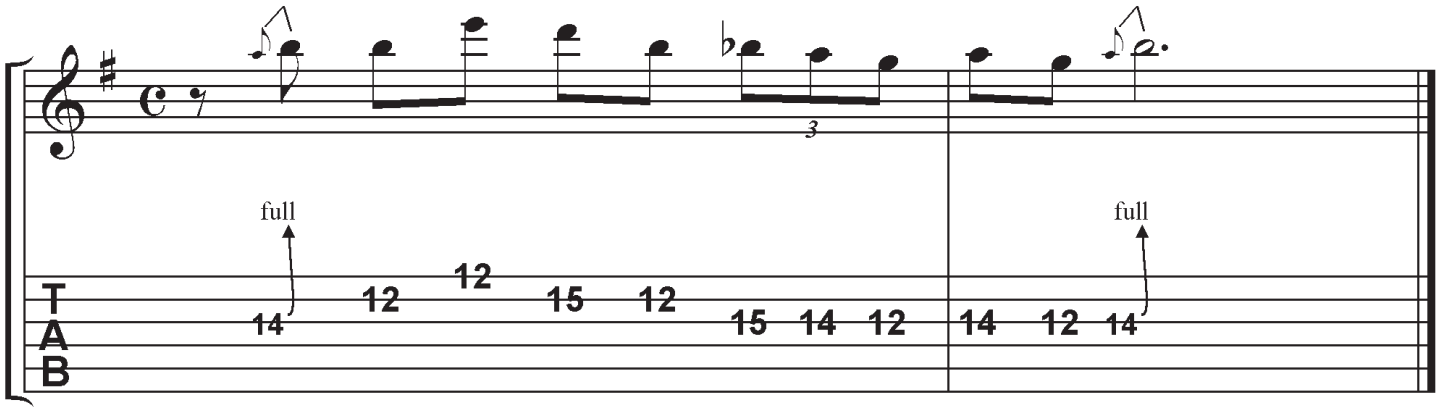
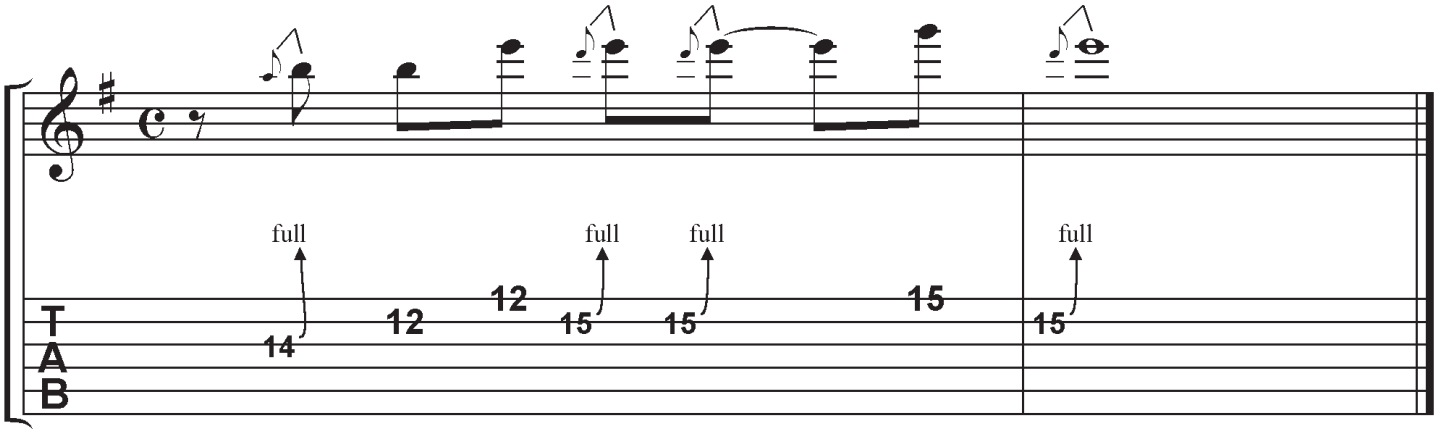
In this lesson I would like to explore a couple of different ways to expand your vocabulary. First, what do I mean by vocabulary. Well, it's just like the vocabulary you have in the language or languages that you speak. It's the same as the number of words that you know and use, or in this case licks or musical ideas.

How do you go about expanding your vocabulary. There are several ways but the one I want to explore here is getting licks from your favorite guitarists. We all have our favorite players, or songs and certain licks that they have played that makes us take notice. Something that just grabs us and won't let go.

For this lesson I have chose two licks that Jimmy Page played in the solo to Whole Lotta Love. These are classic rock/blues licks straight out of the pentatonic /blues scale. The two examples below are the licks I am talking about.





Now the first thing you want to do when you learn a lick like this is to apply it immediately. Get together with some other musicians or put on a jam track and play the licks just like you learned them. This is how they become part of your vocabulary. Don't worry about sounding like someone else or stealing licks. This is how everybody learns.

After a while the lick will start to take on a different sound as it becomes part of who you are. Even though you may be playing the same notes you got from someone else, they won't sound like it anymore.

Ok, so I've got these two licks and I can play them like the record, I can even play them over a jam track, now what? I'd like to sidetrack here for a moment and tell you about my experience with NLP or Neuro Linguistic Programming. What is NLP? I'm glad you asked.

NLP is best defined as the study of the structure of subjective experience. In other words, we all experience the world in our own way. Take public speaking for example, most people have said they would rather die than speak in public, but there are some people that love to speak in public, in fact they are energized by it. Why is that?

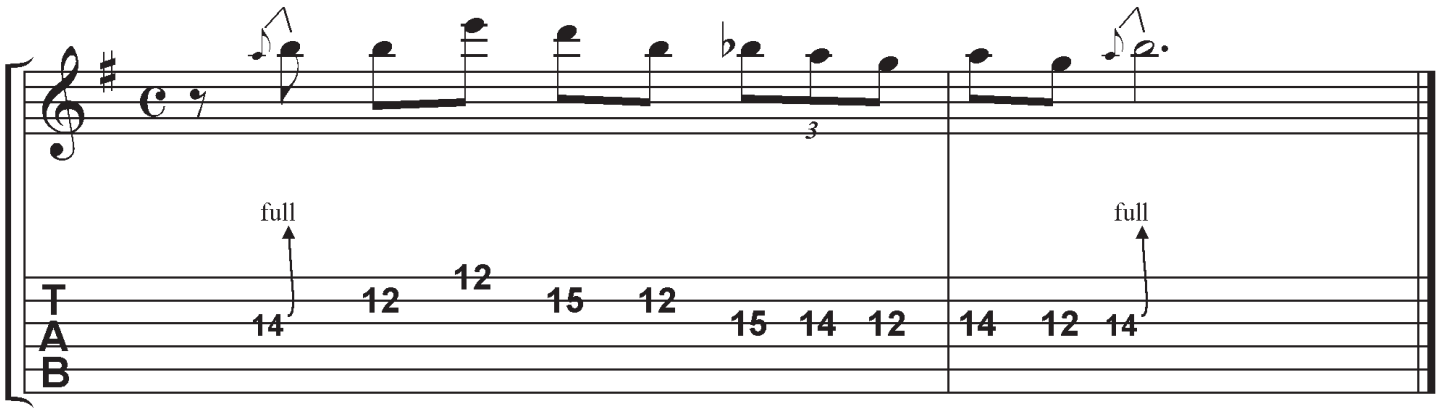
NLP claims that it's the internal structure of their thinking that causes this reaction. And, if one person can do something, we can use an NLP process called modeling to find out what that structure is and teach it to ourselves and others. By using this process, the founders of NLP were able to do amazing things like cure phobias in 5 minutes, develop strategies to help people learn things faster, generate new behaviors, etc.

I first learned about NLP in the 80's sometime. I would find an occasional book on the subject and read it. I found it to be fascinating but I never really did much with it as most if was geared towards therapy. But, in the summer of 2002 and 2003 I had the opportunity to attend a Practitioner and Master Practitioner training in NLP.

Each training lasted for 30 days and you were certified at the end of each training for that level. These training were held in the mountains of Colorado and it was a life changing experience. I learned some amazing things but the thing that stuck with me most was a quote by one of the instructors. He simply said, "The people that have the most success with NLP take it back to what they do best."

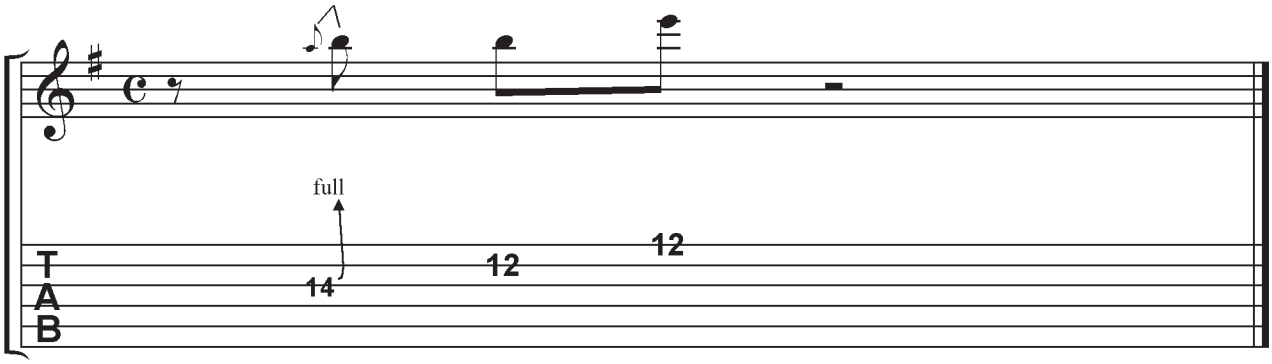
Since then, I have been applying what I learned to playing and teaching the guitar. NLP has given me simpler, easier ways to explain things, to break them down and teach them to others. The material in these lessons have been based on what I learned there.

In this rest lesson I am going to use what NLP calls chunking. It's really just what it sounds like, breaking things down into smaller parts or chunking up to larger parts. Let's apply chunking to the Jimmy Page licks on the previous page. If case you don't remember, here is the first lick...



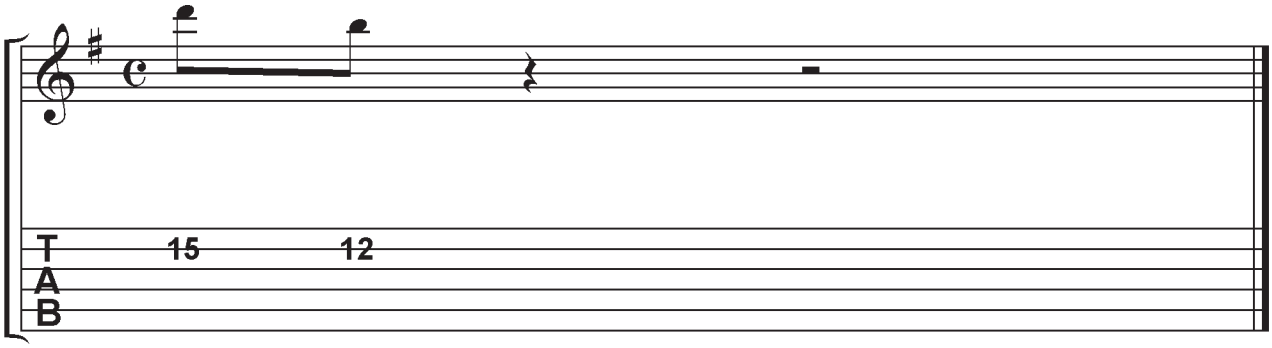
There are lots of ways to chunk this down. We can start by just taking the first 3 notes.

Chunking Example 1

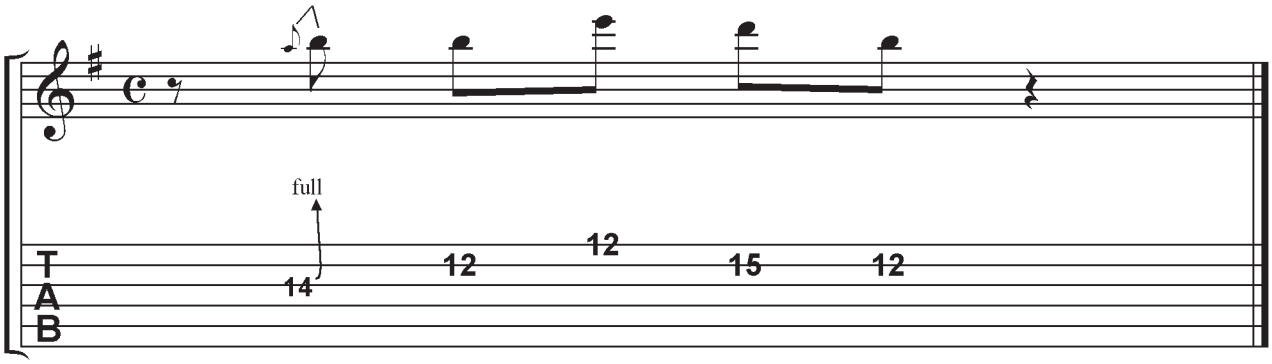


As I mentioned in the video, this sequence of notes has been used over and over again. Learn this one well.

Chunking Example 2

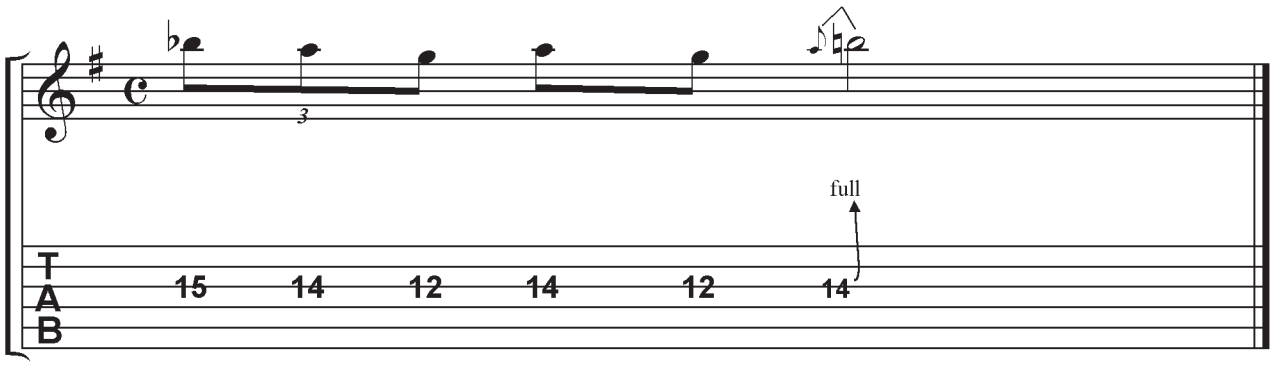


Chunking Example 3



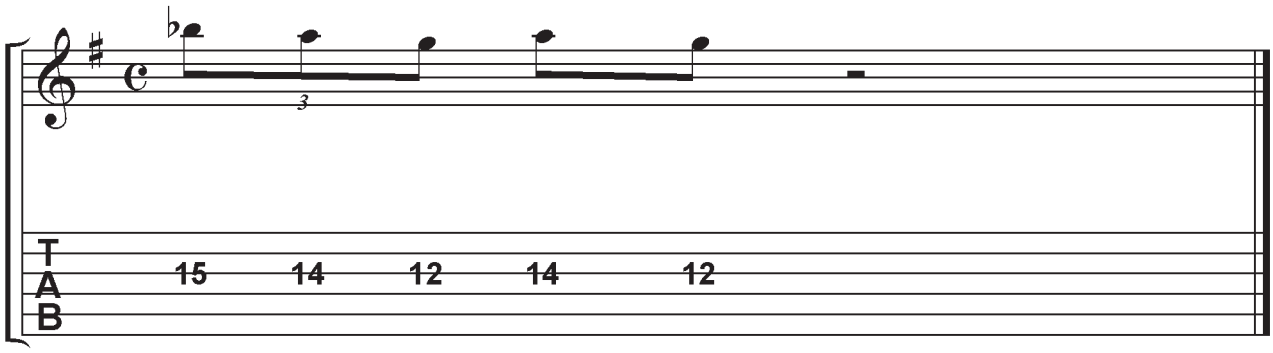
Example 3 could be viewed as a smaller chunk of the original lick or as Examples 1 one and 2 combined. How would you rather think of it? There is no right or wrong way but your preference says something about the way you prefer to structure your subjective experience. There's that dang NLP again...

Chunking Example 4

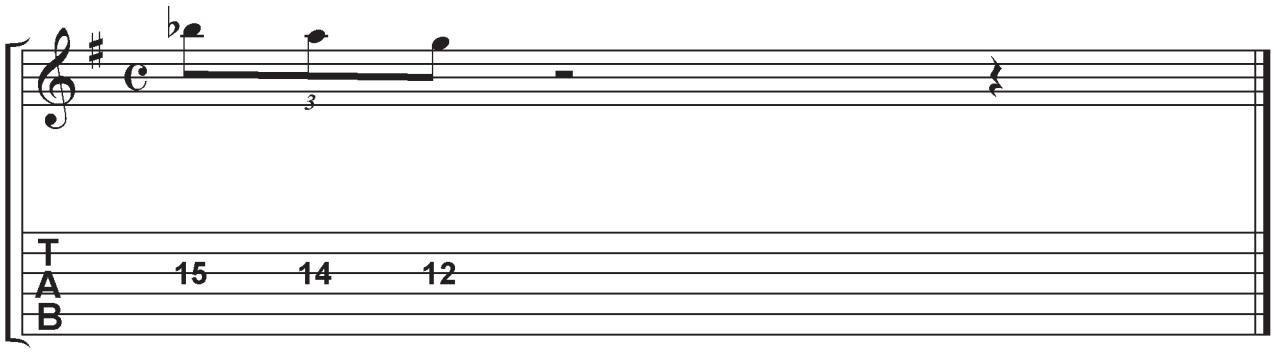


Now I’m just chunking off the second half of the lick and I can chunk it down even farther.

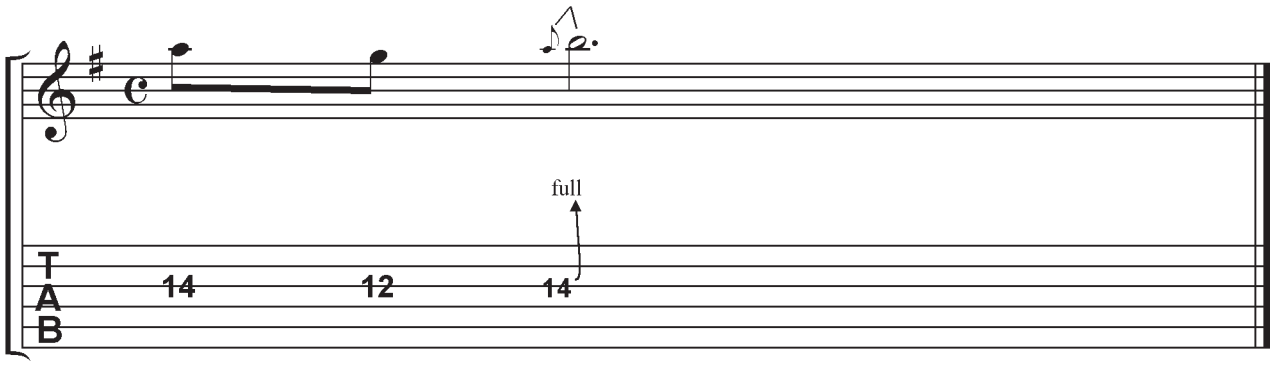
Chunking Example 5



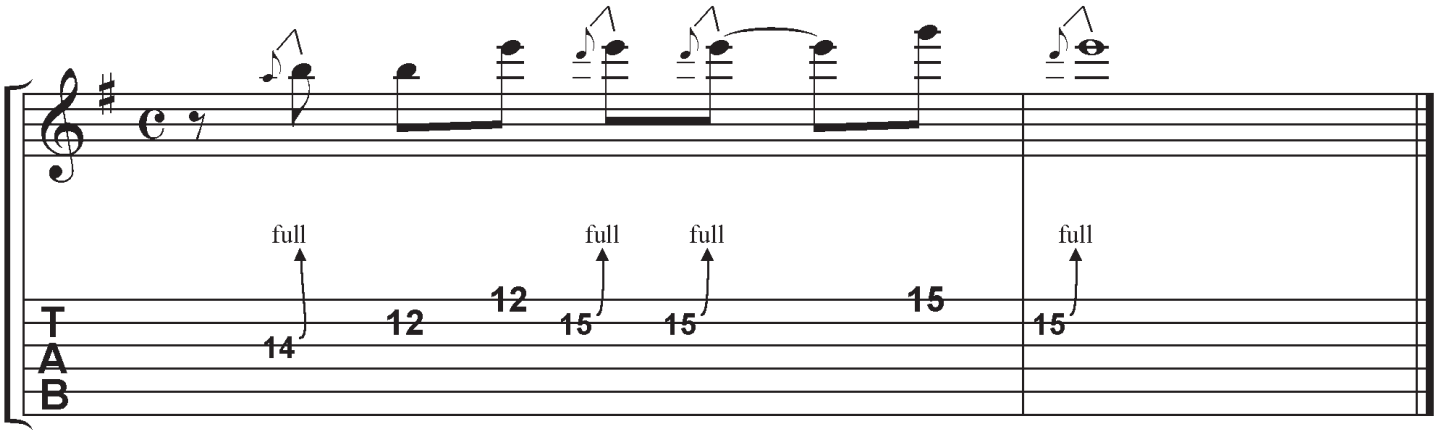
Chunking Example 6



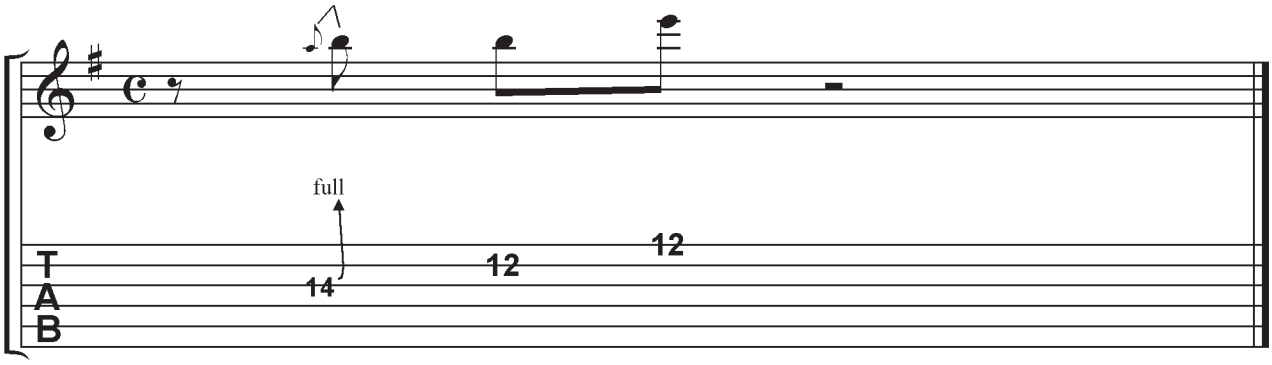
Chunking Example 7



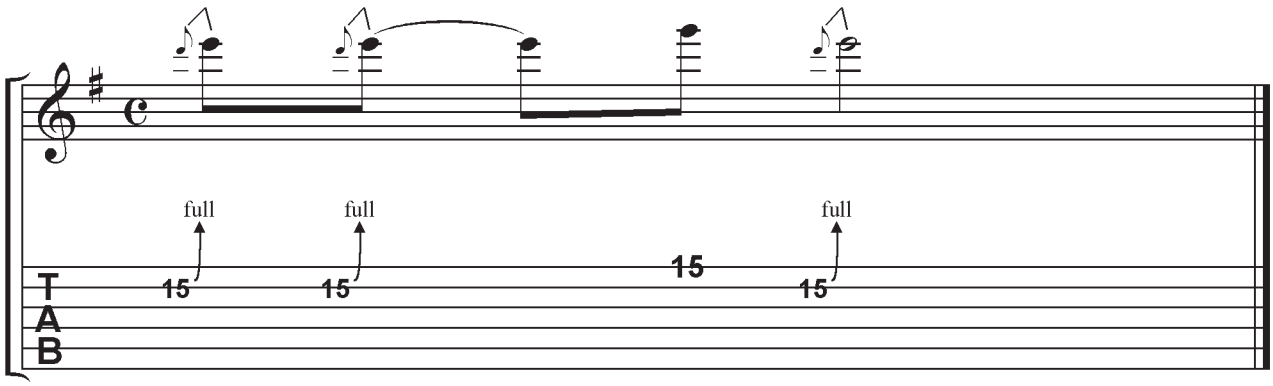
I could continue to pull smaller chunks out of this but I think you get the idea now. Let' look at lick number two again



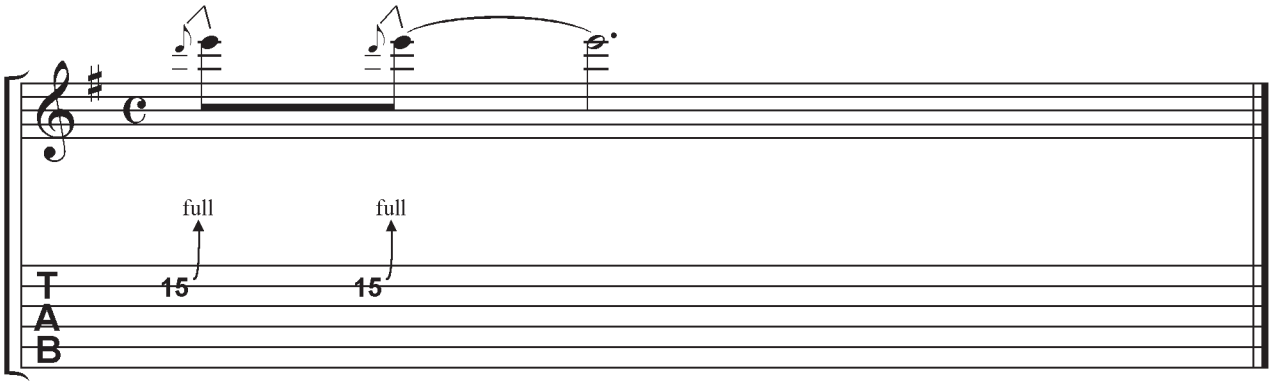
It starts the same way as lick number one and can be chunked the same way.



Chunking Example 8



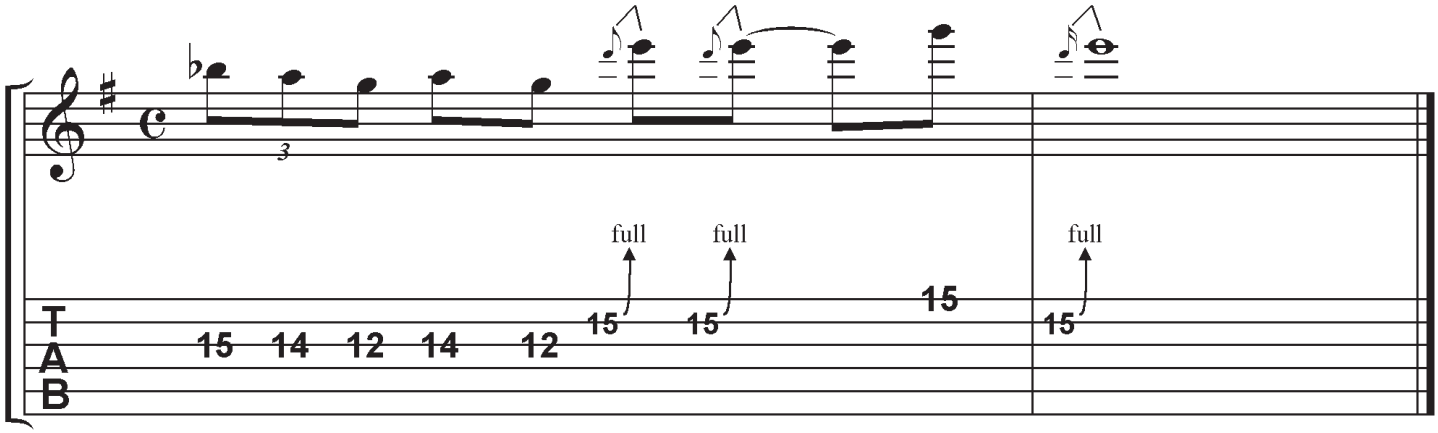
Chunking Example 9



Once again, I could chunk this even smaller but I am going to leave that up to you.

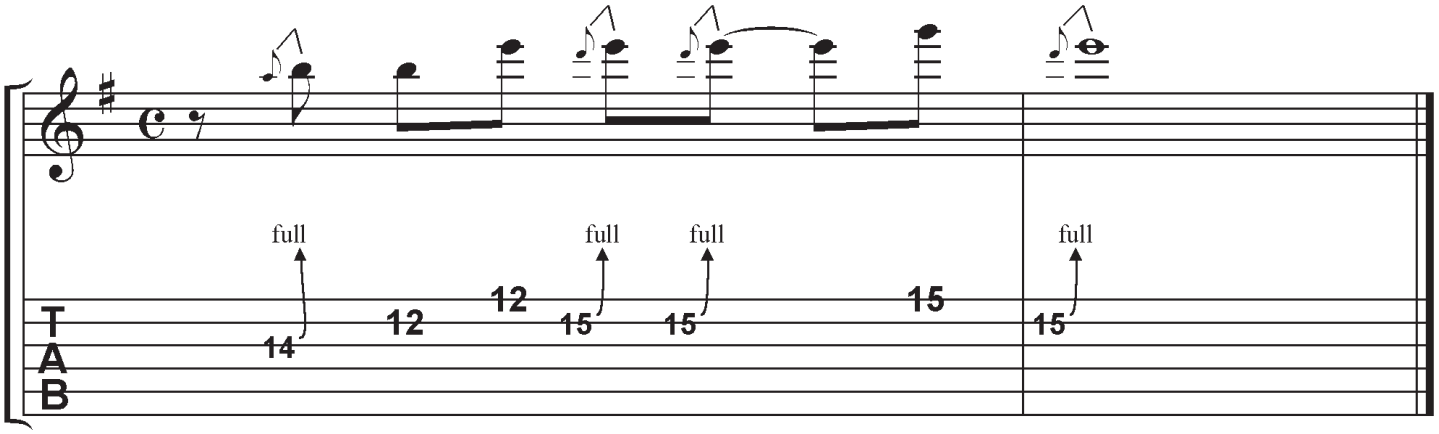
Once you have these chunks you can start to put them together in different combinations. How about chunk 5 with chunk 8.

Chunking Example 10

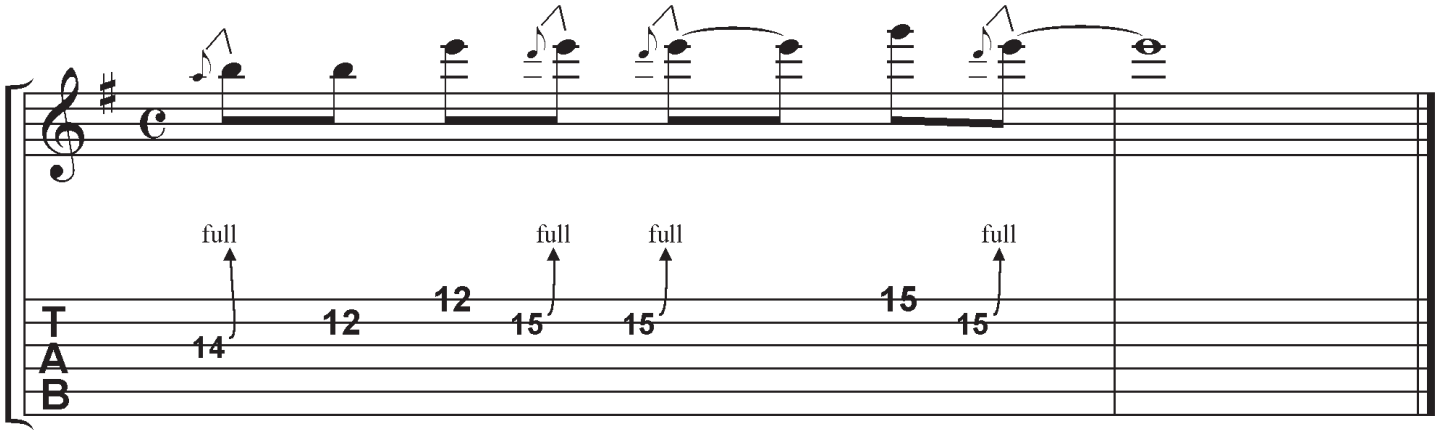


And you thought you had only learned two licks. I hope you are starting to see the power in this. Using these simple ideas you can create lots of variety.

I want to warp up this lesson by briefly mentioning one other point I discussed in the video, starting the ideas in different places rhythmically. This can really make the same lick sound completely different and give you even more mileage out of what you know. Here is lick number two again.



Notice that it starts on the and of beat one.



Here is the same lick starting on beat number one. This little shift is subtle but can make a difference in how the lick is perceived. Try moving it to other spots. Start it on beat three or four. Or the and of four. Every one of these moves will have an impact on how it sounds.

In closing I would like to encourage you to get the jam track going and go for it. You just have to jump in there and don't be afraid to mess up. That's how you learn. I'm just a regular guy just like the rest of you (or gal as the case may be). Granted, I have spent lots of time playing the guitar, either a sign of someone that has too much free time or a lazy slacker. I'll let you decide.

But the fact remains, I grew up in a small town in southern Ohio, grew up playing sports and played the guitar on the side. Went to college, got married, had kids, etc If I can do it, so can you. It's my hope that by sharing this info I can save you some of the time and frustration I went through. Until next time...

Best Wishes,
Bob