

The minor scales

Every minor key has three scales, not one. They share a key signature and differ only in the sixth and seventh degrees — the notes that decide how strongly the scale pulls home.

THE THREE FORMS, ON A MINOR

Natural	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
Harmonic	A	B	C	D	E	F	G [#]	A
Melodic, going up	A	B	C	D	E	F [#]	G [#]	A
Melodic, coming down	A	G	F	E	D	C	B	A

Gold boxes are notes raised by an accidental, written into the music rather than the key signature. Coming down, the melodic minor drops back to the natural form.

NATURAL MINOR

T S T T S T T. The key signature exactly as written, nothing altered — the sound of folk song and of the relative major turned dark.

HARMONIC MINOR

Raise the 7th by a semitone so it leans into the tonic. This is the scale behind minor-key chords: it makes the dominant major.

MELODIC MINOR

Raise the 6th and 7th going up, to smooth the step-and-a-half the harmonic form leaves; lower both again coming down.

SHARP-SIDE MINORS

KEY	#	NATURAL SCALE	RAISED 7TH
A minor	0	A B C D E F G	G [#]
E minor	1	E F [#] G A B C D	D [#]
B minor	2	B C [#] D E F [#] G A	A [#]
F [#] minor	3	F [#] G [#] A B C [#] D E	E [#]
C [#] minor	4	C [#] D [#] E F [#] G [#] A B	B [#]
G [#] minor	5	G [#] A [#] B C [#] D [#] E F [#]	F ^{##}
D [#] minor	6	D [#] E [#] F [#] G [#] A [#] B C [#]	C ^{##}

FLAT-SIDE MINORS

KEY	b	NATURAL SCALE	RAISED 7TH
D minor	1	D E F G A B ^b C	C [#]
G minor	2	G A B ^b C D E ^b F	F [#]
C minor	3	C D E ^b F G A ^b B ^b	B ^h
F minor	4	F G A ^b B ^b C D ^b E ^b	E ^h
B ^b minor	5	B ^b C D ^b E ^b F G ^b A ^b	A ^h
E ^b minor	6	E ^b F G ^b A ^b B ^b C ^b D ^b	D ^h
A ^b minor	7	A ^b B ^b C ^b D ^b E ^b F ^b G ^b	G ^h

RELATIVE MINOR

Same key signature, different home note: count down three semitones from the major tonic. C major and A minor share no sharps and no flats.

PARALLEL MINOR

Same home note, different signature: C major and C minor. Flatten the 3rd, 6th and 7th of the major scale and you have the natural minor.