

# Guitar Tab Feature Request

The image displays six examples of guitar bends, labeled a) through j). Each example is presented in two staves: a standard musical staff with a treble clef and a guitar tablature staff below it. Examples a) through f) show various bend types: a) a half-step bend, b) a whole-step bend, c) a lower string bend with vibrato, d) a compound bend (1/2 + 1/2), e) a compound bend (1 + 1), and f) a compound bend with release. Examples g) through j) show grace note bends: g) a standard grace note bend, h) a grace note bend with vibrato and tied duration, i) a grace note bend with vibrato, and j) a grace note bend with vibrato and tied duration.

## Bends

a) In the note staff, a pointed slur, arching over, connects the initial note to the 'bend to' note. A second pointed slur, also arching over, connects the 'bend to' note to the 'release to' note. In the TAB staff, a curved line initiates from the initial note and rises to the apex of the 'bend to' note (about 1 1/2 staff spaces above the TAB staff). The 'bend to' note in the note staff and the apex of the bend indication in the TAB staff are aligned horizontally. The 'apex' is capitulated with an arrowhead and a numeric value indicating the difference in interval in **whole steps** between the initial note and the 'bend to' note. A second curved line initiates from the apex of the 'bend to' note and contours downward to the 'release to' note, indicated by the initial note's fret value in parentheses.

b) Really, the same as 'a', but showing a bend of a whole step rather than a half-step.

c) In the note staff, a pointed slur, arching under, connects the initial D to the 'bent to' E. The pointed slur arches under to indicate that it is the lower string that is bent upward to achieve the 'bend to' note. The apex of the bend is capitulated with a numeric value indicating the difference in interval in **whole steps** between the initial note and the 'bend to' note. Vibrato is indicated by the wavy line (a trill extension used in classical notation) which begins centered over the notehead in the note staff, and just to the right of the numeric bend value in the TAB staff. The vibrato line is extended to the full value of the note in both staves.

d) A compound bend. Again, the apex of each component bend should be aligned horizontally with the corresponding noteheads. The bend's values are shown in the TAB staff as **fractions of whole steps**.

e) A compound bend of 2 whole steps.

f) A compound bend, with a final release back to the initial note.

## Grace Note Bends

g) In the note staff, the grace note is indicated by a notehead **with no stem**, connected to the 'bend to' note by the now familiar pointed slur. The slur arches over. In the TAB staff, a cue-sized fret number represents the grace note. The bend is once again indicated by a curved line ending in an arrowhead. Again, at the apex of the bend line is the numeric value of the bend in **whole steps**. The apex of the bend indication is horizontally aligned with the corresponding notehead.

h) A grace note bend, held for the duration of one half-note, with vibrato, released over the duration of a half-note, ending with the original pitch for the duration of a whole-note with vibrato. In the TAB staff, the duration of the 'tied from' note is indicated with a dashed line which connects the apex of the bend with the beginning of the 'release' line.

**Pre-Bends**

i) The 'pre-bend' grace note is shown in parentheses. The note is bent before the attack, and then struck. In the TAB staff, the line indicating the bend should be a straight vertical line originating from just above the fret number. It is centered horizontally on the fret number. Vibrato is shown for the duration of the half-note.

j) A 'pre-bend and release.' In the note staff, the initial note (which is not sounded before the bend) is again shown as a stemless grace-note. It is bent to a normal grace note, which is struck and then quickly released to the half-note. In the TAB staff, the initial grace note is again a cue-sized fret number. The 'pre-bend' is again indicated by a straight vertical line which is terminated by an arrowhead and numeric bend value. The 'release to' note is a regular sized fret number in parentheses.

**A note about parenthetical fret numbers:**

In these examples, parentheses around fret numbers were indicated with the corresponding parentheses glyphs for the typeface used for fret numbers (Helvetica Narrow Bold). There are many reasons to **not** use the parentheses glyphs belonging to the TAB fret number font. It's my opinion that TAB fret number parentheses should be done in PostScript and should be flexible enough to 'stretch' vertically in order to dynamically accommodate chords of various sizes in the TAB staff. This would allow bend 'release to' notes to reuse the same parentheses as 'tied to' chords at the beginning of new systems. Also, it could provide a springboard to improve LilyPond's handling of parentheses in the note staff--again, dynamically accommodating chords of varying sizes.

Additionally, the shapes and contours used for the parentheses should be elegant, yet ambiguous enough to match Serif and Sans Serif typefaces on the TAB staff. This will eliminate the need to 're-do' the parentheses instructions for different typefaces which may be used for fret numbers in the TAB staff.

This is really just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. There is lots more to this than is outlined here. The suggestions outlined above represent my experience over 9 years transcribing and typesetting guitar music for the popular press. However, I realize that the tools currently being used for this purpose are imperfect and have likely resulted (at least in some circumstances) in sub-par engraving. If any of this doesn't seem right, please post to the group. The placement of graphical objects should be considered open for discussion. If we can at least get this mostly right at the outset, then adjustments can surely be made over time to implement the most elegant TAB support in any professional-grade engraving tool.

Sibelius and Finale do a so-so job of this sort of thing, but they're far from "automatic." Some of these examples required some 'by-hand' adjustments and I really have faith that LilyPond can do a better job of it (if for no other reason than that there is already a group of people who want to see improved Guitar/TAB implementation). Combine LilyPond's knack for doing things automatically with its superior layout and typography, and we'll have a tool that easily surpasses the best proprietary tools on the market.

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