

Using the Major Scale to Learn the Guitar Neck

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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.

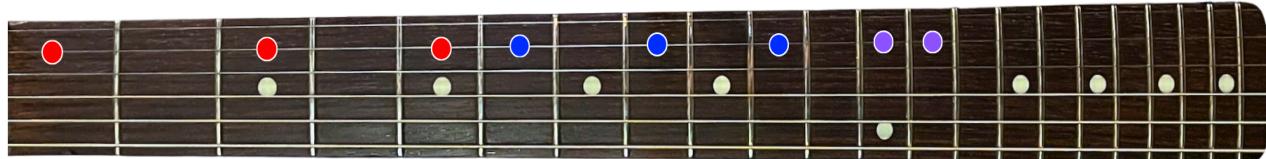
Scales are named for the first note in the collection. Below is the C Major scale including the combination of whole steps and half steps used in its construction. You could call this combination the *formula* for the major scale.

WS WS HS WS WS WS HS

T 1 3 5 6 8 10 12 13

A

B



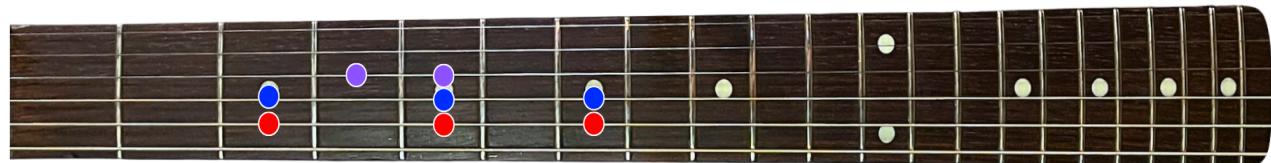
As you can see, this orientation lays out really well on the guitar on the B string.

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 2 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.

A musical staff in G clef. The notes are aligned vertically. Below the staff, fingerings are indicated: 3, 5, 7, 3, 5, 7, 4, 5.



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.