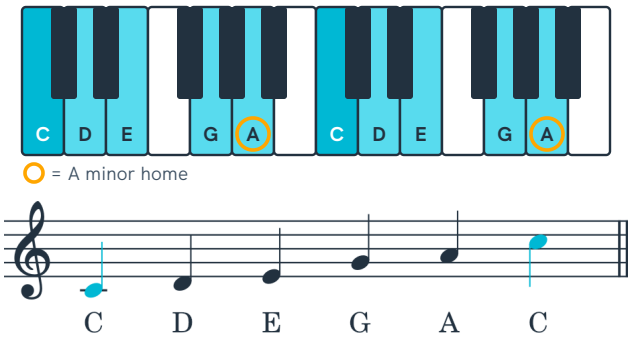
Improvising with the Pentatonic

Improvising means **making up music as you play**. It sounds scary, but with the right five notes and a simple left hand, almost nothing can go wrong. This page gives you a recipe: the notes, a way to shape your ideas into musical sentences, and a trick that makes them sound planned.

YOUR FIVE SAFE NOTES

The **C major pentatonic** (Handout 73) is C D E G A — the C major scale without F and B. With no half steps left, no two notes rub, so **every note sounds good over every chord** in this loop.

Start the same five notes on A and you have the **A minor pentatonic**: A C D E G. Same keys, different home. Over C chords, C feels like home; over A minor, A does.



ASK A QUESTION, GIVE AN ANSWER



The **question** (bars 1–2) stops **on A** — up in the air. The **answer** (bars 3–4) comes down and lands **home on C**.

CHORD	LAND ON	PASS THROUGH
C	C E G	D A
Am	C E A	D G
F	C A	D E G
G	D G	C E A

Quick notes can be any of the five. **Long notes** sound best on a note **inside the chord** — the "land on" column.

Musicians call this **call and response**: two bars that ask, two bars that answer — like a conversation. The left hand plays one chord per bar (F and G share bar 3) and loops forever.

RHYTHM FIRST, NOTES SECOND

1

Pick a rhythm

Clap a short one, like **quarter, two eighths, half** — the rhythm of bars 1–3 above.

2

Repeat it, change the notes

Use the **same rhythm** every bar with new notes. Repetition is what makes a solo sound planned (Handout 355).

3

Leave some space

Rests are part of the music. A long note or a silent beat lets the listener **hear your idea**.

4

End on the home note

Finish the answer on **C**, on a long note. Any wobble before it is forgiven once you land home.

Try it Loop the left hand C – Am – F G – C slowly. Play the example once, then make up your own question and answer with the four steps. Next, try the same five notes over the **12-bar blues in C** (Handout 53) — then swing your eighths (Handout 338, Exercise 88) and you are playing jazz.
Write the minor pentatonic and blues scales: Exercise 81.

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