

The Circle of Fifths

Below you will see the Circle of Fifths, it is used by composers and those who wish to know how certain keys are related and constructed. Also, to understand and remember a logical way to find out how many sharps or flats a key has.

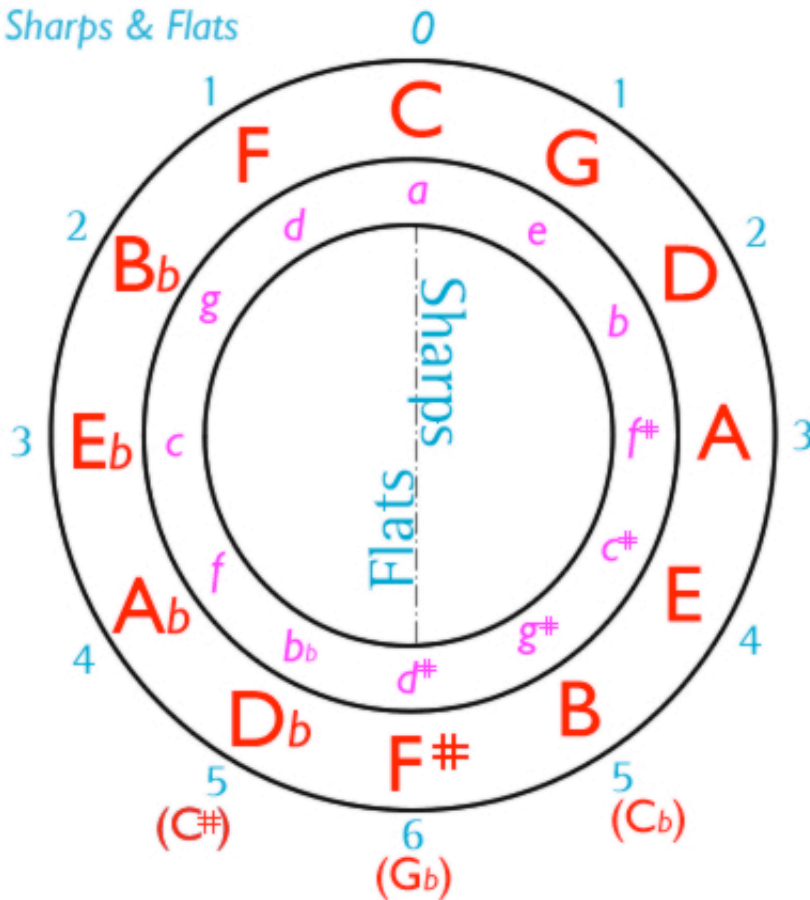
In music theory, the **circle of fifths** (or **circle of fourths**) shows the relationships among the 12 tones of the chromatic scale, their corresponding key signatures, and the associated major and minor keys. More specifically, it is a geometrical representation of relationships among the 12 pitch classes of the chromatic scale.

Briefly study the diagram below and then read through the Q and A's below:

Major Keys

Minor Keys

No. of Sharps & Flats



Some Questions:

Q: What do you notice when looking at the circle of fifths? Start from C, and run clockwise until you get to 6?

A: You will notice that from "step to step" or "hour to hour" one more sharp is added.

Q: So then, why is it called the circle of fifths?

A: It is called the circle of fifths because one "step" represents a fifth (a perfect fifth). From C to G, it is a fifth, from G to D, it is a fifth and each time we take a step one more sharp is added.

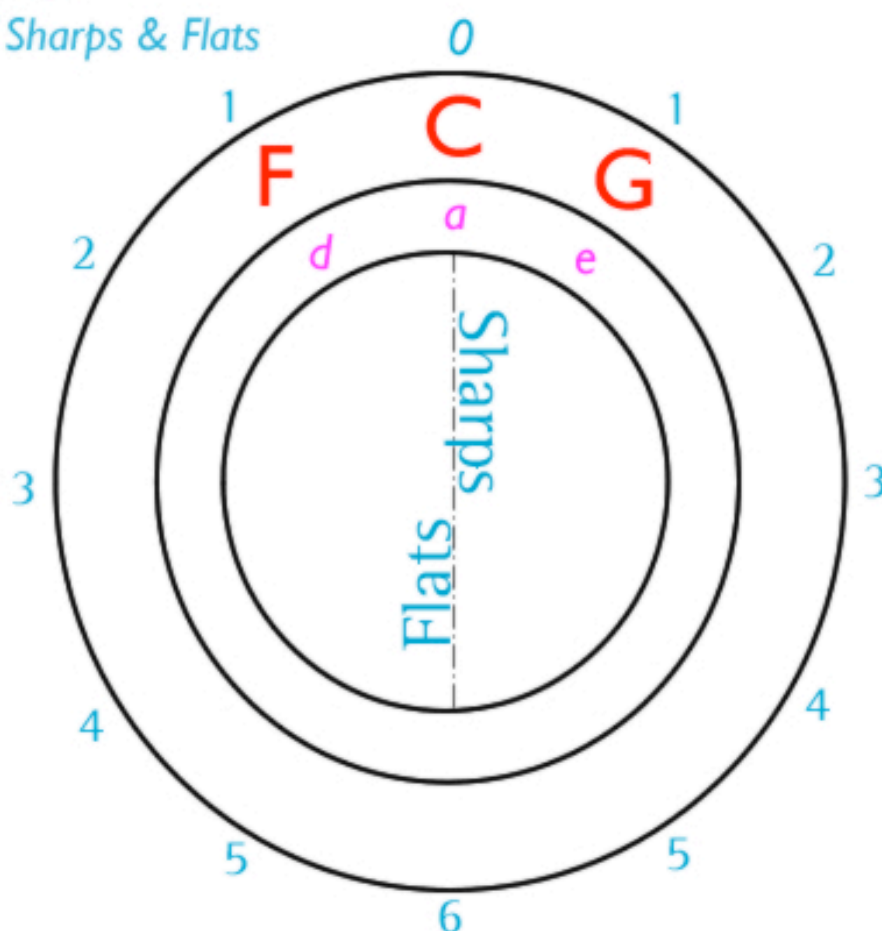
TASK:

Starting on C, fill out the missing gaps on the Circle of Fifths diagram below (use a piano/keyboard if it helps) – can you work out any relationship in the sequence of flat keys going counter clockwise:

Major Keys

Minor Keys

No. of Sharps & Flats



Once we arrive at 6 sharps (F sharp Major or Db Minor), we come to a bit of a halt. We now have a major key signature for each note of the keyboard, G flat is the enharmonic equivalent of F sharp Major.

If we continue on further we would continue to get enharmonic equivalents. This can be said if we go counter clockwise too, if you read it this way we will get the sequence of flat keys.

For varying reasons composers do sometimes go further than F sharp or G flat Major e.g. by writing C sharp major (seven sharps) rather than D flat (five flats), or C flat major (seven flats) rather than B major (five sharps), but the simpler option is usually chosen.