

1. 12-Bar Blues - Understanding the Nashville Number System

This 12-Bar Blues pattern is not defined by the chords you play, but by the relationship between them. The Nashville Number System allows us to see the underlying structure of this pattern:

C	C	C	C
F	F	C	C
G7	F	C	C - G7 -

Let's look **the scale of this key** of C:

C D E F G A B

Next, let's add a number that corresponds to its place in the scale, using Roman numerals:

C D E F G A B
I II III IV V VI VII

Finally, we'll replace the letters of the chords with the Roman numerals:

I	I	I	I
IV	IV	I	I
V	IV	I	I - V7 -

As we move the Blues from one key to the next, we can keep in mind that we need the I chord ("one"), the IV chord ("four") and the V7 ("five-seven") chords of each key. We find them by counting up the scale, beginning with the root chord of the key, itself. (See Transposing Cheat Sheet for more practice!)

2. Adding Variations to the 12-Bar Blues

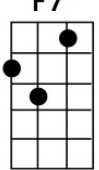
Because there's so much repetition in this pattern, it's nice to add some variations to help you mark each group of bars as you move through. Let's use Sweet Home Chicago as an example:

Verse:

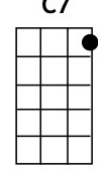
	C	C	
	C	C	
	Come on!...	Baby don't you want to go?	
	F	F	
	Come on!...	Baby don't you want to go?	
	G7	F	C C* G7*
	Back from the land of California to my sweet home Chi-ca-go		

7-Chord Additions

F7




C7



C ---	C ---	C ---	C7 ---
F ---	F7 ---	C ---	C7 ---
G7 ---	F ---	C ---	C - G7 -

Bar 2: Quick Change



C ---	F ---	C ---	C7 ---
F ---	F7 ---	C ---	C7 ---
G7 ---	F ---	C ---	C - G7 -

Verse:

	C	F	
	C	C7	
	Come on!...	Baby don't you want to go?	
	F	F	
	Come on!...	Baby don't you want to go?	
	G7	F	C C* G7*
	Back from the land of California to my sweet home Chi-ca-go		

Sweet Home Chicago (with Variations)

Blues Standard - First recorded by Robert Johnson (1936)

Standard time - Each chord = 4 strums, * = 2 strums, /=1 strum hold - Swing strum

C ---	F ---	C ---	C7 ---
F ---	F7 ---	C ---	C7 ---
G7 ---	F ---	C ---	C - G7 -

Intro: One time through the 12-bar pattern

Verse:

C	F	C	C	
Come on!... Baby don't you want to go?				
F	F	C	C	
Come on!... Baby don't you want to go?				
G7	F	C	C*	G7*
Back from the land of California to my sweet home Chi-ca-go				

Repeat Verse

Break:

C/	C/			
Two and two is four, four and four is eight				
C/	C			
Come on darlin', now you're gonna make me late				
F	F	C	C	
My darlin' please!... Baby don't you want to go?				
G7	F	C	C*	G7*
Back from the land of California to my sweet home Chi-ca-go				

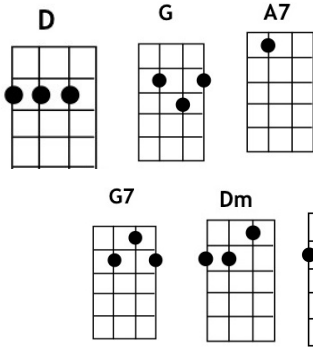
Instrumental: One verse without lyrics

Verse:

C	C	C	C	
Come on!... Baby don't you want to go?				
F	F	C	C	
Come on!... Baby don't you want to go?				
G7	F	C	End on C	
Outro: Back from the land of California to my sweet home Chi-ca-go				

St. Louis Blues (Full)

Originally by W.C. Handy / Lyrics as performed by Billie Holliday



12-Bar Blues in D with Variations:

D ---	G ---	D ---	D7 ---
G ---	G7 ---	D ---	D7 ---
A7 ---	G ---	D ---	D - A7 -

Each chord = 4 beats, except * = 2 beats - Swing strum

Intro: A7 G D D* A7*

D G D D7
 I hate to see that evening sun go down
 G G7 D D7
 I hate to see that evening sun go down
 A7 G D D* A7*
 'Cause, my baby... he's gone left this town
 D G D D7
 If I'm feelin' tomorrow like I feel to - day
 G G7 D D7
 If I'm feelin' tomorrow like I feel to - day
 A7 G D D* A7*
 I'll pack my truck and make my get-a-way

Bridge: Dm Dm A7 A7
 St. Louis woman with her diamond ring
 A7 A7 Dm Dm
 Pulls that man a-round by her apron string
 Dm Dm A7 A7
 If it wasn't for powder and her store-bought hair
 A7 A7 Dm A7
 That man I love wouldn't have gone no-where, no - where

D G D D7
 I got the St. Louis blues, blue as I can be
 G G7 D D7
 That man's got a heart like a rock cast in the sea
 A7 G D End on D7
 Or else he wouldn't have gone so far from me

8-Bar Blues: Trouble in Mind

Traditional, with lyrics and arrangement by Richard M. Jones (1924)

First recorded by Thelma La Vizzo (1924) and Bertha "Chippie" Hill (1926) - my personal favorite recording is by Nina Simone (1960)

Swing strum:				
1	+	2	+	3
↓		↓	↑	↓
D		D	U D	U D
			+	4
			↑	↓
			U D	U (D)

Basic 8-Bar Blues:

C	G7	C	F
C	G7	C	C - G7 -

Standard time - Each chord = 4 beats - Slow swing strum

C G7 C F

V1: Trouble in mind ... I'm blue, but I won't be blue al-ways

C G7 C C* G7*

The sun's gonna shine ... in my back door someday

V2: I'm all a-lone at mid-night, and the lamps are burning low

Never had so much trouble ___ in my life be-fore ___

V3: Trouble in mind, I'm blue, oh I almost lost my mind

Sometimes I feel like livin', ___ sometimes I feel like dyin' ___

Repeat Verse 1 ... End on C

16-Bar Blues: Careless Love

Traditional turned Blues Standard - Made famous by Bessie Smith (1925) - Our arrangement is after the simpler Country Blues progression of Big Bill Broonzy (1956)

The image shows five guitar chord diagrams: A (open strings, 2nd fret on 4th string), A7 (open strings, 2nd fret on 4th string, 7th fret on 7th string), D (2nd fret on 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th strings), Dm (2nd fret on 1st, 2nd, and 3rd strings), and E7 (open strings, 7th fret on 2nd string, 9th fret on 4th string). To the right is a 'Swing strum' diagram for a 4-beat measure: Beat 1: D (down); Beat 2: D (down); Beat 3: U D (up then down); Beat 4: U D (up then down); Beat 5: U (D) (up then down).

Standard time - Each chord = 4 beats, except * = 2 beats - Swing strum

A	E7	A	A
A	A	A	E7
A	A7	D	Dm
A	E7	A	A

Chorus: Love, oh love, oh careless love ____
Love, oh love, oh careless love ____
Love, oh love, oh care - less love
 Don't you see what care-less love will do? ____

V1: Now you see what careless love will do (x3)
 Make you love someone that don't love you

Chorus

V2: You robbed me of my silver and my gold (x3)
 But I'll be damned if you rob me of my soul

Chorus