

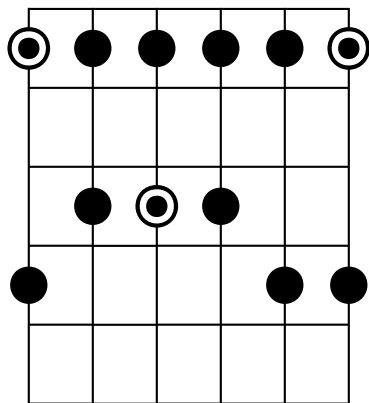
# Pentatonic Scales

## Part 3: The Five Shapes of the Minor Pentatonic

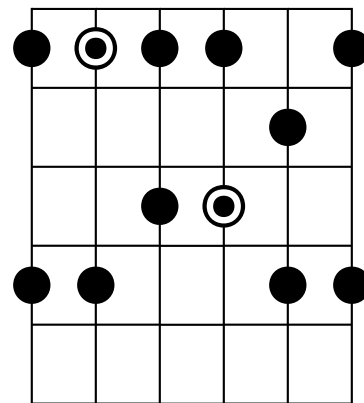
### Review of the E & A String Tonic Patterns

If you haven't noticed by now identifying shapes and patterns on our fretboard is a huge part of unlocking the mystery of the guitar. In the last lesson we broke down two movable minor pentatonic patterns: The **E string tonic** & **The A string tonic patterns**. We learned that we can simply learn two shapes or patterns of the minor pentatonic scale; and realized that as long as we know the notes on our E and A strings, we can move those shapes around the neck to play minor pentatonic scales in any key we desire. Those two shapes looked like this:

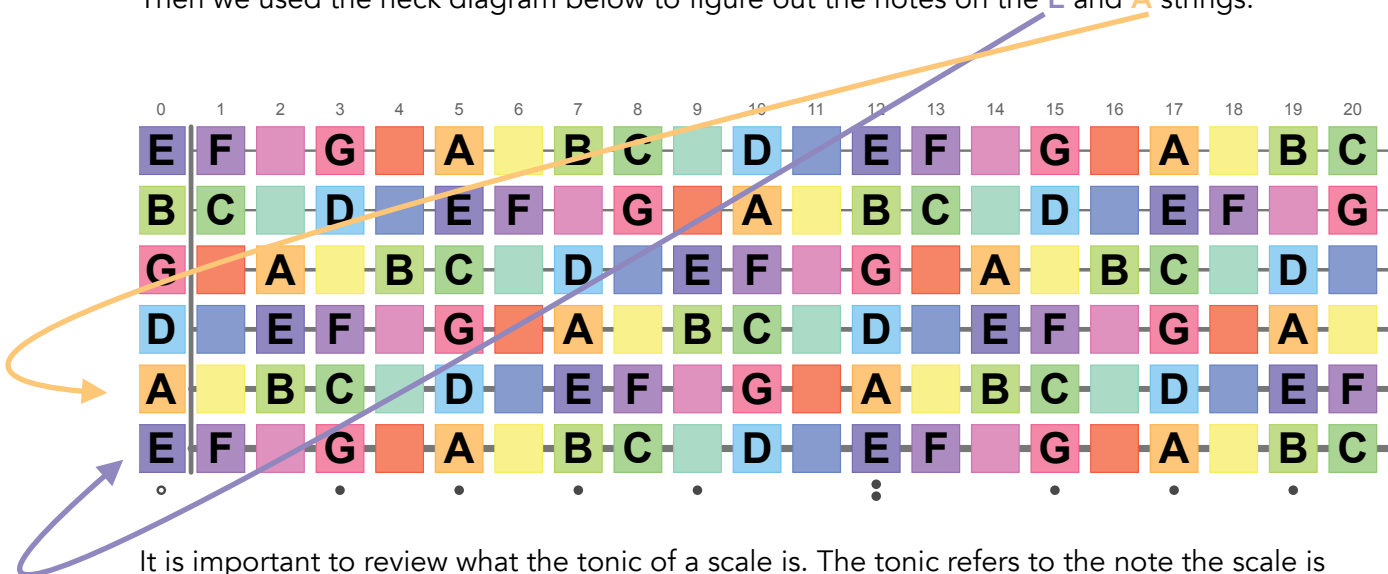
E STRING TONIC



A STRING TONIC



Then we used the neck diagram below to figure out the notes on the **E** and **A** strings.



It is important to review what the tonic of a scale is. The tonic refers to the note the scale is named after. If you look at the E string tonic diagram you will notice three notes indicated with

a bullseye. Those are all the instances of the tonic in that pattern. If we were to play F minor pentatonic all those bullseye notes would be the note F. Consider that with the E string tonic pattern the tonic occurs on the first note we play on the low E (6th) string. That means if we want to utilize the E string tonic shape for F minor pentatonic we would need to start on the first fret which is the note F.

When looking at the A string tonic pattern we see that the tonic occurs on the first note we play on the A (5th) string. Using the fretboard diagram we would then navigate to the 8th fret (which is where F is on the 5th string) and use our A string tonic pattern.

Thus, if we wanted to play a G minor pentatonic scale we would either use the E String Tonic Pattern to start on the 3rd fret, or the A String Tonic Pattern to start on the 10th fret. C minor pentatonic would be played on the 8th and 3rd fret using the E and A string tonic patterns, respectively.

When playing these two minor pentatonic patterns you may think “but how do I play like the pros that look like they’re playing indiscriminately up and down the neck?” The fact is that the E and A string patterns put us in two fixed positions, limiting the range of what we can play. Luckily there are three more pentatonic patterns that will allow us to play the pentatonic throughout the entire fretboard. With these additional three shapes we will end up with what most call the **five shapes of the pentatonic scale**.

## *Building Shape Two*

Let's start learning the five shapes of the minor pentatonic by starting with a bit of theory. We will use the A minor pentatonic scale as a reference. In the previous two lessons we learned that every minor pentatonic scale follows the following formula:

**W+H - W - W - W+H - W**

In this formula the letter *W* stands for *whole step*, the *H* stands for *half step*, so therefore *W+H* means *whole plus a half step* or one and a half steps. A half step is achieved by moving one fret on the guitar, a whole step two frets and a step and a half is three frets. Using that information we can look at the above fretboard diagram and figure out the five notes in the A minor pentatonic scale. (Remember that all pentatonic scales have five notes. Penta = five. Tonic = note.)

A - C = 3 frets = W+H

C - D = 2 frets = W

D - E = 2 frets = W

E - G = 3 frets = W+H

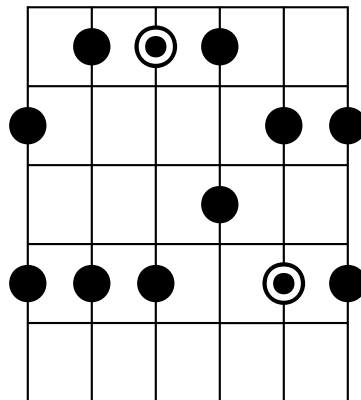
G - A = 2 frets = W

We now have our five notes for A minor pentatonic: **A C D E G**

Earlier we discussed how the E string tonic pattern starts with the tonic on the low E (6th) string. If we're playing A minor pentatonic that means we would start that pattern on the note A on the 6th string. That would bring us to the 5th fret. Let's now call this **shape 1** instead of the E string tonic pattern. It's much less of mouthful right?

So shape 1 begins with the tonic on the low E string. **Shape 2** happens to just start on the second note of the scale on the low E string. As we just figured out the second note of A minor pentatonic is the note C. That note is the second note we played in shape 1. It occurs on the 8th fret of the E string. What we will do now is shift our hand position up so that either our first or second finger is playing the note C on the 8th fret. Then we would follow the rest of the scale sequence: C D E G A

Don't worry about learning where all those notes are right now. Let's just use the following diagram for shape 2:



If you play the above diagram starting on the 8th fret you will be playing A minor pentatonic using shape 2.

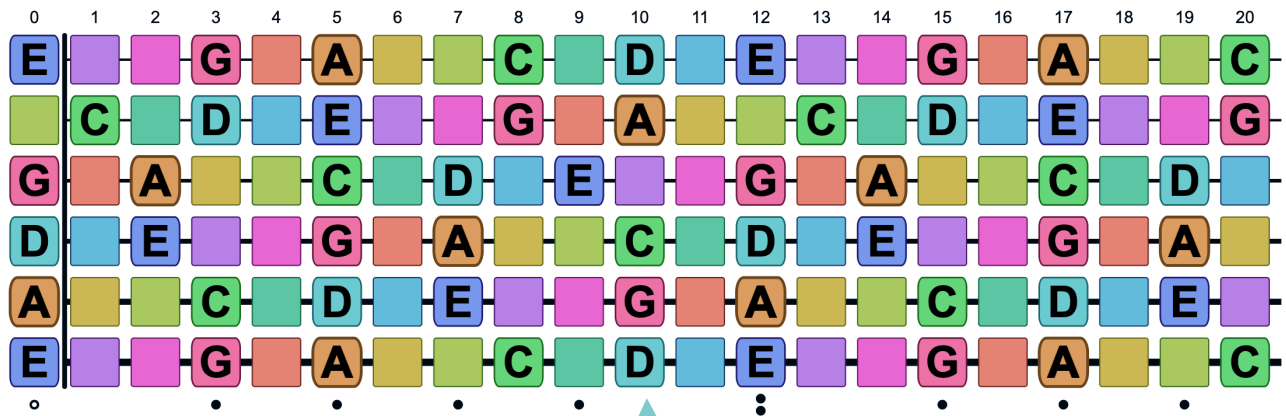
## Shapes 3 -5

Now that we have shape 2 down, let's go through shapes 3, 4 and 5 using the same concept.

Shape 1 started on the first note of the scale. For the key of A minor that was the the note A. Shape 2 started on the second note of the scale. That note was C. Thus, **shape 3** will start on the third note of the scale, **shape 4** starts on the fourth note and **shape 5** starts on the fifth note.

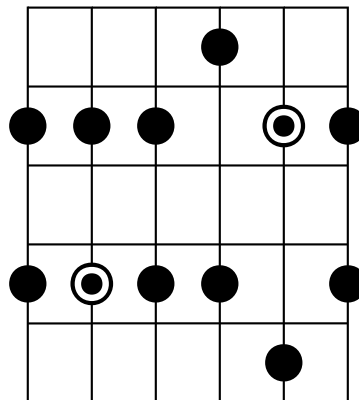
Here are the 5 notes in the A minor pentatonic scale again: A C D E G

That means that D is the third note, so we want to start shape 3 on the note D on the low E string. Let's use that fretboard image again.



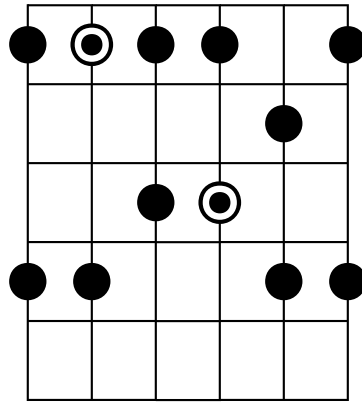
As we can see the note **D** is on the 10th fret of the low E string. That note also happens to be the second note of shape 2. It turns out that all these shapes actually connect to each other. We will go over that at the end of this PDF.

Here is shape 3. If you play it starting on the 10th fret you will be playing A minor pentatonic using shape 3.

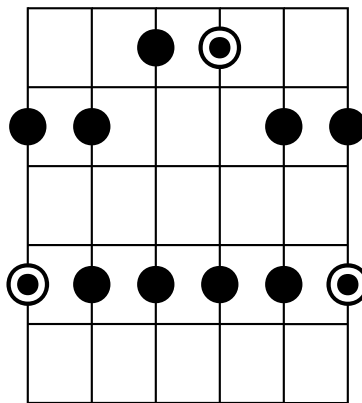


At this point we know that shape 1 starts on A, shape 2 starts on C and shape 3 starts on D. Following the five notes in the A minor pentatonic scale we will figure out that the fourth shape starts on E and the fifth shape starts on G.

Here's shape 4:



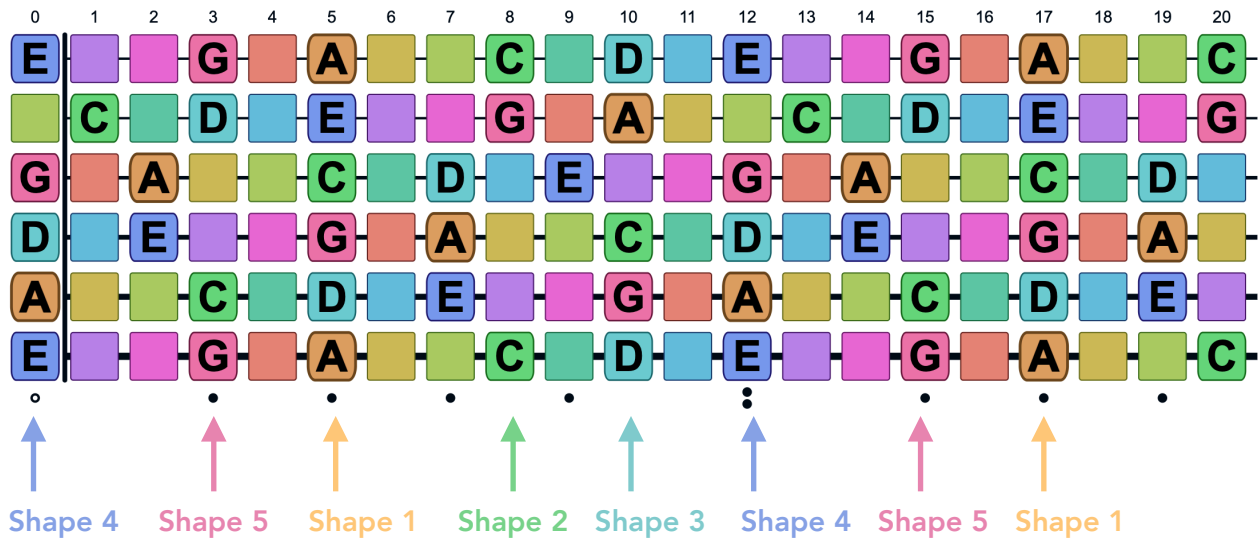
And here is shape 5:



Shape 4 would be played on the 12th fret and shape 5 would start on the 3rd fret.

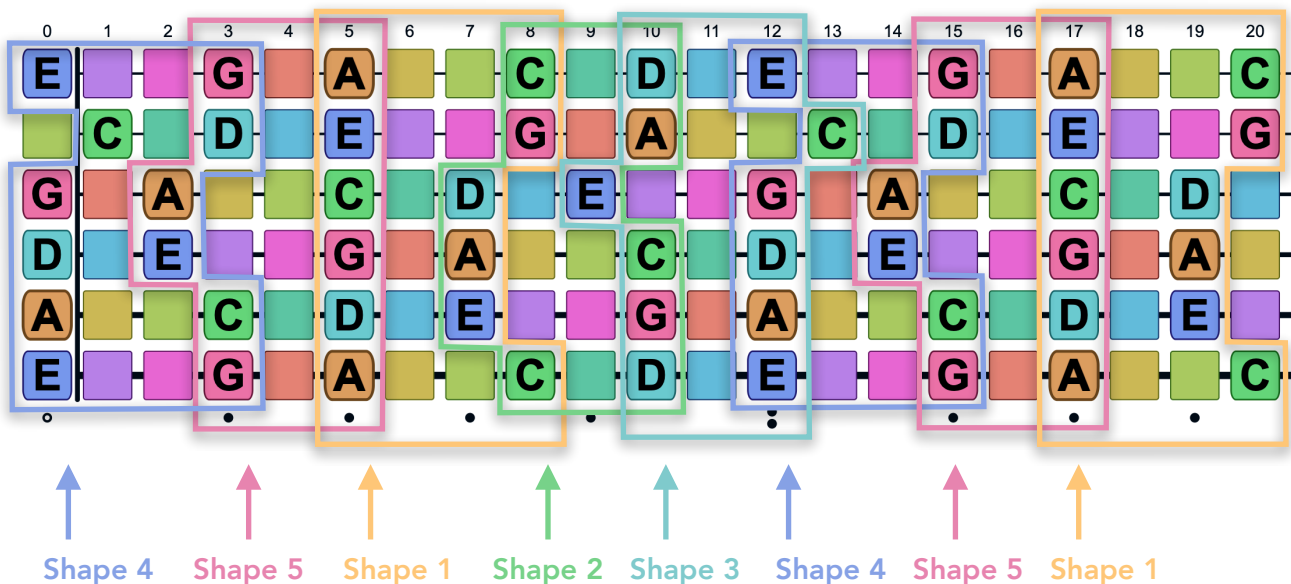
## *The Concept of an Octave (Moving 12 Frets)*

When looking at the fretboard diagram with all the notes on it you will notice that the note E occurs on the 12th fret of the low E string, but it is also the note that gets played when the E string is open. This is because moving up or down 12 frets along one string will yield an octave. As we know moving up or down one fret is one half step. Moving 12 half steps is an octave. Thus, moving 12 frets on one string moves us an octave. Using this idea we can play some of the shapes of the A minor pentatonic in two locations by shifting any of them up or down 12 frets (assuming we don't run out of frets). On a guitar with at least 20 frets you should be able to play Shape 1 starting on the 5th or 17th fret, Shape 4 starting open or on the 12th fret, and shape 5 starting on the 3rd or 15th fret. (See the diagram below).



## Connecting the 5 Shapes

At this point we have learned how to play each shape and figured out where to play each of them in the key of A minor. Now we will dig a little deeper to see how each shape relates to each other. The main idea is that each shape connects to one another. Below is a fretboard diagram with all the notes from the A minor Pentatonic written in. Color coded boxes have been drawn around each box. Take note of where these boxes overlap.



As we can see from the diagram the second note of each shape becomes the first note of the next shape. For example if we look at shape 1 we see the first note is A on the 5th fret, then C on the 8th fret. However, shape 2 starts on that 8th fret note (C) and then goes to the 10th fret (D) which happens to be the first note of shape 3. This works for all the strings, all the shapes and in all keys. Perhaps now is a good time to take a closer look at the above diagram?

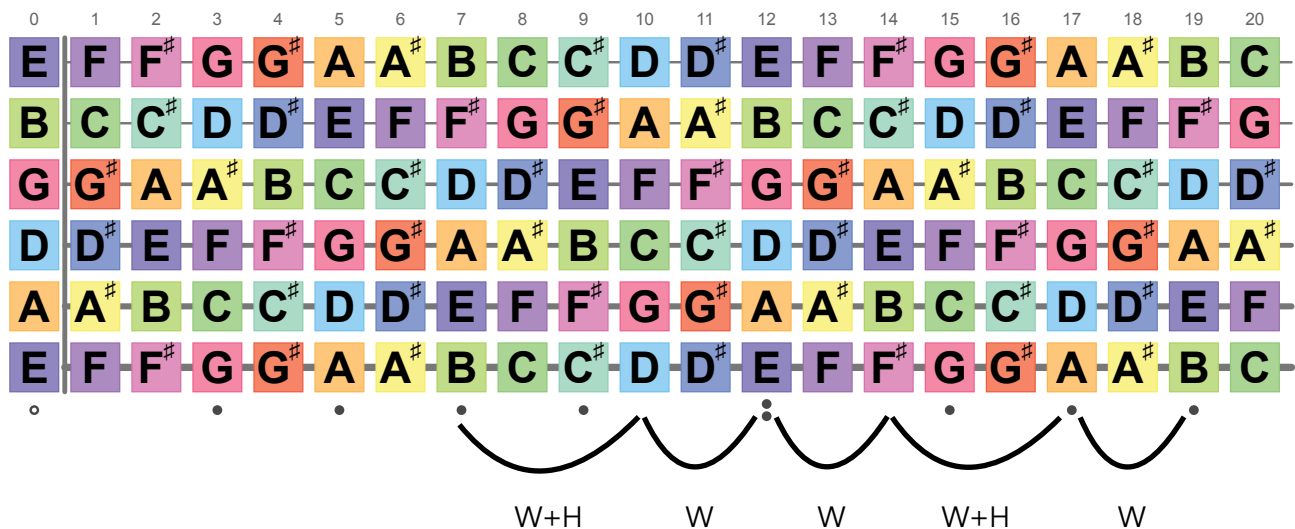
Another way to think about these 5 shapes is this: play the A minor pentatonic scale along just the low E (6th) string. If we do this we would hit A on the 5th fret, C on the 8th, D on the 10th, E on the 12th, and the G on the 15th. Each of these positions is where each of our shapes start. So shape 1 starts on A (the tonic or first note of the scale), shape 2 starts on C (the second note of the scale), shape 3 on D (our third note) and then Shape 4 and 5 start on E and G (notes 4 and 5). This means that if you know the 5 notes of any minor pentatonic scale then you can find those notes on the low E string and start each of your shapes on the corresponding frets. Let's test this by changing keys.

## Changing Keys

Now that we have gone over the major concepts concerning the 5 shapes of the minor pentatonic let's try playing in B minor instead of A minor. The notes for the B minor pentatonic scale are: **B - D - E - F# - A**. We could check our work on this by using a fretboard diagram with all the notes and following our minor pentatonic formula:

**W+H - W - W - W+H - W**

If you want to check your work on that here's a fretboard diagram with all notes (including sharps).



Our formula checks out, so let's go and play shape one on the 7th fret now. This will put us in B minor instead of A minor. Shape 2 would then start on the second note of the 1st shape which is the 10th fret or the note D. Shape 3, 4 and 5 would start on the 12th (E), 14th (F#) and 17th (A) frets respectively.

Another way to arrive at these locations for the 5 shapes of B minor pentatonic would have been to realize that B is a whole step (two frets) above A. Then we could have just shifted each

our 5 shapes up two frets, but it is important to go the long way and see how everything works in detail.

## A Few Exercises

Below four different keys have been listed. Your jobs is to locate where the tonic of each key is on the low E (6th) and A (5th) strings. This will give you your location for shapes 1 and 4. From there you should be able to use the information we went over previously to find all 5 shapes of the given keys. Here are the keys. Answers are on the following page.

**G Minor**

**C Minor**

**Bb Minor** - A flat (b) means lower the note by a 1/2 step.

**F# Minor** - A sharp (#) means raise the note by a 1/2 step.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
E	F	F <sup>#</sup>	G	G <sup>#</sup>	A	A <sup>#</sup>	B	C	C <sup>#</sup>	D	D <sup>#</sup>	E	F	F <sup>#</sup>	G	G <sup>#</sup>	A	A <sup>#</sup>	B	C
B	C	C <sup>#</sup>	D	D <sup>#</sup>	E	F	F <sup>#</sup>	G	G <sup>#</sup>	A	A <sup>#</sup>	B	C	C <sup>#</sup>	D	D <sup>#</sup>	E	F	F <sup>#</sup>	G
G	G <sup>#</sup>	A	A <sup>#</sup>	B	C	C <sup>#</sup>	D	D <sup>#</sup>	E	F	F <sup>#</sup>	G	G <sup>#</sup>	A	A <sup>#</sup>	B	C	C <sup>#</sup>	D	D <sup>#</sup>
D	D <sup>#</sup>	E	F	F <sup>#</sup>	G	G <sup>#</sup>	A	A <sup>#</sup>	B	C	C <sup>#</sup>	D	D <sup>#</sup>	E	F	F <sup>#</sup>	G	G <sup>#</sup>	A	A <sup>#</sup>
A	A <sup>#</sup>	B	C	C <sup>#</sup>	D	D <sup>#</sup>	E	F	F <sup>#</sup>	G	G <sup>#</sup>	A	A <sup>#</sup>	B	C	C <sup>#</sup>	D	D <sup>#</sup>	E	F
E	F	F <sup>#</sup>	G	G <sup>#</sup>	A	A <sup>#</sup>	B	C	C <sup>#</sup>	D	D <sup>#</sup>	E	F	F <sup>#</sup>	G	G <sup>#</sup>	A	A <sup>#</sup>	B	C

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
E	F	G <sup>b</sup>	G	A <sup>b</sup>	A	B <sup>b</sup>	B	C	D <sup>b</sup>	D	E <sup>b</sup>	E	F	G <sup>b</sup>	G	A <sup>b</sup>	A	B <sup>b</sup>	B	C
B	C	D <sup>b</sup>	D	E <sup>b</sup>	E	F	G <sup>b</sup>	G	A <sup>b</sup>	A	B <sup>b</sup>	B	C	D <sup>b</sup>	D	E <sup>b</sup>	E	F	G <sup>b</sup>	G
G	A <sup>b</sup>	A	B <sup>b</sup>	B	C	D <sup>b</sup>	D	E <sup>b</sup>	E	F	G <sup>b</sup>	G	A <sup>b</sup>	A	B <sup>b</sup>	B	C	D <sup>b</sup>	D	E <sup>b</sup>
D	E <sup>b</sup>	E	F	G <sup>b</sup>	G	A <sup>b</sup>	A	B <sup>b</sup>	B	C	D <sup>b</sup>	D	E <sup>b</sup>	E	F	G <sup>b</sup>	G	A <sup>b</sup>	A	B <sup>b</sup>
A	B <sup>b</sup>	B	C	D <sup>b</sup>	D	E <sup>b</sup>	E	F	G <sup>b</sup>	G	A <sup>b</sup>	A	B <sup>b</sup>	B	C	D <sup>b</sup>	D	E <sup>b</sup>	E	F
E	F	G <sup>b</sup>	G	A <sup>b</sup>	A	B <sup>b</sup>	B	C	D <sup>b</sup>	D	E <sup>b</sup>	E	F	G <sup>b</sup>	G	A <sup>b</sup>	A	B <sup>b</sup>	B	C



### G Minor (G Bb C D F)

- Shape 1 - 3rd or 15th fret
- Shape 2 - 6th or 18th fret
- Shape 3 - 8th or 20th fret
- Shape 4 - 10th fret
- Shape 5 - 13th or 1st fret

### C Minor (C Eb F G Bb)

- Shape 1 - 8th fret
- Shape 2 - 11th fret
- Shape 3 - 1st or 13th fret
- Shape 4 - 3rd or 15th fret
- Shape 5 - 6th or 18th fret

### Bb Minor (Bb Db Eb F Ab)

- Shape 1 - 6th or 18th fret
- Shape 2 - 9th fret
- Shape 3 - 11th fret
- Shape 4 - 1st or 13th fret
- Shape 5 - 4th or 16th fret

### F# Minor - (F# A B C# E)

- Shape 1 - 2nd or 14th fret
- Shape 2 - 5th or 17th fret
- Shape 3 - 7th or 19th fret
- Shape 4 - 9th fret
- Shape 5 - 12 fret

Did you get them all right? If not go back over the fretboard diagrams and check your work.  
For your convenience here all 5 shapes in one place.

