

Lesson 8: The Major Scale

Basic Music Theory for Guitar

What you will learn: the most important scale in music, and how to build it in any key.

What is a scale?

A **scale** is a group of notes played one after another, going up or down. Each scale has its own **pattern** of half steps and whole steps (Lesson 3).

The major scale pattern

The **major scale** has 7 different notes, and then the first note again, one octave higher. Its pattern is:

W W H W W W H

W = whole step (2 frets) H = half step (1 fret)

The major scale sounds **happy and bright**. You know it already: **Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do**.

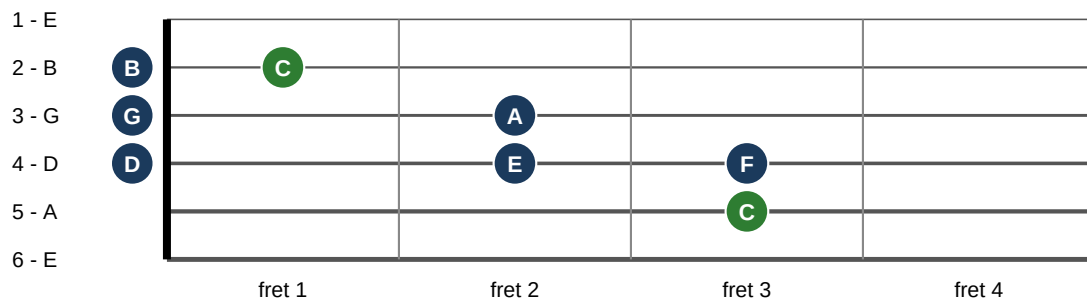
The C major scale

C major is the easiest major scale, because it has **no sharps and no flats**. Each note has a number, called a **scale degree**:

Note	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 (1)
Sing	Do	Re	Mi	Fa	Sol	La	Ti	Do
Step to next	W	W	H	W	W	W	H	

C major in open position

Play these notes from low to high. The **green** notes are **C**, the first note (the **root**):



Notes on fret 0 are **open strings** (left of the thick line, the nut).

Building a major scale in any key

Start on any note, and follow the pattern **W W H W W W H**. Let's build **G major**:

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

From E to the next note must be a **whole step**. E to F is only a half step, so we need **F#**. That's why G major has **one sharp: F#**.

Now **D major**: D E F# G A B C# D. It needs **two sharps: F# and C#**. You will learn more about this in the Keys lessons.

The pattern is the same on every fret

On one string, the major scale is always: **start, +2, +2, +1, +2, +2, +2, +1 frets**. For example, G major on string 6: frets **3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15**.

Practice

1. Play C major in open position (the picture above), up and down. Say the note names.
2. Play it again and sing "Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do".
3. Play G major on string 6, frets 3 to 15. Count "W W H W W W H".
4. Choose any fret on string 5, and build a major scale on it with the pattern.
5. Find the major scale lessons on the Training page (Scales), and play along.

Next lesson: Minor Scales