

Keys

The heptatonic major scale (7 notes) is a succession of degrees distributed over the octave according to the following intervals: 1 - 1 - ½ - 1 - 1 - 1 - ½. Starting this scale with the note C, we get the C major scale, formed by the notes C D E F G A B. If we start this major scale on another note, some notes will have to be altered to keep the same structure. In the table below, we obtain the flats order by starting the scale a fifth below, and the sharps order by starting a fifth above.

Keys and key signatures

Sharps order

Flats order

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

C#
A#m

F#
D#m

B
G#m

E
C#m

A
F#m

D
Bm

G
Em

C
Am

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

C
Am

F
Dm

Bb
Gm

Eb
Cm

Ab
Fm

Db
Bbm

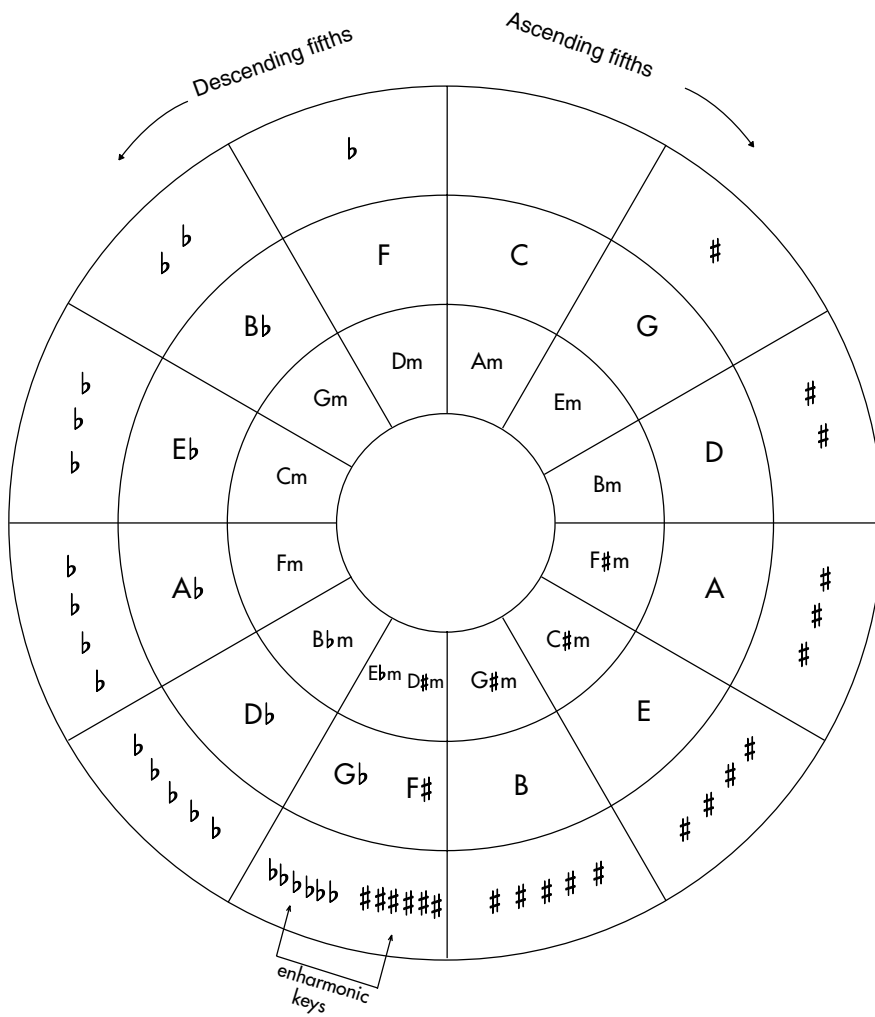
Gb
Ebm

Cb
Abm

The different keys can therefore be distributed according to a circle of fifths: ascending fifths which increase the number of sharps in the key signature, and descending fifths which increase the number of flats. The whole circle can be completed by passing through enharmonic tones F# ou Gb (keys composed of the same notes but notated differently).

Each major scale has a relative minor, i.e. composed of the same notes but whose tonic is the major scale 6th degree. We thus obtain also a circle of fifths of minor keys, parallel to the major keys.

Circle of fifths



The keys have a greater or lesser number of common notes, depending on their respective distance on the fifth circle, implying more or less new accidentals. The table below starts from the key of C.

Neighboring keys

Basic key : C	Number of steps on the circle	Number of shared notes	Number of not common notes	New accidentals	Distance between keys	Keys
Close key	1	6	1	+1# +1b	P5	G♯M F♯M
	2	5	2	+2# +2b	M2	D♯M B♭M
	3	4	3	+3# +3b	m3	A♯M E♭M
	4	3	4	+4# +4b	M3	E♯M A♭M
	5	2	5	+5# +5b	m2	B♯M D♭M
Distant key	6	2	5	+6# +6b	Triton (d5)	G♭M F♯M