Jazzy Pentatonic Scale Patterns

One of the main problems guitarists have with pentatonic scales in jazz is that they play up and down the scale but don't add on from there.

This leads players to sound OK in their pentatonic lines, but they never really sound jazzy.

To combat this issue in your playing, here are a number of patterns that you can add to your pentatonic soloing phrases.

Each will create a jazzy sound with your pentatonic scales, using both diatonic and chromatic notes in the process.

These are essential patterns for any guitarist to know, and they allow total beginners to sound jazzy right away in their solos.

Because of this, every jazz guitarist or guitarist interested in jazz should spend time on these patterns in the woodshed.

Start by learning each pattern as written, then take it to other keys, and finally add it to your pentatonic based soloing lines and phrases.

Lastly, though these patterns and exercises are written in one position, you can apply them to any position of the minor pentatonic scale.

Coltrane Patterns

The first group of patterns is found in the solos of many players, including the late great John Coltrane.

Coltrane loved to use pentatonic scales in his solos, and he created legendary performances using these 5-note scales.

The first Coltrane pattern that you explore is ascending “3rds” in the scale.

This means that you don’t play the scale in order, like 12345.

Instead, you play 1 3, 2 4, 3 5, etc. as you go up and down the scale.

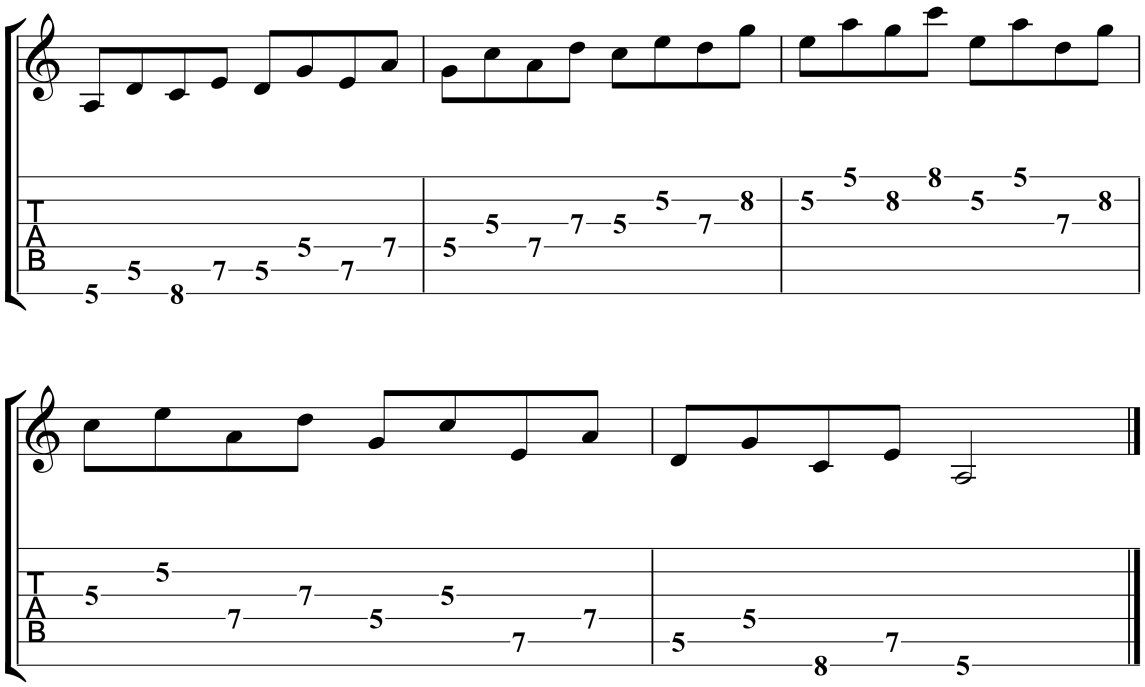
This creates an open sound that many players enjoy in their solos.

Here’s a sample fingering to get you started with this concept on guitar.

Start by learning this concept in one position, then take it to other positions from there.

When ready, apply this concept to other keys before soloing with it over various progressions and tunes in your studies.

Audio Example 1



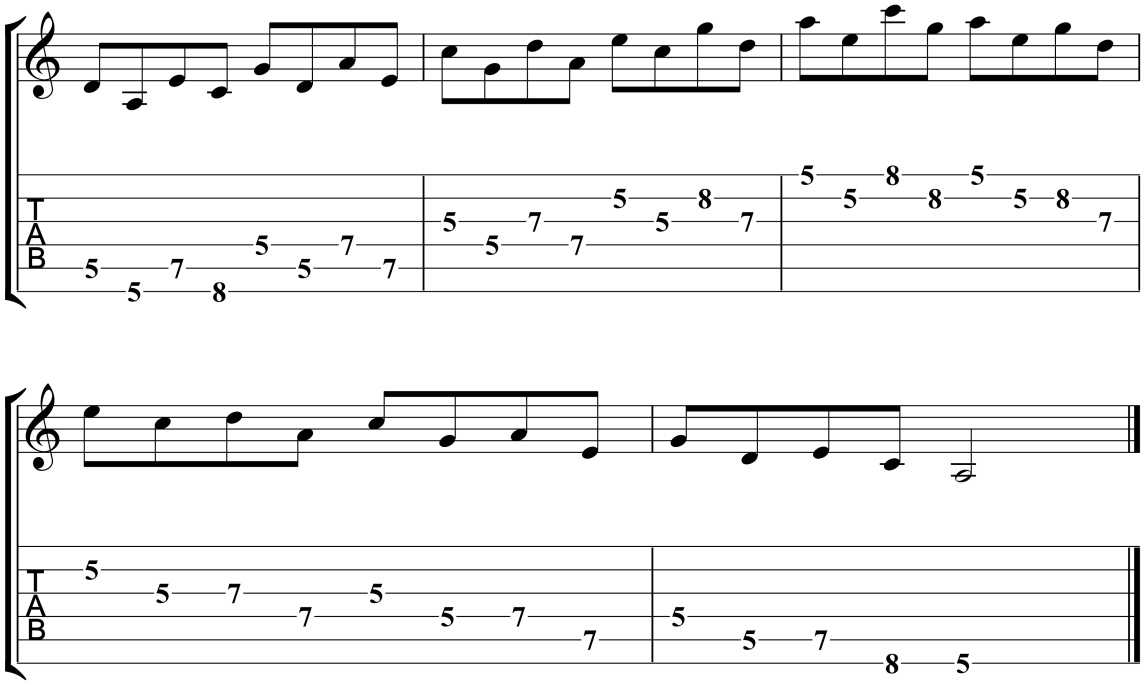
You now reverse the previous pattern as you play 3 1, 4 2, 5 3, up and down the scale.

Here’s a sample fingering to get you started with this concept on guitar.

Start by learning this concept in one position, then take it to other positions from there.

When ready, apply this concept to other keys before soloing with it over various progressions and tunes in your studies.

Audio Example 2



As well as playing in one direction, up or down the pattern, you can also combine the Coltrane patterns to open new doors in your playing.

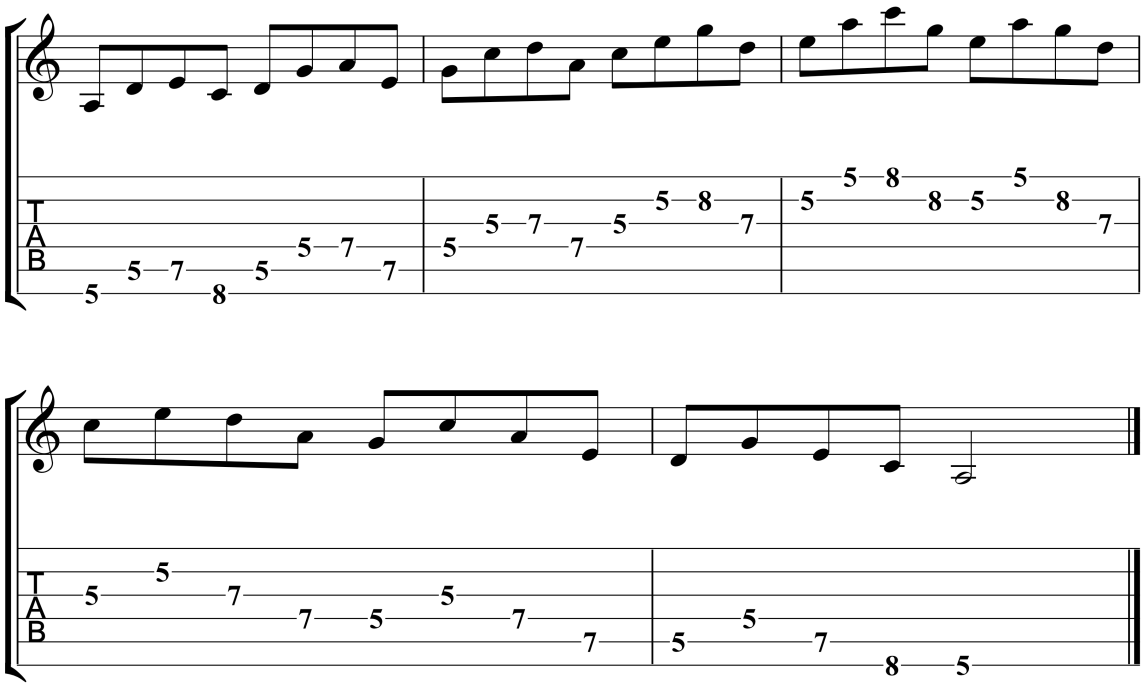
The first combination pattern goes up one then down the other, so 1 3 then 4 2, up and down the scale.

Here's a sample fingering to get you started with this concept on guitar.

Start by learning this concept in one position, then take it to other positions from there.

When ready, apply this concept to other keys before soloing with it over various progressions and tunes in your studies.

Audio Example 3



The final Coltrane pattern is a reverse of the previous pattern, where here you go down one and up the other.

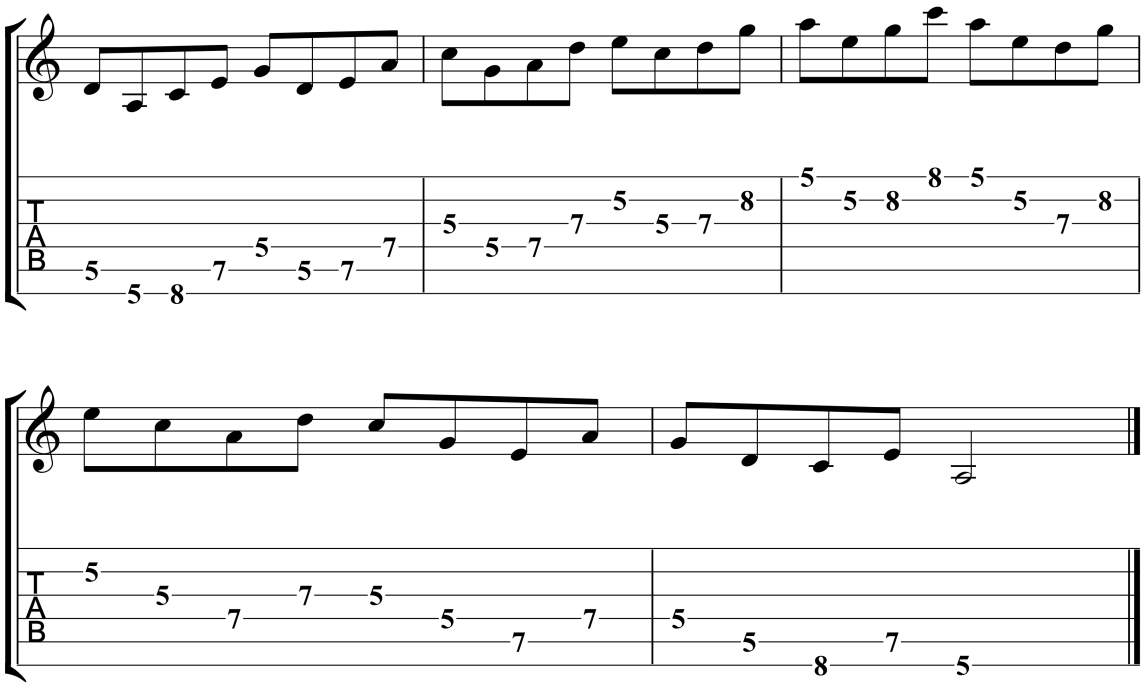
This means you play 3 1 then 2 4 etc. up and down the scale.

Here's a sample fingering to get you started with this concept on guitar.

Start by learning this concept in one position, then take it to other positions from there.

When ready, apply this concept to other keys before soloing with it over various progressions and tunes in your studies.

Audio Example 4



Approach Notes

You now move on to adding chromatic ornaments to your pentatonic scale soloing lines and phrases.

The first chromatic pattern is called approach notes, where you play one fret below any note in the scale.

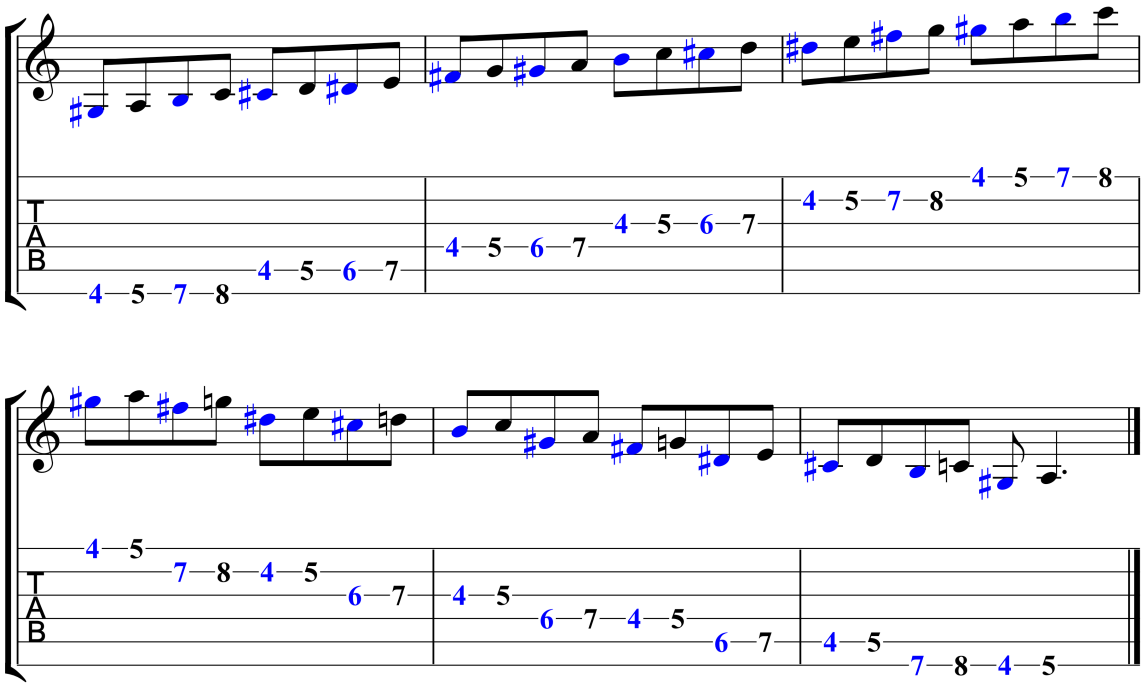
After you play that chromatic note, you resolve it by playing the note in the scale that's one fret higher.

Here's a sample fingering to get you started with this concept on guitar, with the chromatic notes in blue.

Start by learning this concept in one position, then take it to other positions from there.

When ready, apply this concept to other keys before soloing with it over various progressions and tunes in your studies.

Audio Example 5


T
A
B
4 5 7 8 4 5 6 7
4 5 6 7 4 5 6 7
4 5 7 8 4 5 7 8

T
A
B
4 5 7 8 4 5 6 7
4 5 6 7 4 5 6 7
4 5 7 8 4 5

Passing Notes

You now add passing notes to the minor pentatonic scale.

Passing notes are where you connect any two diatonic notes, scale notes, with chromatic notes in between.

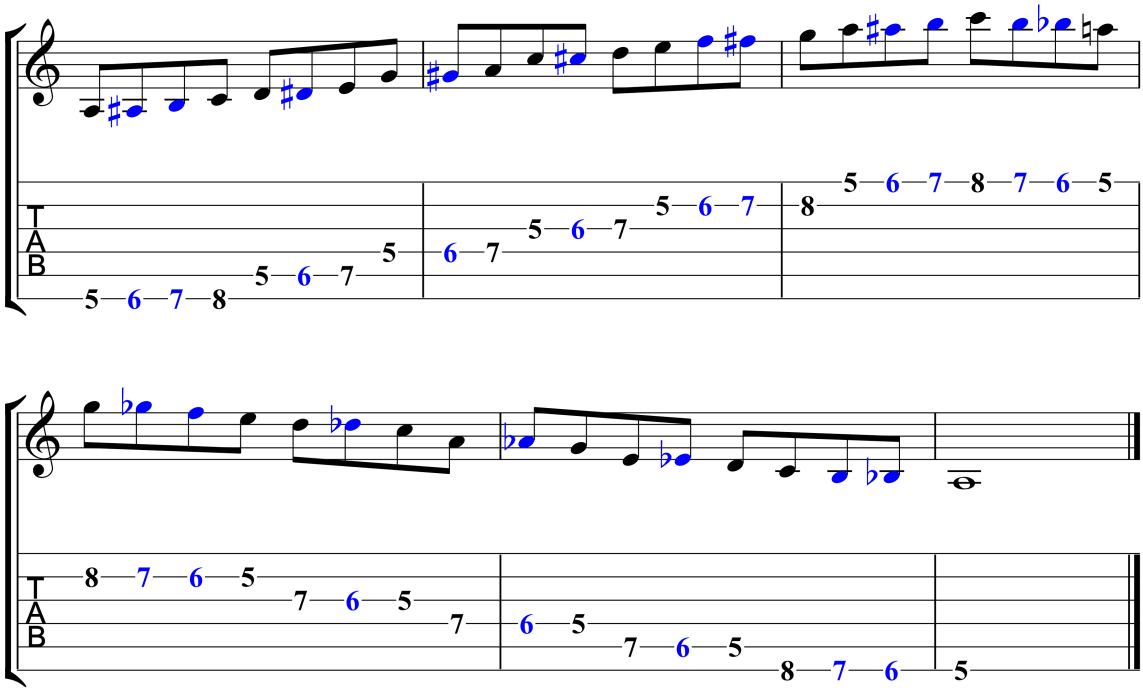
You can use 1 or 2 passing notes to connect any two scale notes, as you see below.

Here's a sample fingering to get you started with this concept on guitar.

Start by learning this concept in one position, then take it to other positions from there.

When ready, apply this concept to other keys before soloing with it over various progressions and tunes in your studies.

Audio Example 6



Enclosures

The next pentatonic pattern uses two chromatic notes for every note in the scale.

To create an enclosure, you play one fret above, then one fret below, before landing on your target note in the scale.

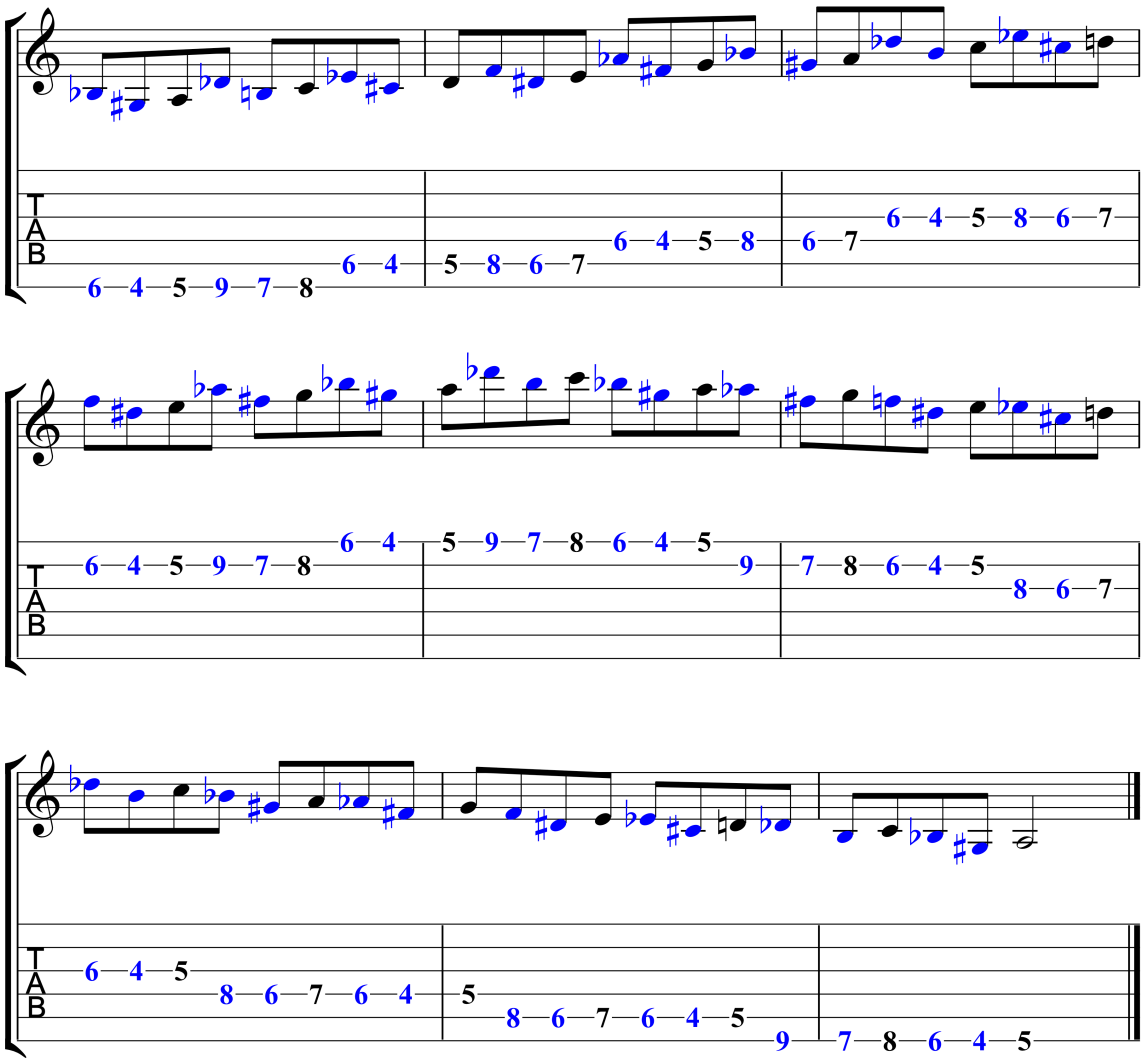
This creates a cool tension and release sound in your solos.

Here's a sample fingering to get you started with this concept on guitar.

Start by learning this concept in one position, then take it to other positions from there.

When ready, apply this concept to other keys before soloing with it over various progressions and tunes in your studies.

Audio Example 7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6 4 5 9 7 8 6 4
5 8 6 7 6 4 5 8
6 7 6 4 5 8 6 7
6 4 5 9 7 8 6 4
5 9 7 8 6 4 5 9
7 8 6 4 5 8 6 7
6 4 5 8 6 7 6 4
5 8 6 7 6 4 5 9
7 8 6 4 5

4123 Pattern

The next chromatic pattern uses 3 notes outside the scale before you resolve into a note from the pentatonic scale.

This pattern is called 4123 because those are the fingers you use to create the pattern.

Pick a note in the pentatonic scale, place your pinky finger one fret above that note, and then play 4123 fingers, one finger per fret.

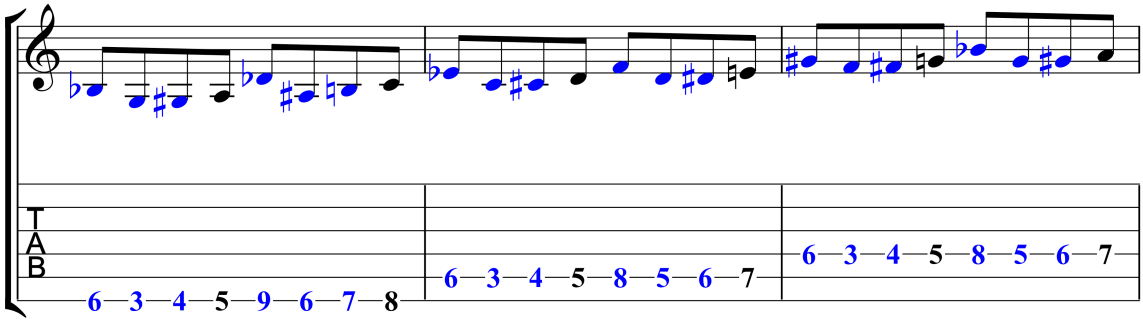
This creates a pattern with 3 chromatic notes before you land on your target note from the pentatonic scale from there.

Here's a sample pattern to get you started with this concept.

Start by learning this concept in one position, then take it to other positions from there.

When ready, apply this concept to other keys before soloing with it over various progressions and tunes in your studies.

Audio Example 8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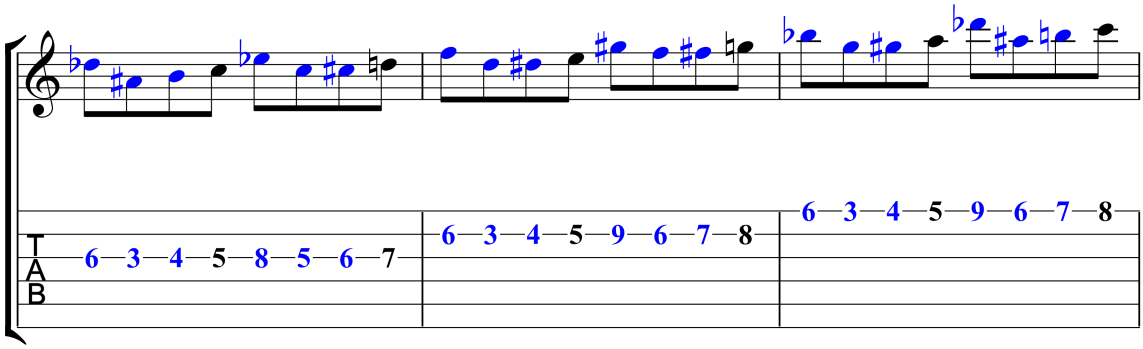
6 3 4 5 8 5 6 7
6 3 4 5 8 5 6 7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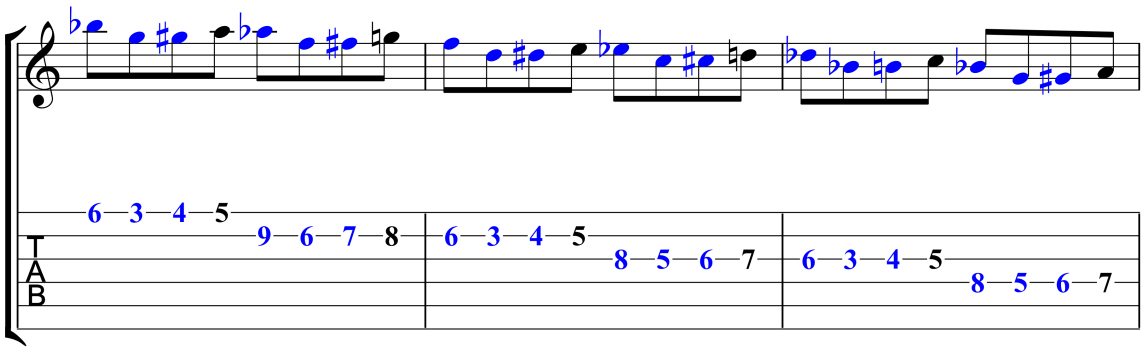
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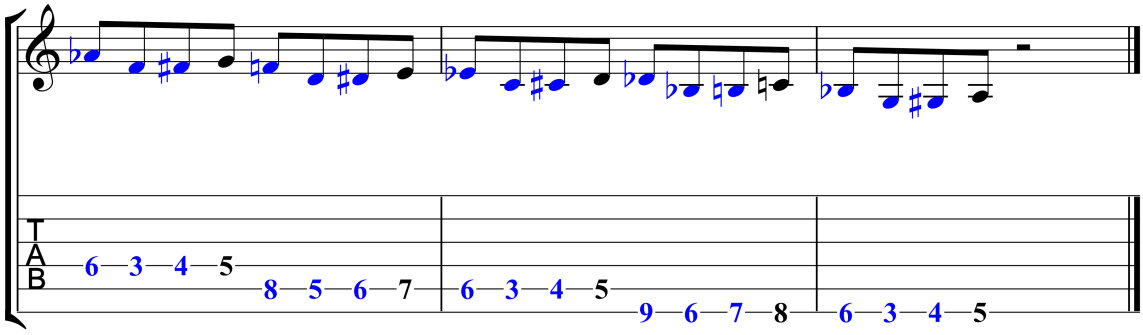
6 3 4 5 8 5 6 7


T
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B
6 3 4 5 8 5 6 7
6 3 4 5 9 6 7 8
6 3 4 5

Side Stepping

The last pentatonic pattern uses two pents a half step, one fret, apart.

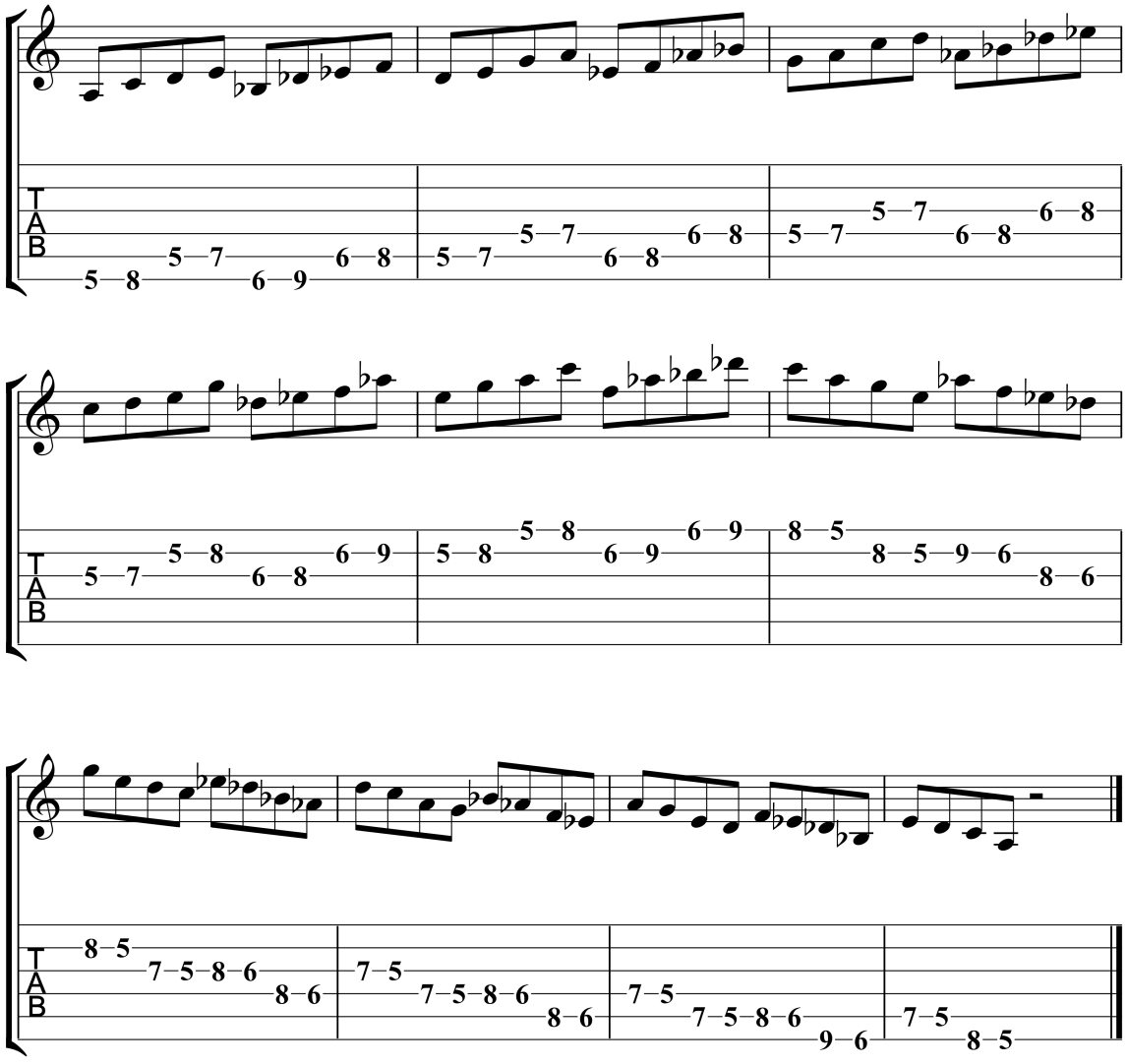
This means if you're soloing over an Am pentatonic scale, you move between Am and Bbm pentatonic to create tension and release.

Side stepping is easy to do on the guitar, but takes a while to sound natural to your ears.

Because of this, make sure to run this concept over backing tracks, rather than a metronome, so you hear the concept in context.

Here's an exercise to get you started where you play two beats of Am and then two beats of Bbm pentatonic.

Start by learning this concept in one position, then take it to other positions from there.

When ready, apply this concept to other keys before soloing with it over various progressions and tunes in your studies.

Audio Example 9