

Understanding The Fretboard.

How you understand the fretboard will determine how you approach playing the instrument, which will in turn determine in large part how and what you play. If your understanding is limited, your playing will be limited. One of the first things to do is learn some of the notes, how they are laid out on each string and across strings. Learning the notes on the fret board can be daunting, and may take you a long time. Don't fret (pun intended), there are ways to make this efficient. This section is designed to build a good foundation about how the fretboard is laid out, and help you visualize it as effectively and efficiently – by doing one simple thing - by learning the C major scale horizontally on each string.

A 4 string bass has about 90 notes, a 5 string has about 110 and about 60% of them are the natural notes C-D-E-F-G-A-B – the white keys on the keyboard, which also happens to be the C Major scale. So, by memorizing the C major scale on each string you will know 60% of the notes on your instrument. The remaining notes are the notes in between them – the black keys on the keyboard. There are only 12 notes in the Western Music System. 7 of them are the white keys, 5 of them are the black keys. The octave is divided into 12 notes, and repeats.

C Major Scale: horizontally on each string.

The following will help you understand how the fretboard is laid out, AND it will help you understand how to connect the vertical patterns across the neck, AND as you progress will have a huge impact on what and how you play.

Start with the open G string. Remember we're playing the C major scale on each string starting with the open string notes. All the open string notes are in the C major scale. The Root of the scale, C, is marked in **RED**.

Hopefully you will notice that the pattern of intervals (the distance between notes) is always the same!! One of the positive attributes about how guitars are laid out is that the shape of each scale, the pattern of frets, is always the same regardless of the Key. C Major, D Major, A Major and every other major scale have the same shape on the fretboard, but start that pattern on a different note. As you go through these notice the pattern of intervals between notes.

We will go into to the major scale and intervals in depth in another tutorial. For now we'll keep it simple. Here is the pattern of whole steps and half steps for the major scale.

Whole step = 2 frets

Half step = 1 fret

The Major scale pattern is this: W – W – H – W – W – W – H

C Major Scale: C – D – E – F – G – A – B – C

Scale Degrees: R – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – R

Notice there are two half steps in the major scale, between the 3rd and 4th scale degrees, E and F, and 7th and Root, B and C. All other intervals are whole steps. If you change the position of these half steps you change the key of the scale. These half steps are the reason the major scale sounds the way it does.



