

# UNDERSTANDING WHAT MUSIC THEORY REALLY IS

A Free Beginner's Guide

COMPLETE BEGINNER GUIDE

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# Welcome

I'm really glad you're here.

Whether you're picking up an instrument for the very first time or you've been playing for years, learning music theory will help you become a better musician. It doesn't matter if you play piano, guitar, drums, sing, or produce beats on a computer — music theory has something to offer everyone.

## 1. Music Theory Is Like Learning a Language

When people hear the words “music theory,” they often think it's going to be difficult. The truth is, it isn't.

Music theory is simply understanding how music works.

Think of it like learning a new language. Nobody becomes fluent overnight. You learn a few words, then a few sentences, and before you know it, you're having conversations without even thinking about it.

Music theory works exactly the same way. You learn one idea, then another, and over time everything starts to make sense.

## 2. It Works on Every Instrument

One of the best things about music theory is that it doesn't belong to just one instrument.

Whether you play piano, guitar, bass, violin, or make beats on your laptop, the same ideas apply. The notes stay the same. The chords stay the same. The scales stay the same. Only the way you play them changes.

That means once you've learnt music theory, you can take that knowledge with you wherever your musical journey goes.

### 3. You'll Start Seeing Patterns Everywhere

At first it can feel like there's loads to remember.

But after a while you'll realise music is really just patterns.

You'll notice the same chord progressions appearing in your favourite songs. You'll hear melodies using the same scales. You'll even start predicting what chord is coming next before it's played.

Once you start spotting those patterns, learning music becomes much easier.

### 4. Theory Helps You Understand What You're Playing

One of my favourite things about music theory is that it tells you why something sounds good.

Instead of just copying songs or memorising finger positions, you'll actually understand what you're playing. That confidence makes a huge difference.

### 5. Here's What That Looks Like

Imagine you're playing piano.

You've learnt C major, A minor, F major and G major. They sound nice together, but now you know why they work. Instead of randomly trying chords until something sounds good, you understand that they're all part of the same key, so building chord progressions becomes much easier.

Now imagine you're playing guitar.

You've learnt a riff by ear, but you realise it's using notes from the A minor scale. Suddenly you can create your own riffs using those same notes instead of copying someone else's every time.

Now think about a drummer.

At first you might just play a beat because it sounds good. But once you understand rhythm, counting, bars and timing, you know exactly where to place fills, when to leave space, and how to lock in with the rest of the band instead of guessing.

Even though those examples are completely different, they're all using music theory. Theory isn't just about notes and chords — it's about understanding how music fits together. Every musician uses the same musical language. They're just speaking it through different instruments.

## 6. How One Scale Gives You a Whole Key

Remember when I said C major, A minor, F major and G major all work together because they're part of the same key? Here's exactly why, and it's simpler than it sounds.

### Finding Your Scale First: The Tone-Tone-Semitone Trick

Before you can build a key, you need the scale it's built from — and there's a simple pattern that lets you work out any major scale on the spot, without needing to memorise all 12 separately. This is something I use constantly when I need to figure out a scale in the moment.

**The pattern is: Tone, Tone, Semitone, Tone, Tone, Tone, Semitone.**

A tone means two notes up from the note you're on. A semitone means the first key right beside the note you're on. Start on any note, follow that exact pattern, and you'll land on a correct major scale every time, no matter which note you started from.

### Why This Trick Also Gives You Your Chords

Here's the useful part: once you know the scale, you already know its chords too, because every major scale — without exception — gives you the exact same mix: 3 major chords, 3 minor chords, and 1 diminished chord. Always that split, every single time, only the actual notes change depending on which scale you're in.

Building one of these chords is easy: start on a note from the scale, then take every other note going up from there, three notes in total.

#### WORTH NOTING

A diminished chord sounds tense and unsettled compared to major or minor chords — it naturally wants to move somewhere else rather than sit comfortably. You don't need to use it much as a beginner, but it's worth knowing it's always there, in every key, without exception.

### **Example 1 – The Key of C Major**

The C major scale is: C, D, E, F, G, A, B.

Build a chord starting on each note, and you get:

**C major, D minor, E minor, F major, G major, A minor, and a B diminished chord.**

That's 3 major (C, F, G), 3 minor (D, E, A), and 1 diminished (B) — exactly as expected. Notice C major, F major, G major and A minor are all in that list — the exact four chords from our earlier example. Now you know why they work together: they all came from the same scale.

### **Example 2 – The Key of G Major**

The G major scale is: G, A, B, C, D, E, F#.

**G major, A minor, B minor, C major, D major, E minor, and an F# diminished chord.**

Same pattern, completely different set of chords, just because we started on a different scale.

### **Example 3 – The Key of F Major**

The F major scale is: F, G, A, Bb, C, D, E.

**F major, G minor, A minor, Bb major, C major, D minor, and an E diminished chord.**

### **The Pattern That Never Changes**

However many keys you try, the pattern is always identical: major, minor, minor, major, major, minor, diminished — always 3 major, 3 minor, 1 diminished. Only the actual note names change. Once this clicks, you stop needing to guess which chords go together — you already know, just by knowing the scale.

# Questions & Answers

## **What is music theory?**

Music theory is simply understanding how music works. It explains why certain notes, chords and rhythms sound the way they do and how they all fit together.

## **Why is music theory important?**

Because it helps you understand what you're playing instead of just memorising it. The more you understand your music, the easier it becomes to learn songs, write your own ideas, improvise, communicate with other musicians and keep improving.

## **How do musicians use music theory to improve their music?**

They use it to solve problems. If a chord progression feels boring, theory gives them ideas. If a melody doesn't sound right, theory helps them understand why. If they want to change the key of a song, improvise over chords, or make a song sound more emotional, theory gives them the tools to do it.

The more theory you know, the more choices you have as a musician. And that's what music theory is really about — not rules, but understanding.