

Scale Degrees

In popular music, instead of using the letter names of the notes in a scale, musicians often use numbers. Each note of the scale is given a number, referring to its scale degree, starting with the tonic as '1'. For example, in the C major scale the notes are numbered as follows:

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

So, rather than talking about the G note in the scale of C major, popular musicians may refer to it as the 5th degree of the scale, or simply 'the 5th'.

As pentatonic scales are basically major or natural minor scales with some notes omitted, they do not have as many scale degrees as the full major or minor scales. This is illustrated in the tables below.

Scale/ Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
C Major	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
C Major Pentatonic	C	D	E		G	A		C

Notice how the 4th and 7th degrees of the major scale are omitted in the pentatonic major scales.

Scale/ Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
A Natural Minor	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
A Minor Pentatonic	A		C	D	E		G	A

Notice how the 2nd and 6th degrees of the natural minor scale are omitted in the minor pentatonic scales.

Exercise:

1. What is the 5th of G Major?
2. What is the 3rd of Ab Minor Pentatonic?
3. What is the 7th of D Natural Minor?
4. What is the 2nd of F Major Pentatonic?
5. What is the 6th of Eb Major Pentatonic?

Answers

1. D
2. C
3. C
4. G
5. C