

UNDERSTANDING KEY SIGNATURES

Key Signatures:

When musicians talk of scales, or a piece of music, as being in a certain key, i.e., “*this song is in the key of, “F Major,”*” they are defining the tonality, the tonic note, (the, “tonic,” is the primary note of a scale), and the specific notes (and to a lesser extent the chords), found within the piece.

For example:

If we say a certain melody is in the key of “G Major”, then the melody is made up of notes from the, “G Major,” scale; “G, A, B, C, D, E, F#.”

The tonic note, (or first note - key note), of the scale is, “G”, but the key center is, “G Major.” Key centers are given at the beginning of a piece of music. The key center is shown as the appropriate sharps or flats on the staff for the prescribed key. The sharps and flats are indicated between the clef and time signature. When placed on the staff in this manner we call the key center label a, “Key Signature.”

Key Signatures are used to label keys and to indicate what notes must be raised or lowered in order to maintain the same intervals for ,the major and minor scales.

Make a study of the Key Signatures found in the next examples.

Example #1). The “SHARP” Key Signatures

Sharps	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Major keys: C	G	D	A	E	B	F#	C#
Minor keys: a	c	b	f#	c#	g#	d#	a#



The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a sequence of chords corresponding to the sharp key signatures listed in the table above. The chords are: G major (G, B, D), D major (D, F#, A), A major (A, C#, E), E major (E, G#, B), B major (B, D#, F#), F# major (F#, A#, C#), and C# major (C#, E#, G#). The bass line consists of single notes: G, D, A, E, B, F#, and C#.

Key Signatures Continued...

Example #2). The “FLAT” Key Signatures

Flats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Major keys: C	F	B \flat	E \flat	A \flat	D \flat	G \flat	C \flat
Minor keys: a	d	g	c	f	b \flat	e \flat	a \flat

One of the first things you will notice is how the order of the accidentals, (sharps & flats), follows a common pattern. We begin the design of musical keys with the, “C” major scale.

The key of, “C,” major has no sharps or flats. If you look at the examples you will see, “G” major is the first sharp key. It contains one sharp. The first flat key is, “F” major. It contains one flat. The keys follow a pattern, as you travel to the next key you add on a new accidental, but keep the previous one(s) from the last key. The common agreement between keys allows us to come up with a simple, useful system of memorizing accidentals through keys.

Memorize this sentence:

“Father Charles Goes Down And Ends Battle”

The first letter in each of the words of the above sentence is the order for which “SHARPS” occur through the sharp key signatures. Look at example #1.

By simply reversing the sentence you attain the order in which flats occur.

Memorize:

“Battle Ends And Down Goes Charles Father”

Now look at the flat keys in example #2.

As long as you know how many sharps or flats are in a key, you can correctly name them by applying the appropriate sentence.

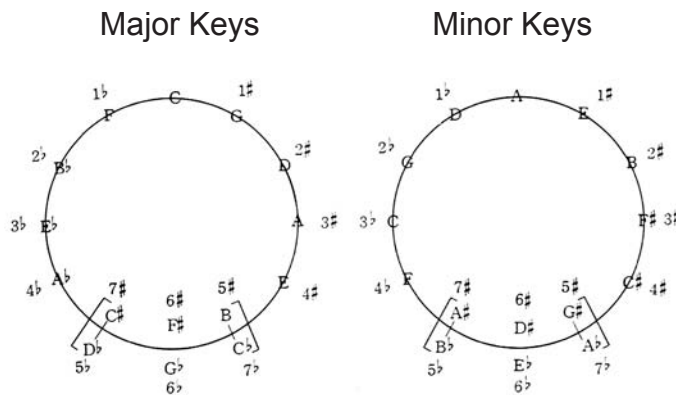
Key Signatures Continued...

The Circle of Fifths:

The circle of fifths, or sometimes referred to as the, “CLOCK,” is often used to show the relationship of the various keys. There are two directions of travel you can have when using the circle. The clockwise or, “Dominant,” direction and the counter-clockwise or, “Sub-Dominant,” direction.

Look at the example below.

Example #3).



The Dominant Direction:

Moving clockwise around the circle is movement of the dominant direction. This direction moves in intervals of a fifth, (counting up from the tonic every 5th letter name, in the key). It involves adding one extra sharp note to the next major scale in the circle.

The Sub-Dominant Direction:

Moving counter-clockwise traces the movement of the flat key signatures. Each step in the Sub-Dominant direction is an interval of a fifth counting down or a fourth counting up from the tonic. It involves adding one extra flat note to the next major scale.

Key Signatures Continued...

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

The name of the key and the number of sharps has been given.

Using the space provided, write the correct sharps, or flats for the key. This exercise will require you to use the sentences given on page 2, for the order of sharps and flats.

PART (1). SHARP KEYS:

KEY OF "E Major" _____

KEY OF "D Major" _____

KEY OF "G Major" _____

PART (2). FLAT KEYS:

KEY OF "Db Major" _____

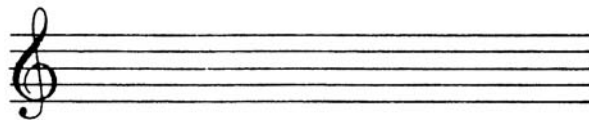
KEY OF "Bb Major" _____

KEY OF "Ab Major" _____

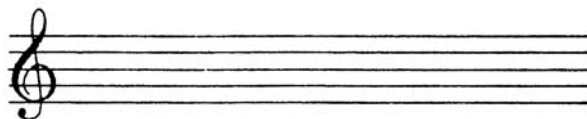
EXERCISE #2).

Write the key signatures for the following keys.

(A). Notate the Key Signature for, "A Major"



(B). Notate the Key Signature for, "Eb Major"



The Major Key-Signatures

There are 12 musical keys which can be used to create music. Major keys are the foundational keys and minor keys are a form of major created by playing the major scale off of it's sixth scale degree. Making a study of major keys - and memorizing all of them - is one of the first steps in strengthening your ability as a musician. The next step with the keys is to clearly understand the, "relative minor," ones found within the major structure. Below you will find the structure of the major keys ascending from the neutral key of, "C," to the full sharp or flat coverage of keys like, "C#," and, "Cb." *Please read below...*

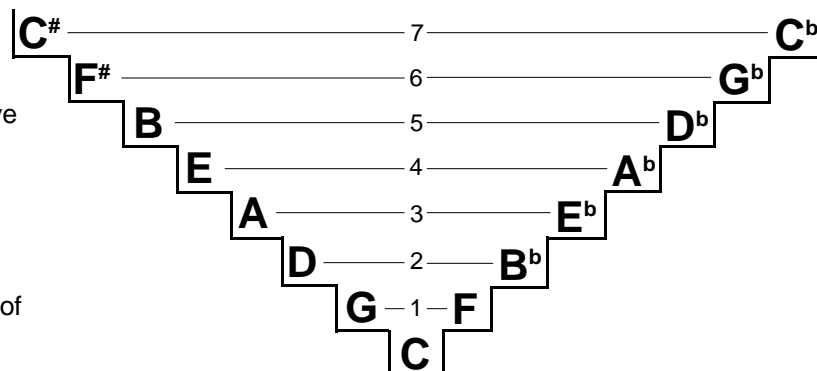
SHARPS

The key of "C major" has no sharps or flats

FLATS

The sharp keys move up in 5ths from the neutral key of "C."

Each new key contains another sharp in it's content of accidental notes.



The flat keys move up in 4ths from the neutral key of "C."

Each new key contains another flat in it's content of accidental notes.

Major Sharp Key-Signatures:

- Key of "G" = 1 sharp
- Key of "D" = 2 sharps
- Key of "A" = 3 sharps
- Key of "E" = 4 sharps
- Key of "B" = 5 sharps
- Key of "F#" = 6 sharps
- Key of "C#" = All notes sharp (7 sharps)

Major Flat Key-Signatures:

- Key of "F" = 1 flat
- Key of "Bb" = 2 flats
- Key of "Eb" = 3 flats
- Key of "Ab" = 4 flats
- Key of "Db" = 5 flats
- Key of "Gb" = 6 flats
- Key of "Cb" = All notes flat (7 flats)

The order of sharps and flats

- Key of "G" = F#
- Key of "D" = F#, C#
- Key of "A" = F#, C#, G#
- Key of "E" = F#, C#, G#, D#
- Key of "B" = F#, C#, G#, D#, A#
- Key of "F#" = F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#
- Key of "C#" = F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#, B#

Memorize the order of sharps:

- Key of "F" = Bb
- Key of "Bb" = Bb, Eb
- Key of "Eb" = Bb, Eb, Ab,
- Key of "Ab" = Bb, Eb, Ab, Db
- Key of "Db" = Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb
- Key of "Gb" = Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Cb
- Key of "Cb" = Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Cb, Fb

Memorize the order of flats:

The Natural Minor Key-Signatures

There are 12 musical keys which can be used to create music. Natural Minor keys are created by playing the major scale off of it's sixth scale degree. Making a study of minor keys - and memorizing all of them - is very important. These, "relative," natural minor keys are found within the major's structure, so we must learn a system for quickly being able to know which minor keys belong with which major keys. Below you will find the structure of the minor keys ascending from the neutral key of, "A," (relative to "C"), to the full sharp or flat coverage of keys like, "A#," and, "Ab." *Please read below...*

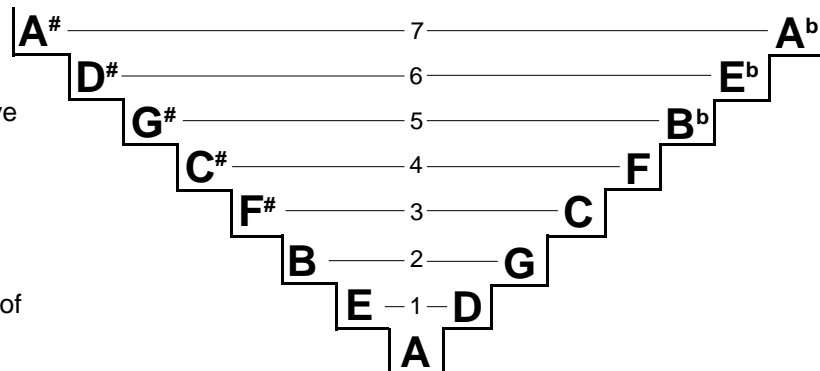
SHARPS

The key of "A minor" has no sharps or flats

FLATS

The sharp keys move up in 5ths from the neutral key of "A."

Each new key contains another sharp in it's content of accidental notes.



The flat keys move up in 4ths from the neutral key of "A."

Each new key contains another flat in it's content of accidental notes.

Relative Minor Sharp Key-Signatures:

Key of "G" major = Key of "E" minor
 Key of "D" major = Key of "B" minor
 Key of "A" major = Key of "F#" minor
 Key of "E" major = Key of "C#" minor
 Key of "B" major = Key of "G#" minor
 Key of "F#" major = Key of "D#" minor
 Key of "C#" major = Key of "A#" minor

Relative Minor Flat Key-Signatures:

Key of "F" major = Key of "D" minor
 Key of "Bb" major = Key of "G" minor
 Key of "Eb" major = Key of "C" minor
 Key of "Ab" major = Key of "F" minor
 Key of "Db" major = Key of "Bb" minor
 Key of "Gb" major = Key of "Eb" minor
 Key of "Cb" major = Key of "Ab" minor

Finding Relative Minor / Relative Major Key-Signatures

The relative major and minor keys each share the same notes, (key-signature). You must become well versed on exactly which major keys and minor keys share the same key-signatures. There are two ways of doing this.

- 1). The most common situation is when you already know the minor key but you need to know the major key to which it is relative.
 - To do this: Move up an interval of a, "minor 3rd," from the minor keys tonic note, (key's naming note). This note is the tonic note of the relative major key. *Example: A minor 3rd up from "G" is "Bb."* Therefore, the key of Bb Major is relative to the key of G Minor.
- 2). Another less common situation is when you want to know the relative minor of a major key you are working in. To do this: Count up to the sixth note of the major scale you are using. This note is the relative minor scale's tonic note. *Example: Up six notes from G in the key of G major is an E note. This tells us that E minor is the same as G major. They are relative keys.*

Note: The relative minor scale is often referred to as the, "Natural Minor Scale." Another name for this scale is the, "Aeolian Mode." Scale modes are covered in the [®]Advanced Guitar Program™