

# KEY-SPECIFIC KEYBOARDS

## **Introducing key-specific keyboards**

When a trained musician sees a key signature, he or she automatically ‘filters’ their view of the keyboard to match it. If the key is D major, the white keys F and C are provisionally ‘erased’ and replaced by the black keys F sharp and C sharp indicated in the key signature.

In the musician’s eye, the piano keyboard has become ‘key-specific’ – it is the keyboard for that key.

This collection of illustrations shows the key-specific keyboard arranged progressing from C major through the sharp keys as far as F sharp major, then from C major through the flat keys to G flat major.

## **The progression of key signatures**

Classical musicians are usually introduced to key signatures in an simple-to-complex order, but often without any overall perspective on the build-up of accidentals in the key signatures being given. It is assumed that the logic of key signature progression will somehow ‘sink in’.

This ad hoc way of proceeding is not efficient. An overview of key signature, divorced from actual pieces and studied on its own, is easily presented, speeds learning, and puts appreciation of ‘key’ on a firm footing.

Some valuable understanding of key signature can be absorbed by simply looking through the progressive series of sharp and flat keys, without further explanation. Sharps and flats accumulate regularly and logically as we progress round the circle of fifths - sharps in one direction, flats in the other - and this can be appreciated intuitively..

The actual rule behind the accumulation of accidentals (sharps and flats) is, however, quite simple and easily comprehended. It is spelled out in detail before the cumulative series of keyboards and adds greatly to the understanding of ‘key’.

## **Key to the diagrams**

The diagrams show first ‘the key’ in text (C major, F major etc.) Below that is the piano stave (treble and bass clef) showing the key signature sharps or flats. Below that is a list of the sharps or flats in the key signature, in text.

The ‘tonic’ (home note) is indicated on the stave by the lozenge shapes. This same lozenge shape indicates the tonic on the keyboard, too.

On the ‘key-specific’ keyboard, the white keys that are played in the key are shown with a strong outline – as they are replaced with the black keys indicated in the key signatures, they are greyed out.

The black keys belonging to the key signature illustrated are shown in black; you do not play the greyed-out black keys.

There is a demonstration octave on the keyboard. Above the keyboard you see the names of the notes in one full octave of the key in question – the scale tones of that

## Musicarta – Key-specific Keyboards

key. Below the keyboard is the one-octave scale fingering, the right hand above the left hand.

The **Key**  
Only major keys are dealt with in this set of keyboards.

The **lozenge shapes**  
indicate the tonic (home note of the key) both on the musical staff and on the keyboard.

A **sample octave** - the actual notes in one octave of the major key selected.

The **Key-specific Keyboard** indicates which white keys drop out and are replaced by the black keys (shown black).

**E major**

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E F# G# A B C# D# E

1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5  
5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1

F# C# G# D#

The **Key Signature** - the collection of sharps or flats indicating which black piano keys to play.

The **accidentals** (sharps or flats), in the order in which they appear in the key signature.

The **scale fingering** for one octave of the key selected - right hand fingers above, left hand below.

### General observations

- Sharps accumulate as roots fall a **fourth** (rise a fifth).
- Flats accumulate as roots fall a **fifth** (rise a fourth).
- Accidentals in key signatures accumulate in a certain order.
  - Sharps: F sharp, C sharp, G sharp, D sharp, A sharp, E sharp.
  - Flats: B flat, E flat, A flat, D flat, G flat, C flat.

(Two sharps in a key signature are always F sharp and C sharp; three flats in a key signature are always B flat, E flat and A flat, and so on.)
- The tonic of a major sharp key is always a semitone above the last sharp in the key signature.
- The tonic of a major flat key is always a perfect fourth below the last flat in the key signature.

Use these keyboards in conjunction with the following Musicarta resources:

- Scale practise patterns – see the Musicarta Scales home page.
- The Musicarta Keyboard Chord Generator – a visual glossary of the triads.
- Inversions and broken chord patterns. See also the Musicarta YouTube Inversions modules.

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# Musicarta Key-specific Keyboards – The sharp keys

## The accumulation of sharps

Sharps accumulate in the key signature as roots fall a perfect fourth: C major has no sharps, G major (down a perfect fourth) has one sharp, D major (down a fourth again) has two sharps, and so on.

The sharps ‘carry over’ into the new key. The new sharp is required to raise the seventh note of the new scale a semitone and make it a major seventh, only a semitone below the tonic. Thus, F sharp is the key signature for G major. The F sharp carries over into two-sharp D major (down a fourth); C sharp is required to sharpen the seventh and form a major scale.

This means that the tonic of a major sharp key is always a semitone above the last sharp in the key signature.

### C major

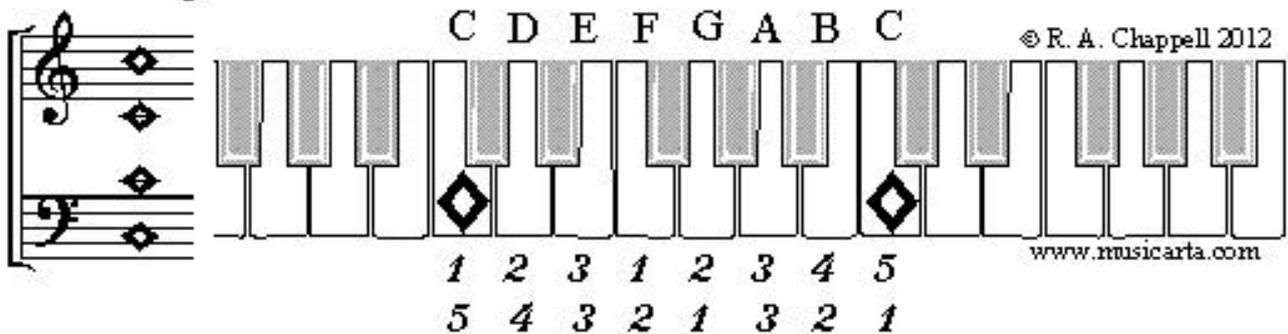


Diagram illustrating the C major scale on a keyboard. The scale is shown in treble and bass clefs. The notes are C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The keyboard shows the corresponding keys, with diamonds indicating the starting and ending notes. The scale is labeled with notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The diagram includes the copyright notice © R. A. Chappell 2012 and the website www.musicarta.com. Below the keyboard, the fingering for the ascending and descending scales is provided:

Ascending: 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5  
 Descending: 5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1

### G major

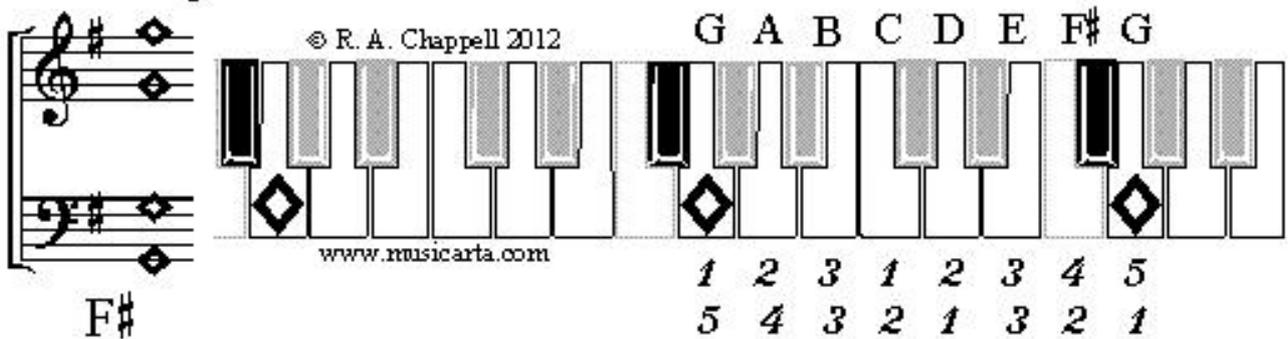


Diagram illustrating the G major scale on a keyboard. The scale is shown in treble and bass clefs. The notes are G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The keyboard shows the corresponding keys, with diamonds indicating the starting and ending notes. The scale is labeled with notes G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. The diagram includes the copyright notice © R. A. Chappell 2012 and the website www.musicarta.com. Below the keyboard, the fingering for the ascending and descending scales is provided:

Ascending: 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5  
 Descending: 5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1

### D major

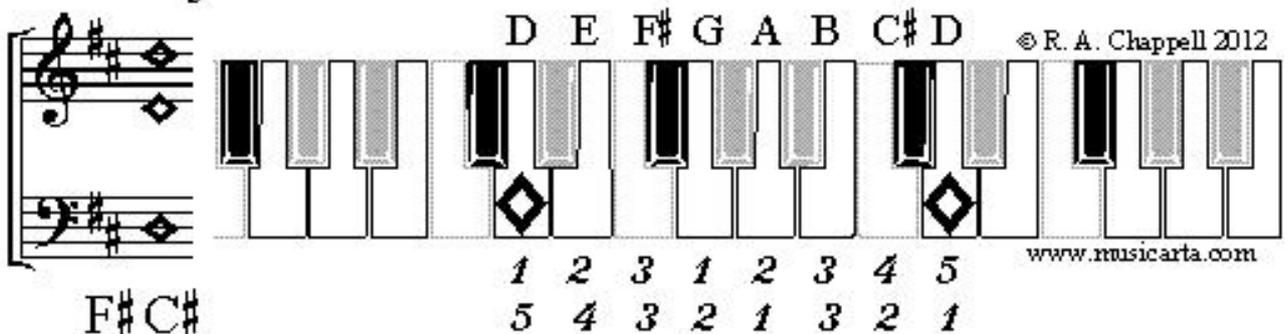


Diagram illustrating the D major scale on a keyboard. The scale is shown in treble and bass clefs. The notes are D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D. The keyboard shows the corresponding keys, with diamonds indicating the starting and ending notes. The scale is labeled with notes D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D. The diagram includes the copyright notice © R. A. Chappell 2012 and the website www.musicarta.com. Below the keyboard, the fingering for the ascending and descending scales is provided:

Ascending: 1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5  
 Descending: 5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1

### A major

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A B C# D E F# G# A

1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5  
5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1

F# C# G#

### E major

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E F# G# A B C# D# E

1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5  
5 4 3 2 1 3 2 1

F# C# G# D#

### B major

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B C# D# E F# G# A# B

1 2 3 1 2 3 4 5  
4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1

F# C# G# D# A#

### F# major

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F# G# A# B C# D# E# F#

2 3 4 1 2 3 1 2  
4 3 2 1 3 2 1 2

F# C# G# D# A# E#

F# major (six sharps) is ‘enharmonic’ Gb major (six flats) – the keys used are the same.

# Musicarta Key-specific Keyboards – The flat keys

## The accumulation of flats

The flats accumulate as roots fall a perfect fifth: C major has no sharps, F major (down a perfect fifth) has one flat, B flat major (down a fifth again) has two flats, and so on.

As with the sharps, the flats ‘carry over’ into the new key. The new flat is required to lower the fourth note of the new scale a semi-tone to a perfect fourth above the tonic. Thus, the single B flat is the key signature for F major. The B flat carries over into B flat major (down a fourth); E flat is required to lower the new fourth a semitone and form a major scale.

This means that the tonic of a major flat key is always a perfect fourth below the last flat in the key signature.

### C major

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### F major

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### B $\flat$ major

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### E♭ major

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E♭ F G A♭ B♭ C D E♭

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2 1 2 3 4 1 2 3  
3 2 1 4 3 2 1 2

B♭ E♭ A♭

### A♭ major

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A♭ B♭ C D♭ E♭ F G A♭

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2 3 1 2 3 4 1 2  
3 2 1 4 3 2 1 2

B♭ E♭ A♭ D♭

### D♭ major

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D♭ E♭ F G♭ A♭ B♭ C D♭

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2 3 1 2 3 4 1 2  
3 2 1 4 3 2 1 2

B♭ E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭

### G♭ major

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G♭ A♭ B♭ C♭ D♭ E♭ F G♭

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2 3 4 1 2 3 1 2  
4 3 2 1 3 2 1 2

B♭ E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭ C♭

G♭ major (six flats) is ‘enharmonic’ F♯ major (six sharps) – the keys used are the same.