

Grade 2 Scales

A guide for students and teachers
for ABRSM Grade 2 scales

by

FERGUS BLACK

© Fergus Black 2012

INDEX

Scales in Parallel Motion – (A) Scales with Standard Fingering – Introducing E major	page 1
Scales in Contrary motion (i) E major	page 3
Scales in Parallel Motion – (A) Scales with Standard Fingering (i) E major	page 4
Scales in Contrary Motion (ii) C major	page 5
Thumbs	page 5
Scales in Parallel Motion – (A) Scales with Standard Fingering (ii) D Major	page 6
Legato Playing	page 6
The Brain	page 6
Speed	page 7
Fingering	page 7
Prompt Response	page 7
More Scales in Parallel Motion – (A) Scales with Standard Fingering (iii) :-	
d minor and G major	page 8
g minor and A major	page 9
e minor	page 10
Scales in Parallel Motion – (B) Scales with non-standard fingering (i) F Major	page 10
Black Note Revision	page 11
Melodic Minor scales	page 11
Chromatic Scales (A) Right Hand	page 12
Chromatic Scales (B) Left Hand	page 13
Arpeggios – (A) Right Hand (i) All White Notes: G Majors, e and d Minors	page 14
Arpeggios – (B) Left Hand (i) All White Notes: G Majors, e and d Minors	page 16
Arpeggios – (A) Right Hand (ii) Second Note is Black: D and A Majors, g Minor	page 17
Arpeggios – (A) Left Hand (ii) Second Note is Black: D and A Majors, g Minor	page 18
Broken Chords – Grade 1 Revision	page 19
Broken Chords – (A) Right Hand - F major and e minor	page 19
Broken Chords – (A) Left Hand - F major and e minor	page 20
Practice Rota	page 21

New things:

There are a substantial number of new things to learn in Grade 2, if you are coming from Grade 1 - there are more keys to learn, of course, and also four new things:-

- Scales in parallel motion (i.e. both hands together moving in the same direction)
- Chromatic Scales
- Arpeggios
- New Broken Chord pattern

Scales in Parallel Motion

(A) Scales with Standard Fingering

Introducing E major

The hardest thing to do is to play scales with hands together in parallel motion. I always think of this as a milestone of achievement, when the student manages it, and can be persuaded that it will become second nature in time.

Odd as it may at first appear, I start with E major - you might think C major would be easier, but I would argue that E major has 'guides' - the black notes help with the pattern of fingering: 1 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4. (Chopin used to start his students off with B major (right hand) because it helps establish that fingering pattern).

So, the first thing to do, is learn the notes and patterns for the two hands separately for E major.

Memorise "E major has F#, G#, C# and D#". (See note)

I'd suggest that you begin with the right hand, one octave, noting that the 4th finger plays D#. This is one-to-one correspondence: the 4th finger plays D#, and D# is only played by the 4th finger. Be absolutely sure about this: it is possible to play scales with all manner of fingerings, but the important thing is to lay down a foundation for the future, and learn the standard pattern. I cannot emphasise this too much.

Say to yourself as you play:

"White Black Black - White White Black Black - White Black Black - White White Black Black - White"

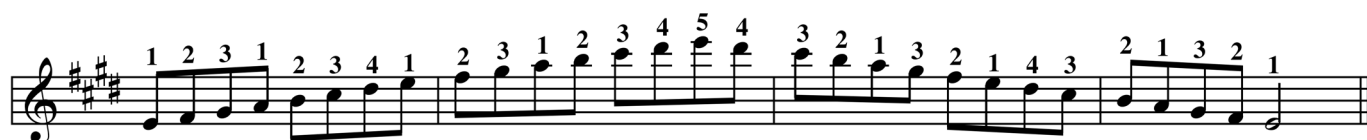
Note in passing: it is the same pattern going down.

Now play E major with the Right Hand - one octave, up and down.

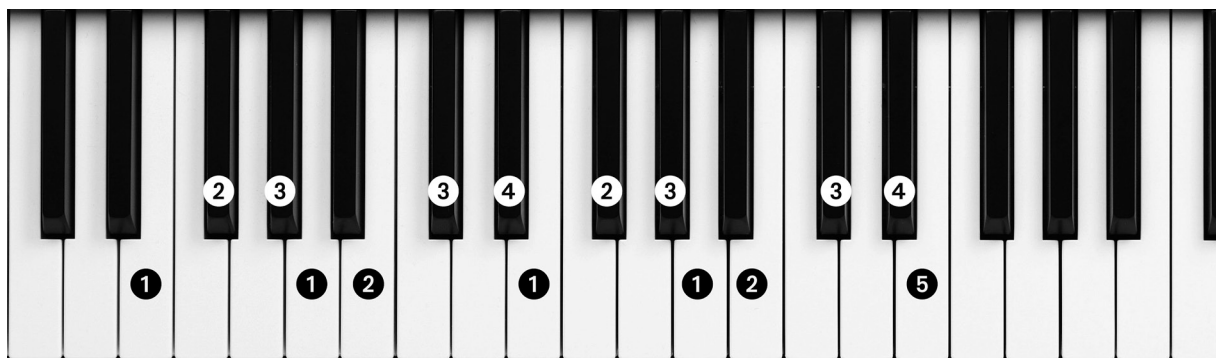
Note (as you play) that the 4th finger plays the D#.



Next, extend this pattern to two octaves. Make sure that the 4th finger plays the D all four times - especially the last!



You may at first find it easier to find the notes if you can see a visual plan of the keyboard like this:-



Try, however, to get used to reading the standard notation, to make the connexion between what you play and the key signature of four sharps.

Check that you know the notes by closing the keyboard (or looking away), and saying the note names up and down:-

Memorise

(up) E - F# - G# - A - B - C# - D# - E

(down) E - D# - C# - B - A - G# - F# - E

Then, do the same with the left hand:

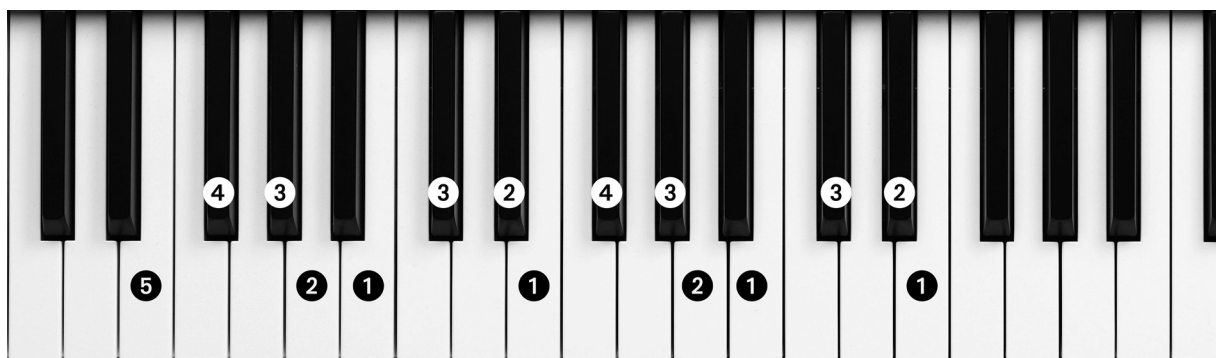
Play a scale of E major with the Left Hand - one octave. Note that the 4th finger plays F#



When you extend this to two octaves, make sure the 4th finger plays the all the F#s, especially the last one! I've put a box round it.



Again, this might be easier if you can see an image of the keyboard - some people learn in a more visual way:-



Start here and read
to the left first, then
back up to the right!

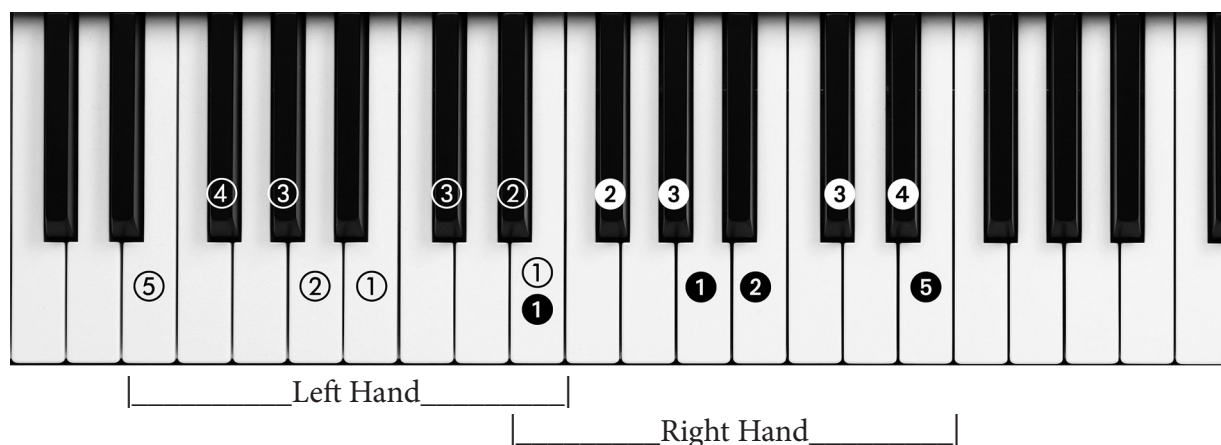
Scales in Contrary motion

(i) E major

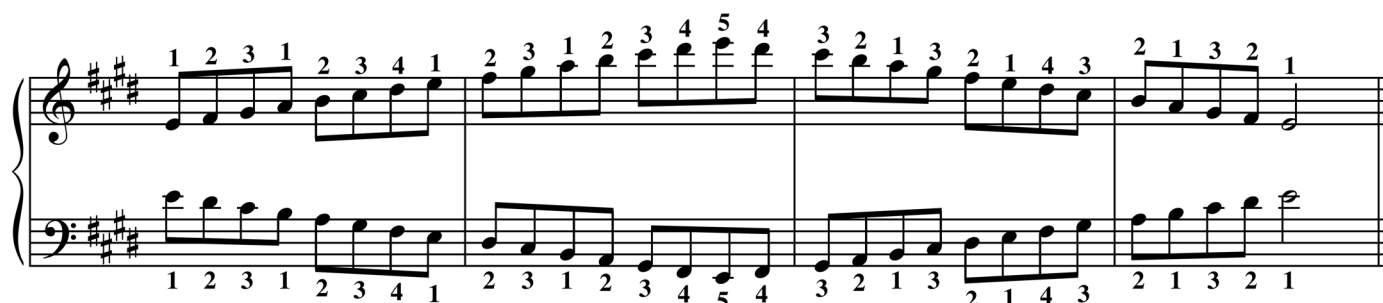
Next, to consolidate the feel of E major and the fingering that goes with it, try the scale in contrary motion. Detailed work at this early stage will pay dividends later. It is worthwhile spending time to get it right.

Start with one octave

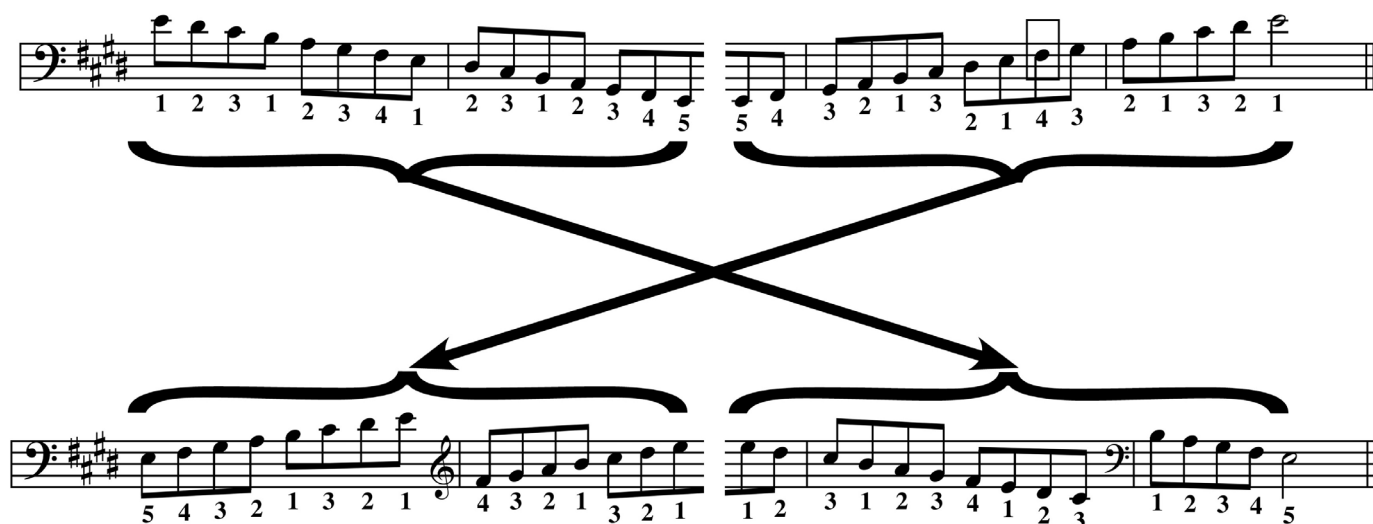
You will see that the colour of the notes is the same in both hands at the same time - if the right hand has a black note, then the left has a black note, too. (it is just that the gaps between the notes are different in the two hands).



Extend this pattern to two octaves. Try and visualise what the hands are doing. Try not to be like a table-tennis umpire, looking back and forward between the hands.



Next, turn the left hand upside down, and start from the lowest note - this is just like starting in the middle of the scale at the bottom of page 2.



The scale of E major, with the Left Hand alone looks like this. Remember: the 4th finger goes on F#.



Scales in Parallel Motion

(A) Scales with Standard Fingering (i) E major

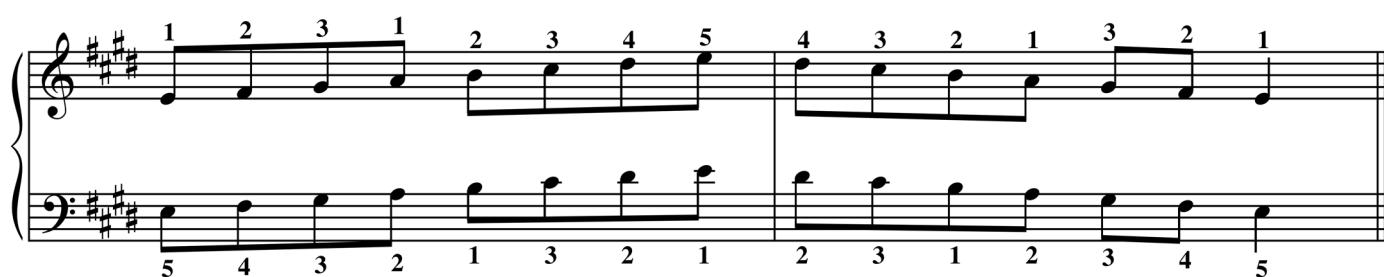
Are you ready? Try one octave hands together, parallel motion. **PLAY THIS REALLY SLOWLY!** Note that the

E Major

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: F#

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: D#

The 3rd fingers go down together on the 3rd and 6th notes: G# and C#

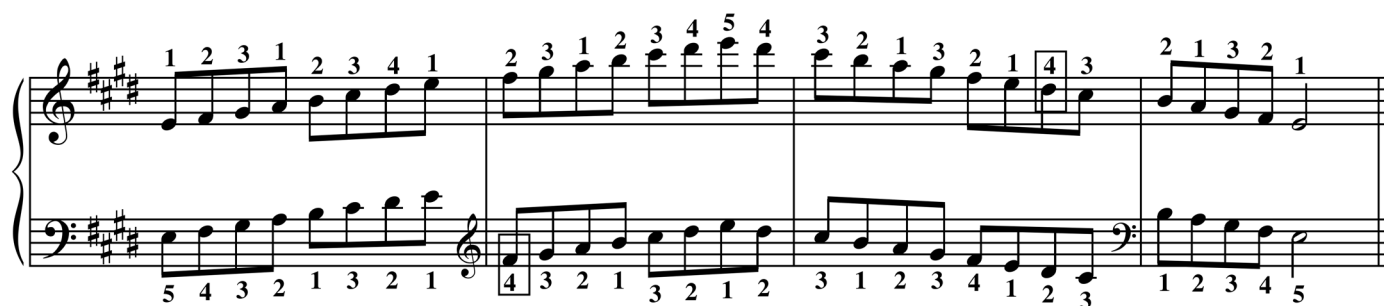


Finally, two octaves: Hopefully by now you know what the notes are, but I'll tell you from experience that the note that is most likely to have the wrong fingering is the last D in the right hand - I've put a box round it.

You might find it helpful to focus on the left hand when going up, and the right hand when coming down. Here's why: when playing up the scale (i.e. from left to right), it is the left hand that has questions to answer - "After each thumb note, is the next note played by the 3rd or the 4th finger?"

Coming down, that question is asked of the right hand, so when coming down (i.e. playing from right to left), focus your attention on the right hand.

Do your very, very best not to miss out fingers - so many people get into trouble playing 5-4-3-1 from the top in the RH.



Scales in Contrary Motion

(ii) C major

If you did Grade 1, then you already know C Major in contrary motion - now, however, it is two octaves.



Thumbs

Stop learning scales for a moment, and concentrate on your thumbs

Take a scale - C major is as good as any, with the Right Hand. Look at your hand as you play. Look specifically at the thumb: the thumb should move in a smooth arc from the C to the F. There shouldn't be a jerky, last-moment lunge for the F. Instead, as soon as you have played the C, *and as you play the D and E*, move the thumb in a smooth trajectory towards the F.

(Some people find this really difficult: their thumb moves the wrong way - as they play the D and E, the thumb moves to the left, not the right as it should. Are you one of them?)

These exercises are very helpful here (watch the fingering! - the thumb plays the first and fourth notes).

Start by playing only the first and fourth notes of each bar - with the second and third fingers gently touching the D and E notes. (You will note that this is not even possible if your fingers are not curved: curved fingers allow the thumb to pass freely under the hand)

(1) This Exercise is for the Right Hand:-



(2) This Exercise is for the Left Hand:-



Scales in Parallel Motion

(A) Scales with Standard Fingering (ii) D Major

Many other scales have the same standard fingering as E major - all major or minor scales that start on C, D, E, G and A have the same fingering pattern.

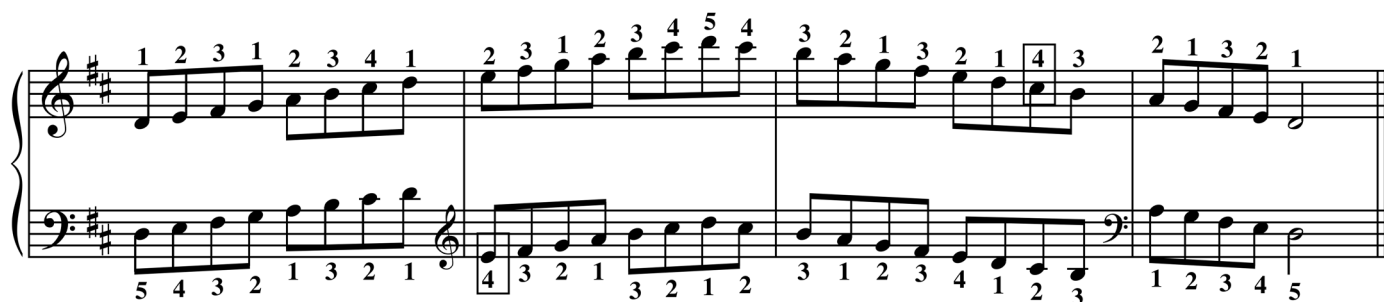
For Grade 2, every scale you need, with the exception of F major has that standard fingering pattern. Here, for example is D major, which should be known from Grade 1. Remind yourself of Fish and Chips - F# and C# are the two accidentals. Make sure the 3rd fingers of both hands go down together on the F# and the B. Look at the notes with the boxes round them, and take especial care to play them with the 4th fingers.

D Major

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: E

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: C#

The 3rd fingers go down together on the 3rd and 6th notes: F# and B



If in any doubt, close the keyboard so you can't see the notes, and say the names of the notes - both going up:

Memorise

(up) D - E - F# - G - A - B - C# - D (down) D - C# - B - A - G - F# - E - D

This is a good thing to do with other scales, too.

Legato Playing

Clearly, one would wish for mistake-free performance, but there is more to scales than mechanical repetition. Aim for an even legato (for the pianist, legato means joining the bottoms of the notes together), and think of the notes in groups of 4.

Don't hammer every note - think instead about smooth words, like glide and flow, If you count "1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and" before you play, that will help.

The Brain

Apparently, the part of the brain which lights up when you are making music, remains stubbornly unlit when you practise scales - in other words, the brain doesn't see them as music. Please do everything you can to persuade yourself that you are making music: shape the scale up and down, vary what you are doing - rhythms and articulations.

In her book "On Teaching The Piano" (Novello, 1954), Hetty Bolton has a long and interesting list of different ways to play scales, which is hard to better. Here are some suggestions that I think are appropriate to this grade:—

Vary the dynamics:

- Play the scale *p* (or *mf*, or *f*);

Vary the articulation: • Play staccato;

Vary the rhythm:

- Play in a dotted rhythm;
- Crescendo on the upward scale from *p* to *f*, and back to *p* going down;
- Play detached;
- Play in a scotch snap rhythm.

Speed

The Handbook "These Music Exams", published by the ABRSM, helpfully recommends minimum speeds for piano scales at Grade 2 as follows:

Scales ♩ = 66

Arpeggios and Broken chords ♩ = 63

Did you spot the word "minimum"?

Speed is not the most important thing here: accuracy is important, as are evenness, legato, and fluency.

Fingering

Why is fingering important? I could write a book! but largely there are two reasons: Learning patterns which can be applied in real music.

Laying down a foundation for more advanced work. For example, if you try and play a grade 8 scale, such as D major in 6ths at a fast speed, you will come unstuck if the fingering isn't right.

You have possibly heard that examiners are blind: they don't look - you could play scales with any old fingering, even playing the odd note with your nose, if you can. However, they do listen, and uncertain fingering is pretty obvious, because it shows itself in the sound.

Prompt Response

In exams, respond quickly to the scale asked for. By all means think before you play, but try and get the thinking part over quickly - these scales need to be second nature.

More Scales in Parallel Motion

(A) Scales with Standard Fingering (iii) G and A Majors: - e, d and g Minors

D minor

D minor has a B^b in the key signature (*see note below*).

Learn the notes (again!):

Memorise

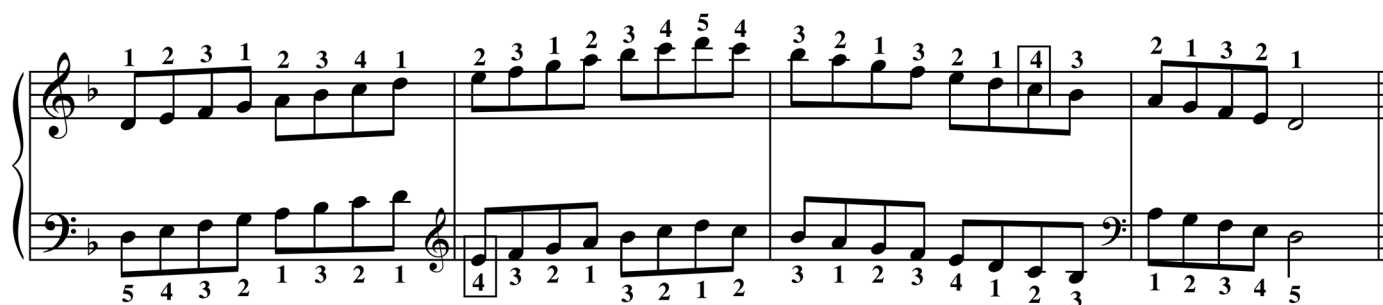
(up) D - E - F - G - A - B^b - C - D (down) D - C - B^b - A - G - F - E - D

D minor

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: E

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: C

The 3rd fingers go down together on the 3rd and 6th notes: F and B^b



G major

G major, you will recall has an F[#] in the key signature. Learn the notes:

Memorise

(up) G - A - B - C - D - E - F[#] - G (down) G - F[#] - E - D - C - B - A - G

G Major

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: A

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: F[#]

The 3rd fingers go down together on the 3rd and 6th notes: B and E



CHECK: pause on a B, and check that you are actually playing it with the 3rd finger in each hand.

A short note on minor scales

ABRSM Grades 1 and 2 allow the student to choose one of three different forms of the minor scales. In order to keep things simple (and to avoid having to explain at this early stage why there are different forms of the minor scale), I suggest students learn only the natural minor. The student can immediately see that, say, E minor and G major are related, by virtue of having the same notes and key signature. (Rather oddly, the natural minor is the one option omitted in the ABRSM's own scale book. Goodness knows why! Perhaps because it is quite a new option.)

The remaining scales in this section are new for students who did Grade 1 scales.

G minor

Here is G minor, which has two black notes - B \flat and E \flat . Learn the notes (again!):

Memorise

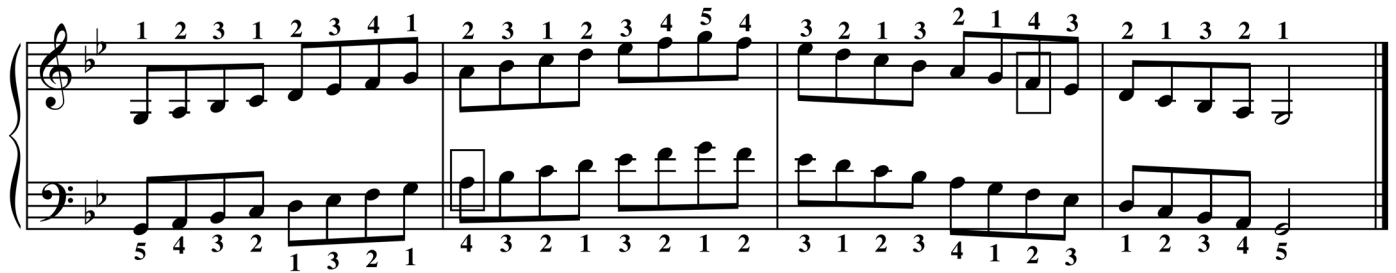
(up) G - A - B \flat - C - D - E \flat - F - G (down) G - F - E \flat - D - C - B \flat - A - G

G minor

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: A

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: F

3rd fingers go down together on the 3rd and 6th notes: B \flat and E \flat



A major

A major has three black notes - C \sharp , F \sharp and G \sharp . Learn the notes:

Memorise

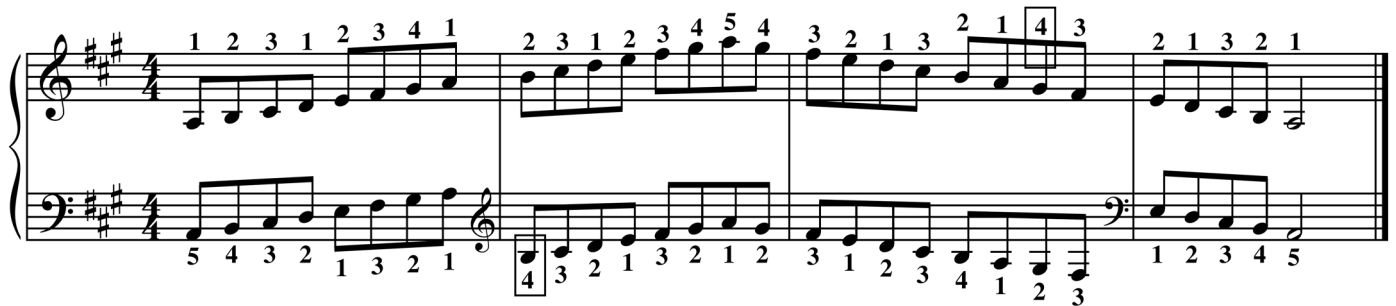
(up) A - B - C \sharp - D - E - F \sharp - G \sharp - A (down) A - G \sharp - F \sharp - E - D - C \sharp - B - A

A Major

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: B

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: G \sharp

The 3rd fingers go down together on the 3rd and 6th notes: C \sharp and F \sharp



E minor

E minor is related to G major and has one black note: F#. Learn the notes:

Memorise

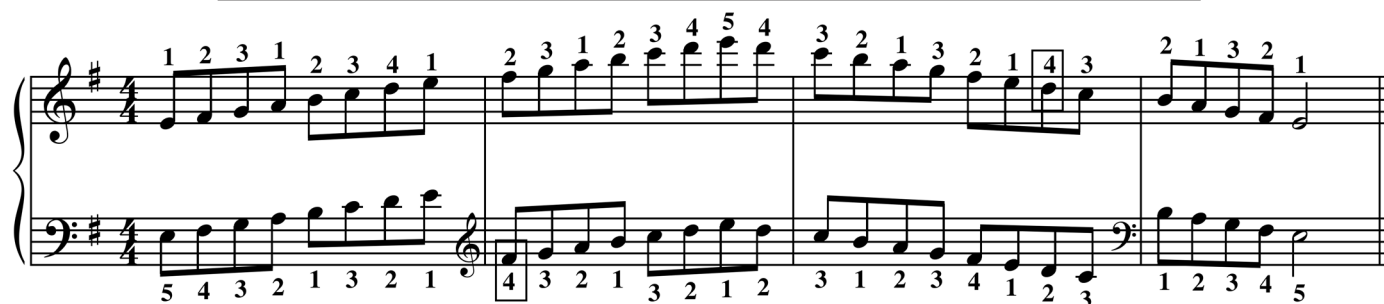
(up) E - F# - G - A - B - C - D - E (down) E - D - C - B - A - G - F# - E

e minor

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: F#

Right Hand 4th finger on 7th note: D

3rd fingers go down together on the 3rd and 6th notes: G and C



CHECK: pause on a D, preferably the last one - is the right hand 4th finger on the note?

Scales in Parallel Motion

(B) Scales with non-standard fingering (i) F Major

F major is an exception to the standard fingering. Please do not start learning it until the previous “standard-fingering” scales can be played securely.

Because of the B^b in the key signature, the right hand fingering starts 1 2 3 4 1 2 3, and ends on the 4th finger.

Please note: the left hand has the usual standard fingering.

Start by playing the right hand on its own, then one octave with both hands together.

F Major

Left Hand 4th finger on 2nd note: G

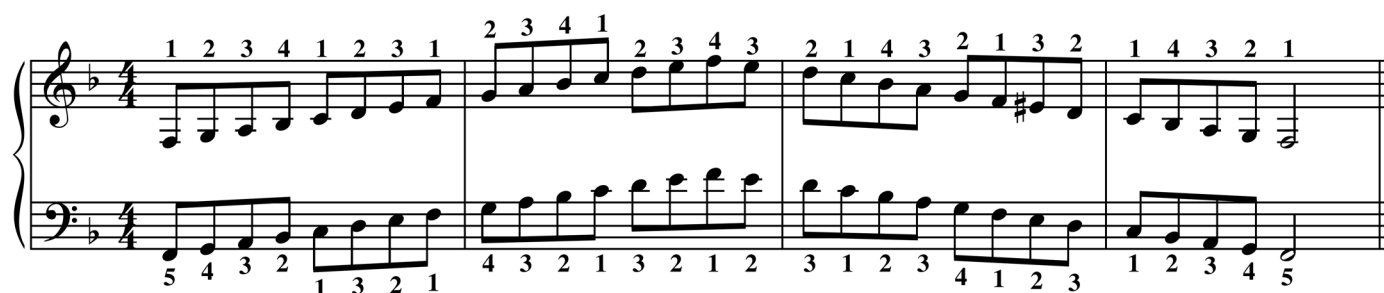
Right Hand 4th finger on 4th note: B^b, and on the top F

The thumbs go down together on every F and every C (except the first and last)

Learn the notes:

Memorise

(up) F - G - A - B^b - C - D - E - F (down) F - E - D - C - B^b - A - G - F



(It is possible to play the right hand of F major with the standard fingering (123 1234), and apparently Liszt taught it this way. He had his students play all scales with the same standard fingering, including the ones that start on black notes!)

Black Note Revision

At Grade 2, I don't worry too much about the theory of why certain scales have certain black notes, and why some of them are in the key signature, and others aren't.

Since children are good at memorising, I simply get them to memorise which scales have which black notes. Here is a list to help:–

MAJORS

C major - no sharps and no flats

G major has an F#

D major has F# and C#

A major has a C#, an F#, and a G#

F major has a B^b

MINORS

e minor has an F#

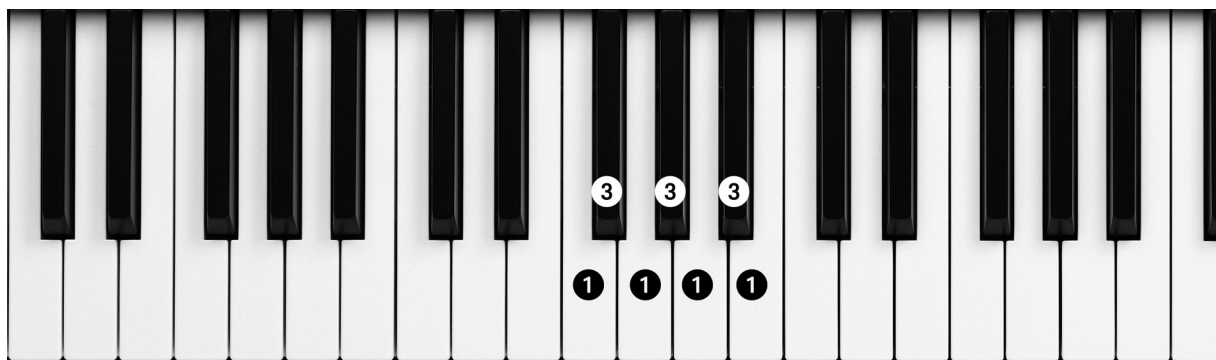
d minor has a B^b

g minor has a B^b, and an E^b

(I don't worry at this stage about keeping the accidentals in the order in which they appear in the key signature - there isn't much point if the theory is not in place).

(A) Right Hand

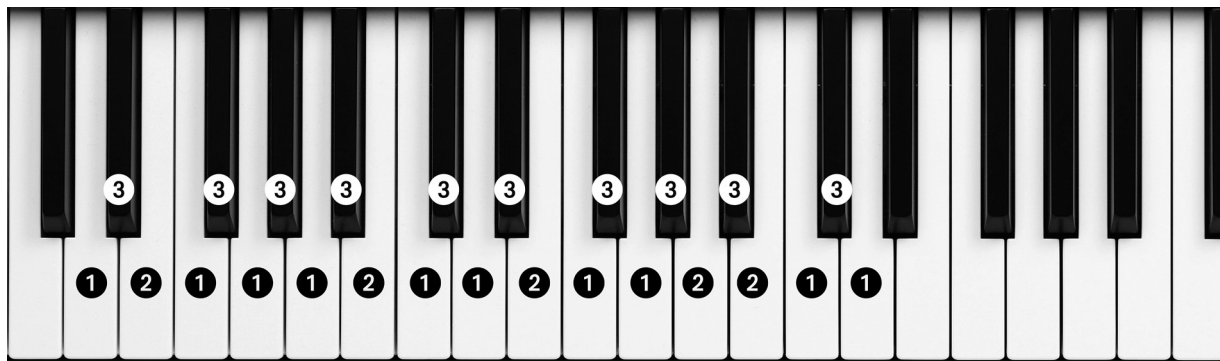
Start on a mini-scale of F to B. Put the thumb on every white note and the 3rd finger on every black note.



You'll probably get the hang of this very quickly - it is easy with the right hand going up. But coming down, it is too easy to get wrong: make sure that the second finger and the thumb aren't in the wrong order on the two adjacent white notes. It should be:

2nd finger on C - thumb on B





(For amusement, try starting on different notes)

Chromatic Scales

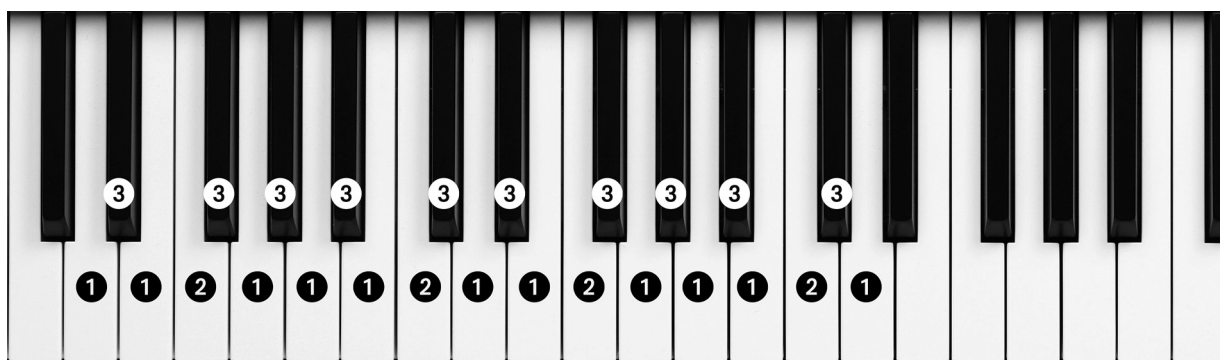
(B) Left Hand

Start with the same mini-scale that you used for the Right Hand on page 12.

In the extended scale, for the Left Hand, the fingering problem happens on the way up:

2nd finger on E - thumb on F

2nd finger on B - thumb on D



Arpeggios

(A) Right Hand

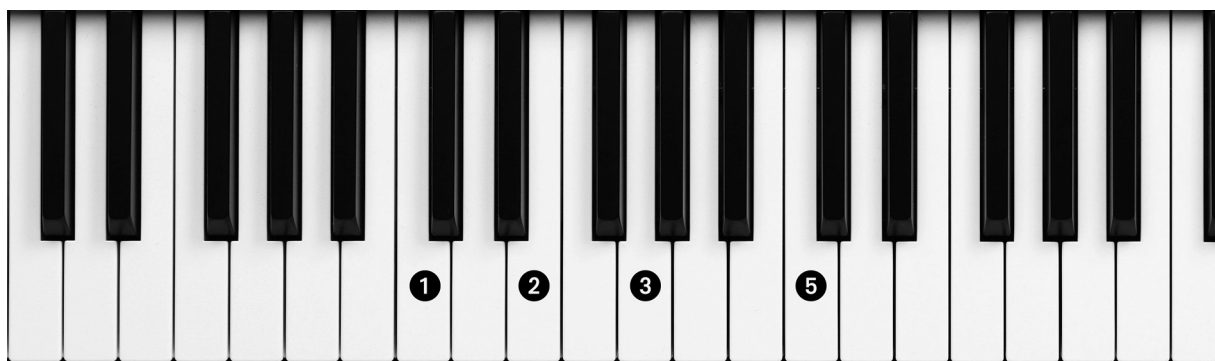
(i) All White Notes: G Majors, e and d Minors

Another of the major new technical exercises at Grade 2 is the Arpeggio

In the Olde Days, there were one octave arpeggios at Grade 1 that made a useful introduction to the two octave arpeggio demanded at Grade 2. Alas, they are no longer included.

This is how to play an arpeggio: Stretch an octave (or as near as you can) Play the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the scale with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd fingers. For an experienced player, this is easy - but I find it has to be explained and demonstrated to the inexperienced.

In C major, play the C with the thumb, the E with the 2nd finger, and the G with the 3rd finger. Finish off with the 5th finger on the top C - retrace your steps: play the G, E and C going down.



Try this also, playing all four notes at once:



Having got the hang of one octave, the next thing is to extend the pattern over two octaves, by putting the thumb on the top C and carrying on to the right.

It might be helpful to say the names of the notes before starting, to focus on playing the right ones.

As with scales, aim for a smooth passage of the thumb in the Right Hand going up - there should be no gap, (not even a tiny one) after the G. You will need to push the thumb under the other fingers quite a long way - and you will notice that the hand can rotate at the wrist - moving a bit like a windscreen wiper on a car, but with the fingers bent. DO NOT allow yourself to raise the elbow, playing with a stiff wrist.

Although it is not in the syllabus, stay with C major to learn the pattern.



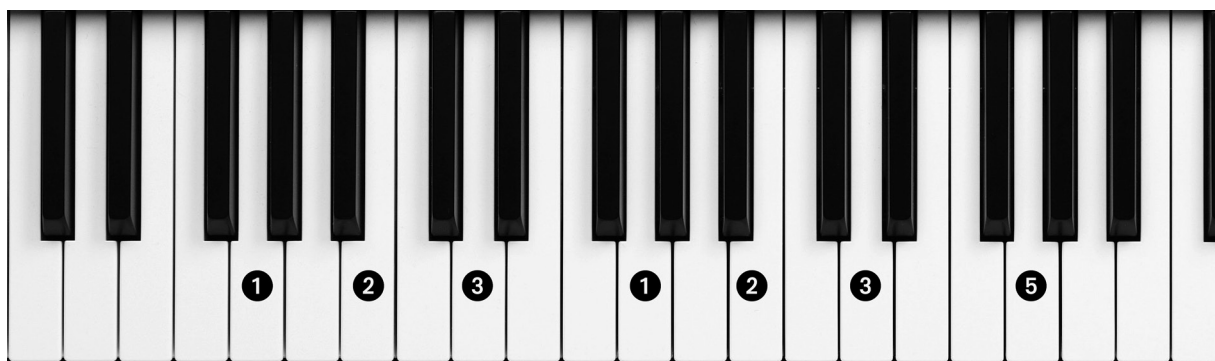
Since the thumb is heavier than the other fingers, there is a natural tendency for the notes played by the thumb to be heavier. You can counteract that by thinking in 3/4 not 6/8.

It is time to apply the pattern to different keys, when you can play the arpeggio with your eyes closed.

For G major, first of all remember that you are playing the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the scale with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd fingers. You know the scale of G major, so you know the notes are G, B and D.

Memorise

The arpeggio of G major has the notes G, B and D



There are two other arpeggios at Grade 2 which are all white notes:

d minor

Memorise

The arpeggio of d minor has the notes D, F and A



e minor

Memorise

The arpeggio of e minor has the notes E, G and B



Arpeggios

(B) Left Hand

(i) All White Notes: G Majors, e and d Minors

G Major

(N.B. going down, there should be no gap after the B, before the G.)



Arpeggios

(A) Right Hand

(ii) Second Note is Black: D and A Majors, g Minor

For this group of arpeggios, the second note is black. The fingering pattern is the same:

D Major

Memorise

The arpeggio of D major has the notes D, F \sharp and A



A Major

Memorise

The arpeggio of A major has the notes A, C \sharp and E



g minor

Memorise

The arpeggio of g minor has the notes G, B \flat and D



Arpeggios

(B) Left Hand

(ii) Second Note is Black: D and A Majors, g Minor

D Major



A Major



g minor

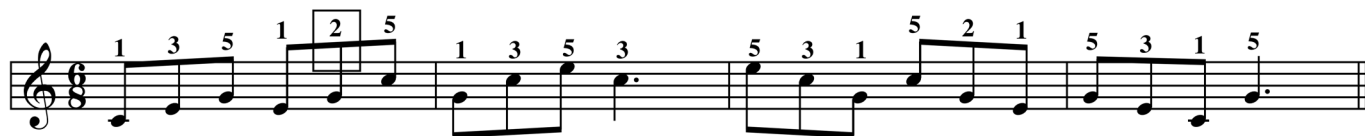


Broken Chords

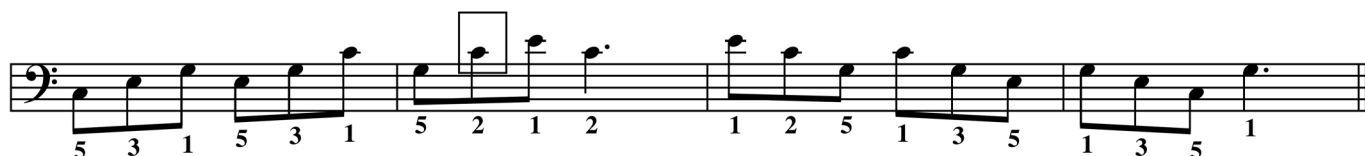
Grade 1 Revision

First of all, remind yourself how broken chords went at Grade 1. In case you didn't get how important fingering was at the Grade 1 stage, make sure you get it right now. In the right hand, put the second finger on the 2nd note of the 2nd group - the one that I've marked.

C Major



The Left Hand pattern is the same, but now the 2nd finger goes on the 2nd note of the 3rd group.



It is helpful to practise broken chords unbroken, that is playing all three notes of the chord together.

Right Hand:—



Left Hand:—



Broken Chords

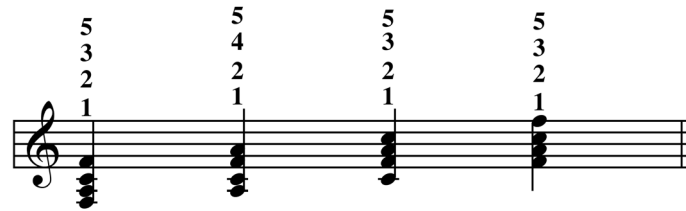
(A) Right Hand - F major and e minor

You can apply the same method to the Broken Chords at Grade 2. The main difference is that they are in groups of four notes, not three. You could start off revising one octave arpeggios at the top of page 10 - especially the bit about playing all four notes at the same time.

C major isn't required for Grade 2, so move on to F major - play the first chord in the following bar. Check the names of the notes:

Memorise

F - A - C - F



Play the other chords - N.B. all the chords have the same three notes, but in a different order. Note also, the change of fingering on the second chord. Please strive to get this right.

From here, it is relatively straightforward to play the chords broken:-



Again, I would encourage you to play this with your eyes closed, so that you get the feel of it: being able to visualise the keyboard is fundamental.

If you can play F major with your eyes closed, then e minor is exactly the same, but starting on E - (both Broken Chords at Grade 2 are all white notes.)

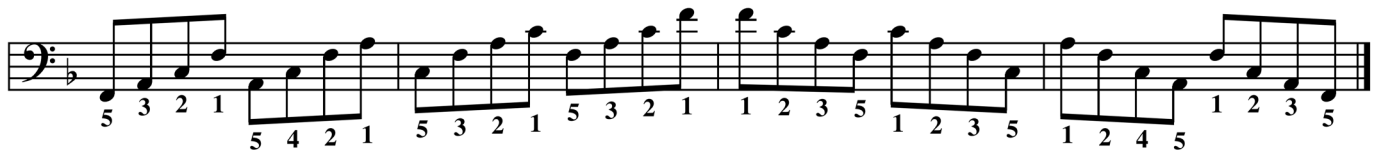
e minor



Broken Chords

(A) Left Hand - F major and e minor

F Major - note the fingering



e minor



Practice Rota

For use in the three or four weeks leading up to an exam (ABRSM Grade 2)

ABRSM Grade 2 piano scales (from 2011)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Scales: right hand (two octaves):	G major	D major	A major	g minor	F major		
	e minor				d minor		
Scales: left hand (two octaves)	G major	D major	A major	g minor	F major		
	e minor				d minor		
Scales: hands together (two octaves)	G major	D major	A major	g minor	F major		
	e minor				d minor		
Scales: in contrary motion				E major		C major	
Chromatic scales starting on D						Right Hand Left Hand	
Arpeggios: right hand (two octaves):	G major	D major	A major	g minor	d minor		
Arpeggios: left hand (two octaves)	G major	D major	A major	g minor	d minor		
Broken Chords: right hand (two octaves):	e minor				F major		
Broken Chords: left hand (two octaves)	e minor				F major		

Syllabus

Scales (similar motion)
G, D, A, F majors
E, D, G minors
(natural *or* harmonic *or* melodic at candidate's choice)
hands together *and* separately
2 octaves

Contrary-motion scales
C, E majors
hands beginning on the key-note (unison),
2 octaves

Chromatic scale
beginning on D
hands separately
1 octave

Arpeggios
G, D, A majors
D, G minors
hands separately 2 octaves

Broken chords
F major E minor
hands separately,
as pattern below

