

HOW TO LEARN YOUR SCALES

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Where I teach, students are required to play the “Easy” major scales (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, G, C, two-octave F, and Easy Chromatic) from memory for their junior high region band auditions.

For high school band placement auditions, they are required to play all 12 major scales (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db/C#, G, C, F, A, B/Cb, D, E, and F#/Gb), although not necessarily from memory.

I teach scales in this order:

- 1) **Learn the “Easy” one-octave major scales, one at a time, usually in this order: Bb, Ab, C, Db, Eb, G, F (two octave), Chromatic.** I

do not let students play the Ab scale until they have mastered the Bb scale, i.e., until they can play the Bb scale at least 3 times in a row with the right pitches, the right rhythm, a good tone, and a relatively steady beat, no matter how slowly. Give yourself 1-2 weeks per scale, with 1-3 weeks for the Chromatic and two-octave F scales.

After mastering a scale, I expect my students to play it every time they practice so they don’t forget it and don’t have to learn it over again. I do not let them memorize any scale until they can play all the “Easy” scales off the page. Young players need to get good at READING MUSIC, not memorizing it.

- 2) **Memorize the “Easy” scales, one at a time, starting with the Chromatic scale.** Again, do not go from one scale to the next unless you can play the first one, from memory, with the correct pitches, correct rhythm, good tone, and a relatively steady beat. Again, 1-2 weeks per scale, with an extra week for the Chromatic and two-octave F scales.
- 3) **If you’re still in junior high and you’ve already memorized your “Easy” one-octave**

scales, learn & memorize “Easy” multi-octave major scales. Do this one extra octave at a time, one scale at a time, in roughly this order: G, Eb, Db, C, Ab, Bb. In other words, learn the G scale one octave higher than before, then learn the Eb scale one octave lower than before, then learn the Db scale on octave lower than before, etc. When you get to scales like C and Bb, whether you go higher or lower depends on what’s easier for you. If you go higher, don’t learn the higher octave of the C scale until you’ve learned the higher octave of Ab, then Bb. If you go lower, don’t learn the lower octave of the Bb scale until you’ve mastered the lower octave of the C scale.

Don’t skip around just to show off; don’t try to learn a two-octave high Bb scale if you can’t already play a two-octave G scale. You have to be able to play a high G to play a two-octave Bb scale, so you might as well learn the scale that goes with it. 1-2 weeks to master a scale using the sheet music with another 1-2 weeks to get it from memory.

- 4) **If you’re about to enter high school or are already in high school, learn the “Difficult” one-octave major scales (A, B / Cb, C#, D, E, F# / Gb).** Skip the multi-octave “Easy” scales for now. Learn the one-octave “Difficult” scales just like you learned the “Easy” one-octave scales, mastering them one at a time. You can save the Cb, C#, and F# scales for last, because they sound the same as B, Db, and Gb scales, which are used more often.
- 5) **Learn ALL 12 major scales as many octaves as you can.** Whether you already know your “Difficult” scales or not, or whether you’ve never tried playing any scale besides the F two octaves, it’s time to learn

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everything. Whether you try to memorize these scales depends on how much time and how often you can practice.

If you can already play your “Easy” scales two-octaves but have never touched a difficult scale, I recommend learning the remaining scales and octaves in this order:

1 & 2 – D major, two octaves (lower) & A major, two octaves (higher)

3 & 4 – E major, two octaves (lower) & Gb major, two octaves (higher)

5 – B major, one octave

6 – C scale, two octaves (lower, if not learned already)

7 – Bb major, three octaves (whichever octave is missing)

8 – B major, two octaves (higher)

9 – Advanced Chromatic

10 – B major, three octaves (lower) (*players without compensating fourth valves may find pedal B exceedingly difficult and may skip this scale*)

11 & 12 – A major, three octaves (lower) (*players without compensating fourth valves may find pedal B exceedingly difficult and may skip this scale*) & C major, three octaves (higher, if not already learned)

13 & 14 – Ab major, three octaves (lower) & Db major, three octaves (higher)

15 & 16 – D major, three octaves (higher)

17 – Eb major, three octaves (higher)

etc.

If you can play all 12 scales one octave but have never tried a second octave besides F, I recommend learning the remaining octaves in this order:

1 & 2 – E major, two octaves (lower) & Gb major, two octaves (higher)

3 & 4 – Eb major, two octaves (lower) & G major, two octaves (higher)

5 & 6 – D major, two octaves (lower) & A major, two octaves (higher)

7 & 8 – Db major, two octaves (lower) & Bb major, two octaves (higher)

9 – Advanced Chromatic

10 & 11 – C major, two octaves (lower) & B major, two octaves (higher)

12 & 13 – B major, three octaves (lower) (*players without compensating fourth valves may find pedal B exceedingly difficult and may skip this scale*) & C major, three octaves (higher)

14 & 15 – Bb major, three octaves (lower) & Db major, three octaves (higher)

16 & 17 – A major, three octaves (lower) (*players without compensating fourth valves may find pedal B exceedingly difficult and may skip this scale*) & D major, three octaves (higher)

18 & 19 – Ab major, three octaves (lower) & Eb major, three octaves (higher)

20 – E major, three octaves (higher)

21 – F major, three octaves (higher)

etc.

6) Learn multi-octave minor harmonic scales.
The harmonic scale is the most useful of the minor scales. Start with them.

7) Learn multi-octave natural minor scales.

8) Learn multi-octave melodic minor scales.