

Blues Basics

It is important to become familiar with certain basics in blues guitar-playing before going on to more complicated material. A knowledge of blues chords and progressions, rhythm licks, and "turn-arounds" will give you the necessary tools to begin playing the blues.

The Blues Progression

The three main chords utilized in the blues are I, IV, and V. In the key of E these are: E, A, and B; in A: A, D, and E. The I chord (the *tonic*) takes its name from the first note of the scale in the key you are playing in. The IV, or *subdominant* chord, takes its name from the fourth note of the scale. The V, or *dominant* chord, takes its name from the fifth note of that scale.

the
1 chord the
4 chord the
5 chord

I IV V

root (tonic)	sub-dominant	dominant
A	D	E
B \flat (A \sharp)	E \flat (D \sharp)	F
B	E	F \sharp (G \flat)
C	F	G
D \flat (C \sharp)	G \flat (F \sharp)	A \flat (G \sharp)
D	G	A
E \flat (D \sharp)	A \flat (G \sharp)	B \flat (A \sharp)
E	A	B
F	B \flat (A \sharp)	C
F \sharp (G \flat)	B	C \sharp (D \flat)
G	C	D
A \flat (G \sharp)	D \flat (C \sharp)	E \flat (D \sharp)

The Twelve-Bar Blues

The *twelve-bar blues* is the most well-known form of blues music for all instruments. Here is a twelve-bar blues progression in the key of E:

The first staff shows a 12-bar blues progression in the key of E. The chords are: I (E) for the first 4 bars, I7 (E7) for the next 4 bars, and IV (A) for the final 4 bars.

The second staff shows a 12-bar blues progression in the key of E. The chords are: I (E) for the first 4 bars, V7 (B7) for the next 4 bars, IV (A) for the next 2 bars, I (E) for the next 2 bars, and V7 (B7) for the final 2 bars.