

## STEP-BY-STEP SHREDDING

A simple yet cool sounding technique commonly used in metal guitar solos is to take a lick and apply it chromatically up (or down) the fretboard. In case you're unfamiliar with the term chromatic, a chromatic scale in Western music consists of all twelve tones played consecutively, with each note being a semitone (one fret) above or below the previous pitch. Chromaticism in music refers to sections where parts of the chromatic scale are used, and as such, will include notes that aren't diatonic (belonging) to the overall scale or key that the song is in. So, what I mean by playing a lick chromatically is that you just take the lick and move it across the neck one fret at a time. In doing so, you'll be playing a lot of notes that are technically 'wrong'. However, to make this work you just need to resolve the chromaticism with a strong chord tone (such as the root or the fifth) or a 'safer' lick from the overall key.

Two well-known examples of this technique include the closing passage of Kirk Hammet's 'Whiplash' solo, as well as the ending of Dave Mustaine's frenetic solo in 'Holy Wars... The Punishment Due'. A more obscure solo that also comes to mind is Alek Skolnick's escalating chromatic lick in the track 'Envy Life' from Testament's *Practice What You Preach* album. As you'll hear, this technique is a great way to build tension in a solo and bring it to a climax. I've come up with a few licks to further demonstrate this idea. All of the following exercises use 16th note triplets in the overall key of E minor.

### EXERCISE 1

Similar to the aforementioned 'Whiplash' solo, this lick starts in 12th position and moves up chromatically whilst continuing to play an open E pedal note in-between. It resolves with a bend to the high E. You can hear all of these licks by going to [www.australianguitarmag.com](http://www.australianguitarmag.com). I've recorded them at 120bpm, and then played slow at 60bpm.

Em

The image shows a musical score for Exercise 1. It consists of a treble clef staff in 4/4 time, a guitar tablature staff, and a picking pattern. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The piece is in E minor. The notation shows a series of 16th note triplets starting from the 12th fret and moving up chromatically. The tablature shows the fret numbers for each note: 15 12 0, 15 12 0, 16 13 0, 16 13 0, 17 14 0, 17 14 0, 18 15 0, 18 15 0, 19 16 0, 19 16 0, 20 17 0, 20 17 0, 21 18 0, 21 18 0, 22 19 0, 22 19 0, and finally a bend to the 22nd fret. The picking pattern is indicated by a series of 'v' marks, with 'sim.' (sustained) written below the last few notes.

T  
A  
B

15 12 0 15 12 0 16 13 0 16 13 0 17 14 0 17 14 0 18 15 0 18 15 0 19 16 0 19 16 0 20 17 0 20 17 0 21 18 0 21 18 0 22 19 0 22 19 0 22

full

sim.

### EXERCISE 2

This lick takes a basic E Dorian fingering on the top two strings and ascends chromatically using alternate picking. Once again, it resolves to the high E note. Playing chromatic licks like this quickly also helps to disguise the fact that you're playing out of key.

Em

T  
A  
B

sim.

### EXERCISE 3

Although musically quite bizarre, diminished seventh arpeggios sound pretty cool when played chromatically – as this sweep-picked lick demonstrates. Chromatic-style licks work best over a static riff belonging to an overall key, regardless of whether that riff is diatonic or chromatic in nature.

Em

T  
A  
B

sim.

### EXERCISE 4

This example takes a basic sweep-picked E minor arpeggio and moves it down chromatically – doubling-up each shape. This leads nicely to an E bend on the second string to resolve.

Em

T  
A  
B

sim.

### EXERCISE 5

You can get as extreme with this concept as you like. This is atonal lick is similar to a section from Steve Vai's 'The Attitude Song'. Using sweep picking on the top three strings, it criss-crosses up and then down the neck chromatically, finishing on the E note where it began. It's a real finger-twister!

Em

T  
A  
B

9 10 11 9 10 11 10 11 12 11 12 13 11 12 13 12 13 12 13 14 12 13 14 15 13 14 15 12 13 12 11 12 13 11 12 13 10 11 12 10 11 9

▣ --- | V --- ▣ --- | V --- | *sim.*

This technique can be used with any sort of lick across the fretboard, and as long as you start and end on a strong chord tone, it will work. Of course, these chromatic-style licks are not just limited to heavy metal. However, they definitely lend themselves nicely to the dark, aggressive nature of metal music.