

MyGUITAR LESSONS

Arpeggio's with My Guitar Lessons.

If you're playing rock/heavy metal guitar, and you have an ambition to blaze out insane guitar solos, at some point you're going to come across sweep arpeggios. An arpeggio is quite simple - to play one, what you're going to do is play every note of the chord, one after the other - rather than all at the same time. If anyone ever tells you that an arpeggio is 'every other note of the scale', they're wrong! On a guitar, they're usually referred to as 'sweep' arpeggios, because you're going to have to get used to a new technique if you're going to play them - "sweep picking", which is basically a technique whereby rather than pick every note, you're going to 'sweep' the pick through the notes you're playing (and across the strings) kinda like you're strumming a chord, slowly. There are a load of different types of sweep arpeggio - ranging from the relatively simple to master to the relatively insane, so we're going to cover them here. Be warned! There are no two ways about it - this is yet another case where you're going to want to start slow and build up...so get that metronome out!

NOTE: Just because you see an arpeggio here in A minor - (we have put all of these examples in A minor just to make it slightly simpler) that DOES NOT mean that you're being limited to only playing in that key. Every example here is what they call a "moveable pattern" - so to play these arpeggios in different keys, or to "transpose" them into the key of the song you're playing, simply find the root note (in any "A" arpeggio, the root note is "A") and move the pattern so that that note is now the note of the key you're playing in. Make sense? Here - move any of these patterns UP two frets, and you're now in B minor. Move it up three, you're in C minor, move it down 2, you're in G...and so on. Just make sure that the fingering pattern you're playing stays the same! To play a minor arpeggio in ANY key, you only need to learn ONE pattern.

ANOTHER NOTE: What you're going to be aiming to do - if you want these to sound good - is link up arpeggios into a run/sequence rather than just playing one at a time, which by itself will hardly sound like the most amazing guitar solo of all time ... but fear ye not! I'll get into that - just bear with me! Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to be some music theory technical jazz expert to know what you're doing here.

Three String Arpeggios

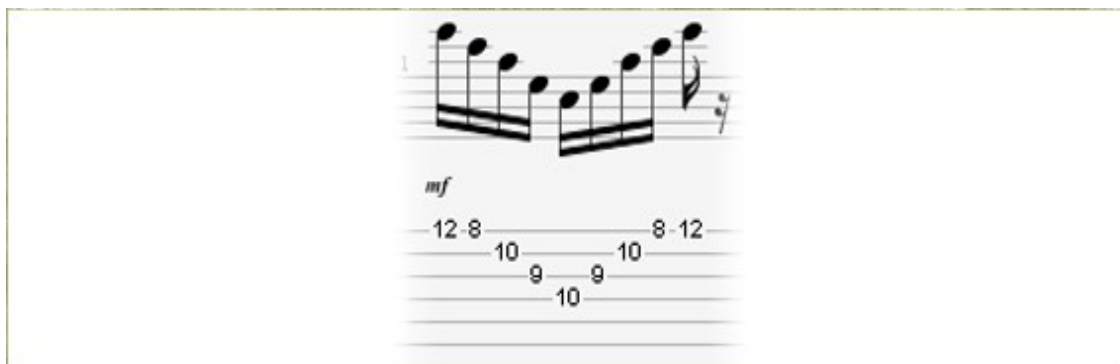
A three-string sweep arpeggio is probably the most common. It's sometimes referred to as a "one octave" arpeggio because that's the distance you're going to cover from the top note to the bottom note - here's an example:



To play this, you're going to hit the top note (and do the pull-off to the next note), then drag the pick down through the notes as you go DOWN the arpeggio (across the B and G strings). Then you're going to do the opposite - having hit the bottom note, drag the pick back up again (upstroke on the B string, then up onto the E string, just like you were playing a chord) before landing back at the top note. Sounds simple? Well, to be honest, it is - once you get the hang of it. You need to start slow though, and probably on a clean sound to make sure you can hear every note clearly. Once you get the hang of it though, it's possible to pay more attention to going UP the arpeggio than going down, in that you can pretty much get away with hammering on the notes with your left hand as you go DOWN the arpeggio if you're blazing it out at speed. Try and pay special attention to your picking hand though - you'll need to get the hang of muting the strings below the note you're hitting as you're playing the arpeggio - else you'll end up with a heinous amount of string noise that kinda ruins what you're trying to do. This can be a fiddle until you get the hang of it, and is, weirdly enough, easier to do with bigger arpeggios - that are harder to play! So let's get into something a little more taxing:

Four String Arpeggios

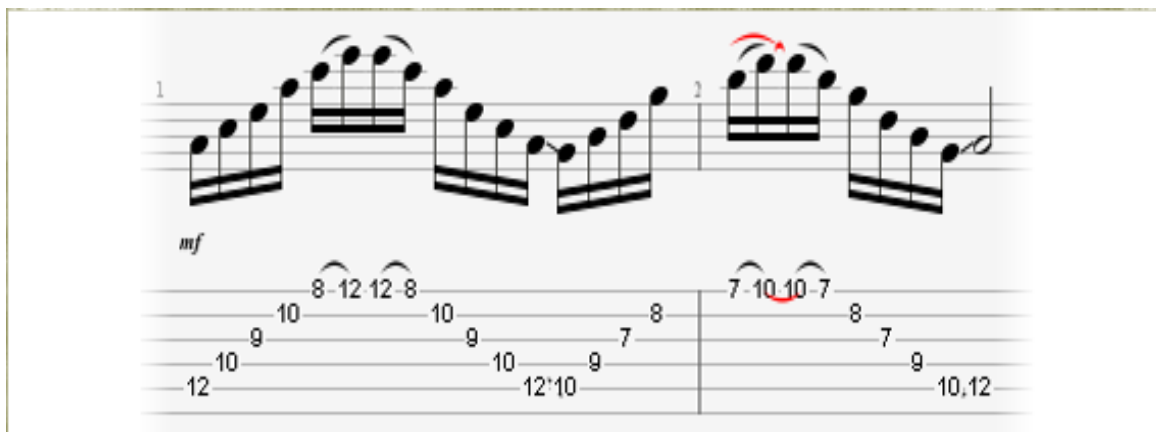
What a pain in the cheeks! Not the largest arpeggios, but fairly unusual (for some reason you tend not to hear these so much) and pretty awkward to get the hang of at first. If you're writing a guitar solo, and you've got your backing track going and doing some three-string arpeggios over the top but they sound a bit lame and/or not quick enough, squeezing that extra note in there can make all the difference! Here's how you do them:



The technique for pulling this off is basically the same as the technique for the three-string arpeggio, and a little easier to practice, really, because you get more of a 'sweep' out of it every time you play one. Hit the top note, pull-off onto the next note then "sweep" the pick down through the rest of the notes until you get to the bottom one, which you need to hit with a UPSTROKE (don't cheat here! It'll make perfect sense once you can get them going). Once you've hit the UPSTROKE on the bottom note, simply follow through with the pick and "sweep" up the rest of the notes until you arrive back at the top string, hammer-on back to the note you started from and you're done. Easy-peasy! Just make sure you try to mute the strings below the one you're playing with your picking hand on the way up - because we've stuck an extra string in from the three-string arpeggios, it's simply one more string to sound nasty with if you don't get it right! You want to be able hear each note of the arpeggio clearly and separately (get your metronome out again).

Five String Arpeggios

Now we're getting serious! And we're going to do these my way...not the way your guitar teacher tells you to. This isn't a two octave arpeggio (yet!) because we're deliberately missing the top (root) note. Bear with me...it'll all make sense. To pull this off and make it sound cool, you're going to want to fiddle with it a little bit - so we're going to start at the **BOTTOM** of the arpeggio this time, and as an example we're going to do two of these, one after the other. Here's the tab:

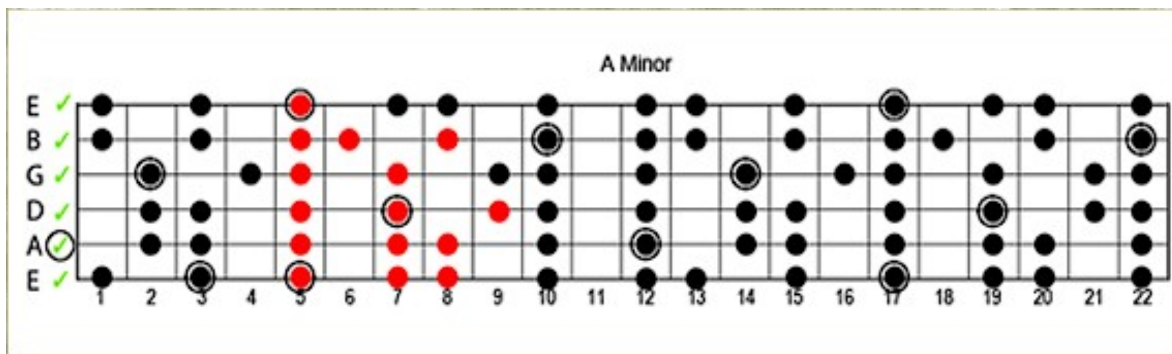


Start with an upstroke on the first note, and sweep up through the notes (make sure both hands are in time here! Start slow...) until you get to the top. Try to mute the strings with your picking hand after you've hit them as you go upwards. This will make all the notes ring clearly without a dreadful din coming from open strings. We're going to add a double-note at the top to make it fit better into 4/4 timing (which basically is the key signature of just about everything you're going to want to play anyway), so hammer-on to the top note, hit it again and pull-off onto the second note from the top before coming back down again...then the bottom note is going to lead straight into the next arpeggio. In my attempt to make that clear, it actually sounds quite complicated...but it isn't once you get the hang of it!

If you're writing a guitar solo, and the chords are changing about in the rhythm track, it will always sound cool to change the arpeggio every time the chord does. For example, if the riff behind goes Am/C/D, busting out an A minor arpeggio, followed by C major then D minor will always sound cool! If you want to get extra fancy and you're in the studio (or have a killer second guitarist) stick a harmony on it too - a harmony in thirds will always sound cool (even though a technical music nerd might tell you it's a bit predictable - but we're playing cooler stuff with it than he can anyway) so here's how you do it.

Harmony-Fest

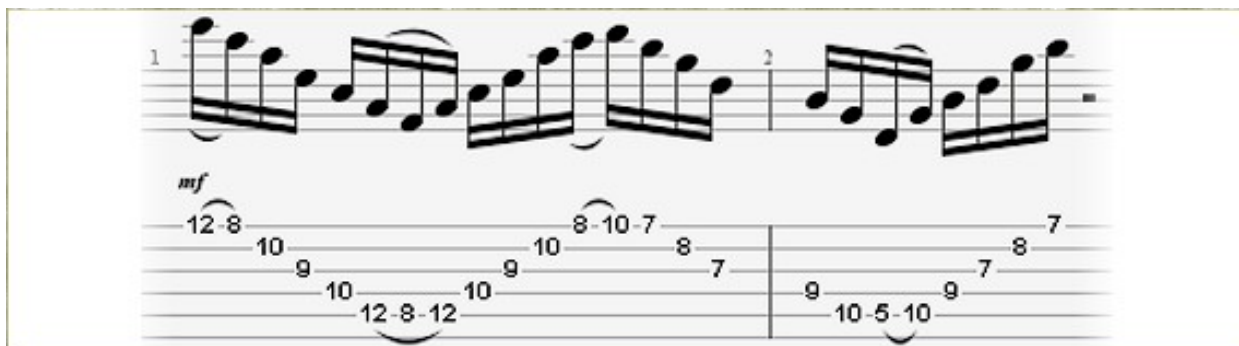
OK imagine Thin Lizzy but a million times more insane. Dragonforce do a load of this sorta stuff at breakneck speed. To do it, here's what you're gonna do:



Here's the A minor scale map again. To play the harmony, you're simply going to have one guitar playing the note two notes of the scale above the one you're playing. Make sense? So if guitar one plays "A" (here in A minor), guitar two is going to play "C". If guitar one plays "C", guitar two is going to play "E"...and so on. If guitar one sweeps up through A/C/E/A, guitar two is going to sweep up through C/E/G/C.

Every note of the scale of A minor is plotted on there so you no longer need to stay in one boring position when soloing, because you can now see where all the notes are on the fretboard! They're all going to sound cool, so instead of playing the same tedious runs over and over again you want to start deliberately moving around the fretboard, hitting any note plotted on here and coming up with some ridiculous runs.

Five String Stretch Arpeggios

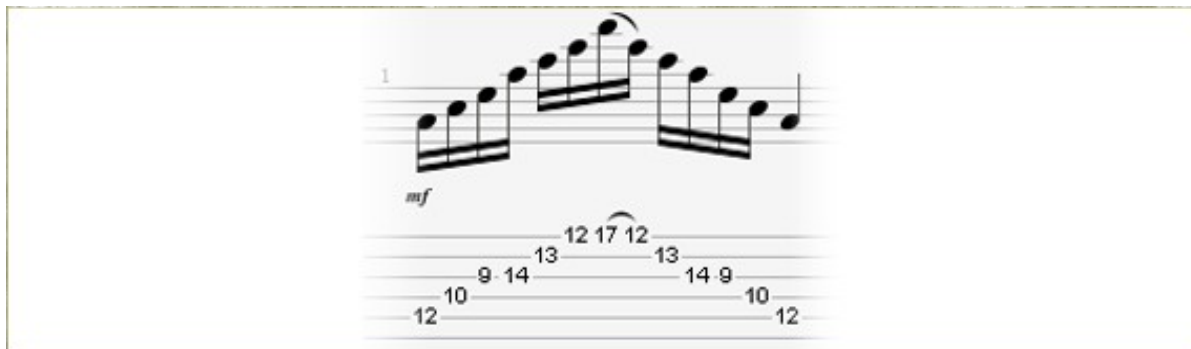


I hereby christen these "arstretchios"! Can't say I've seen too many of these about either - so sticking them into your repertoire gives you a cooler and more original sound than the majority of guitar players ripping off arpeggios from their Trivium records. It's basically the same as the five-string arpeggio, but we're going to deliberately avoid landing on the root note at the beginning and the end of the arpeggio to give it a more interesting sound. Similar to the 5-string arpeggio we've already covered, start at the top, make sure it's nice and clean on the way down then prepare for the stretcheroo at the bottom! Pay particular attention to the note you're stretching down to - it's very easy to make the mistake of hitting the wrong note, and the further down the fretboard you play one of these (further DOWN the fretboard, i.e. further towards the headstock), the harder they're gonna get!

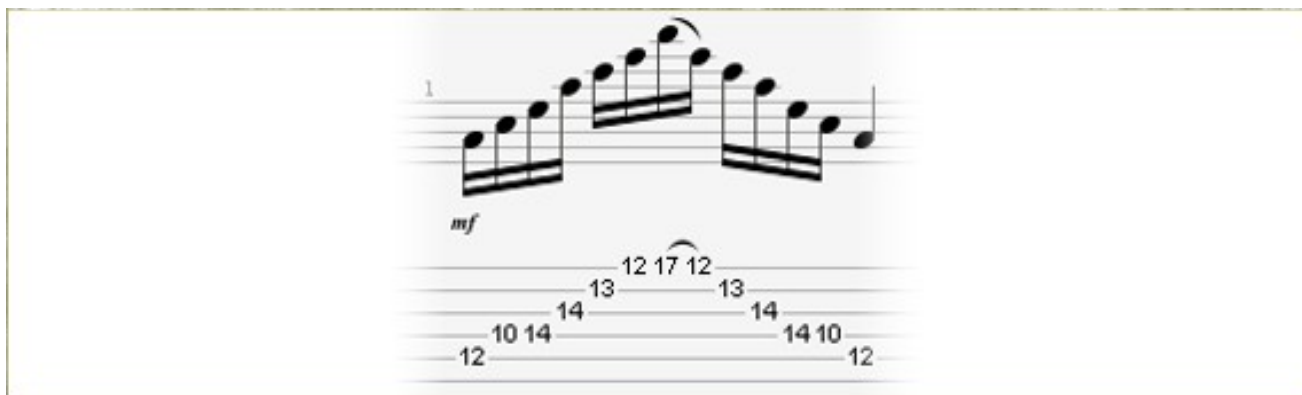
Five String Two Octave Arpeggios

OK, time for a big arpeggio. It's called a 'two octave arpeggio' because that's the amount of distance you're going to cover on the fretboard. For example, in this one we're going to start on 12th fret on the bottom A string, play another A on the way up, and finally

arrive at 17th fret on the top E string, having covered two octaves in doing so. But before we do that, we need to point out that there are three different ways of playing this arpeggio. The first two are the ones they're going to show you in guitar magazines, but to be honest, I think they stink! The fingering is a pain and I say you're going to have trouble playing them at breakneck speed and making them sound cool. Personally, we NEVER use the first two ways I'm going to show you. Ever. And neither should you - but I'll show you them anyway. The third method, in my opinion, is easily the coolest, easiest to do and clearest to hear. But for some reason, it would appear, I'm going to be the first to show you how to do it.



In this example (which you'll find all over the internet and in every guitar magazine), you're going to start with your third finger on the bottom note, play the next two with your second and first fingers respectively, then jump up the G string, landing the fourth note of the arpeggio with your pinky, getting to the top of the arpeggio before executing the same awkward jump on the way back down. This is how Yngwie Malmsteen does it, but I still say it's awkward and I don't like it. Give it a go anyway.



This is just horrible! Play the first note with the second finger, the second note with the first then awkward roll your third finger across the D and G strings to play the next two notes before doing the same on the way back down. horrible, a complete pain in the rear end to get the hang of and there's NO WAY you're going to play that at speed without making the middle of the arpeggio sound like a horrible mush. What you want is a method to play the arpeggio nice and smoothly, in one motion, and be able to hear every note clearly rolling off the one before it. Fortunately, help is at hand with the third method here, My Guitar Lessons method is quite clearly the best one!



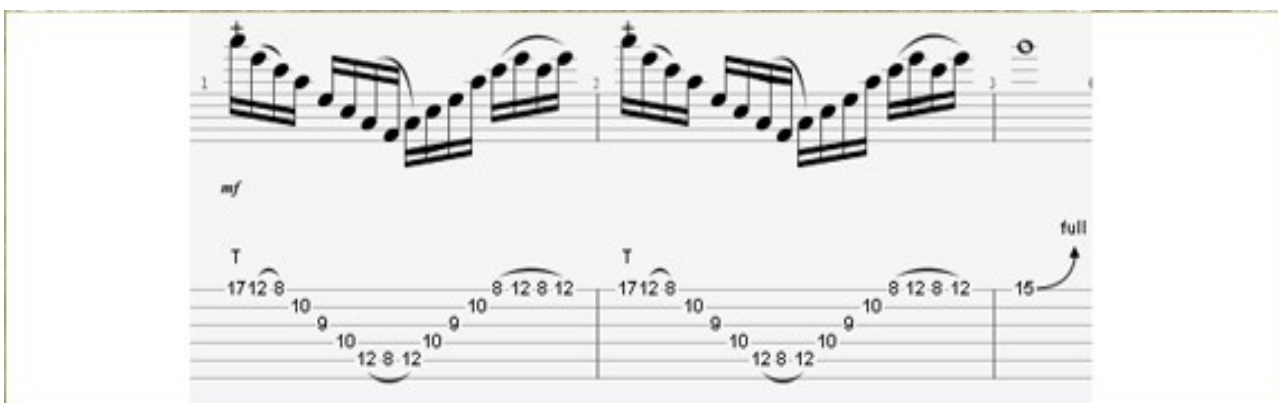
We guess we could call this a sweep-tap two octave arpeggio. It's the same arpeggio as the previous examples, but played in a much more convenient way - it sounds a lot smoother, and has the distinct advantage of looking particularly cool when you play it, as it's going to look like both hands are on the neck and you're pulling off some insane new super-advanced guitar style! Chicks dig that...so here's how you do it:

Hit the bottom note with your third finger. Sweep up through the notes til you get to the 8th fret on the top string, hammer-on to the 12th, then tap 17th fret with the second finger of your right hand.

NOTE: DO NOT get into the habit of tapping with your first finger. It's lame, and means you're going to have to find somewhere to put the pick while you do it. Palming it into your hand is just awkward and having it between with your teeth just looks dumb. To play tap runs in the middle of something cool and keep it all flowing smoothly, second-finger tapping is the way to go.

After the tap, pull-off the 12th fret to 8th fret on the top string, then in one "sweep", drag the pick back down the notes until you get the bottom note again. Groovy! No awkward stretches, no horrible finger-rolling techniques, just one smooth and butt-kicking arpeggio (that looks cool as you do it!). As with any of the arpeggios, just make sure you try and mute the string below the one you're playing to stop any nasty string noise.

Five String Tap Stretch Arpeggios



Ok now we're getting fairly ridiculous...what we're going to do here is basically join the technique of the 5-string "arstretchio" to that of the five-string tap arpeggio - so if you've practiced them both and got the hang of them already, shouldn't be too big of a deal. To make these fit into 4/4 timing, I tend to play the top two notes before the root

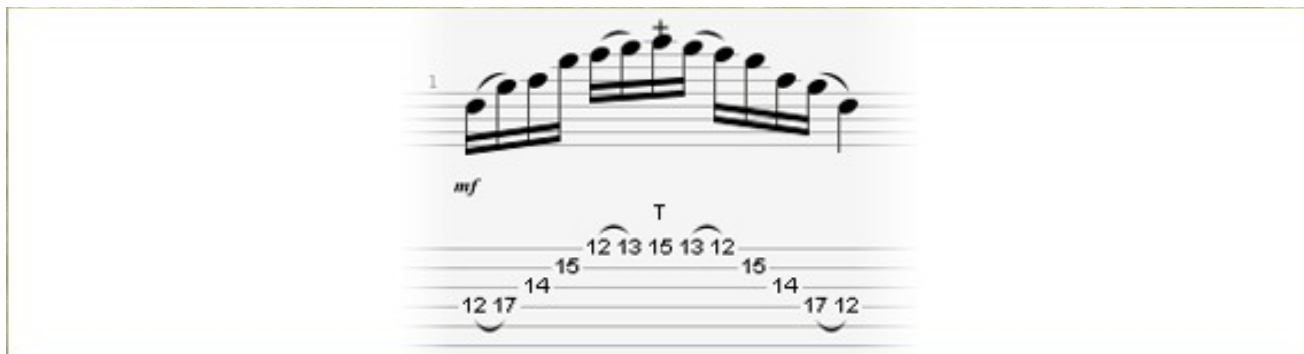
(highest note, here) twice, and it makes it sound pretty cool.

Like I said - if you've already gotten a hang of the techniques so far, this should be pretty straight forward. What you want to watch out for in particular is the stretch. The further down the neck (towards the headstock) you're playing these, the harder they're going to be as the stretch is going to get bigger. On the other hand, they can be a bit of a fiddle higher up the neck too, as the frets start to get smaller and smaller so you want to be super-accurate with your fingering. Once you've done the stretch and you're on your way back UP the arpeggio, make sure you're muting the string below the one you're playing to stop any string noise. Don't cheat, else it won't sound cool!

Making Arpeggios Sound A Bit More Original

Here's an idea - when you're playing, deliberately hit unusual notes of the scale in your arpeggios. Instead of hitting the root note as your highest note every time, try hitting the one below the root, or two below the root. Two below is a favourite of mine - it'll give your runs a very different sounding quality and should you want to whack a harmony in thirds on there, the second guitar will be hitting your root note anyway! No need to worry about that though - the whole point is to do something that sounds cool here, and there are about a million ways to do that.

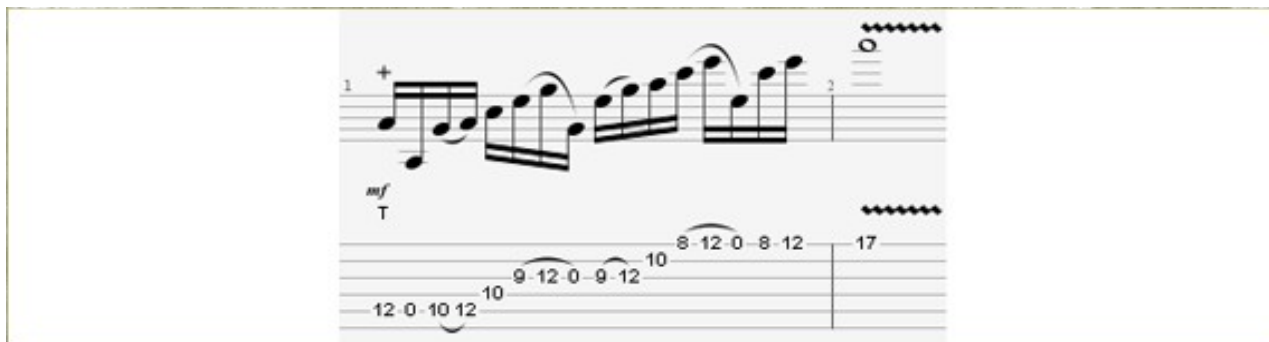
Try playing a bunch of arpeggios, in A minor (or any other key for that matter) - but basing them around a different "root note". Got no idea what I'm on about? Here - stick to the notes that are in A minor and on the scale map diagram, but instead of using an A at the top and bottom of your arpeggio, start on a D, fly up an arpeggio using only other notes in the A minor scale and land on a D at the top. By doing things like this, some smarty-pants will inevitably tell you you're playing in a different MODE...and indeed you are. But you didn't need to spend 5 years at music college boring yourself senseless learning what modes are (I'll stick a tutorial on modes up on here soon though should you really want to know!).



Example - this is a perfectly plausible arpeggio in A minor, but deliberately weird-sounding because you're starting and finishing on an unusual note. It will also sound perfectly fine over an A minor riff, just slightly more interesting! You can work this sort of thing into a run - skip to the bit at the end of this lesson to work out how to put your own arpeggio runs/sequences together.

Alternatively, try deliberately changing a note in the arpeggio for a different one in the scale, or if the key you're playing in has a note that can be played on an open string - E, A, D, G, or B (or, for example, if your arpeggio contains any note on the 12th fret) see if you can stick a random open string in there - randomly plummeting down an octave and hitting a note way lower than the rest of what you're playing in the middle of a

"passage"...will always sound fairly insane! Here's an example:



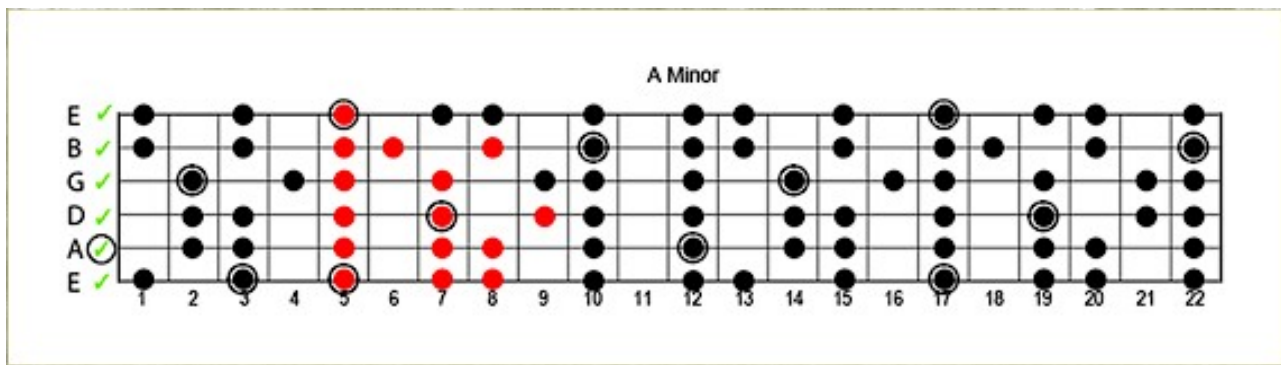
Try also playing the ENTIRE arpeggio an octave or two lower down on the guitar. This is unusual, because you're going to play the arpeggios on solely on the bottom strings - which you don't see much of! This usually means some pretty big stretches, and a bit of practice to get it right, but once you've done it you can add something else to your arpeggio runs, in that you can, in theory, start an arpeggio from an open bottom string, blur your way up the fretboard and end up at 24th fret on the top string! If you have 24 frets, of course, which I don't - which means you'll end up bending 22nd instead, and as long as you haven't stunk up the run sound butt-kicking when you get to the end! No matter how cool the run was, to be honest, the way you end it is going to make or break how cool it sounded. Work on your vibrato and your bends! For what my opinion's worth, a super-wide and crazy-sounding Zakk Wylde-style vibrato is, almost without fail, what you should be going for. Try getting your fingers around these runs:



Sequencing Arpeggios

OK - mastered everything to here? Fantastic. Now we get to the business end of this arpeggios-fest. What you're inevitably looking to do with these arpeggios is to be able to put them together into sequences so that you can play a super-cool blitz in the middle of your guitar solo. I'm pretty sure you won't have any trouble finding a million dudes online who will bore you senseless with the ins-and-outs of musical theory etc etc yada yada yada. I'm pretty sure that you, like me, can't really be bothered with that and just want to play some cool guitar - so here's the NO-NONSENSE method of sticking some awesome arpeggio licks together - that you can do RIGHT NOW!

Firstly, what key are you playing in? Like everything else in this lesson, We are in A minor here. So the first thing you need to be able to do is know where all the notes of A minor are, all over the fretboard. Here's the super-scale diagram again to show you (saving you AGES in painstakingly memorising it all), showing you EVERY note you can play on the fretboard in that key.



NOTE: Every now and again, you'll be able to hear in your head what you might want to play/sound like, and it involves hitting a note that is NOT on the scale diagram. Here's what you do - Step one - hit the note. Does it sound cool? (You might want to hear it over the riff you're going to playing over) Step two - if it does, to hell with the scale diagram - hit it anyway! It's inevitably a note from a different scale, but who cares? The whole point here is to sound cool, and by sticking the odd bit of weirdness in, you start to sound like yourself. Just hit the weird note confidently! Finishing a run on the note one fret below the root note, for example, often sound cool. It isn't on the scale diagram here, and is actually referred to as a "raised seventh", and a note of the harmonic minor scale. You don't really need to know that though - just hit it anyway, and if it sounds cool, you might want to stick it in there! Likewise for anything else - who cares if it isn't in the scale? The most important thing is that it sounds cool.

REMEMBER: Just because everything's in A minor here, that DOES NOT mean you're going to have to learn everything all over again to play in different keys. Once you've got the hang of everything we've gone through here, you're done! To move all of this stuff into different keys, just shift the patterns you're playing up or down the right amount of frets to be in a different key. Shift any of the runs here UP two frets, you're in B minor. Shift them DOWN, say, 5 frets, and you're in E minor. To work out what key you're in, just look at where the root note is. Your root notes in A minor are 5th fret Bottom E string, 7th fret D string, 10th fret B string and 17th fret Top E string. Remember that - it's important. Once you've mastered the fingering pattern of any of these patterns, just move the pattern up or down the neck until the root note is now on the root of the key you want to play it in. Shift it to a C, and you're now in C. Shift it to F#, you're now playing in F#. No problem.

The easiest way to put together a cool run of arpeggios is to first work out what arpeggio you want to start with, and think whether you want to go up or down from it. As you go up, simply check out the super-scale diagram and see what the notes are that are going to follow. If you start your run on the 5th fret on the top string, for example, play the arpeggio then hit the 7th fret. Looking at the diagram, you can see where the next notes up from the arpeggio you've just played are. Play them as an arpeggio, then hit another random note in the scale - say, er, 12th fret, and knowing you've moved up four notes (counting the one you were on) from your last arpeggio, simply find all the notes four-up from the last arpeggio, and play them as an arpeggio! Does it sound cool? Does it suck? If it sucks, don't worry, just keep messing about with arpeggios until you find a run that sounds super-cool - no irritating mind-bending and endlessly boring music theory required - just play around with it until it sounds great.

The image displays two systems of guitar notation, each consisting of a standard musical staff and a guitar TAB staff. The first system shows three measures of arpeggio runs starting at frets 13, 14, and 15. The second system shows three measures starting at frets 7, 8, and 9. The TAB staff includes fret numbers and specific instructions like 'T' for tap and 'full' for full bend.

NOW TAKE A DEEP BREATH ...

...phew! You got that? Have a go at those arpeggio run ideas and keep an eye on the scale diagram as you do them so you can see how they've been put together. If you like, you can stick them into one of your guitar solos. Just give 'My Guitar Lessons a special thanks quote in your album sleeve! But you'll be doing yourself a favour if instead of ripping off my runs, you change them around a bit, stick different note in there etc. and come up with your own! The aim of the game, after all, is to create your own "voice" on the guitar - Slash, Zakk Wylde, BB King or Yngwie Malmsteen sound only like themselves - if you just play these runs in your soloing exactly as they are they'll sound cool, but you don't some dude at your gig saying "Hey - that guy sounds like Mick Priestley when he plays!" That would be pretty lame after you've busted your butt with arpeggio practice - so my advice here would be to soak up everything I've showed you here, then take my advice (which is inevitably the advice of any decent guitar teacher) and deliberately fiddle around with everything once you've learned it to come up with some crazy arpeggio ideas of your own. Not that imaginative? Try these then:

- Play an arpeggio entirely on one string, even if you need to tap-bend 22nd fret to do it!
- Find a way to play an arpeggio pattern where you start at the bottom note of the scale, go up three notes, then go up three notes from the second note of the scale...then three notes from the third note of the scale...and so on.
- Try sticking an arpeggio run together with as many octave-jumps in as possible. For example, hitting an A at 12th fret, with the next note being an open A string would be one. As would hitting 5th fret, then tapping 17th....etc.

...get to work!