

Jazz for Kids:

10 Exciting Lessons for use in your piano studio

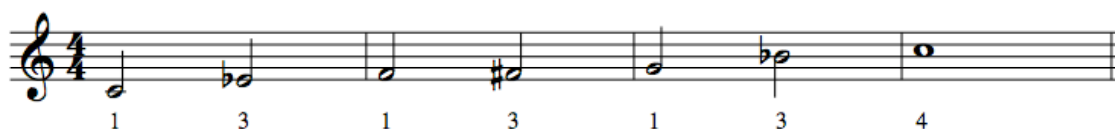
TEACHERS GUIDE

Lesson 1: The Basics: The Blues Scale

The Blues Scale is often presented to most piano students in high school or college as part of a music theory curriculum. Many times, the blues scale is not easily explained and also not written correctly. It is so simple, I have taught this scale to students as young as seven with great success. It can be taught in several different keys, but as an example I will explain how to teach it in the key of C.

The first thing to explain to the student is that this scale is different than the others and will sound very jazzy. Tell them that it is also different because they will only need to use their thumb, middle finger and ring finger to play this scale. Maybe you can come up with a creative analogy to this, but also explain that this scale will have two leaps on the outsides and 3 steps in a row (including a black key) in the middle. To initially teach them this scale, use alternating thumb and middle finger until the last note, which will be using the ring finger.

Below, you will find the notes beginning on middle C in the blues scale and the appropriate fingering. Just teach this in the right hand:



A couple of important things to note:

- Unless they are an older student, I would not show them the above music, teach this scale by rote and repetition, or perhaps write down just the note letters.
- Have them practice going up and down the scale.
- Once they get good at that, have them play the blues scale with a 'blues feel' – in jazz we could call this a Doo-bah feel. But the idea is to have the first note long, and the second one short, but with an accent. For some of you, this swing feel may come naturally, but for others – look below to help you with the rhythm:



Now here is the practical use of the blues scale:

Have the student practice going up and down with the swing feel with you playing the blues changes below, and walking bass (see lesson 6 to learn about how to play blues changes). If you don't know how to do this, play track 1 on the accompanying CD while they go up and down the blues scale to sort of hear how things fit together.

Tell them that they have learning the first steps toward improvisation, and in the next lesson, they will learn how to really improvise (make something up on the spot) and have a 'jam session' with your teacher.

Extension:

You can always come back to this lesson because of its fun nature and eventually you should have your student learn the blues scale in all of the keys. See if they can figure it out by ear, but if not, either help them, or use the pattern below to figure it out:

Tonic – 1.5 steps – whole step – half step – half step – 1.5 steps – whole step (ending note)

Now you are ready for lesson 2!