

Guitar QuickStart Syllabus Addition: Major Scale Construction

Guitar QuickStart by Mary Jo Disler

ISBN 0-9642229-0-6

Orders: 1-800-247-6553

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Introductory notes for teachers.

This two-page worksheet is an addition to the Sample Syllabus for *Guitar QuickStart*. It may be photocopied as a class handout. Page one of the worksheet provides theoretical information. The tablatures on page 2 can be used by students to diagram the first position scale spellings.

The current edition of the book does not include material introducing the formal construction of scales. Students frequently request scale information, however, so this brief introduction can be incorporated into the syllabus for classroom work.

A complete chromatic scale across the fretboard requires five frets on the guitar. Therefore all major, minor and modal scales can be played in first position, which incorporates the open string plus frets one through four. Musicians traditionally learn the major form of scale first, because it provides a short-cut to learning spellings of the three forms of minor and of the modes. (There are only 15 major scales, whereas there are 45 forms of minor, and 90 theoretical modes. We don't have to let students know they will probably never use all of them in most of the music they play!)

Working out the scales across first position is a valuable first step on guitar, because it requires students to think the spellings and fingerings, rather than rely on finger patterns alone. As a long range benefit, it encourages them to learn the fretboard thoroughly and develop versatility in determining fingerings and strategies for performance.

This teacher limits spellings to complete octaves, tonic to tonic. This helps beginning students hear the "do re mi" sound of the major scale. If spellings are extended, especially below the tonic on the lower strings, the sound takes on that of a mode rather than a major scale. After working with the tonic-to-tonic approach, it may be explained later that the scale extensions to higher and lower strings are possible as required by the music.

Within first position, therefore, some scales have only one tonic-to-tonic full octave, and some have two full octaves. Work them out accordingly.

Mary Jo Disler

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Course requirement:

- A. Know the whole- and half-step pattern for the major scale.
- B. Letter-spell the scales of C, G, and F major.
- C. Play the C major scale for one octave in first position.
- D. Play the G and F major scales for two octaves in first position.

• **A scale** is an alphabetical “list” of the letters used in a particular key. It includes letter-names with sharps and flats where needed. There are several types of scales. The common scales are the major, three types of minor, and the modes. Special scales, such as the pentatonic and blues scales, are used for idiomatic styles of music.

• **The major scale** is studied first because it is used most frequently, and because it provides a convenient model from which to derive the other types of scales.

The sound of all scales is defined by the order of whole- and half-steps.

The music alphabet from C to C spells the C major scale, an easy model to remember:

C D E F G A B C

Whole- and half-steps: **W W H W W W H**

• **When spelling other major scales**, write the alphabet first, without skipping any letters. Then check the whole- and half-step connections. Where the letters do not fit the major scale formula W W H W W W H, change the higher letter. To *raise* it a half-step, make it a sharp [#]. To *lower* it a half-step, make it a flat [b].
[Sharps are one fret higher than the natural letter, and flats are one fret lower.]

• **The G major scale is spelled**

G A B C D E F# G

Whole- and half-steps: **W W H W W W H**

• **The F major scale is spelled**

F G A Bb C D E F

Whole- and half-steps: **W W H W W W H**

