

The following exercises are designed to help students learn to play fluent, even chromatic scales.

They are based on the conventional fingering where the 3rd finger is used for every black note and the white notes are played with the thumb and 2nd finger. We will refer to this as the “basic chromatic scale”. Other fingering patterns that make use of all five fingers are useful when playing extremely rapid chromatic scales – but these can be studied when the basic chromatic scale has been mastered.

When learning to play a basic chromatic scale it is essential that the thumb is not brought into play by means of dropping the wrist - this is a very common mistake in young students and once the habit is formed it can be difficult to get rid of. The result of this error is only too obvious when a chromatic scale played in this way is heard. Evenness gives way to “lumpiness” as the thumb places an accent on each note it plays, caused by the dropping of the wrist. The constant up and down motion of the wrist as the scale ascends and descends is a barrier to speed, and a student playing a chromatic scale in this way will never achieve fluency and evenness.

Using SCALERAIL when learning to play the basic chromatic scale will ensure that the thumb is used correctly, enabling evenness and speed to be developed quickly. SCALERAIL ensures that the hand is in the optimum position at the keyboard; it prevents the wrist from dropping as the thumb is played and it allows the student to both see and feel the continuous lateral movement of the hand up and down the keyboard. The teacher, too, can immediately see if the movement up and down the keyboard is even and continuous, or jerky and faltering.

By moving the arm rest up and down the keyboard with the student’s hand and arm resting in the playing position, the student can be allowed to experience what smooth lateral movement actually feels like. It is then far easier for them to reproduce this action when they are actually playing the scale. If the student has been using SCALERAIL when learning major and minor scales they will already be familiar with the feeling of smooth and continuous lateral motion, and this will transfer to the chromatic scale with ease.

The young student can begin learning the basic chromatic scale as soon as the teacher would like to introduce it. A good starting point is to teach the scale hands separately over one octave, concentrating on learning the fingering pattern for each hand and evenness of tone. It can be a good exercise in listening for the student to make sure that the notes played with the thumb sound at the same dynamic level as those played with the 2nd and 3rd fingers.

When the student can play the scale evenly over one octave using SCALERAIL, the exercises below can be introduced. Each group of semi-quavers (16th notes) can be repeated several times to start with, and then the whole exercise can be played from beginning to end. The tempo can be gradually increased over a number of lessons using the metronome, always making sure that no evenness or fluency is lost as the tempo gets faster.

As with all other technical exercises the student's interest and imagination should be kept alive by:

- Practising at different dynamic levels (how soft can you make a "pp" whilst maintaining evenness and tempo?)
- Using different rhythmic patterns
- Placing accents deliberately on different parts of the beat (for example the second or third semi-quaver of each group)
- Using the top two or bottom two octaves of the keyboard

All these methods help to develop the student's artistic as well as technical abilities, and this is a very important part of the student's development as a pianist and musician. Teachers and students can invent other ways of practising the exercises that will help to add variety and interest to the student's piano practise at home.

Exercise 1 RH

Exercise 1 RH is a technical exercise in 3/4 time, written for the right hand in treble clef. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff contains 12 measures of eighth-note patterns with fingerings (1-3, 1-3, 1-3, 1-3, 1-2-3-2, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1) and accidentals (sharps and flats). The second staff continues with similar patterns, including triplets and more complex fingerings (3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1). The third staff concludes the exercise with a final pattern and a double bar line.

Exercise 1 LH

Exercise 1 LH is a technical exercise in 3/4 time, written for the left hand in bass clef. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff contains 12 measures of eighth-note patterns with fingerings (1-3, 1-3, 1-3, 1-3, 1-2-3-2, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1) and accidentals (sharps and flats). The second staff continues with similar patterns, including triplets and more complex fingerings (3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1, 3-1-3-1). The third staff concludes the exercise with a final pattern and a double bar line.

Exercise 2 RH

Exercise 2 RH musical notation. It consists of two staves in 4/4 time. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music features eighth-note patterns with various accidentals (sharps and flats) and fingerings (1, 2, 3) indicated above the notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Exercise 2 LH

Exercise 2 LH musical notation. It consists of two staves in 4/4 time. The top staff is in bass clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music features eighth-note patterns with various accidentals (sharps and flats) and fingerings (1, 2, 3) indicated above the notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Exercise 3 RH

Exercise 3 RH musical notation. It consists of two staves in 4/4 time. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music features eighth-note patterns with various accidentals (sharps and flats) and fingerings (1, 2, 3) indicated above the notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Exercise 3 LH

Exercise 3 LH musical notation. It consists of two staves in 4/4 time. The top staff is in bass clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music features eighth-note patterns with various accidentals (sharps and flats) and fingerings (1, 2, 3) indicated above the notes. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Exercise 4 Complete Chromatic Scale (Hands an octave apart)

The musical score is written for piano in 3/4 time. It consists of three systems of music. The first system shows the right hand starting with a whole rest, while the left hand plays a chromatic scale from C4 to C5. The second system shows both hands playing chromatic scales, with the right hand starting on C5 and the left hand on C4. The third system shows the right hand playing a chromatic scale from C5 to C6 and the left hand playing a chromatic scale from C4 to C5. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 2, and 3. An 8-measure rest is indicated at the start of the second system.