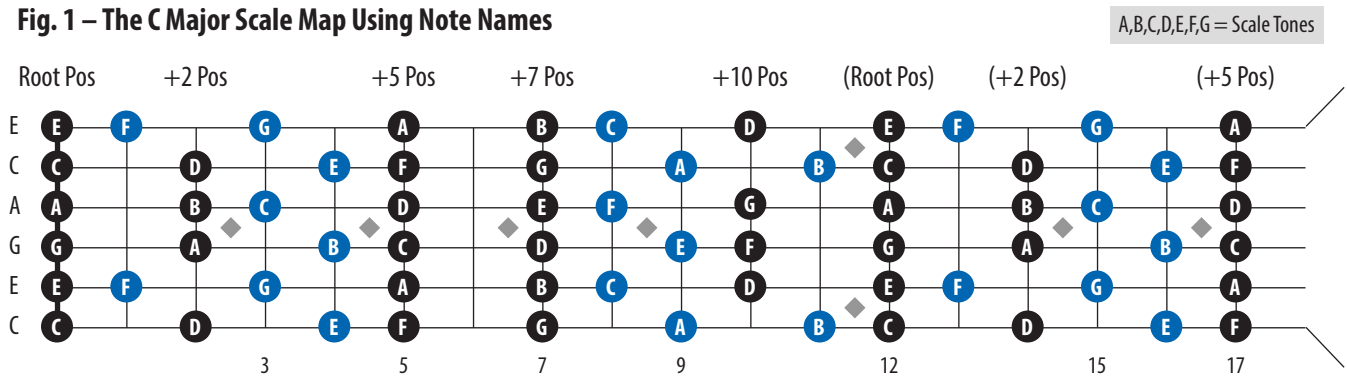


Steel Guitar Fretboard Map—Major Keys (C6th tuning)

Material by John Ely

Fig. 1 – The C Major Scale Map Using Note Names



Most of what you play on steel guitar is based on one (or more) of the 12 unique major keys. Each major key has a major scale that defines it. A song in the key of C, for example, is built primarily on the C major scale. Figure 1 above shows the layout of the notes of the C major scale on the C6th tuning. The notes of the scale, in order, are: C (the scale root), D, E, F, G, A and B—the same notes as the white keys on a piano. It is useful to refer to the major scale notes in general terms, independent of the key you're in; an example is the *solfege* note naming convention: 'Do', 'Re', 'Mi', 'Fa', 'Sol', 'La' and 'Ti'. For practical reasons, it's a lot easier to use numbers, called **Scale Degrees**. You get scale degrees by simply numbering the notes of the scale starting at the scale root. For the C major scale, you get: C=1, D=2, E=3, F=4, G=5, A=6, and B=7. Figure 2 below shows the C major scale map using scale degrees.

Notice that there are three prime fret positions where every string at that fret is a valid note of the C major scale. They are:

- **Root Position**—located in the open position or at the 12th fret
- **+5 Position**—located at the 5th and 17th fret, 5 frets up (or 7 frets down) from root position
- **+7 Position**—located at the 7th and 19th fret, 7 frets up (or 5 frets down) from root position

Note also that there are two semi-prime fret positions where nearly every string at that fret is a note of the C scale. The semi-prime frets are the **+2 Position** and the **+10 Position**. In the diagrams shown, notes at prime or semi-prime frets are colored black. *These are the most important positions and are where a high percentage of steel guitar harmony is located.* A good way to visualize these fret positions is: root position, two frets above and below root position, and five frets above and below root position. These are the five most important frets for the major key you are playing in.

Fig. 2 – The C Major Scale Map Using Scale Degrees

