

Pentatonic Scales 1

1. What is a "Pentatonic Scale"?

Strictly speaking, any scale with five notes in it could be called a pentatonic scale (*penta* - five, *tonic* - notes). However, in music it is the convention that a set of

particular notes makes up the pentatonic scale. If the D major scale were to be assigned numbering, it would look like the chart below:

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

With the pentatonic scale, which is a type of *gapped scale*, the 4th and 7th notes of the scale are not used, leaving the 1st, 2nd,

3rd, 5th and 6th notes of the scale, plus the octave note (which is the same as the first note, but an *octave* higher):

D	E	F#		A	B		D
1	2	3		5	6		1

We can extend the D pentatonic scale by playing the same five notes in different

octaves, so the extended D pentatonic scale could look like this:

F#	E	D	E	F#	A	B	D	E	F#	A	B
3	2	1	2	3	5	6	1	2	3	5	6

So that's what we mean when we talk about a pentatonic scale, and the formula -

1, 2, 3, 5, 6 - works for any major scale. For example:

D major:

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

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

A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
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2. Exercises in Pentatonic Scales

Ex.1: D Pentatonic Scale Exercise

DEF#A B D E F# A F# E D B A F# E F# A B A F# A F# E D F# D

Ex.2: D Pentatonic Perpetual Motion Exercise

DEF#DEF#AE F#ABF#ABDA B D E B D E F# D E F# A E D A F# E A F# E D F# E D B E D B A D B A F# B A F# E A F# E D F# D

Ex.3: D Pentatonic Jig Exercise

DF#DF#AF# A D A B E B D F# D E A E D B A F# E F# D F# D

3. Tunes in the D Pentatonic Scale

1: The Blackberry Bush (traditional) pipe reel

F# F# E D B B A B D D A B A A F# F# E D B B A B E E F# E F# F# E D B B A B D D A B A A D E F# E D B A B D D E D F# A A F# E D E F# D E D B A A D E F# E D B A B E E F# E F# A A F# E D E F# D E D B A A D E F# E D B A B D D E D

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3. Tunes in the D Pentatonic Scale (continued)

2: The Battle of New Orleans (traditional American)

old time

Ḋ Ė F#̇ F#̇ ĠF#̇ ĖḊ Ė F#̇Ė ḊB B Ḋ Ė Ė F#̇Ė ḊB A
 Ḋ B A F#̇D D E F#̇ A A F#̇ A B A F#̇E D D E
 F#̇ A Ḋ B A F#̇ E D E F#̇D



The Battle of New Orleans

3: Donald Blue (traditional)

Shetland reel

Ḋ B A F#̇ A F#̇ A B Ḋ B A F#̇ E D
 Ḋ B A F#̇ A F#̇ A Ḋ B B A B Ė A B Ḋ Ė F#̇ Ȧ F#̇ Ḋ
 F#̇ Ȧ F#̇ Ḋ Ė Ḋ B A B Ḋ Ė F#̇ Ȧ F#̇ Ḋ B B A B Ḋ

4: Miss Graham (traditional)

reel

F#̇ D F#̇D A F#̇ A B D A F#̇ A F#̇ E F#̇ D F#̇D A F#̇ A B D A F#̇ E
 A Ḋ F#̇ Ė F#̇ Ḋ A Ḋ B Ḋ A Ḋ F#̇ Ė Ė F#̇ Ȧ Ė F#̇ Ḋ A Ḋ B D A F#̇ E
 A Ḋ F#̇ Ė F#̇ Ḋ A Ḋ B Ḋ A Ḋ F#̇ Ė Ė F#̇ Ȧ Ė F#̇ Ḋ Ė B Ḋ A F#̇ Ḋ F#̇ E