THE ALPHABET METHOD

19 scales from A. Note names, guitar tab and piano.

WHY I START WITH A

C major is a common starting point. The white keys make the major pattern easy to see, though starting there can make C feel like the default.
I start with A, the first letter of the musical alphabet. A major brings in three sharps straight away, so there’s more to learn up front. On guitar, A also gives us an open root and lets us use the open D and G strings when they fit.

HOW TO READ EACH SCALE

Read the note letters and guitar tab from left to right. 0 means an open string.
Play the highlighted piano keys left to right. Orange marks A at both ends.
In the formulas, ♭ lowers a note by a semitone and ♯ raises it by a semitone.
H means half step (one semitone). W means whole step (two semitones).

TAKE THE PATTERN TO ANOTHER KEY

Move the pattern one semitone at a time. On guitar, use a capo to keep the open-string fingering, or fret the notes that were open in A. On piano, keep the same gaps between notes as you move the starting note.

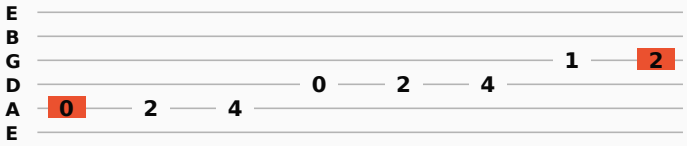
Guitar tabs use standard tuning. Each example spans one octave.

SCALES FROM A

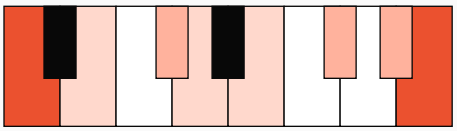
A Major

A B C♯ D E F♯ G♯ A — 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



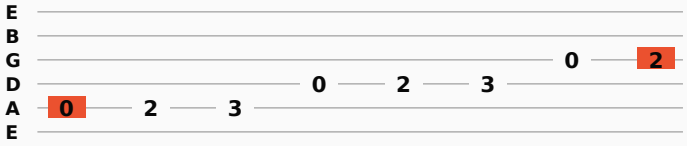
PIANO / ONE OCTAVE



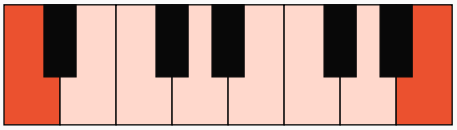
A Natural minor

A B C D E F G A — 1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



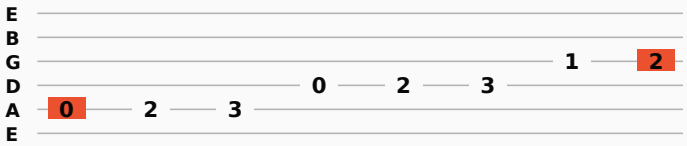
PIANO / ONE OCTAVE



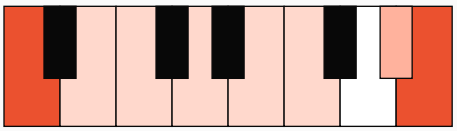
A Harmonic minor

A B C D E F G♯ A — 1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



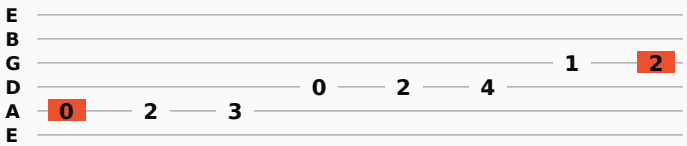
PIANO / ONE OCTAVE



A Melodic minor

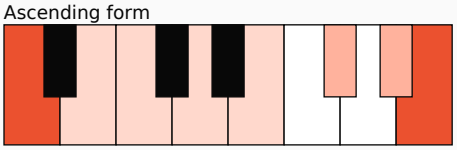
A B C D E F♯ G♯ A — 1 2 ♭3 4 5 6 7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

Ascending form



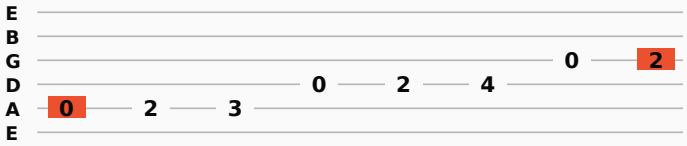
SCALES FROM A

A Dorian

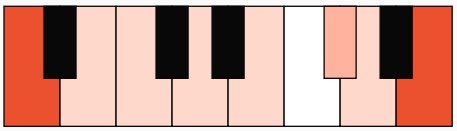
A B C D E F♯ G A

1 2 ♭3 4 5 6 ♭7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

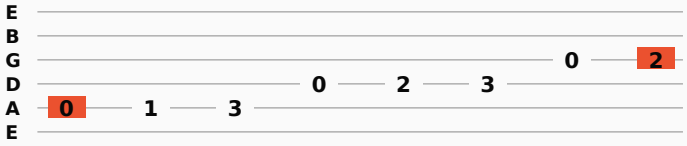


A Phrygian

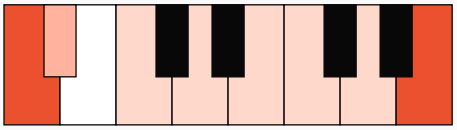
A B♭ C D E F G A

1 ♭2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

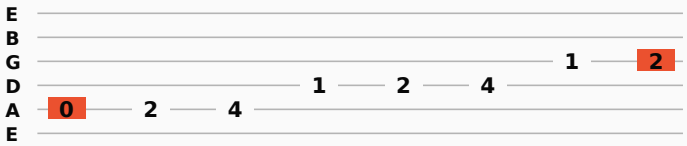


A Lydian

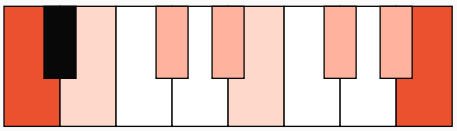
A B C♯ D♯ E F♯ G♯ A

1 2 3 ♯4 5 6 7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

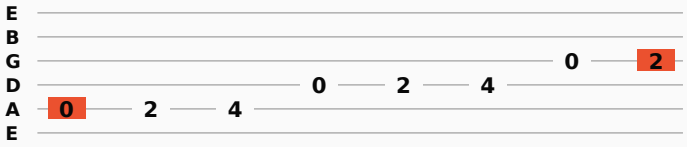


A Mixolydian

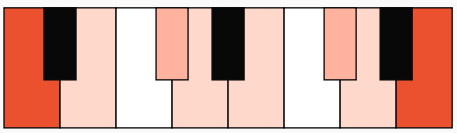
A B C♯ D E F♯ G A

1 2 3 4 5 6 ♭7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE



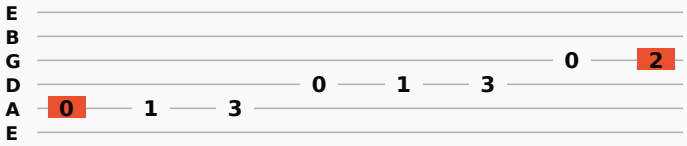
SCALES FROM A

A Locrian

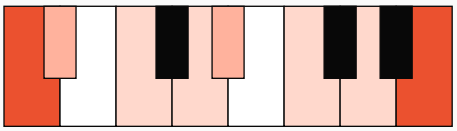
A B♭ C D E♭ F G A

1 ♭2 ♭3 4 ♭5 ♭6 ♭7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

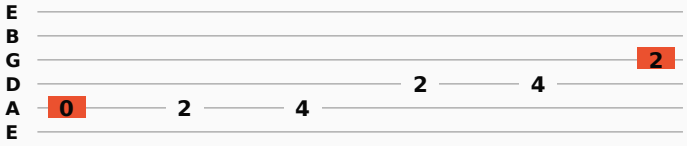


A Major pentatonic

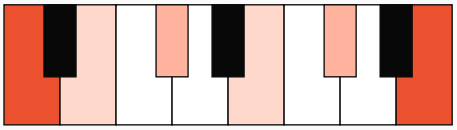
A B C♯ E F♯ A

1 2 3 5 6

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

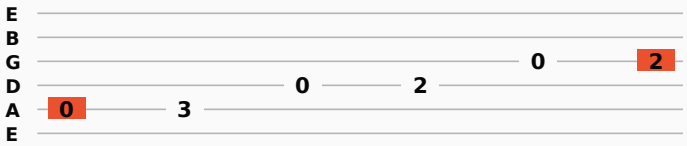


A Minor pentatonic

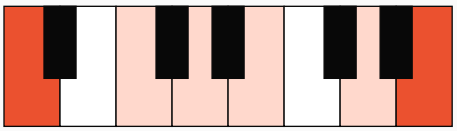
A C D E G A

1 ♭3 4 5 ♭7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

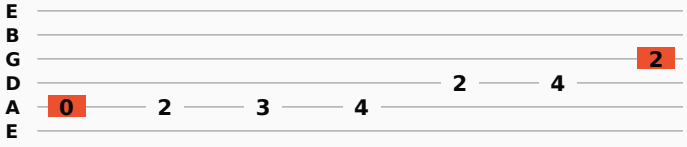


A Major blues

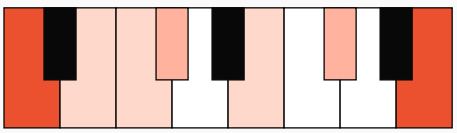
A B C C♯ E F♯ A

1 2 ♭3 3 5 6

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE



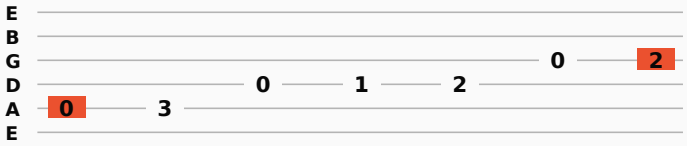
SCALES FROM A

A Minor blues

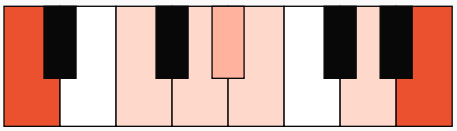
A C D E♭ E G A

1 ♭3 4 ♭5 5 ♭7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

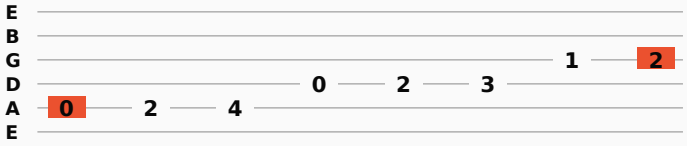


A Harmonic major

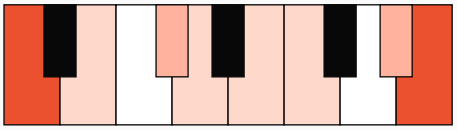
A B C♯ D E F G♯ A

1 2 3 4 5 ♭6 7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

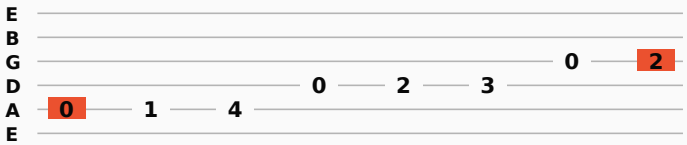


A Phrygian dominant

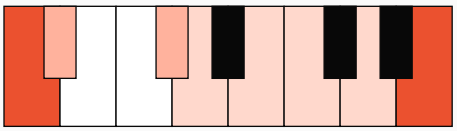
A B♭ C♯ D E F G A

1 ♭2 3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

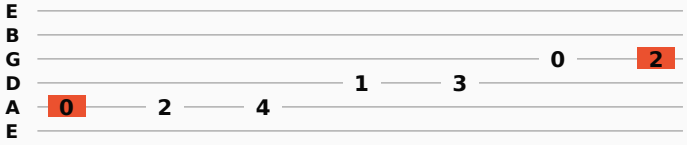


A Whole tone

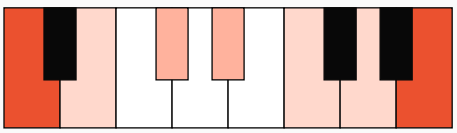
A B C♯ D♯ F G A

W W W W W W

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE



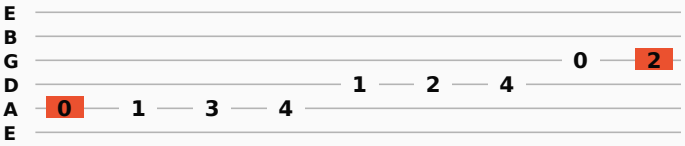
SCALES FROM A

A Diminished · half–whole

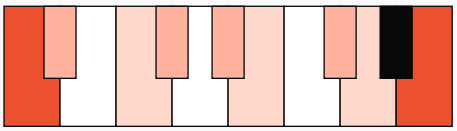
A A♯ C C♯ D♯ E F♯ G A

H W H W H W H W

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

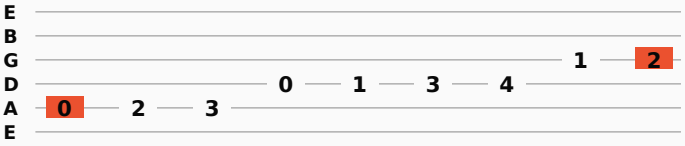


A Diminished · whole–half

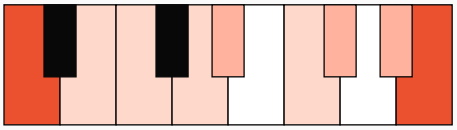
A B C D D♯ F F♯ G♯ A

W H W H W H W H

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

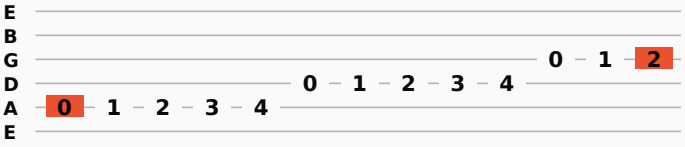


A Chromatic

A A♯ B C C♯ D D♯ E F F♯ G G♯ A

H H H H H H H H H H H H

GUITAR TAB / ONE OCTAVE



PIANO / ONE OCTAVE

