

How To Read Guitar TAB

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This PDF will teach you how to read and write guitar Tabs.

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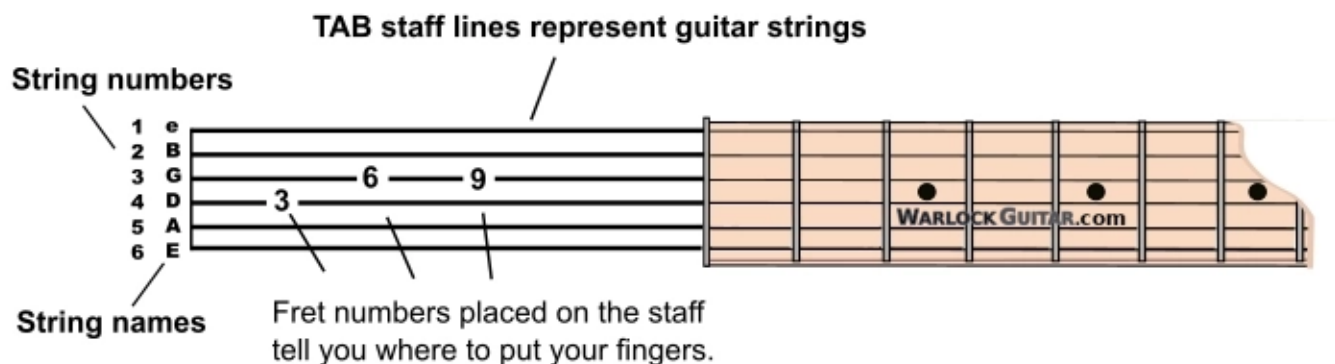
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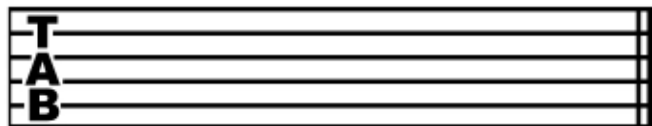
What is Guitar Tab?

Guitar Tab is a clever invention that lets people easily communicate music written for guitar.

Tab is actually an abbreviation for the word **tablature**. Tablature is a shorthand for musical notation that indicates guitar fingering and other mechanics used to play a piece of music. Tab consists of a staff (lines and spaces) that mimic the strings of a guitar as well as various other symbols.



The word **TAB** is placed at the start of a TAB staff so it is not confused with regular music notation..



Benefits of Guitar Tab?

There are quite a few benefits to using guitar Tab.

- It's easy to learn.
- Tab is easier to read and write compared to standard music notation.
- If done right, Tab can show the timing and the technique used to play guitar music.
- It's a great learning tool.
- It's a fast way to communicate or archive musical ideas.

Guitar Tab symbols help communicate technique

Tab symbols help convey important messages to the reader about the techniques used to play particular notes.

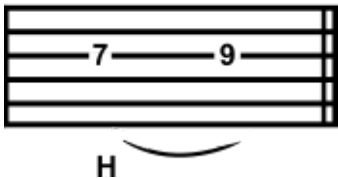
While there are quite a few commonly used symbols, there is no set standard when it comes writing guitar Tab. You should always look for a legend provided by the Tab author for custom symbols he/she may have used.

Tab symbols and definitions

Here are some of the most used Tab symbols.

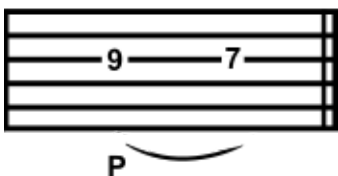
Hammer on - While holding the 7th fret with the first finger, slam down another finger on to fret 9 without picking.

Hammer on

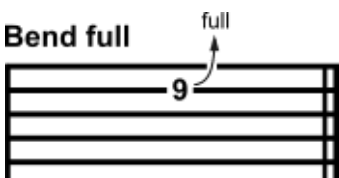


Pull off - Opposite of a hammer on, a pull off lifts one finger to a held fretted note behind it causing it to ring.

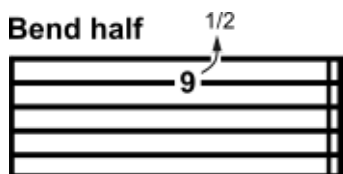
Pull off



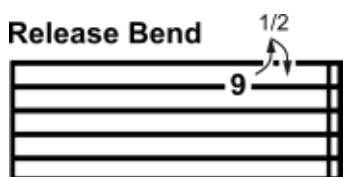
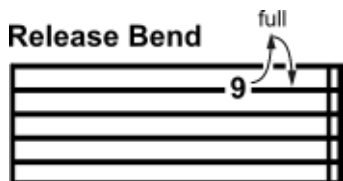
Bend (full) - Note is picked then bent upward to a pitch a whole step higher.



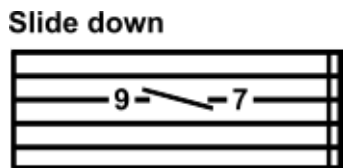
Bend (1/2) - Note is picked then bent upward a 1/2 step higher in pitch.



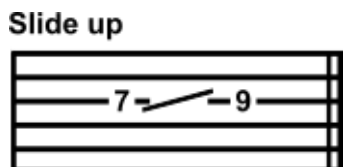
Release Bend full and half - Starting from a pre-bent position a full or half pitch higher, the note is then picked and brought down to normal position.



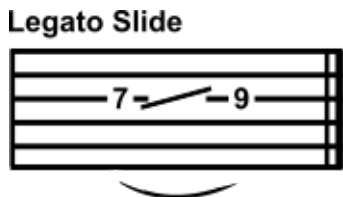
Slide down - Pick the first note then slide your finger to the next note in the direction towards your head stock.



Slide up - Pick the first note then slide your finger to the next note in the direction towards the guitar body.

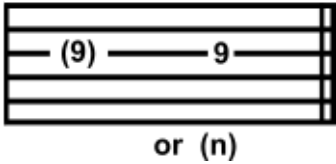


Legato slide - Slide from one note to the other without picking.



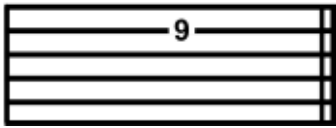
Ghost note - An audible note that is not picked and whose sound may be caused by the vibration of other notes.

Ghost note



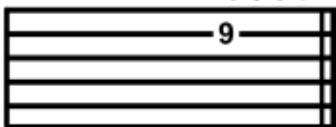
Vibrato - Rapid bend and release of a string that causes the pitch of the note to fluctuate.

Vibrato



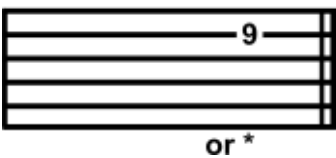
Wide Vibrato - Rapid bend and release of a string that causes the pitch of the note to fluctuate but with wider bends than normal vibrato.

Wide vibrato



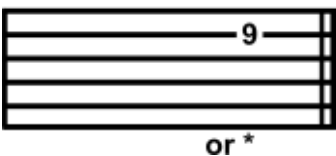
Pinched harmonic - A pinched harmonic is caused by the pick or picking hand coming into contact with a ringing string. This usually generates a high pitched squealing harmonic.

Pinched harm. PH



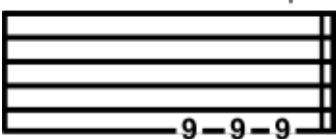
Natural harmonic - A natural harmonic is the bell like sounds you get when lightly touching the strings above the fret then playing the string.

Natural harm. NH



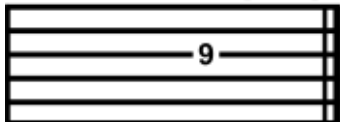
Palm mute - The string is muted using the meat of the picking hand near the bridge, pickups or sound hole.

Palm mute PM - - |



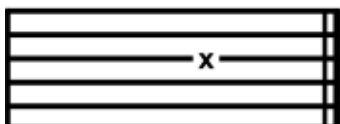
Let ring - Keep the note ringing until the end of the dashed line.

Let ring Let ring - - -|



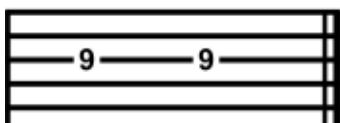
Dead note - A note that is muted using the fretting hand.

Dead note



Down stroke - Pick the indicated note or chord downward towards the floor.

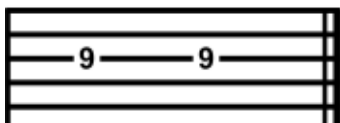
Down stroke



▮ or ▴

Up stroke - Pick the indicated note or chord upward towards the sky.

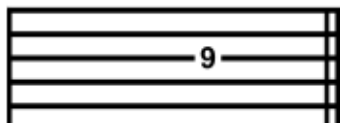
Up stroke



▽ or ▾

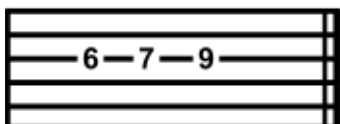
Tapping - Indicates a note or series of notes where a finger of the picking hand "taps" on the fretboard to produce the sound at the desired fret number.

Tapping T



Fingering - Shows the finger number of the fretting hand used to play the note.

Fingering



1 2 4

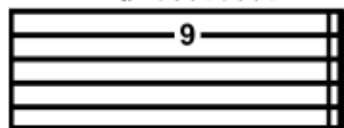
Pick scrape - The guitar pick is dragged down the length of the string.

Pick scrape



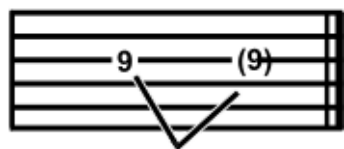
Trill - Rapid hammer on and pull offs between two notes.

Trill



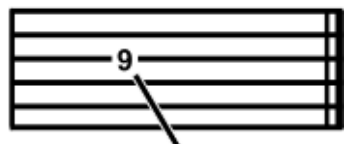
Tremolo bar dip - Tremolo / whammy bar is quickly depressed then returned back to note pitch.

Tremolo bar dip



Tremolo bar dive - Tremolo / whammy bar is depressed completely.

Tremolo bar dive



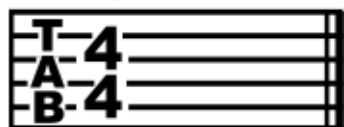
Note Duration - Note duration is not always displayed in Tab but when it is then it is usually placed under the staff.

Note duration



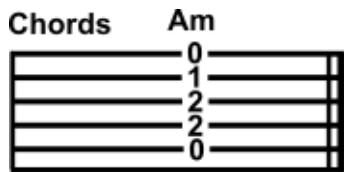
Time Signature - Along with note duration, Tab can also show a time signature. In this case the time signature indicates 4 beats per bar with quarter notes getting the beat.

Time signature



Guitar Chord Tabs

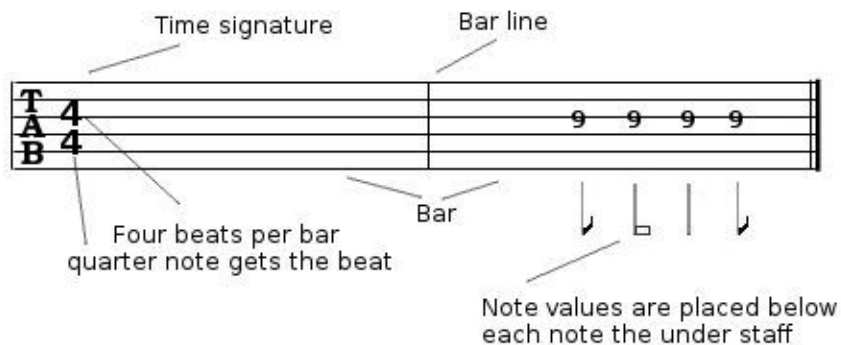
Chords are written in Tab with the fret numbers stacked on top of each other. Stacked numbers mean the fretted notes are played simultaneously. It's also helpful to write the chord symbol above it but you don't have to.



TAB symbols for guitar rhythm / timing

Just about any symbol used in regular music notation can be adapted for use in TAB. Again there really is no standard in use for TAB but the symbols below are a good idea of what can be accomplished. I only show whole, half, quarter, eighth and sixteenth note values with TAB to notation comparison below so you can get the idea.

Guitar TAB timing / rhythm example



Note values in TAB

□ = A whole note

┌ = A half note

| = A quarter note

└ = Eighth note

┌┐ = two beamed eighth notes

└└ = sixteenth note

└└└ = two beamed sixteenth notes

Note values in standard notation

● = Whole note lasts for 4 beats counted as 1234

◡ = Half note lasts for 2 beats counted as 1 2

♩ = Quarter note lasts for 1 beat counted as 1

♪ = Eighth note lasts for 1/2 a beat



♫ = Sixteenth note lasts for 1/4 a beat



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Rest values

— = whole or half note rest when placed above or below a line

⏏ = quarter note rest

⏏ = sixteenth note rest - can be stacked to make 32nd and 64th note rests

Write Your Own Tab

How many times have you came up with a cool guitar riff or lick only to find that you have forgotten it the next day? My advice to you is write down everything that you want to remember. Soon you will have a library of licks.

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