



12 scales to play over dominant 7th chords

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The first thing to know before starting exploring the twelve different scales shown in this lesson is how to build a basic dominant 7th chord and what its role is.

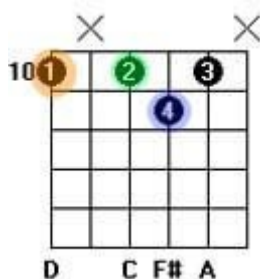
Dominant 7th chords are made up of a root / tonic (1), a major third (3), a perfect fifth (5) and minor seventh (*b7*). It is the most versatile of any chord. It is considered as a major chord because of its major third (3), indeed the 3rd tell us if the chord is minor or major. The minor seventh (*b7*) indicates whether the sound wants to move or not (resolve) to another chord. Usually dominant chords tend to resolve to a chord down a perfect fifth (or a chord up a perfect fourth).

C dominant 7th chord	C	E	G	B \flat
Intervals	1	3	5	<i>b7</i>
Related Arpeggio	1	3	5	<i>b7</i>

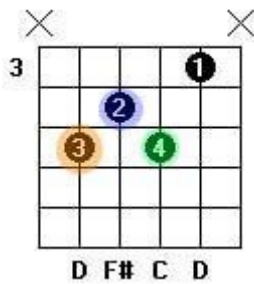
Dominant 7th chords

Because it is very important **to make the association between scales and chords**, you must be able to play several dominant 7th chords positions on guitar. Here are three **basic guitar positions** that will help you. These guitar diagrams represent a D7 chord. Please note that **the root is the orange note, the minor seventh is the green note and the major third is the note in blue**. The principle is the same for the two other diagrams. Any jazz guitar student must be able to play these three guitar positions in twelve keys and make the link between them and the scales below.

D7 guitar position 1, root on the sixth string. The black note is the fifth, free to you to play it.



D7 guitar position 2, root on the fifth string. There is no fifth in this diagram, the black note is the octave of the main root.



D7 guitar position 3, root on the fourth string. The fifth is the black note.



The mixolydian mode is surely the most obvious choice when you want to improvise over dominant 7th chords. It is built with a root (1), second (2), minor third (*b3*), perfect fourth (4), perfect fifth (5), sixth (6) and minor seventh (*b7*). Also called dominant 7th scale, it is the fifth mode of the major scale related to the fifth chord of the harmonized major scale, indeed when you stack the 1, *b3*, 5 and *b7* of the mixolydian scale you get a dominant 7th chord.

C mixolydian mode	C	D	E	F	G	A	B \flat
Formula	1	2 (9)	3	4 (11)	5	6 (13)	<i>b7</i>
Intervals	W	W	H	W	W	H	W

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The dominant bebop scale is an eight-note scale (octatonic). It contains the same notes as the previous mixolydian mode including a chromatic passing tone, a major seventh (7), between the minor seventh (*b7*) and the root (1). This passing should never be played on the downbeat but preferably on the upbeat. The chart below shows you how to build the G dominant bebop scale. You can notice the chromatic passing tone is the yellow note (B \flat).

C Dominant bebop scale	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	B \flat
Formula	1	2	3	4	5	6	<i>b7</i>	7
Intervals	W	W	H	W	W	H	H	H

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The lydian dominant scale is the fourth mode of the melodic minor scale. You can think it as the mixolydian mode with a raised fourth (#4) or raised eleventh (#11) also used to be called a *b5*. You will understand, it is designed to work over 7#11 chords or any dominant 7th chord when you want to highlight the #11.

C lydian dominant scale	C	D	E	F#	G	A	Bb
Formula	1	2 (9)	3	#4 (#11)	5	6 (13)	b7
Intervals	W	W	W	H	W	H	W

The mixolydian b13 or b6 scale is the fifth mode of the melodic minor scale. In comparison with the mixolydian mode it has a flat (*b6*) instead of a natural sixth, hence its name. Playing this scale over dominant 7th chords brings a little bit of tension and has a very melancholic sound.

C mixolydian b13 mode	C	D	E	F	G	Ab	Bb
Formula	1	2 (9)	3	4 (11)	5	b6 (b13)	b7
Intervals	W	W	H	W	H	W	W

The phrygian dominant scale, also called altered phrygian scale is the fifth mode of the harmonic scale. It has a very particular sound because of its minor second (*b2*) and its minor sixth (*b6*). This scale can be applied to dominant 7th chords when you want to produce a *7b2b13* sound in your jazz improvisations.

C phrygian dominant scale	C	Db	E	F	G	Ab	Bb
Formula	1	b2 (b9)	3	4 (11)	5	b6 (b13)	b7
Intervals	H	W	H	W	H	W	W

The altered scale or superlocrian scale is the seventh mode of the melodic minor scale. All the scale tones are flattened that gives four altered tones that bring tension, *b9, #9, b5 #5*. That's why it should be used with caution not to stay on it too long. The scale is designed to be played over *7#9, 7b9, 7b5, 7#5*.

C altered scale	C	Db	D#	E	F#	G#	Bb
Formula	1	b9	#9	3	b5	#5	b7
Intervals	H	W	H	W	W	W	H

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The major pentatonic scale as its name implies, is made up of five notes, it is surely the easiest scale to play over a dominant 7th chord. It produces a ninth (9) and a thirteenth (13) sound.

C major pentatonic scale	C	D	E	G	A
Formula	1	2 (9)	3	5	6 (13)
Intervals	W	W	H + W	W	W+H

[MAJOR PENTATONIC SCALE GUITAR DIAGRAMS](#)

The **minor pentatonic scale** is played over dominant 7th chords when you want to bring a blues feel to your jazz lines. As it is explained at the beginning of this lesson, dominant 7th chords contains a major third (3) and minor pentatonic scales has a minor third (*b3*). Mixing major and minor tonality, the clash of the minor and major thirds, it is that blues thing.

C minor pentatonic scale	C	E^b	F	G	B^b
Formula	1	<i>b3</i>	4	5	<i>b7</i>
Intervals	W+H	W	H	W +H	W

[MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE LESSON WITH DIAGRAMS](#)

The **major blues scale** is an hexatonic scale it contains six notes including an added minor third (*b3* / *b10*) between the second (2) and the major third (3). This is the major pentatonic scale with a passing tone.

C major blues scale	C	D	E^b	E	G	A
Formula	1	2 (9)	<i>b3</i> (<i>b10</i>)	3	5	6 (13)
Intervals	W	W		H + W	W	W+H

The **whole tone scale** is the first in a series of symmetric scales. This type of scales consists of repeated symmetric intervals. The whole tone scale consists of a succession of whole tone intervals, the octave is divided in six equal parts. It contains a raised eleventh (or #11) and a raised fifth (#5) that can bring interesting tensions and funny new colors to your jazz guitar solos.

C whole tone scale	G	A	B	C[#]	D[#]	F
Formula	1	2	3	#11 (or #4)	#5	<i>b7</i>
Intervals	W	W	W	W	W	W

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The **dominant diminished scale** also known as half-tone whole-tone scale is a symmetric scale built by alternating half-steps and whole-steps. You can play this scale over dominant 7th chords, theoretically *7b9* chords, when you want to produce interesting tensions and create outside sounds in your jazz and blues guitar improvisations. This way you highlight the *b9*, #9 and #11.

C dominant diminished scale	C	Db	Eb	E	F#	G	A	Bb
Formula	1	b9	#9	3	#11 or b5	5	13 (6)	b7
Intervals	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W

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The **chromatic scale** contains the twelve musical notes. It is a scale where every note is a semi-tone (or half-step) apart. As you can see in the chart below the chromatic scale has no intervals larger than a semi-tone. Unlike other scales, it doesn't have chords associated with. The first approach to familiarize yourself with is to play each consecutive frets, up or down on the guitar. This symmetric scale is rarely played over an entire guitar solo, but maybe useful when mixed with more conventional dominant scales.

C chromatic scale (ascending)	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B
Formula	1	b2	2	b3	3	4	b5	5	b6	6	b7	7

Conclusion

The best way to take the most of this lesson is to experiment each scale by playing them over a [dominant 7th backing track](#). Try to play them ascending and descending, try to create fluid lines using arpeggios and patterns. Try to incorporate these lines into common jazz progressions as minor and major II-V-I, blues, turnarounds, bridges. And remember, playing the corresponding chord after or before playing each scale is an excellent way to develop your musical ear.

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