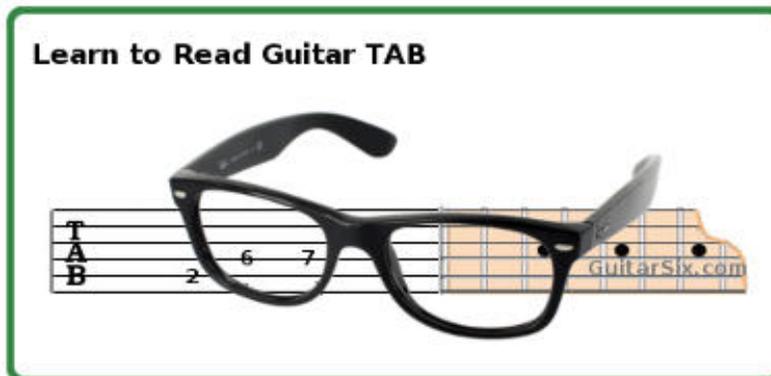


# How To Read Guitar TAB

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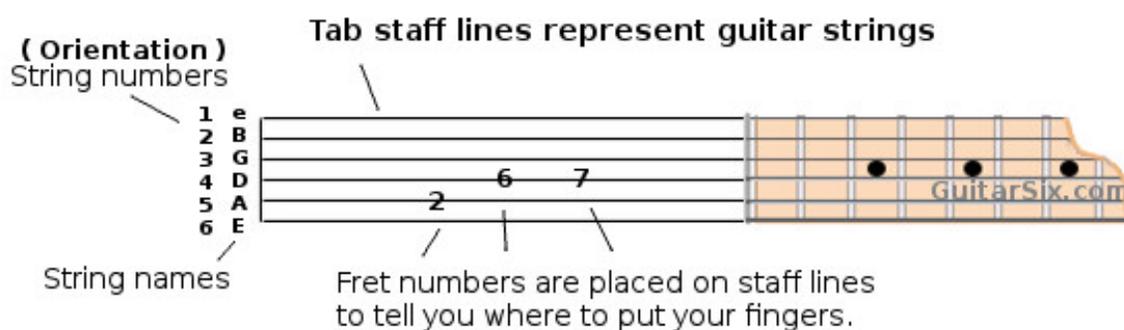
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# What is Guitar TAB?

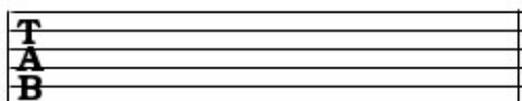
Guitar TAB is a clever invention that lets people easily communicate music written for guitar. This lesson will teach you how to read guitar TAB as well as how to write it so that others can read it. I also provide a printable image of blank TAB paper at the bottom of this article that you can use to write your own TABs.

TAB is actually an abbreviation for the word **tablature**. Tablature is a shorthand for musical notation that indicates an instrument's fingering and other mechanics used to play a piece of music. TAB consists of a staff (lines and spaces) that mimic the strings of a guitar as well as various other symbols.

## The TAB Staff



The beginning of a piece of music written in TAB is prefaced with the word "**TAB**" in bold so it's not confused with regular music notation.



## Benefits of Guitar TAB?

There are quite a few benefits to using guitar TAB.

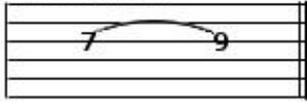
- \* It's easy to learn.
- \* TAB is easier to read and write compared to standard music notation.
- \* If done right, TAB can show the timing and the technique used to play guitar music.
- \* It's a great learning tool.
- \* It's a fast way to communicate or archive musical ideas.

## TAB symbols for guitar technique

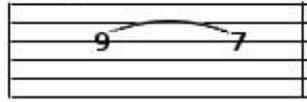
There is no set standard for writing TAB but there are TAB symbols that are fairly common. I'll go over most of them here. Most authors include a legend at the top of their TAB that define the symbols they are using. **It's good practice to always include a legend in TAB you write** especially if you write TAB that uses uncommon symbols.

Guitar TAB basic techniques

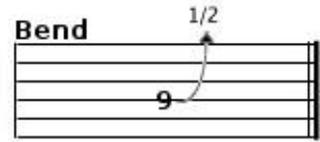
Hammer on



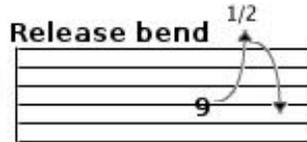
Pull off



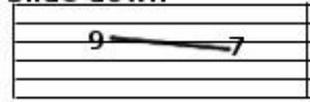
Bend



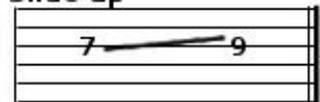
Release bend



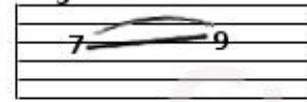
Slide down



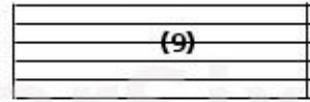
Slide up



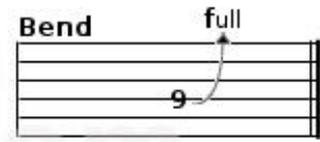
Legato slide



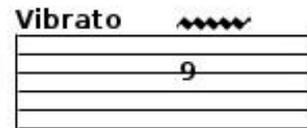
Ghost note



Bend



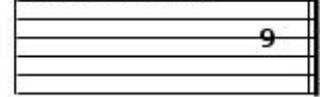
Vibrato



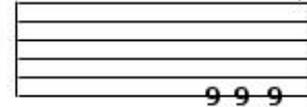
Wide vibrato



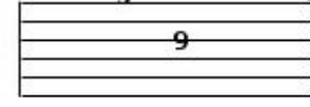
Pinched harm. P.H.



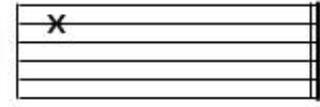
Palm mute P.M. - - - |



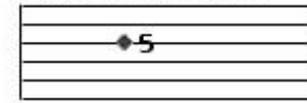
Let ring Let ring - - - |



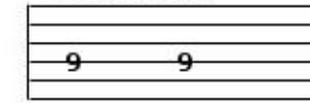
Dead note



Natural harmonic

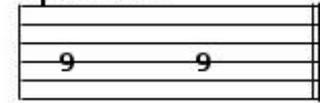


Down stroke



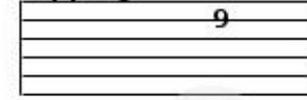
▮ or ●

Up stroke

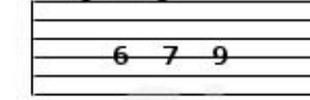


∨ or ●

Tapping T

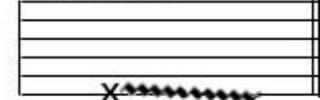


Fingering

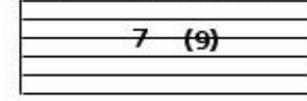


1 2 4

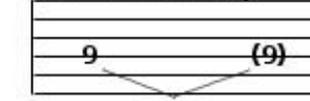
Pick scrape



Trill tr

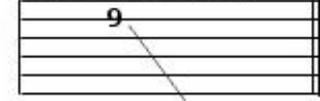


Tremolo bar dip



-1

Tremolo bar dive



-2

## TAB symbol descriptions

**Hammer on** - While holding the 7th fret with the first finger, slam down another finger on to fret 9 without picking.

**Pull off** - Opposite of a hammer on, a pull off lifts one finger to a held fretted note behind it causing it to ring.

**Bend (1/2)** - Note is picked then bent upward to a pitch a 1/2 step higher.

**Release Bend** - Starting from a pre-bent position the note is then picked and brought down to normal position.

**Slide down** - Pick the first note then slide your finger to the next note in the direction towards your head stock.

**Slide up** - Pick the first note then slide your finger to the next note in the direction towards the guitar body.

**Legato slide** - Slide from one note to the other without picking.

**Ghost note** - An audible note that is not picked and whose sound may be caused by the vibration of other notes.

**Bend (full)** - Note is picked then bent upward to a pitch a whole step higher.

**Vibrato** - Rapid bend and release of a string that causes the pitch of the note to fluctuate.

**Wide Vibrato** - Rapid bend and release of a string that causes the pitch of the note to fluctuate but with wider bends than normal vibrato.

**Pinched harm.** - A pinched harmonic is caused by the pick or picking hand coming into contact with a ringing string. This usually generates a high pitched squealing harmonic.

**Palm mute** - The string is muted using the meat of the picking hand near the bridge, pickups or sound hole.

**Let ring** - Keep the note ringing until the end of the dashed line.

**Dead note** - A note that is muted using the fretting hand.

**Natural Harmonic** - The harmonic produced by lightly touching the string above the indicated fret number.

**Down stroke** - Pick the indicated note or chord downward towards the floor.

**Up stroke** - Pick the indicated note or chord upward towards the sky.

**Tapping** - Indicates a note or series of notes where a finger of the picking hand "taps" on the fretboard to produce the sound at the desired fret number.

**Fingering** - Shows the finger number of the fretting hand used to play the note.

**Pick scrape** - The guitar pick is dragged down the length of the string.

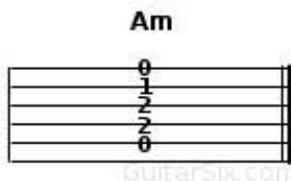
**Trill** - Rapid hammer on and pull offs between two notes.

**Tremolo bar dip** - Tremolo bar is quickly depressed then returned back to note pitch.

**Tremolo bar dive** - Tremolo bar is depressed completely.

## Guitar Chord TABs

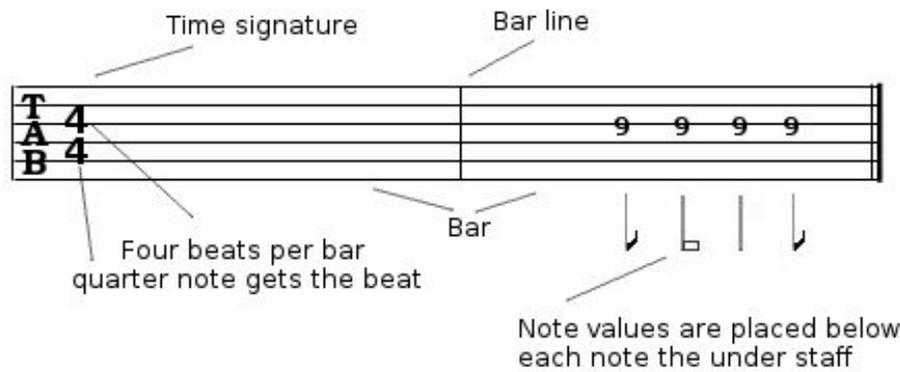
Chords are written in TAB with the fret numbers stacked on top of each other. Stacked numbers mean the fretted notes are played simultaneously. It's also helpful to write the chord symbol above it but you don't have to.



## TAB symbols for guitar rhythm / timing

Just about any symbol used in regular music notation can be adapted for use in TAB. Again there really is no standard in use for TAB but the symbols below are a good idea of what can be accomplished. I only show whole, half, quarter, eighth and sixteenth note values with TAB to notation comparison below so you can get the idea.

# Timing / Rhythm TAB Example



## Note values in TAB

- = A whole note
- ▣ = A half note
- | = A quarter note
- └ = Eighth note
- └└ = two beamed eighth notes
- └└└ = sixteenth note
- └└└└ = two beamed sixteenth notes

## Note values in standard notation

- = Whole note lasts for 4 beats counted as 1234
- ♩ = Half note lasts for 2 beats counted as 1 2
- ♪ = Quarter note lasts for 1 beat counted as 1
- ♫ = Eighth note lasts for 1/2 a beat
- ♫ = two beamed eighth notes
- ♮ = Sixteenth note lasts for 1/4 a beat
- ♮ = two beamed sixteenth notes

etc.

## Rest values

- = whole or half note rest when placed above or below a line
- ⏏ = quarter note rest
- ⏏ = sixteenth note rest - can be stacked to make 32nd and 64th note rests

## Write your licks and riffs

How many times have you come up with a cool guitar riff or lick only to find that you have forgotten it the next day? My advice to you is print out some TAB paper and keep it handy. Write down everything that you want to remember. Can you imagine having a library of licks that you can always have at your disposal? Buy a folder and get some TAB paper (below) and start cataloging your licks in TAB now!

## Blank Guitar TAB paper

On the next page is a blank printable guitar TAB paper. You can use it as is or you can cut it up using your favorite image editor to customize it. Then print it out and write on it.

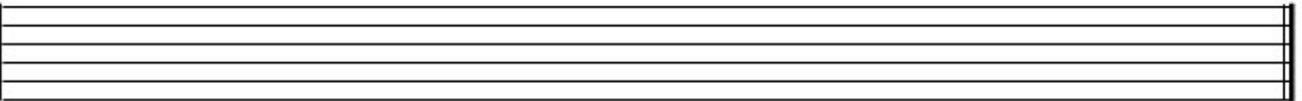
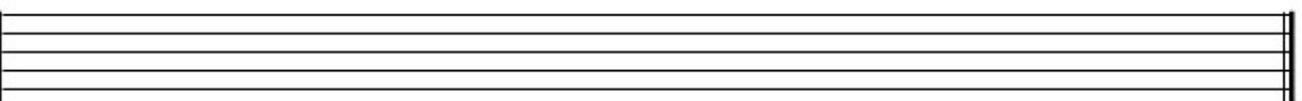
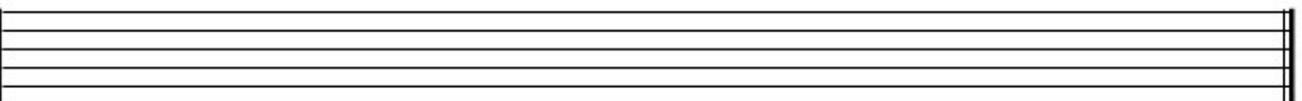
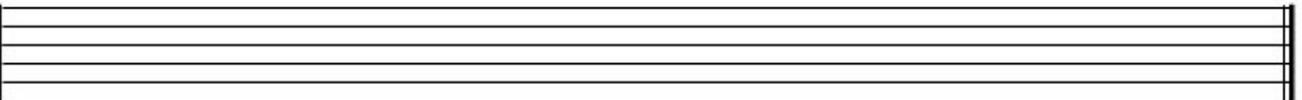
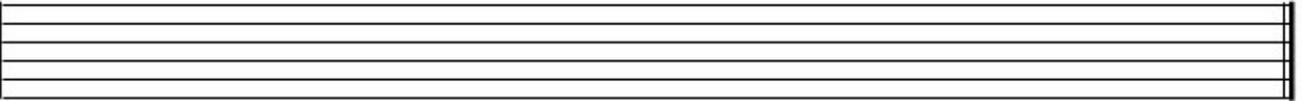
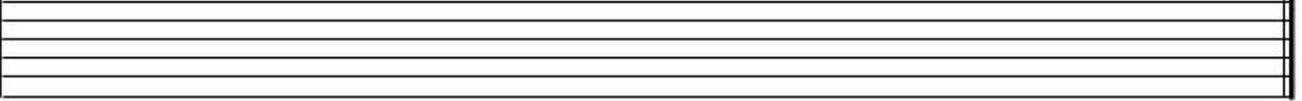
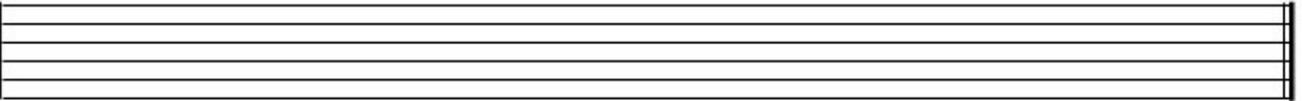
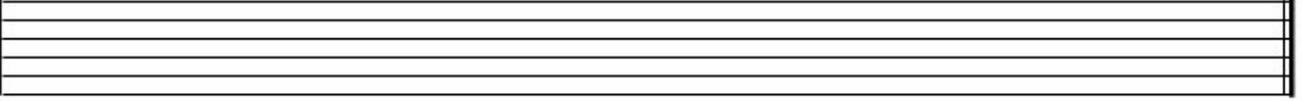
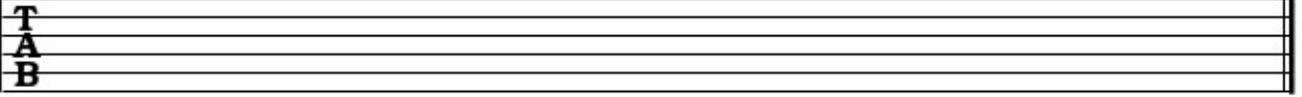
### **Print settings are:**

Scale - 100%

Paper size - US Letter or 8.50 x 11

Layout - Portrait

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A  
B**



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