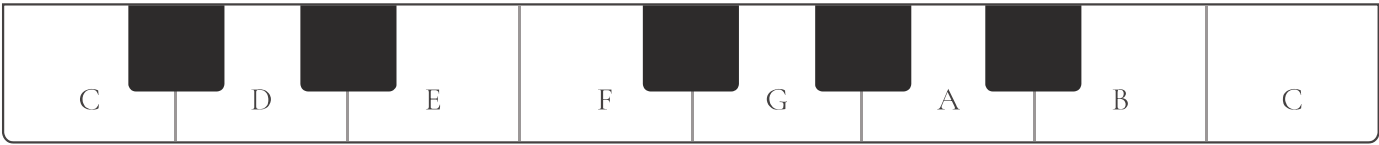


Tones, semitones & your first key signatures

Two distances build every scale you will ever write: the semitone and the tone. Get those into your ear and your first key signatures stop being a list to memorise.

THE TWO DISTANCES, AT THE KEYBOARD



C to D – a **tone** E to F – a **semitone**

A **semitone** is the smallest step: any two neighbouring keys, black or white. A **tone** is two semitones joined. E–F and B–C are the only white-key steps of a semitone – which is exactly why key signatures exist.

EVERY MAJOR SCALE IS THE SAME PATTERN

C T D T E S F T G T A T B S C

Tone · tone · **semitone** · tone · tone · tone · **semitone**. The semitones always fall between degrees 3–4 and 7–8. Start anywhere else and you must add sharps or flats to keep the pattern – that set of accidentals *is* the key signature.

YOUR FIRST THREE KEY SIGNATURES

C major NONE
All white keys. The pattern already fits without help.

G major 1 # – F#
F must rise so the last step, F#–G, is a semitone.

F major 1 b – Bb
B must fall so the third step, A–Bb, is a semitone.

KEY	SIGNATURE	THE SCALE, WRITTEN OUT	WHERE THE SEMITONES FALL
C major	–	C D E F G A B C	E–F and B–C
G major	F#	G A B C D E F# G	B–C and F#–G
F major	Bb	F G A Bb C D E F	A–Bb and E–F

THE SIGNATURE APPLIES ALL THE WAY THROUGH
One sharp after the clef means *every* F is played F# – in any octave, in every bar, until the key changes. You do not write it again each time.

PROVE IT AT THE KEYBOARD
Play C to C on white keys: it sounds right. Play G to G – the last step is a tone and sounds wrong. Fix it with F# and you have found G major yourself.