

What Key is this in?

Common key signatures

Tonic is the starting note of scales. It is also referred to the home tone, because music has a feeling of wanting to go to the tonic. Melodic movement away from the tonic and then back to the tonic gives music much of it's expression.

In sharp key signatures, the tonic (starting note is a half-step above the last sharp. For example, if the last sharp in the key signature is G-sharp, the major tonic is A. The piece is in either A-major or F#-minor. Check the final note to see if it is an A or an f-sharp.

In flat keys, if there is one flat in the key signature, it will be a B-flat, the key is either F-Major or d-minor. Flat signs and sharp signs in key signatures are always in the same order. When there is more than one flat in the key signature, the major tonic is the same as the next-to-last flat. For example, if there

are four flats in the key signature, the next-to-last flat is A-flat. The piece is in either A-flat major or f-minor. Check the last note to determine the key

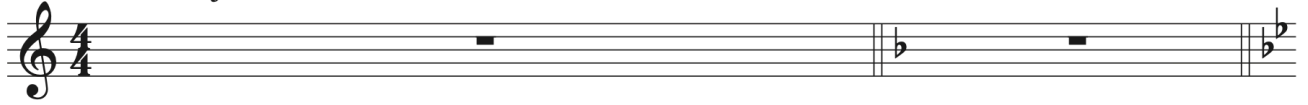
To find the relative minor of a major key, count down two notes (3 half steps) from the major tonic. In the key of A-major, for example.

count down A, G#, F#. The relative minor tonic is F#.

See samples for commonly used key signatures below.

Cmajor or a minor

F major or d minor



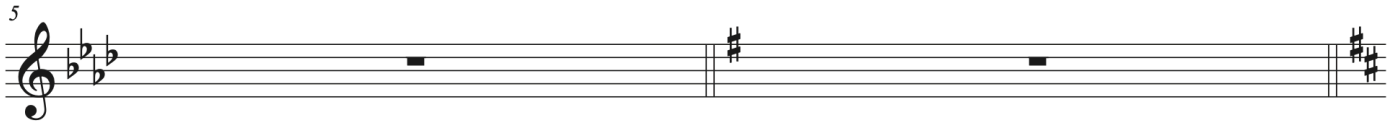
3 B-flat Major or g minor

E-flat major or c minor



5 A-flat major or f minor

G major or e minor

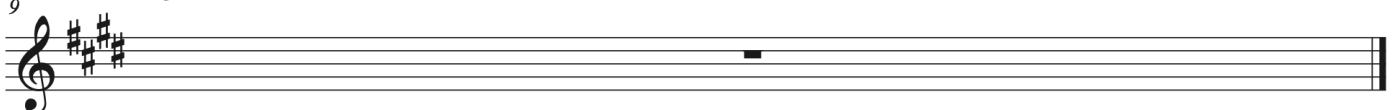


7 D major or b minor

A major or f# minor



9 E major or c# minor



See examples below.

Examples

Based on the key signature, “Summertime” could be in either C-major or a-minor. The last note is A, indicating that it is in a-minor

Summertime C Instruments

Gershwin

Slur and tie everything. Light swing.



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Summertime

Bass clef Instruments

Gershwin

Slur and tie everything. Light swing.

The musical score is written for bass clef instruments in 4/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first staff begins with a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. The melody starts with a quarter note G2, followed by a quarter note F2, then a half note G2 with a slur above it. This is followed by a quarter note E2, a quarter note D2, a quarter note C2, and a quarter note B1. The second measure of the first staff has a slur above it and a tie to the first note of the second staff. The second staff continues the melody with a quarter note A1, a quarter note G1, a quarter note F1, a quarter note E1, and a quarter note D1. The third staff continues with a quarter note C1, a quarter note B0, a quarter note A0, and a quarter note G0. The fourth staff concludes the piece with a quarter note F0, a quarter note E0, and a quarter note D0, ending with a double bar line.

Based on the key signature, “Happy Birthday” is in either C major or a minor. The last note indicates that it is in C major.

Score

Happy Birthday

Musical score for 'Happy Birthday' in treble clef, 3/4 time signature. The score consists of three staves. The first staff contains the first four measures. The second staff, starting with a measure number '4', contains measures 5 through 8. The third staff, starting with a measure number '8', contains measures 9 through 12. The melody is written in a simple, rhythmic style with quarter and eighth notes.

Score

Happy Birthday

Musical score for 'Happy Birthday' in bass clef, 3/4 time signature. The score consists of three staves. The first staff contains the first four measures. The second staff, starting with a measure number '4', contains measures 5 through 8. The third staff, starting with a measure number '8', contains measures 9 through 12. The melody is written in a simple, rhythmic style with quarter and eighth notes.

Tonal music (based on a tonic) music is most common. It does not always start and end on the tonic note, but it usually starts and ends on notes of the tonic triad, notes 1, 3 and 5 of the scale.

There are other kinds of music that are not tonal.

Modulation

Most pieces begin and end in the same key. They may change to other keys in the piece. If the section of the key change is large it may be indicated by a new key signature. If it is small section it may be

indicated by accidentals. Most popular songs, for example, change keys and the change is indicated by accidentals rather than a new key signature.

For example, if the piece is in C-major and B-flats are found, the piece has probably modulated to F-major or d-minor for a middle section.

Short pieces like “Summertime” and “Happy Birthday” usually are in one key without modulation.

Modulation is a large topic with more information in a separate lesson.