

Characteristics of Major Scales

1. All major scales are based upon a series of notes existing within one octave. The top note of the scale is the same pitch as the first note but one octave higher. NOTE: Scales should be performed in multiple octaves when applicable.
2. All major scales must follow alphabetical order using the common pitch names of A, B, C, D, E, F, and G and the sharp and flat variations of them. The only two pitches in a major scale that will share the same pitch name are the root (first pitch/note) and the octave of the root (last pitch/note). All other pitches must follow alphabetical order starting at **A** and going through **G** then beginning again at **A**. Examples: (A B C D E F G A; C D E F G A B C; F G A B C D E F – NOTE: The appropriate sharps or flats must be added to make these examples major scales. This example only expresses the alphabetic characteristic of the major scale.)
3. The first note of a major scale indicates the name of that scale. (NOTE: Do not confuse Concert Pitches with the actual name of the scale. (Concert Pitches are used to adjust the sounding pitch inherent to the key of a given instrument to a pitch referenced in the Key of C. – Refer to the chart on the right.)
4. Each major scale has a unique key signature comprised of a set of sharps, flats, or no sharps or flats (The absence of any sharps or flats in the key signature indicates the key of C major with regard to the major scale.). No two major scales share a common key signature.
5. You do not mix sharps or flats in a key signature. Sharps or flats add in a certain and consistent order. This order cannot be altered or rearranged.
 - a. Flats: B E A D G C F (up a 4th and down a 5th)
 - b. Sharps: F C G D A E B (down a 4th and up a 5th)(NOTICE – The order of sharps and flats is the opposite of one another.)
6. All major scales share a unique characteristic sound relative to the beginning pitch based upon a series of whole and half steps. Regardless of what note you use to begin the scale, this characteristic sound is easily recognizable. The pattern is as follows:

Whole Step | Whole Step | Half Step | Whole Step | Whole Step | Whole Step | Half Step

The two half steps in the sequence are the ones that distinguish the sound of the major scale from the minor scales and the church modes.
7. There are 15 key signatures. One major scale exists for each key signature (7 flat scales, 7 sharp scales, and one major scale with no sharps or flats). However, there are actually only 12 performable scales due to the fact that 6 of the scales share an enharmonic pairing (same playable scale, different pitch names): (F#/Gb), (B/Cb), and (Db/C#).

Tips for Learning and Rehearsing Scales

- First, familiarize yourself with the key signature and the notes of a given scale. Begin the learning process with the immediate objective of memorizing the pitches/notes of the scale. Use thought processes relating to the key signature of the whole/half step sequence.
- Rehearse the scale initially using whole notes (4/4 time) at a moderate tempo. Strive for pitch accuracy. Advance to half notes, then a half and quarter rhythm, and then the accepted/prescribed quarter and eighth note rhythm pattern. Increase the tempo at a rate in which you can comfortably perform the scale accurately. (speed will come gradually)
- Initially learn the lower octaves and become familiar with the characteristic sound of the scale, then advance to higher octaves where applicable. Transfer learning from one octave to another.
- To master the scales, rehearse them daily utilizing the full prescribed range for each scale. Consistency and accuracy/perfection should be your goal. *MAINTAIN THEM!*