A horse fucker cheat guide to scales and basic chords

By

Anon (who else?)

Introduction

So you’re a newbie and want to learn the arcane ways of musicfagging?

Let me tell you 2 things.

First, is not as complicated and arcane as the musical circle jerk might make you think it is. If you can figure out patterns and follow easy recipes, you’re good to go with music fagging.

Second, you’ll need to experiment and practice a lot. Like any other artistic form, music takes time to master, and practice makes master. So don’t worry if at first you don’t succeed. As you keep doing so you’ll figure your own stylistic stuff out and learn from your mistakes.

I’m not an expert, and that should suffice to let you know that ANYONE can musicfag with some dedication and logic.

So keep it up, anon, and good luck! Work hard, play hard and rest hard!

Let’s get down to business.

Having got that introduction/foreword out of the way, we can get down to what you want, the cheats.

These sheets will focus on a more practical way, and those of you who are onto keyboards (pianos and such) will feel at home, because the keyboard layout is the easiest way to understand how to cheat.

As a little reminder, the piano layout has big (most often white) keys for all the tones and smaller (usually black) keys for semitones/halftones, and they are always in the same pattern:

C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B

You know the drill, anon. The **#** means sharp and the **b** means flat. If you’re not into microtonal shit, you can take the sharp of a tone equal to the flat of the next one for practical purposes. Don’t sweat it, keep it simple.

And you might have already heard about the circle of fifths and the major/minor shit… the problem with that circle is that it works for 2 modal scales mostly, but in practice we use at least 7 in western music theory. So you kinda see the problem now, right?

You probably also have heard of those “formulas” to figure out scales, but honestly, they are a pain in the ass to remember and I couldn’t bother on them. Instead, I’ll show you where did they get them.

But before that, let’s recall the 7 modal scales I mentioned before.

- Major (Ionian, if I recall it right)
- Dorian
- Phrygian
- Lydian
- Mixolydian
- Minor (Aeonian, but I could be wrong)
- Locrian

Note: Major and Minor have another name, but you’ll find them most often by their generic names, so don’t sweat it.

But now, how do we build them?

Well, This is where shit gets easy. You see, anon, in their most basic shapes, they are made from the 7 white keys. Yeah, that stupidly easy.

Major	C D E F G A B
Dorian	D E F G A B C
Phrygian	E F G A B C D
Lydian	F G A B C D E
Mixolydian	G A B C D E F
Minor	A B C D E F G
Locrian	B C D E F G A

Easy peasy one two threesie, ain't it?

But wait, so how do we get the formulas from knowing that?

Well, this is where the piano roll comes to save the day. Instead of memorizing the tone half-tone tone chant these guys do, you can aid yourself with a piano roll and count shit.

So, if we were to construct a major scale, we look at the piano roll and count each interval of whites.

C	C#/Db	D	D#/Eb	E	F	F#/Gb	G	G#/Ab	A	A#/Bb	B
R		2		2	1		2		2		2

See what I did?

The root is C, I counted to the next white 2 keys, and so on.

So the formula for all major scales is

R 2 2 1 2 2 2 R

Yeah, that easy.

So, let's say I want to build the major Scale for D. I just apply the formula with the aid of the piano roll.

C		D		E	F		G		A		B	C		D		E	F		G		A		B
		R		2		2	1		2		2		2	R									

So there we have it.

D E F# G A B C#

The same goes for the rest of the modal scales you might want to build.

Next up, I'll leave all the formulas on a single table.

Major	R 2 2 1 2 2 2 R
Dorian	R 2 1 2 2 2 1 R
Phrygian	R 1 2 2 2 1 2 R
Lydian	R 2 2 2 1 2 2 R
Mixolydian	R 2 2 1 2 2 1 R
Minor	R 2 1 2 2 1 2 R
Locrian	R 1 2 2 1 2 2 R

Check it, I might have fucked up due some time issues.

So there you have it. You can build any modal scale from there with no problem. It seems faster and easier than using the circle of fifths (at least for me)

Next up, we shall treat cheating bastard chord building (yeah, I have a shortcut to be lazy and not use the regular formulas).

Usually, to build chords we are taught formulas and they tell us modal scales have their chord formulas too. You know, the minor Major diminished mumbo jumbo. Well, what would you do if I told you there's an easier, far more faggotish way to do so without learning a shit ton of patterns?

Indeed, we have an easy way to build the chords for a given modal scale without actually having to work it out too much.

To do so, you need to make the scale and write it down first, and what comes next is just counting and filling up a table. Nothing too complex, really.

All modal scales we do will have an octave of length. I don't need to get into that. In general, we can use a single formula to build ALL chords according to our scale.

Taking the root pitch as 1, just write down 1-7 (I do so twice in a row to make it easier to count).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

From there, you can build the basic chords by adding 2 steps and then another two steps, like this:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	4	5	6	7	1	2
5	6	7	1	2	3	4

That there is the general form of the chords proper to a given modal scale, disregard what modal scale you use.

So, let's use this formula to build the "natural" chords of the scale we made earlier.

Our scale was D major, and it resulted as follows:

D E F# G B A C#

We can give a number to each pitch to make it easier to understand.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#

Following the above table, we can just substitute and we will have the chords easily.

D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#
F#	G	A	B	C#	D	E
A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G

And there we go, we got the 7 "natural" chords of our modal scale. The only "problem" we might find here is we don't explicitly have the chord quality/type/whatever there. If you write the chords down on your DAW, you'll see the quality easily, same if you use a piano roll.

C	#	D	#	E	F	#	G	#	A	#	B	C	#	D	#	E	F	#	G	#	A	#	B
	7	1		2		3	4		5		6		7	1		2		3	4		5		6

If you count the spaces in between, you'll notice most have gaps of 2 and 3 spaces. You can easily figure out the quality of a given chord by observing these gaps. We can make 3 easy rules with these observations.

1. If the gaps go 3-2, is a Major chord (M)
   i.e *D F# A*
2. If the gaps go 2-3, is a minor chord (m)
   i.e *E G B*
3. If the gaps go 2-2, is a diminished chord (°)
   i.e *C# E G*

Now, remember how we matched each pitch to a number? That's useful if you want to use the notation for chords. It helps you if you're going to use one of those minor-Major progression cheat sheets you can find or if you are going to write about your composition for someone's study.

To use the notation, you just substitute the number by its roman numeral. If it is a Major chord, you write it in capitals. If it is minor, you write it in lower case. If diminished, you write it in lower case and add a grade symbol (°).

For our example, we would do as follows:

I ii iii IV V vi vii°

Not so hard, right?

There's a whole lot about chords, though. I'll board some that are quite useful and quite common.

Inversions

An inverted chord is nothing but a chord in which you move pitches an octave up. This is useful if you want to adapt your pitch to either raise it without raising the whole chord or move the pitch down for a mood swing.

A first inversion moves the root an octave up. For instance, if we were working on the 4th octave our D major first chord, the basic form would be D4 F#4 A4. But the first inversion would be D5 F#4 A4. We can do the second inversion by moving the pitch from the middle (usually called the 3rd) an octave up too. So, our second inversion would be D5 F#5 A4. This is something you should try on your instrument or DAW to understand better.

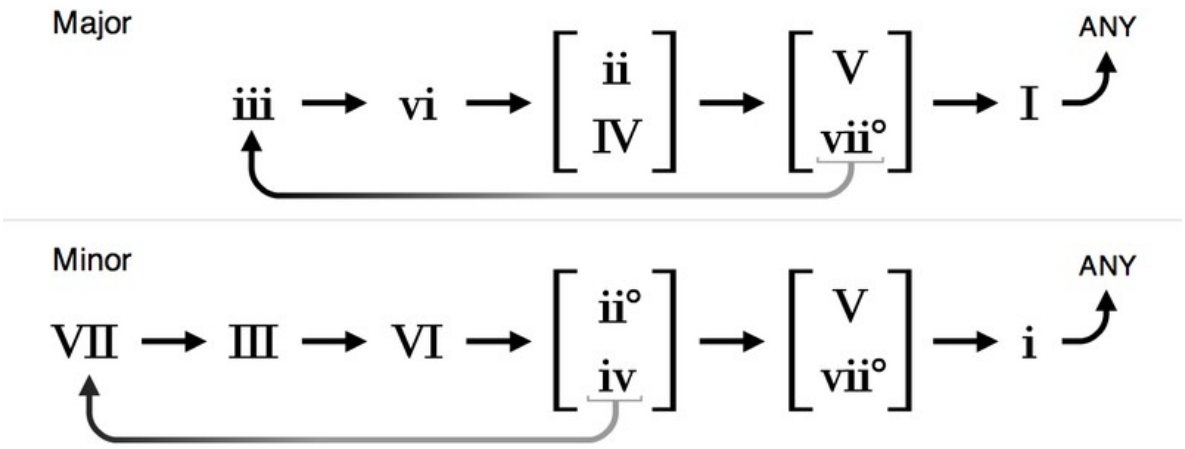
7ths, 9ths and so on!

Up to this point, we've been working with triads, but you can add one, two or more pitches if you follow the building idea we saw earlier. Given these grow in intervals of 2, we call them according to this idea. So, for instance, if we make the 7th of our D major, we would have 4 pitches in our chord and it would look like this:

D F# A C#

That there is the 7th. Not too much science. I'm not really sure if this applies all the times, so don't take it as a law or rule, but as an empiric observation. You can build 9ths by following this idea. And even longer chords. How you use them? That's up to you.

Now, I don’t know of actual cheats for progressions, but you can use this tip of mine. Usually, if you look up a cheat sheet, you’ll find 2 formulas for the entire thing. One for major and one for minor. But that leaves us with 5 scales out. So what do instead of using these fellas? I mean, is not like there aren’t other charts out there, but more often than not they are on those annoying paid courses and what not and following the same usual progressions can make for boring music.



What you can do is use pivot tones. This is pretty much moving between chords that share one or more pitches. You’ll have to listen to your progression to figure out if you like it or it sucks, but that’s part of music fagging. Be creative!

For instance, if you are on a chord that uses F# A C#, you can move to any other chord that has one or more of those pitches, opening several options that either move up or down. You could jump to D F# A, or C# E G, for instance.

I’m kinda tired of typing, so I will update regarding easy tips for melody construction later.