

How to Conquer the Long A

Practice Guide for Tuesday Blues Lesson #087

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OVERVIEW

Many guitar pickers have trouble with the “Long A”. This chord is played by barring across the 4th, 3rd and 2nd strings at the 2nd fret and reaching way up to the 5th fret on the first string with your pinky finger.

If you’re just not able to make this difficult stretch, here’s a 4-step exercise to work into your daily practice.

STEPS TO CONQUERING THE LONG A

1. Find your comfort zone.
2. Practice at the edges.
3. Track your progress.
4. Repeat.

FINDING YOUR COMFORT ZONE

The frets are spaced closer together as you move up the neck. Fret 12 is a lot closer to fret 11 than fret 1 is to fret 2. Therefore, the further up the fretboard we move the Long A shape, the shorter the stretch needed.

Let’s put this to our advantage by moving way up the neck (toward the bridge) and trying to play this same Long A Shape.

Perhaps play the E position starting with a 9th fret barre and reaching up to the 12th fret on the 1st string. Is that doable?

If so, great. Move down a fret until you’re just barely able to nail the stretch. This is your comfort zone. If you can’t make the 9th fret to 12th fret stretch, keep moving up the neck until you find your comfort zone.

PRACTICE AT THE EDGES

Now that you know the last spot on the fretboard that you can make this stretch, we can begin strategic practice. Play a simple picking exercise (*See the TAB from Tuesday Blues 87*) daily.

Split your time between your comfort zone and one fret lower than your comfort zone. For example, if you can play the long stretch at the 5th to 8th frets but the 4th to 7th sounds a little off, then these are the two areas you'll focus on.

For the exercise, Practice for 3 minutes on the stretch that's just outside your comfort zone. Then, for 2 minutes practice making the stretch inside your comfort zone. In the example, you would spend 3 minutes on the picking exercise between the 4th/7th frets and then 2 at the 5th/8th frets.

By starting above your current capability, you'll certainly challenge yourself. Then by returning to a stretch that you know you can do, that stretch will become easier.

TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

What gets measured gets done.

Use the following chart to make note of your expanding comfort zone. It may take you a few weeks, months or years to move your comfort zone a significant distance on the fretboard. It's important to track where you start.

So drop in today's date in the chart at the end of this guide and write down the fret numbers for your comfort zone. Then, practice this routine for a few minutes each day and log your progress. I recommend logging this on a weekly basis.

It can take a while to see progress here, but paying attention to this along with the benefit of daily practice compounds. Over time, you should see an expanding comfort zone.

REPEAT

Make this exercise part of your daily routine and be sure to adjust as your comfort zone expands. Keep working your way down the neck until you can nail the Long A.

