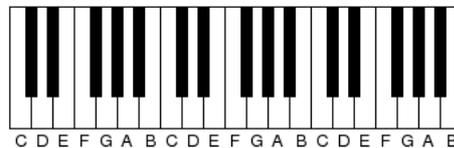


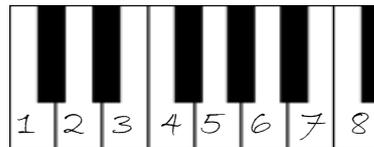
If you walk down Glenfield Avenue (where I used to live), you'll see that the houses look basically the same. When they were built in the early 1930s, I presume that except for the different types of roof, they were all the same. The architect made one plan and that was used for all the houses. That's really the same for scales in music. If we can understand how one scale is constructed, we can use that information to help us write or play another of the same type starting on a different note. The three blueprints we will be briefly investigating on this Page are for Major, Harmonic Minor and Melodic Minor scales. Once you have read this, you may want to read another Page about a fairly easy way to remember all the Major and Minor key signatures.

Constructing a scale involves measuring the difference between notes. We don't use a ruler and look at inches or centimetres though! Instead, we use terms like semitone (where two notes are next to each other) and tone (where two notes have one that separate them).

The easiest instrument to play a scale on is the piano. The easiest scale to play on the piano is *C Major*. Play a C (the white note to the left of the two black notes) and then every white note until you reach the next C. It doesn't matter if you go up to the right or down to the left. Congratulations: you've done it! Let's look at the ascending version in more detail.



The distance between the first two notes (C and D) is a tone because a note separates them. Slowly check through all eight notes and you will see that a tone exists between all the notes except for E to F and B to C. Instead of using letter names, let's use numbers:



So semitones occur between the third and fourth and the seventh and eighth notes in a major scale. Now you can start on any note and work out all eight notes of a major scale.

We can do the same with the minor scales. A *Harmonic Minor* uses the notes A, B, C, D, E, F, G[#] and A. This is because harmonic minor scales use the key signature and then sharpen the seventh note. Melodic minor scales use the key signature with the sixth and seventh notes being sharpened on the way up. Coming down, melodic minors use the key signature only. This means that for a *Melodic Minor* ascending you would play A, B, C, D, E, F[#], G[#] and A. Descending you would play A, G, F, E, D, C, B and A.

The table below shows where semitones occur when counting from the bottom note upwards. If you are taking Associated Board theory exams, it is useful to remember. Questions are often asked about where semitones occur in different scales. Note that the distance between the sixth and seventh notes in a harmonic minor scale is a tone and a half as there are two notes in between.

Major		3 → 4			7 → 8
Harmonic Minor	2 → 3		5 → 6		7 → 8
Melodic Minor Ascending	2 → 3				7 → 8
Melodic Minor Descending	2 → 3		5 → 6		

If you wish to see all the major and minor scales pictorially, click the *Playing Scales* button on this site.

Let me know if there is anything you don't understand here.