

Circle of Fifths

The CIRCLE OF FIFTHS is useful in understanding scales and key signatures. It shows the relationship of one key to another by the number of sharps or flats in the key signature and the order in which the sharps or flats occur.

SHARP KEYS

Start with C and go clockwise in ascending tetrachord order.

FLAT KEYS

Start with C and go counterclockwise in descending tetrachord order.

The sharp keys ascend by 5ths (W W H W);* the flat keys descend by 5ths (H W W W).

SHARP SCALES

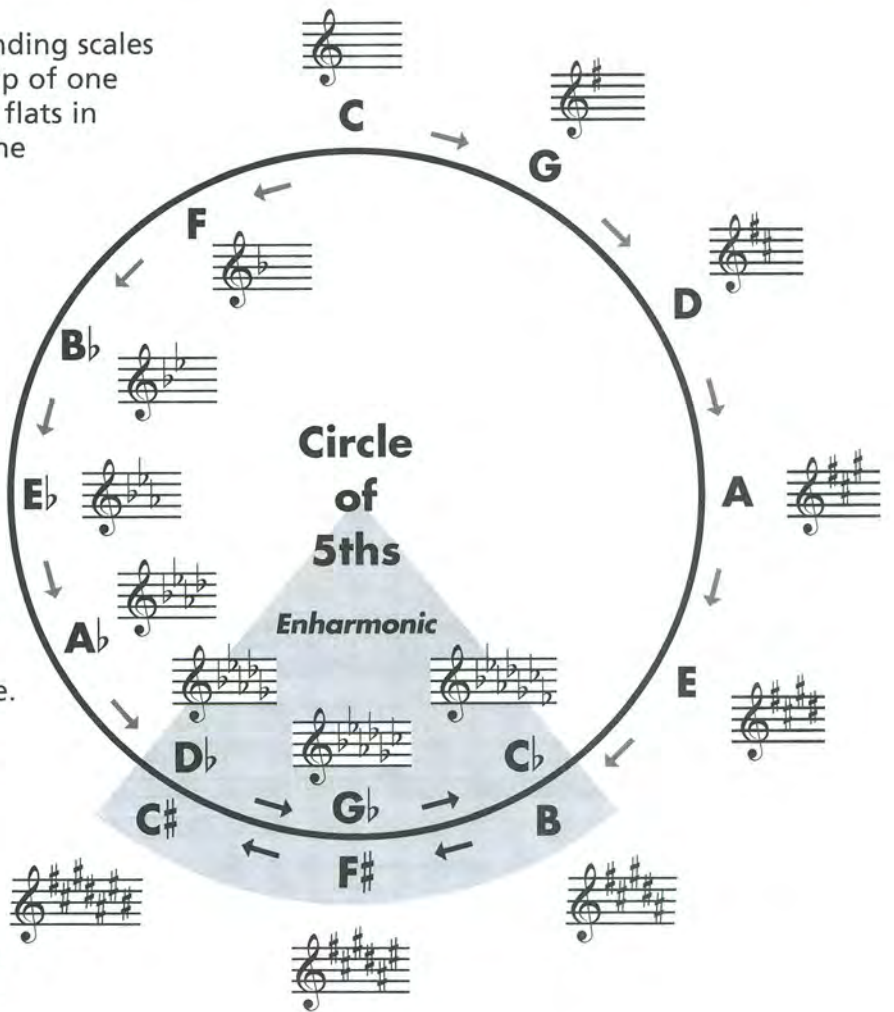
Starting with C, the 2nd tetrachord of the ascending major scale becomes the 1st tetrachord of the following ascending scale. The scale's name is derived from the 1st note of that tetrachord, and one sharp is added to the key signature.

FLAT SCALES

Starting with C, the 2nd tetrachord of the descending major scale becomes the 1st tetrachord of the following descending scale. The scale's name is derived from the 1st note of that descending tetrachord, and one flat is added to the key signature.

OPTIONAL

Another way to determine the order of the flat keys is to ascend by 4ths (W W H). Starting on C: C to F, F to B \flat , B \flat to E \flat , etc.



The order of sharps in the key signature:
F C G D A E B.

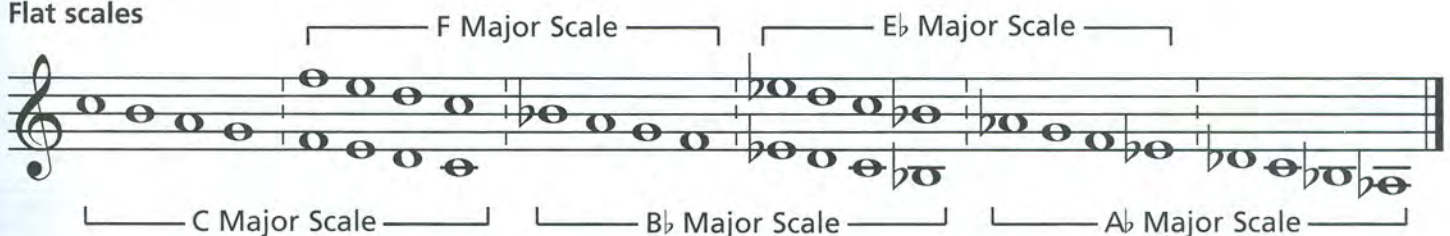
The order of flats in the key signature:
B E A D G C F.

OVERLAPPING TETRACHORD PATTERNS

Sharp scales



Flat scales



*W=Whole Step. H=Half Step.