

Accidentals & enharmonics

Five signs that raise or lower a note for the rest of the bar, and the reason one pitch can go by two different names.

# Sharp Up one semitone	b Flat Down one semitone	♮ Natural Cancels either one	## Double sharp Up two semitones — a whole tone	bb Double flat Down two semitones
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HOW LONG AN ACCIDENTAL LASTS

TO THE END OF THE BAR

Write # on one note and every later note on that same line or space is sharp too — until the barline, which cancels it.

THROUGH A TIE

A tie carries the accidental across the barline into the tied note — but no further.

THAT OCTAVE ONLY

An accidental applies to the exact line or space it sits on, not to the same letter in another octave.

COURTESY ACCIDENTALS

A natural in brackets after a busy bar reminds the player that the sharp has gone. It changes nothing; it is politeness.

THE TWELVE SEMITONES OF THE OCTAVE

C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B
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Shaded cells are the black keys of the piano. Between E–F and B–C there is no black key: those two steps are already semitones.

ENHARMONIC EQUIVALENTS · ONE SOUND, TWO NAMES

WRITTEN	SOUNDS THE SAME AS
C#	Db
D#	Eb
F#	Gb
G#	Ab
A#	Bb

WRITTEN	SOUNDS THE SAME AS
E#	F
B#	C
Fb	E
Cb	B
F##	G

WHY THE SPELLING MATTERS

A scale uses each letter once. B major needs A#, not Bb, because it already has a B. The sound is identical; the notation has to stay readable.

SIGNATURE OR ACCIDENTAL?

Sharps and flats in the key signature hold for the whole piece, in every octave. Ones written next to a note hold only for that bar.