

## Major Scale Harmony Spelling

How many words can be spelled with the 26 letters of the English alphabet? A whole dictionary full. Now, let's apply this "alphabet" concept and spell the **chords** and **arpeggios** of major scale harmony.

The **letters** of the **C major scale** are: C D E F G A B and 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 are the *one octave* scale degree **tone numbers**. How many harmonies can be spelled with just seven letters of the C major scale? The simple answer is 49. **Figure 1.**

Notice that there are *seven* three letters **triads**, and *fourteen* four letters **tetrads**. We may continue spelling harmonies with five, six and seven different letters and tones until we run out of letters and tone numbers with which to spell.

Remember, chords and arpeggios are *spelled* with the same letters and tones but are *played* differently. A **chord** is played "at the same time", while an **arpeggio** is played "one at a time".

**Slash** and **poly** harmony symbols are needed because many chords and arpeggios have very complex names - sometimes even different names for the same spelling (**enharmonic**).

**Numerals** are used to "place" harmony within the scale. **Serif** numerals are **major** and **san serif** numerals are **minor**.

Don't feel bad if you don't know all of these harmonies. It's just like English, we may not know all the words, but we know all the letters!

Have some spelling fun..I'll be listening.

**Figure 1.** C major scale harmony as letters: C D E F G A B and tones: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7.

|                    | Three                  | Four                       | Four                                     | Five                            | Five                                 | Six                                  | Seven   |
|--------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| I                  | C<br>1 3 5<br>C E G    | C6<br>1 3 5 6<br>C E G A   | CΔ<br>1 3 5 7<br>C E G B                 | CΔ9<br>1 3 5 7 2<br>C E G B D   | C6/9<br>1 3 5 6 2<br>C E G A D       | CΔ11<br>1 3 5 7 2 4<br>C E G B D F   | CΔ13<br>1 3 5 7 2 4 6<br>C E G B D F A        |
| ii                 | Dm<br>2 4 6<br>D F A   | Dm6<br>2 4 6 7<br>D F A B  | Dm7<br>2 4 6 1<br>D F A C                | Dm9<br>2 4 6 1 3<br>D F A C E   | Dm6/9<br>2 4 6 7 3<br>D F A B E      | Dm11<br>2 4 6 1 3 5<br>D F A C E G   | Dm13<br>2 4 6 1 3 5 7<br>D F A C E G B        |
| iii                | Em<br>3 5 7<br>E G B   | CΔ/E<br>3 5 7 1<br>E G B C | Em7<br>3 5 7 2<br>E G B D                | G7/E<br>3 5 7 2 4<br>E G B D F  | Bmb5<br>Em<br>3 5 7 2 4<br>E G B D F | G9/E<br>3 5 7 2 4 6<br>E G B D F A   | CΔ13/E<br>3 5 7 2 4 6 1<br>E G B D F A C      |
| IV                 | F<br>4 6 1<br>F A C    | F6<br>4 6 1 2<br>F A C D   | FΔ<br>4 6 1 3<br>F A C E                 | FΔ9<br>4 6 1 3 5<br>F A C E G   | F6/9<br>4 6 1 2 5<br>F A C D G       | FΔ9#11<br>4 6 1 3 5 7<br>F A C E G B | FΔ13<br>4 6 1 3 5 7 9<br>F A C E G B D        |
| V                  | G<br>5 7 2<br>G B D    | G6<br>5 7 2 3<br>G B D E   | G7<br>5 7 2 4<br>G B D F                 | G9<br>5 7 2 4 6<br>G B D F A    | G6/9<br>5 7 2 3 6<br>G B D E A       | G11<br>5 7 2 4 6 1<br>G B D F A C    | G13<br>5 7 2 4 6 1 3<br>G B D F A C E         |
| vi                 | Am<br>6 1 3<br>A C E   | FΔ/A<br>6 1 3 4<br>A C E F | Am7<br>6 1 3 5<br>A C E G                | Am9<br>6 1 3 5 7<br>A C E G B   | CΔ/A<br>6 1 3 5 7<br>A C E G B       | Am11<br>6 1 3 5 7 2<br>A C E G B D   | Am11b13<br>6 1 3 5 7 2 4<br>A C E G B D F     |
| vii <sup>b</sup> 5 | Bmb5<br>7 2 4<br>B D F | G7/B<br>7 2 4 5<br>B D F G | Bm7 <sup>b</sup> 5<br>7 2 4 6<br>B D F A | Dm7/B<br>7 2 4 6 1<br>B D F A C | F<br>Bmb5<br>7 2 4 6 1<br>B D F A C  | Dm9/B<br>7 2 4 6 1 3<br>B D F A C E  | Am7<br>Bmb5<br>7 2 4 6 1 3 5<br>B D F A C E G |

**Mike Overly** is a regular contributor to *BassBooks.com* and author of *Bass EncycloMedia*, *BEM Jam audio disc 1*, *Bass Fretboard Facts* and *Bass Fretboard Flashcards for 4, 5 & 6 String Bass*.