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# Single-String Frames

The scale fingerings in this book can be played easily if you have a grasp of the following whole-step/half-step patterns. There are a total of eight possibilities when you place all four fingers on a string without using any extensions. In other words, if you are playing only half steps and/or whole steps, there are eight possible shapes, or “frames” you can play. The five shown below are the ones we’ll use in the major-scale fingerings that follow.

The first frame is three consecutive whole steps, which we’ll abbreviate as *www*.

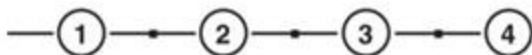


FIG. 1.1. *www* Fingering Frame

Arbitrarily putting the first finger on  $E^5$ , in standard notation, the “*www*” frame looks like figure 1.2.

*www*: whole, whole, whole

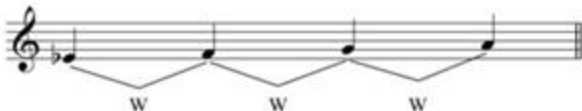


FIG. 1.2. *www* from  $E^5$

You can play the frames from any first-finger position; the  $E^5$  is just an example.

Here are the other frames. Note: Usually, the frame diagrams are presented vertically, to match how we see them on the fingerboard, but we’ll present them horizontally in this chapter to make a clearer connection to the notation.

*wh*: two whole steps and a half step

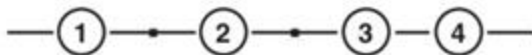


FIG. 1.3. *wh* Fingering

## CHAPTER 2

## Four-String Frames

A four-string frame is a combination of four single-string frames. Here's a four-string frame for the key of C major, diagrammed here as a bird's-eye view of the fingerboard. The vertical lines represent the G, D, A, and E strings, left to right. The lowest root C is set white on black.

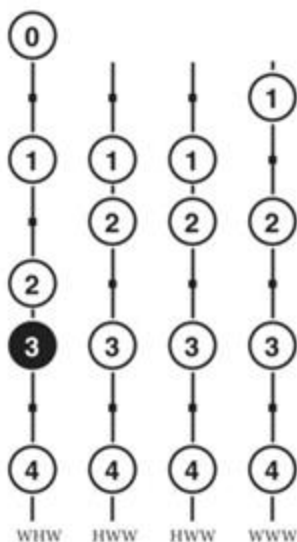


FIG. 2.1. C Major Four-String Frame

The four-string frame includes every note in the key of C that's available in first position. Here it is notated:



FIG. 2.2. C Major Scale Notation

# VIOLIN: TECHNIQUE

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- Etudes applying these scales and arpeggios in an improvisational context
- Essential chord and scale relationships that are useful for improvising
- Exercises to help memorize and internalize the scales

**Rob Thomas** is a professor of strings at Berklee College of Music, where he has taught since 2002. He has performed and recorded with the String Trio of New York, the Jazz Passengers, Chuck Owen's Jazz Surge big band, the Mahavishnu Project, the Chris Parker Quintet, Gypsy Jazz Caravan, and many others.

"Through notated exercises, visual aids, and fingering approaches, Rob Thomas presents a detailed and logical approach for four-stringed fretless instrumentalists to understand and navigate scales and chord changes.

He has mapped out a practical way to understand jazz harmony and fingering applications that are essential to playing jazz."

—Regina Carter

"In the 1990s, one evening, I heard Rob Thomas playing the Clifford Brown tune 'Daahoud.' He played such a beautiful and musical solo, in such an effortless way, I still remember it to this day. It was a tune I always found challenging—with the inconvenient key centers of C<sup>+</sup> major and E<sup>-</sup>min(Maj7), and then ending in E major. I often wondered what methods or thinking Rob had used to get the results I heard, as he burned through this tune.

Now, with this book, Rob offers a full disclosure of his approach. It is so clearly written and its ideas are expressed so transparently that I will be using it as a method book with my students—as well as working out of it myself to solve some problems that still plague me. I recommend this book to all violinists and violists who want to unlock the mysteries of improvising in all twelve tonalities.

Rob, thank you for your great contribution!"

—Mark Feldman

"Great book for violinists who are eager to learn what improvisation is about, and to help keep in technical and mental shape those who already know."

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"Rob Thomas's *A Modern Method for Violin Scales* belongs in the library—and in the fingers—of every serious violinist. For many years, Rob's approach has laid the essential technical foundation for violinists of all genres at Berklee College of Music. Time and again, his systematic approach to mastering all diatonic modes in all twelve keys has produced immediate and far-reaching results.

In my estimation, this scale system represents as significant a contribution to the violin literature as the timeless scale methods of Carl Flesch and Ivan Galamian. Moreover, Rob's approach addresses contemporary musical language, harmony, ear training, and improvisation—aspects that are sorely lacking from historical scale methods.

My students and I have reaped tremendous dividends from internalizing and practicing Rob's system. You and your students will too."

—David Wallace, Chair of the String Department,  
Berklee College of Music



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