

Lesson 9: Minor Scales

Basic Music Theory for Guitar

What you will learn: the 3 minor scales, and how they are different from the major scale.

The sound of minor

The major scale sounds **happy and bright**. The minor scale sounds **sad, dark or serious**. Many rock, blues, Latin and classical songs use minor scales.

1. The natural minor scale

The **natural minor** scale has this pattern:

W H W W H W W

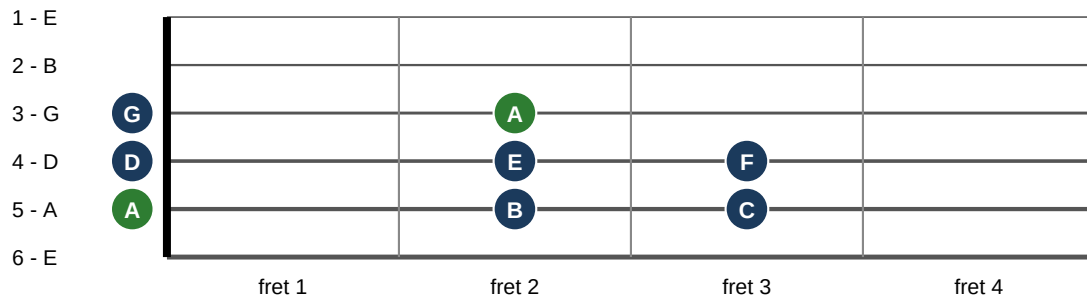
The easiest minor scale is **A minor**, because it has **no sharps and no flats**:

Note	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
Degree	1	2	b3	4	5	b6	b7	8 (1)
Step to next	W	H	W	W	H	W	W	

Look at the degrees: **b3, b6 and b7** are one half step **lower** than in the major scale. The **b3** is the most important note. It gives minor its sad sound.

A minor in open position

Play these notes from low to high. The **green** notes are **A**, the root:



A minor and C major: same notes!

A minor uses the **same notes** as **C major** (no sharps, no flats). It just starts on a different note: A instead of C. We say A minor is the **relative minor** of C major. You will learn more in the Keys lessons.

2. The harmonic minor scale

Take the natural minor, and **raise the 7th note one half step**. In A minor, **G becomes G#**:

A B C D E F G# A

The jump from F to G# (3 frets) gives it an **exotic, Spanish or Middle Eastern** sound.

3. The melodic minor scale

Take the natural minor, and **raise the 6th and 7th notes**. In A minor, **F becomes F#** and **G becomes G#**:

A B C D E F# G# A

It sounds smooth, and is used a lot in jazz. In classical music, it goes back to the natural minor when it comes down.

Compare all of them

Scale	Notes in A	Formula
Natural minor	A B C D E F G A	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7
Harmonic minor	A B C D E F G# A	1 2 b3 4 5 b6 7
Melodic minor	A B C D E F# G# A	1 2 b3 4 5 6 7
Major (to compare)	A B C# D E F# G# A	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Practice

1. Play A natural minor in open position (the picture above), up and down. Say the note names.
2. Play C major (Lesson 8), then A minor. Listen: same notes, but a different feeling.
3. Play A harmonic minor: the same, but play **G#** (string 3, fret 1) instead of G.
4. Play A natural minor on string 5 only: frets 0, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12. Count "W H W W H W W".
5. Find the minor scale lessons on the Training page (Scales), and play along.

Next lesson: What Is a Key?