

# Simple Steps to Learning Major Scales

## BASICS

Knowing how scales are constructed takes the drudgery out of practicing because you'll be able to engage both your **mind** and your **fingers**. Here are the simple rules:

1. A major scale has 8 notes (**OCTAVE** means 8).
2. All major scales are constructed diatonically (alphabetically). The note **A** is followed by **B** (then **C - D - E - F - G - A**). When master musicians look at a pitch they comprehend note name, fingering and sound as one. Work to develop this skill.
3. Each scale has its own unique key signature. We know that key signatures carry through the full scale. The 12 major scales start on 12 different notes, using 12 different key signatures **however, all major scales have the same "Do - Re - Mi" melody**. This makes it easy to tell when you hit a wrong note!

2 3 4 5 6 7 8

DO	RE	MI	FA	SOL	LA	TI	DO
Ab	Bb	C	Db	Eb	F	G	Ab

4. Scales get their name from the **FIRST** note. As a time saver, Band Directors and musicians refer to scales using **CONCERT** pitch (ex.: **Concert** Bb scale). - See the next page for more on how to figure this out.

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## KEY SIGNATURE RULES

Attaching the correct **KEY SIGNATURE** to a scale is the "**KEY**" to success. Here are some simple tricks.

- FLATS always appear in your key signature in this order: **BEADGCF** (think the word **BEAD** and "**G**reatest **C**ommon **F**actor").
- SHARPS always appear in the reverse order: **FCGDAEB** (think "**F**our **C**ops **G**ot **D**onuts **A**t **E**d's **B**akery").
- FLATS and SHARPS will never appear together in a key signature.

- To play a flat scale (ex: Ab), take the name of the scale (Ab) and add one more flat to your key signature. Remember to start with Bb and go one flat past the scale name. For the Ab scale your key signature would include Bb, Eb, Ab and Db. Start on Ab and play up 8 notes thinking diatonically (alphabetically) using this key signature (play: Ab, Bb, C Db, Eb, F, G, Ab).

❖ **NEXT: MEMORIZE THESE TWO SCALES:** the C scale has no flats or sharps in the key signature. The F scale has a Bb in the key signature. These are exceptions to the rule below.

- For all other scales (scales that do not have a flat in their name and NOT the C or F scales) do the following:
  - Go to the sharp immediately below the scale name and consider it the final sharp in the scale's key signature. Remember to start with F# (Four Cops Got Donuts At Ed's Bakery). Example: For the A scale, the sharp immediately below would be G#. So the key signature for the A scale would include F#, C# and G#.
  - To play the scale, start on A and go up diatonically (alphabetically) 8 notes using this key signature (play: A, B, C#, D E, F#, G#, A).

## FIGURING OUT "CONCERT PITCH"

Scales get their name from the FIRST note. As a time saver, Band Directors and musicians refer to scales in CONCERT pitch.

So when you are asked to play a CONCERT C scale, what note do you start on? That's easy!

If you play flute, oboe, trombone, baritone, tuba or mallets you start on the CONCERT pitch, in this case you will start on C.

If you play clarinet, trumpet or tenor sax count C as 1 and go up alphabetically to 2.  
C = 1    D = 2    Start on D

If you play French horn count C as 1 and go up alphabetically to 5.  
C = 1    D = 2    E = 3    F = 4    G = 5    Start on G

If you play the alto sax count C as 1 and go up alphabetically to 6.  
C = 1    D = 2    E = 3    F = 4    G = 5    A = 6    Start on A