

The 12-Bar Form

Typical 12-Bar Blues Chord Progression

The 12-bar blues is 12 measures arranged in three sets of four measures each. The following is a typical 12-bar progression (keep in mind there are plenty of variations on this theme):

I	IV	I	I
IV	IV	I	I
V	IV	I	V

The following example is in the “call-response” format where the lyrics call out in the first two measures and the guitar responds in the next two measures. The second line is a repeat of the first. The first two bars of the third line are the conclusion, and the last two bars are the turnaround.

Stranger Blues (Elmore James)

E	A7	E	E
I'm a stranger here,	just blowed into your	town.	
← Verse = “call” →	← Response = fill →		

A7	A7	E	E
I'm a stranger here,	just blowed into your	town.	
← Repeat verse = “call” →	← Response = fill →		

B7	A7	E	B7
If I ask you for a favor,	please don't turn me	down.	
← Conclusion →	← Turnaround →		