



# Creative Guitar Mastery: Fretboard Orientation

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## **The Goal**

In this lesson we will lay the foundations of complete understanding of the entire fretboard. We will do this in as straightforward a manner as possible. First, we'll cover some basic theory. Then we'll apply this theory to the guitar. In other words, we try to keep all that you learn practical. In future lessons we will show you exactly how to incorporate this stuff into real playing situations.

## **Scope**

More specifically, this lesson will cover

- Simple Intervals
- The Music Alphabet
- Applying the Alphabet to Guitar

We have deliberately limited the scope of this lesson to make it more manageable. Then each successive lesson builds on the ones before. There is no fixed time to spend with each lesson. I have been working on this stuff for the better part of a lifetime! And I always find some new angle, or way of looking at this stuff that gives me a fresh view on this wonderful subject- The Guitar.

We will only be using natural notes in this lesson (an explanation of these follows soon). No sharps or flats. Sharps and flats are simple to learn once you've mastered where the natural notes are. Due to the complexity of the guitar, it's just easier to do it this way. Also, the natural notes fit over at least seven different chords, and uncountable chord progressions. In fact, I would say 75% of the most familiar chordal material is contained within these natural notes. (This may or may not be clear to you- but trust me- it will be!)

This lesson involves single string work. This is one of those cases where simplicity is called for. It is much easier to 'see' a single string than a cluster of strings. Guitar knowledge is accumulative. Once you can visualize each individual string then it is much easier to put these pieces of the puzzle together into some kind of coherent whole. Besides, how can you play six strings well if you cannot play one string? There is no other way to figure out just what exactly you can play on one string unless you actually explore playing on one string.

And for the more advanced student who may have already covered some of this stuff. Some gaps may have occurred in your learning which can now be filled. Just keep in mind that we are taking the straightest path to the most knowledge. This is quite an undertaking. It is best to be complete and thorough right from the beginning. Think of stuff in here you've already covered as review. And if you already know all of this lesson, please see a more advanced one.

For more info on guitar and creative philosophy, see our introductory articles to [CreativeGuitarMastery.com](http://CreativeGuitarMastery.com) available for free from the website.

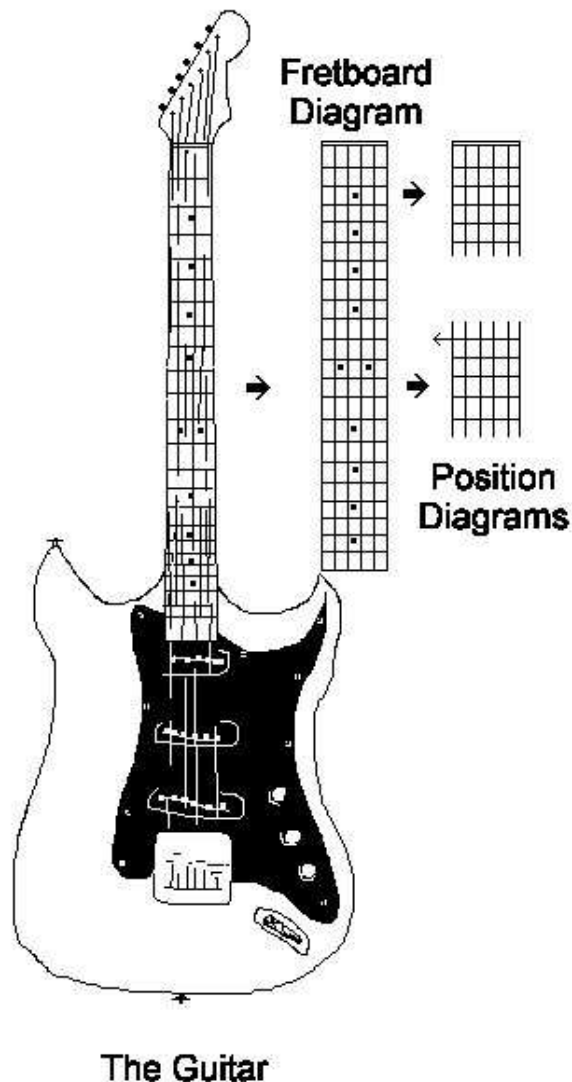
## Materials List

Of course, you'll need a playable guitar. Besides this, all you need is patience, and the desire to learn.

Thanks again for checking this material out. Let us know how it goes and if there is any way we can help you. [chris@DoublePlanet.com](mailto:chris@DoublePlanet.com)

## Diagrams

Diagrams can be confusing at first. Just think of a diagram as a tool for visualizing the fretboard. In fact, this is a key concept in guitar mastery. Imagine what it would be like to be able to see everything on the guitar in your mind's eye! You could practice without a guitar in your hand.



Diagrams are derived directly from the guitar itself. They are graphic representations of the guitar.

## The Guitar

The guitar in the model diagram (on the preceding page) is a typical right-handed model (If you are left-handed and are having trouble- please let us know-we'd be happy to help). This means most people pick, strum, pluck or otherwise sound the strings with their right hand. The left hand can do several things. It can do nothing. In this way you are either playing an open string, or not playing at all.

Another option with the left hand is to press the strings down at various frets. This shortens or lengthens the strings; thus, raising or lowering the various strings' pitches. Another left hand option is to touch the strings (or a string) with the fingers but not press down on the frets. This deadens the string, producing a 'chick' or 'click' sound. This is like playing a drum- you can play rhythm (by striking the deadened string with the right hand), but there is no melody. all this sounds more complicated than it really is. Notice that when you play guitar the subconscious mind takes over many of the subtle physical actions involved. This greatly simplifies things!

### Options

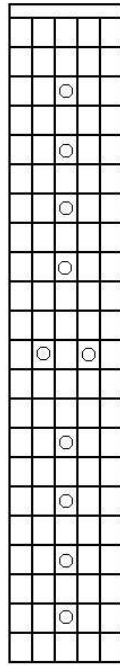
(For each of the six strings and/or any combination)

With the right hand	With the left hand	
Sound(pick, pluck, strum,... )	Do nothing	
Not Sound (Do nothing)	Press string on a fret (thus create a note)	Touch (enough to deaden- like a drum)

- Do you understand the implications of the above chart?
- Does it cover all possibilities?
- Can find all the options available?
- Try each combination (from both columns).

## Fretboard Diagrams

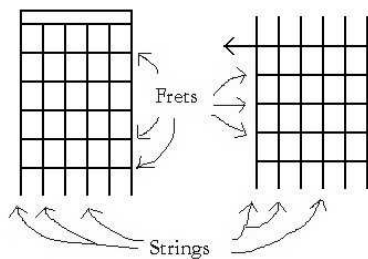
Fretboard diagrams allow you to see (or show to someone else) the entire length of the fretboard. This is useful for visualizing an entire single string. However, you will find that it is very difficult to see the entire fretboard (all six strings up and down the entire neck) all at one time. At least at first it is!



Note that this fretboard has 22 frets (like my guitar!!!). Some have 21 frets. Some have 24!!! Acoustic guitars generally have less.

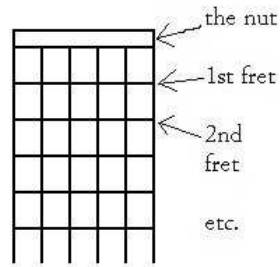
## Position Diagrams

These let you focus on a small area of the fretboard. These diagrams are useful for showing (or mentally seeing) scales, chords, runs and riffs, melodies, etc. that occur in a particular area of the fretboard. This type of diagram is a valuable key to guitar mastery.

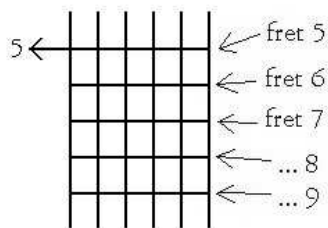


As you saw earlier, the vertical lines represent the strings. The horizontal lines represent the frets.

If a diagram includes open strings (strings played without pressing any frets), or if the diagram includes the first several frets of the guitar, the position diagram will have a double line indicating the so-called 'nut' of the guitar.

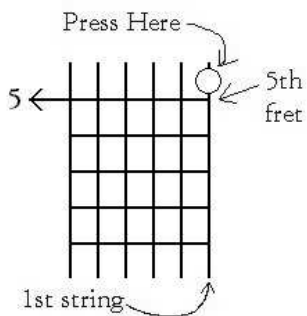


An arrow pointing to a number attached to a position diagram indicates the fret number at which the diagram is located.



The arrow above pointing to 5 indicates the 5th fret. This diagram represents the 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th frets.

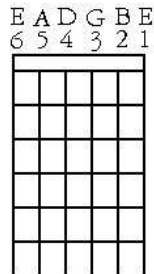
A circle on a position diagram usually indicates where a note is pressed down and played (with a left hand finger).



This means to play the 1st string on the 5th fret.

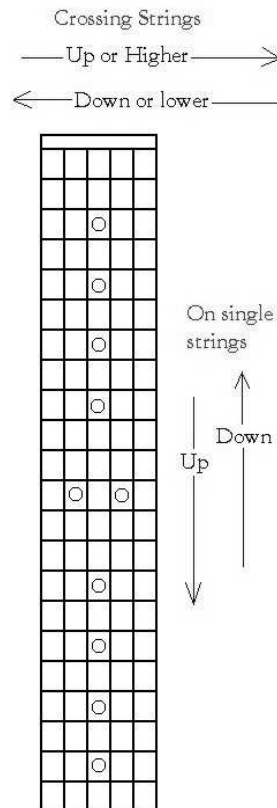
## A Few Other Things You Should Know

Strings are numbered from the thinnest one to the thickest one. The note names of the open strings are-



(This is if you are standard tuned.)

'Up' and 'down' always refer to pitch, not necessarily direction on the guitar. The higher strings, for example, are the thinner ones. The lower strings are the thicker ones.



The 1st string is the highest. The 6th string is the lowest. On single strings, up is moving away from the nut.

## Intervals

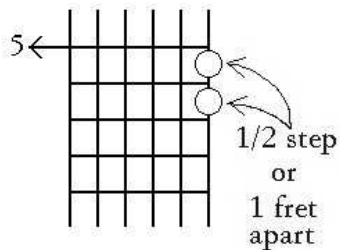
Simply put, an interval is the space between two notes.

### *INTERVAL=SPACE*

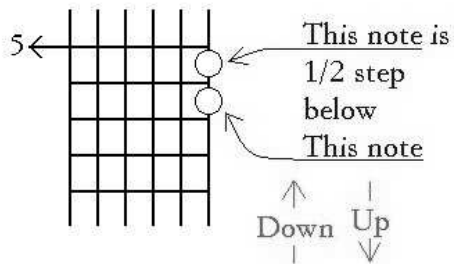
In this lesson we will be using two intervals. They are:

<b>The Half Step (abbreviated 1/2 step or just 1/2)</b>	<b>The Whole Step (abbreviated W. step or just W.)</b>
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A 1/2 step is an interval (or space, remember?) of one fret. For example, here are two notes which are 1/2 step apart-

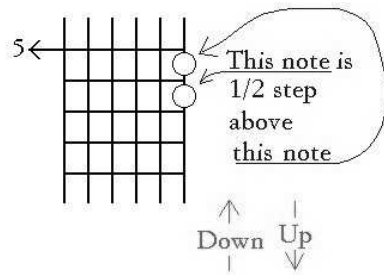


Remember up and down? You can say one note is 1/2 step below the other –

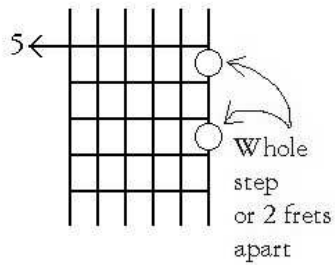


Also, the other way around is true –

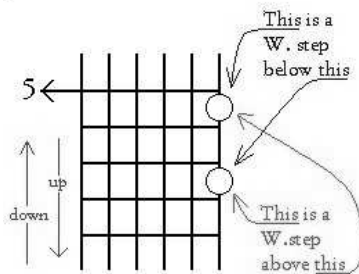




A whole step is an interval of 2 frets. For example:



Up and down (pitch-wise) also applies to this interval.



So - to review:

From any note -

- Be able to play up 1/2 step
- Be able to play down 1/2 step
- Be able to play up a W. step
- Be able to play down a W. step

### The Alphabet (or the Natural Notes)

The notes on the guitar are named after the first seven letters of the alphabet -

**A B C D E F G**

After G, it repeats -

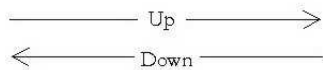
**A B C D E F G A B C D . . . .(etc)**

This goes on both ways - forever! -

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

Pitch (up & down, remember?) applies to the alphabet on paper as well as on the guitar -

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



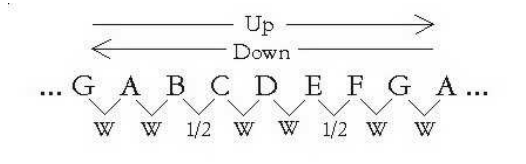
The sequence is the natural notes. It represents all the white keys on the piano -



Notice (in the diagram above) that some of the white keys don't have black keys in between. Interesting, huh? Read on-

Due to the nature of the guitar (there are no white and black keys to help us)- it is easiest to learn these note's locations first. Once you have learned these natural notes, it will be easy to learn the so-called accidentals. (Accidentals are the black notes on the piano. They are named by sharps and flats.)

The interval (remember this word- 'interval'?) between any two of these notes that are adjacent to each other is either a 1/2 step or a whole step. Check this out -



It would be in your best self-interest to memorize this now. Just remember, they are all whole steps except B to C and E to F, which are 1/2 steps.

## Applying the Alphabet to the Guitar

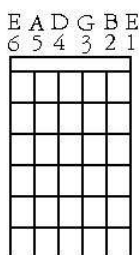
Now it is only a matter of using the stuff we just covered to apply the music alphabet to the entire fretboard. We will begin by naming the notes on one string at a time. This is good because it is so easy to visualize a single string at a time. It is a straight line - much easier to see than a whole cluster of strings. Besides - in all my years of teaching I have noticed that this is one of the weakest points in aspiring guitarists' knowledge. Even quite advanced students have seldom taken a close look at the fretboard "lengthwise" (as opposed to "crosswise" - catch my drift?).

In this series we will look at the guitar in many different ways. This is what makes guitar a complicated and challenging instrument - the sheer number of ways of looking at it. Each viewpoint is quite simple in itself. For example - learning one string at a time (which we are about to do) is an easy task. So is looking at position playing or learning the notes in one area of the fretboard, (which we will do in a future lesson). Neither of these two ways of seeing the neck are too awfully hard. But put them together at one time without mastering each viewpoint individually and the task becomes difficult.

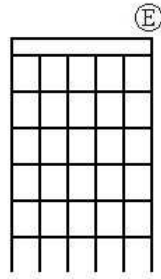
This is what we will be doing - covering the most basic viewpoints first. From here we will "stretch" your viewpoint to include more and more ways of seeing it.

So now, with guitar in hand, follow with me as we walk through naming and playing the notes on one string at a time.

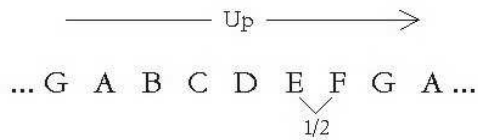
First, remember the names of the open strings?



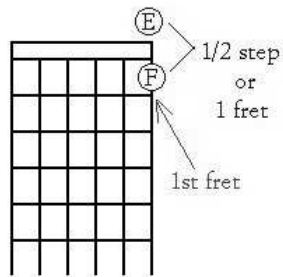
Let's start by naming and playing the notes on the 1st (smallest) string. The open 1st string is an E note-



The note after E is F (in the music alphabet). And the interval (or space, remember?) between E and F is up 1/2 step (or one fret)-

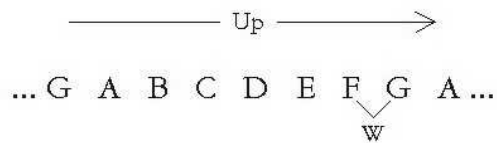


So, F is on the 1st fret of the 1st string-

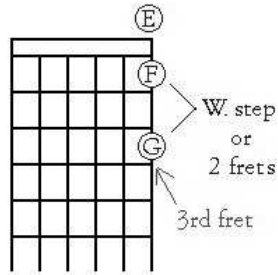


Does that make sense? If so go on. If not, read this again.

The next note after F is G, and the interval between F and G is a whole step (or two frets)-

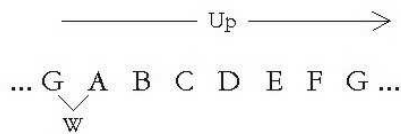


So, G is on the 1st string/ 3rd fret (up two frets from F)-

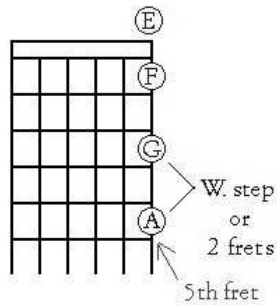


Make sense? Please continue.

Now you know where E, F, and G are on the first string. The next note after G is A, and it is up a whole step-



So, A is on the 5th fret of the first string (up two frets from G)-



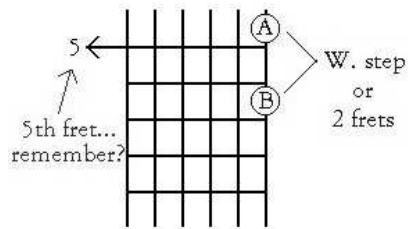
Let's go on.

### More Applying...

Continuing with this train of thought-

The next note after A is B and it is up a whole step, or 2 frets (from now on refer back to the Alphabet diagram on page 8 for the intervals between the notes... in fact, if you'll memorize this it'll save you a lot of trouble).

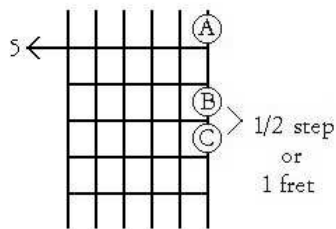
So...



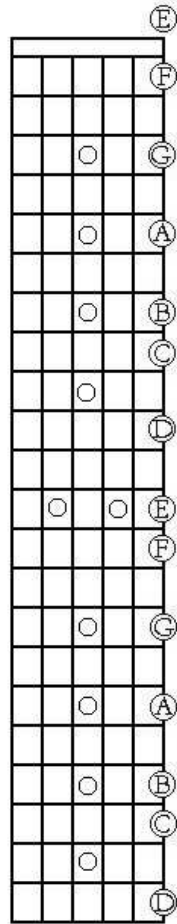
Now you know where E, F, G, A and B are on the first string! Of course, it'll take some time and work and repetition before this becomes 2nd nature. But this is well worth the effort!

Continuing on-

The next note after B is C and it is up 1/2 step. So...



Do you understand this so far? If not, go back and review. If so, you should be able to continue on with this same procedure till you run out of frets. Just work in the same way making a mental note of where you are (the note name), where you are going (the next note name), and the interval between these (whole step or half step). Here is what you get when you continue-



You are trying to build a picture in your mind's eye like the above diagram. But don't rely on this diagram to do this exercise. If you do you will only have memorized the 1st string. Instead, follow the procedure outlined (the long, hard way). In this way, you will understand the concepts underlying why the notes are where they are as well as memorizing where they are.

### More...

Here are exercises to help you really master the fretboard. Give each one a little time to get the most out of this lesson, but keep in mind that you know what's best for you. So don't be afraid to use what works for you.

Do each of the six strings just like we did the first string. Keep in mind that open note (or beginning note) of each string is different (except the 1st and 6th strings, which both begin on E). This makes the layout of every string different (except string 1 and string 6). Work really hard on trying to visualize this, attempting to see each string with its note names and locations in your mind's eye. *This is one of the KEYS to really mastering the guitar.*

Be able to start at the top of each string (highest note) and work your way down. This is tricky because you have to work backwards, thinking the note before, and the interval down instead of up, etc. In other words, be able to name the notes all the way up each string (as before), and then go back down.

Don't rely on these charts and diagrams. Memorize this stuff! It'll pay off in the long run. You'll not only know the material, but know why it is this way.

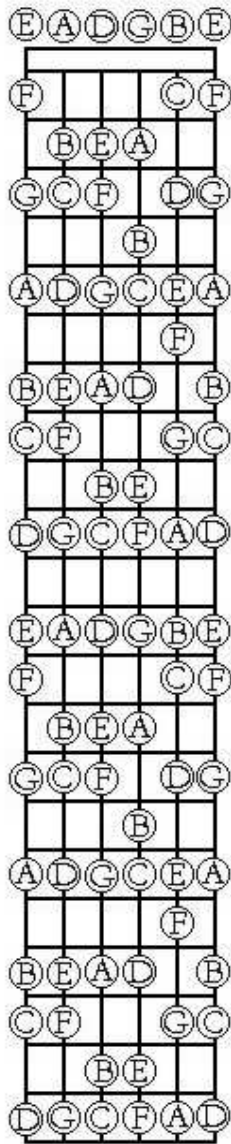
Spend a few minutes a day just playing the pattern these notes create on the strings (ignoring the names of the notes). Explore any kinds of patterns you can find... anything that helps get this stuff into your head, ears, and hands. This too is an important aspect of the guitar. You'll see these 'shapes' and 'patterns' again very soon.

When this exercise begins to lose its challenge, try inventing other ways to do this. For example, try picking out a particular note (the 'A' note, for example... or the 'D' note...) and finding it all over the guitar. Etc. Or plop your finger down on a random note and then name it. This will help in really mastering this material.

Remember to have fun. Keep in touch with the reasons you picked up the guitar in the first place, that little creative urge that just has to be expressed. This is everything. And don't be afraid to put this material down when you need to. You can always find your way back to it when you're ready. It'll be here and waiting.



And now, here is the entire fretboard for reference. But again, keep in mind that sometimes the slow, difficult way is the shortest path. I wouldn't rely on this chart, but on your own knowledge of this material.



This stuff should get you well on your way to total guitar mastery. We hope we have helped you along to finding your unique creative voice. In the lessons ahead we will be covering many exciting and challenging aspects of the guitar. Hope to see you there.

If you have any questions about this material, or suggestions- please feel free to contact me in care of the publishers.

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Thanks again, and I really hope this has helped!

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If you are ready to learn how to use this material by mastering it all very naturally and in a very practical way, get the book and CD course *Creative Guitar Mastery: Modal Improvisation 101* from the website [www.CreativeGuitarMastery.com](http://www.CreativeGuitarMastery.com), or save postage and handling by requesting it at your local music store or private guitar teacher. And feel free to put them in touch with us so we can get this great material to you!