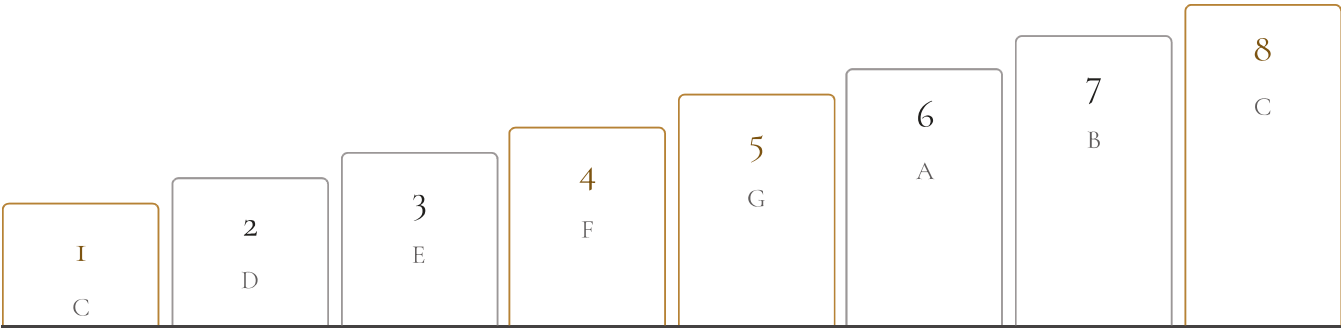


Scale degrees

Every note of a scale has a job. Number them one to eight and the same names apply in every key – which is why composers talk in numbers rather than letters. Degrees 1, 4 and 5 do most of the work.

THE LADDER, IN C MAJOR

Home · away · home



DEGREE	NAME	IN C	CHORD	WHAT IT DOES
1	Tonic	C	I	Home. Everything is measured from here, and most pieces end on it.
2	Supertonic	D	ii	A step above home – restless, often leading to the dominant.
3	Mediant	E	iii	Decides the mood: major or minor lives here.
4	Subdominant	F	IV	The first real move away from home. Warm and open.
5	Dominant	G	V	The strongest pull back to the tonic. Tension, then release.
6	Submediant	A	vi	The relative minor's home – a darker shade of the same key.
7	Leading note	B	vii	One semitone below home, and desperate to get there.
8	Octave	C	I	Home again, higher. Arrival.

WHY NUMBERS, NOT LETTERS

Degree 5 pulls home in every key. Learn the numbers once and you have learnt all twelve keys.

THE THREE THAT MATTER MOST

I, IV and V will harmonise an enormous number of tunes on their own. Start there.