

Pentatonic Blocks (Skips & Steps)

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The Pentatonic scale is essential in the sound of modern improvisation. Often times the scale is not used in a melodic manner. Many improvisors just run up and down the scale. This system will help break the concept.

There are a variety of pentatonic scales. This concept will deal with the Minor Pentatonic Scale. (see example below for the construction of the scale)

This is the D Minor Pentatonic Scale. The construction is: 1, $\flat 3$, 4, 5, $\flat 7$

Dmi⁷

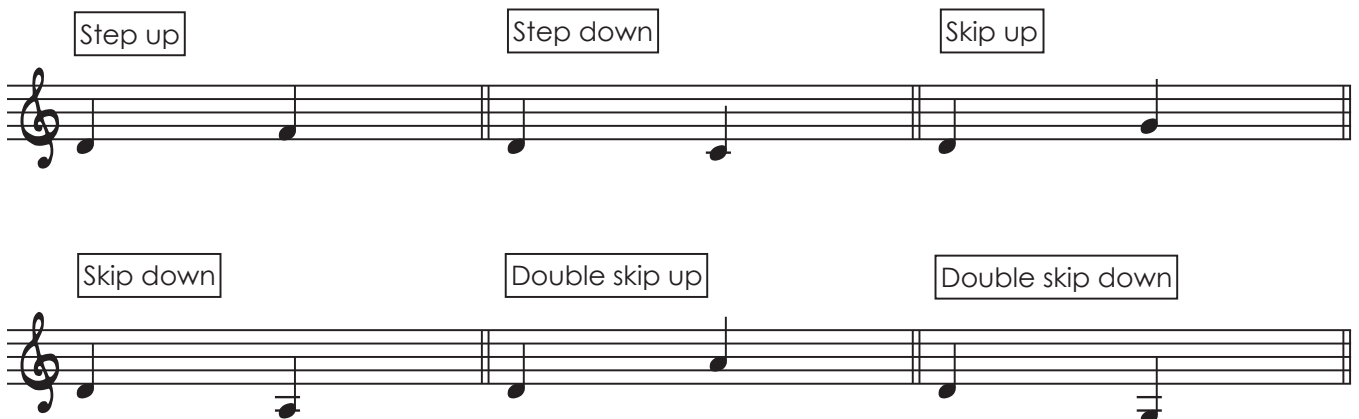


In this exercise for creating melodies, we will use a system of **Steps & Skips**. Using the minor pentatonic scale, we can build a series of interesting melodies.

Here are 6 formulas for creating melodies

- #1 **Step** ↑ (move up to the next note in the scale)
- #2 **Step** ↓ (move down to the next note in the scale)
- #3 **Skip** ↑ (skip one note up to the next note in the scale)
- #4 **Skip** ↓ (skip one note down to the next note in the scale)
- #5 **Double Skip** ↑ (skip two notes up to the next note in the scale)
- #6 **Double Skip** ↓ (skip two notes down to the next note in the scale)

Here are some examples of **Steps & Skips** in the minor pentatonic scale. The examples below will show all 6 formulas from the root of the chord



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The key now is to use these formula's to develop melodies. The best way to start using this is to sequence the formula from every degree of the minor pentatonic scale (the pentatonic scale modes).

The example below with use formula #3 (**Skip ↑**) from every degree of the scale.

Dmi⁷



We can now develop melodies by using our 6 formulas. Start simple by picking 2 formulas to create a melody (see example below)

This example will combine formula #3 (**Skip ↑**) and formula #1 (**Step ↑**)

Dmi⁷



The formula above built from every degree of the scale (look at the downbeat of each bar, those notes are the ascending pentatonic scale)

Dmi⁷



Here is another

This will use formula #3 (**Skip ↑**) twice

Dmi⁷



Now from every degree of the scale



PENTATONIC BLOCKS (SKIPS & STEPS)

Create some melodies that combine 3 of the formulas.

The example below uses:

formula #1 (**Step** ↑), formula #4 (**Skip** ↓), formula #1 (**Step** ↑)

Dmi⁷



A musical staff in treble clef showing an ascending pentatonic scale in D minor: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4. The notes are grouped into three boxes with labels: 'Step up' (D-E), 'Skip down' (E-F), and 'Step up' (F-G).

Now from every degree of the scale (look at the downbeat of each bar, those notes are the ascending pentatonic scale)

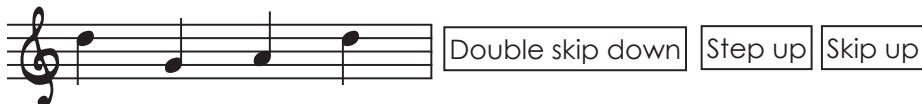


A musical staff in treble clef showing the ascending pentatonic scale starting from every degree of the scale. The notes are: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4; E4, F4, G4, A4, B4; F4, G4, A4, B4, C5; G4, A4, B4, C5, D5; A4, B4, C5, D5, E5. The notes are grouped into four boxes, each starting on a downbeat.

Here is another

This one uses formula #6 (**Double Skip** ↓), formula #1 (**Step** ↑), formula #3 (**Skip** ↑)

Dmi⁷



A musical staff in treble clef showing a descending pentatonic scale in D minor: D4, C4, B3, A3, G3. The notes are grouped into three boxes with labels: 'Double skip down' (D-C), 'Step up' (C-B), and 'Skip up' (B-A).

Here it is from every degree of the scale. This time we will move the shape down the notes of the pentatonic scale (look at the downbeat of each bar, those notes are the descending pentatonic scale)



A musical staff in treble clef showing the descending pentatonic scale starting from every degree of the scale. The notes are: D4, C4, B3, A3, G3; C4, B3, A3, G3, F3; B3, A3, G3, F3, E3; A3, G3, F3, E3, D3; G3, F3, E3, D3, C3. The notes are grouped into four boxes, each starting on a downbeat.

The next series of pages will be melodies created by formula's and all worked out through the pentatonic modes. Each melody will be numbered with (a,b,c,d,e) labels to break up the modes. This will be important later when we start combining melodies to create lines and sequences.