

Key Signatures

The sharps or flats used in a major scale can be compiled into a list (called the **key signature**) and placed at the beginning of a piece of music. The key signature not only tells musicians which notes to sharp or flat, it also indicates the scale that was used to write the piece.

Sharps and flats placed in the key signature are always written on specific lines and spaces and always follow a specific order.



The order of sharps is: F(♯) C (♯) G D A E B
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

The order of flats is: Bb Eb Ab Db Gb Cb F(b)
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

It is important to note that the order of the letters for flats is simply the order of sharps in reverse. Also, for our classroom, we will not put a sharp sign next to the letters in the order of sharps, but we WILL put the flat sign next to the letters in the order of flats. You'll see why later on.

Rule for figuring out a key signature with sharps: Count the number of sharps in the key and skip one. For instance, if you have two sharps in the key signature, count over to the second, which is C, skip the third, and the name of the key is the fourth one, which is D.

Rule for figuring out a key signature with flats: Count the number of flats in the key signature and go back one flat. For instance, if you have four flats in a key signature, count to the fourth one, which is Db, and go back one, which is Ab. Ab is the name of the key.

Exceptions: The key of C has no sharps and no flats. Six and seven sharp keys need to go back to the beginning and add a sharp sign. The key with one flat is the key of F