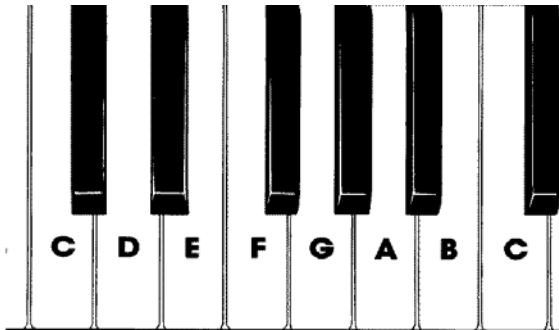


Guitar Theory: Scales Intro

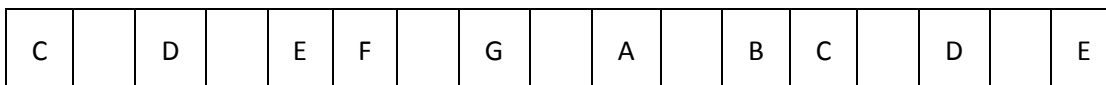
My experience with theory courses and texts has often been very piano-centric. While the piano is a beautiful instrument, it does not need to be the Rosetta Stone of the musical language. Rather than teach a guitarist piano basics that then need to be translated to the guitar, I will take advantage of the guitar's grid-like layout and teach *guitar* theory.



Instead of working with the piano, let's expand all of the keys to something that looks more like the frets on a guitar:



Then remove the black color, simply to make it a little easier on the eyes :



This is the system will be working with throughout your guitar and music education. You can see where each box represents one fret. You can play a C Major scale by applying these boxes to your guitar. Beginning on string 2, this system will easily map out where each note falls on this string:

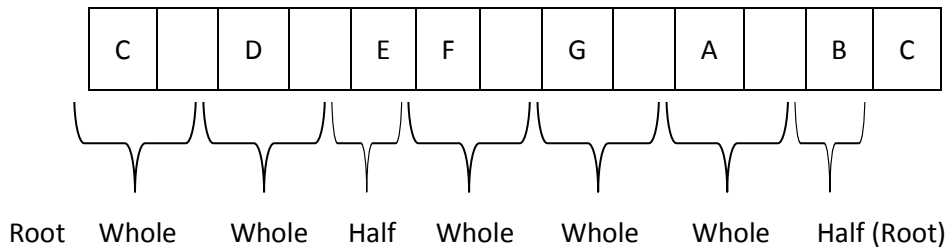
C		D		E	F		G		A		B	C
1 st Fret	<i>skip</i>	3 rd Fret	<i>skip</i>	5 th Fret	6 th Fret	<i>skip</i>	8 th Fret	<i>skip</i>	10 th Fret	<i>skip</i>	12 th Fret	13 th Fret

Congratulations, you just played a C Major scale! Let's take a closer look and see what is actually happening. This is similar to playing only the white keys on a piano, as we are skipping over certain notes. How we choose what notes to play and what notes to skip is determined by the **Major Scale**. All scales consist of a pre-determined pattern of **whole steps** and **half steps**.

A **half step** is the smallest distance we use in Western Music. It is the relationship of **one fret** to the very next. For example, 5th fret to 6th fret is a half step.

A **whole step**, then, is simply 2 half steps or **2 frets**. When traveling in whole steps, we will skip over one fret. For example, 1st fret to 3rd fret is a whole step.

Now that you understand the ingredients, let's take a look at the recipe. By using the C Major scale, a clear pattern of whole and half steps emerges:



In the beginning, it is necessary to commit certain information to memory. It is far easier to memorize the formula for the major scale than it is to memorize ALL of the major scales. Memorize the pattern as **Root – Whole – Whole – Half – Whole – Whole – Whole – Half**. Speak it out loud as you play through the scale:

Root Whole Whole Half Whole Whole Whole Half

The word *root* in music refers to the pitch center of a chord or scale. If we are playing a C major scale, “C” is the root of the scale. If we are playing an E minor chord, “E” is the root of the chord. As the name implies, the root is the foundation of a chord or scale. In scales, the sounds created by playing the notes one after another will want to push you toward the root.

Practical Application

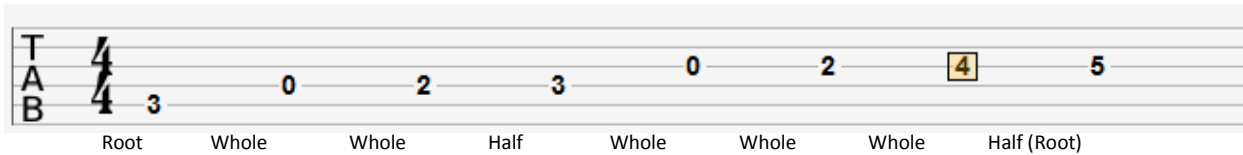
Let's put the Major Scale Formula- R W W H W W W H- on the 3rd fret of the 5th string:

As you can see, this isn't really the best way to play the guitar. Your hand is moving ALL over the place!

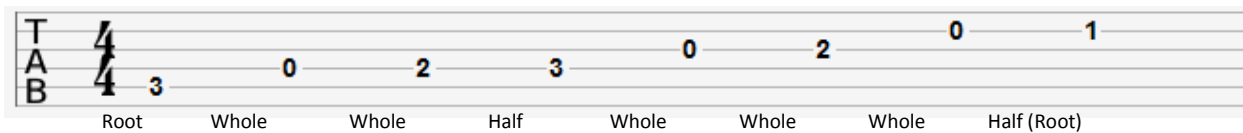
The cool thing about the guitar is that it repeats itself. The **5th fret** on the **5th string** is the very same note as the **open note** on the **4th string**. So instead of playing all of these notes on one string, let's NOT play the **5th fret** on the **6th string**, but instead get that same pitch (D) from the next open string.

Root Whole Whole Half Whole Whole Whole Half (Root)

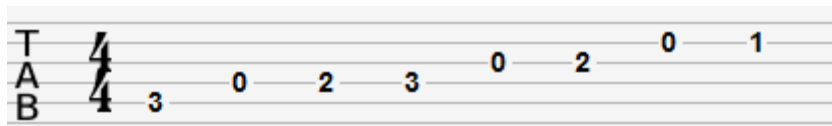
This is a little better, but we have the same problem on the 4th string now. So let's replace the 5th fret again with the open G string:



Just because things have to be complicated, the next string repeats at the 4th fret (instead of the 5th like all of the others). To be clear, The **4th fret** on the 3rd string is the very same note as the **open note** on the 2nd string.



Hopefully, the layout of the guitar is starting to make more sense. If all of the above didn't quite sink in, that's ok! As long as you can play the C scale, you're good to go! Here is the final version of the C Scale that we came up with:



Assignment 1:

1. Play the C scale several times saying: **Root – Whole – Whole – Half – Whole – Whole – Whole – Half**
2. Then play it a few more times, saying the letter names you are playing: C D E F G A B C
3. Can you play it backwards?!?
4. Can you play it with your eyes closed?

Assignment 2:

The C Major scale has all of the letters of the musical alphabet (there is no "H" Jack!) C D E F G A B C.

1. On the low, thick E string, there are extra notes we could add in. What 3 letters could we get on this string BEFORE we hit the 5th fret? _____
2. On the A string (5th string), we are currently playing one note. That is C on the 3rd fret. BUT there are 2 notes we could get before this 3rd fret on this same string. What are they? _____
3. True or False: Since the 6th string and the first string are E's, we can play the SAME frets on both E strings and they will be the SAME letters. _____

Assignment 3:

Take your answers from the last assignment and write the TAB for the new notes on the 6th, 5th, and 1st strings:

T	
A	
B	

Assignment 4: Using any scale you'd like, come up with 3-5 different melody ideas (make sure to be clear where one melody ends and the next one begins):

Don't panic, you have ALL month to do this!

T	
A	
B	

T	
A	
B	

T	
A	
B	

T	
A	
B	

T	
A	
B	

T	
A	
B	

T	
A	
B	

