

The Language of Music

Think of music as a language. A language starts with an **alphabet**. In English we have a 26 letter alphabet from which we form words. In western music we have a 12 note (letter) alphabet from which we form chords (or words) and write melodies. We call the 12 note musical alphabet the **Chromatic Scale**. Here is what it looks like:

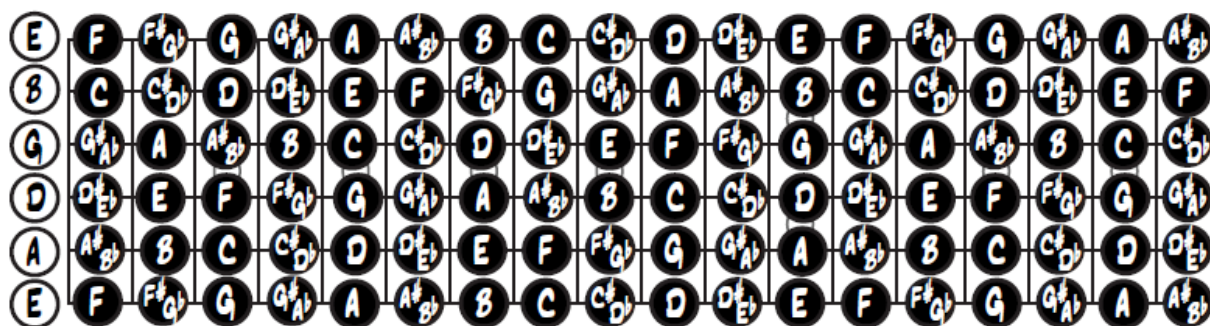
A A#/Bb **B** **C** C#/Db **D** D#/Eb **E** **F** F#/Gb **G** G#/Ab

The **Chromatic Scale** is made up of seven “natural” notes – A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. If you are familiar with the piano, these are the white keys. There are also five notes that share a name. They are underlined above. The # sign means sharp (or higher than) and the ‘b’ means flat (or lower than). These are the black keys on the piano.

With the A#/Bb note, the A# is higher than the natural note A that precedes it and the Bb is lower than the natural note B that follows it. Even though they have two names, they are the same note (or pitch). The name we use depends on the scale in which they are used. More on this in a lesson on Scales.

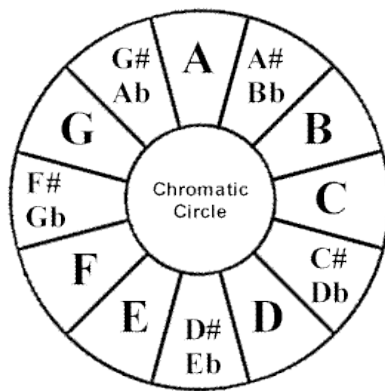
Notes on the guitar: There is one note of the Chromatic scale on each fret of your guitar.

The Chromatic scale shown above may be found on the fifth string. Played open, the fifth string is the note A. The first fret is A#/Bb, the second fret is a B, the third fret is a C, and so on until you get to the 12th fret where you play another A. This A is an octave higher the A played on the open fifth string.

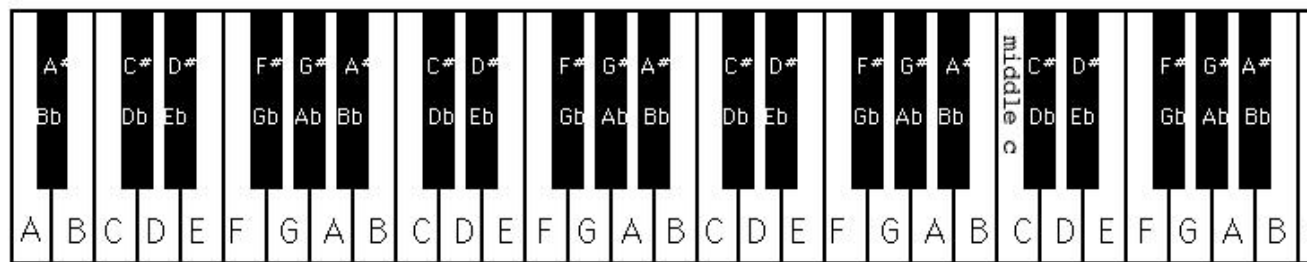


CHROMATIC SCALE ON WHOLE FRETBOARD

The Note Circle: The chromatic scale may be thought of and viewed as a circle. Starting with any note in the chromatic scale, going forward or backwards you will find the note repeats itself 12 notes later.



If we unravel the circle of notes and lay them out in a linear fashion we have the piano keyboard.



←-----Octave-----→←-----Octave-----→←-----Octave-----→←-----Octave-----→

Chords: Chords are the words of music that we make from the musical alphabet. A chord takes its name from the first note (letter) used to build it. Major chords are spelled with the first, third and fifth notes of the scale that is derived from the chromatic scale based on a formula starting with the beginning note of the scale. In the case of the **C chord**, it is spelled with the musical notes C, E and G. The **D chord**, it is spelled with the musical notes D, F# and A, the **A chord** is spelled A, C# and E and the **E chord** is spelled E, G# and B. There are similar spellings for all the chords you will learn.

A chord with just the **letter** *of the chord in its name is called a major chord. These chords sound pleasant or “happy”. A chord with a lower case “m” after its letter name is called a minor chord. These chords are spelled slightly differently and sound melancholy or sad. A **Dm chord** is spelled with the notes D, F and A. The **Am chord** is spelled A, C and E and the **E chord** is spelled E, G and B.

In addition to these chords, you will learn chords that have a number after the chord letter name and these chords will have one or more additional notes in it’s spelling. The first one you will learn is the B7 chord which is spelled B, D#, F# and A.

There are rules and patterns in music that dictate how a chord is spelled and this will be discussed in in a lesson on chords.

(* A major chord may have a # or b after the letter name)