

Major Scales for Dummies

Here is an easy system to learn all your major scales which is crucial if you want to understand music theory. I will assume that you already know that the music alphabet in english consists of the letters, A - B - C - D - E - F - G, sometimes in combination with some “alterations” which we will discuss . However before we begin, in case you aren’t familiar with the formula for a major scale, here is the succession of whole and half steps that constitute its make up:

1 <whole> 2 <whole> 3 <half> 4 <whole> 5 <whole> 6 <whole> 7

The above formula if starting with the note C would yield the C major scale:

C <whole> D <whole> E <half> F <whole> G <whole> A <whole> B

When starting with the note D, if we just follow the same alphabetical sequence without any alterations, we end up with a scale that does not conform to the major scale formula. This is where we must employ “sharps “ (#). A sharp when placed in front of a given note, raises it a half step. Let’s see how this comes into play when constructing the D major scale:

D <whole> E <whole> F# <half> G <whole> A <whole> B <whole> C#

Next let’s examine a scale that requires the use of a “flat” (b). The flat does the opposite of a sharp, therefore when placed in front of a given note it lowers it a half step. Notice how the flat becomes a required alteration when building the F scale:

F <whole> G <whole> A <half> Bb <whole> C <whole> D <whole> E

A SYSTEM TO MEMORIZE EVERY MAJOR SCALE

Now that we are familiar with the use of sharps and flats when constructing a major scale, let’s learn a shortcut to memorize every major scale. It would clearly be a tedious task if every time we want to construct a scale we would have to figure out the whole and half steps between the notes. We need to have that information stored in our long term memory and available to us without any major cognitive effort in order to play and understand music. Therefore here is a procedure to minimize the thought process in recalling each scale.

For each major scale, memorize the altered notes only if they are the majority or the naturals if so. For example, in the case of B major you would memorize that B and E are natural and that the rest are sharp. Next, simply recite the music alphabet starting with B and make every note “sharp” except of course B and E. *This is much easier than having to memorize C#, D#, F#, G# and A#!*

To aid you in this process, here is a list of commonly used major scales and what to memorize:

C MAJOR: All natural

Sharps:

D MAJOR: *memorize F# and C#* , the rest are natural

G MAJOR: *memorize F#* , the rest are natural

A MAJOR: *memorize C#, F#, G#* , the rest are natural

B MAJOR: *memorize B and E* , the rest are sharp

E MAJOR: *memorize E, A and B*, the rest are sharp

C# MAJOR: all are sharp

F# MAJOR: *memorize B*, the rest are sharp

Flats

F MAJOR: *memorize Bb* , the rest are natural

Bb MAJOR: *memorize Bb and Eb*, the rest are natural

Eb MAJOR: *memorize Eb ,Ab and Bb*, the rest are natural

Ab MAJOR: *memorize C , F and G* , the rest are flat

Db MAJOR: *memorize C and F* , the rest are flat

Gb MAJOR: *memorize F* , the rest are flat