

The major scales

Every major scale is the same ladder of tones and semitones, started on a different note. Fifteen of them are in common use — twelve sounds, three of which can be spelled two ways.

THE PATTERN · TONE TONE SEMITONE TONE TONE TONE SEMITONE



The two semitones always fall between degrees 3–4 and 7–8. Start the same pattern on G and you need an F# to keep it; start on F and you need a Bb.

SHARP KEYS

KEY	#	SCALE	REL. MINOR
C	0	C D E F G A B	A minor
G	1	G A B C D E F#	E minor
D	2	D E F# G A B C#	B minor
A	3	A B C# D E F# G#	F# minor
E	4	E F# G# A B C# D#	C# minor
B	5	B C# D# E F# G# A#	G# minor
F#	6	F# G# A# B C# D# E#	D# minor
C#	7	C# D# E# F# G# A# B#	A# minor

Sharps appear in the order **F C G D A E B**.

FLAT KEYS

KEY	b	SCALE	REL. MINOR
F	1	F G A Bb C D E	D minor
Bb	2	Bb C D Eb F G A	G minor
Eb	3	Eb F G Ab Bb C D	C minor
Ab	4	Ab Bb C Db Eb F G	F minor
Db	5	Db Eb F Gb Ab Bb C	Bb minor
Gb	6	Gb Ab Bb Cb Db Eb F	Eb minor
Cb	7	Cb Db Eb Fb Gb Ab Bb	Ab minor

Flats appear in the order **B E A D G C F** — the sharps backwards.

WORKING IT OUT AT SPEED

NAMING A SHARP KEY

Find the last sharp in the signature and go up one semitone. Three sharps end on G# — the key is A major.

NAMING A FLAT KEY

The second-to-last flat *is* the key. Four flats — Bb Eb Ab Db — give Ab major. For one flat, learn F by heart.

ENHARMONIC PAIRS

B = Cb, F# = Gb and C# = Db sound identical. Composers pick whichever needs fewer accidentals on the page.