

Using the Major Scale to Learn the Guitar Neck

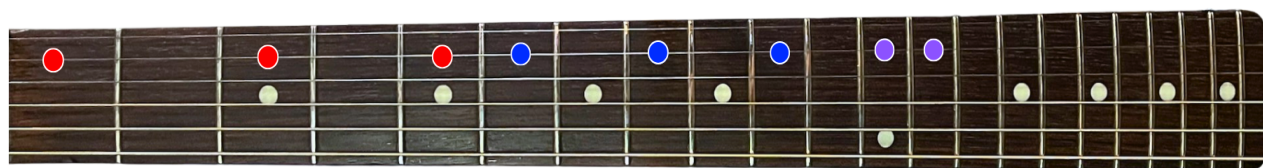
Kevin O'Shaughnessy

A **Scale** is simply a collection of notes that are arranged in stepwise motion. While any number of notes arranged in this manner may be considered a scale, the term is generally reserved for collections of five or more.

The **Major Scale**, has been the central structure of Western music for centuries and is composed of five whole steps and two half steps. A half step is a distance of one fret, and a whole step is two frets.

Scales are named for the first note in the collection. Below is the C Major scale including the combination of whole steps and half steps used in its construction. You could call this combination the *formula* for the major scale.

The image shows the C Major scale on a musical staff and a corresponding fretboard diagram. The staff is in 4/4 time, starting on a treble clef. The notes are C4 (open), D4 (2nd fret), E4 (4th fret), F4 (5th fret), G4 (7th fret), A4 (9th fret), B4 (12th fret), and C5 (13th fret). The intervals between notes are labeled: WS (Whole Step) between C4-D4, D4-E4, E4-F4, F4-G4, G4-A4, and A4-B4; and HS (Half Step) between B4-C5. Below the staff, a fretboard diagram for the B string shows frets 1 through 13. The notes are color-coded: C (red dot at open), D (red dot at 2nd fret), E (red dot at 4th fret), F (blue dot at 5th fret), G (blue dot at 7th fret), A (blue dot at 9th fret), B (purple dot at 12th fret), and C (purple dot at 13th fret).

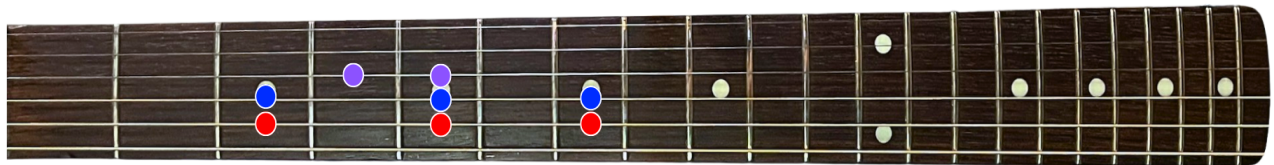
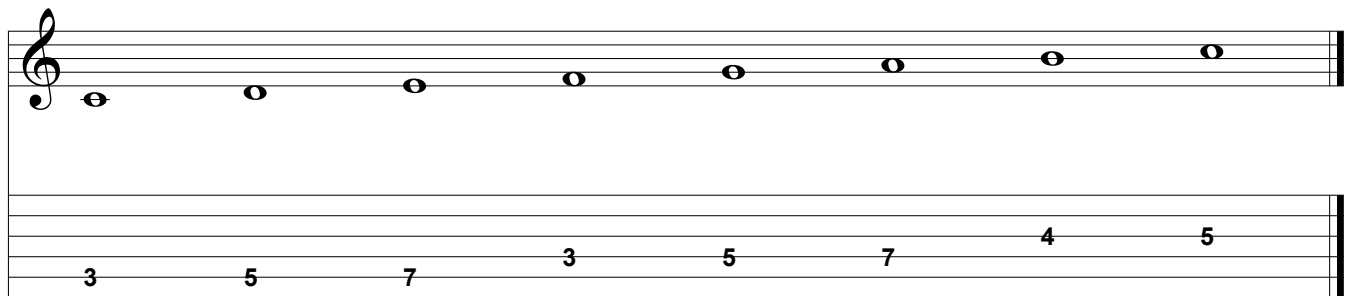


As you can see, this orientation lays out really well on the guitar on the B string.

1. Practice the scale as written using the color codes to switch positions. Use fingers 1, 2, and 4 for the first two groupings, and 1 and to for the last.
2. Reverse the fingering for the descending version.
3. Apply the letter names C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C to the frets to learn the notes on that string.

That orientation of the scale won't be practical in all situations, of course (though it does sound cool to play a solo on one string like that. It allows for some interesting phrasing when *sliding* from note to note). Fortunately, the guitar is laid out so you can also put these notes closer together.

This orientation of the C Major scale is one octave lower, but notice how the notes line up--most of them are right on top of each other. And if you follow the same fingering as in the previous example, it's very easy to play.



1. Play the scale as indicated.
2. Name the notes as you play.
3. Play the scale along the A string (starting at the 3rd fret, as above) to learn the natural notes on that string.

One of the most important things you can do when practicing is *listening*. Listen to each segment of the scale and compare and contrast them. With this formula you can build the C Major scale anywhere there is a C. If you do take the extra step of memorizing the letter names for each note in the scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C), you'll learn where all your natural notes are all over the neck.