

Tablature Notation

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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, sometimes not:

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E-----0-----  
B-----0-----  
G-----0-----  
D-----2-----  
A-----2-----  
E--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 as individual notes and finally an E^m (minor) chord (all strings strummed at the same time).

The major drawback of tablature is that it does not communicate rhythmic information. The student must know the rhythm of the song or the tab is useless. The student's other choice is to use standard musical notation to read the rhythm and the notes together. In the above example there is no way to know whether the notes to be played are eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, or a combination thereof.

The following example is the first four measures of the Tennessee classic Rocky Top with musical notation and tab combined:

The image shows the first four measures of the song 'Rocky Top' in 4/4 time, key of D major. The top staff is standard musical notation with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The notes are: Measure 1: D4, E4, F#4, G4; Measure 2: A4, B4, C5, B4; Measure 3: A4, G4, F#4, E4; Measure 4: D4 (half note). The bottom staff is guitar tablature with three lines labeled T (Treble), A (Middle), and B (Bass). Measure 1: T has four 3s; A and B are empty. Measure 2: T has 0, 0, 3, 0; A and B are empty. Measure 3: T has 0, 0, 0, 0; A and B are empty. Measure 4: T has 0; A and B are empty.

If you had never heard Rocky Top, you would only be able to play it by reading the musical notation. If you are from Tennessee you won't need the musical notation, hence you can read the tab.

The most accurate tablature will come from reputable music book publishers such as Hal Leonard, Berklee Music Publishing along with a host of others. Music is transcribed by paid professionals who tab accurately. There are hundreds of thousands of songs "tabbed" on the internet, but these are often contributed by amateurs who may or may not transcribe accurately. Useful sites for good tab include Songsterr, Ultimate Guitar, TrueFire and others. Many YouTube videos include good tab as well.

Learning to read tab proficiently is an essential 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.

1st string	High E			0
2nd string	B		10	0
3rd string	G		9	1
4th string	D			2
5th string	A	3		2
6th string	Low E			0

5th string, 3rd fret
2nd string, 10th fret and 3rd string 9th fret played together
an open E chord

Bend 1

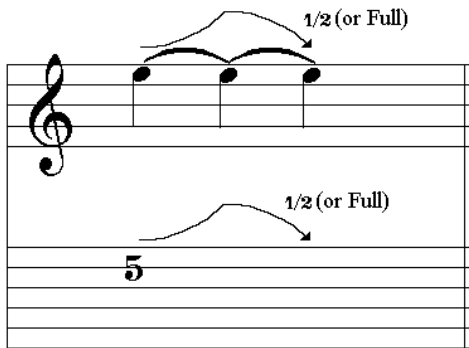
Strike the note and bend up $\frac{1}{2}$ step (one fret).

Bend 2

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

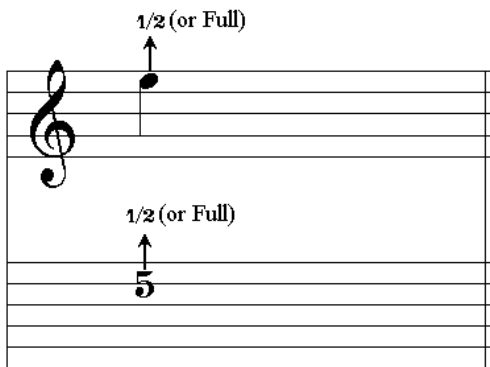
Bend & Release

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.



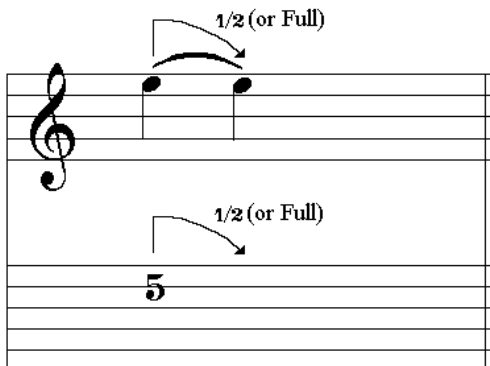
Pre-Bend

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



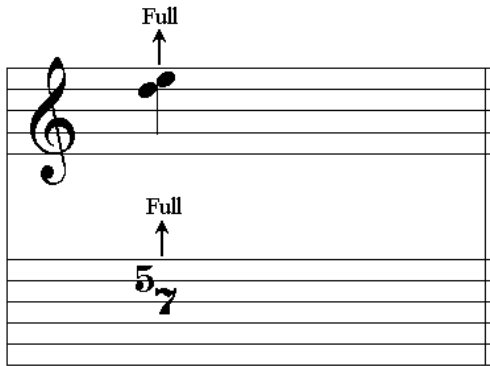
Pre-Bend & Release

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



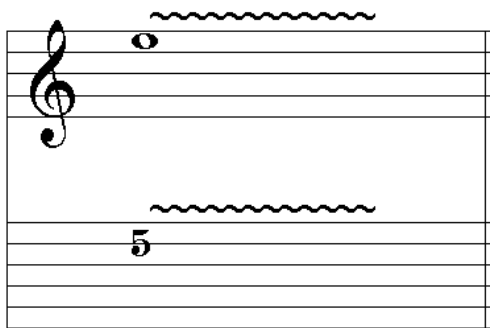
Unison Bend

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



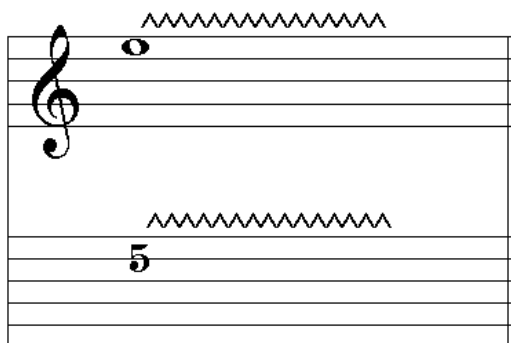
Vibrato

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



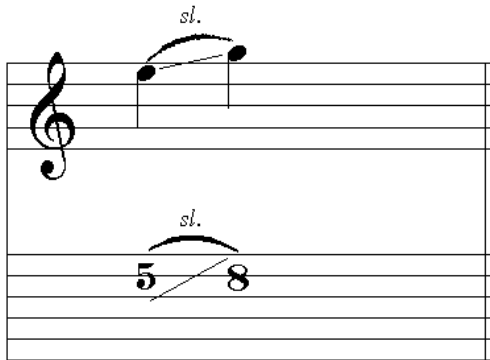
Wide (Exaggerated) Vibrato

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



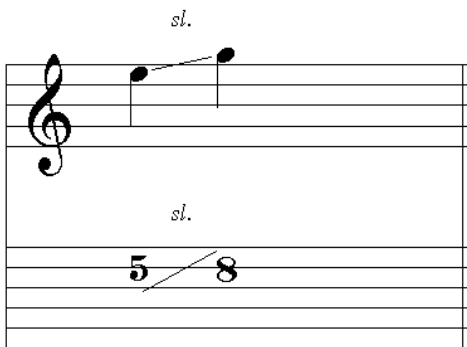
Slide 1

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.



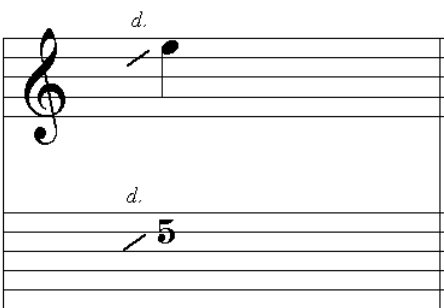
Slide 2

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.



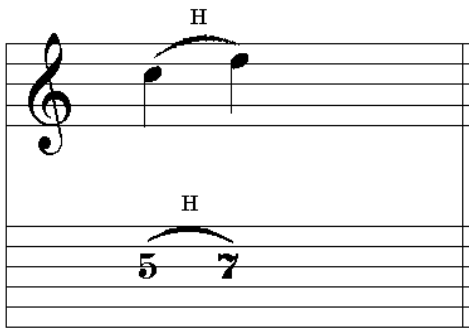
Slide 3

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



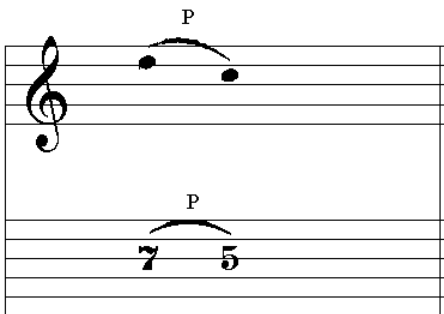
Hammer-On

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



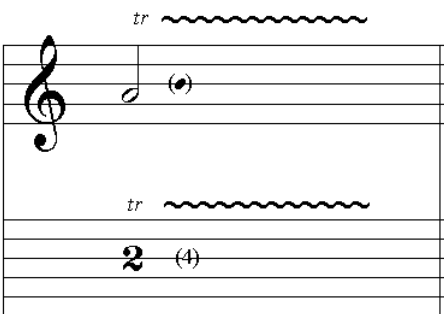
Pull-Off

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.



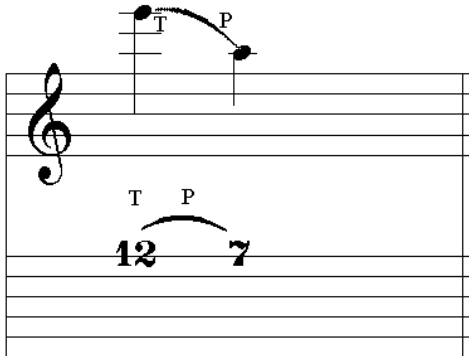
Trill

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



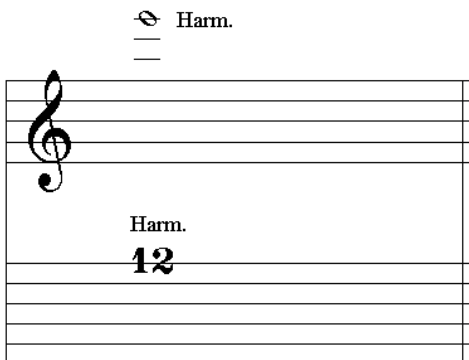
Tapping

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



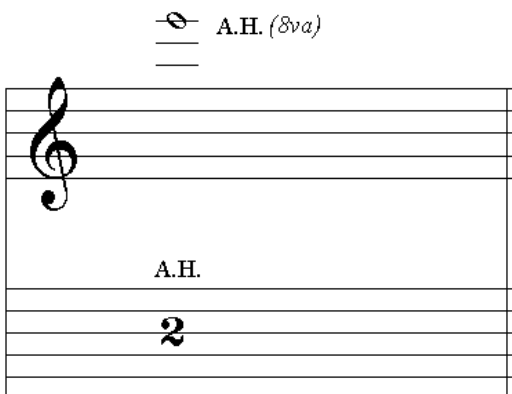
Natural Harmonic

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



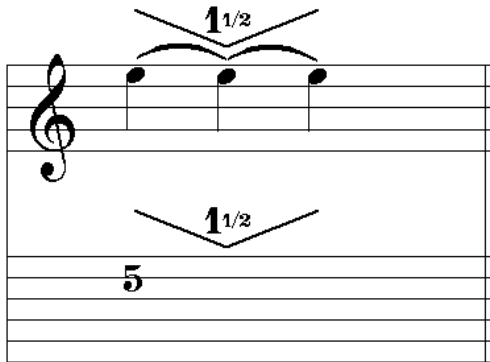
Artificial Harmonic

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



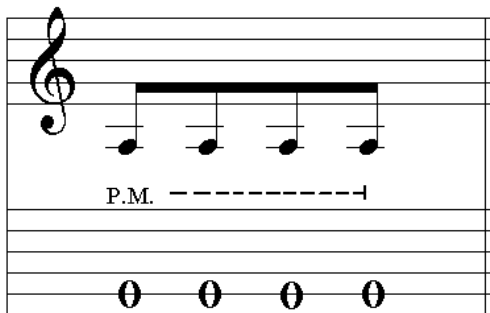
Tremolo Bar

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



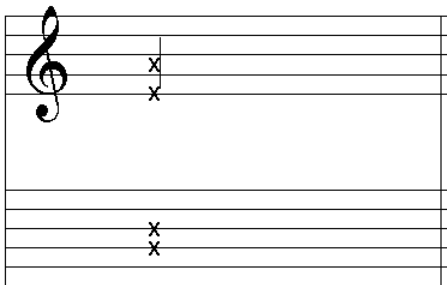
Palm Mute

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



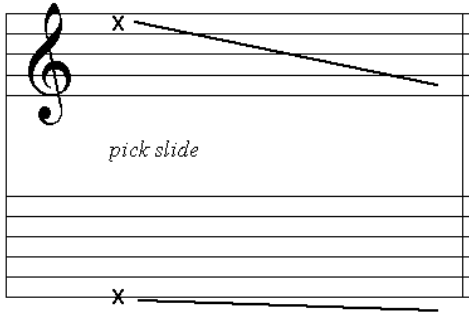
Muffled Strings

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.



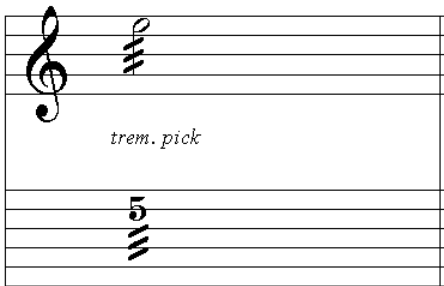
Pick Slide

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



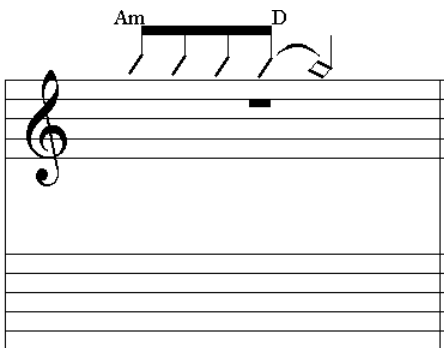
Tremolo Picking

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 stems pointing down to the staff lines. The notes are labeled as follows: a circled 5 above 'C', a circled 2 above 'B', the word 'open' above 'A', and a circled 3 above 'G'. A horizontal line is drawn across the staff between the first and second lines, representing a slash. The staff itself is empty except for the treble clef.