



creative piano
a c a d e m y

Guide Sheet

Piano Scales - The Ultimate 'Get
Started' Guide!



Creatives!

Josef Sykora here and welcome to this guide booklet on piano scales.

First off, its fantastic to have you here. This guidebook will cover all the basics to get you sat down and playing those scales correctly and hopefully enjoying them too (even just a little bit).

We are NOT going to cover every piano scale there is... However we are going to get the foundations right so you can take those fine fingers of yours and know you doing a small number of things absolutely right... rather than trying to do everything mediocre and full of mistakes.

Deal?

Good!

This is an accompanying book to go alongside my youtube video right here - <https://youtu.be/6EK-ZT17PMg>



I want to cover what's in that video as well as some extra nuggets for you.

So... Piano scales from the beginning... Here we go!



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1. Why Piano Scales Are Important...

First off, What is a piano scale? Very simply its a collection of 'related' notes played moving up the keys or/and down the keys.

Piano scales teach you a number of things. They get your fingers moving. Feeling the keys, understanding the landscape of the piano and ultimately giving you a foundation of technique and familiarity that will follow you into all aspects of piano.

Not only that but 'most' melody is built around scales. Take a major scale, shift the notes around and add in a bit of rhythm and there you have a melody! Technically a scale is a melody but a pretty dull and predictable one right...

Anyway, through learning the scale you train you ear to hear the general sound of that scale and as such the world we play in inside a given key. (key meaning the musical parameters we set so everything we play has a homogeneity and works together)

Here at Creative Piano Academy, I do love finding new and interesting ways to learn our core skills through playing actual music. There is no exception with piano scales.

There are absolutely awesome, interesting methods we can use to practice our scales but nothing beats (at least to start with) running up and down our scales to get a baseline. A certain level of familiarity.

Its this level of familiarity I want to bring to you in this guide and the real time video lesson over on U-Toob! Once you have that, a world of musical, melodic and inspiring piano scale methods open up.



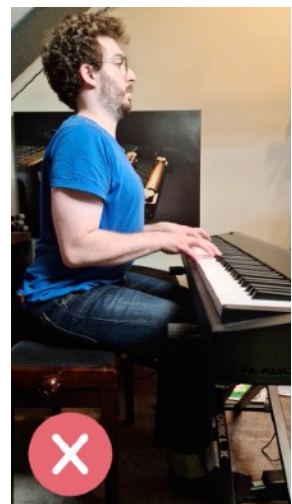
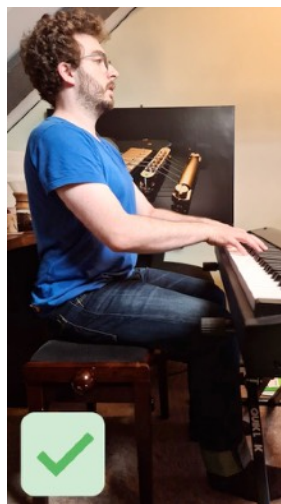
2. The 'Josef's Rough and Ready Guide to Sitting at the Piano'...

Not everybody wants to be a concert pianist. So these are my rough and ready points to think about when sitting at the piano.

1. Relaxed shoulders, very slightly forward
2. Straight back, or thereabouts (if possible)
3. Rounded structure from our shoulder down the tips of our fingers (see the main video)
4. Elbows slightly forward. Angle looking down at elbow should be roughly 110 to 140 degrees
5. Similar at the knee joint but this will be determined by how far you sit from the keys. This is more subjective. See what works for you. Like driving a car. Some people sit close, some further away. One way works better for others. I favour a slightly further away approach as I find it more comfortable to rest my foot on the sustain pedal.
6. Maintain a balance between relaxed/loose and tense. Too loose and you play like noodle. Too tense and the music will not flow! Plus it will plain old hurt after a while and as well as a piano you will be buying yourself a massager!

A general point on this, which also applies to the wrist... This will become more familiar to you over time. You will naturally settle the more familiar you get behind those keys!

Try and register when you are tense and just relax. A nice exercise is the raise the shoulders and... let it go. Tense up and then drop and relax. Feel it, correct it when it needs correcting... Don't stress or worry about it.





3. The correct Wrist Technique...

Don't let your fingers collapse. Keep a good rounded structure and try to keep your wrists up. Look at the images below. The left image is the correct position. The middle and right images are common mistakes I see my beginners make all the time.

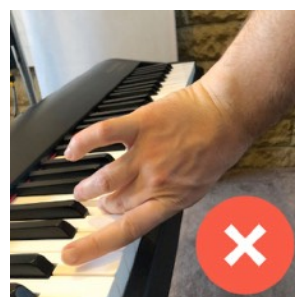
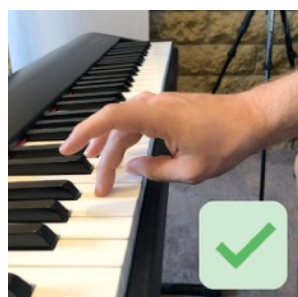


Also, be mindful of fingers 3 4 and 5. These are your weak fingers and they might cause you some frustration in the early days. You could isolate these for short bursts to give them some attention.

Try to maintain a hinge like quality to the wrist. You need a certain level of structure in those fingers. I've seen other teacher say you need to be relaxed in the fingers. Its not true at all. You need to have that balance of tension of softness so you can actually push the keys down and manipulate your fingers into the shapes they need in order to communicate the musical thoughts you have down into those keys with directness and musicality.

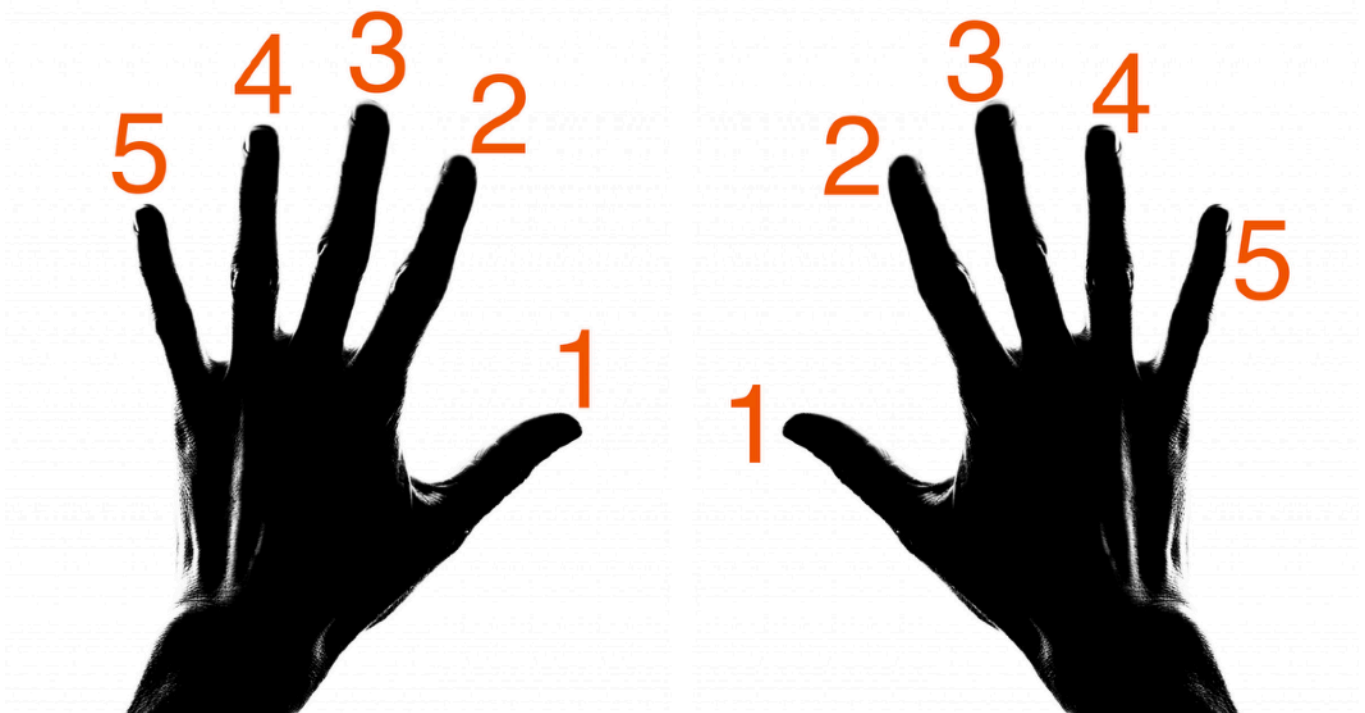
Technique - One thing that is quite important (and we go over this in the video) is our thumb tuck. When you bring the thumb underneath or your fingers over the top your wrist remains level and your thumb or fingers are guided underneath or over the top.

Do not twist the wrist. Watch the video for a full break down!





4. Our Fingering (hm hm) ...



Fairly straight forward. Look at the image and get to know which finger is which. It's important not only for correct fingering with our scales but also everything else moving forwards.

When you see a number above any note in a piece of sheet music... that means play that note with the specific finger indicated. That will make much more sense soon... I promise!

The way I've written out these scales for you in this guidebook includes the notes as well as the fingering so if you can't read music... Don't worry.



5. Notes on the Piano...

Learning the notes on the piano can be a little daunting if we aren't aware of a few things.

First, there are only 7 notes you need to learn. There are in fact 12 including the black keys but essentially, once you learn 7 notes... You're set. Why? Because they simply repeat themselves up and down the piano.

Second, We all know the alphabet right? The notes follow the alphabet. See below...



If you are struggling a bit learning these notes, or they just aren't becoming second nature, please check out this video I made on a simple technique/exercise which literally downloads the notes into your brain.

Go here - <https://youtu.be/9hMFQzXK77E>

The black keys are all relative to the white keys.

If we move up (or to the right) we call this a sharp. E.g. the black key just to the right of C is called C sharp (C#) G ♭

If we move down (or to the left) we call this a flat. E.g. the black key just to the left of G is called G flat (G ♭).



6. The 'Unlock Your Scales' Music Theory...

Feel free to come back to this section once you have had a good bash at actually playing a scale. It will make far more sense.

In western music, notes are divided by what we call **whole steps (WS)** and **half steps (HS)**.

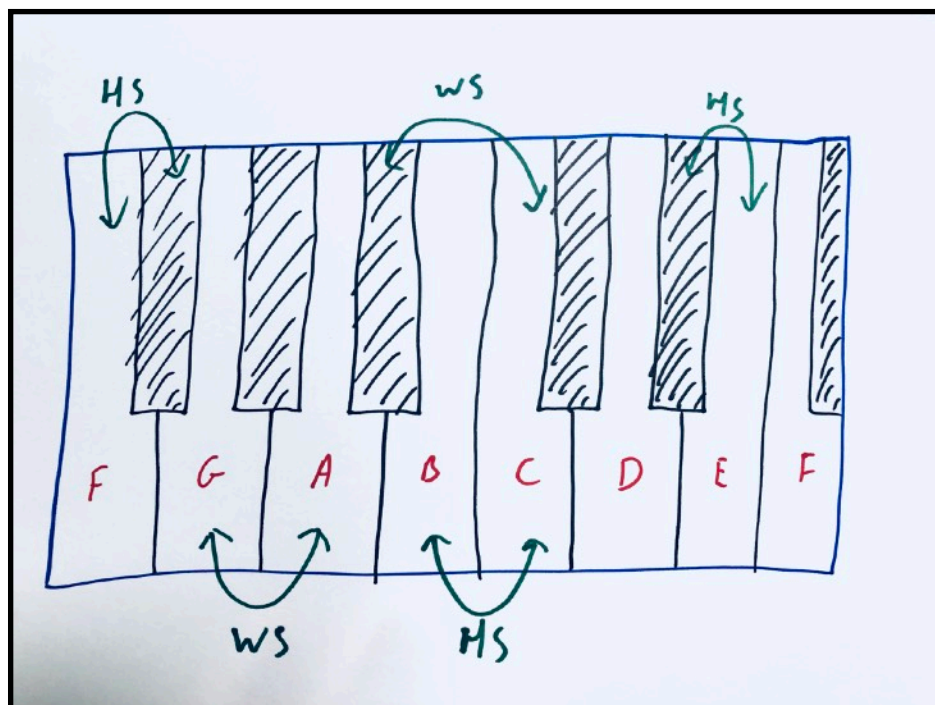
These are known as Tones and Semitones in Europe and a few other places but are essentially the same thing.

Look down on a piano and you will see a bunch of black and white notes.

Every time you move up or down by ONE of those notes (black or white) this is a Half Step.

If you move up or down by TWO of those notes, this is a Whole Step. So you could think of a whole step as simply two half steps.

Check out the colourful image below (hand drawn by yours truly) to see what I mean.



WS = Whole Step

HS = Half Step



Do this right now! Look down at your piano and study the layout... the pattern. Notice how each note ascends and descends including both black and white keys...

Play a game with yourself. Play a random note and move up a whole step. Then move up a half step. Do this 10 times until it makes perfect sense.

IMPORTANT! - Notice how we have a half step between B and C? This is because there is no black note between these notes. The same is true for E and F.

So now you see the keys in front of you in terms of whole and half steps, there is a particular formula we can use, using these steps, to work out any major scale.

Before I show you the exact formula for the major scale, understand that there are multiple formulas for different scales. For instance the natural minor scale, the modal scales etc.

We are interested in the major scale right now as its the fastest route to playing comfortably in a key and sounding great. So I recommend getting to grips with this first.

So pick your key, and start on the root note of that key. For D major, this would be D. G major, this would be G... You get the idea.

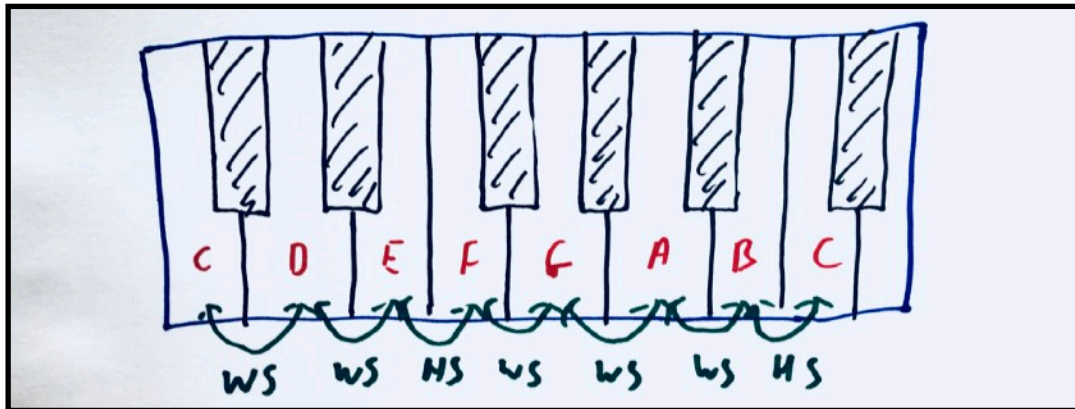
So we start on the root then move up in the following sequence...

WS → WS → HS → WS → WS → WS → HS

Follow this formula on the piano and you will be playing the major scale of that key.



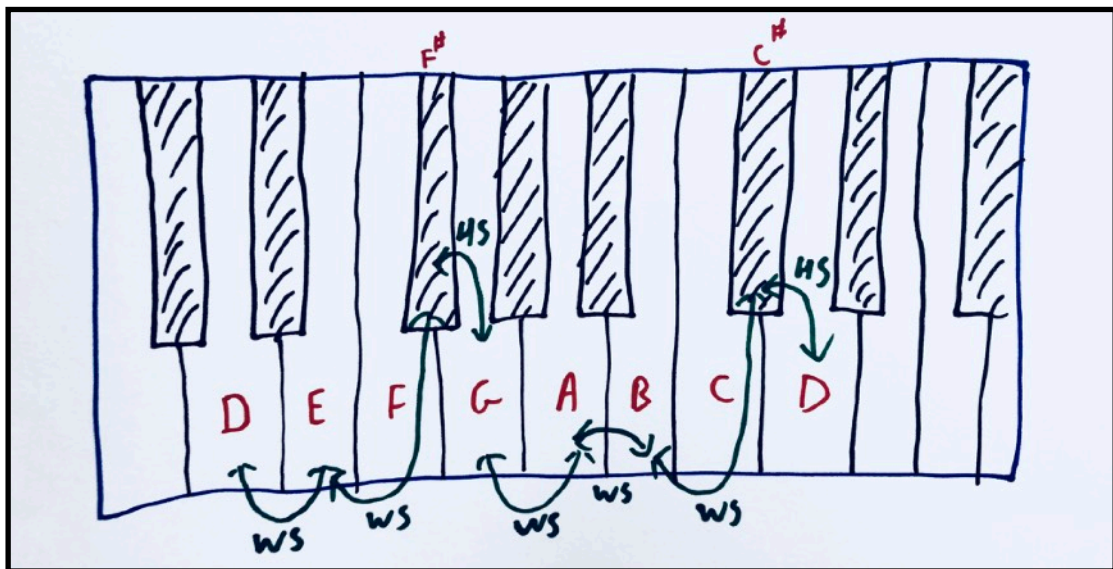
So looking at our first scale 'C-major' look at what we get below...
This works for ANY major scale.



WS WS HS WS WS WS HS

C D E F G A B C

Another example... D Major



WS WS HS WS WS WS HS

D E F# G A B C# D



Now over to you. As an exercise (and do this before you read on because I give you the answers) Work out and write down the major scales for...

The following are included in this guidebook

C major

G major

D major

A major

And finally... E major. This one is NOT included on purpose. Use this as an opportunity to work out the E major scale and play it without looking up any other resources. This way you truly know you understand the theory. The fingering is EXACTLY the same as every scale above.

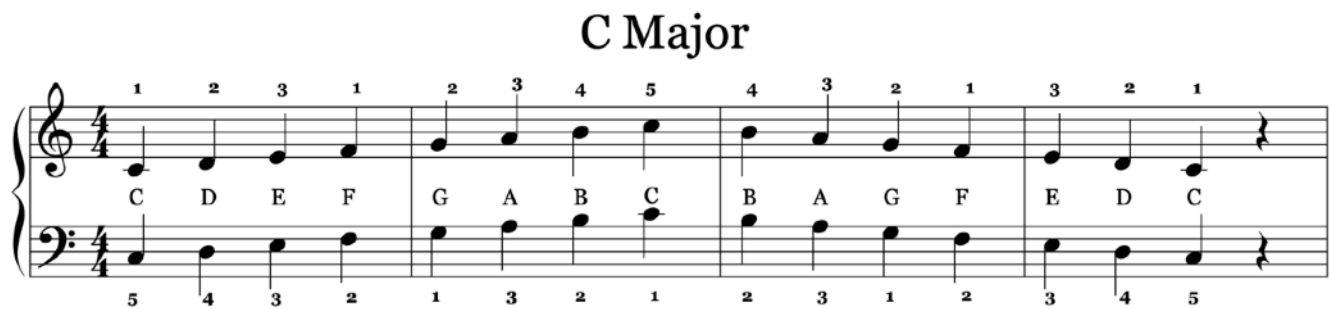
Write it down, work it out and see if you can play it without looking it up.

You can do it.



7. The C Major Scale

Our first piano scale! Lets do this.



Practice Points!

If you have never played a scale before... Do not try putting both hands together.

Get used to the right hand first, then the left hand and make sure each hand is fairly confident. No need to be an expert or anything but try to have a base level of confidence to move up and down the scale, with correct fingering at a slow but consistent speed.

Look at the music above... If you can't read sheet music... no problem! The numbers above the notes are your fingers and the letters in the middle are the notes you need to play. We've gone through those two and thats it really. You have everything you need.

I recommend you practice the point where the thumb tucks underneath when we go up and when the finger rolls over the top when we come down. Pay attention to the technique and try to make sure you get used to cheeping that wrist level. This is a common mistake I see in beginners.

A GREAT practice technique when you are just starting (particularly when you start putting both hands together...) is to not worry about consistent speed. Chill out, relax and simply play the note. Then pause, collect your thoughts and when you are ready... move to the next note. And etc. Do this as much as you need to to build familiarity.

Then, when you feel a bit better, play to a slow and steady consistent speed.



I guide you through this in our video so once you know what you are doing... feel free to try this practice technique on your own and with the rest of your scales!

Once you feel confident with hands separately, put your hands together.

THIS WILL BE DIFFICULT! No two ways about it. There is a lot going on that requires a fair old amount of coordination! Your fingers and thumbs move over and under at different points so its going to be a challenge.

Again, like I said, approach this in a relaxed way to start with... then put yourself under a bit of pressure.

Additional tip - Once you get fairly confident with this scale... Something I love to do with my students is to just play as fast as you possibly can completely not worrying about technique or being correct or anything... let all that go and just fly up and down as fast as you can.

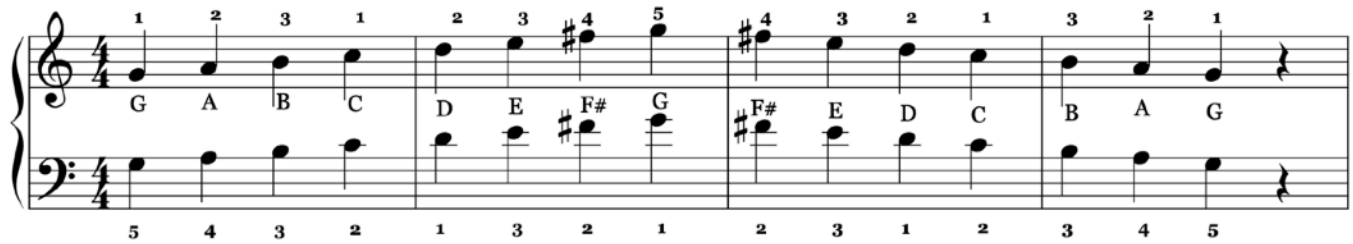
Even though you will be all over the place and the notes will be wrong... It sort of shoots you into a different space mentally and physically. If you do this a few times... when you go back to playing 'properly' you may find you can play just that touch quicker and more confidently. Essentially its shunting your brain into a state of "OH MY WORD I BETTER ADAPT IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO DO WHATS BEING ASKED OF ME". Even though you won't fully adapt... its a small little nudge in the right direction.

The key is to let go of being correct... Just go for it!



8. The G Major Scale

G Major



Here's the thing.

If you've gone through C major... You can do G major. Trust me.

The only difference is that pesky F# you need to worry about. Everything else is the same. The fingering, the technique, how you practice it... All the same!

In my experience, some people adapt really quickly, some find the addition of the F# a bit tricky. Stick with it and see if you can transfer those skills over into the G major scale.

This is the final scale we work on in the video together. Now, I did this on purpose.

Firstly, I can't go over every scale or the video would be 20 hours long. What I can do and hopefully have done is given you a great, principle based start in order to learn your first set of scales confidently and correctly. But also what you need to learn your next few scales by yourself.

Secondly, Yes you can look online and find all the answers you need however I totally recommend you use everything you have learned so far to nail the next few scales on your own. Not only will this help you understand the scales more but it will give you lots of confidence!

Your next mission... should you choose to accept it, is to learn, practice and play the...

D major, A major and E major scales.



D and A major are included at the end of this guidebook, E major on the other hand... you're on your own.

I have faith in you!



9. Moving Beyond the Octave...

When you get to a certain stage you are going to want to expand beyond just one octave.

I recommend trying two octaves when you can play both hands together smoothly without needing to stop or making mistakes. This can be REALLY slow... but the marker point for you is “can I go up and down consistently and without any misbehaving fingers...”

The good thing about playing two octaves is that there is very little difference between two octaves and one octave. The trick is to get your hands to reset into the correct position at the top of the octave ready to start again.

So we introduce the fourth finger.

See the notation below...

C Major (2 Octaves)

The notation shows two systems of four measures each, covering two octaves of C Major. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below the notes. The first system covers the first octave (C4 to C5), and the second system covers the second octave (C5 to C6). The notation shows a smooth transition between octaves, with the right hand starting the second octave on the first measure of the second system. The left hand follows in the second measure of the second system. The final measure of the second system ends with a whole note C6 in the right hand and a whole rest in the left hand.

Notice a few differences...



In the Right Hand - When we get to the 'B' on the first octave, the right hand is using finger 4. Just tuck that thumb underneath and low and behold you are right back to your original position of thumb (1) on the C but now on the second octave!

Continue to the top and back down again as normal until you reach the C on the way down. You should have the thumb on the C. Bring the 4th finger over this time and again you have now reset back in to your normal position. Continue down and you're done!

In the Left Hand - Similar to the right. However when we get to the first C on the way up, the 4th finger shoots over the top. Now stop and take a look. You are reset into your normal C major position.

On the way back down when you reach the D, your thumb comes under the 4th finger back onto the C and now again, your reset. Now continue back down to the C.

And thats it. Thats your 2 octaves. The same principle applies for 3 octaves and even 4 octaves.

If the text above is confusing, you have everything you need in the notation above. Follow the notes, follow the fingering and apply the correct thumb tuck technique.

Make sure you practice both hands separately before putting them together again, just to get used to the subtle fingering additions.



10. How to Enjoy Learning Your Scales

Scales are inherently dull. Or they can be. They are primarily there to simply drill into you the necessary technique you will need to be able to take your piano playing forward.

They familiarise you with the 'piano' landscape so to speak.

So, try to hang on to the notion that sowing the seed of piano scales will result in benefits down the road which may not be apparent as you sit there battling it out.

Having said that, they can be quite interesting as well depending on your perspective. Not only do piano scales familiarise you with the physical structure of the piano but also the inner worlds of specific keys.

By sticking to the specific notes inside our key (or scale) we slowly develop our ear and recognition of that all elusive 'sound' that is both coherent and forms the backbone of music that simply sounds good!

Now, I approach piano differently to a lot of teachers. I am firm believer in finding new and exciting ways to learn our core skills through actual music and fun. I think I'm pretty good at that.

So I want to leave you with this video I put out a while back on melody...

<https://youtu.be/plv5qfdhk5E>

What this video will do is show you how to take your piano scales and use those skills to create and develop beautiful melodies.

Use it and abuse it. Its a lot of fun and will get you creative.

On the next page I have placed all the notation from this guide sheet together in a print sheet so if you wish to only print that, its much easier for you. I also included your fist minor scale!



Print Sheet - Page 1

C Major

Handwritten musical notation for the C Major scale exercise in 4/4 time. The exercise consists of 12 measures, divided into four groups of three measures each. The first group (measures 1-3) is an ascending scale: C, D, E, F. The second group (measures 4-6) is an ascending scale: G, A, B, C. The third group (measures 7-9) is a descending scale: B, A, G, F. The fourth group (measures 10-12) is a descending scale: E, D, C. Fingering numbers (1-5) are written above the notes in the treble clef and below the notes in the bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

G Major

Handwritten musical notation for the G Major scale exercise in 4/4 time. The exercise consists of 12 measures, divided into four groups of three measures each. The first group (measures 1-3) is an ascending scale: G, A, B, C. The second group (measures 4-6) is an ascending scale: D, E, F#, G. The third group (measures 7-9) is a descending scale: F#, E, D, C. The fourth group (measures 10-12) is a descending scale: B, A, G. Fingering numbers (1-5) are written above the notes in the treble clef and below the notes in the bass clef. The key signature is two sharps (F#, C#) and the time signature is 4/4.

D Major

Handwritten musical notation for the D Major scale exercise in 4/4 time. The exercise consists of 12 measures, divided into four groups of three measures each. The first group (measures 1-3) is an ascending scale: D, E, F#, G. The second group (measures 4-6) is an ascending scale: A, B, C#, D. The third group (measures 7-9) is a descending scale: C#, B, A, G. The fourth group (measures 10-12) is a descending scale: F#, E, D. Fingering numbers (1-5) are written above the notes in the treble clef and below the notes in the bass clef. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4.

A Major

Handwritten musical notation for the A Major scale exercise in 4/4 time. The exercise consists of 12 measures, divided into four groups of three measures each. The first group (measures 1-3) is an ascending scale: A, B, C#, D. The second group (measures 4-6) is an ascending scale: E, F#, G#, A. The third group (measures 7-9) is a descending scale: G#, F#, E, D. The fourth group (measures 10-12) is a descending scale: C#, B, A. Fingering numbers (1-5) are written above the notes in the treble clef and below the notes in the bass clef. The key signature is four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#) and the time signature is 4/4.



Print Sheet - Page 2

C Major (2 Octaves)

Handwritten musical score for C Major (2 Octaves) in 4/4 time. The score is written for piano (p) and includes fingerings (1-5) and articulation marks (accents). The melody is in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score consists of two systems of four measures each. The first system covers the first octave (C4 to C5), and the second system covers the second octave (C5 to C6). The notes are: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, B. The fingerings are: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 4. The bass line notes are: C, B, A, G, F, E, D, C, B, A, G, F, E, D, C. The fingerings are: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 2.

A Minor

Handwritten musical score for A Minor in 4/4 time. The score is written for piano (p) and includes fingerings (1-5) and articulation marks (accents). The melody is in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score consists of two systems of four measures each. The first system covers the first octave (A4 to A5), and the second system covers the second octave (A5 to A6). The notes are: A, B, C, D, E, F, G#, A, G#, F, E, D, C, B, A. The fingerings are: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1. The bass line notes are: A, G, F, E, D, C, B, A, G, F, E, D, C, B, A. The fingerings are: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.



13. Resources

4 Wrist 'warm-up' Exercises - <https://youtu.be/fqk9UgCUthw>

Piano Chords - The Ultimate 'get started' Guide - <https://youtu.be/3NZyyWhVBpY>

Below are a collection of inspiring lessons for you once you have a grasp on scales.

How can the D Major Scale sound THIS Good - <https://youtu.be/m36EY-kxw9Q>

How to write a melody like a pro - <https://youtu.be/plv5qfdhk5E>

Improv. Trick - How To Write Infinite Sweet Melodies - <https://youtu.be/vwbr960XkcU>

YOUR NEXT STEP - MY PIANO COURSES

If you want to take your piano playing to the next level I have 2 courses you can check out.

I thoroughly recommend my course Creative Piano Patterns if you want to just sit down at that piano and play beautiful music.

Go here for more info - <https://creativepianoacademy.com/creative-piano-patterns>

If you are overwhelmed with the sheer amount of stuff to learn on the piano... My piano practice plan could help you.

For more details, zip on over to <https://members.creativepianoacademy.com/cpr>

I hope you have enjoyed this guide.

Speak soon,
Josef Sykora