

Bending

Bending a note on the Guitar is usually one of the most misunderstood techniques for the beginning soloist. Most guitarists seem to think that a bend is just an effect where you push the string around a little bit. In reality, it is just another way to get from one note to another much like a hammer-on or pull-off is. The first thing that we are going to do is to train your ears to hear a target note, and then bend the string to that note.

Before we get started, let's talk about the physical motion of bending a string. Just trying to push a string with one finger isn't going to work very well. One finger by itself isn't particularly strong (especially for someone new to the technique - eventually you should be able to bend with any finger!). What we will do to compensate for that is to use our 3rd finger for all of the bends on this page, and place our second finger on the same finger right behind it. This will support the 3rd finger. The other thing to remember is that we don't actually bend from the finger. Keep the finger arched as if you were playing the note normally and use your wrist and forearm to move the string. This is like using your legs and not your back to lift a box...the legs just have more power!

Listen to the target note: Now bend!

Fretted note target note

full full

T 8 10 8 7 9 7

A

B

Now that we have gotten the basic motion under our fingers, let's practice our **Whole Step** bends. A whole step is the distance between two notes when you go up a string two frets (there will be an unplayed fret in between the two notes that make up the whole step). Play the target note and then play the bend like above. Then move up one fret and repeat, continuing all of the way up the string. I have it here on the 2nd string because it will be easier to bend on at first, but repeat on all 6 strings. I usually bend up on the plain strings and I pull down on the wound strings (strings 4,5 and 6). Experiment!

Use your metronome and be sure to do these exercises in time!

Ex. 1

full full full full full full full full

5 3 6 4 7 5 8 6 9 7 10 8 11 9 12 10

Exercise 2 is the same idea, but now we are playing *Half Steps*. A half step is when we move up the string only one fret.

Ex. 2

Exercise 2 is a musical exercise on a single string, starting at the 8th fret. It consists of eight measures, each containing a pair of eighth notes. The first note of each pair is a natural note, and the second note is a half-step higher, achieved by bending the string. An arrow labeled '1/2' indicates the amount of bend for each note. The fret numbers for the first notes are 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, moving up the string in half-step increments.

A bend is not a one dimensional technique. Lets try some variations...

Immediate Bend - Pick the note and then immediately bend the string to pitch

This diagram shows a single note on the 8th fret. An arrow labeled 'full' points upwards from the note, indicating that the string is bent immediately after being picked to reach the target pitch.

Bend on the "and" of one.

Bend up on "Three" and down on "Four"

This block contains two musical examples. The first example shows a four-beat phrase starting on the 8th fret. The first note is picked on beat 1, and a 'full' bend is applied on the 'and' of beat 1, reaching the 10th fret. The second example shows a four-beat phrase starting on the 8th fret. The first note is picked on beat 1, and a 'full' bend is applied on beat 3, reaching the 10th fret. On beat 4, the string is released from the bend, returning to the 8th fret.

Bend the eighth notes in time - only the first note is picked!

Bend the note first, pick and then release

This block contains two musical examples. The first example shows a sequence of eighth notes starting on the 8th fret. The first note is picked, and a 'full' bend is applied to it. Subsequent eighth notes are bent but not picked, as indicated by the circled '8' below the notes. The second example shows a single eighth note on the 8th fret. A 'full' bend is applied to the note first, and then it is picked, as indicated by the circled '8' below the note.

Ex. 3 Playing examples...the next two exercises are pretty unhip, but they will give you the chance to play a few of these bending ideas in a more "musical" context.

Ex.4 Try bending the notes on the 4th, 5th and 6th strings down towards the floor...this will give you a little more power in the bend. As you get into these strings the possibility of pushing the string off the side of the neck will also increase...