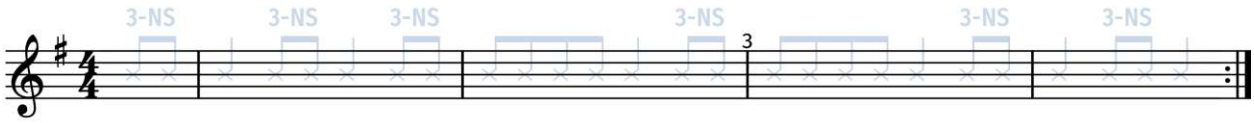
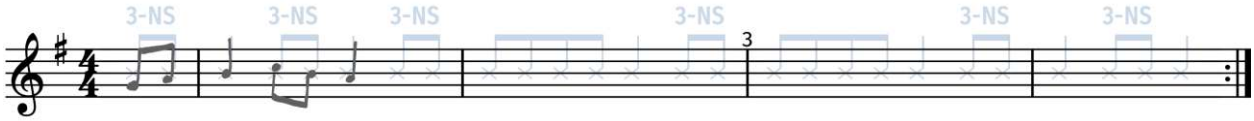
3-Note Scale Exercises

General directions.

Each exercise has "ghost notes" that indicate the rhythm for the 3-Note Scales you'll compose. For example, this:



becomes this:

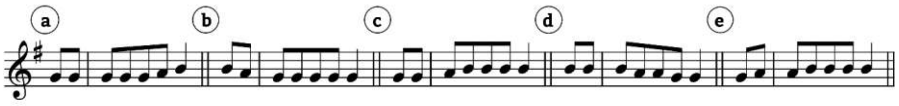


Begin each exercise with a 3-Note Scale that spans the Root & 3rd or the 3rd & 5th of the home chord of the key. After the first figure, feel free to start your 3-Note Scale on any note you wish. Use your ear. If a 3-Note Scale sounds harsh or wonky, replace it with one that sounds better. Precise (intentional) harmonic treatment is not necessary to make these exercises sound great.

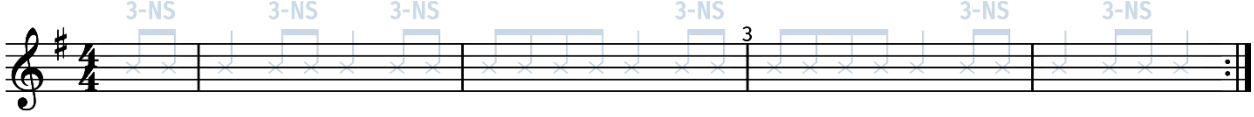
- Your 3-Note Scales can ascend or descend.
- You can connect to the next 3-Note Scale by step or leap (though some exercises request a specific connection).
- Keep working on each exercise until it sounds good enough to play for a fellow musician.

EXERCISES FOR EFFECT #1: TIME-WARP</p>

In the first melody you write, most of the rhythms have three notes, so you can just plug in a 3-Note Scale, and you're good to go. But notice the two 7-note rhythms. You'll have to repeat some notes within the 3-Note Scale. But which ones? Here are just a few common ways to spread a 3-Note Scale over this rhythm.



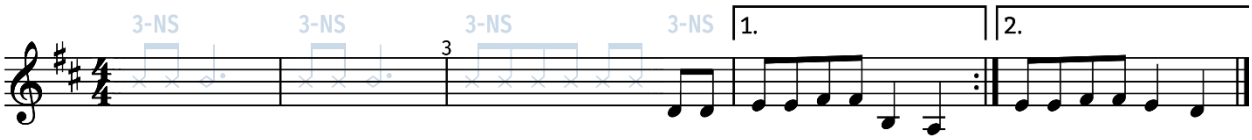
Key: G major. Start with a 3-Note Scale that uses G-A-B or B-C-D (ascending or descending).



Variation: Put the 3-note rhythms in the upper register and the 7-note rhythms in the lower register. Or vice-versa.

Now for this second melody, you have fewer 3-Note Scales to write. So why not compose at least three different solutions? Using a different strategy each time will make each one unique. Strategy? The variation for the previous exercise gives an excellent example of a strategy.

Key: D major. Start with a 3-Note Scale that uses D-E-F# or F#-G-A (ascending or descending).



EXERCISE #2: DRAWING BOUNDARIES

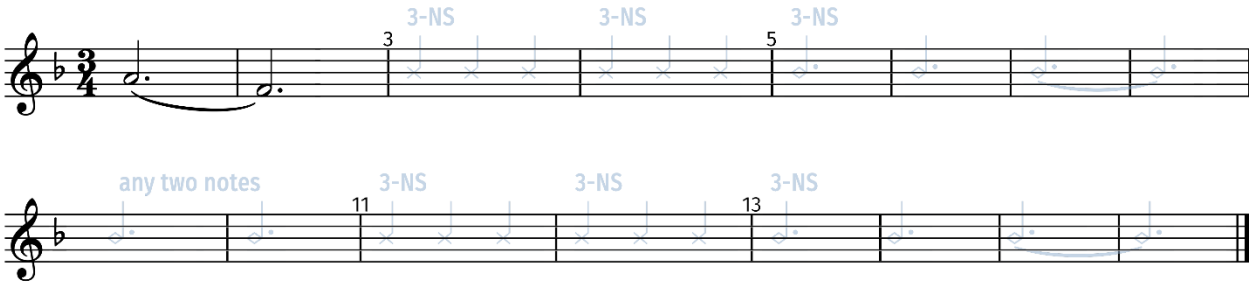
Choose one 3-Note Scale to use for bars 3-4. If your 3-Note Scale ascends in bar 3, make those same three notes descend in bar 4 (or vice-versa). You've made an "up & down 3-Note Scale pair."

Now that you've established some "registral boundaries," it's time to break them!

At bar 5, start the 3-Note Scale on a note that was not one of the boundary notes in bars 3-4. (It can be a new note—a note that isn't part of the up & down pair of 3-Note Scales. Or you can start on the middle note of your up & down pair of 3-Note Scales.)

The second phrase (starting in bar 9) works the same way as the first. It's common for a second phrase to repeat all or most of the first. If you'd rather try something different, variations might include transposing the second phrase (most commonly up or down a step) or writing a new gesture for part or all of the second phrase.

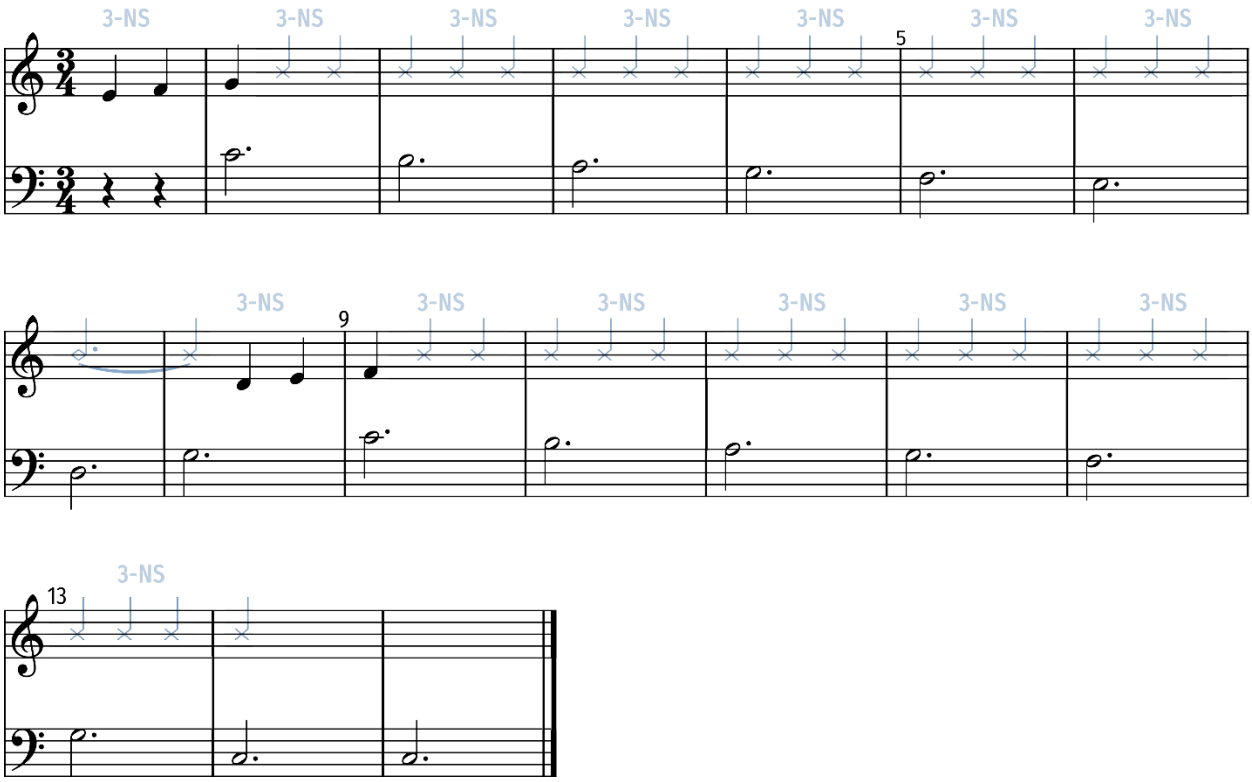
Key: F major.



EXERCISE #3: THE MELODIC TREADMILL

Each phrase already starts with a 3-Note Scale. To create a “treadmill” effect, repeat the first 3-Note Scale several times in a row. How many times? That’s up to YOU! There are several great solutions. After you stop repeating the initial figure, find a compelling way to finish each phrase.

Key: C major



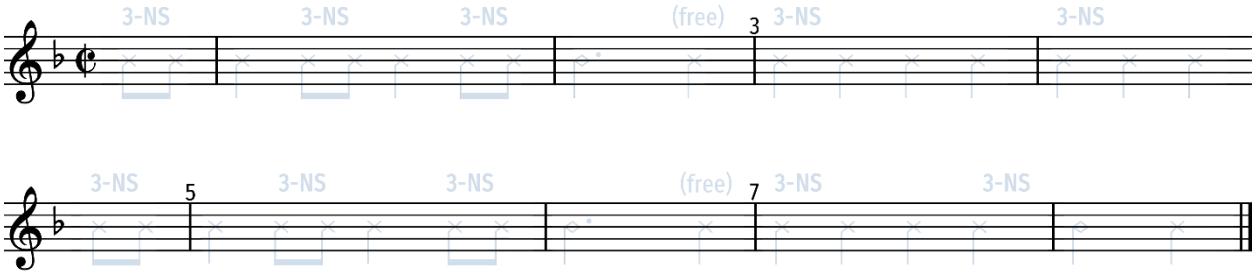
EXERCISE #4: LINKS IN A CHAIN

There are two phrases in this exercise. Both open in the same way. You'll run three 3-note scales in an overlapping sequence. That means that the middle note of each 3-Note Scale becomes the first note of the following 3-Note Scale. Use the examples in the lesson as a model if you have trouble.

Notice the two single pickup notes. (One is a pickup to bar 3; the other to bar 7.) You can match the upcoming note, repeat the previous note, choose some new note, whatever. Experiment! And look for more lessons on pickup notes from FOM.

Just to be clear, in bar 3, you need to spread a 3-note scale across a 4-note rhythm. (You did something similar in exercise #1.) Make sure to try several options before locking into one.

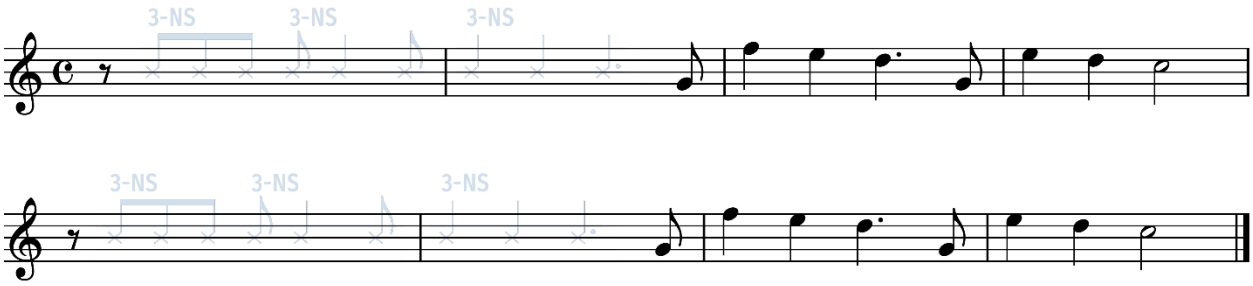
Key: D minor. Start with a 3-Note Scale that uses D-E-F or F-G-A (ascending or descending).



EXERCISE FOR EFFECT #5: THE OPEN ROAD

You have three 3-Note Scales to work with for each phrase. Arrange at least two of those 3-Note Scales to stretch out into a scale. Depending on how you connect to the other figure, your scale might be six, seven, or nine notes long.

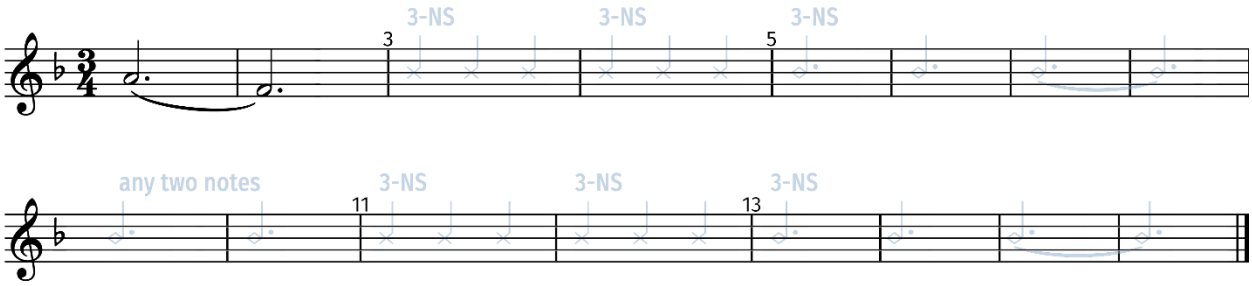
Key: C major. Start with a 3-Note Scale that uses C-D-E or E-F-G (ascending or descending).



EXERCISE FOR EFFECT #6: EXPRESSIVE MISDIRECTION

If this rhythm template looks familiar, it's because you already used it for exercise #2. With new instructions, you'll produce a new melody—or at least a significant variation.

Engineer a hard connection between bars 3 & 4 or bars 4 & 5. Remember, to make a hard (expressive) connection, leap "away" from the 3-Note Scale. If your 3-Note Scale goes up, leap down. If your 3-Note Scale goes down, leap up.

If you're feeling ambitious, write a second version that makes hard connections between bars 3 & 4 AND bars 4 & 5.

Key: F Major. The first notes already establish the key so you are free to begin bar 3 as you wish