

Understanding Major Keys Quickly And Easily

Understanding of keys is a skill that a major majority of musicians lack. Whether bad teaching methods or just plain laziness is to blame, far too many guitarist's struggle with this easily developed skill. It really is the method that you choose to learn your essential music theory concepts that can either develop total confusion or complete understanding.

I am going to show you a quick method of memorizing your major keys which will be the foundation of all of our scale and chord studies here at www.guitarlessons365.com. After using this method for a very short while, you will be able to fully understand and spell every major key. Why am I only doing major keys? You will see why as soon as you start the scale studies on the site for either pentatonics, full 3-note per string major scales or modes.

Before you start ANY scale studies on www.guitarlessons365.com, you MUST complete this lesson to fully understand the method. If we put them together we have not just a bunch of scale forms, but full knowledge on how to apply all scales across the neck in every key. It really only takes a few simple concepts and some practice to be able to see all scales easily across the neck.

So now that I have your attention.. **LETS GET STARTED!!!!**

The first thing you need to do is just memorize this order of letters: **B E A D G C F**
After you have finished that, try to say them in reverse as well like this: **F C G D A E B**
(By the way, memorizing these 7 letters is the only simi-difficult part of this system, it just gets easier from here!!)

Now, why am I having you memorize these seemingly random letters? Well they form what is know as the “Order of Flats” and the “Order of Sharps”. When you start the letter sequence with **B E A** etc..., you are actually saying the Order of Flats. When you start the letter sequence in reverse ie.. **F C G** etc..., you are saying the Order of Sharps.

So how do we use these letter combinations to figure out an entire key? Well, the first thing we need to learn is that there are 2 different types of keys, and I am not referring to Major or Minor. The 2 different types of keys are keys with “Sharps” and keys with “Flats”.

No major scales that stay completely within the key will have both Sharps and Flats in them. That doesn't mean that a piece of music written in a sharp key will never have a flat in it, but instead, that flat would be considered chromatic or out of the key. But we don't have to worry about any of that when we are just learning keys.

Sharps and Flats are used to alter the tones found in a scales. You see, there are only 7 notes in the entire musical alphabet. **A B C D E F G**, thats it. So the first thing we need to realize is that EVERY major scale uses one of those letters. Yes, that means every major scale in music uses the same 7 letters, so in order to change the key we have to ALTER some of the letters. That is where Sharps and Flats come in.

A Sharp raises a notes pitch by ½ step, which is one fret on the guitar. Sharps look like this (#).

A Flat lowers a notes pitch by ½ step. Flats look like this (b).

So if we can understand that all keys use these letters just altered in different ways you can see it as a little musical merry-go-round. If the key we wanted was an A key we would simply start on A and go through the 7 letters from there like this: **A B C D E F G**. However, if we want a D key we will have to start our scale on D like this: **D E F G A B C**.

It is very important when you are trying to figure out the notes in a key, that you start on the letter name of the key then go around the musical alphabet from there until you have used all 7 letters. After that, all you have to do is alter some of them and you have your full major scale. The reason we are doing major scales is that they give you all the 7 notes used in a particular key spelled one after the other.

So we will work with “Sharp Keys” then “Flat Keys”. But first, you need to be able to know if a key is a sharp key or flat key before you can try and figure it out. Simply put **ALL FLAT KEYS HAVE A FLAT IN THEIR NAME EXCEPT FOR THE KEY OF F MAJOR**. But it is still quite easy to remember that F is a flat key by remembering that F is the first letter in the word Flat. **ALL OTHER KEYS ARE SHARPS KEYS!!** There is one however that has NO Sharps or Flats, and that is the key of C Major spelled: **C D E F G A B**, it is the only key where there isn't at least one Sharp or Flat.

COMPLETE LIST OF MAJOR KEYS

C Major: No Sharps or Flats	F Major: Bb
G Major: F#	Bb Major: Bb Eb
D Major: F# C#	Eb Major: Bb Eb Ab
A Major: F# C# G#	Ab Major: Bb Eb Ab Db
E Major: F# C# G# D#	Db Major: Bb Eb Ab Db Gb
B Major: F# C# G# D# A#	Gb Major: Bb Eb Ab Db Gb Cb
F# Major: F# C# G# D# A# E#	Cb Major: Bb Eb Ab Db Gb Cb Fb
C# Major: F# C# G# D# A# E# B#	

Now we will learn how to put all of that information in our brains where we can actually put it to good use.

SHARP KEYS

After memorizing your “Order of Sharps” from earlier **F# C# G# D# A# E# B#**, you are ready to go. Just follow these few steps and you will be able to figure out all sharps keys very quickly.

- When you are trying to figure out a sharp key, you first need to take the key's name say D, then go one letter back in the alphabet to C and call it C#. That is it. So for the key of B you would get an A#, or the key of G you would get an F# or the key of A you would get an G# and so on.
- Now the next step is to go through your order of sharps until you find the sharp that you figured out from the first step. So for the key of D you would say **F# C#** then stop. Or for the key of E you would say **F# C# G# D#** and stop. What you have just figured out are the exact notes that you are going to alter in the scale (see next step).
- The final step in figuring out any major sharp key is to first start on your “Keynote” or Root Note or whatever you want to call it. So for the key of D Major your Keynote is D, and for the key of G Major your Keynote is G. So using the key of D we would start out spelling the scale tones first like this **D E F G A B C**, then you can apply the sharps for the key of D that we figured out in step 2 which were F# and C#. So the complete D Major Scale would be **D E F# G A B C#**. Now how easy was that.

As you can see from the complete list of keys at the top. When you figure out the sharp from step one, you are actually finding your stopping point in the Order of Sharps. If you look you will see that the order never changes and you can't have a C# in a key without an F# as well because F# always comes before it. Just like you can't have a D# in a key without F# C# and G#. So from here you should be able to figure out Sharp keys, so on to the flats, which are even easier.

FLAT KEYS

Now we reverse the “Order of Sharps” to get the “Order of Flats” **Bb Eb Ab Db Gb Cb Fb**. There are only 2 steps to know for the flat keys, so let's get to it.

- First, after you know the name of the key you want, you simply go through the Order of Flats until you find that letter **THEN GO ONE LETTER PAST IT IN THE ORDER OF FLATS!!** For instance, if you want the key of Eb you simply go through the Order of Flats till you find Eb then keep going one more like this: **Bb Eb Ab**, or for the key of Db you would get **Bb Eb Ab Db Gb**. It's that simple. Now you know all the flats to use when altering the notes of the scales.
- The final step is the same as the final step for the sharp keys. Simply lay out your scale from the Keynote, then alter the notes using the flats that you figured out for that key from step one. So the key of Eb would be: **Eb F G Ab Bb C D**. That's it!!

One little key that doesn't fit into this system is F Major. You simply have to memorize that it has one flat. And if there is only one flat it has to be..... Yes.. Bb, since that is always the first flat.

Well I hope you get something out of this little tutorial, be sure to email me any question or post comments, and study this stuff quickly so when can start **PLAYING IT ON THE GUITAR!!**

