

Beginner Pentatonic ‘CAGED’ System and Those unruly ‘Box Positions’

Although I’ve been playing acoustic guitar for a few years, able to play basic Country and Folk songs, I have always struggled to understand the CAGED system concept to enable me to play up and down the fret-board.

Then a short time ago, the system started to click into place and I felt that many beginner guitarists will find this information very useful: it’s not that I am providing new knowledge – more a case of how I have broken the system down in a much more accessible format and therefore easier to grasp (in my opinion)

So here goes:

Knowledge required:

1. Have an understanding of Major and Minor scale structure (ie. WWHWWWH the intervals between notes on the scales: Whole step, Whole step, Half step, Whole step, Whole step, Whole step, Half step.) There is a half step between B & C, and E & F on the Major scale.
2. The Pentatonic scale excludes B and F from the scale which creates a musical structure that will always ‘sound good’ no matter what order the notes in the scale are struck.
3. Know the open string chords A, C, G, E, D with ease.
4. Knowing the notes on low E string is useful

Now let’s begin our inspirational journey:

When you play an open C chord, a shape is created **across** the strings Fig 1. The position of the **scale** notes for the C chord are shown and you will memorize this shape.

When an open A chord is played, another shape across the fret-board is created

Further shapes are created with G, then E, then D.

These 5 shapes form the backbone to the ‘CAGED’ system.

Forget about ‘boxes’; that idea creates misunderstanding and unnecessary complexity for the student. I have noted that one tutorial would name the combined A and G shapes as ‘Box 1’ and yet another tutorial will name it as ‘Box 4’ - so it can be very confusing.

These ‘boxes’ are really relating to the following combined shapes: CA, AG, GE, ED, DC. You can see that as you go up the frets, that each shape set (box) has an upper shape and a lower shape (ie A is the lower shape for AG and G is the upper shape (ie further up the neck).

This order of shape sets – CA, AG, GE, ED, DC is the way the fret-board notes are laid out in the pentatonic scales going up the fret-board. So quite simply, the sequence of chord shapes up the fret-board spells out ‘CAGED’. The shapes are ALWAYS in this order!

To clarify this concept: an open C chord can also be played further up the neck using the A shape; and the same C chord can be played further up the neck using the G shape then the E shape and finally, the D shape (all producing the same C chord)

SO IN REALITY, 'BOXES' REFER TO GROUPS OF SHAPES, CA / AG / GE / ED / DC.

IN FACT, YOU ONLY NEED TO LEARN EACH INDIVIDUAL SHAPE C / A / G / E / D /

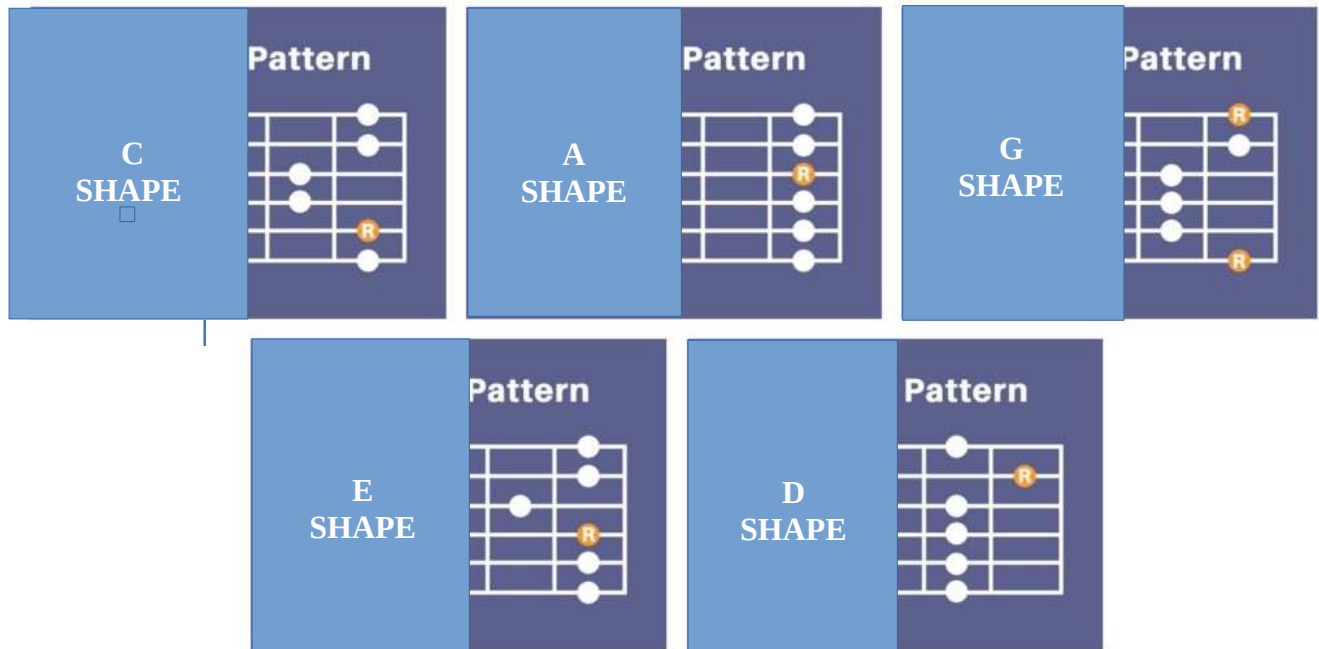


Fig 1.

Here are the patterns in consecutive order:

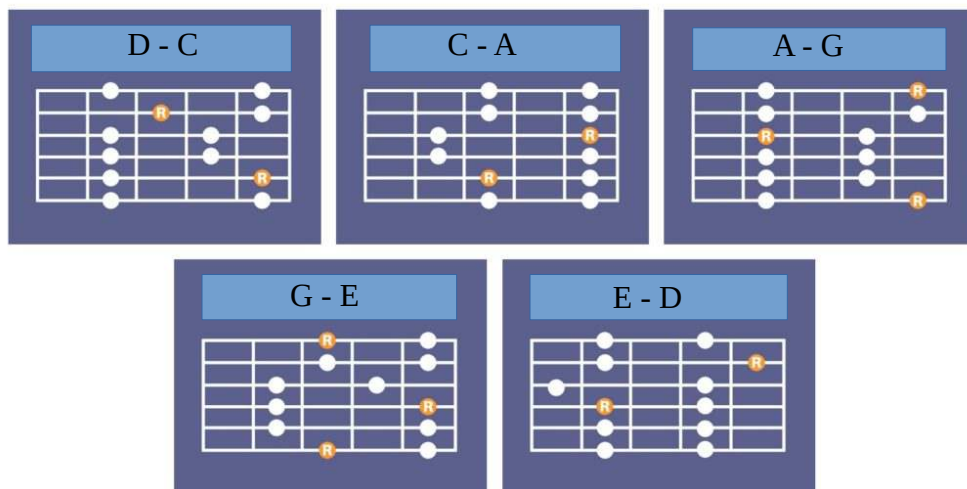


Fig 2.

Once you've learned the 5 shapes – C, A, G, E, D you can really move forward at a much faster pace.

I learned the 5 shapes in only a few days, so I'm certain you will too!

Next! Visit **Scott Paul Johnson's guitar tutorials for a 'hands-on' approach to success.**

After years of struggling with the best way to learn and practice, I recently came across this teaching platform and it is truly a revelation. I cannot emphasize enough, just how much you will benefit from these lessons. There are many good sites to learn from but do check SPJ out for yourself – you'll be amazed!