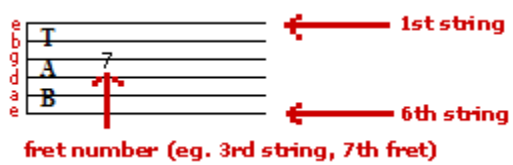


# How To Read Guitar Tablature

## Understanding the Tab Staff



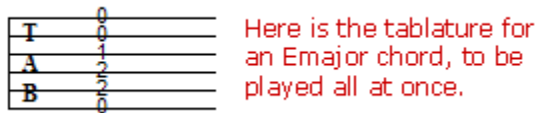
A tab staff for guitar has 6 horizontal lines, each one representing a string of the instrument. The bottom line of the staff represents your lowest "E" string, the second line from the bottom represents your "A" string, etc. Easy enough to read, right?

Notice that there are numbers located in the middle of the lines (aka strings). The numbers simply represent the fret the tab is telling you to play. For example, in the illustration above, the tab is telling you to play the third string (third line) seventh fret.

**Note:** When the number "0" is used in tablature, this indicates that the open string should be played.

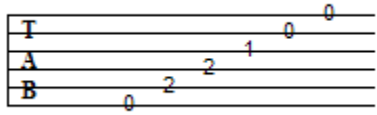
This is the concept of reading tab, at it's most basic. Now let's examine some of the more advanced aspects of reading tablature notation, including how to read chords in tab.

## Reading Chords in Guitar Tab



Reading chords within guitar tab is a relatively simple process. When a tab displays a series of numbers, stacked vertically, it is indicating to play all these notes *at the same time*. The above tablature indicates that you should hold down the notes in an E major chord (second fret on fifth string, second fret on fourth string, first fret on third string) and strum all six strings at once. Often, tablature will additionally include the chord name (in this case E major) above the tablature staff, to help guitarists recognize the chord more quickly.

## Reading Arpeggiated Chords in Tab



Here is the tablature for the notes in an E major chord, to be played one string at a time.

The above tablature contains the exact same notes as the first E major chord presented on the previous page, but it will be played differently. In this situation, the notes in the chord will be played one at a time, rather than all together. "How fast should I play these notes?" you may ask. Good question...

## Fundamental Flaws of Guitar Tab

The lack of rhythmic notation is the biggest flaw you'll find in guitar tablature. And it's a big flaw. Most guitar tab doesn't notate rhythm in any way, so if you haven't heard how the guitar part to the song you're playing goes, you have no way of knowing how long to hold each note. Some guitar tab does attempt to include rhythms, by putting stems on each number (to indicate quarter notes, eighth notes, etc), but most guitarists find this cumbersome to read. And besides, if you're going to include traditional rhythmic notation in guitar tab, why not just go the extra step and write the whole thing in standard notation?

Another major problem with guitar tablature: only guitarists can read it. While "standard notation" is readable by those who play any instrument, tab is native to guitarists, so those who don't play guitar won't be able to comprehend it. This makes any sort of musical communication with a piano player, or other musician, very difficult.

We've covered the basics of the pros and cons of guitar tablature. Now, we'll take a moment to talk about a few of the intricacies of tab - like how to read/write string bends, slides, and more.

## Other Symbols Used in Guitar Tab

Here are some of the little details that you'll need to know to fully understand how to read guitar tablature. Be aware that some of these symbols vary, depending on who created the tablature.

### Hammer Ons and Pull Offs

It's most common to see the letter **h** representing a hammer on, located within the tablature between the original fret, and the hammered on fret (e.g. **7h9**)

Similarly, the letter **p** is generally used to represent a pull off, also found in the same location within the tablature (e.g. **9p7**)

Occasionally, you'll see the **^** symbol used for either a hammer on or pull off (eg. **9^7**).

## Slides in Guitar Tab

Generally, a / symbol is used to notate an ascending slide, while a \ symbol is used to notate a descending slide. So, 7/9\7 indicates sliding from the seventh fret, up to the ninth fret, and back to the seventh fret. If no number precedes the slide symbol, this indicates sliding from an indeterminate fret.

It is also not uncommon to see the letter **s** used to notate a slide. This is somewhat less concise, as when sliding from an indeterminate point (e.g. **s9**), it is unclear whether to slide up to the note, or down to the note.

## Miscellaneous Notation

The use of **vibrato** can be notated several different ways in tablature. Most often, the ~ symbol is used, often strung together to appear as ~~~. Sometimes, vibrato will be simply notated with a **v**.

A **string mute** is almost always notated with an **x**. Several **x**'s in a row, on adjacent strings, is used to notate a **rake**.

**Right hand tapping** (for right handed guitarists) is generally notated in tab via a **t**, in conjunction with the pull off and hammer on techniques used when executing right handed tapping. Thus, 2**h5t12p5p2** represents traditional tapping technique.

When notating the tab for **harmonics**, the <> symbols are usually used, surrounding the fret which the harmonic is played at.