

# The Linear Connection Method

By Michael Clement Music

The simplest exercise that you NEED to master  
soloing... that only takes 10 minutes a day.

So many musicians don't know where to start when it comes to melody improvisation.

Most methods focus on one of two approaches—drilling scales or memorizing common phrases ("licks")

While each of these approaches have their place, they aren't very helpful when first learning to improvise because they don't teach you how to put scales or "licks" in context.

The Linear Connection Method is a way to build melodic composition and improvisation skills by first learning core principles of melodic structure. This way, when you learn new phrases or scales, you will understand how to use them.

While the Linear Connection Method encompasses more than this guide alone, this guide breaks the first steps of the method down into easy-to-manage steps. By the end of this guide, you will have the tools to create an endless variety of melodic phrases in the key of C Major. *I recommend printing out this pdf guide and working through it at the piano, with a pencil.*

**Let's dive in!**

## Step 1: 1-Note Connections

I'll start out by asking,

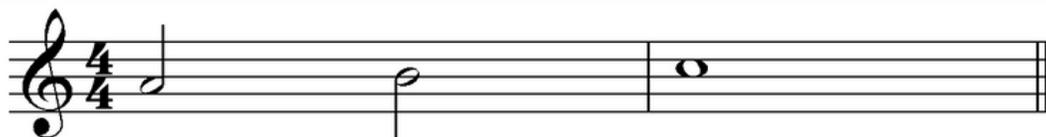
*What is a melody?*

Well, a melody can be defined many different ways, but it is a combination of notes that connects one or more chords.

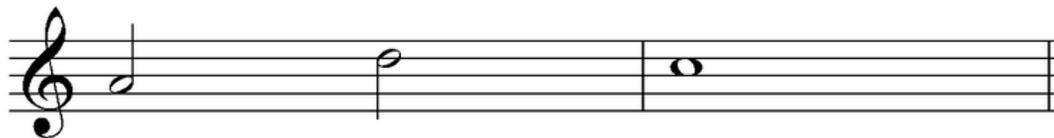
So when learning to create our own melodies, either composed or improvised, we need to learn to connect a starting note to a destination with other notes in between.

There are 3 ways to connect two notes to form a 3 note melody:

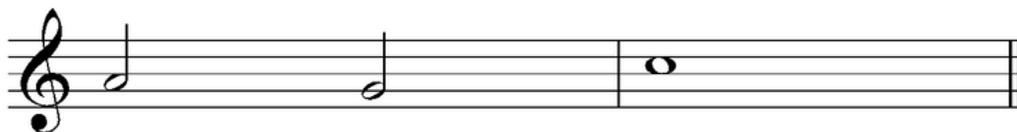
1 – Move toward it



2 – Move past and return

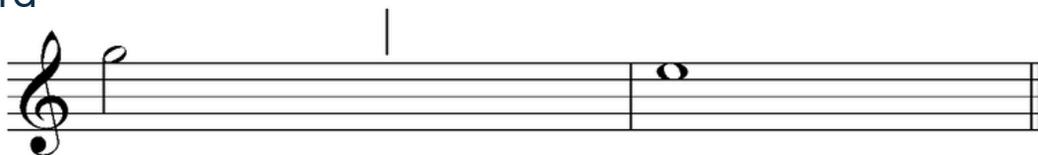


3 – Move away and return

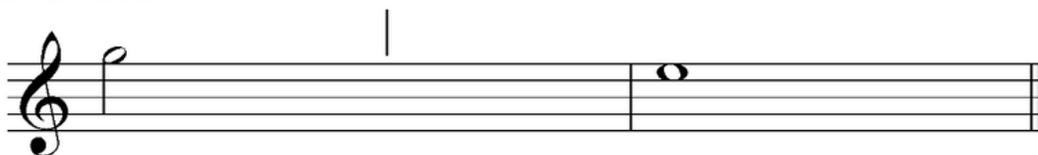


Now let's try each of these, writing them down below. For now, don't worry about how far you're moving in each direction. Just explore the different options, while only using notes from C Major.

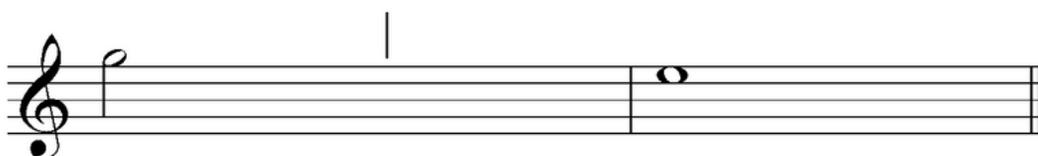
Move toward



Move past and return



Move away and return



Now try each method (toward, past, and away from the destination) on the following, in order, without writing them down (3 ways each)



Congrats! You've completed Step 1! But... soloing using only half notes won't get you very far, so let's continue on to Step 2! In step 2 we'll be learning to connect with quarter notes.

## Step 2: 3-Note Connections

The next step is similar to the first, but now with more notes between the starting note and the destination.

### Anchor Notes

Now that we can essentially improvise short connections, all we need to get comfortable with larger lines is to start by putting an anchor note between our starting note and our destination. This is simply a checkpoint or intermediate destination just in case you feel uncomfortable improvising the whole line. You can pick this "anchor note" using the same logic from before (it will go either toward, past, or away from the destination).

After you pick an anchor note, then fill in the rest of the notes based on the principles in last step. While we want to be able to improvise lines, there's no shame in breaking the process down until you can do it automatically.

For example, in the following example the "anchor note" (at the downward arrow below) goes toward the destination. Then we fill in the gaps. In this case, beats 2 and 4 go away from the destination.



If you pick beats 2 or 4, you'll need to fill in two notes instead of one. Any of the three methods in succession work, but moving by step is certainly the easiest. Here are some examples:



Now come up with some options of your own! For each prompt, write in a different anchor point in the space provided. Then, use what you practiced in step 1 to fill in the remaining notes. Try several variations before moving on.



Now, come up with four variations for each prompt without writing anything down.



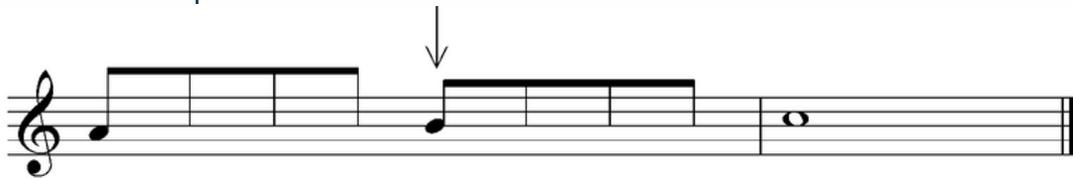
Congrats! You're almost there! In the next step, we'll be expanding this exercise to 8th notes. Are you noticing a pattern here?

## Step 3: The Linear Connection Exercise

Hey, you're doing great! You've arrived at step 3, The Linear Connection Exercise. This is the exercise I use to help my students take their first steps into soloing. Thus far, we haven't discussed how different keys or chords fit into all of this, but we'll get to that by the end of this guide. For now, let's jump into it!

Step 3 is connecting chords using 8th notes. Similar to the last step, we will pick an anchor point and use the ideas from previous steps to fill in the remainder—first on the page, then off of the page.

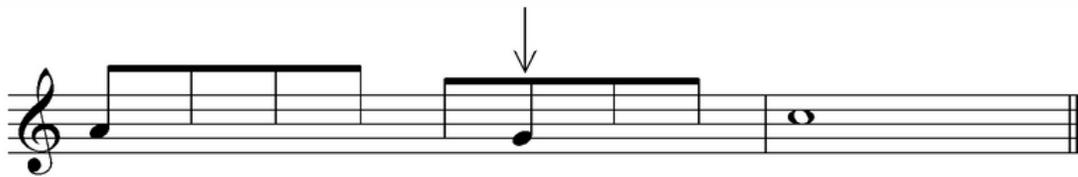
First, pick an anchor point:



Then fill the rest in based on what we did in the last step:



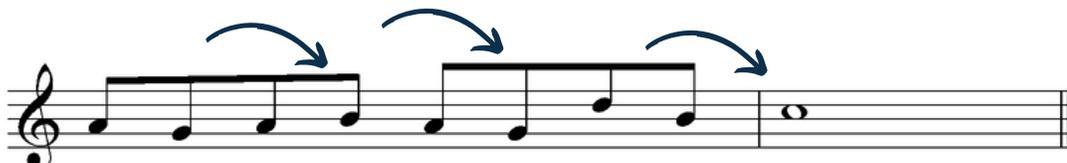
Similar to the last step, you can move the anchor point:



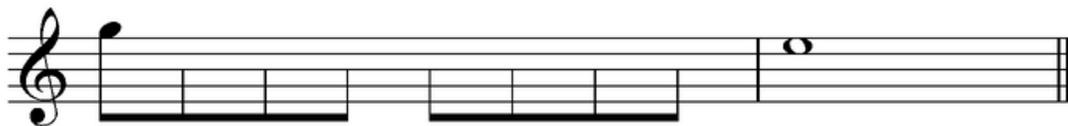
If you need, you can add an additional anchor point to make it easier:



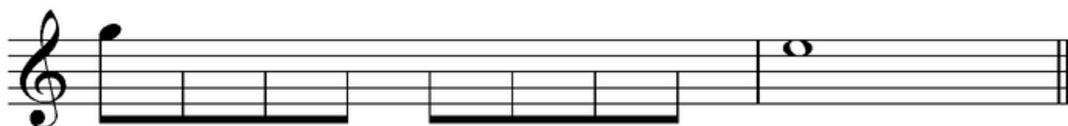
And then fill it in:



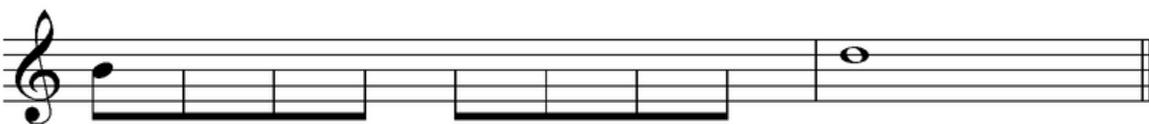
Now try it on our second example. First pick an anchor point. If you need additional anchor points, fill them in as well. Then complete the melodic line without writing the remaining notes down. Try a few variations before moving on.



Now pick a different anchor point for each staff below and come up with additional options.



Now try coming up with 4 variations for each of these without writing them down.



## Final Step: Applying The Linear Connection Exercise

Hey, you're doing great! Just by doing steps 1-3, the way you think about soloing and connecting melodies will have changed quite a bit. Since these exercises require you to not only fill in possible "answers" but also to compose melodic lines without writing them down, I recommend repeating the steps several times until they are easy and straightforward for you. You will know you're starting to get it when it starts to feel natural!

While doing these exercises, you may have noticed that you found yourself enjoying some melodies more than others. If you particularly liked a melody you composed, go ahead and write it below!



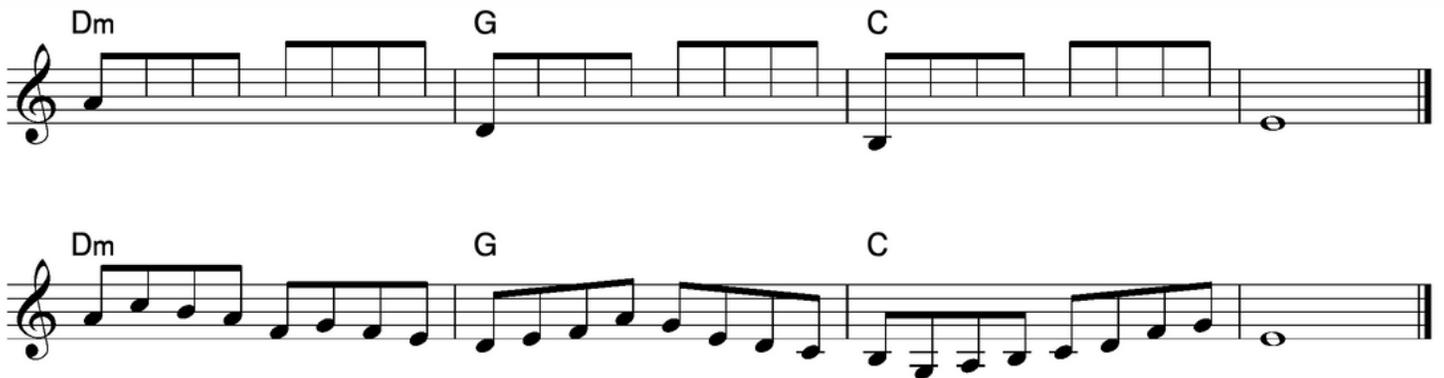
So how do we apply this to songs so we can start soloing?

Well, every exercise we've done so far only works in the key of C Major. So, first we should become comfortable with the basic exercise in different keys. I recommend branching out using the circle of 5ths. First C, then F and G, then Bb and D, and so on through the keys. However, you can start now by improvising melodies for chords in the key of C.

First pick starting and ending notes that fit with your chords, as shown below. Then fill in the rest. An example is shown below, but if possible, first hear and play the melody before putting pencil to paper.



We can even string together multiple measures to create a longer melodic line:



Then we can experiment with rhythm to make the melody more interesting:



We can even start experimenting with chromatic notes to make the melody more interesting:



You can see that soon the possibilities are endless! That's why soloing is so much fun! Once you have some basic melodic skills under your belt, you can do quite a bit with what you've already mastered.

Congrats! You've successfully completed The Linear Connection Method introductory bootcamp. You're well on your way to being able to create melodies freely at the piano!

If this guide has changed the way you think about soloing and improvisation, send me a message at [michael@michaelclementmusic.com](mailto:michael@michaelclementmusic.com) to tell me all about it! I'd love to hear about your successes.

If you've gotten a lot out of this guide and you're hungry for more, click [here](#) to join my free Facebook group, Freedom at the Piano. There are plenty more free resources, live-streamed trainings, and opportunities to join my exclusive improvisation coaching and mentorship program, **The Complete Pianist**. **The Complete Pianist Program** is the only program that combines improvisation, arranging, composition, practice strategy, and piano technique into simple, straightforward steps.

See what some of my clients in the program had to say about their wins!



**Caroline Hunt**

My biggest win was realizing that a lot of my skills have transferred over to learning new pieces quicker!



**Linda Grow Clement**

Biggest win: Finding that so many of the pieces on my "yet to learn" are now "almost learned" because new pieces are getting easier!



**Herman Kao**

Biggest win was being able to come up with most of the chords to a song by just listening.



**Felicity Breen**

1. Biggest win was starting to understand the roadmap(s); how musical elements can be teased apart, mapped, and worked through sequentially; how it's important to know where you are located on the map for each element before starting the journey.



**Brenda Starkey**

I visited my sister and families. We all took a turn at the piano and I was amazed at the feeling I had to be able to show them a bit of what I've learned. Thank you Michael!

Like Reply 4w



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**Linda Grow Clement**

Going to group classes has been a big win for me lately! I feel more motivated because of it and I'm getting help I didn't realize I need. Sometimes I even just conjure up a question, so I'll have something to ask. 😊 And then I look forward to practicing more. A nice spiral up!

Love Reply 6w



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