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Major Scale Mastery

by Dan Denley



Contents

Remember:.....	2
The Major Scale Formula.....	2
The Seven “Secret” Notes	3
Everybody Gets A Name	3
G major scale on three strings:	4
Please Read This!.....	5
How To Use The Pictures And Diagrams	6
The Movable Patterns Of The Major Scale Using A Major As An Example	7
Movable pattern #1 major scale: Ionian mode	7
Movable pattern #2, major scale: Dorian mode	8
Movable pattern #3, major scale: Phrygian mode	9
Movable pattern #4, major scale; Lydian mode.....	10
Movable pattern #5, major scale: Mixolydian mode	11
Movable pattern #6, major scale: Aeolian mode.....	12
Movable pattern #7, major scale: Locrian mode	13
Practical, Real-World, Nuts-And-Bolts Examples Of How To Use The Major Scale:	14
How To Use Each Example	14
Example 1: G Major	15
Example 2: C Major	16
Example 3: D Major	17

Remember:

A whole step is when you skip a fret. A half step is from one fret to the next fret (without skipping). Whole and half steps can ascend (go up the fretboard) or descend (go down the fretboard). Read and play the following examples:

Whole Step, Ascending Whole Step, Descending Half Step, Ascending Half Step, Descending

-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----
-3-5-	-5-3-	-4-5-	-5-4-

The Major Scale Formula

There is a specific formula of whole and half steps that make up the major scale. The formula for the major scale is:

Whole | Whole | Half | Whole | Whole | Whole | Half

Here's the formula for the major scale in action. Take your guitar and play the following example. It's the G major scale on one string (the 6th string).

G major scale on one String using the whole/half step formula for the major scale:

-3-5-7-8-10-12-14-15-

The distance between 3-5 is a whole step. Between 5-7 is a whole step. 7-8 is a half step. 8-10 is

half step. 10-12 is a whole step. 12-14 is a whole step. 14-15 is half step. You need to memorize the major scale formula: W | W | H | W | W | W | H. This will make your life much easier when we move into the minor scales.

The Seven “Secret” Notes

Every major scale has seven different notes. These notes change depending on which scale you are playing. For example, the seven notes of the C major scale are C, D, E, F, G, A, B. And the seven notes of the D major scale are D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#. (Hint: # is pronounced, “sharp.”)

Even though the notes of the scale change depending on which note you start on, you can build any scale using the whole-half formula. So, if you start on G (6th string, 3rd fret) and follow the formula for the major scale, you'll get the G major scale. If you start on F# (6th string, 2nd fret) and follow the formula for the major scale, you'll get the F# major scale.

Everybody Gets A Name

Just like every unique person has a specific name, each of the seven notes of the scale has a name, too. Fortunately, the names of the notes of the scale are much easier to remember than those of humans! Each of the names of the different notes of the scale are called, degrees. (No, not like the ones on your thermometer.) A scale degree is just the name of the note as it falls in order from lowest to highest pitch.

Let's take the G major scale for example. The notes of a G major scale are G, A, B, C, D, E, F#. If we give each letter name a number, starting with the lowest pitch G, we would label them like this:

G = 1, A = 2, B = 3, C = 4, D = 5, E = 6, F# = 7

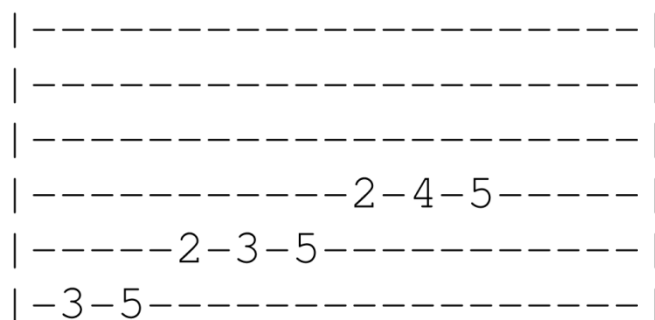
Now, that each note is numbered, the G is called the 1st degree of the G major scale. A is the 2nd degree. B is the 3rd degree. C is the 4th degree. D is the 5th degree. E is the 6th degree and F# is the 7th degree.

One important point to remember is that scale degree names change depending on which scale they belong. For example, D is the 5th degree in the G major scale. But it's the 4th degree in the A major scale. D is the 6th degree in the F major scale. And so on and so forth. The thing to understand is that every note of the scale can be labeled with a name according to where it falls in the scale.

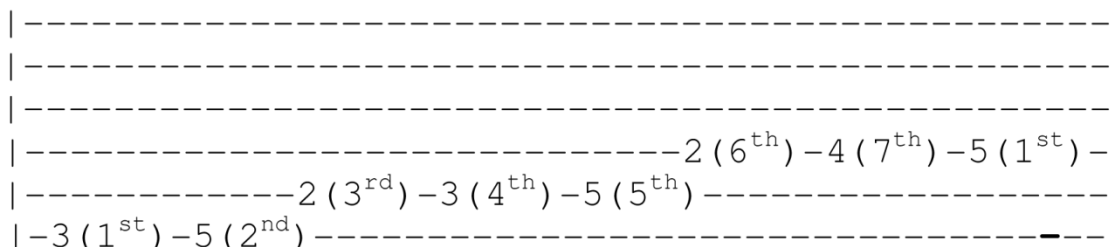
This is important because in order to modify the major scale to create the minor scale, you'll need to know which scale degrees to change.

One last note. (No pun intended.) Most of time, you won't hear people speak about scale degrees, they actually drop the word degree. In other words, if someone wants to know what the 5th degree of the scale of G major is, he or she would probably just say, What's the 5th in G? Not, What's the 5th degree in the G major scale? This is a key point to remember. To make sure you fully understand the concept, here's the G Major scale with each degree identified for you. Try playing these examples on your guitar.

G major scale on three strings:



G major scale on three strings with each scale degree identified for you:



Some Things Never Change

Some things always remain the same. Like the notes of a scale. The notes of the G major scale will, always, always, always be G, A, B, C, D, E, F#. That much you can count on.

It's important to understand that the notes of G major scale (or any scale for that matter) will always be the same. Now, you could definitely use the whole-half formula for the major scale to know which notes belong to any scale. But playing a major scale and actually knowing which notes you're playing are sometimes two different things.

For example, if you start on G and use your whole-half formula for the major scale, you would play G, A, B, C, D, E, F#. But how did I know the letter names of the scale? Simple. I know the key

signature for the key of G major. If you haven't memorized your key signatures you'll want to start today. Have that information tucked away in your memory will serve you well in the future.

Please Read This!

Important Note About The Movable Positions And Tab: As soon as you start practicing the scales in this book you will notice something: the movable fretboard patterns and the tab do NOT always match. This is on purpose. The reason is simple: there are several different ways to play the same scale. This will expose you to a least two. You can play both variations and see which one you like best. I've tried to indicate when the movable pattern and the tab do NOT match. Please keep your eyes peeled for this as you go through each position.

Important Note About The Modes: You will also see that I've labeled each position for you with the position number AND the corresponding mode. Try to keep in mind that each position of the major scale corresponds to a particular mode. Also, remember that each mode can be transposed from one key to another.

Time To Play! Ok, we've talked about a lot of abstract theoretical concepts. Hopefully, you're not getting too bogged down in the technical jargon and forgotten that all this is really to help you play music! Let's wrap our discussion up quickly so you can get to playing, right away.

As you know, there are seven different notes in each major scale. If you start on the tonic (tonal center) of the key of A major, you'd start on A. Easy enough, right? And because you're memorizing your key signatures, you know that A major has three sharps. And because you're memorizing the order of sharps, you know that the sharps in the key of A are, F#, C#, G#. So, knowing all that, you now know that A major has these notes: A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G#. Well, here's the thing that 99% of all learn-how-to-play guitar books conveniently forget to mention. Because there are seven different notes in every major scale, there are actually seven different positions on your fretboard to play every major scale! Think of it like this. If you start on A and play all the notes of the A major scale, you would play A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G#. We'll call that 1st position, because you're starting on the first note of the scale. But what if you started on the second note, B, and play the exact same notes? You'd play B, C#, D, E, F#, G#, A. It's still the notes of the A major scale, you're just starting on a different note. We call this 2nd position because B is the 2nd note of the key of A. Third position starts on C# because it's the third note of the A major scale. If you start on D and play the notes of the A major scale, we call that 4th position. And so on and so forth. It's true! Every major scale can be played in seven different positions on the fretboard. That's one of the insider secrets that professional guitarists use to play over the entire fretboard. The vast majority of books that I've come across in my 16 years of playing only show you one position. Not me. I'm holding nothing back. I'm going to pull back the curtain and expose all the tricks I know to help you learn how to play a solo over the entire fretboard, in any key. Now here's another insider tip for you. There are movable patterns for each of the seven positions. And once you memorize them you can play all 15 major keys! In order to teach you how to play the major scale in all positions, we're going to use the A major scale. It's a very common scale that you're going to come across all the time in your guitar playing.

How To Use The Pictures And Diagrams

The following diagrams will give you all seven positions of the A major scale. The movable patterns will give you the movable patterns that you can use for any major scale, in any key. Remember, there are a lot of other scales. We're focusing on the major scale in this book.

So, what you'll want to do is practice the A major as I've given you here for each position. Start with position 1, first. Play the tab exactly as it's written. It would be a good idea to use a metronome to help you keep a steady beat. As you learn the notes of the A major scale in first position, start to look at the movable pattern, too. Try to get into your fingers and brain where your fingers need to go next.

Then, once you've mastered the first position for the A major scale, try to take the moveable pattern for that 1st position and move it to a different starting note. For example G (6th string, 3rd fret). When you play the 1st position, movable pattern on G, you'll be playing the G major scale in 1st position.

After you've gotten comfortable with that, try moving it to other starting notes all over the fretboard. Remember the movable pattern won't change. Just by changing the starting note, you'll be transposing that pattern into different keys.

So, let's get started! Roll up your sleeves, grab your guitar and dive in. The more you practice these different patterns, the more flexible and knowledgeable you'll be. And the more fun you'll have playing your guitar!

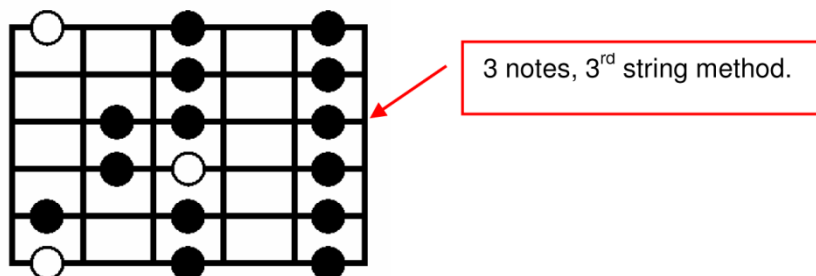
One last thing. You'll definitely want to spend some time playing the different positions in this book before moving on. Because everything we discuss about the minor scales, pentatonic scales and the modes will be based on the foundation laid down for you in this book.

Happy playing!

Dan Denley

The Movable Patterns Of The Major Scale Using A Major As An Example

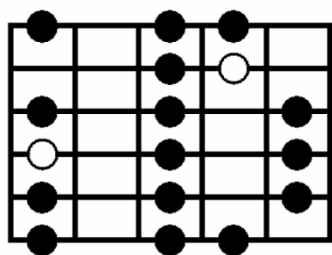
Movable pattern #1 major scale: Ionian mode



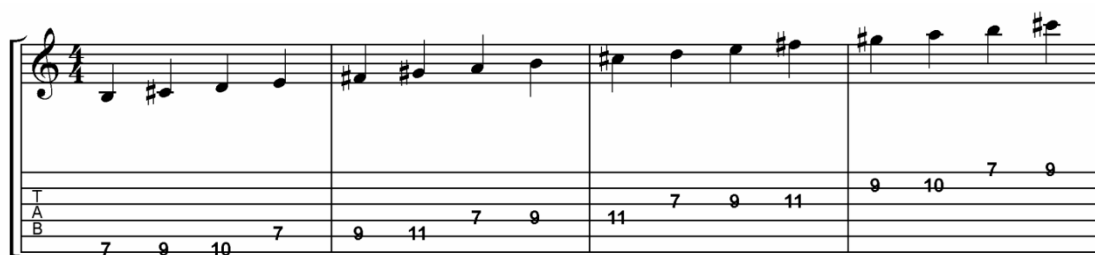
1st position, A major: A Ionian



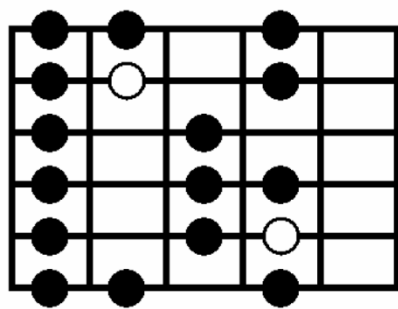
Movable pattern #2, major scale: Dorian mode



2nd position, A major: B Dorian



Movable pattern #3, major scale: Phrygian mode



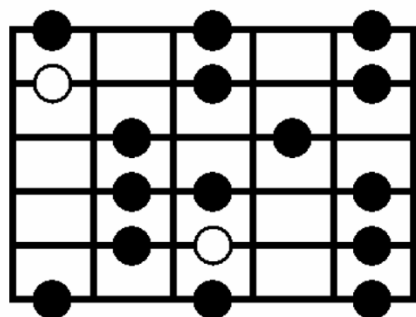
3 notes, 2nd string method.

3rd position, A major: C# Phrygian

3 notes, 3rd string method.

3 notes, 3rd string method.

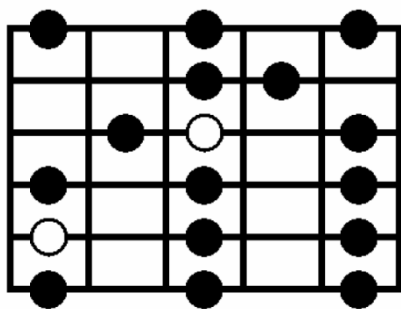
Movable pattern #4, major scale; Lydian mode



3 notes, 2nd string method.

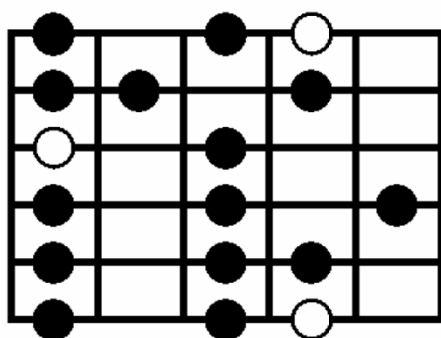
4th position, A major: D Lydian

Movable pattern #5, major scale: Mixolydian mode



5th position, A major: E Mixolydian

Movable pattern #6, major scale: Aeolian mode



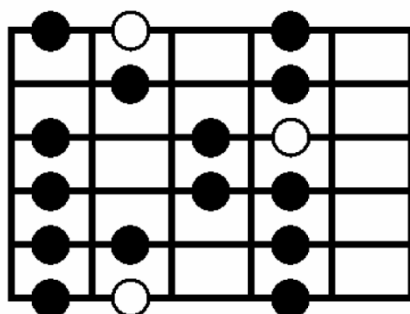
3 notes, 2nd string method.

6th position, A major: F# Aeolian (Same as F# Natural Minor)

3 notes, 3rd string method.

5

Movable pattern #7, major scale: Locrian mode



7th position, A major: G# Locrian

Practical, Real-World, Nuts-And-Bolts Examples Of How To Use The Major Scale:

I never want to be accused of giving you the theory, but not enough practical examples of how to use it. So, here are three chord progressions that I've written that are built on major scale harmony. Each chord progression comes from the major scale. But each is in a different key. I've done the leg-work for you by matching the chord progression to the scale that you should use to improvise over.

How To Use Each Example

Play each chord progression. Create your own rhythmic patterns. Then, grab a friend and have him play the chord progression while you solo over the top. Or you could grab a tape recorder from RadioShack and record the rhythm guitar part (that's the chord progression). Playback the rhythm section and play the scale over it. Improvise your own solo using bends, trills, vibrato, slides, etc. Each scale is in that I've given you is in 1st position (i.e., they all start on the tonic, or root note of the scale.) Try to use the moveable patterns as well. Use them to move out of the 1st position. Try to incorporate as many different positions as you can. But most importantly... Have fun!

Example 1: G Major

Play this chord progression.

Diagram illustrating the G Major chord progression (I - V - I) using guitar fretboard diagrams and musical notation.

The progression consists of three measures:

- Measure 1: G Major (GM) chord, indicated by a fretboard diagram and the Roman numeral I.
- Measure 2: D Major (DM) chord, indicated by a fretboard diagram and the Roman numeral V.
- Measure 3: G Major (GM) chord, indicated by a fretboard diagram and the Roman numeral I.

The musical notation shows a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The notes for each measure are: Measure 1: G4, B4, D5; Measure 2: D4, F#4, A4; Measure 3: G4, B4, D5.

Use this scale to improvise:

Diagram illustrating the G Major scale (I - V - I) using guitar fretboard diagrams and musical notation.

The scale is written in treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), and common time (C). The notes are: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5.

The fretboard diagrams show the scale notes across four measures:

- Measure 1: G4 (3), A4 (5), B4 (7), C5 (3).
- Measure 2: D5 (5), E5 (7), F#5 (4), G5 (5).
- Measure 3: G5 (7), A5 (4), B5 (5), C6 (3).
- Measure 4: D6 (5), E6 (7), F#6 (3), G6 (5).

Diagram illustrating the G Major scale (I - V - I) using guitar fretboard diagrams and musical notation.

The scale is written in treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), and common time (C). The notes are: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5.

The fretboard diagrams show the scale notes across four measures:

- Measure 1: G4 (5), A4 (7), B4 (5), C5 (3).
- Measure 2: D5 (5), E5 (3), F#5 (5), G5 (4).
- Measure 3: G5 (7), A5 (5), B5 (4), C6 (7).
- Measure 4: D6 (5), E6 (3), F#6 (7), G6 (5).

Example 2: C Major

Play this chord progression.

Diagram showing the C Major chord progression: C, Am, C. The chords are represented by fretboard diagrams above a musical staff. The staff shows the progression: I, vi, I.

Use this scale to improvise:

Diagram showing the C Major scale for improvisation. The scale is written in treble clef, 4/4 time. The fretboard diagrams show the scale across four measures, with fingerings indicated by numbers 1-4 on the strings.

Measure 1: C4 (open), D4 (1), E4 (2), F4 (3), G4 (4), A4 (open), B4 (1), C5 (2).

Measure 2: C5 (1), B4 (2), A4 (3), G4 (4), F4 (open), E4 (1), D4 (2), C4 (3).

Measure 3: C4 (open), D4 (1), E4 (2), F4 (3), G4 (4), A4 (open), B4 (1), C5 (2).

Measure 4: C5 (1), B4 (2), A4 (3), G4 (4), F4 (open), E4 (1), D4 (2), C4 (3).

Example 3: D Major

Play this chord progression.

A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The staff contains three measures. The first measure has a whole rest. The second and third measures contain a series of diagonal slashes, indicating a continuous or sustained sound. Above the staff, three guitar chord diagrams are shown, each with a label above it: 'DM' (first), 'GM' (second), and 'DM' (third). The 'DM' diagrams show a D major chord with the root on the open D string (4th fret) and the major third on the 2nd fret of the G string. The 'GM' diagram shows a G major chord with the root on the open G string (3rd fret) and the major third on the 2nd fret of the B string. Below the staff, the Roman numerals 'I', 'IV', and 'I' are centered under each measure respectively.

Use this scale to improvise:

Two systems of musical notation for a D Major scale improvisation exercise. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The first system shows the scale ascending: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C#5 (quarter), D5 (half). The second system shows the scale descending: D5 (half), C#5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). Below each staff, a guitar fretboard diagram is shown with fingerings indicated by numbers 1-4. The first system's fretboard shows the ascending scale with fingerings: 10, 12, 14, 10, 12, 14, 11, 12, 14, 11, 12, 10, 12, 14, 10, 12. The second system's fretboard shows the descending scale with fingerings: 14, 12, 10, 14, 12, 10, 12, 11, 14, 12, 11, 14, 12, 10, 14, 12, 10.