

Lesson 3: Half Steps and Whole Steps

Basic Music Theory for Guitar

What you will learn: how to measure the distance between two notes, using frets.

The half step

A **half step** is the **smallest distance** between two notes in music. On the guitar, a half step is **1 fret**.

- E to F = 1 fret = **half step**
- C to C# = 1 fret = **half step**

Another name for a half step is a **semitone**.

The whole step

A **whole step** is **two half steps**. On the guitar, a whole step is **2 frets**.

- C to D = 2 frets = **whole step**
- F to G = 2 frets = **whole step**

Another name for a whole step is a **tone**.

The steps between the natural notes

Now you can see why Lessons 1 and 2 said **E-F** and **B-C** are special. Between all other natural notes there is a **whole step (W)**, but between **E-F** and **B-C** there is only a **half step (H)**:

Note	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Step	W	W	H	W	W	W	H	

See it on string 5

Play these notes on string 5 and count the frets between them:

Note	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Fret	3	5	7	8	10	12	14	15
Step		W	W	H	W	W	W	H

You just played the **C major scale**! Its pattern is **W W H W W W H**. You will learn more about it in the scale lessons.

Why this is important

Every **scale** and every **chord** in music is built from half steps and whole steps. When you know how to count them on the frets, you can build any scale or chord yourself.

Practice

1. On string 6, play a half step from E (open) to F (fret 1), then a whole step from F (fret 1) to G (fret 3).
2. On string 5, play C (fret 3) to C (fret 15) and say "W W H W W W H" as you play.
3. Start on any fret. Play one half step up, then one whole step up. Say the note names.

Next lesson: Note Lengths