



GT132

50 Licks To Go

*Blues - Country - Funk - Fusion - Gipsy Jazz
Jazz - Latin - Metal - Prog Rock - Rock*

*Getting ready for some autumn gigs?
Here are a bucket-load of licks to turbo charge your chops
and get you sounding authentic in loads of styles!*

We all know that playing metal licks in a country standard will probably lose you the gig and sound lame to boot; this article will solve this problem by giving you authentic and cool licks in ten of the most popular styles.

We'll identify the main clichés, the basic tone characteristics, the scale/chord choice and the most important artists for each style.

For obvious reasons it's impossible to cover all this in depth for each style, so if you're a new to a style (e.g. Latin or Country), take it as dipping a toe into new musical waters...

PRO TIP

When studying licks it's important to keep in mind...

- 1. Understand what chords you can use the lick on.*
- 2. Find 2/3 other places where you can play the same notes (maybe in different octaves).*
- 3. Play the lick over a backing track. Improvise with it and try to incorporate it into your vocabulary (think of the analogy of learning to speak a new language. You learn a phrase and then you try to say the same thing slightly differently).*
- 4. Transpose it into other keys.*
- 5. Compose your own licks in that style.*
- 6. Analyse then develop the central 'idea' of the lick.*
- 7. Every time you come across a lick that you like, write it down and work on it!*



Blues

Traditional blues is based on a very simple chord progression, namely (I, IV, V) and all using the strong sounding dominant 7th chord (1-3-5-b7). Scale choice is also limited mostly to the blues scale.

The tone of the guitar is quite simple (valve amp and a good guitar) and should leave the player free to experiment with different dynamics (from clean to natural overdrive). One of the main characteristics is the use of very expressive vibrato and bending (also use of the slide).

The focus is very much on 'how to play' one note then to play too many notes. Some important names would be Robert Johnson, B.B. King, Albert King, Freddy King, Eric Clapton, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Robben Ford.

Lick 1: This lick is played using the slide but in standard tuning. The tone should be a crunchy valve-amp sound. The lick uses the G7sus4 arpeggio over the progression. This is a very popular approach for the 'old school' guys from the 1950's, such Muddy Waters.

♩ = 100

D⁷ C⁷ G

w/slide

T
A
B

3/5 4 | 5 4 5 7 5 | 5 7 5 4 5 3 5

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Lick 2: This lick shows a development of the previous idea but without the slide. Again it's a G7sus4 arpeggio, although this time it's over the IV chord, C7. This lick is typical of Buddy Guy.

♩ = 100

D7 C7 G

let ring-----

T
A
B

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Lick 3: In the Memphis area, blues is characterized by a mixture of the major (country influence) and the minor pentatonic (blues from Mississippi). B.B. King, Memphis Slim and many other players use these kinds of licks.

♩ = 100

D7 C7 G

T
A
B

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Lick 4: This lick is in the style of Stevie Ray 'Texas Tornado' Vaughan. SRV was a walking encyclopedia for blues... This lick shows the use of D minor pentatonic (V degree in the key of G) over the D7; a common trick employed by Blues guitarists.

♩ = 100

D7 C7 G

T
A
B

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Lick 5: This is a contemporary lick. Nowadays, many styles have incorporated influences from other genres and this one shows a more ‘jazzy’ approach. It works around the arpeggios of the chords. This lick is in the style of players such as Duke Robillard or Robben Ford.

♩ = 100

The musical notation is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of a treble clef staff and a guitar tablature staff. The treble staff shows a sequence of notes: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). There are three triplet markings over the first three notes of the first measure, the last three notes of the second measure, and the last three notes of the third measure. Chord symbols D7, C7, and G are placed above the staff. The tablature staff shows fret numbers: 1, 2, 3, 2, 5, 3, 4, 3, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 8, 6, 7, 5, 8, 9. A 'let ring' instruction is written below the tablature for the final note.

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Country

Again a simple chord progression (I, IV, V) and scale choice (major pentatonic). The sound is more triad-ish than the blues; there's limited dominant 7 chords here.

The classic guitar is a Tele type, and most of the time is quite clean; go for 'twang'! Typical characteristics are fast, almost mechanical bending, use of open strings and hybrid picking. Some important names are Chet Atkins, Jerry Reed, James Burton, Albert Lee, Brent Mason and Brad Paisley.

Lick 1: This is a typical lick for a bluegrass player such as Doc Watson. The major pentatonic with the b3 (alternatively known as the 'country blues scale') and rapid picking are the main characteristics.

♩ = 100

A

T
A
B

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Lick 2: This lick is in the style of Albert Lee and uses hybrid picking (pick, middle and ring fingers). The idea is to play with the pick on one string and use the fingers to cross the strings. Albert often mixes the major pentatonic with the blues scale or mixolydian scale.

♩ = 100

A

T
A
B

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Lick 3: This lick echoes one of the biggest influences on the country guitarist: the pedal steel. Here we have double bends in the style of Jerry Donahue; the king of country bends! Keep the fingers together as one and use the wrist to bend the strings.

♩ = 100 A

let ring-----| let ring-----|

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Lick 4: This one is in the style of the most recorded guitarist ever, Brent Mason, and it shows another big influence for the country guitarist: piano. Brent uses double stops built on the blues scale and mixolydian mode, which is a trademark of one of his heroes: Jerry Reed.

♩ = 100 A

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Lick 5: This lick is in the style of Brad Paisley and shows his totally new approach to country music. He often plays 'weird' notes such as the b3 and major 7. The second bar is a bit challenging, but it's not as hard as it looks! Follow the fingerings carefully and you'll be amazed at the results!

♩ = 100 A

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Funk

The harmony here is predominantly static, typically over a dominant 7 or a m7 chord. Go for a Strat in position 2 and set up a clean tone, sometimes with wah or phaser. The focus here is more on rhythm than anything else; the common techniques are strumming and left and right hand muting.

Some names to check out are Jimmy Nolen, Wah-Wah Watson, Neil Rodgers, Al McKay, David Williams and Paul Jackson Jr.

Lick 1: This is a funk rhythm lick in the style of James Brown. The tone should be totally clean (maybe with a hint of compressor) and the left hand should release the pressure very quickly to get the short, staccato feel.

Swing ♩ = 100

D7
8va

T
A
B

13 14 10 12 13 13 14 10 10 10 9 10
12 13 10 10 11 11 10 11
13 14 12 10 10 10

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Lick 2: This lick is in the style of one of funk's legends, Nile Rodgers. He often plays block chords mixed with 'Motown fills' (typical of Hendrix too). The strumming hand should play with a wide movement and the fretting hand should mute the unwanted strings.

Swing ♩ = 100

D7

T
A
B

10 10 10 10 10 12
11 11 11 11 11 11
12 12 7 7 7 9 7 7 7 7 9 11

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Lick 3: This lick is in the style of another incredible player; Eddie Hazel from Funkadelic. The sound of the lick is around the D7sus4 chord and, again, a wide movement is needed.

Swing ♩ = 100
D7

T
A
B

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Lick 4: This lick is in the style of the Red Hot Chili Peppers. It's quite 'aggressive' for funk and heavily influenced by rock-blues players. To get the right tone try an MXR Dynacomp, a Strat and a valve amp.

Swing ♩ = 100
D7

T
A
B

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Lick 5: This lick is in the style of session supremo's Paul Jackson Jr or David Williams. Those guys are amazing! The lick uses a single note line played with a light palm mute and shows the use of 16th note triplets (on a Quartal triad).

Swing ♩ = 100
D7

T
A
B

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Lick 3: This lick is in the style of fusion virtuoso Frank Gambale. It uses the sweep/economy picking techniques on arpeggios. Frank uses a Major9 arpeggio built over the 3rd of the 11m7 chord, and the G7(#5) arpeggio.

♩ = 100

Dm¹¹ G⁷alt Cmaj⁷(b⁵)

T 6 5 5 7 8 7 8 7 10 9 8 9 10 10 8 12 11 8 10 9 8 10 12 12 11 13 15 14 13 12

A

B 8 10 12

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Lick 4: This lick is in the style of John Scofield. John often uses unusual notes such as the tritone (F-B) over the 11m7 chord. For the G7alt he plays an outside line that resolves on the b5 of the 1st degree. Scofield has a fantastic laid back feel, so try to emulate it.

♩ = 100

Dm¹¹ G⁷alt Cmaj⁷(b⁵)

T 19 18 19 19 18 15 16 18 15 16 16 15 15 14 16 15 13 12 13 15 12 11

A

B 16 16 15 13 12 13 15

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Lick 5: This lick is in the style of one of the most important fusion players, namely Allan Holdsworth. Holdsworth is famous for playing in wide, stretched positions and for using long, fluid chromatic lines played legato. Over the 11m7 chord he uses the Dorian mode whereas for the G7alt he plays an outside line that resolves again on the b5 of the Cmaj7(b5).

♩ = 100

Dm¹¹ G⁷alt Cmaj⁷(b⁵)

T 1 3 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 2 1 4 3 1 3 2 1 4 2 1 1 3 2 1 3

A 7 9 12 8 10 12 8 12 10 8 9 6 11 10 6 9 7 7 7 10 9 8 10 11

B 8 10 12

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Gypsy Jazz

This style can, confusingly, be both easy and complex at the same time! On the 'easy' side you'll find simple triads and dominant 7 chords, whilst on the 'hard' side you'll find all that complex jazz harmony in the scale choices.

This genre is played on an acoustic type (Meccaferrri) guitar. One of the characteristics is very fast picking; sometimes alternate and sometimes economy.

Django Reinhardt, Bireli Lagrene, Gary Potter and the Rosemberg Trio are all important names.

Lick 1: This lick is in the style of the most important Gypsy Jazz player: Django Reinhardt. It is based on the arpeggio of the chord, and uses the semitones above and below each note as approach notes.

Swing $\text{♩} = 100$

A⁷ Dm

T
A
B

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Lick 2: Another lick in the style of Django. This time it shows the use of a diminished 7 chord to create a A7(b9) chord. Over the Dm (I) he uses the major 6th and major 7th to create that typical Gypsy sound.

Swing $\text{♩} = 100$

A⁷ Dm

T
A
B

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Lick 3: This lick is in the style of Bireli Lagrene. This incredible player is not only an amazing jazz and fusion guitarist, but he's also one of the most important Gypsy players! This lick again shows the use of diminished arpeggio over the V (A7) and the use of major 6th over the I (Dm) to create a minor 6th sound.

Swing ♩ = 100

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Lick 4: This lick is in the style of Gary Potter and shows how important it is to work around the arpeggios of the chords. Again, note the heavy use of the semitones above and below.

Swing ♩ = 100

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Lick 5: This lick, in the style of the incredible Rosemberg Trio, is played using alternate picking. It's actually very common to play economy picking in this genre. It shows how to combine diminished arpeggios, chromatic lines (over the V) and major 6th and 7th's over the I. The last bar should be played sliding the finger from the 4th up to 10th fret while the right hand keeps picking in triplets.

Swing ♩ = 100

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Jazz

The general rule here is that Jazz is complex; many different types of chord and scale can be employed. Technique wise, avoid bending or vibrato, but use slides and legato (and that doesn't mean in the 'Satch' way...).

The phrasing is more focused on arpeggios/chord tones than scales, and the guitar is ideally a hollow body on the neck pickup. Use flatwound strings and roll the tone control almost totally off. The amp needs to be clean and clear and can be a good transistor amp.

Important players are Wes Montgomery, George Benson, Jim Hall and Pat Metheny.

Lick 1: This first lick is in the style of the most important jazz guitarist ever; Wes Montgomery. Over the IIm7 it uses arpeggio notes and a chromatic line to land on the 3rd of the V7 chord. Then it plays the diminished arpeggio and augmented arpeggio to land on the 3rd of the Imaj7 chord. For authenticity, this example should be played using the thumb only; no pick allowed!

Swing ♩ = 110

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Lick 2: This lick is in the style of Joe Pass and shows his wonderful approach to chord melody. He plays the Dm7 and then a diminished chord (substitution for D7b9 which is a secondary dominant) to get to the V where he plays G13sus4 and G13b9. It seems very complicated but when you play it, everything makes perfect sense!

Swing ♩ = 110

Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

T 6 5 6 8 5 7 12 12 12 12 8 8
 A 5 4 5 8 10 10 9 9 8 8
 B 7 6 7 7 10 10 10 10 7 7

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Lick 3: This is a lick in the style of another Jazz giant: George Benson. The lick demonstrates, again, the use of arpeggios but this time it's combined with a very clever approach to the outside notes. Again it lands on the 3rd of the first chord.

Swing ♩ = 110

Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

T 6 5 5 7 5 4 7 6 4 4 5 3 6 5 3 2
 A 6 5 5 7 5 4 7 6 4 4 5 3 6 5 3 2
 B 6 5 5 7 5 4 7 6 4 4 5 3 6 5 3 2

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Lick 4: This lick is in the style of Pat Martino. It's a fast line that uses Dorian mode and upper extension over the G7 (b9, #9). A constant, strong picking technique is required to nail this.

Swing ♩ = 110

Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

T 9 10 13 10 11 12 11 13 12 10 9 12 10 11 10
 A 9 10 13 10 11 12 11 13 12 10 9 12 10 11 10
 B 11 12 9 10 12 10 13 10 11 12 11 13 12 10 9 12 10 11 10

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Lick 5: This lick is in the style of one the most important contemporary players: Pat Metheny. The lick shows a ‘be-bop’ approach to the third (first 4 notes) and how he plays around the b9 and #9 of the G7. This is a trademark of Metheny: he uses the legato technique to add a natural 9 which creates a chromatic line.

Swing ♩ = 110

The image shows a musical score for a guitar lick. It consists of a treble clef staff in 4/4 time, a guitar tablature staff, and a bass clef staff. The treble staff has three measures: the first measure is marked with a Dm7 chord, the second with a G7 chord, and the third with a Cmaj7 chord. The tablature staff shows the fret numbers for each string: T (top), A (middle), and B (bottom). The first measure has frets 2, 5, 4, 2, 3, 2, 5, 5. The second measure has frets 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 5, 6, 5, 4, 6, 4. The third measure has frets 4, 3, 6, 3, 4, 5. The bass staff is empty.

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Metal

Metal harmony is quite simple, even if there's no 'common progression' present. Power chords and single note lines, often moving around the diminished 5th interval, are very common. The cliché sound is minor, such as the Aeolian mode, or darker still the Phrygian or Locrian modes.

The focus here is definitely on chops; tone wide vibrato, tapping, sweeping, legato, alternate picking, harmonics and whammy bar stunts. The tone is heavily distorted with a 'scoop' in the middle frequencies.

Important names are Black Sabbath, Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer and Pantera.

Lick 1: The first lick is one the most common rock-metal licks ever. It's in the style of Kirk Hammet of Metallica, but it's been used by most of players. It's based on sextuplets from the E minor pentatonic using legato.

♩ = 100

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Lick 2: This lick is in the style of Marty Friedman (Megadeth). Marty has a very personal approach which is heavily influenced by exotic scales. This lick shows a long repetitive line using legato.

♩ = 100

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Lick 3: Another trademark of this genre is the use of arpeggios (mainly triads). It's not particular to a band or player, but is rather just an often used technique. This lick shows a clever way to create the tension typical of Metal (b5) and it's built using the E blues scale.

♩ = 100
E⁵

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Lick 4: It's impossible to talk about Metal and not mention the harmonized guitar parts typical of bands like Iron Maiden and Judas Priest. This lick is built on a very simple line built from the Aeolian mode.

♩ = 100
Gtr 1
E⁵

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Lick 5: This lick is in the style of one the most innovative Metal guitarist: Dimebag Darrell (R.I.P.). His style was heavily influenced by rock players such as Van Halen and Steve Vai. Some of his trademarks are the use of harmonics and a different scale choice, in this case Dorian. Play the first natural harmonic and dive bomb with the bar, and then play the pinched harmonic with pick and the edge of the thumb.

♩ = 100
E⁵

Natural Harmonic

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Prog Rock

This style is, in some respects, closer to orchestral classical music than to popular song form. The compositions typically are very long, feature many different sections with odd meters, and a wide range of instrumentation; you may hear a sweet nylon string guitar section, followed by a brutal distorted riff.

A few important names: Yes, Genesis, Rush and Dream Theater.

Lick 1: The first lick shows a riff in the style of Rush's Alex Lifeson in 7/8. When working with odd meters, try to avoid the mathematic approach and make the riffs musical! This lick shows a rhythm pattern that can be used with two chords. Note the use of open strings. This lick will work as backing track.

♩=180 (♩=90)

Gsus² Dmaj⁷/F[#] Gsus² Dmaj⁷/F[#] Gsus²

The musical notation for Lick 1 consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 7/8 time signature. The melody is a rhythmic riff. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six lines. The notes are indicated by numbers 0-5 and 7. The rhythm is 7/8. The chords are Gsus² and Dmaj⁷/F[#].

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Lick 2: This lick in the style of Steve Howe and Alex Lifeson. This time it's an arpeggio which is one of their trademarks. Note again the use of open strings and how the pattern fits in the rhythm.

♩=180 (♩=90)

Gsus² Dmaj⁷/F[#] Gsus² Dmaj⁷/F[#] Gsus²

The musical notation for Lick 2 consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 7/8 time signature. The melody is an arpeggiated pattern. Below the staff is a guitar tablature with six lines. The notes are indicated by numbers 0-7. The rhythm is 7/8. The chords are Gsus² and Dmaj⁷/F[#].

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Lick 3: This is a very simple line typical of a band like Yes, or even Pink Floyd. This lick is based around the B minor pentatonic with an added 9th (C#). Again the rule is to find something simple that fits in the rhythm perfectly.

♩=180 (♩=90)

Gsus² Dmaj⁷/F# Gsus² Dmaj⁷/F# Gsus²

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Lick 4: This is a lick that shows another trademark of the genre: playing harmonized lines with the keyboard player. This line is mixture of Yes's and Tool's styles and shows more freedom on the rhythm. Again, note the use of open strings.

♩=180 (♩=90)

Gsus² Dmaj⁷/F# Gsus² Dmaj⁷/F# Gsus²

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Lick 5: This lick is a bit harder than the previous ones, but it's not as hard as it looks! It's in the style of contemporary bands and players such as John Petrucci and Dream Theater. It's built using power chords in the upper register and played using hybrid picking and needs a bit more attention than usual but once you get it on board, it's great! It sounds like a whammy pedal!

♩=180 (♩=90)

Gsus² Dmaj⁷/F# Gsus² Dmaj⁷/F# Gsus²

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Rock

The formula revolves around quite simple harmony with strong roots in the blues. The classic combo is a Les Paul and Marshall for a very direct and straight forward sound.

The main techniques are, as in blues, bending and vibrato but played with more distortion and also starting to draw on Major harmony and modes (a popular choice being the Aeolian).

Important bands are Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, AC/DC, and Guns 'n' Roses.

Lick 1: The first lick is in the style of the father of Rock 'n' Roll: Chuck Berry. This is probably the most common 'old school' lick and it's built using the minor pentatonic with a couple of extra notes from the major. For extra authenticity, play with downstrokes only.

♩ = 160 A

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Lick 2: This lick shows how players such as Jimmy Page have incorporated and developed the previous idea. Again minor pentatonic in the upper register played using alternate picking.

♩ = 160 A

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