

The 11th (or the fourth scale tone) is the least understood of the scale tones. It has been called an “avoid” note but more accurately should be described as a scale tone that requires special attention. The 11 needs to be resolved when played over a major or dominant chord. When played over a minor 7, minor 7 $\flat$ 5, or a diminished chord, the 11 does not need to be resolved, in fact it sounds great. In the example below, when played over major or dominant chords, the 11 is resolved up to the 5 and back to the 3. This is one of many possible resolutions for the 11. Practicing the 3 - 11 scales really tunes the ears into the special attention required by the eleven.

Example: 3 - 11



When descending from 11 to 3, note that the 11 resolves right into the 3.



1. Chord Scales

In this first chapter, learning chord scales is the main objective. Every chord has its appropriate chord scale and knowing these scales without having to think about it is a prerequisite for the improviser. To know a scale “inside out” means that you know a scale starting anywhere in the scale, both ascending and descending. The first exercise is to play the entire chord scale from the root ascending to the 7th of the scale.

Example: 1 - 7



If you are a more advanced player you can do the following exercises playing 16th notes rather than 8th notes. When you play the scales with 16th notes you play from the root ascending to the 9th of the scale.

Example: 1 - 9



Playing through to the 7th or the 9th of the scale provides a destination or target note, which lands on the beat. Practicing the scales in this way facilitates one's awareness of all the scale tones.

Example: Exercise #1 on a C minor blues (ascending 1 - 7)

Exercise #1 on a C minor blues (ascending 1 - 7) is shown across three staves of music. The first staff begins with a $C-6^9$ chord, followed by a $C7^b9^b13$ chord. The second staff begins with an $F-7$ chord, followed by a $C-6^9$ chord. The third staff begins with an $A^b7^{\#11}$ chord, followed by a $G7^b9^b13$ chord, then a $C-6^9$ chord, and finally a $G7^b9^b13$ chord. Each phrase ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Example: Exercise #1 on a C minor blues (ascending 1 - 9)

Exercise #1 on a C minor blues (ascending 1 - 9) is shown across four staves of music. The first staff begins with a $C-6^9$ chord. The second staff begins with a $C7^b9^b13$ chord, followed by an $F-7$ chord. The third staff begins with a $C-6^9$ chord, followed by an $A^b7^{\#11}$ chord. The fourth staff begins with a $G7^b9^b13$ chord, followed by a $C-6^9$ chord, and finally a $G7^b9^b13$ chord. Each phrase ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Exercise #2

After playing the ascending 1 - 7 or 1 - 9 chord scales, next repeat the exercise playing the chord scales descending 7 - 1 or 9 - 1 on the major and minor blues. An example of the minor blues is below. Do the same exercise over a minor blues as in the example below.

Example: 7 - 1

Example: 7 - 1 musical notation. The exercise consists of four staves of music, each showing a descending 7-1 chord scale over a specific chord. The chords and their corresponding scales are: C-6⁹, C7^{b9b13}, F-7, C-6⁹, A^b7^{#11}, G7^{b9b13}, C-6⁹, and G7^{b9b13}. The notation includes treble clefs, a common time signature (C), and various accidentals (flats, sharps) to indicate the specific notes in the scales.

Example: 9 - 1

Example: 9 - 1 musical notation. The exercise consists of four staves of music, each showing a descending 9-1 chord scale over a specific chord. The chords and their corresponding scales are: C-6⁹, C7^{b9b13}, F-7, C-6⁹, A^b7^{#11}, G7^{b9b13}, C-6⁹, and G7^{b9b13}. The notation includes treble clefs, a common time signature (C), and various accidentals (flats, sharps) to indicate the specific notes in the scales.

Note that over the C-6⁹ chord you can also play a Dorian scale.

Musical notation showing a Dorian scale over a C-6⁹ chord. The notation includes a treble clef, a common time signature (C), and a flat (b) to indicate the specific notes in the scale. The scale is written as a descending 9-1 scale.