

Key Signatures make reading modern musical notation easier. The series of sharps or flats after a clef make the page less cluttered, as far fewer objects need to be placed on the score. Can you imagine playing a piece in D<sup>b</sup> major without a key signature? The notes B, E, A, D and G would all need flats in front of them. Not so easy to read!

By the time you get to Grade 5 Theory you will need to remember twenty six keys and their associated key signatures. Oh noooo! Hey, it's okay. I can help! Read on. If you can count up to five and know the first seven letters of the alphabet, there's an easy method to work it all out.

The word *sharp* has five letters in it. If we count up five from C major (as that has no sharps or flats in it's key signature), it will give us the name of the key with one sharp in it's key signature. Deep breath: 1 is C, 2 is D, 3 is E, 4 is F and 5 is G. This means that G major has one sharp. The name of that sharp is a semitone below the name of the key. So G major has F<sup>#</sup>. To find out the name of the key which has two sharps, we count up five from G: 1 is G, 2 is A, 3 is B, 4 is C and 5 is D. D major has two sharps: F<sup>#</sup> which we carried forward from G major and C<sup>#</sup> which is a semitone below D. We can carry on with this procedure until we have written all of the sharp major keys.

If we want to discover the minor sharp keys, we simply start from A minor and continue to count up five each time. The key signatures for minor keys are the same as their respective major keys. In other words, E minor and G major have the same key signature. (There are several ways to distinguish between a major key and a minor one.) All of this is shown in the table below.

A <sup>#</sup> minor	C <sup>#</sup> major	F <sup>#</sup>	C <sup>#</sup>	G <sup>#</sup>	D <sup>#</sup>	A <sup>#</sup>	E <sup>#</sup>	B <sup>#</sup>
D <sup>#</sup> minor	F <sup>#</sup> major	F <sup>#</sup>	C <sup>#</sup>	G <sup>#</sup>	D <sup>#</sup>	A <sup>#</sup>	E <sup>#</sup>	
G <sup>#</sup> minor	B major	F <sup>#</sup>	C <sup>#</sup>	G <sup>#</sup>	D <sup>#</sup>	A <sup>#</sup>		
C <sup>#</sup> minor	E major	F <sup>#</sup>	C <sup>#</sup>	G <sup>#</sup>	D <sup>#</sup>			
F <sup>#</sup> minor	A major	F <sup>#</sup>	C <sup>#</sup>	G <sup>#</sup>				
B minor	D major	F <sup>#</sup>	C <sup>#</sup>					
E minor	G major	F <sup>#</sup>						
A minor	C major	None						

What about flat keys? It's another painless procedure. No anaesthetic is needed. The word *flat* has four letters in it. Counting up four from C major again we discover that F major has one flat. If we count up four again it will give us the name of the flat *and* the name of the next key. Brilliant! The same is true for minor keys. As before you simply start counting up from A minor. Use the table below to help you.

A <sup>b</sup> minor	C major	B <sup>b</sup>	E <sup>b</sup>	A <sup>b</sup>	D <sup>b</sup>	G <sup>b</sup>	C <sup>b</sup>	F <sup>b</sup>
E <sup>b</sup> minor	G major	B <sup>b</sup>	E <sup>b</sup>	A <sup>b</sup>	D <sup>b</sup>	G <sup>b</sup>	C <sup>b</sup>	
B <sup>b</sup> minor	D major	B <sup>b</sup>	E <sup>b</sup>	A <sup>b</sup>	D <sup>b</sup>	G <sup>b</sup>		
F minor	A major	B <sup>b</sup>	E <sup>b</sup>	A <sup>b</sup>	D <sup>b</sup>			
C minor	E major	B <sup>b</sup>	E <sup>b</sup>	A <sup>b</sup>				
G minor	B major	B <sup>b</sup>	E <sup>b</sup>					
D minor	F major	B <sup>b</sup>						
A minor	C major	None						

Eventually you'll know all the keys off by heart. For now, it is good to be able to write down the two tables when you are in a theory exam, so that all the facts are at your fingertips.

Another Page shows how all of these key signatures look in the treble, alto, tenor and bass clefs.

Let me know if there is anything you don't understand here.