

FRETBOARD FOUNDATIONS

Intervals, Part 1

LEARN THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT
INTERVALS AND HOW TO FIND THEM ON
THE FRETBOARD.

A close-up photograph of an acoustic guitar, showing the wooden body, the soundhole, and the bridge. The guitar is positioned at the bottom of the frame, with the text overlaid on it.

BLUES GUITAR INSTITUTE

Every chord has them.

Every scale.

Every solo.

Every song.

Intervals are the basic building blocks of music. Without them, you'd have a lot of one-note songs!

So, what is an interval?

An *interval* is a space between two things.

In music, it's the space or distance between two pitches.

In this guide, we'll focus on the most important intervals in music, the Octave, Major Third and Perfect Fifth. These three intervals are the cornerstone of chords and scales.

Knowing what they sound like and where to find them will help you find the sound you're looking for no matter where you are on the neck.

Below you'll learn a bit about each of these three very important intervals and how to find each interval at several locations on the fretboard.

Octaves

The *Octave* is one of the most important intervals because of its relationship to the starting pitch.

An octave is exactly double the frequency of the starting pitch (*called the root*). For example, tune your 5th String to an A at 110 Hz (*Hertz or Hz is a measurement for the number of vibrations per second*). The octave can be found at the 12th fret and will vibrate at 220 Hz.

The octave gets the same letter name as the root pitch but it's important to realize that even when the root pitch changes, its octave will always sound at twice the frequency.

In Western music, an octave is divided into 12 half-steps or 12 frets on the guitar.

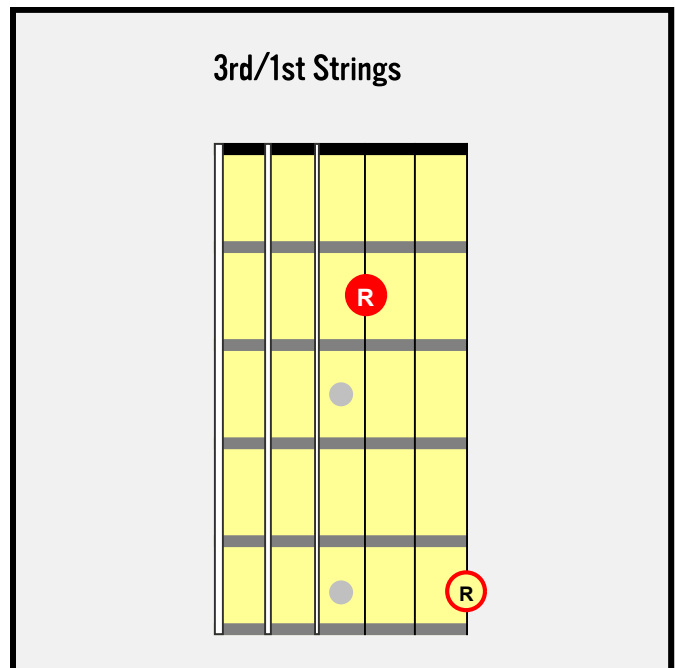
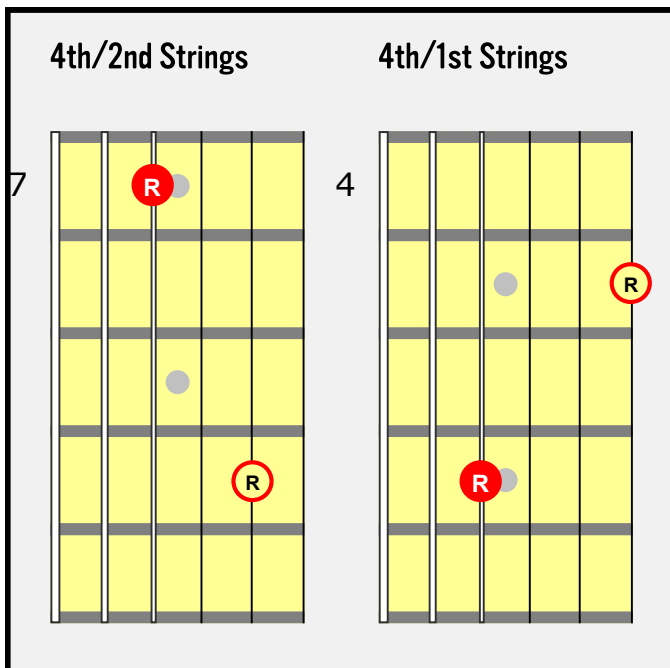
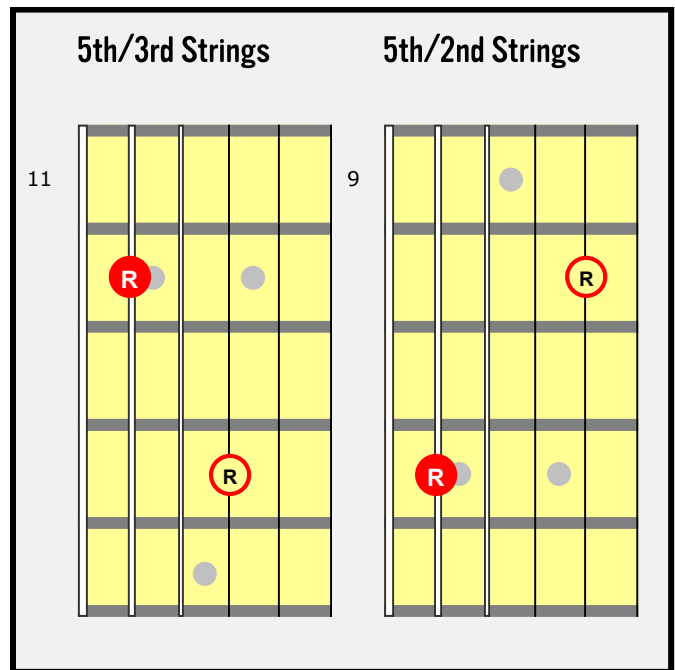
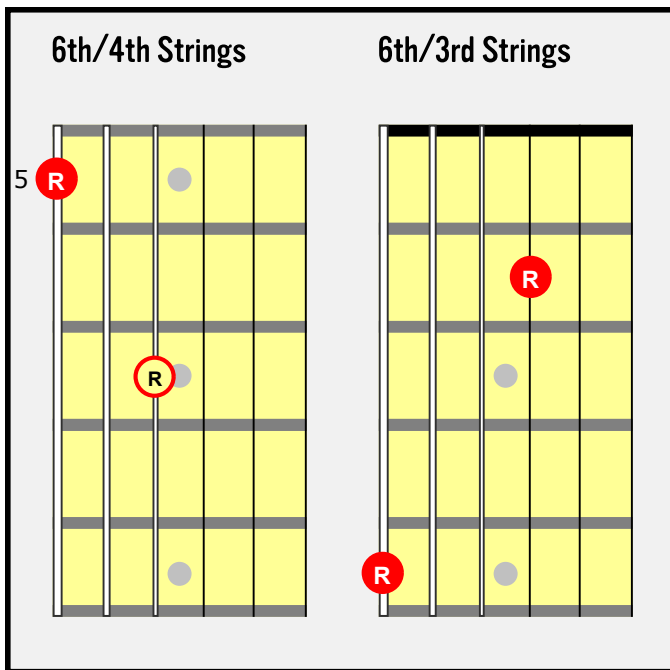
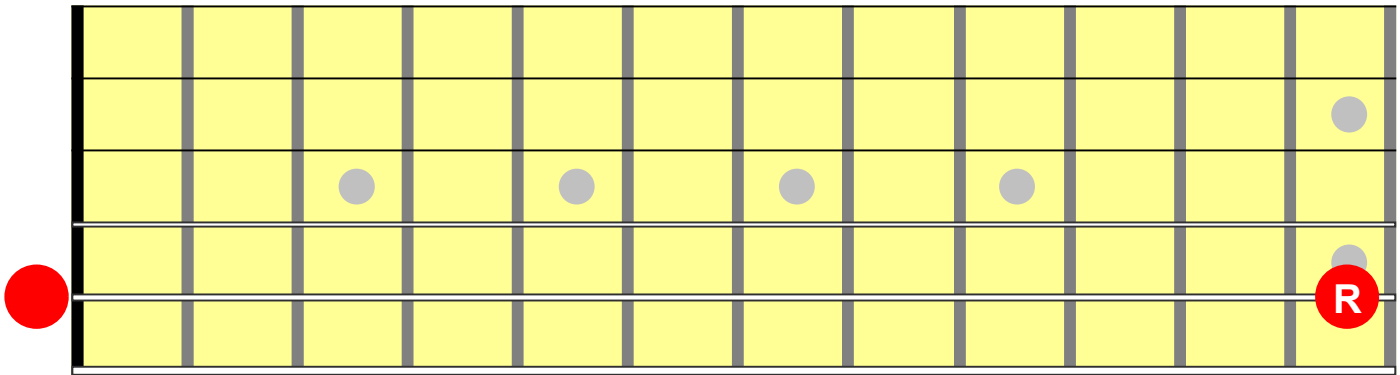
The 12th fret usually has a double-dot fret marker to help us visualize this important interval. While each of these 12 half-steps has a special name, we'll focus the rest of this lesson on two crucial divisions of the octave.

Key Takeaways:

- A half-step is a one fret on the guitar.
- There are twelve half-steps in an octave.
- The Octave is assigned the same letter name as the starting note.

FRETBOARD FOUNDATIONS: Important Intervals on the Guitar (Octaves)

Single String Octave (12 Frets)



Major Thirds

The Major Third interval is found 4 half-steps above the root. Without worrying about note names, we can count up 4 frets from any note to play the Major Third.

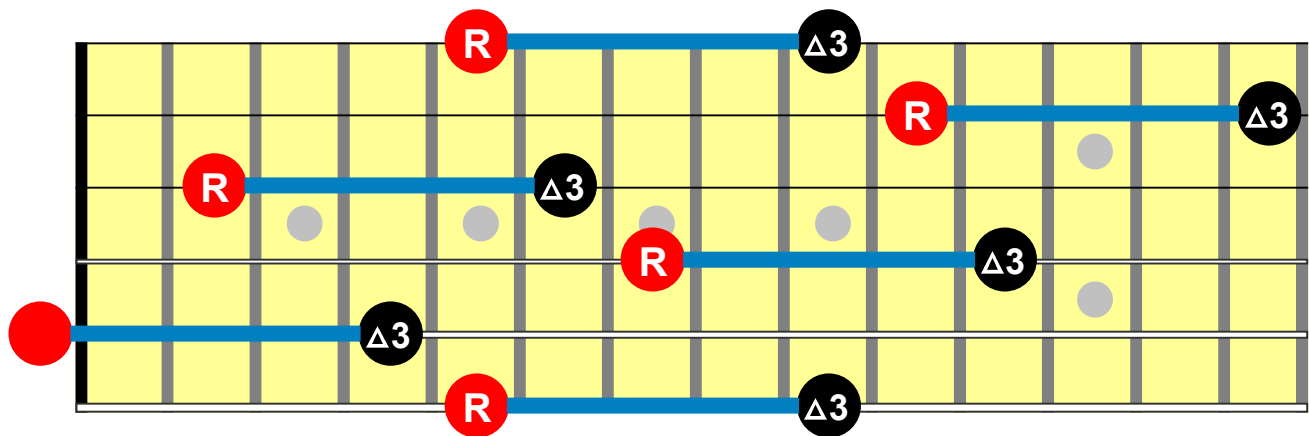
Take some time to play major thirds on your guitar using various string combinations to familiarize yourself with the sound.

Challenge yourself to find the *Major Third* of each open string.

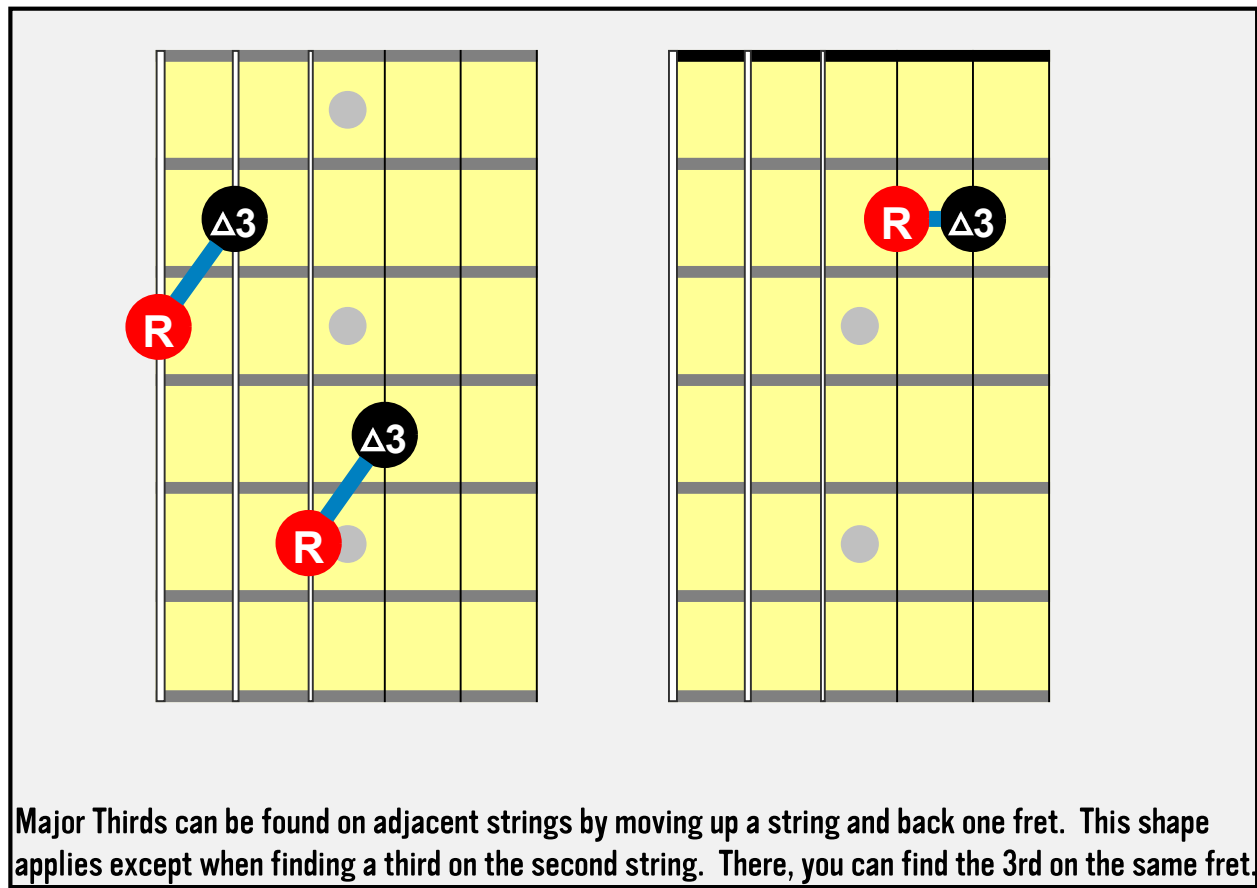
Then use the following diagrams to check yourself, then practice playing the shapes on different string pairs.

Notice how the characteristic of the interval doesn't change even though the pitches may change.

Major Third One String



Major Thirds can be found by moving up in pitch by 4 Half Steps (4 frets distance on the fretboard)



Perfect Fifths

As we've learned, each interval has its own characteristic sound.

The octave sounds strikingly like the root but higher, the major third gives us a pleasant sound and the Perfect Fifth has a sound all its own.

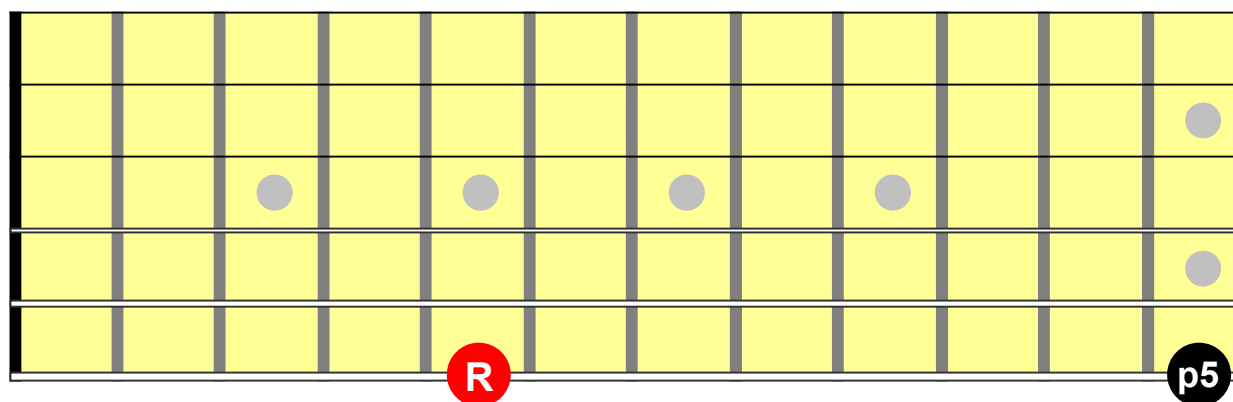
The Perfect Fifth interval can be found 7 half-steps above the root note.

For example, from the open 5th string, you'll find the Perfect 5th at the 7th fret on the same string.

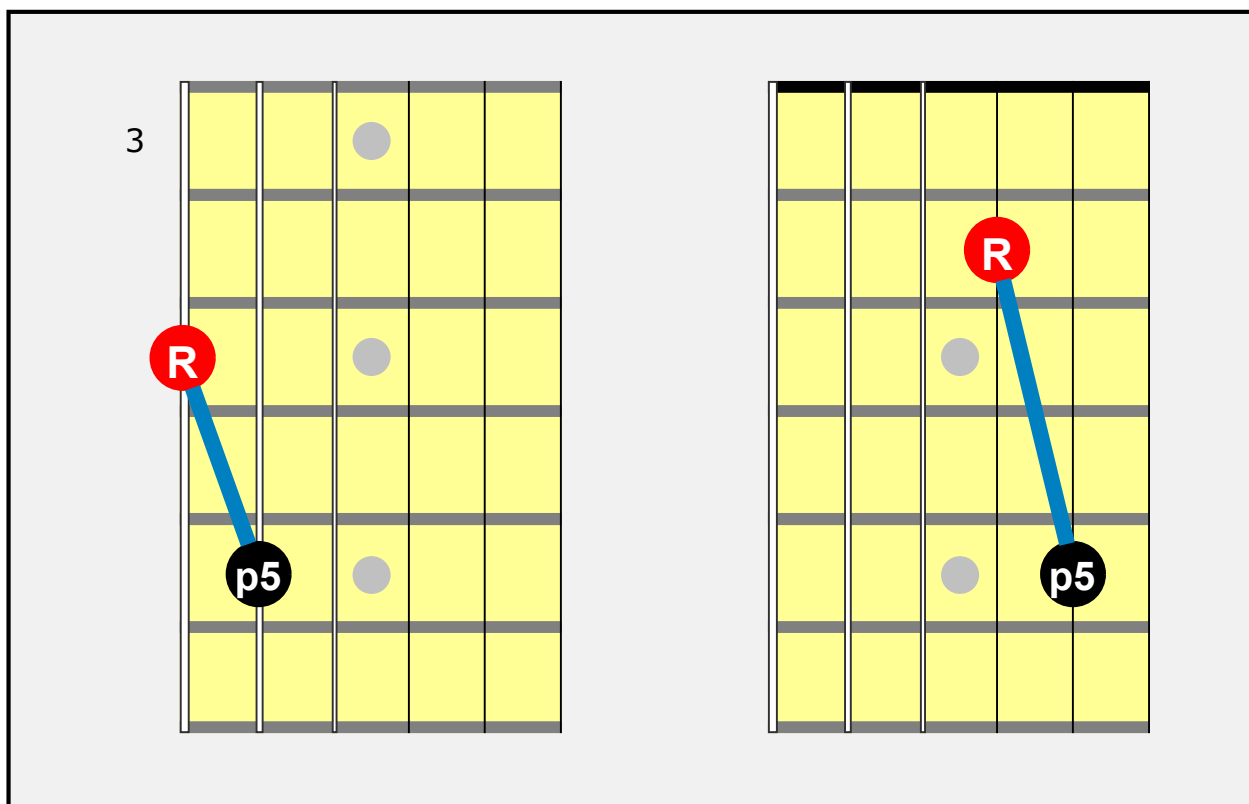
Of course, this interval can be played on adjacent strings.

There's a stable relationship to this interval and it is foundational to building chords. The Perfect 5th (also just called the 5th) sounds closely related to the root, but not quite as close as the octave.

Perfect Fifth One String



A Perfect Fifth interval can be found 7 Half-Steps (7 Frets) above the root.



Similar to Major Thirds, Perfect Fifth Intervals on adjacent strings can be found by moving up a string and up two frets except when the Fifth is on the second string. Add another fret to the shape when the 5th is on the 2nd string as shown above.

ABOUT JOHN HATCHER



John Hatcher is the founder of Blues Guitar Institute (BGI), a blues-focused guitar educational site. Since 2011, John has dedicated himself to teaching acoustic blues with a simple, straightforward approach.

He has grown a popular YouTube channel and cultivated an engaged online guitar community of pickers and students at BGI.

His library of no-frills lessons helped him win TrueFire's Next Top Guitar Instructor contest and helps students play the music they love.

Play On!

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