

METAL RIFFS AND LICKS

The Ultimate Metal Guitar Practice Guide V3

BOOK 🤘 VIDEOS 🤘 TABS 🤘



by Jason Stallworth

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And...**Keep it Metal.**

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Intro: Welcome to Metal Riffs and Licks

Welcome to Metal Riffs and Licks. Thank you for being part of my world of metal guitar. It's an honor to be part of your musical journey.

Now, I'll be honest—I've got a hidden agenda. (Well... not so hidden now.)

I don't want you just to learn more riffs and licks. I want you to unlock what's already inside you and develop your **own signature style** of playing.

Because at the end of the day, that's the most important thing you can do as a musician—whether you're just starting out, playing for the love of it, gigging regularly, or a professional. You have something unique to say through your guitar. And I'm here to help you bring that out.

That's exciting, right?

Sure, it's fun (and important) to learn riffs from your favorite songs—we all start that way. But if that's all you do, you're missing out on what really makes metal special: **your voice** as a guitarist.

That's why you'll often hear me say in my YouTube videos, courses, and lessons:

Learn the riffs and licks—but don't stop there. Make them your own.

When you do that, you're not just repeating something cool—you're creating something that's *you*. Add notes. Take some away. Change the rhythm. Play it in a different key. Move it to another place on the fretboard. There are no rules here—only opportunities to explore.

You don't need permission to be creative. Give yourself the freedom to play with confidence and express who you really are.

So I want you to think about this as you're going through the techniques, riffs, and licks in this book.

We'll start by mastering the fundamentals. Then we'll build on them.

By the end of this guide, you'll have the tools, the mindset, and the riffs to start making progress on metal guitar — and sounding like **you** while doing it.

Let's get started.

Chapter 1: Fundamentals of Metal Guitar

 **Video Lesson:** [Chapter 1: Fundamentals](#)

If you're just getting into metal guitar—or picking it back up after a long break—this chapter is for you.

Even if you've been playing for a while, this can be a powerful refresher. Every great guitarist circles back to the fundamentals because they're what everything else is built on.

In this section, we'll cover four essential techniques for metal guitar:

- Power chords
- Palm muting
- Picking (down-picking and alternate picking)
- Single-note riffs

Sure, there's more to explore—including a bit of theory—but **this is where your metal foundation begins.**

Why Start Here?

A lot of guitarists want to jump straight into shredding.
But here's the problem with that:

You can have a metal song without a solo—
But you *can't* have one without strong riffs and rhythm.

That's the **backbone** of metal. These aren't just “beginner techniques”—they're the **building blocks** for every riff you'll ever learn or write.

So before we dive into licks and leads later on, let's get your rhythm chops locked in.

Power Chords

Power chords are powerful. Yes, pun intended. And they're everywhere in metal—and they're surprisingly simple.

Each one is made of just two notes played together:

- The **root note**
- The **5th note** (played on the next string, two frets higher)

The easiest way to remember this:
There's a fret between the two notes.

Let's start with power chords that use open strings:

- **E Power Chord:**
 - Open low E string (root note)
 - 2nd fret of the A string (B = 5th note)
 - There's one fret (a whole step) between the E and B notes

You can use the same shape starting on the A string to play an A power chord and the D string to play a D power chord.

What about power chords that don't start on open strings?

Let's say you want to play a G power chord. Here's what you'd do:

- Place your first finger on the 3rd fret of the E string
- Place your ring (or pinky) finger on the 5th fret of the A string
- Now you've got a **G power chord** (also known as G5)

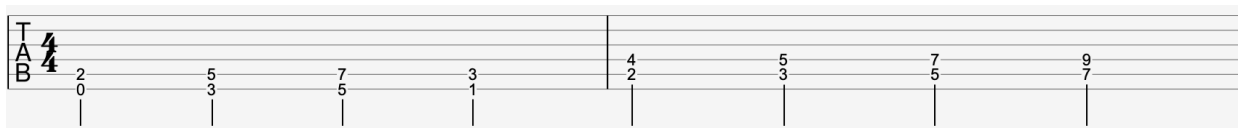
⚡ **Pro tip:** Power chords are often written as "**G5**" or "**E5**" because they're built from the root and the 5th note. More to come on this in the theory section.

You can move this shape **anywhere along the low E, A, or D strings**.
Once you know one, you know them all.

And because the 5th note is the same in both major and minor scales, power chords work in almost any context—they're **extremely versatile**,

Here are some examples:

From left to right: E, G, A, F | B, C, D, E



Which Finger Should You Use?

You might see some players use their ring finger for the 5th note, and others use their pinky. There's no right or wrong answer—**go with what feels comfortable** for your hand and technique.

But keep this in mind:

If you're going to be moving that second note around (adding variations to your power chords), your finger choice might affect how easily you can shift. We'll dive deeper into that in the next chapter, Metal Riffs.

Palm Muting

Palm muting is what gives metal riffs that tight, heavy “**chug**.”

It's one of the most recognizable and defining sounds of metal—and let's be real, it's probably what got you hooked on metal in the first place.

It creates that aggressive percussive punch, especially when paired with power chords and open notes.

Here's how to do it:

1. Rest the edge of your picking hand lightly on the strings—**right where the strings meet the bridge** of your guitar.
2. Apply **just enough pressure** to mute the strings slightly—not fully.
3. Pick in a downward motion (start slow and listen to how it sounds).

Start with a simple E power chord (open low E + 2nd fret on the A string), and move the palm of your hand slightly forward or back to find the sweet spot.

As our hands come in different sizes and guitars can differ, play around with the positioning until you hear the sound you like.

You can palm mute:

- **Single notes** (great for that “chainsaw” effect)
- **Full power chords**
- **Riffs that mix muted and open notes** for dynamic contrast

Play Around With Pressure

- A **heavier mute** gives you a tighter, more percussive sound
Too much pressure, though, and you'll bend your notes out of tune. So take some time to find that sweet spot that gives you power *and* precision.
 - A **lighter mute** gives you more clarity and sustain
-

You can also palm mute while alternate picking, which gives you that classic fast, tight metal rhythm sound. **This combo is beneficial for speed riffs and darker styles like thrash, death, melodic death, and black metal styles.**

Try mixing it up: mute part of a riff, then let a few chords ring out. This adds tension and release—and helps your riffs hit harder.

Picking Techniques

There are two essential picking methods to master in metal:

- **Down-picking**
- **Alternate picking**

You'll use both constantly—sometimes even within the same riff.

Let's break them down:

- **Down-picking:** You pick every note with a downward stroke. This gives you that tight, punchy, aggressive sound that metal is known for.
- **Alternate picking:** You pick **down, then up**, in a consistent back-and-forth motion. This allows you to play faster, more fluidly—especially helpful for single-note riffs and more technical playing.

Most riffs you start out with will be played using downstrokes. But here's the deal...

Don't wait to learn alternate picking.

Personal Note

I made the HUGE mistake of avoiding alternate picking for almost a year when I started playing.

It felt awkward—like trying to write with my non-dominant hand—because I had trained my muscles to only pick one way.

It took me way longer than it should've to feel comfortable switching between down and alternate picking.

So learn from my mistake: **start practicing both now.**

The better you get at both—and switching between them—the more confident and creative you'll be.

Dialing In Your Technique

As you refine your picking technique, you might notice something interesting...

- With **down-picking**, your pick naturally angles a bit toward the **bridge** (toward your volume knob).
- With **alternate picking**, your pick may tilt slightly toward the **neck**.

Don't overthink this or try to force anything—it's just something to be aware of. These slight angles are natural and can actually help your technique feel smoother and more controlled.

Another tip:

Try not to dig in too hard with your picking hand. You might feel like you need to attack the strings with force because... well, **it's metal**.

But **control** beats force every time.

I personally use a lighter touch—even when playing aggressive riffs—and it's helped me stay accurate, consistent, and avoid tension or fatigue over long sessions.

That doesn't mean *you* have to play that way. Some players thrive with a heavy hand.

As always, test both styles and find what **works best for you**.

Single-Note Riffs

These are the riffs that bury themselves deep in your brain.

You might forget where you put your keys... but you'll never forget that one riff that made you crank your gain to 11.

Single-note riffs give a song its **melody, movement, and mood**.

They're played one note at a time—picked in sequence to form a catchy, often unforgettable melody.

Think:

- *Iron Man* by Black Sabbath
- *Master of Puppets* by Metallica
- *Breaking the Law* by Judas Priest

While some riffs are more complex than others, even simple riffs can be iconic and powerful.

Single-note riffs can:

- Fill space between power chords
 - Build full melodies and hook lines
 - Create transitions between parts of a song (like from verse to chorus)
 - Add tension in intros or bring closure in outros
 - Or just *be* the core of the entire song
-

When you combine single-note riffs with **palm muting**, **power chords**, and **tight picking technique**, you've got the recipe for truly heavy, expressive rhythm playing.

And even better—once you understand how riffs are built, you can start creating your own.

There are some basic connections between riffs, chords, and progressions (we'll cover that later in the theory section). But for now, focus on nailing down these fundamental concepts and listening closely to how great riffs move.

Fundamental Riffs to Learn

This is where it gets epic.

Now that you've learned the techniques, it's time to **put them into practice**. In this section, you'll play through a series of simple metal riffs and exercises designed to bring everything together.

***Remember, there's a video that goes with all of this: [Chapter 1: Fundamentals](#)

Riff 1: Master of Chug

This is a great riff to start with because it combines power chords and palm muting, the ultimate core of metal guitar.

Focus on tight palm mutes and a smooth transition between the palm-muted notes and power chords.

Riff 1: Master of Chug ♩ = 141

P.M. -----|

T
A
B

2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 5 3

P.M. -----|

T
A
B

4 2 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 3 1

Riff 2: Power Chord Overload

More than just playing a simple power chord, you're now playing several and in different places throughout the fretboard. This gets you moving around more, so you're not stuck in one place.

Focus on your accuracy as you move these chords around and the timing of the palm-muted notes between these chords.

Riff 2: Power Chord Overload ♩ = 137

P.M. -----|

T
A
B

2 0 2 0 0 0 10 8 9 7 2 0 0 0 5 3

P.M. -----|

T
A
B

4 2 2 0 0 0 5 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

P.M. -----|

Riff 3: Riff of Darkness

Now you're getting into playing single-note riffs, which gives you the melody of the song, and it's that part that gets stuck in your head.

Focus on making each note count and building confidence in playing these single-note riffs. This comes with repetition and exploring beyond the notes to make it your own.

Riff 3: Riff of Darkness ♩ = 131

P.M. -----| P.M. -----|

TAB

2 0 0 0 5 0 0 7 (7) 8 ⑦

└─┘ └─┘ └─┘ └─┘ └─┘

P.M. -----| P.M. -----|

TAB

2 0 0 0 2 0 0 3 (3) 2 ③

└─┘ └─┘ └─┘ └─┘ └─┘

Riff 4: Half Stacked

Alternate picking can be a different beast than downpicking. But it's worth nailing down this technique sooner than later, as it will allow you to play some fast, killer riffs.

Focus on your timing in alternate picking the notes. You can slow this down if you feel the need to, but ultimately, you want to get that rhythmic motion down with your picking hand.

[illegible]

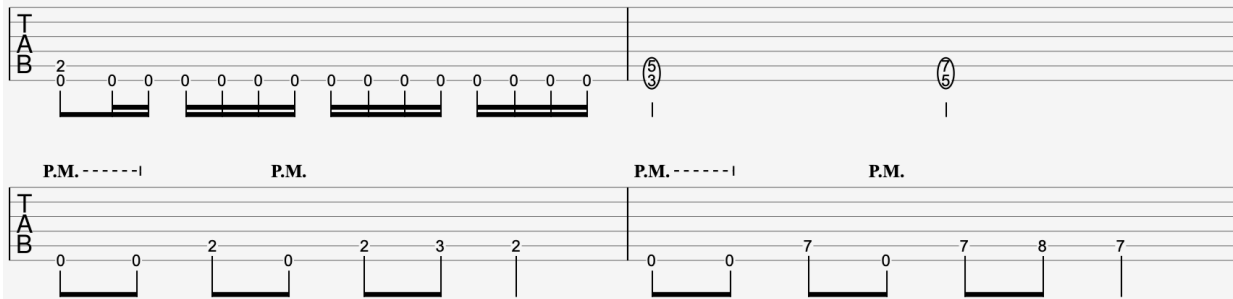
Riff 5: Full Tank

This riff takes you to the next level of riffing as you combine all of the techniques you've learned up to this point into one riff.

Focus on each section at a time and break this down into pieces if that helps. The goal here is to have smooth transitions between these techniques so that it becomes second nature.

Riff 5: Full Tank ♩ = 150

P.M. -----



Make These Riffs Your Own

Now that you've played through all five riffs, here's where the fun really starts.

- Add or remove notes
- Change the picking pattern
- Shift it to a different key or fretboard position
- Experiment with tempo or rhythm

There's no right or wrong way to do it. The more you tweak and explore, the more you start shaping your **own signature style**—and that's the real win here.

Chapter 2: Metal Riffs

 **Video Lesson:** [Chapter 2: Metal Riffs](#)

Alright. You've mastered the fundamentals. Now we're entering the deeper depths of metal guitar. Welcome to the world of **Metal Riffs**—where your rhythm playing goes to the next level and you grow as a guitarist.

As I mentioned in the Fundamentals chapter, rhythm playing is what holds metal together. Yes, solos are cool (and we'll get to them soon). But remember:

- You can have a killer song *without* a guitar solo.
- You can't have one without rhythm.

Sure, songs like *Eruption* by Van Halen or *Nagasake* by Rex Carroll are cool. But are you listening to an hour of straight soloing on repeat? Probably not.

What You'll Learn in This Chapter:

We're going beyond the basics and building out more creative, aggressive, and expressive riffs using a combination of techniques:

- **Single-note riffing**
- **Power chord variations and inversions**
- **Hammer-ons & pull-offs**
- **Gallop**
- **Tremolo picking**

These riffs are a step up—not just in speed, but in **feel**, **creativity**, and **technique**. And some will be played at faster BPMs (beats per minute), so be ready to crank it up in every way.

But remember...

A fast riff isn't automatically a *good* riff.
Sometimes it's the simpler grooves that hit the hardest.

My favorite riffs are the ones that **breathe**—where you're mixing intensity with dynamics. That's what keeps the listener hooked.

Riffing (Single-Note Riffs)

This chapter kicks up the intensity from what we covered earlier. Here's what to expect:

- Faster single-note runs
- More frequent string changes
- Combining **down-picking** and **alternate picking** within the same riff

This is where your rhythm skills start to sharpen big time.

Power Chord Variations & Inversions

You already know a basic power chord is root + 5th. But in this chapter, we're going beyond that:

- Play another note instead of the **5th** for endless possibilities
- Create melodies and creative rhythms with these **power chord variations**
- Even add an octave on top for extra punch

I like to call these “**powerful power chords**”—they hit harder and make your riffs sound bigger. Bonus: they're a great tool for breaking out of riff-writing slumps.

Hammer-ons & Pull-offs

These aren't just for lead guitar—they can make your rhythm riffs come alive.

- Pick a note (like the 5th fret on the A string)
- Hammer onto the 7th fret without picking again
- Then pull back off to the 5th

That's your basic **hammer-on/pull-off combo**

Galloping

One of the most iconic sounds in metal. You know it when you hear it—and now you'll know how to play it.

- It's a 3-note rhythm: **down-up-down** (or **up-down-down**, depending on the riff)
- You'll hear a quick burst of notes followed by a pause (I also call these 'quick picks')
- Try combining galloping with added down-picking notes in between for texture

This is one of my all-time favorite rhythm techniques—super addictive once you get it.

Tremolo Picking

Think black metal, melodic death metal, and some of the darker subgenres (and power metal, too). It's basically **ultra-fast alternate picking** on a single note.

- Start with one note
- Alternate picking it rapidly
- You'll feel the intensity it brings immediately

The riffs in this section will introduce some **off-the-beaten-path note choices**, too—so get ready to explore beyond the basics.

Let's Play: Metal Riffs with Tabs

Just like before, I'll be walking you through each one in the video. Use this chapter to get inspired, push your rhythm chops, and start building riffs that sound **uniquely you**.

Video Link: [Chapter 2: Metal Riffs](#)

Riff 1: In the Shadows

- **Technique:** Choppy power chords with palm muting, ending with a single note riff (and not in the typical key of Em)
- **Style:** Classic heavy metal

Riff 1: In the Shadows ♩ = 171

P.M.-----♩ P.M.-----♩ P.M.-----♩ P.M.-----♩ P.M.

TAB 4/4

P.M.-----♩ P.M.-----♩

TAB

Riff 2: Devour Forth

- **Technique:** Galloping combined with downpicking and variations of power chords
- **Style:** Heavy groove, thrash at a medium tempo

Riff 2: Devour Forth ♩ = 149

P.M.-----♩ P.M.

TAB

P.M.-----♩ P.M.

TAB

Riff 3: Thrashmore

- **Techniques:** Fast alternate picking, power chord variations, single-note riffs
- **Style:** Thrash metal, power metal

Riff 3: Thrashmore ♩ = 151

P.M. -

H P P

TAB
 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 6 6 6 6 5 5 5 5 3 5 3 0 2
 P.M. ----- 4 H P P

Riff 4: Timeless

- **Technique:** Riffs using the higher strings with plenty of power chord variations
- **Style:** Think of 80's metal bands with darker sounds like Queensryche

Riff 4: Timeless ♩ = 137

P.M. - - - - -

P.M.

P.M. - - - - -

TAB

0 0 4 2 0 4 2 2 0 0 2 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

TAB

0 0 7 5 5 7 5 5 5 5 4 3 (4) (3) 4 3 3 5 3 3 5 3

Riff 5: Bliss of Existence

- **Technique:** Variation of power chords with arpeggiated notes with single-note riffs
- **Style:** Melodic metal

Riff 5: Bliss of Existence ♩ = 144

P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

TAB

3 4 3 0 4 3 4 5 4 5 0 4 5 4

P.M.-----|

TAB

2 0 0 0 0 0 3 2 3 2 3 2 0

Riff 6: Blackened Death

- **Technique:** Tremolo picking and single-note riffs
- **Style:** Death/black metal, melodic death metal

Riff 6: Blackened Death ♩ = 163

TAB

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 3 3 3 3 2 2 2 2 6 6 6 6 5 5 5 5 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3

TAB

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 3 3 3 3 2 2 2 2 6 6 6 6 5 5 5 5 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3

Riff 7: Hetfield Meets Mustaine

- **Technique:** Galloping, downpicking between two strings, and single-note riffs
- **Style:** Thrash/heavy metal (a taste of Blackened combined with Holy Wars)

Riff 7: Hetfield Meets Mustaine ♩ = 173

P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. ----- 4

TAB

0 7 0 7 0 7 8 7 (7) 0 0 0 0 0 0

P.M. ----- 1 P.M. ----- 4 P.M. ----- 4

TAB

5 6 7 5 6 7 0 0 0 0 5 6 7 5 6 7 0 0 0 0

Pro Tip: Expand and Make these Riffs Your Own

Don't just stop at playing these riffs as written.

- Add or remove notes
- Change the tempo
- Try a different key or position on the fretboard
- Blend techniques—like galloping into tremolo, or hammer-ons between power chords

Your goal isn't just to learn riffs—it's to *create* your own riffs.

Chapter 3: Metal Licks

 **Video Lesson:** [Chapter 3: Metal Licks](#)

Now it's time to shred. But more importantly—this is where you start adding feel and personality to your playing.

Fast solos are awesome (and you'll get your share here), but let's not forget: It's not just about speed—it's about expression.

That's why I'm starting you with a more **melodic** approach. You'll still get some fast licks in here, but what's even more exciting is how these ideas help you build your own signature style and, more importantly, create a memorable solo.

This chapter is designed to meet you wherever you are—so you'll find a mix of simple, creative licks and more advanced ones. All of them are meant to be musical—not just exercises. And once you learn them, I strongly encourage you to make changes to them and make them your own.

Lead Guitar Methods You'll Use:

- Vibrato, bends, and slides
- Hammer-ons, pull-offs, and tapping
- Speed picking
- Sweep picking

You'll often use more than one of these in a single lick. They complement each other and can really elevate your creativity.

Vibrato, Bends, and Slides

These three techniques are the **soul of your solos**. They give emotion and personality to your notes. You can come up with memorable lead licks using just these.

A bend creates tension and release.

Vibrato makes the note *sing*.

Slides add movement and fluidity between notes.

Together, they're powerful tools to shape the vibe of your playing. There's no "correct" way to use these—it's all about what sounds right to *you*.

Hammer-ons, Pull-offs, & Tapping

These techniques let you do more with less effort—and sound slick while doing it.

Hammer-ons and pull-offs are great for speed and fluid motion across the fretboard.

Tapping adds a new dimension by using your picking hand to join the action. You'll often use your index or middle finger (whichever feels most natural).

There are infinite ways to use this technique—vertical, horizontal, across strings, and with slides. Once you get the hang of it, you'll see how versatile it is.

Note: Legato picking is also closely related to these techniques as you're not picking every note that's played.

Alternate / Speed Picking

You've seen alternate picking earlier—now we're kicking it up a notch.

This is all about using **tight, controlled alternate strokes** to build speed and precision. You'll use this for fast runs, picking through scales, and driving melodic lines.

Add palm muting to speed picking to give your solo that killer edge.

Sweep Picking

Sweep picking is one of the most advanced lead techniques—but I'll give you a solid place to start.

Think of it like this:

- You're "sweeping" your pick across multiple strings in one smooth motion.
- You're not individually picking each note—you're letting your pick glide.
- Usually, you're playing an arpeggio (the notes of a chord spread out).

It's like painting with your picking hand—fluid and expressive. Or 'wax on, wax off' type of thing.

A common pattern is: Downward sweep → hammer-on/pull-off in the middle → upward sweep

With enough practice, this becomes second nature—and gives your solos a pro-level edge.

Metal Licks with Tabs

This is where the fun kicks in. You'll now:

- Learn 7 licks that use everything you just saw
- Each of these licks is paired with one of the Metal Riffs from the previous chapter
- Every lick in this chapter is something you could use in an actual solo. These aren't meant to sound like boring drills—they're meant to **inspire** you.

Remember, the video lesson for this chapter is here: [Chapter 3: Metal Licks](#)

Metal Licks – The Setlist

Lick 1: Shadow Warrior

Techniques: Vibrato, Bends, Slides

Style: Melodic, expressive

Lick 1: Shadow Warrior ♩ = 171

6 6 4 6 4 6

Lick 2: Devoured Soul

Techniques: Hammer-ons, Pull-offs, bends

Style: Melodic with some snappy notes and emotion behind the bends

Lick 2: Devoured Soul ♩ = 149

Two staves of guitar tablature. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: 12 (hammer-on), 13 (pull-off), 12 (pull-off), 14 (hammer-on), followed by a circled 12. The second staff continues with 14, 12, and then a long sustain on 15 with a 'full' vibrato mark. The third staff repeats the first four notes, followed by a circled 12, 12, 13, and then a long sustain on 12 with a 'full' vibrato mark.

Lick 3: Tap into Thrashness

Techniques: Tapping, Hammer-ons, Pull-offs

Style: A bit technical, yet controlled

Lick 3: Tap into Thrashness ♩ = 151

P P H P P H P P P H P P H P

Two staves of guitar tablature. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: 7, 5, 2, 7, 5, 2, 7, 5, 8, 5, 2, 8, 5, 2, 8, 5, 9, 5, 2, 9, 5, 2, 9, 5, 8, 5, 2, 8, 5, 2, 8, 5. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: 2, 4, 5, 4, 5, 4, followed by a circled 2. Above the second staff, there is a wavy line indicating a vibrato effect.

Lick 4: Passage of Time

Techniques: Partial sweep picking and hold-out notes with vibrato

Style: Melodic and telling a story with the notes

Lick 4: Passage of Time ♩ = 137

Two staves of guitar tablature. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: 14, 12, 12, 13, followed by a circled 12 and a long sustain on 12 with a wavy line indicating a vibrato effect. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: 14, 12, 12, 13, 12, 14, 12, 15, followed by a circled 15, 13, 12, 13, 12, 12.

Lick 5: Bliss of Fading

Techniques: Vibrato and melody-focused to fit the feel of the song

Style: Expressive, emotional, great for ballad-style songs

Lick 5: Bliss of Fading ♩ = 144

Two staves of guitar tablature. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: 8, 7, 9, 7, 9, 7, followed by a bend on the 7th fret marked (7). The second staff shows the same sequence, but with a slide (sl.) on the 7th fret and a circled 9 indicating a final note or bend.

Lick 6: Darkened Path

Techniques: Speed picking/alternate picking

Style: Heavy, edgy, somewhat technical

Lick 6: Darkened Path ♩ = 163

Two staves of guitar tablature. The first staff shows a complex sequence of notes: 12, 12, 12, 12, 14, 14, 12, 12, 15, 15, 12, 12, 14, 14, 12, 12, followed by a sequence of 11, 11, 11, 11, 12, 12, 11, 11, 14, 14, 11, 11, 12, 12, 11, 11. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: 9, 9, 9, 9, 11, 11, 9, 9, 12, 12, 9, 9, 11, followed by a sequence of 11, 12, 9, 12, and a circled 8.

Lick 7: Two Worlds Collide

Techniques: Bending two strings with alternate picking licks

Style: Classic heavy metal soloing with a raw feel

Lick 7: Two Worlds Collide ♩ = 173

The image displays a guitar tablature for a lick. The first system consists of two measures. The first measure shows a long slide starting from fret 14 (indicated by a circled 14) and ending at fret 12 (indicated by a circled 12). A wavy line above the staff indicates a vibrato effect. The second system also consists of two measures. The first measure contains a sequence of notes with fingerings: 7, 8, 9, 7, 8, 9, 7, 8, 7, 8, 7. Above the staff, there is a dashed line labeled 'P.M.' and a circled 1. The second measure contains notes with fingerings: 10, 7, 9, 7, and ends with a circled 9. A wavy line above the staff indicates a vibrato effect.

Chapter 4: Metalhead's Guide to Guitar Theory

 **Video Lesson:** [Chapter 4: Metahead's Guide to Guitar Theory](#)

This isn't your typical theory lesson—and that's a good thing.

You're about to learn a simple, practical way to understand just enough theory to help you take out the guesswork of knowing where to play, write better riffs, play tighter solos, and make sense of it all.

No fluff. No boring lectures. Just the essentials that actually *serve your playing*—without killing your creativity.

After going through this, you'll have a solid foundation that will give you more freedom on the fretboard—to do what?—Develop your own style of playing!

In a nutshell, this is what you'll learn:

- Why you only need to know 2 boring scales (and how just these two scales will unlock every note on the fretboard, instantly)
- Easy way to understand keys, progressions, and how to make sense of the Circle of Fifths (a.k.a. the Wheel of Death)

You'll see how just this little bit of knowledge will help you build a rock-solid (or METAL-solid) foundation. This foundation will give you more freedom and creativity as you'll always have this solid ground to fall on. This will all make perfect sense as we continue.

NUMBER ONE RULE:

There are NO rules! **Use theory as a tool—not a rulebook.** Don't look at theory as something you have to fit your playing into. It's the other way around. Use theory as a tool to *serve* you.

You're not here to follow the rules. You're here to create.

The Only 2 Scales You Really Need to Know

First, you never want your riffs or licks to sound like you're practicing scales. So you're not learning these basic scales for the sake of playing them. You're learning them to build the foundation. What I mean by that is that you'll know which notes across the fretboard fit within a certain key (you'll see how easy this is below).

I'll give you the two essential ones:

- **Minor scale**
- **Major scale**

And I'll explain the **structure** behind each so you can apply them to any key.

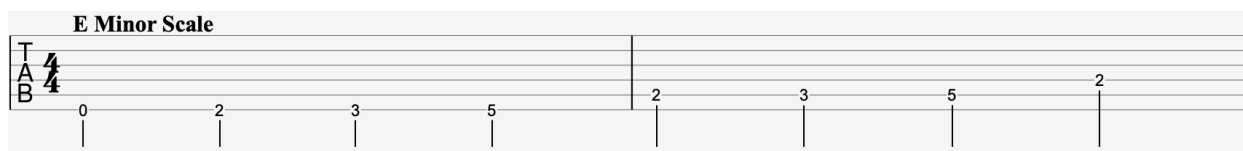
Scale Structure Basics

Scales follow a pattern of steps (frets) between notes.

Minor Scale:

- Half step (not skipping a fret) between the **2nd & 3rd** notes
- Half step (not skipping a fret) between the **5th & 6th** notes

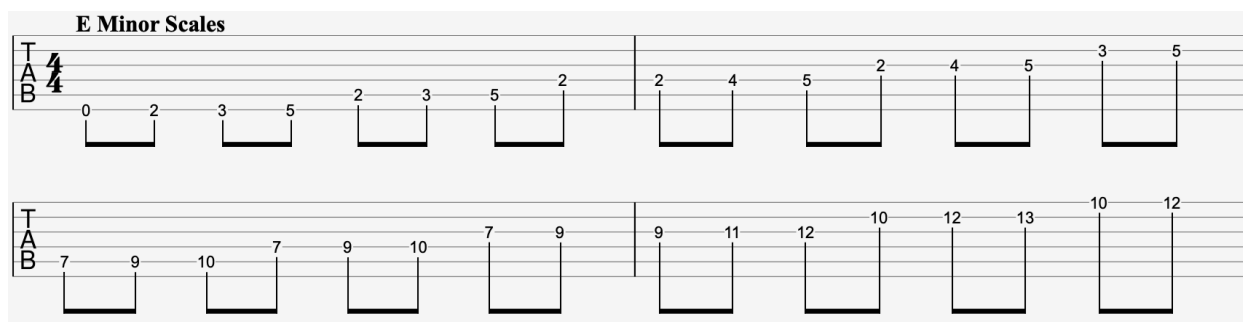
Here's an example of an E minor scale starting on the open E string (good for riffs!):



That's great, but what about the rest of the fretboard?

Here's where it gets super easy—you end on the same note you start with. So this means you can repeat that structure where you ended that last scale.

Here are other places you can play the E minor scale:



It's just a matter of connecting these structures, which gives you more notes that fit within that key (in this case, the key of E minor). It's almost too easy, right?

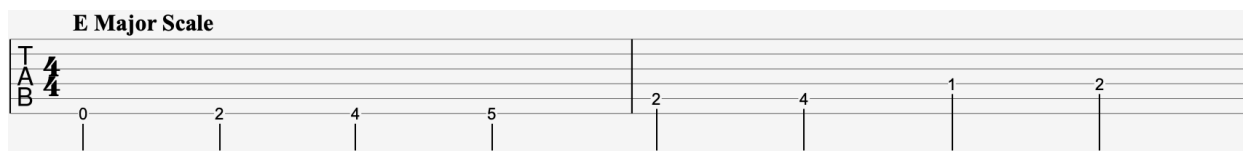
Again, you don't necessarily want to play these scales as riffs or solos. Instead, use the foundation you just built to create these 'safe zones' on the fretboard. This means you'll always know what notes you can play that fit within that key. And this will allow you to branch out and get really creative because you can always revert to this structure and land on your feet.

Now, let's cover the major scale. For the sake of simplicity, we'll do an E major.

Major Scale:

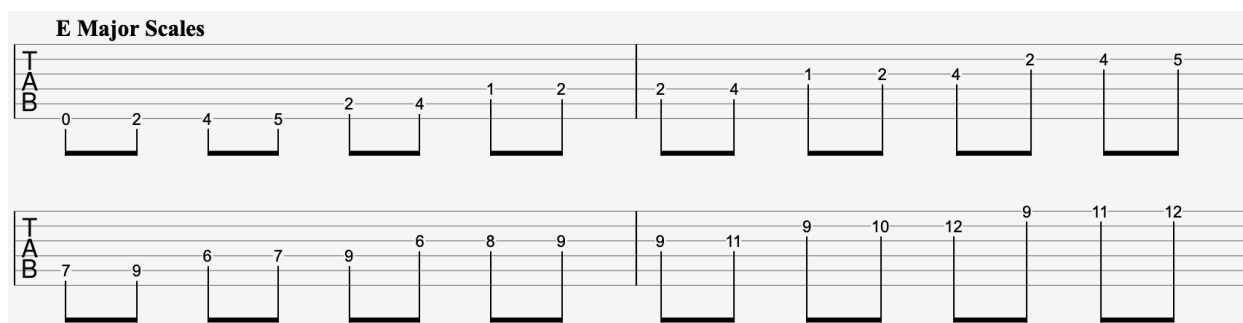
- Half step (not skipping a fret) between the **3rd & 4th** notes
- Half step (not skipping a fret) between the **7th & 8th** notes

Here's an example of an E major scale:



Just like the minor scale, you'll end on the same note you start with when playing a major scale. What does this mean? You got it—you can simply continue repeating that structure from that final note.

Here are other places you can play the E major scale:

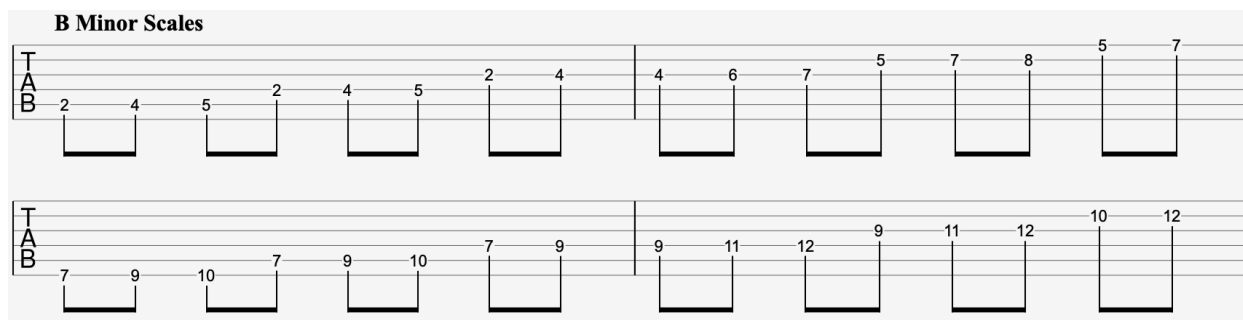


You Now Know Every Major and Minor Scale

So what happens if you start with another note other than E, like B?

You just apply the major or minor structure that you just learned, starting with that note.

For example, here are some B minor scales:



You see, it's exactly the same structure as E minor - Half step (not skipping a fret) between the 2nd and 3rd, and 5th and 6th notes. You just started with a B, instead.

Why This Helps:

- You'll start to connect your riffs and solos to keys
- You don't have to second-guess yourself and will always know where you can play that perfectly fits within that key
- Having this solid foundation allows you to gain freedom across the fretboard and be creative because you'll always be able to land on your feet (well, the fretboard!)

Now you see why you only need to know the two basic scales: major and minor. Once you know one, you know them all. It's just a matter of connecting them across the fretboard.

Of course, if you always take this further and learn more scales. Actually, there are some exotic scales that sound really cool. If you learn best that way, I encourage you to do that.

Just remember—it all goes back to not wanting your riffs and licks to sound like you're practicing scales, even if they're the most exotic scales. Instead, I'll tell you the same thing I tell you when you're going through my lessons—learn the notes, but quickly expand and find ways to make them your own.

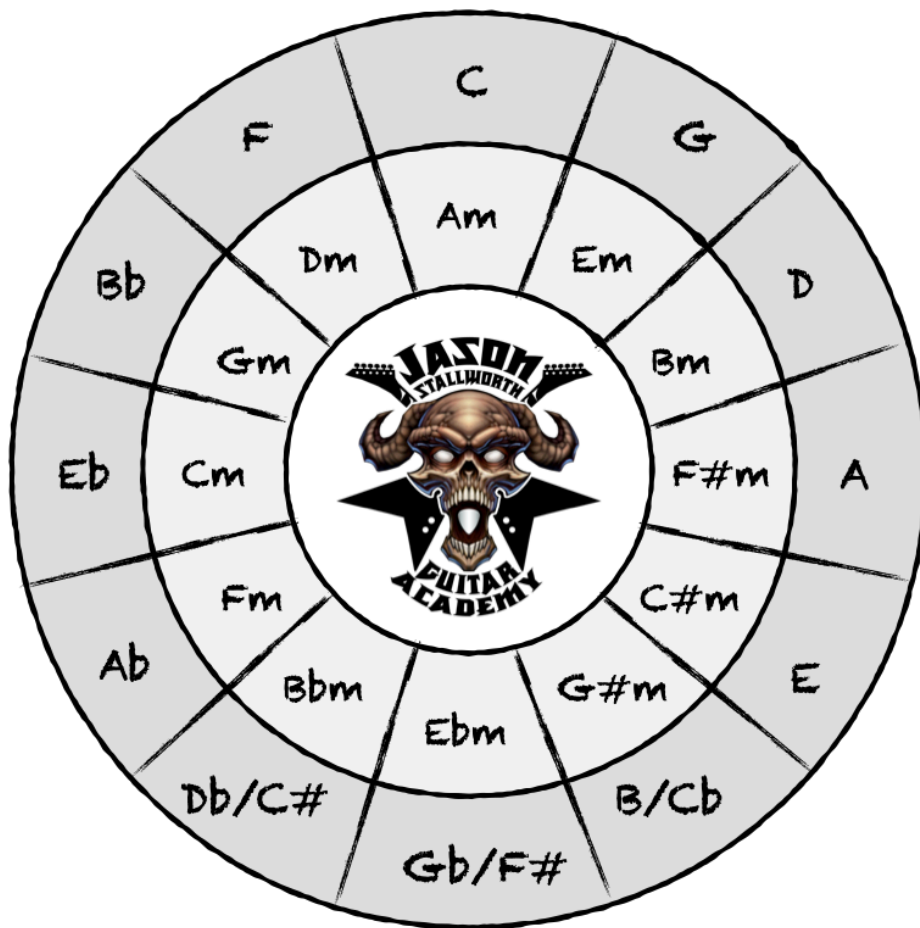
Progressions & The Wheel of Death!

Ever hear someone say, *"This song is in the key of B minor"* or *"The chorus moves from E minor to A minor"*?

They're talking about **chord progressions**—which chords naturally sound good together based on the key you're playing in.

We'll start by breaking down The Wheel of Death...well, it's called the **Circle of Fifths**!

I say 'wheel of death' because this is something I would have put up a cross to in order to keep the demons away...until I learned a super-easy way to look at this. I'll explain below...



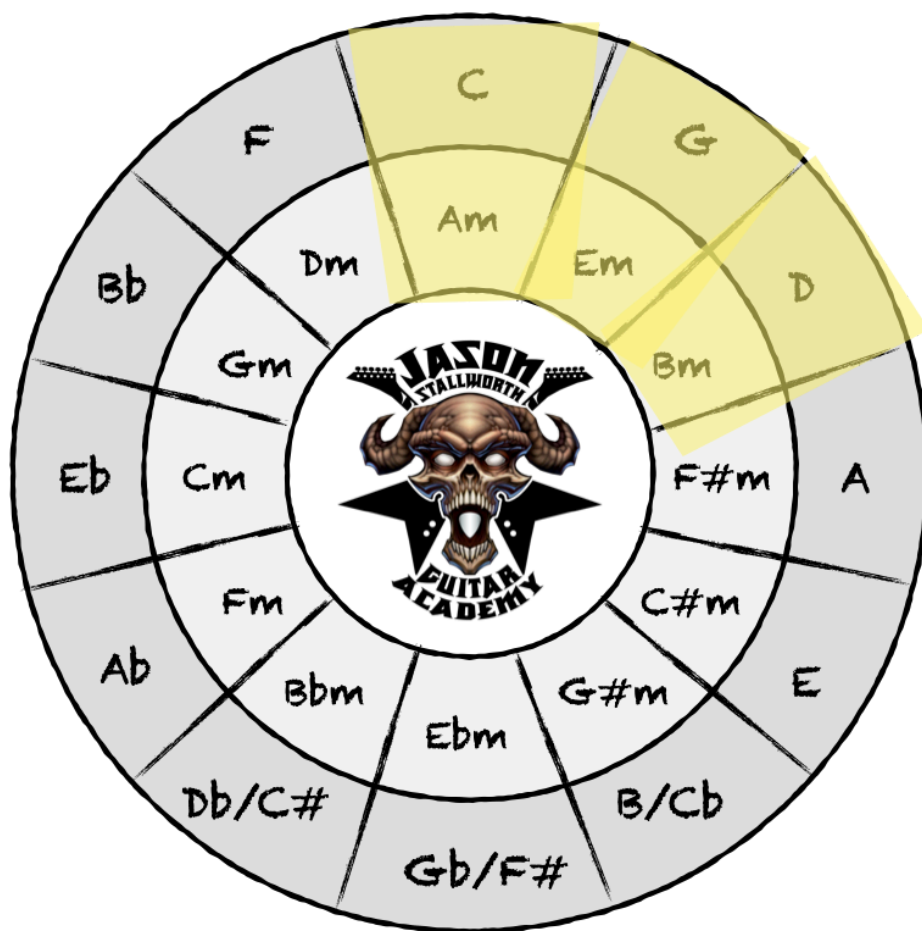
This might look intimidating at first, but here's an ultra-simple way to use it:

- The **outside notes** are **major chords**
- The **inside notes** are **relative minor chords**
- The **relationships naturally fit together** (for example, Em and G fit - see the chart)

Next, there's an easy way to determine what other chords fit within that key. I call these **3 pieces of the pie**:

- Using Em for our example, you already know the centerpiece is Em and G
- The chords that are clockwise naturally fit within that key
- The chords that are counterclockwise naturally fit within that key

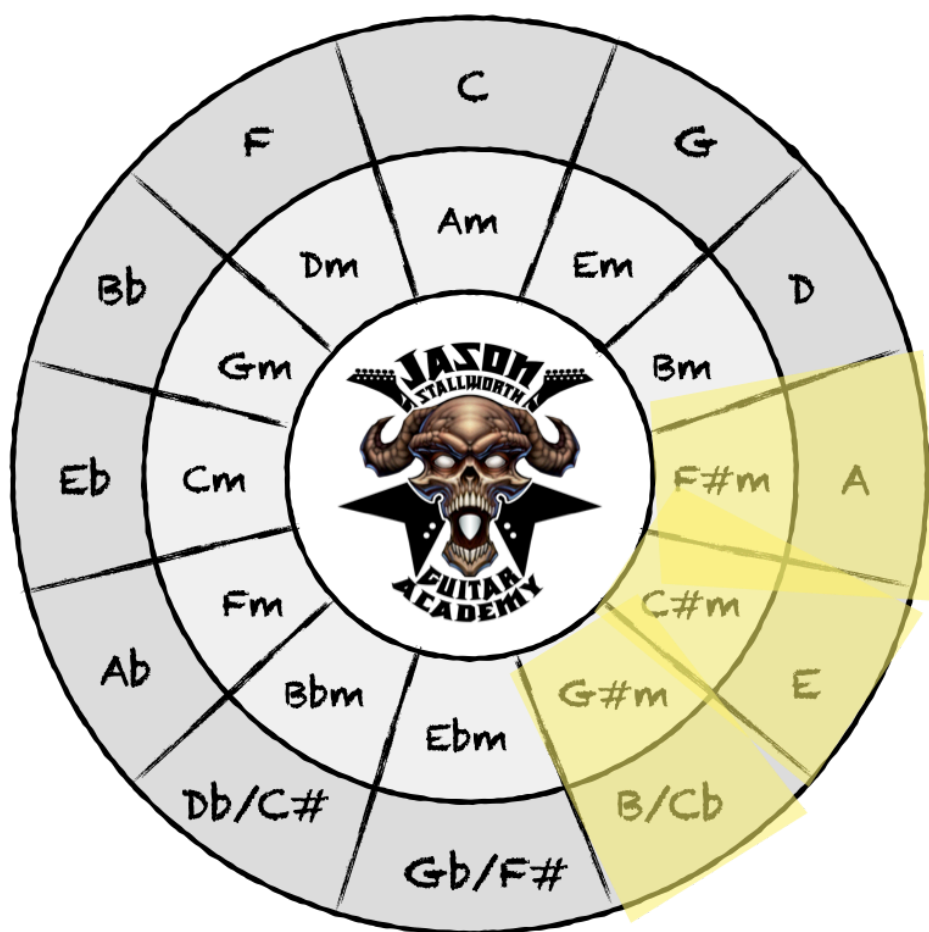
Here's what that looks like for the **key of Em** (highlighted in yellow):



Now, what if we want to play in the key of E major instead of minor?

The same applies. We just travel a little further clockwise to the E major (on the outer part of the circle). You have your relative minor, which is C#m. And you have your chords clockwise and counterclockwise to E.

Here's what **E major** looks like (highlighted in yellow):



You may notice that these chords are the same notes within the scale, but there's one small caveat. There's an additional note in the scale that you do not see in my 3 pieces of the pie explanation.

That note translates into what's called a diminished chord, in this case. The chords in bold (with 'dim' at the end) below are those diminished chords in the keys of E minor and E major:

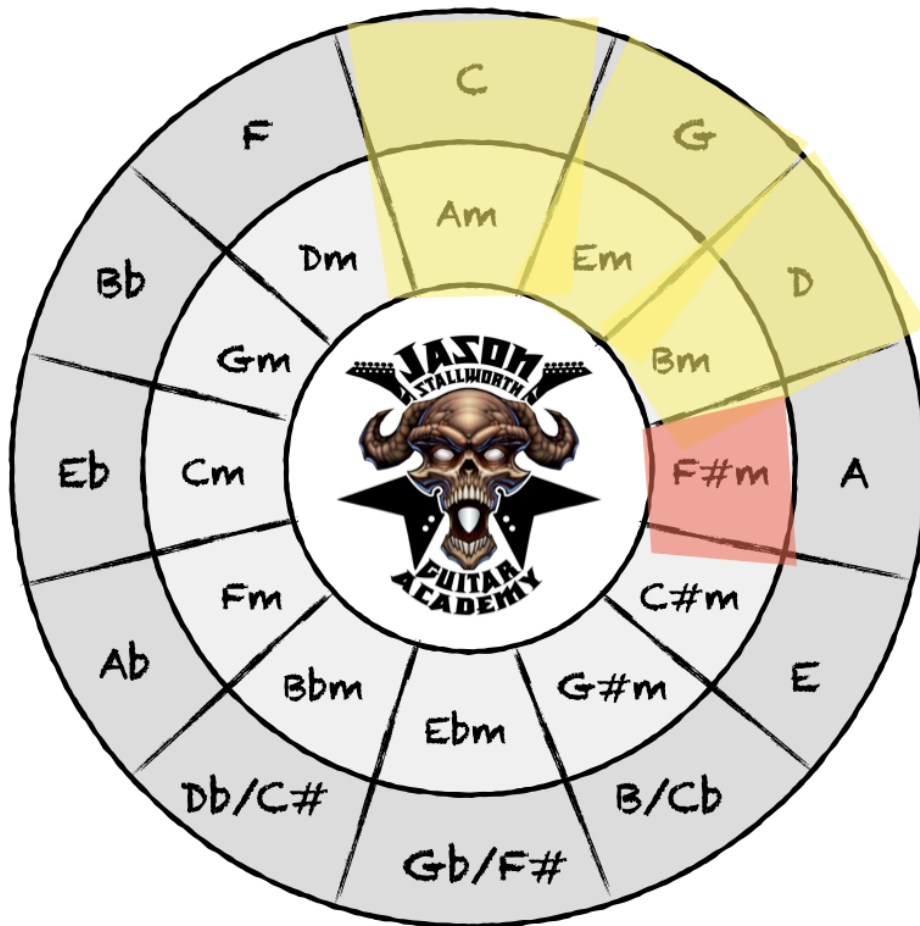
- **E minor:** Em, **F#dim**, G, Am, Bm, C, D
- **E major:** E, F#m, G#m, A, B, C#m, **D#dim**, E

There are three simple ways to view this.

- 1) The 2nd note of the minor scale (not listed in the 3 pieces of the pie) is a diminished chord
- 2) The 7th note of the minor scale (not listed in the 3 pieces of the pie) is a diminished chord
- 3) A simple way to view this on the Circle of Fifths wheel is to count 2 steps clockwise to that minor chord and change that to a diminished chord.

This works whether the key is major or minor.

Example: In the case of E minor, it would be F#minor—this would be played as an F# diminished chord when playing in the key of E minor. See the note below in red:



Now, we're not using a lot of cowboy chords in metal—we're mostly working with **power chords** and their variations. However, understanding what chords fit where still helps you write riffs and structure songs.

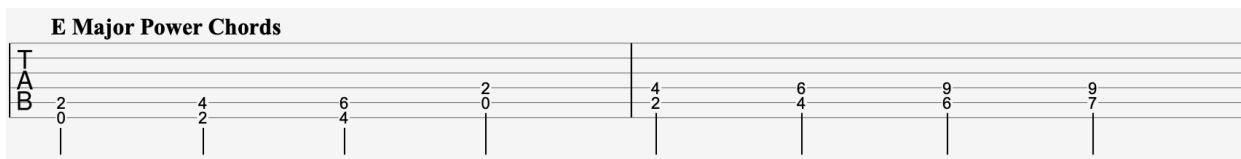
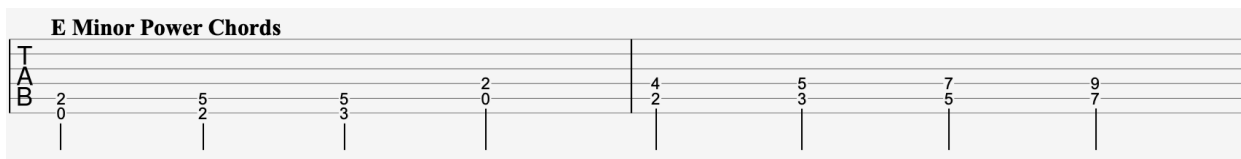
How I Play Diminished Power Chords for Metal:

Try swapping in some of these:

- **For E minor:** Play **F# over D** power chord for the F#dim
- **For E Major:** Play **C# over B** power chord for the D#dim

REMINDER: You may recall us going over variations of power chords in the Metal Riffs chapter. This is just one of those variations.

Here are the tabs for the power chord progressions for E minor and E major (this includes my 'special' way of playing those diminished chords for power chords:



IMPORTANT: You are not required to play these notes and chords that fit perfectly within that key. In fact, a common thing to do in metal progressions is to throw in an F or B flat power chord when playing in the key of E minor. That's one of the many ways you can approach writing riffs and solos.

Trusting Your Ears Over Theory

You don't need a music degree to write great riffs and solos.

Just having a **basic understanding of how chords and scales work** gives you more power to create music that feels intentional—and sounds killer.

Use what serves you. Break what doesn't.

Let theory be your **tool**, not your **limit**.

The best way to do that is to trust your ears. Use this foundation of knowledge to build on. Also, use it as freedom to branch out and try different things.

Color outside the lines and take chances on the fretboard, but be honest with yourself. Did your 'off note' sound good? If yes, keep doing it. If not, try something else. There are no rules or boundaries; only the ones we create for ourselves. So throw those out the window.

Again, **these are just guides**. Don't feel boxed in. Metal is about freedom. Mix things up. Use your ears. If it sounds cool, it *is* cool.

Personal Note:

Other than learning the basic chords when I first started playing, I never dove deep into theory. And I do not think about theory when I'm playing or writing music. Well, that's partially true.

After decades of being an active guitarist, playing with bands, and playing live, I realized that I had inadvertently learned a decent amount of theory. So I wanted to include this chapter in this book to share some concepts that may help you, even if you're not a diehard fan of learning theory. Let this serve you as a foundation builder—but don't overthink it or let it rule over your playing.

Chapter 5: Writing and Developing Your Own Style

 **Video Lesson:** [Chapter 5: Writing Your Own Riffs and Developing Your Own Style](#)

I've been planting seeds throughout this book about developing your own style. And now it's time to bring it full circle.

Learning songs and riffs from your favorite bands is awesome. That's how most of us get started—including me. But there's nothing like coming up with your *own* catchy riff or writing a lick that punches you in the soul when you play it back.

That's when playing guitar stops being just about skill and becomes something much deeper. That's where *you* start to become your own guitarist.

And I want more of that for you.

You Already Have What You Need

Don't wait until you think you're "good enough" to write your own music.

The truth is—you're already good enough. You've been playing riffs. You've been learning techniques. Now it's time to *use* them.

Take a riff or lick you've learned in this book and make it your own:

- Add or remove a note (remember, more isn't always better)
- Change the key or play it in a different position
- Switch up the rhythm or timing or picking method
- Throw in a slide, harmonic, or vibrato

And just like that, you're not copying—you're *creating*.

You've got everything you need within you. Now it's just about giving yourself the freedom to explore it.

Don't Overthink or Compare

One of the biggest traps guitarists fall into is thinking, "This isn't good enough," or "That other player is way better than me."

Forget all that.

This isn't about being the best. It's about being *you*.

There's no magic riff out there that suddenly makes you a "real" guitarist.

What matters is that you're playing what you feel—and that you're not afraid to let your personality bleed through your music.

Write what *you* want to hear. That's what makes it authentic. That's what makes it metal.

Embrace the Weird

Ever write something that sounded strange at first... but you kinda liked it?

Follow that.

Some of your best riffs will come from mistakes. Some of your most unique ideas won't sound like anyone else. And that's a *good* thing.

That's how your style emerges—not by copying someone else's sound, but by trusting your gut (and ears) and leaning into what excites *you*.

If it sounds cool to you, it *is* cool.

Use Structure to Spark Ideas

If you're feeling stuck, don't worry. Having a little structure can help you get going:

- Pick a key (E minor or B minor are great starting points)
- Choose 2–3 power chords from that key
- Use palm muting, slides, or single-note riffs to connect them
- Add a bend or vibrato where it makes sense
- Play it slow, then faster. Try it with a backing track. See what hits.

Even just playing around with a few simple notes can turn into something powerful.

You Don't Need Permission

You don't need a degree in theory.

You don't need to master sweep picking.

You don't need anyone else's approval to start writing your own music.

All you need is the courage to *try something*.

This is your journey. And one of the best things you can do as a guitarist is develop your own signature style.

Not someone else's. *Yours*.

So write that riff.

Play that lick.

Let your creativity run wild.

Give yourself the freedom to be your own guitarist.

Your Next Step

You've made it to the end of *Metal Riffs and Licks*—but in reality, this is just the beginning.

If you've worked through even a few of the riffs, licks, and techniques in this guide, then you already know this isn't about just learning another riff or lick.

It's about becoming the guitarist you were meant to be.

That means playing the kind of music you actually *want* to play.

It means building real confidence in your skills.

And it means finally making consistent progress, instead of spinning your wheels.

That's exactly why I created the **Jason Stallworth Guitar Academy**.

Inside the Academy, you get access to:

- ✓ A structured path for mastering rhythm and lead guitar in the metal style
- ✓ Ongoing monthly lessons, riffs, and backing tracks to keep your playing fresh
- ✓ Learning from someone who actually gets what you're trying to do
- ✓ And a ton of value that goes way beyond any one course

It's not about learning *more* random stuff—it's about learning the *right* stuff. In the right order. With a clear roadmap that actually gets results.

And most importantly, it's a place to stay motivated, stay on track, and stay connected to the music you love.

So if you're ready to take everything you've learned here and go even deeper...

👉 [Join the Jason Stallworth Guitar Academy Here](#)

You've already taken the first step by grabbing this guide.

Now it's time to build momentum—and crush your next level.

Keep it Metal, and Keep Playing Music

-- Jason

