

Effective Guitar Scale Practice

How to Transform Scales from Mechanical to Musical



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Thank you for subscribing to my newsletter!

This short ebook deals with a subject that guitarists spend large amounts of time on in the practice room, scales. But let's be honest, sometimes practicing scales can be less than inspiring and more than a little frustrating. Am I right?

Having devoted countless hours to practicing scales on the guitar over the years, I've discovered several useful techniques that can help to learn scales, arpeggios and modes easily and effectively that I am happy to share with you, my newsletter readers, in this volume.

Don't like practicing at the computer? Remember that this is a PDF, so you can easily print it off and put it on your music stand.

Thanks again for subscribing; I hope you enjoy my ebook!

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Get the Most from This Book

All the exercises in this book should be practiced **slowly**, at least to begin with. It is always better to play a scale slow and accurately than fast and sloppy.

Every exercise must also be practiced **in time** either by tapping your foot, or with a metronome.

You should say each note of the scale that you're practicing to ensure that you are learning the actual notes of each scale, and not just memorizing a mechanical finger pattern.

Using Intervals to Practice Scales

Playing scales in intervals breaks us out of 'grid locked' positions on the guitar fretboard, and helps us understand the imbedded harmony found within each scale on a much deeper level.

What intervals should we use to practice scales you may ask? The answer is; those which are diatonic to the scale, arpeggio, or mode that you are using at that moment in the woodshed.

For example, if you are practicing the C major scale, you wouldn't practice minor 2nds, because you'd get notes that clash against the harmony.

Therefore, I recommend thoroughly learning the appropriate scale harmony before practicing the scale in intervals.

Harmonized Major Scale in the key of 'C'

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Cmaj7	D-7	E-7	Fmaj7	G7	A-7	B-7b5

So, returning to our C major scale, if we wanted to practice this scale in thirds, note that some would be major 3rd while others would be minor 3rds.

C Major Scale in Thirds

Major 3rd Minor 3rd Minor 3rd Major 3rd Major 3rd Minor 3rd Minor 3rd Major 3rd

T
A
B

3 2 5 3 2 5 3 2 5 4 2 1 4 3 5 5

Some intervals present challenging fingerings on the guitar (most notably 6ths and 7ths) that we might not use often when improvising, but this exercise ensures we know the scales

inside out. By practicing in octaves, we are also developing a great solo technique used by jazz-guitar legend Wes Montgomery.

Once you can comfortably play a scale using a variety of intervals, try and create some lines using a specific interval and take it to a progression or tune you are working on in the practice room.

Here is an example of a ii-V-I line with a specific focus on utilizing 3rds throughout the phrase.

The image shows a musical score for a ii-V-I progression: Dm⁷ - G⁷ - C^{maj7}. The music is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The melody is on a single staff, and the bass line is on a separate staff below it. The bass line includes fingerings for the thumb (T), index (A), and middle (B) fingers. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, while the bass line consists of quarter notes. The progression is: Dm⁷ (Bb, D, F, Ab), G⁷ (Bb, D, F, Ab), and C^{maj7} (Bb, D, F, Ab).

Practicing Out of Position

While it's a great idea to learn scales in positions that fit nicely under the fingers, you can sometimes become lazy and not think about what notes you're playing, instead relying solely on box patterns to guide your fingers.

One way to avoid this problem is to practicing scales on one string, because you have to think about the notes you're playing and can't depend solely on the fingering. As guitarists, we tend to rely on playing vertically on the neck most of the time, which is fine, but we don't want this approach to become a limitation.

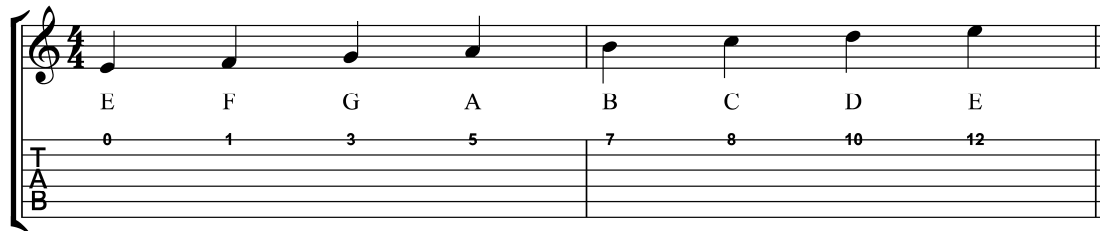
As well as being a good practice technique to learn scales, playing horizontally across the neck is also a beneficial way to practice phrasing. Because you don't have many notes within reach, you will probably get bored fast and have to find new and interesting ways to use the notes that are available.

My old guitar teacher once told me a story of Mike Stern giving a workshop, where he restricted himself to the top two strings and improvised over "Autumn Leaves" for 10 minutes, and yet he still sounded "just like Mike Stern."

This exercise also means that we're often not starting on the root, so we tend to avoid simply playing up and down the scale, which can help further develop your understanding of scale construction.

Here's how a one-octave C major scale would look on the first string of the guitar, starting on the lowest possible note, E.

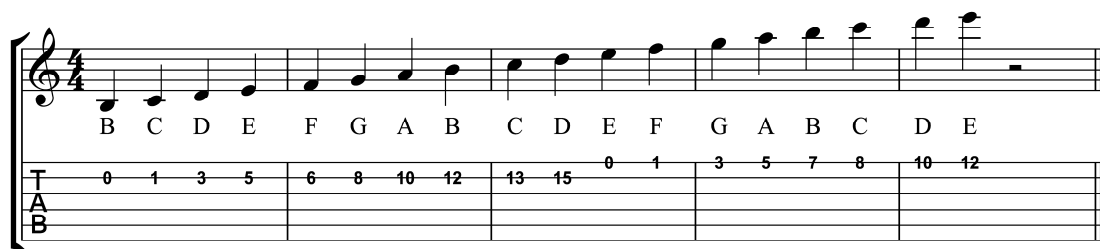
C Major Scale Top String Only



Work your way through each string of the guitar in a similar manner. After you can play the scale on each string, try combining two strings before moving on to other keys and scale types, such as melodic minor and diminished scales.

Here's how the C major scale would look like on the top two strings of the guitar, starting on the lowest note on each string, B and E.

C Major Scale Top Two Strings



Rhythmic Incorporation

When practicing scales, you are working on a number of other items such as technique, theory and dexterity, but rhythm is the one that always seems to get forgotten.

So far all the exercises in this book have been notated in quarter notes for easy readability and clarity, but you should practice every exercise with different rhythms to ensure a well-rounded practice session. Rhythm should be a focus of all your practice room items, including arpeggios, chords, chord progressions and improvising.

Below are some common jazz rhythms that you can use to practice scales. Practice each one separately at first before try switching between two or more different rhythms.

Quarter Notes
Eighth Notes

Quarter-Note Triplets
Eighth-Note Triplets

Once you can play each rhythm comfortably by itself start to combine different rhythms together, and then start to create lines as you did at the end of the interval section of this book.

You Don't Always Need a Guitar To Practice

Many musicians practice guitar as a hobby, so you may not have much time to devote to practicing scales in the woodshed. The good news is that you don't always need your instrument to practice scales and can therefore practice on your lunch break, in front of the TV, walking through the grocery store etc.

When I first started studying music at college, I quickly had to learn all the notes of each for each scale and arpeggio in all 12 keys, a highly recommend exercise by the way, and 70% of the shedding for this task was done on the bus each morning as I made my way to school.

Every morning I would think of a scale to work on. Then, I would say the notes in my mind for that scale staring in C, before working through the other 11 keys. By the time I got my guitar in my hands, I already knew the notes of each scale cold, so all I had to do was get the muscle memory down and the scales were learned. Because of my mental shedding, I was able to get the scales down much faster than I had done before.

Visual Practice Table

Key	Accidentals	Chord Type	Arpeggio	Scale
C	0	Major 7 th	C, E, G, B, C	C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C
C	1	Dominant 7 th	C, E, G, Bb, C	C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C
C	2	Minor 7 th	C, Eb, G, Bb, C	C, D, Eb, F, G, A, Bb, C
C	4	Minor 7 ^{b5}	C, Eb, Gb, Bb, C	C, D, Eb, F, Gb, Ab, Bb, C

Repeat this exercise in all 12 keys, either by saying the notes or writing them down if it helps, before moving on to other scales such as harmonic minor or whole tone. I also recommend modulating between keys in different intervals to get the maximum results from your time in the practice room.

By doing this twice a day, five days a week I had all of the essential major/minor scales and arpeggios mastered in all 12 keys in just under a month.

I hope these exercises have been useful and that you have enjoyed them.

Check out www.jamieholroydguitar.com for further study and more lessons