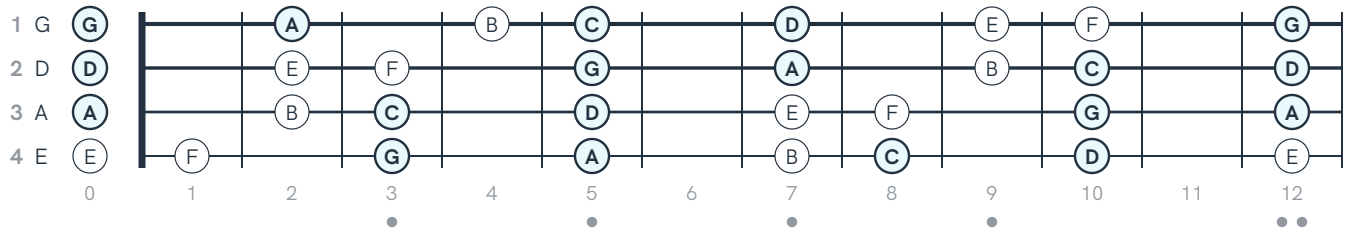
The Bass Player's Shape: Root, Fifth, Octave

A four-string bass is tuned **E1–A1–D2–G2**, each string a perfect fourth above the one before. Bass music is **written one octave higher** than it sounds, in bass clef. One grip, moved along the neck, gives you the root, the fifth and the octave of any note.

1 · THE MAP: NATURAL NOTES, FRETS 0–12
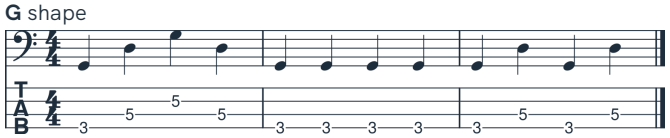
Strings are numbered 4 (lowest, E) to 1 (highest, G), as in tab. Bold circles mark every G, A, C and D, the four roots used below.



2 · THE SHAPE, AND A GROOVE FOR EACH ROOT
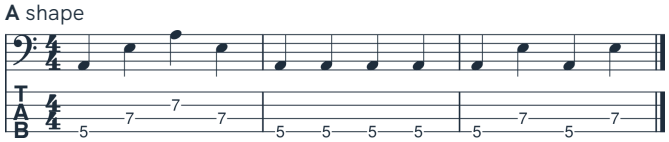
Put the **root (R)** on string 4 or 3. The **fifth (5)** is two frets higher on the next higher string. The **octave (8)** is two frets higher on the string above that. Bar 1 plays the shape. Bar 2 plays the root on every beat. Bar 3 plays root–fifth.

G shape
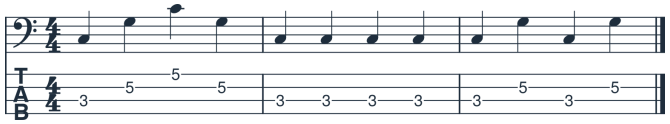


R G: string 4, fret 3 · **5** D: string 3, fret 5 · **8** G: string 2, fret 5

A shape
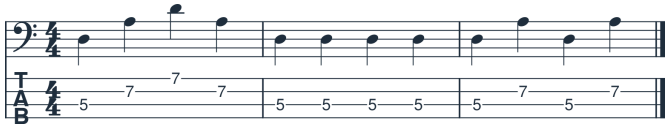


R A: string 4, fret 5 · **5** E: string 3, fret 7 · **8** A: string 2, fret 7

C shape



R C: string 3, fret 3 · **5** G: string 2, fret 5 · **8** C: string 1, fret 5

D shape



R D: string 3, fret 5 · **5** A: string 2, fret 7 · **8** D: string 1, fret 7

3 · SOUNDING AND WRITTEN PITCH

Each note is written one octave above the pitch you hear. The tab numbers show where to play it.

	Root (R)	Fifth (5)	Octave (8)
G	string 4, fret 3 **G1** sounds · **G2** written	string 3, fret 5 **D2** sounds · **D3** written	string 2, fret 5 **G2** sounds · **G3** written
A	string 4, fret 5 **A1** sounds · **A2** written	string 3, fret 7 **E2** sounds · **E3** written	string 2, fret 7 **A2** sounds · **A3** written
C	string 3, fret 3 **C2** sounds · **C3** written	string 2, fret 5 **G2** sounds · **G3** written	string 1, fret 5 **C3** sounds · **C4** written
D	string 3, fret 5 **D2** sounds · **D3** written	string 2, fret 7 **A2** sounds · **A3** written	string 1, fret 7 **D3** sounds · **D4** written

TRY IT

Play the G groove, then slide the whole shape up two frets and play the A groove. The grip does not change. The guitar power chord uses the same root-and-fifth shape, but plays the notes together. On bass you play them one at a time. See the guitar power chord sheet for the chord version.

Listen · quarter = 80 · All four grooves, three bars each.
Audio: tissimo.co/worksheets/bass-guitar-root-fifth-octave-map

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