Major Scale

The most important scale form in Western music (based on usage) is the major scale, which is constructed as follows:

- The first note is the root tone from which the scale gets its name, e.g., E major scale,
- the position of the second note is up two 1/2 steps from the root, and uses the next letter name (after the root) in the musical alphabet,
- the third note is up four 1/2 steps from the root, using the next letter name (after the second) in the musical alphabet,
- the fourth note is up five 1/2 steps from the root, using the next letter name (after the third),
- the fifth note is up seven 1/2 steps from the root, using the next letter name (after the fourth),
- the sixth note is up nine 1/2 steps from the root, using the next letter name (after the fifth),
- the seventh note is up eleven 1/2 steps from the root, using the next letter name (after the sixth),
- and the eighth note (octave) is up twelve 1/2 steps from the root, using the next letter name (after the seventh – which is the same letter name as the root).

Note: When constructing a major (or minor) scale, all the note names of the musical alphabet are used in successive order beginning with the root. The root is the only note name used two times: (1) as the 1st degree, and (2) as the octave or 8th degree.

Example 16

C major scale

A less tedious form of scale construction would be to measure the distance between the adjacent notes of the scale instead of between each note of the scale and the root, and create a formula using whole steps and half steps. The major scale formula would then be: (root) 1, 1, 1/2, 1, 1, 1, 1/2. Note that a half step occurs between the 3rd and 4th degrees of the scale, and between the 7th and 8th degrees as well. All other adjacent notes are separated by whole step.