

II V Is

A II V I is a chord progression which refers to chords on the second, fifth and first degree of a major or minor scale. Traditionally they are written in Latin script but as there are very few ancient Romans reading this, I will use numerals instead now.

Most standards and a lot of jazz tunes are made up of little more than 251s and 1625s (1625 1625 if repeated. (1625 was a momentous year - for a start, it was the year that the Dutch settled in New Amsterdam, later to become New York City. Think of that the next time you play "We'll Build Manhattan".)

In all 251s in which the tonic chord is a major, the chords refer to a minor seventh on the 2nd step, a dominant 7th on the 5th and a tonic major chord (major seventh or sixth) on the 1st. These are what you end up with if you create 4-note chords on these three steps.

In all cases, the scale which can be played on the minor seventh (on 2) and the tonic (on 1) is the major scale starting on the root-note of the tonic. If you want to be pedantic, the scale on the minor seventh is the Dorian mode and the one on the tonic is the Ionian mode, although there are times when you can play the Lydian mode on the tonic chord. What **can** change is the dominant seventh chord (on 5) and depending upon the extensions and alterations, a number of different scales may apply to this chord.

The following list of instances relates to the key of C and should be transposed into all keys. The scales in question relate to the dominant seventh chord. (A minor scale is the same as a major but with a minor 3rd.)

1. Dm7 G7 (G9/G13) C - no alterations to the dominant seventh chord

- use the C major scale

2. Dm7 G9+5 C

- use the C minor scale if the chord doesn't also have a -5.

3. Dm7 G9-5 C

- use the D minor scale if the chord doesn't also have a +5

4. Dm7 G9-5 C

- use the G whole-tone scale (on the root note of the chord) if the chord also has a +5
(G A B Db Eb F G)

Note that in the last 2 examples the dominant 7th may be written a G7+5 and G7-5. The context will make plain whether the 9th is altered or not.

5. Dm7 G7(b9) C

- use the C harmonic minor scale

Note that if the chord has a natural 5 and/or a +5, the scale will have a D and an Eb in it.

6. Dm7 G7(b9+5) C

- use the C harmonic minor scale
(see note to number 5)

or use the G altered scale (= Abm - a semitone above the root of the chord)
(G Ab Bb B Db Eb F G)

7. Dm7 G7(#9-5) or G7(#9+5) C

- use the G altered scale

8. Dm7 G13(-5) C

- use the Ab diminished scale (a semitone above the root of the chord)
(G Ab Bb B Db D E F G)

To tell which to use, refer to the tune to see what melody notes are used against the chord. Also, experiment and see which seems to be the best. Choosing the right one will come with experience.

Be aware that the chords may not be written as detailed as the ones here.

MINOR SEQUENCE

When the 251 ends in a minor tonic or a minor seventh or half-diminished, the first chord is usually not a minor seventh but a minor seventh with a flattened fifth (a half-diminished).

The dominant seventh chord that follows will invariably have an altered ninth - usually a b9.

1. Dm7(-5) G7(b9) Cm (where the 5th in the dominant 7th is natural or raised/augmented)

- use an Eb major scale for the Dm7-5 (a semitone above the root of the chord)

a C harmonic minor scale for the G7(b9) (built on the root of the tonic chord)

a C minor scale for the Cm

Note: you can also use a C harmonic minor scale for the Dm7(-5) or depending upon the context, an Fm scale instead.

2. Dm7(-5) G7(b9-5) (or any other combination of altered 9ths & 5ths) Cm

- use an Eb or C harmonic minor scale for the Dm7(-5)

a G altered scale for the dominant seventh

a C minor scale for the Cm

Note: if the Cm scale is a Cm maj7 or a Cm triad and you want an exotic sound, you can use a C harmonic minor scale on it.

An extra note can often be included in the C harmonic minor scale - the Bb (a tone down from the octave). This bridges the minor second interval between the Ab and B in the scale.

Sometimes you come across these cases:

a) Dm7 G7(b9) Cm

This occurs where the note A (the perfect 5th of the chord) is in the melody on the first chord

An example of this occurs in the first few bars of *The Shadow of your Smile*

b) Dm7(-5) G7(b9) C

An example of this occurs at the end of the bridge of *I remember April*.

All of this sounds highly complicated, but consider that you will come across these sequences so frequently that you will soon learn which scales seem to work best. When you have got these under your belt you may find other scales also work well, pentatonics, for example. But knowing the basics never hurts.

251s have been overdone and there is a tendency to let your fingers do the playing when you come across them. My suggestion is to try and find other chord progressions where you can, even if it means re-writing the traditional changes.