

## SCALES

The foundational element of all musical composition is the **scale**. A scale is a specific arrangement of pitches, which ascend and descend according to a particular pattern of intervals. Most western music is based upon what is known as the **diatonic** scale, which is to say, any scale of pitches based upon the twelve notes in the chromatic scale.

The chromatic scale consists of all twelve pitches in any octave, containing only half-steps (or semitones). The diatonic scale ("at the interval of a tone") uses only the eight notes of a standard major or minor scale, without chromatic variation.

Below is a chart of some very common scales found in western music.

SCALE NAME	STEPS	EXAMPLE (C Major)
Chromatic	all half-steps	C, C#, D, D#, E, F, F#, G, G#, A, A#, B, C
Major	w w h w w w h	C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C
Minor (melodic, ascending)	w h w w w w h	C, D, Eb, F, G, A, B, C
Minor (melodic, descending)	w h w w h w w	C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb, C
Whole tone	all whole-steps	C, D, E, F#, G#, A#, C
Gypsy	w h (w+h) h h (w+h) w	C, D, Eb, F#, G, Ab, B, C
Pentatonic	w (w+h) w w (w+h)	C, D, F, G, A, C
Diminished	w h w h w h w h	C, D, Eb, F, Gb, Ab, A, B, C

The pitches in a scale are often referred to as **scale degrees**. These tones, each of which have a name and corresponding number, play an important role in harmonic analysis. Below is a chart of the names of the scale degrees.

SCALE DEGREE	NAME OF DEGREE	EXAMPLE (C Major)
I	tonic	C
II	supertonic	D
III	mediant	E
IV	subdominant	F
V	dominant	G
VI	Submediant or superdominant	A
VII	Subtonic or leading tone	B

The most common diatonic scales are variations of major or minor scales. The major scale is comprised of the arrangement of intervals as described above. The pure minor scale (described here as the descending melodic minor scale) differs from the major scale by three notes: in C major, E, A, and B. Or in terms of scale degrees, the 3, 6, and 7. The 3rd scale degree of any scale holds the greatest importance in distinguishing major harmony from minor harmony.