Universal Fingering for Major Scales

This fingering makes it possible to play all twelve major scales using essentially the same “universal” fingering, and without playing any open strings.

A slight fingering variation occurs at the start of the third octave: the scales whose third octaves begin in 4th position or lower (C, C# & D majors) begin their third octaves with 1-3, while the scales whose third octaves begin above 4th position (Eb thru B majors) begin their third octaves with 1-2.

Due to the fact that one cannot avoid starting C major on an open string, it is a slight exception, requiring a fingering “correction” (0-1-3) at the beginning of the scale.

The four scales that begin on the G string (Ab, A, Bb & B majors) also require one minor modification. Due to the fact that their second octaves end above 4th position, the final fingering for the second octave in these keys is 1-2-3.

C: 0-1-3 1x2-4 1-2-4 1-2-4 1-3-4 1-3 1-2 1-2-3 1-2 1-2 1-2-3
C#, D: 1x2-4 1x2-4 1-2-4 1-2-4 1-3-4 1-3 1-2 1-2-3 1-2 1-2 1-2-3
Eb, E, F, F#, G: 1x2-4 1x2-4 1-2-4 1-2-4 1-3-4 1-2 1-2 1-2-3 1-2 1-2 1-2-3
Ab, A, Bb, B: 1x2-4 1x2-4 1-2-4 1-2-4 1-2-3 1-2 1-2 1-2-3 1-2 1-2 1-2-3

Use of Guide-Notes

When learning the universal fingering, it is helpful to practice it with the guide-notes that connect the position changes in the first two octaves. The principle is:

Ascending:
- When shifting backward: 4th finger shifts back to the note just played by the 2nd finger, then 1st finger “walks” across to the next string
- When shifting forward: 1st finger is the guide (return to 1st finger, then shift on 1st finger)

Descending:
- 1st finger is the guide on both forward and backward shifts

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