

**What Are Roots and fifths?**

The root and fifth pattern is one of the most common note patterns used by bass players. When a guitarist or keyboardist plays a chord, he or she is playing several notes at the same time — usually 3 or more different notes. Two of the notes which form each chord are called a root and a fifth. The root and fifth of the chord are the most supportive sounding notes a bassist can play beneath a chord. Roots and fifths are conveniently the same pattern for almost every chord. It doesn't matter if it's a major chord, minor chord, or a power chord. You can apply this pattern pretty broadly when creating bass lines. If you know the root note to play, you can use the fifth, too. It almost always works.

**Why is It Called a Fifth?**

I don't want to get into the details of this too deeply in this lesson. The short answer is the notes of scales and chords are assigned specific numbers. The fifth is simply the fifth note of the scale from which it comes.

**Playing Roots and fifths on the Bass**

The root-fifth pattern is pretty easy to remember on the bass fretboard and it's not too hard to play. Just like the octave pattern, the root-fifth pattern is the same shape all over the neck of the bass. Remember when we say above/below and up/down, we are talking about pitch, not physical space. The fifth above any root note is always on the next higher string, two frets higher.

The fifth below any root note is always on the next lower string, on the same fret. When you combine the octaves of the root notes and the octaves of the fifths, you have a lot you can play with for nearly any chord. Notice for any root note there is a fifth a string below. Notice how the fifths are octaves of each other.

**Fingering Roots and fifths on Bass**

You will be playing roots and fifths a lot, regardless of style. It's good to develop a consistent fingering and learn to play the patterns cleanly. When you play these patterns by themselves, use your first finger on the root and play the higher fifth with your 3rd finger. You can still use either the 3rd or 4th finger on the higher octave of the root.

When playing the lower 5th, always use the same finger you used on the root note.

**The Use of Roots and Fifths in Bass Playing**

You will quickly notice that roots and fifths are the most common bass note pattern after just roots by themselves. If roots and fifths aren't being used all by themselves in a bass line, a lot of the time they anchor more complex bass lines. The reason roots and fifths are used so often is because they consistently sound good, they fulfill the bassist's supportive responsibility, and they're not too hard to play.

You'll most easily recognize root-fifth bass lines in styles like country, polkas, tejano, and tuba bass lines. Those are just very obvious uses. Don't think for a minute that these are the only uses of roots and fifths. They are absolutely everywhere in every style from Classical music to metal. The root and fifth pattern is critical to bass playing. You must have a thorough grasp of these patterns regardless of what you intend to play.

**Try to get the sound of roots and fifths in your head.** They are everywhere. Some common root-5th sounds are:

- The piano bass line for the Linus and Lucy theme (root-5th-octave-root-5th-octave).
- The first two notes of the Star Wars theme (root-5th).
- Eine Kleine Nachtmusik by Mozart (root-lower 5th-root)

**COUNTRY/FOLK Bass Pattern in D**

♩ = 200

**LOW RIDER BASS PATTERN in G**

This is the real bass line during the whole song

G-----  
 D-----3-----3-5-----  
 A-----1-3-4-5-----5-----  
 E---3-----

## 12 Bar BLUES BASS PATTERN in G

<p>G D A E</p> <p>(4x)</p>	<p>G D A E</p> <p>(2x)</p>	<p>G D A E</p> <p>(2x)</p>
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G  
D  
A  
E

The following bass line, from the theme song to the movie, "Stand By Me." ( Ben E. King was the original artist), demonstrates a bass line that moves between 4 chords, using passing tones to get from one to the next. It also uses the dotted—quarter note rhythm, emphasizing the 1 and 2—and beats with root notes.

D major

B minor

e e	q. q. e e	q. q. e e	q. q. e e	q. q. e e
G-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
D-----	-0--0-----	-0--0--0-----	-----	-----
A--0--4--	-----0--4--	-----4--	-2--2--r--0-	-2--2--2--0-
E-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Oh I won't be a- afraid, no I won't shed a tear, just as

G major      A major      D major

q. q. e e	q. q. e e	q. q. e e	q. q.
G-----	-----	-----	-----
D-----	-----	-0--0-----	-0--0--
A-----2--	-0--0--0--4--	-----0--4--	-----
E--3--3--3--	-----	-----	-----

long as you stand, stand by me.

This line is one of the simplest and yet most powerful bass lines in popular music. It has a lot of features worth noting. First, it uses the same rhythm in each measure: two dotted quarter notes on the roots, followed by two eighth notes, or a note and a rest. Note that the vocal line is singing essentially the same rhythm.

Second, the dotted quarters are always roots, which emphasizes those beats more strongly than the eighth notes, which are not roots, but are leading notes, leading towards the root of the next measure: A to C# to D for the D major chords, D to C# to B for the B minor chords, B to A to G for the G major, and G to B to A for A major.

See that, while the leading tone is usually between the two root notes, it doesn't have to be: For the G major to A major transition, with only G# as a possible in-between note, the author chose instead to go up to the B, then back down to the A. This is still called a leading tone, although it's not quite the same as the others, because it fulfills the same function: It warns of an upcoming chord change, and gives a pointer in the direction that the chord is going to move.

A third thing to note is that the leading notes are played each measure, regardless of whether the chord is changing or not. So in measure 6, we play A-C#-D to move from the A chord to the D chord, and in measure 7 we play A-C#-D again even though we're staying on the D chord. The sequence still points to the root of the chord, so why not play it again? By doing this, we make the bass line a little more interesting, and we give it more of a sense of movement than it would have if we just played D all the time.