RY NAYLOR GUITAR SINCE 2010

CAGED CLARITY

CONNECT THE DOTS TO FINALLY 'SEE' THE GUITAR USING THE CAGED SYSTEM

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Introduction

After you've learnt all the notes on the fretboard, the next stage in fretboard mastery is readily having chords, arpeggios, pentatonic and diatonic scale patterns under your fingers.

But what is the best approach for learning all of this?

There is no doubt that fretboard fluidity has to be built up in stages and, as such, the fretboard inevitably has to be broken up into smaller chunks to give you a sporting chance!

It's at this point that we often see two distinct camps: **3 note-per-string** and **CAGED**.

Players continue to argue it out on YouTube and guitar forums as to which method is best.

There's no denying the value of the 3 note-per-string approach (in which we learn 7 scale patterns from each note of a diatonic scale, with each pattern having 3 notes to each string), but, personally, I have gotten *much* more value from CAGED.

The main reason for this is because with CAGED we can (with practice) effortlessly visualise 3-note triads, arpeggios, pentatonic scales and 7-note diatonic scales from **one chord shape** (or even as little as a two-note octave shape).

The same cannot be said for the 3 note-per-string method.

CAGED gives context and additional insight into the chord and scale patterns that you may have already learnt.

We can begin to better understand the relationship between chords and scales to give us more confidence when it comes to improvising and writing solos.

If you want to play a solo over a specific chord or chord progression the CAGED approach will give you several different soloing strategies.

We'll start with the fundamentals of CAGED before applying it to form chord shapes, arpeggios, pentatonic and diatonic scales all over the fretboard.

People often refer to the **'CAGED system'**, but I'm not such a fan of that term as it suggests that it was devised by someone, that it was someone's creation.

In reality, no-one came up with this. The tuning of the guitar strings just creates these patterns on the fretboard, like a roadmap. Someone at some stage clearly started promoting it as a teaching method, but it is an innate feature of standard tuning.

CAGED is not the *only* way to do things but, for me, it's the most logical and there's *so* much we can learn from it. I hope to give a little insight into its possibilities with **'CAGED Clarity'**.

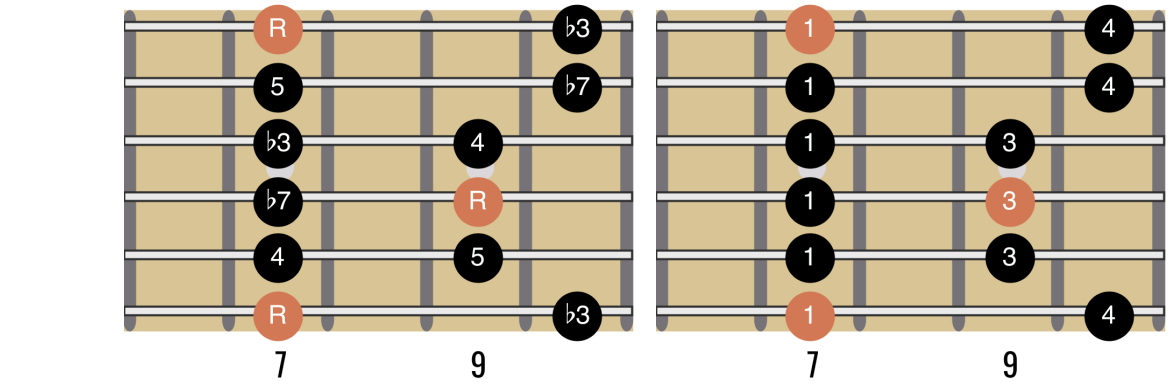
What You Can Expect

CAGED is a way of layering fretboard patterns on top of one another and grouping them together to allow you to see the big picture.

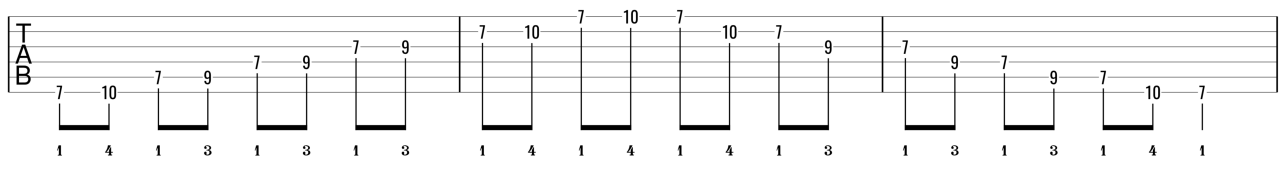
At each stage we will work progressively through each of these layers.

There are 'rhythm guitar' layers (barre chords and triad forms) and 'lead guitar' layers (arpeggios/ pentatonics/diatonic scales).

After the introduction, we'll break down each of the ten CAGED Shapes (five major and five minor). You will be presented with something like this:



Em-Shape minor pentatonic scale intervals and recommended fingering



Playing the Em-Shape minor pentatonic scale from the Root

The first fretboard diagram presents the intervals of the given layer, and beside that the second fretboard shows my recommended fingering (these are my preferred approach, but I would encourage you to experiment and find what works best for you).

Beneath that will be a TAB showing you how to play through the layer from the Root note. These scale patterns are full range, in that they will go as high and as low as possible in the given CAGED Shape.

The numbers sitting beneath the TAB the recommended fretting hand fingering numbers.

I am assuming that you are familiar with the spellings of chords, arpeggios and scales. These will be reviewed in this eBook, but if you are not confident, I would recommend you check out my **'Guitar Rut Busters - Essential Theory'** video course.

For consistency I use the term 'Root' to represent both the Root note of chords, but also the tonic of arpeggios and scales. Technically, the starting note of a scale *should* be named the 'tonic' (1) but, for ease and transference between scales and chords, I've kept it as 'Root' (R).

The layers we will learn are:

- **Octave Shape**
- **Barre Chord**
- **Major/Minor Arpeggio** - playing the 3 chord tones melodically
- **Triads** - from the arpeggio notes we can create mini-chord shapes across three strings
- **Pentatonic Scale** - from 3 notes to 5, giving more melodic possibilities
- **Diatonic Scale** (major/natural minor) - from 5 notes to 7, giving you the most notes available for your soloing and melody creation.

Not wanting to overwhelm you, I have omitted the study of seventh and other chord forms, as well as more advanced arpeggios and modal scales.

These too can be studied with the CAGED approach, but I think it is important to firstly be confident with the fundamentals.

How to work with CAGED Clarity?

The CAGED Shapes are presented in order to show you how they link up along the fretboard.

I would recommend you read through the eBook once and play through the layers and examples to get an overview.

I would then suggest you work with one form before trying to memorise too much. The guide provides all the diagrams and TABs that you will need to keep you busy for a few months!

Try to memorise the intervals to allow to to easily switch between chord layers and soloing layers.

There are suggestions for practice room exercises on pages 88-95.

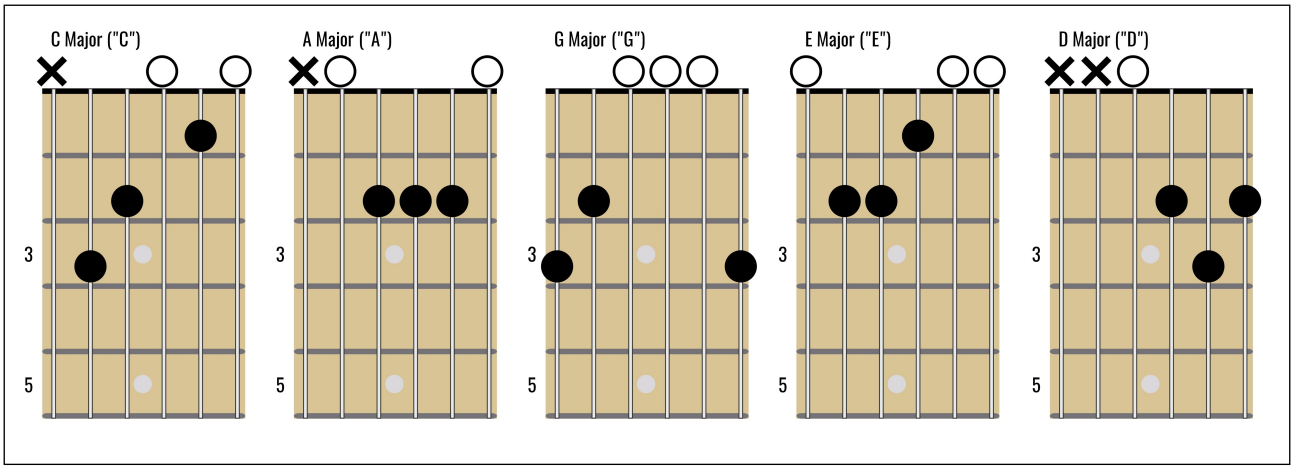
You will also find printable one-page summaries of the CAGED Shapes and the manner in which they link up in the appendices at the end of the book.

Why the name ‘CAGED’?

But what is CAGED? Why that name?

It all begins with some open chords, probably some of the first things you ever learnt.

Each letter of the word ‘CAGED’ refers to one of 5 open position chord forms, namely C, A, G, E and D major:

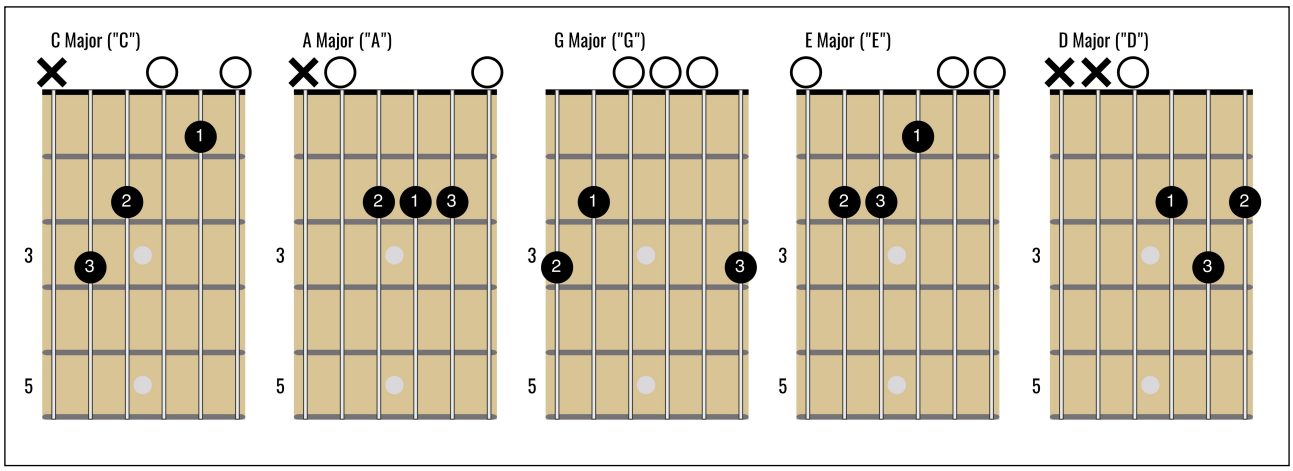


Going forward, I’ll refer to these chord forms as the **‘CAGED open chords’**.

These are the five major chords that can be played in the open position without requiring a barre finger. As such they can actually be played anywhere on the fretboard if we have the strength and dexterity to use the index (finger 1) as a barre finger.

> Remember that *every* shape on the fretboard that doesn’t use open strings is *entirely* moveable.

The first stage is to make sure these are memorised. These would be my recommended fingerings for each chord:



Root Octave Shapes

So we have the chord forms memorised...what's next?

You need to understand exactly where the Root notes are found and be able to visualise the octaves of the Root notes within each of these chords.

To review, the Root is the main note upon which a chord is built and it is the note which names the chord.

The Root of an A major chord is A. The Root note of an A minor (Am) chord is also an A.

The chord *quality* (whether major, minor, dominant...) does not affect the Root note.

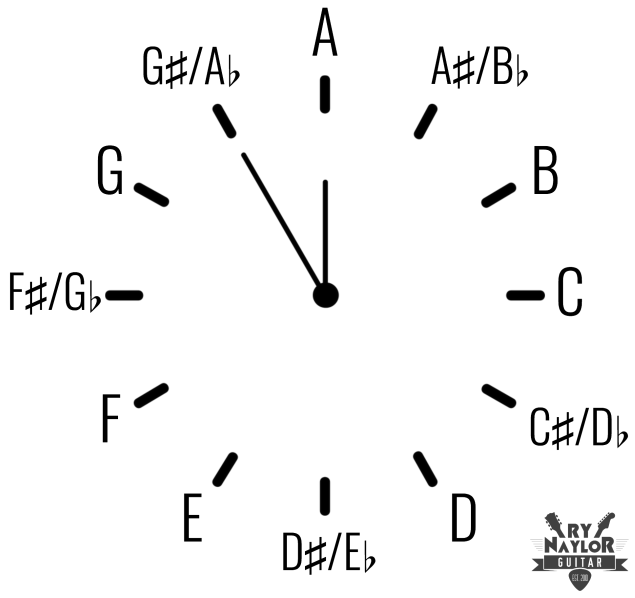
Once we identify the location of the Root, we can theoretically play any chord anywhere on the neck if we place the root on the correct fret.

CAGED is applicable in both the major and minor realms and so we don't want to get too attached to open chords. **Octave shapes** will better serve us. With them we can more easily switch between the major and minor patterns.

An octave is the distance between the first and eighth note of any diatonic scale (for example, C major - **C** D E F G A B **C**). The prefix *oct-* referring to the 8 notes that make up one octave (C to C).

An octave spans 8 alphabet letters, but it is the distance of **12 frets horizontally** on one string. The double inlay dots found on most guitars at the 12th fret represent the octave of the open string

notes. Why 12 frets? Because we have the sharp/flat notes to include as well (as seen in my note clock):

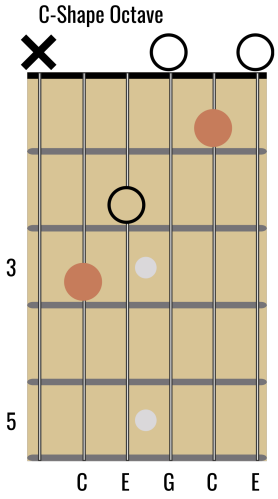


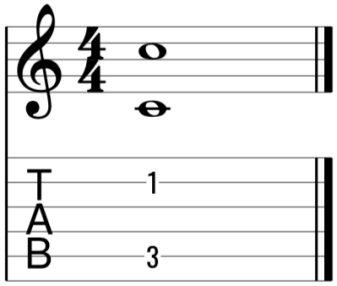
The Note Clock

As we shall see, for each of the CAGED open chords, the Root is the note found on the lowest string played (in pitch).

C-Shape Octave (Strings 5-2)

The Root note of the C chord is found on string 5(A) at the 3rd fret.



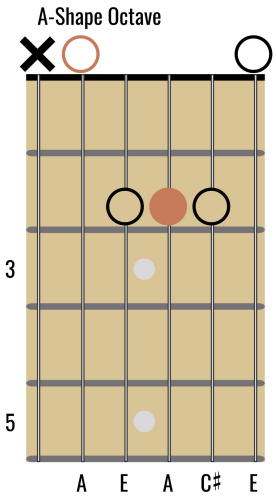


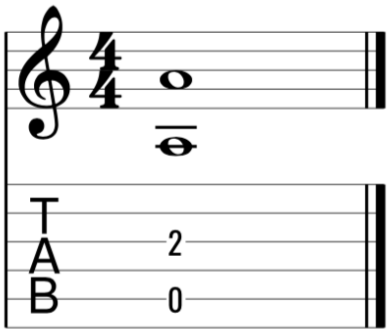
The octave of the Root note on string 5(A) is found two frets lower on string 2(B). We have an octave shape skipping over two strings.

Notice how the shape of the chord and the octave shape is in a diagonal plane towards the headstock.

A-Shape Octave (Strings 5-3)

The Root note of the A chord is also found on string 5(A), the open A string.





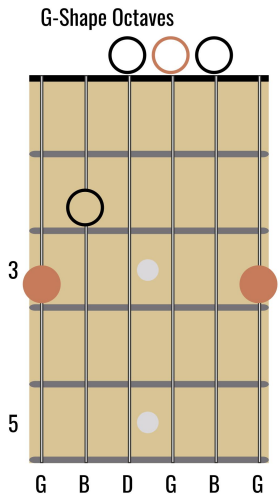
The octave of the Root note on string 5(A) is found two frets higher on string 3(G). This octave shape is skipping over just one string this time.

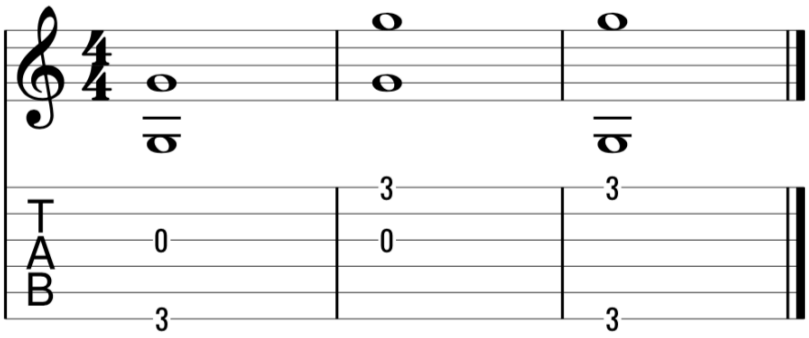
In contrast to the C chord (which also has its root note on string 5(A)) see how the A chord and its octave shape in in a diagonal plane towards the guitar body.

G-Shape Octaves (Strings 6-3, 3-1, 6-1)

The Root note of the G chord is found on string 6(E) at the 3rd fret.

The open G major chord has three octave shapes within it.





The first octave shape is found between strings 6(E) and 3(G). The octave of the G note on string 6(E) is found three frets lower on string 3(G) (the open G string).

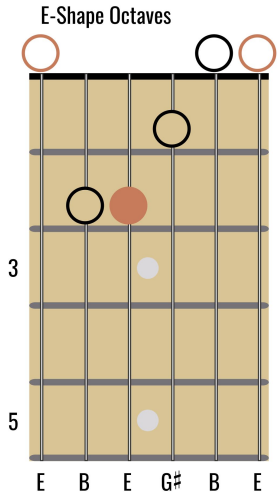
The second octave shape is found between strings 3(G) and 1(E). The octave of the open G note on string 3(G) is found three frets higher on string 1(E).

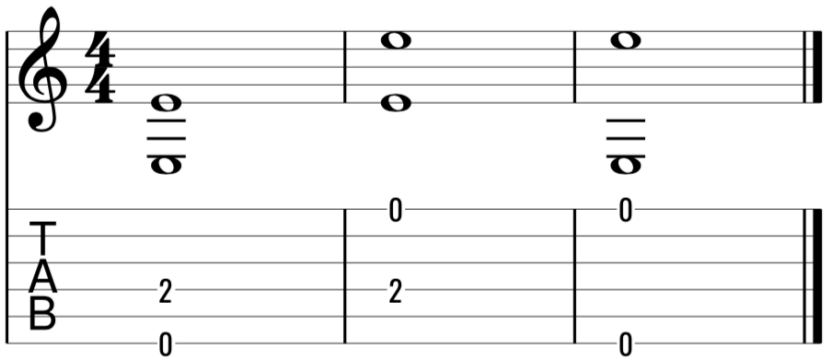
Therefore, there exists a *two octave* shape between the G note on string 6(E) and the G note on string 1(E).

Any note on string 6(E) can be found two octaves higher in the same fret on string 1(E).

E-Shape Octaves (Strings 6-4, 4-1, 6-1)

As with the G-shape, we can think of there being three octave shapes within the open E chord.





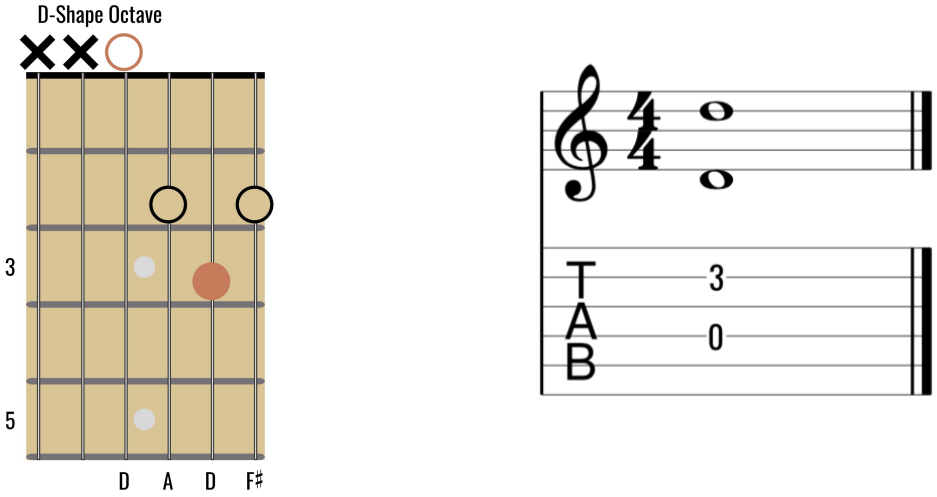
The first octave shape is found between strings 6(E) and 4(D). The octave of the open E note on string 6(E) is found two frets higher on string 4(D).

The second octave shape is found between strings 4(D) and 1(E). The octave of the E note on string 4(D) is found two frets lower on string 1(E) (the open E string).

There is, therefore, a *two octave* shape between the G note on string 6(E) and string 1(E).

D-Shape Octave (String 4-2)

The octave found within the open D major chord is between string 4(D) and string 2(B).



The octave of the open D note on string 4(D) is found three frets higher on string 2(B).

You might notice that there are some similarities to the octave shapes found in each chord form. These shapes can, in fact, be linked together to form a chain of the same note name (in differing octaves) across the entire fretboard.

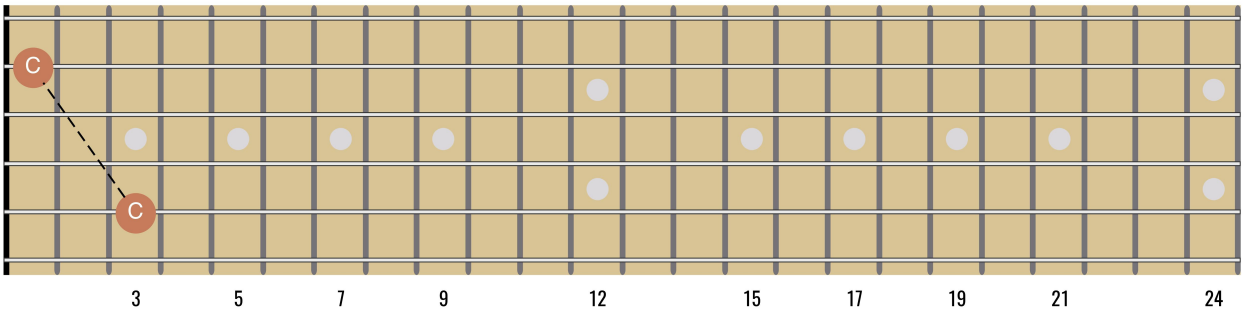
From here on out we're going to be talking in terms of 'C-shape' or 'A-shape' etc.
Every fretboard pattern will be linked to an octave shape, derived from the CAGED open chords.

Linking the Octave Shapes - The Backbone of CAGED

Any of the octave shapes that we identified previously can freely be moved up and down the fretboard.

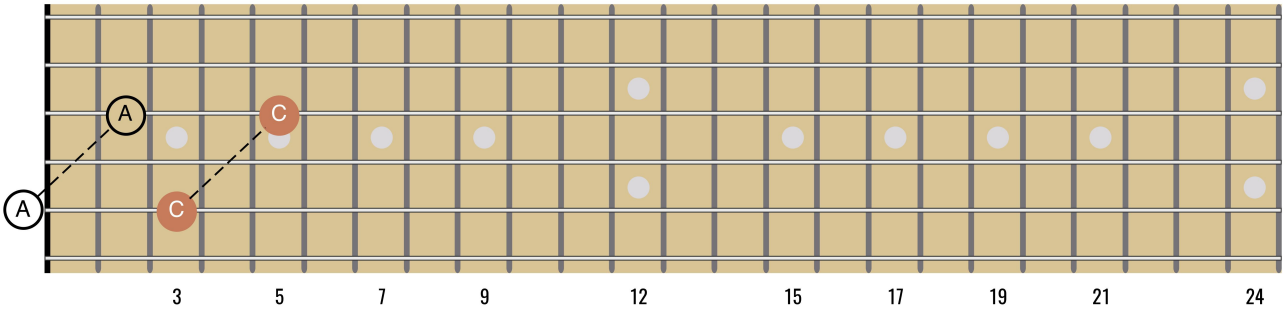
We're going to see how we can move the octave shapes to help us find all of the C notes on the fretboard.

We have already established the C notes in the *open position* (defined as the first four frets), found within the C-shape octave.



We can move each of the other octave shapes up the fretboard horizontally and place them upon a C note to quickly be able to visualise all the C notes within a 4-fret "segment".

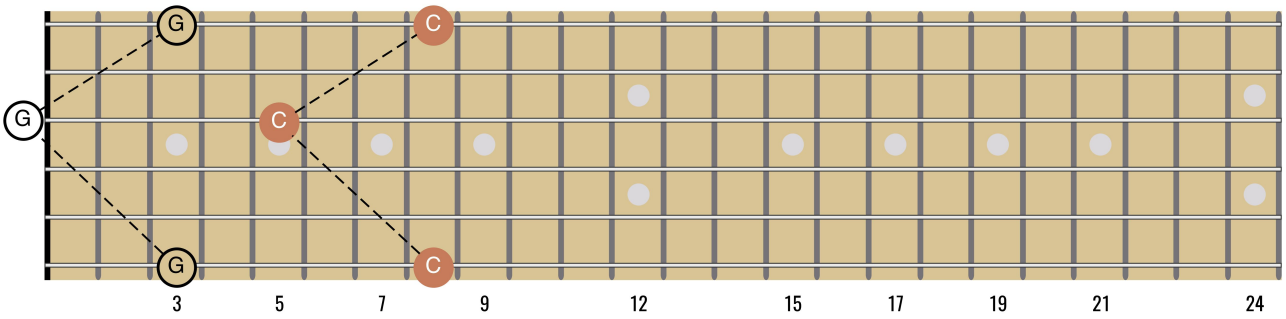
The A-shape octave can be raised 3 frets onto the C note at the 3rd fret of string 5(A).



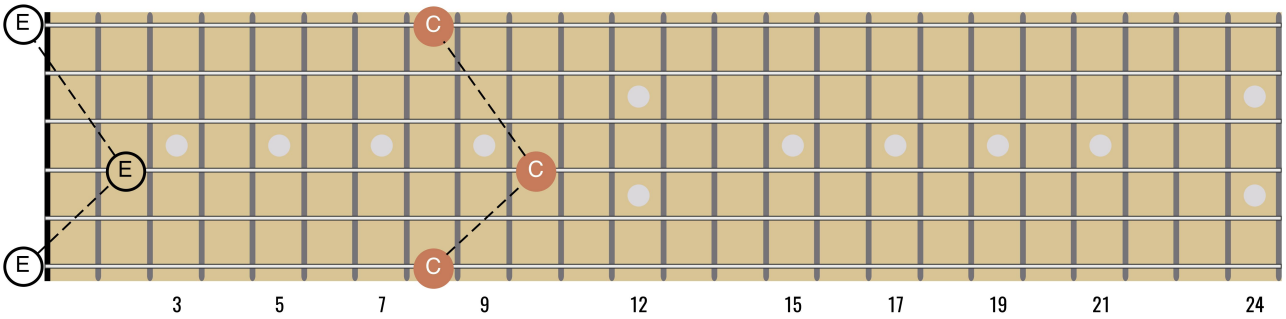
****Important****

The octave between the two C notes will still be named the 'A-shape' despite it being between two C notes. The name of the octave is always derived from the CAGED open chord form.

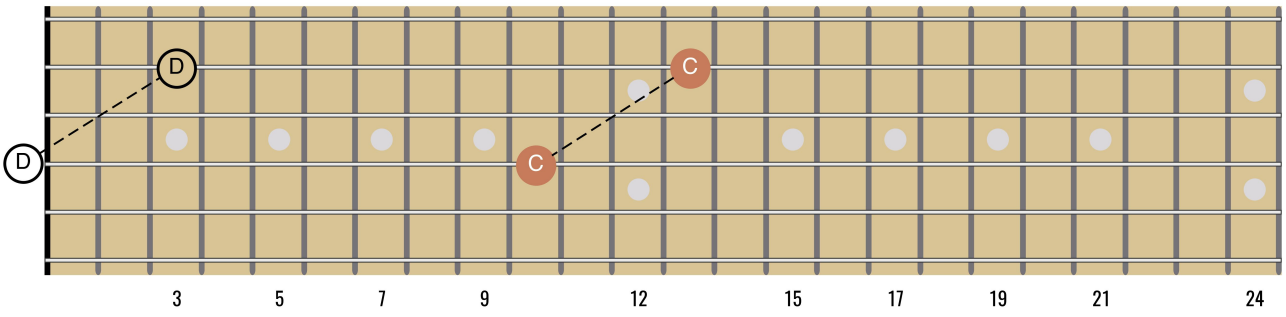
The G-shape octave can be raised 5 frets onto the C note at the 8th fret of string 6(E):



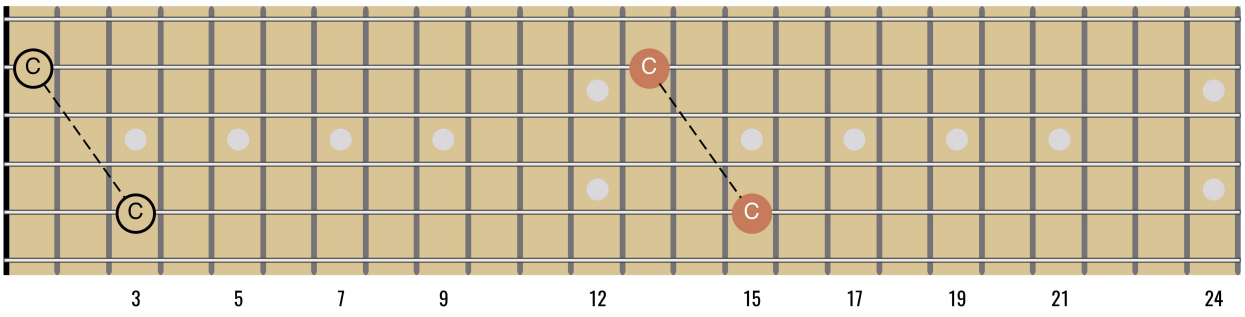
The E-shape octave can be raised 8 frets onto the C note at the 8th fret of string 6(E):



The D-shape octave can be raised 10 frets onto the C note at the 10th fret of string 4(D):

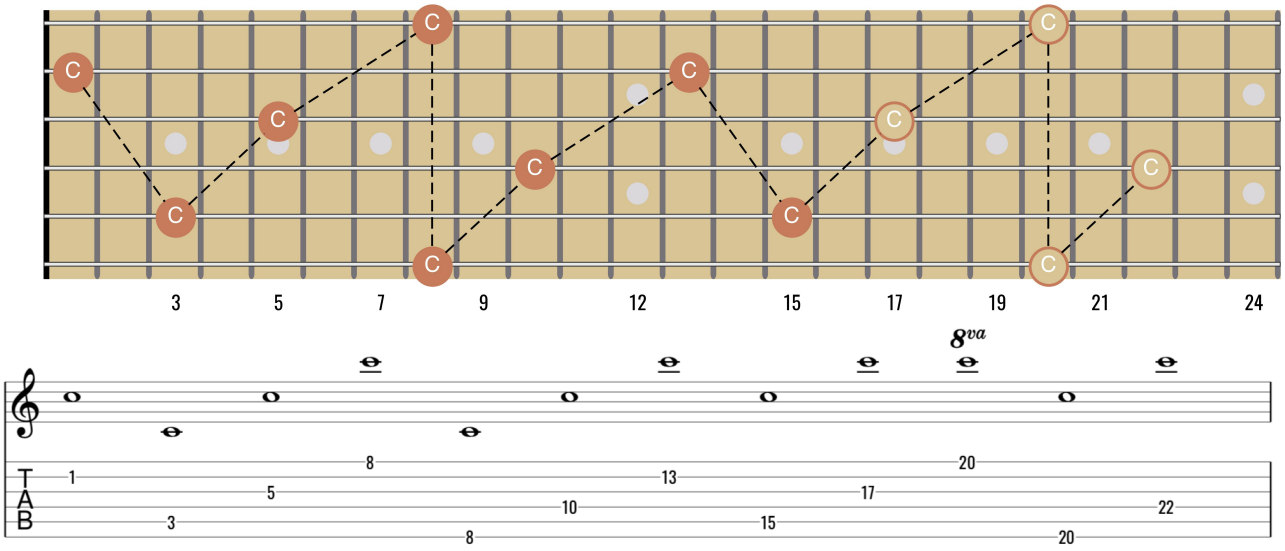


The open position C-shape can be raised one octave onto the C note at the 15th fret of string 5(A).



Any note, chord or pattern can be found an octave higher by moving horizontally 12 frets.

All of these octave shapes can then be linked together to form one long chain of C notes across the fretboard:



C Octaves

See how the octave sequence continues one octave higher in the same shapes beyond the 12th fret.

Linking the Octave Shapes

The ability to link the octave shapes forms the backbone of the CAGED system. These shapes can be used as stepping stones for instantly finding any given note across the fretboard.

There is a sequence to the octave patterns that allows us to move up the fretboard through the different shapes:

1. When on 2(B) move to 5(A) *(5-2 octave)* = ***C**-Shape*
2. When on 5(A) move to 3(G) *(5-3 octave)* = ***A**-Shape*
3. When on 3(G) move to 1(E) *(3-1 octave)* = ***G**-Shape*
4. When on 1(E) move to 6(E) *(6-1 two octave pattern) = G-Shape/E-Shape*
5. When on 6(E), move to 4(D) *(6-4 octave)* = ***E**-Shape*
6. When on 4(D), move to 2(B) *(4-2 octave)* = ***D**-Shape*

See how (at least for the C note) the sequence of octave shapes spells out **CAGED**. The word CAGED gives us the order in which the octave shapes link up horizontally.

C-Shape - A-Shape - G-Shape - E-Shape - D-Shape (CAGED)

This sequence will not change, although the starting 'shape' will vary according to the particular note that you have chosen to start the sequence. You identify the string upon which the chosen note is closest to the headstock (i.e. the lowest fret) and start the sequence from that given string.

In that way the "CAGED system" could also have been called the "AGEDC system" or the "EDCAG system". Not quite as easy to say or remember!

You should, though, be familiar with the order of the octave shapes when we don't start from the C-shape. We would therefore have another four possibilities:

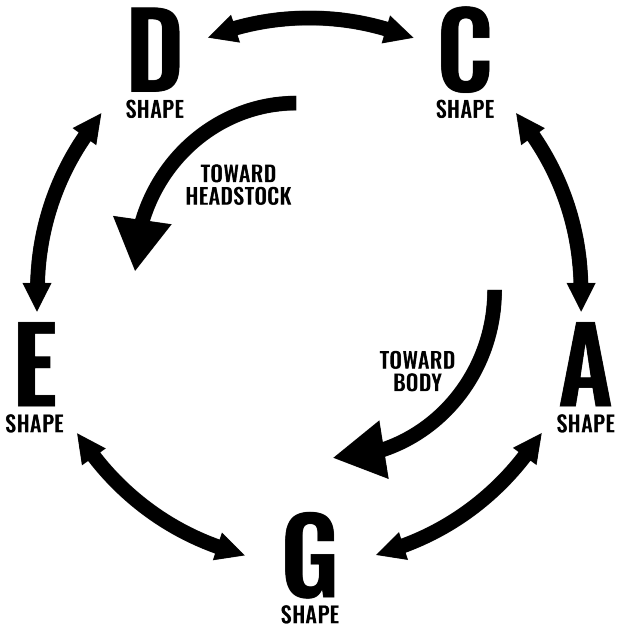
A-Shape - G-Shape - E-Shape - D-Shape - C-Shape (AGEDC)

G-Shape - E-Shape - D-Shape - C-Shape - A-Shape (GEDCA)

E-Shape - D-Shape - C-Shape - A-Shape - G-Shape (EDCAG)

D-Shape - C-Shape - A-Shape - G-Shape - E-Shape (DCAGE)

You could think of it as a cycle on which you can move in either direction. Moving clockwise would be moving higher up the fretboard (towards the body). Moving counter-clockwise would be moving lower on the fretboard (towards the headstock).

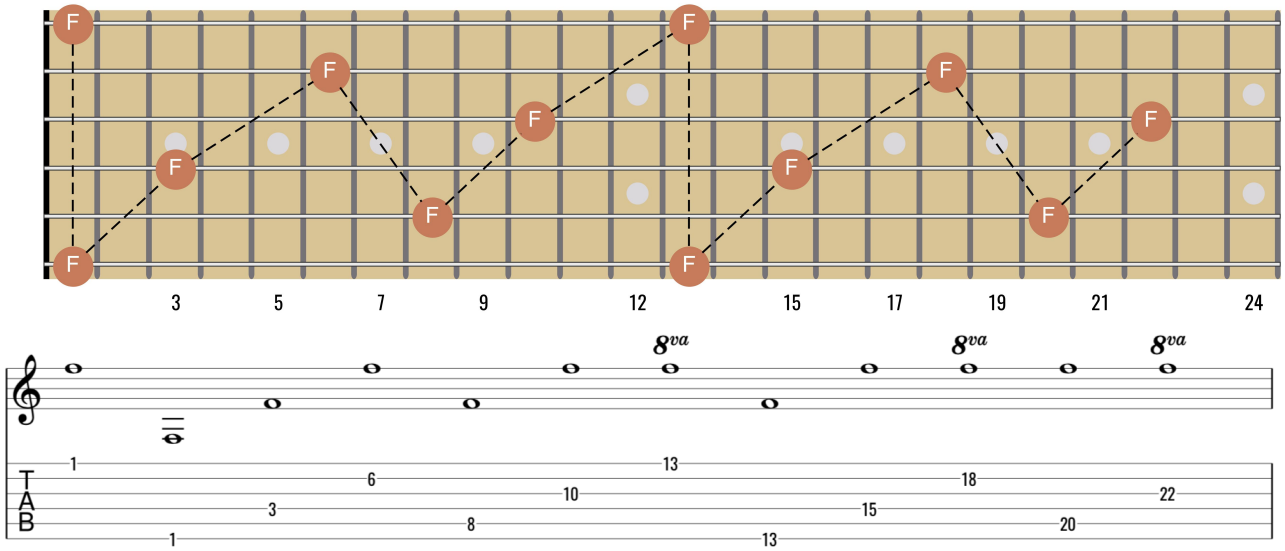


The CAGED Cycle

Taking some other examples, if we want to find all the F notes, we can begin on string 1(E).

When on string 1(E) we will move down two octaves to string 6(E), and then we follow through the octave patterns:

- When on 6(E), move to 4(D) *(6-4 octave) = E-Shape*
- When on 4(D), move to 2(B) *(4-2 octave) = D-Shape*
- When on 2(B) move to 5(A) *(5-2 octave) = C-Shape*
- When on 5(A) move to 3(G) *(5-3 octave) = A-Shape*
- When on 3(G) move to 1(E) *(3-1 octave) = G-Shape*
- When on 1(E) move to 6(E) *(6-1 two octave pattern) = G-Shape/E-Shape*

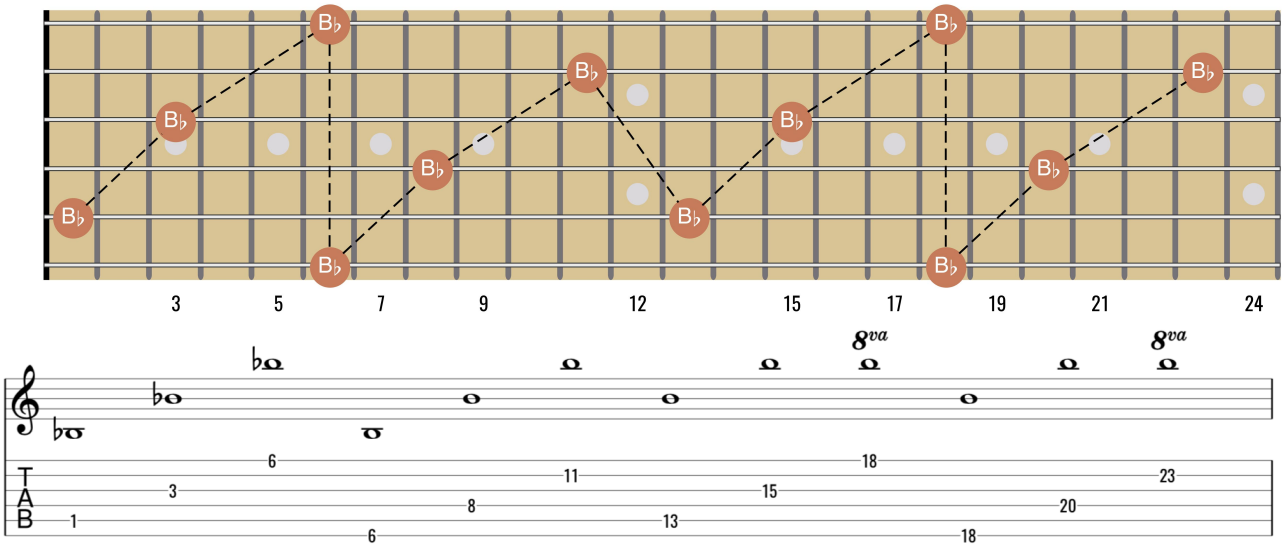


F Octaves

The sequence will continue until you run out of space on the fretboard.

As a final example, let's find all the B♭ notes. Again, start with finding the lowest fret in which we find a B♭. This will be the 1st fret of string 5(A). Our octave sequence this time will start from number 4. (*When on 5(A) move to 3(G)*) and the sequence continues from that point.

- When on 5(A) move to 3(G) *(5-3 octave) = A-Shape*
- When on 3(G) move to 1(E) *(3-1 octave) = G-Shape*
- When on 1(E) move to 6(E) *(6-1 two octave pattern) = G-Shape/E-Shape*
- When on 6(E), move to 4(D) *(6-4 octave) = E-Shape*
- When on 4(D), move to 2(B) *(4-2 octave) = D-Shape*
- When on 2(B) move to 5(A) *(5-2 octave) = C-Shape*



B♭ Octaves

Whatever note (whether natural, sharp or flat) will work in exactly the same way across the fretboard.

Practice Exercise

Practise the sequence starting from any note at random. You'll find that with a little practice, it is possible to memorise the sequence and see the notes all over the fretboard. This is an essential skill to gain fluidity with the CAGED approach.