

John Hallberg



Developing Finger Dexterity



SAXOPHONE



About the Course

Strengthen your technical foundation and unlock greater fluency on the saxophone with this comprehensive course led by John Hallberg. You'll dive into scale work—ranging from five-note exercises to full-range runs—alongside intervallic patterns in thirds, fourths, fifths, and beyond. Explore arpeggios, creative sequencing, and rhythmic variation exercises designed to develop speed, precision, and musical flexibility. Whether you're building consistency or pushing your limits, this course gives you the tools to make technique both structured and expressive.

Contents

Scales	pg. 3
Five-note scales	pg. 3
Patterns	pg. 4
Arpeggios	pg. 4
Practicing in Different Rhythms	pg. 5



Scales

The process of working out scales, learning new patterns, and navigating throughout the whole range of the horn is particularly helpful for honing finger dexterity and technique.

Follow along as John walks you through some different methods for practicing your scales, in one octave, two octaves, and the full range.

Bonus: Exploring the full range of the horn on your scales can help you familiarize yourself with notes you don't often see, so that when you encounter them in music, they will not feel foreign.



Five-note scales:

Take the first five notes of a scale and loop the pattern. As you cycle through it, really listen and pay attention to the smoothness of your fingers.

Check for: Are you lifting anything? Is anything uneven?

After a few cycles through, do the same on the next scale degree.

John's Hot Tip: Practice in front of a mirror. Are your hands flying all over the place? Keep an eye out for wasted motion. Try to make sure your fingers are hovering right above the keys and that you don't have any glitches. Practicing all of this with a metronome will help keep you honest and help you make sure your groupings are very even.

Focusing on effective motion is especially helpful to practice in the palm keys, really listening for evenness and not allowing the notes to blur together. Your fingers need to experience these faster tempos to have that muscle memory of what it feels like to move at that speed.

Patterns

After you have practiced your scales in one octave, two octaves, full range, and five-note scales, it's time to practice other patterns.

John recommends 3rds and 4ths, but 5ths, 6ths, 7ths, and octaves are also great! The goal is that when you see these patterns in music, your muscle memory kicks in; you can say to yourself, "Oh, that's just the scale."

As always, you want to make sure the rhythm and articulation are very even with no notes sticking out over others.

Arpeggios

John recommends practicing your arpeggios on the full range of your saxophone to round out your scale practice.

Again, this will strengthen your muscle memory so that when you encounter these patterns in music, you have experienced what it feels like to articulate through them and can rely on muscle memory.

Practicing in Different Rhythms

Practicing difficult passages in different rhythms can be very helpful for your technique, especially if you are struggling with a particular passage.

John's favorite patterns are:

- long–short;
- short–long;
- long–short–long–long;
- long–triplet;
- and triplet–long.

Practicing difficult passages by breaking them into these small chunks and playing them in different rhythms will weed out all the little flubs and unevenness that your fingers could fall into.

The final step John likes to add on is to play it as written, in even sixteenths, through the entire scale.

Taking the time to even out any bumps and unevenness will help you play consistently smooth passagework in whatever you encounter.

