

## Using Minor and Major Pentatonics in the Same Guitar Solo

by [Dennis Winge](#)

Once you've learned your major and minor pentatonics, you can practice them interchangeably. All of the great classic rock and blues players from B.B. King and Eric Clapton to the modern guitarists like Joe Bonamassa and John Mayer do this effortlessly, so it is a milestone in a guitarist's life to be sure. In fact, the way you intertwine these two scales can really shape your 'voice' on the guitar, especially in blues or blues-influenced genres.

When can you use both major and minor pentatonics interchangeably? This article discusses some of the most common scenarios.

### **1. The chord progression sounds 'open' enough so that either scale will fit.**

For example, just take two chords such:

||: D | C :||

Both the D minor and D major pentatonics work. The former sounds bluesier or darker, and the latter sounds happier or brighter. Mix them up in ways that match the emotion you want the listener to feel.

A famous song in which the harmony is 'open' enough to allow for both scales to be used freely is "Can't You See" by Marshall Tucker goes:

||: G | F | C | G :||

You can play both G major and G minor pentatonic here. For a challenge, try ascending 1 scale and descending the other both in the same neck position. Or, how about playing mostly one of the 2 scales but throwing in just a few notes from the other one strategically in the same line?

### **2. The song or progression implies each of the 2 scales back and forth.**

In the following version of "I Know You Rider" (discussed in my article called "Make Up Cool Chord Progressions Easily), the D, G and Em chords are from D major and the F and C are from D minor. As a place to start, see if you can play D major pentatonic on the whole tune except for the 3<sup>rd</sup> line which would be minor. (In that scenario, you would ignore that the C chord in line 1 comes from minor). After gaining familiarity with the changes, you could switch to minor on any F or C chord.

||: D | % | C | G |

| D | % | % | % :||

|| F | C | F | C Em |

| D | % | % | % ||

Also in that article, I cited "Soulshine" by Warren Haynes as an example where the harmony is mixed. In that article I only gave the roman numerals, but here are the actual chords.

Intro

||: Bb | F | Gm Ab | Bb :||

verse

|| Bb F | Eb Bb | Bb F | Eb Bb |  
| Bb F | Eb Bb | Bb F | Gm Ab ||

chorus

|| Bb | F | Eb7 | Bb |  
| Bb | F | Gm Ab | Bb ||

bridge

|| Gm | Eb | % | Bb |  
| Dm | Eb | Ab | F ||

(song form: intro, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, solos on chorus and bridge, multiple choruses with vocals and solos)

The chords are all in Bb major except: Ab and Eb7, which imply Bb minor. The Ab is sprinkled liberally throughout the tune and gives it a bluesy flavor. Because of this, in addition to keeping the 2 scales strictly separate, you could also experiment with a bit of bluesiness (not a real word but it should be lol) over the other parts as well, but use caution. For example, Bb minor pentatonic won't sound particular great over the Dm or Gm chords.

Another great example of a progression that toggles between major and minor pentatonic is in the song Pretzel Logic by Steely Dan. From 1:52 to 2:47 is a guitar solo over the following chords:

A section

|| Am | % | % | % |  
(A minor -----)

| Am | F | % | % |  
(A minor -----)

| Dm | % | Am | % |  
(A minor -----)

B section

|| D/E E/A | C/D D/G | D/E E/A | C/D D/G |  
(A major A minor A major A minor)

| D/E E/A | C/F Bb | Am | % | % | % ||  
(A major A minor -----)

I have artificially labeled the sections because A section is just straight up Am. The B section toggles between A major and A minor as shown. So try toggling between major and minor pentatonics as the chords change.

(By the way to play D/E use x7777x, E/A play 5x645x, C/D play x5555x, and for D/G use 3x423x where the numbers are fret numbers or 'x' for do not play that string from strings 6 to 1 respectively.)

Good luck and have fun!