



## Musical Terms for the Bass Guitar

by John Falstrom

**Here are some important musical terms that you should know as a Bass Guitarist:**

**Arpeggio**-----Playing the notes in a chord separately.

**Ascend**-----The playing of a note that is higher sounding in pitch than the previous note played.

**Descend**-----The playing of a note that is lower sounding in pitch than the previous note played.

**8va**-----The playing of a note or musical passage one octave higher in pitch than it is written or than it was previously played.

**Enharmonic tone**----Means that a note can be called by two different letter names but and still have the same pitch. Example: C# and Db.

**Flat**----- A symbol used to lower the pitch of a note by a half step. The symbol for a flat is ( b ). All seven natural notes can be flatted: Ab, Bb, Cb, Db, Eb, Fb, and Gb.

**Frets**-----The frets on the bass separate the notes from one another.

(Memorize the frets with the dot-markers on them. They are all odd number frets except the twelfth fret, and also the twenty-fourth fret on basses with twenty-four frets.)

**Half Step**-----Used to define the distance between a note that is one fret away from another note, ascending or descending i.e. equal in distance of B to C (ascending) or C to B (descending).

**Improvisation**----Creating original musical ideas on the spur of the moment.

**Key Signature**----The sharps or flats in the chosen key (scale).

**Metronome**-----A mechanical device that clicks out a desired tempo (beat).

The numbers on a metronome indicate how many times it clicks per minute. (I highly recommend practicing with a metronome. Tapping your foot with the beat is extremely important. If you don't own a metronome, still tap your foot to the beat. This helps to build solid rhythmic sense.)

**Natural Notes**----There are seven natural notes in music. They are: A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. These are also known as the musical alphabet.



**Octave**-----Two notes that have the same letter name but one of them will be exactly twice as high or low in pitch as the other one.

**Parallel Keys**----Major and minor keys that have the same note letter as its root. Example: C Major and C Natural Minor.

**Pitch**-----The highness or the lowness of the notes.

**Rhythm**-----The playing of notes or sounds "on and in-between" the downbeats.

**Riff**-----A short melodic musical idea that is repeated in a song.

**Root**-----The 1st note in a scale or chord.

**Sharp**-----A symbol used to raise a note one half step higher in pitch. The symbol for sharp is (#). All seven natural notes can be altered using sharps: A#, B#, C#, D#, E#, F#, and G#.

**Tuning**-----There are hundreds of ways to tune a bass guitar. The theory behind tuning is matching in pitch, the same note on all the strings on the bass.

**Unison**-----Means that the same exact note can be played on two or more places on the fretboard of the bass guitar.

**Whole Step**----The distance between a note that is two frets or two half steps away from another note, ascending or descending. Example: C to D (ascending), D to C (descending).

Knowing and understanding as many musical terms on the bass guitar as you can makes you a "smarter" bassist/musician, which is where you want to be. Understanding music theory and the associated terminology is all about communication and being able to speak "the language" of music.