

ELECTRIC BASS MASTERCLASS

Ryan Foglesong

I. WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

A. Vision for the Session

1. Set the tone: Not just chops, but rather “skillful” (Ps. 33:3) and “wise” (Col. 3:16) accompaniment.
2. Our aim is to serve the song and serve the church.
3. Biography and Influences

II. WHY THE BASS EXISTS

A. Role of the Bass

1. Connector between Rhythm & Harmony (Half Guitar, Half Drums)
2. Reveal the Harmony without occupying every register
3. Give the chord weight and direction
4. Help the band and the congregation feel secure
5. Shape the emotional movement of the song through entrance, register, dynamic, note length, groove, articulation, and effects.

B. A Brief History of the Instrument

1. Upright Bass: Foundation in Orchestral, Jazz, and Popular Music
2. The fretted electric bass: Portable, Amplifiable, and consistent Intonation
3. Basic function remained, yet evolves with style and technology

III. TECHNIQUE

A. Right Hand

1. Alternating fingers and consistent articulation
2. Rest stroke (muting string below), floating thumb, and anchoring
3. Contact point: How your hand position changes tone
 - I. Next to neck
 - II. Over pickups
 - III. By the bridge

B. Left Hand

1. Relaxed Thumb, curved fingers, economy of motion
2. Clean shifting; minimize unnecessary finger lift

C. Muting and Note Endings

1. Right hand and left hand muting.
2. Control sympathetic string vibration.
3. End the note as intentionally as it begins.

D. Pick Playing

1. Attack, consistency, a different musical character.
2. Palm muting and note length.

E. Dynamics and Groove

1. Time and consistency matter more than difficulty.
2. Emphasis on *how* the notes are placed in time rather than *what* the notes are.
3. Groove: the sustained, recurring rhythmic feel that a piece of music locks into; the interplay of pulse, subdivision, and small timing/accent choices (by drums, bass, and other rhythm-section instruments) that makes the music feel cohesive and makes listeners want to move.
4. Pocket: Agreement on pulse, space, and subdivisions between all sounding instruments

IV. NECK FAMILIARITY & ESSENTIAL THEORY

Theory isn't about becoming more complicated. It's about making better musical decisions.

A. Learn the bass neck in layers

1. Open strings: E, A, D, G.

2. Note landmarks

- I. Use dots on the neck
- II. Use 5-note rule (same note up a string)
- III. Use Octave Box (same note sounding higher)
- IV. Intervals away from a known root note (based on notes you are already most comfortable with)

B. Basic Terms

1. **Half Step (Semitone)** – the smallest distance between two notes on a neck; one fret apart.
2. **Whole Step (Tone)** – two half steps; two frets apart.
3. **Interval** – the distance between any two notes, measured in steps (e.g., major 3rd, perfect 5th, etc.)
4. **Triad** – the most basic chord: root, 3rd, and 5th.
5. **Key** – the tonal “home” a piece of music is centered around.
6. **Scale** – a specific sequence of whole and half steps starting from a root note (major, minor, pentatonic, etc.)
7. **Diatonic** – notes that belong to a given key or scale (as opposed to notes outside it, or “chromatic” notes).

C. Chord tones

1. **Root:** names the chord (the “1”)
2. **Third:** defines the quality of the chord; either major or minor.
3. **Fifth:** strengthens the stability of the chord without changing its quality.
4. **Octave:** the root in a new register.

D. Practice Sequence

1. Find every G, then every C, etc.
2. Move one shape through a 3-4 chord progression.

E. Scales

1. Building on chord tones (R, 3, 5), add 2 more notes to make a Pentatonic Scale
 - I. Major Pentatonic Scale (R, 2, 3, 5, 6)
 - II. Minor Pentatonic Scale (R, b3, 4, 5, b7)

V. TONE & PEDALS

Every pedal should solve a problem or create a color. If it doesn't do either, you probably don't need it.

Tone begins long before your pedalboard.

A. Practical Signal Path

B. Compression

1. You can use it as a scalpel or a paintbrush
2. Control the peaks and add consistency
3. Preserve useful dynamics

C. Drive

1. Warmth, grit, distortion, and fuzz.
2. Principle: Adding more harmonic information so that the bass is heard in a mix.
3. Stages:
 - I. Transparent overdrive / Edge of break-up
 - II. Distortion
 - III. Fuzz
 - IV. Fuzz + Octave (below and above)
4. Ensure that the low end survives

D. Equalization (EQ)

Don't EQ with your eyes. EQ with the band playing.

1. Feel (Sub-Bass): 20–80 Hz
 - I. 20–40 Hz: felt, not heard (pressure/vibration; subwoofer range)
 - II. 40–80 Hz: fundamental of most bass notes, “chest thump”
2. Perceive (Pitch/Tone): 80–800 Hz
 - I. 80–250 Hz: weight/warmth (“boom” zone)
 - II. 250–500 Hz: mud zone (overlaps with guitar & keys)
 - III. 500–800 Hz: pitch clarity (where our ear identifies the note)
3. Cut-Through (Most Practical): 800–3kHz+
 - I. 800–1.5 kHz: attack/articulation (finger, pick, slap)
 - II. 1.5–3 kHz: presence (cuts through drums/PA)
 - III. 3 kHz–above: string noise/finger squeak (usually cut out)

4. Rule of Thumb

- I. Feel = below 100 Hz
- II. Musical Usefulness in a room = 500 Hz and up
- III. Fix mud by cutting around 300–500 Hz
- IV. Add presence around 800–2 kHz instead of raising volume

E. Priority

1. Utility (Problem-solving tools): Tuner, Compression, EQ/DI, Drive, Volume Pedal
2. Color Tools: Chorus, Octave, Delay, Reverb, Flanger, Other Modulation pedals.
3. Touch, note length, and register come before pedals.

VI. **LISTEN, THEN RESPOND**

A. Ask these questions as you walk into rehearsal

1. Who's playing with me? Quite a few folks? 2-3? What is their instrument designed to do? How capable are they?
2. Where is the melody? (sung and lead/hook) What is the melody?
3. What is the drummer playing?
4. What is the piano covering?
5. Is the guitar already filling this register?
6. Is a section grooving, building, resting, etc.?
7. Does a moment in a song need movement or stability?

VII. COMMON MISTAKES

- A. Playing before listening
- B. Adding fills because there's empty space
- C. Ignoring the kick drum
- D. Too much low EQ
- E. Scooped Mids
- F. Holding notes too long
- G. Not holding notes long enough
- H. Changing tone instead of changing touch
- I. Watching your hands instead of listening
- J. Thinking complexity equals maturity
- K. Overplaying to show off

VIII. BASSISTS THAT SHAPED ME

- A. Geddy Lee
- B. Flea
- C. Abe Laboriel Sr.
- D. Adam Clayton
- E. Pino Palladino
- F. Sean Hurley

APPENDIX

Fretboard Reference Library

Every diagram from the 2024 reference set, redrawn for this workbook. Boards run horizontally with the nut at the left; strings read G–D–A–E from top to bottom, and each note is labeled with its interval from the root so shapes can be moved to any key. The map below names every note to the 12th fret.

HOW TO READ THESE DIAGRAMS

R Chord tone (root · 3rd · 5th)

2 Pentatonic addition

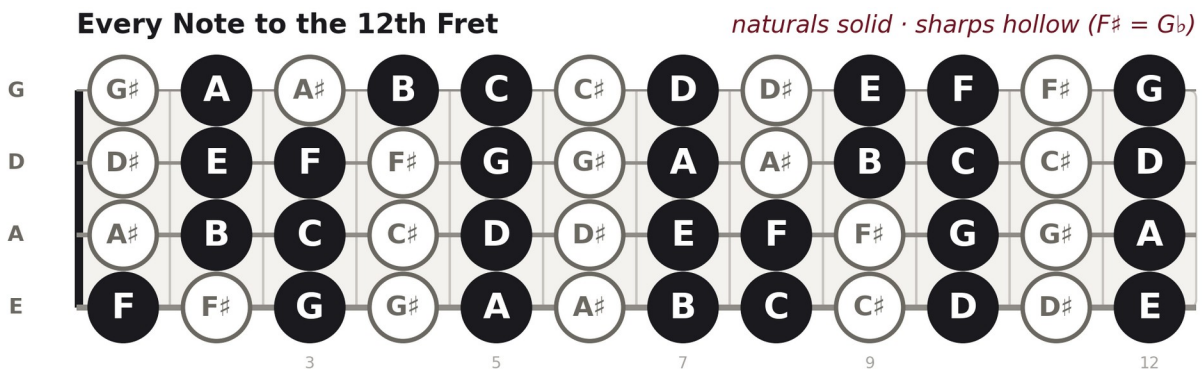
4 Color / passing tone

R Upper octave (8va)

5 Open string (left of nut)

4 Passing tone (hollow)

Strings read top-to-bottom G · D · A · E · numbers below each board are fret markers · every note is labeled with its interval from the root



IN THIS APPENDIX

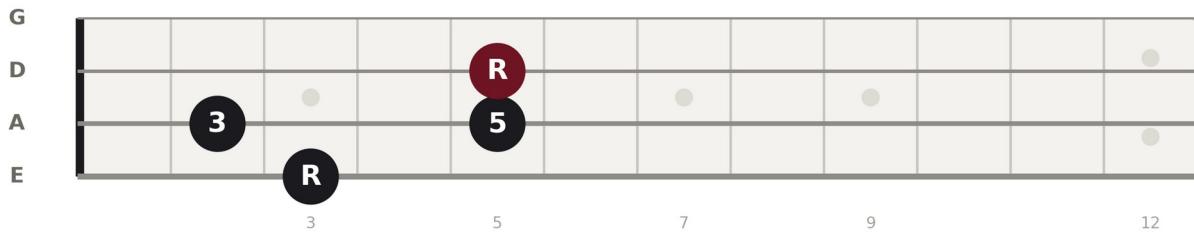
- A.1** G Major — Triads & Pentatonic Positions
- A.2** G Minor — Triads & Pentatonic Positions
- A.3** The Modes of G Major
- A.4** Diatonic 10th Chords in G Major
- A.5** G Major — Chord Voicings & Dyads
- A.6** G Minor — Chord Voicings & Dyads
- A.7** Practical Signal Path

A.1 G Major — Triads & Pentatonic Positions

Root-position shapes for the G major triad, plus the two-octave major pentatonic (R-2-3-5-6).

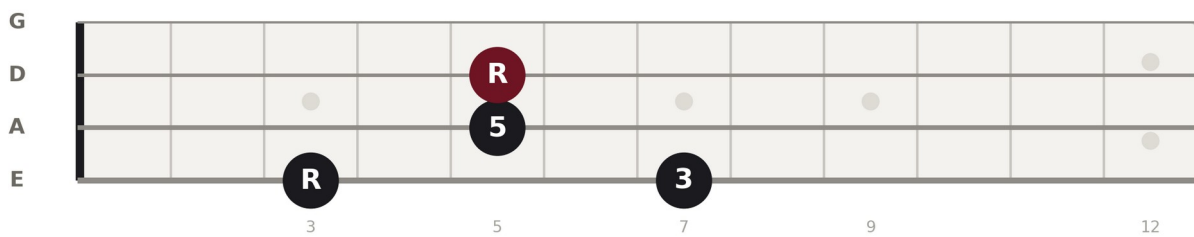
G Major Triad

2nd Position



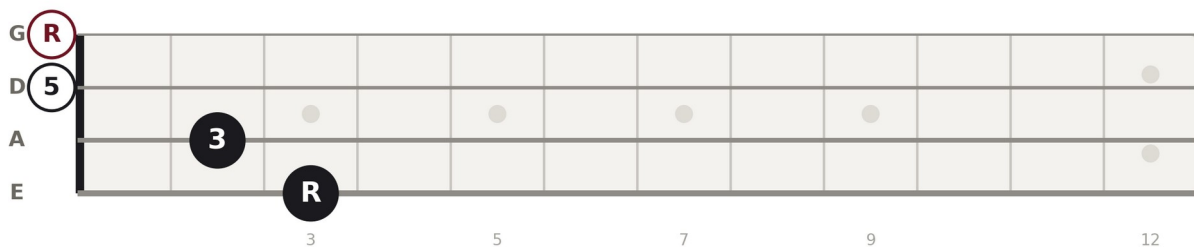
G Major Triad

1st Position



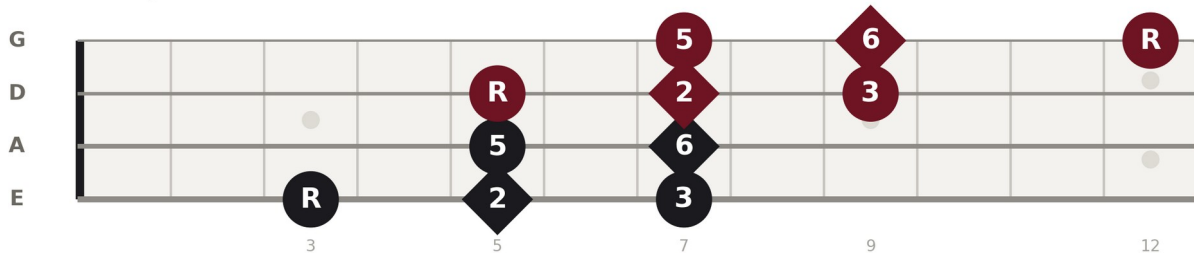
G Major Triad

4th Position



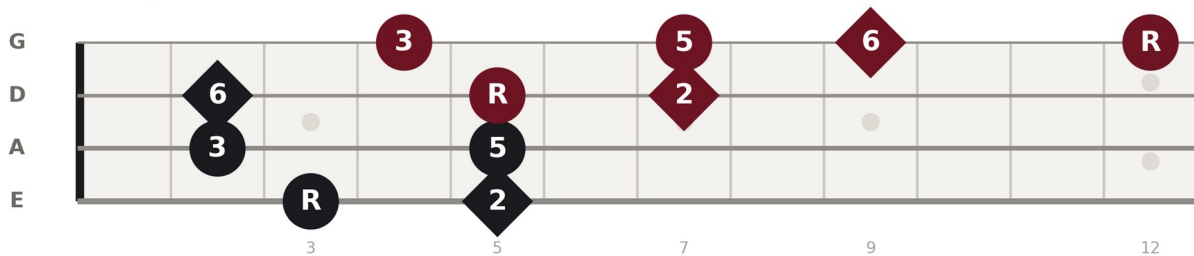
G Major Pentatonic Scale

1st Position · 2 Octaves



G Major Pentatonic Scale

2nd Position · 2 Octaves

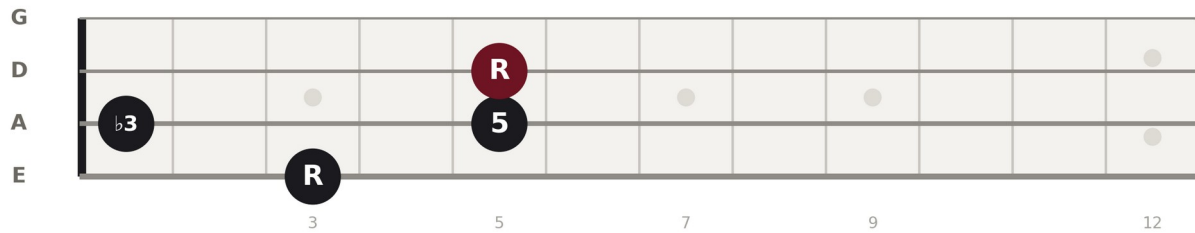


A.2 G Minor — Triads & Pentatonic Positions

G minor triad shapes and the two-octave minor pentatonic (R-b3-4-5-b7).

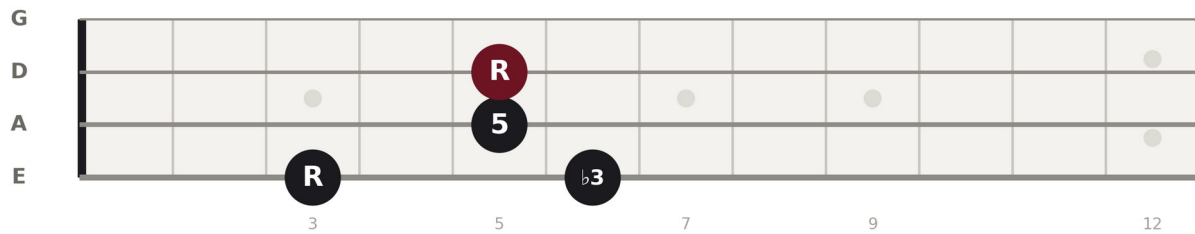
G Minor Triad

2nd Position



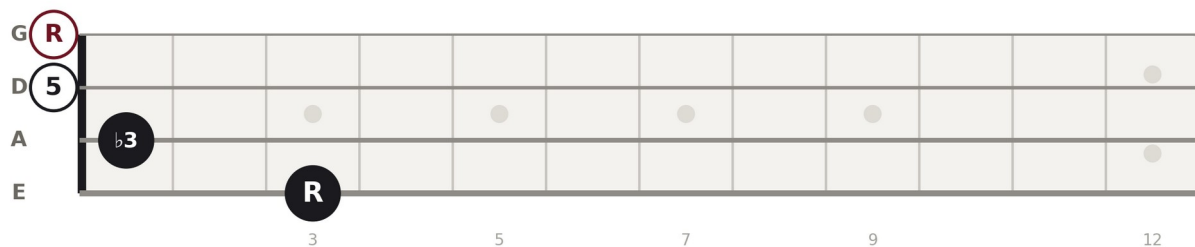
G Minor Triad

1st Position



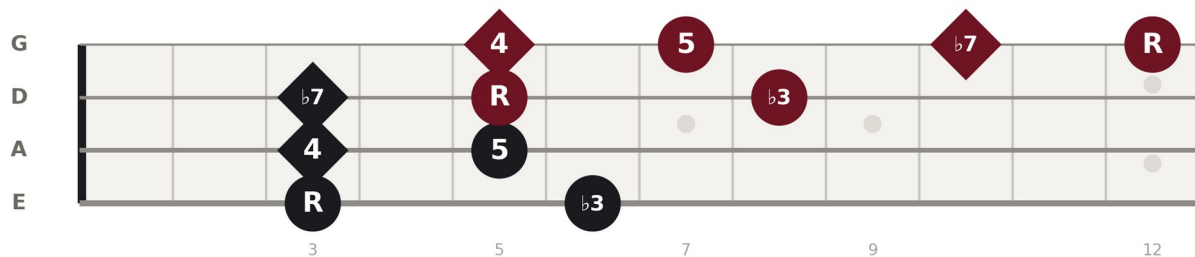
G Minor Triad

4th Position



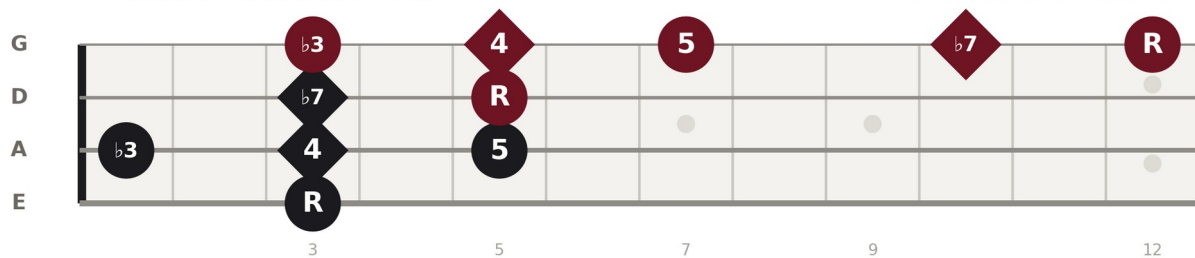
G Minor Pentatonic Scale

1st Position · 2 Octaves



G Minor Pentatonic Scale

2nd Position · 2 Octaves

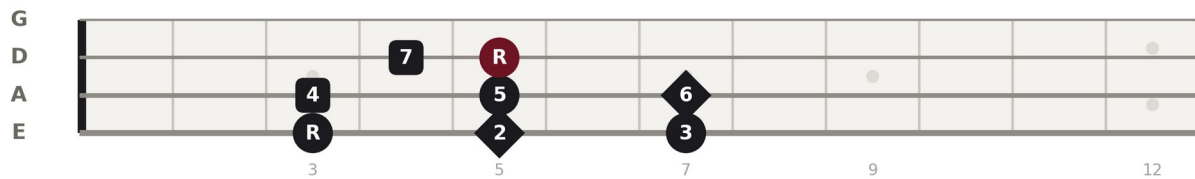


A.3 The Modes of G Major

Circles: chord tones · diamonds: pentatonic · squares: the color tones named in each header.

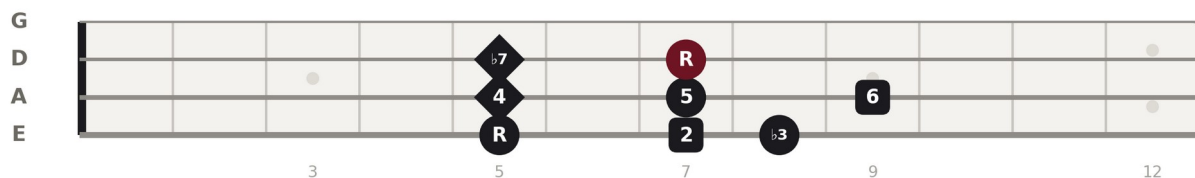
G Major (I) — “Ionian” / Standard Major

Pent. + P4, maj7



A Minor (ii) — “Dorian”

Pent. + M2, M6



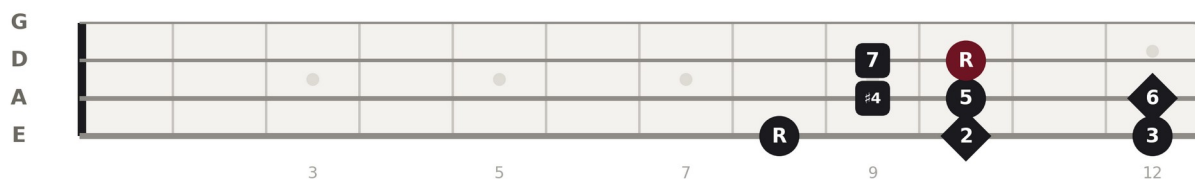
B Minor (iii) — “Phrygian”

Pent. + m2, m6



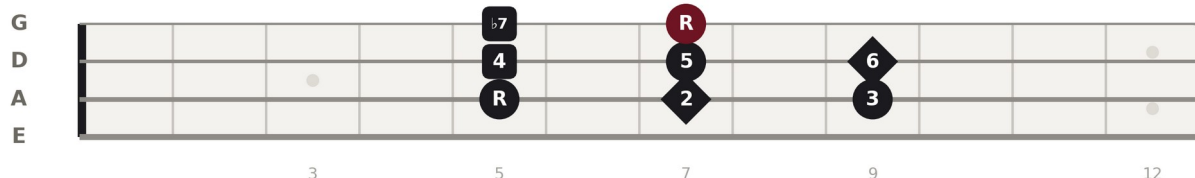
C Major (IV) — “Lydian”

Pent. + #4 (#11), maj7



D Major (V) — “Mixolydian” / Blues

Pent. + P4, b7



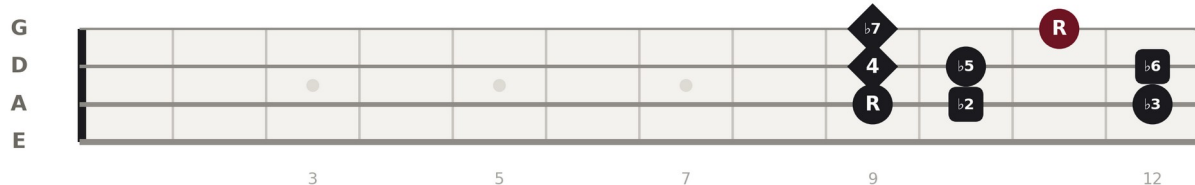
E Minor (vi) — “Aeolian” / Standard Minor

Pent. + M2, m6



F# Half-Diminished (vii) — “Locrian”

m2, b5, m6

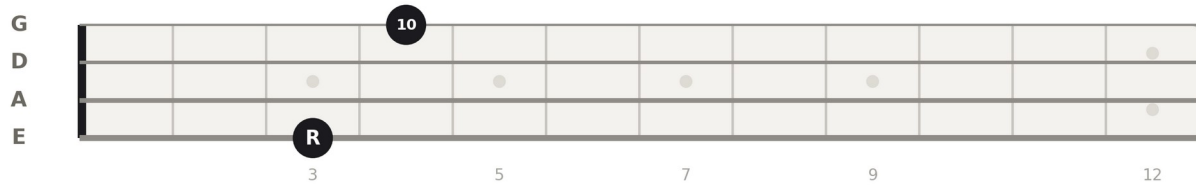


A.4 Diatonic 10th Chords in G Major

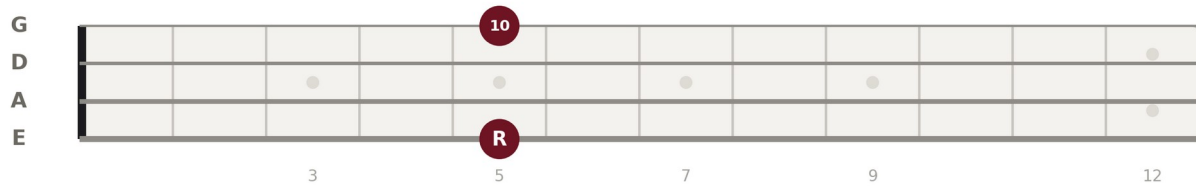
Root on the E string, 10th on the G string. Charcoal = major; burgundy = minor / diminished.

G Major 10th Chord

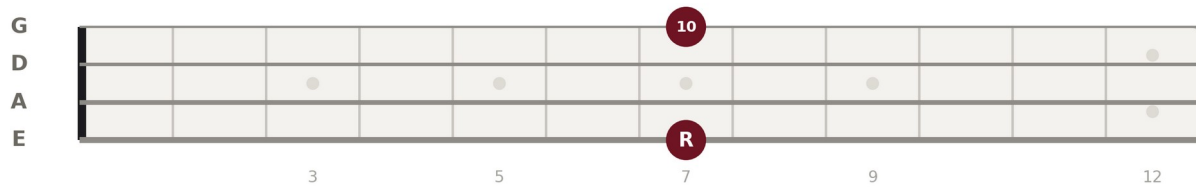
Root & 3rd one octave above



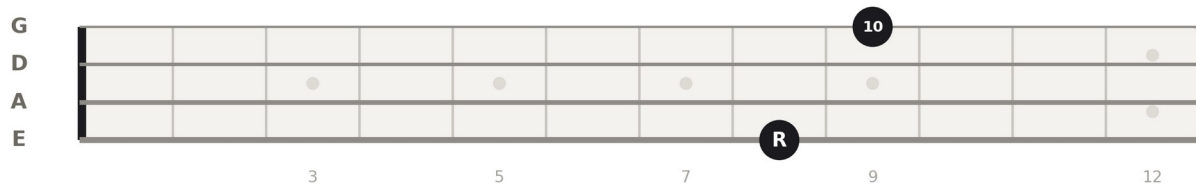
A Minor 10th Chord



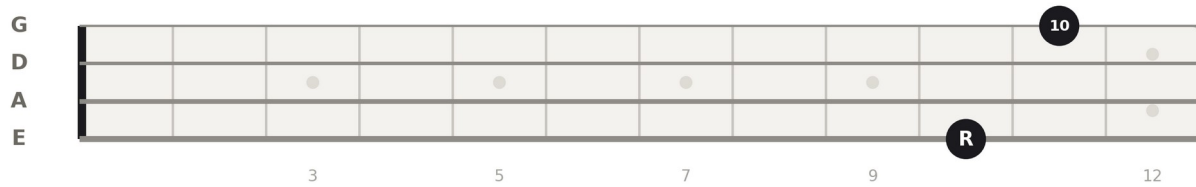
B Minor 10th Chord



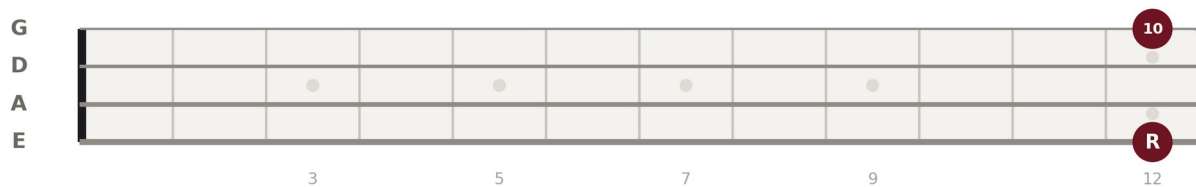
C Major 10th Chord



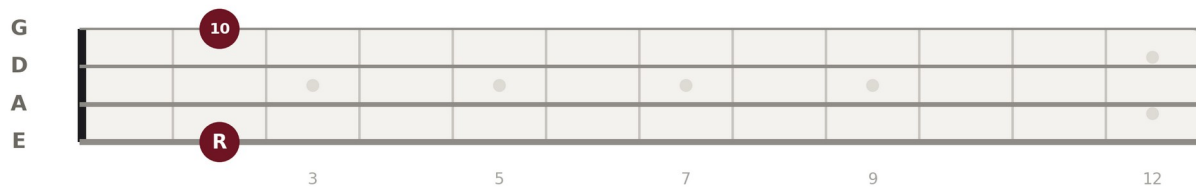
D Major 10th Chord



E Minor 10th Chord



F# Diminished 10th Chord

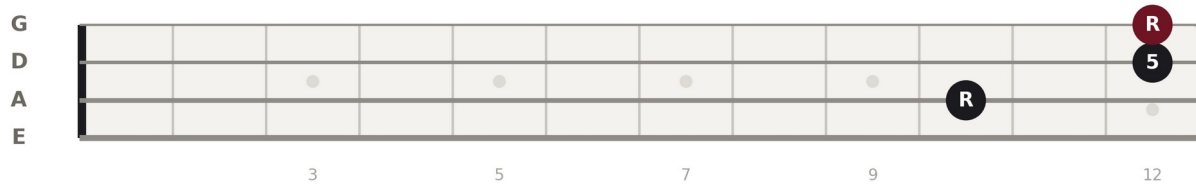


A.5 G Major — Chord Voicings & Dyads

Voicings built from the root at the 10th fret, plus dyads up the neck with passing tones.

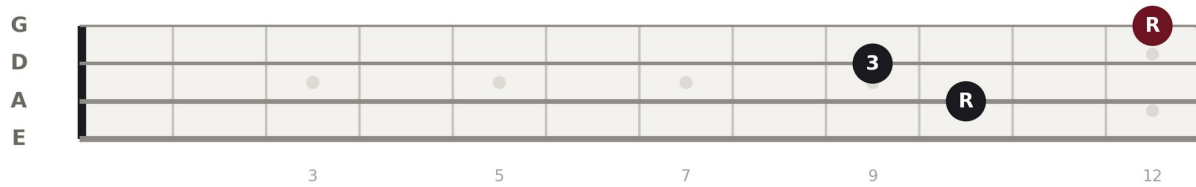
G Power Chord (No 3rd)

works over G Major or G Minor



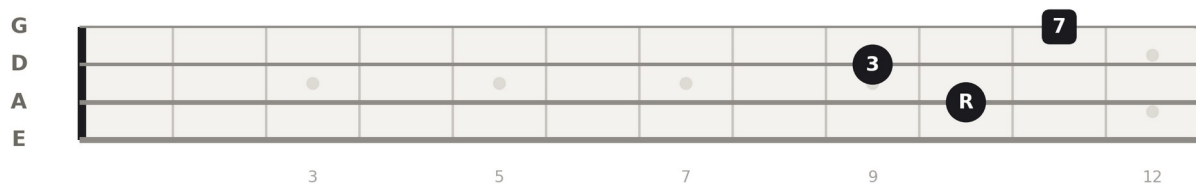
G Major

Root, 3rd, and 8va



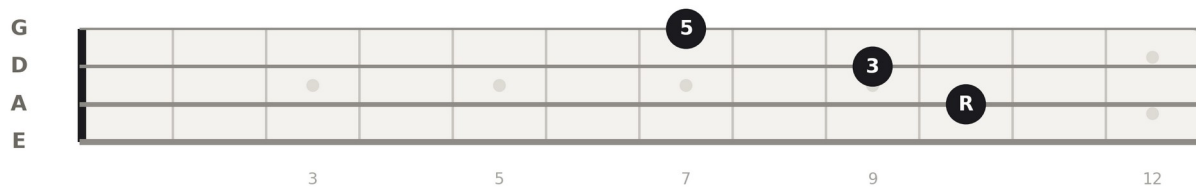
Gmaj7

Root, 3rd, and maj7



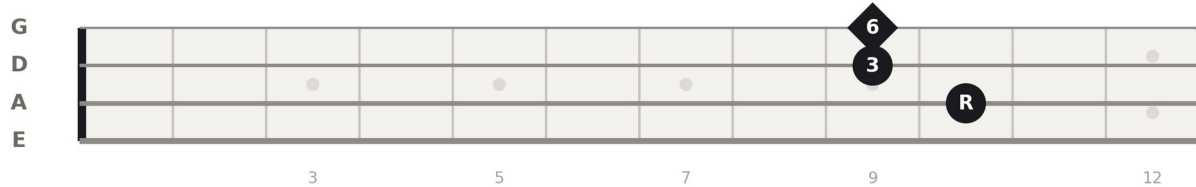
G Major Triad

Root, 3rd, and 5th



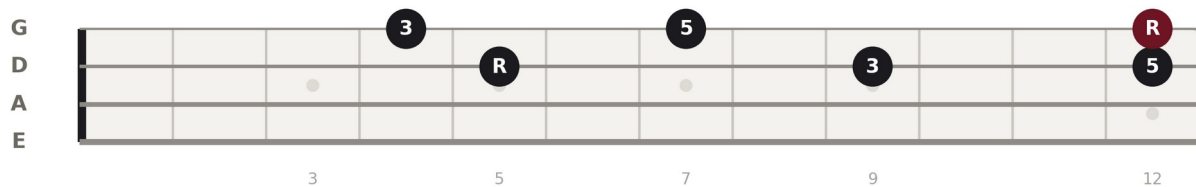
G6

Root, 3rd, and 6th

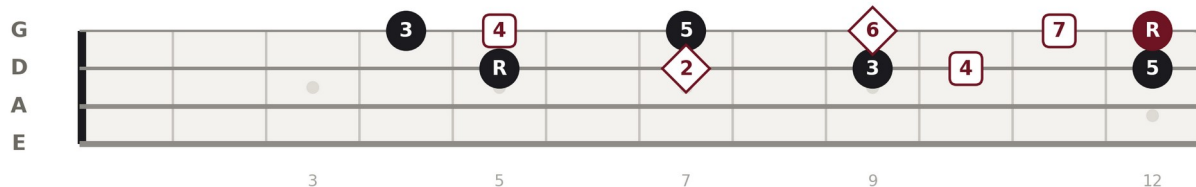


G Major Dyads

(Root, 3rd) · (3rd, 5th) · (5th, Root)



G Major Dyads with Passing Chords



A.6 G Minor — Chord Voicings & Dyads

The minor counterparts: $\flat 3$ voicings, the R–2– $\flat 7$ color, and minor dyads with passing tones.

G Power Chord (No 3rd) *works over G Major or G Minor*

G Minor *Root, $\flat 3$ rd, and 8va*

Gm7 *Root, $\flat 3$ rd, and $\flat 7$*

G Minor Triad *Root, $\flat 3$ rd, and 5th*

Gm9 *Root, 2nd, and $\flat 7$ th*

G Minor Dyads *(Root, $\flat 3$ rd) · ($\flat 3$ rd, 5th) · (5th, Root)*

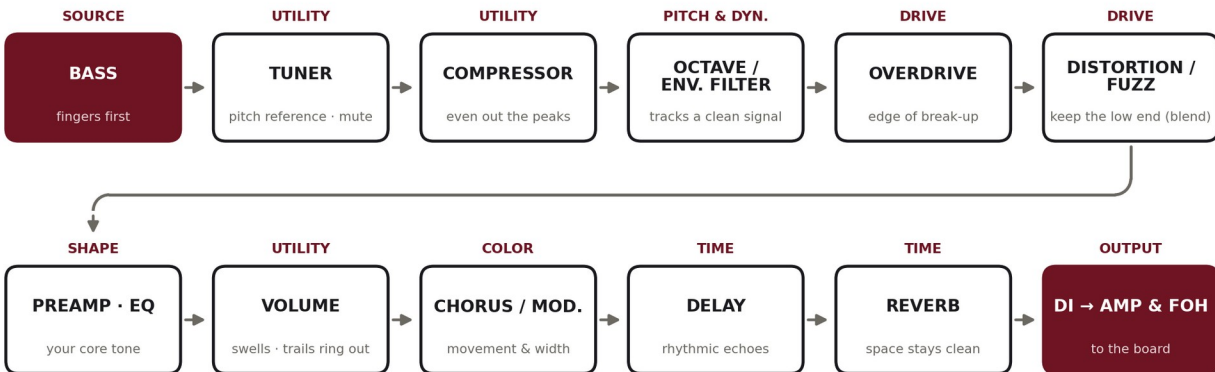
G Minor Dyads with Passing Chords

A.7 Practical Signal Path

One proven pedal order: utility and pitch-tracking pedals see the clean signal first, drive sits in the middle, tone shaping follows, and time-based effects come last so the space they create stays intact.

PRACTICAL SIGNAL PATH

utility first · drive in the middle · time last



Common variations — Volume also works first (right after the tuner) for clean swells and an instant mute · fuzz first in line · compressor after drive. A guideline, not a law — if a pedal solves a problem or creates a color, it earns its place; if not, pull it off the board.