

What* is a Blues Progression*

The **Blues** are at the heart of all American music. It has influenced Country, Rock, Folk, Jazz, Bluegrass and just about every form of American music we listen to today.

The **Blues**, is a *chord progression, a scale, a feeling*. This lessons covers the chord progression of the blues.

A “Blues” Chord Progression

The most common form of a blues chord progression is twelve measures in length containing three four measure sections using the primary chords of a key. The primary chords of a major or minor key are the I*, IV and V chords.

While other measure lengths are possible, such as eight and sixteen measures, the twelve measure form is the most common.

- 4 measures of the **I** chord
- 2 measures of the **IV** chord
- 2 bars of the **I** chord
- 2 measures of the **V** chord
- 2 measures of the **I** chord

Totalling 12 measures

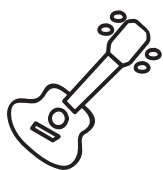
Here is a common twelve measure blues chord progression in the key of C major.

¹ C (I)				
⁵ F (IV*)		⁷ C (I*)		
⁹ G7 (V*)		¹¹ C (I*)		

What Makes a Blue Progression a Blues Progression?

Measures one, five, seven, nine and eleven are critical measures where the I, IV and V chords **MUST** appear or their direct diatonic substitutions for a progression to remain a blues progression.

* These uppercase roman numerals correspond to the chord's function with in its major or minor tonality. See the author's book **Harmonic Analysis for Scale Selection and Chord Substitution** for more information.



7th Chords?

This is a basic I IV V blues chord progression in the key of C major. The I, IV, and V refer to the chord's function within its scale or tonality.

9 C E A
TUNING

4 4

2 3 4

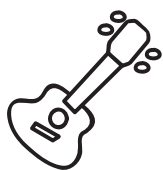
4 4

D G B E
TUNING

4 4

5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12



7th Chords?

It is common for the I, IV and V chords to be 7th chords.

The image shows a 12-measure blues progression in C major. The progression is: C7 (4 measures), F7 (2 measures), C7 (2 measures), G7 (2 measures). The notation includes guitar tuning (GCEA and DGBE), fret numbers (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12), and chord diagrams for C7, F7, and G7.

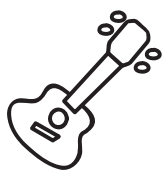
Measure 1-4: C7 chord. Fret 4. Chord diagram shows C7 (C4, E4, G4, Bb4).

Measure 5-6: F7 chord. Fret 5. Chord diagram shows F7 (F4, Ab4, C5, Eb5).

Measure 7-8: C7 chord. Fret 7. Chord diagram shows C7 (C5, E5, G5, Bb5).

Measure 9-10: G7 chord. Fret 9. Chord diagram shows G7 (G4, Bb4, D5, F5).

Measure 11-12: C7 chord. Fret 11. Chord diagram shows C7 (C5, E5, G5, Bb5).



Quick Four?

To break up the monotony of six measures of a I chord when the progression is repeated. A V chord is added to measure twelve turning the progression back to the I chord. A IV chord is added to measure two, returning to the I chord in measure three. This change is often referred to as a “Quick Four” change. A IV chord can also be added to measure ten.

Chords can be major triads or 4-part seventh chords.

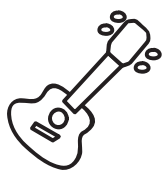
The diagram illustrates a 12-measure ukulele progression. It is organized into four systems, each with two staves. The first two staves are labeled 'G C E A TUNING' and 'D G B E TUNING' respectively. The progression is as follows:

- Measure 1: C7 (3fr)
- Measure 2: F7 (3fr)
- Measure 3: C7 (3fr)
- Measure 4: C7 (5fr)
- Measure 5: F7 (5fr)
- Measure 6: C7 (3fr)
- Measure 7: C7 (3fr)
- Measure 8: C7 (5fr)
- Measure 9: G7 (7fr)
- Measure 10: F7 (5fr)
- Measure 11: C7 (3fr)
- Measure 12: G7 (3fr)

Chord diagrams are provided for each measure, showing fingerings and fret numbers (e.g., 3fr, 5fr, 7fr). The progression demonstrates the 'Quick Four' change by introducing IV and V chords to break up the monotony of a single I chord progression.



A more harmonically active turnaround has been added to measures eleven and twelve and will be used, or a variation for the remaining examples.

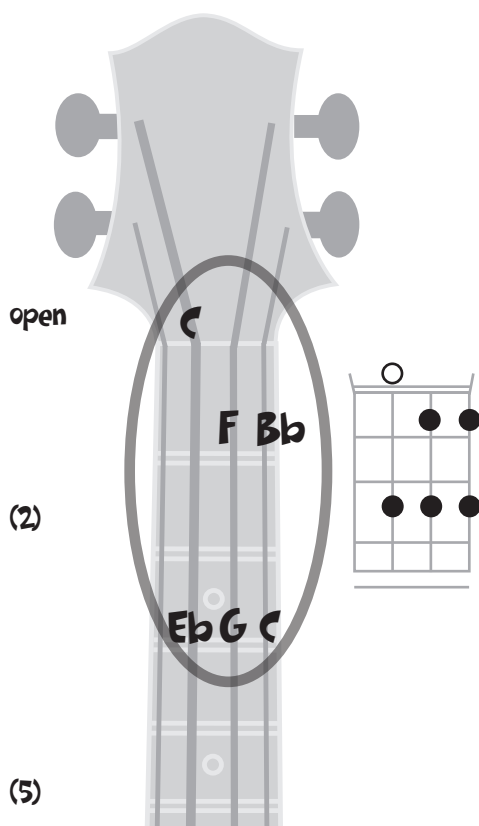


A Couple of Pentatonic Scale to Get You Started Soloing

C Blues Scale

Sometimes referred to as a Minor Pentatonic scale a C Blues scale contains the notes: C Eb F G Bb C' and works over the following basic chords: C Cm C7, F Fm F7, G Gm G7, Eb, A, Bb.

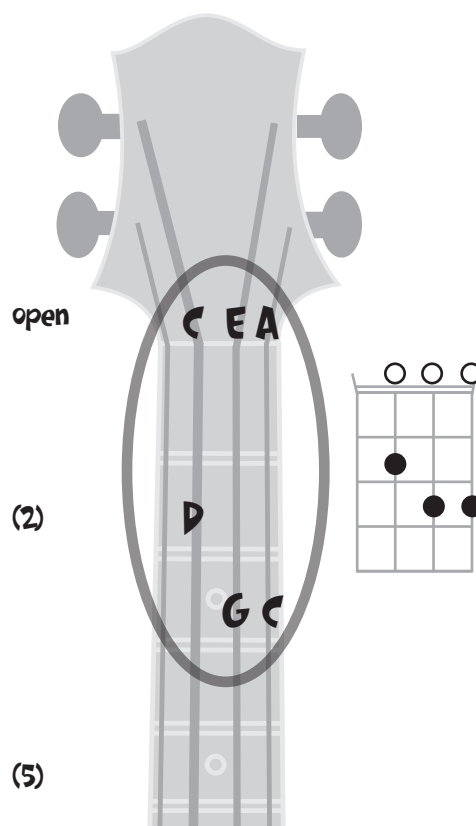
An open position C Blues scale.



C Pentatonic Scale

Sometimes referred to as a Major Pentatonic scale a C Pentatonic scale contains the notes: C D E G A C' and works over the following basic chords: C Dm Em F G, G7 Am and Bb.

An open position C Pentatonic scale.



Both scales contain the primary chords for a C blues: C F G and G7. Both scale can be used to improvise over a C major blues progression of C F and G or G7. For a minor blues were the I and IV chords are minor the blues or minor pentatonic scale great.



A Guide to Blue Chord Progressions for Ukulele, A to Z

26 blues chord progressions. From a basic three chords major or minor blues all the way to a fancy jazz blues interpretation with a lot of substitutions.

www.curtsheller.com/books/AGCPB1UKE/