

How to Build a Major Scale

The major scale is the first starting point in learning music theory. Almost everything you learn will come from this scale, so make sure you're 100% happy with how it works!

What makes a major scale?

The sound of a major scale comes from the distances between all of the notes. These distances are called "intervals", and come in two types; tones and semitones.

A tone is 2 frets on your guitar, and a semitone is 1. If you play your 3rd fret on the E string then the 5th fret, that's a tone; if you play the 7th followed by the 8th, that's a semitone.

A major scale comes from a specific arrangement of intervals, which looks like this (S = semitone, T = tone):

T T S T T T S

Every major scale has the same order of intervals no matter what note it starts on - this is what makes it sound like a major scale.

Notes in a major scale

There are 8 notes in a major scale. The intervals we've just looked at are placed between these notes like this:

1 T 2 T 3 S 4 T 5 T 6 T 7 S 8

Now we don't use numbers in music theory; we use the first 7 letters of the alphabet instead. This is because a scale only ever contains 7 different notes; there's no need for more letters. As you can see below, the "8" is actually just the first note repeated again; this is called an "octave".

C T D T E S F T G T A T B S C

We're starting on C major because this is the easiest major scale to learn. There are no sharp (#) or flat (b) symbols - these alter the pitch of the note. In C major, all the notes are natural, and fit our major scale intervals perfectly with no need to alter them.

Notice that between all the notes in the scale there is a tone, *except* between E and F, and between B and C. This means that whenever you play a B, C will be one fret higher, and the same applies for E and F. This is worth remembering - we'll need to know it for later lessons.

I remember this by thinking of my top two strings on the guitar, the B and E strings, and remembering that if I want to go to the next note on those strings I only have to go up one fret.

Making a major scale - summary

For a first introduction to major scales, we've learned enough to give us the basic tools of understanding. Now we know:

- What tones and semitones are
- What order of intervals makes a major scale
- How the order of intervals makes up the C major scale.
- Which notes have a semitone between them and the next note.

Make sure you remember these important points, and you'll be ready for the next step in learning music theory!