

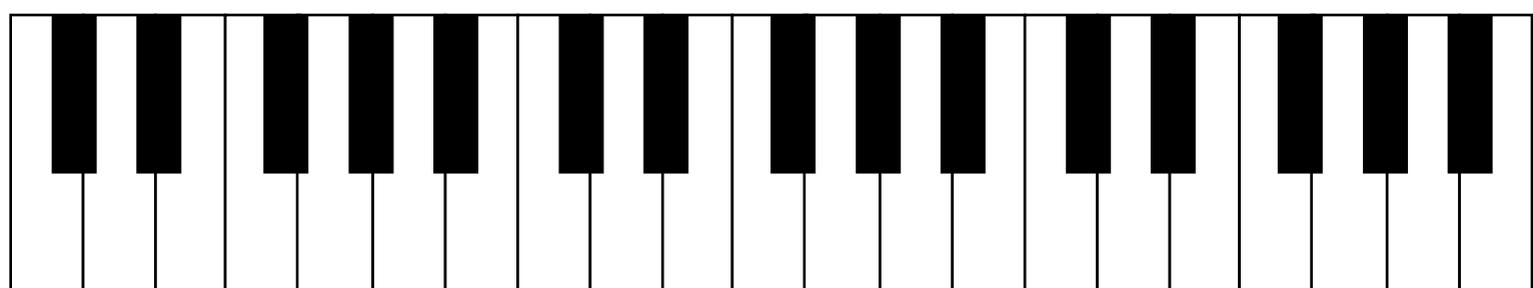
with NEW Piano Rulers

Piano Improvisation

with Bass Lines and Songwriting

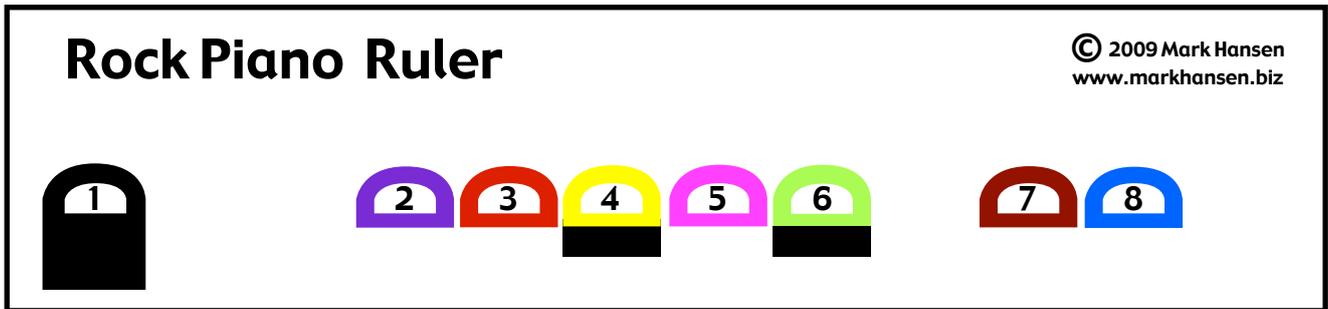
The Easy Way

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Guide to Rock, Blues & Jazz Bass Lines

Cut out the Rock Piano Ruler above after printing onto cardboard. Place it on your keyboard behind the black keys. The Black tabs under numbers 1, 4 & 6 show the 3 main start notes for Rock/Blues progressions. For example if you place the Ruler so the all Black (1) tab is at the note C, then F (Yellow tab) and G (Green tab) are the 2 remaining positions to place the Ruler for a complete 12 bar Rock or Blues progression.



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Rock, Blues & Boogie Patterns

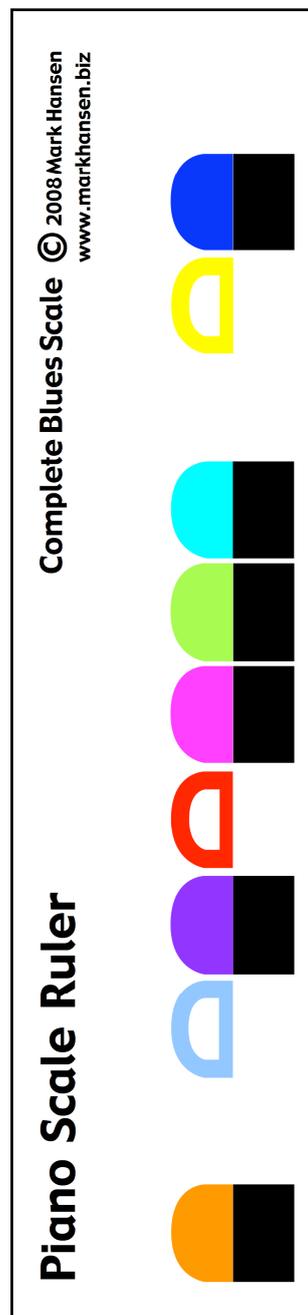
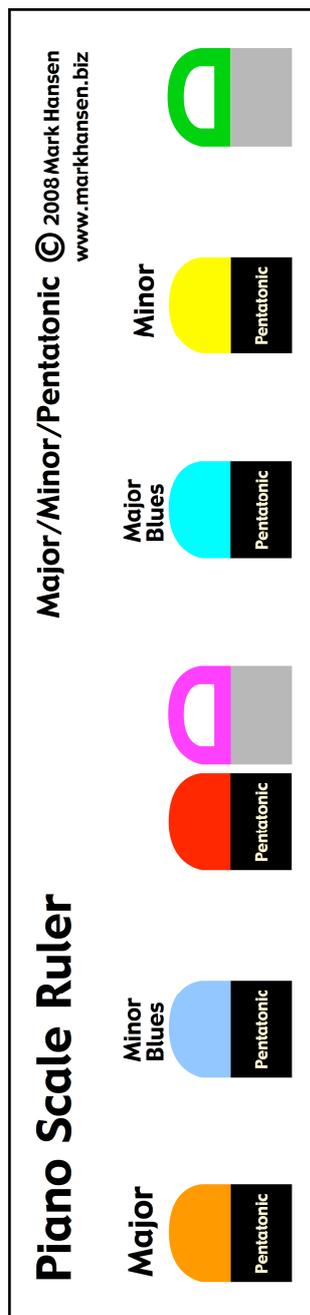
Play the numbered tabs shown in the patterns below with your Left Hand for Rock, Blues and Boogie Bass Riffs.

1:6 means play tabs 1 & 6 together
 1+ means play the tab (1) an octave higher= up 8 notes
 1- means play tab (1) an octave lower

- (A) 1 6 7 6
- (B) 1 6 7 6 8 6 7 6
- (C) 1:6 1:7 1:6 1:7
- (D) 1:6 1:6 1:7 1:7
- (E) 1:6 1:6 2 3
- (F) 1:6 1:6 1:7 1:7 1:8 1:8 1:7 1:7
- (G) 1:6 1:6 1:7 1:7 1:6 1:6 2 3
- (H) 1:6 1:6 1:7 1:7 1:8 1:8 2 3
- (I) 1 3 6 7 8 7 6 3
- (J) 1 1+ 2 3 6 7 6 7
- (K) 1 1+ 3 4 5 6 5 6
- (L) 1 1+ 3 4 5 6 6- 6

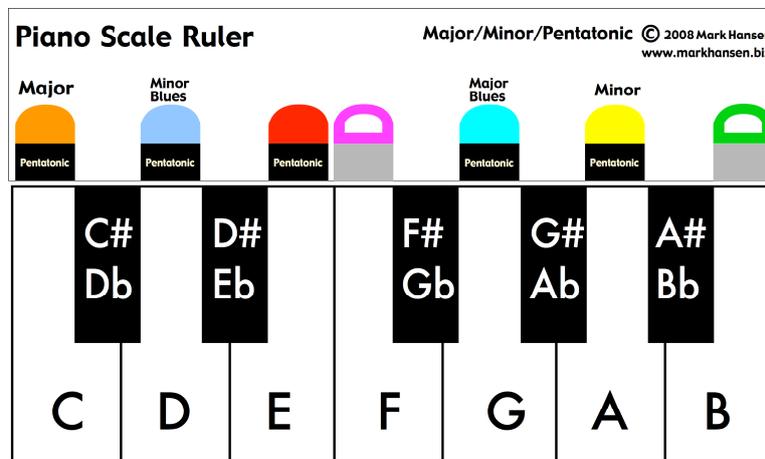
Guide to Rock, Blues & Jazz Scales

The Piano Scale Ruler is used to find a variety of scales on the piano. Scales can help you to make up melodies or improvise solos to your favourite songs. The Piano Scale Ruler does this with colourful patterns and clear labels, so there isn't even any need for you to understand or read music notation. Print onto cardboard and Cut out the 2 Piano Scale Rulers below. Read what follows to start improvising and composing your own pieces.

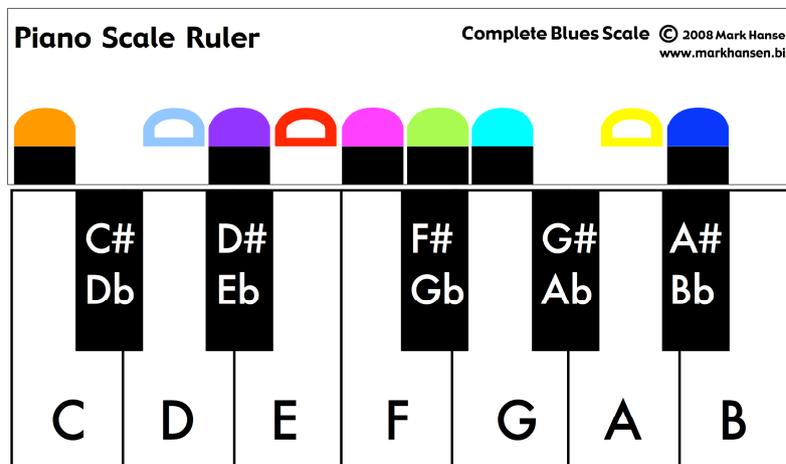


Using the Piano Scale Ruler

The Piano Scale Ruler is to be placed standing up behind the black keys and slid back and forth to locate scales. The 1st ruler is shown below and will help you find 6 different types of scales. There are 5 **Black** tabs and 2 **Grey** tabs, each with a colourful hat on top. If you just use the **Black** tabs then you can find all the Pentatonic scales. The note below the **Orange** hatted tab shows the Major Pentatonic key - in this case C Major. The note below the **Yellow** hatted tab shows the Minor Pentatonic key - in this case A Minor. If you use all 7 tabs, then the notes below the **Orange**, **Light Blue**, **Aqua**, and **Yellow** tabs will indicate the key of the scale for Major (C), Minor Blues (D), Major Blues (G) and Natural Minor (A) scales.



The 2nd ruler is shown above and will help you find the set of notes for a complete Blues Scale. The main notes are shown with 6 **Black** tabs. There are also 3 coloured hat outlines (**Light Blue**, **Red**, **Yellow**) which show the optional notes that may be added for effect. The starting note of this scale is under the **Orange** hatted tab which in this case is C.



Guide to Improvising and Composing

Aim

To learn how to find and use scales to improvise over chord progressions, using the Piano Scale Rulers.

Learning Outcomes

1. Find Major and Minor scales for a variety of chords
2. Find modal scales for a variety of chords
3. Use scales to create basic improvisations over chord progressions

Theory

What is improvisation?

When you play a series of notes without reference to anything written down you are said to be improvising or "making it up as you go along". You can do this solo or over the top of chords or other accompaniment.

Why improvise?

While written music is usually well-constructed and sounds good, it sometimes lacks the spontaneity and personal flavour that comes with making up your own tunes. Remember that written music was once made up or improvised by a composer or songwriter and then jotted down, so you can also use improvisation to write your own music for others to play.

How do you improvise?

There are 3 main ways to improvise :-

- (a) You can use the main and "nearby" notes in chords to create melodies that fit each chord - e.g. a tune with the notes c, e, g will fit well with a C Major chord because they are the chord notes, and notes near to these like d & a will also work well.
- (b) You can use a variety of scales that are known to work well with different chord progressions.
- (c) You can listen repetitively to a chord progression and wait till you feel or hear a tune emerge from your musical mind, then play that on your instrument. In the remainder of this guide we will be using scales from the Piano Scale Ruler to improvise.

Finding Major & Minor Scales

For this you will need the 1st Piano Scale Ruler - Major/Minor/Pentatonic. A very common and beautiful chord progression uses just the chords C, F and G repetitively or transpositions of that pattern into other keys. A scale that works well over these simple chords is **C Major**. To find **C Major** slide your Piano Scale Ruler until the first **Black** and **Orange** marked **Major** tab lines up with the C note.

Now you can read off the notes in the **C Major** scale using the 7 **Black** and **Grey** tabs which are all the white notes c, d, e, f, g, a, b, c. Try playing these notes over the chord progression above. You will hear that they sound quite good, though some will sound better than others - usually the notes in the scale that are closest to the each chord's main notes will sound the best.

Another common progression, this time in a minor key, is Am, Em, Am, Dm, F, Am. Let's find the **A Minor** scale that works well with this. Line up your Scale Ruler so the **Black** and **Yellow** tab is on the A note. The notes in the A Natural MINOR scale are a, b, c, d, e, f, g, a. Try playing these notes over the minor key chord progression above and notice what notes sound best with each chord.

Try finding so other **Major** and **Minor** Scales - like **G Major**, **D Major**, **E Minor** and **D Minor**. Note that **Major** and **Minor** scales work well with simple chords, and many Pop songs.

Finding Other Blues Scales

The Scale Ruler shows a number of other scales. These scales are often used with Blues or Jazz chord progressions - i.e. chords that have more complex sounds because they add 7ths, 9ths and beyond to the basic **Major** or **Minor** chords. For example to find **E Minor Blues** line up the **Black** and **Blue** tab with the E note. You will see that the notes are d, e, f#, g, a, b, c#. To find **F Major Blues** line up the **Black** and **Aqua** tab with F - the notes are b^b, c, d, e^b, f, g, a.

We will now look at the **Minor** and **Major Blues Scales** and apply them to some blues chords progressions. A common blues chord progression is G7, C7, G7, D7, C7, G7. One scale that fits these chords reasonably well is **G Minor Blues**. - the notes are f, g, a, b^b, c, d, e. Improvise over the progression G7, C7, G7, D7, C7, G7 and notice which notes sounds best with each chord.

In the **G Minor Blues** scale the b^b note will clash with the b of the $G7$ chord, and the f note with the $f^\#$ in the $D7$ chord. These clashes provide a tension which is a recognisable sound texture of the Blues.

So far we have only used one scale for each chord progression, but to get a better fit of notes with chords it is sometimes best to choose a different scale for each chord. We will use the **Major Blues** scale for this. Our chord progression will be $G7, C7, G7, D7, C7, G7$.

Find **G Major Blues** scale first - the notes are c, d, e, f, g, a, b . Now shift the Scale Ruler to find **C Major Blues** scale and then the **D Major Blues** scale.

Using Scales to Improvise

When using multiple scales to improvise try to move smoothly from one scale to another as the chords change. In our example progression we start out using **G Major Blues** scale over the $G7$ chord, then switch to **C Major Blues** scale over the $C7$ chord. Play each scale separately first, then play them over the chords and look for ways to transition from one scale to another - finding common notes in each scale to move between them.

Some simple tips for improvising with Scales are:-

- (a) Start out with 3 to 4 notes per bar then add more notes when you feel confident.
- (b) Listen to other improvised music and try to copy short melodies (or riffs) that you like
- (c) If you improvise a tune you really like, write it down and make it your own riff.
- (d) Try all sorts of combinations of the scale notes to make tunes - one way to do this is to write down all the scale notes on pieces of paper and pull several out of a hat.

Exercises

1. Find the **Bb Major** scale and use it to improvise over the repeated chords Bb, Eb, F .
2. Find the **D Minor** scale and use it to improvise over the repeated chords Dm, C, Bb
3. Find the **C Minor Blues** scale and use it to improvise over the chords $C7, F7, G7$.
4. Find the B^b, E^b & **F Major Blues** scales and use them to improvise over the chords $B^b7, E^b7, F7$

Using Pentatonic Scales

You will notice that there are 5 **Black** tabs with the word **Pentatonic** inside them. **Pentatonic Scales** are very useful for improvising because there are fewer clashes with chords in a progression and since they have only 5 notes they are easier to remember. **Pentatonic Scales** are so versatile that one scale can be played over many different chords. There is often no need to use 3 or 4 different scales for a particular progression.

To find a **D Major Pentatonic** line up the **Black** and **Orange** tab marked **Major** with the D note. Read off the 5 notes in the **Major Pentatonic** scale using the 5 **Black** tabs - the notes are d, e, f[#], a, b. To find a **G Minor Pentatonic** line up the **Black** and **Yellow** tab marked **Minor** with the G note. Read off the 5 notes in the **Minor Pentatonic** scale using the 5 **Black** tabs - the notes are b^b, c, d, f, g.

Major and **Minor Pentatonic** scales can be used wherever **Major** and **Minor Blues** scales are used. So try them out over the chords progressions earlier in this guide.

Using the Complete Blues Scale

There is a 2nd Piano Scale Ruler which is marked **Complete Blues Scale**. The 6 **Black** tabs show the notes in this scale and the 3 coloured outlines show additional notes that you can add for effect when your ear feels like it.

To find the D Complete Blues scale line up the **Black** and **Orange** tab with the D note. The notes are d, f, g, g[#], a, c. And you can also add the notes e, f[#], b as part of the improvisation.

You can use the Complete Blues Scale over Rock, Jazz and Blues chord progressions, especially what's known as 12 bar Blues. A typical 12 bar chord progression (one chord per count of 4) in the key of C is C7, C7, C7, C7, F7, F7, C7, C7, G7, F7, C7, G7. Try playing a **C Complete Blues** scale over the top of this. You may like to play **F** and **G Complete Blues** scales when each chord appears as well.

Guide to Songwriting

There are many ways to create songs, and by "Songs" I mean words and music. I love songs and I love creating songs, and I have been doing so for over 30 years. I remember when my first serious song won the student vote at my High School in "The School Song Contest". I used words that a friend wrote and came up with a catchy melody, happy chords and up-tempo beat. Since that first attempt I have tried many ways to create songs and here is a summary of some of methods that you can try too.

Start with Words

Write you own words or use somebody else's - perhaps a friend. You can even use an existing poem or short story. David Bowie apparently once cut out words and phrases from a newspaper and organised them into a song. You can try stream-of-consciousness writing - get a blank piece of paper and write whatever is in your head and don't stop until you fill the page. You will usually find some interesting phrases or ideas that you can use to make up a song verse or chorus.

Start with Chords

I prefer this way as I love great chords. You can borrow existing chords from a song you like or make up your own. Try cutting out 12 squares of paper with the 12 notes of music on them. Place them in a bag and draw out 3 or more of them. They become your chords. You can turn some into Major and some into Minor or other variations.

Start with Melody

You can use an existing melody but if you want something really original try the bag approach in (2) but this time the notes are the melody and not the chord. Alternatively you can just sing as randomly as possible and see what comes out. Stop and repeat any phrases that sound good to you. If you play an instrument, try the same thing - play randomly on your piano or violin and stop if something good develops.

Start with Rhythm

There are plenty of drum loops on the internet, many computers and most keyboards these days. You can also tap or hit anything that makes a sound. Listening to drum groups can also inspire. I remember watching a video "Stomp Out Loud" which really got me feeling and thinking beats. I played one of my incomplete songs to a routine with sweeping brooms and my song came alive.

Start with a Bass-Line

What can I say - a great Bass-Line drives a song and gets people moving. There are Bass-Line loops around, but just listen to some of masters like Stevie Wonder and try to emulate. Getting a Bass-Line happening usually requires working with a Bass player. You can also take an existing Bass-Line and swap some of the notes around to see what happens.

Song Structure

Most modern songs follow a basic structural pattern as follows:-

Verse 1

Verse 2

Chorus

Verse 3

Chorus

Bridge

Verse 4

Chorus

Chorus

Each Verse adds to the unfolding story of the song. The Chorus is a summary of the lessons learnt or things desired within the story. The Bridge is a section to break up the routine, so when the end of the song appears it sounds fresher to the ears. If there are lyrics, the Bridge can also be a moment of insight which leads to the songs resolution in the last Verse.

There are, of course many songs that do not follow this pattern very strongly. Some lack a distinctive Chorus ("Losing My Religion" - REM), and many leave out a Bridge, and instead have an instrumental solo section using the chords of the Verse or Chorus.

Where do you start writing the song? In the previous article I suggested a number of ways to start, but my favourite is with chords. I usually fiddle around with some chords on the piano or guitar until I find a combination I like. At this point I don't know whether I am in the Verse or Chorus, but I will play the chords repetitively and try singing or humming a tune.

Paul McCartney famously came up with the tune for "Yesterday" in a dream and then sang along with the words "Scrambled Eggs" until the final words came to him. You can use any words you like to sing along to your chords until you find a tune that you like. If you really let go and use words that come spontaneously you may well be surprised at the result. I have written most of my songs in this way and I am profoundly surprised at the messages from my subconscious.

Instead of coming up with words on the spot, you may prefer to write them separately once you have a tune or even part of a tune. Remember that when you have words the tune may have to be changed slightly to accommodate them. Likewise you may find that if your tune is very strong, you prefer to modify some of your words to fit it instead.

When you have finished, you have a song section. Then you must decide if it is a Verse or Chorus. Are the words telling a part of a story or do they feel like a summary of events? Whichever you decide, your next task is to do the same as above for the Verse or Chorus that remains.

Expressing Yourself

I have been writing songs for a long time and for many reasons but today I am going to look at the therapeutic benefits of putting your deepest desires and angst into words and music.

Music as therapy has been known for some time. The expression "Music soothes the savage beast" which is a misquote of the original "Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak", describes the power of music to relieve the mind and body of stress. Songs that are written from deep emotional experiences can do more than just soothe.

By awakening the deep disquiet within, well written, truthful songs can connect the listener to the songwriter's pain, joy, fear or anger and create a sort of affirmation of the soul. "I've been through what you've been through and know what you're feeling", is the message that can create a therapeutic affect in the listener. It can also act as a sort of virtual support group where the listener's feelings and experiences are validated.

I remember listening to Alanis Morissette's "You Oughta Know" after a relationship breakup and yelling along to the chorus with the anger that I felt towards my ex. It helped to release my grief and gave me permission to really vent within a safe time frame - i.e. the length of the song. Some of Evanescence's songs have also had that effect, most notably "My Immortal" when I was dealing with loss of confidence and childhood fears.

There are also upbeat songs to boost your mood and get you in touch with the joys of life. Stevie Wonder writes some great songs in that vein like "I Wish" and "Isn't She Lovely". And then of course there are the classics "Wonderful World" and "Somewhere Over the Rainbow". So if you are feeling down or weird or lonely or angry or anything in-between, try using songs to get you fully in touch with your feeling and thoughts. Then you can release them and be affirmed and accepted by the songwriter. Remember if a song is popular that means that a lot of people can identify with its message which shows you are not alone in your feelings or experiences of life.

You can also use your own experiences to write songs. This can help you to express things that may be difficult in any other situation - even with a trained counsellor. Even if you can't write music, you can write lyrics. You don't have to be a poet - just put down what you are feeling and thinking and imagine someone on stage singing it. Try to inject some hope in each song even if the rest of it is rather bleak. So when writing your songs try sometimes writing a hopeful conclusion - like "I'm lost without you, but I will find love again". After all there's nothing wrong with a happy ending.

Summary

I've covered just a few ideas for creating songs, so go and try some of them. I've talked about song structure, things like verses, chorus and bridge, but in pure song writing anything goes. There are no right or wrongs especially when you are writing to express yourself.