

Major Key Signatures

Knowing the key signatures by heart allows you to "intellectually" (using the brain) play any major scale without having to think about where the half tones must occur. As an example, if the project at hand is to play an "A" major scale, simply play an alphabetical sequence of notes from "A" to "A" but sharp the notes "F-C-G." The more tedious method would be: A, up a whole tone = B, up a whole tone = C#, up a half tone = D, up a whole tone = E, up a whole tone = F#, up a whole tone = G#, and up a half tone = A. This is not to say that you should not know where the half tones occur within the scale. Being aware of the scale "degrees" will ultimately be very important. (degree=the numerical points of the scale. example: E is the 3rd degree of the C Major scale.)

Several observations will help in memorizing the key signatures. Notice that the last sharp in the key signature is a note that is a half tone lower than the tonic note. example: last sharp in "A" is "G#".



Notice that the sharps progress in this order: F-C-G-D-A-E-B.

In the keys containing flats, the name of the second last flat is the name of the key. example: Key of Ab. Second last flat is Ab.



Notice that the flats progress in the opposite order to the sharps: B-E-A-D-G-C-F.

A convenient way to memorize the key signatures is as follows: It is demonstrated in the above chart by means of what seems to be a spider web.

Notice that the key of C contains "0" sharps but the key of Cb contains 7 flats.	0 + 7 = 7
" " " " " G " 1 sharp " " " " Gb " 6 "	1 + 6 = 7
-----D----- 2 sharps ----- Db -----5-----	2 + 5 = 7
-----A----- 3 ----- Ab-----4-----	3 + 4 = 7
-----E----- 4 ----- Eb-----3-----	4 + 3 = 7
-----B----- 5 ----- Bb-----2-----	5 + 2 = 7
-----F#-----6----- F-----1-----	6 + 1 = 7
-----C#-----7----- C-----0-----	-7 + 0 = 7

If you have memorized the key signatures which contain sharps, you will automatically know the key signatures which contain flats. Keep in mind that the order of the flats is exactly opposite to the order of the sharps. Example: Key of A has 3 sharps: (F-C-G) Therefore Ab will have 4 flats: (B-E-A-D) The only natural notes in the key of Ab will be the ones that are sharp in the key of A.