

MIRANDA'S SCALE GUIDE!

Learning scales is an essential part of playing any instrument. It helps to develop good technique and also an understanding of keys, modes and music theory.

But we all know how tricky and tedious scale practice can be!

This guide is aimed to make learning scales a bit easier for you. There are many ways to approach learning them, and this is just one. You may prefer a different method, which, if it works for you, is fine.

I hope you find this helpful!



NORMAL RULE C G D A E Major c g d a e minor

I call this 'normal' because it's the first finger sequence you learn, and because it's the fingering you go for unless the layout of the scale means you need to use a different one (like F Major).

Basically, it's the 'turn after 3, then 4, then 3' sequence that you learn at grade 1, but hands together, which requires **a lot** of concentration!

Try following this script:

Start with 5 and 1

RH turn after 3

LH 3 comes over

RH uses 4

THUMBS TOGETHER on the mid-scale octave!

LH 4 comes over

RH turn after 3

LH 3 comes over

No more turning

Get to the top with 1 and 5

At the top with 1 and 5

LH turn after 3

RH 3 comes over

LH uses 4

RH 4 comes over

LH turn after 3

RH 3 comes over

No more turning

Get to the bottom with 5 and 1

Things to note:

- Fingers 3 ALWAYS GO DOWN TOGETHER. If they don't, you have gone wrong. Use this information to help you choose the correct finger and check you are getting it right.
- Remember to use finger 4! It appears on either side of the mid-scale octave.
- Notice how the coming down is the same as the going up—just the other way around with the hands.
- Don't miss fingers out—always use the next-door finger unless you are turning.
- Thumbs only go down together at the mid-scale octave. Otherwise they will go down with 2 (mid-scale) or 5 (at the top and bottom).

THE BLACK-NOTE RULE

B F# Db F Major

b d# bb f minor



This is my favourite rule, because it's the easiest one!

Basically, you use the pattern of the black notes to guide you up and down the scale.

It goes like this:

- Focus on the **LH as you go up** and the **RH as you go down**.
- As you come to a group of two black notes, bring 3 over.
- As you come to a group of three black notes, bring 4 over.
- THUMBS GO DOWN TOGETHER

Things to note:

- You need to work out your starting fingers so that you will fit the pattern—e.g., B Major starts with 4 in the left hand because you need to get 3 onto the next note (c#).
- Use those thumbs to inform the 'turning hand' when to turn—if the thumb is about to go down in one hand, it needs to go down in the other, so TURN!
- The rule is at its best with the scales that have all five black notes (B, F#, Db Major) and you're best off learning them first so you can get used to the rule. For the others, remember that you're **not** playing all the black notes but still use them to guide you and inform your fingerwork.

NOT-QUITE-THE-BLACK-NOTE RULE!

f# c# g# minor

These scales are a bit strange but you're best off using the Black-Note rule... ish!

c# and g# minor make their first appearance at grade 4, and although you can use the Flat Rule for g# minor, it's *SO* similar to c# minor, they are best treated in exactly the same way and learned at the same time. It goes like this:

- Their note-pattern is identical: **2 black notes**, 1 white note, **2 black notes**, 2 white notes with a 'big gap' between them.
- **RH starts with 2, LH starts with 3.**
- **c# minor—the RH breaks the Black-Note Rule.** In other words, it does the opposite—use 3 at a group-of-three turn and 4 at a group-of-two turn. The **LH** follows the rule.
- **g# minor—the LH breaks the Black-Note Rule.** In other words, it does the opposite—use 3 at a group-of-three turn and 4 at a group-of-two turn. The **RH** follows the rule.
- Still watch **LH going up** and **RH going down**.
- Thumbs **will not** go down together all the time.

f# minor first shows up at grade 5 and follows the Black Note Rule but:

- The thumbs don't go down together at all.
- **RH 4** does go in the group of 3, but it's the middle black note (g#), rather than the usual a#/bb.

It 'feels' like Eb Major to play because fingers 4 and 3 of both hands play two of the three black notes (see The Flat Rule).

THE FLAT RULE

Bb Eb Ab *Db Major

*g# minor



These scales start to appear at grade 3. This rule is a bit tricky, but luckily there aren't that many of them. It goes like this:

- **RH starts with 2**
- **LH starts with 3**
- **RH 4 goes on Bb in all the scales!**
- **LH 4 goes on the first turn (the fourth note)**
- Turn the thumb under after black note(s). This is for **RH going up** and **LH going down**

Things to note:

- Bb Major is horrible! Think of it as a 'scale of opposites' - when **RH has 3**, **LH has 4** and vice versa. Also, on the first Bb, you will be using **2 in the RH**, not 4 as you usually do with this rule.
- Eb Major has a special feel to it. Fingers 3 and 4 of both hands go on two of the three black-note group, Ab and Bb. Try really hard to learn the sensation of these same fingers covering those notes and you'll find it easier to play.
- If you like, you can treat Ab Major in the same way as g# minor (see Not-Quite-the-Black-Note Rule). Like Bb Major, the **RH does not use 4** on the first Bb it comes to.

* Although these scales fit with this rule, you're better off using the Black-Note rule for them, as previously explained.

MELODIC MINORS

Aaaargh!

At grade 6, we have to know both the harmonic and melodic minors. As most people go with the more straightforward harmonic minors in the lower grades, it's usually the melodic ones that are new at grade 6. These scales are a bit weird in that they're different descending from ascending, but there's a trick you can use to get playing them relatively painlessly!

Because of the raised 6th and 7th as you ascend, they are *almost the same* as the Major scale starting on that note. The only difference is the third note—the minor third that gives it its minor tonality. So... for the ascent, think of the Major scale, but accidentally-on-purpose play a minor third—easy!

The descent sees the 6th and 7th put back to normal, which means you are playing the scale according to its key signature, so go down according to key signature. Sounds hard? The trick is to make a note of that minor 3rd you played on the way up... and come down in the Major key of that note. This is because that third note is the key note of the scale's related major.

Let's take c minor as an example.

- Go up as if you are playing C Major... BUT with a minor third, so Eb instead of E.
- Make a mental note of that minor third (Eb) - you will need it for coming down.
- As you start to come down, switch from thinking in C Major to Eb Major (that minor third note you remembered as you came up).
- Come down in the key of Eb Major (three flats).
- Don't forget to go all the way back down to C—no stopping at Eb!

Thinking of it like this means you play a minor scale, thinking in *Major keys only* (and we all know Major keys come to mind much more easily than minor ones!).



Guess my favourite colour?



Green right?

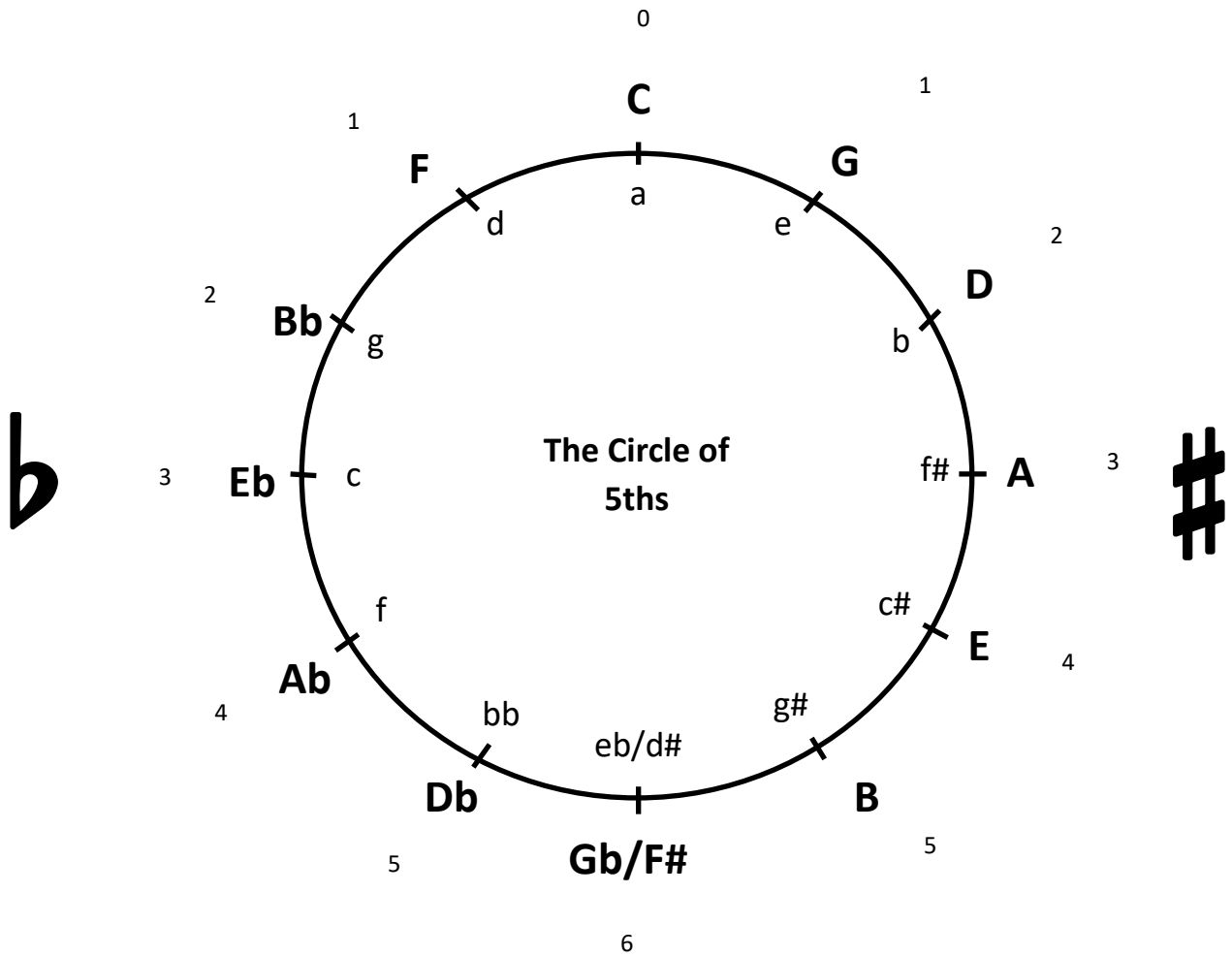
WRONG!!!

It's actually **purple** but you assumed it was green because there were so many more of them.

This is what happens if you keep getting your scales wrong—you actually learn them wrong!

**PRACTISE YOUR SCALES SLOWLY ENOUGH THAT YOU CAN GET THEM RIGHT
MORE TIMES THAN YOU GET THEM WRONG!**

That way, your brain will latch on to the correct way so much more quickly. If you play a scale ten times but only get it right once, you've done more harm than good, which is a shame when you've taken the time to sit down and practise! Make your practise time count. Playing it once only but correctly is better than playing it once correctly out of many incorrect attempts.



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Father **C**harles **G**oes **D**own **A**nd **E**nds **B**attle

←————— **b**