

## Scales: an Electric Bass Approach

Scales are one of the most used tools in a bassists' toolbox. We are the bridge between the rhythm (drums, percussion), melody (vocalist, horns, etc.) and the harmony (guitar, piano). As bassists we have to be fully aware, regardless of style, of every instrument. This is often why the bassist normally sets up in the back of the stage, or even in the middle of the stage, much like a den mother looking over her pack.

There are many different ways to approach learning scales and your fretboard. I teach multiple ways, I will demonstrate one. I will start with assuming that you know how to play a one-octave major scale in the key of C. Also, I am explaining this as though you are playing a 4-string 20 fret bass, much like a typical Fender Bass.

The notes in the key of C major are C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C. The first shape I normally teach is as follows:

Scale degree:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Note:	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Fingering:	2	4	1	2	4	1	3	4
String:	A	A	D	D	D	G	G	G

I would have students play the one octave 'shape' as much as possible using the specific fingerings written above. I then would normally have them play it in different keys starting on the 'A' and 'D' string roots. This helps them get to know the notes on the fretboard better, and if you throw in the metronome can also help them work on developing time. If we are going to stick with C major for now, I would then have them play the one octave C major in different spots on the neck, like C on the 8<sup>th</sup> fret of the 'E' string and C on the 15<sup>th</sup> fret of the 'A' string.

Once the concept of one-octave scales is understood I move on to scale pattern exercises such as playing the notes in groups of 3's and 3rds.

Thirds is basically playing the scale as follows:

1-3, 2-4, 3-5, 4-6, 5-7, etc.

Playing in groups of 3's is as follows:

123, 234, 345, 456, 567, 678, etc.

You can apply this concept to 4ths, 5ths, 6ths, and 7ths, as well as 4's, and 5's. I normally do these with more advanced students, on top of the fact that you can use rhythm to add to the difficulty. For example, try to play groups of 5's over 16<sup>th</sup> notes!!

After this, I add the concept of playing 2 octave scales. This can be tricky since most students at this point become reliant on the one octave shape. This is not a bad thing. Shapes to me are much like training wheels. Eventually you get to the point where you don't have to rely on them as much, if at all. With 2 octave scales I introduce the concept of Target Notes. These are root notes that you target when playing a 2-octave scale, or any scale for that matter. For example if I am playing a 2 octave C major scale, I could start on the 8<sup>th</sup> fret of the E string, play the next C on the 15<sup>th</sup> fret of the A string, then finish on the 17<sup>th</sup> fret of the G string, then come back down the exact same way. I still use the concept of the one octave scale by using similar fingerings, but start to rely more on my knowledge of the actual notes in the scale. Below are some target note combinations:

- E-D-G
- E-A-G
- E-A-D
- E-G-G

After this, I move to playing the lowest note on my bass to the highest note possible. On a 4 string 20 fret bass in the key of C, my lowest note is the low E string, and the highest is the 19<sup>th</sup> fret D on the G-string. Again, I would use target notes to help pave my path to get from the lowest to highest note. The wider the range of notes, the more possibilities you have to play these notes in different positions.

From here I move to playing scales in 5 fret positions. Basically this means my hand stays in one spot and I play all the notes in that spot. For example, I could isolate the 8-12 fret area. The lowest note is that 8<sup>th</sup> fret E string C and the highest is the 12<sup>th</sup> fret G on the G-string. You could do this anywhere!

Next is playing one-octave scales but only using two strings to achieve this. An example of this going from 8<sup>th</sup> C on the E string to 15<sup>th</sup> fret C on the A string. Keeping the normal one octave pattern in your head and fingers helps with this one.

Next are single string scales. First I focus on just playing one-octave C major scales on all 4 strings where possible. Then I move to playing the lowest note to highest note on each string.

Lastly, I apply the above mentioned scale pattern exercises of 3rds, 3's, etc. to every exercise mentioned above.

This alone can keep a bassist busy for months, if not years, and this is with only one scale in one key!!! Always practice in all 12 keys. Once you attack the most used scales, go on to pentatonics and then arpeggios. Again, there are multiple ways to learn scales. This is just one. Personally I have used this approach and it works great, but everyone learns differently. The key is finding what works for you, and go with it! Now I'm going to go practice now!