

Phrasing

Ukulele Music Theory

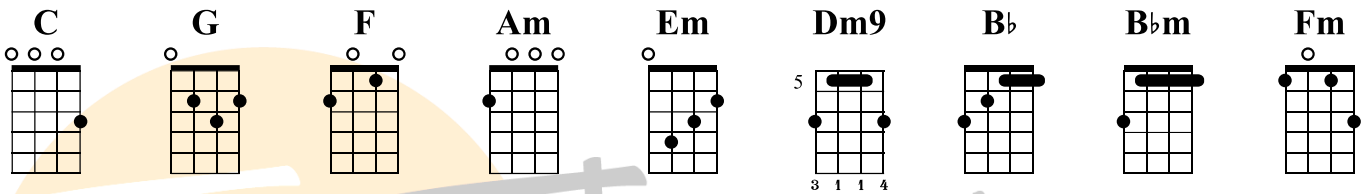


Tenthumbspro.com
For educational purposes only

Chords needed for lesson: C, G, F, Am, Em, Dm, Dm9, Bb, Bbm, Fm

Video Tutorial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nf23IqOrDds>

Chord Shapes for this lesson:



What is a phrase? Two text book definitions

- In music theory, a phrase (Greek: φράση) is a unit of musical meter that has a complete musical sense of its own, built from figures, motifs, and cells, and combining to form melodies, periods and larger sections.
- A *phrase* is a substantial musical thought, which ends with a musical punctuation called a cadence. Phrases are created in music through an interaction of melody, harmony, and rhythm.

My Definition

- A musical sentence

One of the reasons our understanding of phrasing as a ukulele player is so poor is because we don't need to breathe to play our instrument. Saxophone or any woodwind, trumpet or any brass, melodica, harmonica, etc, or the voice for that matter, require breath to create music. Every time these musicians breathe it marks a phrase. So that is a good way to identify a phrase while you are learning, when you sing a song, where do you pause to breathe? That would make a phrase.

What makes phrasing important?

Good phrasing is like good writing, it is articulate, fluid, informed, and thoughtfully put together. Good phrasing is determined by two factors, the notes that are chosen and how it is resolved. Good phrasing will make a melody more cohesive and complete. Just like you can't have a good story

without quality paragraphs and quality sentences, good stories require quality writing. Likewise, You can't have a good melody with quality phrasing.

Somewhere Over the Rainbow Case Study - [3:24](#)

The image shows a musical score for the song "Somewhere Over the Rainbow". It consists of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 9 to 12, and the second system covers measures 13 to 16. Each system includes a treble clef staff with a melody line and a guitar staff with chord diagrams and fret numbers. Chords are labeled above the treble staff: C, G, F, C, F, C, G, and Am. The lyrics are written below the treble staff, with some words like "yyy" and "yyyy" indicating vocalizations. The guitar staff shows fret numbers for the left hand and string numbers for the right hand.

The first thing we have to ask ourself is

- How many phrases?
- How long are they?
- How do they resolve?

The first phrase ends on "high" on the 4th measure and the second phrase ends up on the last "yyy" on the 8th measure. That makes both phrases 4 measures.

The first phrase ends on a G note over a C chord. A C chord has the C, E and G notes. So we have finished this phrase on what is known as a "chord tone" or a note of the chord. The 1st, 3rd and 5th intervals are considered stable resolutions. Because we are in the key of C, this is also the 5th interval of the scale. You want to be aware of both how the note resolves to the chord used as well as the overall harmony.

The second phrase ends on the B note. This is the 2nd interval, also written as the 9th interval, relative to the A minor chord. That makes what we are playing an Am9 chord. The 2nd and 6th intervals are considered to be semi-stable. The B note in the C major scale is the 7th interval as well. So it is semi-stable in the context of the harmony and unstable in the context of the melody. The most important is the immediate harmony, knowing how it fits relative the to song key really just helps you understand how you are going compose the rest of the melody.

The next case study is Space Oddity, this time let's examine every note in the phrase and see if we can figure out why they choose them for phrase.

[9:30](#)

17 Em 18

ground con- trol to maj- or tom

3 3 3 3 5 3 2 3 4 0

Here we see the melody is in C and it hangs out on the C note before going up to the D back to the C resolving on the b over the E minor. B is a chord tone of E minor, specifically the 5th interval, (E - G - B) so we have a stable resolution there.

The C note is also a chord tone of the C chord, it is the root note. You can really play any note you want in the key, even the most unstable notes, if they are used in passing, the resolved notes, because they are played for longer times, require a little more thought. Having said that using chord tones over chords throughout your phrasing will create a strong sense of harmony and you should always choose the last note of your phrase wisely.

Learning to transpose these ideas is also very important. The B note is the 7th interval of the C major scale and the E minor is the iii chord. That means I can play the 7th interval over the iii chord in any key. Learning these little tricks in terms of roman numerals and intervals is great for your improvising because now I know no matter what the key, if that progression is going to the iii chord, I can resolve my solo phrase on a 7th interval no problem. Now I can solo in any key no problem.

Lastly, how we put all this into play as an artist. Let's look at a selection of Al Green's music. - [11:12](#)

F Dm9

21 22 23 24

I'm so in love with you what ev- er you

0 0 0 3 7 3 3 1 0 1 3

Bb Bbm

25 26 27 28

want to do is al- right with me- ee- ee

5 1 1 1 3 0 1 4 1 1

- Identify the chord progression - I (F) vi (Dm) IV (Bb) iv (Bbm)
- What scale are we using? F major
- What are the notes and intervals of the scale? F (root) G (2nd) A (3rd) Bb (4th) C (5th) D (6th) E (7th)
- How many phrases? - 3
- Where do they resolve?

- 3rd measure 3rd beat
- 5th measure 3rd beat
- 8th measure 1st beat
- What intervals do they resolve on? -
 - C note over a Dm. C is the 5th interval of F and the b7th of Dm
 - Bb over Bb chord. Bb is the 4th of the F and the Root of the Bb
 - F over Bbm chord. F is the root of F and the the 5th of Bbm

To take your playing to the next level you can take just the resolution of that melody and "jam by numbers" similar to the old school paint by numbers. I am going to transpose this melody to the key of C

The new progression: C - Am - F - Fm

Then I am going to put up just the points of resolution, now in the key of C.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for guitar. The first system covers measures 29 to 32. Measure 29 is in the C chord, and measure 31 is in the Am chord. Measure 32 is labeled 'Phrase 1 Resolves Here'. The second system covers measures 33 to 36. Measure 33 is in the F chord, and measure 35 is in the Fm chord. Measure 34 is labeled 'Phrase 2 Resolves Here' and measure 36 is labeled 'Phrase 3 Resolves here'. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and guitar-specific fretting instructions on the bass staff.

The idea is that I know have a skeleton of a melody with the exact same resolution of an artist that I love and respect. So I can create my own melody that pays homage to music I love. This is the absolute best way to improve your phrasing and ability to compose melody.

I do it a phrase at a time and just play around until I got something that I like.

Phrase 1 - I could just post all the tabs at once but I want you to physically see that I do this one a time. Phrase by phrase, I get comfortable with them and build the melody up.

The image shows a system of musical notation for guitar covering measures 37 to 40. Measure 37 is in the C chord, and measure 39 is in the Am chord. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and guitar-specific fretting instructions on the bass staff.

Phrase 2 - This one starts on the 4th measure. You will see as you repeat this activity there is a lot of variance in both phrase length and where they start and finish as well.

C Am

F 2nd Phrase Resolves Here Fm 3rd Phrase Resolves Here

Phrase 3 - The F major to the F minor is an old modulation trick that you can use in your own song writing. When returning to the root chord you can play the IV chord, make it a minor iv chord and then land on the I chord. Why does this work? The F contains an A note, the F minor contains a G# and the C contains a G chord, so there is a chromatic movement from these notes, A to G# to G that makes it sound really nice. This is called chord modulation, when you borrow chords from other keys, when that happens you need to pay special attention to the melody because if the chord comes from outside the key that means you will more than likely need to use notes from outside the key as well. We cover this by playing an arpeggio over the F minor that ends on a C note, both a chord tone of F minor and the root note of our scale, completely resolving the idea. If you wanted you could actually finish the song there as the resolution of the C note in the key of C works as a final resolution for a song.

C Am

F Fm

Alright! Great work! I know this was an intense lesson. It is strongly recommended that you repeat this activity we did with this Al Green song with some of your favorite music.

How to read sheet music Part 1 of 4 -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ve4BK9wBhbA&t=113s>

Understanding intervals -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fab90AjfYzc&t=635s>