

SCALE DEGREE REFERENCE

The emotional character of each solmization note — in order of stability

← MOST STABLE ←				→ MOST TENSE →		
DO 1 OF 7 · TONIC HOME Home base. Arrival. Rest. The note that says "we're here." Phrase endings, chorus peaks, moments of resolution	SO 2 OF 7 · DOMINANT STRONG Open and stable but not closed. Confident, forward-facing, not quite home. Power phrases, pre-arrival resting points, masculine strength	MI 3 OF 7 · MEDIANT SWEET Warm, clear, emotionally bright. The most "musical" resting tone after DO. Gentle arrivals, emotional warmth, classic singable melodies	LA 4 OF 7 · SUBMEDIANT WARM On the border. Emotional, slightly floating — stable enough to linger on, just restless enough to feel feeling. Soulful phrases, emotional verses, bittersweet moments	RE 5 OF 7 · SUPERTONIC OPEN Forward-moving, unresolved. Feels like a question waiting for an answer. Rising phrases, forward motion, pre-chorus build, questions	TI 6 OF 7 · LEADING TONE LEADING High tension — strongly pulls upward toward DO. The note that most urgently wants to resolve. Climactic phrases, suspension build, dramatic tension	FA 7 OF 7 · SUBDOMINANT TENSION The strongest friction note. Creates a tritone against TI — maximum dissonance inside the key. Ache, blues moments, maximum harmonic color, modern edge

WHY IS THIS THE STABILITY ORDER?

The order **DO SO MI LA RE TI FA** comes from acoustics and harmonic tension. **DO** is the tonic — the key's center of gravity. **SO** is the dominant, the strongest harmonic partner to DO. **MI** is the third — the note that defines major vs. minor. As you move right, notes create more friction against the tonic and dominant, making resolution feel increasingly urgent.

THE DO-FA TRITONE: WHY FA IS THE TENSEST

FA and **TI** together form a **tritone** — an interval of three whole steps, the most dissonant interval in Western tonality. This is why FA (from below) and TI (from above) both exert such strong gravitational pull toward resolution: FA wants to fall to MI, and TI wants to rise to DO. They are the two "active" tones that define harmonic tension within the key.

WRITING WITH SCALE DEGREES

For arrival and resolution

Land on *DO, SO, or MI* at phrase endings. DO = full stop. SO = open but strong. MI = warm and melodic. These three form the major triad — the most stable home base.

For forward motion and tension

Let phrases lean toward *RE, TI, or FA*. RE asks a question. TI pulls urgently upward. FA creates ache. End on these only when you want the listener leaning forward.

LA as the emotional wildcard

LA sits in the middle and earns its "warm / emotional" label by floating between stability and tension. Soul, gospel, and blues melodies use LA heavily — it feels open enough to hold emotion without resolving it.

WHY THE STABILITY ORDER MATTERS

Sheet 2A gave you the **stability order**: DO → SO → MI → LA → RE → TI → FA. This companion explains **why** that order is real — rooted in physics and music theory — and how to use it intentionally when writing or revising a melody.

1 THE NOTE ISN'T JUST A NOTE

In Western tonal music, every scale degree carries a **built-in gravitational field**. The key center (DO) acts like a sun — other notes orbit around it. The further a note sits from DO in the stability order, the stronger the pull back toward home.

This is not subjective or cultural convention. It emerges from the acoustic relationships between pitches. **Stability is a physical property of intervals** — consonant intervals between a note and the tonic create stability; dissonant intervals create tension.

THE GRAVITY METAPHOR

Think of DO as the ground floor. SO and MI are comfortable chairs one floor up — easy to rest on. LA and RE are standing in a doorway — not uncomfortable, but not settled. TI and FA are leaning out a window — the pull back to ground is physical and urgent.

2 THE OVERTONE SERIES — WHY DO, SO, MI FEEL STABLE

When any note sounds, it produces **natural overtones** — a series of higher frequencies generated by the vibrating string, column, or membrane. The first few overtones above any fundamental note are the octave, the fifth (SO), and the major third (MI).

This means **DO**, **SO**, and **MI** are the notes that nature itself generates when DO is played. The ear recognizes them as consonant with home because they *are* home — they are acoustically embedded in the fundamental tone.



THE PRACTICAL RESULT

Melodies that emphasize DO, SO, and MI feel resolved and consonant. This is why these three notes make up the tonic triad — they are the notes that are "already there" in the natural acoustic property of the tonic pitch.

3 THE TRITONE: FA AND TI — MAXIMUM TENSION

The interval between **FA** and **TI** is a **tritone** — three whole steps, exactly half an octave. This is the most dissonant interval in Western music theory. Medieval theorists called it *diabolus in musica* — "the devil in music."

The tritone is uniquely unstable because it is equidistant from both directions of resolution. FA wants to fall a half-step down to MI. TI wants to rise a half-step up to DO. Together they form the harmonic engine that drives dominant chords back toward tonic.

The Tritone Pair. FA wants to resolve down to MI (half step). TI wants to resolve up to DO (half step). Together they define the strongest tension available within the key — which is why the dominant seventh chord (SO-TI-RE-FA) creates such irresistible pull toward home.

4 THE MIDDLE NOTES: LA AND RE

LA and **RE** sit in the moderate tension zone — neither as stable as the tonic triad nor as tense as the tritone pair. Each has a distinct emotional character.

LA — Warmth with a Question

LA is the 6th degree — the natural minor tonic. It sits close enough to home to feel settled, but with an emotional undertone that suggests something unresolved. Soul, gospel, and blues melodies use LA constantly for this reason: it holds feeling without forcing resolution. It can rest, but it never fully arrives.

RE — The Open Question

RE is the 2nd degree — a step away from home. It wants to fall back to DO or rise to MI. It's the melodic equivalent of ending a sentence with a question mark. RE gives melodies their sense of forward motion and yearning. Land on RE at the end of a verse phrase and the listener leans in for the answer.

WHY THE STABILITY ORDER MATTERS

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USING THE LADDER INTENTIONALLY

Once you understand the stability ladder, you can **engineer tension arcs** in a melody by choosing which notes land on structurally important beats. The ladder is a tool, not a constraint.

THE CORE PRINCIPLE

Stepping up the stability ladder (toward FA) builds tension. Stepping down (toward DO) creates resolution. The speed of the climb or descent controls the emotional pacing of your melody.

STEP UP →

DO → MI → RE → TI

rising tension — each step more urgent

STEP DOWN →

TI → RE → MI → DO

resolution — relaxing into home

LEAP TO TOP

DO → FA

dramatic tension — sudden dissonance, demands resolution

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COMMON STABILITY MOVES

These three patterns appear repeatedly in well-crafted melodies. Each uses the stability ladder deliberately to create a specific emotional shape.

Resolution Move

DO → TI → DO

Leave home, create tension, return. Classic cadence shape.

Tension Climb

RE → TI → FA

Build from moderate to maximum tension — pre-chorus energy.

Stable Platform

SO → MI → SO

Hover between stable notes — chorus hooks often rest here.

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QUICK TEST — MAP A PHRASE'S TENSION ARC

Apply this exercise to any 4-note melody phrase to see its stability contour.

- 1

Write out the solmization syllables for the 4 key notes in your phrase (skip fast passing tones).
- 2

Rank each note on the stability ladder: DO=1, SO=2, MI=3, LA=4, RE=5, TI=6, FA=7.
- 3

Plot those four numbers: **1, 5, 6, 1** (for example) gives you a climb to tension and return. **3, 4, 5, 6** gives you constant rising tension with no release.
- 4

Ask: does the shape serve the emotional job of this section? Verse should lean toward ascending. Chorus should tend to land low.

EXAMPLE

Phrase: MI → LA → TI → DO = stability numbers **3 → 4 → 6 → 1**. This phrase climbs tension then resolves completely. Classic verse-to-arrival shape.

THE CORE INSIGHT

The stability order is physics made musical.

DO–SO–MI are stable because they live in the natural overtone series. TI and FA are tense because they form a tritone — the most dissonant interval. LA and RE sit in the emotional middle. When you understand *why* this order exists, you stop treating it as a rule and start using it as a tool.

The stability ladder is always available. Every phrase you write is already climbing or descending it. The only question is whether you're doing it deliberately.