Music Theory Essentials.

The core references for anyone learning music.

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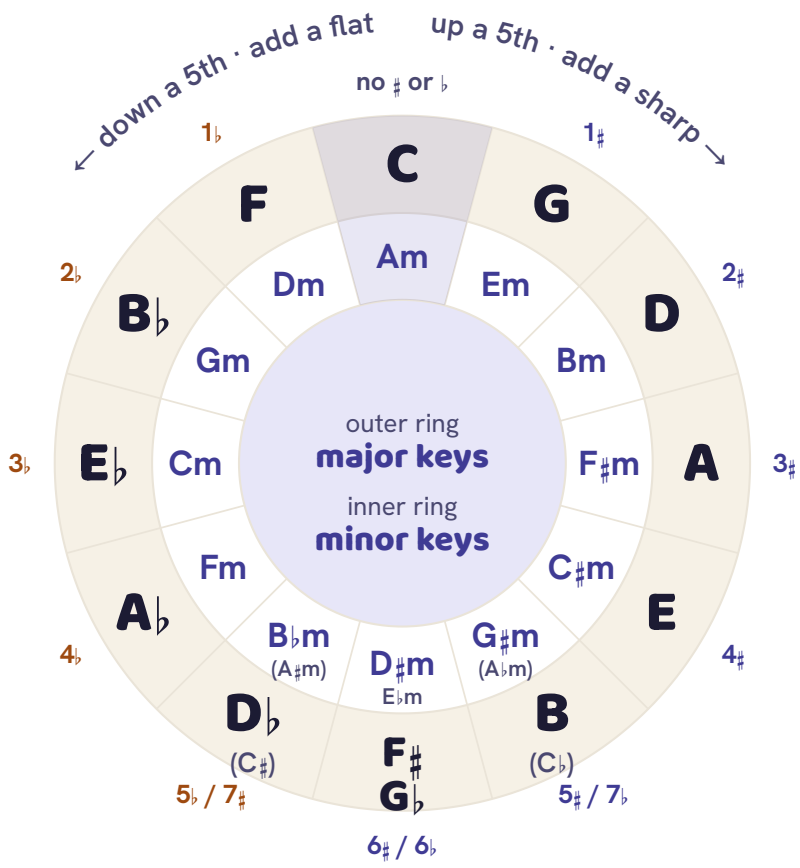
SCALES & KEYS

Circle of Fifths

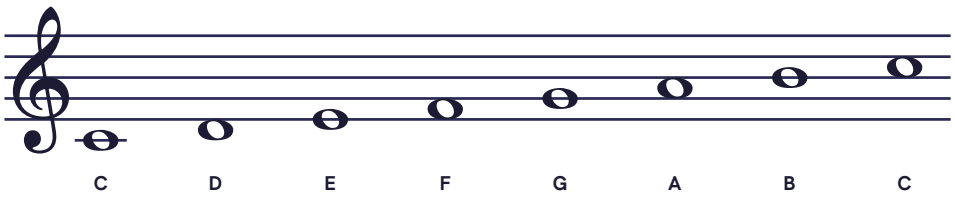
Clockwise, each key is a perfect 5th higher and adds one sharp. Counter-clockwise, each is a 5th lower and adds one flat.



Where a position has two names, the one with fewer sharps or flats is the main label and the other is smaller. At 6 o'clock both have six, so both are the same size.

SCALES & KEYS

Major Scale



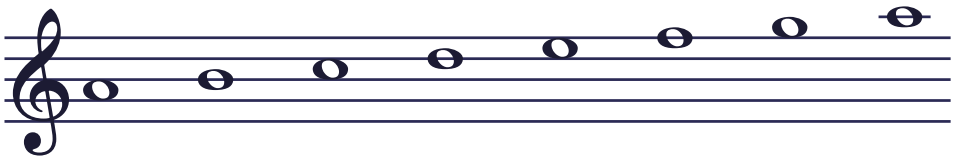
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
W	W	H	W	W	W	H	

W = whole step (2 semitones), H = half step (1 semitone)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

SCALES & KEYS

Natural Minor Scale



A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
W	H	W	W	H	W	W	

W = whole step (2 semitones), H = half step (1 semitone)

1 2 ♭3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7

Every minor key shares its key signature with the major key a minor 3rd above. A minor ↔ C major: same notes, different home note.

"Music is the universal language of mankind."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Outre-Mer, 1835

SCALES & KEYS

Key Signatures

Order of sharps

F♯ C♯ G♯ D♯ A♯ E♯ B♯

Order of flats

B♭ E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭ C♭ F♭

Sharp keys

C	Am	0	—
G	Em	1	F♯
D	Bm	2	F♯ C♯
A	F♯m	3	F♯ C♯ G♯
E	C♯m	4	F♯ C♯ G♯ D♯
B	G♯m	5	F♯ C♯ G♯ D♯ A♯
F♯	D♯m	6	F♯ C♯ G♯ D♯ A♯ E♯
C♯	A♯m	7	F♯ C♯ G♯ D♯ A♯ E♯ B♯

Flat keys

F	Dm	1	B♭
B♭	Gm	2	B♭ E♭
E♭	Cm	3	B♭ E♭ A♭
A♭	Fm	4	B♭ E♭ A♭ D♭
D♭	B♭m	5	B♭ E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭
G♭	E♭m	6	B♭ E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭ C♭
C♭	A♭m	7	B♭ E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭ C♭ F♭

FOUNDATIONS

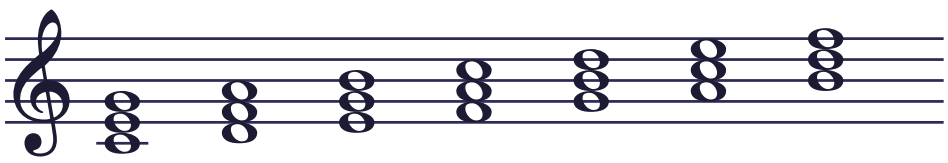
Intervals

	INTERVAL	HALF STEPS	FROM C	SOUND
P1	Unison	0	C–C	consonant
m2	Minor 2nd	1	C–D♭	dissonant
M2	Major 2nd	2	C–D	dissonant
m3	Minor 3rd	3	C–E♭	consonant
M3	Major 3rd	4	C–E	consonant
P4	Perfect 4th	5	C–F	consonant
A4 / d5	Tritone	6	C–F♯	dissonant
P5	Perfect 5th	7	C–G	consonant
m6	Minor 6th	8	C–A♭	consonant
M6	Major 6th	9	C–A	consonant
m7	Minor 7th	10	C–B♭	dissonant
M7	Major 7th	11	C–B	dissonant
P8	Octave	12	C–C	consonant

CHORDS & HARMONY

Chords in a Key

Stack every other note of the scale on each degree to get the seven chords that belong to the key. Major keys always follow the same pattern: major, minor, minor, major, major, minor, diminished.



C MAJOR · TRIADS

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	B°

C MAJOR · SEVENTH CHORDS

Cmaj7	Dm7	Em7	Fmaj7	G7	Am7	Bø7

CHORDS & HARMONY

Chord Formulas

SYMBOL	CHORD	FORMULA	NOTES
C	Major	1 3 5	C E G
Cm	Minor	1 ♭3 5	C E♭ G
C°	Diminished	1 ♭3 ♭5	C E♭ G♭
C+	Augmented	1 3 ♯5	C E G♯
Csus2	Sus2	1 2 5	C D G
Csus4	Sus4	1 4 5	C F G
SEVENTH CHORDS			
C7	Dominant 7th	1 3 5 ♭7	C E G B♭
Cmaj7	Major 7th	1 3 5 7	C E G B
Cm7	Minor 7th	1 ♭3 5 ♭7	C E♭ G B♭
Cø7	Half-diminished 7th	1 ♭3 ♭5 ♭7	C E♭ G♭ B♭
C°7	Diminished 7th	1 ♭3 ♭5 𝄫7	C E♭ G♭ B𝄫

♭ lowers a degree by a half step, ♯ raises it.

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