

Getting Oriented

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Guitar

The image shows three lines of guitar notation, each consisting of a treble clef, a common time signature (C), and four measures of music. The notes in all measures are represented by diagonal slashes. Roman numerals and numbers are placed above the measures to indicate the chords to be played. Line 1: Measure 1 has 'I7' above it. Line 2: Measure 1 has 'IV7' above it, and Measure 3 has 'I7' above it. Line 3: Measure 1 has 'V7' above it, Measure 2 has 'IV7' above it, Measure 3 has 'I7' above it, and Measure 4 has 'V7' above it with the text 'TURN AROUND' written below the staff.

You might be scratching your head wondering what all this is about. Never seen music like this? It's called "Slash Notation". It's short-hand for musicians who really don't need all the complicated standard notational stuff. So, with that, let's go ahead get you oriented as to what's going on here.

What you see are three lines of four music measures (mm) that are the basis of the Blues form. The Roman numerals mean what chords are being played over that measure, and the numbers next to them indicate what KIND of chord is being played. We use this system because this chord pattern will not change regardless of what key the song is in.

Now, how do the numbers indicate what chord your playing? It's easy. "I7" represents the first chord of the key your in. So, if you're playing a blues in A, "I7" will mean "A7". If you're playing a blues in G, "I7" will mean "G7". The other Roman numerals are relative to that key. Four up from A is (a, b, c ...) D! So, "IV7" in A is a "D7"! Now you're cooking, eh? And, ergo, "V7" in the key of A will be (drum roll) one up from D, so, "E7"! That's right! You got it! Easy-peasy, isn't it?

Let's do another key, in G. If "I7"= G7. Then, "IV7" (four up from g, a, b ...) = "C7"! And "V7" = "D7"! It's as easy as that. And when you refer to the companion fret-board PDF to this lesson, it'll make even more sense. And when you print these pages, and look at my video showing you this stuff ... well, you'll be off and running like a real pro in no time flat!

Good.

Now, let's take a look at the different sections of the 12 bars. What you should notice is that these bars are broken up into three groups of four. That's not just some arbitrary division; it means something. Line one is to set up the song's key (mm 1-4). That's why it doesn't change for 4 bars (or 16 beats!). That's a long time to play just one chord. Line 2 (mm 5-8) is to set a variation on the theme - to break up the monotony, if you will. We do this by playing the "IV" chord for two measures, or 8 beats, before coming back to the home key (or chord). The third line (mm 9-12) is totally different from the other two in that it departs completely and introduces one more chord, the "V". It then steps down to the "IV" and then returns to the "I" chord to set up the resolution.

Did you notice that "V" chord at the very end of the song, at the 12th bar? We call that the "turn around" because it gives the song that "push" that disturbs the resolution that we just set up. It's how we continue the cycle of 12-bars over and over again. We "turn around" and play the 12 bars from the top!

There you have it. The 12-Bar Blues! And from just this one "template" we can extrapolate *all kinds* of variation. We'll go over some of the most commonly used ones in later lessons. But, for now, get very comfortable with these 12 bars. And if you have any questions, email me at luis@luisarizpe.com Until then, go getcha some blues!