
Playing Rock Chords (Using Whole Notes)

Introducing Power Chords and their Role in Rock Music

Electric rock guitar playing is generally divided into two areas:

- **Rhythm guitar** playing
- **Lead guitar** playing.

Lead guitar usually involves playing single notes, whereas rhythm guitar playing involves the use of **chords**. Playing chords involves playing more than one note at the same time.

The maximum number of notes that can be found in a guitar chord is 6, but quite often in rock music we use **power chords** which only have 2 notes. The musically correct name for a power chord is a **5 chord**.

There are 7 **natural notes** and they are called by the letters of the alphabet namely:

A, B, C, D, E, F, G.

Lesson Objectives

- Introduce **power chords**, also known as **5 chords** and be able to play the **chords** of A5 and G5.
- Introduce **chord boxes** to help understand chord shapes.
- Introduce the **plectrum** and how it is used.
- Understand and be able to count **whole notes** and the concept of **common time**.
- Develop co-ordination in both hands in the playing of rock chords.
- Introduce **repeat signs**.

Understanding the Chord Box Diagram

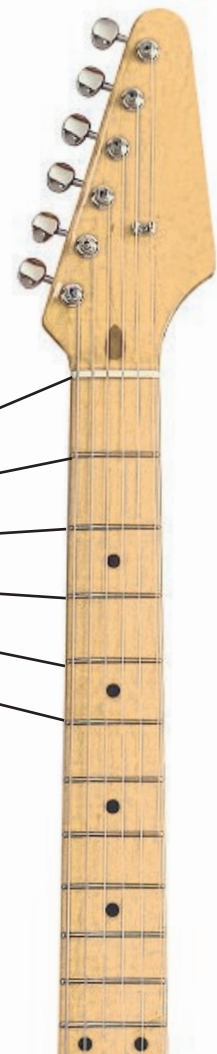
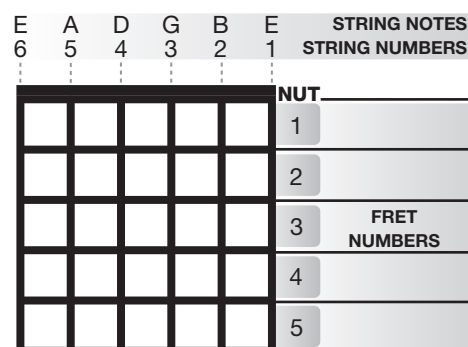
Throughout the course we will be representing the neck of the guitar (**fretboard**) using diagrams. The most widely used diagram is that of a **chord box**.

To illustrate how a chord box works, you can see that (on the right hand side) there is a picture of the neck of an electric guitar alongside a chord box.

The vertical lines on the chord box represent the strings of the guitar and the horizontal lines represent the **fret (fret markers)** of the guitar.

Now look at the top of the chord box. String number 6, is called the E string and is closest to you when you look down at your Guitar. This string has the lowest note in terms of **pitch** and is therefore called the bottom string. String number 1 is therefore the top string.

A Chord Box



Understanding the Guitar Fretboard

To play different notes on the guitar we place our fingers on the fingerboard between the metal fret markers. The space in between each marker is called the fret.

Each space is numbered with the numbers increasing as we approach the body of the guitar. Look at the picture below. We have numbered the fingerboard up to the 7th fret.



E
A
D
G
B
E
STRING NAMES



Plectrums or Picks

Role of the Plectrum in guitar playing

The **plectrum** or **pick**, is the piece of plastic we hold in our right hand that we use to strike the guitar strings with. Plectrums come in varying levels of stiffness.

It may be best as a beginner to use a light and flimsy plectrum until your technique has been developed. A heavier plectrum may be more difficult to use but will create a more solid sound when striking the strings. Ideally you should try various different plectrums to see which type you prefer.

Holding the plectrum

The plectrum should be held between the thumb and index finger, as shown in the picture opposite. There is an instructional video you can refer to which will help you understand how to hold the plectrum.



Video 1: Using a Plectrum

lesson001.igsprc.techstore.plec

Numbering of the fingers on the Fretting Hand (the hand that plays on the Fretboard)

Looking at the picture to the right, you will see the fingers of the fretting hand are numbered from 1 to 4, with the index finger being number 1 through to the little finger being number 4.

The thumb has no number and is referred to as the thumb (rarely used on the fretting hand).



Introducing the Chord of A5

Now we have gone through some of the essentials let's get playing. Using your fretting hand press fingers 1 and 3 down on the strings as shown in the chord box below.

This is the chord of A5, so make sure your 1st finger is on fret 5 on the 6th string and your 3rd finger is on fret 7 on the 5th string. Watch the second video file which shows how your right hand plays the 6th and 5th Strings.

Video 2: Striking strings 6 and 5

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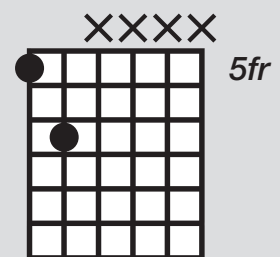
Now play the chord of A5. You will see how we strike strings 6 and 5 simultaneously with the plectrum, with an even weight. Make sure that both strings can be heard clearly without buzzing or rattling.

Now watch *Video 3* and compare to the sound you are creating.

Video 3: Playing the Chord of A5

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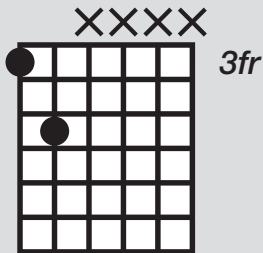
Chord of A5



An 'X' above a guitar string denotes a string that is not struck with the right hand.

5fr means that the first line in the box is the 5th Fret, accordingly 3fr is the 3rd Fret etc.

Chord of G5



Introducing the Chord of G5

Using your fretting hand press fingers 1 and 3 down on the strings as shown in the chord box below.

This is the chord of G5, so make sure your 1st finger is on fret 3 on the 6th string and your 3rd finger is on fret 5 on the 5th string.

Watch again the video showing how your right hand playing the 6th and 5th Strings.

Video 4: Striking strings 6 and 5

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Now play the chord of G5. You will see how we strike strings 6 and 5 simultaneously with the plectrum, with an even weight, just as we did for A5.

Make sure that both strings can be heard clearly without buzzing or rattling.

Now watch *Video 5* and compare to the sound you are creating.

Strike strings 6 and 5 simultaneously with the plectrum with an even weight making sure that both strings can be heard clearly with no buzzing or rattling.

Video 5: Playing the Chord of G5

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Introducing and Understanding Whole Notes (Developing Rhythm)

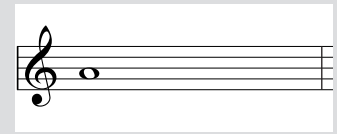
We are about to use our first two chords to create music, but before we can do this we need to have some understanding of counting rhythm.

Music is ordered into **bars**. The most common bar is divided into 4 beats and because it is the most common it is called **common time**.

In a bar of common time there are 4 beats. In the example below there is only one note and it lasts for 4 beats. Consequently this note is called a **whole note** as it fills the whole of a four beat bar.

A Whole Note

Worth 4 beats



1 2 3 4
Count

Co-ordination between your hands

When changing between chords, ensure that the fretting hand arrives on the new chord at precisely the moment the plectrum strikes the strings on the first beat of the new bar. Enough time must be allowed for the fretting hand to reach the new chord as well to ensure the new chord is played on the first beat of the next bar.

Use the multimedia files to help you understand what you have to do in this exercise. When you play along with the play-along files you can change the tempo and cycle the exercise round and round. You can also mute the guitar track and replace the guitarist, so that you play exclusively with the band.

You will hear four clicks to introduce the track, then play along playing chords each bar. Make sure you count to four, so that you know when to change chords.

Exercise 1: lesson001.igsprc.01



Repeat Signs

The purpose of repeat signs are to save the **composer** writing out repetitive patterns unnecessarily.

A repeat section is denoted by a beginning repeat mark and an end repeat mark. The music in between is simply repeated as many times as is noted. Our first MIDI file exercise is an example of the use of repeat signs to show that the music needs to be played twice.

A repeat mark is made up of two lines and two dots. One set of lines and dots marks the beginning of where to repeat and another set of lines and dots where the repeat ends.



Beginning of the repeat

From here you go to the end of the section and then return to here and play through the repeat section again. The number of times you repeat is normally clearly marked. In our exercises there are no limits to the repeats so you keep repeating until you are comfortable.

End of the repeat

Go from the end repeat mark back to the beginning of the section and play again all the bars from the beginning repeat mark, back to here.

From now on repeat signs will be used in all exercises where repeats are required. This is intended to get you used to seeing these markings.

Posture

We are trying not to over burden you with loads of technical information in these first few lessons, as we are keen that you get on and do some playing and get a real idea of making music. However, there are some useful things to know.

We feel it is important to have an idea of how you should be sitting and holding the guitar so we have prepared a short instructional video clip about posture that you should find useful.

Video 5: Posture

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Anatomy of the Modern Electric Guitar

The Modern Guitar has three main parts joined together.

1. The **Body**.
2. The **Head Stock**.
3. The **Neck**.

We have added a few brief descriptions to help you understand your instrument's make up.

Machine Heads

The Machine heads can be tightened and loosened to tune the guitar strings. Tightening them sharpens the sound and loosening flattens the sound.

Frets

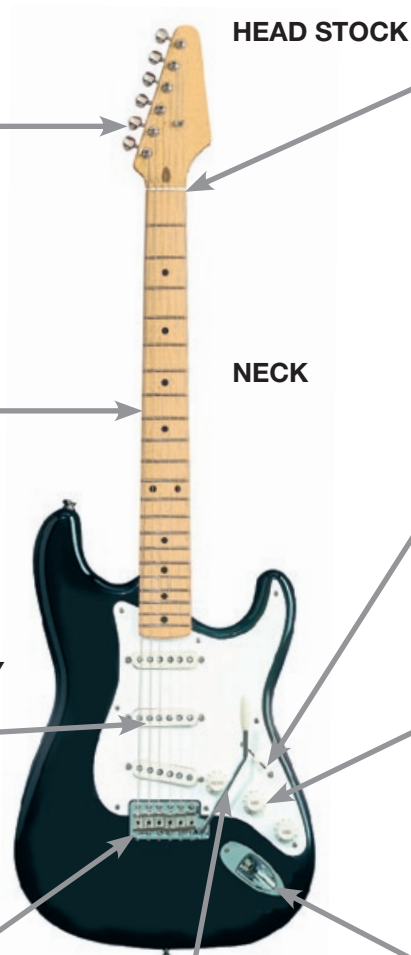
Each fret creates a different note. The nearer the fret to the body, the higher the sound.

Pick-ups

The pick-ups, 'Pick up' the sound of the strings and act like a microphone sending the sound down the cable from the Jack input to an amplifier.

Bridge

The strings are connected from the bridge of the guitar to the machine heads. You can adjust the height of the bridge to make the strings lower or higher on the guitar neck, according to how you want the guitar to sound and feel to play.



Nut

Separates and gives height to the strings at the top of the fretboard.

Pick-up selector switch

Selects which pick-up is active. Each pick-up creates a different sound. The nearer the neck, the warmer the sound. The nearer the bridge brighter the sound.

Volume and Tone controls

You control the volume of your guitar on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being loudest. The tone is controlled in the same way with 10 being the brightest.

Jack input

This is where you plug one end of your guitar lead into. The sound comes through here into the cable from the pick ups and with the other end of your cable connected to your amplifier, you now have sound.

Tremolo Arm

The tremolo arm is not found on all guitars. It raises and lowers the bridge to create a tremolo or vibrato effect.