SLIDE GUITAR SOLOING TECHNIQUES

Discover the Techniques and Secrets of Modern Slide Guitar Playing



Learn Slide In Open & Standard Tunings

Master Intonation, Vibrato & Expression

Discover "Behind The Slide" Playing

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LEVI CLAY

FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES

Slide Guitar Soloing Techniques

Discover the techniques and secrets of modern slide guitar playing

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Chapter One: An Introduction To Slide Playing

Playing slide is one of the few techniques that can change your approach to the guitar at such a fundamental level that it almost becomes a new instrument.

For over 100 years, players of stringed instruments have experimented with items like medicine/beer bottles, copper pipes, knives and more to press on the string and act as a “movable fret”. This gives the player near infinite expressive possibilities as they slide between pitches and capture microtonal detail like that of the human voice, rather than the fret-by-fret steps of regular guitar playing.

Finding popularity with the import of the “slack-key” guitar to Hawaii (Spanish guitars that were tuned to open chords and played with a bar), slide guitar found prominence in the blues playing of the Mississippi Delta, with guitarists like Bukka White, Sylvester Weaver, Son House and Robert Johnson taking the style across America and beyond.

This early style of slide blues predated guitar amplifiers, and is an important introduction to the style, often played on beat up old acoustic or resonator guitars with a high action. I covered this style in detail in my book *Delta Blues Slide Guitar*, so check it out if you want an authentic trip down the Delta.

This book examines slide playing in a landscape of loud amplifiers and effects, where slide guitar became a technique that could take the spotlight and captivate audiences.

Electric slide guitar developed an early audience due to players like Elmore James and Muddy Waters, but really took off in the 1960s, coinciding with the British blues boom. Bands like The Rolling Stones, Fleetwood Mac and Led Zeppelin all wore their American blues influences on their sleeve. American rock groups were also featuring slide guitar more prominently, with Duane Allman, Garry Rossington of Lynyrd Skynyrd, Johnny Winter, Ry Cooder and many others all establishing slide as a staple sound of the electric guitar.

Slide playing has been a great tool to bring rootsy blues influences to any genre and can be heard in diverse styles, from Zakk Wylde's work with Ozzy Osbourne to Slash's emotive solos with Guns n Roses, to Joe Perry's work with Aerosmith.

Other important slide guitar work includes the gospel and jazz stylings of Derek Trucks, Sonny Landreth, Jack White of the White Stripes, and Dan Auerbach of the Black Keys. One of my favourite players is Joey Landreth, who fluidly combines American jazz and soul influences with modern blues songwriting. He's proof that slide is a style that continues to evolve. There are also guitarists who go out of their way to emulate slide guitar on a fretted guitar, with players like Jimmy Herring and Michael Lee Firkins being renowned experts.

It's important to point out that slide guitar isn't a "science" in the same way that classical guitar is. It doesn't have centuries of pedagogy surrounding it. Slide guitar is unorthodox at its core. In some ways, this book is a direct contradiction to the ethos of playing slide! Slide guitar has an aural and personal tradition, so while I'm going to teach you everything I know about slide guitar in this book, remember that I learnt it with my ears and eyes.

That said, I can confidently say that learning slide guitar will make you a better, more lyrical, and more expressive guitar player – with or without the slide in your hand. This book will help guide your journey and give you a good head start, but never stop listening to real slide music. Never stop experimenting and never stop learning!

Choosing a slide

Deciding what kind of slide to use and which finger to wear it on is a big decision.

I don’t recommend that you wear the slide on the index finger, but the middle, ring, and pinky fingers are all viable candidates. Each finger has its own set of pros and cons, so I suggest you try it on each finger and see which you find most comfortable.

I learned with the slide on my ring finger *ala* Derek Trucks, but then found myself switching to the middle finger like Brett Garsed. In the last couple of years, I’ve developed a lot of vocabulary with the pinky finger and I’m now able to switch between fingers, depending on how I want to play. The point is, nothing is set in stone – once you understand the technique required to play slide guitar, you’ll be able to relearn with the slide on a different finger quite quickly.

Another tricky aspect of slide choice is the diameter. This will depend on the size of your hands, which finger you wear it on and how you like the slide to feel on the finger. I like quite a loose-fitting slide on the ring finger, but something a little tighter on the pinky, so I have various slides. It’s important to give different slides a try and not to write the technique off as uncomfortable, when it may be a case of not having found a slide that’s comfortable yet.

The final thing to consider is the slide’s material. The most popular materials are brass and glass, but you’ll also find slides made from copper, ceramic, nickel and more if you shop around. Each material sounds slightly different, but the biggest difference to a beginner is normally the weight. I like to use a thick glass slide (although I’m also fond of brass as it’s a little heavier and creates some aggressive high frequency string noise, which is great with an overdriven tone!)

If you’re shopping online, I can personally recommend The Rock Slide company in the USA who make an awesome selection of slides with various modern twists like ball ends and tapered interiors for your playing comfort.

Guitar Choice and Setup

Where electric slide guitar differs greatly from early Delta slide is the range of notes that can be played. As a soloist, you'll play all over the neck, so an instrument with good upper fret access is preferred.

The Gibson SG can't really be topped as an instrument for slide guitar. It features two wonderful, high-output humbuckers, and the two cutaways allow the neck to join the body right up at the 21st fret to give unrivalled access to the upper range of the guitar.

Of course, there are no rules. Duane Allman was a die-hard Les Paul player, yet I can't think of a more cumbersome instrument to play slide on!

I recorded the audio for this book using two Telecasters. One was made by Suhr with a mini humbucker in the neck and a vintage Telecaster bridge pickup. The other was a Fender Telecaster with Joe Barden's Danny Gatton pickups.

The most important area for consideration is the *setup* of your instrument.

Setup covers factors like how high your strings are above the frets (known as the *action*), and how much bow there is in the guitar neck (known as *neck relief*). Action is extremely important when you begin playing slide guitar, as the strings need to be high enough above the frets that they don't push the strings down onto the actual fret.

Modern electric guitars ship with a medium-to-low action, but they can be setup for slide easily, usually by adjusting some screws at the bridge (though this will vary depending on your specific model). If you're not sure, pop into your local music shop and ask if someone is able to help. If you have a bit of a budget, you can pay their resident guitar technician to set your guitar up for slide.

Once you've got a feel for playing side on a well set-up instrument, you shouldn't have a problem applying the techniques in this book to any guitar. I play slide on many different guitars, including my Vigier which has one of the lowest actions I've ever seen.

The last thing to consider is the strings. While playing fretted guitar with lighter strings such as .009s is fine, slightly heavier strings can help with slide technique, so consider bumping up to .011s.

Getting the Tone

Now that you've chosen a slide and what guitar to play, it's time to think about your tone.

While tone is always a personal choice, there are some things you can do to ensure you always create a good one!

The early electric slide players took advantage of the ability to naturally overdrive a tube amplifier. This happens when you push an amp beyond its normal operating volume and the cone reaches the end of its bevel. When the cone hits the end of its movement range, it stops suddenly and the normal sine curve of the sound wave begins to clip to create a nice overdriven tone. This overdrive creates a natural compression that softens off the peaks of the louder notes and evens out your dynamics.

Playing slide guitar without overdrive is certainly possible, but you will have to work a lot harder. A compressor pedal will help you get more out of your slide playing and can add more attack and sustain to your sound.

Aside from natural amplifier overdrive, there are many overdrive and distortion pedals that can help you get more mileage from your amp. These pedals add gain to simulate natural overdrive and smooth out your tone with natural compression. Experimentation is key: most guitarists own several overdrive pedals as we're constantly for searching for ways to create the sound we hear in our heads.

However, always remember that slide player extraordinaire Derek Trucks still goes straight from his guitar to his amp (where he might add a touch of reverb). So maybe there is some truth to the "tone in the fingers" rumours!

While it's possible to play slide guitar with a pick, most great players use only their fingers. One reason for this is that it makes muting the un-played strings easier and I highly recommend this approach.

Finally, and I cannot stress this enough, *slide guitar transcends notation*.

You may be the most competent reader in the world, but music notation was not designed with the nuances of slide in mind. It's near impossible to indicate accurate representations of notes being in (or out of) tune, and it's impossible to show clearly just how long a slide between two notes might take.

For that reason, I’ve gone out of my way to make sure that every audio example in this book is pristine. Download the audio now and use your ears to hear the nuances that can’t be described in the tablature. Listen carefully to each example and focus on turning the notes on the page into the sound you hear on the recordings.

With all that technical stuff out of the way, let’s get playing slide guitar!

Get the Audio

The audio files for this book are available to download for free from **www.fundamental-changes.com.** The link is in the top right-hand corner. Simply select this book title from the drop-down menu and follow the instructions to get the audio.

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Chapter Two: Getting in Tune

My last book bounced between the Open D and Open G tunings commonly used for Delta Blues rhythm guitar, but due the soloing oriented nature of this book, I'll begin by focusing on Open E tuning, then adapt the concepts to standard tuning later.

Open tunings (tuning the open strings of the guitar to a chord) are popular for slide guitar because the slide can be used a bit like a capo. It's useful to be able to strum with the slide touching the strings above a fret and play a chord that will always sound good. When soloing in an open tuning, you're also able to let strings ring slightly and it won't sound too bad. This usually isn't an option in standard tuning.

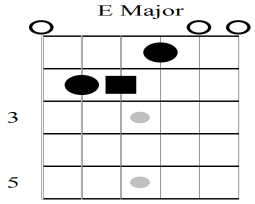
I've also chosen to teach in Open E as it's closely related to standard tuning, and is the tuning of choice for players like Elmore James, Duane Allman and Derek Trucks.

One frustrating aspect of relying on open tunings, however, is that you often don't know how to use a slide when playing a regularly tuned guitar, so in this book I'll teach you to apply everything you learn to standard tuning too.

First then, what is Open E tuning and how do we tune our guitar to it?

Open E means tuning the open strings of the guitar to the notes of an open E major chord (E G# B).

A quick way to do this is to look at an open E chord and tune the open strings *up* to the fretted notes in the chord.



To retune the open strings so that they contain the fretted notes of the E Major chord, we must:

Tune the A string up a tone (whole step).

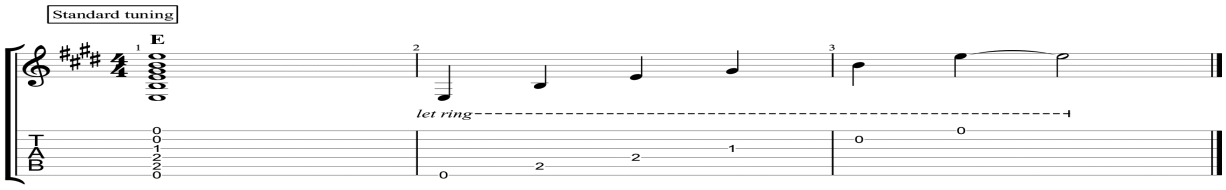
Tune the D string up a tone (whole step).

Tune the G string up a semitone (half step).

From low to high, the guitar should be tuned E B E G# B E. It’s that easy to tune your guitar to Open E!

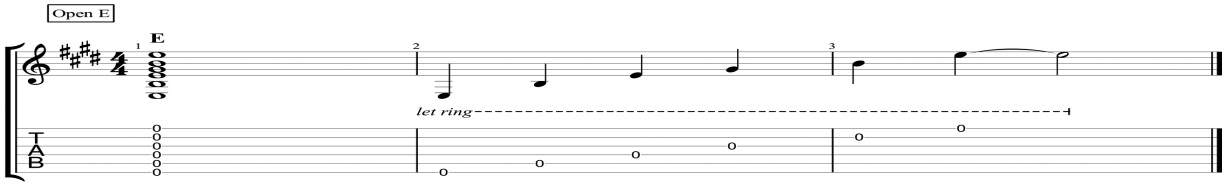
This first example shows me playing an open E chord in standard tuning.

Example 2a



Now here’s me playing the open strings with my guitar tuned to Open E. You can hear that it sounds identical.

Example 2b



We could stop there and just start playing licks, but I want to equip you with the tools to understand music at a deeper level and teach you another way to think about open tunings. Then you will be able to use them without having to think about shapes.

An E major chord contains the notes E, G# and B, so if you tune your strings to these notes, you’ll be in open E tuning. However, the notes don’t need to be in that order, so please don’t run off and tune your guitar E G# B E G# B!

In standard tuning the notes of the strings are E A D G B E. Knowing this helps us to quickly adjust these notes to create the open E tuning (E B E G# B E).

The low E string is already tuned to the root note of the chord.

The A string can be tuned up a tone to B.

The D string can be tuned up a tone to E.

The G string can be tuned up a semi-tone to G#.

The B string is already in an E major chord.

The high E string is already in an E major chord.

Knowing this, instantly gives you a better understanding of how other open tunings work. For example, if you know that a G major chord contains the notes G, B and D, then you could quickly create Open G tuning:

The low E string can be tuned down a tone to D.

The A string can be tuned down a tone to G.

The D string is already in a G chord.

The G string is already in a G chord.

The B string is already in a G chord.

The high E string can be tuned down a tone to D.

Another tuning you may come across is Open A. Knowing that an A major chord contains the notes A, C#, and E…

The low E string is already in the A chord.

The A string is already in the A chord.

The D string can be tuned up a tone to E.

The G string can be tuned up a tone to A.

The B string can be tuned up a tone to C#.

The high E string is already in the A chord.

I interviewed Joey Landreth recently, and when I asked about his tuning he talked for a bit and then nonchalantly said, “So it’s just a root, 5, root, 3, 5, root tuning.”

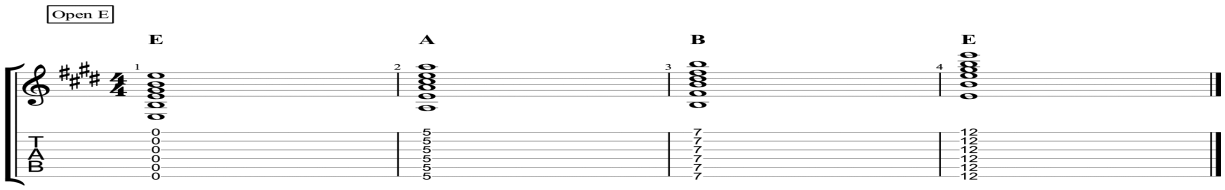
I had to stop him and draw attention to this. It confirmed to me that high level players are necessarily aware of the key they are tuned to when they play. Joey was thinking in terms of intervals rather than notes. We know that the E major chord contains E (root), G# (3rd), and B (5th), so our open E tuning of E B E G# B E could be described as R 5 R 3 5 R.

This may feel like more information than you need to know at this stage, but as you progress through this book, returning occasionally to this chapter will help you master open tunings in no time at all.

Before learning to use the slide, I want to show you some exercises that highlight the benefits of Open E tuning. As the open strings are tuned to an E major chord, if you hold a barre across the first fret, none of the intervals will change – you will be playing a major chord a semitone higher i.e. F major.

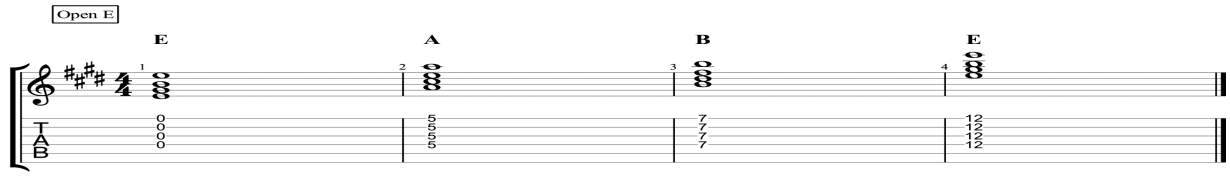
It’s therefore easy to play a I IV V progression in E major by playing the open strings and barring at the 5th and 7th frets. The 12th fret is an octave higher than the open position, so this is another way to play an E major chord.

Example 2c



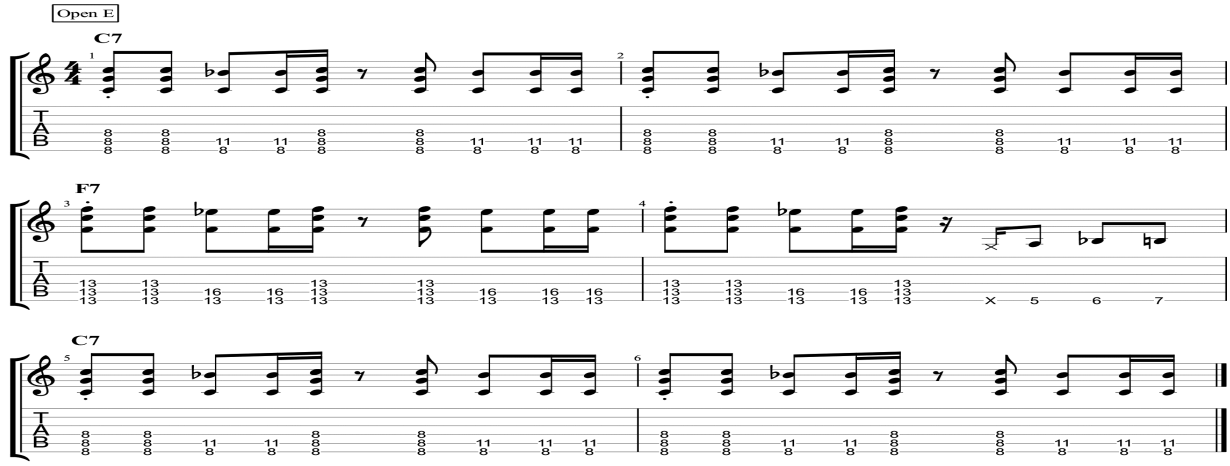
You don’t even need to play all six strings. Here’s the same I, IV, V, I chord progression using just the top four strings.

Example 2d



Here’s a simple open E riff similar to Derek Trucks’ groove on the song *Made Up Mind*. This doesn’t use a slide, but gives you a good idea about how to form a riff with the open tuning.

Example 2e



Before moving on, practise moving your standard tuned guitar to Open E and back again. The ability to confidently tune your guitar should not be overlooked.

hapter Three: An Introduction to Using the Slide

The most important part of playing slide guitar is understanding how the slide works, so that you can play using the minimum required effort and create the cleanest, most reliable sound.

The slide functions like a movable fret. To really understand that, it's worth thinking about how stringed instruments work and what a fret actually does.

On a fretless instrument like a double bass, the string vibrates when it is plucked. When you press a finger down on a string and it makes contact with the fingerboard, you reduce the vibrating length of the string so it vibrates at a higher frequency to create a higher pitch.

Unfortunately, on a double bass or violin, you can place your finger absolutely anywhere on the string to create near infinite, microtonal pitch options. This makes playing fretless instruments tricky as your fingering has to be perfect to get the correct intonation.

On a fretted guitar, pressing the string down anywhere between the 2nd and 3rd fret will push the string down so that it makes contact with the 3rd fret. This makes playing in tune much easier. However, a slide makes contact with the string from above, so you have to be very accurate if you want the note to be perfectly in tune.

It's important to realise that the slide doesn't press the string down so that it comes into contact with the frets. This means that you must develop a feel for how much pressure is required to create a strong note, without pushing so hard that the slide touches the frets.

The first exercise I want you to practise doesn't require any notation. Simply play the open strings and *lightly* place the slide on the strings directly over a fret and keep strumming. At first, the pressure will be so light that you won't create a decent note, but as you gradually increase pressure with the slide, the note will begin to sound cleanly.

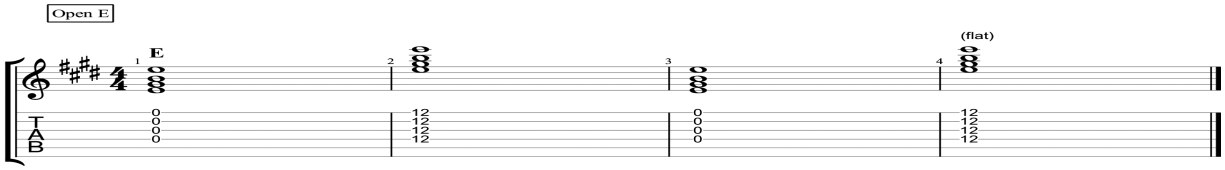
It's important to spend time getting a feel for the minimum pressure required to create a strong note without pressing the strings into the fret. This takes time and is something that will improve naturally as you progress through the book.

Intonation is the other aspect of using the slide that requires careful attention.

Intonation refers to the tuning of a note. Because the slide can fret the string at any point, it’s easy to place the slide inaccurately and play a note that’s out of tune.

In the next example, I play the open strings and place the slide precisely over the 12th fret. Next, I play the open strings again and place the slide midway between the 11th and 12th frets. Listen carefully to the recording and notice how the open chord sounds like an E major, and the second sounds flat.

Example 3a

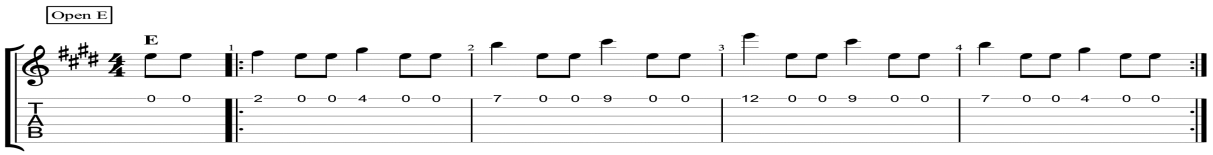


When playing slide, your goal is to place the slide as close to where the fret would make contact with the string as possible.

Here’s an exercise that features notes of the E major pentatonic scale (E, F#, G#, B, C#) played against an alternating open E string.

Play the open E twice, then the F# at the 2nd fret, then the open E twice, followed by the G# at the 4th fret, and so on. Keep the fretted note as accurate as possible and don’t add vibrato. Vibrato covers a multitude of sins, so focus on getting the notes perfect. You’ll learn to add vibrato later.

Example 3b

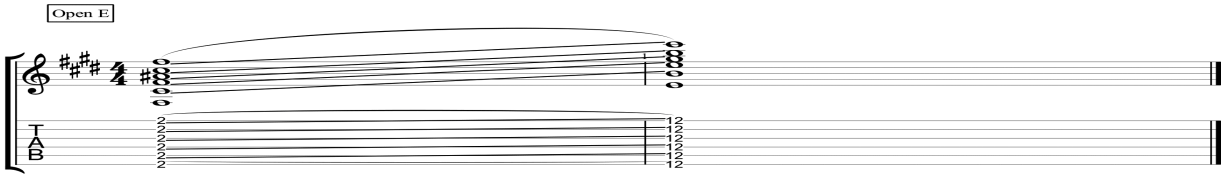


Regardless of which finger you wear the slide on, you must rest the remaining fingers on the strings behind the slide (between the slide and nut) to dampen the strings and prevent any unwanted vibrations. This is why the slide is not worn on the index finger.

Let’s learn how the slide can create smooth transitions from one pitch to another with a *glissando* (smooth slide between notes). Sliding with a bottleneck requires you to maintain an even pressure on the string as you move, because reducing the contact with the string will kill the note.

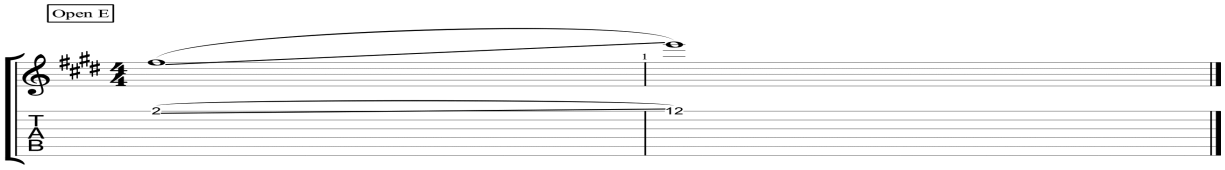
Place the slide on all the strings at the 2nd fret, strum the guitar and slowly slide up the neck to the 12th fret. The focus here is on maintaining the note. Move the whole arm horizontally – don’t try turning the wrist or moving the fingers, and don’t squeeze with the thumb on the back of the neck.

Example 3c



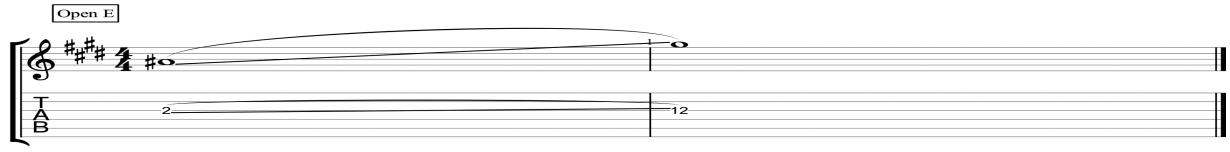
The same exercise can be played on a single string too. Here’s the same idea applied to just the high E string.

Example 3d



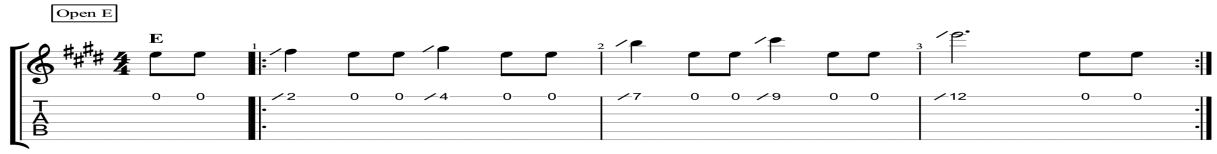
Now play it on the third string.

Example 3e



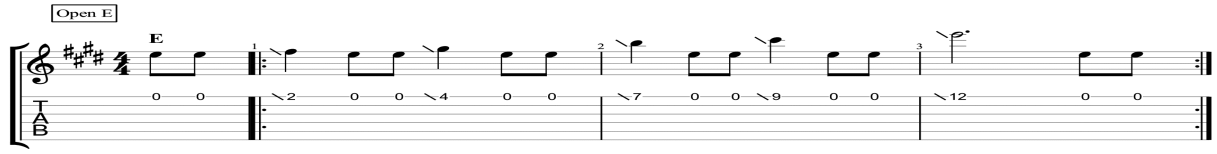
With this motion under control, try Example 3f. Notice that there's no fixed place to slide from – it depends on how fast you plan on sliding, and how you want to the note to sound. As a guide, aim for around two or three frets below the target note.

Example 3f



Reverse the exercise and slide into the fretted notes from above.

Example 3g



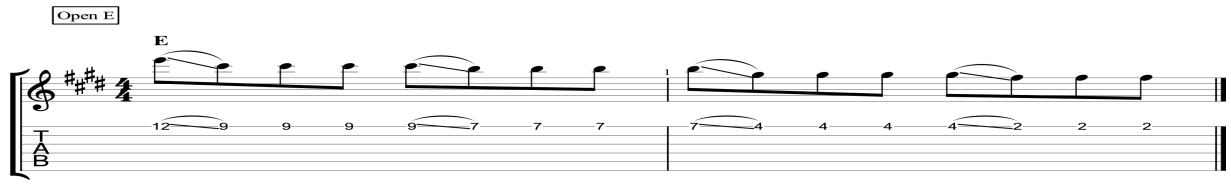
The previous two exercises feature the same notes but with different *articulations*.

These "indiscriminate" slides are great for effect, but there's much more to playing slide guitar than that!

Let's use the E major pentatonic scale on the high E string, but this time slide between defined pitches.

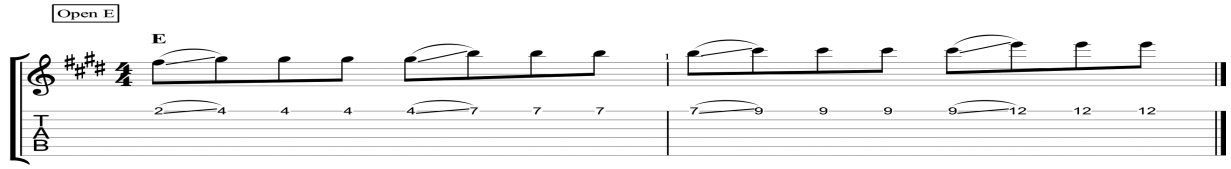
Play the E at the 12th fret and slide down to the 9th fret and pluck it twice. Pick once more and then slide down to the 7th fret and pick this note two more times, and so on.

Example 3h



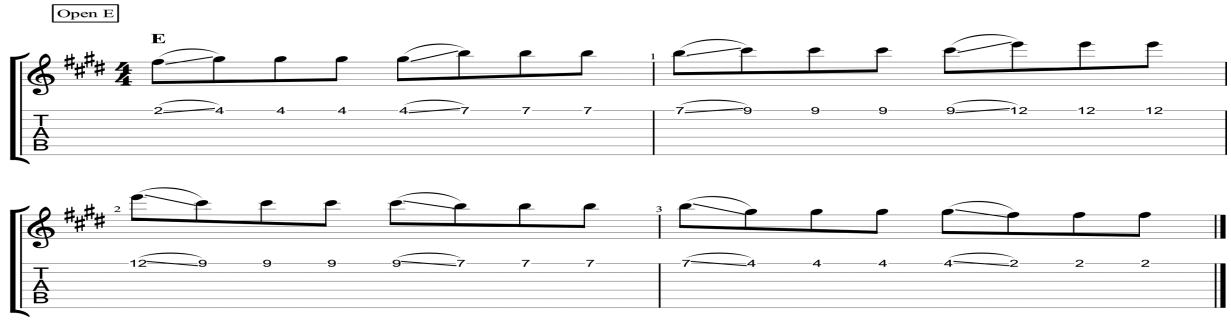
This idea can be applied to the ascending the scale too.

Example 3i



Now combine the ascending and descending versions of the exercise for something more lick-like.

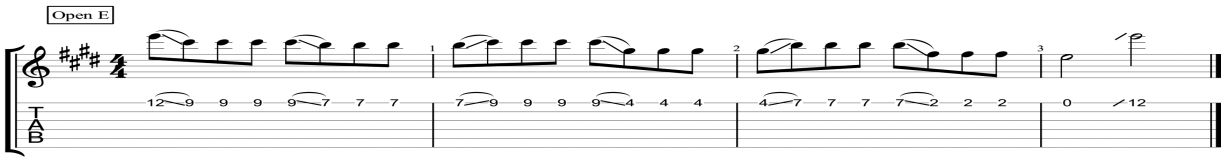
Example 3j



Finally, combine the slides in both directions to make a more musical phrase.

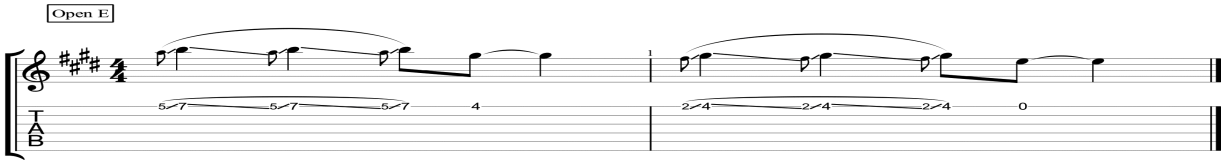
Pick the 12th fret, move down to the 9th, then descend to the 7th. Next, ascend from the 7th to the 9th before descending from the 9th to the 4th and repeat this pattern.

Example 3k



A useful exercise to help develop your intonation and technique is to slide into a note then, without repicking, drop down in pitch and slide back into the note. This can be repeated as many times as you like, or until you lose sustain.

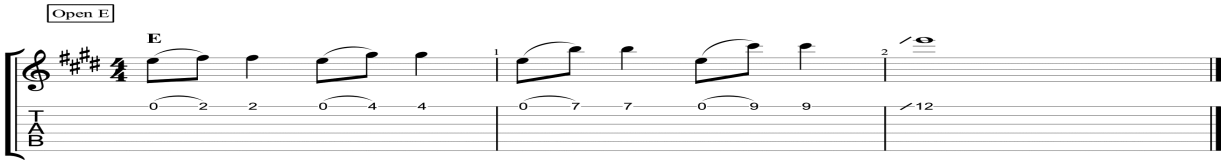
Example 3l



It is possible to play a hammer-on with a slide, although it’s a tricky technique. Slide hammer-ons are executed in the same way as you would play them with a finger, but as the slide sounds the note when you make contact with the string, it’s important not to hammer on too hard and make contact with the fret.

In this example, alternate between picking the open E string and hammering on to notes of the E major pentatonic scale.

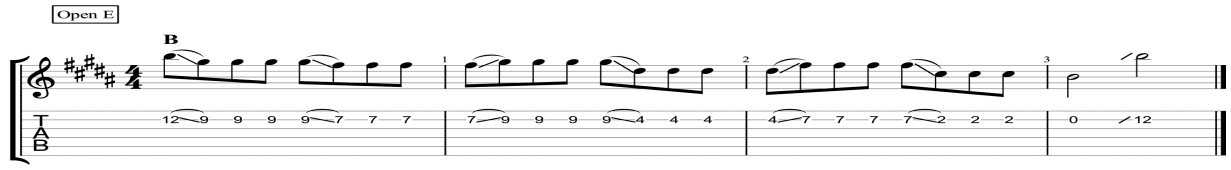
Example 3m



So far, all of the exercises have been played on the high E string, but we can play any of these ideas on other strings too.

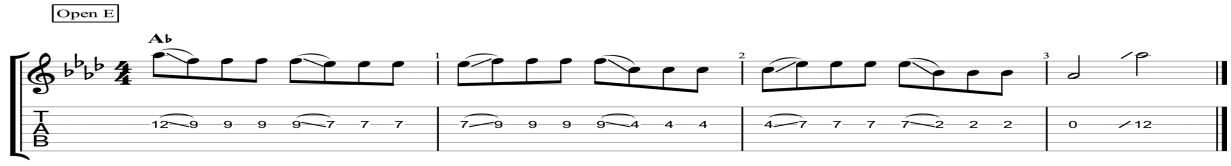
Here's Example 3k played on the second (B) string, meaning the lick now uses the B major pentatonic scale (B, C#, D#, F#, G#).

Example 3n



Here's the same idea again, but this time played on the third (G#) string to create a lick in the key of G# (or Ab).

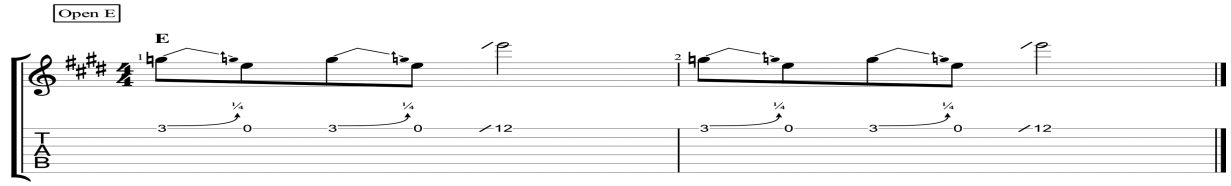
Example 3o



Another important technique is the use of *micro slides*. These are more akin to the quarter step bends or *blues curls* you often hear on a fretted guitar.

Play the 3rd fret and then move the slide ever so slightly sharp, much in the same way you'd bend the string on a fretted guitar. Getting these to sound right is an important part of nailing the bluesy sound of slide guitar.

Example 3p



With the ability to play notes accurately and the sliding mechanics under your fingers, the next thing to learn is how *vibrato* is created with the slide.

Vibrato is the technique of producing rapid changes in pitch, and creates a more expressive, melodic sound. Unfortunately, on an unfretted instrument, vibrato is sometimes used to help mask inaccurate intonation. That's why we should learn to play a pitch perfectly before adding vibrato.

Vibrato with a slide is created by combining multiple tiny slides that remain close to the intended pitch. It's a deeply personal subject – a player's vibrato is like a signature or fingerprint. Some players have a wide, fast vibrato, while some prefer a narrow, slow vibrato. There are so many variables that it's best if I show you the basic concepts surrounding the technique and you can find the sound that you prefer.

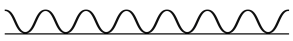
In notation and tablature, there's only one symbol for vibrato, but to help you understand it a little more I've created some graphical representations of the "sound" of different types of vibrato. It's really important to listen carefully to each audio recording of the following examples and compare what you're hearing to the images below. More important still is to copy the ones you like the most!

The first concept to understand is "intended pitch". As the name suggests, this describes the perfectly in-tune note that you are targeting. This pitch is indicated in the diagrams by a horizontal line.

The wavy line that intersects the intended pitch represents the vibrato applied to the note. When written above the intended pitch, the slide is moving sharp of the intended note. When it's below the intended pitch, the note is being played flat.

On a fretted guitar, the only way to create vibrato is by bending the string, so vibrato only ever *raises* the intended pitch of the note.

Example 3q



When we use a slide to apply vibrato *below* the intended pitch, it sounds just as jarring.

Example 3r



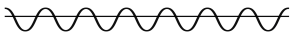
Vibrato that moves both above and below the intended pitch certainly sounds more musical.

Example 3s



However, you don’t need to achieve a vibrato as even as this. I like to go further below the intended pitch than I do above it. It’s hard to record something like this perfectly, because it’s not a science – it’s a feel thing – and is subjective, based on what appeals to your ears.

Example 3t



Another important aspect to consider is the *speed* of your vibrato.

It’s possible to have an extremely slow vibrato.

Example 3u



Or one that’s extremely fast

Example 3v



You could even mix up your speeds, perhaps beginning slow and gradually increasing speed.

Example 3w



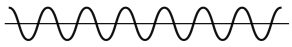
Then there's the *width* of your vibrato: how far you move from the intended pitch. This could be subtle with a thin vibrato.

Example 3x



Or wide enough to drive a truck through!

Example 3y



I encourage you to take a break from reading now and listen to some of your favourite slide players. Try to describe their vibrato styles and compare them. How are they different? What do you like? What don't you like?

It may seem odd to talk about vibrato in so much detail so early on, but it really is one of the most defining characteristics of any melody played on the guitar, whether it is with a slide or not.

Now that you understand how the slide works and how vibrato can be applied, spend some time getting comfortable with the technique before moving on to the next chapter. In Chapter Four we'll learn some expressive phrasing exercises.

Chapter Four: Single String Exercises

We'll get to examples across multiple strings later in the book, but one of the most unique aspects of slide guitar is the transition between notes – which lends itself to playing up and down the strings rather than across them. For this reason, it's worth exploring vocabulary that uses just one string as a way of improving our slide control. This will also help you learn various scales you can use when improvising.

The first scale worth exploring is the trusty minor pentatonic scale, which in E contains the notes E, G, A, B and D.

If you learn this scale as a set of intervals rather than notes, it will allow you to use it in any key. Instead of E, G, A, B and D, it is easier in the long run to think of this scale as Root, b3, 4, 5, b7.

This isn't a book on music theory, so if these terms are completely new to you, I'd recommend checking out one of Fundamental Changes' theory books. They will help you to brush up on the inner workings of music. Here, we are only worrying about playing!

Before getting into the examples, it's worth mentioning the muting techniques required to play these ideas cleanly and authentically.

As mentioned earlier, you should be using the fingers behind the slide to mute the string, but attention needs to be given to the strings in front of the slide.

As all of these examples feature just one string, it will serve you well to keep the strings you're not playing quiet.

If you're using a pick, this can be tricky as you'll need to experiment with some careful palm muting. This is the main reason I recommended fingerstyle technique for slide guitar – you can rest the side of the thumb on the lower strings, and use the fingers you're not plucking with to mute higher strings.

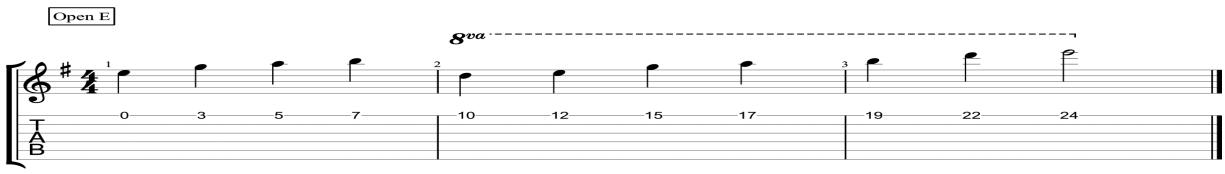
If, for example, I'm picking the high E string, my thumb will rest on the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth strings, allowing me to strike the first string as aggressively as I like with the index finger.

If I’m playing the third string, my thumb will rest on the fourth, fifth and sixth strings, while my middle and ring fingers will rest on the second and first strings respectively, allowing me to strike the third string with my index finger.

This will take time and experimentation, but I can’t stress enough how important this is in the long run.

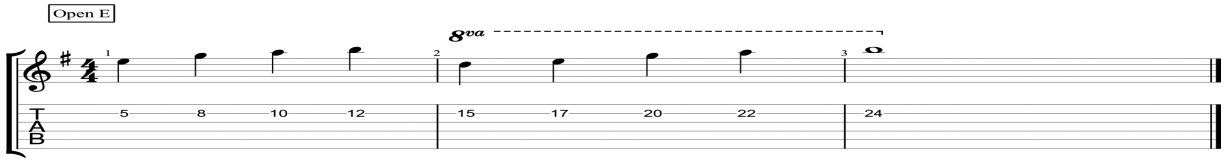
The first example lays out the notes of the E minor pentatonic scale on the high E string, and as this book is focused on electric guitar, it’s assumed you won’t have any problem going above the 12th fret (though just how far will depend on the guitar you’re using!)

Example 4a



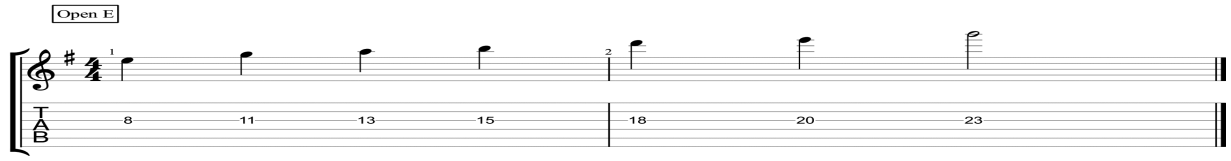
Here’s that same scale, but played on the B string, still beginning on the E root note, but now at the 5th fret. You’ll notice that the distance between notes is the same as in the last example, you’re just starting in a different place.

Example 4b



Here’s the same E minor pentatonic scale, but on the G# string. Now the E root note is found at the 8th fret, but again, from there the pattern is the same.

Example 4c

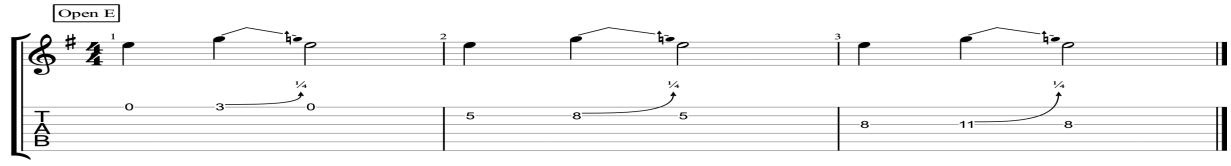


With the larger scale out of the way, I find it best to really dig into smaller fragments of the scale and make music, so we'll begin with the root and b3.

When playing the root of a chord/scale, the b3 will always be three frets higher.

Notice that in the following examples, I always tend to bend that b3 a little sharp. This helps to give it that blues vibe.

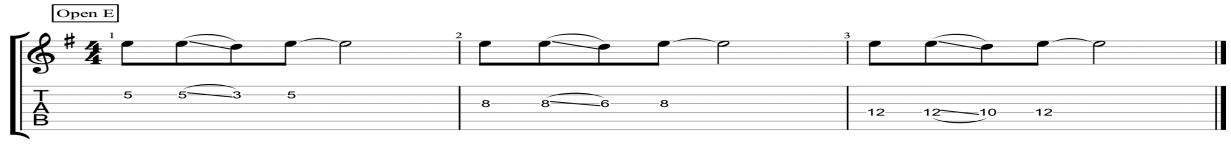
Example 4d



Two frets below the root note you'll always find the b7. This is a great note found in both minor 7 chords and dominant 7 chords, so perfect for blues, rock and jazz.

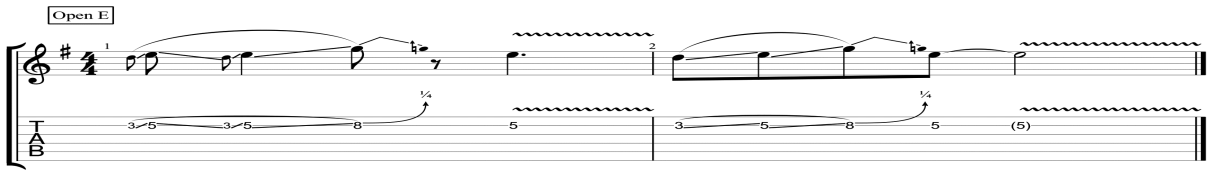
Obviously, you won't be able to do this on an open string, but anywhere you can find a root and can move two frets below, this will work.

Example 4e



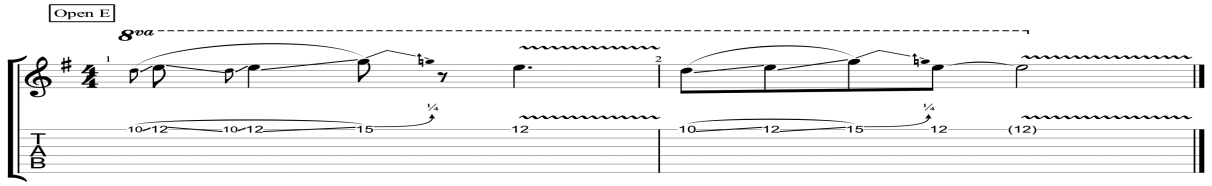
Now you've learned two strong notes around the root note, here's a simple phrase using just those three notes, with the root note at the 5th fret of the B string

Example 4f



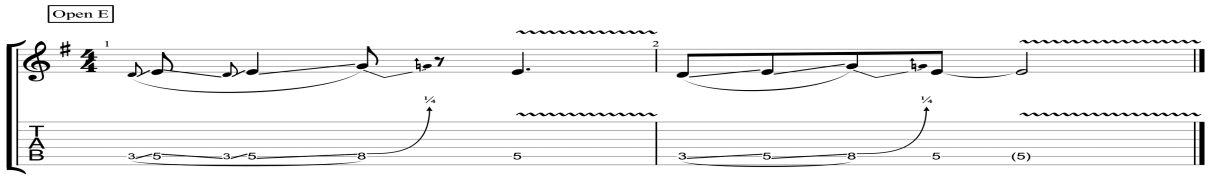
Here’s that same idea, but an octave higher, on the high E string at the 12th fret.

Example 4g



Here’s the same thing, but now down on the fifth string.

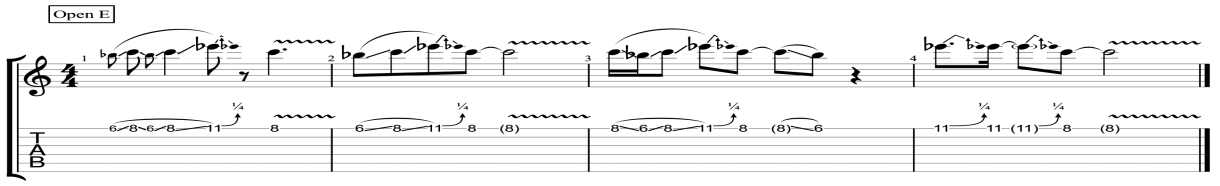
Example 4h



With that simple phase out the way, here something a little longer. This one features slides between multiple notes without repicking them, so take it slowly at first until you can make these transitions without losing the note.

To mix things up a little, this time you’re in C, at the 8th fret of the high E string. Once you have these patterns down, it’s easy to move them to any key. Before moving on, take this lick and play it in several keys on different strings.

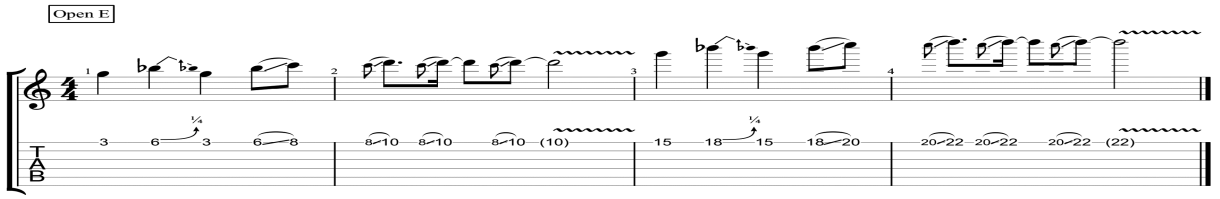
Example 4i



A tone higher than the b3rd is the 4th, and when you are here you can slide up a further tone for the 5th.

Here’s a musical phrase beginning on the root, but moving up to that 5th, seven frets higher. This is played in two different octaves, on the same string twelve frets higher.

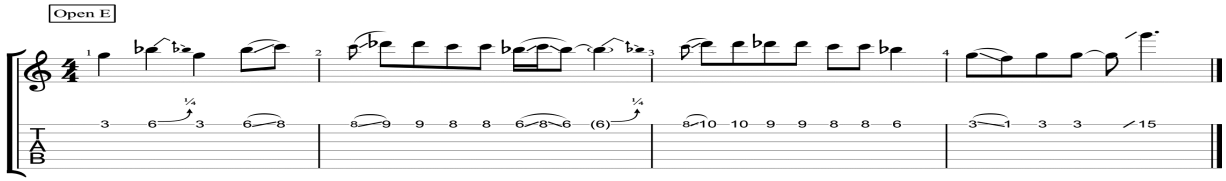
Example 4j



You’ll have noticed that the last lick wasn’t in E, it was in G. Again, using intervals means you’re able to transpose these ideas quickly to any key without needing to know the names of the notes in a G minor pentatonic scale.

To highlight this, here’s another lick in G, but this time adding the b5th (a semitone below the 5th) into the equation for a bluesy sound. There’s no need to know the note as Db, as long as you know what it sounds like, and where it is in relation to that root note!

Example 4k

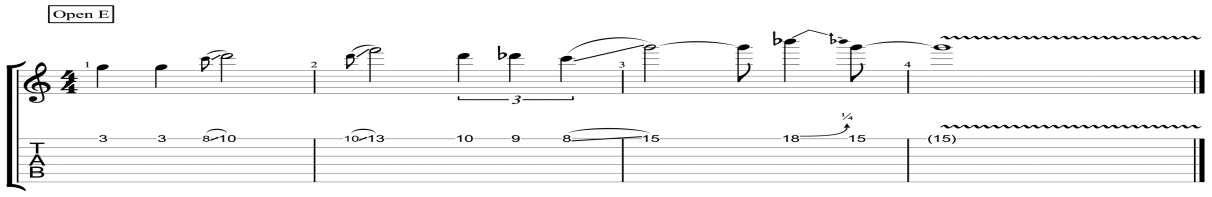


When on the 5th, you can slide up a further three frets and you'll be on the b7th.

Here's a great lick that begins on the 5th and slides up to the b7th. From there you use the b5th before sliding up to the root note an octave above.

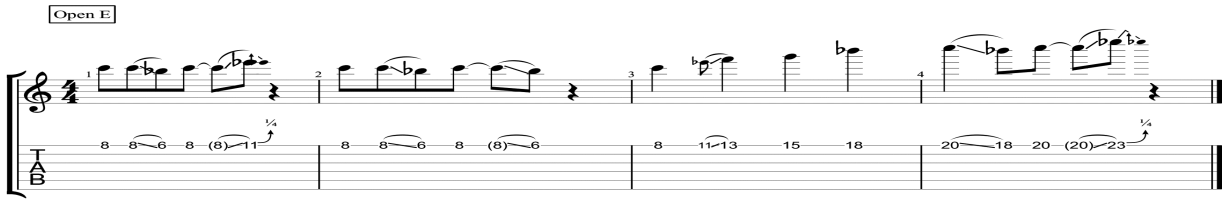
Note the vibrato here and how fast I slide between notes. Some sound best played fast, but others are really expressive if you take your time.

Example 4l



With all of these little fragments under your belt, here's an idea in C that begins on the 8th fret of the high E string, ending an octave higher at the 20th fret. This may feel high up, but when you listen to Duane Allman's classic slide solo on Layla you quickly realize that slide players can play pretty high up.

Example 4m

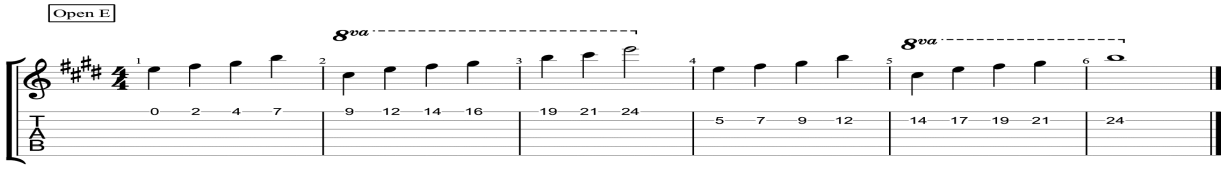


With those essential minor sounds out of the way, it's time to move on to the major pentatonic scale.

E major pentatonic contains the notes E, F#, G#, B, and C#, or the Root, 2, 3, 5 and 6.

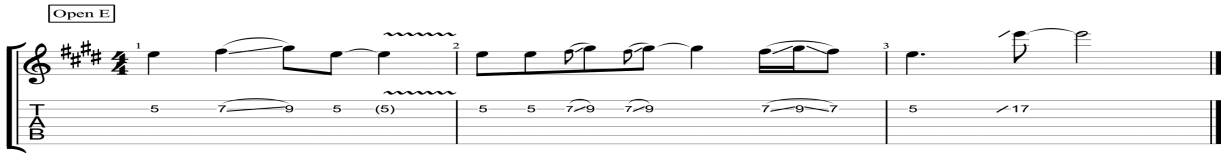
Here’s the full scale, first on the high E string, then beginning at the 5th fret of the B string.

Example 4n



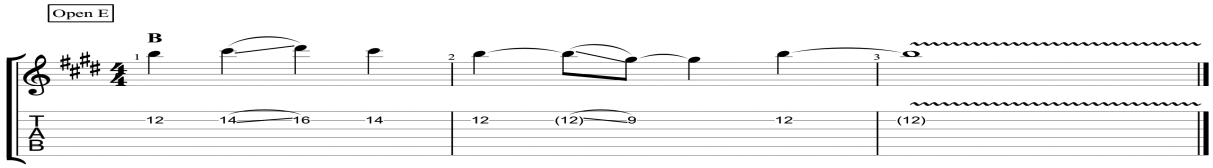
Now let’s begin learning the scale in smaller fragments. Here’s the root note, followed by the 2nd and 3rd, then a lick using them both in a musical context.

Example 4o



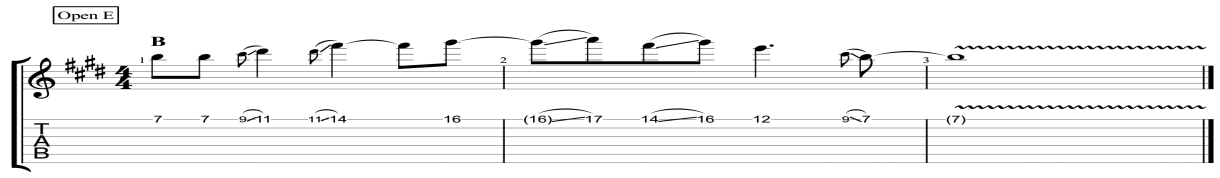
Three frets below the root is the 6th. This note has a really sweet sound that I associate with gospel and soul music. To mix things up, I’ve played this in B, around the 12th fret of the B string. This means the 6th is found at the 9th fret.

Example 4p



You should already know where the 5th is and the 6th can be found a tone above it. There are literally limitless ways to use this, but here’s a lick that I play often.

Example 4q

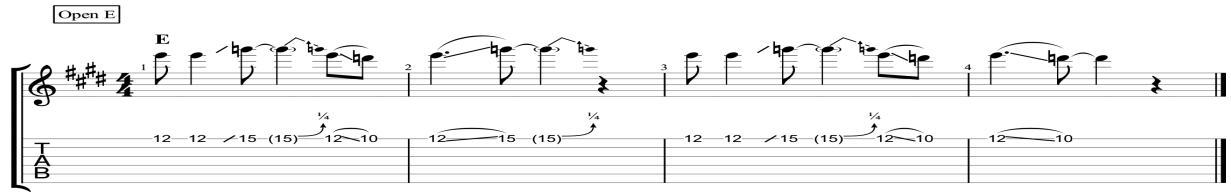


Now you have the notes of both the blues scale (R, b3, 4, b5, 5, b7) and the major pentatonic (R, 2, 3, 5, 6), you have the tools to start painting your own sounds. I love the sound of the minor pentatonic scale, but I find the b7 is quite dark in sound, whereas the 6th from the major pentatonic has a much sweeter quality.

It’s possible to create a hybrid of these two scales, R, b3, 4, 5, 6. I’ve heard this called many things, from the “minor 6 pentatonic” to “Dorian pentatonic”, and even the “Robben Ford pentatonic”, but to me it’s just tweaking the notes of one scale to give it the feel I want.

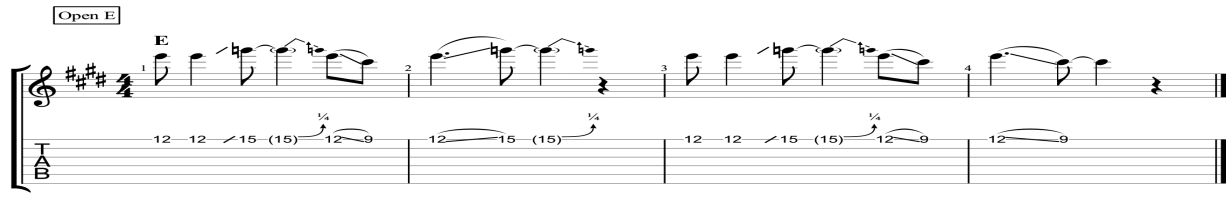
Here’s a lick played using just the notes of the minor pentatonic scale

Example 4r



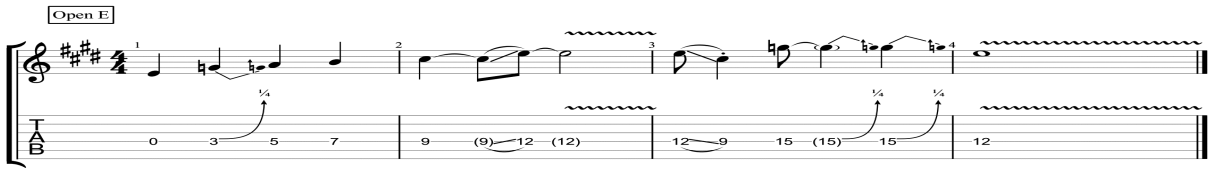
Now, here’s the same lick, but with the b7 switched out for the 6th. Notice how it instantly takes on a completely different, funkier vibe.

Example 4s



Here’s another lick using the same intervals, but this time played in a lower register, using the fourth (E) string.

Example 4t

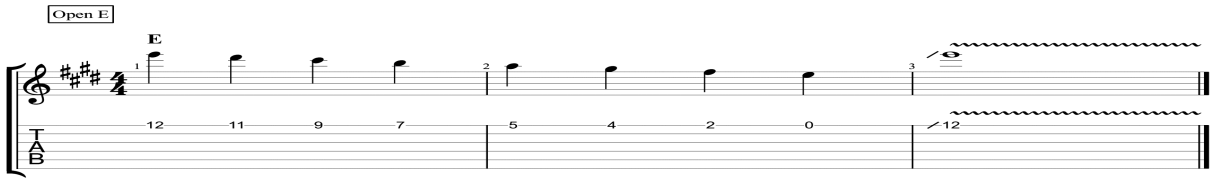


Another scale worth working on is the trusty major scale. In E, that’s E, F#, G#, A, B, C# and D#. Or Root, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

If you’ve been paying attention, you’ll probably have noticed that you know six of these seven notes. The only one that needs addressing is the 7th (D#).

As the scale on a single string shows, the 7th is found a semitone below the root note.

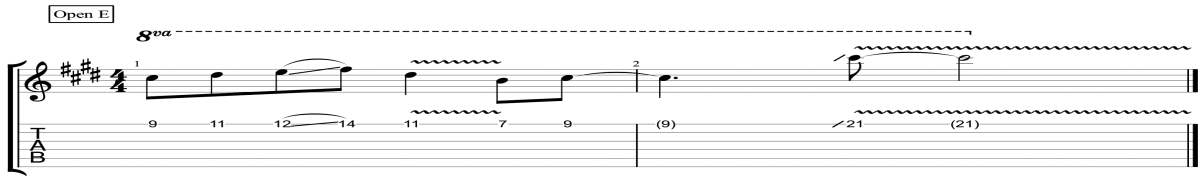
Example 4u



This scale can sound a bit “nursery rhyme”, but it’s an essential sound to have under your belt as its parent chord (the major 7 chord) does come up in jazzier music.

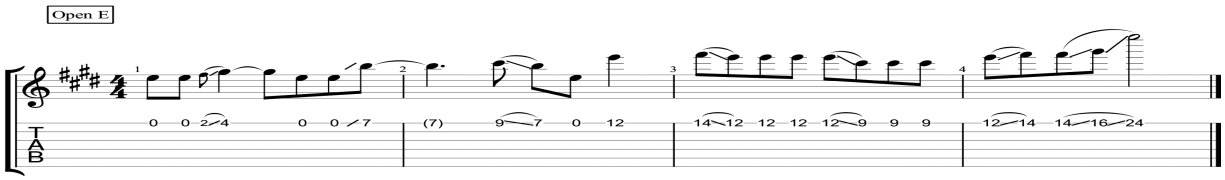
Here’s an example of a jazz lick (THE lick!) adapted for slide guitar on one string.

Example 4v



Here’s another major scale idea which you’ll notice ends on the 24th fret. Don’t worry if your guitar doesn’t have a 24th fret, your slide IS the fret, so you can put it wherever you want. It’s hard to get up this high (unless you’re playing an SG of course!) but if you have access, the sky is the limit. You can select the bridge pickup and slide right up to where fret 30 would be if you’re seeking a range that will drive dogs wild!

Example 4w



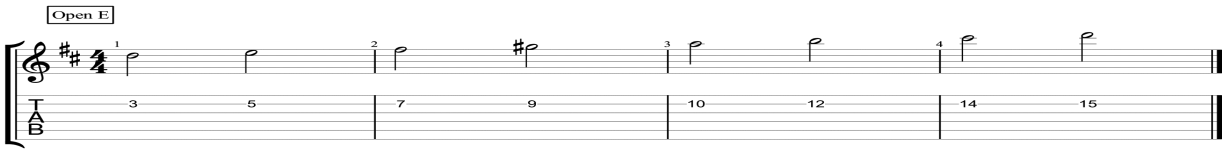
As mentioned in the introduction, a lot of the early slide influences came from Hawaii, but one of the more exotic influences some slide players explore is the world of Indian classical music.

This is a subject that could easily warrant its own book (or series!), but in short, Indian classical music uses collections of notes called “ragas” (or sometimes *raagas*) which don’t readily translate to Western music theory. Each collection of notes is considered to have the ability to colour the mind in a certain way, and tends to be used in specific circumstances, such as the time of day.

It’s an extremely deep subject, but one that Derek Trucks has explored for many years and he has used this influence from time to time in his compositions.

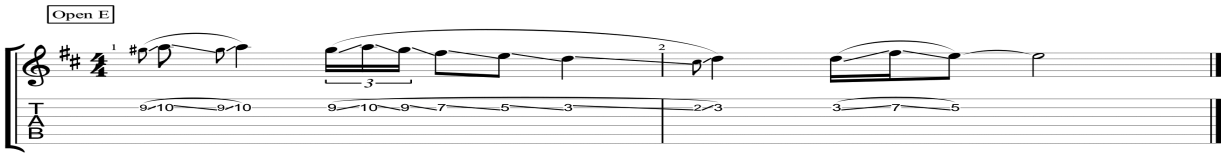
Here’s an attempt to translate the Raga Yaman to slide guitar. In its basic form it looks like the Lydian mode.

Example 4x



And here’s a lick using this raga.

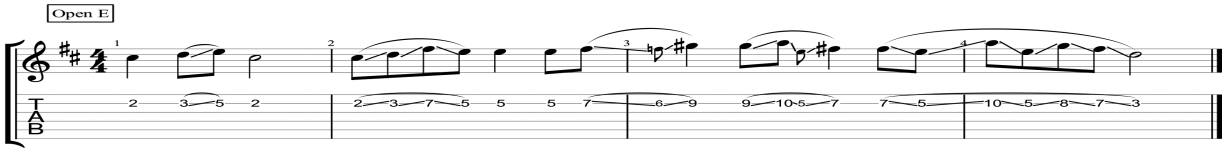
Example 4y



Finally, here’s an example adapted from the Derek Trucks band piece, *Maki Madni* from 2002’s *Joyful Noise* album.

One could attempt to analyse this in relation to Western music theory, but this would miss the point as this style of music cannot be boiled down to a formula.

Example 4z



With these single string ideas under your belt, I’d recommend you get used to playing different scales on each string as a way to practise your muting technique and attack. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, much of your slide vocabulary will exploit this single string style of playing, so it’s something you should feel at home with before moving onto string crossing.

Chapter Five: Single String Solo

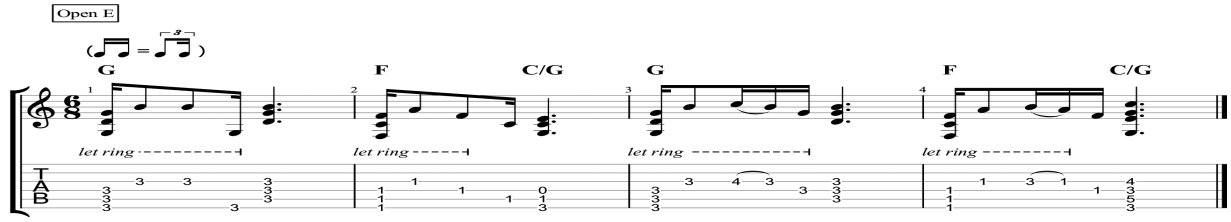
Now you have some simple, single string vocabulary under your fingers, I want you to see just how much music you can make already. If you can make a solo sound cool with limited single string vocabulary, just imagine what you can do when you add more strings into the equation!

Before launching into the solo, let’s discuss the chords and how we’re going to play them in Open E tuning.

The chord sequence is a simple diatonic progression with a bluesy soul vibe in the key of C Major. There are many ways to play these chords in Open E tuning and we’ll look at some more voicings later, but for now here’s a simple way to voice them.

Use your picking hand fingers for these chords as this will allow you to create incredible dynamic range. If you play rhythm guitar through a loud amp, but play as soft as a whisper, you can build up in volume with the band.

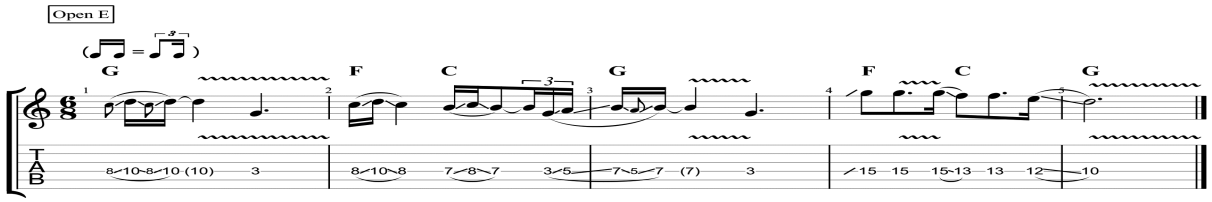
Example 5a



The first lick stays on the fourth string and uses notes of the C major scale.

Listen carefully to the recording, as the nuance in the rhythm is a big part of what the slide brings to the style.

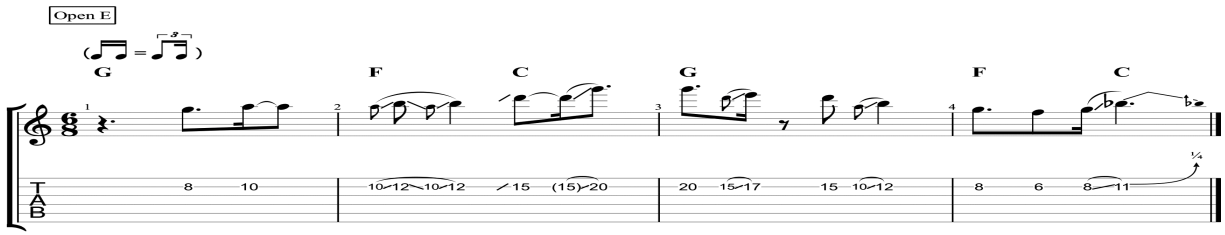
Example 5b



Example 5c has a similar feel to the pervious idea, but is now moved over to the second string.

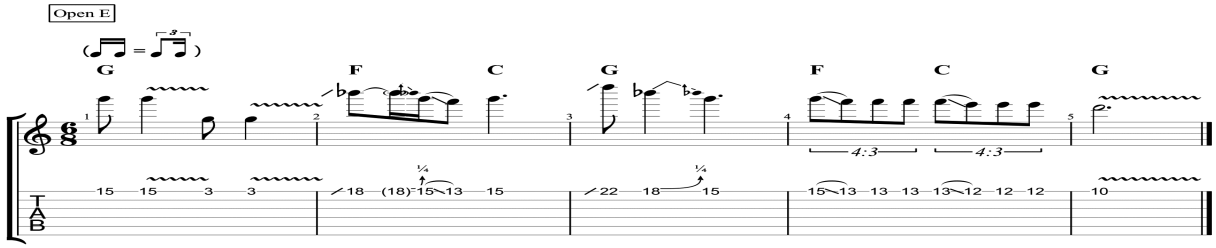
The final Bb comes from the G minor pentatonic scale, and bending it slightly sharp gives it a wonderful aggressive blues rock vibe.

Example 5c



The next example moves to the high E string and covers a massive 20-fret span! It’s important to learn the lick in small sections and look at where you’re aiming *to slide to*, rather than where you are.

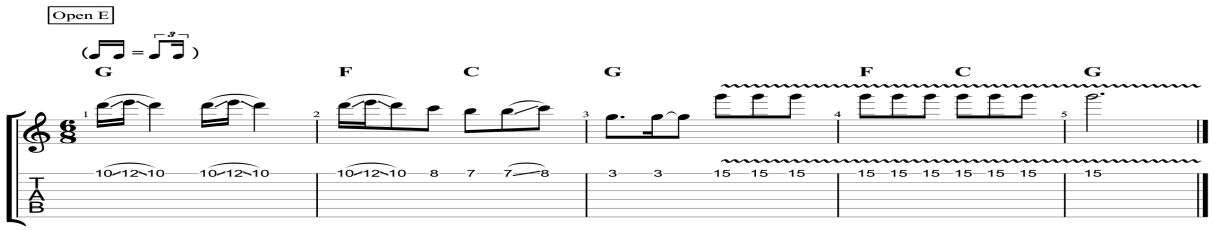
Example 5d



The final example focuses on simple major scale melodies that complement the chords. It’s is about playing strong melodies, rather than showing off.

On the final note, gradually increase the width of your vibrato as you re-pick it. This is a great way to reach a climax in a solo.

Example 5e



Creating solos like this is rewarding as you're able to use the slide to make something exciting and musical, despite the potential limitation of playing on single strings. If you can develop great vocabulary on single strings like this, you'll only improve your musicality and options when playing on multiple strings.

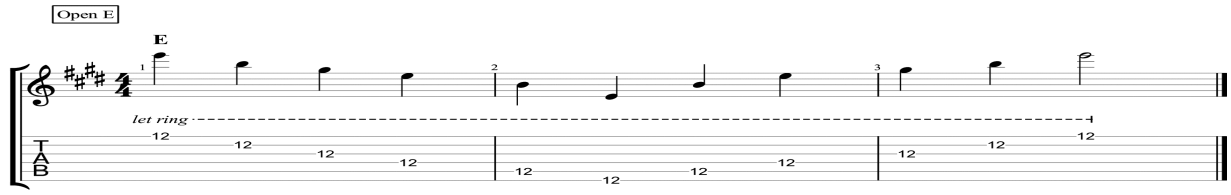
Chapter Six: Changing Strings

Now you're starting to get your slide skills under control and you have some musical vocabulary under your belt, it's time to expand your vocabulary with some licks that use multiple strings.

The toughest aspect of changing strings when playing slide guitar is stopping unwanted string noise. This won't always be necessary, but it's much better to develop the skills and not need them, than need them and not have them.

The first example features an E major chord at the 12th fret. As all of the notes are in the chord, it really doesn't matter too much if the notes ring into each other a bit.

Example 6a



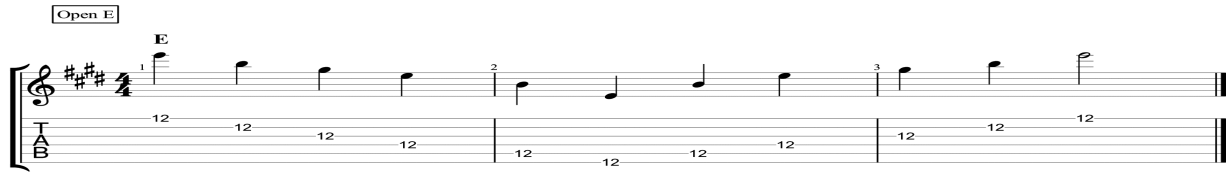
This same idea can be played again, but without having the notes ring into each other. In order to execute this, begin by muting strings 6-2 with the thumb and striking the first string with the index finger.

As you switch to the second string, the hand moves over so that the thumb mutes strings 6-4, with the middle finger muting the first string. This leaves the index finger free to pluck the second string.

For the third string, the thumb moves over again, while the index and ring fingers mute the first and second strings. As with the previous strings, the index finger is now free to pluck the third string.

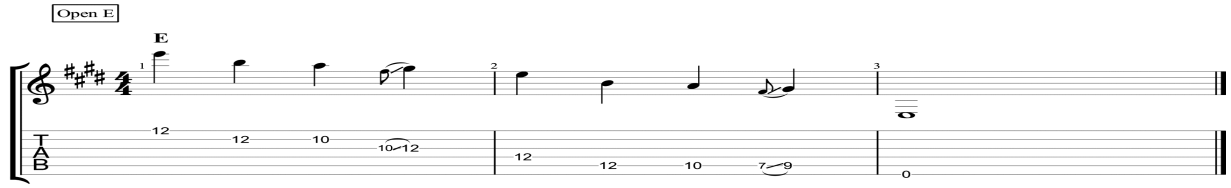
Continue this idea across the neck and focus on having as little note-bleed as possible.

Example 6b



Here’s another idea that covers multiple strings using 1/4 notes, so you can focus on your muting technique. Listen to the recording and use that as a benchmark for how clean this should sound.

Example 6c

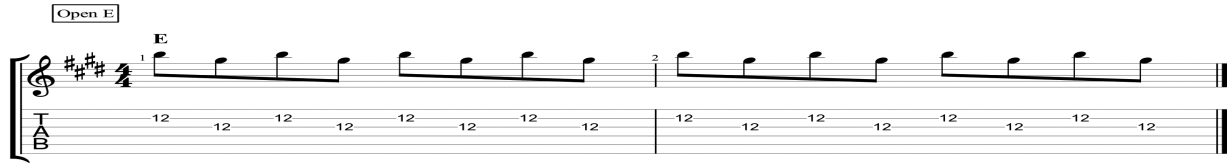


Another common string crossing mechanic slide players employ is alternating between adjacent strings.

This will often be played a little bit faster, which makes using the index finger to pluck both strings problematic.

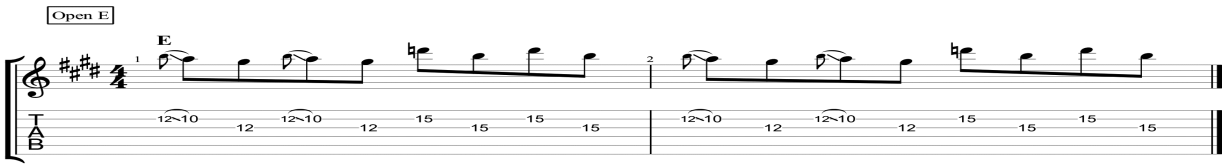
In order to build this one up, use the index finger to pluck the higher note, and the thumb to pluck the lower note. When plucking the high string, the thumb mutes the lower strings, and as soon as you pick the low note, the index or middle finger touches the high string to mute it. This has the added benefit of the finger now being placed ready to re-pick the note and continue the pattern.

Example 6d



Example 6e uses the same mechanics, but applied to a musical phrase. It’s unlikely this will be perfectly clean, but the goal isn’t to be robotic, just to clean things up enough to sound like you’re in control.

Example 6e

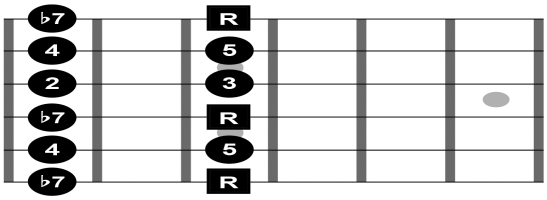


With those two mechanics covered, let’s look at the first box pattern you need to know in Open E. In fact, this one could be just about all you need!

Back in Chapter Two, I mentioned the interval structure of our Open E tuning. With our single string scales nailed, and due attention paid to the various intervals in different scales, this tuning analysis should make a little more sense now.

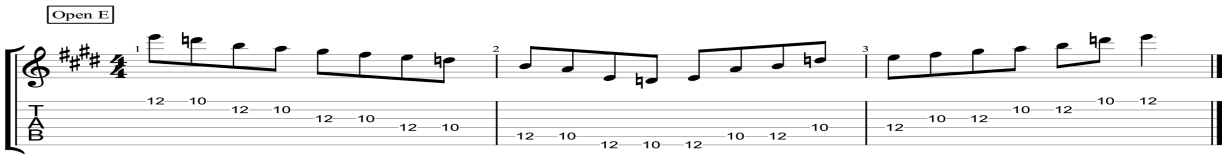
As a refresher, Open E tuning (E, B, E, G#, B, E) can be described as R, 5, R, 3, 5, R.

The first pattern to learn is formed by taking this barre form and adding notes a tone below. This is purely about “geometry” rather than it being a true “scale”. Looking at the following diagram, you should be able to tell that none of these notes are “bad” notes. Each of them is found in either the major or minor pentatonic scale.



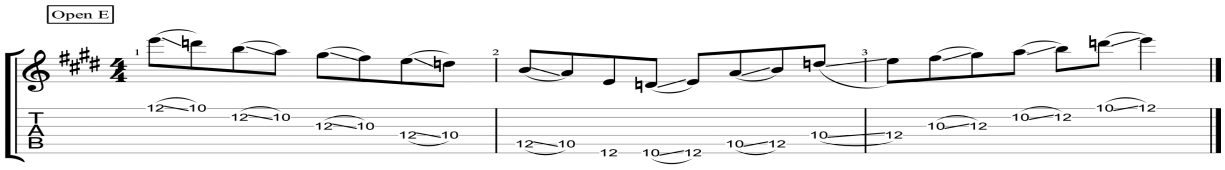
Begin by practising this pattern ascending and descending. The focus here is not having any of the notes ring into each other.

Example 6f



Here’s the same idea, but now sliding between notes.

Example 6g

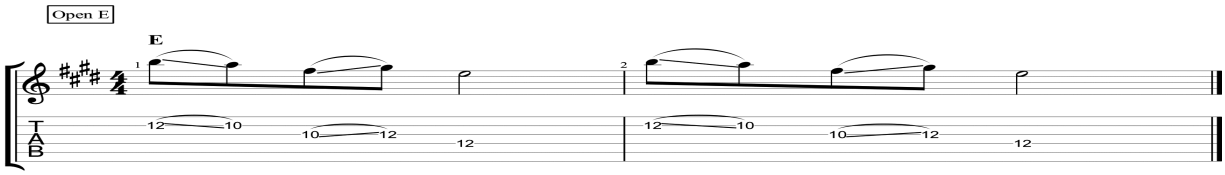


My approach is to think of the 12th fret as “home” and the notes two frets lower as adding “colour” for melodic interest. I will drop down to the 10th fret when playing, but it’s unlikely I’ll stay there for long, because none of these notes sound as strong as the chord tones at the 12th fret.

As an example, here’s a lick that moves down from the 12th to the 10th fret on the second string (taking you away from home), then shifts back from the 10th to the 12th fret on the third string (taking you back home), before playing the root note on the fourth string.

Listen carefully to the audio, because it’s almost impossible to capture the nuance of a lick like this in notation and tablature. To my ears, it sounds best when you slide slowly between those first notes, rather than the quicker slide that the notation would suggest! However, experiment with both because you’re likely to find a setting in which each will work.

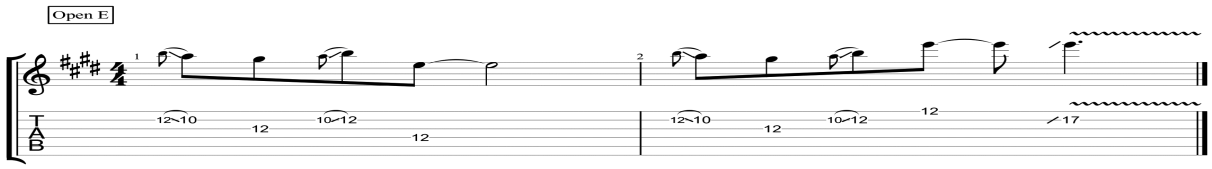
Example 6h



Here’s another lick in the same area, but now moving more quickly between the second and third strings. Here you’ll slide quickly down from the 12th to the 10th fret, then pick the third string at the 12th fret without any noticeable slide to it. This will take time to master, but it’s one of the most played clichés in slide guitar.

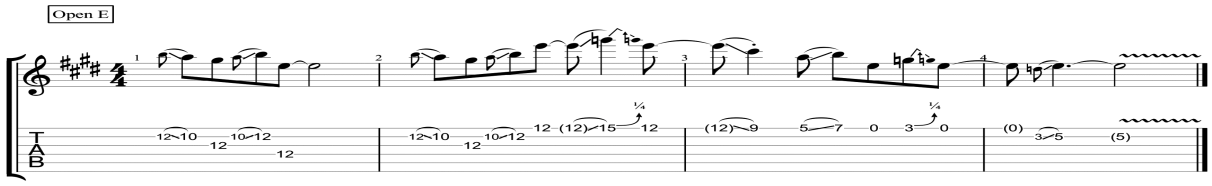
On the repeat, you’ll notice that after playing the root note on the first string, I slide up to the same note on the second string. This is the single string improvisation influence coming in.

Example 6i



Here’s that same string crossing idea with the switch to the root note on the second string at the end. This time I expand the idea a little with some single string minor pentatonic improvisation around the root note.

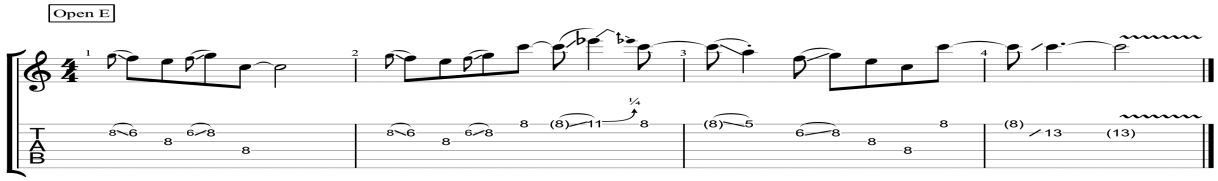
Example 6j



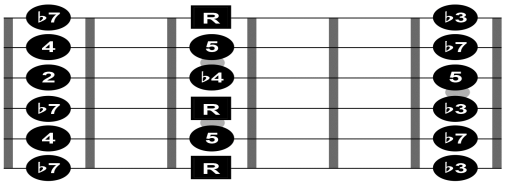
To demonstrate the viability of this approach, here’s the same idea, but now in C. This is as simple as moving your “home” barre position down to the 8th fret, instead of the 12th. The notes have changed, but the intervals are exactly the same!

The only drawback is that by moving down four frets, some of the notes on the lower positions in E won’t work, but that’s not a problem… just play something else around that home position!

Example 6k

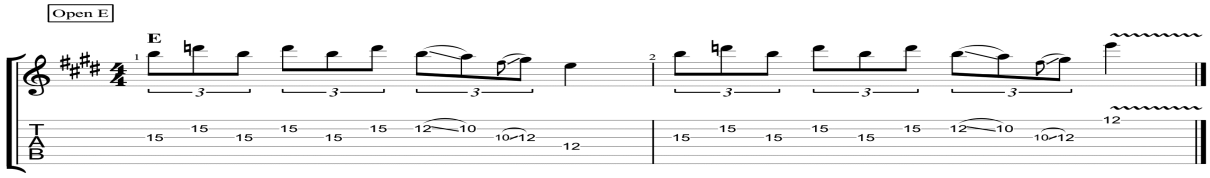


Another way to enhance this shape is to add notes three frets higher than the home position. Look at the diagram and you'll see that the intervals this creates are notes that keep the minor flavour, so they will work fine.



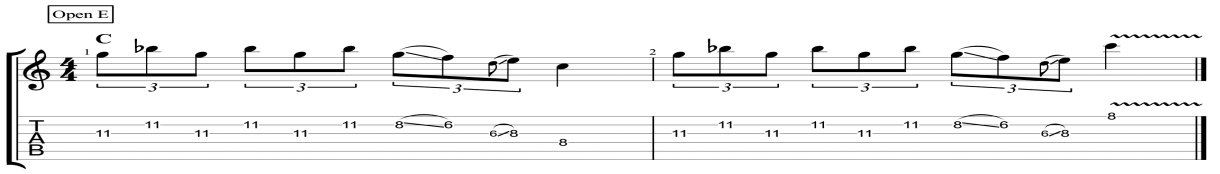
A common idea you'll see using this shape is moving up three frets on the second and third strings for some bluesy tension, before going back down to the position covered in the last examples to bring it home.

Example 6l



As with Example 6k, it's possible to move this pattern to anywhere it might be needed. Here's the last lick, but now moved to C at the 8th fret area.

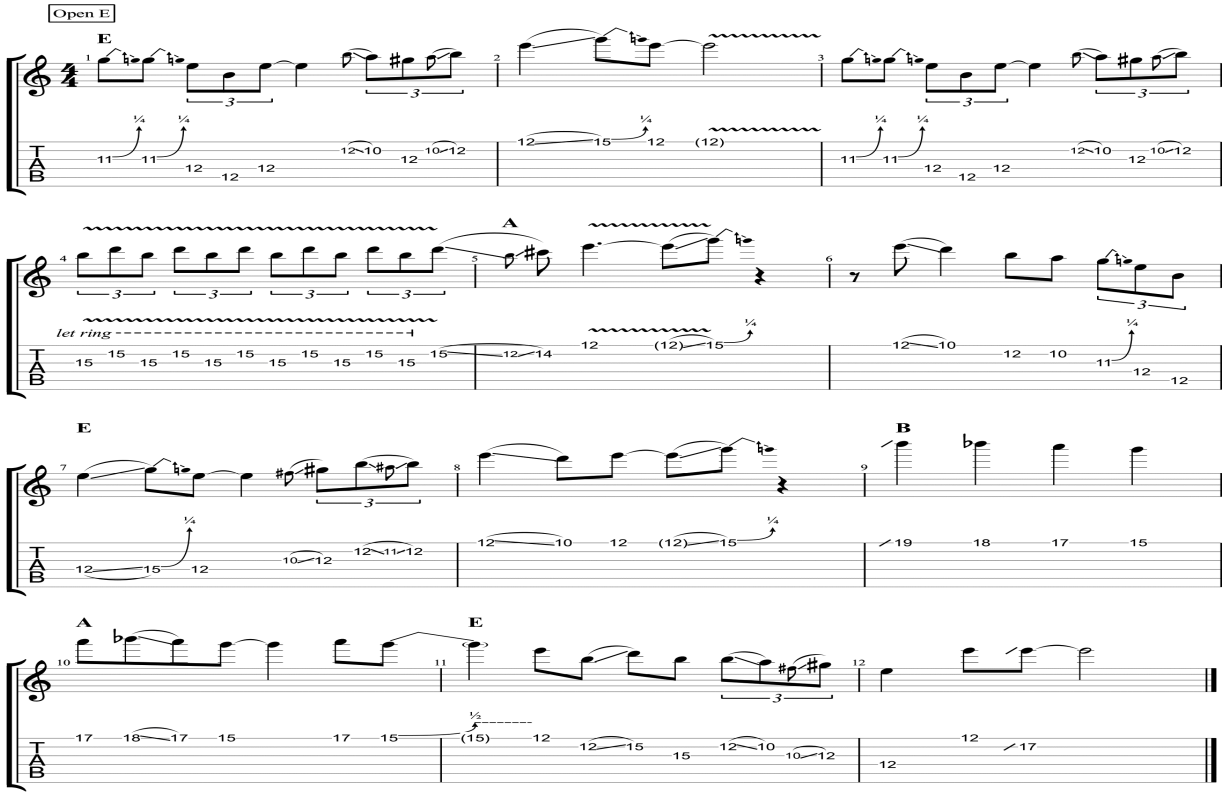
Example 6m



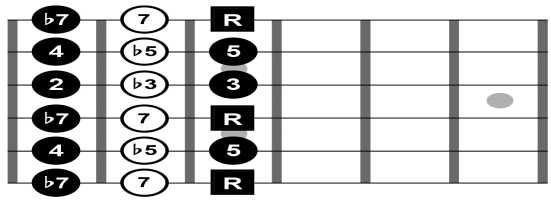
We've gone into some depth analysing these shapes, but it's worth remembering that what we're learning is a "pattern" rather than anything more intellectual. Players from Elmore James to Bonnie Raitt use this kind of pattern to play entire blues solos. There's more than enough here to give you an authentic blues vocabulary without having to worry too much about playing the right notes over the chord. As long as you come "home", it's going to sound good.

To demonstrate this, here's a full twelve-bar blues solo using nothing but the shape we've looked at so far – both the previous pattern and the single string scales.

Example 6n



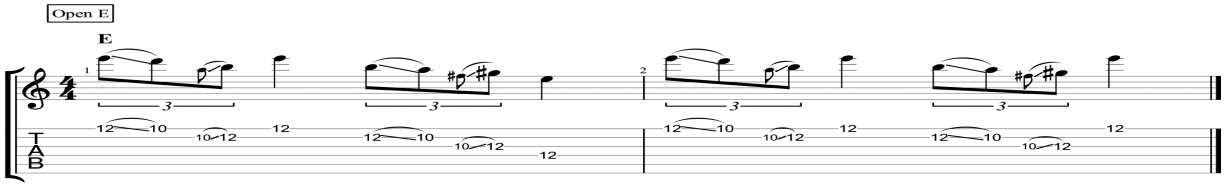
The next logical step with this pattern is to fill in some of the blanks using chromatic passing tones. These are usually applied a fret below your home position. You can see from the diagram, however, that the intervals created are a little more questionable.



Despite that, the focus should be on the home position, with the other notes used to create tension before returning home.

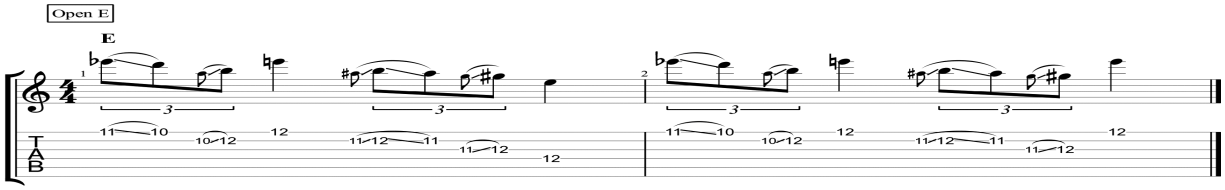
Here's a simple lick that doesn't use these passing tones. It doesn't sound bad, but it's a bit by the numbers.

Example 6o



Now here is the same idea, but instead of using the 10th fret each time, sometimes I'm using the 11th. Pay attention when you play these notes and listen to how much tension they add to a lick.

Example 6p



I can’t stress this enough: if we could wind back the clock and talk to someone like Duane Allman in his prime, I don’t think for a second that he’d talk to us about scales and chords. It was all about the music. But when you start to get the music under your fingers, learning some scales will become more worthwhile, as you’ll have a much better idea of how to use them.

Chapter Seven: Slide Guitar Scales

Now you can change strings easily, it’s time to learn full scales in a single position. This section will develop your technique and refine your skills as you become 100% accurate with your fretting and eliminate excess string noise. You’ll naturally develop this ability, because unwanted notes ringing out will destroy the sound of the scale.

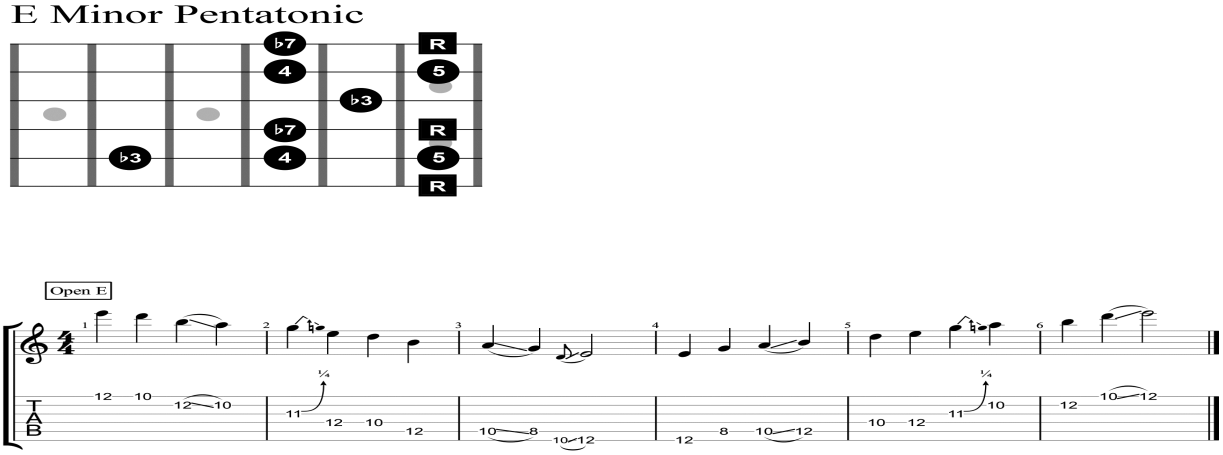
The following scales will enable you to play much more music than the blues. If you want play traditional gospel, soul, and jazz progressions it’s essential to know the following melodic scales.

The minor pentatonic scale is the basis of countless blues and rock improvisers’ vocabulary, so it’s essential that any versatile slide player has this scale nailed. It can be played in the following way using Open E tuning.

Notice the articulation and how I move between notes. This isn’t the only way to play this scale, but the phrasing is loose and melodic and takes advantage of the nuances of slide playing.

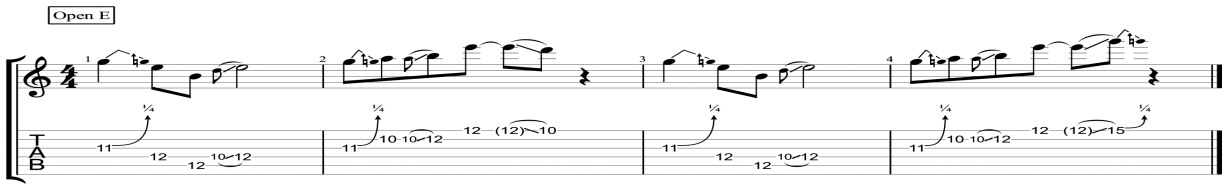
You’ll notice there are three notes on the fifth string. This isn’t ideal for easy fingering, as you’re probably used to playing two-note-per-string shapes, but unfortunately that’s the nature of Open E tuning and staying in one position is often impossible if we are to play every note in the scale.

Example 7a



When playing licks with this pattern you'll quickly get used to bending the b3rd a little sharp and applying some of the phrasing ideas from the previous chapter.

Example 7b

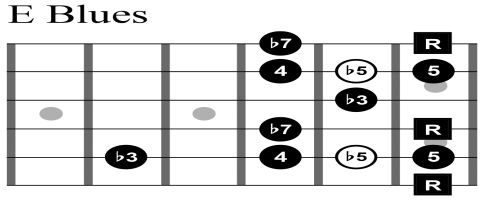


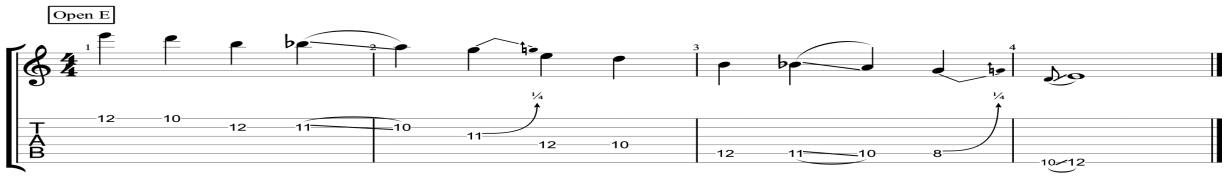
As the guitar is tuned to a major chord and this is a minor scale that fits a *minor* chord, the first position of the minor pentatonic isn't available in the same way as it is with open tuning. This means that playing a barre with the slide at your home position is now off limits, because that would form a major chord. This is a challenge of open tunings and we'll look at how to surmount it in later chapters.

Another common scale which is a slight variation on the minor pentatonic scale is the blues scale.

The blues scale is the same as the minor pentatonic scale with an added b5th. Pay attention to how that b5 sounds, and how it instantly gives the scale a darker, bluesy vibe.

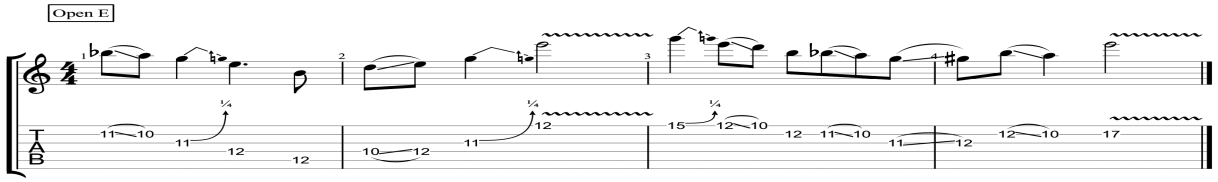
Example 7c



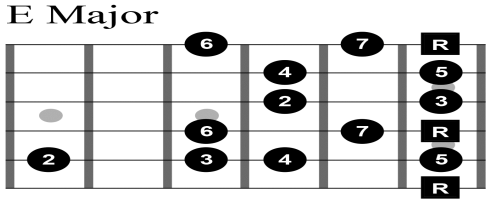


Here’s a lick using the blues scale. Lines like this require a little more consideration than the geometric shapes from the last chapter, but the reward is well worth it.

Example 7d



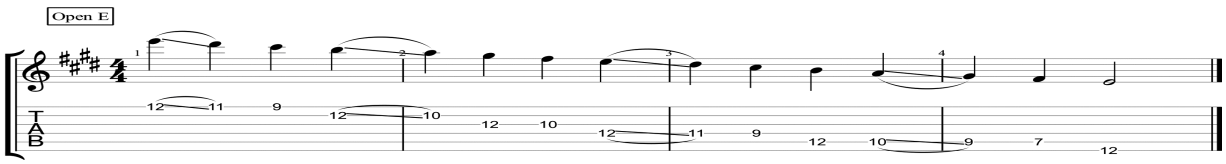
Next up is the major scale. This is the parent scale from which all Western music is built, so while it may not be the most usable scale right now, it will prepare you for learning other scales and modes.



As with the previous scales, this one can be a bit tough to play cleanly in one position. If you compare playing the major scale in one position to playing it on a single string, you’ll have a good idea of why slide players tend to play up and down strings, rather than across them.

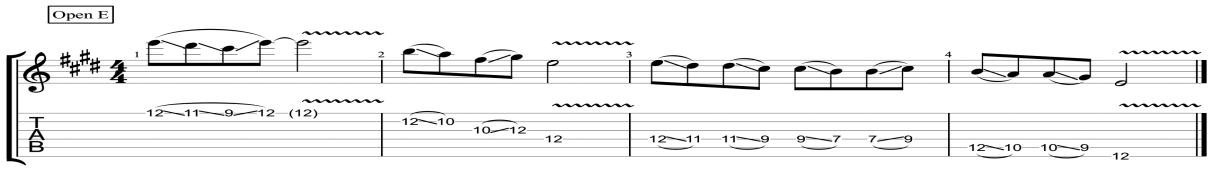
Playing the major scale in one position with a slide is a great way to practise your muting technique though, especially as you build speed.

Example 7e



Here’s the scale used to play something a little more musical.

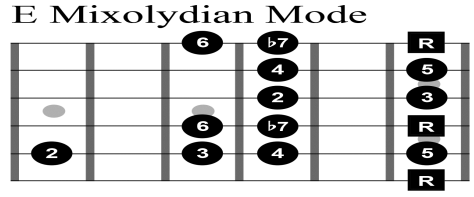
Example 7f

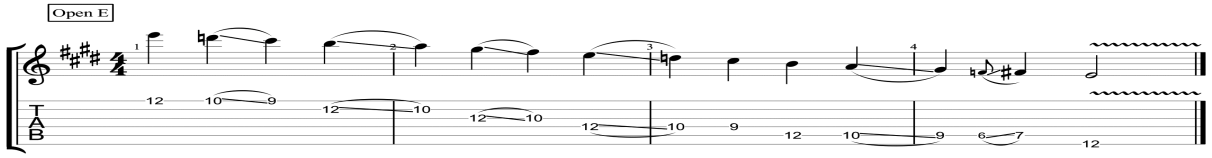


A scale you’re more likely to use in blues and rock soloing is the Mixolydian mode.

This mode consists of the major scale with a b7 and has the formula 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7.

Example 7g

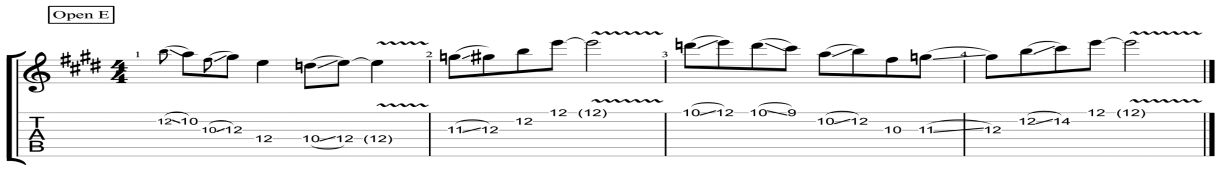




A bluesy way to play the Mixolydian mode is to approach each 3rd from a semitone below. This “minor 3rd to major 3rd” sound is a huge part of authentic blues playing.

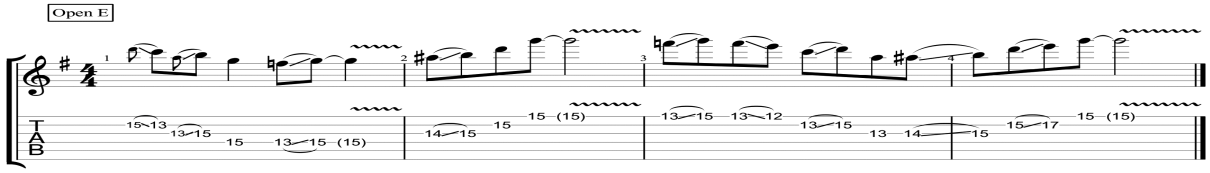
Here’s a lick that uses the notes of the Mixolydian mode with the added b3.

Example 7h



Here’s that same lick, but moved up to the 15th fret, resulting in a key change from E to G.

Example 7i



Chapter Eight: Chord Inversions

One big appeal of open tunings is that playing a major chord with the slide is extremely easy. By moving the slide to different frets, it functions as a barre and any major chord can be played by simply strumming all the strings

However, while playing these simple barred chords is extremely easy, playing major chords in other areas of the neck become much trickier. Most slide players understand that this challenge is part of the territory and rely on three *inversions* of the major barre chord that are relatively easy to play. This can unlock the rest of the neck.

As the word suggests, an inversion is where you take a chord and turn it on its head.

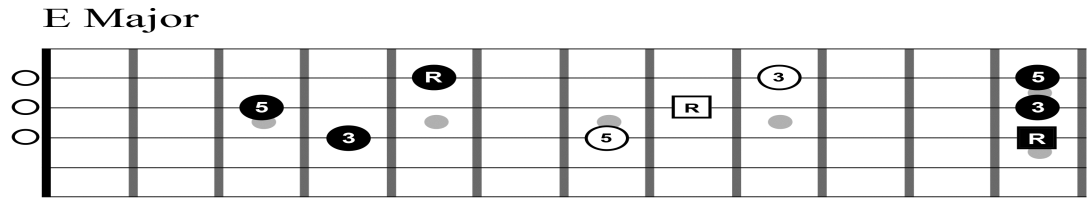
An E Major triad (1 3 5) contains the notes E, G# and B. The root (E) is the lowest pitched note, so this is called the *root position chord*.

In an inversion, a different note from the chord is played as the lowest pitch. For example, if you move the note E to the top of the chord and a G# is played in the bass, the chord voicing becomes G# B E. This is still an E major chord as it contains the correct three notes, but the 3rd (G#) is now the bass note. This is a *first inversion chord*.

By moving the G# to the top of the chord and placing the B in the bass, we get B E G#. This is still an E major chord, but it is now in *second inversion*.

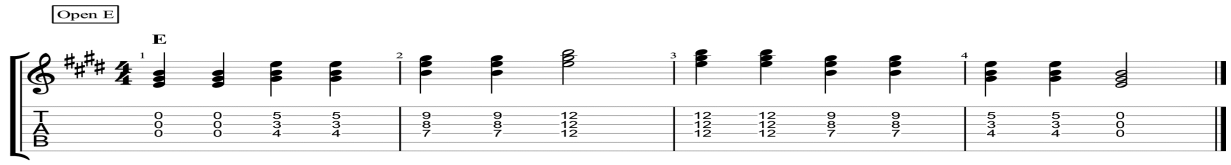
Let’s look at how to play these three inversions on the guitar. Learn them without a slide to begin with and we’ll learn them with a slide later.

The following diagram shows the three inversions played along the neck on the second, third and fourth strings. The root position chord is played at the 12th fret, the first inversion is played at the 4th, and the second inversion is played at the 7th. I’ve shown the triads in black and white alternately, so you can see each one more clearly.



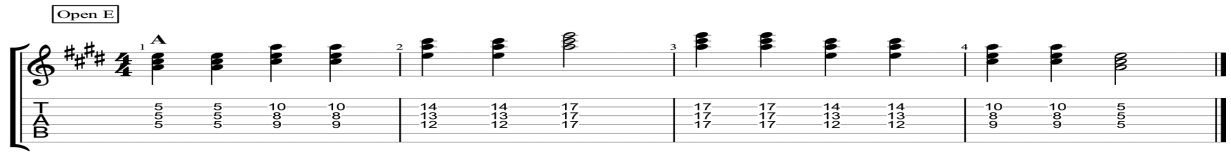
Play through these inversions ascending and descending on the middle strings.

Example 8a



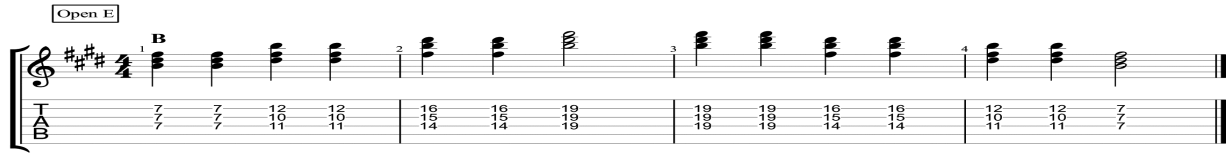
These three shapes allow you to play *any* major chord in *any* inversion. If you want to play an A major chord, the “straight” shape can be found at the 5th fret, then each inversion will move up the neck as they did for the E chord.

Example 8b



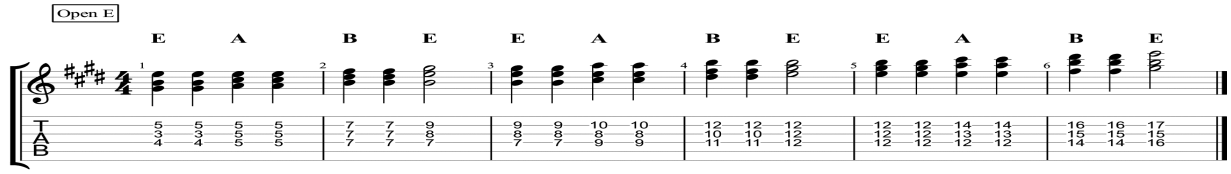
The same is true of a B major chord.

Example 8c



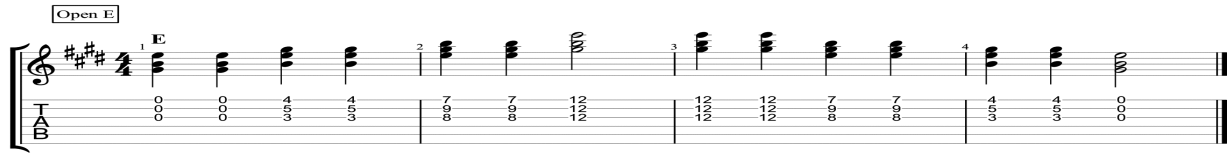
Link these three triads one after the other to form a chord sequence of E A B E in each position before moving on to the next area of the neck.

Example 8d



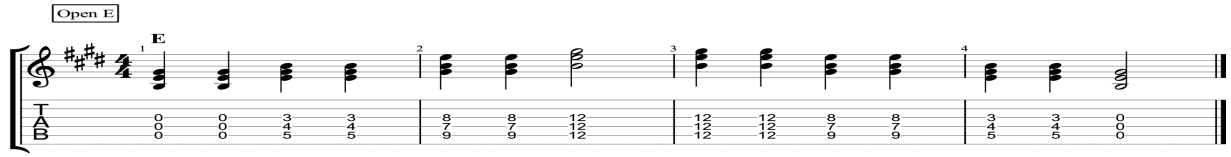
A handy feature of this tuning is that we can move the note on the fourth string over to the first string and play a different voicing of the same chord. This is another way to invert the chords without having to move up and down the neck.

Example 8e

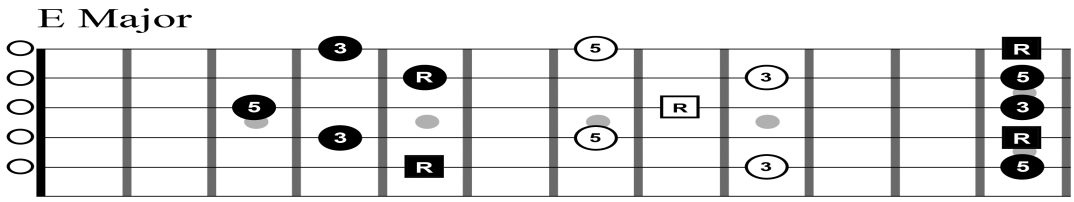


It’s also possible to move each shape down a string set onto the third to fifth strings.

Example 8f

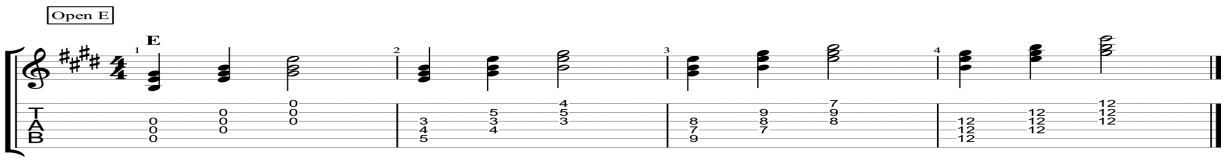


With these chords under your belt, you now have three basic “master positions” for major chords in any open tuning.



These patterns can be played across the strings like this.

Example 8g

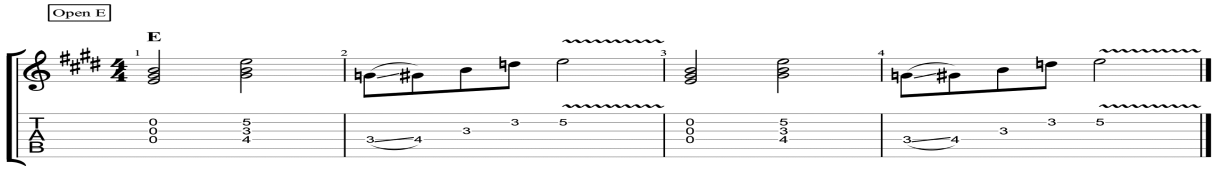


Now we understand the “geometry” of the open tuned guitar, how can we go about extracting music from these shapes and integrate them into your playing?

In chapters six and seven we learnt licks and scales around the “home” position (the one where the chord is played with the straight slide). This chapter will apply these concepts to the other two positions and give you a solid grasp of how to move between them in a musical way.

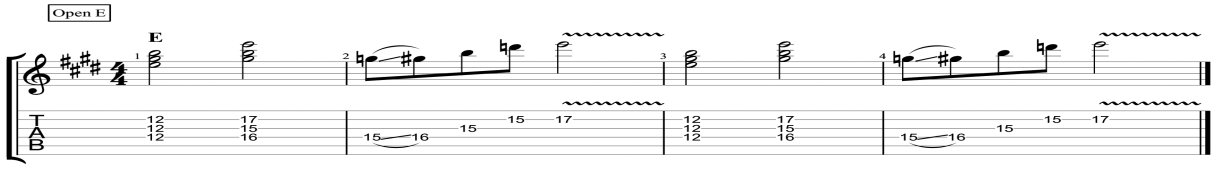
This next exercise moves from the root (straight barre) position to the next inversion of the chord and then adds an arpeggio fragment around it. You may wish to experiment with which finger you wear the slide on, but the important part to focus on is the melody. Try to visualise the chord while you play the melody.

Example 8h



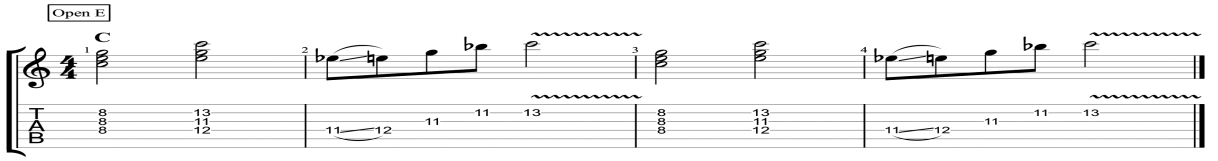
Here’s the same idea played an octave higher.

Example 8i



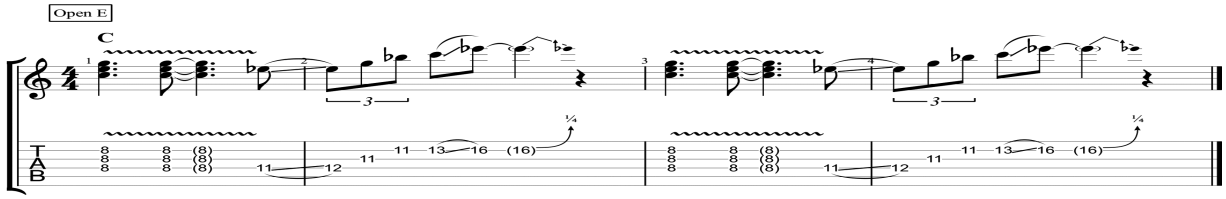
This idea can be played in any key. Here it is played on a C major chord. Try moving these ideas to different keys and playing them over the moving chords of a twelve-bar blues.

Example 8j



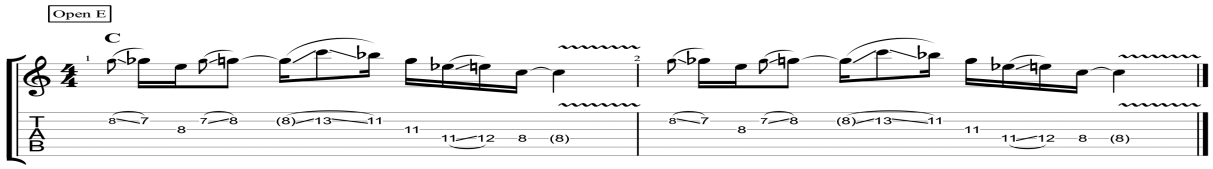
Here’s a lick in C that uses the two positions. Begin by playing the chord at the 8th fret, then move up the neck for the single note melody with the triad fragment. To finish, I use a single string approach by sliding up three frets from the root to the b3.

Example 8k



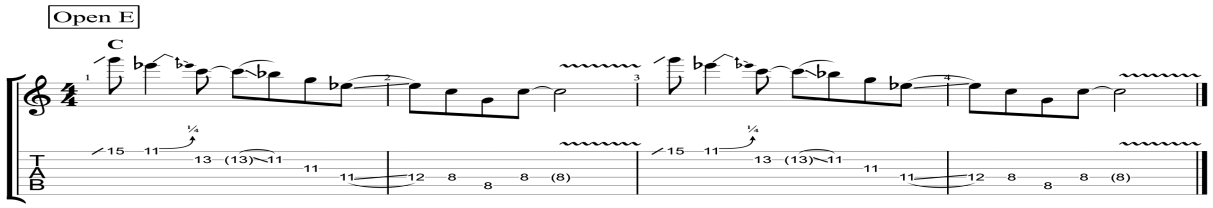
Again, in the key of C, the next lick begins with a melodic fragment around the barre position before shifting up to the next triad via a slide on the second string.

Example 8l



When you’re comfortable with the triad position on the second to fourth strings, start adding more melodic notes around it. Here are two more notes added on the high E string that move down to the barre position.

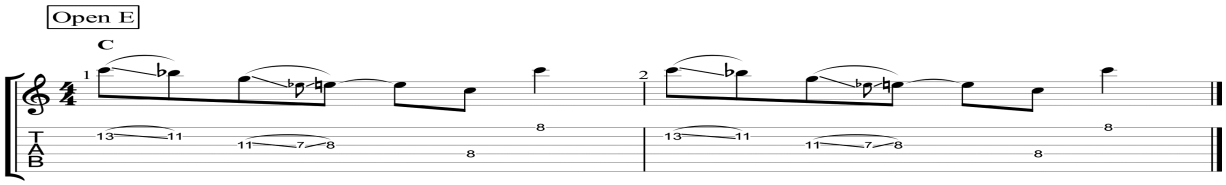
Example 8m



You should be able to transition between these positions on any string group. Here’s a lick that moves down from the first inversion to the barre position on the third string.

Listen to the audio and pay attention to how I take advantage of the barre position by allowing the notes to ring out when playing in this location. Muting is important in other positions, but here any extra notes will be contained in the chord.

Example 8n

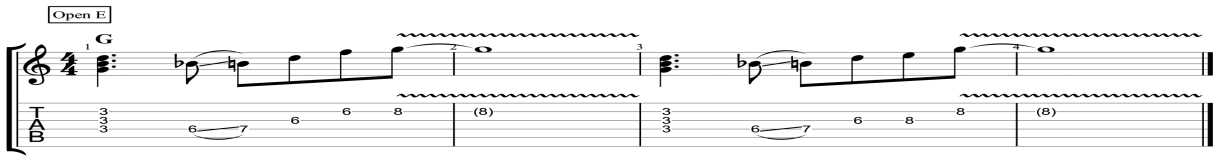


It’s possible to expand the first inversion triad position to open up your sonic palette a little.

The fragment in the previous lick added a b7 degree note to the triad, giving it a distinctly dominant quality. It's also easy to add the 6th degree too in this position to create a major pentatonic flavour.

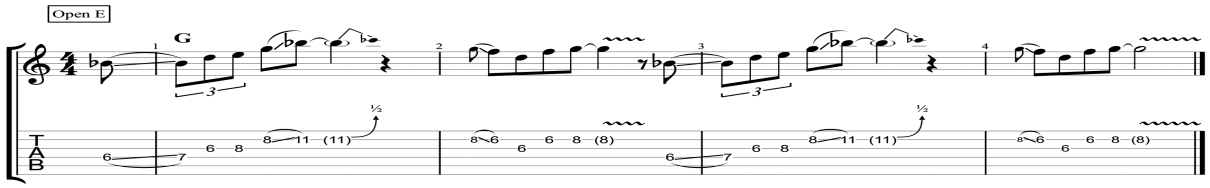
The following example switches to the key of G and plays the same shape from before. On the repeat we swap the darker b7 note (played on the second string) for the 6th (played on the third string)

Example 8o



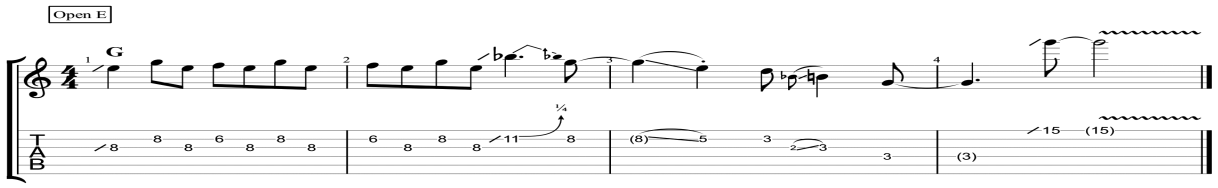
The following lick demonstrates how using both the 6th and b7th brings you closer to a bluesy Mixolydian sound. The secret to learning and internalising a lick like this is understanding how it connects back to the home position (the 3rd fret in this instance, as this idea is played in the key of G), even when it's not actually played.

Example 8p



The final example moves quickly between the 6th and 8th frets and is difficult to do cleanly. However, the noise created by switching between frets quickly gives you an authentic slide guitar sound.

Example 8q

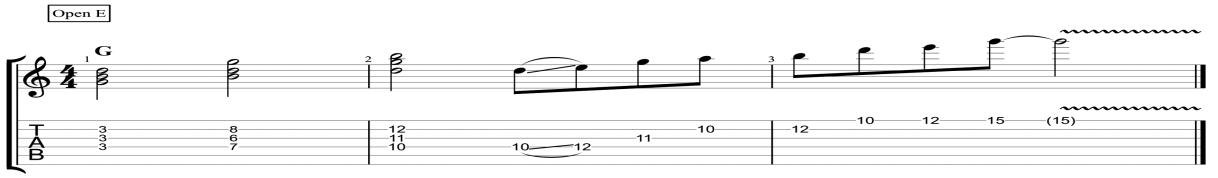


With the first inversion position under our fingers, it’s time to move on to the second inversion position.

The following G major example begins in the home position and moves up through the inversions before decorating the second inversion position with a single-note melody. The shape presented here again uses the 6th of the scale to create a strong G Major Pentatonic sound.

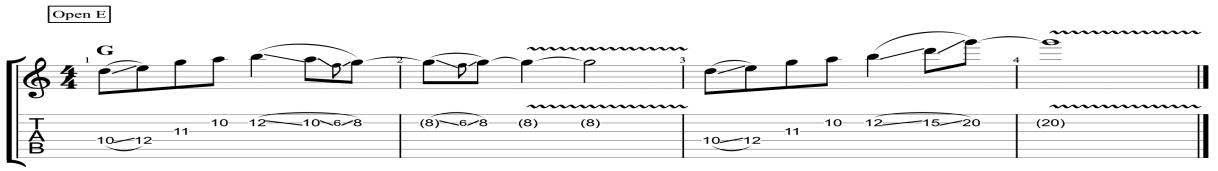
The lick ends by shifting up to the 15th fret and returning back to the home position.

Example 8r



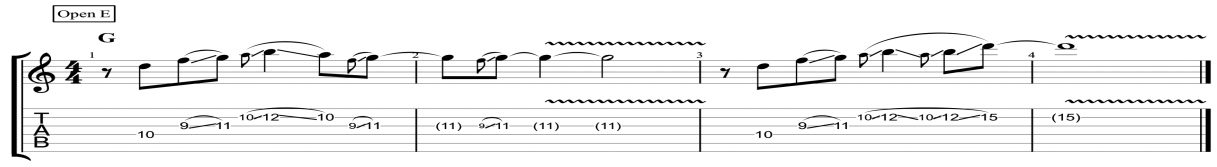
To explore this position further, I have used the fragment from the last example and ended the phrase in a more musical way, firstly by moving down to the root note, then by moving up to the root at the 20th fret on the repeat.

Example 8s



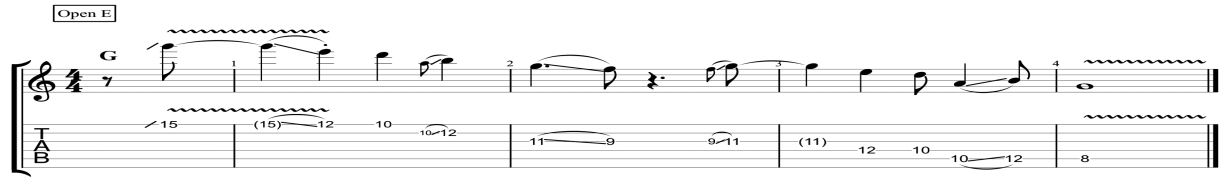
Here’s a similar lick that changes the 6th (E) on the fourth string to a b7th (F) on the third. Getting a feel for how these subtle differences in note choice alter the sound so dramatically is the secret to learning to play the music you hear in your head.

Example 8t



The next example is another lick in this same position that explores more strings. Learn to focus on the smaller triad in the centre of the position and visualise the melody notes around it, so you’re able to access this sound in any key.

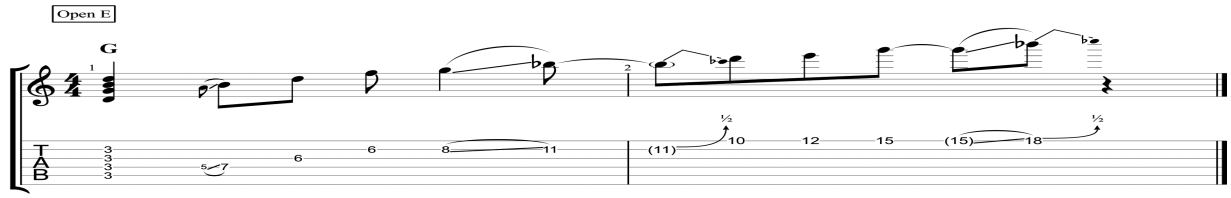
Example 8u



Now you have some vocabulary around each of the three inversions, the rest of this chapter will focus on melodic ideas that move horizontally between each inversion.

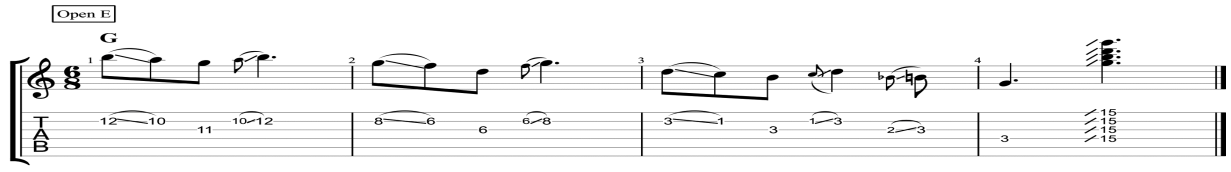
The first example begins in the barre position at the 3rd fret before moving up to the first inversion. At the end of the first bar, shift up to the 11th fret and bend it up to the 12th fret, which is in the second inversion position. The line ends by ascending again to the 15th fret, bringing you back to the home position.

Example 8v



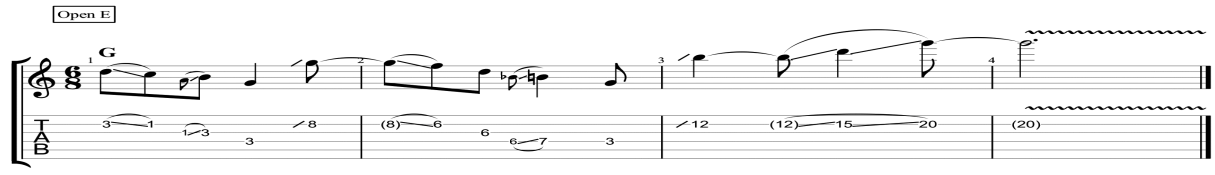
Another excellent way to consolidate your fretboard knowledge is to take a short musical phrase (motif) and play it in each of the three positions. This approach creates a certain cohesiveness that gives the listener something structured to latch onto.

Example 8w



Example 8x takes the motif approach through the root and first inversions, before shifting up the neck with some soulful single-string slides. These can be unbelievably lyrical when played right – just listen to AJ Ghent!

Example 8x



To conclude this chapter, I've written a full twelve bar solo piece with a soulful blues vibe.

The most effective way to create the vibe of a solo slide guitar blues is to outline the chord changes. A twelve-bar blues in G contains the chords G major, C major and D major, so they need to be emphasised.

The first two bars of the solo begin on a G major chord and contain all three chord inversions along with some expressive single-string lines built from the G Minor Pentatonic scale. This phrase is repeated an octave higher in bars three and four.

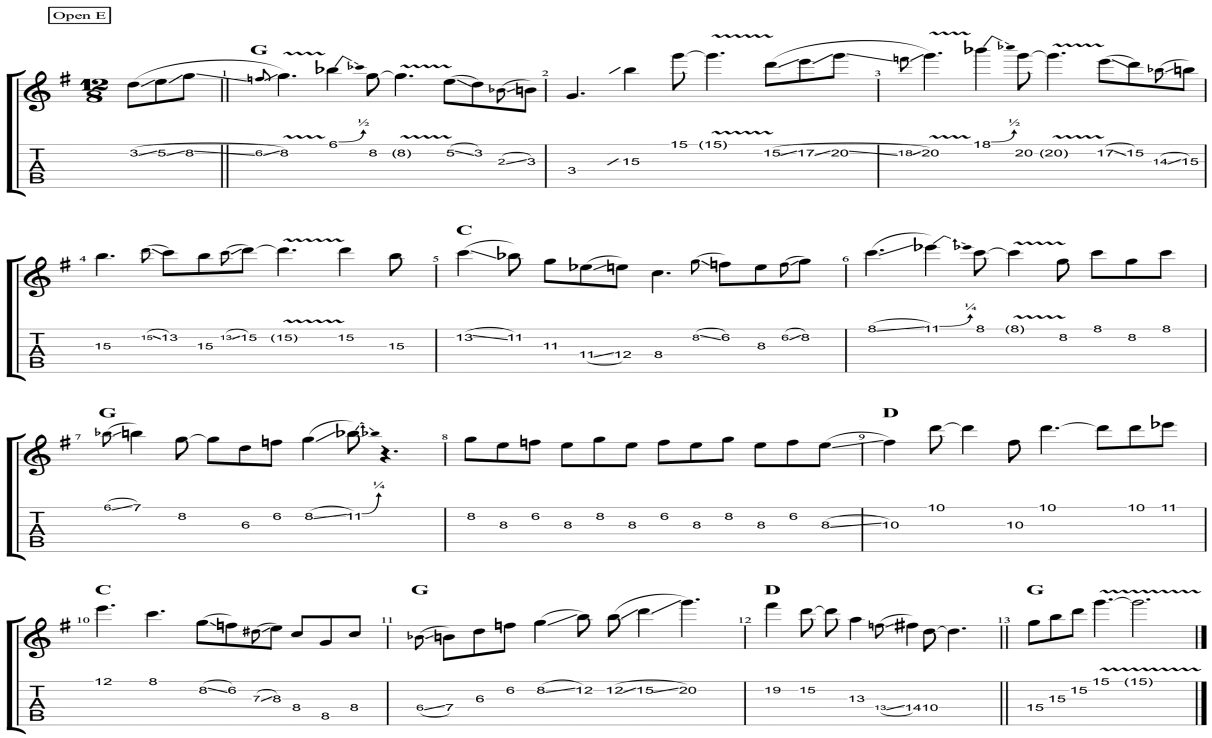
When the chord changes to C major, I move to the first inversion pattern in bar five and shift down to the root (straight) barre position.

In bar seven we return to the G major chord where I use a first inversion pattern.

For the D major and C major chords in bars nine and ten, I use the root position barre chord again. You don’t have to do something clever to sound great.

The final two bars outline a G major chord by moving up the neck, and a D chord by descending. There’s nothing fancy here, just outlining the chord tones and using the patterns in the chapter to help guide us to the best notes.

Example 8y



Chapter Nine: Advanced Techniques

It’s probably safe to say that by now, you’re beginning to get a decent grasp on slide guitar playing and its vocabulary.

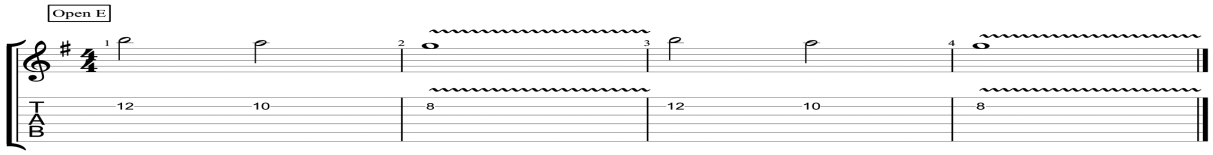
This chapter focuses on some more advanced techniques that will take your slide guitar playing from “clinical” to “authentic”. These examples will take some time to master, but with each practice session you will get better and more musical.

The first, and probably most important, technique to learn is the rake.

When you listen to the great slide players, they rarely play only the note they want you to hear, and will often precede it with a rake through some muted strings before hitting the target pitch. Non-slide players like Stevie Ray Vaughan do this with the pick, but most slide players will do this with the fingers of the picking hand. Whether you use fingers or a pick, you will be able to add some punch and aggression to your melodies.

Example 9a shows a simple melody played as cleanly as possible.

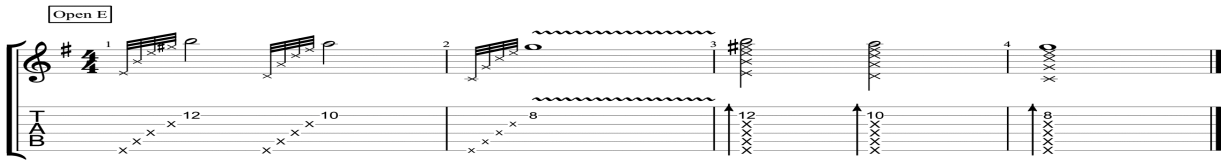
Example 9a



Example 9b contains the same melody, but this time adds rakes into each note. There is no universal way to notate a rake, so I’ve shown it in two different ways. In the first two bars I’ve used grace notes, and in the second two I’ve used brush arrows on the muted notes. These sound identical, they’re just included here to help you know what to expect if you see any music written for slide guitar.

Listen to Example 9a and Example 9b and notice how different they are before learning the examples.

Example 9b



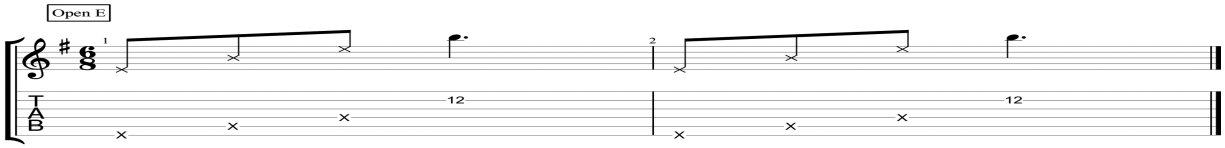
Teaching this technique is a nightmare because it’s not an exact science and the results will vary depending on how you play.

The problem comes from the slide itself. If the slide is touching the string when you pick a note, you will always create a sound – there is no way to mute notes with your fretting hand as you would normally.

As I use the fingers of my picking hand instead of a pick when I play slide, I rest the fleshy part of my palm on the strings (just over the bridge pickup) and use the thumb to rake down through the low strings, pushing it firmly through the sixth, fifth and fourth strings and coming to rest on the third string as I pluck the second string with my finger.

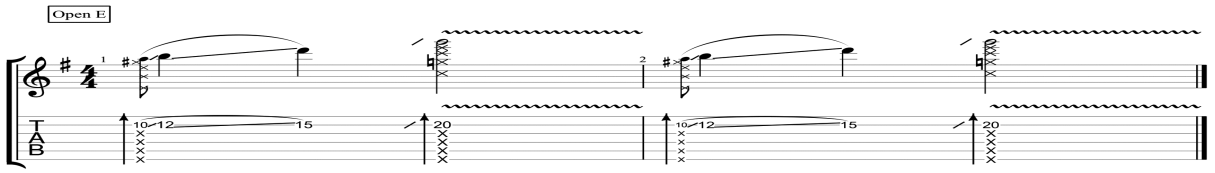
If you were to play it slowly and in time (which goes against the whole idea but will help you to understand the mechanics) it would look like example 9c. As your finger plucks the second string, the thumb should be resting on (and muting) the third string, just as if it were ready to pluck it.

Example 9c



When this technique starts to feel comfortable, you can use it almost anywhere. Here’s an example of it being used to slide into notes, with the rake occurring as the slide moves up the neck. I’ve used the arrow marking to indicate the rakes, but in most transcriptions, this type of articulation is often omitted and left to the discretion of the player. Listen carefully to the audio and try to match my phrasing.

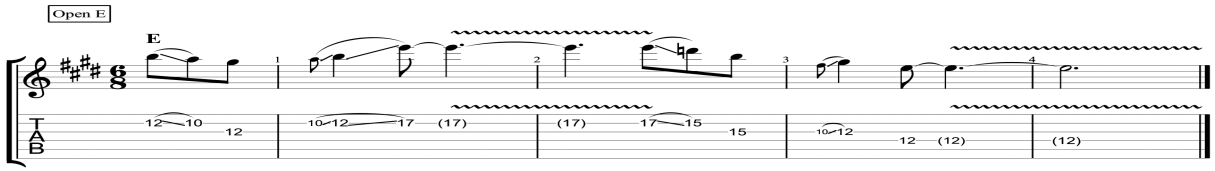
Example 9d



You may have noticed in the audio examples for earlier chapters that this technique is something I use all the time. When you've mastered the rake it's hard to stop using it to add snap to a melody note!

Here's another raked idea, but this time I haven't notated any of the rakes, so listen to the audio track to see where I add them.

Example 9e



Another technique that may seem simple but is tough to execute cleanly with a slide is playing octaves.

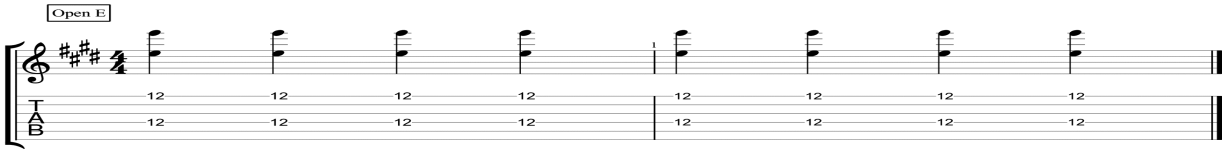
In our Open E tuning there's an octave between the first and fourth strings (that are both tuned to E), the second and fifth strings (both tuned to B), and the fourth and sixth strings (both tuned to E). This means that you can play the same fret on these string pairs and add a note one octave below the melody. This is a lovely way to thicken up the texture and tone of your music.

This sounds easy, but it is tricky with a slide because you'll likely to get some sympathetic resonance from the strings between the ones you're trying to play. This resonance can be quite ugly and get in the way of your melody.

As with most things in slide guitar playing, the answer to this problem lies in good muting, but this is one of the trickiest muting techniques you're likely to come across.

In the following example, pluck the fourth string with the thumb and place the index finger of the picking hand across the second and third strings to keep them silent. Then use either the middle or ring finger to pluck the first string.

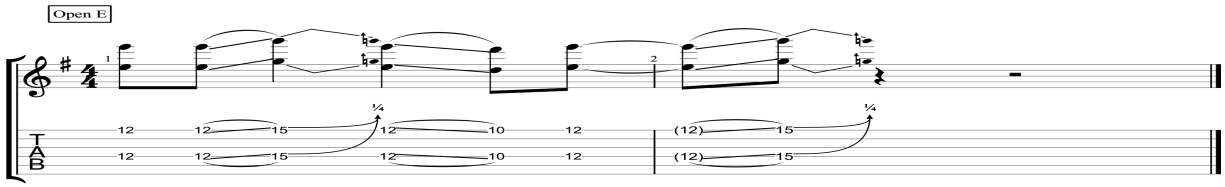
Example 9f



With this mechanic mastered, you can now play anything from your single string vocabulary with an added note one octave below the melody.

Here’s a lick using the notes of the E Minor Pentatonic scale.

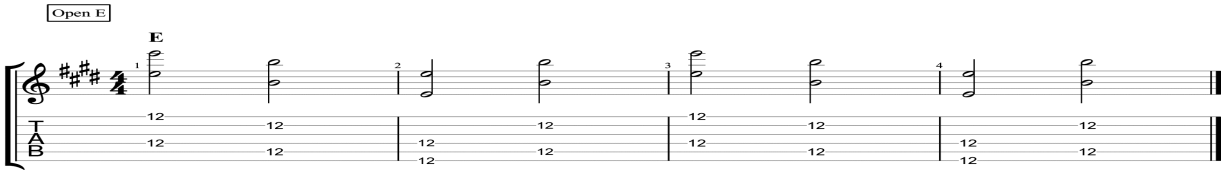
Example 9g



As you’d expect, it’s important to practise moving this technique across string sets. It requires careful attention as the distance between the paired strings gets smaller towards the bass strings.

Learn the following example slowly and ensure you mute the middle strings cleanly with the index finger.

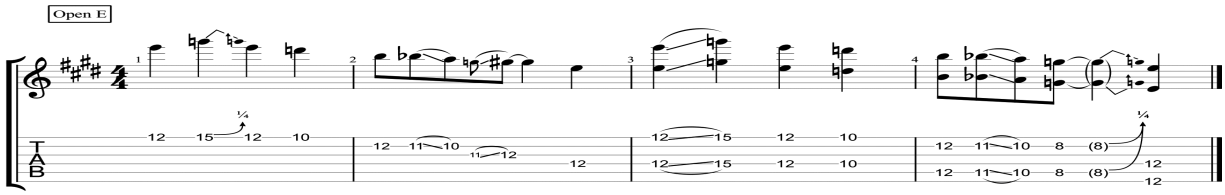
Example 9h



When you have got this string-crossing mechanic under your belt, you will be able to freely play octave licks across string groups with ease.

In the next example I play a lick as a single-string idea, then repeat it in octaves.

Example 9i

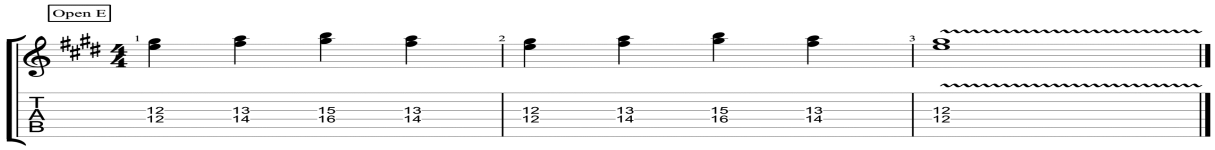


One unorthodox technique involves angling the slide so you’re able to play two notes on different frets. This is something you might see Australian guitar whizz Brett Garsed use in standard tuning to create the illusion of playing in an open tuning.

This example is almost impossible if you wear the slide on any finger other than the second (middle).

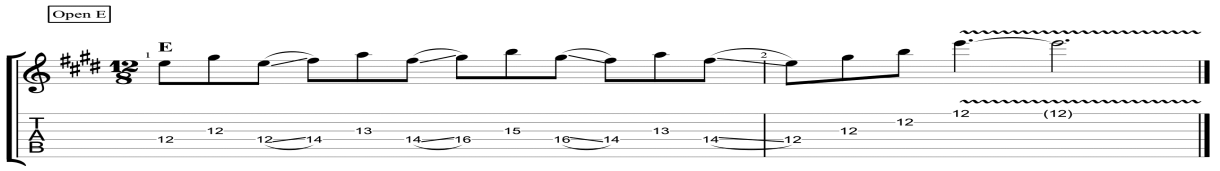
Begin by playing the first double-stop with a straight slide, then begin turning the slide to play the two notes on different frets as you ascend the neck.

Example 9j



This technique can also be used to play single note ideas, as the following lick demonstrates.

Example 9k

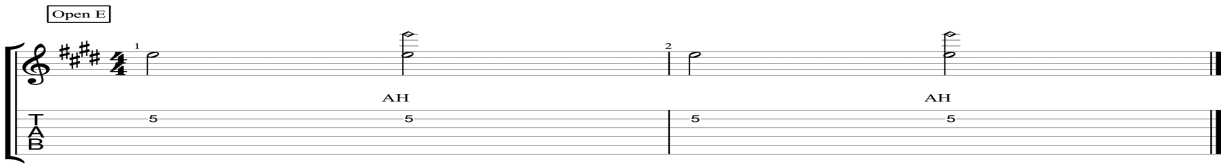


This is a technique you're more likely to use in standard tuning rather than open tunings, but I felt it was worth mentioning, as once you have it mastered it opens a lot of creative doors as a slide musician.

One of the flashiest techniques I've ever seen on slide guitar involves playing artificial harmonics.

An artificial harmonic is created by fretting a note, placing the tip of the index finger (of your fretting hand) on the string twelve frets higher and plucking the string with another finger (in my case, the ring finger). This results in a note sounding an octave higher than the original fretted pitch.

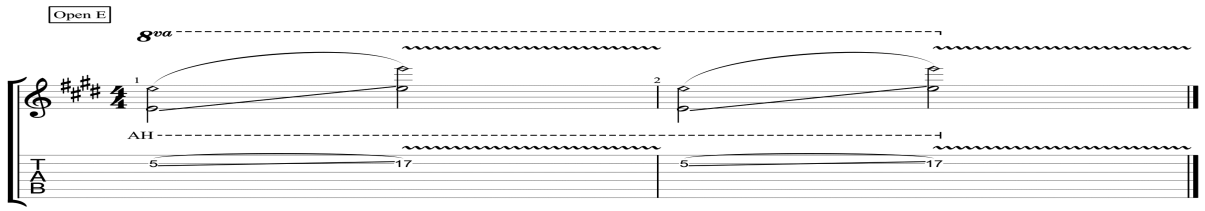
Example 9l



The unique aspect of these harmonics is that once the harmonic note is ringing, you can slide it up or down the neck.

In the next example, play the artificial harmonic then shift the slide up to the 17th fret while keeping in contact with the string. This will create a screaming harmonic an octave higher than the 17th fret (E note).

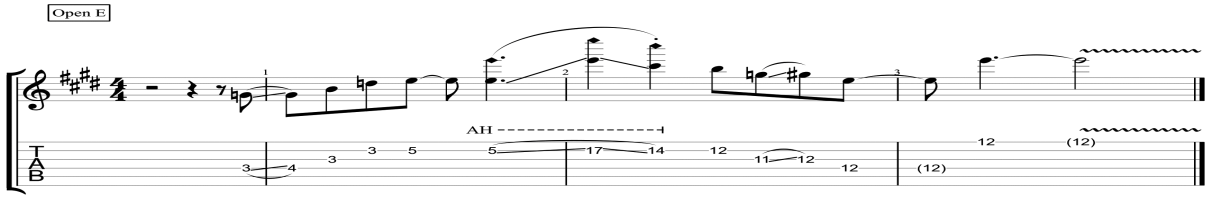
Example 9m



These harmonics can be played in the middle of licks to create fluid position shifts and grab your audience’s attention with these unique sounds.

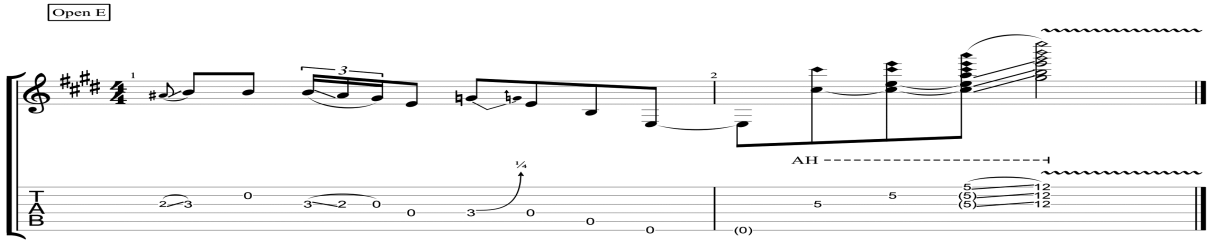
The following is a lick in E that begins around the first inversion position. It then shifts up an octave before resolving to the barre position at the 12th fret. Notice that after sliding the harmonic up to the 17th fret, I slide back down to the 14th. These harmonics can be treated like any normal note and will sustain as long as the string vibrates.

Example 9n



This final harmonic lick begins with a riff in E and adds a small chord played in harmonics that slides up to the 12th fret to form a beautiful E major chord played in harmonics.

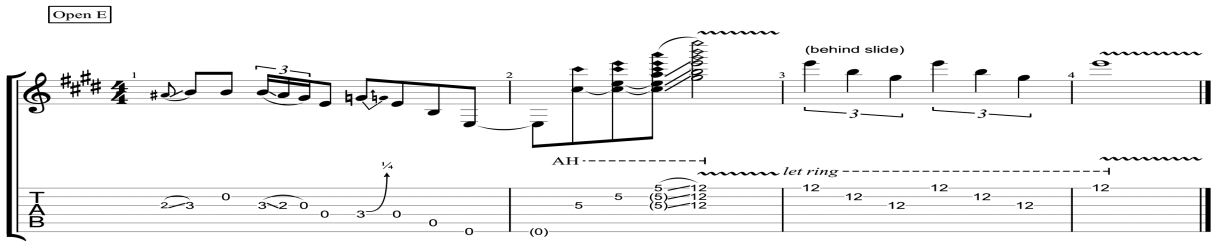
Example 9o



This next example will teach you a technique that Sonny Landreth often uses, which involves picking the strings between the slide and the nut. This creates a haunting resonant sound and is perfect for adding atmosphere to a chord. Don’t forget to lift up the fingers you use to mute behind the slide!

He’s the same lick as shown in Example 9o with the pick behind the slide added in bar three.

Example 9p



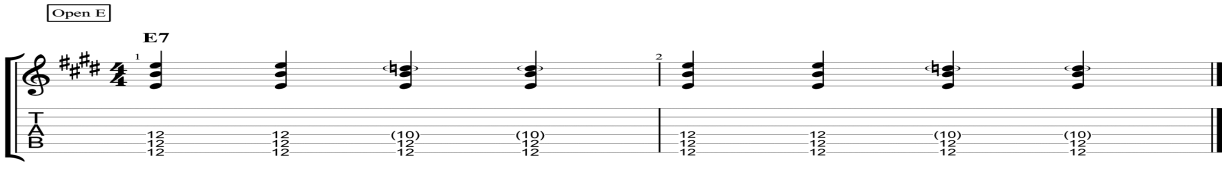
The most versatile advanced technique to learn is how to use the fretting hand fingers to play notes behind the slide. This technique is easier with the slide on the pinky, but can be done with the slide placed on other fingers too.

The idea is that when the slide is on the strings, it acts like a fret, but if you use a finger to press down the string behind the slide, the string stops touching the slide and the fretted note will sound. This allows you to play chords and melodies that would be impossible to play with the slide on its own.

As I've mentioned several times already, slide guitar came about hundreds of years after conventional notation was standardised, and traditional notation is often unable to convey the musical techniques we use with the slide. Fretting behind the slide is an extreme example of this limitation as it's such an unorthodox technique. In the following examples, I have uses brackets to show the notes that are fretted *behind the slide*. In traditional notation, these would normally represent ghost notes, but I felt this was the clearest option in the context of this book.

In the following example, place the slide over the 12th fret and strum the lowest three strings twice. Then, use the index finger of the fretting hand to fret the 10th fret on the fourth string, as indicated by the bracket.

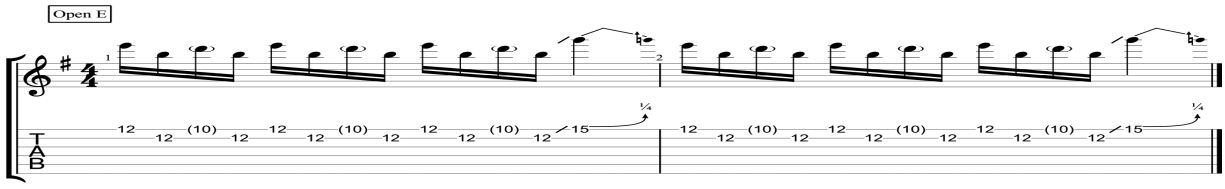
Example 9q



With practice, this technique will allow you to play additional fretted notes with some real speed, as the next example shows.

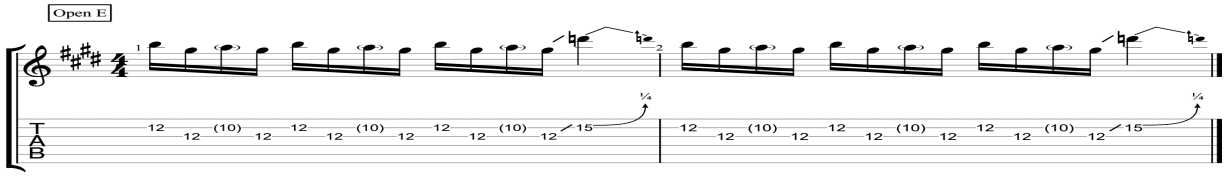
As you’re now able to fret notes behind the slide, the slide itself can remain at the 12th fret while the index finger frets and releases the 10th fret note.

Example 9r



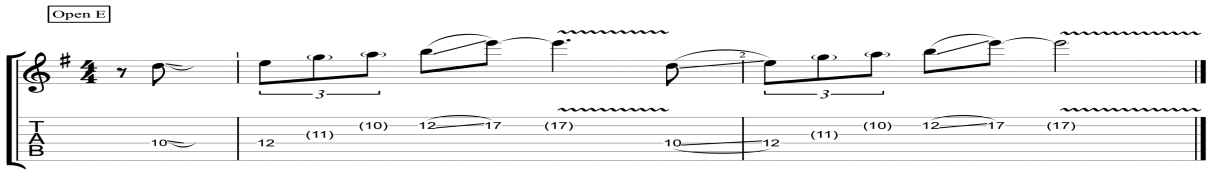
Here’s the same mechanic, but moved down a set of strings. Playing something like this without fretting behind the slide would be extremely problematic or even impossible!

Example 9s



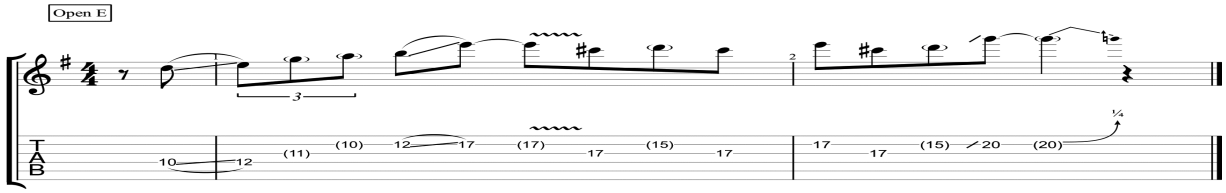
In the next example I use both the middle and index fingers to fret two notes behind the slide to create a cool little E Minor Pentatonic run. Try playing this without fretting behind the slide and see how difficult it is. While fretting behind the slide may feel odd at first, mastering the technique is much easier than trying to play without it!

Example 9t



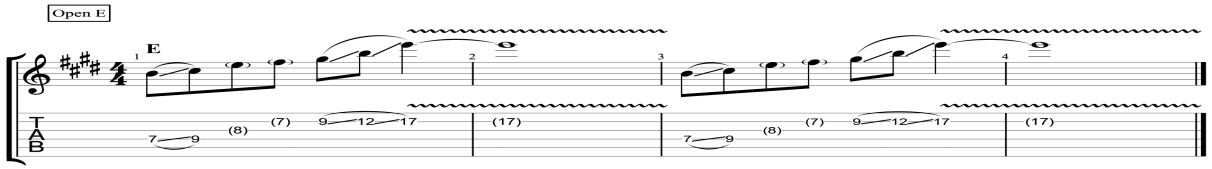
The next lick develops the previous idea by playing behind the slide in the first inversion area at the end of the lick. As the fretboard is a little cramped up here, I use my middle finger to play the 15th fret.

Example 9u



A similar idea is to play the same fragment around the second inversion pattern.

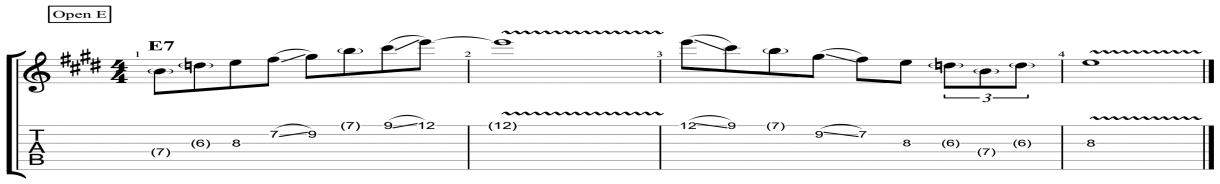
Example 9v



You should be able to tell by now that mastering this technique and integrating it into your playing is as simple as taking each of the triad inversion positions and seeing how you can use the notes behind the slide to facilitate fast, fluid lines.

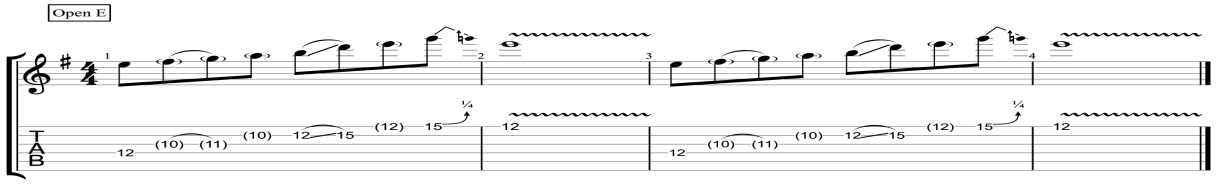
Here’s another lick around the second inversion position that adds some b7s to create a bluesy, dominant 7 sound.

Example 9w



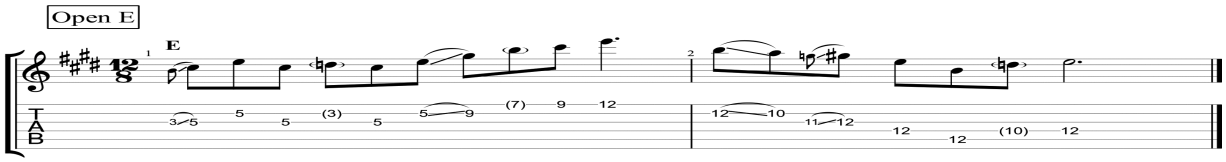
You can get extremely in-depth with this technique and even add hammer-ons between multiple notes behind the slide. I've demonstrated this as shown in the following tricky E Minor scale idea. At first this will be difficult, but over time you'll find the approach quite elegant as the slide stays at the 12th fret for the first half of the lick before moving up to the 15th fret.

Example 9x



The next lick covers a full twelve-fret span on the neck and uses notes played behind the slide to facilitate position shifts and speed. Take it slowly and make sure you keep an eye out for notes in brackets and fret them behind the slide!

Example 9y



The collection of techniques in this chapter serves as a solid starting point for your slide guitar creativity, so make as much music with them as you can.

In the next chapter, you will learn a full blues-rock solo in open E tuning, before we explore how to play slide in standard E tuning.

Chapter Ten: Open E Solo

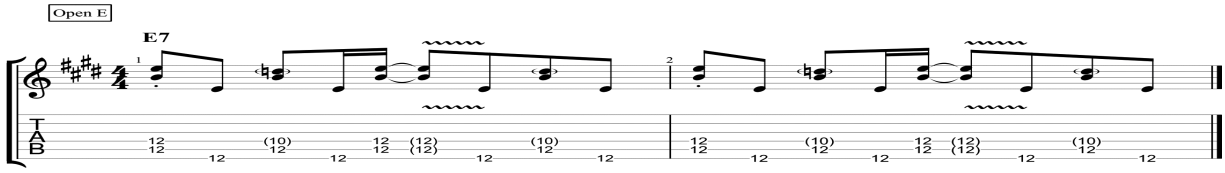
Now you're armed with a full toolkit of slide guitar techniques, the most valuable use of your practice time is to develop strong musical vocabulary while playing real music. To that end, I've composed a solo for you to play with a full band backing track. You can use it as both as a vehicle to practise the concepts covered and as a tool to develop your own ideas and style.

Before learning the lead guitar part, it's important to understand the basic part, especially here, as this is a great example of fretting behind the slide to help create a riff.

The chord progression is a slight variation on a twelve-bar blues in E, with the only change being a move to the bVII7 (D7) chord after the V chord in bar nine, instead of the more traditional IV (A) chord.

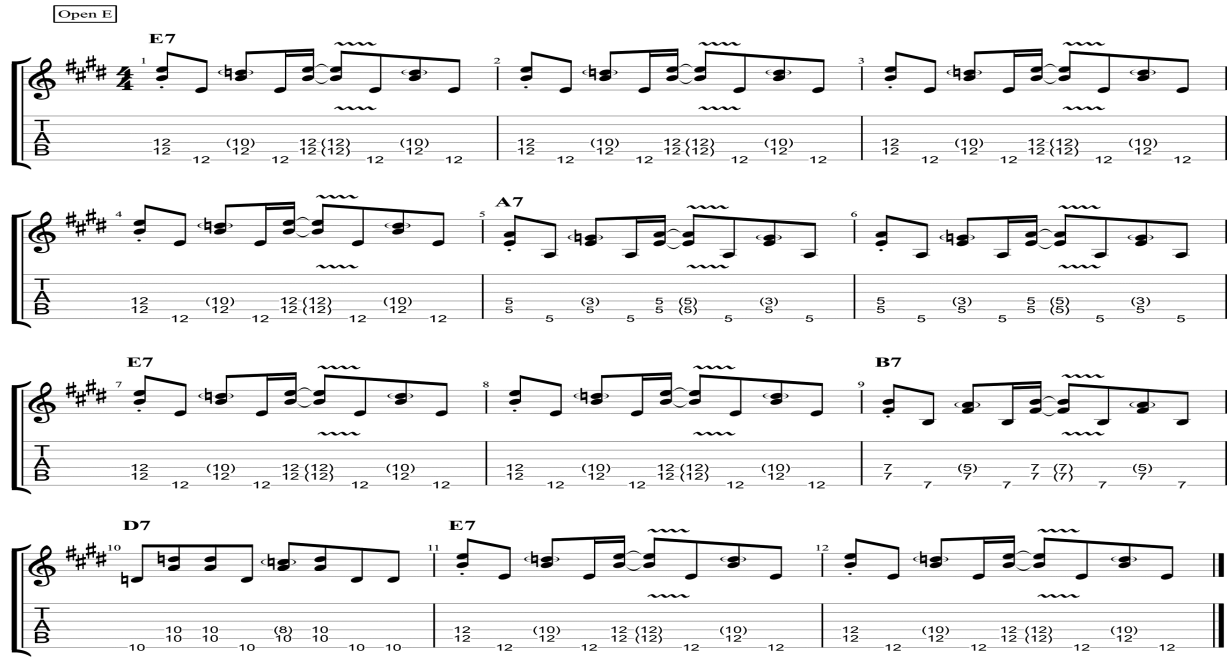
Here's the riff idea played around an E chord at the 12th fret. Again, I use brackets in the tab to indicate notes that are fretted *behind* the slide. Unfortunately, the nature of tab is that notes that are rhythmically tied are *also* shown in brackets. This is certainly not ideal, but a quick analysis of the notation helps to distinguish between which notes are tied and which are played behind the slide. The 10th fret notes are played behind the slide, but that pesky 12th fret note with vibrato on beat 3 is played normally with the slide!

Example 10a



With that first riff under your fingers, here's the full progression. It's simply a case of taking the riff and moving it down to the 5th fret in bar five to outline an A major chord, the moving to the 7th fret to outline the B major chord, and so on…

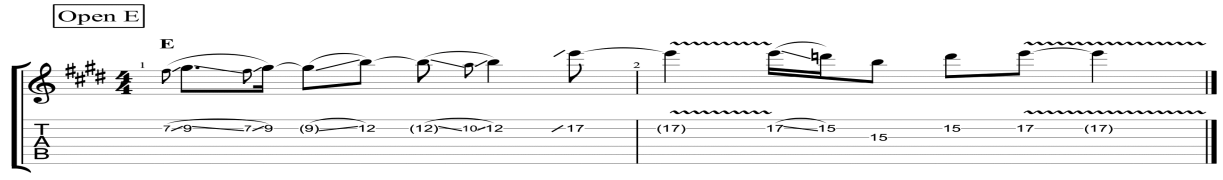
Example 10b



Now on to the solo!

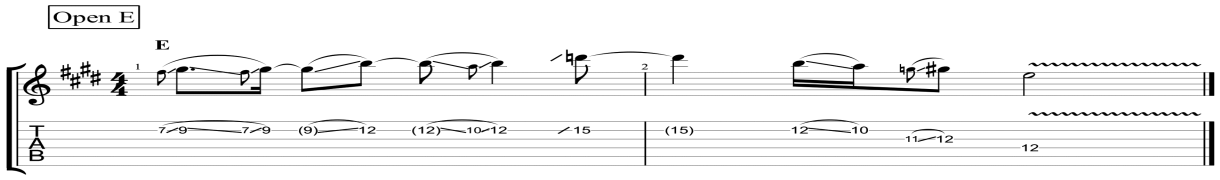
The first lick of the solo exploits a single-string pattern around an E major triad in three positions. I've spiced this up with some rakes and repeating slides into notes. Listen to the audio for the phrasing.

Example 10c



The next lick uses the same basic idea, but instead of sliding up to the note E, it ascends to D (the b7) to create an E7 chord sound. The line finishes with a slide cliché around the 12th fret barre position.

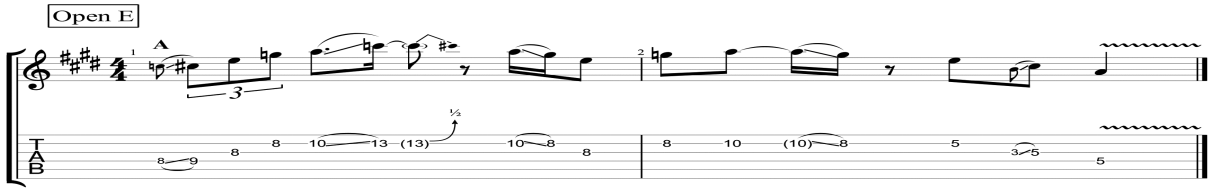
Example 10d



As the chord changes to A major, your perspective needs to change to address it. As I finished the previous phrase at the 12th fret, it makes sense to stay close to that area and use the first inversion of the A major triad. This contains its lowest note at the 9th fret, so it's a great way to transition into the A major chord.

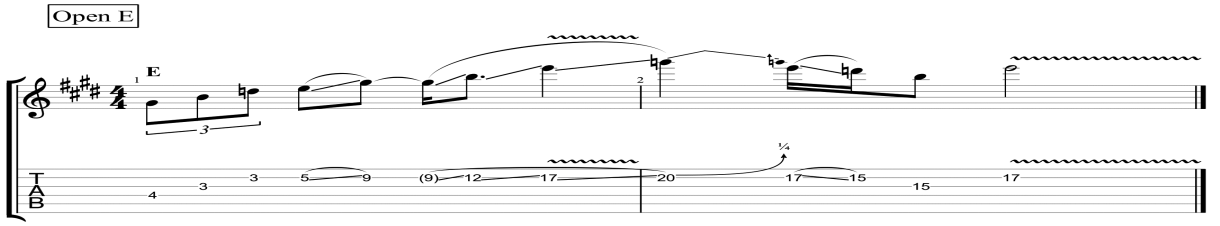
After ascending the triad, there's a phrase on the second string which descends the neck to the A major barre position at the 5th fret.

Example 10e



When the backing returns to the E major chord, I play a tricky little line that ascends from the 3rd fret, all the way to the 20th. This is a perfect example of how slide guitar players generally move horizontally. Sliding between notes is the most expressive approach you have at your disposal, so take your time mastering this line and make sure that all your notes are in tune.

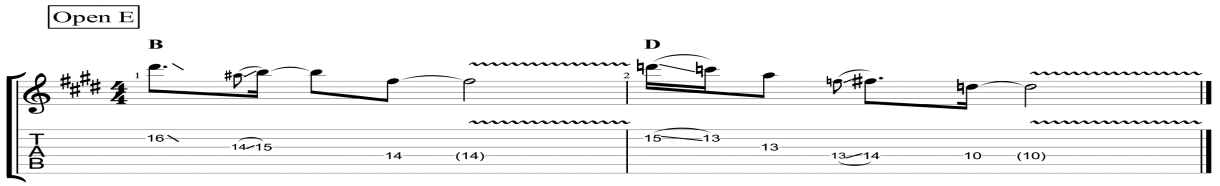
Example 10f



The next lick moves from the B7 to the D7 chord, and in order to play something that sounds articulate, I stick closely to the chords. The first bar descends through the second inversion position of B major, while the next bar descends through the first inversion position of D major.

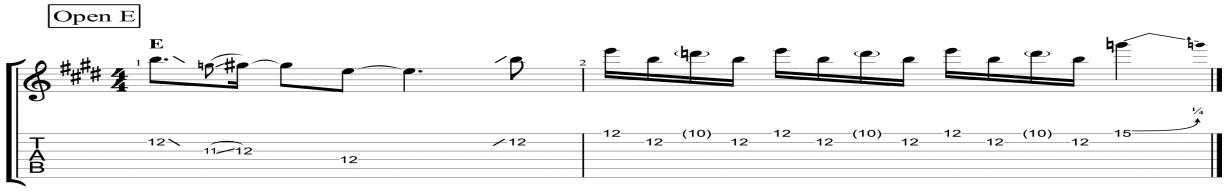
Seeing chord positions like this, and being able to use them to outline whatever chord changes are thrown at you, is great practice and will help to develop your musical versatility.

Example 10g



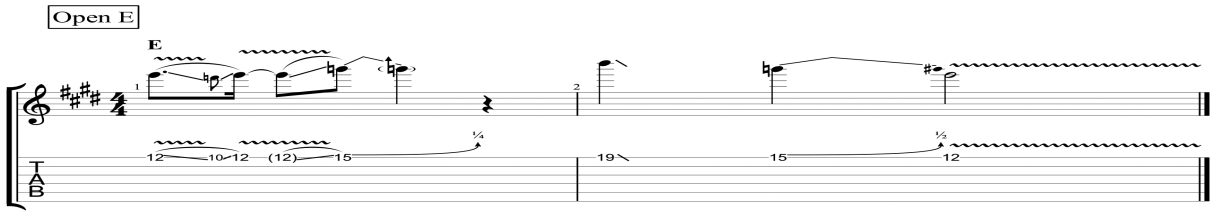
The end of the first chorus introduces some rapid fretting behind the slide. This sounds complicated, but the slide stays at the 12th fret and the index finger plays the 10th fret as you alternate between the first and second strings.

Example 10h



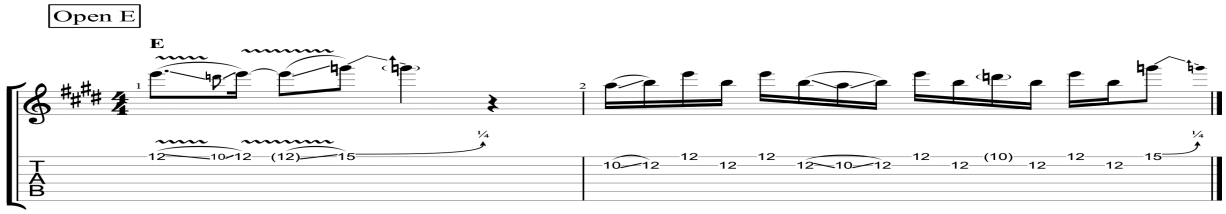
Example 10i is the start of the second chorus. To step things up a bit, I've moved over to the high E string to access a higher note range. Aside from that, it's similar to the theme in the first chorus which helps to tie the full piece together.

Example 10i



The following lick begins by repeating the previous phrase, then switches to a tricky 1/16th note run in E Minor Pentatonic, using fretting behind the slide to add notes outside of the barre position.

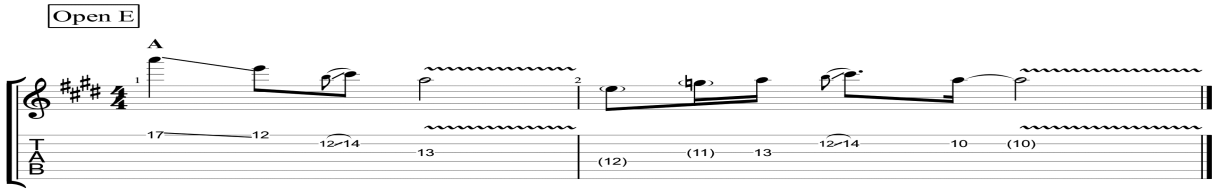
Example 10j



From here, the chord progression moves to A major. I play the root note at the 17th fret of the high E string, then descend to the 12th fret area which contains the second inversion shape.

The second bar is an excellent example of how to use notes fretted behind the slide in different positions to facilitate smooth scalar playing. This would be tricky to pull off with the slide alone.

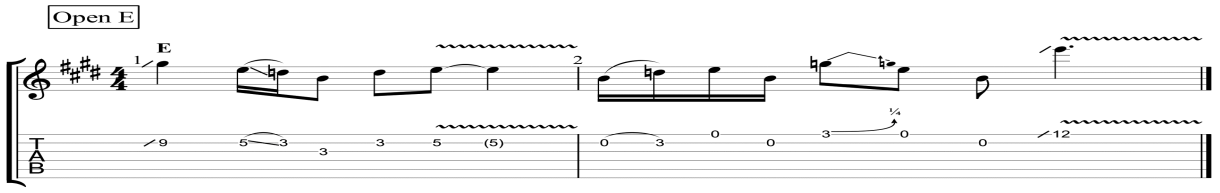
Example 10k



As the chord moves back to E major, your perspective must move to the first inversion pattern at the 5th fret.

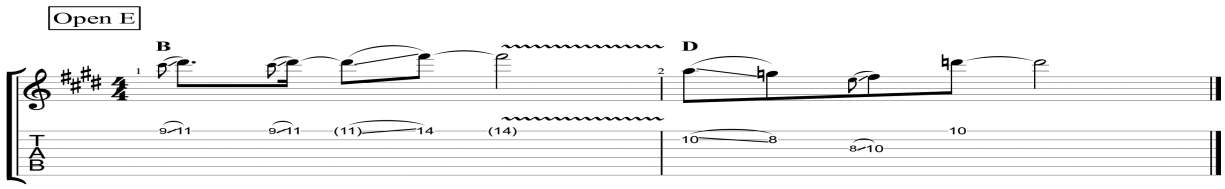
In the second bar I introduce another advanced slide guitar technique. Hammer from the open B string onto the third fret with the index finger. This combination of fretted open position and slide notes is a trademark of high-level slide players.

Example 10l



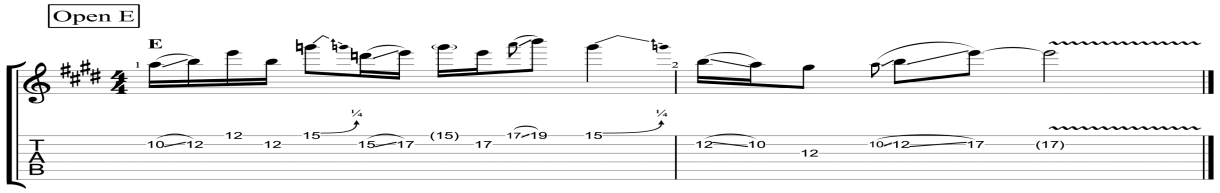
As with the previous chorus, outlining the B major and D major chords is easy to do if you stick closely to the chord tones. I play the notes of the B major chord (B, D, F#) on the high E string, then explore the barre position (10th fret) on the D chord.

Example 10m



The final lick in this solo will test your technique as you move around the neck and add rapid notes fretted behind the slide. If you study the notes here, there’s nothing more than the E Minor Pentatonic scale, but the speed and accuracy may cause problems!

Example 10n



When you have got the solo under your fingers, spend some time experimenting over the backing track with the ideas covered earlier in the book, along with some of your own musical inventions. Remember, you picked this up book because you wanted to master slide guitar, not to play like me!

Find your own voice, and you’ll find your own audience.

Chapter Eleven: Standard Tuning

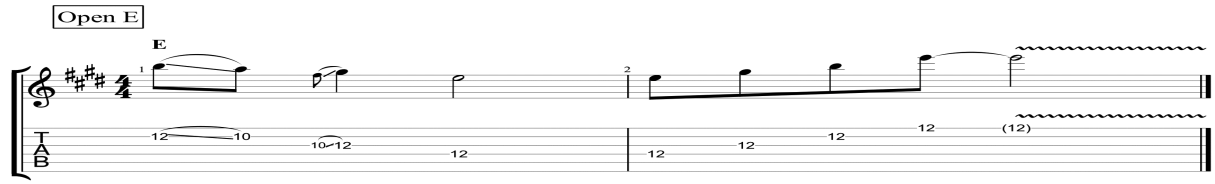
Now you've developed the skills to play slide guitar in Open E tuning, it's time to return to standard tuning and learn to deal with its pitfalls and advantages.

The secret to mastering slide in standard tuning is to find the strengths of open tunings and exploit their parallels in standard tuning. Then use advanced techniques make melodic playing easier.

In Open E tuning, the barre position is extremely easy to play around, but the two inversions present more of a challenge. We used things like fretting behind the slide to make those positions more manageable. Using these kinds of advanced techniques can make playing slide in standard tuning a real possibility.

Here's a simple lick in open E tuning built around the 12th fret barre position.

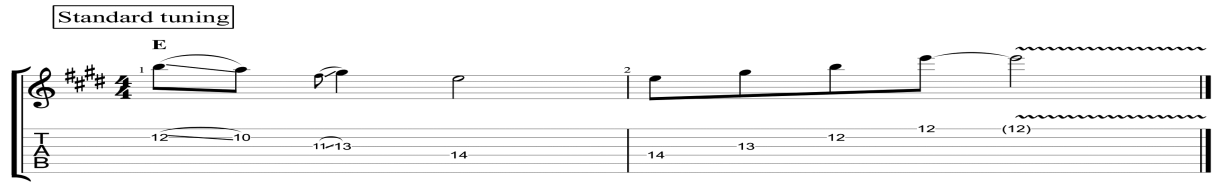
Example 11a



Here's the same lick, but now played in standard tuning (note the standard tuning marking in the top left).

You'll notice that the first bar is hard to play… but the second bar is impossible if you want to let it ring out as you would in Open E tuning.

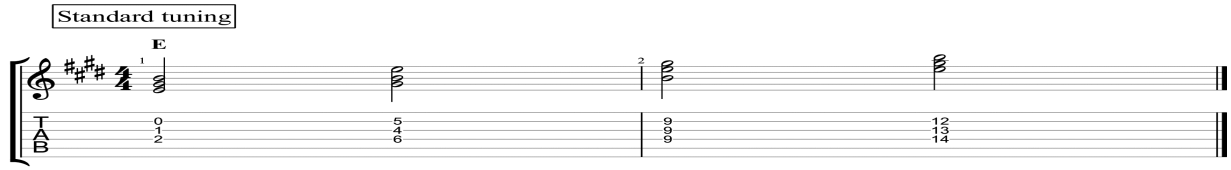
Example 11b



So, root position is hard to play in standard tuning with a slide, but what about the other positions?

The next example demonstrates the three inversions of the triad played on the D, G and B strings, and you will notice that there is a triad position in standard tuning that can be barred with a single finger. In standard tuning this is the source of many slide licks, as it allows you to access some of that open tuned charm.

Example 11c

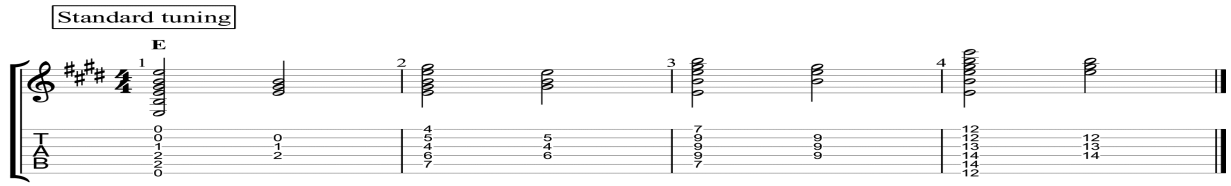


I’m not going go into too much depth here, but I would advise you to learn to visualise each of the above triad positions as part of a larger CAGED barre position.

In the next example I play the larger barre chord form of each chord, then isolate the smaller three note-chunk within this form. This will help you reconcile the chord fragments with what you probably already know about barre chords.

These three major triads are taken from the E, C and A shapes of the CAGED system.

Example 11d



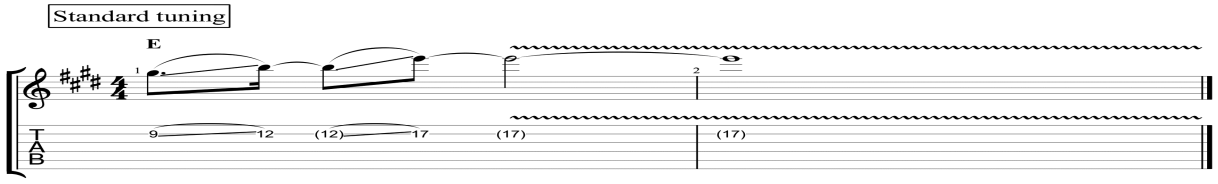
As you can see, none of these positions lend themselves to barring playing across all six strings with the slide, so no matter where you are, you always need to play accurately and use good muting to make sure no unwanted strings ring out.

I could spend an entire book talking about fretboard visualization, but our focus is slide guitar, and I want to stay on topic!

The first thing to point out is that single string soloing works in the same way as it does in Open E tuning. All the scale and interval patterns are the same along each string – all that changes is that some root notes are located in a different place.

Here's a pattern we used in Open E tuning, but played in standard tuning. As the second (B) string is unchanged in both tunings, it will sound identical whichever tuning you use.

Example 11e

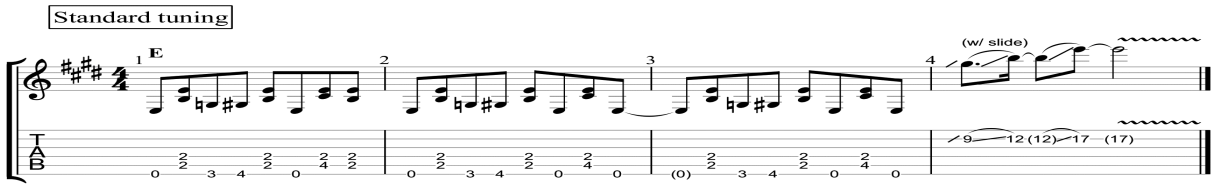


Ideas like the previous example will always work on any string, but they will have different pitches depending on the tuning of the guitar

In standard tuning, we often need to be bit more versatile with our approach to playing and wearing the slide on the little finger makes it possible to fret "normal" notes and later introduce the slide for melodic lines.

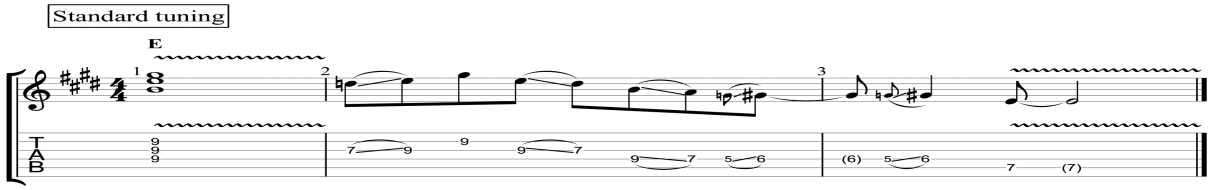
Here are three bars of a country rock pattern in E major followed by the slide lick from Example 11e in bar four. This is a great way to practise integrating the slide with normally fretted notes, and also teaches you to play guitar while wearing a slide, even if you're not using it.

Example 11f



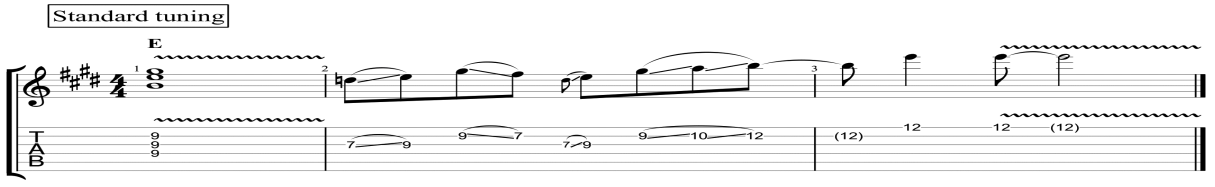
The most important thing to learn in standard tuning slide playing is how to change strings cleanly and keep un-played strings well muted. Let’s learn this technique using the small barre shape triad as it is the simplest shape to begin with.

Example 11g



Here’s another lick around that position that ends on the root note at the 12th fret. You could call this root an *exit note* – a possible place to end a lick. Learning where these notes are located near the triad inversions is a great way to know you’ll always finish with a strong note in your phrase.

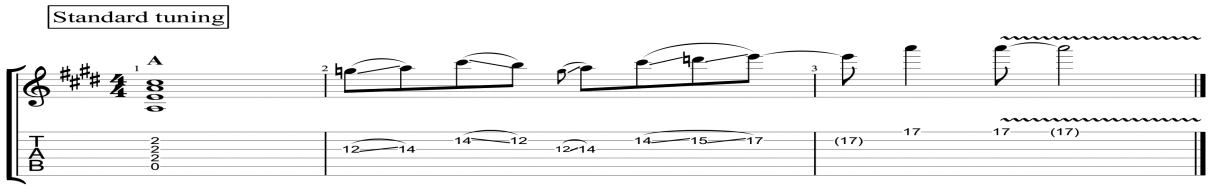
Example 11h



Of course, you can play these licks in any key if you can visualise the chord form you’re basing the idea around.

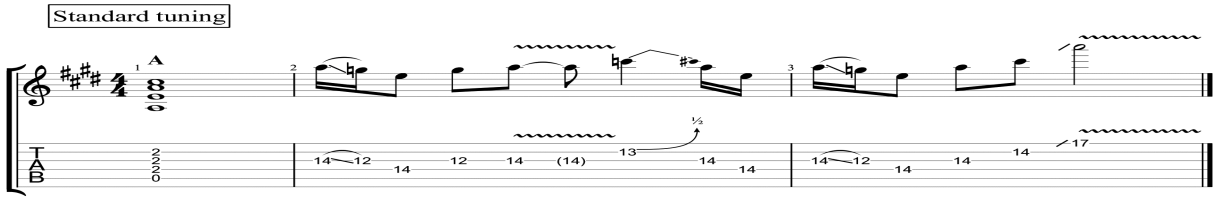
Here’s the same lick played in A major. First play the open A major chord, then play the lick around the same shape an octave higher.

Example 11i



Here are some 1/16th note slides, still around that position of A major.

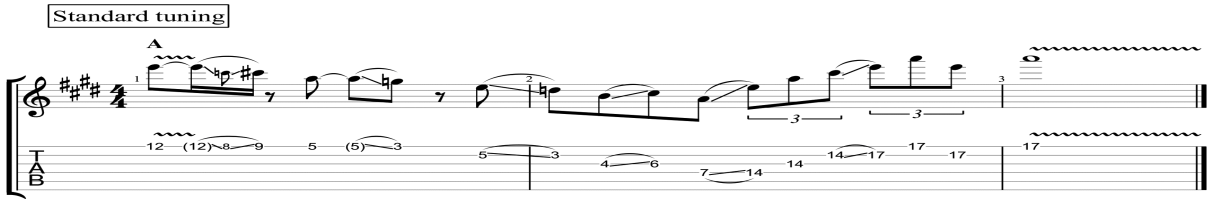
Example 11j



This shape can be used to finish any standard tuned slide lick, as shown in the following A major example.

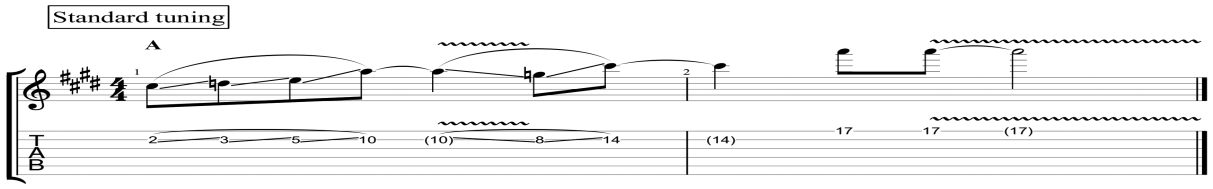
The lick begins by outlining A major on the high E string and then moves across the strings around the E major barre position before shifting up to the same A major barre form at the 14th fret.

Example 11k



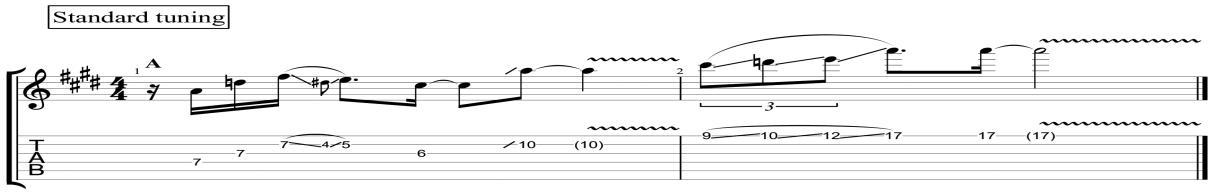
You don’t need to play the full position to use this idea to end a phrase, as demonstrated by this predominantly single string lick in A.

Example 11l



Here’s one final A major idea that combines some tricky string changing mechanics with single string playing. This juxtaposition of approaches is a good way to see which aspects of slide you enjoy most and can exploit further.

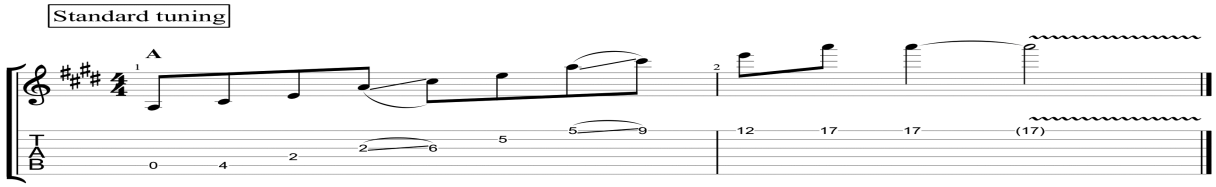
Example 11m



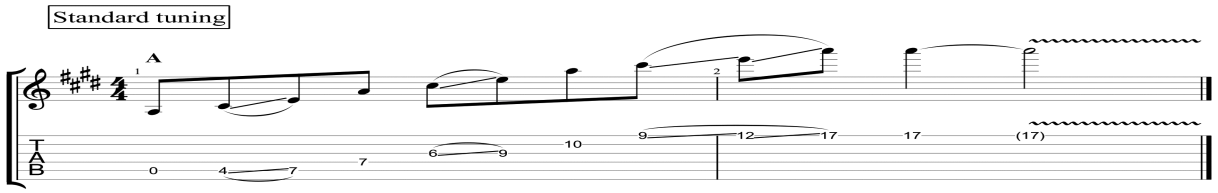
Now you understand how licks work in standard tuning, let’s look at some exercises that will help you focus on developing a clean muting technique.

The next two examples consist of an A major triad played from low to high. Each example takes a different melodic path as it ascends. There are countless ways to do this, and each presents its own muting hurdles to overcome.

Example 11n



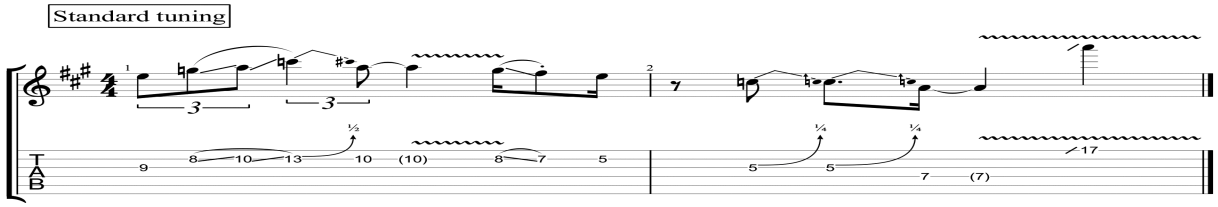
Example 11o



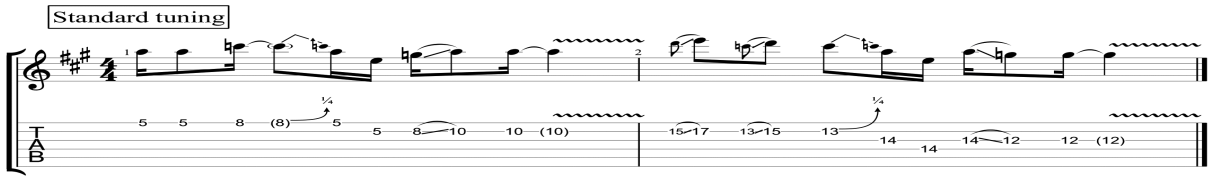
The previous examples highlight some important benefits of standard tuning, and, assuming you have some proficiency in the tuning already, and can introduce slide technique cleanly, you'll be unstoppable!

Before moving on to the final solo, I want to teach you a collection of minor pentatonic licks to show you how I develop my own slide guitar phrasing. First, learn these without the slide, then introduce it when you have the line memorised. This way you're just adding slide phrasing to lines you already know.

Example 11p

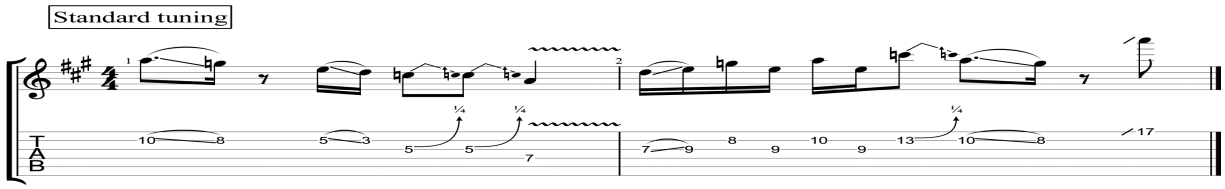


Example 11q



The final line requires some quick shifting on the second and third strings. This requires careful attention to your intonation and good muting technique, so the 9th fret on the B string doesn't ring when you play the 9th fret on the G string.

Example 11r



After working through the book to this point, you're fully prepared to become a fantastic slide player. Moving forward musically is now about developing your vocabulary and technique, and becoming free to express yourself fluently through improvisation.

If you're determined to play slide in standard tuning, I suggest that you go back to the start of the book and work your way through each of the Open E examples, then develop them to work in standard tuning. This will take time, but using techniques like fretting behind the slide will give you some useful creative options.

All that's left now is the final chapter: a full slide guitar solo in standard tuning! So, take a breath, then move on when you're ready.

Chapter Twelve: Standard Tuning Solo

Keeping in line with the roots of this book, the final solo is played on a traditional twelve-bar blues in A – the kind you're likely to find at any blues jam night.

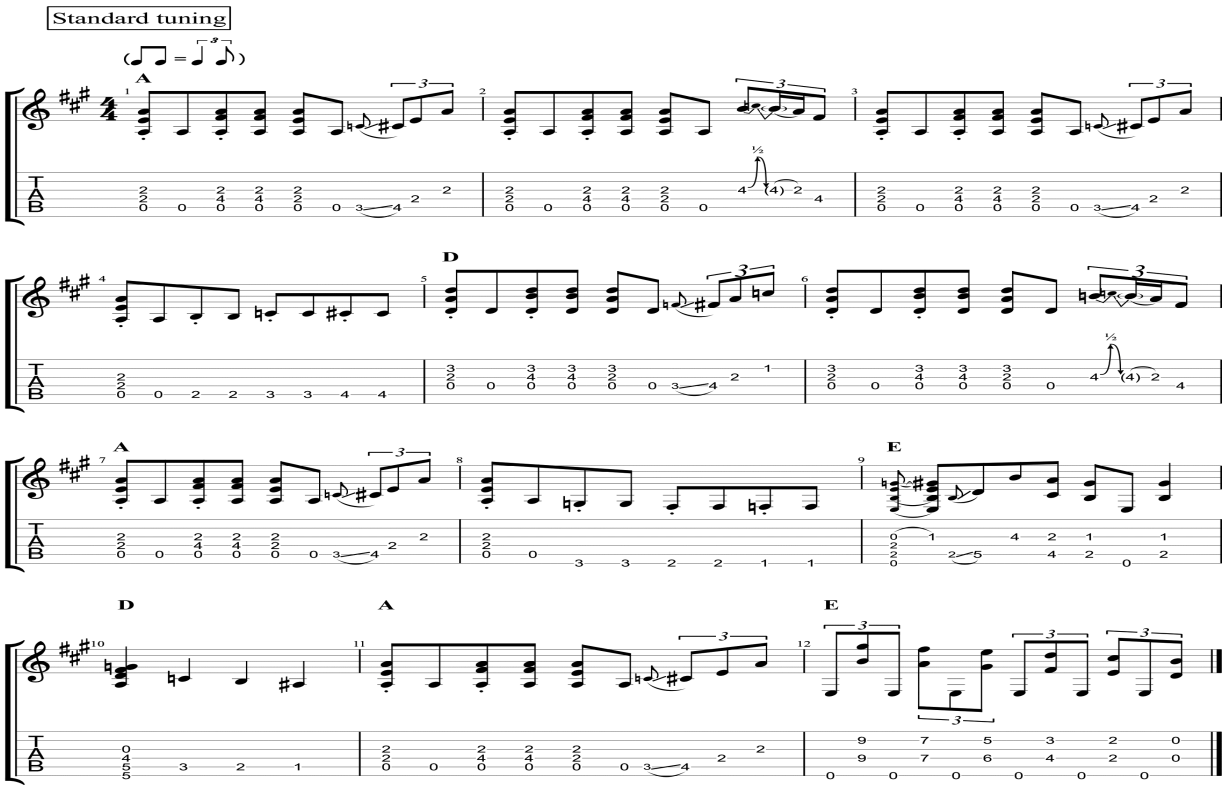
Step one is to learn the rhythm guitar riff. It's a little flashier than using just simple chords, but it can be played with the slide kept on the little finger.

The secret to mastering a track like this is understanding how each melodic idea fits around the underlying chord. The first riff fits around an open A chord and in bar five, when the chord changes to D, the same basic idea shifts over to an open D chord.

In bar eight I play an open E chord and add some descending 6ths on the A and G strings.

Bar nine features a rich Dadd11 chord, which is formed from a D triad on the low strings and an open G sustained over the top.

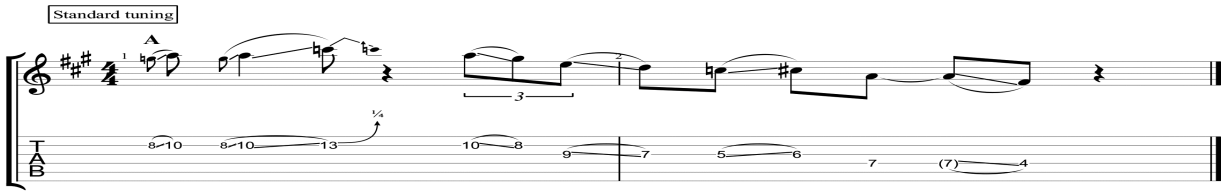
Example 12a



Now to the solo!

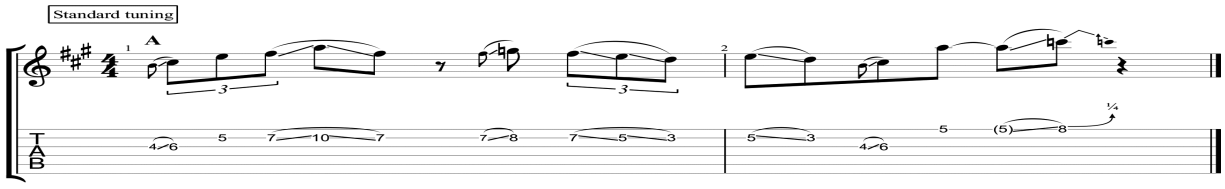
The first lick begins with some minor pentatonic phrases and descends to outline an A7 chord by targeting the note C#, the 3rd of the chord.

Example 12b



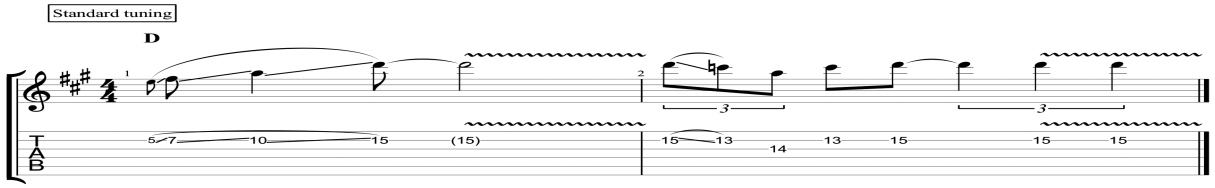
The second lick draws a little more from the A Major Pentatonic scale that's still played in the root position triad.

Example 12c



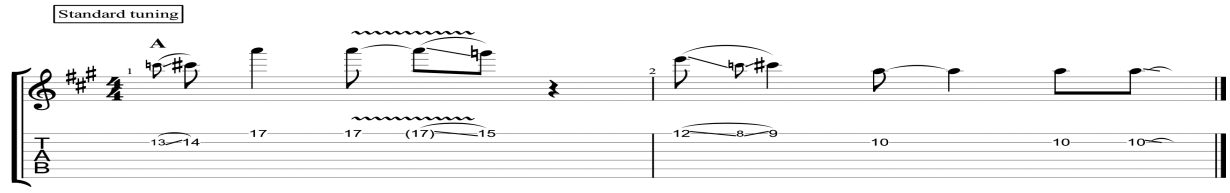
As the chord changes to D, our perspective changes again to target notes around the chord. This begins by landing on an F# (the 3rd), then ascending to a D triad on the second string. When I reach the root note at the 15th fret, I draw from the D Minor Pentatonic scale.

Example 12d



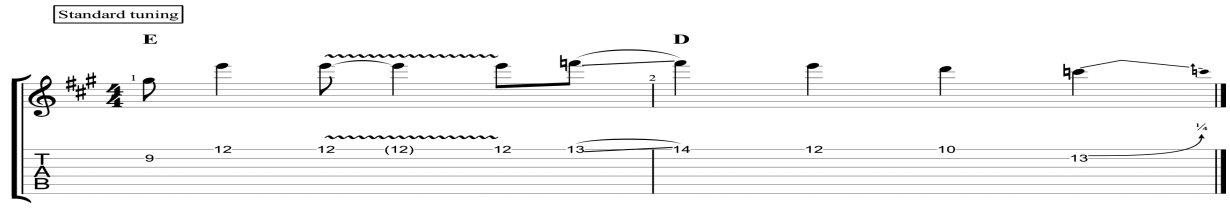
After two bars of D major, the chord returns to A major. Again, I land on the 3rd (C#) in the second inversion triad position.

Example 12e



On the first E major, I target the 3rd (G#) and root (E), then shift up to land on the 3rd (F#) of the D chord before descending through the D Mixolydian mode on the way back to the tonic A major chord.

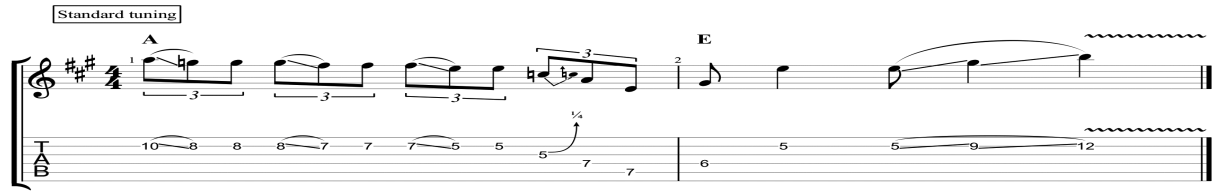
Example 12f



The final lick in the first chorus moves from A major to E major – first by descending the notes of A Mixolydian, then outlining an E major chord as the chord changes.

Note how many times I land on the 3rd as the chord changes. It’s not a rule, but it’s an effective tool to give your soloing a touch of sophistication.

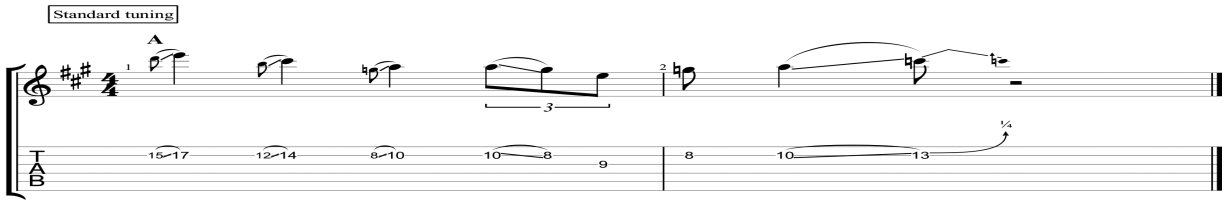
Example 12g



The second chorus is a little more advanced, with some behind the slide fretting to help imitate open tuning. Keeping the slide on your little (pinkie) finger is easiest, but you can get by with it on the ring finger.

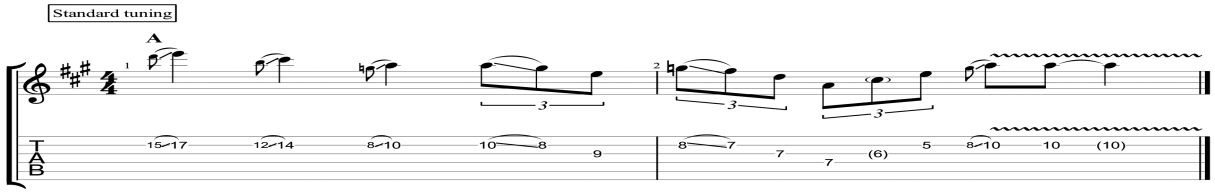
The chorus begins high up on the neck using notes of the A Minor Pentatonic scale. Beginning a chorus with a strong, repeatable melody is the best way to craft a solo your listeners will remember.

Example 12h



The next line begins with the same phrase as before, then shifts to a complicated lick in the second bar. Slide from the 8th fret down to the 7th and keep the slide here as you descend the D Major triad, then fret the two notes behind the slide to form an A major triad.

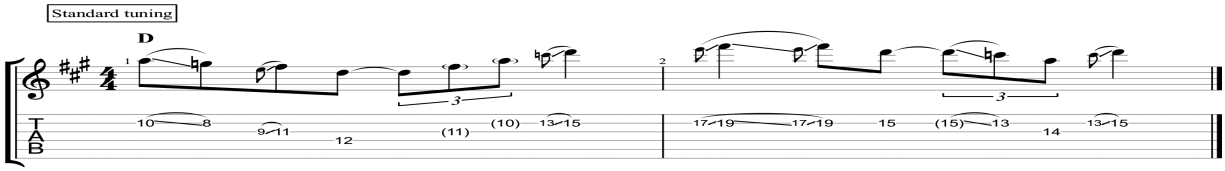
Example 12i



On the D Major chord, I use the same fretting behind the slide pattern. This pattern is a great one to master in standard tuning as it gives you the ability to play a root position major chord and let it ring out as it would in open E tuning.

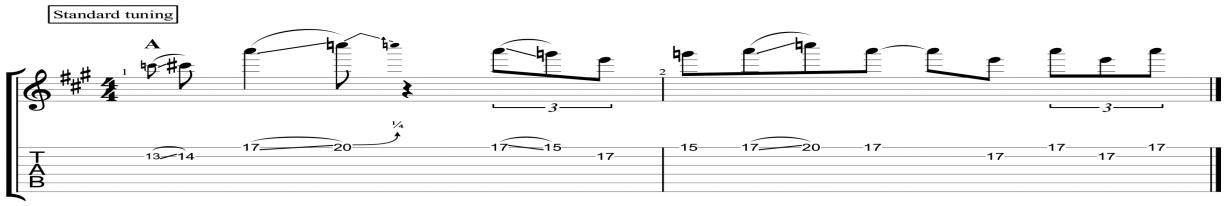
The second bar ascends the neck with notes from the minor pentatonic scale, and by targeting the 3rd (F#) of the D chord.

Example 12j



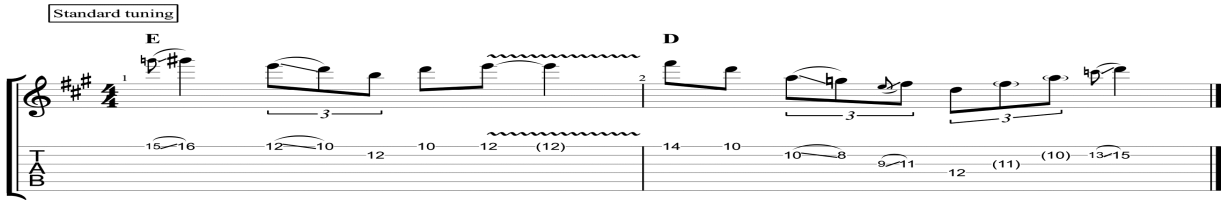
When moving back to A major, I switch to a combination of an A Major chord and an A Minor Pentatonic scale. The 3rd (C#) is played to begin the phrase before switching to root position of A Minor Pentatonic as the lick progresses.

Example 12k



Over the E major chord I play an E7 arpeggio (E, G#, B, D) idea, then transition into the D major chord with another fretting behind the slide lick. It’s important to practise making this transition fluid to articulately outline the chord changes.

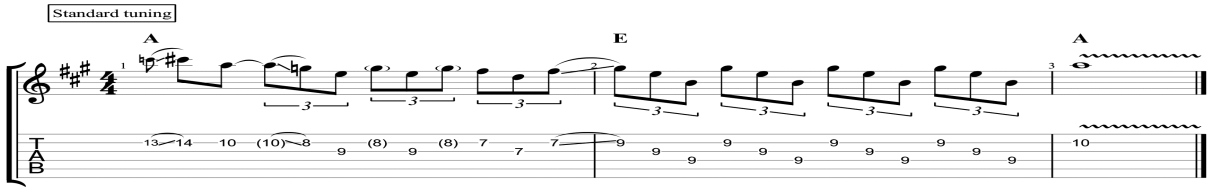
Example 12l



The final lick combines some challenging triplet ideas with fluid fretting behind the slide (8th fret, B string) to let the double-stops ring into each other and create the illusion of an open tuning.

Apply light vibrato to the descending E major triad in the final bar before resolving to the A root note to finish.

Example 12m



And that’s it! Playing this solo cleanly and in full isn’t simple, so don’t rush ahead – learn each lick slowly. Master each one fully before stitching them together over a longer period of time.

There’s no rush and going faster than you need to will only create tension and stress in your playing. Every note needs to be effortless and musical, so it’s not like you’re just repeating a collection of notes you’ve memorised.

Keep working at it. Every day is a step closer to your goal, and you will get there in your own time. Just don’t give up!

Conclusion

Don’t think for one second that the final page of this book is the end of your journey.

You’ve now been given the skills you need to play slide guitar, but never forget that music is a language. Even though you’ve learned to speak, there’s still a lifetime of vocabulary and expression to learn, adapt and master.

Music can’t be learned in a vacuum, that’s why I’ve made a point of encouraging you to listen to the recorded audio for each of these examples. You need to hear as much slide playing as you can and learn to imitate how it sounds, rather than how you imagine it sounds.

It’s imperative that you listen to as much great playing as you can, make a note of the bits you love, and then try and copy these sounds to understand the language of the professionals.

The following is a listening list of my favourite recordings that feature prominent slide guitar playing. Some are slide playing from start to finish, others only include a few moments.

Expose yourself to this music. Listen to it regularly and internalise the ideas.

At Fillmore East (1971) – The Allman Brothers Band

The Sky Is Crying: The History of Elmore James (1993) – Elmore James

Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs (1970) – Derek and the Dominos

Sail On (1969) – Muddy Waters

Nick of Time (1989) – Bonnie Raitt

Ry Cooder (1970) – Ry Cooder

Big Sky (2002) – Brett Garsed

From the Reach (2008) – Sonny Landreth

Shout! (2013) – Gov’t Mule

Joyful Noise (2002) - The Derek Trucks Band

Let it Lie (2013) – The Bros Landreth

Made Up Mind (2013) – Tedeschi Trucks Band

Beyond It All (2006) – Allen Hinds

The Neo blues Project (2018) – AJ Ghent [pronounced “j-ent”]

What better way is there to end a book on slide guitar than with these words from one of the fathers of the style?

“There are many different forms of communication, but music is absolutely the purest one.”

–Duane Allman