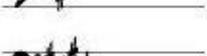


Understanding Key Signatures

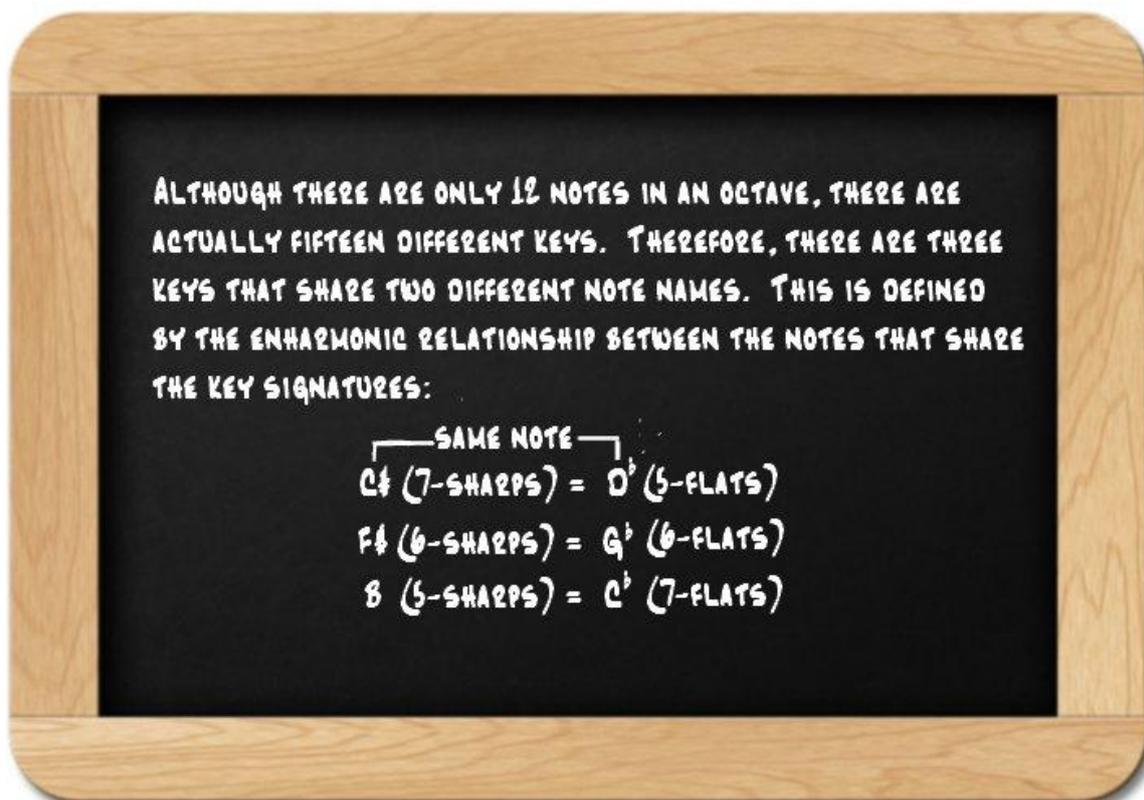
Every major scale (with the exception of the C major scale) and its relative minor scale will have from one to seven sharps or flats. A collection of predetermined sharps and flats that represent the major and minor keys (tonalities) are presented at the beginning of a composition to indicate to the reader which notes are to be sharped or flatted throughout the music. For example, the key of Eb major has three flats: Bb, Eb, and Ab; therefore, the “key signature” that is placed at the beginning of the piece of music communicates to the player that all B’s, E’s and A’s are to be flatted automatically unless they are preceded by another accidental such as a natural sign or a double flat.

There are seven different notes in each major and relative minor scale. The key of C major (A minor) has no sharps or flats, but it is possible to either flat all seven notes in a scale or sharp all seven notes in a scale. With that said, there are fifteen different key signatures that represent all the major and relative minor key areas.

The following table illustrates how the fifteen key signatures relate to the number of accidentals; the order of accidentals and the corresponding key names for both major and relative minor tonalities.

NUMBER OF ACCIDENTALS	KEY	ORDER OF ACCIDENTALS	KEY SIGNATURES
7 (seven) Flats	Cb major Ab minor	Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Cb, Fb	
6 (six) Flats	Gb major Eb minor	Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Cb	
5 (five) Flats	Db major Bb minor	Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb	
4 (four) Flats	Ab major F minor	Bb, Eb, Ab, Db	
3 (three) Flats	Eb major C minor	Bb, Eb, Ab	
2 (two) Flats	Bb major G minor	Bb, Eb	
1 (one) Flat	F major D minor	Bb	
0 (zero) Flats and Sharps	C major A minor	NO ACCIDENTALS	
1 (one) Sharp	G major E minor	F#	
2 (two) Sharps	D major B minor	F#, C#	
3 (three) Sharps	A major F# minor	F#, C#, G#	
4 (four) Sharps	E major C# minor	F#, C#, G#, D#	
5 (five) Sharps	B major G# minor	F#, C#, G#, D#, A#	
6 (six) Sharps	F# major D# minor	F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#	
7 (seven) Sharps	C# major A# minor	F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#, B#	

Useful Tip: When learning to memorize the different key signatures, the last sharp in all of the sharp keys will be the seventh (7th) degree of the scale or a semi tone below the root note.



Useful Tip: The second to the last flat in each flat key is the name of the key. Because the key of F major (D minor) only has one flat, you'll just have to remember that one!

