FretMonster Handbook

FretMonster is an interactive web tool on my Song Notes website. I built it to help you visualize the fretboard & see how everything connects.. Every song or solo we play is in a **musical key**, which is defined by a *root note* (such as "C") and a *scale* (such as "major"). Chords, triads, melodies, and riffs we play will typically come from the key + scale combination we're using.

GETTING STARTED

When loading FretMonster from scratch, it'll default to the major scale in the the key of C... showing the 7 notes in that key across the entire fretboard. This may be what you're looking for, but if not – you're free to modify things!

I'm hungry for a **major** scale in the key of ‹ **C** ›
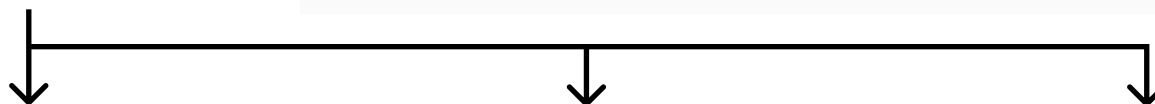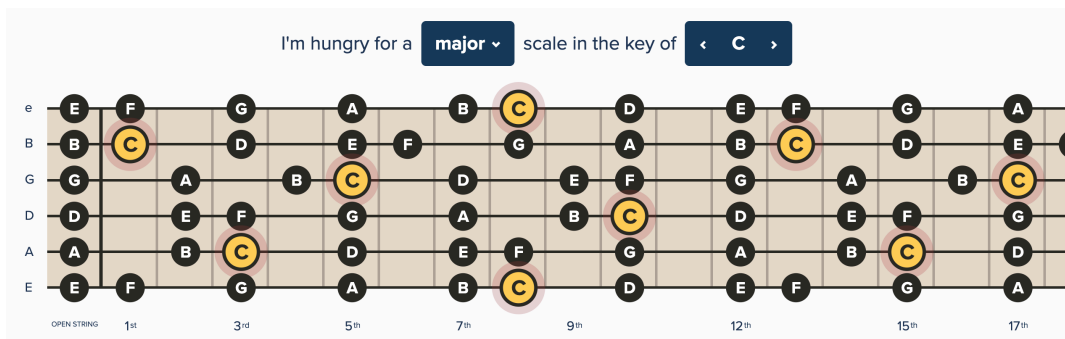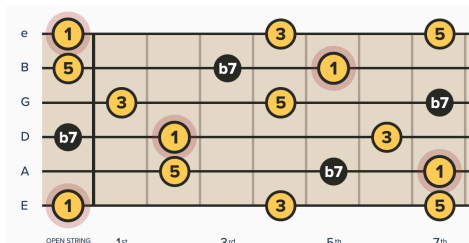
CHANGE THE KEY OR SCALE

You don't need to stick with the major scale! Pentatonic (major or minor), blues scales, arpeggios, and more are also available.
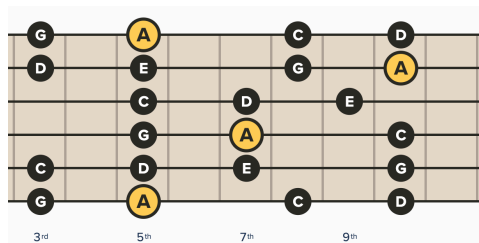
A minor pentatonic scale
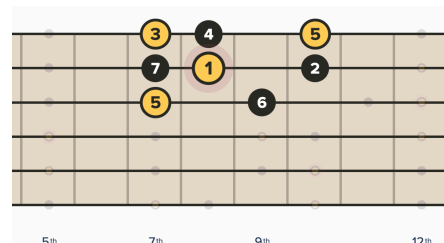
ADJUST NOTE HIGHLIGHTS & LABELS

Want to target triads (1-3-5), or prefer to use scale degrees instead of note names? This is easy to do as well.

E dominant 7 arpeggio, labeled with scale degrees

TWEAK VISIBLE FRETS & STRINGS

You can also hide notes on certain frets and/or strings, allowing you to focus on a small cluster of notes.

G major scale, thinnest three strings (frets 7-10)

FRETMONSTER KEYBOARD SHORTCUTS

I've baked in a number of handy keyboard shortcuts to let you change what's displayed without fumbling for your mouse. Here's a list of the available shortcuts... start with simple ones shown at the top, and expand from there.

← and → **Change Key**

[and] **Change Scale**

T Highlight **triads** (1-3-5)	**,** **Reduce** range of visible frets
R Highlight **root note** (1)	**.** **Increase** range of visible frets
S Label with **scale degree**	**shift** + **,** **Reduce** highest visible fret
N Label with **note name**	**shift** + **.** **Increase** highest visible fret
	shift + **Z** **Reset** (start from scratch)

shift + **/** Show **frets 0-4**

/ Show **all frets**

1 **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** Show/hide **single string**

0 Show **all strings**

Fun Things to Try

There's no single way to use FretMonster. It's a robust tool that can be used in countless ways, allowing you to see (and hear) the patterns hiding in plain sight on the fretboard. Here's a handful of things you can experiment with to put it through its paces.

## MAKE THE CHORD & SCALE CONNECTION

To get started, I recommend setting your key to match the name of any familiar major chord (C, G, D, etc) – and then select **major** or **major pentatonic** as your scale. Set highlight to **triads**. Look at the first 3-4 frets only.

Notice how notes each chord uses are all found with *within* their parent scale. Specifically, they're always built with scale degrees 1-3-5. All the remaining notes in that scale can be used for flourish, melodies, or licks – and will generally sound good, since they're in that same key.
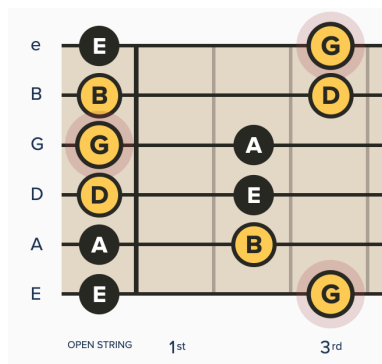
Key of G, major pentatonic scale. Notice the G major chord notes are revealed.

View in FretMonster
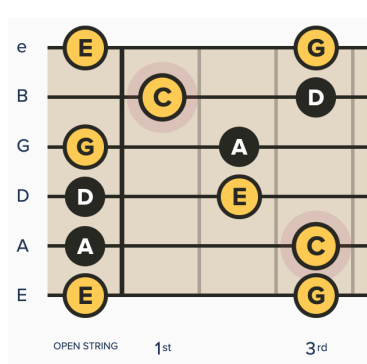
Key of C, major pentatonic scale. Notice the C major chord notes are revealed.

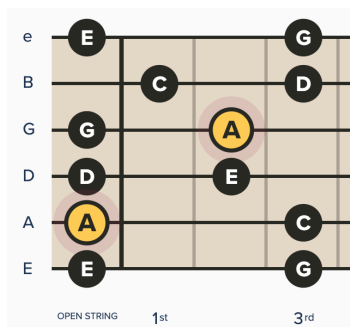**View in FretMonster**

LEARNING TO USE SCALE DEGREES

Scale degrees allow us to refer to any note by its position within the key we're using. For example, "1-4-5" refers to the notes (or chords) occurring on the first, fourth, and fifth degrees of *any* key (scale) you choose.

To start getting familiar with these, take any scale shape you already know – and toggle the label between **note names** and **scale degrees**. With practice, you'll hear each scale degree has its own unique sound relative to the root note (1).

A fun way to verify this is to play the same sequence of notes (using scale degrees *or* note names) in two different positions of the same scale. You can hear how they give the exact same melodic sound! You can repeat this in every single scale position, if you wish.

To the right, I show two different positions of the **A minor pentatonic**. Load these in FretMonster and hear the similarities for yourself – by clicking on the notes or playing them on your guitar.

The main idea: you can play *any* melody in *any* scale position. Once you realize this, you're off to the races.
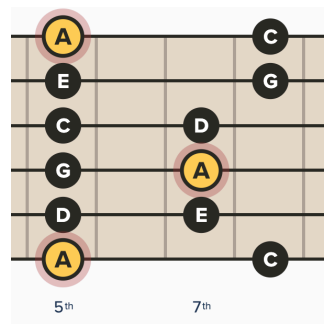
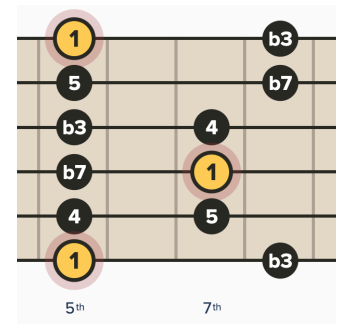*A minor pentatonic (frets 0-3), labeled with **note names***

View in FretMonster
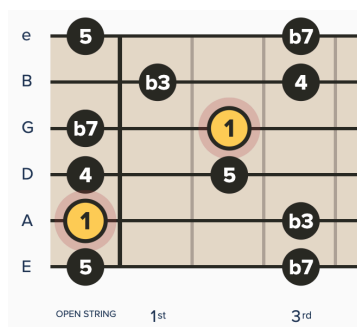
*A minor pentatonic (frets 0-3), labeled with **scale degrees***

View in FretMonster

*A minor pentatonic (frets 5-8), labeled with **note names***

View in FretMonster

*A minor pentatonic (frets 5-8), labeled with **scale degrees***

View in FretMonster

PRACTICING TRIADS

Triads are "mini chords" played on three strings, which include a root (1), third (3), and fifth (5). They're a fun way to add harmony, create melodic fills, and jump to CAGED shapes up the neck.

In this example, you're seeing the **A major chord** (left) and **A major triads** (right) on the thinnest 3 strings. Notice how these all use the same three notes! You can use FretMonster to visualize these in any key, major or minor, and see how they repeat up & down the fretboard.
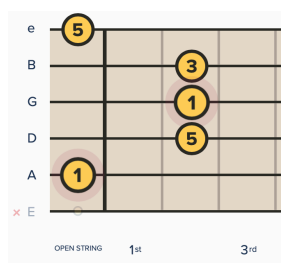
A major chord shown in open position (labeled with scale degrees)
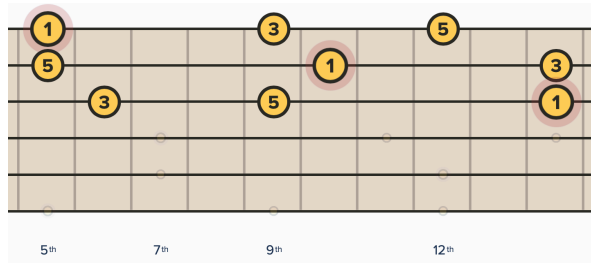
A major triads shown up the neck. They use the same 3 notes!

View in FretMonster *(strings 3-2-1)*
View in FretMonster *(strings 4-3-2)*

More Fun Things to Try

VISUALIZING C-A-G-E-D SHAPES

When you select any major key and turn the **triad (1-3-5)** highlights on, you'll notice the pattern of C-A-G-E-D shapes that reveal themselves. Specifically, notice how every root note "C" is found in *two* of the CAGED shapes shown to the right.
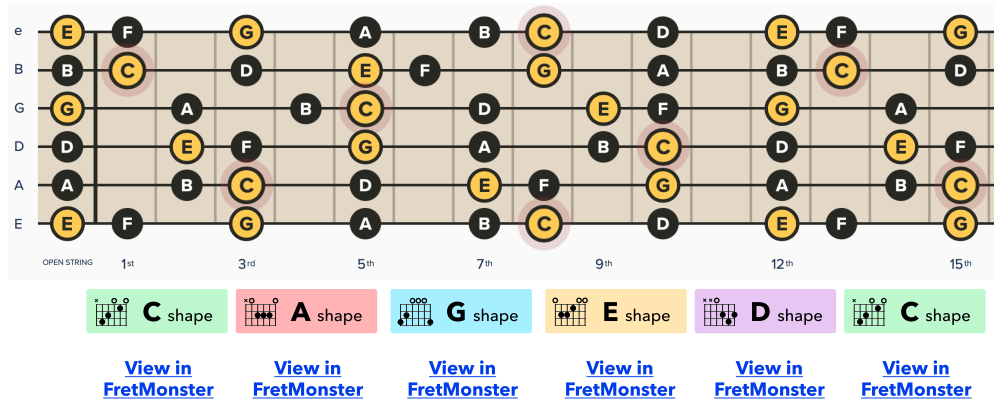
Here's links to each of these shapes within the Key of C. Remember, these same shapes exist in every major key!

| C shape | A shape | G shape | E shape | D shape | C shape |
| **View in FretMonster** | **View in FretMonster** | **View in FretMonster** | **View in FretMonster** | **View in FretMonster** | **View in FretMonster** |

CLICK TO HEAR EACH NOTE

You can click on any note you see on the fretboard and you'll hear that exact tone through your computer speakers. This is helpful if you'd like to quickly explore or validate the sound of a specific melody, chord, triad, or scale.

Note: if using an iPad or smartphone, be sure your device is *not* in silent mode... or you won't hear anything.

OPEN FRETMONSTER ON YOUR PHONE

FretMonster is *mobile friendly* — which means I designed & coded it to open through your phone's (or iPad's) browser. On small screens it shows 5-6 frets — allowing you to scroll horizontally to see the full fretboard.

While there's no proper app for it, you can add a shortcut to your phone's homescreen for quick access.

CHANGE GUITAR TUNING & INSTRUMENT

You're not limited to a guitar in standard tuning! Beneath the fretboard interface, there's an interface that lets you switch to other guitar tunings (Drop D, Open G, etc) as well as other instruments. Bass, ukulele, mandolin, various banjo tunings – and many more are available.

BOOKMARK YOUR FAVORITE SETUPS

In June 2025, I've updated FretMonster so it will "remember" a setup via the web browser's URL bar. This means you can save any specific setup you create by bookmarking it — or by sending the URL to a friend. This also means I can give you some quick links to example fretboard setups (which I do in this handbook).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

First Steps with the Pentatonic Scale
https://songnotes.net/lessons/492/

Need a Refresher on "CAGED" Shapes?
https://songnotes.net/topics/caged

Confused by Scale Degrees vs. Note Names?
https://songnotes.net/courses/practical-music-theory/

Scale Formula Guide
https://songnotes.net/topics/lead-guitar/scale-formula-guide

Need Help Reading Fretboard Diagrams?
https://songnotes.net/courses/reading-music

Looking for Major Key Guides?
https://songnotes.net/tools/keymaster

Looking for Printable Scale Charts in Every Key?
https://songnotes.net/topics/scales

One Riff in Five Positions
https://songnotes.net/lessons/381/

Quicklinks to Pentatonic Scales in FretMonster

The links below will open FretMonster with a single **pentatonic scale position** – either major or minor – pre-set on the fretboard. All these positions span 4-5 frets, which allows us to play all notes with minimal movement of our fretting hand. The pentatonic scale is used quite often *and* is much easier to learn than its "full" major or minor parent scales.

Key of C

Major Pentatonic	**Open Position**	frets 0-3
	Box 4	frets 2-5
	Box 5	frets 5-8
	Box 1	frets 7-10
	Box 2	frets 9-13
	Box 3	frets 12-15
Minor Pentatonic	**Open Position**	frets 0-4
	Box 4	frets 3-6
	Box 5	frets 5-8
	Box 1	frets 8-11
	Box 2	frets 10-13
	Box 3	frets 12-16

Key of G

Major Pentatonic	**Open Position**	frets 0-3
	Box 1	frets 2-5
	Box 2	frets 4-8
	Box 3	frets 7-10
	Box 4	frets 9-12
	Box 5	frets 12-15
Minor Pentatonic	**Open Position**	frets 0-3
	Box 1	frets 3-6
	Box 2	frets 5-8
	Box 3	frets 7-10
	Box 4	frets 10-13
	Box 5	frets 12-15

Key of A

Major Pentatonic	**Open Position**	frets 0-4
	Box 5	frets 2-5
	Box 1	frets 4-7
	Box 2	frets 6-10
	Box 3	frets 9-12
	Box 4	frets 11-14
Minor Pentatonic	**Open Position**	frets 0-3
	Box 5	frets 2-5
	Box 1	frets 5-8
	Box 2	frets 7-10
	Box 3	frets 9-13
	Box 4	frets 12-15

Key of E

Major Pentatonic	**Open Position**	frets 0-4
	Box 2	frets 1-5
	Box 3	frets 4-7
	Box 4	frets 6-9
	Box 5	frets 9-12
	Box 1	frets 11-14
Minor Pentatonic	**Open Position**	frets 0-3
	Box 2	frets 2-5
	Box 3	frets 4-8
	Box 4	frets 7-10
	Box 5	frets 9-12
	Box 1	frets 12-15

Remember, each of these five "box" positions occur in every key. Learn them once, use them anywhere. See my **Scale Handbook** or **CAGED Handbook** for a deeper dive into these shapes and how to use them.
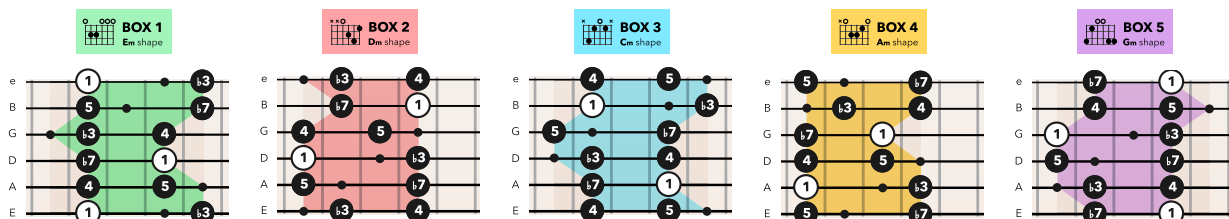

MAJOR Pentatonic Shapes

BOX 1 E shape · BOX 2 D shape · BOX 3 C shape · BOX 4 A shape · BOX 5 G shape

MINOR Pentatonic Shapes

BOX 1 Em shape · BOX 2 Dm shape · BOX 3 Cm shape · BOX 4 Am shape · BOX 5 Gm shape
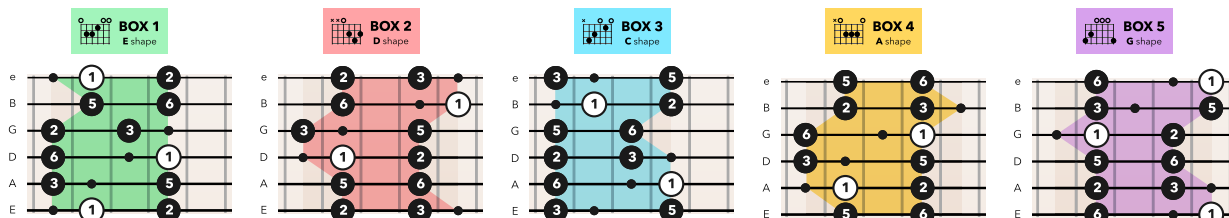
Similar Tools I've Made

All of the following are available on my Song Notes website at **songnotes.net/tools**

Key Master

Everything we play on the guitar is in a musical key. Understanding the key we're using reveals the chords, scales, walk-ups & walk-downs, and various other things that make our musical lives easier. KeyMaster is an interactive way to wrap your head around this.
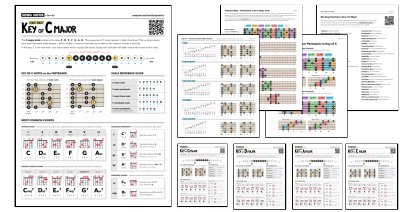
Capo Captain

Capos let us play along with our favorite artists and get new sounds from familiar chords – but knowing where to place one (or how to play along without one) can get confusing. Capo Captain is an interactive way to quickly calculate what you need – showing the chords and capo position to play along with your friends or favorite artists.

Browse My Guitar Courses

In addition to my various song tutorials, I have a large library of course & topic-based lessons to help you learn guitar.

Guitar Fundamentals

A guide to getting started with guitar! Everything you need to know to begin your journey. Choosing a guitar, other gear you'll need, fretting notes & chords, learning your first songs, and more.

Reading Music for Guitarists

Learn to read tabs, chord charts, fretboard diagrams, strumming patterns, and more! This course explains how to understand all of these must-know notation styles.
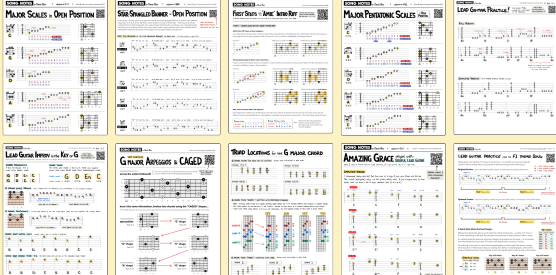
Practical Music Theory

A general overview of must-know theory concepts. The goal here is practical, easy-to-understand explanations – all of which provide clarity to your everyday guitar playing.

Beginner Chord Guide

A guide to the must-know chords you'll need when getting started with guitar! The quickest way to learn major chords, minor chords, the chords in each key, and more.

You can also browse my weekly lessons by topic:

- **Learning Lead Guitar**
- **Fingerstyle & Travis Picking**
- **Strumming & Rhythm**
- **CAGED Handbook**
- **Scales Handbook**
- **Blues Starter Kit**

Support My Lessons & Level Up Your Playing!

If you enjoy FretMonster and the *hundreds* of free lessons I've posted on YouTube, please consider joining as a Premium member on my Song Notes website. Members unlock my library instructional PDF guides, get 24/7 access to my online courses, can join the members-only community forum, and save 50% when buying any of my licensed song sheets. As always, you have my thanks!

- Join today at **songnotes.net/join** – monthly and annual plans are available.

- Want to learn more? **Watch a video tour »**

Hi! I'm David, creator of FretMonster and every single lesson at songnotes.net