

Chapter 2

Form

The form of a piece can give clues to what's going to happen. If I am sitting in with a group and they call a song I don't know but they feel like I will catch on quickly, I will ask some important questions to give me a feel for what to expect. I'll ask: is it major or minor, what key is it in, and what's the form?

You will encounter many different types of forms, but there are some that come up frequently and it is important to understand them. It's important to know the different blues forms --, the 12 bar blues, 8 bar blues, 16 bar blues, 24 bar blues. Some forms are abbreviated into letter groupings.

The 12 bar blues is sometimes abbreviated as an AAB form. The two A sections are similar with a slight variation, the B section is new material. The 12 bar blues in this way is broken down into three 4 measure groups. The first 4 measures are on the I7 chord. The second 4 measures are based on the IV7 chord but go back to the I7 chord. The third 4 measures start on the V7 chord and resolve to the I7 chord. This is not a common way of explaining a blues. A few frequently used forms using letter abbreviations are AABA, AB, and AB with a tag. This is explained using roman numerals because the chords associated with roman numerals can be applied to any key. Major key blues first, minor blues in parenthesis. Take a look at *Illustration 1*.

12 Bar Blues Forms

I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)
IV7 (iv7)	IV7 (iv7)	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)
V7	V7	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)

Illustration 1

The basic blues has many variations that overlap across genres and styles. One very common variation is a quick change. The difference with a quick change blues comes in measure 2 when the IV7, or iv7 in minor is played, instead of the I7, or i7 in minor. Measure 2 is bold to show that that's the only difference in *Illustration 2*. In comparison to the traditional blues form in *Illustration 1*, the quick change has the change in measure 2, but measure 3 & 4 go back to the I7 chord. The IV7 only lasts for the one measure and quickly goes back to the I7. A quick change.

I7 (i7)	IV7 (iv7)	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)
IV7 (iv7)	IV7 (iv7)	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)
V7	V7	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)

Illustration 2

Another common variation is in measure 10. In a traditional blues, measures 9 & 10 are both the V7 chord, but it is very common in the blues for measure 9 to be the V7 chord, and measure 10 to be the IV7 chord. This can happen with, or without the quick-change variation. It is something you'll have to learn to listen for. The chord instruments (piano, guitar, organ) and the bassist will be easy to detect if they are changing in measure 10 by going down a whole step or not. So, a blues, with a quick change, and the V7 — IV7 will look like *Illustration 3*.

I7 (i7)	<u>IV7 (iv7)</u>	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)
IV7 (iv7)	IV7 (iv7)	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)
V7	IV7 (iv7)	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)

Illustration 3

Additionally, adding a V7 chord in the last measure of each chorus is frequently used. Sometimes the whole last measure, other times just the last 2 beats. This is shown in *Illustration 4*. In this example, the quick change is still being used, and the IV7 chord in measure 10 is being used, but they don't all have to be used together. This is something you'll have to practice listening for – and listen to lots of blues songs and forms to develop your ear – so you can hear it once or twice and know what's going on.

I7 (i7)	<u>IV7 (iv7)</u>	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)
IV7 (iv7)	IV7 (iv7)	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7)
<u>V7</u>	<u>IV7 (iv7)</u>	I7 (i7)	I7 (i7) V7

Illustration 4

For analysis, let's look at a couple of blues songs that are frequently called at jams that are different than the variations discussed thus far, but utilize some of the variations discussed.

i7	i7	i7	i7
iv7	iv7	i7	i7
bVI7	V7	i7	i7

Illustration 5 – *Thrill Is Gone*, B.B. King

“Thrill Is Gone,” *Illustration 5*, does not use the quick change, nor does it use the V7 chord at the very last measure. Also, B.B. King

did something different in measures 9 & 10. In measure 9 he went to the bVI7 chord – the flat-six, dominant 7 chord. This resolves down by a half step to the V7 chord, the dominant chord.

Next take a look at *Illustration 6*, the song “Call It Stormy Monday Blues” by T-Bone Walker. Measure 3 has a bII7, that's a flat two chord. Lower the second scale step a half step and make it a dominant 7 chord. It's resolved by going back down to the I7 chord. Measures 7 & 8 have the diatonic walk up from I7-ii7-I7/III then back to I7. The tune then goes to the V7 like most blues do in measure 9, and finished to the IV7 like a regular blues. Some bands have evolved the tune over the years and added a half step up to the bVI7 in measure 10, then back down to the V7 but not every band plays it that way so use your ears to figure out what way they are playing the last 4 measures. Measure 11 adds in a bII7 chord. This is a lot of changes from the basic blues mentioned earlier. It requires some practice to get it but it's worth it because you can ace it when you go to a jam and this gets called.

I7	IV7	I7 bII7	I7
IV7	IV7	I7 ii7	I7/iii I7
V7	IV7 (bVI7 V7)	I7 bII7	I7 (V7)

Illustration 6 – The Stormy Monday Blues

I can clearly remember being about 16-17 years old, sitting in the smoky bar playing at the jam and both “Thrill Is Gone” and “Call It Stormy Monday Blues” get called. The bass player was trying to help me out and giving me “the look” and strongly landing on the bVI7. After I totally missed it the first few times he began doing it while adding the emphasis of moving the neck of his bass and doing the additional head nod when going down the half step to the V7. I just didn't know. I would hit the V7 chord each time against the bVI7 and would release the notes and not play anything for a moment because I could hear the crunch being created by my part.

It was an uncomfortable feeling. I knew the bass player was trying to help me out. I missed it that night, but the players that were giving me constructive feedback told me after the set what I was missing. With “Stormy Monday” they told me it was a blues with a walk up. As correct as that is, I wasn't too familiar with passing chords, diatonic turnarounds, or substitute turnarounds. I struggled through that tune for a few weeks. YouTube wasn't a thing. Facebook hadn't been invented yet. I couldn't just look them up. I had to find the tracks on a CD at the library and check it out or ask my Uncle Tim who was a huge blues fan and knew most of the players I was sitting in with personally. You've got to use the resources available to you.

Many blues jams play the song “Mustang Sally.” It's a 24 bar blues. Everything is doubled. Take a look at *Illustration 7* to see how everything is twice as long. This song does not use the quick change, but it does go to the V7 chord in the last measure, usually with a rhythmic hit on the & of 1, down beat of 2, and on 3 and the & of 3. There is also a break in measure 19, everyone hits the downbeat together on 1 and rests the rest of the measure and the next measure. The vocal line takes this break during singing, and soloists fill this break during solos.

I7	I7	I7	I7
I7	I7	I7	I7
IV7	IV7	IV7	IV7
I7	I7	I7	I7
V7	V7 bV7	IV7 (HIT on 1)	(BREAK)
I7	I7	I7	V7

Illustration 7 – Mustang Sally

The 8 bar blues is a bit different. It still goes through the I-IV-V chords. In *Illustration 8* you can see that the chord changes come in the same order as the basic 12 bar blues, but the duration is shorter. Also, it is an option to go to the V7 chord at the end of the 8 bar blues just like it is with the 12 bar blues. Sometimes the V7 at the end comes only on beats 3 & 4.

I7	I7	IV7	IV7	I7	V7	I7	I7 (V7)
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Illustration 8

There's a variation of the blues where there's a long I7 chord. Sometimes there are hits with band breaks, other times the band plays throughout the form. Most of the time, after the long I7, the rest of the form follows the standard 12 bar blues and it ends up being 16 measures long. The chords and form are shown in *Illustration 9*. An easily identifiable song that uses this is "Jailhouse Rock." There is a hit on 1 of measure 1, then rests the rest of the measure. Measure 2 has rests for beats 1 & 2, then hits on the & of 3 and holds the rest of measure 2. This is repeated a total of 4 times taking up the first 8 measures, then a shuffle or walking feel the rest of the form. The hits are repeated again for each additional verse of vocals. The hits can sometimes be played in the solos too, but isn't as common. Let your ears be your guide for that part.

I7	I7	I7	I7	I7	I7	I7	I7
IV7	IV7	I7	I7	V7	V7 or IV7	I7	I7 (V7)

Illustration 9

There's a form called AABA that has a lot of options or variations, but knowing the basics of it can prove helpful. Let's look at a couple popular AABA songs that have different chord changes. Typically, an AABA song is going to be 32 measures long, and

consists of 4 different sections. The A sections are repeated very similarly each time, and the B section is a bridge. Each section is 8 measures long. *Illustration 10* is the song “Five Foot Two” and the song “Honeysuckle Rose” is *Illustration 11*. “Five Foot Two” has what is often referred to as a “rhythm changes bridge.” This is a bridge used by popular music of the past and jazz standards based on the bridge to the George Gershwin tune “I Got Rhythm.” Let’s look at the jazz form, “Rhythm Changes” based on the Gershwin tune in *Illustration 12*.

The original chord changes to “I Got Rhythm” were a 34 measure tune with a built in turnaround at the end of each chorus. In the generic rhythm changes form it’s often reduced to a 32 measure form with the tag on the very last chorus if applicable to the melody written over those changes. In this configuration the whole song takes 4 lines. 8 measures per line, 32 measures total. This means each section of our form takes one line on the illustration. There are 4 sections to an AABA form. Two A sections, a B section, and an additional A section. The first two lines are the A sections. Line 3 is the bridge. Line 4 is the repeated A section. When talking about lines in the following examples I am referring to the specific line of the illustration. If an example has chord changes above and below each other in a measure, the upper chord is the first 2 beats, the lower chord is the last 2 beats.

I6	III7	VI7	VI7	II7	V7	I	V7
I6	III7	VI7	VI7	II7	V7	I6	I6
III7	III7	VI7	VI7	II7	II7	V7	V7
I6	III7	VI7	VI7	II7	V7	I7	V7

Illustration 10 – Five Foot Two

ii7 V7	ii7 V7	ii7	V7	I6 I6/III	IV7 V7	I6 IV7	iii7 VI7
ii7 V7	ii7 V7	ii7	V7	I6 I6/III	IV7 V7	I6	I6
I7	I7	IV7	IV7	II7	II7	V7	V7
ii7 V7	ii7 V7	ii7	V7	I6 I6/III	IV7 V7	I6 (IV7	iii7 VI7)

Illustration 11 – Honeysuckle Rose

I6 vi7	ii7 V7	iii7 vi7	ii7 V7	I6 I/III	IV7 #IV°7	I7/V VI7	ii6 V7
I6 vi7	ii7 V7	iii7 vi7	ii7 V7	I6 I/III	IV7 #IV°7	I7/V V7	I6
III7	III7	VI7	VI7	II7	II7	V7	V7
I6 vi7	ii7 V7	iii7 vi7	ii7 V7	I6 I/III	IV7 #IV°7	I7/V V7	I6 V7

Illustration 12 – Rhythm Changes

vi7	vi7	vi7	vi7	II7	V7	I6	vii°7 III7
vi7	vi7	vi7	vi7	III7	VII7	III7	V7
I6	I6	I6	I6	II7	II7	II7	V7 III7
vi7	vi7	vi7	vi7	II7	V7	I6	I6

Illustration 13 – Everybody Loves My Baby

Illustration 13 starts on the minor six chord. It is the song “Everybody Loves My Baby” and it too follows the AABA format. What you should notice about *Illustration 10-13* is that they are not the same chord changes. They are very different from each other, but they all use the same 32 bar song structure. It's a form that needs to be internalized and understood so it can be used when sitting in and when analyzing songs you are learning. Take a listen

to the playing examples that accompany this book. You'll hear that the sound of the 3 different examples above are all different, but when zooming out and listening to, and analyzing the broader picture, they are identical in their form. There are similarities, and there are hundreds of songs that fit the AABA format.

Compare the audio file for *Illustration 13* to *Illustration 10-12*. The drums were different. On 13 the drummer did a floor tom beat for the A sections and swung the bridge. This is a utilized format in some older jazz tunes and you should know how to play your part to accompany this figure.

Look at the bridge of *Illustration 11 & 13*. This will be the third line of each illustration. The first and second line are the A sections, the third is the bridge, and the fourth line is the repeat of the A section. AABA. The bridge of both pieces start on the I chord, both end up getting to a V7 chord. One of them passes through a minor ii, the other through a major II. These differences need to be memorized specific to each piece because playing a major chord when it should be minor, or vice versa, can clash with the melody and soloist. Also, a trained player will hear this and it will stand out.

AB form is common in older jazz tunes. Songs like “Swing That Music” and “The Curse of an Aching Heart” are both AB form songs. Again, just like with the AABA form, these two AB form songs are very different. Let's take a look. Up first is “The Curse of an Aching Heart” in *Illustration 14*. “Swing That Music” is *Illustration 15*. Songs using the AB form are frequently 32 measures much like AABA form. There is material that is played identically in both the A section and B section. They differ on the second half of each section.

I	VII7	I	I7	IV	iv	I	I
V7	V7	I	I (VI7)	II7	II7	V7	V7
I	VII7	I	I7	IV	VI7	III7	III7
IV7	i°	I III7	VI7	II7	V7	I	I

Illustration 14 – The Curse of an Aching Heart

I6	I6	IV7	IV7	I6	I6	VI7	VI7
II7	II7	V7	V7	iii7	biii°7	ii7	V7
I6	I6	IV7	IV7	I6	I6	VI7	VI7
ii7	iv	iii7	biii°7	ii7	V7	I6	I6

Illustration 15 – Swing That Music

AB form is easy to identify melodically for some because there is repeated portions that are note for note identical in both the A and B section. In *Illustration 14 & 15* the example is written over 4 lines of chord changes. The first two lines of changes are the A section. The following two lines of chord changes are the B section. Notice if you compare the first line to the third line of *Illustration 14* and the first line to third line of *Illustration 15* are the same in each tune. It's repeated material that has already been played in the song. Since that material is played twice, these songs could also be analyzed as ABAC. Line 1 is A, line 2 is B, line 3 is A again, line 4 is C. The new material or different material is found in lines 2 and 4. Just like the AABA form songs, these examples are 32 measures long.

There is a form that can be classified as AB with a tag, and that covers songs like “Sugar Blues” and other pieces where it's very similar to the AB form, but a small piece at the ending is tagged or a turnaround is added, and this happens every time the song is

repeated. Some songs use this technique only on the last time going out as an ending, but songs that have the tagged portion built in every time fall into the category of AB with a tag. Here's "Sugar Blues" in *Illustration 16*. Notice that "Sugar Blues" is 18 measures long. The A section is 8 measures. The B section is 10 measures because it has the built in tag, or turnaround of the last 2 measures repeated. Comparing this to the AB form, the AB with a tag form follows the style of AB form by repeating material note for note. Measures 1-3 are the same as 9-11. This is the first 3 measures of line 1 and line 2 of the example. The tag that is added to this form is measure 17 & 18. It is the last 2 measures of the B section, measures 15 & 16, repeated once.

I7	I7	V7	V7	V7	V7	I7	I7
I7	I7	v7 I7	IV7	IV7 #iv°7	I7 VI7	ii7 V7	I7 VI7
ii7 V7	I7						

Illustration 16 – Sugar Blues

Another song that uses this extended form is "Ja-Da." Like the "Sugar Blues", "Ja-Da" is 18 measures long. Another way to analyze "Ja-Da" is AABA with a tag, because you can break the first 8 measures into two groups of 4, and call them each an A section. This means measures 1-4 is identical to, or very close to identical to, measures 5-8. The B section would be measures 9-12, and the last A section would be measures 13-18, and includes the tag of the last 2 measures. What it means to tag the last 2 measures is, measures 15 & 16 are repeated in 17 & 18. Measure 16 does have a VI7 chord, that is a turnaround chord that leads back to the II7 in measure 17. *Illustration 17*.

I	VI7	II7 V7	I	I	VI7	II7	V7
I biii°7	ii7 V7	I biii°7	ii7 V7	I	VI7	II7 V7	I VI7
II7 V7	I						

Illustration 17 - Ja-Da

Let's analyze this next example.

I	III7	IV	II7	I	III7	IV	II7
I	VI7	I	VI7	I	II	I	VI7
I	III7	IV	II7	I	III7	IV	II7
I	VI7	I	VI7	I	II	I	VI7
I V7	IV	I V7	IV	I V7	IV	bVII	V7
I	III7	IV	II7	I	III7	IV	II7
I	VI7	I	VI7	I	II	I	VI7
I	I	I	VI7	I	I	I	VI7
I	I	I	VI7	I	I	I	VI7

Illustration 18

The piece above is 72 measures long. It can be analyzed in a couple of different ways. In the pop analysis, some might say it has a verse for the first 8 bars, then a chorus for the next 8 bars. This is followed by a second verse for the third 8 bars, and a repeat of the chorus for the fourth 8 bars. The fifth grouping of 8 bars is a bridge. That is followed by a third verse for the next 8 bars, and again a repeat of the chorus for the seventh grouping of 8 bars. There is a 16 bar vamp or outro on this piece too. Another way to group this piece is to call the verse and chorus together an A section. Then the first two lines of *Illustration 18* is an A section,

followed by another A section for the 3rd and 4th line. The 5th line is a bridge, then lines 6 & 7 are the last A section. The vamp or outro then follows. That would make this an AABA form with an outro or vamp or extended ending. This ending doesn't tag specific measures of the piece, it is new material at that point. It has its own melody that is played over that part that is different from the rest of the piece. This song is "Sittin' On The Dock of the Bay" by Otis Redding. Take a listen to the track for *Illustration 18*.

Forms are often cyclical and repetitive. It becomes easier to hear the sections of tunes over time and with practice. Knowing many musical forms is vital to being able to adapt to new material on the spot. The more you know and can identify by hearing it, the quicker you will be able to identify an unknown piece you are playing when sitting in with new players.