

# 47 Hot Tips On Playing Smokin' Blues Guitar

## By Claude Johnson

This report will give you some key ideas about how to play blues guitar. This is just a small sample of material from my new guitar course: "How to Play Smokin Blues"

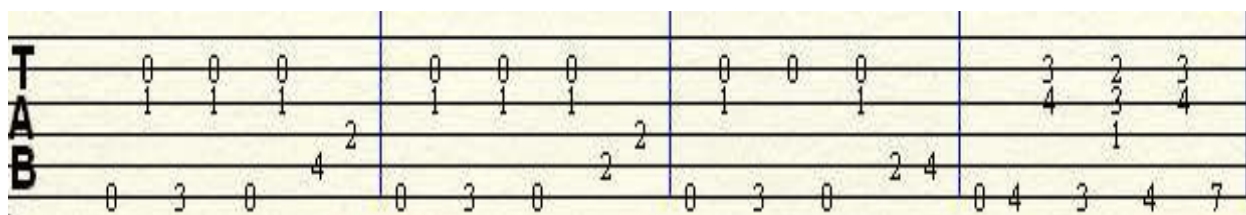
1. Blues is really a vocal art form. Blues started a long time ago in African-American communities in the United States, mostly as field hollers or work chants. Originally, blues consisted of repeating a vocal line 4 times, and later evolved into more complex structures such as repeating a line twice, changing it, and then concluding with another vocal line.

But here's the point: Blues started as a kind of singing. Nowadays, you might see a lot of fancy young guitar players filling up every bar of a song with screaming guitar licks, but this is not really in the blues tradition. The vocals come first. I believe that the song should come first in any kind of music. The fancy guitar solos should be a compliment to this.

You should focus on understanding the basic structure and feel of the old-time blues to get a solid grasp on the idiom.

2. The second point to understand when playing the blues is that what you play will depend on the musical group context. In other words, when you're playing by yourself on one guitar, you can play a much more complex arrangement than you would play if you were playing in a 6 piece blues band.

Here's an example of "complex" arrangement for blues guitar when you would be playing just by yourself:



ETC....

A lot of blues guitarists, such as B.B. King or Albert Collins really don't play much rhythm guitar at all, but have a large band and just sing and play some lead guitar licks.

3. The common common chord progression is simply known as a “12 bar blues”, which looks like this:

I7	I7	I7	I7
IV7	IV7	I7	I7
V7	IV7	I7	V7

So what does this mean? This really goes back to basic music theory. The roman numeral “one” (I) “four” (IV) and “five” (V) are used here. That's why the 12 bar blues is often referred to as a “ONE FOUR FIVE” progression.

The “7” refers to the fact that the chord types are dominant 7.

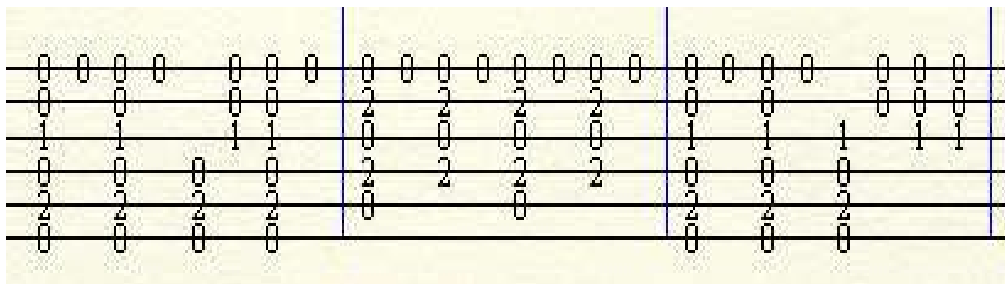
I won't go into the entire theory , but for example in the key of A we have the following chords:

A7	A7	A7	A7
D7	D7	D7	D7
E7	D7	A7	E7

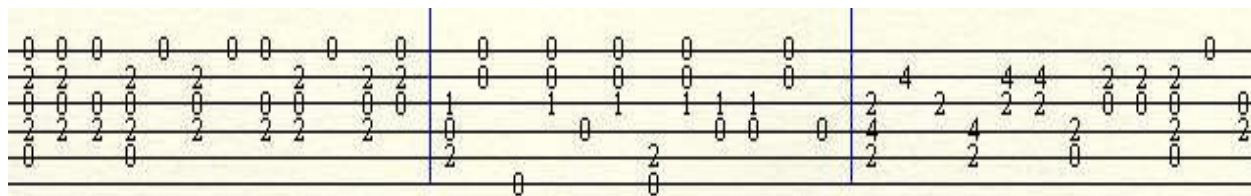
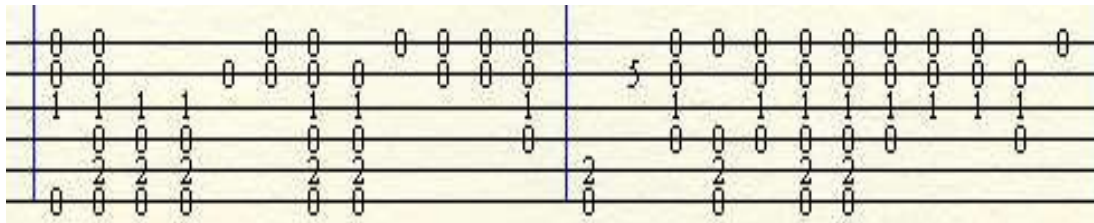
Notice each chord gets one bar for a total of 12 bars.

A dominant 7 chord has a very bluesy sound.

Try working the E7 and A7 chords back and forth for a blues feel in the key of E:



4. Here's a complete 12 bar progression:



5. You can substitute major chords instead of Dominant 7 chords for a slightly different sound that still works well in the blues progression:

E	E	E	E
A	A	E	E
B	A	E	B

6. Try playing the 12 bar blues progression using both open chords and barre chords. While using barre chords, you will find that you can play all three chords without moving around too much on the neck. For example, in the key of A, you have barre chord at the 5<sup>th</sup> fret with the root on the low E string, and then on the IV, you have the barre chord at the 5<sup>th</sup> fret with the root on the A string.

7. You can play the 12 bar blues pattern with different strumming rhythms or strumming patterns. For example, you can strum a triplet pattern for each bar. Just count “1 2 3” for each chord. You can also divide up the triplet feel into 2 parts , such as holding the chord on “1 2” and strumming again for “3”... This is like a shuffle feel.

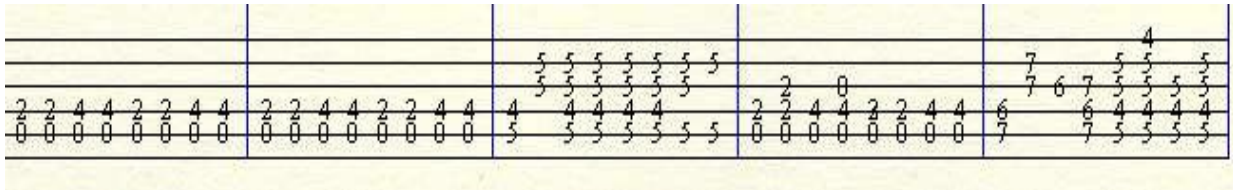
8. You can alternate between the 5<sup>th</sup> degree and 6<sup>th</sup> degree of the scale in a true blues shuffle pattern like this:

This is the most common blues guitar rhythm. This example is in the key of A, but you can move it up or down the fretboard to explore other keys. Also you can use open strings to play in certain keys:

9. You can add the 7<sup>th</sup> degree as well like this:

Try adding a little palm muting to help the rhythm feel.

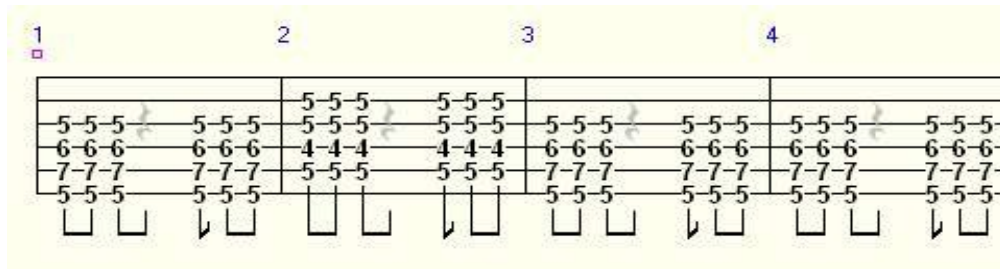
10. Another technique you can do is to alternate between normal chords and the shuffle rhythm.



You can see in this example, we have a new kind of chord – D9 and E9. This is a very useful blues chord. In this voicing we have no 5<sup>th</sup> degree.

By the way, these are all examples from the 3-DVD course: “[How to Play Smokin' Blues](#)”, where I explain everything in a lot more detail and you watch it on your TV.

11. You can combine the triplet feel with 9 chords like this:



13. You can add a note on the top string to change the 9 chord into a 13<sup>th</sup> chord. Just add the 13<sup>th</sup> degree of the scale.

14. Another idea is to use minor chords as the chord type. This is a minor blues. Here's an example of a 14 bar structure with a slightly longer turn around.

The tablature shows a 14-bar structure with the following bar numbers and fret patterns (from top to bottom line):

- Bar 1: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 2: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 3: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 4: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 5: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 9-9-9-9-9-9-9-9
- Bar 6: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 7: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 8: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 9: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 1010101010101010
- Bar 10: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 11: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 12: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 13: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8
- Bar 14: 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8, 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8

15. You can add variations to minor by sliding a half step into the chords and also by changing the progressions slightly as you see above.

16. You can also use a #9 chord on the V of a minor blues:

This is like the chord Hendrix uses on Purple Haze. This is like the 9 chord we played earlier but the pinky is up 1 fret to make the 9 sharp. Another idea is to play the V chord as a dominant 7 chord in a minor blues.

17. The popular blues song “dust my broom” could be arranged very simply like this. Notice the interesting intro lick :

1 2 3 4 5

10-10-10-10 10-10-10 5 5 5 6 1212141412121414 1010101010101010

6 7 8 9 10

8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8 1010101010101010 8 10 1212141412121414 1010101010101010 1212141412121414 1010101010101010 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8 1010101010101010

11 12 13 14

8 10 7-7-9-9-7-7-9 5-5-5-5-5-5-5 9-5-5-7-7-5-5-7 5-3-3-3-3-3-3 7-12 3-10 10-9-8 7-7-5-6-7 5 5 6 7

Again, please watch the DVD to hear how this fits together, but the last 2 bars are called the turnaround, which are very important, and we'll talk more about this shortly.

18. Another common chord structure is an 8-bar blues, which can have many variations. Here's the most common:

I V IV IV  
I V I V

So in the key of C:



Here we see the E7 on the top 4 strings. Try moving the 7 chord around to all the different inversions going up and down the neck, and also experiment with different strings (middle 4 strings, lower 4, etc) Also try voicing the 7 chord with no root (just 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>), or even try (3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>) :)  
3-note voicing are very powerful.

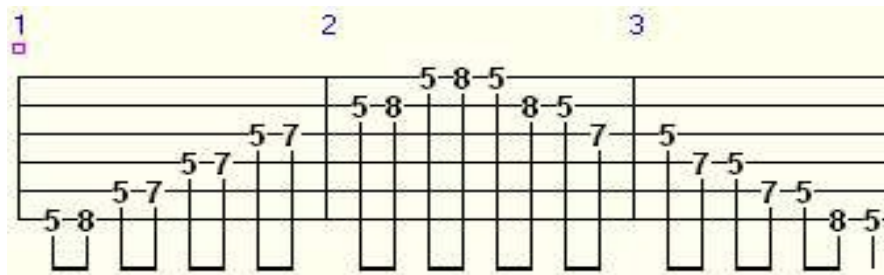
20. Give your 3-note chords a slight (1/4 note) bend to make them more bluesy!

21. As far as voicings go, there are no limits. You can try just the root and 7<sup>th</sup>. You can also try ending a blue progression on an augmented chord.

22. If you are playing solo, one cool idea is to use a drone approach: Play an open string and then let it ring out while you play melodies on the higher strings.

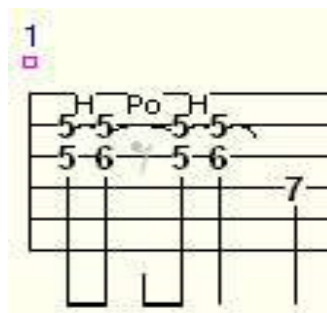
23. Learn the pentatonic scales all over the neck. These notes can be used for both lead and rhythm guitar.

For example, in the key of A, here's one pattern:



24. Notice that the A pentatonic scale contains the note “C” but the A chord contains C#. Playing the minor 3<sup>rd</sup> and major 3<sup>rd</sup> together is the blues sound. Usually the chord is played with major 3<sup>rd</sup> and the minor 3<sup>rd</sup> melody goes over it.

You can use it in all kinds of riffs. For instance:



1 2 3 4 5

H Po H Po H H H

5-5 5-6 5-6 7 5-5 5-6 5-6 7 1010 1010 1011 1011 12 5-5 5-6 5-6 7 1212 1212 1213 1213 14

5 6 7 8

H H H Po H Po H H

1212 1212 1010 1010 5-5 5-5 5-5 9 1213 1213 14 1011 1011 5-6 5-6 7 7 7 5 6 7

25. Here's another note you can throw in – the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 3<sup>rd</sup>: In the key of A, (F#)

1 2

H Po

5-7 5-7 5 7-7 5 7

26. Try simple descends down a pentatonic scale as another riff idea:

1 2

5 5-8-5 7-5 7 7-7-9-9-7-7 5-5-5-5-5-5

27. quarter note (slight) bends can be used with the pentatonic riffs too:

A musical notation diagram for a guitar riff. It consists of two measures. The first measure is marked with a '1' and a small square. Above the staff, there are five quarter notes with upward-pointing arrows and the number '1/4' above each arrow, indicating quarter note bends. The notes are 8, 8, 8, 8, and 5. The second measure is marked with a '2'. The notes are 8, 5, 7, 6, and 7. The diagram includes a six-line staff and a fretboard diagram below it showing the fingerings for each note.

28. Another idea is to pick out notes of a chord with a triplet pattern:

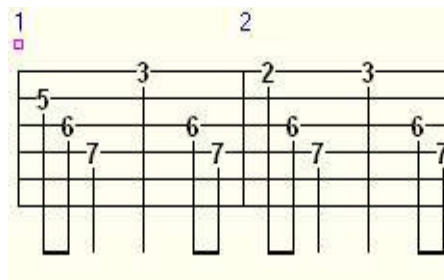
A musical notation diagram for a guitar riff, divided into five measures. Measure 1 is marked with a '1' and a small square. The notes are 5, 6, 7, 5, 6, 7. Measure 2 is marked with a '2'. The notes are 8, 6, 7, 8, 6, 7. Measure 3 is marked with a '3'. The notes are 7, 6, 7, 7, 6, 7. Measure 4 is marked with a '4'. The notes are 5, 6, 7, 5, 6, 7. Measure 5 is marked with a '5'. The notes are 7, 5, 7, 7, 5, 7. The diagram includes a six-line staff and a fretboard diagram below it showing the fingerings for each note.

A musical notation diagram for a guitar riff, divided into four measures. Measure 6 is marked with a '6' and a small square. The notes are 7, 5, 7, 7, 5, 7. Measure 7 is marked with a '7'. The notes are 5, 6, 7, 5, 6, 7. Measure 8 is marked with an '8'. The notes are 8, 6, 7, 8, 6, 7. Measure 9 is marked with a '9'. The notes are 9, 7, 9, 8, 7, 6, 9, 9, 8, 7. The diagram includes a six-line staff and a fretboard diagram below it showing the fingerings for each note.

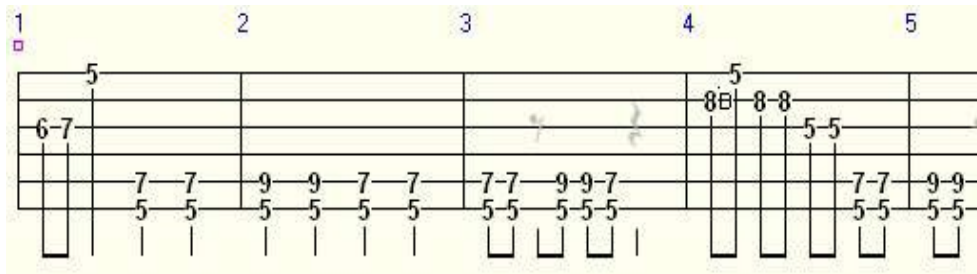
A musical notation diagram for a guitar riff, divided into three measures. Measure 10 is marked with a '10'. The notes are 7, 5, 7, 7, 5, 7. Measure 11 is marked with an '11'. The notes are 5, 6, 7, 8, 6, 7. Measure 12 is marked with a '12'. The notes are 7, 6, 7, 7, 5, 6, 7. The diagram includes a six-line staff and a fretboard diagram below it showing the fingerings for each note.

Notice this is the same idea as we saw earlier: Using the 7<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> degrees of the scale.

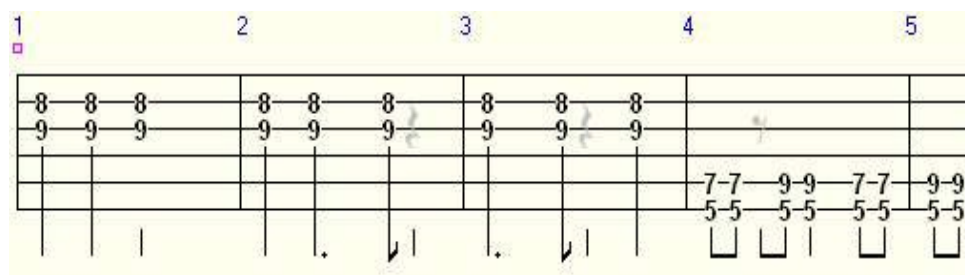
29 . If you want to get fancy and use a stretch voicing, you can do so like this:



30. Alternate the shuffle pattern with pentatonic licks for endless blues riff variations. Here's one to get you started:



31. Here's another cool riff just outside the main pentatonic position:



32. Here' a totally different idea – take the 2 fretted notes on an E7 chord and start sliding them up the neck , keeping in the key.

1 2

OR:

1 2

You can use a triplet feel here as well.

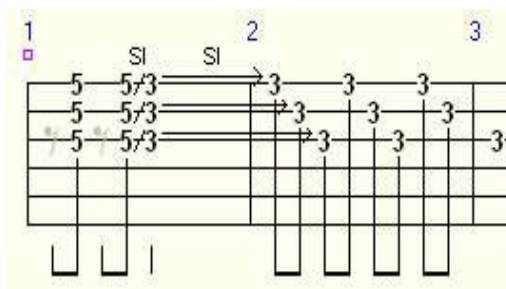
33. Try adding open strings to this idea:

1 2

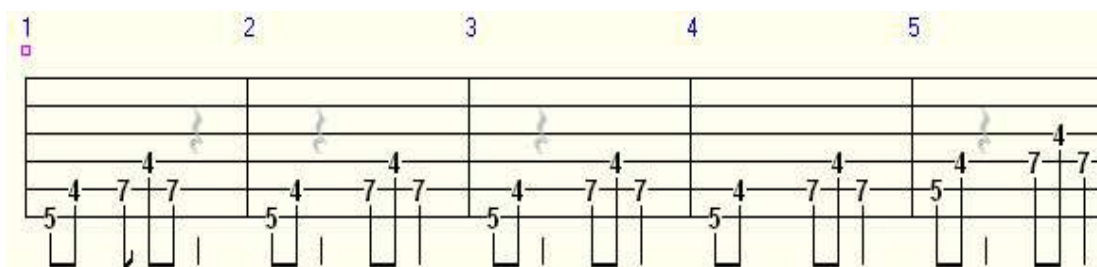
34. Here's another variation on this theme:

1 2

35. You can play 9 chords on the top 3 strings (looks like a minor triad, but actually is 9 chord without the root)

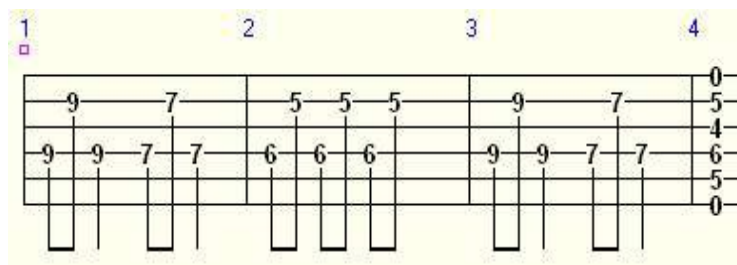


36. You can play basslines on the guitar as a riff like this:



You can also combine basslines with chords.

37. Another idea is harmonization patterns on the inner strings:



38. Another idea is to use the high E string as the drone:

The first diagram shows measures 1 through 5. Measure 1 has a high E string drone (0) and fretting 5-5-5-3-3-3 on the other strings. Measure 2 has a high E string drone (0) and fretting 2-2-2-1-1-0. Measure 3 has a high E string drone (0) and fretting 1-0-0-2-0-0-0-1-0-0-0. Measure 4 has a high E string drone (0) and fretting 8-8-8-8-8-8 with eighth notes and a quarter note. Measure 5 has a high E string drone (0) and fretting 8-8-8-5-3-3 with eighth notes and a quarter note.

The second diagram shows measures 6 through 9. Measure 6 has a high E string drone (0) and fretting 5-3-5 with a half note. Measure 7 has a high E string drone (0) and fretting 8-10-10-10-10-8 with a half note. Measure 8 has a high E string drone (0) and fretting 5-8-3-5 with a half note. Measure 9 has a high E string drone (0) and fretting 3-0-0-0 with a half note.

As you can see, there are countless ways to form blues riffs.

39. How about a simple melodic riff?

The diagram shows measures 1 and 2. Measure 1 has fretting 5-3-3 on the strings. Measure 2 has fretting 5-3-3 on the strings.

Or

The diagram shows measures 1, 2, and 3. Measure 1 has fretting 5-3-3 on the strings. Measure 2 has fretting 5-3-3 on the strings. Measure 3 has fretting 5-3-3 on the strings.



43. Here's another classic walking bassline idea:

Musical notation for exercise 43, showing a walking bassline across six measures. The notation includes fingerings (5-5, 7-7, 5-5, 1010, 1212) and rhythmic patterns (quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes).

44. Yet another variation, and notice the use of the passing tone:

Musical notation for exercise 44, showing a walking bassline across five measures. The notation includes fingerings (5-5, 6-7, 5-5, 6-7, 5-5, 7-7, 5-5, 6-7, 5-5, 7-7, 5-5, 6-7) and rhythmic patterns. Red numbers (5, 5) indicate passing tones.

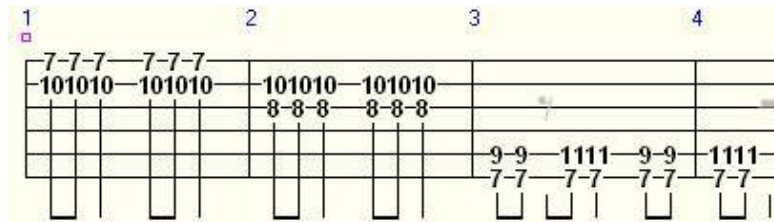
45. You can apply this walking bassline idea to a minor blues:

Musical notation for exercise 45, showing a walking bassline for a minor blues across four measures. The notation includes fingerings (5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5, 7, 5, 5, 5, 5, 7, 5) and rhythmic patterns. Red numbers (3, 5) indicate specific notes.

46. You can also incorporate octaves into your playing.

Musical notation for exercise 46, showing a walking bassline with octaves across four measures. The notation includes fingerings (2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 7, 7, 7, 7, 10, 10) and rhythmic patterns. Red numbers (2, 2, 7, 7) indicate specific notes.

47. Here's one more idea:



I hope this has been an interesting taste of the possibilities. This is just a taste of what you will discover inside my “How to Play Smokin Blues” course on DVD.

In the actual course, you'll see everything demonstrated very clearly, and what you've seen here doesn't even cover 20% of what's in the course.

We go a lot deeper into all these ideas, and into completely new realms that I didn't have time to cover in this short report... Things like:

- Lead guitar for blues
- Slide guitar for blues
- Country blues (including playing multiple parts at the same time)
- Harmonization patterns
- Turnarounds
- Jazz chords and progressions for blues
- and much more....

I hope you have enjoyed this report and I invite you to check out the entire blues course to get the real “full meal deal”

“How to Play Smoking” Blues includes 3 DVDs with over 3 hours of intense blues instruction, 245 tabbed examples, and 10 cool bonuses...

[Click Here to Learn More about the Blues Course](#)