

Tutorial 1A: Virtual Practice



Welcome! Here's what you will learn in this tutorial:

1. How to use Virtual Practice
2. How to use Flexible Scales
3. SHAPE
(See, Hear, And Play Expressively)
4. How to name, hear, and play intervals

Enjoy the learning ~ see you at the hilltop!

Other Level 1 Tutorials

- 1B: Building Chords & Scales
- 1C: Melodic Color
- 1D: Rhythmic Variety
- 1E: Flexible Scale Levels
- 1F: Using Expression
- 1G: Develop Motifs/Phrases
- 1J: Chords, Keys, Progressions

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- Virtual Practice and Flexible Scales form a practice foundation that will help you progress faster and more reliably in your improvisation. SHAPE helps you see what to play in solos. Together, these tools will get you off to a great start!

Part 1 ~ How to Use Virtual Practice



A) What is Virtual Practice?

*It's practicing improvisation effectively, but without your instrument.

B) Why should I use the Virtual Practice Method (VPM)?

↓ *You can learn improvisation scales and chords almost anywhere you go, without "instrument fatigue."

*It helps you see what you are practicing!

*You can practice each scale and chord in many different ways, so they come alive with improvisation possibilities.

C) How does it work?

*Hum (or whistle or sing) each note you hear while moving your fingers or hands just as though you were playing the notes on your instrument.

*Trumpeters can wiggle three fingers onto the thumb for fingerings; saxophonists can move fingers on a pencil for fingerings; trombonists can move the wrist to each slide position; guitarists or bassists can finger imaginary frets; vocalists can picture notes on a staff;

and pianists can touch imaginary keys.

*The important thing is to *accurately hum each note as you finger it cleanly*. ~ Unless you do this, your efforts won't get the results you need. If you have trouble humming a note, match pitches with an instrument. Vocalists can also use the piano-touch approach. ~

D) What are the steps?

1 Choose a scale or arpeggio, such as a C Major scale.

2 Choose a comfortable tempo for eighth-notes.

3 Hum any medium-low starting pitch and think of it as the starting note, such as C.

4 Hum each new pitch in the scale, going up to the octave and back down to the starting pitch. As you hum each pitch, "finger" the notes for your instrument (without your instrument, of course). Keep the tempo steady.

▶ **TRY IT – Basic:** Hum and finger eighth-notes for the C Major scale, MM = 120. Go up and down the scale, ending on a quarter-note each time. Medium Challenge

E) How do I use Virtual Practice with a routine?

*In the circle of 4ths (C F Bb Eb Ab Db F# B E A D G C), hum and finger the C scale. After returning to the root (first note), insert 2 scale notes to find the root of the next scale.

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*For example:

- C D E F G A B C B A G F E D C (... D E ...)

- F G A B \flat C D E F E D C B \flat A G F (... G A ...)

- B \flat C D E \flat F ... etc.

- **TRY IT - Basic:** Hum & finger eighth-notes for all 12 Major scales, circle of 4ths, at 120. Med. Challenge

Part 2 – How to Use Flexible Scales

A) What are Flexible Scales? **avoid octavitis** **

↓ *They are “normal” scales that go up and down randomly, changing directions whenever *you* want to.

*They can start on *any* note in the scale.

*They can use other rhythms besides eighth-notes.

*You can practice flexible scales virtually or on your instrument.

B) Why should I use them?

*Flexible scales help you create your own ideas for improvisation melodies.

*Whenever you play a flexible scale, you are *actually improvising!*

*You can create *many* useful versions of flexible scales; they’re “food for thought” for your solos and they help you visualize what you play in solos.

C) How do I get started?

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To use flexible major scales in your virtual practice,

1 Choose a starting pitch, such as a C.

2 Go up and down only a *few* notes at a time, instead of the whole scale, humming and fingering. Make the up-and-down movement somewhat random and play the scale pattern as long as you want. For example:



or



Important: As you practice flexible scales, visualize the shape of your scale as you go, so you’ll be accurate.

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▶ **TRY IT** – Basic: Hum/finger each flexible major scale in the circle of 4ths. Play each note in the scale at least once; pause before each new key. Medium

D) How do I absorb flexible scales in all keys?

*Some keys are harder to master than others. You can “live” in a key by practicing and playing flexible scales in that key so much it feels like home. Try a whole day of practice in each difficult key.



Part 3 – SHAPE

A) What is SHAPE?

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*SHAPE is “See, Hear, And Play Expressively.” This means you *see* the shape of the flexible scale, then *hear* how it sounds, then *play* what you see and hear. You don’t usually see a long ways ahead of where you are – just enough to set you in the right direction.

*The vision part of your brain will see where to go next, and the computer part of your brain will turn that vision into notes. That’s a terrific and satisfying experience! As you practice this skill over time, your

vision-brain and computer-brain will cooperate ever faster and more accurately.

B) How does SHAPE help me improvise better?

*When you “see” a musical shape before you play it, it’s easier to hear it correctly; you can sense (see) the right notes to attack.

*When you hear a note in your mind, it’s a lot easier to play it accurately.

*The more you use SHAPE, the better your ideas will flow; the better you’ll play melodies you see and hear.

C) What is PHASE, and why is it bad? 

*SHAPE backwards is PHASE – “Play, Hear, And See Errors.” Many improvisers are trapped by PHASE – they play something, hear it after they play it, then see (focus on) their errors. *Always use SHAPE in your solos* to help your creativity soar and expand. In time, you’ll *see it, hear it, and play it*.

D) How do I use SHAPE with flexible scales?

*See the shape (contour) of each flexible scale in your mind as it unfolds to you

*Use longer ascending or descending lines, such as nearly an octave or more than an octave.

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*Stay in the lower or higher range for a longer time.

*Occasionally stay within a 3-note or 4-note range.

- ▶ **TRY IT – Basic:** Hum and finger each flexible major scale in the circle of 4ths. Use the suggestions in *Question D* above. Medium

Part 4 – Hearing and Playing Intervals

- A) Why should I study intervals? **path now!**
- ↓ *It's the key to getting you the freedom you need to improvise better and build effective melodies.

B) What are the interval types?

Minor second	m2	1 half-step
Major second	M2	1 whole-step
Minor third	m3	1 whole-step + half-step
Major third	M3	2 whole-steps
Perfect fourth	P4	2 whole-steps + half-step
Augmented 4th	A4	3 whole-steps
Perfect fifth	P5	2 whole-steps+ half+ whole
Minor sixth	m6	Perfect fifth plus + half-step
Major sixth	M6	Perfect fifth plus + whole-step
Minor seventh	m7	Octave minus 1 whole-step
Major seventh	M7	Octave minus 1 half-step

Major-key intervals:

M2 M3 P4 P5 M6 M7

M2 m3 P4 P5 M6 m7



Minor-key intervals:

M2 m3 P4 P5 M6 m7

m2 m3 P4 P5 m6 m7



- ▶ **TRY IT - Basic:** Around the circle of 4ths, quickly name the pitch that's a minor 3rd above the root of each key. Repeat with major thirds. Medium: Name the 4ths, augmented 4ths, and fifths above each root. Challenge: Name the minor 6ths, major 6ths, minor 7ths, and major 7ths.
- ▶ **TRY IT – Repeat the Try It you just did, but step between the intervals using whole-steps and half-steps.**

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(Part 4 – Intervals)

C) How do I remember intervals? (reverse -identify)

- ▼ For each interval, hear the *starting interval* from a familiar song, as in the examples below:

P4 — The Eensy, Weensy Spider

A4 — Maria (West Side Story)

P5 — Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

m6 — Black Orpheus

M6 — My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean

m7 — Star Trek, original theme

M7 — Christmas Song (notes 1 & 3)

D) How do I handle wide intervals (4ths, 5ths, 6ths)?

1 Hear and sing *each scale tone in between* the lower and upper note of the interval. For example, to sing a major 6th from C to A, sing “C D E F G A.”

2 To hear 7ths or 9ths, sing an octave and then a step down or up. Use the key signature of the key you are in.

*Stepping between intervals takes the guesswork out of wider intervals. It assumes you can accurately hear whole-steps and half-steps in scales.

E) How do I build my interval skills?



1 Play a pitch on your instrument and sing it exactly.

2 Using that pitch, sing up or down by the smallest interval that challenges you (half-step, whole-step, minor third, etc.) You can test the interval on your instrument. If you need help locking in a wider interval, refer to *Stepping Between Intervals* above.

3 Repeat steps 1 and 2 for other pitches, using the same interval, until the interval is comfortable.

4 Repeat steps 1 through 3 for the next wider intervals, until you finish sevenths.

- **TRY IT – Basic:** Around the circle of 4ths, sing up or down a minor 3rd from each root, then return to each root. Repeat with major 3rds. **Medium:** Use 5ths; then aug. 4ths. **Challenge:** Use minor 6ths; then major 6ths.

That’s all for Tutorial 1A!

Next is the Quiz – it’s open book, so don’t be nervous.

To get started, go to the next page.

QUIZ ~ 1A: Virtual Practice

Click on the letter for the best answer for each question. You'll hear a C Major arpeggio if you're right. If you miss 2 or less, you pass the Tutorial!

Or, click **Back**  to review the Tutorial before taking the Quiz.

- 1) What is one of the elements of PHASE?
A) exercises B) errors C) enjoy D) emotion
- 2) The fourth note in the C Circle of Fourths is:
A) C B) Bb C) Ab D) Eb
- 3) A flexible scale:
A) goes up and down as you want B) always starts on the root of the key C) is not related to virtual practice D) uses only 8th-notes
- 4) What's one advantage of virtual practice?
A) it takes less time than practicing an instrument B) it requires almost no effort C) you can do it almost anywhere D) it doesn't require ear-training skills
- 5) What is one of the elements of SHAPE?
A) performance B) exercises C) hear D) habits
- 6) What note is a perfect fifth up from D?
A) F# B) G C) B D) A
- 7) What's a good way to learn wide intervals better?
A) step through the intervals B) play them on your instrument first C) trial and error D) all of these
- 8) What is virtual practice?
A) practicing without concentration B) practicing without your instrument C) using your instrument but not playing it D) learning chord and scale theory



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