

A SHORT COURSE IN
MUSIC THEORY

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COURSE OBJECTIVE:

At the end of this course you are expected to be able to construct a major scale beginning on any note utilizing sharps and flats appropriately to create the proper intervals based on the structure 2-2-1-2-2-2-1. You should be able to create the basic triads on each note of the scale, assign correct roman numerals to each chord and describe each chord in terms of: the intervals involved; major, minor, or diminished tonality, and correctly identify which notes from the scale are added to the naturally occurring chords within the scale to create: sixths, sevenths, augmented and diminished fourths and fifths. You will be expected to correctly annotate roman numeral notation to express alterations of chords both those natural to the scale and borrowed chords as well.

Chord progressions will be covered and you will be expected to correctly identify those commonly used with an 80% accuracy.

APPROACH:

No structure can be built unless a proper foundation is created. The most recognized example is a house. No structural work can be done until the foundation has been set. Without that, the structure would settle, drift, and quickly fall apart. This concept applies equally to the building of a piece of machinery, an automobile, and also to music.

The foundation of music is the scale. To spend an inordinate amount of time on them results in a boring, tedious, and discouraging course of study. But the basic understanding is required.

This course is short consisting of some 6-8 lessons. It begins with the examination of scales with some written exercises. That is followed by the construction of natural chords, those naturally occurring within the construct of the scale, the explanation of tonality, and the introduction of the roman numeral system. These two first lessons must be understood thoroughly. Borrowed chords are covered along with a roman numeral annotation methodology.

This section will be expanded as the course materials are completed.

There are no examinations or grading within this course. It will be assumed that when the student responds to the exercises indicated that the material has been understood so it is imperative that if there are any questions, however minor, that they be asked so clarification can be offered.

READING A MUSIC STAFF

This is pre-course material for the Music Theory course. If you do not know how to read a staff, this will provide a basis for that.

Basic: Each line and space represents one letter name note.

Quick history. Music scores did not appear overnight as we know them today. Before the year 1000, (yeah, that's old!) a composer would consider the range of his opus and draw as many lines as thought necessary to accommodate his music. Thus a score could have 12 lines or 30. To determine which line represented which note, a starting point had to be identified. It eventually became the convention to use a "G" to identify the line for that note. Since the lower voices never really got into the region of the music around the "G" line, another convention was to use an "F" to indicate the line for that note and that was, by nature of the voices (lower), set down somewhere on the page of many lines.

Of course the "G" and the "F" couldn't just be plain, they had to be dolled up so they came to look like this:



This little curly part is the "G" part. It says this line (the second one here) is the note "G".

And this is what the "F" became:



These dots bracket the "F" line.

So these two symbols occurred somewhere within the many lines scrawled across the page. Then some very clever person actually looked at the whole system and noted that if you identified the "G", then moved down the spaces and lines by note names you would eventually identify where the "F" had to be if any consistency between the two was to be observed. So that fixed the relationship, in terms of distance, between the "G" (now known as the Treble "clef" (French for Key)) and the "F" clef. Now it is certain there was much contention about establishing standards but several did get defined.

Five lines and four spaces seemed to be quite adequate for most music

If additional lines or spaces were needed it wasn't necessary to draw the complete line across the entire score, just use a piece of it and these became "ledger lines"

The positioning of the "G" and "F" clefs along with just using 5 lines for each staff meant that there was only one line, or ledger line, between them and that was "C". Since it was in the middle of the two staves, it was called "middle C". (OK, I made that part up but it could have happened!)

READING A MUSIC STAFF

So this all led to what we have today. Each staff has five lines each with a predetermined note name. “C is the ledger line between the two but that doesn’t prevent use of additional lines because it is convenient. Here (ignore all those “b” for now) is an example:

This second line is “G”

This fourth line is “F”

The “C” ledger line

So start on the “G” line in the treble clef and move down, each space and line getting a letter, as follows: G - F - E (the lowest line), D, C (the ledger line but there is no note on it). Then below C is B (notice this is all in alphabetic order). That “B” is the same as the space above the “F” staff. The next note will be on the first, highest, line of the F staff and that is A. Proceeding on from A to G (top space), the F second line and that is the line which the “F” clef says should be F so it all works. Notice that the line and space names are not the same between the two clefs. Why? Because the number of notes we use, before they repeat, is seven, an odd number

There are other features of the staff (a “Grand” staff is shown) such as the Key signature, indicating which scale was used (that is all the “b”s, the time signature (the 4/4 “fraction”)), and the metronome speed indicator. Everything else is either don’t play or play with all the little bars and lines indicating how to do all that. But this discussion was just about reading the staff, not the music.

Finally there are some memory, nemonic, devices to help remember what the lines and spaces are all from bottom to top:

Treble (G) clef: Lines: Every Good Boy Does Fine: E-G-B-D-F
Spaces: FACE: F-A-C-E

Bass (F) clef: Lines: Good Boys Do Fine Always: G-B-D-F-A
Spaces: All Cows Eat Grass or All Cars Eat Gas: A-C-E-G

You have to remember or figure out the names above and below the staves but remember that the first ledger line below the G clef and the first ledger line above the F clef represent the same note which is “C”, middle C to be exact.

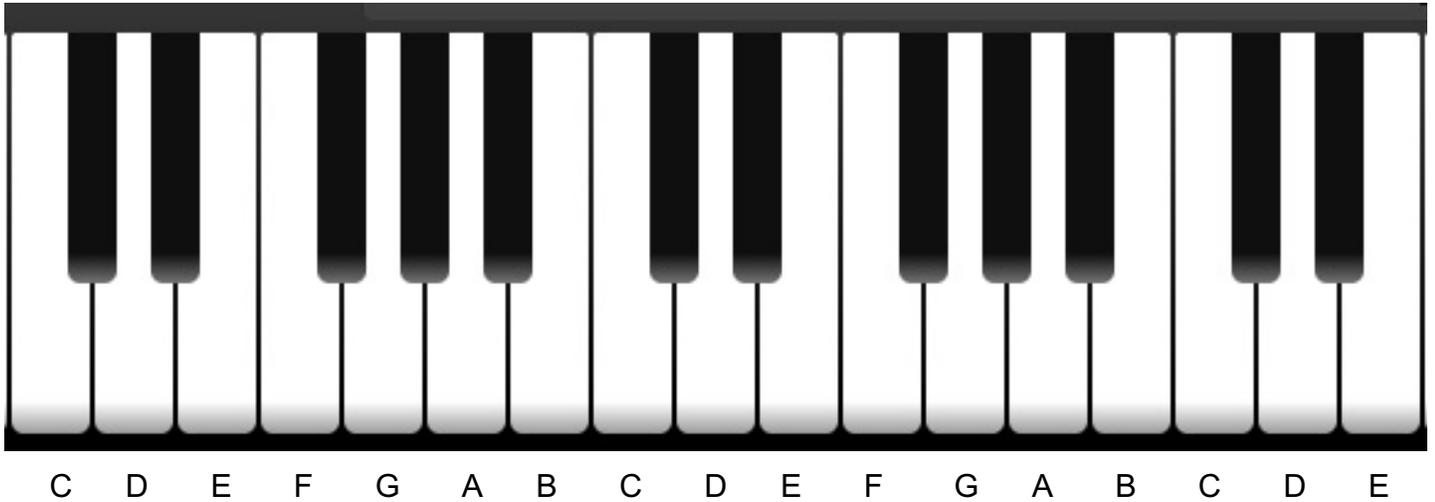
As usual, please ask questions.

SCALE AND CHORD WORKSHEET

Use the phone number: 2-2-1-2-2-2-1 to build scales using the piano keyboard for reference.

Once the scale is built, construct the 7 triads within the scale associating each chord with the appropriate roman numeral.

Finally, use the fret diagrams to determine the fingering for the chords.



Scale example: The "C" major scale consists of the notes: C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C which will be the 8 white keys beginning in the above figure on the far left and moving to the right as labeled.





