

# SOLFÈGE DRILLS

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Scales and arpeggios constitute an ideal medium for teaching elements of instrumental music technique. When a particular technique is called for in a piece of music, students have less trouble when they have already mastered the technique in scales and arpeggios. It is unfortunate that there does not exist for sightsinging an analogous body of standard, easily memorized skills.

Students' efforts to master the pitch element of melodies in sightsinging texts are greatly facilitated by first practicing well-graded rote exercises designed specifically to teach the pitch "problem" contained in the melodies (e.g., "conjunct melodies in major keys," or "melodies with skip in the tonic triad.") The purpose of this article is to present a few simple solfège drills and to suggest ways they may be used in a classroom setting.

I teach in the music department of a small liberal arts college. Students enroll in a four-term sequence of sightsinging classes, along with independent classes in written theory, ear training, and keyboard harmony. Class size ranges from five to fifteen students. Sightsinging meets for two one-hour periods per week. Students use two textbooks: Robert Ottman's *Music for Sight Singing* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1986) and, not unexpectedly, my own book, *Rhythm Reading: Elementary Through Advanced Training* (Mountain View, CA.: Mayfield, 1989).

For each class period, I assign three to five exercises from *Music for Sight Singing* (using moveable Do), three to five exercises from *Rhythm Reading*, and two or three short solfège drills, as individuals or as a class, but always from memory. Students sing the drills in many permutations (see variants, later in this article).

## THE DRILLS

Each set of solfège drills (following) is intended to help students master a specific melodic sightsinging concept. The drills may be sung with solfège, numbers (1 = Do) or, less successfully, with letter names or with a single neutral syllable such as "La." In class, all drills and variants should be performed from memory.

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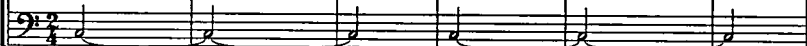
Figure 1.

## Major Scale Drills

Purpose: Drills 1–3: To prepare students to sing melodies in major keys, using conjunct motion. Drills 4–8: To acquire agility in using solfège in major keys.

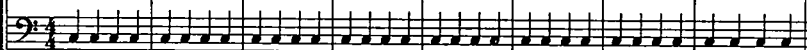
### 1. Basic scale

Sing:   
Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do Do Ti La Sol Fa Mi Re Do

Play: 

### 2. Slow scale

Sing:   
Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do Do Ti La Sol Fa Mi Re Do

Play: 

### 3. Fast scale



### 4. Intervals



### 5. Thirds



### 6. Broken thirds



### 7. Fourths



### 8. Broken fourths



Fifths and sixths: Add if desired and if students' vocal ranges permit.

## SOLFEGE DRILLS

Figure 2.

## Tonic Triad Drills in Major (I)

**Purpose:** To prepare students to sing melodies in major keys with leaps within the tonic triad.

### Root position (A major)

### 1. Arpeggiated triad



## 2. Small leaps



### 3. Intervals



#### 4. Large leaps



1st inversion (F major)

### 5. Arpeggiated triad



## 6. Small leaps



## 7. Intervals



## 8. Large leaps

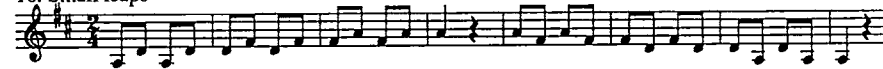


**2nd inversion (D major)**

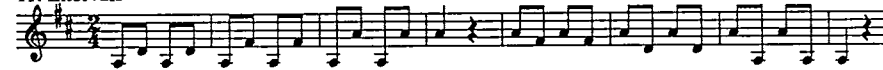
9. Arpeggiated triad



## 10. Small leaps



## 11. Intervals



## 12. Large lcaps



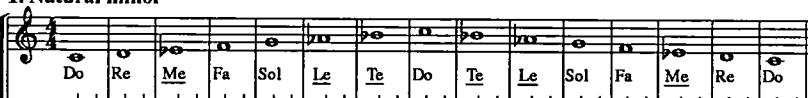
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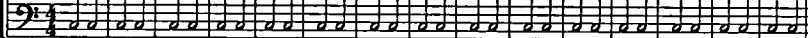
Figure 3.

## Minor Scale Overview

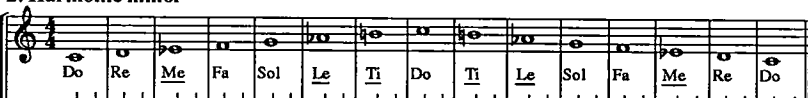
**Purpose:** An overview of the three “versions” of minor. This drill sheet supports learning in written theory more than learning in sight singing. Singing in natural minor, for example, is of limited value as a preparation for singing tonal (rather than modal) melodies.

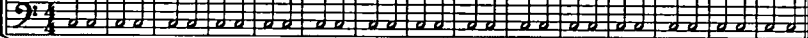
### 1. Natural minor

Sing: 

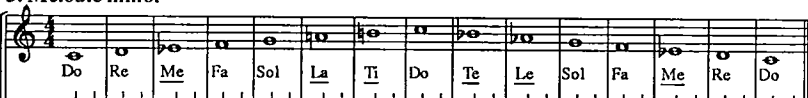
Play: 

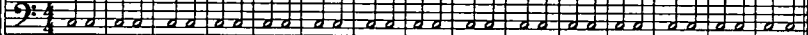
### 2. Harmonic minor

Sing: 

Play: 

### 3. Melodic minor

Sing: 

Play: 

# SOLFEGE DRILLS

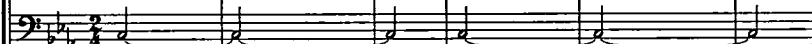
Figure 4.

## (Melodic) Minor Scale Drills

Purpose: Drills 1–3: To prepare students to sing melodies in minor keys, using conjunct motion. Drills 4–8: To acquire agility in using solfège in minor keys.

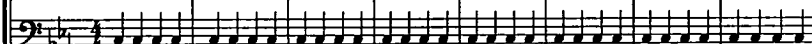
1. Basic scale

Play: 

Sing: 

2. Slow scale

Play: 

Sing: 

3. Fast scale



4. Intervals



5. Thirds



6. Broken thirds



7. Fourths



8. Broken fourths



Figure 5.

## Tonic Triad Drills in Minor (i)

**Purpose:** To prepare students to sing melodies in minor keys with leaps within the tonic triad.

**Root position (A minor)**

1. Arpeggiated triad



2. Small leaps



3. Intervals



4. Large leaps



**1st inversion (F minor)**

5. Arpeggiated triad



6. Small leaps



7. Intervals



8. Large leaps



**2nd inversion (D minor)**

9. Arpeggiated triad



10. Small leaps



11. Intervals



12. Large leaps



# SOLFEGE DRILLS

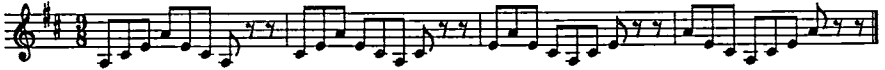
Figure 6.

## Dominant Triad Drills (V)

**Purpose:** To prepare students to sing melodies with leaps within the dominant triad.

**Root position (D major)**

1. Arpeggiated triad



2. Small leaps



3. Intervals

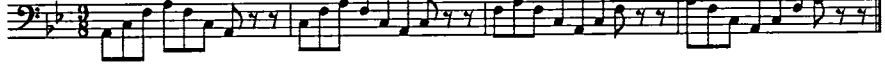


4. Large leaps



**1st inversion (Bb major)**

5. Arpeggiated triad



6. Small leaps



7. Intervals

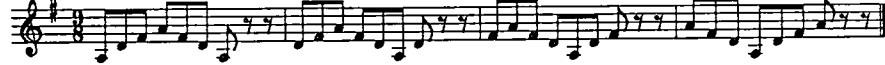


8. Large leaps



**2nd inversion (G major)**

9. Arpeggiated triad



10. Small leaps



11. Intervals



12. Large leaps



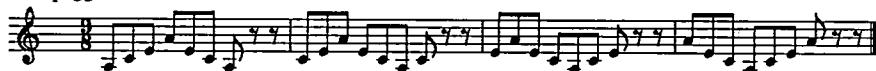
Figure 7.

## Other Triad Drills

Purpose: To prepare students to sing melodies with leaps within other triads.

**Root position (      )**

- ### 1. Arpeggiated triad



- ## 2. Small leaps



- ### 3. Intervals



- #### 4. Large leaps



**1st inversion ( )**

- ### 5. Arpeggiated triad



- ## 6. Small leaps



- ## 7. Intervals



- ## 8. Large leaps



**2nd inversion ( )**

- ### 9. Arpeggiated triad



- ## 10. Small leaps



- ## 11. Intervals



- ## 12. Large leaps



**Instructions:** To create a drill sheet for, e.g., “Subdominant Triad Drills in Major (IV),” use the following key signatures:

Root position: E major; 1st inversion: C major; 2nd inversion: A major.

# SOLFEGE DRILLS

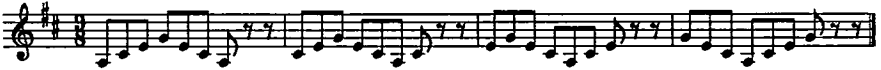
Figure 8.

## Dominant Seventh Chord Drills (V7)

**Purpose:** To prepare students to sing melodies with leaps within the dominant seventh chord.

**Root position (D major)**

1. Arpeggiated triad



2. Small leaps



3. Intervals



4. Large leaps



**1st inversion (Bb major)**

5. Arpeggiated triad



6. Small leaps



7. Intervals



8. Large leaps



**2nd inversion (G major)**

9. Arpeggiated triad



10. Small leaps



11. Intervals



12. Large leaps



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Figure 9.

## Chromatic Solfège

**Purpose:** To prepare students to sing chromatic melodies.

### 1. Chromatic drill



Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti Do Do Do Do Re Do Di Re Re Mi Re Ri Mi Mi Fa Mi Fa Fa So Fa Fi So

So La So Si La La Ti La Li Ti Ti Do Ti Do Do Do Do Ti Do Ti Ti La Ti Te La

La So La Le So So Fa So Se Fa Fa Mi Fa Mi Mi Re Mi Me Re Re Do Re Ra Do Do

### 2. Chromatic scale



Do Di Re Ri Mi Fa Fi So Si La Li Ti Do Do Ti Te La Le So Se Fa Mi Me Re Ra Do

## Modulation

**Purpose:** (1) To prepare students to sing melodies that modulate. (2) To practice changing solfège syllables at points of modulation.

**Instructions:** Sing a scale ascending or descending. Before beginning, choose a "pivot note," i.e., a note that will be sung as a syllable in one key and sung again as a syllable in a new key. Examples:

1. Sing a C major scale ascending. Turn La into Fa. The new key will be E major.



C: Do Re Mi Fa Sol La E: Fa Sol La Ti Do

2. Sing a D major scale descending. Turn Mi into La. The new key will be A major.



D: Do Ti La Sol Fa Mi A: La Sol Fa Mi Re Do

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Figure 10.

## Medieval Church Modes

**Purpose:** To prepare to students to sing melodies using medieval church modes.

### 1. Basic scale

1: Basic scale

Sing: 

Play: 

## 2. Slow scale

2: Slow scale

Sing:

### 3. Fast scale

5. Fast scale

## 4. Intervals

4. Intervals

## 5. Thirds

## 6. Broken thirds

2/4

Broken Glass

## 7. Fourths

The bass line of 'The Rose Tree' is written on a single staff in 2/4 time. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody starts on a middle C (C4) and proceeds with a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, creating a rhythmic and melodic pattern. The notation includes various rests and accidentals, such as flats and naturals, to indicate the specific notes and their durations. The piece concludes with a final note and a double bar line.

## 8. Broken fourths

8. Broken fourths

**Instructions:** The drill sheet above may be adapted for use with authentic church modes—Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian, Ionian (of course!) and, if desired, Locrian.

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## VARIANTS

In a class setting, these drills can be performed in a variety of ways. While still teaching the specified melodic concept, each variant goes further: it trains intonation, rhythm, and sheer concentration. Following are a few useful variants:

### Add a drone

With any drill: one student (or half the class, or all men, or all women, or all but one student) sing a drone on Do (or any other syllable) while the rest of the class sings the drill.

With a simple scale: student 1 sings a drone on Do. Student 2 sings Do-Re and holds Re until the professor cues that Re is in tune. Then student 2 stops singing and student 3 sings Re-Mi and holds Mi until the professor cues that Mi is in tune. And so on. (Figure 11.) This works best with fewer than ten students.

Figure 11.

The musical notation for Figure 11 is arranged in four staves, each labeled on the left: Student 1, Student 2, Student 3, and Student 4. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. Student 1's part is in the bass clef and consists of a continuous drone on the note Do (C4). Student 2's part is in the treble clef and begins with a whole rest, followed by a half note D4 (Do), which is held for the remainder of the measure. Student 3's part is in the treble clef and begins with a whole rest, followed by a half note E4 (Re), which is held for the remainder of the measure. Student 4's part is in the treble clef and begins with a whole rest, followed by a half note F#4 (Mi), which is held for the remainder of the measure. To the right of the notation, the text "etc." is written.

When all students have sung once, start again. This time, student 2 sings the drone, student 3 sings Do-Re and holds Re, etc.

With a simple scale, for an enlightening demonstration of good intonation and of difference tones:<sup>1</sup> choose two very competent singers, both women. One sings a drone, the other a simple scale. Both should sing very loudly. The difference tones indicated in Figure 12 will be heard most readily.

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Figure 12.

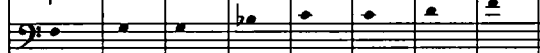
Singers: 

Diff. tone: 

This demonstration produces in-class enthusiasm bordering on hysteria. Cries of "I hear it" ripple across the classroom. If this demonstration works well, also try the demonstration shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13.

Singers: 

Diff. tone: 

## Rhythm variations

Apply simple stock rhythms to each drill. For drills with duple division of the beat, use the two rhythm variants shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14.

6. Broken thirds (Major Scale Drills)

Original: 

Variant 1:  etc.

Variant 2: 

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For drills with triple division of the beat, practice the three variants shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15.

Root position (A major)  
1. Arpeggiated triad (Major Scale Drills)

Original: 

Variant 1:  etc.

Variant 2: 

Variant 3: 

Within each grouping of two or three notes, the single long note (eighth or dotted eighth) is good for intonation and security. The one or two short note values (sixteenth) are for agility.

## Canons

Some of the most successful variations are canons and other polyphonic treatments of drills. Perform the drills as canons as follows:

Number of parts: two up to as many students as are in the class.

Temporal distance between each entry: one measure, one beat, or, as an exercise in concentration, half a beat (Figure 16).

Figure 16.

1. Basic scale (Major Scale Drills)

Original: 

Variant: 

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Interval of imitation: the unison most often; other intervals if the students are able.

### Other polyphonic variants

On several drill sheets, it is possible to combine two drills, using the same figure (Figure 17).

Figure 17.

**2nd inversion (D major)**

11. Intervals

(Tonic Triad Drills in Major)

12. Large leaps

For a drill that includes an ascending and a descending portion, half the class starts at the beginning (the bottom of the scale) and half the class starts from the middle (Figure 18).

Figure 18.

**6. Broken thirds** (Major Scale Drills)

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## Variant for Scale Drills

Begin on a note other than the tonic (Figure 19).

Figure 19.

1. Basic scale (Major Scale Drills)

Original: 

Variant: 

## Other variants

Sing all or part of a drill or variant silently: cue students when to sing out loud or to sing “in their heads.”

Sing any drill or variant with attention drawn to one or more of the following elements of music:

1. Dynamics: loud or soft; *cresc.* or *dim.* or a swell.
2. Tempo: slow or fast; *accel.* or *ritard.*
3. Articulation: *staccato* or *legato* or a gradual change between the two.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A difference tone is, in a sense, an aural illusion. It occurs “as the result of a so-called nonlinear distortion of the acoustical signal in the ear” (Juan G. Roederer, *Introduction to the Physics and Psychophysics of Music*, 2nd ed. [New York: Springer-Verlag, 1979]: 34). When two pitches are heard together, the most clearly audible difference tone is the frequency representing the difference of the two frequencies sounding.