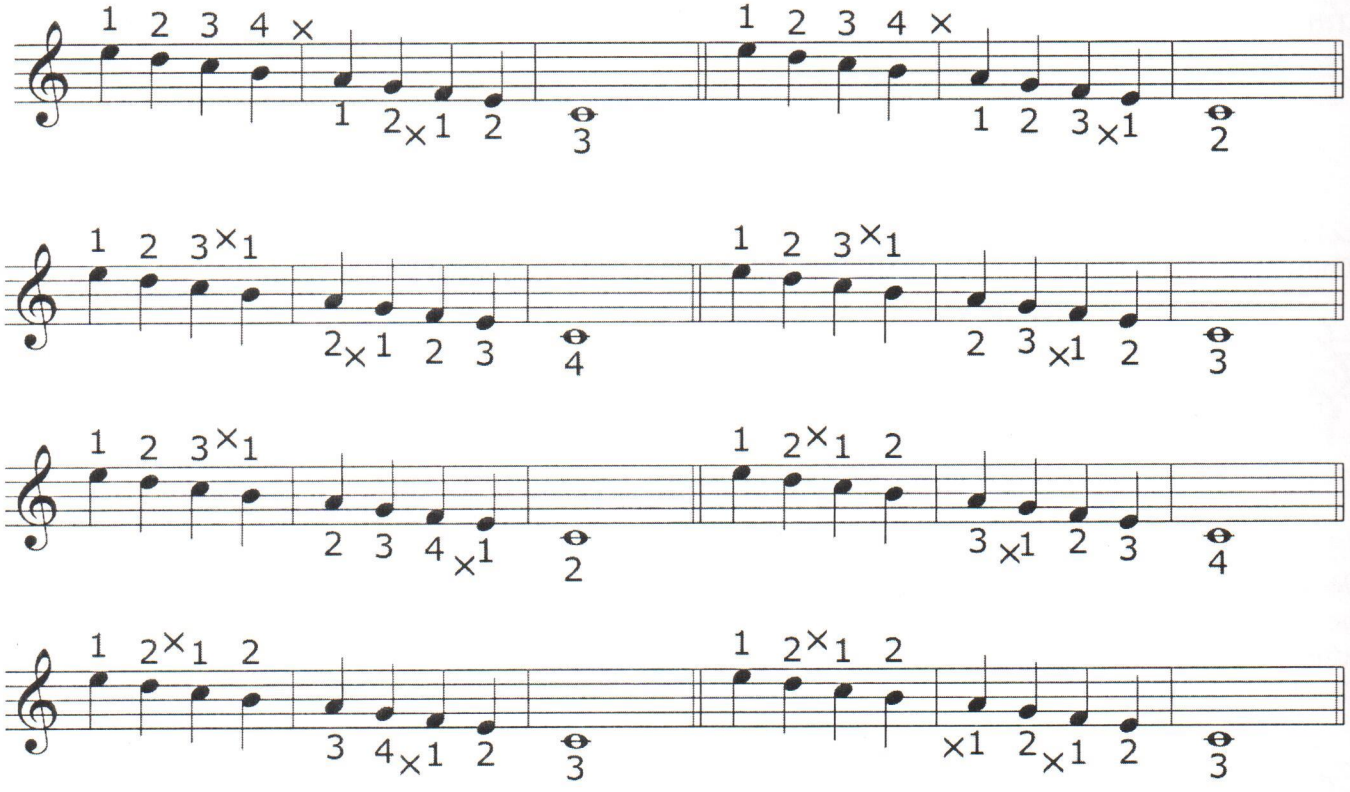
Runs of more than four notes

Since we only use four fingers on each hand, runs of more than four notes can create "~~difficulties~~," no, let's reword that to say "opportunities for creative fingering." In runs of five notes or more, a variety of fingerings are possible.

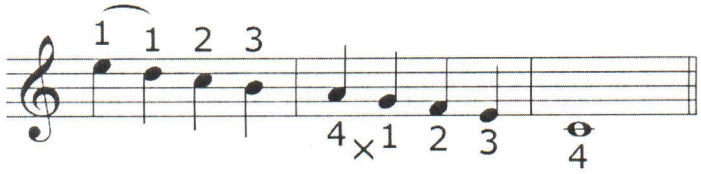
Usually, you'll be using cross-overs and cross-unders in these runs, instead of moving your whole hand by lifting. Crossing between placings is usually much safer, faster and smoother than lifting and jumping. In the following examples, I'm placing an x where you'll cross. **Please read Appendix 1 on page 56 if you're not familiar with cross-overs and cross-unders, as they are very important techniques.**

DESCENDING

Here are eight possible fingering options for playing the same nine-note descending run. You'll cross-over after four fingers, or three or two, in various combinations. Play all eight versions to feel the differences.



Sliding is also an option when the first two notes of a descending run are consecutive, giving you even more fingering options. Notice that by adding a slide to this same run, only one cross-over is needed, instead of two.

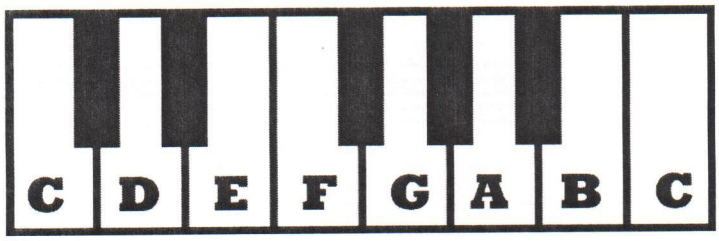


(If you don't know how to slide, please read Appendix 1 on page 56.)

Enharmonics

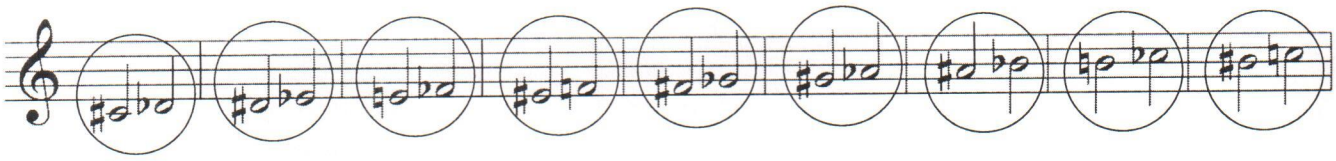
Joyce Rice worked at my Harp Center store back in the early 1990s. She now lives in Seattle, and was kind enough to help edit this book for me. After reading my first draft she said: "Frankly, I would go out of my way *not* to play 'Old MacDonald' unless I used a tuning where I could use enharmonics." Thank you, Joyce, for the great suggestion!

Enharmonics are two notes that sound the same, but are spelled differently. For example, the black key between the white A and B keys on the piano can be named or "spelled" either as an A-sharp or a B-flat. It is the same pitch. So A-sharp and B-flat are enharmonics of each other.



Also, on the piano keyboard there is no black key between the E and the F keys. So an E-sharp is the same pitch as an F-natural, and an E-natural is the same as an F-flat. Similarly, a B-sharp is the same pitch as a C-natural, and a B-natural is the same pitch as a C-flat.

The two notes in each circle below are enharmonics. They sound the same, because they are the same pitch.



If you have a lever harp with a full set of sharping levers, and your harp is tuned to the key of C, if you raise the lever on a B string, you will notice that it is the same pitch as the C string next to it.

If you have a lever harp tuned to three flats, raise the lever on a D string and it will give you the same pitch as your E-flat next to it.

If you have a pedal harp, make the appropriate pedal changes for any of the enharmonic notes.

Using enharmonics, particularly on a lever harp, is not often practical. But it is another example of thinking "outside the box" to solve a fingering problem.

In both versions of "Old MacDonald" on the previous page, the melody uses a pentatonic (five-note) scale. There are no B or F notes anywhere. (There may be in the harmony, but we'll ignore that for this discussion.) Because of these unused notes, by using enharmonics we can get rid of most of the awkward fingerings in the melody of "Old MacDonald." I'm printing two examples on the next page. Pick the one that matches how your harp is tuned.