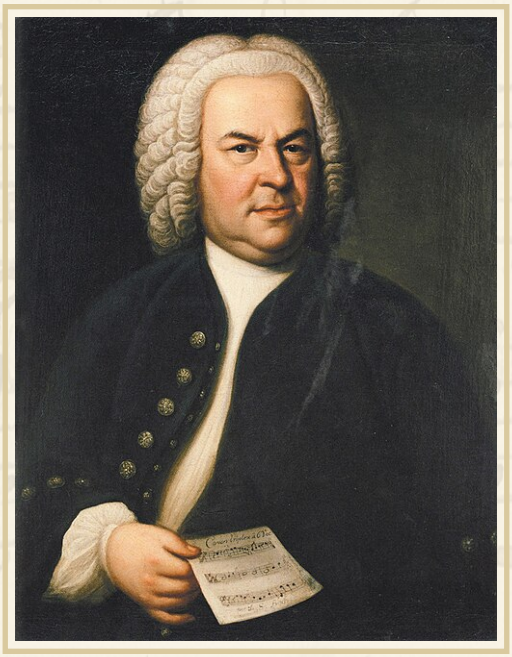
THE YOUNG COMPOSER

Grade 3

Theory Pack

Intermediate



Johann Sebastian Bach

Bach taught himself by copying out the music he loved by candlelight. Curiosity and patience are a composer's best tools.

Welcome, young composer! This pack is yours to print, write on and keep. Work through it at your own pace, try every worksheet, and remember - there are no wrong notes, only surprising ones. Happy composing.

- The Young Composer

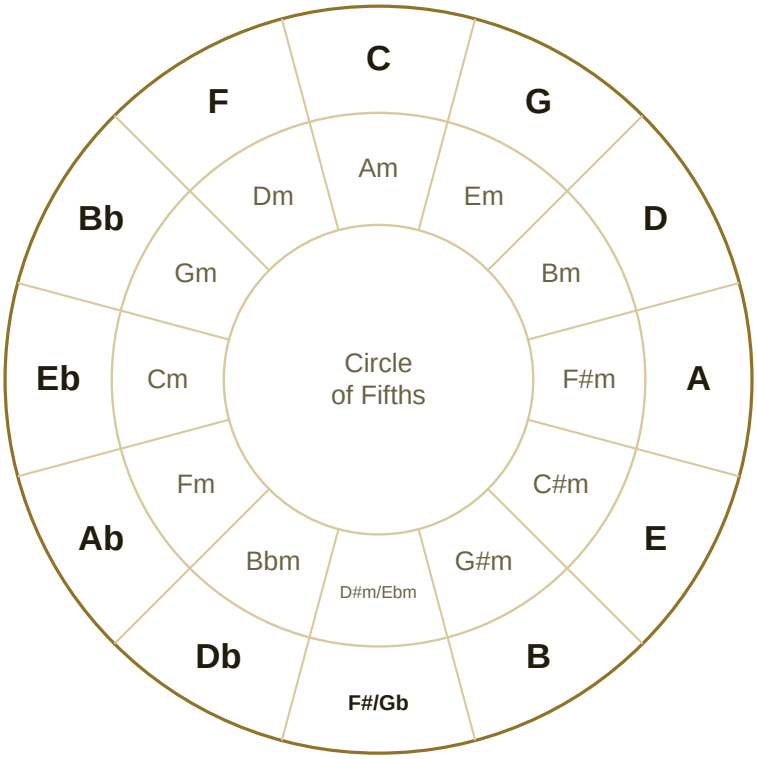
What to expect

Grade 3 opens up compound time, the exact quality of intervals, and the scale formulas that unlock real composing - the major scale, all three minor scales, and the names of the scale degrees - finishing with short composition tasks.

In this pack

How to use this pack: read each reference sheet, then try its worksheet on paper. Tick off chapters as you go, and keep the Circle of Fifths beside you whenever you compose.

The Circle of Fifths



How it works

Clockwise from C, each key adds one sharp: C, G, D, A, E, B, F#.

Anticlockwise from C, each key adds one flat: C, F, Bb, Eb, Ab, Db.

The inner ring is each key's relative minor - it shares the very same key signature.

Keys next to each other share nearly all their notes, so moving between them sounds smooth.

Using it while composing

- Find a key signature fast - count the steps around the circle from C.
- Change key smoothly - modulate to a neighbouring key, which shares the most notes.
- Pick a relative minor (inner ring) for a darker version of a major-key idea.
- Build chord progressions (like I - IV - V) from chords that sit close together.

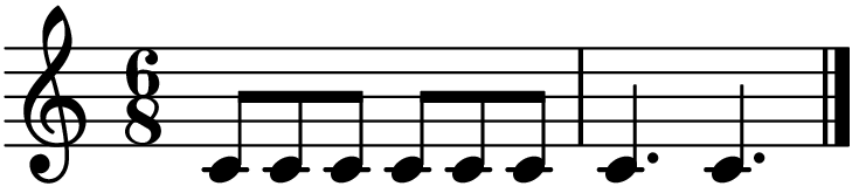
GRADE 3 — INTERMEDIATE

Compound Time Signatures

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

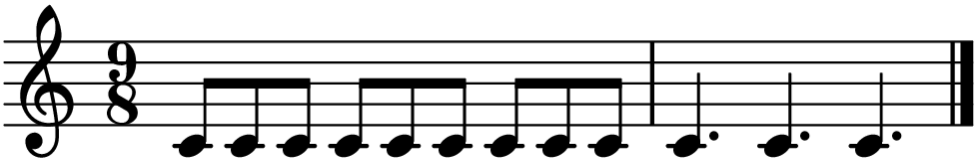
Compound time signatures are new for Grade 3 Theory. Unlike simple time (where each beat splits into two), in compound time each main beat splits naturally into three.

6/8 — Two Main Beats Per Bar



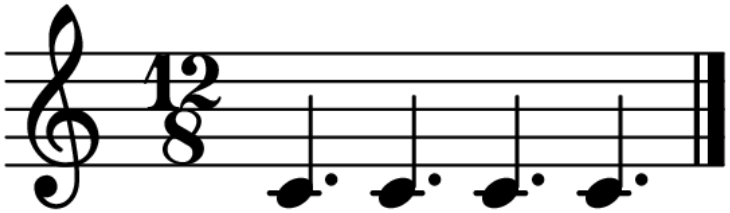
Two dotted-crotchet beats per bar, each splitting into three quavers.

9/8 — Three Main Beats Per Bar



Three dotted-crotchet beats per bar.

12/8 — Four Main Beats Per Bar



Four dotted-crotchet beats per bar.

Key Rules to Remember

- The top number in compound time is always divisible by 3 (6, 9, or 12) — that's your first clue it's compound, not simple.
- Divide the top number by 3 to find how many main beats are in the bar (6/8 = 2 beats, 9/8 = 3 beats, 12/8 = 4 beats).
- Each main beat is a dotted note (a dotted crotchet in 6/8, 9/8, and 12/8), which naturally divides into 3 quavers.
- Beam quavers in groups of 3 in compound time, matching each main beat — this is the compound-time version of the beat-grouping rule from Grade 2.

Compound Time Signatures

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. How many quavers are in a bar of 6/8? Of 9/8? Of 12/8?
2. 6/8 is felt in how many main beats per bar?
3. Add barlines to a 6/8 rhythm so each bar is correct.
4. Compose a two-bar rhythm in 6/8 on the staves below.

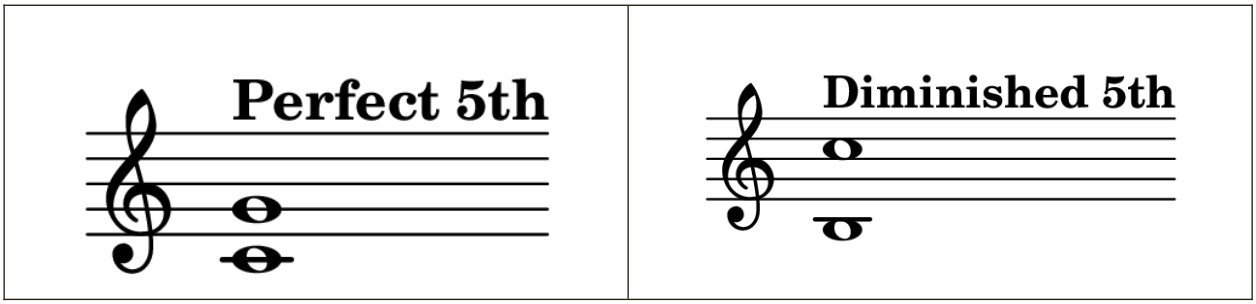
Your working:

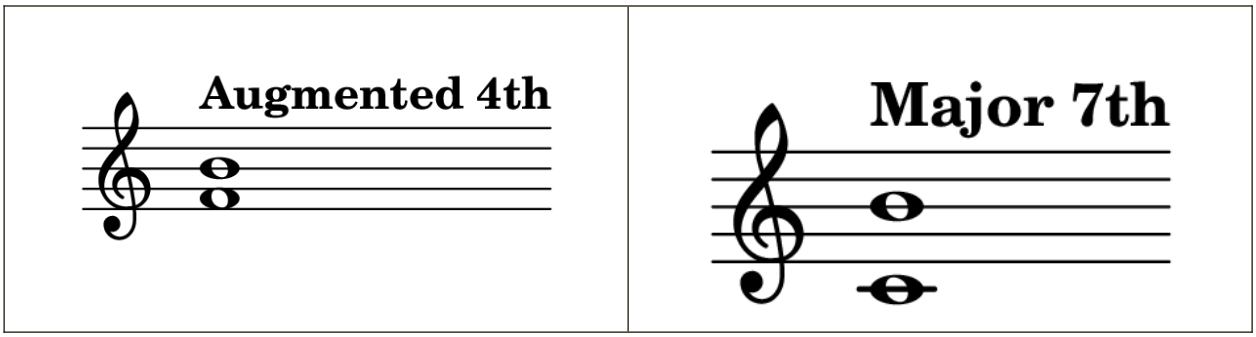
GRADE 3 — INTERMEDIATE

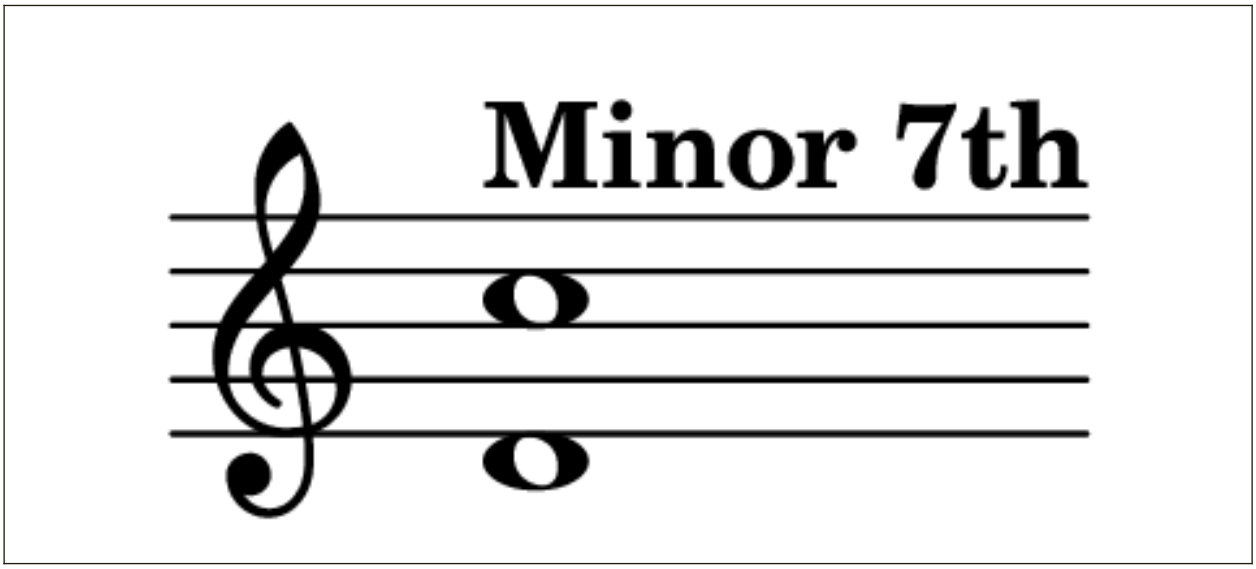
Interval Quality

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

Grade 3 completes the interval picture: alongside major and minor (Grade 2), you now need perfect, diminished, and augmented qualities too. Quality depends on the exact number of semitones, not just the letter-name distance.







Which Intervals Can Be "Perfect"?

Unisons, 4ths, 5ths, and octaves are the "perfect" family — they don't come in major/minor pairs like other intervals do. Instead, they can be perfect, diminished, or augmented.

2nds, 3rds, 6ths, and 7ths are the "major/minor" family — they can be major, minor, diminished, or augmented, but never "perfect."

Key Rules to Remember

- Diminished = one semitone smaller than perfect or minor.
- Augmented = one semitone larger than perfect or major.
- A perfect 5th narrowed by a semitone becomes a diminished 5th; a perfect 4th widened by a semitone becomes an augmented 4th.
- Always check the letter-name number first (Grade 1 method), then work out the quality from the semitone count — the two steps are separate.

Interval Quality

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. Name the quality of these intervals: C-E, C-Eb, C-G, C-F#.
2. Turn a major 3rd into a minor 3rd - which note moves?
3. Widen a perfect 5th by a semitone. What is it now called?
4. Label the quality and number of each interval on the stave.

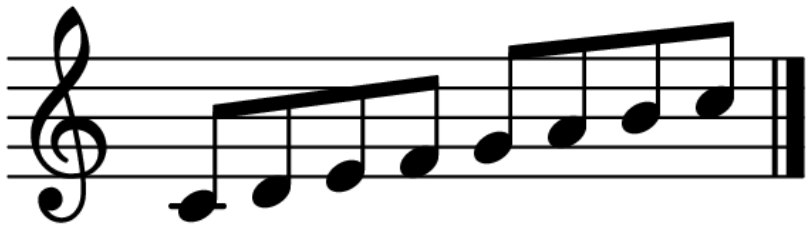
Your working:

GRADE 3 — INTERMEDIATE

Major Scale Formula

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

Every major scale — in any key — follows exactly the same pattern of tones (T) and semitones (S). Once you know the formula, you can build a major scale starting on any note.



The Formula

T – T – S – T – T – T – S

Starting on C: C to D (T), D to E (T), E to F (S), F to G (T), G to A (T), A to B (T), B to C (S) — the white notes of the piano, with no sharps or flats needed.

Using the Formula in Other Keys

- Start on any note and apply the same T–T–S–T–T–T–S pattern.
- Where the formula calls for a tone but the natural note is only a semitone away, add a sharp or flat to correct it — this is exactly how key signatures are built.
- The semitones always fall between scale degrees 3–4 and 7–8, in every major key without exception.

Key Rules to Remember

- The pattern T–T–S–T–T–T–S never changes, no matter which note you start on.
- A major scale always uses each of the 7 letter names exactly once before repeating the tonic an octave higher.
- If you know a key's key signature, you already know its scale — just apply the sharps or flats as you play up the letter names.

Major Scale Formula

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. Write out the tone/semitone pattern of a major scale.
2. Where do the two semitones fall in a major scale?
3. Build a G major scale using the formula.
4. Write a D major scale on the stave below.

Your working:

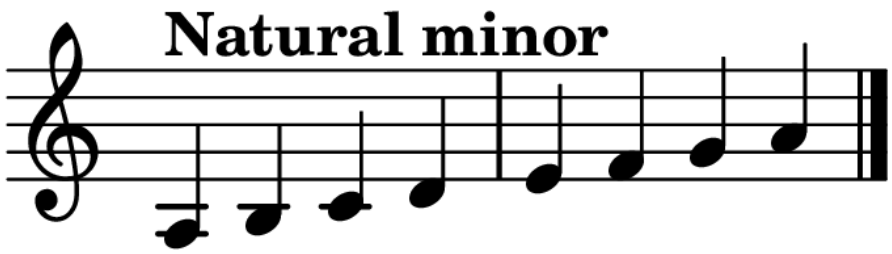
GRADE 3 — INTERMEDIATE

Minor Scales: Natural, Harmonic & Melodic

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

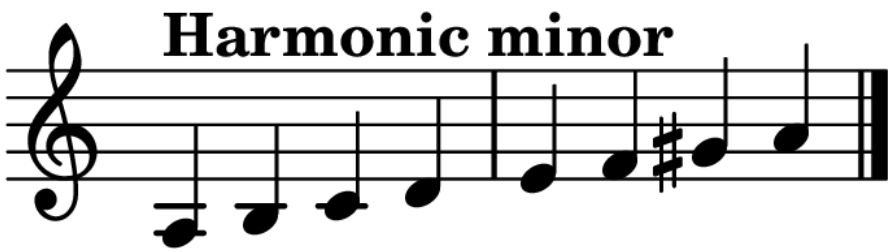
Unlike the major scale, minor keys have three related versions of their scale. All three share the same key signature — they differ only in which notes get raised.

Natural Minor



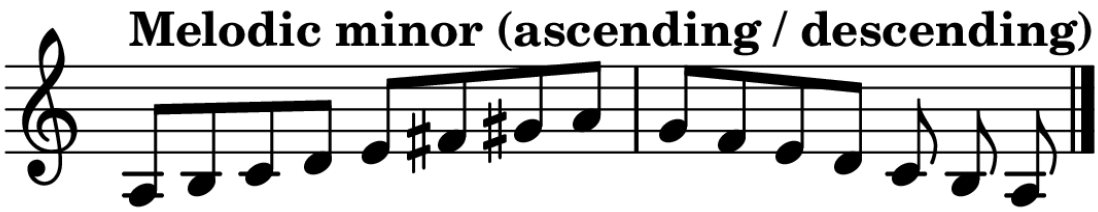
Simply the notes of the key signature, straight up and down — no alterations.

Harmonic Minor



Raises the 7th degree by a semitone (both ascending and descending), creating a stronger pull back to the tonic — but leaves a distinctive gap of 3 semitones between degrees 6 and 7.

Melodic Minor



Raises both the 6th and 7th degrees ascending (to smooth out that gap), but reverts to the natural minor descending.

Key Rules to Remember

- All three minor scales share the same key signature — the differences are added as accidentals, not key signature changes.
- Harmonic minor: raise degree 7 only, both ways.
- Melodic minor: raise degrees 6 and 7 ascending; use the natural minor descending.
- The harmonic minor's raised 7th creates a distinctive augmented 2nd interval between degrees 6 and 7 — a recognisable, slightly "exotic" sound.

Minor Scales

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. Write the natural minor scale of A.
2. To make A harmonic minor, which single note is raised?
3. Name the three types of minor scale.
4. Write an A harmonic minor scale on the stave below.

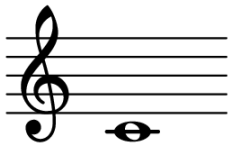
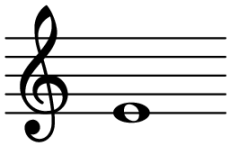
Your working:

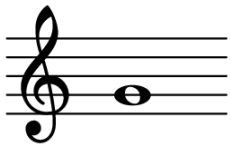
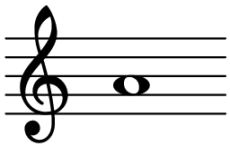
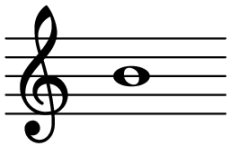
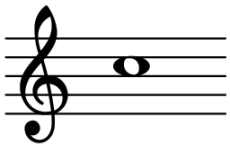
GRADE 3 — INTERMEDIATE

Scale Degree Names & Functions

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

Each note of a scale has a name describing its role, not just its number. These names are used constantly in harmony and composing, so it's worth knowing them by heart.

1 — Tonic	2 — Supertonic	3 — Mediant	4 — Subdominant
			

5 — Dominant	6 — Submediant	7 — Leading Note	8 — Tonic
			

Why These Names Matter

- The tonic (1) is "home" — the note and chord that feels most at rest.
- The dominant (5) is the strongest pull back toward the tonic — the basis of most cadences.
- The leading note (7) sits just a semitone below the tonic and "leads" the ear strongly upward to it.
- The subdominant (4) is named for sitting the same distance below the tonic as the dominant sits above it.

Key Rules to Remember

- These names apply to both major and minor scales — the position number and name stay the same either way.
- Knowing scale degree names makes it far easier to talk and think about chord progressions later on (e.g. "the dominant chord resolves to the tonic").
- The leading note only pulls strongly toward the tonic when it's a semitone away — in natural minor, degree 7 is a whole tone below the tonic and doesn't function as a true leading note (this is part of why harmonic minor raises it).

Scale Degree Names

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. Name scale degrees 1, 4 and 5.
2. In C major, which note is the dominant? Which is the leading note?
3. Which scale degree pulls most strongly towards the tonic?
4. Write a C major scale and label each degree underneath.

Your working:

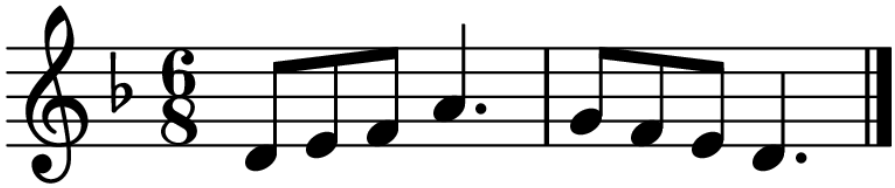
GRADE 3 — INTERMEDIATE

Short Composition Tasks

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

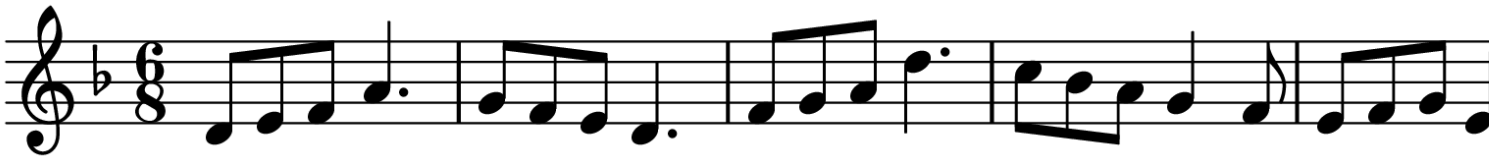
Grade 3 composition tasks build on Grade 2's "complete the melody" exercises, now within a chosen key (often minor) and sometimes compound time. The same principle applies: use everything you've learned in this grade to write something that sounds finished and intentional.

Given Opening (D minor, 6/8)



A two-bar opening using the D natural minor scale.

One Possible Completion



The continuation rises to a peak, then settles back down to the tonic (D) for a clear sense of arrival — using the same key, time signature, and rhythmic language as the opening.

A Simple Approach

- Identify the key and scale being used — check the key signature and, in minor keys, watch for a raised 7th suggesting harmonic minor.
- Keep the same time signature and a consistent rhythmic style throughout, using the beat-grouping rules from Grades 2 and 3.
- Give the melody an overall shape — a rise to a high point, then a fall back toward the tonic, works reliably.
- End on the tonic note (scale degree 1) for the strongest sense of completion, often approached from the leading note or dominant.

Key Rules to Remember

- Examiners are checking for consistency and musical sense, not a "correct" answer — there is always more than one good solution.
- Stay inside the given key signature unless the task specifically invites chromatic notes.
- A strong final cadence (often dominant → tonic, i.e. scale degree 5 → 1) gives the clearest sense of ending.
- Re-using a rhythm or melodic shape from the given opening shows control and unity, rather than introducing unrelated new ideas.

Short Composition Tasks

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. Compose a four-bar melody in C major that ends on the tonic.
2. Use mostly stepwise motion, with just one leap for interest.
3. Give your melody a clear high point (a 'peak' note).
4. Add a title and one dynamic marking (e.g. mp or f).

Your working: