

# Relative Pitch Ear Training

Since music is an aural art, it is essential that musicians possess well-trained ears. With accurate relative pitch, you will be able to instantly recognize the quality of different chords, and by attaining a high level of relative pitch, you will enhance your ability to improvise, transcribe, transpose, tune your instrument with greater precision, memorize music more easily, and perform with greater confidence.

You can improve your relative pitch by utilizing a very simple 3-step exercise that you can apply to practically everything you play on your instrument including intervals, triads, arpeggiated seventh chords, scales, and more. To demonstrate how this exercise works, we will use the interval of a perfect fifth. On your bass, you can start this exercise with the note C at the third fret of the A-string.

Because we are practicing relative pitch, we will need to sound the note C at the third fret of the A-string as a reference point. After you play the C, concentrate on its sound. Then, we will start this easy 3-step process:

Step #1 - Imagine what the note you are going to sounds like in your mind.

Step #2 - Sing that note.

Step #3 - Play that note on your instrument.

To further explain how to apply this 3-step exercise to the interval of a perfect fifth, play the note C at the third fret of the A-string. Next, imagine what the note G, a perfect fifth higher, at the fifth fret of the D-string sounds like in your mind. Then, sing the note G out loud. Finally, play the G on your instrument in order to compare how you imagined and sang that note to what the note actually sounds like. After you complete this 3-step process going from the note C to the note G, repeat the same three steps, but begin with the G and practice ear training a perfect fifth below to the note C. Start by moving through exercises in a chromatic fashion. For example, apply this 3-step process to the interval of a perfect fifth between C and G. Then, employ it on the perfect fifth between C# and G# followed by the perfect fifth between D and A and so forth. Initially, we need to allow our ears to easily grasp the sounds of the basic intervals contained in the material we are ear training, but as your relative pitch improves, you can increase the degree of difficulty and force your ears to listen more deeply by moving about randomly on the fingerboard.

Depending on your current ability to recognize intervals by ear before you start practicing this ear training exercise, you might consider working on a different interval every day if your level is more advanced, or you may need to continue reviewing the same interval for an entire week or longer if you have never dedicated much time to ear training. Begin with the perfect intervals including the perfect fifth, perfect fourth, and perfect octave before integrating all of the remaining major and minor intervals. You can also use familiar melodies to assist in identifying intervals. For example, the interval between the first two notes of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" is a perfect octave. "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" starts with a perfect fifth. "Here Comes The Bride" begins with a perfect fourth, "Happy Birthday" starts with a major second, and "My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean" begins with the interval of a major sixth. As you listen to your favorite music, try to find a melody that is easy to remember which will help you recall the sounds of the different intervals.

If you have not received any prior vocal training, you may sing individual pitches just slightly flat or sharp at first. Like anything you practice, you will improve significantly in your degree of accuracy over time, and eventually you will be able to sing everything perfectly in tune. As a beginner, you just want to make sure that you are not singing really far off pitch.

When working on any kind of ear training exercise, place it towards the beginning of your practice session because your ears will be much more alert and open for listening than they would be if you were to work on ear training after you have been practicing for an hour or longer.