



Learning Checklist: Bass



It can be tricky to keep track of what you've learned, and even more tricky to know what to focus on next. This guide provides a checklist for each key area of study to help you keep track of your bass learning journey.

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Introduction

Welcome to the bass learning checklist! I initially created it to keep track of my own progress (it can be daunting knowing how much there is to learn but not knowing where to start!), but I realised it could be of use for other bassists of any level, so I transformed it into a PDF booklet to share with the bass community.

Whilst there are many aspects of bass playing that cannot be covered here - such as the more creative concepts that can't be reduced to a checklist (you can't really tick off 'does my bass playing groove?'), I have tried to incorporate as many of the ingredients for musical knowledge and bass playing as possible in an easy-to-use format.

This booklet is designed as a checklist, not as an instruction manual or tutorial. There are brief explanations for each section, but the aim of this checklist is not to provide information; it is here as a guide and checklist for information gathered elsewhere. From my experience, finding the information is the easy part - organising it is the hard part!

I very much hope that it provides some direction and helps other bassists organise their practice! Happy Bassing!

Tips

- You are free to use this practice guide however you wish. However, I have found that best way to ensure you have a thorough grasp on each exercise is to practice them in all 12 keys. I only tick off an exercise once I am comfortable with it cycling through the circle of 4ths.
- **Do not rush!** The exercises in this checklist could take a lifetime to learn, and there are many professional musicians that would not be able to instantly tick off everything in here!
- It is important to apply what you learn from exercises to a musical setting. Exercises provide the tools to be musical, but they aren't music in their own right. Once you feel confident with the chord tones in frets 1-5, you could try improvising a walking bass line in that area of the neck. Or when you're comfortable with the scale exercises, have a go at improvising a solo in one key.

Arpeggio Patterns

	Pattern 1	Pattern 2	Pattern 3
Major 7			
Minor 7			
Dominant 7			
Minor 7 flat 5			
Augmented			

Arpeggio patterns refers to the three different fingering patterns that are available from the root of each arpeggio type - i.e. starting from your little finger, from your first finger, and from your middle finger.

Arpeggio Inversions

	Root	1st Inversion	2nd Inversion	3rd Inversion
Major 7				
Minor 7				
Dominant 7				
Minor 7 flat 5				
Augmented				

Arpeggio inversions start from a note of the arpeggio that isn't the root. There's root position (starting from the root), first inversion (starting from the 3rd), second inversion (starting from the 5th), and third inversion (starting from the 7th).

Chord Tones

Breaking the fretboard down into three sections helps with learning the chord tones over the whole neck. The exercises from the root, 3rd, 5th, and 7th are similar to the inversion exercises, except you are limited to a specific area of the fretboard, so the standard inversion shapes won't be available for all arpeggios - you'll have to find new routes through the arpeggios in each area. For instance, if you play an Eb7 arpeggio from the 3rd using only frets 1-5, you start on the low G (3rd fret of the E string), then play Bb for the 5th (1st fret of A string), then Db for the 7th (4th fret of A string), then Eb - the root (1st fret of D string). It forces you to work out new shapes.

You then have exercises from the lowest available note to the highest available note, and vice versa. This means finding the lowest chord tone from the arpeggio in that section of the fretboard and playing all the chord tones for that arpeggio from lowest to highest until you reach the highest note available in that section of the fretboard. Then do the reverse, from highest back down to the lowest.

The final exercise in this section is the continuous arpeggio exercise; this means playing through all 12 keys continuously, moving from each chord tone to the next available chord tone. So you might start on the lowest available note of CMaj7 (the open E), play through CMaj (from E, G, B, C), then move to the next available note of FMaj7, which would be E (it's 7th), play through FMaj7, then move to the next available note of BbMaj7....I tend to use the circle of fourths as my chord sequence to make sure I've played in all 12 keys.

Frets 1-5

	Major 7	Minor 7	Dominant 7	Minor 7b5
From Root				
From 3rd				
From 5th				
From 7th				
From Lowest to Highest Note				
From Highest to Lowest Note				
Continuous Arpeggios				

Frets 5-9

	Major 7	Minor 7	Dominant 7	Minor 7b5
From Root				
From 3rd				
From 5th				
From 7th				
From Lowest to Highest Note				
From Highest to Lowest Note				
Continuous Arpeggios				

Frets 8-12

	Major 7	Minor 7	Dominant 7	Minor 7b5
From Root				
From 3rd				
From 5th				
From 7th				
From Lowest to Highest Note				
From Highest to Lowest Note				
Continuous Arpeggios				

The Modes

These are the modes derived from the major scale. As with the arpeggio studies, it is a good idea to practice each one in every key. You can either work through them one key at a time, e.g. C Ionian, D Dorian, E Phrygian....or you can take one mode and work through it in each key before moving onto the next mode, e.g. C Ionian, F Ionian, Bb Ionian...**I tend to favour the latter approach, as it helps you internalize the sound of each mode properly.**

	Ionian	Dorian	Phrygian	Lydian	Mixolydian	Aolian	Locrian
Scale - Pattern 1							
Scale - Pattern 2							
Scale - Pattern 3							
Up One String							
3 Note Grouping							
3 Note Alternating							
4 Note Grouping							
4 Note Alternating							
Triads							
Alternating Triads							
7th Arpeggios							
Alternating 7th Arpeggios							
3rds							
4ths							
5ths							
6ths							
7ths							

Explanations for the above exercises are listed on the following page.

- **Scale in three patterns** - play the scale from root to the root an octave higher using patterns 1, 2, and 3. It is worth looking up the three scale patterns if you aren't familiar with them. They differ according to which finger you start on.
- **Up One String** - play the scale from root to the root an octave higher up one string.
- **3 Note Grouping** - play the first three notes of the scale, then go to the second note of the scale and play the next three notes, then from the third note of the scale etc. When you reach the highest note in that hand position, do the same descending.
- **Triads** - scales contain triads built from each note of the scale; this is called harmonizing the scale. Play the triad built from the first note of the scale, then the triad built from the second, then the triad built from the third, and so on...
- **Alternating Triads** - play the triad built from the first note of the scale ascending, then descend through the triad built from the second...play the triad built from the third ascending, then descend through the triad built from the fourth note of the scale...
- **7th Arpeggios** - this is the same principal as the 'Triads' exercise above, but includes the 7th of each the chord
- **Alternating 7th Arpeggios** - this is the same principal as the 'Alternating Triads' exercise above, but includes the 7th of each the chord
- **3rds** - play the interval of a third from the first note of the scale, then from the second note of the scale, then from the fourth note of the scale (whether the 3rd is major or minor depends on the scale you are playing and the note of the scale you are playing it from. The notes you play should all be within the scale. e.g. if you are playing a major scale in 3rds, you would play a major 3rd from the root, then a minor 3rd from the second, then a minor 3rd from the third, a major 3rd from the fourth etc...
- **4ths/5ths/6ths/7ths** - this is the same principle as for 3rds (above), but instead of playing the interval of 3rds, you play either 4ths, 5ths, 6ths, or 7ths.

Scales - Part 1

	Major Pentatonic	Minor Pentatonic	Blues Scale	Whole Tone
Scale				
Up One String				
3 Note Grouping				
3 Note Alternating				
4 Note Grouping				
4 Note Alternating				
Triads				
Alternating Triads				
3rds				
4ths				
5ths				

Scales - Part 2

	Double Harmonic	Altered	Diminished	Chromatic	Harmonic Minor	Melodic Minor	Phrygian Dominant
Scale							
Up One String							
3 Note Grouping							
3 Note Alternating							
4 Note Grouping							
4 Note Alternating							
Triads							
Alternating Triads							
3rds							
4ths							
5ths							
6ths							
7ths							

Articulations

Slide (from below)	
Slide (from above)	
Hammer-on	
Pull-off	
Ghost Note (string above)	
Ghost Note (Same string)	
Ghost Note (string below)	
Vibrato	
Staccato	

Articulations really make your music your own; they add expression and can make your playing more rhythmically interesting. Explanations for the different types of articulation can be found with a quick google. Tick them off once you can add them to your playing comfortably!

Rhythm

Straight, swing, and shuffle are all specific rhythmic feels used in different styles of music. It's a good idea to be familiar with each!

4/4, 3/4, and 5/8 are time signatures that you are likely to come across at some point on your musical journey.

Quarter notes, eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and eighth note triplets are note divisions that you should be comfortable playing at a reasonable tempo. I recommend using a metronome and working on them separately. Tick them off once you feel that you are happy with them at a tempo you deem sufficient. I personally aim for 160 bpm.

Most musicians start off learning to play dead on the beat...but intentionally playing slightly ahead or behind can have its own feel, and is something worth experimenting with!

Straight	
Swing	
Shuffle	
4/4	
3/4	
5/8	
Quarter Notes	
Eighth Notes	
Sixteenth Notes	
Eighth Note Triples	
On the Beat	
Behind the Beat	
Ahead of the Beat	



HAPPY BASSING

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