



## Establishing Minor Scale Patterns for Long Term Success

The introduction and establishment of minor scale patterns (and intonation) is one of the crucial points of intermediate technical development. As teachers we rejoice in the few who “get it” instantly, but we consistently strive to teach all who seek the ability to play well. Most students can learn minor scales successfully in first position by rote or by note, but playing a minor scale well in first position does not guarantee the aural knowledge necessary to play successfully in upper positions or in a variety of keys. For example, many students do not automatically internalize the minor connection to the parallel and relative major scales. Nor do they physically memorize the patterns which make up the scales without additional reinforcement.

Frequently this lack of comprehension does not manifest itself until students begin to play minor scales and keys in upper positions, with students changing keys or getting “lost” in the upper registers. In short, the difficulties of playing ascending melodic minor scales lie in the lowered third and the relationship to the ascending parallel major of the second tetrachord. The difficulties of playing the descending natural minor lie in the pattern changes of the upper tetrachord and the scale’s relationship to the relative major key. The learning sequence that follows, solves these issues.

Repetitive listening in Suzuki study can assist with minor intonation and patterns. However students often are older when they approach repertoire in minor keys and upper positions and therefore are not as diligent in their listening. If minor intonation and scale

patterns are not internalized before moving to upper positions, problems will occur.

The sample sequence is intended for violin students, but it can be adapted for any string instrument in many keys. It is best to teach the sequence by rote and by ear at first and then provide notation to reinforce accurate practice. Each step must be practiced repeatedly until the patterns are memorized and fixed in aural and physical memory.

Practice each exercise until intonation is easy and accurate before introducing the next exercise. Practicing slowly without vibrato is vital. Singing each exercise in solfège or in letter name reinforces the aural connection as well. (The use of movable “do” where “do” is the tonic in major and “la” is the tonic in minor underscores the relationships developed by this sequence.) Each exercise intends to progress from the known to the unknown in small, easily attainable steps.

Ex.1. One octave B flat major scale beginning on first finger.

A one octave major scale played

beautifully and in tune is the foundation for minor introduction.

Ex.2. One octave descending major scale with a two note natural minor extension. The major tonic is emphasized in this exercise.

Ex.3. One octave descending major scale with minor extensions with rhythmic emphasis on natural minor tonic.

Ex.4. One octave descending natural minor scale with rhythmic emphasis on descending whole step, whole step, half step patterns.

The aural comprehension of the descending whole step, whole step, half step pattern is crucial in learning the descending natural minor scale. This step is vital in expanding the minor scales into secure upper position technique later. At this introductory level, many students do not hear and recognize these patterns without careful clarification and reinforcement. Students can relate this pattern to a mi, re, do solfège pattern, a 3, 2, 1 major scale degree pattern or the first melodic pattern of a well known tune like “Hot Cross Buns”. This aural

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pattern knowledge will solve many intonation issues in more difficult technical situations.

Ex. 5. One octave descending natural minor scale.

If this scale is not easy for the student repeat previous steps until mastery is achieved. Do not go on until this is mastered and secure!

Ex. 6. One octave ascending parallel major scale.

Often when the student returns to the parallel G major scale the result is often insecure intonation. This underscores the difficulty of moving between parallel major and minor keys. These are called foreign keys for a reason in theoretical study. Much of Volume 3 is devoted to repertoire which addresses this issue. Careful review supported by appropriate scale work is paramount. If the student is not successful then review and play examples 6, 7, 1, and 5, in this order.

Ex. 7. One octave ascending melodic minor scale.

At this point the student should aurally comprehend the commonality between major scale and the ascending melodic minor. The only difference is lowered 3rd scale degree. This aural and intellectual connection to the parallel major is vital when playing the ascending melodic minor in tune. If this scale is introduced without the specific major connection and before the descending natural minor scale is secure many students will not play either scale in tune.

Ex. 8. One octave ascending melodic and descending natural minor scale with pattern reinforcing pauses.

It is tempting to skip through a sequence such as this one as many well trained Suzuki student can easily play through a one or two octave minor scale, but it is important to remember to establish the technique for long term success. Do not skip these basics.

Ex. 9. One octave ascending melodic and descending natural minor scale

If a student cannot play with beautiful intonation at this stage, return to the beginning of the sequence and practice each step more thoroughly.

Note: Theoretical introduction of minor.

It is important to delay detailed theoretical information until the concept is thoroughly integrated into a student's technique.

A simple theoretical explanation will support an introductory sequence like this one. Initially, phrases such as "this is the natural minor scale" is all the theory information the student needs. Complex descriptions of specific whole and half step patterns, raised and lowered scale degrees and relationship to key signature should wait until a student has mastered the minor patterns, scales, and intonation.

Note: Harmonic Minor

Since string instruments are primarily melodic instruments students need to learn the melodic and natural minor scales first, leaving harmonic minor for later development.

## The Next Steps

Both violinists and violists can benefit from one octave scales in a variety of minor keys and then progress to a two octave "A minor" scale, in one position, beginning on first finger G string. Two octave minor scales in one position beginning on first finger in first, second third and fourth position are another developmental step. Playing one octave minor scales on one string with an initial first position to fifth position also helps reinforce these patterns.

This sequence represents a basic introduction to minor

patterns and keys. However it does not deal with minor scale and key intonation. Fine tuning minor scales and keys is an ongoing journey, but if a child has a carefully sequenced introduction such as this one they are on the path to success.

In conclusion, scales should always be played beautifully and musically with thought and purpose. Kent Perry would say, "If they knock on your practice room door and ask 'what was that lovely piece?' and you can answer, 'the g minor scale,' then you have it right!" ♪

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**Winifred Crock** is the orchestra director at Parkway Central High School. She also maintains a private violin studio in suburban St. Louis, MO. Winifred holds music degrees from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville and Kent State University. She also graduated from the Suzuki Talent Education Institute in Matsumoto, Japan and earned Kodaly Certification from the Kodaly Center of America in Boston. Winifred has received the Parkway School District Pillar of Parkway Award, the St. Louis Suburban Music Educators' Merit Award, the Missouri ASTA Studio Teacher of the Year Award and was selected for the 1998 *USA Today* National Teacher Team. Winifred began teaching privately 25 years ago and in the public schools 18 years ago.

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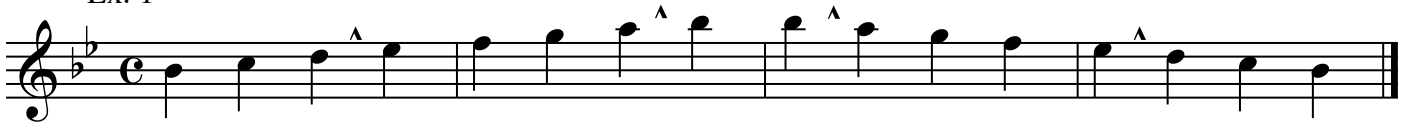


# A Sample Sequence for Introducing Minor Scales

Winifred Crock

Violin

Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



Ex. 4



Ex. 5



Ex. 6



Ex. 7



Ex. 8



Ex. 9

