



The 12-Bar Blues

The most famous progression in popular music

The 12-bar blues is a repeating 12-measure form built mainly on I, IV and V. It is the backbone of blues, rock & roll, jazz and countless pop songs.

Standard 12-bar form

Bar	1	2	3	4
Chords	I	I	I	I
In C	C7	C7	C7	C7
Bar	5	6	7	8
Chords	IV	IV	I	I
In C	F7	F7	C7	C7
Bar	9	10	11	12
Chords	V	IV	I	V
In C	G7	F7	C7	G7

Key points

- Almost always uses dominant 7 chords (C7, F7, G7) even in a major key.
- The turnaround (bars 11–12) often returns to V to lead back to the top.
- You can play it in any key — just keep the same Roman numerals.

Quick practice

Play the form slowly in C, then try G (G7 – C7 – D7) and F (F7 – Bb7 – C7). Count out loud: 1 2 3 4 for each bar.

Once you know this pattern you will recognise it in hundreds of songs.