

Music Theory at a Glance

Everything a young composer needs on one sheet — the note values, the keys, the time signatures, the circle of fifths and the symbols. Each panel has a full chart of its own if you want to go further.

I Note values

Semibreve 4 beats	
Minims 2 beats	
Crotchets 1 beat	
Quavers 1/2 beat	
Semiquavers 1/4 beat	

Each row holds the same total. A **dot** adds half the value again — a dotted minim is three beats.

EVERY NOTE HAS A MATCHING REST

4	2	1	1/2	1/4

II Time signatures

Top number — beats in a bar. Bottom number — which note gets a beat (2 minim, 4 crotchet, 8 quaver).

2	Simple duple · marches
4	
3	Simple triple · waltzes
4	
4	Simple quadruple · most songs
4	
6	Compound duple · jigs
8	

A top number of 6, 9 or 12 means **compound** — divide by three for the real beat count. Beat one is always strongest; in 4/4 beat three takes a lighter stress.

III Key signatures

 C A minor	 G E minor	 D B minor	 A F# minor	 E C# minor	 B G# minor
 F D minor	 Bb G minor	 Eb C minor	 Ab F minor	 Db Bb minor	 Gb Eb minor

Sharps go on **F C G D A E B**, flats the same list backwards. Name a sharp key from the last sharp, up one semitone; a flat key *is* the second-to-last flat. Every signature serves a major key and its relative minor — the sixth degree of the major scale.

IV The circle of fifths

Outer letters are the **major keys**; the lower-case letter inside each segment is its **relative minor**, sharing the same signature. The accent figure on the rim counts the sharps or flats.

Clockwise adds a sharp, one at a time, each key a fifth above the last. **Anticlockwise adds a flat**.

Neighbouring keys share all but one note — the easiest places to move to mid-piece. Any key's three main chords sit side by side: **IV – I – V**.

V Symbols you will meet

Staccato — short and detached	Slur — joined smoothly, different pitches
Tenuto — held for its full length	Tie — one note held across, same pitch
Accent — attacked, then settling	Fermata — held longer than written
Sharp & flat — raise or lower by a semitone	Natural — cancels a sharp or flat
Trill — alternate fast with the note above	Repeat — play the passage again

VI Intervals — the distance between two notes

0 Unison the same note twice	1 Minor 2nd the tightest step there is	2 Major 2nd one whole tone	3 Minor 3rd the minor chord's colour	4 Major 3rd the major chord's colour	5 Perfect 4th steady, a little archaic	6 Tritone restless — wants to resolve
7 Perfect 5th open and hollow	8 Minor 6th yearning	9 Major 6th warm and bright	10 Minor 7th leans home in a 7th chord	11 Major 7th a semitone shy of the octave	12 Octave same letter, twice the pitch	

Count **letter names** first, including both ends — C up to G is five letters, so a fifth. Then count **semitones** to find the quality. Turn an interval upside down and it inverts: a major 3rd becomes a minor 6th, a perfect 5th a perfect 4th. Played together the notes make a *harmonic* interval; one after the other, a *melodic* one.