

## Natural Bass Fun Outside the Box

On the bass, **position** is defined as a “four fret, six string area that may be moved anywhere on the fretboard”. Bass players call “position” a “box”. The following “core four” fretboard diagram may be used by a four, five or six string bass. **Figure 1.**

Let’s start by assigning “one *left hand finger* to each of the four frets”. In the beginning, if a **sound** is “in position” it is best to play it with the pre-assigned finger. This greatly simplifies fingering and immediately improves your technique (skill and ability). **Figure 2.**

Next, let’s place the **seven natural 1st octave major scale tone numbers** (1 2 3 4 5 6 7) “in position”. **Natural** ( $\natural$ ) means: “not sharp ( $\sharp$ ) or flat ( $\flat$ )”. Remember, we already know which left hand finger to use on any tone number because we have pre-assigned a finger to that string and fret location. **Figure 3.**

Now, here’s a simple question, which left hand finger plays tone 7? The answer - finger three.

On a **four or five string bass**, when you place your left hand 2nd finger on the *letter of tone number 1 of string three*, you create **form ③ 2** (circle three-two). However, this becomes **form ④ 2** (circle four-two) on a **six string bass!**

Not only do you create the *form*, but you also define the *key*. **Key** simply means: “the **letter of tone number 1**” that your *2nd finger* is on. For example, if your 2nd finger is on the letter G and it is tone 1, then you are in the “key of G”. If your 2nd finger is on the letter C and it is tone 1, then you’re in the “key of C”. The “letter of tone 1” is the **key**. Yes, it’s that simple.

Don’t confuse yourself by thinking “signature”, as in “key signature”, because this is a totally different concept and needs a lesson of its own.

Let’s continue by placing the **2nd octave major scale natural tone numbers** (8 9 10 11) “in position”. **Figure 4.**

Here’s another simple question, which left hand finger plays tone 9? The answer - finger 1.

Figure 1. Movable 4 fret and 6 string “position”:

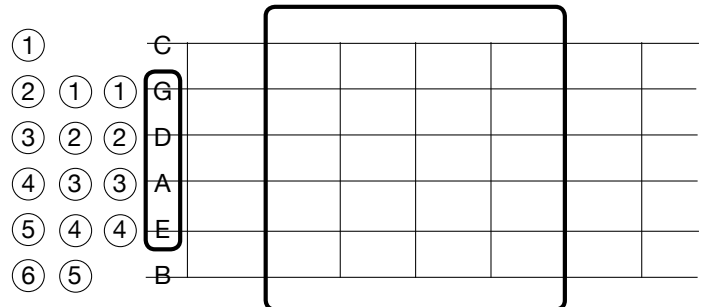


Figure 2. Four fingers “in position”:

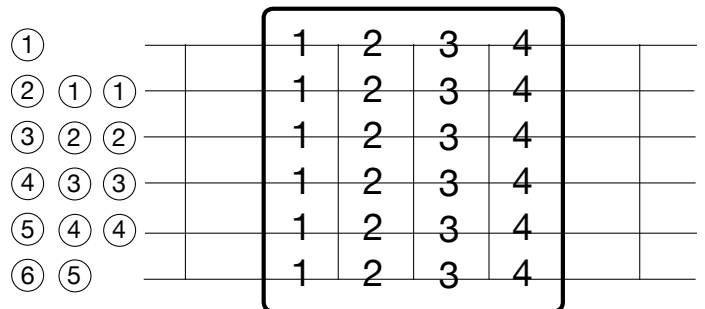


Figure 3. 1st octave natural tones “in position”:

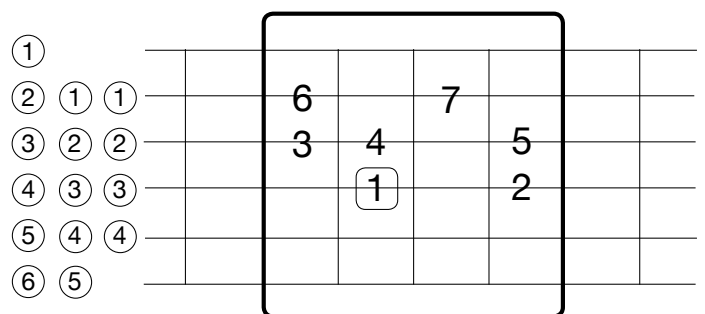
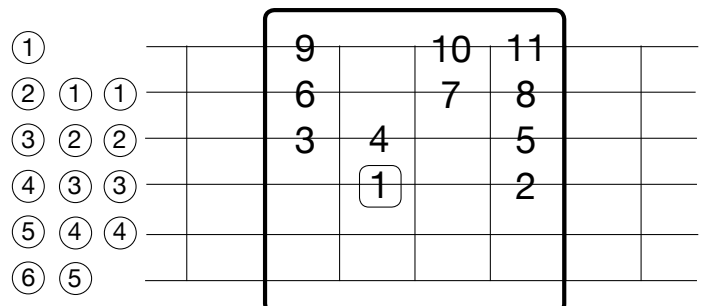


Figure 4. 2nd octave natural tones “in position”:



There are **sounds** that may be played “in position” but are **lower in pitch** than *tone 1*. These sounds are identified as “underlined tone numbers”. For example, **underlined tone number 7**, is *one fret lower* than tone number 1, but is still in “position”. **Figure 5.**

All the natural tones (sounds) “in position” are *isotonic*. **Iso** means “one”, and **tonic** means “sound”. Therefore, **isotonic** means: “one sound with *one location*” and each sound has its own *unique* tone number. **Uni** also means “one”, as in *unison*!

We can play all the *natural* tone numbers, including underlined tone number 7, “in position”. However, there are underlined natural tone numbers that are *one fret* “outside” the position of **form ③ 2** and **④ 2**. *Outside the position* is called “extended position”.

**Extended position** is created by playing one fret “on each side” of the position. And when these *two additional frets* “outside the position” are added to the *four frets* of the “position”, a “*six fret extended position*” is the result. In other words, *extended position* is a “*six fret, six string area* that may be moved to any **key** (tone 1 letter) on the fretboard”. Bass players call *extended position*, “outside the box”. **Figure 6.**

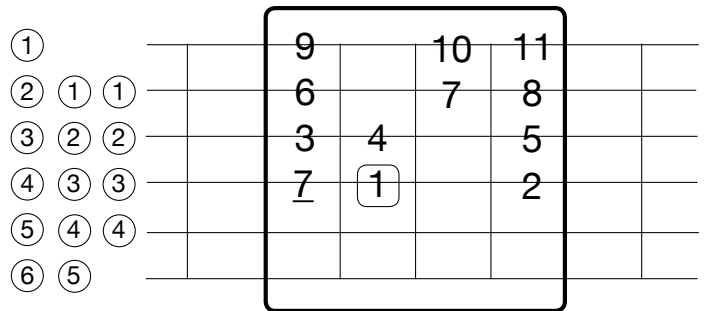
Here are all the **underlined** natural tone numbers that are located “in position” and “extended position”. **Figure 7.**

We’ll end this lesson by showing all the natural major scale tone numbers that are found in both “position” and “extended position”. **Figure 8.**

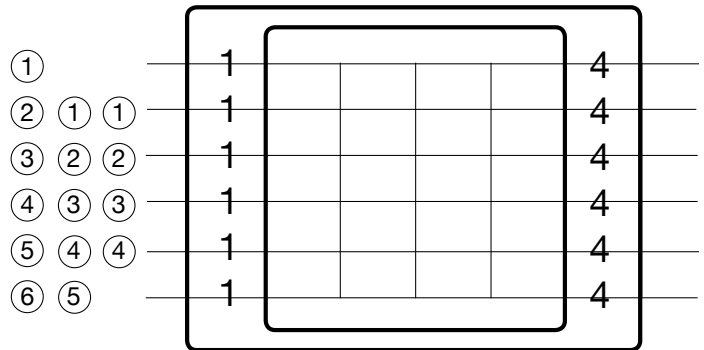
Now, when all the natural tone numbers of the major scale are shown, we can see that **form ③ 2** on a four or five string bass, becomes the *second octave* of **form ⑥ 1** on a six string bass! Time to get your **Bass 6 Fretboard Flashcards**.

Next time we’ll introduce sharp and flat “chromatic” tone numbers, but for now, have some *natural bass fun* “outside the box” in **extended position** - no matter how many strings you play. I’ll be listening...

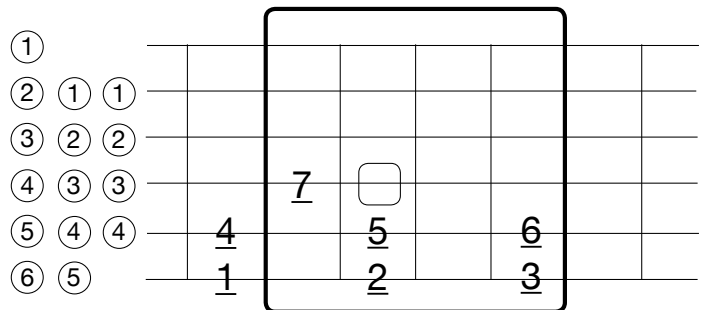
**Figure 5. Underlined natural tone 7 “in position”:**



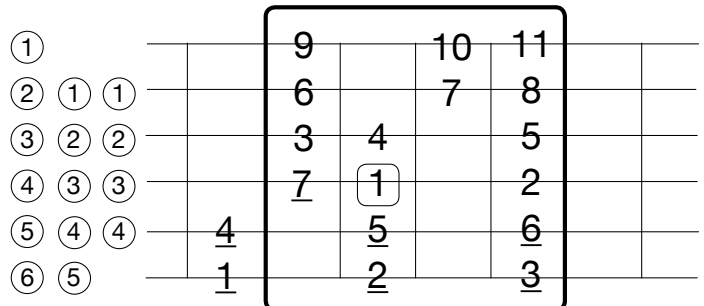
**Figure 6. Two fingers in “extended position”:**



**Figure 7. Underlined natural tones “in position” and “extended position”:**



**Figure 8. All natural tones “in position and “extended position”:**



**Mike Overly** is a regular contributor to *Guitar Digest Magazine*, author of *Guitar & Bass EncycloMedia*, *Guitar & Bass Fretboard Facts* and creator of *Fretboard Flashcards* which now includes the just released **Bass 6 Edition**. Mike’s publications are available from 12 Tone Music Publishing, Amazon.com, B&N.com, Bass Books.com, Books-a-Million.com, JK Lutherie (1-800-344-8880), Elderly Instruments (1-888-473-5810), Cambridge Music (1-617-491-5433), Baker & Taylor Books and other fine music and book retailers - just ask for them!