HighCountryGuitar.com presents

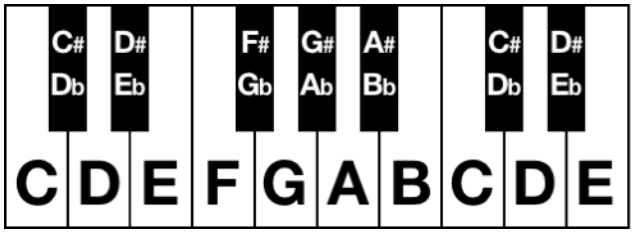
The Least You Need To Know

Quick guide to music theory basics

(Check out the accompanying YouTube video series (links available at HighCountryGuitar.com)

The Musical Alphabet/Chromatic Scale

(All possible notes)



Ascending: typically with # ("sharp") notes
A A# B C C# D D# E F F# G G#

Descending: typically with ♭ ("flat") notes
A Ab G Gb F E Eb D Db C B A
(Note that there is no E♯/F♭ and no B♯/C♭)

An octave refers to the distance from one note to the next instance of the same note, such as C to C, Eb to Eb, or F# to F#.
A half step (or semitone) refers to a leap of one step within the musical alphabet (such as C to C#, Bb to B, or E to F), and equates to one fret on the guitar.
A whole step (or whole tone) refers to a leap of two steps within the musical alphabet (such as D to E, F# to G#, or Bb to C), and equates to two frets on the guitar

Major Scales

The major scale in any key has a total of 7 notes. It starts on the root note of that key, and from there follows this pattern of half steps and whole steps (H=half, W=whole)

W W H W W W H

Each letter (A B C D E F G) gets used once and only once, so for example there will not be a C and a C# in the same major scale.

3 Examples of Major Scales

(The scale steps get numbered 1 through 7)

Key	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1
C Major:	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
E Major:	E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E
Bb Major:	Bb	C	D	Eb	F	G	A	Bb

Refer to HCG's Table Of Major Scales for scales in all keys

Chord Scales (All available standard chords in any key)

	I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii
Triads:	major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	diminished
7th chords:	major 7	minor 7	minor 7	major 7	dominant 7	minor 7	m7b5

Chord Construction

To build chords, refer to the major scale with the same root note as the chord. Start on the root (1), and build in thirds (skipping one note each time).

Triads

Major: 1, 3, 5
Minor: 1, b3, 5
Diminished: 1, b3, b5
Augmented: 1, 3, #5

7th chords

Major 7: 1, 3, 5, 7
Minor 7: 1, b3, 5, b7
Dominant 7: 1, 3, 5, b7
M7b5: 1, b3, b5, b7
diminished 7: 1, b3, b5, bb7 (6)

Copyright 2024, HighCountryGuitar.com