

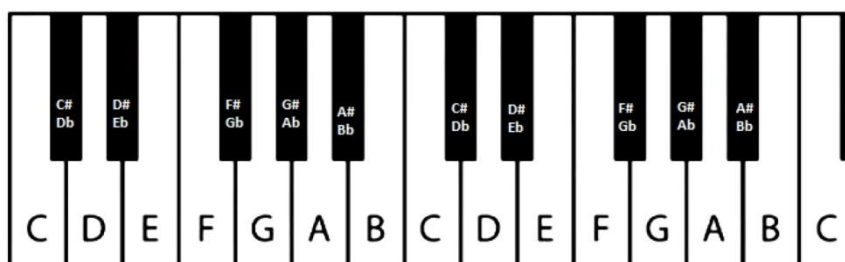
Playing Scales on the Ukulele

A scale is a sequence of notes of ascending or descending pitch. Scales are the building blocks of music.

Scales help you to understand chords, arpeggios, and keys of your ukulele. Knowing scales also allows you to start creating your own music! This is where melody is derived. So they can help you do solos and improvising. They are also great practice for building up strength in your fingers and familiarizing yourself with moving along frets.

There are different types of scales. The main ones are Major and Minor. There are others, but we won't cover them here.

Major scales



The easiest way to think about scales is to look at a piano keyboard. The C Major scale starts on the C note, and continues up the white notes to the next C. That's 8 notes (or an Octave).

You will notice that the black notes are skipped (If you played the black notes as well, that would be called a Chromatic Scale). Moving up or down one note (= moving up or down one fret on the ukulele) is called a semitone, or half step. That may be confusing, but that's just how it is!

So, moving from C note up the keyboard to the next C, the intervals between the notes are:

T T S T T T S (t = Tone, S = semitone)

You can put together any major scale based on these intervals, starting with any note. For example, if you start with an F note and follow this combination of steps, you will have an F major scale, which is shown below.

C major scale C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C

D major scale D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D

E major scale E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D#, E

F major scale F, G, A, Bb, C, D, E, F

G major scale G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G

A major scale A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G#, A

B major scale B, C#, D#, E, F#, G#, A#, B

Minor scales

These consist of the following pattern of whole steps and half steps: **T S T T S T T**

So, the C Minor scale has the following notes: C, D, E b, F, G, Ab, Bb

The A Minor scale happens to be all the white notes, just like the C Major scale, but starting on the A note. This is why the key of A Minor scale is called the 'relative minor' of the C Major scale (and vice-versa)

Playing the main major scales

Learn and get comfortable with the C Major scale first.

C Major

Finger 0 2 0 1 3 0 2 3 3 2 0 3 1 0 2 0

Try doing long and short notes, so it becomes like a melody.

Next practise the D Major scale.

D Major

Finger 1 3 1 2 4 1 3 4 4 3 1 4 2 1 3 1

Notice that it sort of feels the same, but instead of the open strings, you use your first finger, which means you need to use one finger along for each note, compared to the C Major scale.

Get very comfortable with the D scale, because once you have that fingering down, it's the same fingering for all the other scales – just moved up the neck by the appropriate number of frets.

Hence the F Major and G Major scales are moved up 3 and 5 frets respectively from the D scale:

F Major

Finger 1 3 1 2 4 1 3 4 4 3 1 4 2 1 3 1

G Major

Finger 1 3 1 2 4 1 3 4 4 3 1 4 2 1 3 1

From here you should be able to work out all of the other scales – just moving your starting position to the appropriate position on the neck!

This diagram should help you (it only shows the white piano notes).

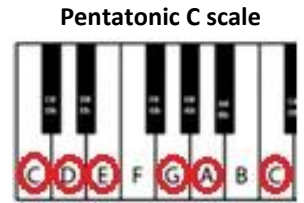
Pentatonic Scale

The pentatonic scale is a five note musical scale that takes its name from the Latin words *penta* meaning 'five' and *tonus* which means 'sound' or 'tone'. It is common in blues, pop and rock music. And is a cornerstone of musical traditions across the world.

The pentatonic scale is simply the major scale with the 4th & 7th removed, notes leaving five notes per octave.

So the pattern is: T T T½ T T½ (t = Tone, S = semitone)

The black keys on the piano form a pentatonic scale (beginning with F#).
In the key of C major, it's: C D E G A C

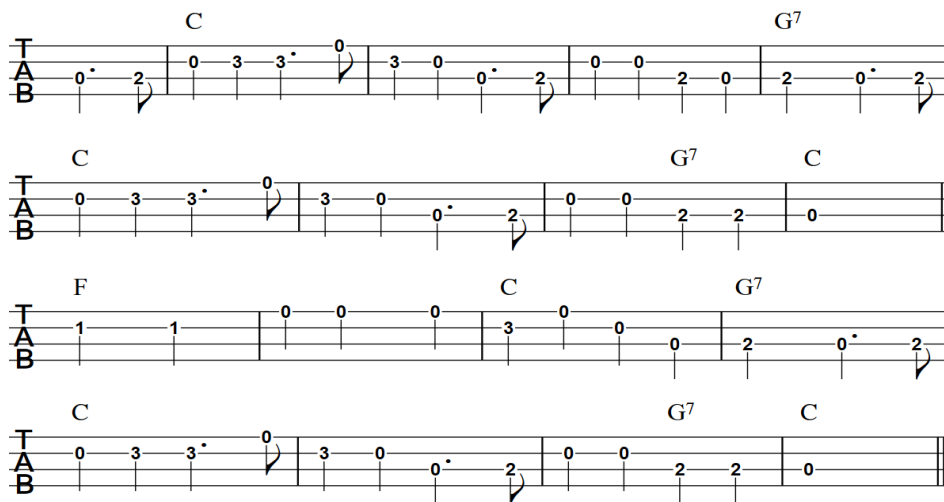


This group of five notes always sound good together regardless of how or in what order you play them or if you play any of them together. This is because in the major scale it is the 4th and 7th notes that introduce possible discord because they are only a semi-tone (half step) from other notes in the scale. Because the pentatonic has no half steps to create dissonance, it sounds good over any chord progression that stays in one key. Because you can't create discord when playing the notes in the pentatonic scale, it's the perfect basis for improvisation. In fact, the vast majority of lead guitar solos are based on the pentatonic scale

Here's the C major pentatonic scale for ukulele:



Here's a well known tune that uses the pentatonic scale, with ONE note out of the scale (actually two notes in the first bar of line 3) – and you can feel the tension created temporarily when that note comes in (twice).



Here is the D pentatonic scale. It can be played two ways on the ukulele. The first way is useful because it has no open strings, so you can move the pattern up one or more steps to play the pentatonic scale in another key.

