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The 12-Bar-Blues

Basic Knowledge

The “normal“ 12-Bar-Blues consists of 3 chords, called the I, IV and V-Chord.

The I-Chord is always the key note (e.g. when we play a Blues in E, the I-Chord is an E) and we can count out the other two ones from this I-Chord on using the scale.

Here we have the scale: C D E F G A B (when we count further we´d start from the C again). We already know the I-Chord (it´s always the note the song is in) and we count out the IV and V chord with our scale.

E.g.: For a Blues in E, the I-Chord is an E, so that the IV and V chords would be an A and a B.

Just count out the I, IV and V chord with the scale. We start to count from the I-Chord, in our example it´s the E.

The Scale: C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C....

Start to count on the I-Chord of your 12-Bar-Blues (in the key of E, start at the E)

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
E F G A B

With this method we can always count out the I, IV and V chord with the scale!

Examples of several 12-Bar-Blues songs

Keytone C:	I=C	IV=F	V=G
Keytone D:	I=D	IV=G	V=A
Keytone E:	I=E	IV=A	V=B
Keytone G:	I=G	IV=C	V=D
Keytone A:	I=A	IV=D	V=E



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The 12-Bar-Blues

The normal 12-Bar-Blues has 12 Bars. Here we have an example in the key of E.

Bars:	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
Chord:	I	I	I	I	IV	IV	I	I	V	IV	I	I
E.g. E:	E	E	E	E	A	A	E	E	B	A	E	E

You see that we play 4 bars of the I-Chord, 2 bars of the IV-Chord, 2 bars of the I-Chord, then 1 bar of the V-Chord, 1 bar of the IV-Chord and two bars of the I-Chord. This structure is always the same in the “normal” 12-Bar-Blues

But as you see, we play 2 bars of the I-Chord at the end and 4 bars of the I-Chord again at the beginning. This would be 6 bars of the same chord and that’d sound a little bit boring. That’s why we have the so-called “Quick-Change-Blues”.

The Quick Change Blues

In the Quick-Change-Blues we only change 2 bars, the second and the last, to bring a little bit more colour to our playing.

Bar :	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
Chord:	I	IV	I	I	IV	IV	I	I	V	IV	I	V
E.g. E:	E	A	E	E	A	A	E	E	H	A	E	B

Now we’re gonna start playing the 12-Bar-Blues in the key of E. We’ll start with the standard Blues first and play the Quick-Change-Blues later.

Please download the mp3 drum loop to bring a good shuffle rhythm to your playing. It makes it more fun to practice and you have a Blues drum rhythm as foundation. Play both variations of the 12-Bar-Blues we’ve learned before and notice the difference in the sound.

