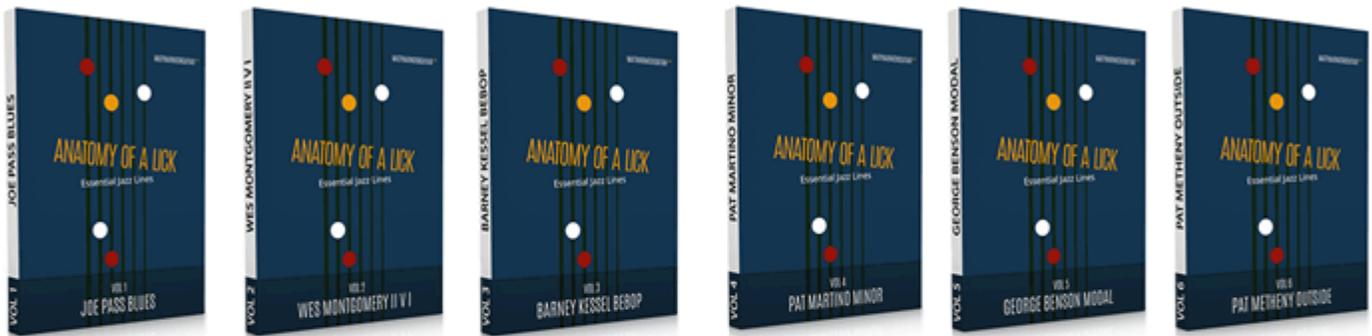


# 7 ESSENTIAL JAZZ GUITAR SCALES FOR BEGINNERS

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Learning jazz guitar scales can be complicated and often beginners wonder which scales they should learn first. The 7 scales on the chart below are a good place to start. These scales are essential for beginning jazz guitarists and enable you to play over almost any jazz standard.

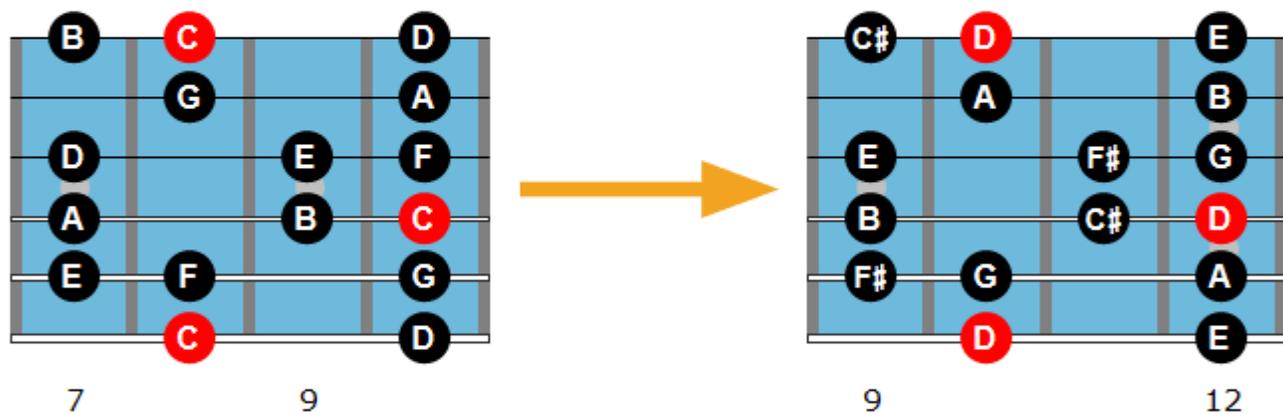
This lesson is by no means meant to be complete, but gives you a good overview of the most important jazz guitar scales. For each scale, there are **2 positions** on the scale chart. These are the most important positions you should learn first. Once you master these two, make sure you learn all other positions as well.

Below the scale charts, you'll find some more tips on how to practice scales, as well as understand how to use them.

These 7 scales are the scales beginning jazz guitarists should start with.

- The **red dots** **C** represent the root of the scale. On this chart, all root notes are C. By moving the scale shapes up or down the guitar neck you get a scale of the same type, but in a different key.

Example: move the shape of the C major scale 2 frets higher and it becomes a D major scale:

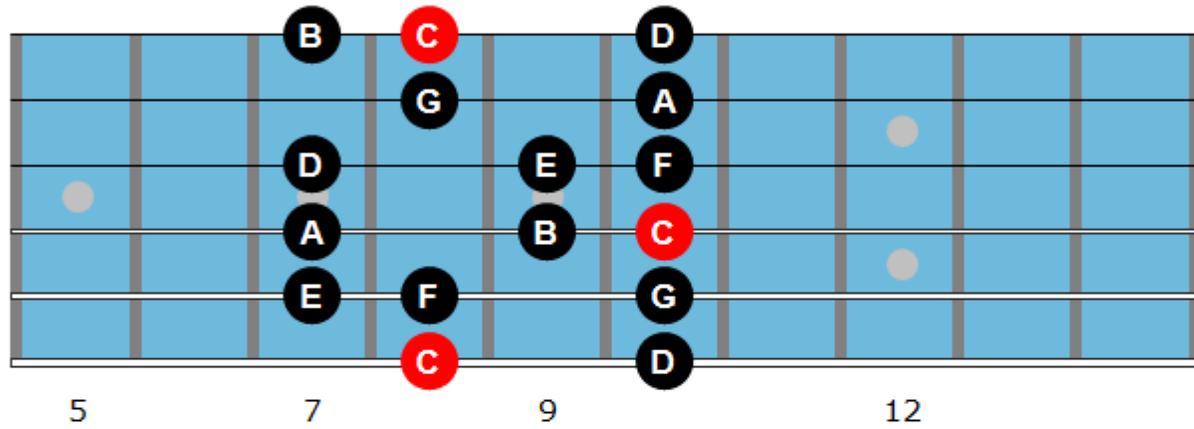


- The **black dots** are the other notes of the scale.
- The **blue dots** **F#** in the blues scale diagrams are called "blue notes" (no surprise here).

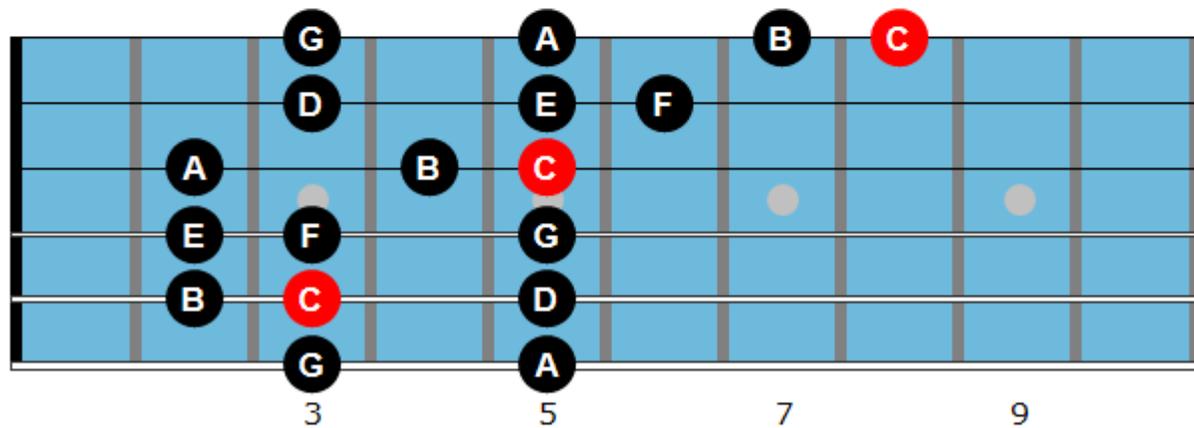
# THE MAJOR SCALE (aka Ionian Scale)

Play over: major chords

C Major Scale (root on 6th string)



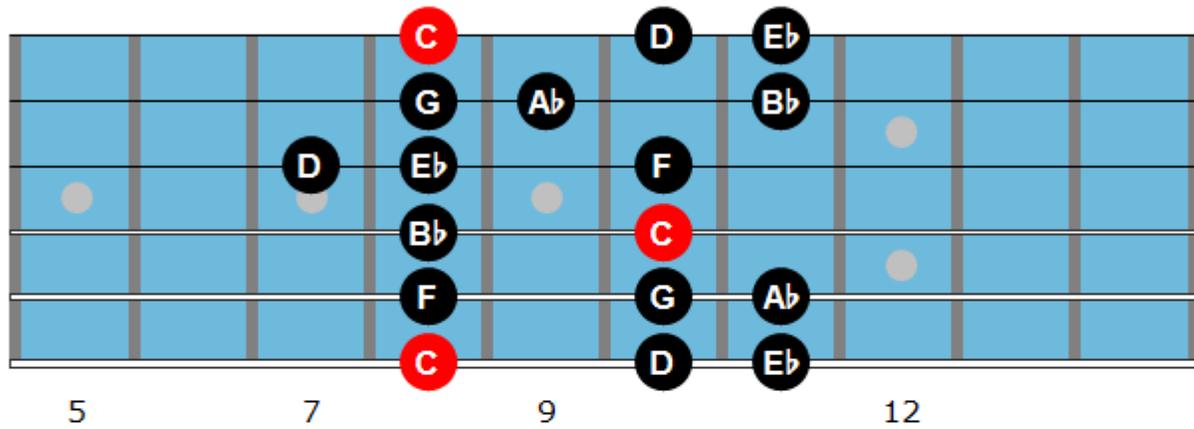
C Major Scale (root on 5th string)



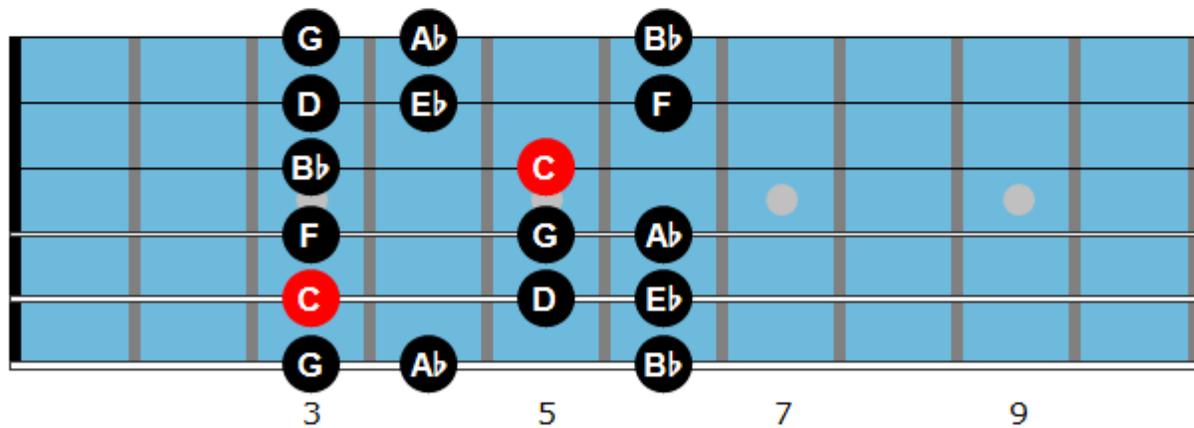
# THE MINOR SCALE (aka Aeolian Scale)

Play over: minor chords

C Minor Scale (root on 6th string)



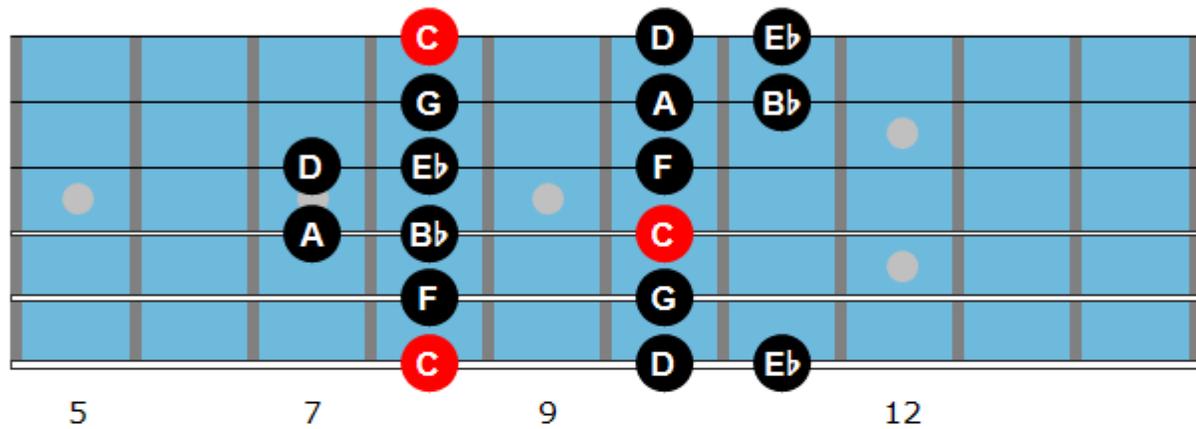
C Minor Scale (root on 5th string)



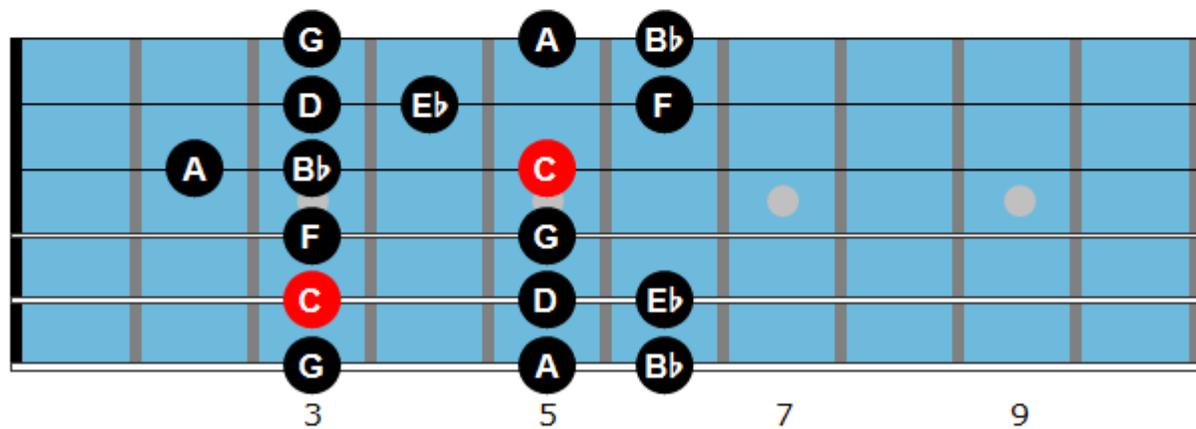
# THE DORIAN SCALE

Play over: minor chords (the ii of a ii V I), minor modal tunes like So What

C Dorian Scale (root on 6th string)



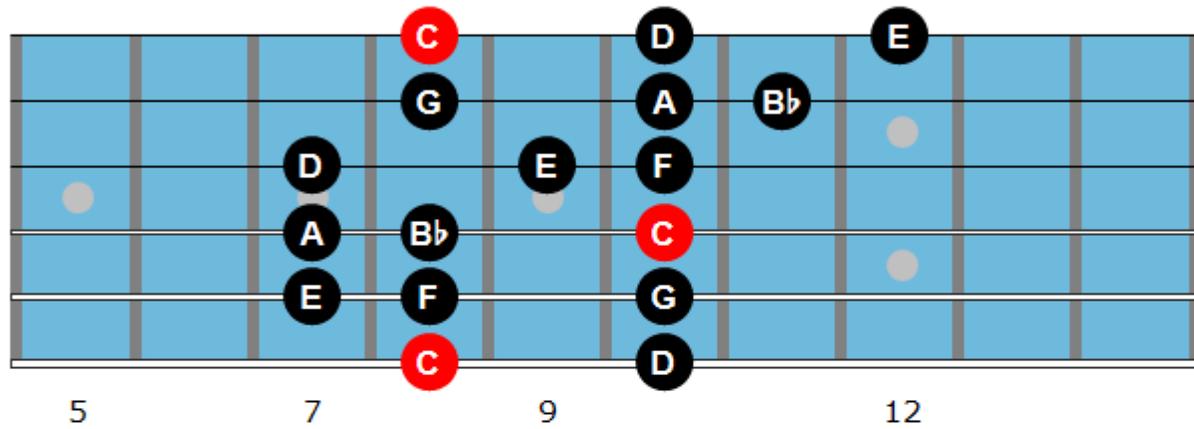
C Dorian Scale (root on 5th string)



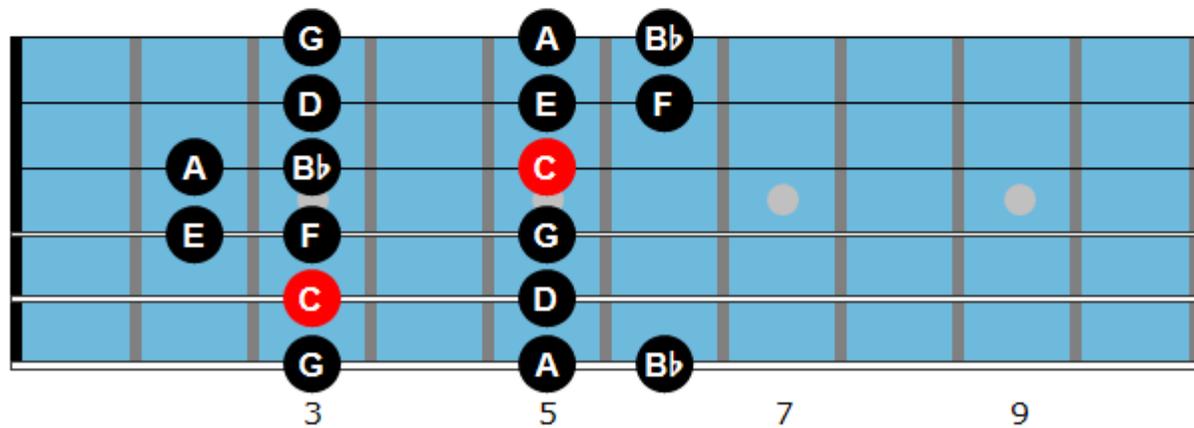
# THE MIXOLYDIAN SCALE

Play over: dominant chords that resolve to a major chord, blues

C Mixolydian Scale (root on 6th string)



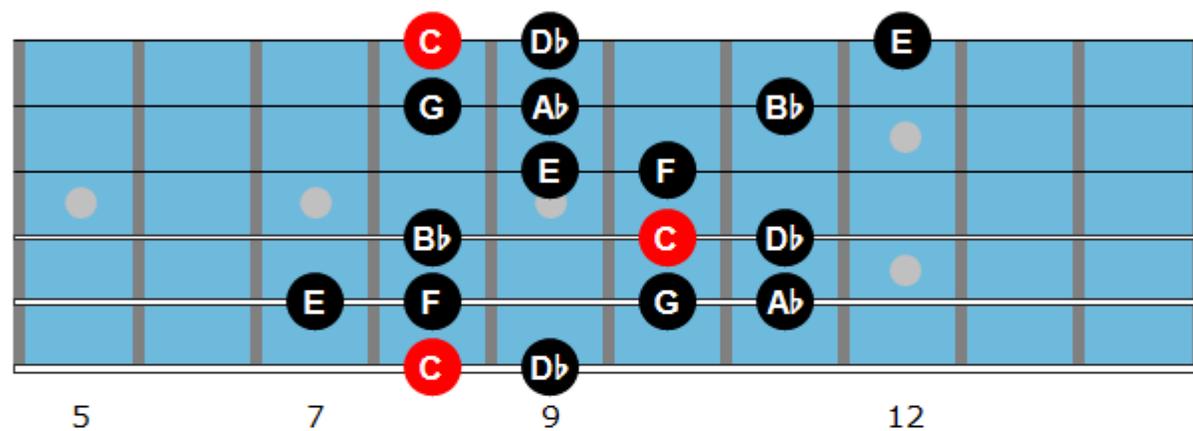
C Mixolydian Scale (root on 5th string)



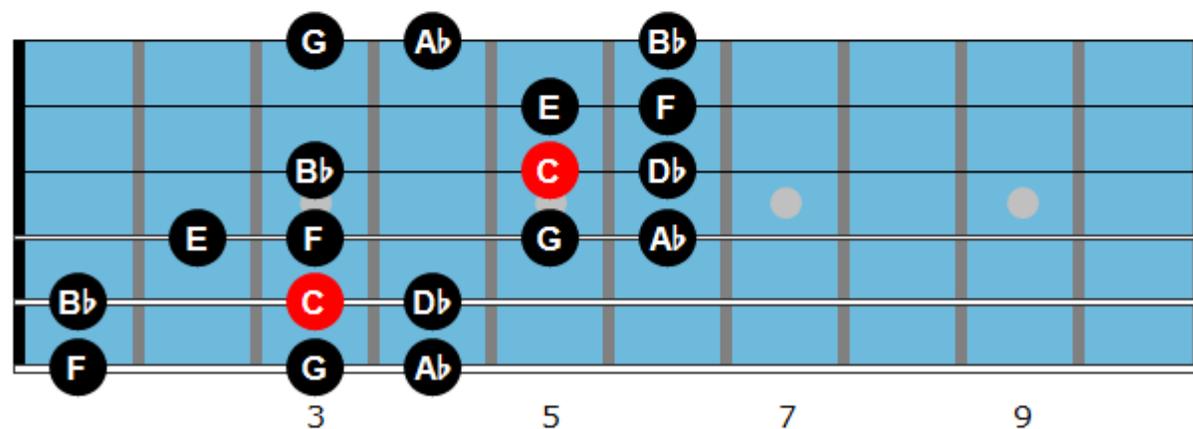
# THE PHRYGIAN DOMINANT SCALE

Play over: dominant chords that resolve to a minor chord

C Phrygian Dominant Scale (root on 6th string)



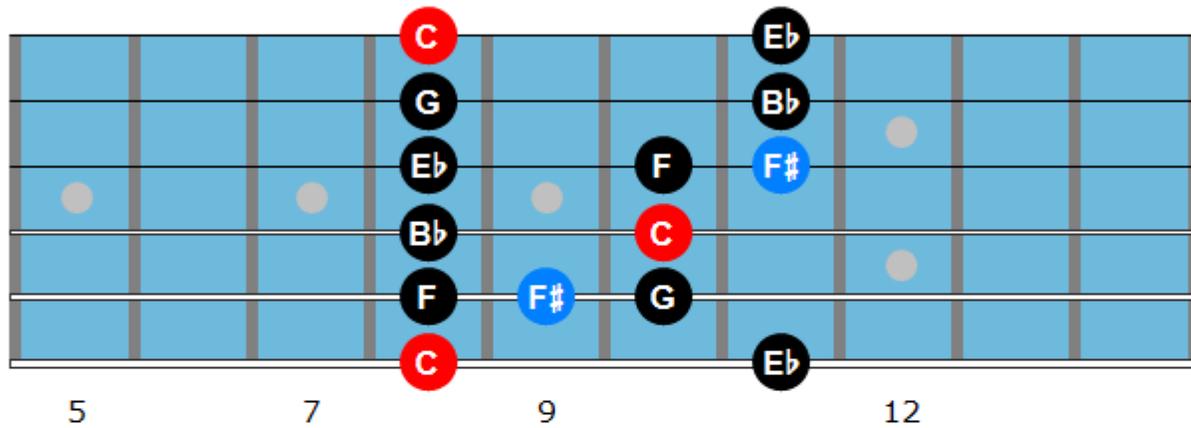
C Phrygian Dominant Scale (root on 5th string)



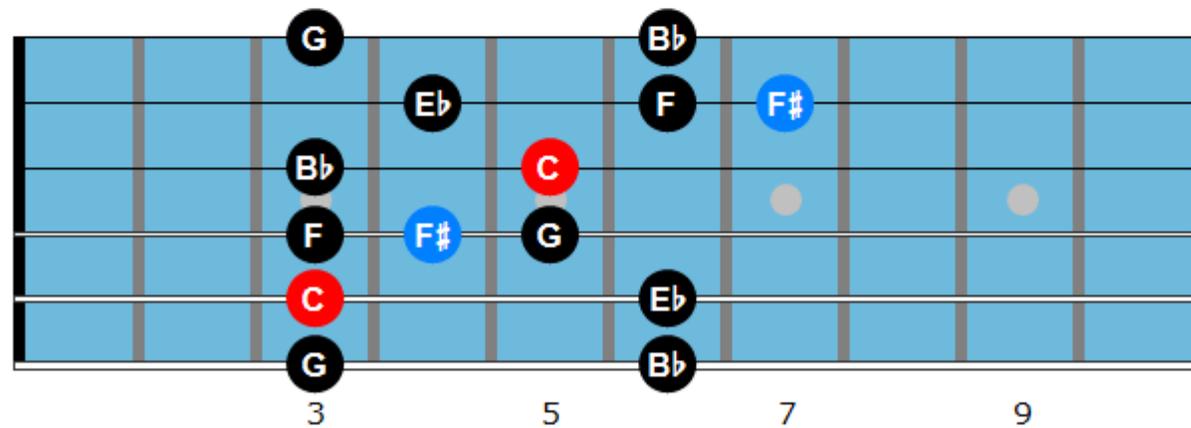
# THE MINOR BLUES SCALE

Play over: minor chords, dominant chords, blues

C Minor Blues Scale (root on 6th string)



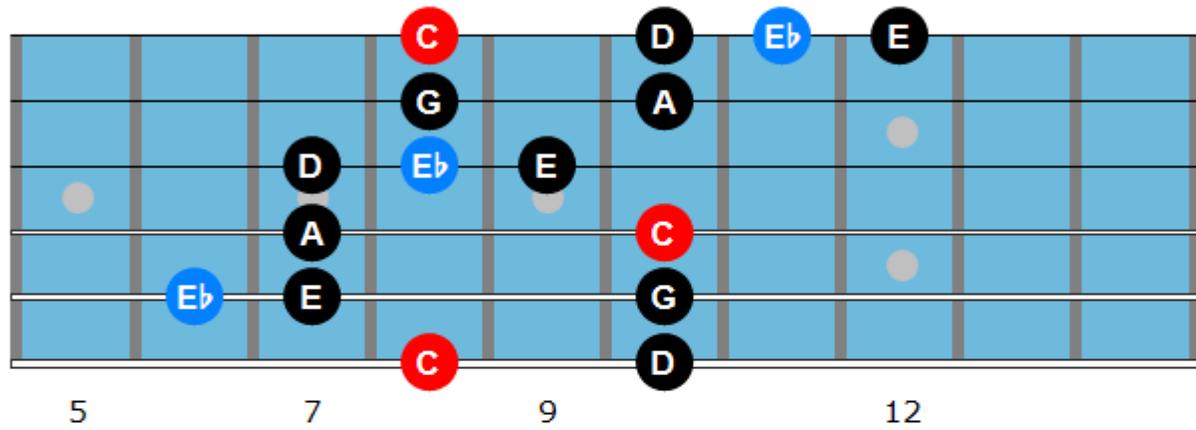
C Minor Blues Scale (root on 5th string)



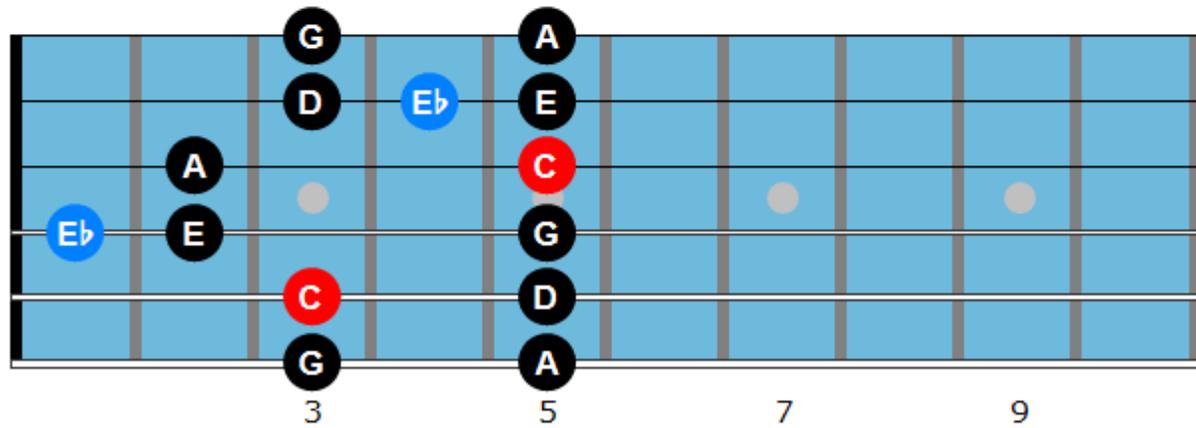
# THE MAJOR BLUES SCALE

Play over: major chords, dominant chords, blues

C Major Blues Scale (root on 6th string)



C Major Blues Scale (root on 5th string)



# How to Practice These Scales?

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In the examples below, we'll be using the **C major scale**.

A general rule for **fingering** the C major scale:

- Notes on the 7th fret are played with the index finger (finger 1).
- Notes on the 8th fret are played with middle finger (finger 2).
- Notes on the 9th fret are played with the ring finger (finger 3).
- Notes on the 10th fret are played with the pinkie finger (finger 4).

In some examples the fingering deviates from the rule, in which case I put the fingering underneath the notation.

## Scale Exercise 1

First, you should be able to **play the scales up and down**, from the low string to the high string and back, without hesitation and without hiccups along the way. All notes should sound clean and even.

Here's an example for the C major scale:

## Backing Track

[Click here to play the Cmaj7 backing track](#)

## Audio Example 1

[Click here to play example 1](#)

Cmaj7

Musical score for Scale Exercise 2. The top staff is in treble clef, showing a C major scale with a 7th fret. The bottom staff is in bass clef, showing the corresponding fretboard positions. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. The fretboard diagram includes the following fingerings: 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 4, 1 3 4 2 4 1 2 4, 2 1 4 2 4 3 1 4, 3 1 4 2 1 4 2 1.

### Scale Exercise 2

Another good starter exercise is to play each note of the scale **double**:

### Audio Example 2

[Click here to play example 2](#)

Cmaj7

Musical score for Audio Example 2 (first system). The top staff is in treble clef, showing a C major scale with a 7th fret. The bottom staff is in bass clef, showing the corresponding fretboard positions. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 7-10. The fretboard diagram includes the following fingerings: 8-8-10-10, 7-7-8-8, 10-10, 7-7-9-9-10-10, 7-7-9-9-10-10, 8-8, 10-10, 7-7-8-8-10-10.

Musical score for Audio Example 2 (second system). The top staff is in treble clef, showing a C major scale with a 7th fret. The bottom staff is in bass clef, showing the corresponding fretboard positions. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 7-10. The fretboard diagram includes the following fingerings: 8-8-7-7, 10-10-8-8, 10-10-9-9-7-7, 10-10, 9-9-7-7, 10-10-8-8, 7-7, 10-10-8-8-7-7.

# Scale Patterns

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When you have the previous examples under your fingers, you're ready to learn some scale patterns.

## Scale Pattern 1

In this first pattern, you'll play the **C major scale in 3rds**, by skipping a note:

### Audio Example 3

[Click here to play example 3](#)

*C* maj7

Fingering: 2 1 3 4

5

4 3 1 2

Detailed description: The image shows two systems of musical notation for a scale pattern in C major. The first system starts with a treble clef staff containing a scale in thirds: C4-D4-E4-F4-G4-A4-B4-C5, with a repeat sign at the beginning. Below it is a bass clef staff with fingerings: 8-7-10, 8-7-10-8-7, 10-9-7-10-9-7-10, 9-7-10-9-8-10-8-7, 10-8-7-10-8-7-10-8. The second system starts with a treble clef staff containing a scale in thirds: C5-B4-A4-G4-F4-E4-D4-C4, with a repeat sign at the end. Below it is a bass clef staff with fingerings: 10-10-8, 9-10-7-9-10, 7-9-10-7-9-10-7-8, 10-7-8, 10-7-8-10-7.

## Scale Pattern 2

In this scale pattern, you'll play the C major scale in **groups of 3 notes**:

### Audio Example 4

[Click here to play example 4](#)

*Cmaj7*

Fingering: 1 3 1

5

3 1

9

10 7

### **Scale Pattern 3**

In this next scale pattern, you'll play the C major scale in **groups of 4 notes**:

### **Audio Example 5**

[Click here to play example 5](#)



# The Ionian, Dorian and Mixolydian Scale

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The Ionian (aka major scale), Dorian and Mixolydian scales are called **modes** in music theory ([learn more about guitar modes here](#)).

There are 7 modes, but in this lesson we'll only have a look at 4, to keep things simple:

- The Ionian mode: used over major chords.
- The Dorian mode: used over minor chords (iim7).
- The Mixolydian mode: used over dominant chords ([What is a dominant chord?](#)).
- The Aeolian mode: used over minor chords (vim7).

Let's say you want to play scales over a **ii V I vi chord progression in C major**:

<b>Dm7</b>	<b>G7</b>	<b>Cmaj7</b>	<b>Am7</b>
<b>iim7</b>	<b>V7</b>	<b>I maj7</b>	<b>vim7</b>

Music theory tells us you should play the following scales over each chord:

- Cmaj7: the C Ionian scale.
- Dm7: the D Dorian scale.
- G7: the G Mixolydian scale.
- Am7: the A Aeolian scale.

The problem with this theoretical approach is that it's **not very convenient** because you have to think about another scale on every chord.

The good news is that these 4 modes **all have the same notes**:

<b>D Dorian Mode</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>b3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>b7</b>
<b>G Mixolydian Mode</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>b7</b>
<b>C Ionian Mode</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>A Aeolian Mode</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>b3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>b6</b>	<b>b7</b>

As you can see in the table above, these 4 modes all have the same 7 notes, namely the notes of the C major scale (C D E F G A B), they just start on a different note.

This means we can **pick one scale** (usually the scale of the Imaj7 chord), and use that scale to play over all chords that are within the key.

- If you play the C Ionian scale over the Dm7 chord, it will sound like the D Dorian scale.
- If you play the C Ionian scale over the G7 chord, it will sound like the G Mixolydian scale.
- If you play the C Ionian scale over the Am7 chord, it will sound like the A Aeolian scale.

In the following audio example I play the C Ionian scale up and down over a ii V I vi backing track, and you'll notice all notes are in key:

### Audio Example 6

[Click here to play example 6](#)

Playing scales like this is good for initial practice, but it **doesn't sound very musical**. In the following example I play the same scale over the backing track, but in a more creative manner.

When using scales to improvise, your **musicality** will dictate how you play them:

- It doesn't matter what note of the scale you start on.
- It doesn't matter what rhythm you play or how long your notes are.
- The order of notes doesn't matter either, you can skip or repeat notes.

Here's a more musical example of how you can use the C Ionian scale over the same ii V I vi chord progression:

### Audio Example 7

[Click here to play example 7](#)

The image displays musical notation for Audio Example 7. It features a treble clef staff with a C Ionian scale (C-D-E-F-G-A-B) played over a four-measure chord progression: Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, and Am7. The notes are played in a more creative, non-linear fashion. Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with four measures corresponding to the chords. The fretboard shows fingerings for the scale notes: Measure 1 (Dm7) has notes 8, 7, 10, 8, 7; Measure 2 (G7) has notes 10, 8, 10; Measure 3 (Cmaj7) has notes 8, 10, 9, 7, 10, 9; Measure 4 (Am7) has notes 10, 7, 9, 10. The chord names are written above and below the staff.

5

10-9-7 8 | 8 10-9-7 | 9 8 8 | 8

10 10 9 7

9

*Dm<sup>7</sup>* *G<sup>7</sup>* *Cmaj<sup>7</sup>* *Am<sup>7</sup>*

8-10 7-8 10 7-9-10 | 7-9-10 8-10 8-7 10 | 10-8-7 10-8-8 12 | 10-8-7 10-8 10

13

*Dm<sup>7</sup>* *G<sup>7</sup>* *Cmaj<sup>7</sup>* *Am<sup>7</sup>*

9 7-9 8 10-9 | 10 7-9 8 10-9 | 7 10-9-7 10-8-7 | 10-8-7-8 8

17

$Dm^7$   $G^7$   $Cmaj^7$   $Am^7$

21

$Dm^7$   $G^7$   $Cmaj^7$   $Am^7$

## Minor Blues Scale Study

In this minor blues scale study you'll be using the minor blues, Dorian, Aeolian and Phrygian dominant scales.

- **Cm7**: on this chord you can play the C minor blues scale, the C Dorian scale or the C Aeolian scale.
- **G7**: here you play the G Phrygian dominant scale (or C minor blues scale).
- **Fm7**: on this chord you play the F Dorian scale, which has the same notes as the C Aeolian scale. C minor blues works fine here as well.
- **Dm7b5**: on the half diminished chord you play the D Locrian scale (one of the modes we didn't cover in this lesson), which has the same notes as the C Aeolian scale. Again, C minor blues works as well.

As you can see from the list above, the **C minor blues scale works over the entire minor blues**, but for the sake of variation it's a good idea to mix in other scales as well.

### **C Minor Blues Backing Track**

[Click here to play the C minor blues backing track](#)

### **Listen & Play**

[Click here to play the C minor blues scale study](#)

Cm7

C7(b9)

C minor blues scale

10 8 10 | 8 | 10 8 10 | 8 10 8 10 | 10 8 10 | 10 8 10

Fm7

Cm7

5

C Dorian scale

10 10 | 10 8 10 8 10 8 | 10 10 | 10 10 8 7 | 10 8 10

Dm7(b9)

G7(b9)

Cm7

Dm7(b9)

G7(b9)

9

C minor blues scale

C Aeolian scale (= D Locrian)

8 8 8 | 8 11 8 | 11 10 8 | 10 10 | 8 10 | 11 | 9 8 | 10 8 10 7

13

**Cm7** **C7(b9)**

C Dorian scale C Phrygian dominant

10 8 10 7 8 10 7-10-7/8 8-11 10 8 11-8 10-8-8 8 9 8-11 9-8 11

17

**Fm7** **Cm7**

F Dorian scale (= C Aeolian) C minor blues scale

9 8 8 10 8 10 8 10 10 8 10 10 8 10

21

**Dm7(b5)** **G7(b9)** **Cm7** **Dm7(b5)** **G7(b9)**

G Phrygian dominant

10-11 9-10 7-8-10 8 9 7-8-10-8-7-10 8 8 7-8-7 9-8 10 8-7

25

**Cm<sup>7</sup>** **C7(b9)**

C Dorian scale C Phrygian dominant

29

**Fm<sup>7</sup>** **Cm<sup>7</sup>**

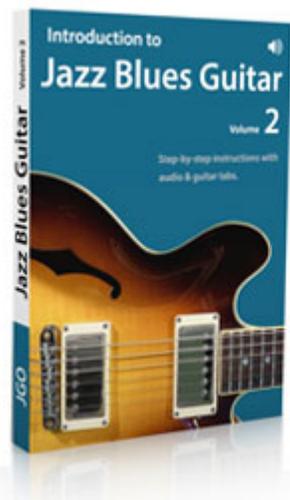
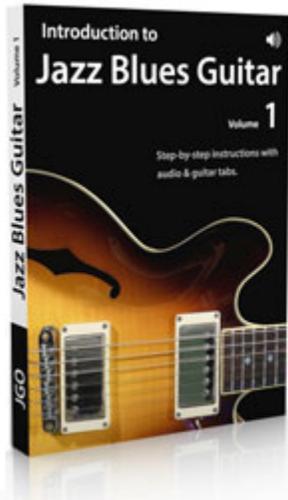
F Dorian scale (= C Aeolian) C Dorian scale

33

**Dm<sup>7(b9)</sup>** **G7(b9)** **Cm<sup>7</sup>** **Dm<sup>7(b9)</sup> G7(b9)**

C Aeolian scale with chromatic notes

To **learn more about the minor blues**, and jazz blues in general, check out our [Introduction to Jazz Blues Guitar Bundle](#).



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