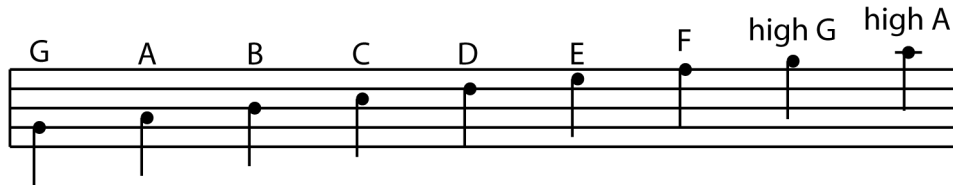


Welcome to the written companion to the free online video courses on how to learn to play the bagpipes offered at www.patrickmclaurin.com.

Let's get started.

Lesson 1: The scale

Here is what the scale looks like in written notation. In reality, relative to A, the C and F notes are actually C# and F# (# = sharp). As you can see, the bagpipe has an octave range, A to high A, with a low G.



To play the note G, you cover the bottom four holes with your right hand. Your right thumb should be placed behind or slightly above your right middle finger on the back of the chanter. Your left hand covers the top three holes so your left pinky finger is not used. Your left thumb covers the last hole at the back of the chanter. Make sure your left pinky stays above your other left hand fingers, not below and tucked under, this will cause problems later. Also make sure that you are not using the tips of your fingers. Your fingers should be straight, not bent like you are playing an instrument with keys. The chanter holes should intersect your right fingers on the middle pads or at the joint between the middle pads and the fingertip pads. The chanter holes should intersect your left fingers on the fingertip pads. But remember, this is the pad of your fingertips, not the tips of your fingers. Keep your fingers straight! Also make sure that you are not bending your wrist. Your hands should be natural extensions of your arms and should be inline with your arm. **To play A**, you simply keep all your fingers where they are except you remove your right pinky finger from the very bottom hole. For most beginners, the bottom hole to sound the G is an incredible stretch for your right pinky. Just keep practicing and it will become more natural. **To play B**, leave your fingers where they are except also pick up your right ring finger. This is an important time to stress that you keep your fingers as close to the chanter as possible without inhibiting the sounding of the note you are trying to play. Also, **RELAX!** It is impossible to improve with any speed whatsoever if you have a death wish to have that chanter with you when you pass on to the next world so do yourself a favor and gently hold your chanter. This will become easier as your brain and fingers remember where the holes are. **To play C**, you pick your right middle finger while simultaneously putting back down your right pinky finger. Make sure the transition is clean, meaning that you should not hear any low pitched crossing noises when you go from B to C. **To play D**, play C except pick up your right pointer finger.

Every note on the top hand is played with the bottom hand like you are playing A, with all the holes covered except the very bottom one, the right pinky hole. **To play E**, remembering how to position the bottom hand, just simply lift your left ring finger off the hole. It is **IMPERATIVE** that when you are going from the note D to E or E to D, that there are no low pitched crossing noises, typically an A or G crossing note. These will spell certain doom for any aspiring piper. **To play F**, play E except pick up your left middle finger. **To play high G**, play F except pick up your left pointer finger. **High A** is played by removing your left thumb from the back hole while simultaneously placing your left ring finger back on the hole right above the holes covered by your right hand. Remember, particularly for high G and high A, keep your fingers close to the holes when they are not covering them. By keeping your fingers close to the chanter you minimize the risk of playing and developing crossing noises in the future and it helps you stay more relaxed.

Lesson 2: Crossing Noises

If you were to have crossing noises (which you shouldn't), they would be written like this. It will make a bit more sense once you look at the part about grace notes. Also remember that crossing noises

can occur between more transitions than just D and E, so if you ever hear any note between the one you are coming from and going to, that is bad.



Lesson 3: Grace notes

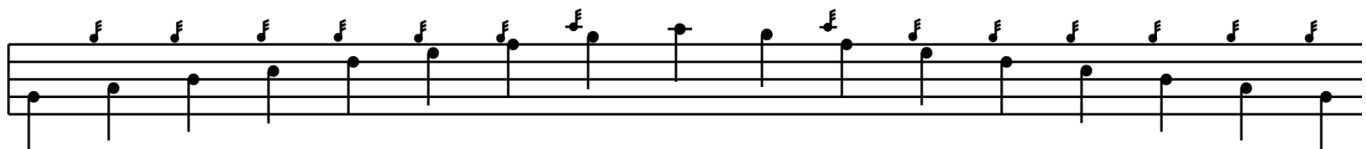
Grace notes are 50% of every pipe tune. The big notes carry the melody. The grace notes carry the rhythm. The four most important individual grace notes are written below. Each grace note is played by simply lifting the one finger that corresponds to that particular note and putting it back down. A **high G grace note** is played by quickly picking up your left pointer finger and then putting it back down. Notice I didn't say at the speed of light pick up your left pointer finger and put it back down, I said quickly. Remember, be relaxed, not stay relaxed (my new quote). A **D grace note** is played by applying the same technique as above to your right pointer finger. An **E grace note** is played using the left ring finger. A **high A grace note** is played by removing the thumb from the back of the chanter. Take note that this often means that no fingers on your left hand will actually be in contact with the chanter when playing a high A grace note. As you will see in the future you are not limited to four grace notes, in fact, there is a grace note for every note! So, you might as well get started trying to move each finger independently of all the rest! I recommend playing G and just try and pick up each finger individually and then putting it back down. As you become accustomed to this, speed your grace notes up until they are nice and snappy. Keep in mind that every grace note should be the same length, and that we want to be able to distinguish the pitch of one grace note from the next, so that means you have to play them long enough that you can tell a difference in pitch between two different grace notes. If you can't tell the difference, you are playing nanosecond long grace notes, which is cool but not practical, and you probably aren't relaxed, so don't do it.



Lesson 4: Grace note scales

Since grace notes are played by, usually, just picking up one finger and putting it back down quickly, you obviously can't pick up a finger and put it back down if it is already up. So, you cannot play a high G grace note above the note F, a D grace note above the note C, nor an E grace note above the note D. For practice, I have added the high A grace note to the high G grace note scale.

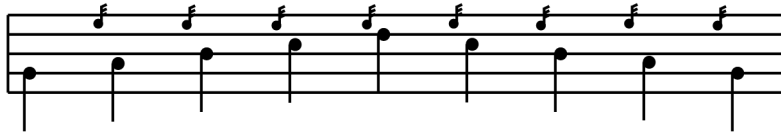
The high G grace note scale



The D grace note scale



The E grace note scale



You are probably asking why I put the grace note pictures in the order high G, D, E instead of high G, E, D. There is a very good reason. It is a very common practice in Jigs and Reels to have grace note progressions that are carried out in the series, high G, D, E; so, this is just to get you thinking along those lines.

Lesson 5: Taps

The second type of grace note is the tap. These are played, usually, by just quickly covering the topmost uncovered hole with the appropriate finger. Exceptions include the B tap, C tap, and one of the D taps. The B, C, and one of the D taps are all played by playing a very short G grace note. Take note that this is not a high G grace note but a G grace note. The other D tap is played by tapping with the right pointer finger to play a C grace note. The E tap is played by tapping with the left right finger to sound an A grace note. The F is played by tapping with the left middle finger to sound an E grace note. The **high G** is played by tapping with the left pointer finger to sound an F grace note. The **high A** tap is played by tapping with your left thumb, which coincidentally is also a high G grace note! There are two ways of playing the high A tap. One involves sliding your thumb over the hole from the top of the hole to the bottom. Although is a very common convention, I have decided after playing it for ten years that unless you are playing jigs or hornpipes with three or four high A taps in a row, this way of playing the tap generally sounds terrible. A better method is to 'push' your thumb straight onto the hole and remove it by doing the same thing in reverse giving an 'in and out' motion instead of a sliding motion. This generates a much cleaner grace note and brings the sound of the tap inline with the sounds generated by the other taps that are not produced by sliding motions. Now, you are probably wondering, this fool forgot to put in the A tap. Well, be all means play an A tap by tapping with your right pinky finger, go ahead and practice it too, it will help later when you learn the birl. The birl is the coolest sounding three grace note embellishment you have ever heard. Then we will see if you play an A tap again!



Lesson 6: Grips

The grip is the first in a series of embellishments that you will learn. The grip is the most basic embellishment and the foundation for others to come. A grip can be played from any note to any note, although if you play it from G to G, well, it is a little anti-climactic because all the ends up happening is you playing a D grace note on G. To play a grip, as in the illustration from A to A, start on A, then play a G grace note, then a D grace note to another G grace note, and then return to A. Note that the D grace note is not from G to A, but G to G. Practice this slowly at first as you train your fingers to do this and it will get faster on its own. The G grace notes in embellishments are different from what I have told about grace notes above. This is a bit harder to put into words but G is the base note onto which you play regular old grace notes. So you are not playing a G tap grace note, you are literally playing G with some grace notes in there and eventually with practice, you will be able to play the embellishment fast enough that you will be, for all practical purposes, playing G grace notes. Watching the video here will help a lot on the lessons covering embellishments.



Grip

Lesson 7: Throws

The light throw

There are two kinds of throws, the light throw is appropriate for any type of tune, although if the tune you are playing contains lots of other embellishments, the heavy throw described further down will probably sound better as it gives a more bubbly sound and would thus be more consistent with the sounds the other embellishments produce. Like the grip, the light throw can be played from any note, but you ALWAYS end on D. Playing a light throw from A, play G, then play a D grace note to C, and end on D. So the progression is A, G grace note, D grace note to C grace note ending on D.



Light Throw

The heavy throw

The heavy throw has one extra grace note than the light throw which gives it a more punchy, bubbly feel. The heavy throw also always ends on D. A heavy throw from A starts with a grip but instead of then going straight to D after the grip, you play a C grace note before proceeding to D. Specifically, from A, play a G grace note followed by a D grace note to another G grace note, then onto a C grace note, and ending on D.



Heavy Throw

Lesson 8: Taorluaths

Taorluaths is the last of the fundamental embellishments. A taorluath is another extension of the grip, like the heavy throw. To play a taorluath, you first start by playing a grip that is followed by an E grace note from the second G grace note to the next melody note. Since the movement ends with an E grace note, taorluaths can only be played to notes below E, namely D, C, B, A, and G.



Taorluath

Lesson 9: Doublings

Doublings are an extension of the simple grace notes: high G, D, E. A doubling is a grace note played to a melody note followed by another grace note. Doublings always start with a high G grace note to whatever note you are playing the doubling on. Once the note is reached, a second grace note is played. Which specific grace note is played depends on the melody note. If the main theme note the doubling is being played to is G, A, B, or C the second grace note is a D grace note. If you are playing a doubling to D you play a second E grace note; if you are playing a doubling to E you play a second F grace note. The 'doublings' to high G and high A aren't really doublings. To play a high G doubling you play a high G

grace note to F and then immediately play high G. To play a high A doubling you play high A and then tap or slide your left thumb across the back hole to sound a high G grace note.

Doublings



Lesson 10: Slurs

Slurs are a variation of the doubling. They all start with the high G grace note again, except for high A, of course. There is not really an A slur but feel free to practice it, usually the birl is used instead (see below). To play a slur on B, play a high G grace note to B followed by a tapping G grace note, same thing for C. There are two slurs for D, a light and heavy slur. The light slur involves playing a high G grace note to D followed by a tapping C grace note. The heavy slur involves playing a high G grace note to D followed by a tapping G grace note, similar to B and C slurs. The E slur is played by playing a high G grace note to E followed by a tapping A grace note. The F slur is played by playing a high G grace note to F followed by a tapping E grace note. The high G slur is played by playing a high A grace note to high G and then tapping an F grace note.

Slurs



Lesson 11: Hornpipe Slurs/Shakes

Hornpipe shakes are just doubling/slur combinations. You play the correct doubling to whatever note you are going to followed by the appropriate tapping grace note. However, it is not uncommon to see the B and C hornpipe shakes written with E grace notes as the intermediate grace note instead of a D grace note.

Hornpipe Shakes



Lesson 12: The Birl

The birl can be the most challenging of the embellishments and can take years to master. The birl is only played on A. The birl is simply two G grace notes in succession with an A grace note in between (the second image in the picture below). However, if you are playing a birl from a note besides A, and even sometimes on A, it is not uncommon to add a high G grace note to A immediately followed by the birl on A (the first picture below).

