

Lesson 5 - Organizing Notes into Scales - The Minor Scale

A - FINDING THE C MINOR SCALE ON THE BASS. The second of the three primary scales you need to know is the minor scale. There are actually at least four different kinds of minor scales, but we will only cover the natural minor (or the aeolian mode) at this point. Here is what one octave of the C natural minor scale looks like on the bass and in written music.

3rd fret

	C	F	B ^b
	D	G	C
	E ^b	A ^b	

NOTES: C D E^b F G A^b B^b C

SCALE DEGREE: 1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 1

Notice that the 3rd, 6th and 7th degrees are a half-step flatter (i.e. lower) than their corresponding scale degrees in major. This is taken into account by calling the scale degrees of those notes the “flat 3rd,” “flat 6th,” and “flat 7th,” as is shown underneath the notes above.

Below is a chart of the notes in the C natural minor scale that are found in the lowest position on the bass.

open strings

		D	G
F	B ^b	E ^b	A ^b
G	C	F	B ^b
A ^b			

NOTES: F G A^b B^b C D E F G A^b B^b

SCALE DEGREE: 4 5 b6 b7 1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7

B - PLAYING THE SCALE IN TIME. Let’s take one of the rhythms we learned earlier and play this scale in this lowest position using that rhythm. As always throughout this book, don’t stop with the written examples—make up something that sounds like music to you based on the idea being presented. It’s more fun that way and you will definitely improve faster. Keep coming back to C to start your two-bar phrases with, as below.

NOTES: C C B^b C B^b A^b G C C B^b C F G B^b C D E^b F G A^b B^b

BEATS: 1 & 2 & & 4 & 1 & 2 & & 4 &

A^b G F G F E^b D C etc.

C - MOVING UP THE FINGERBOARD. Here is the same scale played in the next higher position on the bass. Do **A** and **B** on the previous page in this new position just like you did in the lowest position.



NOTES: G A^b B^b C D E^b F G A^b B^b C

SCALE DEGREE: 5 b6 b7 1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7 1

Note on Musical Notation: In the previous line of music, you might have wondered why there are no flats on the flatted notes, but only at the beginning of the line. Since the three notes that have accidentals are flatted almost all the time in a piece of music in the key of C minor, these three flats are usually put at the beginning of the first bar of music and apply to any of those notes throughout the piece. This is how you know what key a song is in. So three flats at the beginning of the first bar means that those notes are always flatted (unless cancelled out by a natural sign), and that the piece of music is in the key of C minor—or E^b major, which has the same notes. (See *Lesson 31* for more on major and minor keys and their relationships.)

D - COMPARING MAJOR AND MINOR. To be able to hear the difference between the major and minor scales, let's try playing 2 bars of C major and then 2 bars of C minor. Play the note C at the beginning of the first of the two bars on each chord. Use either or both positions on all the remaining exercises in this lesson.

C Major _____ C Minor _____

NOTES: C D E F G A B C C D E^b F

BEATS: 1 & (2) & 3 & (4) & 1 & (2) & 3 (4)

_____ C Major _____

G A^b B^b C E F G C D E G A C

C Minor _____

E^b D C F E^b D G F E^b G etc.

E - IMPROVISING IN C MINOR. Spend a good chunk of time experimenting with how different notes in the minor scale feel leading back to C. Here are a few samples of how that might sound. Play them and then make up your own versions. Try to hear what the notes will sound like before you play them, so that practicing the minor scale will simultaneously be expressing something inside yourself. Big fun!

Ex.1

C D Eb F G Ab Bb C Bb Ab G C Eb D C Bb Ab G F G Ab Bb etc.

Ex.2

C D Eb F G F Eb D G C Bb Ab G F G Eb D Bb etc.

F - LICK/IMPROVISE IN C MINOR. Next, try and play the four-bar pattern below. Play the exact notes and the exact rhythm that is written for the first two bars each time they come up, and make up something of your own on the last two bars, using only C minor scale notes. Keep your place rhythmically in the last two bars so that you don't add or subtract beats from the measures. Then make up phrases of your own to keep returning to in the first two bars.

C Eb F G Eb D C

1 (2) (3) & 4

G - INTERNAL COHERENCE OF YOUR LINES. There are many factors that go into creating a logical-sounding bass line. On the following walking line in the key of C minor you will find examples of three of them: a) four-note patterns starting on different notes, b) jumping up a larger interval between beats 1 & 2 and then descending from there, and c) beat 4 leading into beat 1, and beat 2 leading into beat 3. See "Walking Bassics" at www.shermusic.com for more.

a) b)

NOTES: C Bb C D Eb D Eb F G C G F Eb Ab G D C C Bb G F Ab G Eb

c)

C F Eb D G G F D C F G Eb F Bb C Bb C Eb D G Ab G F Bb C etc.