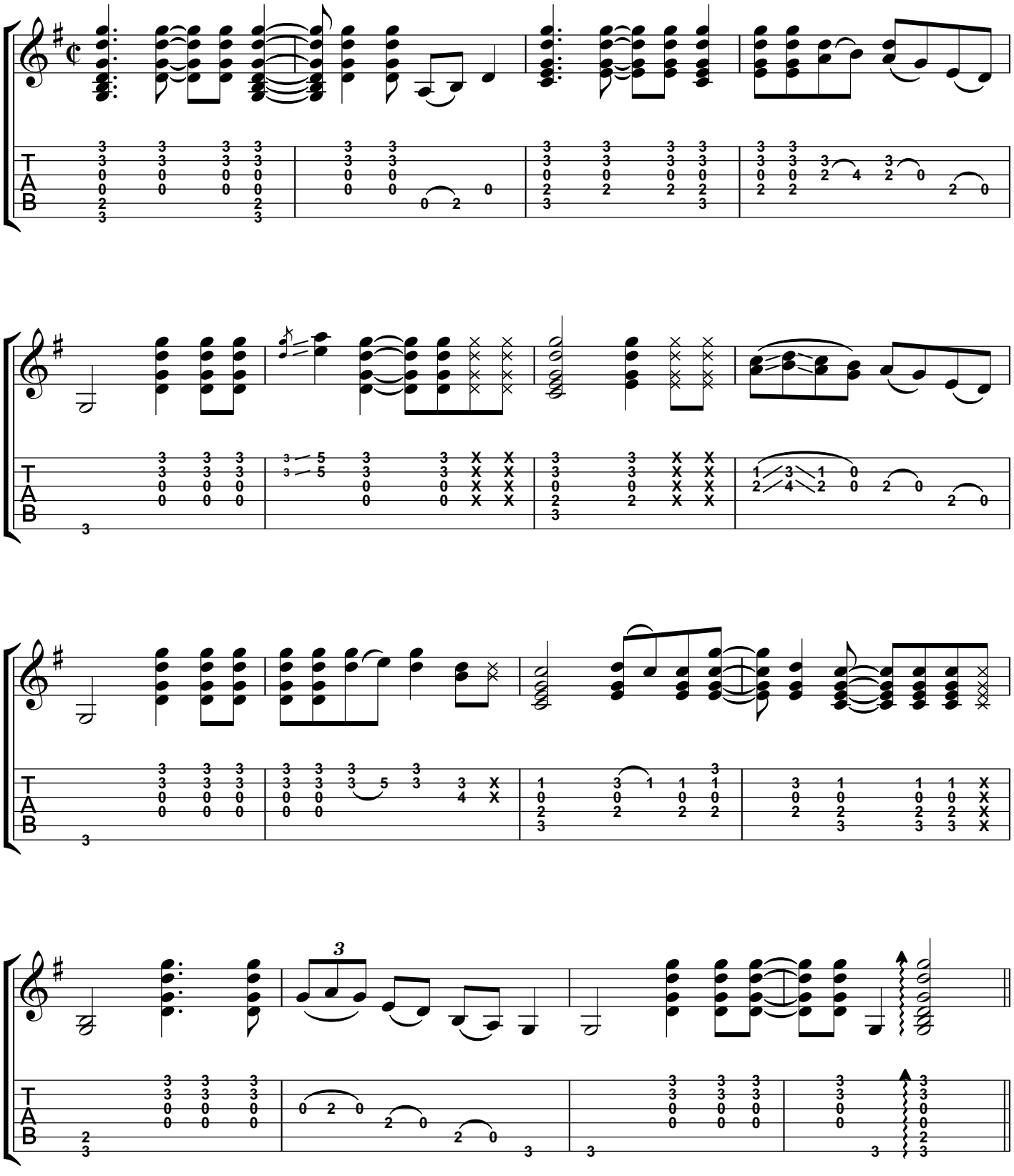
Killer Open Chord Lick Concepts

Steve Stine

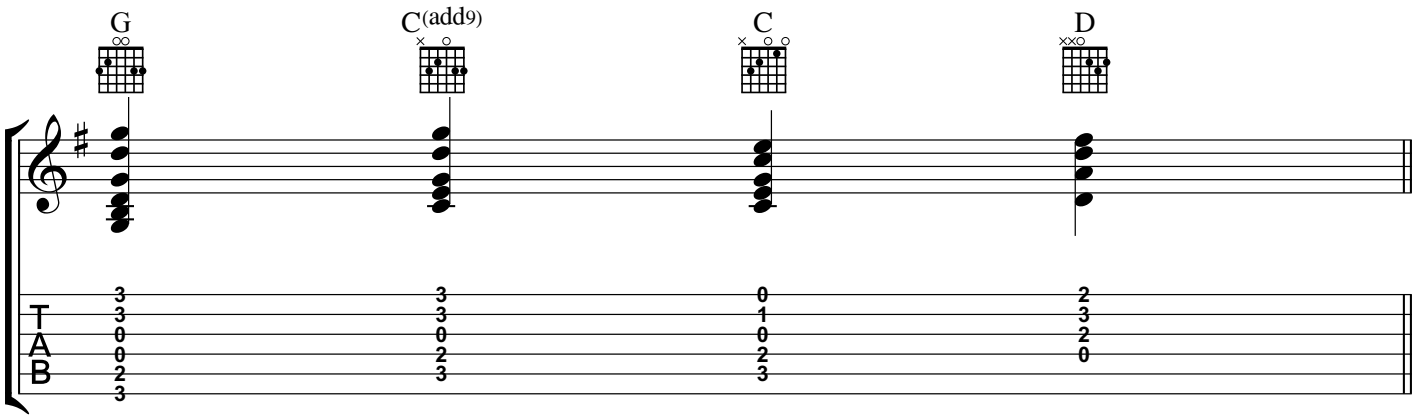
Performance

♩ = 165



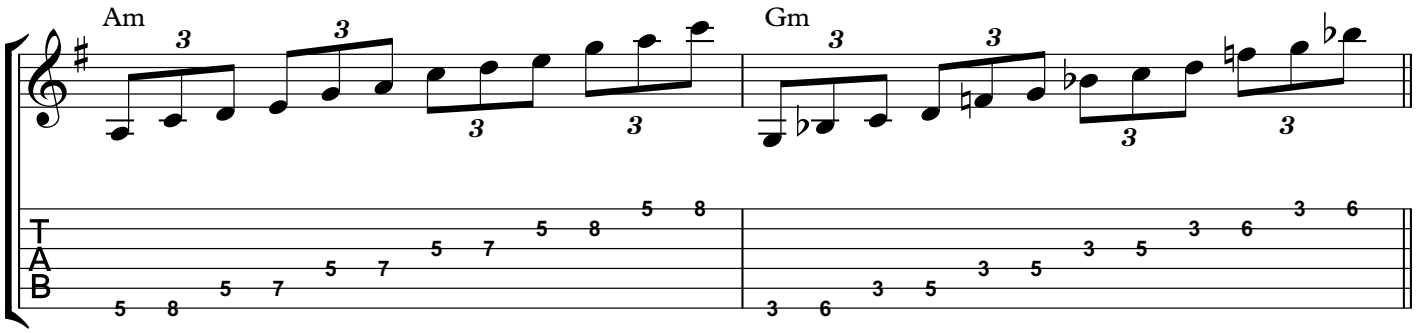
Lesson

Chords

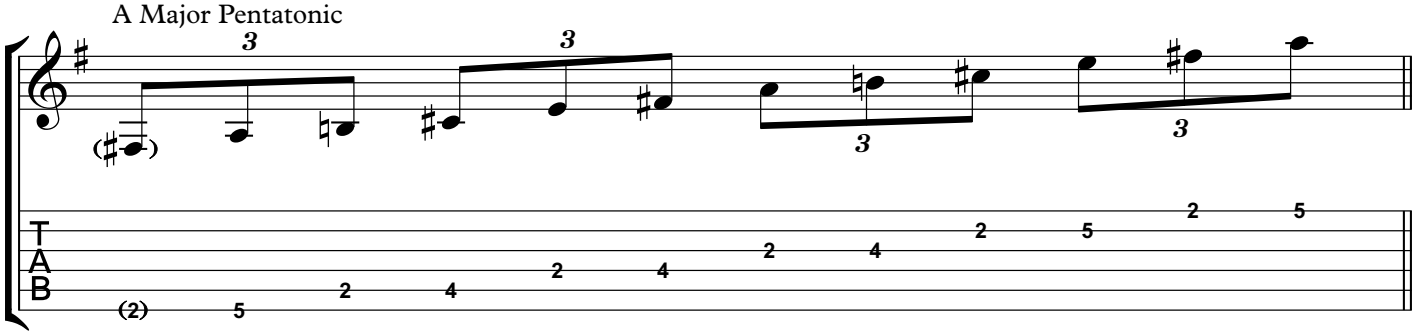


Pentatnoic Scales

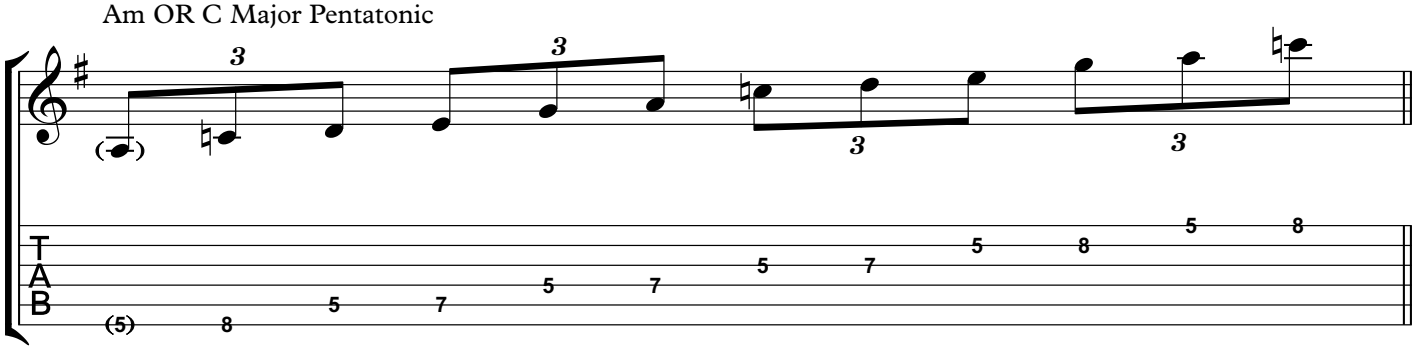
Here we need to understand a bit of music theory in order to better use the penatonic shapes. First the minor pentatonic, first position:



In order to switch from our minor to our major pentatonic we simply have to walk 3 frets down the neck of our guitar. From there we play the same minor pentatonic shape but the notes it creates now outline an A major scale. Skip the F# at the bottom of the scale and emphasise the A to hear the A major scale.

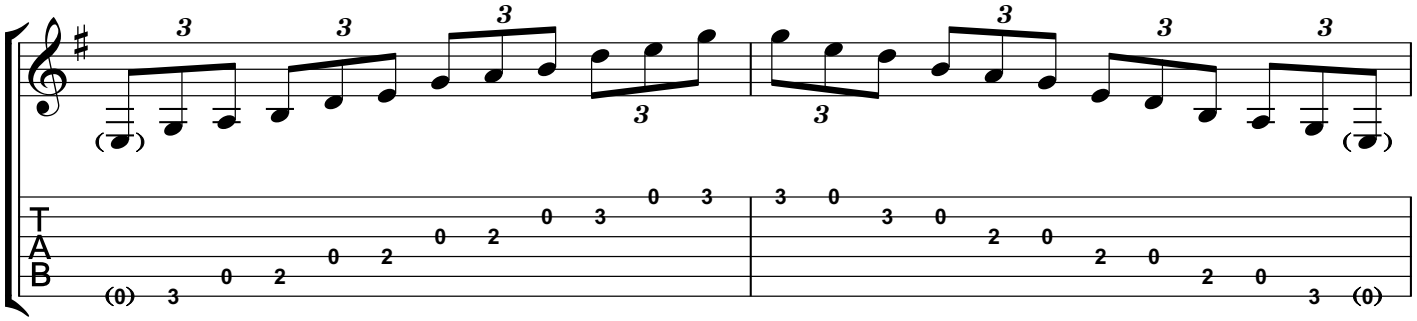


Think about it this way, if you play a minor penatonic scale, depending on what notes you put the emphasis on, you are creating both a minor and a major scale. They use the same notes. If we go back to A we get:



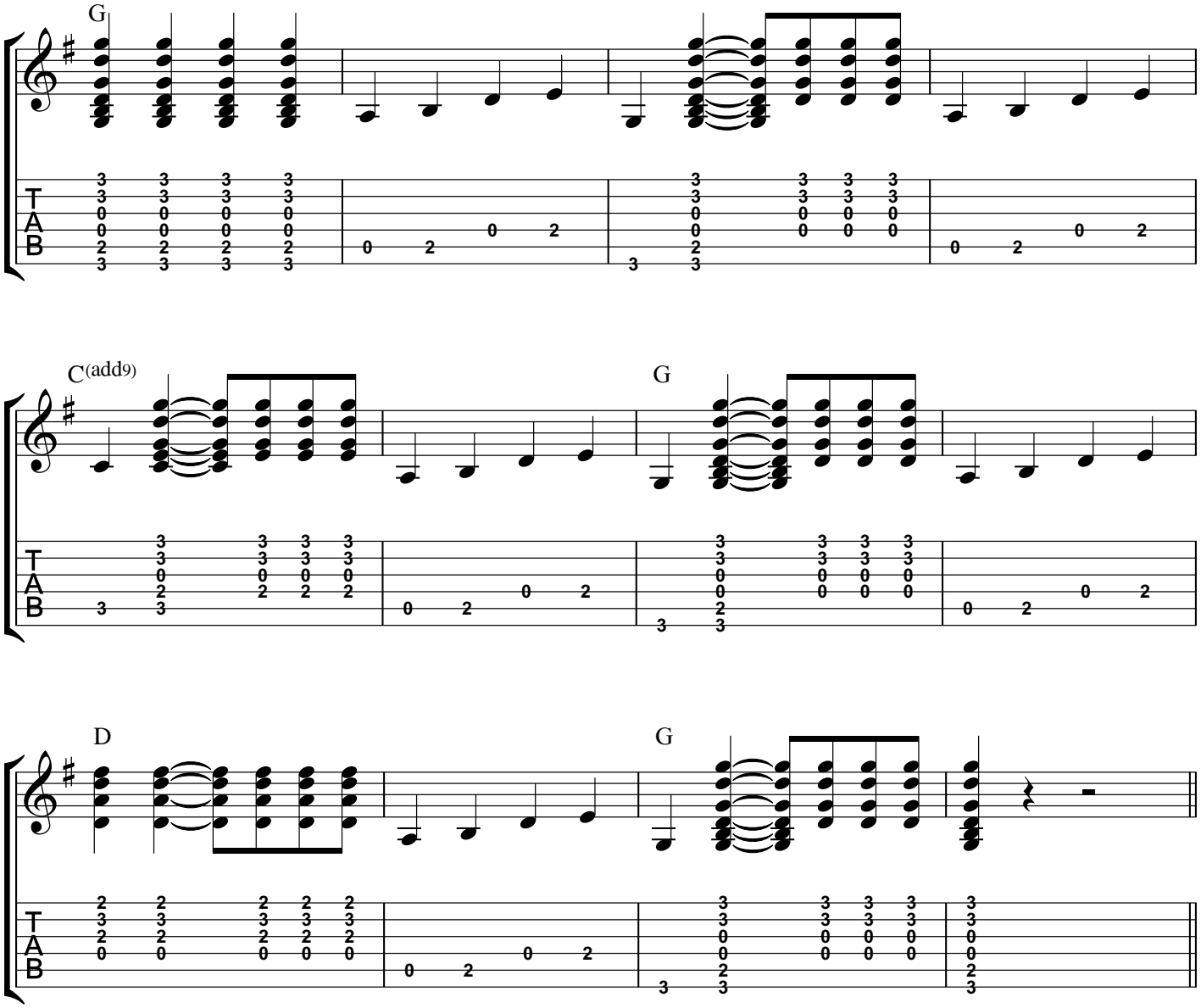
Relating this to G

If we move our three frets down from G we end up using our Em pentatonic shape. Because this is built off of the same notes as G major pentatonic, both scales look like this.



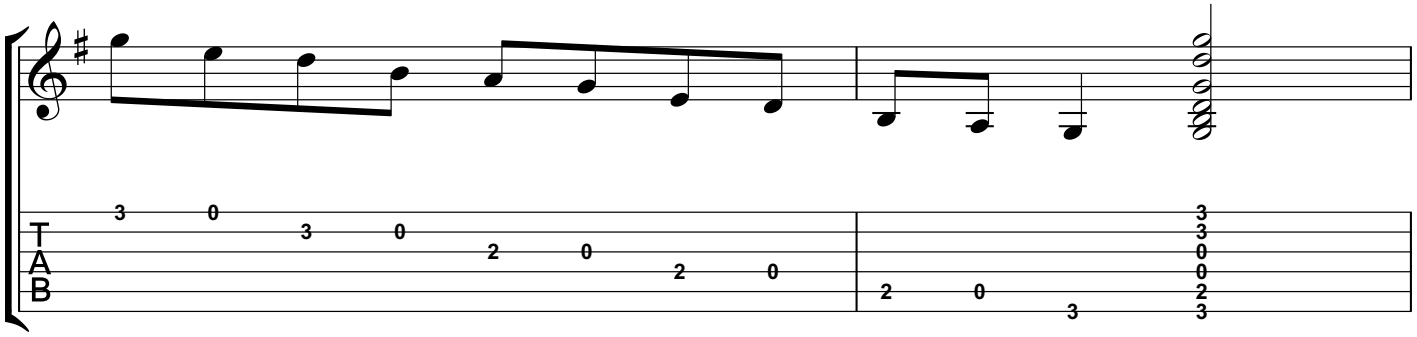
First Example

Here we look at a basic example of adding some penatonic scale notes as me move from chord to chord in an easy progression



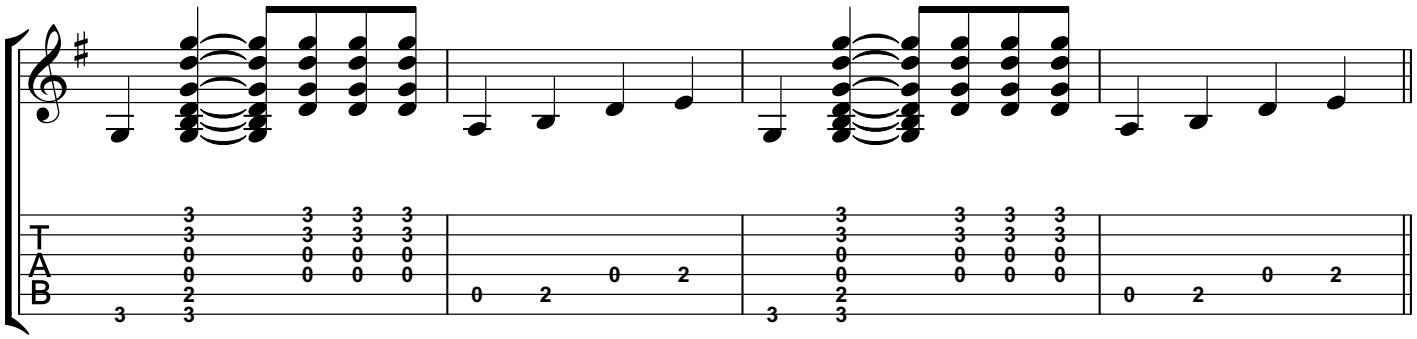
G Tonality

We can use any of these scale tones we want. As long as we return to G our ears will associate them with the G major sound and not Em.



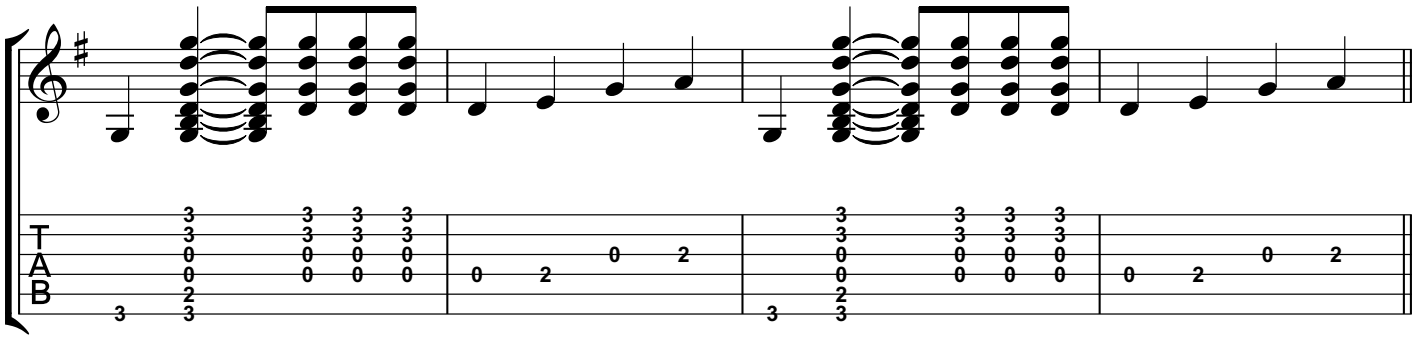
Applying the Major Pentatonic Scale

First, our basic idea from the performance section. Let't take a look at how we could change this up.



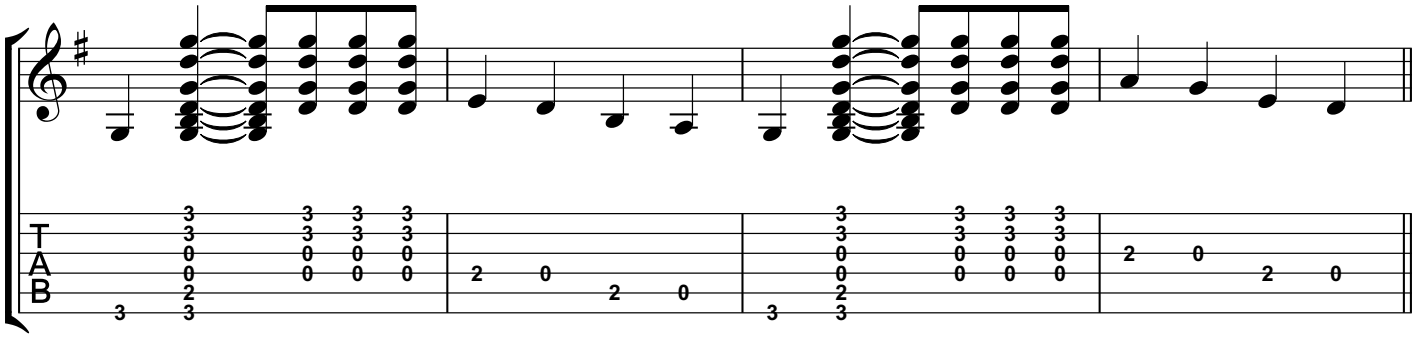
Idea #1

A simple change would be to shift up and use the next two strings from our penatonic scale.



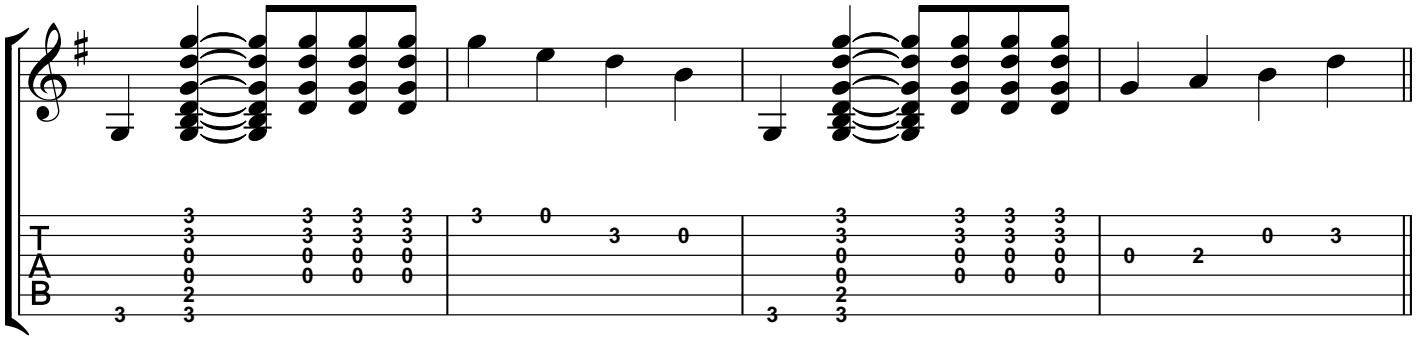
Idea #2

Or we could move backwards on with either of those ideas.



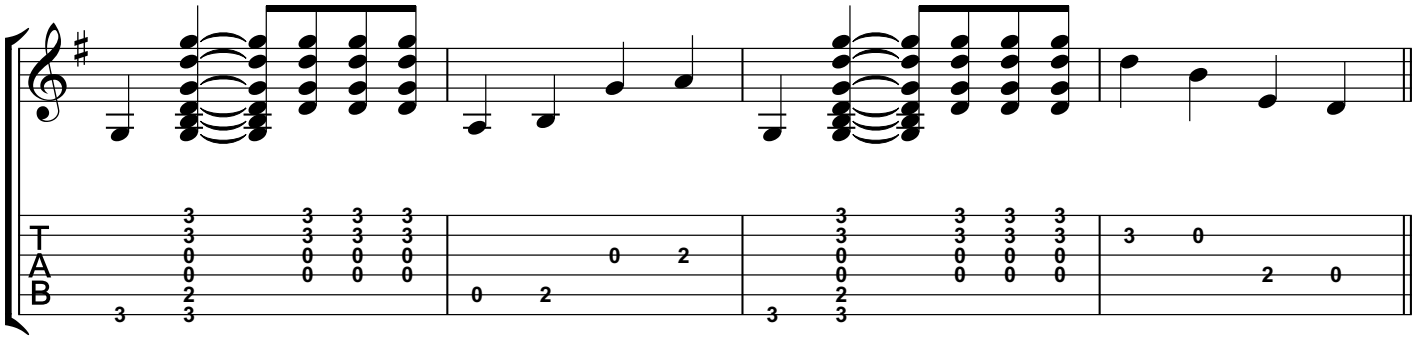
Idea #3

There are many combinations you can use.



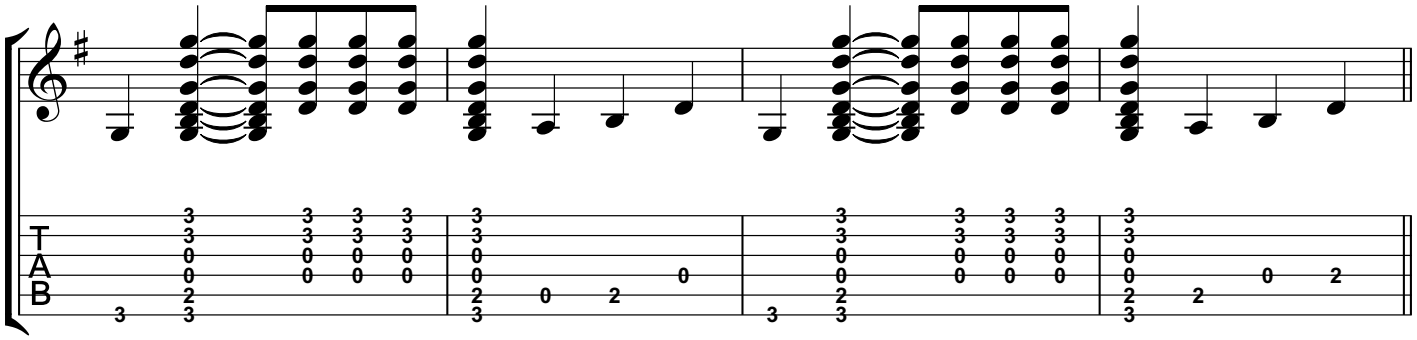
Idea #4

You can even try string skipping.



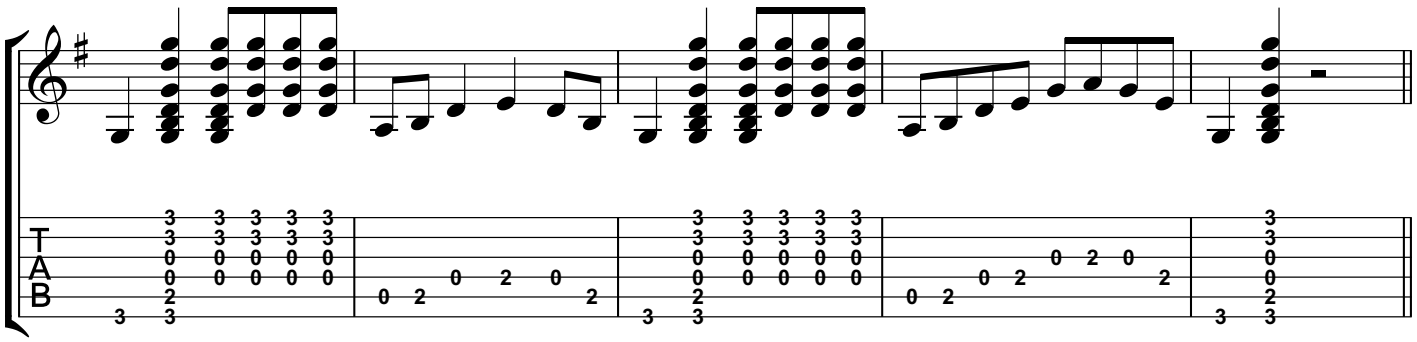
Changing up the Lick

By displacing the rhythm of this lick we have a nice pattern of three.



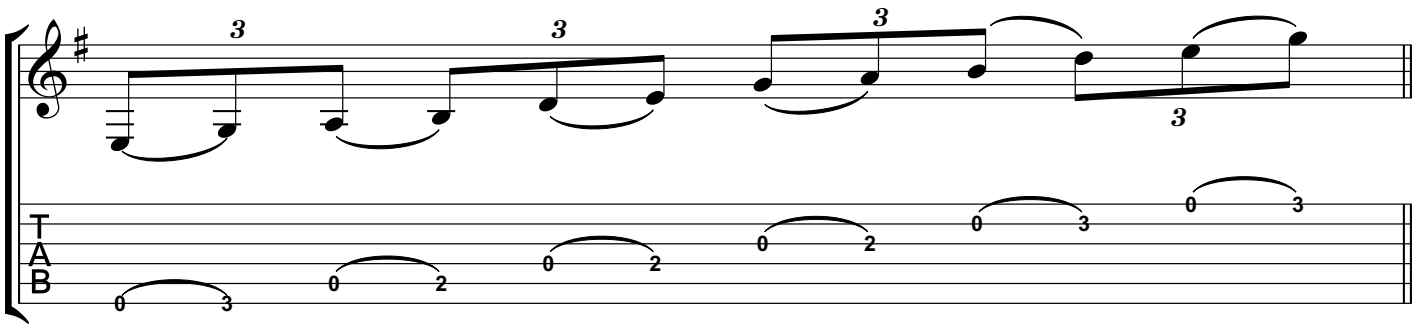
Adding 8th Notes

Doubling the speed at which we use these pentatonic notes gives it a bit more energy.



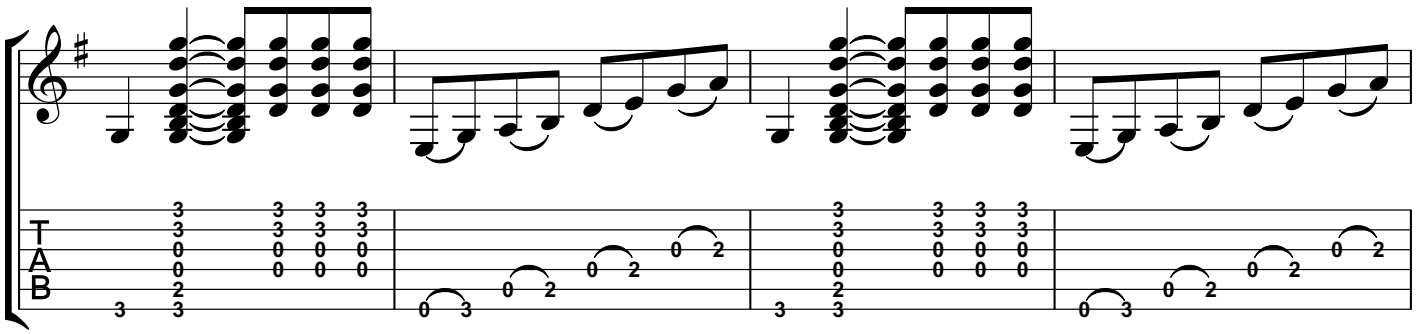
Hammer-Ons

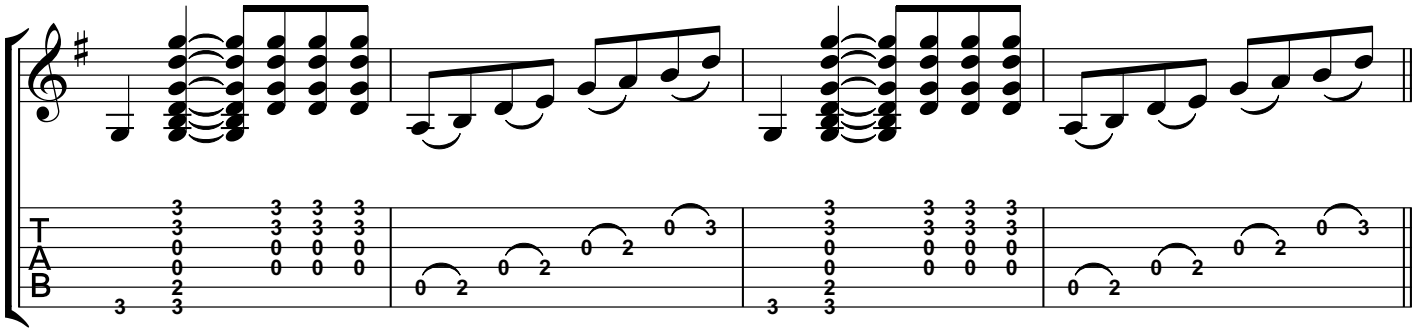
Now that we understand the shapes and some basic ways to use them, let's intergrate some legato playing. Instead of picking every note, it's quite common to use hammer-ons and pull-offs. First the scale with hammer-ons.



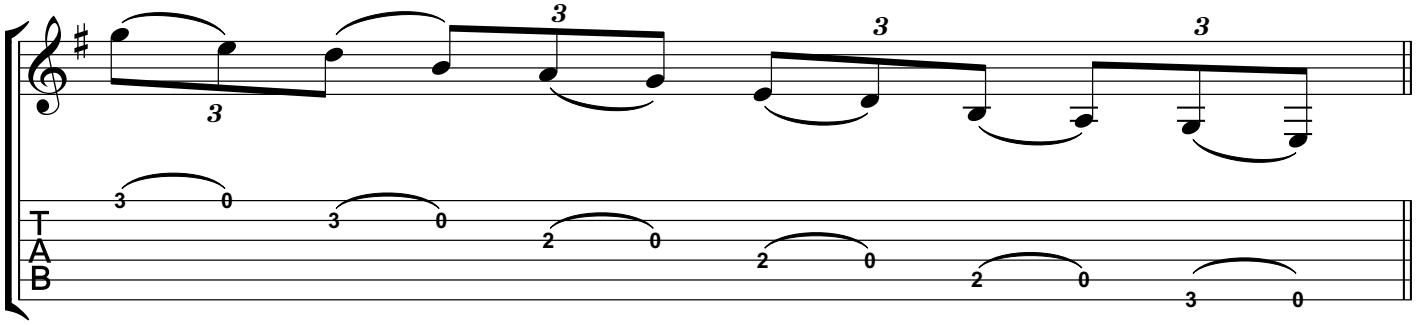
Hammer-Ons Example

Lots of players choose to use hammer-ons because it's easier to execute where it might otherwise be more difficult to pick accurately. Here is an example of some basic hammer-on ideas.



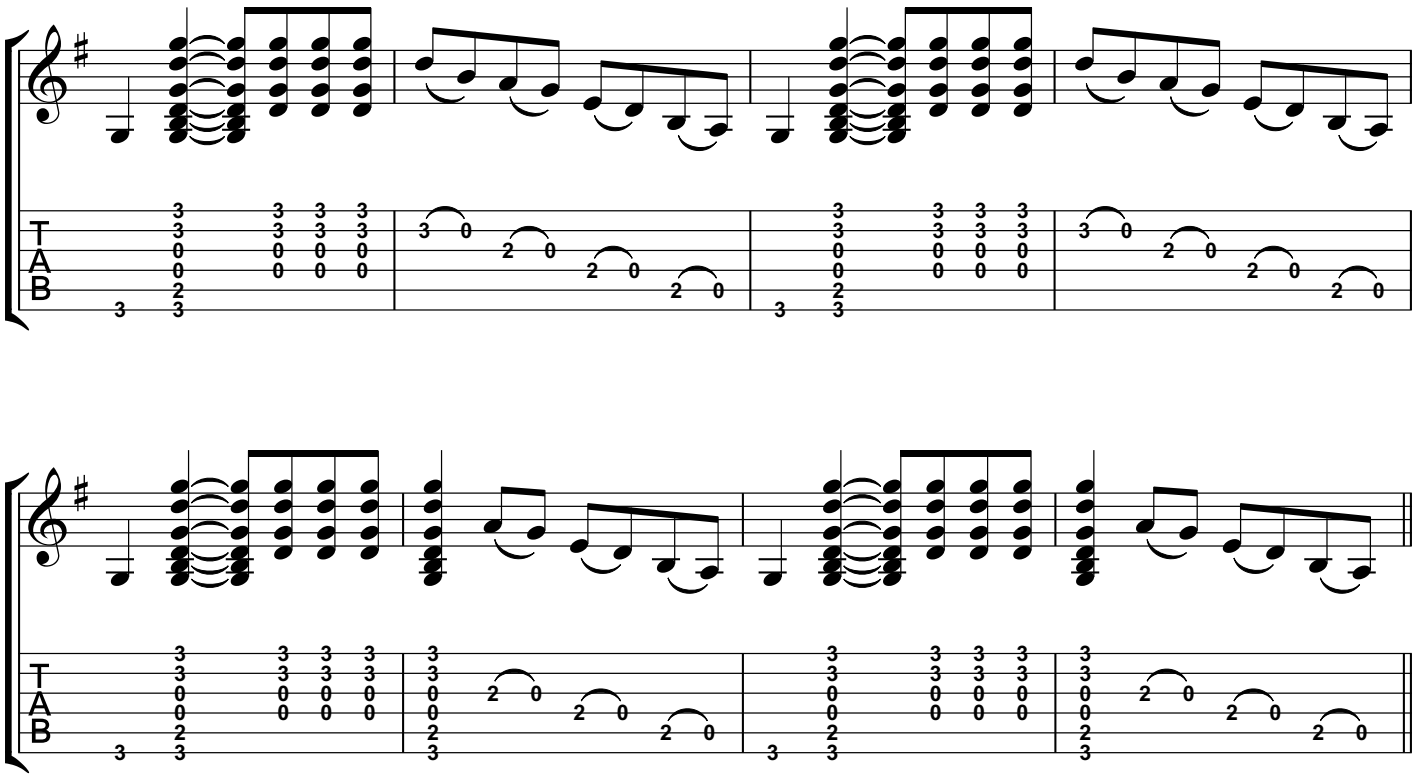


Pull-Offs



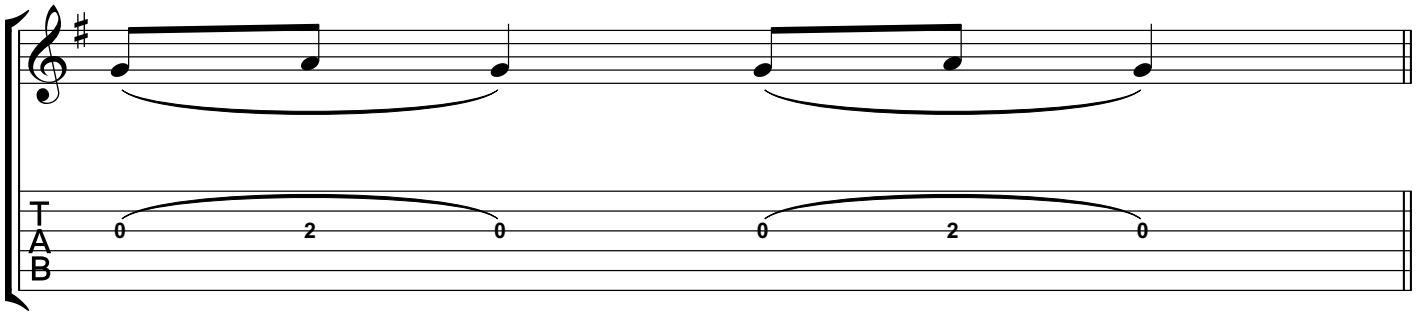
Pull-Offs Example

Here we have essentially the same idea but we're working our way backwards with pull-offs

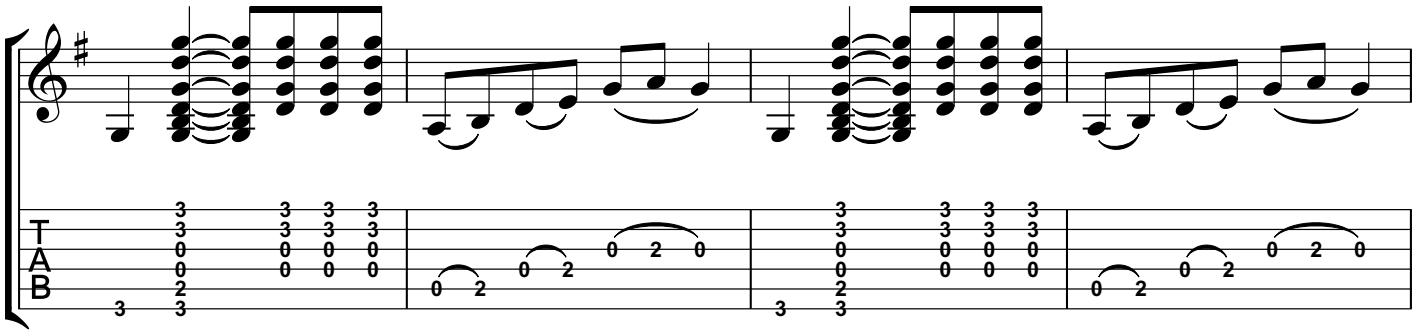


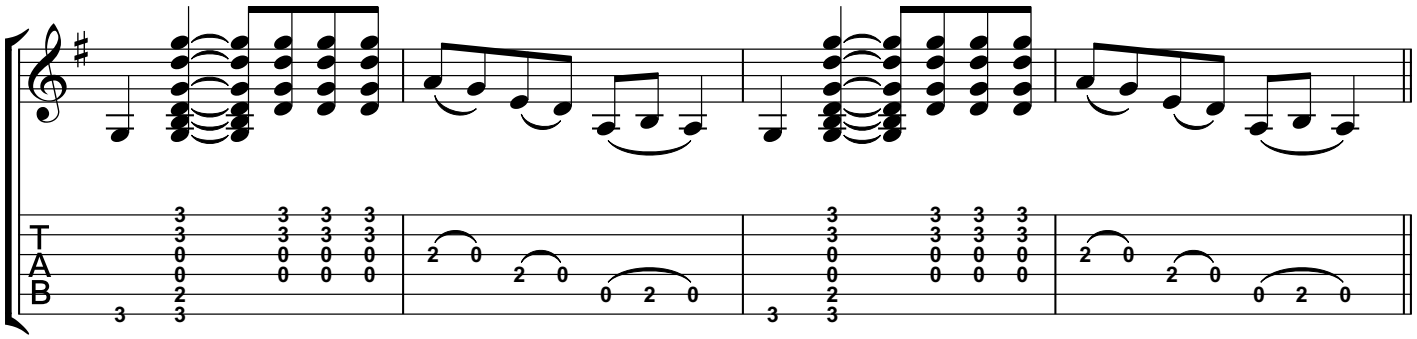
Hammer-Ons and Pull-Offs Combined

Now let's take a look at combining these two techniques. Here Steve is hammering onto the 2nd fret and pulling off back to the open string. To achieve this cleanly he also uses that first finger to deaden the first two strings after he pulls off of the 3rd string.



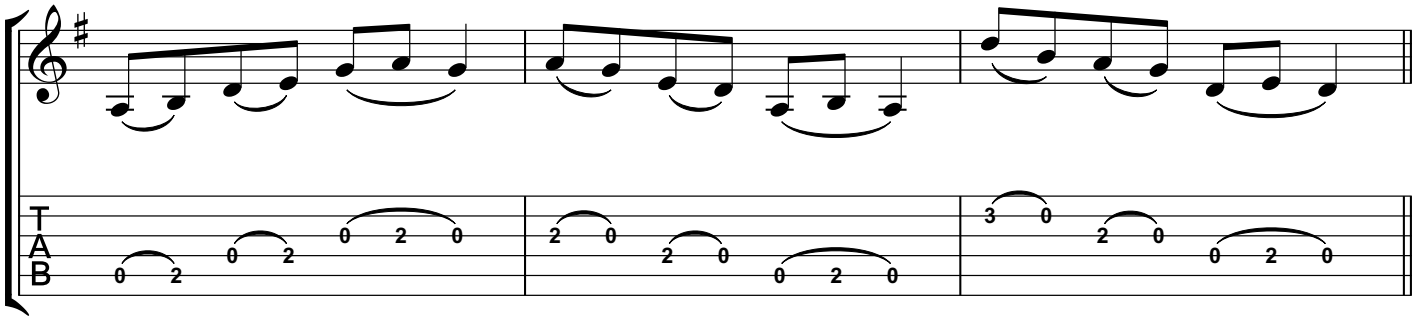
Hammer-Ons and Pull-Offs - Ex. 1





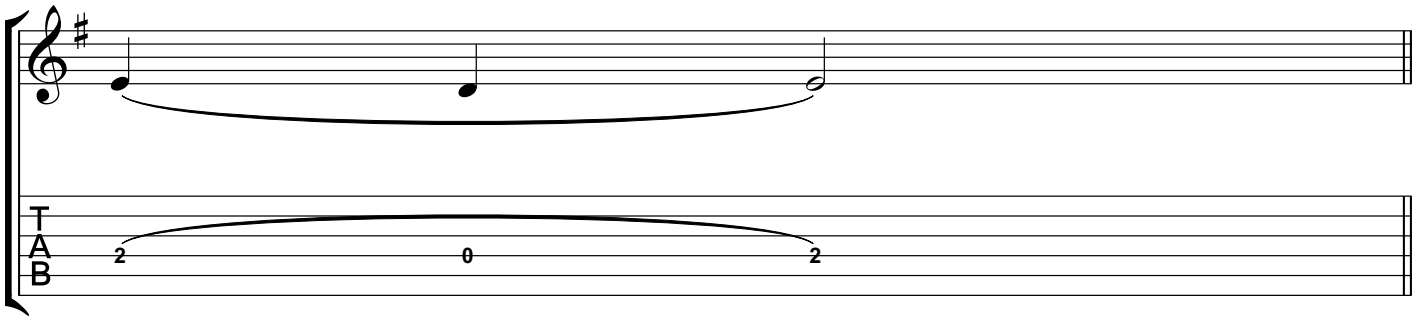
The licks consist of:

Hammer - Hammer - Hammer - Pull Pull - Pull - Hammer - Pull (or) Pull - Pull - Hammer - Pull

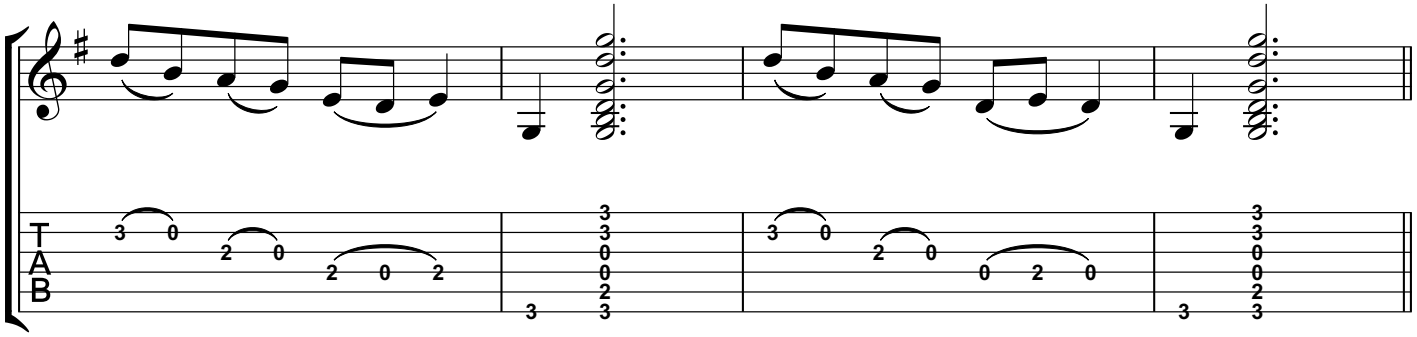


Finishing on Open Strings

There's nothing theoretically wrong with a lick like this, but it ends on a fretted note, which makes it a bit more difficult to jump back to our chord.

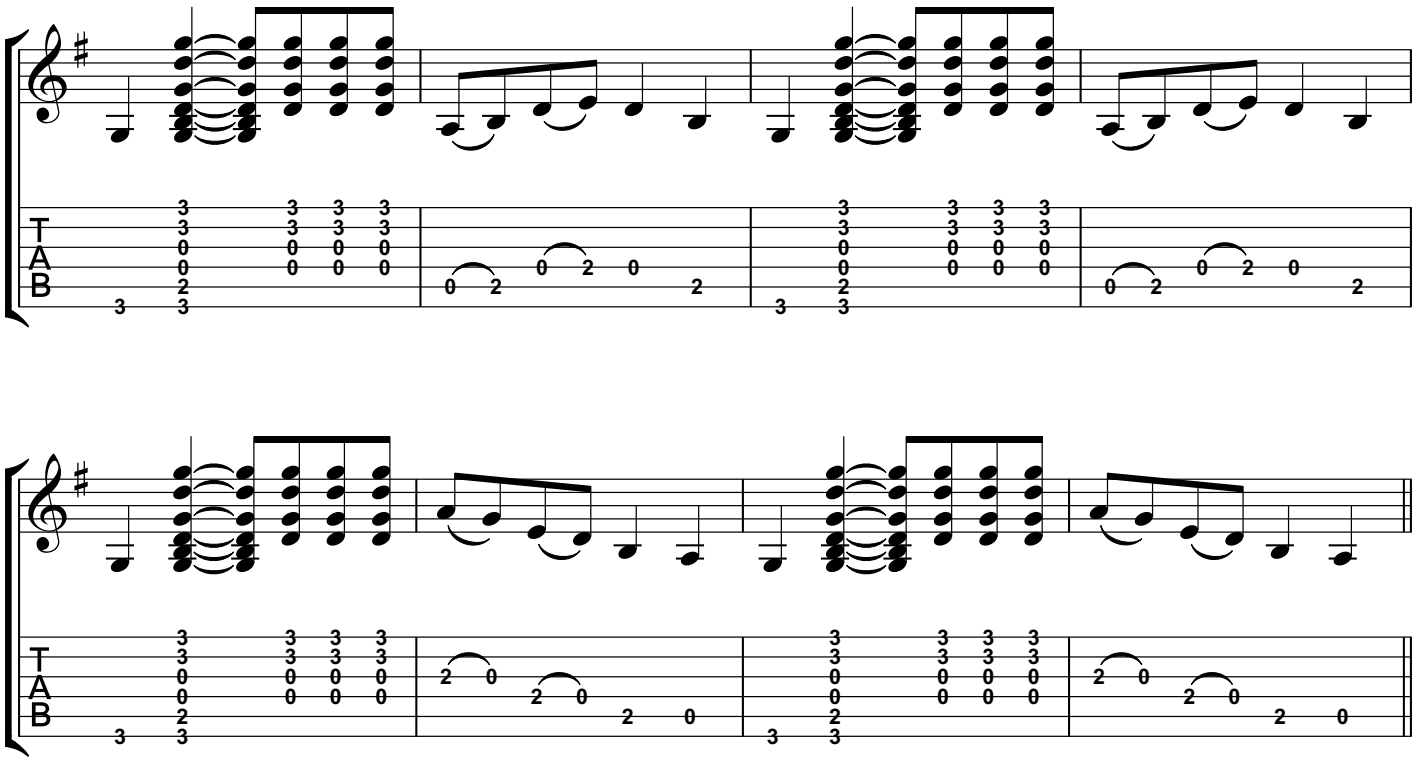


We can end like the first two bars but going back to the G chord gets a bit awkward. With the second two bars we have all fingers free to move directly to the next chord.



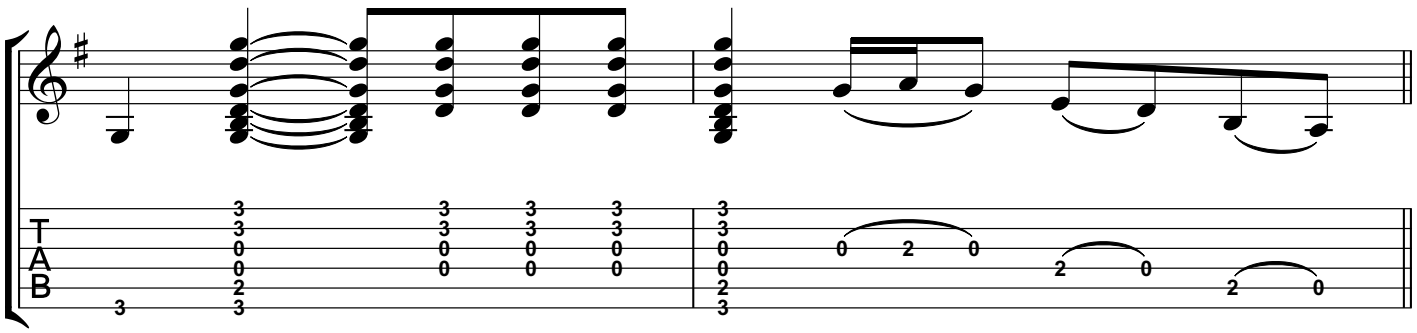
Combining Hammer-Ons, Pull-Offs, and Picking

Since no one plays exclusively with only one technique, let's look at ways to combine this legato playing with simple picking.



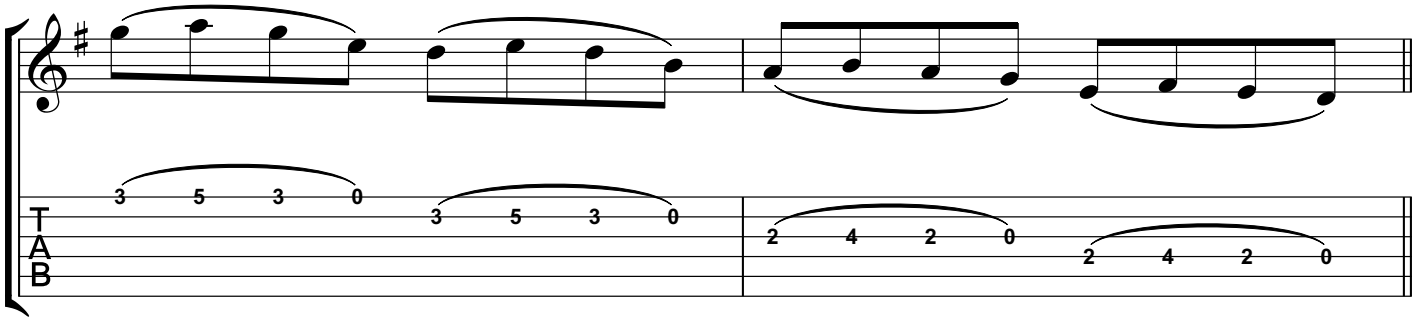
Adding 16th Notes

Here is a basic pattern involving a 16th note hammer-on/pull-off.

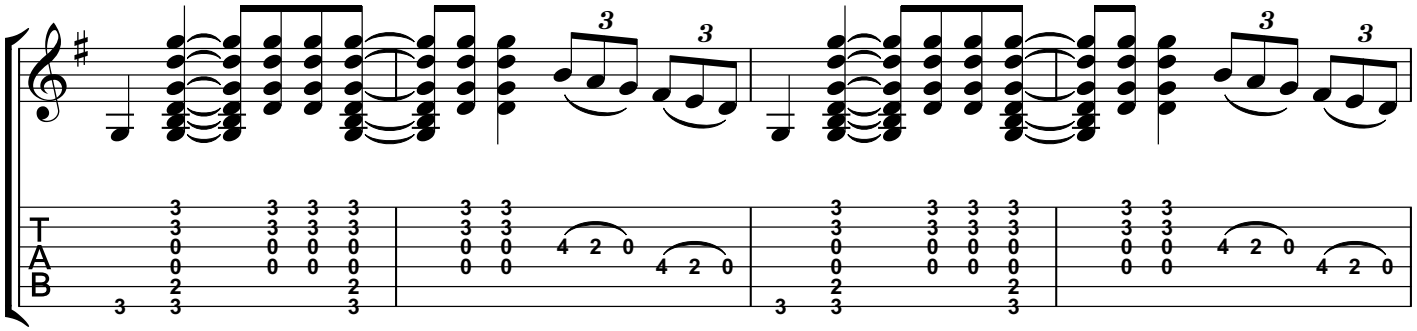


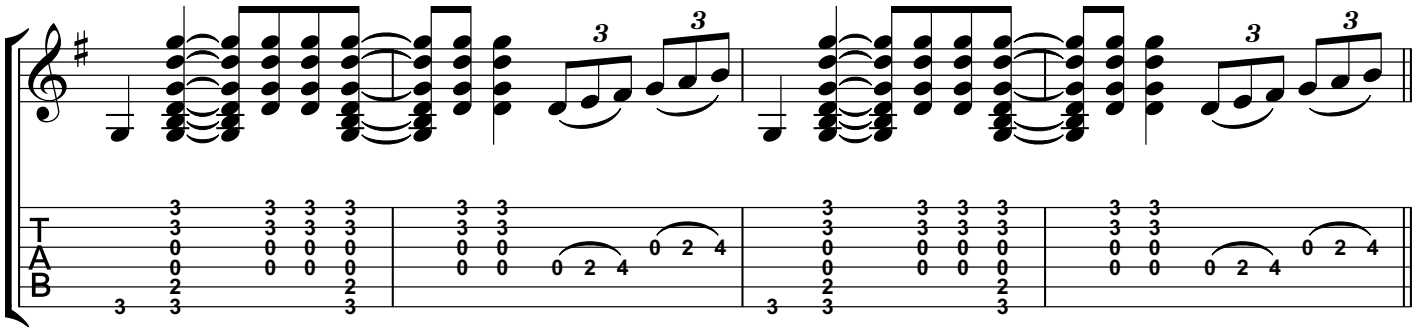
Expanding the Pentatonic Scale

We can take reach up to use more notes from our scale in G Major for even more ways to add licks to our basic strumming pattern.



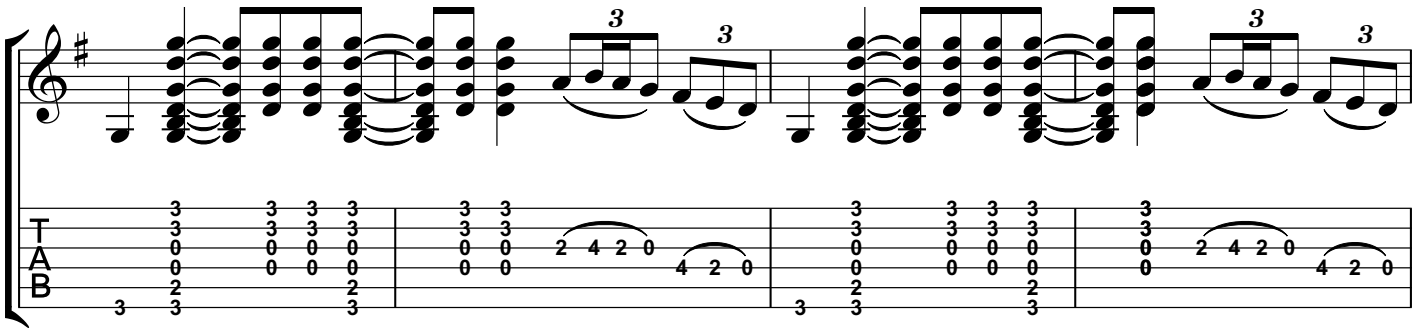
Expanding the Scale - Ex. 1

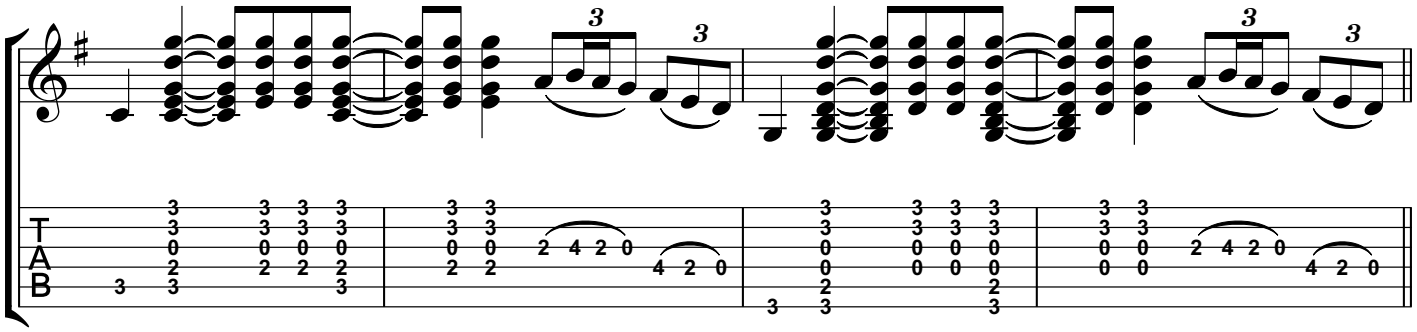




Expanding the Scale - Ex. 2

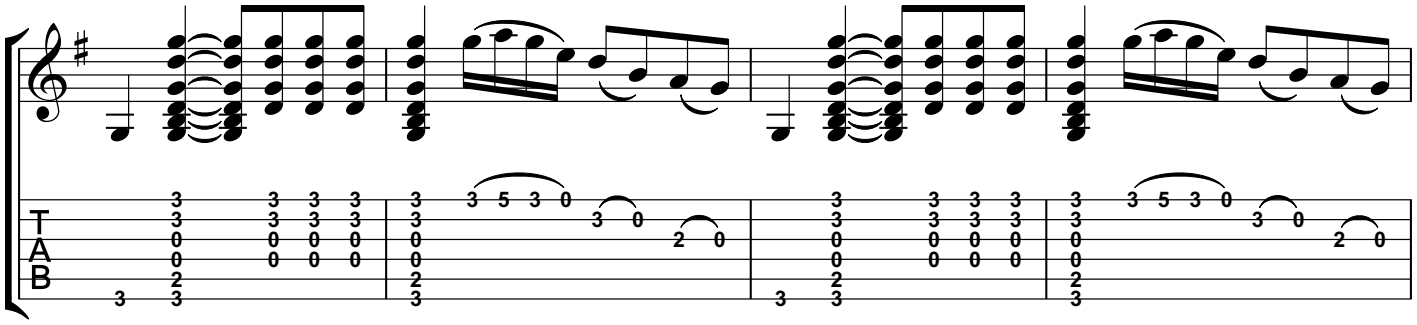
This one involves a pretty quick flick of the finger for that 3rd string lick.





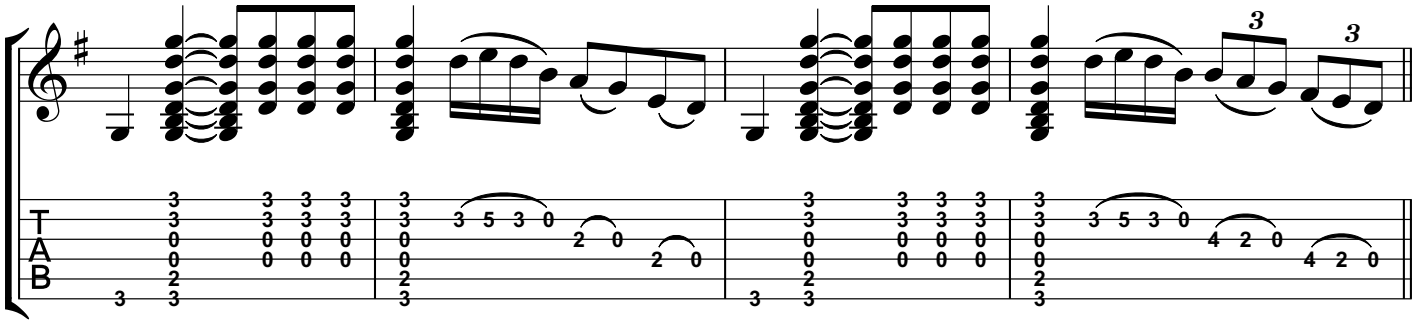
Expanding the Scale - Ex. 3

Here we move the same idea up to 1st string.



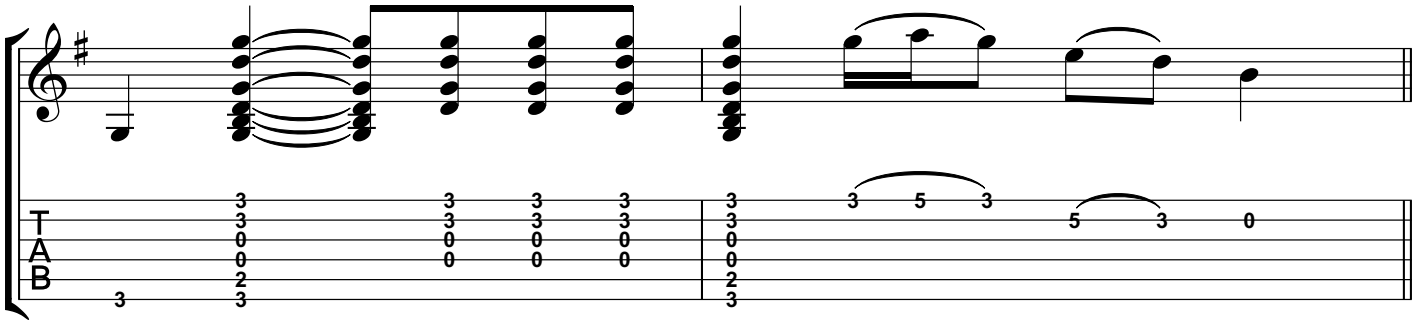
And now the 2nd string.

Combined with Ex. 2



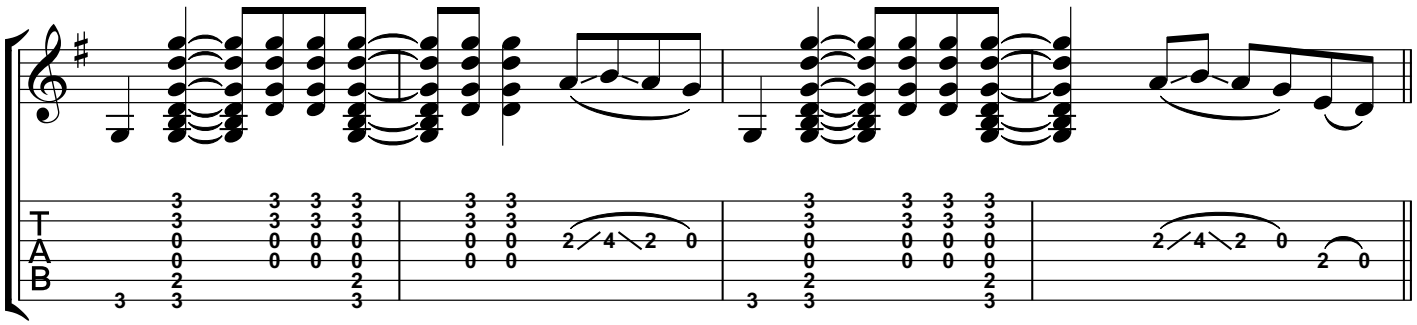
Expanding the Scale - Ex. 4

You have a lot of options with this scale but remember: if you don't end on an open string, it might be difficult for your fingers to move back to strumming the chords.



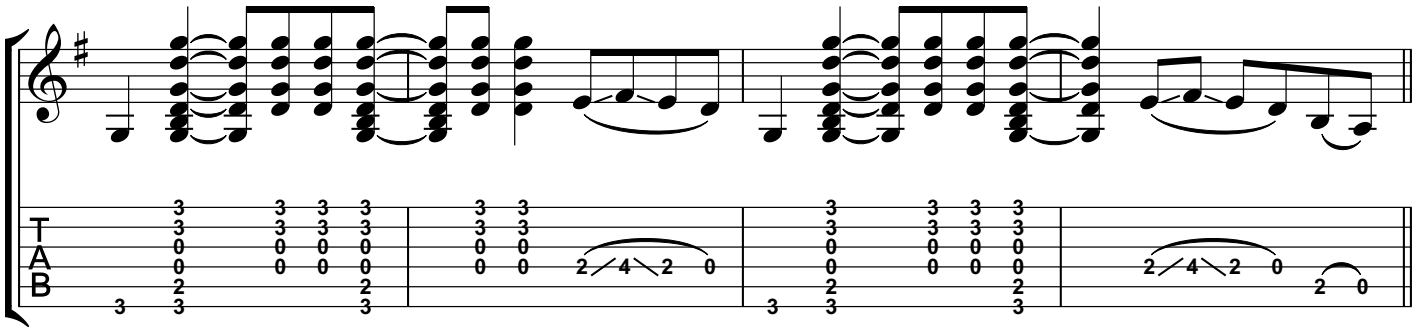
Adding Slides

Now let's look at another aspect of legato playing: slides. Here Steve is using the same notes as before but sliding in and out of them gives them a new flavor. Watch how he uses pull-offs combined with the slides to make one fluid melody out of these lines.



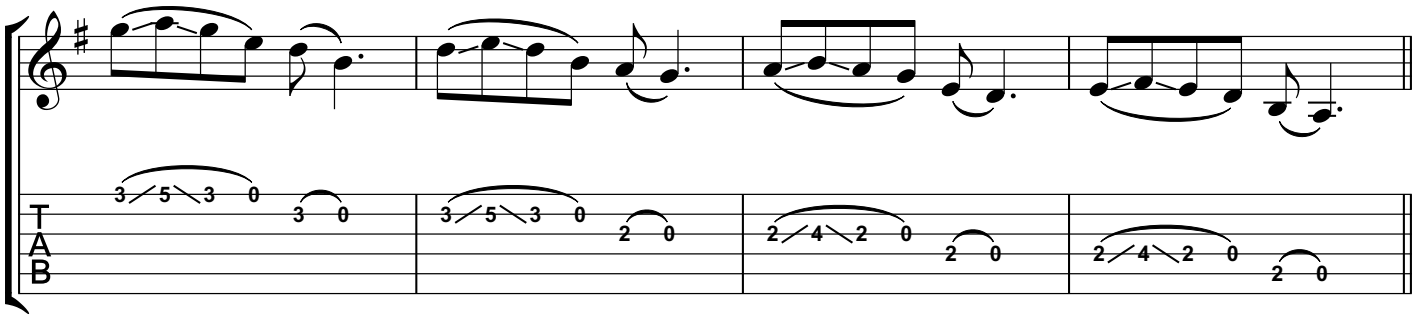
Adding Slides - Ex. 2

Same idea, different strings. The 4th fret of the 4th string is technically not a note of our pentatonic scale but it's fits in the G major scale and has a nice sound to it.



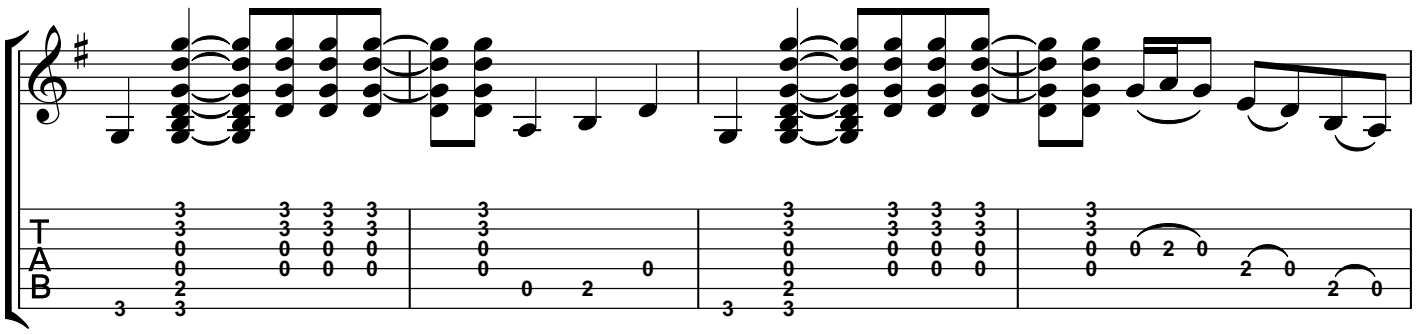
Adding Slides - Ex. 3

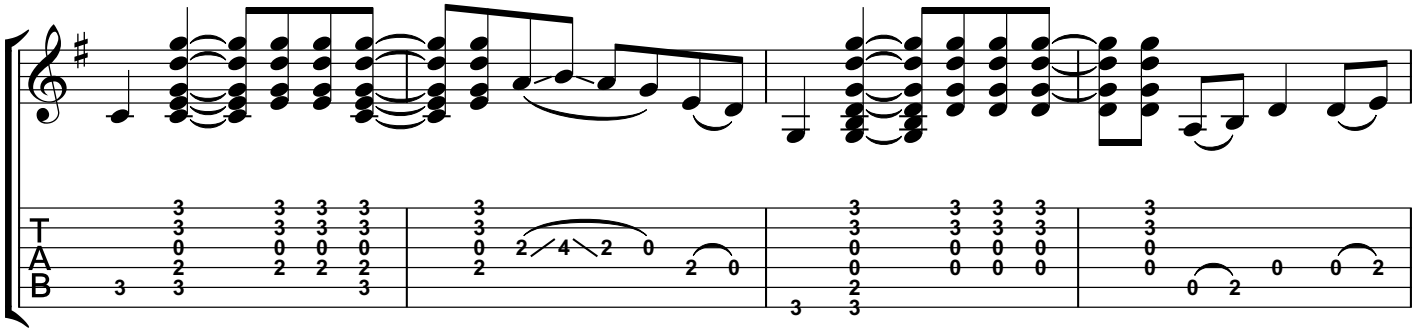
You could use any of these shapes to accent your strumming with slides.

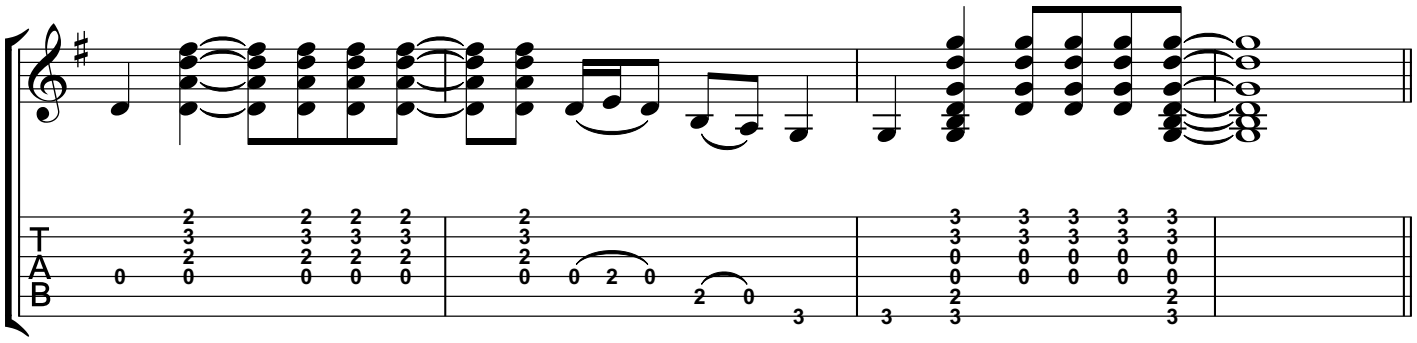


Bringing it all Together

Same idea, different strings. The 4th fret of the 4th string is technically not a note of our pentatonic scale but it's fits in the G major scale and has a nice sound to it.

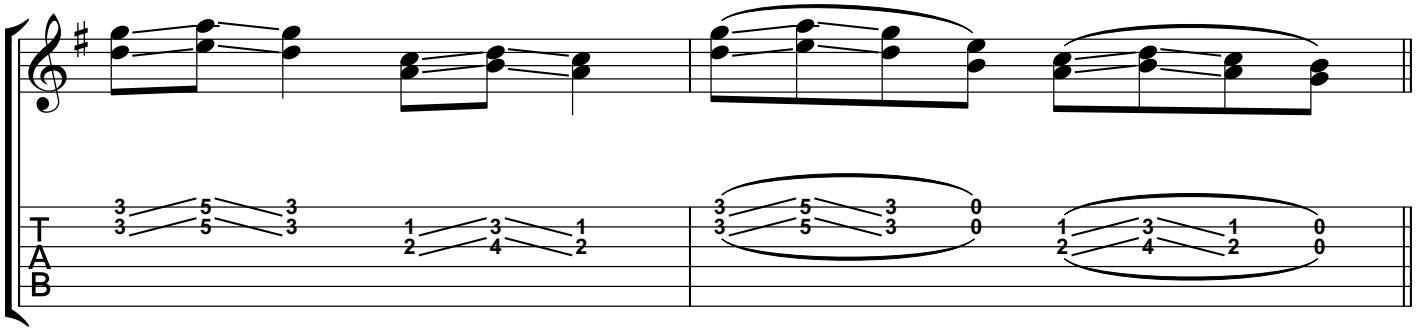






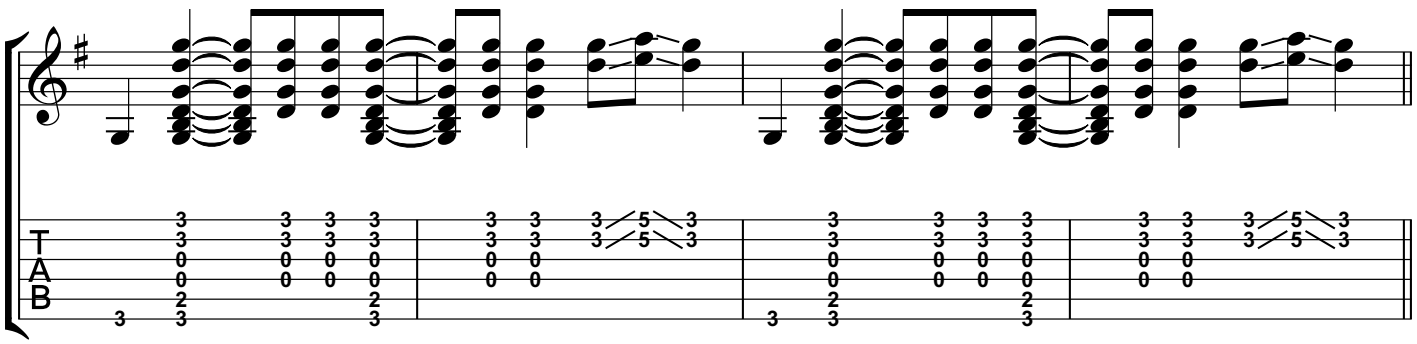
Double Stop Slides

Here are some great ways to use double stops in the context of our G major strumming. We can even pull off both strings to the open strings as done in the second measure of this example.



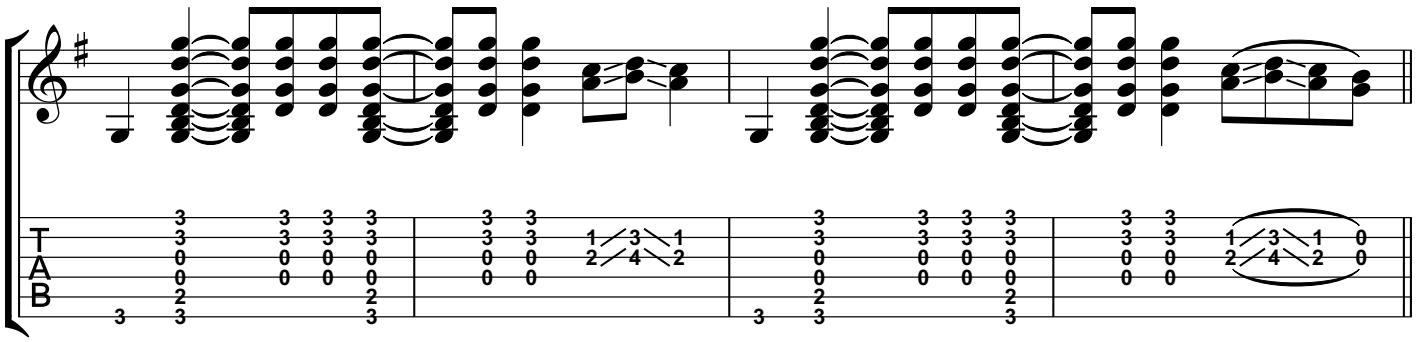
Double Stop Slides - Ex. 1

Using our first finger to play these slides in the middle of strumming a G chord seems unreasonable. Why not use our 3rd and 4th fingers, which are already there fretting the right notes?



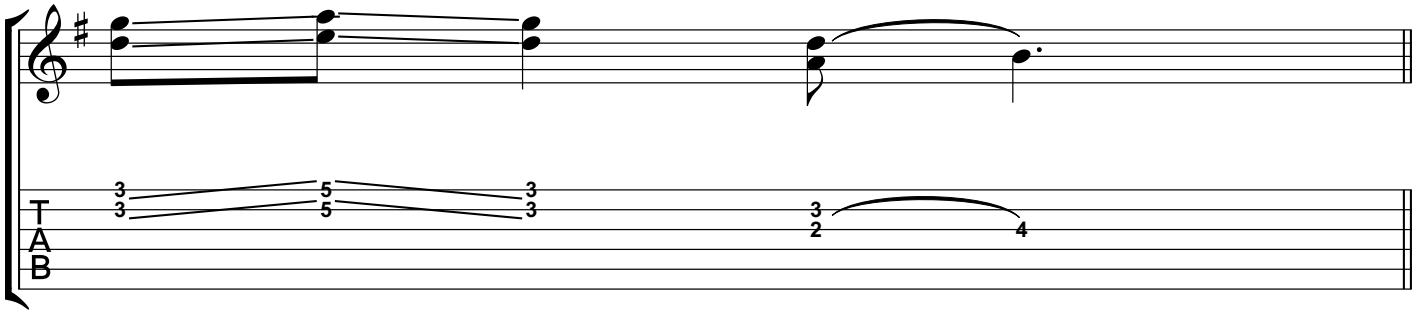
Double Stop Slides - Ex. 2

Now let's use the 2nd and 3rd string figure. Add the pull-offs as well for more variation.

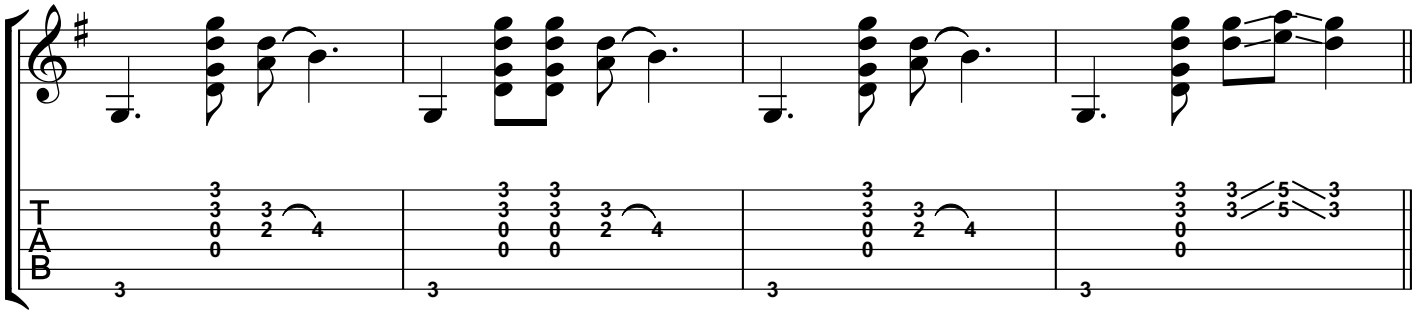


Double Stop Slides and Hammer-Ons

Here's another lick that fits in with the rest. Combining our slide with a bit of hammer-on technique gives us a lick that has a kind of Jimi Hendrix/Stevie Ray feeling to it. These don't necessarily need to be played at the same time with each other, as shown in the example below.

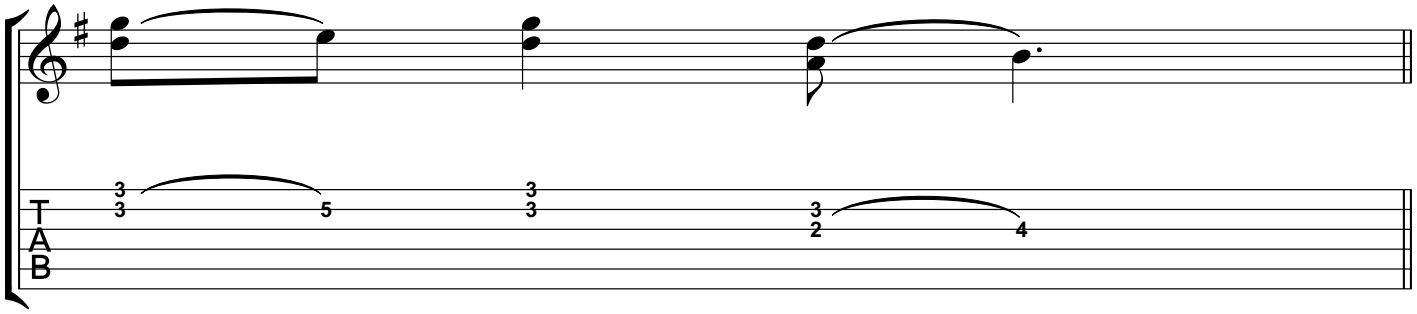


Double Stop Slides and Hammer-Ons - Ex. 1

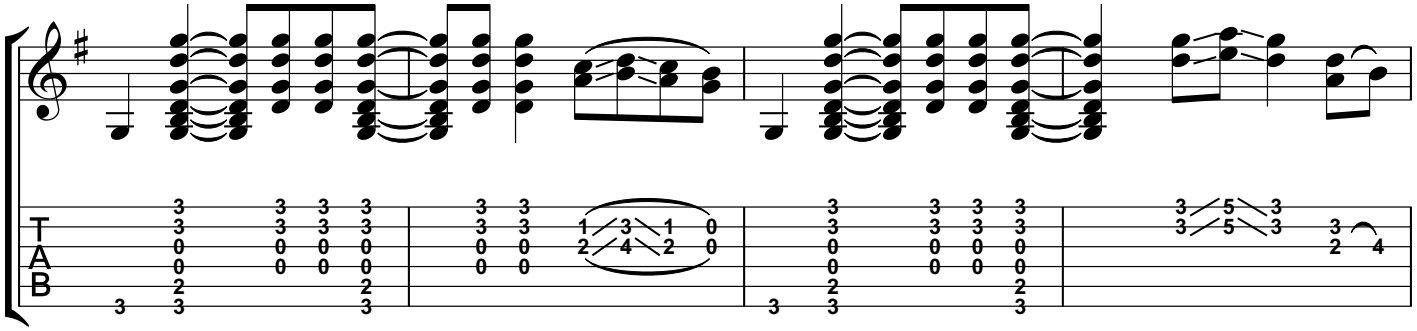


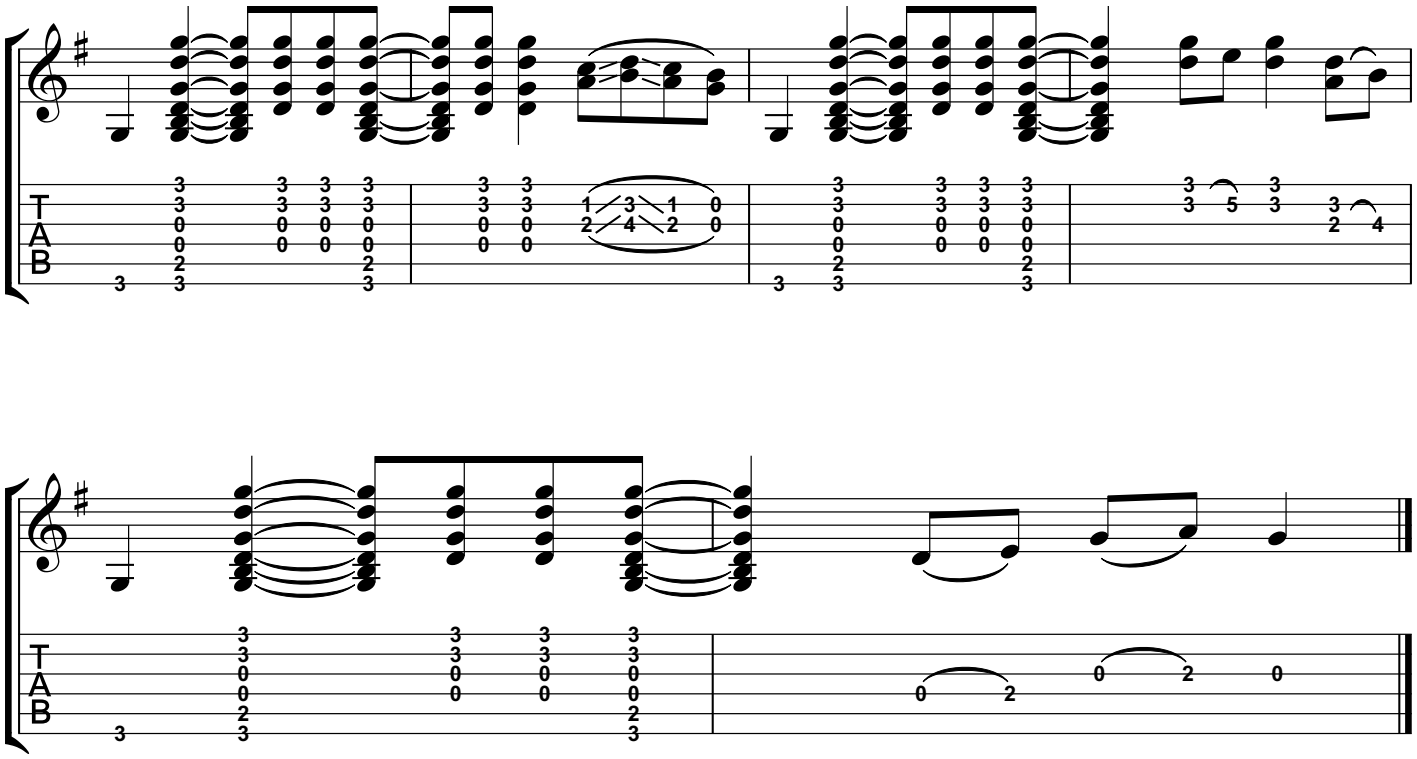
Double Stop Slides and Hammer-Ons 2

In this second lick we skip the sliding and apply a similar lick to the 2st and 2nd strings as we played previously on the 2nd and 3rd strings. This one string hammer-on on a double stop lick is very common in blues, country, pop, and bluegrass genres.



Double Stop Slides and Hammer-Ons - Ex. 2





Final Words

Remember, the goal is not for you to memorize every pattern and play them exactly as presented here by us. Learn the licks, understand the concepts, and use them then explore and play around until you find the ideas that you'd most like to incorporate into your playing and your sound.