

Longy School of Music of Bard College

Music Theory for young students

designed for use in Creative Music Theory classes
in the Preparatory Division

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Levels 1, 2, 3

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Introduction

Dear student!

You are about to start learning music theory. Music theory is a study of music; it helps to understand how music works. It will teach you to read, write, and compose music.

What is music? It is something that can change your mood, make you move faster or slower, it can even change your heartbeat! Music can make you imagine things, sometime nice and sometimes scary, and when it gets stuck in your head, it simply won't leave! It is everywhere – on the radio, in a concert hall, in church or temple, in school – but it only lives while it sounds. You need a composer to make music, a performer to play it, and a listener to enjoy it.

To students, parents, and private instructors:

This portion of the theory text, where we explain and demonstrate basic concepts of music theory, is the same in Levels 1, 2, and 3 of the text for Creative Music Theory classes at Longy. As such, it will go further than a student in Level 1 will progress during a year. It will allow those starting their study of music theory at Level 2 or 3 to have all the background information they will need for a solid start in theory.

One will surmise from the text that we are most interested in developing solid, eventually automatic, mastery of the basic skills of music. The focus is definitely not on the accumulation of knowledge *per se*. Communication with one's theory teacher about such issues is highly recommended. Studio teachers should feel free to bring new concepts into lessons before those are introduced in theory, but we recommend introducing the application of theory in everyday musical activities.

Included is a section of suggestions for parents which we hope will be of value in helping students get the most out of music theory study. A glossary is provided to assist in that process. Homework sometimes provides tips that are not part of the text, when practical execution is the issue rather than conceptual development or exposition.

Suggestions for parents

General

Come back to this list on a regular basis and read it again. Chances are, you'll find something valuable you didn't notice the last time.

Daily work on theory, even in very small amounts, is more valuable than large spans of time on an irregular basis. Three or four short sessions per week is also an acceptable arrangement.

Help your child develop a habit of using a portion of practice time on a daily basis for doing theory. Suggestions include using the work as a warm-up before practice, as a break during practice, or between practice on different instruments.

Be involved with your child's work in aural skills and ear training: progress is the aim, not perfection, but the work needs to matter to the child. It is less important to be involved in the written work, but parents should at least be sure a child is actually doing the work.

Learn solfège and rhythmic syllables with your child.

Listen to music together, talk about it. Talk about the music your child is playing. Some recommendations:

What instruments are involved?

How does it make you feel? Why?

What was interesting? Why?

What mode is the music in (major or minor)?

What is the meter (2/4, 3/4, 4/4, etc.)?

How many parts are involved in the piece (how many players)?

How many sections does the music have?

Is it old or modern?

What register is the music in? What register does your child's instrument play in?

On a regular basis, play a pitch on the piano and ask your child to name it.

Come to your child's theory class and observe the learning, learn for yourself. This is most applicable for younger children and early class levels.

Play a series of pitches, have your child sing it back. Gradually increase the length of the series.

Switch roles: Have your child play a series of pitches and have the parent sing the series back for child. (Apply to rhythm clapping as well.) (Do the same with melodic or harmonic intervals.)

Improvise with your child: even something as basic as playing a single note or chord in a rhythmic way can provide a starting point. Have fun! There is no right or wrong in the absence of a style one has to fit into. Improvising which incorporates the piano or your

child's instrument, and uses concepts from theory to limit choices and free the mind, is especially beneficial.

Encourage your child to play all concepts from theory on the piano. We can't do enough of this in class, so it will be great to do at home!

Have your child play for you the compositions produced for the creative portions of homework. Stay in touch, ask what the creative portion was on a weekly basis.

Solfège

Sing passages from music practiced for one's instrument in solfège.

If a family has no piano, students should play solfège examples on their instrument.

If daily work is done on solfège (highly recommended), the work can be spread in stages. For instance, a child might simply sing an example on "la" one day, while conducting and on "la" the next, and with solfège syllables on the third day. Another intervening step might be to simply speak the solfège syllables in rhythm. It is important to reach the step of naming the notes as sung.

For melodies to memorize, a gradual approach is best. After multiple days of singing, a melody will be easy to memorize. Doing the entire process the last night before class will lead to a stressful, sometimes seemingly impossible situation.

Help your child keep in mind that he/she is *making music*: always aim to sing expressively, not mechanically.

Encourage your child to sing without stopping. In early stages on a solfège example, one will need to go slowly enough to manage the notes and rhythms without stopping: speed will come with familiarity. If mistakes are made, keep going, don't lose the pulse: *go back after finishing* to fix mistakes.

Activities

And if that's not enough, some activities you and your child can share:

- have your child tell you what they learned (or did) this week having to do with rhythm
- have your child tell you what they learned (or did) this week having to do with pitch
- have the child demonstrate a pitch or rhythm concept
- ask if something was done well
- look over any materials covered in class, ask what various things mean
- sing together (anything!)
- have your child apply something from theory class to his/her instrument (play a rhythm, melodic pattern, interval, etc.)
- try to figure out melodies you hear (i.e., name the pitches and rhythms as if you were to write them down)

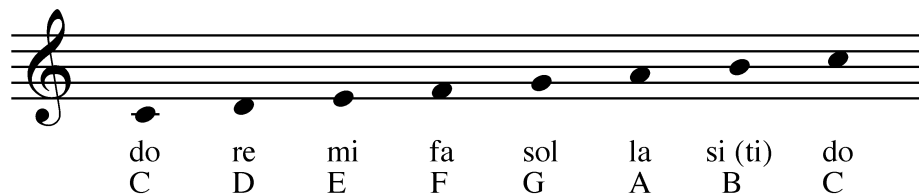
Activities to integrate into practicing:

- play scales, intervals, rhythms on one's instrument
- sing the melodies one plays on an instrument for lessons
- sing the scales one plays on one's instrument
- find and name the chords one plays for lessons
- create a free-form, improvisatory portion of your child's practice time
- start every practice session with no-rules free jam

Notation

Pitch identification in solfège and in writing

Music is made of musical sounds. We hear many sounds, but not all of them are called musical. What makes a musical sound special? It has a definite pitch. A pitch is something we can recognize and, sometimes, imitate. Our ear can only recognize sounds that are not very-very low, and not very-very high. Long ago people invented syllables for naming musical pitches called notes. The names of music notes are: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Ti or Si. This way of naming musical sounds is called solfège, or solfeggio. It was invented by a monk from an Italian town of Arezzo in the 11th century. Syllables used in solfège were convenient for singing, and each symbol had a fixed pitch attached to it.



Keyboard, note location

Look at the keyboard below. You see black and white keys. Black keys are arranged in groups of 2 and 3. A white note in front of two black keys is Do, and notes to the right from Do are Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Ti. After Ti the notes repeat, and go from Do to Do again. The distance between one Do and a neighboring Do (or between any two neighboring notes with the same name) is called an octave, from the Latin numeral 8.



Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do

Octaves

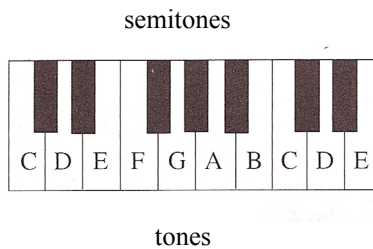
Notes that are an octave apart sound in very much alike. An octave from *Do* to *Do* is marked above. Find more octaves marked on the diagram of octave names on page 28. How many notes are in the sub-contra octave? Does your piano have some notes in the fifth octave? We can sing comfortably within the first octave, and some of us can reach notes in the second octave. Male voices are lower, and men usually sing in the small and sometimes the great octave. Match your singing voice to the piano. What octave feels good for you?

Registers

Piano has three registers: low, middle, and high. Other instruments play only in one or two registers. What are the registers for your instrument?

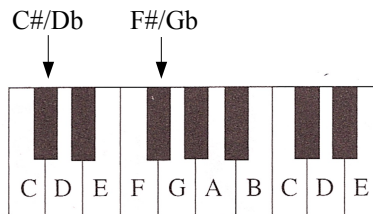
Distance in music: tones, semitones

The distance between a black and a white key or between two white keys without a separating black key is the smallest on the keyboard. It is a semitone or half step. The distance between two white keys (with a black key in between) is a tone or whole step. Semitone is the smallest measuring unit of distance between notes. It is interesting that you can trace the semitones along the back of the keys, where they go behind the wood of a piano (or the top edge of the picture below), and the tones are those that reach the edge (toward the player on a piano, or the bottom edge of the picture below).



Sharps and flats

Black keys get their names from neighboring white keys. A black key on the right from a note is called a sharp, and a black key on the left is a flat. All black keys can have double names. We call notes with different names but the same sound *enharmonic equivalents*. Two are named below. Can you name some that are not marked?



Writing musical sounds (notation)

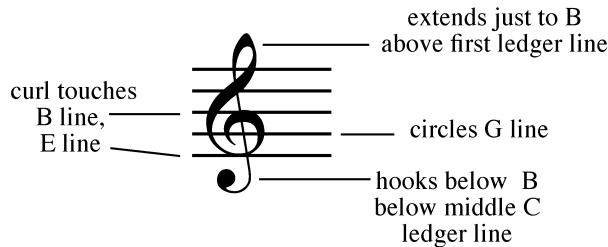
Music notes as we know them today are little circles or ovals placed on or between lines of the staff (five lines counted from the bottom up; we also count the spaces from bottom up). Sometimes, when notes are too high or too low, they are written on ledger lines above or below the staff. Higher notes appear higher on the grand staff. Reading music is like deciphering a secret message that only musicians can understand. Any secret code has a key, and music is not an exception. The key in music is called a clef (a French word for a key), and it is placed on the left side of the staff. We read music from left to right, the same way we read English. Music notes mean different pitches in different clefs. There are three commonly used clefs: treble (for high notes), bass (for low notes), and alto (for notes in the middle register).

For piano and other keyboard music, a grand staff is used. The grand staff combines bass and treble clefs into a single unit by using a bracket at the left end, and by extending barlines all the way through both staves. (For an example of a grand staff, see the example on the next page that shows sharps, flats, and naturals.)

What instruments play music in a high register? What clef will be used for these instruments? Do you know any instruments that can play only in the low register? Why do we use treble and bass clefs for writing piano music?

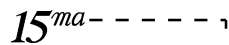
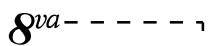
Treble clef

Let's begin reading music in treble clef. It is called the G or Sol clef, because it indicates the location of G of the first octave. The treble clef ends or begins – depending on the way you write it – on the second line of the grand staff. This is a line for Sol. Now write the rest of the octave. You need ledger lines for Do of the first octave, and for notes lower than Do. Usually notes in treble clef don't go lower than Sol of the small octave and higher than Fa of the third octave.



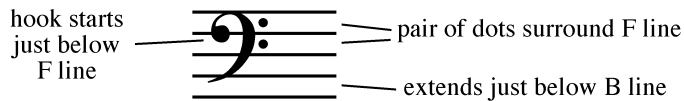
Octave signs

The *8^{va}* sign indicates that notes have to be played one octave higher than they are written. If this sign is placed below a staff, the notes should be played one octave lower than they are written. For many notes in a row which sound in a different octave, the sign is extended with dashed lines. (When notes are *really* high or low, we use the *15^{ma}* sign, raising pitches two octaves.)



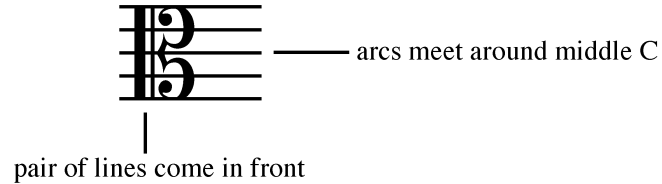
Bass clef

Bass clef is called F or Fa clef, and it indicates the location of Fa of the small octave. Bass clef can be used for notes as high as sol of the first octave or as low as Sol of the contra-octave.



Alto clef

Alto clef is one of four C clefs. They all indicate the position of middle C. Alto clef places C on the third line. Do you know what instruments play music written in alto clef?



Writing sharps, flats, and naturals

A sharp sign indicates a note with a pitch a half step higher. A flat sign indicates a note with a pitch a half step lower. A natural sign cancels a previous sharp or flat. In the example below, notice how the line is visible through each accidental type when placed before a note on a line, and how the space is clearly defined when placed before a note on a space.



When an accidental (sharp or flat) is placed in a measure, all notes of the same pitch should be altered by it, unless it is canceled by a natural sign. In other words, accidentals carry throughout the measure they appear in. Could you name all the notes in the example above?

Playing musical sounds: articulation and dynamics

Legato

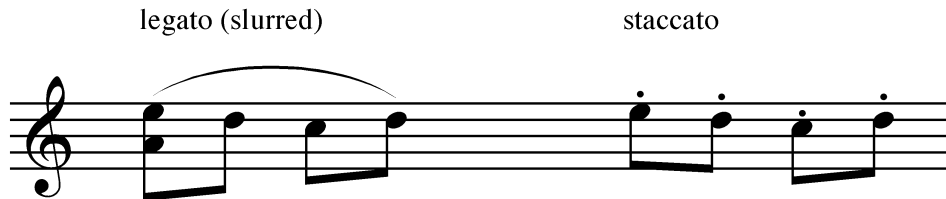
Sometimes musical sounds are played connected and smooth – legato.
Legato is marked with a curved line – a slur.

Staccato

Sometimes musical sounds are played sharp, jumping – staccato.
Staccato is marked with a dot above the note.

Non-legato

Sometimes sounds are not connected, and they are not jumping.
This is non-legato. Non-legato could be marked with staccato dots and accent marks on top.



Dynamics

Musical sound can be played with different volume. Different volumes in music are marked with dynamics:

- f* – forte, loud
- p* – piano, soft
- mf* – mezzo-forte, medium loud
- mp* – mezzo-piano, medium soft
- ff* – fortissimo, very loud
- pp* – pianissimo, very soft

Changes in volume are marked with the following signs:

- cresc.* - *crescendo*: gradually increase sound, sometimes marked with this sign: <
- dim.* - *diminuendo*: gradually decrease sound, sometimes marked with this sign: >

How would the example below sound? Can you execute it?



Sound duration, note values

Sounds not only differ in pitch and volume, they also differ in duration. Notes that last different times have different note values. The longest note we usually deal with in modern notation is called a whole note.

The note that lasts half as long as a whole note is called a half note.

(It takes two halves to make a whole.)

The note that lasts half as long as a half note is a quarter note.

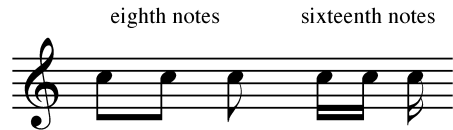
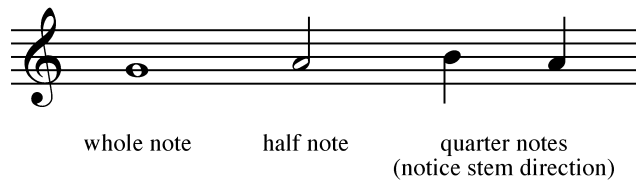
(It takes two quarters to make a half, or four quarters to make a whole.)

The note that lasts half as long as a quarter note is an eighth note.

(It takes two eighths to make a quarter, or eight eighths to make a whole.)

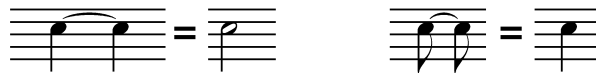
The note that lasts half as long as an eighth is a sixteenth note.

(It takes two sixteenths to make an eighth, or sixteen sixteenths to make a whole.)



Tie

A tie is a curved line connecting two notes of the same pitch. It ties two sounds together creating a longer note value.



Fermata

Fermata indicates that the note is extended indefinitely.



Dotted note

A dot on the right of a note indicates lengthening of the note by half the note's value. (An example is on the next page.)



Stems

All note values except for the whole note have stems.

Stems are attached on the right side facing up for notes below the middle line (Ti in treble clef, Re in bass clef). Notes above the middle line have stems attached on the left side facing down. Stem length is ordinarily one octave. (See the example above.)

Flags

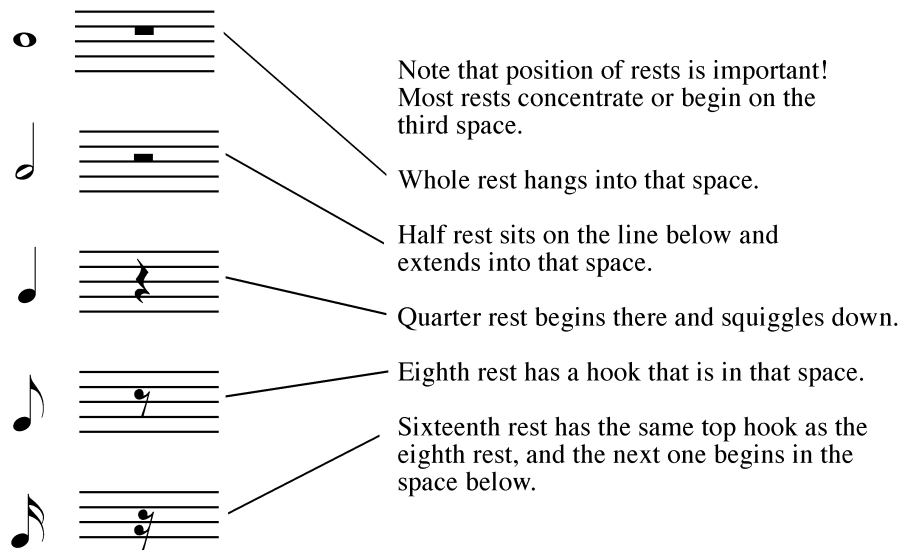
Eighth and sixteenth notes also have flags, little curved lines attached to stems. Eighth notes have singular flags, and sixteenth notes have double flags. (See example on previous page.)

Beams

Sometimes eighth or sixteenth notes are grouped, usually to indicate one beat. Lines that are used for connecting them are called beams. Eighth notes have singular beams, and sixteenth notes have double beams, like sixteenth flags. A beam is much thicker than a stem. (See example on previous page.)

Rests

Rests in music are silent moments, but they also have note values. Here is the table of rests with corresponding note values.



Rhythm

A sequence of different note values is rhythm. We use a method of speaking rhythms at Longy which helps develop the ability to read music on sight very accurately. The method is described later in the text, in Appendix 3, pages 30 to 31.

Tempo

Speed of playing music is a tempo. Tempos could be:

slow: Largo, Andante, Adagio, Lento,
 medium: Moderato, Andantino,
 fast: Allegro, Vivace, Presto

Changing tempos

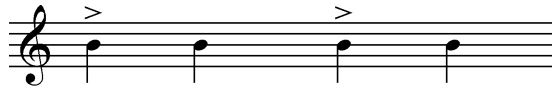
Sometimes a tempo changes as the music unfolds. It is indicated by the following signs:

Accelerando – accelerate
 Ritardando – slow down
 Ritenuto – slow down
 A tempo – back to initial tempo

Meter

Musical pulse is called meter. Meter is regular alternation (taking turns) of strong (accented) and weak (unaccented) beats. Meters could be:

Duple or binary (a strong beat comes every second beat):



Triple or ternary (a strong beat comes every third beat):



Asymmetrical (irregular, odd) meters have groups of two and three (a strong beat comes sometimes two, sometimes three beats apart):



Measure (bar), barlines

The meter is ordinarily a repeated pattern of beats that goes on for some time before changing. A measure line or barline is put before the strongest beat. It indicates the beginning of a measure. The area between two barlines is a measure or bar. Here are the examples from above with barlines:



Time signature

A time signature is two numbers placed on the left of the staff. It only appears at the beginning of a piece, or when changed during a piece. It indicates a number of beats or beat divisions in a measure (top number), and length (note value) of each beat or beat division (bottom number). A time signature is not a fraction, it does not have a line separating top and bottom numbers.



Beat division

Within the measure, beats can be divided into smaller units. When the division is into two parts, we call that simple division. When the beat divides into three parts, the division is called compound. For simple meters, the time signature shows the number of beats and what value gets the beat, but for compound meters, the time signature shows beat divisions and what the value of the division is. The examples below each have two beats. One uses simple division, the other uses compound division. Notice that the beaming of the beat divisions makes it obvious where the beat is.



Triplets (or triplets)

Sometimes a beat that is ordinarily divided into two parts is divided into three parts. We would call this division a triplet, which is a specific kind of "tuplet". One may always think of the tuplet as being a number of divisions "in the time of" the ordinary division of the beat or part of beat affected. For instance, triplets are "3 divisions in the time of 2". The numeral above or below the beam tells us the division is unusual. When there are no beams, a bracket is used, as shown below.



Pitch materials in music

Western classical music uses the scale as the building block for both melody and harmony. After explaining a little about scales, we will explore the melodic aspect and then the harmonic aspect of our tradition.

Scales

Scales are ascending or descending consecutive pitches held together by their attraction to tonic. Notes in a scale sometimes are called steps, or scale degrees, and they are marked with Arabic numerals.

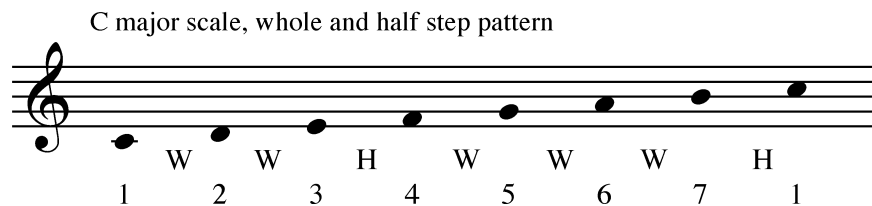
Major and minor scales

The most commonly used scales in tonal music are major and minor scales. They have eight consecutive sounds arranged in separate patterns for major and minor.

Major scale

Major scale is generally described as sounding happy. It is structured the following way, with W standing for whole step, and H standing for half step: W-W-H-W-W-W-H.

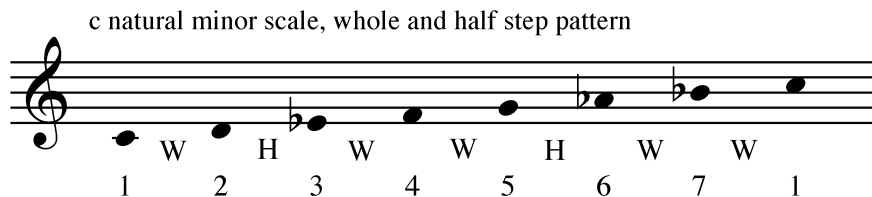
The half steps in a major scale are located between steps 3 & 4, 7 & 1.



Minor scale

Minor scale is generally described as sounding sad. It is structured the following way, with W standing for whole step, and H standing for half step: W-H-W-W-H-W-W. The half steps in a natural minor scale are located between steps 2 & 3, 5 & 6.

A minor scale with this structure is called natural minor. There are two other versions of the minor, harmonic minor and melodic minor, which will be explained when discussing melody, below.



Major and minor compared (parallel major and minor)

If we construct the major scale on C using the pattern just described, and then construct a minor scale on C using its pattern of whole and half steps, as we just did, we find a good way to think about the two. Compare the C major scale and the C natural minor scale on the previous page. Notice that scale degrees 3, 6, and 7 are lowered in the minor version compared to the major. Speaking of major and minor this way, with both on the same tonic, is to speak of *parallel* major and minor.

Modes and pitch sets

If one constructs a major scale, a certain group of pitches is the result, something we call a pitch set. Starting on different pitches, but always using the same set of pitches, will produce different patterns of whole and half steps. We call each pattern a mode. The major scale is also a mode (*ionian*, scale degree 1 to 1, just the same as major) and the natural minor is as well (*aeolian*, scale degrees 6 to 6 in a major pitch set). See Appendix 5, page 33, for a table of modes.

Study the examples below to see that the pattern of whole and half steps is the same in each *aeolian* mode, and that each uses the same set of pitches as the major scale it is said to come from.

C major pitch set, *ionian* mode, whole and half step pattern:

1 W 2 W 3 H 4 W 5 W 6 W 7 H 1

C major pitch set, *aeolian* mode, whole and half step pattern:

1 W 2 H 3 W 4 W 5 H 6 W 7 W 1

E major pitch set, *ionian* mode, whole and half step pattern:

1 W 2 W 3 H 4 W 5 W 6 W 7 H 1

E major pitch set, *aeolian* mode, whole and half step pattern:

1 W 2 H 3 W 4 W 5 H 6 W 7 W 1

Key

When we transpose a scale (that is, when we take the pattern of whole and half steps to a new starting place) we create a new key. A key gets its name from its first note. For example, if we have a major scale starting on E, the key will be E major. Most often a piece of music begins and ends in the same key.

The key of this song is C (do) major; it begins and ends on C, the tonic.



Key signature

A key needs sharps or flats to preserve its structure (the pattern of whole and half steps). These are written right after a clef sign. They are particular to the key and called a key signature. The key signature will appear on every staff system in a piece. It helps us not have to write so many accidentals, but we have to keep it in our head if we are to play the right notes. Compare the C major scale on page 10, paying attention to the whole- and half-step pattern, with the E major scale below.

E major scale (whole and half step pattern is the same as before):



E major scale written with key signature:



Relative keys

Major and minor keys that share the same key signature are called relative keys. A relative minor key is located a minor third down from its major, which takes you to scale degree 6. Natural minor results from singing the octave from scale degree 6 to 6 of the major pitch set.

Relative Major and minor

C major:

A musical staff in treble clef showing a C major scale starting on C4. The notes are: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Below the staff, the scale degrees are numbered: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

a natural minor:

A musical staff in treble clef showing a C natural minor scale starting on C4. The notes are: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5. Below the staff, the scale degrees are numbered: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 1.

Scale degrees

In tonal music each step in a scale has a name:

- scale degree 1 is *tonic*
- scale degree 2 is *supertonic*
- scale degree 3 is *mediant*
- scale degree 4 is *subdominant*
- scale degree 5 is *dominant*
- scale degree 6 is *submediant*
- scale degree 7 is *leading tone*

Tonic

The first and the last note of a major or a minor scale is tonic, the most important note in a scale. Tonic gives a name to a scale, and works as a magnet for other notes. Generally speaking, the closer a note is to tonic, the stronger the pull to move to tonic.

F major scale, tonic marked with "T".



Dominant

The dominant pitch is the second-most important note in a scale after tonic. Many times, it will be the last note heard before tonic, and has a very strong tendency to return to tonic. Music phrases ending on dominant often sound like a question because we sense that something has to come along and settle unfinished business.

C major scale, dominant marked with "D".



The first phrase of this song ends on dominant.



Tonal music

Music that is based on attraction of notes to other notes and all to tonic is called tonal music. There are a few notes that lead strongly to tonic, but the main note with that tendency is the dominant, which will be more fully discussed below.

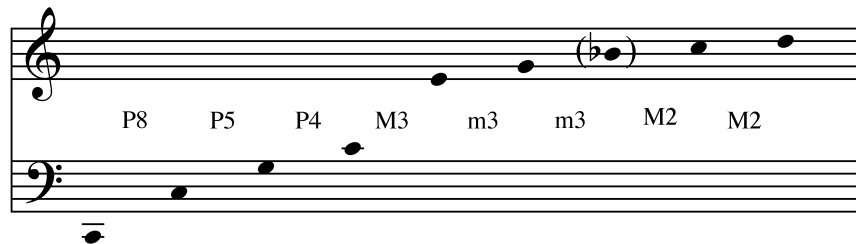
Intervals

The distance between two notes is called an interval. Since intervals are important both "horizontally" (as music unfolds in time, in a melody) and "vertically" (when notes sound at the same time, as in harmony) we will discuss and use them as a means of discussing those two most important musical characteristics. First, a general introduction is in order.



Overtone series

When we produce a musical sound, we hear not just one, but many pitches contained inside. If you play C of the great octave, and listen carefully, you will hear all the notes in the example below (and in fact, many more)! This group of notes is known as the overtone series. Of most importance for us is the fact that the lower three intervals formed are what we call "perfect" intervals, and that those we call major or minor appear higher in the series.

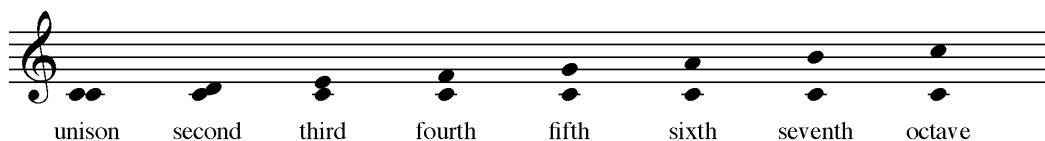


Measuring intervals

Intervals are measured in whole steps and half steps. A table of intervals measured in half steps is on page 17.

Naming intervals

Intervals get their names from numerals expressing a distance between a bottom and a top note. The counting developed out of scales, so we count by scale steps, counting "one" as the bottom note. We speak the number in the same manner, as if to say the top note in an interval on the fifth scale degree above it is "the fifth" we have reached after starting our count with the first, or bottom note. Finding the numerical part of an interval name is the same as counting lines and spaces.



Quality of intervals

Intervals also differ by quality: perfect (P), minor (m), major (M), diminished (D or °) and augmented (A or +).

Perfect, diminished and augmented intervals

Intervals 1, 4, 5, and 8 are "perfect" in sound when they appear above or below the tonic (see below) in a major or minor scale. When altered they become diminished (made smaller) or augmented (made larger).

The image shows three musical staves illustrating interval qualities. Each staff starts with a treble clef and a C note on the first line (C4).

- Staff 1 (Perfect intervals):** Shows perfect unison (C4-C4), perfect fourth (C4-F4), perfect fifth (C4-G4), and perfect octave (C4-C5).
- Staff 2 (Augmented intervals):** Shows augmented unison (C4-C#4), augmented fourth (C4-F#4), augmented fifth (C4-G#4), and augmented octave (C4-C#5).
- Staff 3 (Diminished intervals):** Shows augmented unison (C4-Cb4), diminished fourth (C4-Fb4), diminished fifth (C4-Gb4), and diminished octave (C4-Cb5).

Major and minor intervals

Intervals 2, 3, 6, and 7 could be minor (smaller) or major (larger). When these intervals appear above tonic in a major scale, they are all in the major (larger) form. Making them smaller by half step (raising the bottom note or lowering the top one) makes them minor.

Intervals above tonic in a major scale

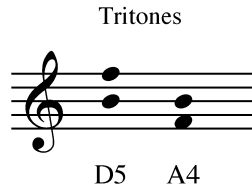
A musical staff with a treble clef showing intervals above the tonic (C4). The intervals are labeled as P1, M2, M3, P4, P5, M6, M7, and P8.

Making major intervals into minor
(Here, accidentals only apply to the note directly following.)

A musical staff with a treble clef showing intervals above the tonic (C4) with accidentals applied to the top note to create minor intervals. The intervals are labeled as M2, m2, m2, M3, m3, m3, M6, m6, m6, M7, m7, and m7.

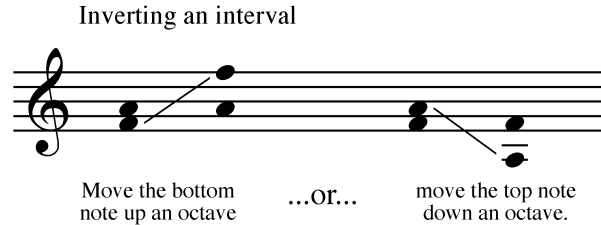
Tritones

Diminished 5th and augmented 4th intervals contain three whole steps and could be called tritones. Technically, the diminished fifth contains two whole steps and two half steps, but it comes out sounding the same. In tonal music these intervals occur only in one place in the major scale, between scale degrees 4 and 7. (In addition to this location, a tritone shows up in minor in one more place, between scale degrees 2 and 6.)



Inversions of intervals

Changing places between bottom and top sounds of intervals is called an inversion.

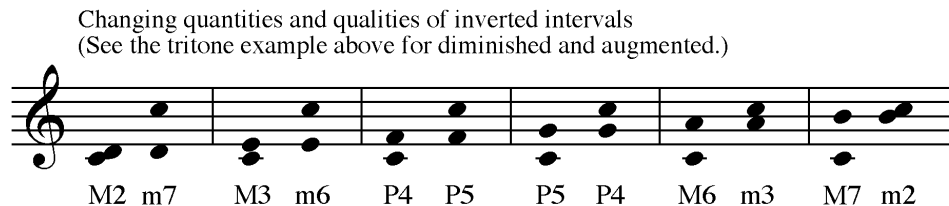


Changing quantity of an inverted interval

Unisons invert into octaves, seconds into sevenths, thirds into sixths, fourths into fifths. Sixths invert into thirds, sevenths invert into seconds, octaves into unisons.

Changing quality of an inverted interval

Perfect intervals invert into perfect, major into minor, minor into major. Augmented intervals invert into diminished, and diminished intervals invert into augmented.




Consonances and dissonances

Consonances are intervals whose vibrations combine easily, sounding smoother and more solid. Dissonances are intervals whose vibrations produce more lack of agreement, sounding edgy and more unstable. The concept of consonance and dissonance has varied with historical periods, but during the period we base most of our study on, the so-called "common-practice" period from about 1650 to 1900, consonances include P8, P5, M3, m3, M6, and m6. Dissonance has historically been a source of instability in music, causing the music to move ahead to get rid of, or "resolve", the dissonance. This basic driving force creates waves of tension and release, and

while it is most easily heard when notes sound together (harmonically), it is a generating force in melody as well.

Table of intervals

The table below provides a list of common intervals up to the octave. Under each notated interval is the common name for the interval, and below that is the number of half-steps that interval contains. The number of half-steps is a useful way to identify intervals, and it is known as the *interval-class number (IC number)* of the interval. Accidentals in the table apply only to the note immediately following.



| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| P1 | m2 | M2 | m3 | M3 | P4 | A4 | D5 | P5 | m6 | M6 | m7 | M7 | P8 |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |

It is also useful to think of the intervals in terms of whole and half steps, which is like thinking of where they are in a scale. Try converting some intervals from counting half steps to counting scale degree steps, as in the examples below.

A major third is: four half steps, or... two whole steps.



A perfect fourth is: five half steps, or... two whole steps and one half step.



Horizontal organization of sounds

Melodic intervals

Two notes sounding one after another create a melodic interval. They are called melodic because they are building blocks of a melody. Intervals could be ascending or descending, narrow (notes close to each other, by step) or wide (notes further apart, by leap or skip).

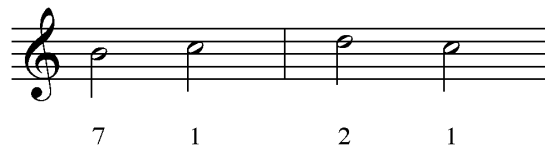
Melody

Melody is a consecutive (one by one) sequence of pitches. Melody could be short or long, memorable (catchy) or not, smooth or jagged. Some melodies have a central note, tonic, a point of attraction for other notes. Melodies have a *contour*, or shape of rising and falling to emphasize high points and low points. Notice the contour of the melody below, and imagine if you drew a line connecting all the note heads.



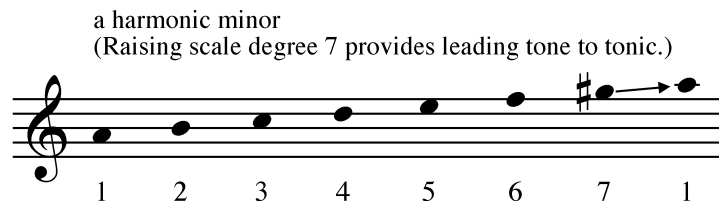
Unstable (leading) tones

Two notes surrounding tonic lead (resolve) to it; one is called the leading tone (scale degree 7), the other (scale degree 2) is not always referred to that way, but some musical thinkers do. In the major scale the distance between tonic and step 7 is a half step.



Harmonic minor

In natural minor, the distance between step 7 and tonic is a whole tone, and the attraction to tonic is not so strong. Harmonic minor has a raised 7 step, to keep the leading tone closer to tonic and provide the strong pull upwards that characterizes it. (Take note of the unusual interval which now exists between scale degrees 6 and 7. It is an A2, or a major second increased by half-step.)



Melodic minor

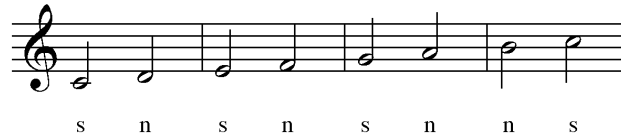
Melodic minor has raised 6 and 7 scale degrees in ascending motion. (This prevents us from having to sing that awkward interval in harmonic minor, the one between scale degrees 6 and 7). In descending motion it lowers steps 7 and 6, bringing it to a natural minor.



Stable and non-stable notes in a scale

Some notes of a major or minor scale sound more stable than others. A stable note could be used at the end of a melody. The only truly stable note in a scale is tonic. Three other notes that sound somewhat stable are steps 2, 3 and 5. Steps 4, 6 and 7 are non-stable and cannot be used for finishing melody. Scale degree 2 is a special case, being an unstable tone that can bring a melody to a partial finish, but that melody would need to be followed by another phrase which ends on a tonic note.

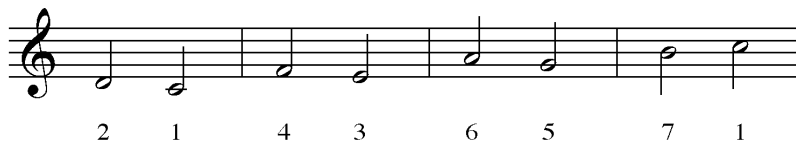
Stable (s) and non-stable (n) steps in the scale:



Resolution and non-stable tones

The whole idea of resolution is one that will apply to many things in theory, including single notes, intervals, dissonances, chords, register, duration, and just about anything one can imagine. If something stands out as unusual, or not fully restful, it creates tension that must be "resolved". Non-stable tones resolve to stable tones located next to them. The two most important non-stable tones we will deal with in theory are scale degrees 2 and 7, both of which resolve to tonic.

Resolution of non-stable tones:



Resolution of tritones

Tritones consist of two tones, scale degrees 4 and 7. They form a fifth or a fourth which is not perfect, a troubling situation for composers in ancient times, and have developed a long history of how they have to be resolved.

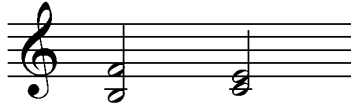
Resolution of tritone:



Diminished 5th

The tritone above the seventh step is a diminished 5th (D5). One will notice that a perfect fifth would be a half step larger, and that the fifth has thus "become smaller". It continues to become smaller (contracts) with resolution, which is typically to a third, either major or minor.

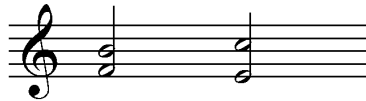
Resolution of diminished fifth:



Augmented 4th

The tritone on the fourth step is an augmented 4th (A4). One will notice that a perfect fourth would be a half step smaller, and that the fourth has "become larger". It continues to become larger (expands) with resolution, which is typically to a sixth, either major or minor.

Resolution of augmented fourth:



Phrase

A phrase is a somewhat complete musical thought that has a beginning, middle, and end. It is similar to a sentence in many ways. A piece of music usually contains many phrases. Relationships between notes create phrases, and relationships between phrases create larger musical structures.

A phrase:



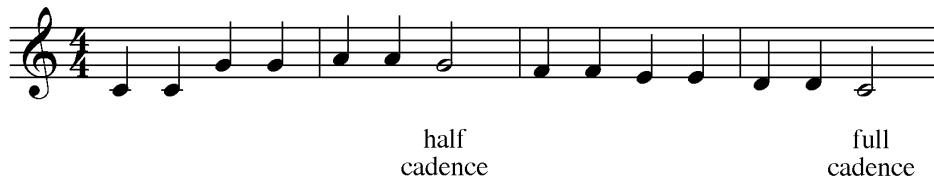
Slur

Slur is a curved line sometimes used to indicate a musical phrase. Sometimes it means to use legato articulation.

Cadence (melodic)

Cadence is a momentary pause, something that creates a sense of repose. It is a very important part of a melody, because it creates the end of a musical phrase.

Two phrases:



Full cadence

A melodic cadence is called full when it ends a phrase on tonic. An example is on the previous page.

Half cadence

A cadence is called half when it ends a phrase on dominant or supertonic, and sometimes the leading tone (all of which belong to the dominant triad, which will be dealt with a little later). An example is on the previous page.

Period

A number of (frequently just two) phrases linked together with the greatest degree of finality at the end is called a period. The pair of phrases in the last example would form a period.

Form in music

Music is organized: notes are organized into phrases, and phrases (often) into periods. Musical structure is called form.

Binary form

One of the most commonly used forms is a binary form.

Binary form has two parts. They could be basically the same: AA' (pronounced A, A-prime); or different: AB.

Binary form (this one is also a period):

**Ternary form**

Ternary form has three parts. Part three repeats or reminds of part one: ABA or ABA'. The basic principle of ternary is departure and return.

Ternary form:

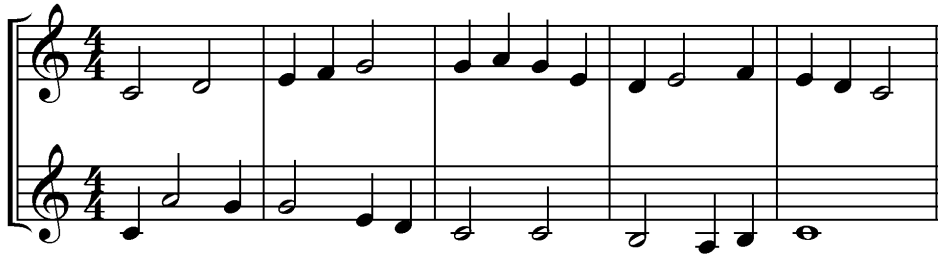


Vertical organization of music

Polyphony

Two or more melodies performed at the same time create polyphony. For several centuries, polyphonic music dominated the musical style of Western Europe. Polyphony gave birth to harmony: chords as we know them first appeared as a result of melodic lines sounding at the same time.

Polyphony:



Harmony

When two or more sounds are played together, they create harmony.

Harmonic interval

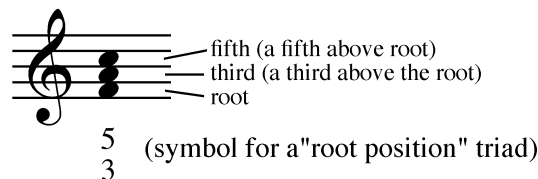
Two pitches sounding together make a harmonic interval. As intervals have been described above, they have usually been presented in their harmonic form, directly above or below each other.

Chord

Three or more pitches sounding together make a chord.

Triad

A triad is a chord of three notes. The distances between the notes are thirds. The distance between the bottom and top notes is a fifth. We refer to the members of a triad as root, third, and fifth. When stacked above the root, one after the other, we use the symbol 53 (also known as a figured bass symbol) for a triad, which simply counts the intervals above the bottom note, or root. We call this "root position", because the root is the lowest-sounding member of the triad.



Major triad

A major triad is chord with major third above the root, and a minor third on top. The fifth from root to fifth will always be perfect in the major triad. A symbol for a major triad is M53.

Minor triad

A minor triad is a chord with minor third above the root, and a major third on top. The fifth from root to fifth will always be perfect in the minor triad. One can create a minor triad by lowering the third of a major triad. A symbol for a minor triad is m53.

Diminished triad

A diminished triad is a chord made of two minor thirds. It gets its name from the quality of the fifth, which is diminished. A symbol for a diminished triad is dim.53, or °53. The diminished triad occurs on scale degree 7 in major, and in minor when scale degree 7 is raised (as in harmonic minor). It shares *dominant function* (see below) as a chord with a strong need to resolve to tonic. Also in minor, a diminished triad occurs on scale degree 2.

Augmented triad

An augmented triad is a triad made of two major thirds. It gets its name from the quality of the fifth, which is augmented. A symbol for an augmented triad is aug. 53, or +53.

Primary triads

Triads constructed on tonic (T), subdominant (S), and dominant (D) are the most important in a key. They are called primary triads. We use Roman numerals to indicate triads, and indicate quality of triad by using upper-case numerals for major and lower-case numerals to minor. In a major key, the primary triads are then I, IV, and V. In a minor key, the primary triads are i, iv, and V. Take special note that the dominant chord is major in both modes, major and minor, and that this will require one to use the harmonic minor to get the quality of the dominant to come out that way.

primary triads in C major and c minor

Tonic triad

Just as the tonic note is the most important note in a scale, the tonic triad is the most important chord in a key. Pieces end there, and most often begin there. All three of its pitches (1, 3, 5) are considered at least somewhat stable.

Dominant triad

The dominant pitch is the second-most important note in a scale after tonic, and it is the most important chord after tonic. All three of its pitches (5, 7, and 2) have strong tendencies to resolve to tonic, as encountered earlier. It is therefore a very important chord in cadences.

Subdominant triad

The subdominant pitch is not nearly so important on its own as the chord built upon it. As a pitch, it wants to move to the third scale degree, but as the building-block of a chord, it has a tendency to move to the chord built on the dominant pitch.

Cadence (harmonic)

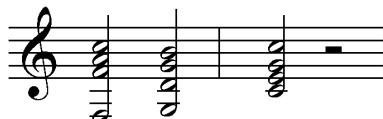
Cadence is important in creating phrases, as mentioned in discussing melody. In harmony, there are specific patterns which support those mentioned earlier. We will refer to the chord sequences which create cadences as cadential progressions.

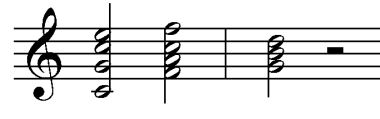
Authentic cadence

Authentic cadences end on tonic, with a dominant chord just before, so we could abbreviate an authentic cadence as V-I in major. The most stable of all authentic cadences will have the tonic note in the melody, or top voice.

Full cadence

A full cadence is one which could be used at the end of a composition. The one referred to above as most stable (authentic, with tonic in melody) is a full cadence.

Full cadence: 

Half cadence: 

Half cadence

A half cadence brings a phrase to an end on the dominant triad. It doesn't matter what chord came before, at least in terms of what we call it.

Triad names

Triad names are the same as scale degree names. Thus we speak of tonic triad or scale degree, supertonic triad or scale degree, and so forth. See page 13 for the list of names.

Using Roman numerals for writing chord symbols

While steps in a scale are marked with Arabic numerals, Roman numerals are reserved for writing chord symbols. Upper case indicates a major triad, and lower case indicates minor. Lower case with a circle is diminished, upper case with a plus sign is augmented.

Harmonic function

So far, we have exposed the idea that dominant leads to tonic, and we have begun to explore the idea that subdominant leads to dominant. As one studies harmony further, one will find that there are actually several chords which operate, or function, the same as dominant, and that there are several chords that function in the same way as subdominant. Chords which share "dominant function", i.e. lead to tonic, include the chord built on scale degree 7 (the leading-tone triad) and the dominant seventh (see below). The other main chord that shares "pre-dominant function", or prepares the way for dominant, is the supertonic triad.

chords sharing dominant function

V vii⁰ V⁷

chords sharing pre-dominant function

IV ii ... and more to come!

Harmonic rhythm

The pace at which chords change is called harmonic rhythm.

Triad inversions

Triads can be inverted, like intervals. Bringing the bottom note of a chord one octave up is called an inversion.

First inversion of a triad

When the bottom note of a triad moves an octave up, it changes the distance between sounds. The third of the chord is now the lowest-sounding pitch, and as in interval inversion, creates the interval of a sixth with the root which moved above it. This inversion is therefore called a sixth chord. First-inversion primary triads are thus I⁶, IV⁶, and V⁶. (If we check the other interval above the lowest note, we would find a third, and therefore the complete name of the first inversion chord is "six-three".)

triad inversion

root position first inversion second inversion

5 6 6

3 3 4

Second inversion of a triad

Second inversion may be thought of as doing the inversion process a second time. When the bottom pitch of a sixth chord moves one octave up, the distance between the sounds changes again. The fifth of the triad is now the lowest-sounding note, and as in interval inversion, the interval to the note just moved is again a sixth. If we referred to the chord this way, we would have the same name as the first inversion, so we need to use a name that accounts for the other interval in the chord. That interval will be found to be a fourth, or the distance from the now-lowest note to the root. This inversion is called a six-four chord. Primary triads in a major key would be I⁶₄, IV⁶₄, and V⁶₄.

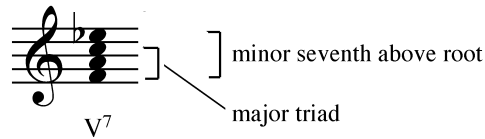
Seventh chords

Adding one more third on top of a triad makes a seventh chord. The name, "seventh chord", comes from the fact that the interval from root to the new note is a seventh. There are several types of seventh chords, but we will deal with only one in theory for a few years.

Dominant seventh chord

A seventh chord on the fifth scale degree, or dominant, in a key is called the "dominant seventh chord". It is sometimes marked as D7, and sometimes as V⁷. (The official name of the dominant seventh is "major-minor seventh", which reflects the fact that it has a major triad to which has been added a minor seventh.)

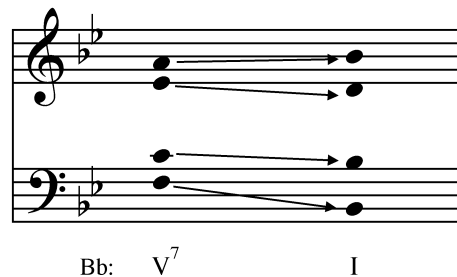
dominant seventh chord in B \flat (major or minor)



Resolution of D7

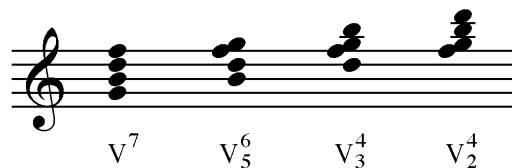
All sounds making V⁷ have a strong tendency to resolve to members of the tonic triad. The chord is constructed of scale degrees 5, 7, 2, and 4. The root, which is the dominant pitch, wants to go to tonic. We have already shown that scale degrees 2 and 7 are unstable, and resolve to scale degree 1. And the tritone between 7 and 4 resolve to 1 and 3, respectively. A correctly resolved V⁷ in root position (i.e., where the root is the lowest-sounding pitch) will therefore produce a tonic triad with three roots and a third, as in the example below.

resolving a dominant seventh



Inversions of seventh chords

The dominant seventh chord can also be inverted. Because it has 4 sounds, it has more inversions than a triad. The chord could be rotated three times before it comes back to root position. The example below shows the inversions and the figures used to describe them (which are called figured bass symbols). Be sure to remember that an inversion depends on which chord member is the lowest one to sound, that is to say whether the root, third, fifth, or seventh is in the bass (or lowest voice).



Resolving the inverted dominant seventh

All the tones within the dominant seventh resolve according to their tendencies, as laid out earlier in the text. The same is true for inversions, with one nice exception: Since the fifth scale degree is not in the bass, it can now hold its note, and the tonic triad which follows can now be a full triad. Inversions will depend on the chord tone of the dominant seventh which was in the bass.

Inversions of V^7 resolved:

V^6_5 I^5_3 V^4_3 I^5_3 V^4_2 I^6

Texture

Musical sounds may be combined in an amazing number of different ways. The way all the musical elements present combine is called musical texture.

Monophony

Melody with no accompaniment is called monophony, no matter how many people sing or play the melody, or whether they sing in the same octave or not.

Monophony:

Polyphony

Two or more melodies sung at the same time create polyphony, the texture that is the hallmark of western classical music, and other western musical styles as well (such as rock, jazz, blues, and so forth.) An example of polyphony is provided on page 22.

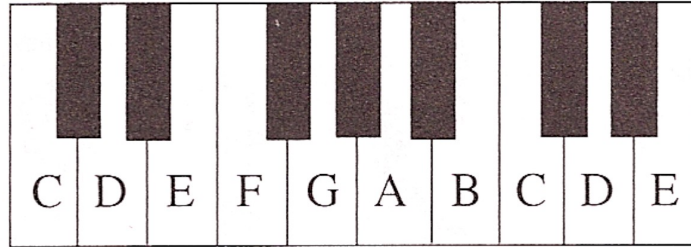
Homophony

A melody accompanied with chords is homophony, which is probably the most commonly-encountered type of polyphony.

Homophony:

Appendix 1

Keyboard Layout and Octave (Register) Names



Because there are so many pitches with the same name, it helps us communicate if we have some agreement about how to refer to the octave one belongs to. The first system, below, is the oldest and most widely accepted. The octaves referred to here as "first", "second", and so forth are often called "first-line", "second-line", and so forth. We write the pitch names to reflect this organization, as indicated in the names below the staff.

sub-contra contra great small first second third fourth fifth
 c¹ b¹ c² b² c³ b³ c⁴ b⁴ c⁵

AAA BBB CC BB C B c b

Detailed description: This diagram shows two staves of music. The upper staff (treble clef) shows a sequence of notes: C¹, B¹, C², B², C³, B³, C⁴, B⁴, C⁵. Brackets below the staff group these notes into five categories: sub-contra (C¹, B¹), contra (C², B²), great (C³, B³), small (C⁴, B⁴), and first (C⁵). The lower staff (bass clef) shows notes: C, B, c, b. Brackets below the staff group these into four categories: AAA BBB (C, B, c), CC (C), BB (B), and BB (B). The notes C and B are shown with ledger lines below the staff, while c and b are on the first line.

Octave identification system of the International Acoustical Society.

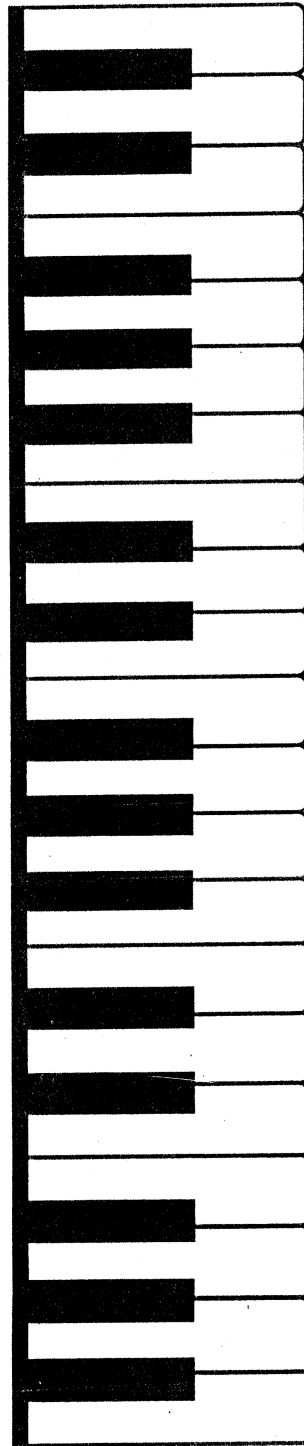
C⁴ B⁴ C⁵ B⁵ C⁶ B⁶ C⁷ B⁷ C⁸

C⁰ B⁰ C¹ B¹ C² B² C³ B³

Detailed description: This diagram shows two staves of music. The upper staff (treble clef) shows a sequence of notes: C⁴, B⁴, C⁵, B⁵, C⁶, B⁶, C⁷, B⁷, C⁸. The lower staff (bass clef) shows notes: C⁰, B⁰, C¹, B¹, C², B², C³, B³. The notes C⁰ and B⁰ are on the first line, C¹ and B¹ are on the second line, C² and B² are on the third line, and C³ and B³ are on the fourth line.

Appendix 2

Keyboard for use with exercises.



Appendix 3

Longy Rhythm Method Rudimentary Description

Premise: everything is counted by the beat, conducting gives place in measure.


→ all beats therefore start with “one”

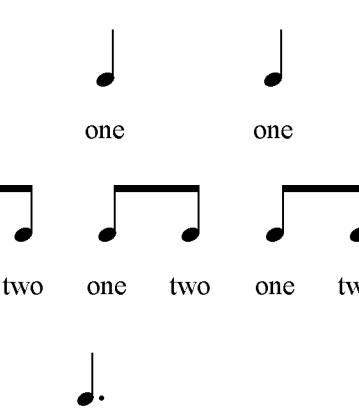
Speak the division of the beat.

→ thus even eighths in simple time: “one-two, one-two”, etc.

→ and even eighths in compound time: “one-two-three, one-two-three”, etc.


$\frac{4}{4}$ 
one one one one

$\frac{4}{4}$ 
one two one two one two one two

$\frac{6}{8}$ 
one one

$\frac{6}{8}$ 
one two three one two three

The syllable denoting a division of the beat continues to sound as long as the note is held.

$\frac{4}{4}$ 
one two ——— two one two ———

$\frac{4}{4}$
one two ——— two one two ———

Rests are not enunciated *per se* (though they could be), but made clear by stopping the solmization.

one two ————— two

Further divisions of the beat are always “ta”.

- straight sixteenths, simple time: “one-ta-two-ta”
- straight sixteenths, compound time: “one-ta-two-ta-three-ta”

one two one ta two ta one two one ta two ta

one two three one ta two ta three ta

One can go deeper, but for the purposes of our classes, this is about as far as it needs to go.

Some extensions:

- If a beat is divided into tuplets, count the divisions (e.g., quintuplet would be 1-2-3-4-5).
- Generally, the prevalent (standard) subdivision is tapped, with beats conducted.
- For clarity, one could decide to tap a smaller division as if it were a first level division of the beat, and count its subdivisions.

one one two one one two three

Additional information:

- conducting is a necessary component, since it provides location in measure
- tapping subdivisions of beat is critical as well, since it provides an internal "slot" for the divisions that are not enunciated

Appendix 4

Table of Intervals

| name | abbreviation | half steps (IC number*) | whole and half steps | ways to think |
|--------------------|--------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| minor second | m2 | 1 | 1H | leading tone to tonic |
| major second | M2 | 2 | 1W | scale degree 1 to 2, major or minor key |
| minor third | m3 | 3 | 1W, 1H | scale degree 1 to 3, minor key |
| major third | M3 | 4 | 2W | scale degree 1 to 3, major key |
| perfect fourth | P4 | 5 | 2W, 1H | in major, perfect 4 everywhere except s.d. 4 to 7 |
| augmented fourth | A4 | 6 | 3W | scale degree 4 to 7, major key |
| diminished fifth | D5 | 6 | 2W, 2H | scale degree 7 to 4, major key |
| perfect fifth | P5 | 7 | 3W, 1H | in major, perfect 5 everywhere except s.d. 7 to 4 |
| minor sixth | m6 | 8 | 3W, 2H | half-step beyond P5; inversion of M3 |
| major sixth | M6 | 9 | 4W, 1H | whole step beyond P5; inversion of m3 |
| minor seventh | m7 | 10 | 4W, 2H | m3 beyond P5; inversion of M2 |
| major seventh | M7 | 11 | 5W, 1H | M3 beyond P5; inversion of m2 |
| perfect octave | P8 | 12 | 5W, 2H | |
| minor ninth | m9 | 13 | | |
| major ninth | M9 | 14 | | |
| minor tenth | m10 | 15 | | |
| perfect eleventh | P11 | 16 | | |
| augmented eleventh | A11 | 17 | | |
| diminished twelfth | D12 | 18 | | |
| perfect twelfth | P12 | 19 | | |

Any perfect or minor interval becomes diminished when reduced by a half step.

Any perfect or major interval becomes augmented when increased by a half step.

*IC number means *interval class number*, which is a way to refer to intervals by number of half steps included.

Appendix 5


The Church Modes

Some of the earliest work in music theory had to do with figuring out the scales used in Gregorian chant. The result is known today as the church modes. Sharps and flat were unknown in such ancient times, which is nice for the ease of using them today. We can use the pitches of C major (the C-major pitch set) and simply begin and end on a particular note, and the pattern of whole- and half-steps changes. This way of remembering the modes also allows you to sing a mode that belongs to a set of pitches from any major scale.

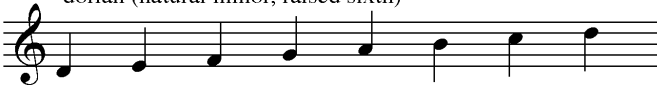
In the table on the right, you'll notice that each mode starts on a different scale degree of C major. The same will be true of any set of notes coming from a particular major key. For example, scale degree 2 to 2 using the pitches of a major key will produce a dorian mode *on* that second scale degree.

Each mode is also described here in terms of how it differs from either a major scale starting on the same note, or a natural minor scale starting on the same note.


ionian (major)




dorian (natural minor, raised sixth)




phrygian (natural minor, lowered second)




lydian (major, raised fourth)




mixolydian (major, lowered seventh)



aeolian (natural minor)



locrian (natural minor, lowered second and fifth)



Appendix 6

Glossary of musical terminology

| | |
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| accent | A heavy attack indicated by the symbol, >, placed above or below a note head. |
| accidental | Natural, sharp, or flat symbol that alters the pitch of a note. |
| antecedent | A phrase whose ending is in need of a second phrase to complete the musical thought, much like a question. |
| articulation | The manner in which a note is begun and ended during performance, indicated by symbols placed above or below a note head. |
| asymmetrical meter | a meter containing unequal beat units, i.e. some beats divide into two parts, some into three |
| augmented | (literally, "enlarged") A major or perfect interval which has been enlarged by half step. Also applied to a triad (which gets its name from the interval.) |
| bar | See measure. |
| barline | The vertical line that begins and ends each measure. |
| beam | The thicker line that connects the stems of consecutive 8th, 16th, etc. notes; beaming of notes should be according to the beat. |
| binary | Binary is two-part form. It generally involves little contrast, and features continuity. It can be represented as A-B or A-A'. |
| cadence | Cadence marks the end of a musical phrase, passage, or larger form. It provides a sense of closure or repose. |
| canon | An extensive process of imitation. A following voice duplicates exactly what the leading voice has done, at a precise distance 1) above or below in pitch and 2) behind in time. |
| chord | Any grouping of three or more notes sounding together. |
| chromaticism | Presence of accidentals outside the key. In melody, it may be purely decorative, or may represent an aspect of functional harmony. |
| circle of fifths | A chart presenting relationship of keys organized by 5ths. |
| clef | The musical symbols that determine the pitch names and pitch register of the staff. |
| composition | Composition is making up and writing down music in non-real-time. |

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| compound division | The division of the beat into three equal parts. |
| compound interval | Intervals larger than an octave. Interval quality remains the same whether compound or simple, thus a minor tenth is a compound minor third. |
| consequent | A phrase which provides the needed completion posed by an antecedent, much like an answer does. |
| consonance | A stable musical sound. Commonly understood as an agreeable combination of musical tones. |
| counterpoint | The way melodic lines relate to each other; historically, the craft of controlling dissonance and consonance. |
| D.C. al fine | Abbreviation for "da capo al fine" (literally, "from the head to the end"); usually found below the last printed measure of a piece of music, directing the performer to return to the beginning and perform the music until the "fine" indication is printed in the music. |
| diatonic scale | Any stepwise arrangement of the seven "natural" pitches. In particular, the major and natural minor scales. |
| dictation | Dictation is a process of writing down what is heard. |
| diminished | (literally, "reduced") An interval or triad with a half step removed. Commonly encountered examples include the diminished fifth, the diminished triad and the diminished seventh. A diminished interval is labeled with a lower case "d"; a diminished triad or seventh chord is indicated with the degree sign, "°". |
| dissonance | An unstable musical sound. Commonly understood as a disagreeable combination of tones. |
| dominant | 1) the fifth degree in a scale, relatively stable, and 2) the chord constructed on it |
| double flat | The sign used to lower the pitch of a note by a whole step. |
| double sharp | The sign used to raise the pitch of a note by a whole step. |
| dynamics | Loudness of performance as expressed by symbols placed in the music. |
| fermata | A symbol which indicates that the note or chord should be held longer than notated. How much longer it is held depends on a number of factors. |
| figured bass symbol | (figured bass numerals) A set of numerals arranged vertically from low to high (reading up) which indicate the intervals present above the bass note. |

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| flag | The symbol on a stem that represents divisions of a beat smaller than a quarter note. One flag equals an eighth note. Two flags equals a sixteenth note. |
| flat | The sign used to lower the pitch of a note by a half step. |
| form | Musical form speaks of common ways of organizing large spans of music. Concepts such as contrast vs. repetition, modulation, departure and return are involved in the study of form. |
| functional harmony | A system of relations between chords in tonal music. |
| half step | (also half tone) The smallest musical interval. The distance between two adjacent pitches in the chromatic scale, or the difference between two adjacent keys on the piano. (i.e. The distance between a white and black key on the piano.) |
| harmonic interval | The distance between two pitches when the pitches are presented simultaneously. |
| harmonic minor | Version of the minor scale with raised seventh scale degree (compared to natural minor). |
| harmony | Agreement, concord in Greek. Harmony is music in its vertical aspect; Harmony also means chords supporting melody. |
| homophony | The most common musical texture, in which a single melody on top is supported by a chord progression. |
| imitation | When one musical part repeats what another just did, often at a different pitch location (transposition). |
| improvisation | Improvisation is making up the music as one produces it, usually relying on limited materials or concepts, and drawing heavily on memory. |
| interval | The distance between two notes, either melodically (sounding sequentially) or harmonically (sounding together). |
| interval quality | The general sound of an interval; there are several ways to classify quality, with the most common being major, minor, perfect, diminished and augmented intervals. |
| inversion (triad) | A triad with the third or fifth in the lowest sounding position. |
| inversion (interval) | Moving a lower note of a simple interval one octave higher, or a top note of an interval one octave lower. |
| key | Organizing music around one note (the first note of a scale, also called tonic); consists of a set of hierarchical relationships. |

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| key signature | Sharps or flats which maintain the structure (placement of semitones) in a given scale, written immediately after a clef on every staff. |
| ledger line | An extension of the staff. A line placed above or below the staff to extend its range. Ledger lines are only long enough to make single notes or notes of a chord legible; they never connect with each other. |
| legato | A smooth and connected performance style. |
| major second | (M2) See whole step. |
| major interval | Larger: seconds, thirds, sixths and sevenths each have a larger and smaller version; the major version of each is found above tonic in a major scale. |
| major scale | The whole- and half-step pattern defined by the white notes on a keyboard from C to c; the pattern when ascending is W-W-H-W-W-W-H, where W is a whole step and H is a half step; the brighter quality of this scale leads to its commonly-described quality as "happy". A scale with semitones between 3rd and 4th, 6th and 7th steps. |
| major triad | The triad which contains a major third and perfect fifth above its root, commonly described as "happy". |
| measure | The combination of notes and rests contained between two barlines. |
| mediant | Scale degree 3 and the chord built upon it. |
| melodic interval | The distance between two pitches when the pitches are presented one after another. |
| melodic minor | Version of the minor scale with raised scale degrees 6 and 7 ascending motion (compared to natural minor), descends using the natural minor form (i.e., lower scale degrees 6 and 7 on the way back down). |
| melody | A series of musical pitches presented sequentially in a given rhythm, a top line of a song. |
| meter | The pulse in music represented by the time signature. |
| minor second | (m2) See half step. |
| minor interval | Smaller: seconds, thirds, sixths and sevenths each have a larger and smaller version; minor intervals are a half-step smaller than major intervals. |
| minor scale | Best understood in relation to the major scale, with a commonly-described quality of "sad"; three versions of minor scales exist, with all sharing the minor third above tonic as a defining characteristic; the three forms of minor include natural minor , harmonic minor , and melodic minor . (See entry for each.) |

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| minor triad | The triad which contains a minor third and perfect fifth above its root, commonly described as "sad". |
| mode | A seven-note scale made of whole and half steps. The two primary modes are major and minor, others exist as well. |
| modulation | A change of key confirmed by a cadence. |
| monophony | The musical texture which features a single line. A texture is monophonic no matter how many individuals take part in executing a single line. |
| motive | The smallest recognizable musical idea, with characteristic rhythmic and intervallic patterns. |
| natural | The sign used to cancel a sharp or flat. |
| natural minor | A scale with semitones between scale degrees 2 & 3, 5 & 6; same as major scale with lowered 3, 6, 7. |
| notation | The system of symbols which allows music to be written and read. |
| note value | The rhythmic duration of a note. |
| overtone series | A set of frequencies made by the vibration of air when the pitch is produced. |
| parallel keys | Major and minor keys starting on the same tonic. |
| period | A complete musical thought that takes two or so phrases to express. The two common components of a period are an antecedent phrase and consequent phrase |
| phrase | A single musical statement marked by coming to a conclusion. Phrase in music is analogous to phrase in writing or speech. |
| pitch | A musical sound described as high or low, expressed through letter names or solfège. |
| polyphony | The musical texture marked by independence of melodic line. |
| predominant | Predominant <i>function</i> refers to a group of chords, each of which might precede the dominant chord in a cadence: II, IV, and others. |
| register | The location of pitch (high, medium, low). |
| relative keys | Major and minor keys sharing the same key signature. |
| repeat signs | Symbols which indicate that the music bounded, or surrounded, by them is to be repeated before going on. |

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| rest | The musical symbols that represent a period of silence. |
| rhythm | The combination of notes and rests that determine the length of sound and silence in music. |
| scale | A group of 5 to 12 sequentially arranged pitches. |
| scale degree | The number of scalar steps above tonic (the "key" note or "home" note); scale degree is expressed with an Arabic numeral with a carat ("^") placed above it. |
| sequence | Repetition of a melodic or harmonic pattern at successively higher or lower pitch levels. |
| semitone | See half step. |
| seventh chord | A four-note chord built in thirds from its lowest note. |
| sharp | The sign used to raise the pitch of a note by a half step. |
| simple division | The division of the beat into two equal parts. |
| slur | A curved line that indicates notes should be played legato. |
| solfège | Solfège is an ancient system of naming pitches. Longy uses "fixed-do" solfège, in which C = do, D = re, E = mi, F = fa, G = sol, A = la, and B = si or ti. |
| staccato | A manner of articulation producing a separated, detached style; indicated by a single dot appearing above or below the note head. |
| staff | A line consisting of five lines and four spaces in which music notation is written. |
| stem | The line attached to a note head, one octave in length, perpendicular to the line of the staff. |
| subdominant | Fourth degree in a scale, often preceding dominant in a cadence, and the chord constructed on it. |
| submediant | Scale degree 6 and the chord built upon it. |
| subtonic | Whole step below tonic, which is scale degree 7 in a natural minor scale. |
| supertonic | Scale degree 2 and the chord built upon it. |
| tempo | Speed of the pulse in music. |
| tenuto | A manner of articulation wherein a note is to be performed in a sustained manner; indicated by the symbol, -, appearing above or below the note head. |

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| ternary | Ternary is three-part form, built upon statement, departure, and return. It is often denoted simply as A-B-A. |
| texture | The way musical elements relate to each other, the "broad picture" of what's happening in the music. The degree of independence of lines which create the whole is an important factor. Western Classical music is known for creating and depending upon a sort of polyphony in which somewhat independent lines combine to function together to create a unified harmonic outcome. |
| tie | A curved line between notes that indicates continues for the duration of all connected note values. |
| time signature | The numeric symbol representing the number of beats in a measure and the organization of strong and weak beats. |
| tonic | The first and the last sound in a scale, the most important note that gives the scale its name. Tonic is most stable note in a scale. |
| transposition | Moving a music structure (phrase, part of a phrase) to a different pitch location |
| triad | A three-note chord built in thirds from its lowest note. |
| triad quality | The sound of a three-note chord resulting from the intervals created between the various notes; the four types include: major triad (major third on the bottom and minor third on top); minor triad (minor third on the bottom and major third on top); augmented triad (major third on the bottom and top); diminished triad (minor third on the bottom and top). |
| whole step | (also whole tone) The distance between two notes that equals two half steps. (Two white keys with a black key in between.) |