

Music Theory for Guitar : Circle of Fifths

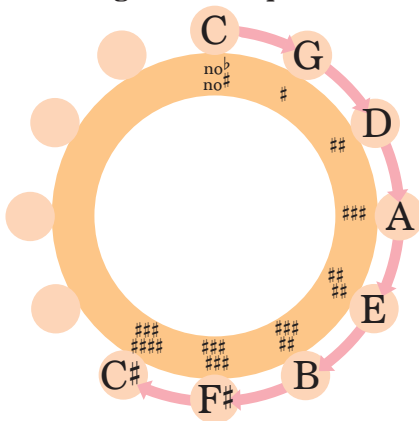
LESSON 4

REVIEW

The **Circle of Fifths** is essentially a filing cabinet. It is an explanation of how all Major Scales fit together in a neat and organized way. Starting with C, we can create a major scale that requires no sharps or flats to conform to the Major Scale Formula. If we move a perfect fifth forward to G and create a Major Scale, it can only conform to the Major Scale Formula if its seventh note, F, is sharp.

Here is where things get interesting! If we follow the same process with a G Major scale - using the 5th note of the scale to create a new Major Scale - all we have to do to make this new scale conform to the major scale formula is keep the sharps from the previous scale and sharp the 7th note of the new scale.

This cascade of creating a new scale with the 5th note of the previous scale continues until you arrive at the C# Major Scale, which requires every single note in the scale to be sharp. From there, the whole system of moving forward a perfect fifth and adding a sharp is done - there are no notes left to sharp. As shown below moving in a clockwise motion, the circle of fifths shows how each of the following scales requires one more sharp than the last: C, G, D, A, E, B, F#, C#.



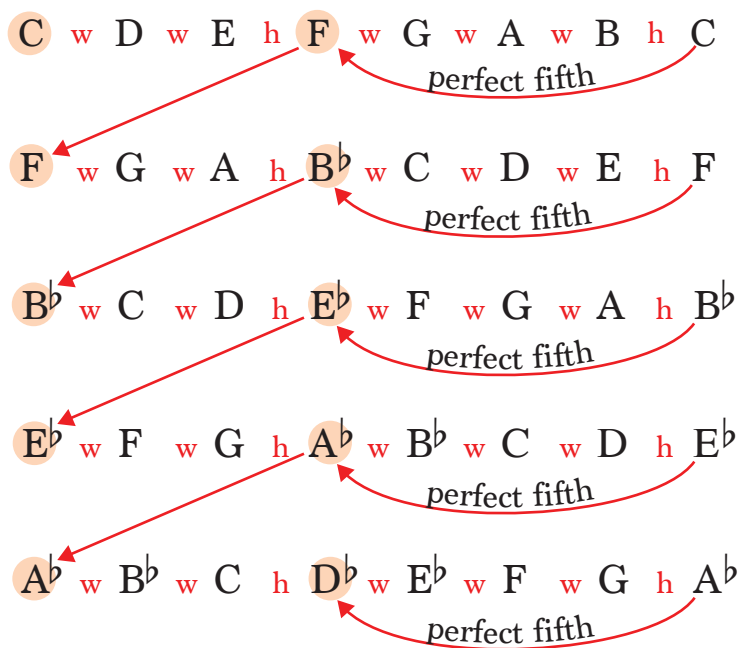
Now lets talk about flats. Going back to the C Major Scale, if we move backward through the scale instead of forward, we arrive at F, the 4th note of the scale. We've still moved a perfect fifth, but in the opposite direction. Creating a scale from this note gives us the first Major Scale requiring a flat to conform to the major scale formula.

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The method for adding sharps is to keep the sharps from the previous scale and then sharp the 7th note of the new scale. Here is the method for adding flats: Start your new Major Scale on the 4th note of the previous scale making sure to include all the flats from the previous scale. With the new scale, flat the fourth note of the scale to conform it to the Major Scale Formula.



On the left you can see how this system plays out. Just like with adding sharps, once every note in the scale is flat, we've created all possible Major scales with flats.

There is no Major Scale with two sharps or two flats on a single note. Once every note is sharp or every note is flat, that's the end of the "move over a fifth, add a sharp/flat" system.

It's important to note that the movement of a perfect 5th in either direction is technically the same distance. Moving forward we move wwhw to the fifth note (a perfect 5th) and moving backward to the fourth note (wwwh) is also a perfect fifth.

Looking at the chart on the right, we see the red arrows from the previous page, showing the order of sharps. In blue on the left side of the diagram, we see the order of flats.

Look at the bottom of the chart and you'll see some overlap. This is showing that there are two ways to represent these particular scales.

D^b and C^\sharp are technically the same note, and can be represented by either scale.

This is the same for the other two sets: G^b and F^\sharp , and C^b and B .

It is worth noting there are no scales for E^\sharp or F^b because those scales would require certain notes to have a double sharp or flat to conform to the scale formula, but E^\sharp is F and F^b is E , and there is a scale for both E and F .

