

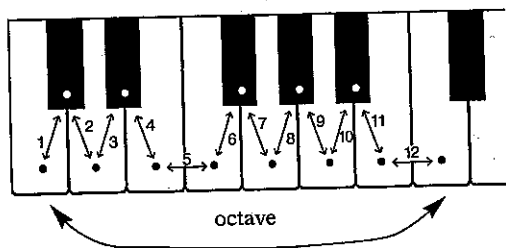
3 Major and Minor Scales

Lesson 14: Major scale (C major)

In this lesson you will learn about the major scale, its arrangement of semitones and whole tones, scale-degree numbers, scale-degree names, and solfège syllables.

A scale is a collection of notes used for a musical composition or part of a composition. The notes are extracted from the music and written in ascending order, within an octave. There are two scales commonly used in tonal music: *major* and *minor*. In major and minor scales, each letter name occurs once; none is omitted and none occurs more than once (except the first note, which is duplicated at the octave). Major and minor scales thus contain seven different notes.

A *semitone* (ST) is the smallest possible space between two notes. On the piano keyboard, any two adjacent keys are a semitone apart. Twelve semitones make up an octave.



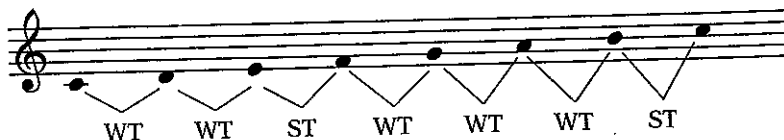
The note D, for example, lies a semitone above C# and a semitone below Eb. Similarly, F is a semitone above E and a semitone below Gb.

Two semitones make up a *whole tone (WT)*. Two notes a whole tone apart are separated by one intervening note. A whole tone consists of two notes with different letter names, written on a space and the adjacent line (or vice versa).



Among the white notes, C-D, D-E, F-G, G-A, and A-B are whole tones (they all have a black note separating them).

A *major scale* consists of a particular sequence of whole tones and semitones above any given note: whole tone, whole tone, semitone, whole tone, whole tone, whole tone, semitone. A C major scale involves that sequence written starting on C—it is the only major scale that can be written without any accidentals.

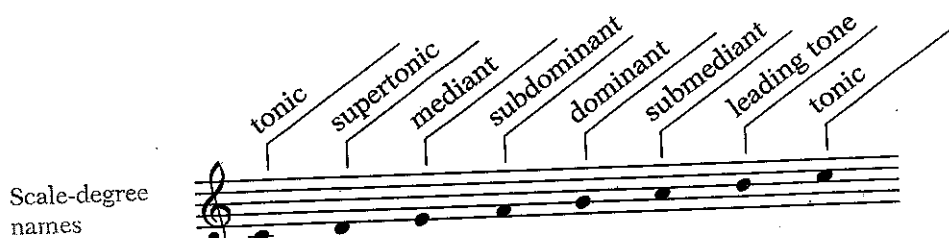


Each note of the scale is called a *scale degree* and these are commonly numbered $\hat{1}$ through $\hat{8}$, with scale-degree $\hat{8}$ the same as scale-degree $\hat{1}$ an octave higher. Scale-degree numbers are designated by a caret (^) over the number.

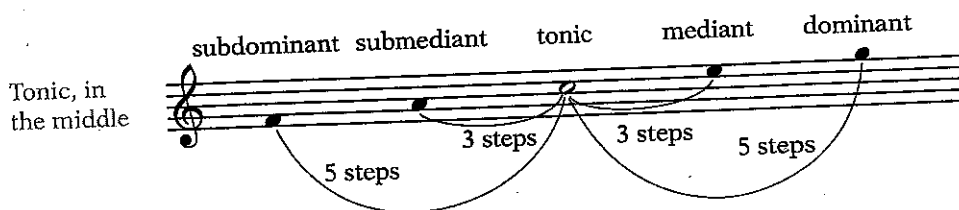


There are two semitones, between scale-degrees $\hat{3}$ - $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{7}$ - $\hat{8}$. All the other steps in the scale are whole tones.

Scale degrees are also called by the names *tonic*, *supertonic*, *mediant*, *subdominant*, *dominant*, *submediant*, and *leading tone*.



The tonic lies at the center of this naming system, with the mediant and dominant three and five steps above, and the submediant and subdominant three and five steps below.



The scale degrees are also sometimes referred to with *solfège syllables*: *do* (pronounced "doh"), *re* (pronounced "ray"), *mi* (pronounced "mee"), *fa* (pronounced "fah"), *sol* (pronounced "soh"), *la* (pronounced "lah"), and *ti* (pronounced "tee"). These syllables are commonly used when music is sung.



We thus have three different ways of naming each note of the C major scale:

Note	Scale-degree number	Scale-degree name	Solfège syllable
C	$\hat{1}$ or $\hat{8}$	Tonic	do
D	$\hat{2}$	Supertonic	re
E	$\hat{3}$	Mediant	mi
F	$\hat{4}$	Subdominant	fa
G	$\hat{5}$	Dominant	sol
A	$\hat{6}$	Submediant	la
B	$\hat{7}$	Leading tone	ti

Each degree of the scale has its own distinctive character, its own dynamic quality and tendencies.

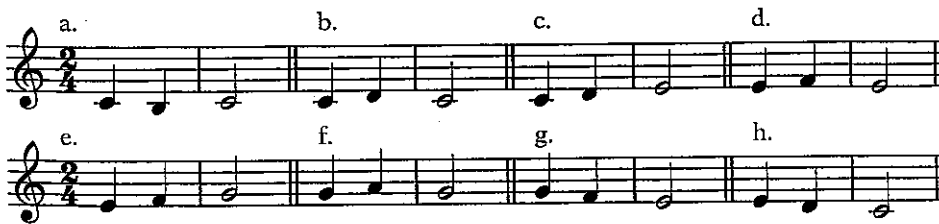
Dynamic qualities



The tonic (scale-degree $\hat{1}$) embodies a sense of poised repose—it is normally both the origin and goal of melodic motion, and the other degrees of the scale tend to move toward it. It is the principal scale degree. The dominant (scale-degree $\hat{5}$) is the second most important and stable scale degree. It lies just beyond the midpoint of the scale and can be pulled either upward or downward to the tonic. The supertonic (scale-degree $\hat{2}$), so called because it is a step above the tonic, is often pulled down one step toward the tonic, as though caught in a gravitational pull. The mediant (scale-degree $\hat{3}$), so called because it is halfway between the tonic and the dominant, is relatively stable compared to the supertonic. Melodic motion often passes downward from the mediant to the tonic via the supertonic. The subdominant (scale-degree $\hat{4}$) tends to move downward to the more stable mediant, a semitone below it. The submediant (scale-degree $\hat{6}$) is pulled downward toward the dominant, a step below it. The leading tone (scale-degree $\hat{7}$) is so called because it has such a strong tendency to move upward to the relatively stable tonic, a semitone above it. In short, the major scale is not a neutral bunch of notes but a scene of dynamism and activity. It is a network of relations in which each scale degree has a distinctive character and role.

Lesson 14: In-class activities

1. Singing. Sing these three-note melodic fragments using scale-degree numbers, solfège syllables, or a neutral syllable like "la," as indicated by your instructor.



2. Singing. Sing these melodies using scale-degree numbers, solfège syllables, or a neutral syllable like "la," as indicated by your instructor:

