

Sequences

A “sequence” is a melodic passage that is successively repeated at different pitches (transposed). Although they are a common melodic device in all kinds of composed music, we are primarily interested in the use of sequences as a tool for improvisation.

The diagram to the right shows a common descending sequence using the notes of a minor pentatonic scale. Even if you can't read the standard music notation, take a look at it and notice the pattern of descending four-note groupings.

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Sequences provide a great way to transform an otherwise bland, linear scale into more interesting musical vocabulary.

One of the attributes that makes them so handy to the improviser is that they can be extended (or shortened) as needed. Once you have established the sequence, it's up to you whether you transpose it two times or eight.

Sequences can be challenging to work out on the fly, so you would do well to get at least a modest collection of them under your fingers, ready to go. The sequences assembled here are among the most common diatonic and pentatonic patterns you'll encounter. Remember, each sequence consists of a seed that allows for all sorts of manipulation: apply it to a new scale, key, or scale form; reverse the direction; explore.

Diatonic Scale Sequences: C major

Pentatonic Scale Sequences: A minor (see also the the first diagram, top right)