

# Improvisational Basics & Blues Form

There are many variations of Blues Form. I have chosen a simplified version of the variety found in "Blue Monk" to study.

Before understanding any jazz form we must first understand it's building blocks.

In any scale the notes of that scale can be numbered. These are called scale "degrees". (for our purposes we will use concert "c")

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8/1
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C

We use these numbers or "degrees" to make basic forms transferable or transposable to any key signature. i.e. scale degree number 1 in B<sup>b</sup> is B<sup>b</sup>.

Chords are built using "select" scale degrees as a basis or "root". In jazz we use 7<sup>th</sup> chords. 7<sup>th</sup> chords have 4 parts or "voices".

**The Root**  
The note on which the chord is based.

**The 3rd**  
A note that is an interval of a 3rd away from the root.

**The 5th**  
A note that is an interval of a 5th away from the root.

**The 7th**  
A note that is an interval of a 7th from the root.

Example: The notes below are used in constructing a C<sup>7</sup> (C seventh) chord.

<b>C</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>B<sup>b</sup></b>
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7<sup>th</sup> Chords in Blues Form are mostly built using the 1st, 4th and 5th scale degrees in a given key/scale as "roots".

Spell the 7<sup>th</sup> chords:

7th	7th	7th
5th	5th	5th
3rd	3rd	3rd
Root: C(1)	Root: F(4)	Root: G(5)

In order to have a true Blues sound it is necessary to have the 7<sup>th</sup> of the chord be an interval of a minor 7<sup>th</sup>. Therefore, in chords built upon the 1st and 4th scale degrees we must flatten (lower by one half step) the 7<sup>th</sup> of the chord. Chords built on the 5th are naturally this way. Basically, this makes the chord a major triad (a triad w/a 3rd that is major and a 5th that is perfect) with a minor seventh on top. The sound of this chord for our purposes will be called "the dominant 7<sup>th</sup>" or more commonly "the 7<sup>th</sup> chord". EX: C<sup>7</sup> (C seventh)

## CHORD SYMBOLS

Chord symbols are written in two different ways:

1. In Key Context : Using the letter names of the notes in the current key signature.

EX. in C Major : C<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

2. In Universal or Transposable Context : Using Roman Numerals to indicate which scale degree the chord is based on. Using Roman Numerals to represent actual chords allows a musician to put the "chord progression" to work in any key signature.

	I	I <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	I	V <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	I
Could be in C:	C	C <sup>7</sup>	F <sup>7</sup>	C	G <sup>7</sup>	F <sup>7</sup>	C
Or in B <sup>b</sup> :	B <sup>b</sup>	B <sup>b</sup> 7	E <sup>b</sup> 7	B <sup>b</sup>	F <sup>7</sup>	E <sup>b</sup> 7	B <sup>b</sup>

This also allows simplified analysis and explanation of a particular musical form without regard to the transpositional differences between instruments (B<sup>b</sup> trumpet and E<sup>b</sup> alto sax).

### **Basic Blues Form**

I <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	I <sup>7</sup>	I <sup>7</sup>
IV <sup>7</sup>	IV <sup>7</sup>	I <sup>7</sup>	I <sup>7</sup>
V <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	I <sup>7</sup>	I <sup>7</sup> (V <sup>7</sup> )

(Each Chord Symbol represents 4 Beats)

1. Lightly write in the letter names for *your* instrument in Concert B<sup>b</sup>.
2. Now that you have found the roots for all the chords in #1, complete the spelling of each chord.

## BASIC TOOLS OF IMPROVISATION

Improvisation should be thought of as spot composing or creating a new melody from the established chords and melody. The following is a list of the most basic tools of improvisation. Your improvisation DOES NOT have to be limited to these tools alone. This is just one point of reference on which we will build.

1. Chord Tones - During the time that a certain chord is being played, (4 beats, 8 beats, etc.) you can use the notes that make up the chord to help you construct your new melody.

2. Basic Scales/Modes - Know your scales? I hope so!! During the time that a certain chord is being played, you can use the "corresponding" scale or mode to help you construct your new melody. Usually, the scale or mode of interest is easily found because it starts with the note that is the same as the name of the chord.

Major Scales you should already know.

Modes are scales that are derived within an established key/scale. A mode is made up of the notes that "naturally" occur within the key/scale. Different modes are constructed upon each scale degree in a key/scale. Each mode has it's own unique name.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8/1</b>
Major	Dorian	Phrygian	Lydian	Mixolydian	Aeolian	Locrian	Major

Example: The Mixolydian scale/mode is based on the 5th degree of a major scale. A Mixolydian Scale in C Major would start on G (5). The notes for the G Mixolydian scale would be natural to the key of C, therefore they are as follows: G A B C D E F G Notice that F is NOT sharp. This is because in C there are no sharps or flats in the key signature.

The most important scales and modes to you right now are The Major Scales, Dorian Mode, and Mixolydian Mode. LEARN THEM IN EVERY KEY!!!!!!

Combinations of the chord tones and scales/modes can be used to construct your new melody. There is no limit to what you can and cannot use to construct your idea/new melody. To improvise literally means that you draw upon every available resource to come up with the same, similar or new result.

Happy Practicing!!!!