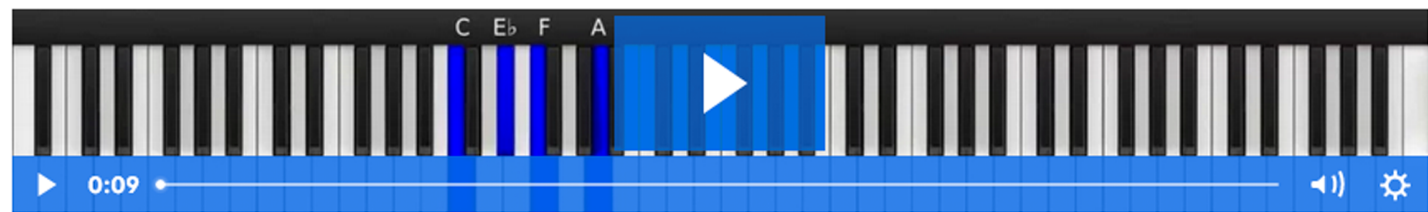


## Step One: 2 Blues Piano Chords

As a beginner, you can get started playing blues piano with only 2 chords. You don't even need to read music. The chords you will need to get started are Cm7 and F7:



Over time, the ability to read music serves students very well, but a balanced approach should encourage students to explore playing sounds that are beyond their current ability to read. In fact, *speaking always precedes reading in language learning*. So don't worry right now if you cannot read both treble and bass clef. To start out, you just need to be able to memorize these two chords by their shape and sound. (We have included notation with alpha-noteheads for these chords as a reference and to recommend specific fingerings, but if you are continually referring to the notation, you are likely to miss the point. Everything in today's lesson can be learned by imitation.)



This groove is known as a "4 On The Floor" groove, and it is common to blues and jazz piano styles. To make quick progress, watch the video deliberately to grasp how to transition between each chord. For example, did you notice that the notes C and E ♭ are *common tones* in Cm7 and F7?

## What is a common tone?

A common tone is a note that is shared by consecutive chords in a chord progression. Not all consecutive chords in a chord progression contain a common tone. However, it is not unusual for some chord progressions to contain two or more common tones between consecutive chords.


Becoming aware of common tones reduces the frequency with which a pianist must look at their hands. The common tones function like tactile anchors for your fingers. You can more easily navigate the notes that move from chord to chord without looking by keeping your fingers in contact with the notes that do not move. Try playing the progression above again using the fingerings indicated in the left hand. Can you switch between Cm7 and F7 without looking at your hand? Setting this groove on autopilot in your left hand will free you up to improvise bluesy piano licks in your right hand.

To prepare to improvise, try playing the left hand "4 On The Floor" groove with the backing track included with this lesson. You can access the backing track and lesson sheet from the bottom of this page after logging in with your membership. You can also transpose this lesson into any key using our Smart Sheet Music.

## Step Two: Beginner Blues Scale for Piano

Nearly all blues methods teach [blues scales](#) as a point of entry for improvisation. However, for the absolute beginner, a full blues scale can pose a challenge because it contains 6 notes to be played by 5 fingers. Inevitably, this requires additional skills such as crossing the thumb under the when ascending and crossing the 3rd finger over when descending. For this reason, today's lesson uses a 4 note blues scale called a "Beginner Blues Scale."

C BEGINNER BLUES SCALE

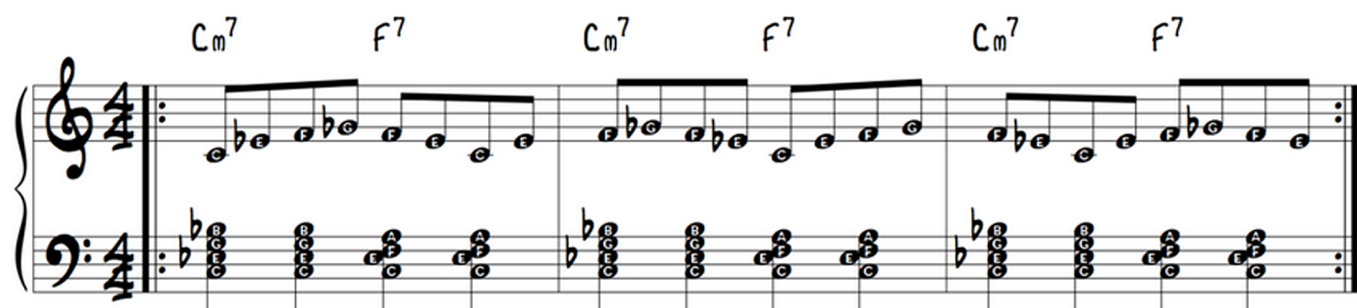


The image shows the C Beginner Blues Scale on a treble clef staff. The notes are C4 (finger 1), Bb3 (finger 2), B3 (finger 3), and Ab3 (finger 4). Below the staff is a piano keyboard diagram with a blue box highlighting the keys C, Bb, B, and Ab. A play button is centered over the keyboard. At the bottom is a video player interface with a progress bar at 0:05, a volume icon, and a settings icon.

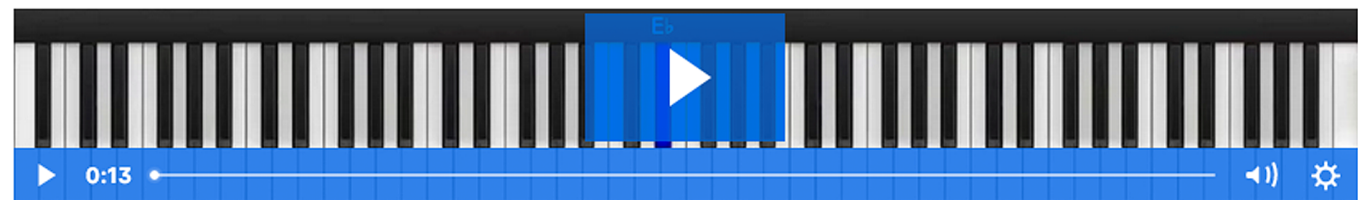
These four notes can be played from a single hand position using the fingering indicated above. As you'll see in the next section, you can create some truly classic blues lines using only these four notes!

## Step Three: 8th Note Blues Exercise

Next, we want to prepare you to improvise with the Beginner Blues Scale. The most common note value used in blues piano improv is 8th notes. Since your left hand is playing quarter notes, that means you will need to play 2 notes in the right hand for every 1 chord played in the left hand. Try playing the 8th note exercise below.



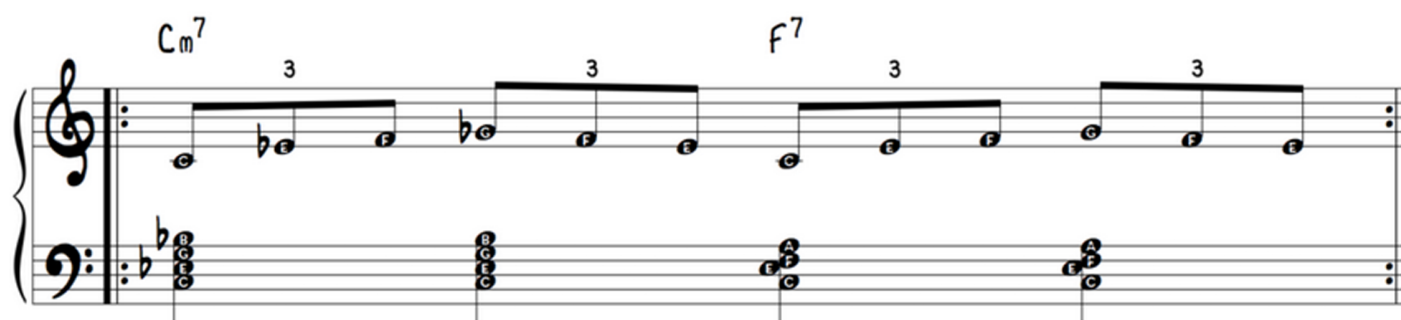
The image shows a musical score for a blues exercise in 4/4 time. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The score consists of three measures, each containing two measures of music. The first measure of each pair is for the right hand (treble clef) and the second is for the left hand (bass clef). The right hand plays eighth notes, and the left hand plays quarter notes. The chords are C<sub>m</sub><sup>7</sup> and F<sup>7</sup>. The right hand melody is: C<sub>m</sub><sup>7</sup> (C4, Bb4, A4, G4), F<sup>7</sup> (F4, E4, D4, C4), C<sub>m</sub><sup>7</sup> (C4, Bb4, A4, G4), F<sup>7</sup> (F4, E4, D4, C4), C<sub>m</sub><sup>7</sup> (C4, Bb4, A4, G4), F<sup>7</sup> (F4, E4, D4, C4). The left hand accompaniment is: C<sub>m</sub><sup>7</sup> (C4, Bb4, A4, G4), F<sup>7</sup> (F4, E4, D4, C4), C<sub>m</sub><sup>7</sup> (C4, Bb4, A4, G4), F<sup>7</sup> (F4, E4, D4, C4), C<sub>m</sub><sup>7</sup> (C4, Bb4, A4, G4), F<sup>7</sup> (F4, E4, D4, C4).



Once you feel comfortable playing this exercise with the backing track, you are ready to try some improvised 8th note lines. As you begin to improvise, there are some important considerations to keep in mind. Firstly, try playing lines in different directions. There are two general types of lines—uplines and downlines. It is important to have variety in your improv or it will sound like a scale exercise. Secondly, remember that you can repeat a note several times before going up or down. Thirdly, be sure to leave gaps between your lines. You can do this by adding rests, but also by adding longer notes such as half notes.

## Step Four: Triplet Blues Exercise

Our next exercise focus specifically on mastering triplets, which is the 2nd most common duration in blues soloing. Triplets are great for adding energy, excitement and variety to your lines. In this exercise below, you will play 3 notes in the right hand for every 1 chord in the left hand.



The musical notation shows a piano exercise in 12/8 time. The right hand (treble clef) plays a triplet of eighth notes in each measure, while the left hand (bass clef) plays a single chord. The exercise consists of four measures. The first two measures are in the key of C minor (Cm7), and the last two measures are in the key of F major (F7). The triplet notes in the right hand are: C4, Eb4, F4 in the first measure; Eb4, F4, G4 in the second measure; F4, G4, A4 in the third measure; and G4, A4, Bb4 in the fourth measure. The chords in the left hand are: Cm7 in the first measure, Cm7 in the second measure, F7 in the third measure, and F7 in the fourth measure.



Great job! You can also play this exercise by beginning on the G  $\flat$  and then descending down to C and back up. Afterward, you'll be ready to try improvising your own triplet lines.



## Step Five: Finger Slide Blues Exercise

If you really want to capture an authentic blues piano sound, then you will want to add *finger slides* ("slides" for short). *Slides* are a blues ornament that adds flavor to your sound. To play a slide, you will literally slide your finger from a black key to a white key. Both notes should be played with the same finger. For example, in the exercise below, you will use the middle finger to play G $\flat$  and then slide the middle finger down to F.

The image displays a musical exercise for piano. At the top, a staff of music is shown with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B $\flat$ ). The exercise is divided into two sections: the first section is marked with a  $C_m^7$  chord and the second with an  $F_7$  chord. The notation consists of eighth notes and triplets. Below the staff, a piano keyboard diagram illustrates the finger slide technique. A blue highlight covers the keys from E $\flat$  to F, with a white arrow pointing from E $\flat$  to F, indicating the slide. A video player interface is visible at the bottom of the keyboard diagram, showing a progress bar at 0:10 and a play button.

What a cool sound! This immediately takes your sound to the next level. You can add slides to both 8th note and triplet lines. This technique also sounds great in the upper register of the piano.

If you are enjoying this lesson, you will certainly love our [10 Day Blues Challenge](#). In this absolutely **free program** you will receive 5 free videos via email in which you will learn even more hallmark blues piano techniques including how to improvise in lower position and upper position, a left hand blues shuffle, the 12-bar blues form and more.

## Step Six: Improvisation

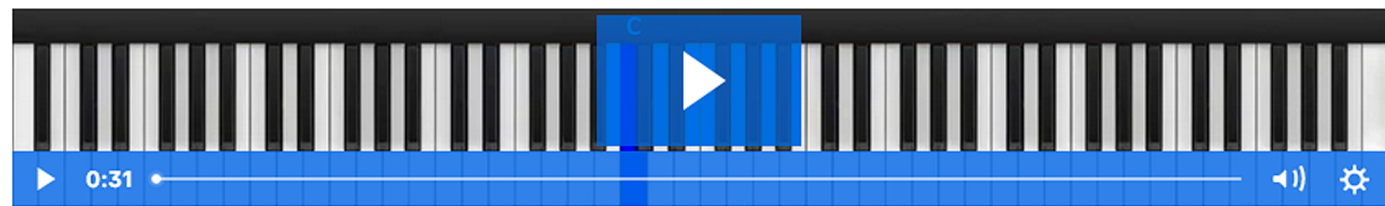
The final step is to combine the techniques mentioned so far as you begin to improvise freely. Remember, at this stage it is not recommended or even helpful to evaluate your improvisation anymore than it would be to critique a baby's first words. The goal is simply to engage in the creative language acquisition process through improvisation. Here are some examples for you to try.

**8TH NOTES** **TRIPLETS**

This musical example shows two techniques: 8th notes and triplets. The first two measures, labeled '8TH NOTES', show a melody of eighth notes in the right hand over a steady bass line of chords (Cm7 and F7). The next two measures, labeled 'TRIPLETS', show the same melody but with groups of three eighth notes beamed together, indicated by a '3' above the notes. The bass line continues with the Cm7 and F7 chords.

**SLIDES** **MIXED**

This musical example shows two more techniques: slides and mixed. The first two measures, labeled 'SLIDES', show a melody where some notes are connected by a slide (a horizontal line with a diagonal slash) over the Cm7 and F7 chords. The next two measures, labeled 'MIXED', combine the techniques, showing eighth notes, triplets, and slides in the melody over the Cm7 and F7 chords.



As you can see, there is a lot you can do with just 2 chords and 4 notes that sounds *very good!* With just a little trial and error, you can be improvising beginner blues piano in no time. Afterward, you can choose one of our [Learning Tracks](#) according to your current playing level and musical interests to build up your foundation.