Music Theory

Major Scale

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
R	M2	M3	P4	P5	M6	M7

G Major Scale

G	A	B	C	D	E	F#
	W	W	H	W	W	W	H
G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F#°

How to read the Major Scale sheet

This document contains a lot of information ! However at first sight it might seem confusing, let's explain everything.

The first thing to notice is the second line, it is written : R, M2, M3, P4, P5, M6 and M7. They represent the **intervals contained within the Major Scale** from the root. They inform how to build the Major Scale from any note.

The first line gives the **scale degrees**. A capital letters represent major chords whereas minuscule letters represent minor chords. For example, in the Major Scale, the chord built based on the third note will always be a minor chord. The chord built based on the fifth note will always be a major chord. The last chord is a diminished chord noted vii°.

The second part of the sheet provides an example of a given Major Scale for a particular root note predefined, here G. It shows the notes in the **G Major Scale**. You can see W and H between notes, they indicate whether a Whole tone or Half tone separate the notes.

The last line shows the chords material for the given G Major Scale.

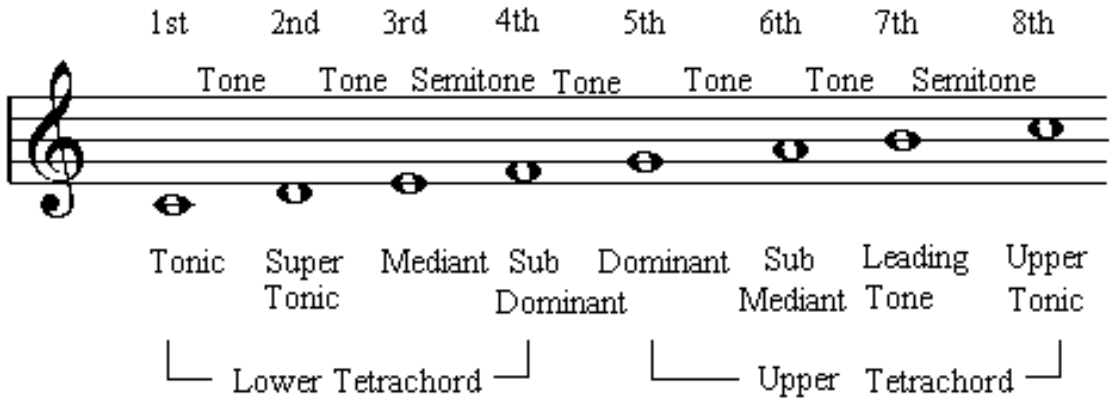
Why does the Major Scale matter ?

To put it shortly for four reasons :

- To **understand how most Western songs are built** and how to create your first own songs
- To **understand how to improvise** solos for lead guitar
- In the end, **get the bigger picture** of the music you hear everyday
- The Major Scale is the foundation of Western harmony, you will need to master it in order to **understand more advanced topics** such as modes

About the Major Scale

The Major Scale is a **diatonic scale** built with two **tetrachords** with one note in common. They are chords of four different sounds or notes. In tonal music, tetrachords have an extended definition : these four notes must be disposed to have two tones and one semitone.



Each scale degree provides a particular chord. Here are the degree names :

- 1st degree - **tonic** : In a X Major Scale the tonic is simply X
- 2nd degree - supertonic
- 3rd degree - **mediant** : called this way because it is midway between the tonic and the dominant.
- 4th - subdominant : used to make a **plagal cadence,** the IV - I chord change
- 5th - **dominant** : most important degree after the tonic because this degree pulls you back strongly to the home chord (the tonic chord). It provides the **perfect cadence** as the V - I chord change**.**
- 6th - submediant
- 7th - subtonic or **leading tone** : this note pulls you back strongly to the tonic

This is important and I encourage you to read this part : There is *no rule* for using the Major Scale. Before exploring how to use the Major Scale, I want to warn you : **the Major Scale is just a tool**. It just so happens that most of the songs we like and create in Western Music fall into the Major Scale category. However it does not tell you how you must restrict yourself ! It provides to you an environment and limits where everything sounds good - well this assertion can be subjective. This is music and you should always explore. There are no rules in music (almost true). The only rule you will hear from musicians is : "*If it sounds good, then it is (probably) good*".

Before breaking the limits of the Major Scale, I would suggest you firstly understand them well. We will discover the Major Scale with two different visions : from a **Harmony** and a **Melody** point of view.

Major Scale - Harmony

Let us decompose the learning of Harmony of the Major Scale with different exercises.

1 - **Understanding the chords material** within the Major Scale would be a great first step. Understanding why these chords are of this quality and the distance that separate each of them is the first thing to learn. In order to practice the understand of that, I would suggest you pick any note. Try to construct the Major Scale where the root is the chosen note. Deduce the seven notes contained in this Major Scale and the chords in it by writing them down. Play the chords on your instrument.

2 - Select a song you like that uses the Major Scale. If you don't know how to find one, just choose one where the first chord is a Major Chord. Start for example with *Stand By Me from Ben E. King* which is in A Major. **Construct the Major Scale** doing the steps from the exercise 1 and apply it on the song. Determine the Major Scale degree of each chord in the song.

If there are chords that do not belong to the Major Scale it is ok. Try to understand, feel and research why it sounds good in that context.

3 - You can **start creating your first music**. Try respecting some rules at the beginning using what you know about the scale degrees and their roles. Generally we even say that chords in each degree have a function ; in music theory we call this approach **Functional Harmony.**

For example, you can create a 4 chords progression song, this is the most common pattern. You can explore these scale degrees on top of a metronome :

I - ? - IV - V

I - ? - ? - V

I - ? - ? - IV

A ? means you can put any degree here.

4 - I recommend you learn the CAGED system and apply it on the chords major scale. There is a course on the CAGED system in the advanced courses.

Major Scale - Melody

Let us decompose the learning of Melody of the Major Scale with different exercises.

1 - Learn and understand the **pentatonic major scale**. See the pentatonic PDF lesson in the intermediate courses. Discover the scale and spend time understanding the role of each note in one position of the pentatonic major scale. The role is defined by the interval from the tonic.

2 - Choose **one scale pattern** that you can play up and down. You can put a major backing track and play on top of it.

3 - Learn the two other pentatonic major scale patterns that as next to the one you have already learned. Put a major backing track and play on top of it. Learn some **embellishments** (pull-off, hammer-on, slide, bends etc...). There is a course on that topic in the intermediate courses.

4 - **Learn all the patterns**. Put a major backing track and play on top of it using all the pattern. Try exploring the ways of playing the scale on the whole neck. Horizontally and vertically. Now that you know all the patterns and can play the scale on the whole neck, it is time to **learn licks**. Spend time looking for licks or learn solos from your favorite guitarists.

5 - Now you are familiar with the pentatonic major scale you can use the whole **diatonic major scale**. This will add two notes to the pentatonic major scale. Those two notes are the 4th and 7th notes. Play on top of a major backing track. Spend some time focusing on the two news notes compared to the pentatonic major scale.

6 - **Play along chord changes**. The idea is that instead of just playing random notes from the scale, try playing notes that are in each chords as the chords changes. Highlight the colors of each chords (emphasize the root and the third). Make the connection between the melodic way of seeing the major scale and the harmonic way of seeing it. Understand that chords are hidden behind every scale patterns.

Advanced concepts about the Major scale

Once you are familiar with the Major Scale, the Minor Scale and the Pentatonic Scales, you can start exploring further. The next page is an advanced version of the first sheet.

Extended Chords : A first step would be to construct all the extended chords from the Major Scale. Firstly, if you understood how the major, minor chords - and the diminished chord - are constructed in this Scale you can start by constructing all the **seventh chords** that belong to the scale. They are denoted in the G Major Scale example in the sheet. Then you can explore even more by deducting the ninth chords, suspended chords or other kind of chords that belong to this scale.

Modes : in the sheet, modes are associated for each note or each chord degree. Here are the seven modes in order : Ionian (Major Scale), Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian (Minor Scale) and Locrian.

Take your time to understand that the Aeolian mode is really just the Minor Scale. If you start using the sixth note as the root for a new scale following the pattern from the Major Scale but with a shift, you end up with the Minor Scale.

It is a great advice to take the Minor Scale as a scale on its own, to take time to learn to understand it, play with it, understand the colors and flavors it gives to the ear. This advice applies to all the modes.

There is a PDF lesson especially about the Modes that focuses especially on the Modes of the Major Scale in the advanced courses. If you feel like learning about it you can go there. Here is just a short little introduction to Modes and does not explain anything about them, I really encourage you take a look at the Modes course in order to learn Modes properly.

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G Major Scale

G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F#°
G△	Am7	Bm7	C△	D7	Em7	Fm7b5
Ionian	Dorian	Phrygian	Lydian	Mixolydian	Aeolian	Locrian