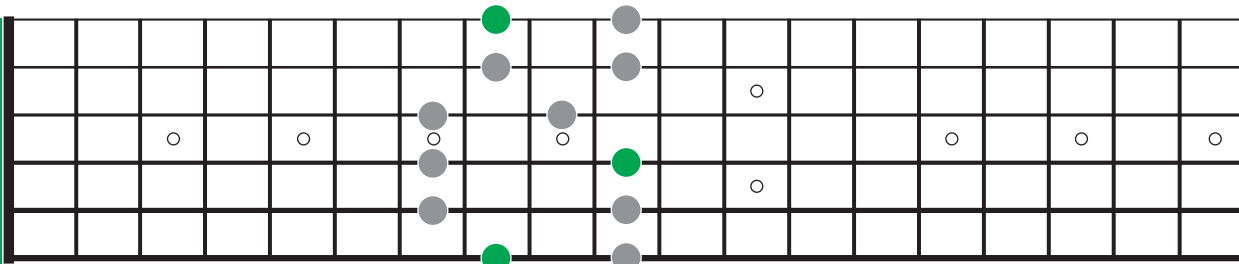
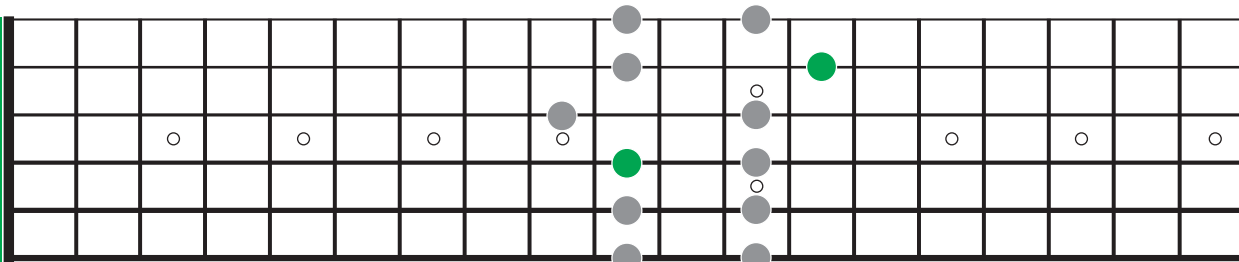
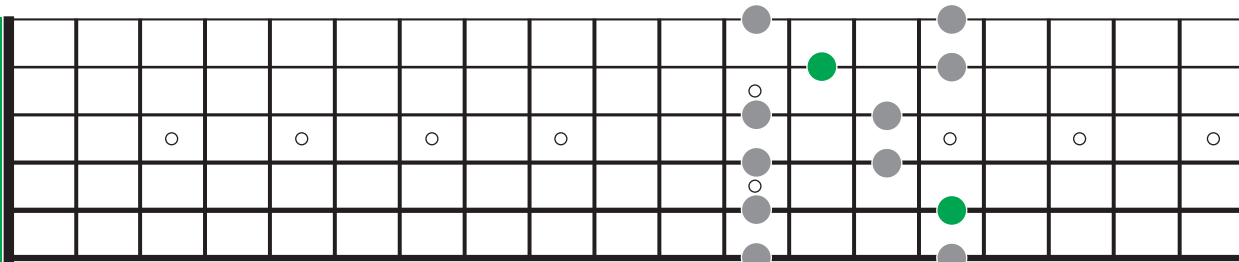
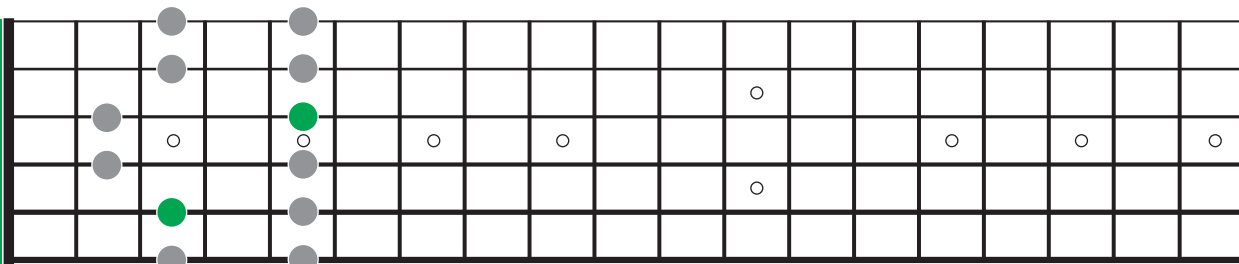
For any minor key, the relative major is 3 frets up the neck. In reverse, the relative minor of any major key is 3 frets down.

But to be honest, that's useless information to us in blues solos. The extra mental step of calculating the relative major or minor is too much for our brains to do while trying to focus on what to play. It takes us away from that highest level.



What you need to be able to do is just decide on a key, like C major and go straight there. Again, here are the 5 boxes in C major with the major root notes shown in **Green**.

These should look an awful lot like the 5 boxes in the key of A minor from earlier. They are the exact same! The only thing that has changed is which note we've chosen to be the most important.

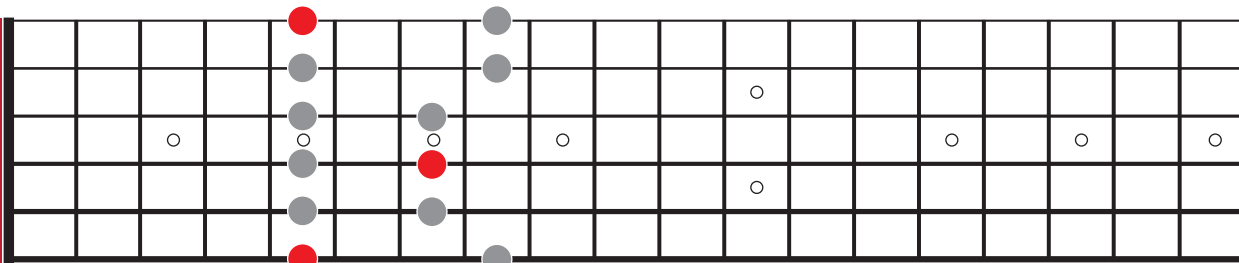
BOX 1**BOX 2****BOX 3****BOX 4****BOX 5**

As another point of reference, on the next page I've put a sheet with all 5 boxes in both A minor and A major. You'll notice that I've done this one by the string that the root note falls on.

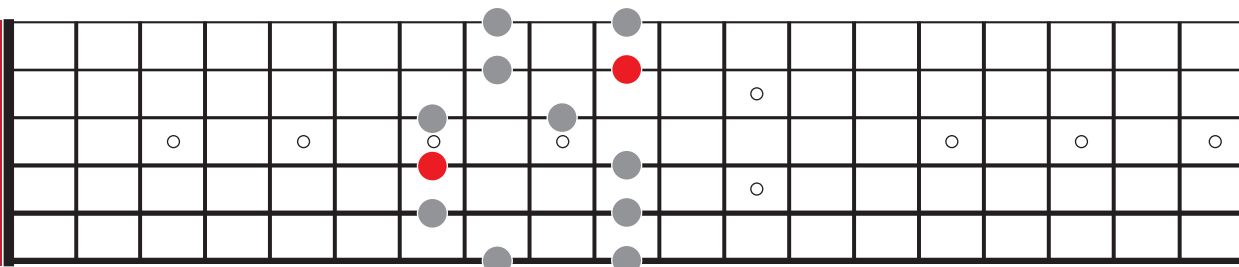
So when the root note is on the 1st string and you want a minor sound, it's box 1. For a major sound, it's box 2. And you'll see that those 2 boxes are on the same row of the chart. Go through this and will make practicing the act of switching between the 2 sounds easier.

Minor Boxes

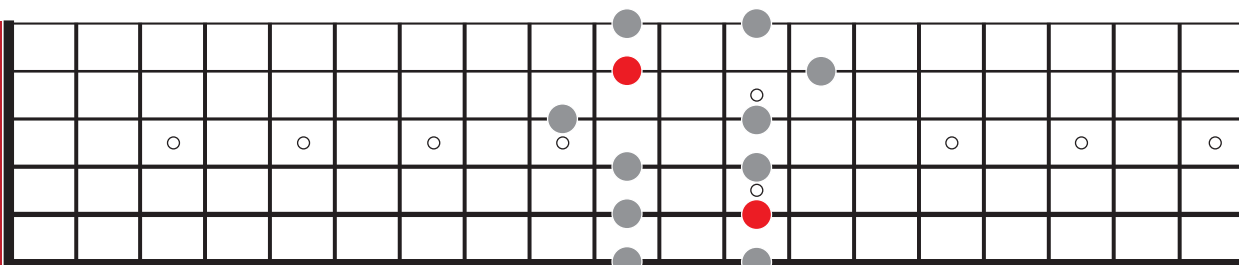
BOX 1



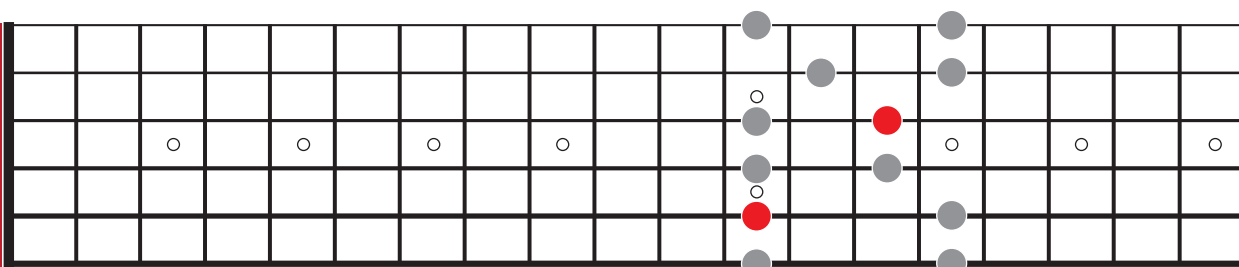
BOX 2



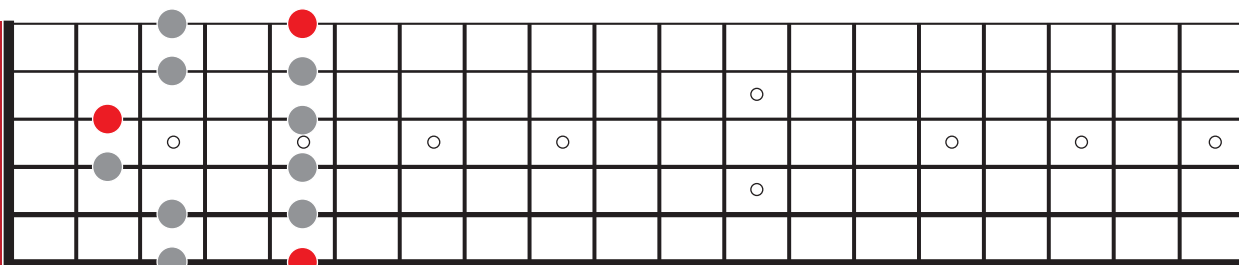
BOX 3



BOX 4

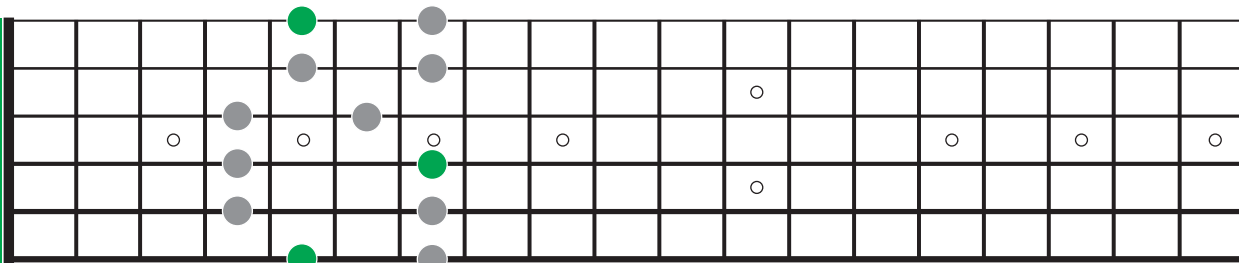


BOX 5

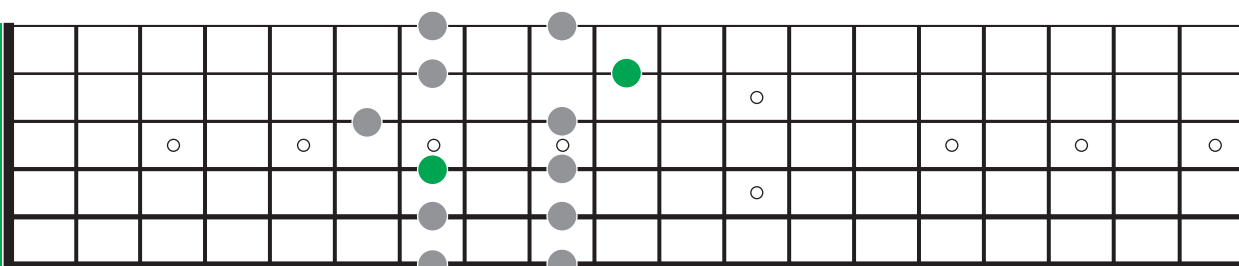


Major Boxes

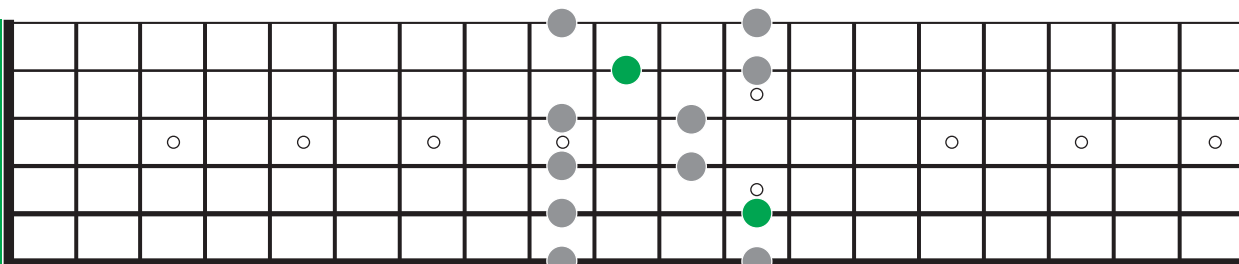
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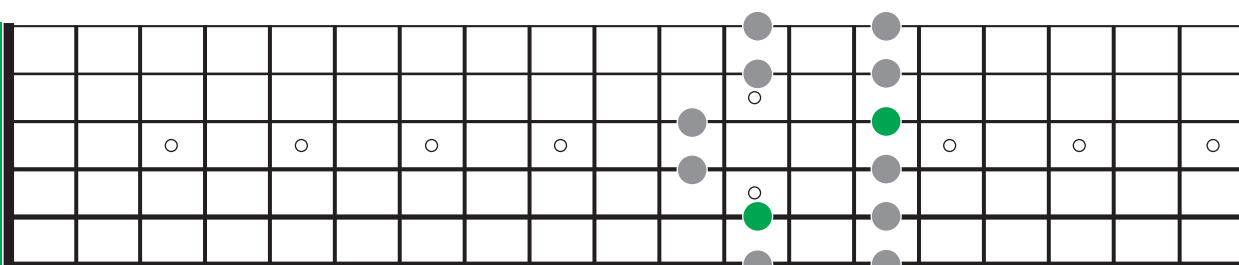
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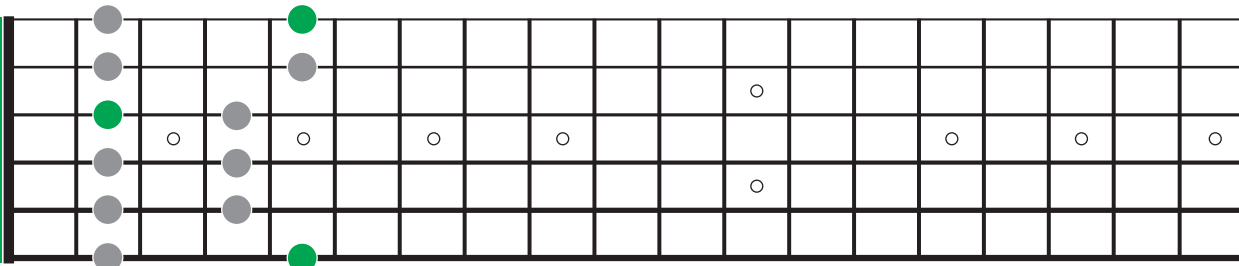
BOX 4



BOX 5



BOX 1



If you'd like to practice this with my super fancy flash card tool, it's free to use at <https://bluesguitarunleashed.com/blues-scale-guitar-trainer/>

So, how do you practice this?

You need to choose a root note, and a mode (major or minor) and work it for a while.

Assuming you've been through the Blues Guitar Unleashed course at least as far as lessons 23 and 24 and understand the concept of when to use the major and when to use the minor sound, all you have to do is pick a root and practice over a jam track.

The slow blues in G jam track for solo 4 is a good one to practice on because it's slow and the changes don't happen that fast.

Choose the 1st string G to start with. That means first make sure you can play the G minor sound either using Box 1 with the 1st finger or box 5 with the 3rd finger. Then make sure you can play the G major blues sound using either your 1st finger on the 2nd box, or your 4th finger and playing box 1. This does mean that you would be forced to use open strings, so you might want to move it up an octave to the G on the 15th fret with your pinky, and your first finger will be on the 12th fret and you'll be playing box 1.

Turn on the jam track for solo 4, and just noodle using the minor blues sound for a while. Once you feel comfortable doing that, start changing to the major blues sound only over the I chords. If you're not that good at hearing the difference yet, try **ONLY** playing over the I chord. And when the chords change to the IV and V, don't play at all... just let them go by.

When you feel like you can comfortably grab the boxes for the major and minor sounds based around the 1st string root, try the 2nd – it's the same concept.

Choose the 2nd string root on the 8th fret. Make sure you can play the minor sound either by playing box 2 using the 3rd finger, or box 3 using the 1st finger. Ideally you'll do both at some point.

Also make sure you can play the major sound using either box 4 with the 1st finger, or box 3 with the pinky.

Again turn on the jam track, and just noodle using the minor sound only for a while. Once you feel like you have the hang of that, add in the major sound over the I chord.

There you go. Once you've done all 6 strings (or... 5 of them since the 6th is the same) you should have a **MUCH** better feel for this.

To better playing,
Griff Hamlin