

# 12 bar Blues

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There are certain elements in jazz that all students should practice such as ii-V-I progressions, major and minor scales, rhythm changes and the **12 bar blues**. Learning the sound and variations of the 12 bar blues will greatly improve your playing, both melodically and harmonically.

It is also important to know the blues from a historical perspective because it is the foundation of jazz. Treatment of the blues has changed dramatically during the history of jazz. However, it has always been a part of every jazz musicians musical vocabulary. Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, to mention a few, all played the blues but in different styles. I think it's safe to say that blues is the common denominator between all jazz musicians, regardless of what style of jazz they are playing.

This article contains examples of chord substitutions that are frequently used when playing a 12 bar blues. It is important to be able to hear and understand the most common blues progression in order to become a skilled jazz musician. When the members of a rhythm section listen to each other and play the same chord changes, greater support will be provided for the soloist.

**Practice Hints:** Practice the changes slowly and listen to their functions. Look for 2-5-1 progressions, chromatic and tri-tone movement.  
Create your own versions of the blues by using the given material.  
Practice with your metronome and work out comping patterns.  
Learn the voicings.

## Basic 12 Bar Blues Changes

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a 12-bar blues progression in B-flat major. Each system consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with chord voicings indicated by circles on the staff lines. The first system shows the first four bars: F13, Bb13, F13, and F13. The second system shows the next four bars: Bb13, Bb13, F13, and D9. The third system shows the final four bars: Gmin9, C13, F13, and C13. The notation includes a key signature of two flats and a common time signature.

**12 Bar Blues Changes with Turnaround. Note:** Bar 7 1 to 4 Dominant.  
 Bar 8 minor 2-5  
 Bar 11 minor 2-5  
 Bar 12 Major 2-5

Chord progression for the 12-bar blues:

- Bar 1: F13
- Bar 2: B $\flat$ 13
- Bar 3: F13
- Bar 4: F13
- Bar 5: B $\flat$ 13
- Bar 6: B $\flat$ 13
- Bar 7: F13
- Bar 8: B $\flat$ 13
- Bar 9: Gmin9
- Bar 10: C13
- Bar 11: Am7( $\flat$ 5) D7( $\flat$ 9)  $\sharp$ 11
- Bar 12: Gmin9 C7Alt

**Chromatic and Tri-Tone Movement.**

Chromatic and Tri-Tone Movement:

Chromatic: B13 → B $\flat$ 13, G $\flat$ 13 → G13, G $\flat$ 13 → G13, F13 → E9, E $\flat$ 9 → D7( $\sharp$ 9)

Tri-Tone: F13 → B13, G $\flat$ 13 → F13, F13 → B13

Chord progression for the 12-bar blues:

- Bar 1: F13
- Bar 2: B13
- Bar 3: B $\flat$ 13
- Bar 4: G $\flat$ 13
- Bar 5: F13
- Bar 6: G $\flat$ 13
- Bar 7: F13
- Bar 8: B13
- Bar 9: B $\flat$ 13
- Bar 10: B $\flat$ 13
- Bar 11: A $\flat$ 13 G13 G $\flat$ 13
- Bar 12: F13 E9 E $\flat$ 9 D7( $\sharp$ 9)

**Suspended to Dominant Sound.** These changes will give the improviser more freedom. Try also to keep the suspension for an entire bar to create a more modal sound.

F7sus    F13    Bb7sus    Bb13    F7sus    F13  
 Bb7sus    Bb13    F7sus    E7sus    Eb7sus    D7sus  
 Gmin7    C7sus    Bb13sus    Ab13    A#9    Ab13    G13    Gb13

**Parker Blues.** This is a series of chord changes, more so than an actual blues. It's named after the great Charlie Parker who used this concept a lot. The Parker blues concept should be mastered. Try putting some of the Parker blues changes into a regular blues.

FMaj7    Em7(b5)    A7(b9)    Dmin9    G13    Cmin9    F7Alt  
 Bb13    Bbmin9    Eb13    Amin9    D13    Abmin9    Db13  
 Gmin9    C13    F13    D7Alt    Gmin9    C7Alt