



*“Every truly cultured music student knows,
You must learn your scales and your arpeggios”
(from *The Aristocats*)*

Scales & Broken Chords

for ABRSM Grade 1 Piano Exams

A guide for students and teachers by FERGUS BLACK

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Why practise scales?

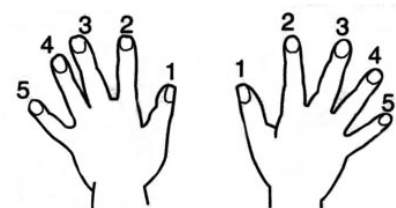
- Scales and Arpeggios are good warm ups, to get the fingers working at the start of practice. “Rattle up and down a few scales to get moving”.
- They encourage ease in rapid figurework
- They improve the strength of the 4th and 5th fingers (which are naturally weaker)
- They give the student familiarity with different keys, so they know what different keys **feel** like.
- Lastly, Scales and Arpeggios give a template, a formula, for scale and arpeggio patterns in pieces. (You don’t need to invent every fingering in every piece from scratch, because you know the fingering from your scale work.)

Three Preliminary Exercises

(1) Finger and note names

Make sure, really sure, that you know the number of each finger.

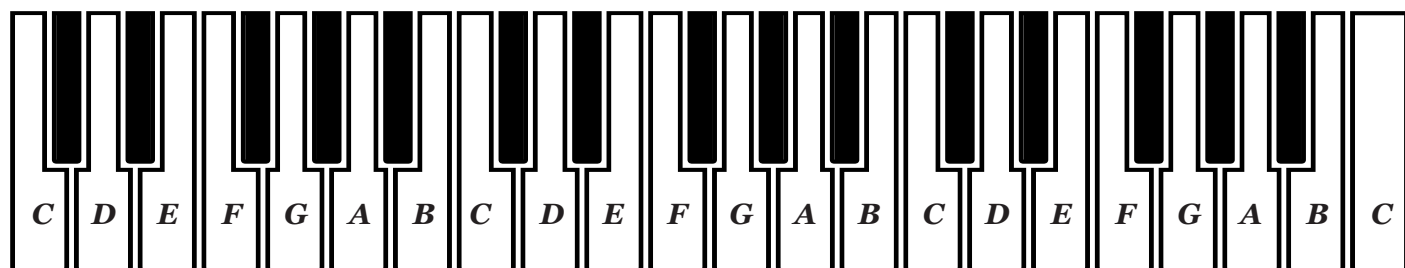
Remember that in the Left Hand, the thumb is finger #1, and the little finger is #5.



Left Hand

Right Hand

Also, check you know the name of each note on the keyboard.



And finally, while we are at it, double check that you know that the high notes are on the right, at the top of the keyboard, and the low notes are on the left. “Going Up” means that the direction of travel is from the left of the keyboard to right:

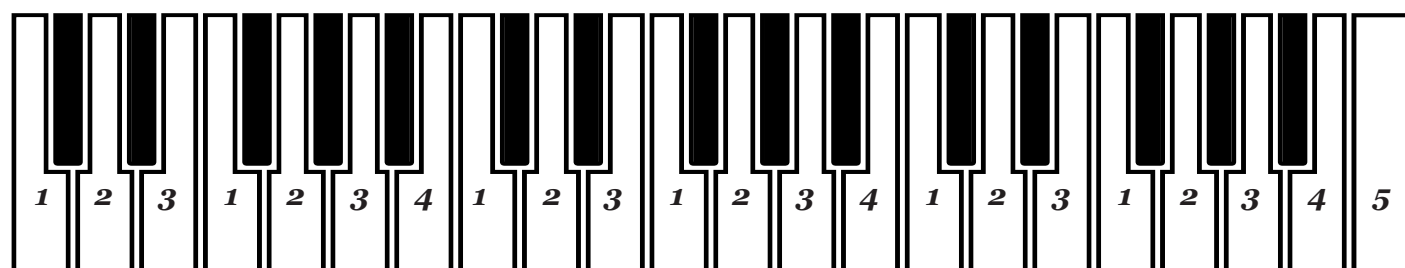


“Going Up!”

(2) $3 + 4 = 7$

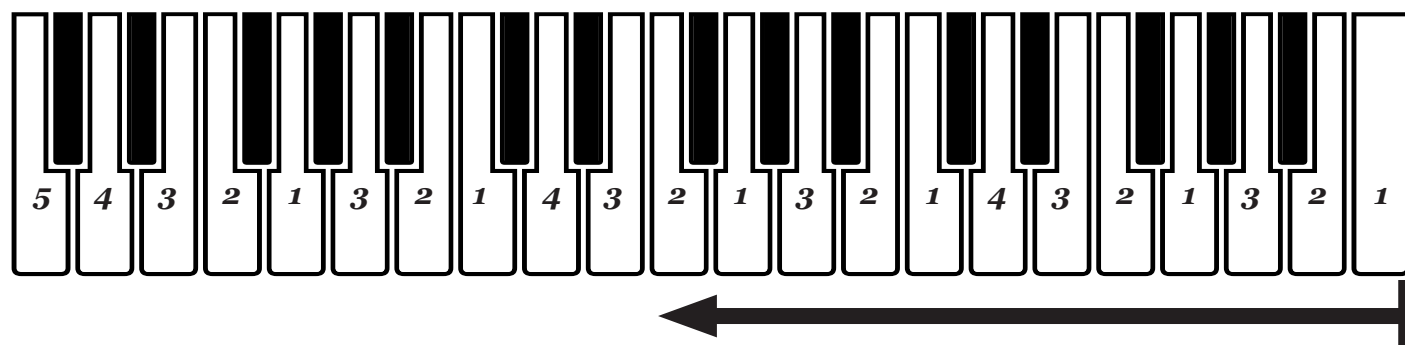
There are 7 different notes (A,B,C,D,E,F and G). To play all 7, we need a group of 3 fingers and then a group of 4. Put the 5th finger on the top note.

Right Hand



Again, try this with the left hand, coming down. Start on a high note, and remember to alternate 3 and 4 in the repeating sequence of fingers. Try it all the way up the piano, starting on any note.

Left Hand



(3) Thumbs

Imagine you are holding a small orange in your Right Hand. Now turn the hand upside down with the tips of the fingers on the piano keys - one finger over each note. Your fingers should be naturally curved like they are when they're at your sides while you walk.

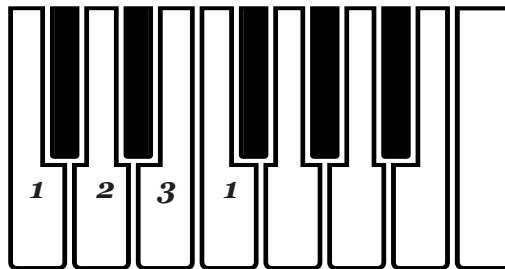
With the thumb on Middle C, start by playing only the first and fourth notes of each bar (C and F), with the second and third fingers gently touching the D and E notes. (You will note that this is not possible if your fingers are not curved: curved fingers allow the thumb to pass freely under the hand).

Now, play a mini-scale of four notes, using the thumb again for the 4th note (F), and then back down, with the thumb playing the 1st note again. Repeat. Aim to get the thumb to move in a smooth arc, with the 2nd and 3rd fingers not moving excessively (but not tensely immobile!). There is a swivel movement in the wrist, but you shouldn't need to stick your elbow out.

There should not be a jerky, last-moment lunge for the F. Instead, as soon as you have played the C, *and as you play the D and E*, move the thumb in a smooth trajectory towards the F.

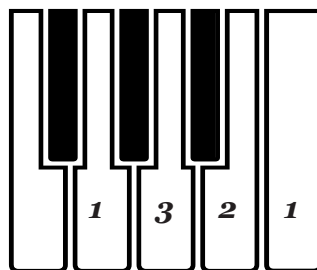
(Some people find this really difficult: their thumb moves the wrong way - as they play the D and E, the thumb moves to the left, not the right as it should. Are you one of them?)

Right Hand



Try with the Left Hand, with the thumb on middle C, but now moving first of all to the left.

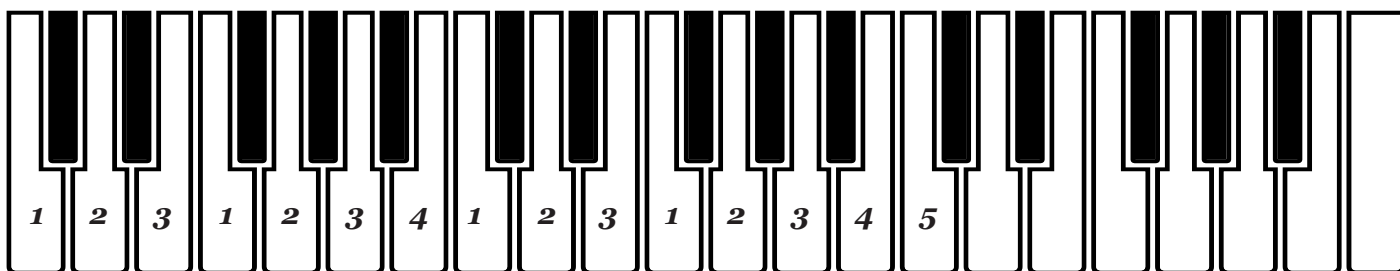
Left Hand



C major

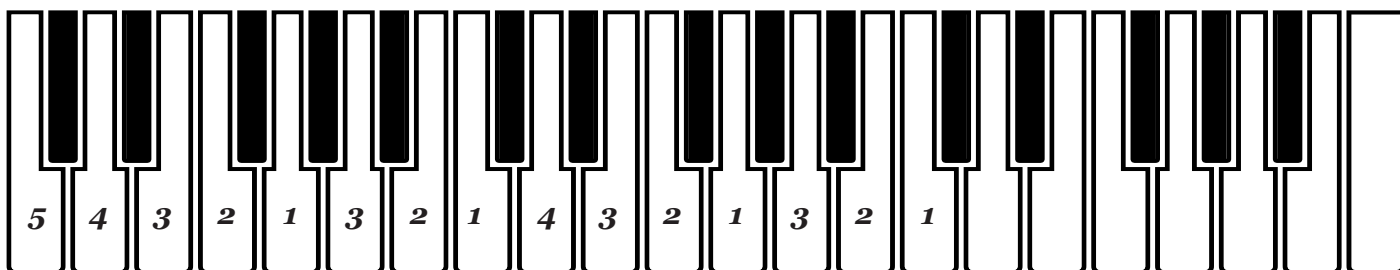
This is the best place to start: all white notes. Start with the right hand. Place the thumb on middle C, with one finger over each note. Play up two octaves, alternating 3 and 4. Put the 5th finger on the top C, and then come back down: “5,4,3,2,1” and then put the 3rd finger over the thumb.

Right Hand



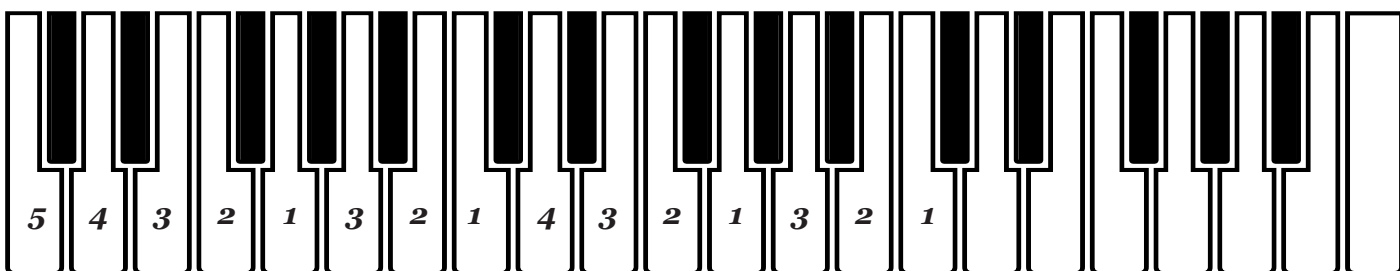
Left Hand

Try that with the left hand, playing the mirror image of what you just did with the right hand - again start with the thumb on middle C, with one finger over each note, but this time go to the left, that is down, towards the lower notes of the piano, and then back up to the right.



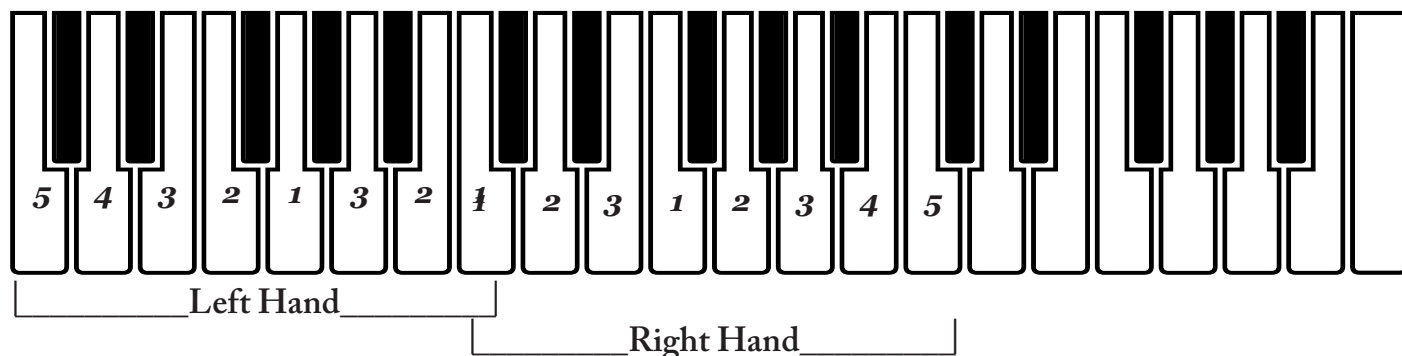
At Grade 1, you have the option to play all Left Hand scales going down and then up, that is from right to left first, but I don't recommend it. It is better to play left hand scales in the same up-then-down direction as the right hand.

So, try the Left Hand, going up then down, starting with the 5th finger on low C, and, that is moving firstly to the right and then the left. You do not need to play both hands together at the same time - not till Grade 2.



Contrary Motion

Try both hands together - moving off from both thumbs on middle C in opposite directions at the same time, just for one octave and back.



C major is easy to memorise, but do get into good habits at this early stage: practise reciting the notes of the scale going up, and going down. also, say to yourself “C major has no sharps and no flats”.

Memorise

C Major

The notes: (up) C - D - E - F - G - A - B - C (down) C - B - A - G - F - E - D - C

There are no sharps or flats

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: D

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: B

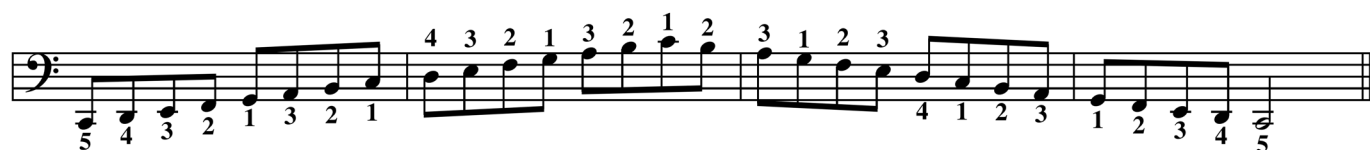
Staff Notation

These scales are written in staff notation, like this:

Right Hand



Left Hand



Contrary Motion



Style

The aim is to play *legato* (smoothly) and evenly. You might think about gliding up and down the keyboard, fluidly.

Legato for the pianist means “Join the bottoms of the notes together”. Think of the notes in groups of four:



Do a tumble turn at the top of the scale, without repeating the top note.

Use the same fingering every time – preferably the one in the book.

Other scales

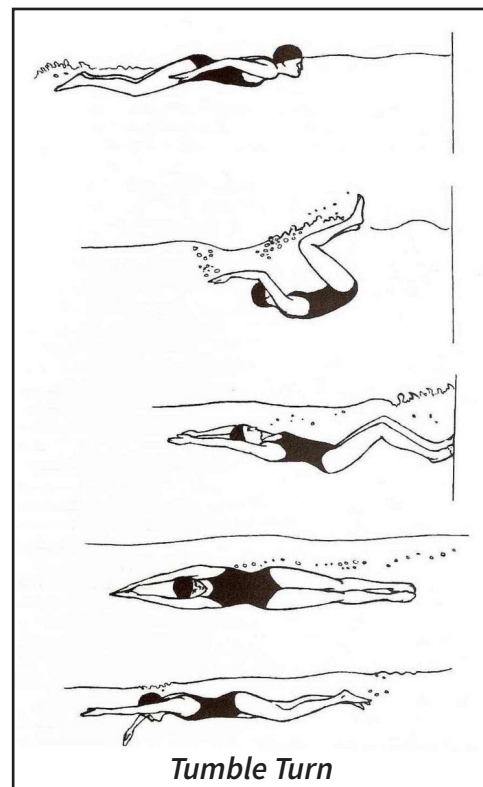
The scale of C major is a template, which can be applied to other scales, which differ only in the different combinations of black and white notes.

There are two things to remember about each scale in order to play them consistently:

- which black notes are in each scale (“book learning”)
- what the pattern of playing the scale feels like (“practical application”)

Try and remember for each scale, what note the fourth finger is playing (the seventh note of the scale in the Right Hand (except F major), and the second note in the Left Hand).

At Grade 1, don't worry about the theory of why certain scales have certain black notes: just memorise which scales have which black notes. Here is a list to help:-



MAJORS

C major has no sharps and no flats

G major has an F#

D major has an F# and a C#
(Fish and Chips)

F major has a Bb

MINORS

a minor has no sharps or flats

d minor has a Bb

You just have to remember this!

N.B. F major (with the Right Hand) is not standard fingering, so we will do it last.

G major

Follow the C major template, but start on G. Play F# instead of F.

Memorise

G Major

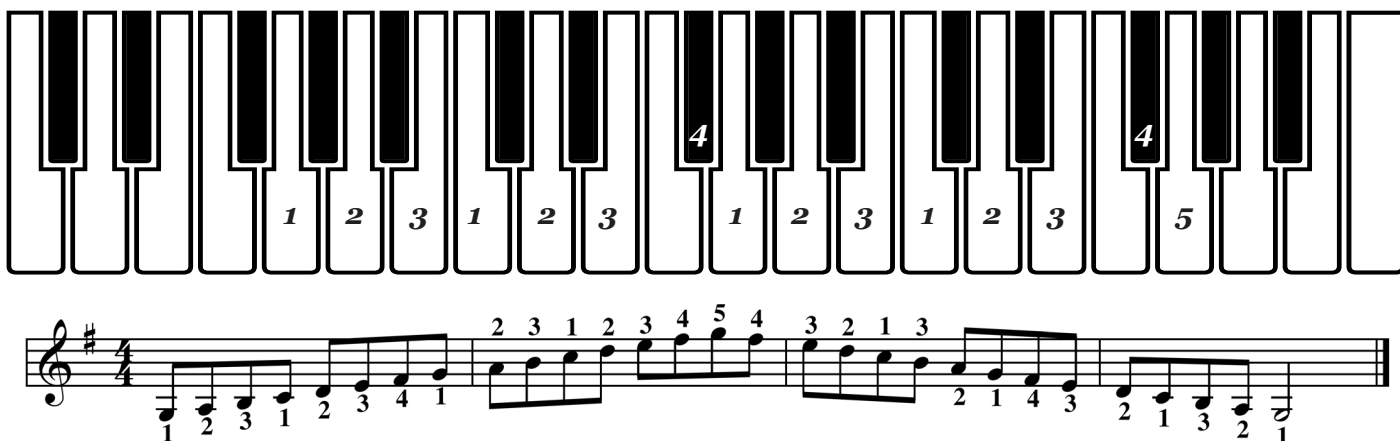
The notes: (up) G - A - B - C - D - E - F# - G (down) G - F# - E - D - C - B - A - G

The black note is F#

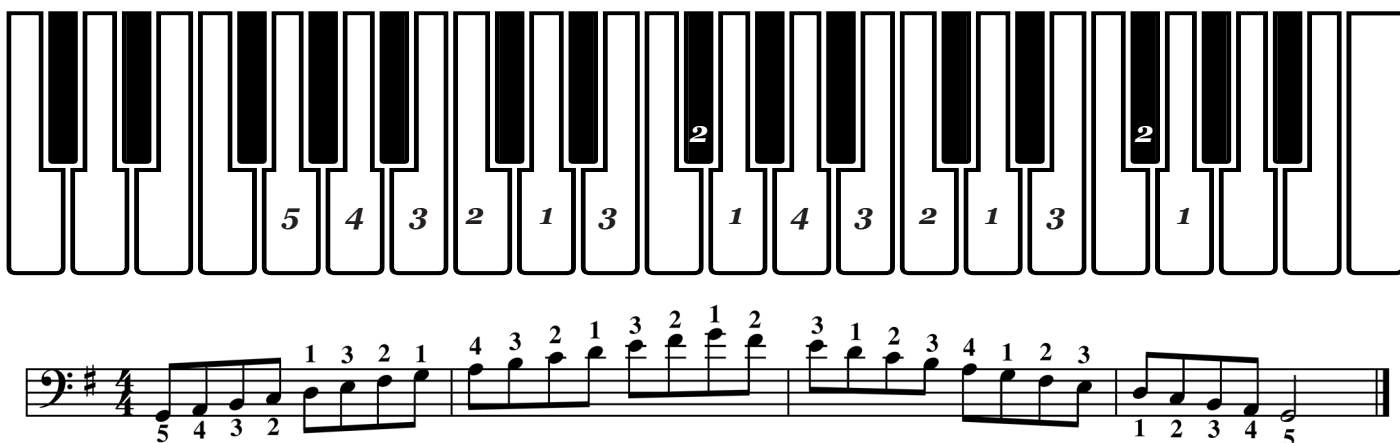
Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: A

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: F#

Right Hand



Left Hand



D major

Memorise

D Major

The notes: (up) D - E - F $\sharp$ - G - A - B - C $\sharp$ - D (down) D - C $\sharp$ - B - A - G - F $\sharp$ - E - D

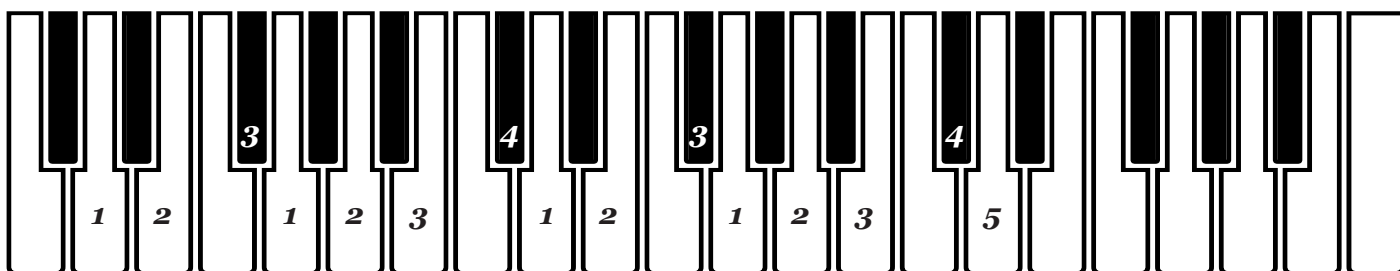
There are two sharps: F $\sharp$ and C $\sharp$

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: E

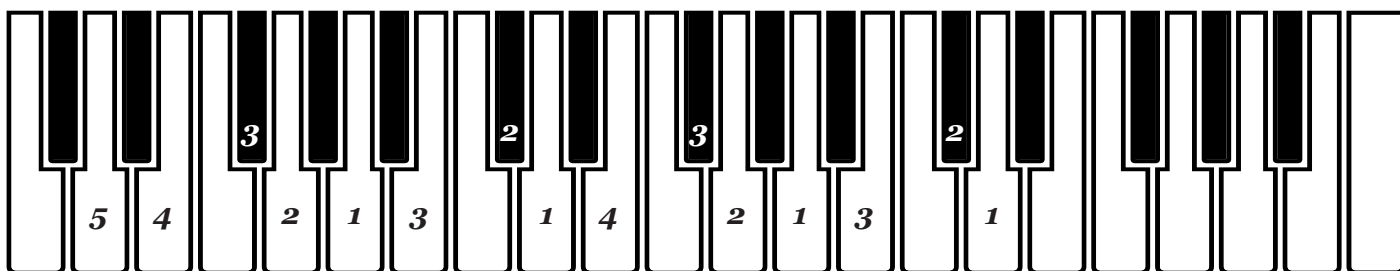
Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: C $\sharp$

Close the keyboard so you can't see the notes, and say the names of the notes - both going up and going down.

Right Hand



Left Hand



A minor

Minor scales sound different from major ones.

Memorise

A minor

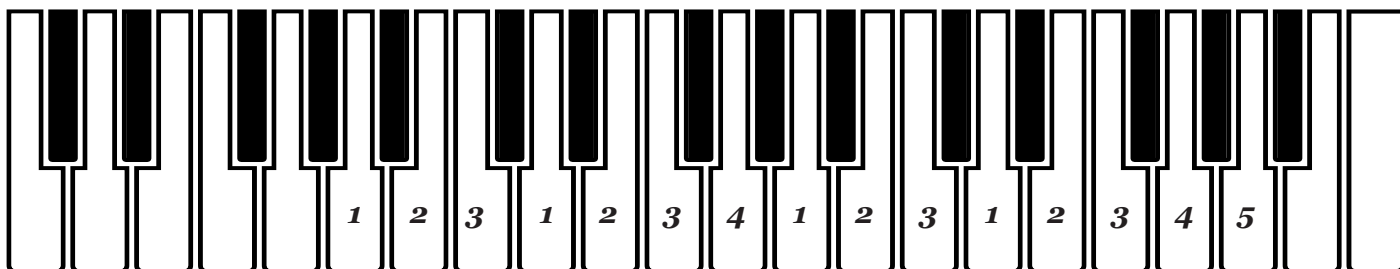
The notes: (up) A - B - C - D - E - F - G - A (down) A - G - F - E - D - C - B - A

There are no sharps or flats : A minor is related to C major

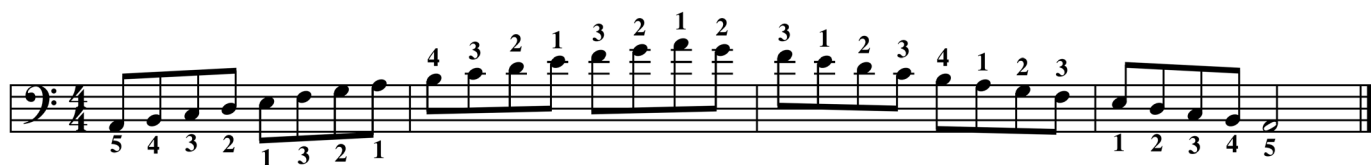
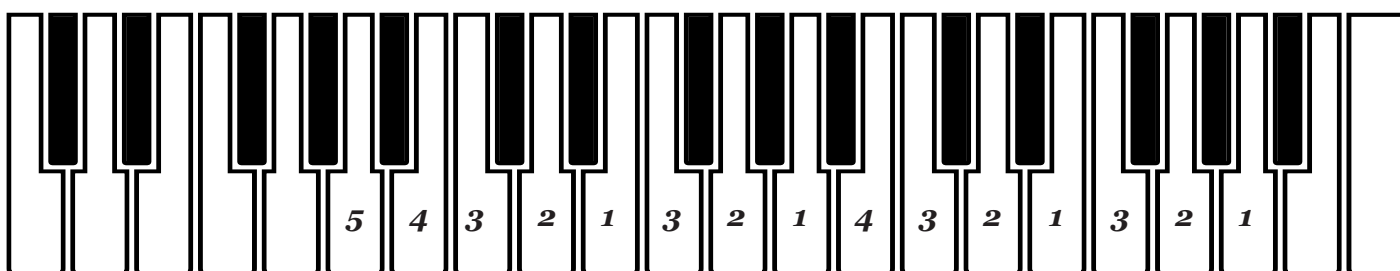
Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: E

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: C

Right Hand



Left Hand



Note to teachers

I teach the natural form of the minor scale for Grades 1 and 2. Both the harmonic minor and melodic minor forms are chromatic alterations of the natural form, and I think they should come later. Learning the natural form creates a link between the relative major and relative minor (I hope!).

D minor

Memorise

D minor

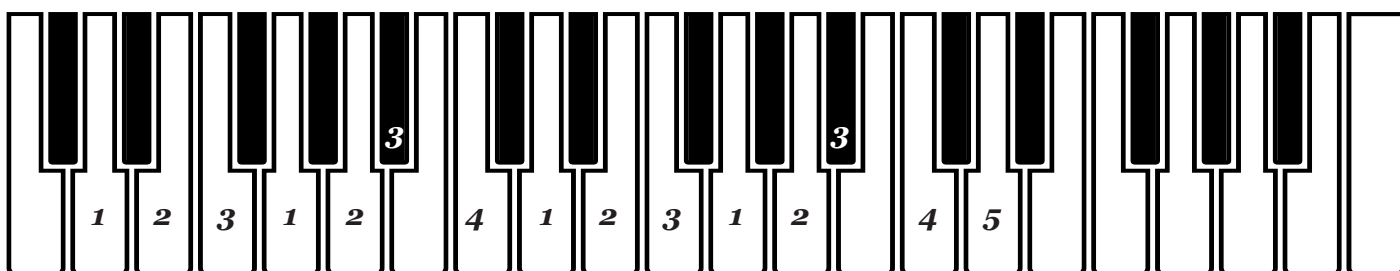
The notes: (up) D - E - F - G - A - B^b - C - D (down) D - C - B^b - A - G - F - E - D

The black note is B^b : D minor is related to F major

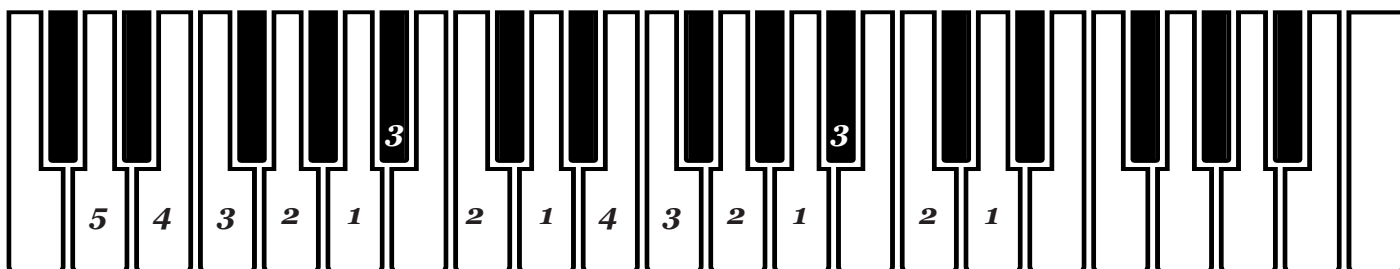
Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: E

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: C

Right Hand



Left Hand



F Major

F major is “the exception that proves the rule” – there is always one! The Left Hand is standard fingering, but the Right Hand is not.

F major is related to D minor – they both have one flat.

F Major

Memorise

The notes: (up) F - G - A - B^b - C - D - E - F (down) F - E - D - C - B^b - A - G - F

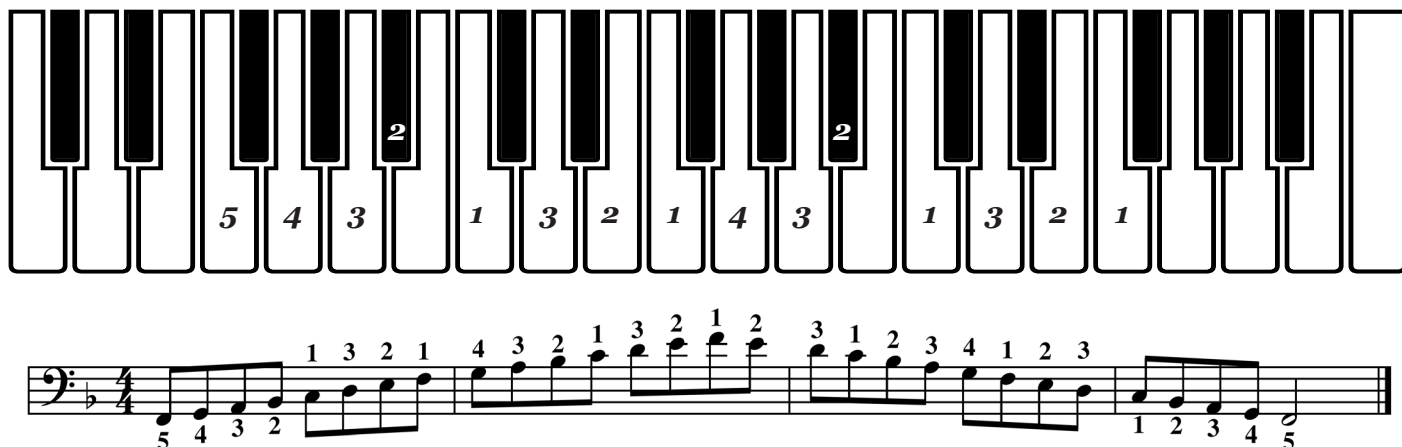
The black note is B^b

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: G

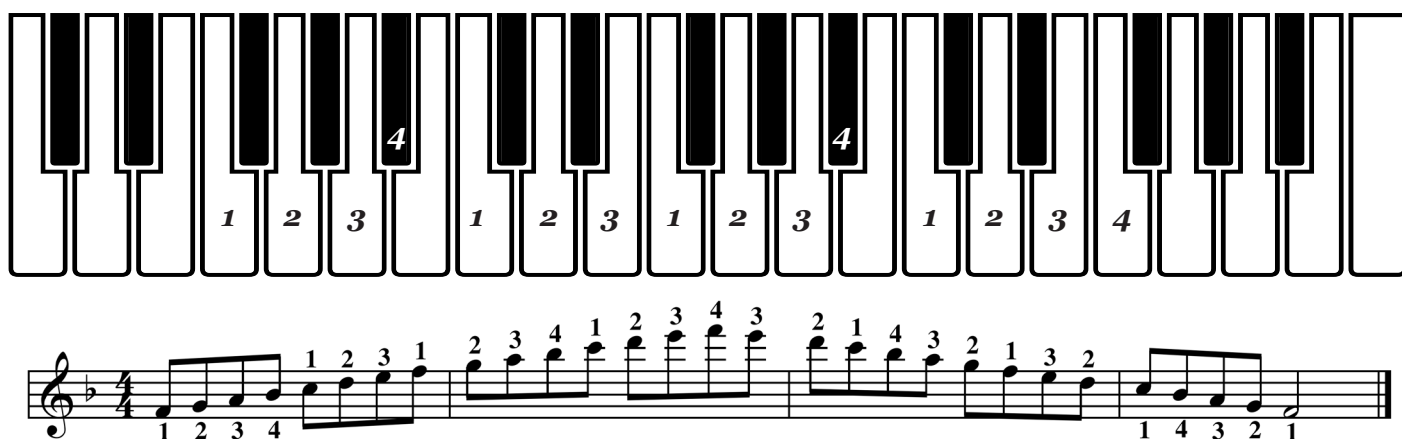
Right Hand 4th finger on 4th note: B^b, and on the top F

Left Hand

Left!



Right Hand



Note: It is possible to play the right hand of F major with the standard fingering (123 1234), and apparently Liszt taught it this way. He had his students play all scales with the same standard fingering, including the ones that start on black notes!

Broken Chords

Definitions

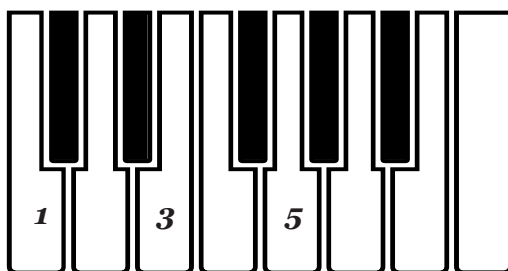
A *Scale* includes one of every letter name: A,B,C,D,E, F and G.

A *Chord* is the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the scale.

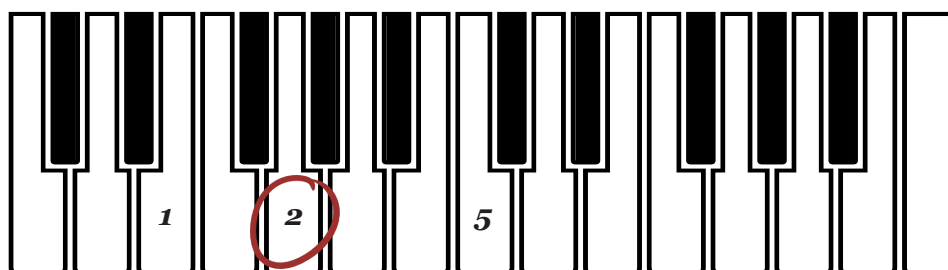
Broken means that the notes are not played together, but one after the other.

“*Broken Chord*” means a melodic pattern of the three notes of the chord, repeated in different combinations up and down the keyboard.

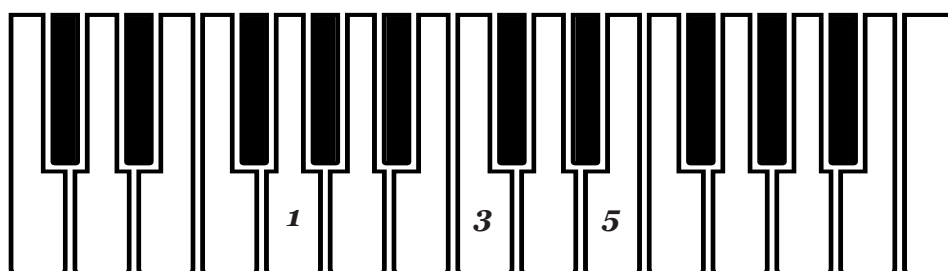
Here's how to play the first half of the Broken Chord of C major for Grade 1 exams: first of all, play the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the scale of C major with the Right Hand: C, E and G, one after the other :—



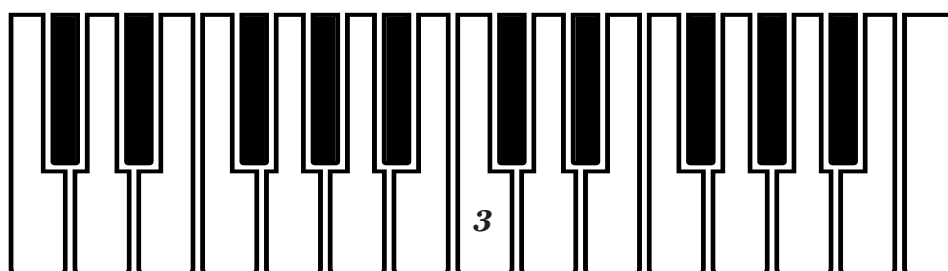
Now move the hand slightly to the right, and play the notes E, G and C (same notes, different order).
VERY IMPORTANT: use the 2nd finger to play the 2nd note, G.



Again move the hand slightly to the right, and play the notes G, C and E (same notes, different order).



Finally, finish on C with the third finger:



To get the first half of the broken chord pattern, simply play the whole sequence of ten notes evenly, equally spaced in time. Don't forget to put the second finger on the 2nd note of the 2nd group. Your hand will look a bit like a caterpillar, closing up and then opening, twice.

Second half

Simply retrace your steps, from the top E with the 5th finger, and finish the whole sequence of ten notes on the G above middle C with the 5th finger.

Whole sequence of 20 notes for a C major Broken Chord

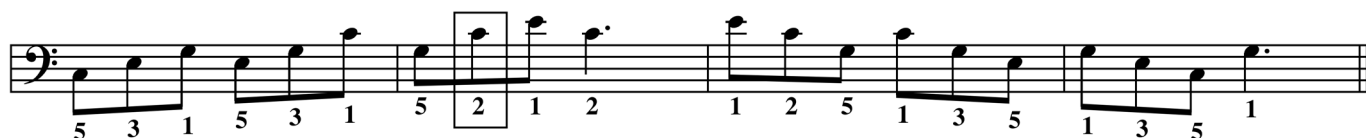
In staff notation, the whole thing looks like this:—

Right Hand



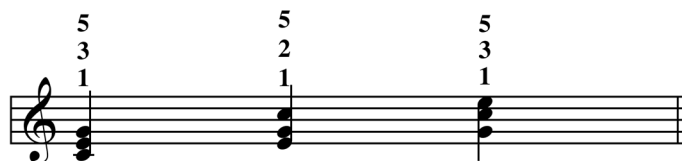
The Left Hand pattern is the same, but now the 2nd finger goes on the 2nd note of the 3rd group.

Left Hand



It is helpful to practise broken chords unbroken, that is playing all three notes of the chord together.

Right Hand:—



Left Hand:—



One you can play the broken chords in C, try them with your eyes closed.

Then you will be able to play them in any key needed at Grade 1, since all the broken chords are played only on the white notes at Grade 1.





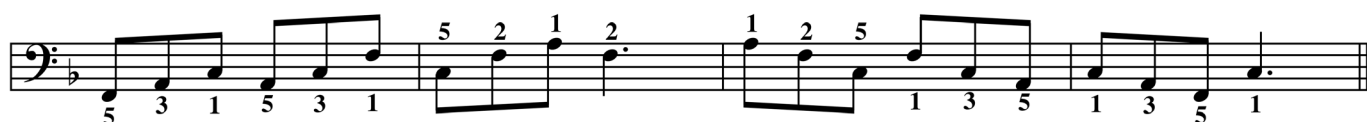
Left Hand Broken Chords

Again, take a moment before playing to remind yourself of the names of the first three notes.

G major



F major



A minor



D minor



Exam Practice Rota

The purpose of the rota is to make sure all the exam requirements get equal play time. Look! you get Sunday off.

ABRSM Grade 1 piano scales rota

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Scales: right hand (two octaves):	C major	G major	D major	F major	a minor	d minor	
	C major	G major	D major	F major	a minor	d minor	
Contrary-motion scales	C major						
Broken Chords: right hand.	C major	G major		F major	a minor	d minor	
	C major	G major		F major	a minor	d minor	

Syllabus

Scales

C, G, D, F majors hands separately
A, D minors (natural or harmonic or melodic at candidate's choice)
2 octaves
(L.H. may, at the candidate's choice, be played descending and ascending)

Contrary-motion scale

C major hands beginning on the key-note (unison)
1 octave

Broken chords

hands separately, as pattern below
C, G, F majors
A, D minors

Musical notation on a single staff showing a sequence of broken chords. It starts with a C major triad (C4, E4, G4), followed by a G major triad (G4, B4, D5), and then an F major triad (F4, A4, C5). The notes are beamed together in groups, illustrating the 'hands separately' pattern mentioned in the text.