



## Jazz 12 Bar Blues Changes Tutorial

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The blues, or '12-bar' chord sequence is very common in jazz. In it's basic form it is the same chord sequence as used in 'The Blues'. However, jazz musicians usually extend this sequence to make it more interesting and suitable for improvising over. This article, and a tutorial session scheduled for the October 2002 meeting, will explain some ways in which these 12-bar sequences have been developed and used by jazz improvisers.

### Example 1

This is the basic 12-bar blues sequence

G	G	G	G7
C	C	G	G
D7	D7	G	G

The chords are the I, IV, and V chords of the G major scale, so improvisation using just the notes of the G major scale is possible throughout the whole sequence.

### Example 2

Converting the major chords to sevenths, and adding a change to the II chord in bar 2 makes the sequence a little more interesting. G7 is the V chord of the harmonised C major scale, so F can be used instead of F# when improvising over that chord i.e. you are playing from the notes of the C major scale over the G7 (in fact, the mixolydian mode of G is what you would be playing here – and it doesn't hurt a bit, does it !).

Similarly, C7 is the V chord of the harmonised F major scale, so a Bb can be used instead of B when improvising over this chord. Use of these seventh chords, and the alternative notes they imply, creates a more 'bluesy' feel.

G7	C7	G7	G7
C7	C7	G7	G7
D7	C7	G7	D7

### Example 3

Here the seventh chords are treated as V chords, and their II chords substituted to add more interest and root movement.

Note how the Am7 in bar 9 substitutes the D7, being its II chord. This can be approached in the previous bar from an E7, which in turn can be substituted by Bm7. This is a very common device in modern jazz 12-bar blues. A similar device is applied in the last 2 bars. The minus sign after the chord is shorthand for m7, by the way.

G7	D-	C7	G-	G7	D-	G7
C7	G-	C7	G7	B-	E7	
A-	D7	G7	E7	A-	D7	

### Example 4

II and V chords can be approached from a semitone above or below. Doing this creates a nice 'walking bass' feel to the chord sequence. You can chose the above or below approach, and vary it to taste, so the following is an example for guidance only. The approach chord usually comes on beat 4 of the preceding bar.

Note also the use of the diminished chords in bar 6 - this is also a very common device. A diminished chord a semitone above a seventh chord substitutes for it, since it has the same notes as the seventh with a b9 added. Putting the b9 in the bass creates root movement, whilst keeping the chord essentially the same, even though it is now spelled as C# diminished (C#<sup>o</sup>) instead of C7b9. Diminished chords repeat themselves when moved up in minor 3rds, so try this to create even more root movement.

In bar 7, I've gone back to a basic G chord, but with a B in the bass, and substituted the II chord, Am7 in the second half of that bar. This leads nicely to the Bm7 via a Bb diminished passing chord, and keeps the bass line moving melodically.

Finally, note the so-called 'tri-tone substitution' in the last beat of bar 11, and in several other places. The Bb here substitutes the E7. A tri-tone substitution substitutes a seventh chord whose flattened fifth is the root of the original 7<sup>th</sup> chord i.e. the chord whose flattened 5<sup>th</sup> is E is Bb7, so Bb7 substitutes E7.

G7	Db-	D-	B7	C7	Ab-	G-	Ab7	G7	G7	G7	Db-	D-	Ab7	G7	B7
C7	C# <sup>o</sup>	E <sup>o</sup>	G/B	A-	Bb <sup>o</sup>	B-	F7	E7	Bb7						
A-	Eb7	D7	Ab7	G7	F7	E7	Bb7	A7	Eb7	D7	Ab7				

### Example 5

Here's another variation - note groovy descending sevenths sequence from bar 7.

G7	Db-	D-	B7	C7	Ab-	G-	C7	G/B	Bb <sup>0</sup>	A-	Eb7	D7	Ab7	G7	B7
C7	Ab-	G-	C7	C# <sup>0</sup>	E <sup>0</sup>	G7	F#7	F7	E7						
Eb7				D7	Ab7		G7	F7	E7	Bb7	A7	Eb7	D7	Ab7	

### Example 6

Charlie Parker's 'Blues For Alice' takes the harmonic extension to the limit with the following 'Round the Clock' sequence, because it passes through so many keys. Wes Montgomery's 'West Coast Blues' also uses parts of this sequence.

G	F#-	B7	E-	Eb-	D-	G7									
C7	C-	F9	B-	E9	Bb-	Eb9									
A-	D7	G	Bb7	Eb7	D7										

Note again the tritone substitution of Bb7 for E7 in the second half of bar 11. This moves via the cycle of 4ths to Eb7, which then slides down a semitone to the final D7 of the original sequence. A common factor in all these substitutions is to aim for the chord roots to move in 4ths, 5ths, and semitones, as such movements create a satisfying forward flow to the music, and make it easier to blow over.

### General note on chord voicing for these sequences

Keep the chords simple, 3 notes should do it, 2 sometimes, and not usually more than 4. Use the bottom or middle 4 strings mainly. Some sample voicings for the chords used in the above examples are as follows. The numbers are the frets, low E to high E strings left to right, X meaning string not fingered or plucked.

G7	3X34XX
D-	X5X56X
E7	X767XX
C# <sup>0</sup>	9X89XX
B-	7X77XX
E9	X7X77X
G/B	7X578X

Minimal chord voicings like this, and constantly shifting root movement via chord substitutions of the type outlined above are also the stylistic basis of the late great Count Basie Band rhythm guitarist, Freddie Green, by the way, and you can apply the principles outline here to other chord sequences than the blues.

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