

DEVELOPING YOUR IDEA

IMPROVISATION PRACTICE

BROCK CHART

IMPROVISATION

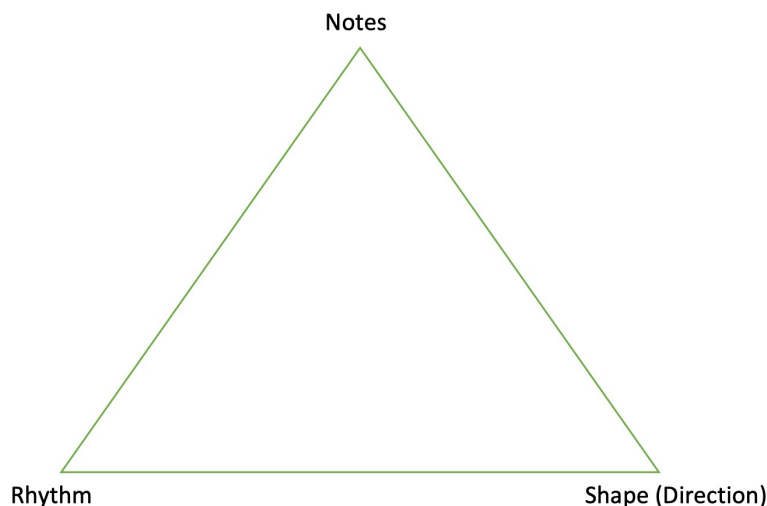
DEVELOPING AN IDEA

Development is a crucial part of improvisation and composition. It's the act of changing a small idea over time through notes, rhythm and shape (direction).

Without development, every idea sounds new and nothing would be related to each other. It's very difficult to keep an audience engaged with that mindset. Small changes that are all based from an original simple idea will allow our audience to follow along and better understand the musical journey.

I like to start with a 2-3 note idea and use the Tools of Development to explore other ways to adapt or evolve the idea over time.

Down below is a diagram I've created to show different ways that we can develop a musical idea:



Each of the three sides is an aspect of the music that you can alter to create change.

Notes - These are the pitches used to create the original idea. We can change them by adding more notes to the idea, removing notes from the idea or changing the original pitches all together.

Rhythm - Every idea has a distinct rhythm. Is your original idea two long notes? Is it two short notes? Maybe a combination of both long and short notes? This is another aspect of the music we can change. We can stretch out our original rhythm to augment it. Or we can shorten our original rhythm to compress it. We can also change where the rhythm is placed in a measure. This can be a fun way to create change and development without altering the pitches or rhythm.

Shape - This is the physical direction of the music. Does the idea go from a low note to a high note? Does it go from a high note to a low note? Does it stay on the same note? Melodies can go up, down or in a straight line if we don't change pitch. This is another fun way to create change and interest in your solos.

IMPROVISATION

DEVELOPING AN IDEA

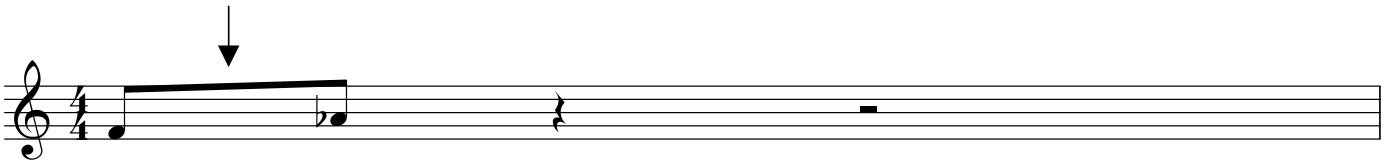
Before we dive any deeper, we need to talk about **repetition**. It's a crucial part of development. **Repetition** is when we play the same idea over and over again. It might sound like a bad thing, but it's not. Mozart used repetition, Beethoven used repetition, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Michael Jackson, the Beatles, John Williams, Danny Elfman, the Billboard Top 40, etc.

Repetition tells the audience what is important. It tells our audience what the main idea is and helps them remember it. Development means nothing if we can't see where it comes from.

Let's start out with a simple two note idea:

(For this worksheet I'll be playing over an F Blues progression and will be using notes from the F Blues scale.)

**Main Idea:
Simple Two-Note Idea**



Here's a simple two note idea from the F Blues scale. The melody is moving up and the rhythm is two eighth-notes. Could it be something different? Absolutely! This is improvisation, I want you to be create and have fun exploring sounds.

Now that we have a **main idea**, we can use repetition to establish it.

**Establishing Idea:
Repetition of Two-Note Idea**

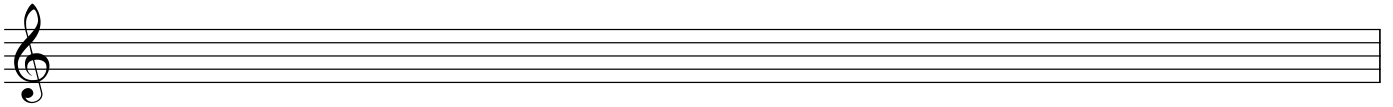


Notes - Practice

Now let's try to make a solo together. Let's use the F Blues scale (F, Ab, Bb, B, C, Eb, F)

The first step is to create a two-note idea and decide what rhythm you would like to play. Maybe a long short rhythm, or two long notes, or two short notes. Totally up to you!

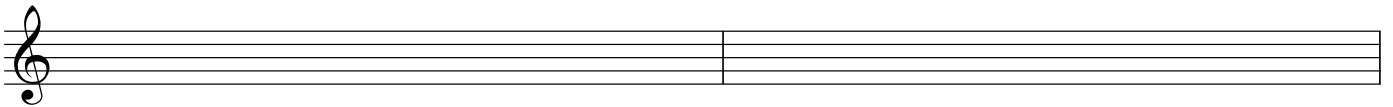
Main Idea



Now we need to establish the main idea by repeating it.

Main Idea

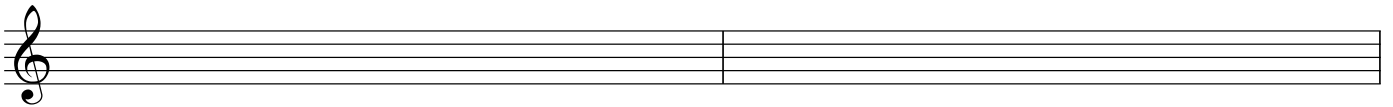
Repetition



Now let's develop it by changing the notes. Let's try to add a third one at the end.

Main Idea

Main Idea with extra note



Continue developing by trying a different note, adding a fourth note or removing a note.



Rhythm

We can also develop our idea by changing the rhythm. Our original idea consists of two eighth-notes.
Let's try using the same notes, but stretching out and compressing the rhythms.

Here are a few examples below:

Main idea

**Augmentation:
Same notes with longer rhythm**

The image shows a single musical staff with a treble clef. The first measure contains two eighth notes: a quarter note on G4 and a quarter note on F4. An arrow points from the label 'Main idea' to this measure. The second measure contains the same two notes, but they are stretched to a longer duration, each lasting for two measures. An arrow points from the label 'Augmentation: Same notes with longer rhythm' to this measure.

**Augmentation:
Same notes with even longer rhythms**

**Compression:
Same notes with shorter rhythm**

The image shows a single musical staff with a treble clef. The first measure contains the two notes from the main idea, but they are stretched to an even longer duration, each lasting for four measures. An arrow points from the label 'Augmentation: Same notes with even longer rhythms' to this measure. The second measure contains the two notes from the main idea, but they are shortened to a shorter duration, each lasting for only half a measure. An arrow points from the label 'Compression: Same notes with shorter rhythm' to this measure.

**Compression:
Same notes with shorter rhythm**

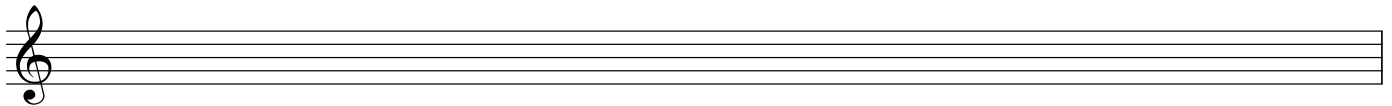
**Compression:
Same notes with shorter rhythm**

The image shows a single musical staff with a treble clef. The first measure contains the two notes from the main idea, but they are shortened to a shorter duration, each lasting for only half a measure. An arrow points from the label 'Compression: Same notes with shorter rhythm' to this measure. The second measure contains the two notes from the main idea, but they are shortened to a shorter duration, each lasting for only half a measure. An arrow points from the label 'Compression: Same notes with shorter rhythm' to this measure.

Rhythms - Practice

Use the same Main Idea that you created for the Notes exercise. Write it down here:

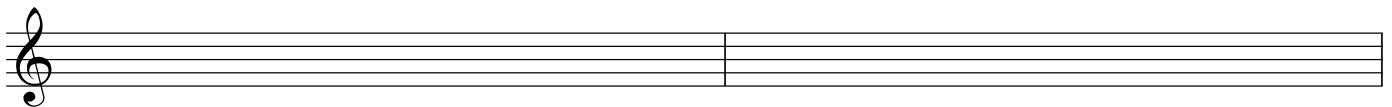
Main Idea



Using the same notes, let's stretch out our idea with longer rhythms.
Maybe try half-notes or whole-notes.

Main Idea

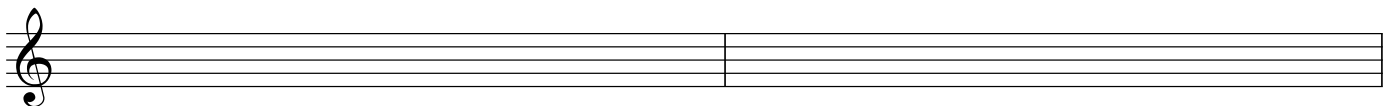
Main Idea with longer rhythms



Using the same notes, let's compress our idea with shorter rhythms.
Maybe try eighth-notes or sixteenth-notes.

Main Idea

Main Idea with shorter rhythms



Now let's use the main idea but put it on a different beat.
This is called rhythm misplacement.

Main Idea

Main Idea on a different beat



Shape

Shape is another word for direction. We can easily develop an idea by changing the direction of the melody.

In our original idea, we have an F moving up to an Ab. This is an ascending melody.
We can change the shape to a descending melody or repeat the notes for a static melody.

Let's try some other options, here are a few examples below:

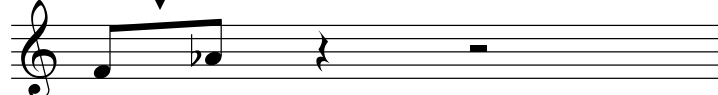
**Main idea:
Ascending Melody**



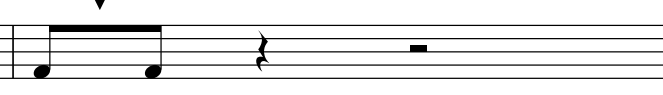
**Main idea:
Descending Melody**



**Main idea:
Ascending Melody**



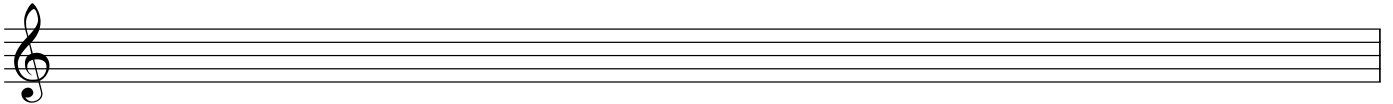
**Main idea:
Static Melody**



Shape - Practice

Use the same Main Idea that you created for the Notes exercise. Write it down here:

Main Idea



Ask yourself if the melody is going Up (ascending), Down (descending) or staying the same (static).

Now let's try switching the shape or direction of the melody.

Main Idea

Main Idea with different shape

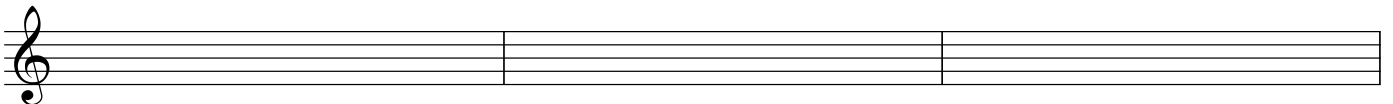


Now let's try your original idea as an ascending melody, then a descending melody, and then we'll repeat the same note for a static melody.

Main Idea - Ascending

Main Idea - Descending

Main Idea - Static

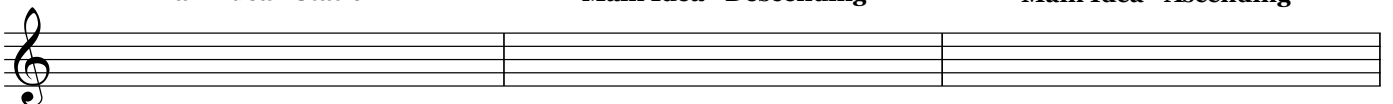


Now let's try your original idea in the opposite order.

Main Idea - Static

Main Idea - Descending

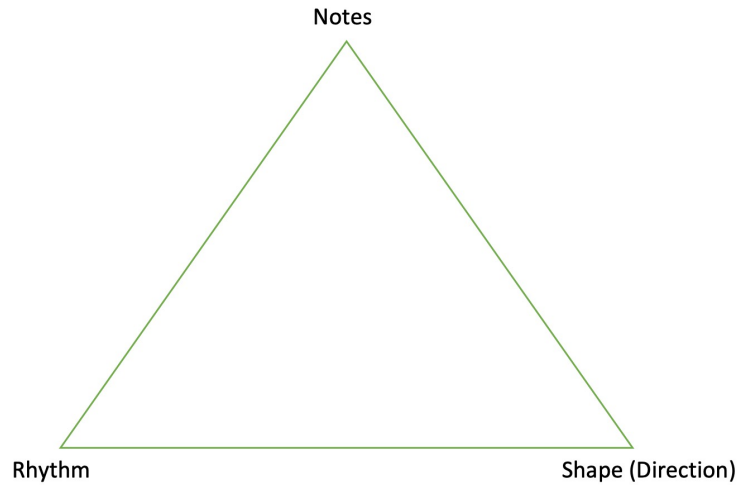
Main Idea - Ascending



Combining Ideas

This is really where things get fun. Improvisation is always up to you and your ear, but generally I like to keep one side of the pyramid grounded. That way there is always a trace of the original idea that the audience can follow.

Typically I like to start slow and then stretch that idea out as much as I can.



Here's a few combinations that I like to do:

Main idea

Main idea with additional notes

Main idea with additional notes

Same idea but on a different beat.
This misplacement of rhythm can feel like syncopation

Main idea with additional notes

Same idea but on a different beat.

Using longer rhythms on the end

Combining Ideas

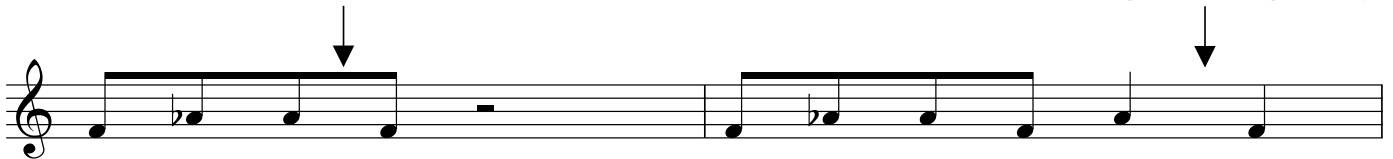
Main idea:
Ascending Melody



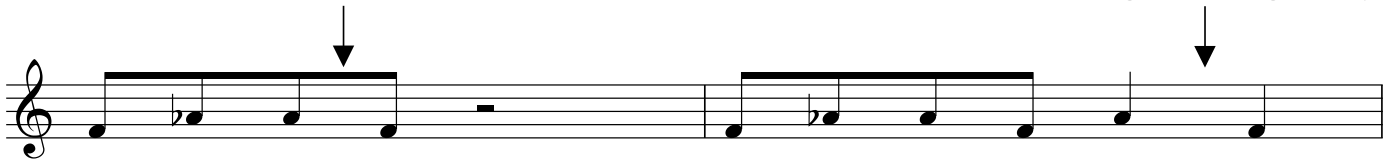
Main idea:
Descending Melody



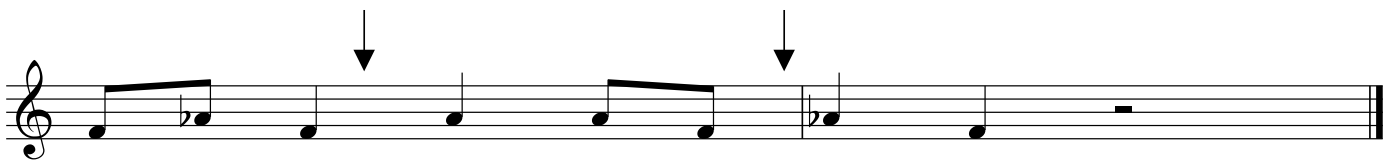
Descending Melody
and on a different beat



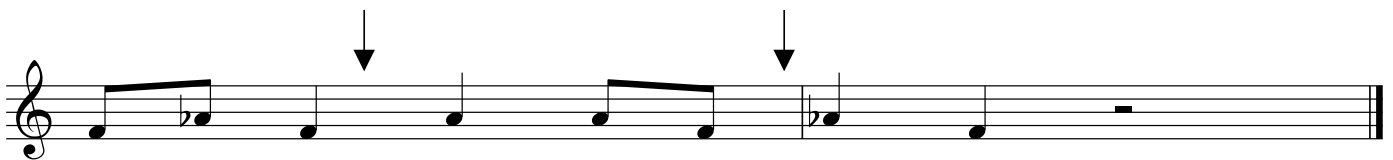
Elongating rhythm
and using descending melody



Misplacing rhythm
and elongating rhythm



Misplacing rhythm, elongating rhythm
and using descending melody



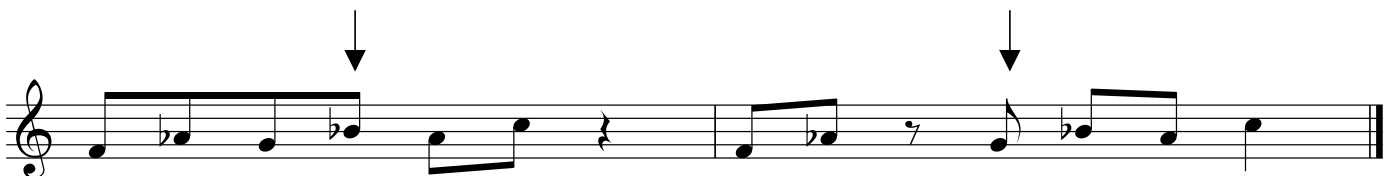
Main idea



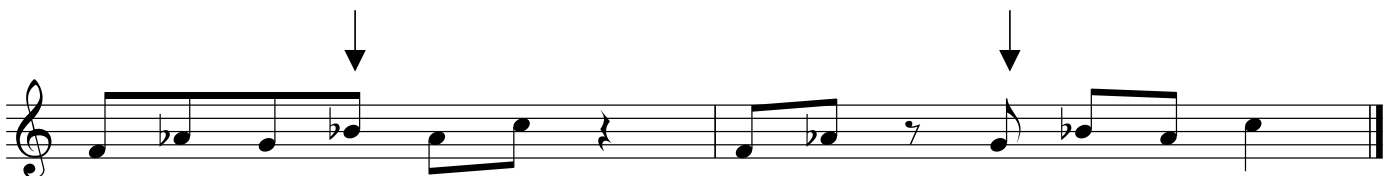
Same shape and rhythm
but up a step



Same shape and basic rhythm
but using different notes from the scale



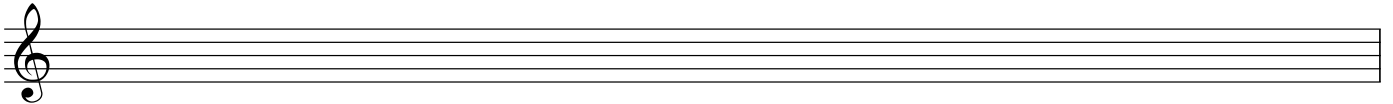
Similar idea but stretching out
the misplacement of rhythm to create syncopation



Combination - Practice

Use the same Main Idea that you created for the Notes exercise. Write it down here:

Main Idea

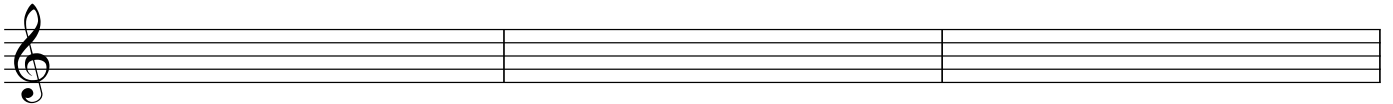


Let's try combining different sides of the pyramid.

Main Idea

Main Idea with a third note

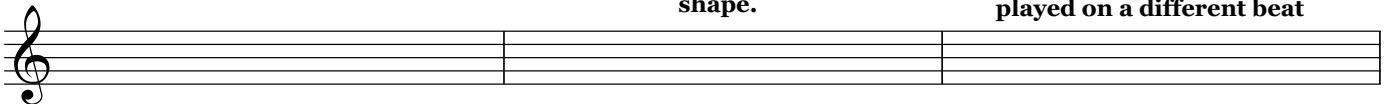
Use the same notes as previous measure but in a new rhythm



Main Idea

Main Idea but with a different shape.

Main idea with different shape played on a different beat



Main Idea

Same rhythm and shape but pick two different notes

Similar idea but play it on a different beat

