

Tablature Notation

Robert Higginbotham

Tablature notation (commonly known as TAB) is used for guitar and other fretted instruments. It is a simple way to represent musical notes as fret numbers on strings. 6 string guitar tab will represent the strings starting with the Low E string on the bottom and ending with the high E string on the top. Sometimes tab will have the string names represented on the left-hand margin, as in the following, many times not:

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E-----0-----  
B-----0-----  
G-----0-----  
D-----2-----2-----  
A-----2-----2-----  
E--0-----0-----
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The above example is telling the student to play the open E string followed by the second fret on the A string, and the 2nd fret on the D string and finally an E^m (minor) chord.

The major drawback of tablature is that it typically does not communicate rhythmic information. The student either has to be familiar with the rhythm of the song, or melody, they are learning, or rely on standard musical notation (the musical staff) to get this information. Note that in the above example there is no way to know whether the notes to be played are eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, or combination thereof. The following example is the first four measures of the Tennessee classic Rocky Top with musical notation and chord changes included:

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of the song 'Rocky Top'. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5 in the first measure; D5, E5, F#5, G5 in the second; A5, B5, C6, D6 in the third; and E6, F#6, G6, A6 in the fourth. Chord changes are indicated above the staff: G (measures 1-2), C (measure 3), G (measure 4), E^m (measure 5), D (measure 6), and G (measure 7). Below the staff is a guitar tablature for the first three measures. The strings are labeled T (Top), A, and B (Bottom). The tablature shows fret numbers: Measure 1: T (3), A (3), B (3); Measure 2: T (0), A (0), B (3); Measure 3: T (0), A (0), B (0). Measure 4 is not shown in the tablature.

If you know what this song sounds like, you should be able to play the melody by reading the Tab. If you don't, you will have to read the musical notation to reproduce it accurately.

Sources of Tablature

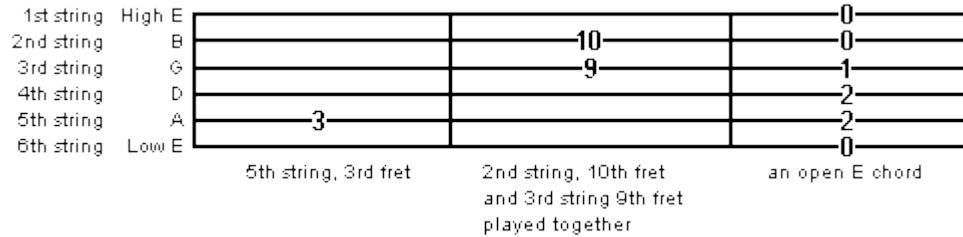
The most accurate tablature will come from reputable music book publishers such as Hal Leonard, Berklee Music Publishing and others. Music is transcribed by professionals who tab accurately and typically very completely. There are tens of thousands of songs "tabbed" on the internet but these are often contributed by amateurs who may or may not transcribe accurately. Even if tab you read is not entirely accurate, it is often a good start. Let your ear identify and help you fix any mistakes.

Learning to read tab, and/or musical notation, proficiently is a basic tool for the guitar student.

Tablature Definitions

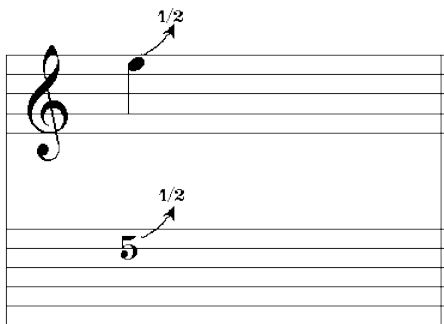
The following definitions were downloaded from www-harmonycentral.com 8/9/06 . There was no copyright information. The following is for educational purposes only.

A six-line staff that graphically represents the guitar fingerboard, with the top line indicating the highest sounding string (high E). By placing a number on the appropriate line, the string and fret of any note can be indicated. The number 0 represents an open string. An 'X' means to muffle, not let it ring.



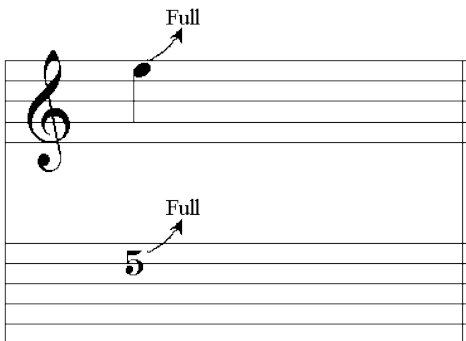
Bend 1

Strike the note and bend up $\frac{1}{2}$ step (one fret).



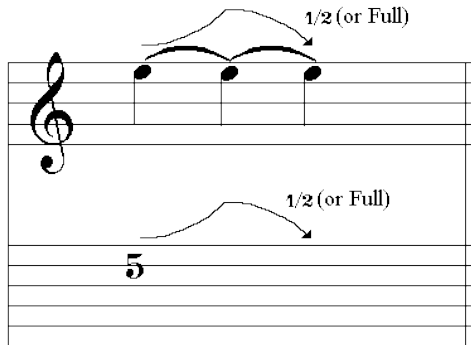
Bend 2

Strike the note and bend up a whole step (two frets).



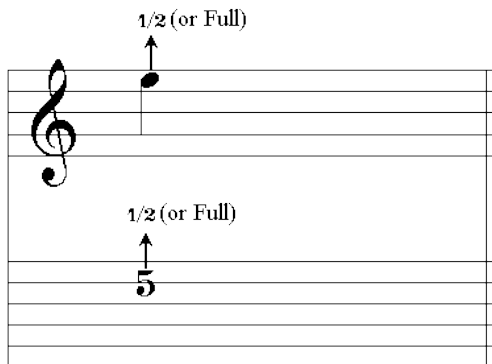
Bend & Release

Strike the note and bend up $\frac{1}{2}$ (or whole) step, then release the bend back to the original note. All three notes are tied, only the first note is struck.



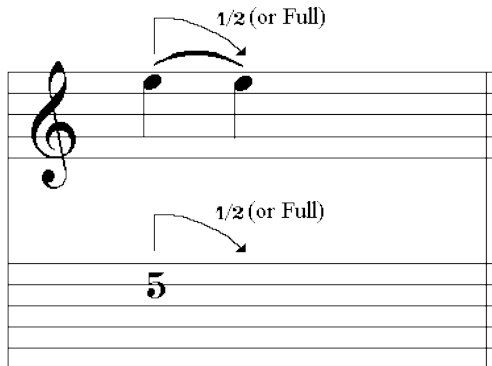
Pre-Bend

Bend the note up $\frac{1}{2}$ (or whole) step, then strike it.



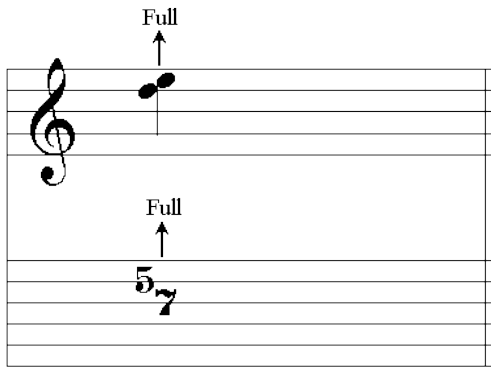
Pre-Bend & Release

Bend the note up $\frac{1}{2}$ (or whole) step, strike it, and release the bend back to the original note.



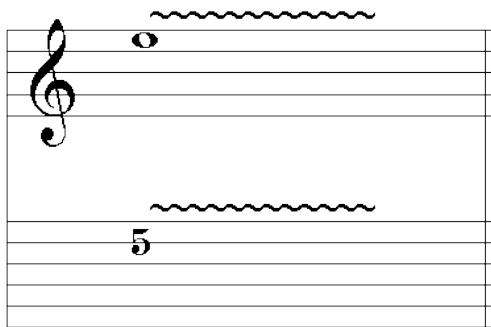
Unison Bend

Strike the two note simultaneously and bend the lower note to the pitch of the higher.



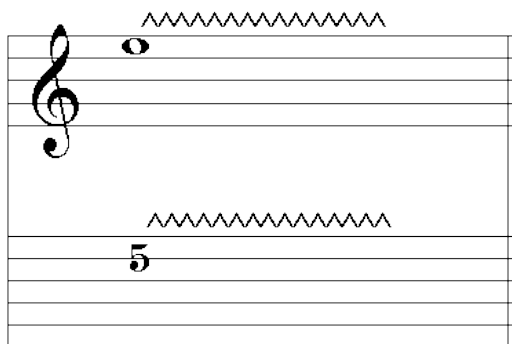
Vibrato

Vibrate the note by rapidly bending and releasing the string with a left-hand finger.



Wide (Exaggerated) Vibrato

Vibrate the pitch to a greater degree with a left-hand finger or tremolo bar.



Slide 1

Strike the first note and then with the same left hand finger move up the string to the second note. The second note is not struck.

Musical notation for Slide 1. The top staff shows a treble clef with two notes: a quarter note on the second line (F4) and a quarter note on the second space (G4). A slur connects the two notes, with the abbreviation "sl." above it. The bottom staff shows a bass clef with two notes: a quarter note on the second line (F3) and a quarter note on the second space (G3). A slur connects the two notes, with the abbreviation "sl." above it. The fret numbers 5 and 8 are written below the notes in the bottom staff.

Slide 2

Strike the first note and then with the same left hand finger move up the string to the second note and strike the second note.

Musical notation for Slide 2. The top staff shows a treble clef with two notes: a quarter note on the second line (F4) and a quarter note on the second space (G4). A slur connects the two notes, with the abbreviation "sl." above it. The bottom staff shows a bass clef with two notes: a quarter note on the second line (F3) and a quarter note on the second space (G3). A slur connects the two notes, with the abbreviation "sl." above it. The fret numbers 5 and 8 are written below the notes in the bottom staff.

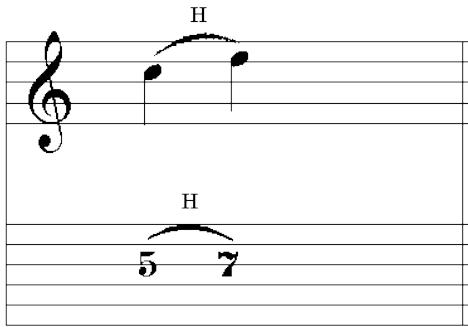
Slide 3

Slide up to the note indicated from a few frets below.

Musical notation for Slide 3. The top staff shows a treble clef with a single note on the second space (G4). A diagonal slash is above the note, with the abbreviation "d." above it. The bottom staff shows a bass clef with a single note on the second line (F3). A diagonal slash is above the note, with the abbreviation "d." above it. The fret number 5 is written below the note in the bottom staff.

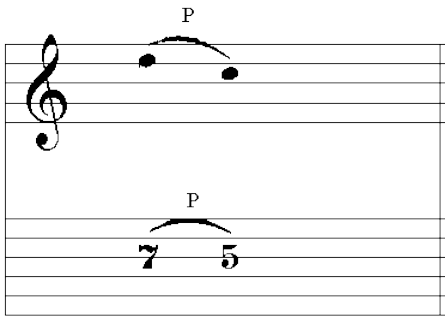
Hammer-On

Strike the first (lower) note, then sound the higher note with another finger by fretting it without picking.



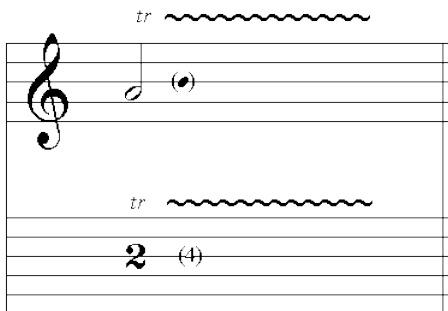
Pull-Off

Place both fingers on the notes to be sounded. Strike the 1st (higher) note, then sound the lower note by pulling the finger off the higher note while keeping the lower note fretted.



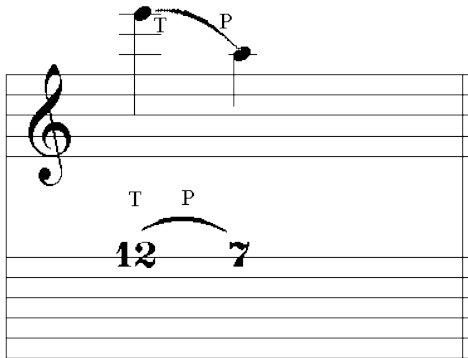
Trill

Very rapidly alternate between the note indicated and the small note shown in parentheses by hammering on and pulling off.



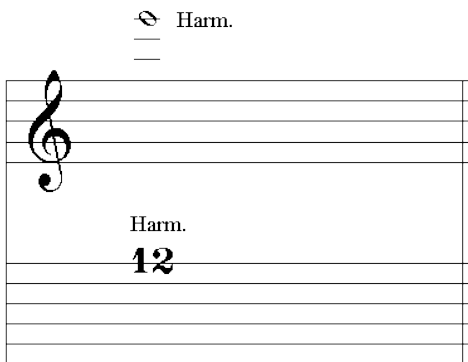
Tapping

Hammer ("tap") the fret indicated with the right hand index or middle finger and pull off to the note fretted by the left hand.



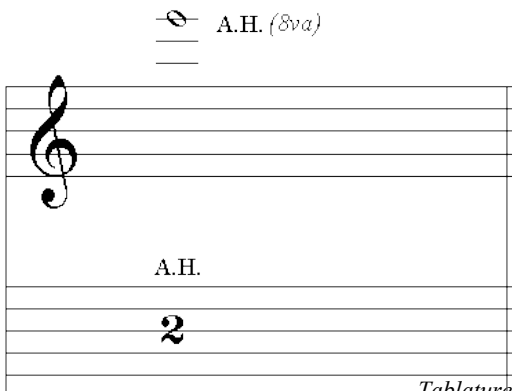
Natural Harmonic

With a left hand finger, lightly touch the string over the fret indicated then strike it. A chime-like sound is produced.



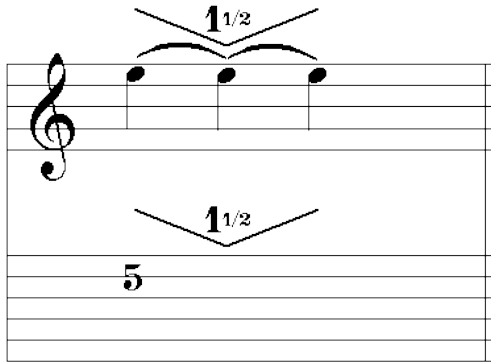
Artificial Harmonic

Fret the note normally and set the harmonic by adding the right hand thumb edge or index finger tip to the normal pick attack.



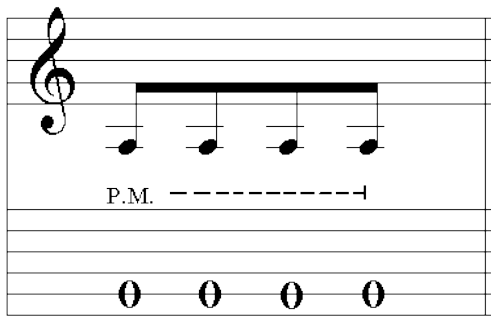
Tremolo Bar

Drop the note by the number of steps indicated, then return to original pitch.



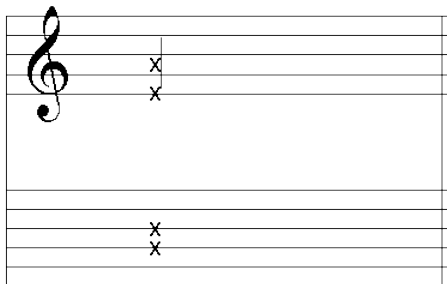
Palm Mute

With the right hand, partially mute the note by lightly touching the string just before the bridge.



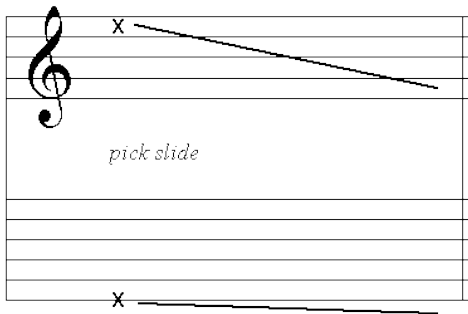
Muffled Strings

Lay the left hand across the strings without depressing them to the fret board; strike the strings with the right hand, producing a percussive sound.



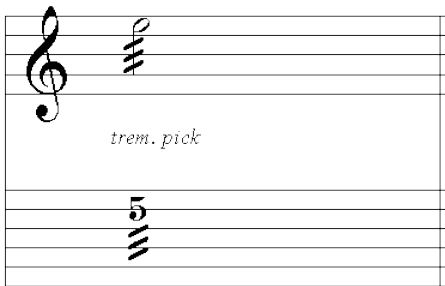
Pick Slide

Rub the pick edge down the length of the string to produce a scratchy sound.



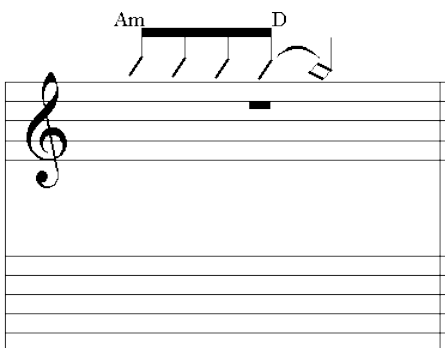
Tremolo Picking

Pick the note as rapidly and continuously as possible.



Rhythm Slashes

Strum chords in rhythm indicated. Use chord voicings found in the fingering diagrams at the top of the first page of the transcription.



Single Note Rhythm Slashes

The circled number above the note name indicates which string to play. When successive notes are played on the same string, only the fret numbers are given.

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. Above the staff, four notes are indicated with their respective fret numbers and string numbers in circled text: ⑤ 3fr. C, 2fr. B, open A, and ⑥ 3fr. G. The notes are represented by stems with flags, and a horizontal line connects the B and A notes. Below the staff, there are four empty staves for tablature.