

A stylized illustration of a bass guitar. The body is a reddish-brown color with a white pickguard. The neck is light blue with black frets. The headstock is also light blue. The strings are black. The guitar is shown from a front-three-quarter view.

Learning the 4 String Bass Guitar Fingerboard

by Curt Sheller

**Tuning
E A D G**

*It's not as hard as
you think.*

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Curt Sheller Publications

2050 Orlando Rd., Suite 101

Pottstown, PA 19464-2348

International Standard Book Number (ISBN)

ISBN 10: 1-60321-045-8

ISBN 13: 978-1-60321-045-4

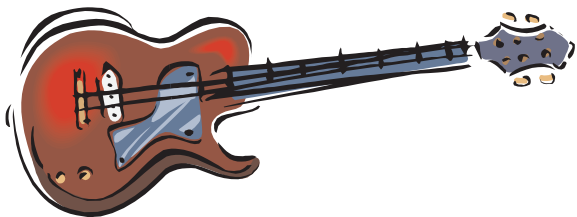


Introduction

Memorizing the notes of the bass guitar fingerboard is not as hard as one would think. Although there doesn't seem to be any pattern and the same letter can be found on every string. There is a systematic approach that can be used to help remember the notes.

The most common tuning used today for four stringed bass guitar is E A D G. This is the same tuning as the low four strings of a standard tuned six string guitar.

A bass guitar can have 4, 5, 6, 7, and more. The most common are four and five string bass guitars.





Standard Tuning

Finally, really learning the names of the notes of the fingerboard is a liberating musical moment. A major breakthrough in most player's learning and enjoyment of the bass guitar.

Knowing the names of the notes is separate from learning to read standard music notation. To learn to read music on the bass see my series of books: *Reading Music on Bass Guitar*.

Knowing the notes of the fingerboard is so important that this book is dedicated to that goal.



Standard Tuning

Standard tuning for a four string bass guitar is E A D G.



④

E

③

A

②

D

①

G





Learning the 4 String Bass Guitar Fingerboard

Key Frets

open

E

A

D

G

In addition to the open strings, which most mandolin players seem to remember. There are three other frets with no sharp or flat notes, fret (5), fret (7) and fret (10).

fret (5)

A

D

G

C

fret (7)

B

E

A

D

fret (10)

D

G

C

F

These are *key* or *reference frets*. From these frets other frets can be derived.

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Learning the 4 String Bass Guitar Fingerboard



Frets (1), (4), (6), (8), (9) and (10) can be referenced relative to the open strings, fret (5), Fret (7) and fret (10) by flatting or sharpening all the notes of those frets.

<i>open</i>	E	A	D	G
<i>fret (1)</i>	E#*	A#	D#	G#
<i>fret (4)</i>	Ab	Db	Gb	Cb
<i>fret (5)</i>	A	D	G	C
<i>fret (6)</i>	A#	D#	G#	C#

* See page 11 & 12 for enharmonic equivalent note spellings.





Learning the 4 String Bass Guitar Fingerboard

fret (6)	Bb	Eb	Ab	Db
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fret (7)	B	E	A	D
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fret (8)	B#	E#	A#	D#
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fret (9)	Db	Gb	Cb	Fb
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fret (10)	D	G	C	F
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fret (11)	D#	G#	C#	F#
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Secondary Frets

Fret (3) has one sharp each.

fret (3)	G	C	F	A#
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Fret (2) and (4) can be referenced relative to fret (3) by flatting or sharpening all the notes of the that fret.

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Learning the 4 String Bass Guitar Fingerboard



<i>fret (2)</i>	G $\flat$	C $\flat$	F $\flat$	A
<i>fret (3)</i>	G	C	F	A$\sharp$
<i>fret (4)</i>	G $\sharp$	C $\sharp$	F $\sharp$	B

From the open strings and four additional frets, you now have the whole bass guitar fingerboard memorized. That is every fret and note of the mandolin fingerboard in standard. A lot easier with a system.

Review the frets ascending and descending; with sharps; with flats; mixed sharps and flats. Know the fingerboard inside and out.

Whether practicing or playing; reading or improvising; playing single notes of chords; not matter what style you are playing. ALWAYS know the notes you are playing. This will make the notes of the bass guitar reflexive and second nature.





Learning the 4 String Bass Guitar Fingerboard

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Enharmonic Equivalents

Enharmonic equivalents are where the same pitch can have multiple names. In other words, if two notes have the same pitch but are represented by a different letter name and accidental (♯ ♭) they are enharmonic.

Sharps to Flats

A♯ is the same pitch as **B♭**

B♯ is the same pitch as **C**

C♯ is the same pitch as **D♭**

D♯ is the same pitch as **E♭**

E♯ is the same pitch as **F**

F♯ is the same pitch as **G♭**

G♯ is the same pitch as **A♭**



Learning the 4 String Bass Guitar Fingerboard

Flats to Sharps

A $\flat$ is the same pitch as **G $\sharp$**

B $\flat$ is the same pitch as **A $\sharp$**

C $\flat$ is the same pitch as **B**

D $\flat$ is the same pitch as **C $\sharp$**

E $\flat$ is the same pitch as **D $\sharp$**

F $\flat$ is the same pitch as **E**

G $\flat$ is the same pitch as **F $\sharp$**

Learning the 4 String Bass Guitar Fingerboard Flat and Natural Notes



STRING	④	③	②	①
open	E	A	D	G
1	F	B ^b	E ^b	A ^b
2	G ^b	B	E	A
3	G	C	F	B ^b
4	A ^b	D ^b	G ^b	B
5	A	D	G	C
6	B ^b	E ^b	A ^b	D ^b
7	B	E	A	D
8	C	F	B ^b	E ^b
9	D ^b	G ^b	B	E
10	D	G	C	F
11	E ^b	A ^b	D ^b	G ^b
12	same as open strings one octave higher			

Sharp & Natural Notes 13



Learning the 4 String Bass Guitar

Fingerboard Sharp and Natural Notes

STRING	④	③	②	①
open	E	A	D	G
1	F	A $\sharp$	D $\sharp$	G $\sharp$
2	F $\sharp$	B	E	A
3	G	C	F	A $\sharp$
4	G $\sharp$	C $\sharp$	F $\sharp$	B
5	A	D	G	C
6	A $\sharp$	D $\sharp$	G $\sharp$	C $\sharp$
7	B	E	A	D
8	C	F	A $\sharp$	D $\sharp$
9	C $\sharp$	F $\sharp$	B	E
10	D	G	C	F
11	D $\sharp$	G $\sharp$	C $\sharp$	F $\sharp$
12	same as open strings one octave higher			

14 Flat & Natural Notes

