

Guitar Fretboard Theory - Half Steps & Whole Steps

Half steps and whole steps are also known as "intervals". They are the basic intervals used to build scales modes and chords. Scales, modes, and chords are the building blocks for melodies, lead riffs, songs, and just about everything else related to the music we like to play and hear! Let's explore half steps and whole steps.

Be sure your guitar is in tune and play the following notes on your guitar; listen to them closely! When you play one note after another this is known a half step which is a melodic interval (as the notes would appear in a melody). Two notes sounding together create a harmonic interval.

	G to A	G to A flat		
	This is a whole step. Distance of 2 frets	This is a half step. Distance of 1 fret	Harmonic whole steps - Notes sound together	Harmonic half steps
T	0	0	2	1
A	2	1	0	5
B			5	4

Notes About Whole & Half Steps

1. Knowing about intervals is important to understand our musical system.
2. An interval is the distance between two notes. Half & whole steps are the smallest regular intervals.
3. Intervals can be melodic (notes played one after another), or harmonic (two notes sounded at the same time).
4. Scales are built using whole and half steps. A scale built of all half steps is called a chromatic scale.

Play & Hear Whole & Half Step Basics

Mark in the whole & half steps!

E E F G G F E D	A G F G A A A	A Major Scale	A Minor Scale
2 2 3 5 5 3 2 0	7 5 3 5 7 7 7	0 2 4 5 7 9 11 12	0 2 3 5 7 8 10 12

These examples are played on a single string so you can easily detect whether the interval is a melodic half step or a melodic whole step. A half step is played by moving to the very next fret; a whole step has a skip of one fret between notes.

C C# D D# E F F# G	G# A A# B C	8 9 10 11	6 7 8 9 10
3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	11 12 13 14 15	7 8 9 10	

Fingering 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 4

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 4

A chromatic scale is made up of all half steps

Now play a chromatic scale using multiple strings!