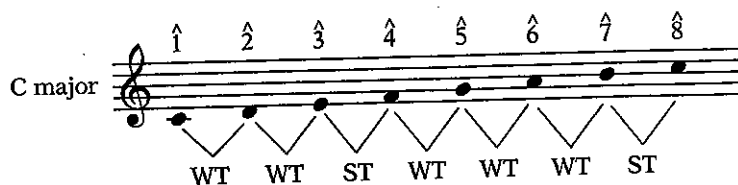


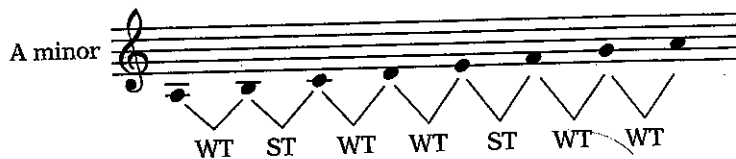
## Lesson 17: Minor scale (A minor)

In this lesson you will learn about the minor scale, its arrangement of semitones and whole tones, scale-degree numbers, scale-degree names, solfège syllables, and raising scale-degrees  $\hat{6}$  and  $\hat{7}$ .

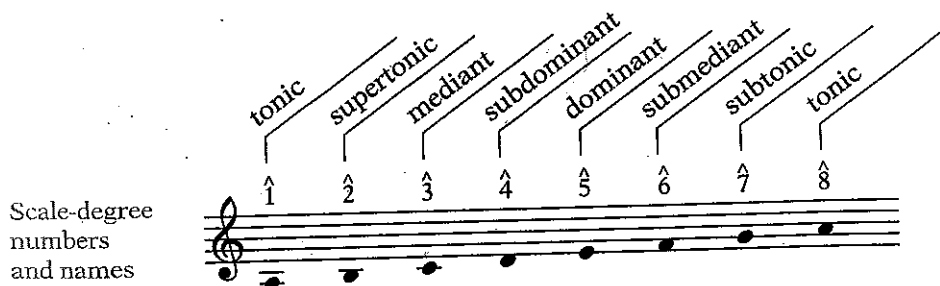
The *minor scale* has a different arrangement of semitones and whole tones compared to the major scale. The minor scale has semitones between scale-degrees  $\hat{2}$ – $\hat{3}$  and  $\hat{5}$ – $\hat{6}$ , while the major scale has semitones between scale-degrees  $\hat{3}$ – $\hat{4}$  and  $\hat{7}$ – $\hat{8}$ . All other steps in the scale are whole tones. Like the C major scale, the A minor scale can be written without any accidentals.



Major and minor



As in major, the scale degrees have names as well as numbers: tonic, supertonic, mediant, subdominant, dominant, submediant, and subtonic.



Notice that scale-degree  $\hat{7}$  in minor is called the *subtonic* rather than the *leading tone*. That is because it is a whole tone rather than a semitone below scale-degree  $\hat{8}$ , and thus lacks a sense of directed movement toward the tonic.

Musicians often use *sofège syllables* when singing melodies in minor. As in major, the syllable *do* is assigned to the tonic of the scale, *re* to the supertonic, and so on. Instead of *mi*, *la*, and *ti*, some musicians use *me* (pronounced "may"), *le* (pronounced "lay"), and *te* (pronounced "tay") for scale-degrees  $\hat{3}$ ,  $\hat{6}$ , and  $\hat{7}$  in minor.

We thus have three ways of naming the degrees of the minor scale: with numbers, names, and solfège syllables.

Note	Scale-degree number	Scale-degree name	Solfège syllable
A	$\hat{1}$	Tonic	<i>do</i>
B	$\hat{2}$	Supertonic	<i>re</i>
C	$\hat{3}$	Mediant	<i>me</i> ( <i>mi</i> in major)
D	$\hat{4}$	Subdominant	<i>fa</i>
E	$\hat{5}$	Dominant	<i>sol</i>
F	$\hat{6}$	Submediant	<i>le</i> ( <i>la</i> in major)
	$\hat{7}$	Subtonic	<i>te</i> ( <i>ti</i> in major)

As with the degrees of the major scale, each degree of the minor scale has a distinctive dynamic character.

Dynamic qualities



As in the major, the tonic is the principal scale degree, with all melodic movement departing from and returning to it, and the dominant is the most important counterweight, dividing the scale nearly in half. The lack of a leading tone means that motions often descend from the tonic toward the dominant. There is a particularly strong pull downward from the submediant to the dominant, only a semitone below. Similarly, there is a strong pull from the mediant down through the supertonic (a semitone below) to the tonic. There is thus a strong downward pull, which lends the minor scale a darker, more brooding character than the major scale.

In writing music using the minor scale, composers often create a leading tone by raising the subtonic a semitone, making the note natural if it was flat, sharp if it was natural, and double sharp if it was sharp. Scale-degree  $\hat{7}$  is now only a semitone below the tonic. When scale-degree  $\hat{7}$  is raised in this way, it is called a leading tone (rather than a subtonic) and is sung with the solfège syllable *ti* (rather than *te*).



This alteration of scale-degree  $\hat{7}$  is extremely common in music that uses the minor scale.

Raising scale-degree  $\hat{7}$  creates a relatively large gap of three semitones between scale-degrees  $\hat{6}$  and  $\hat{7}$ . To smooth this out, composers sometimes raise scale-degree  $\hat{6}$  as well. When scale-degree  $\hat{6}$  is raised, it is still called a submediant, but is sung with the syllable *la* (rather than *le*). Note that  $\hat{6}$  is rarely raised alone, but typically only in conjunction with raised  $\hat{7}$ .



By shifting the position of scale-degrees  $\hat{7}$  or  $\hat{6}$  and  $\hat{7}$ , we create new forms of the minor scale. The natural minor, the basic form of the scale, has  $\hat{6}$  and  $\hat{7}$  in their natural, unaltered position. When  $\hat{7}$  is raised, the resulting scale is called *harmonic minor*. When both  $\hat{6}$  and  $\hat{7}$  are raised, the resulting scale is called *melodic ascending minor*. Lesson 20 discusses these additional forms of the minor scale.

Raising scale-degrees  $\hat{7}$  or  $\hat{6}$  and  $\hat{7}$  from their natural position in the minor scale changes the dynamic qualities of the scale degrees. Now there is a flow of energy upward from scale-degree  $\hat{5}$  to scale-degree  $\hat{8}$ , and the leading tone truly leads upward to the tonic.

Dynamic qualities

