

*Section 3.4***T R A N S P O S I T I O N****Transposition  
of notes**

**Transposition** is the process of rewriting a note, chord, key signature, or melody higher or lower. The distance the music is moved up or down is called the **interval of transposition**. To transpose a single note, write the note that is the requested interval above or below the original note.

Example transposition with a transposition interval of M6 up:

Original note...      ...spell major 6th up...      ...Transposed note

**Transposition  
of chords**

To **transpose a chord**, transpose each note in the chord, **or** transpose the root and spell the same chord quality.

Example transposition with a transposition interval of M2 down:

Original chord...      ...transpose each note M2 down...      ...Transposed chord

Alternate method:

Original chord...      ...transpose the root...      ...spell same quality.

**Transposition  
of key signatures**

To **transpose a key signature**, transpose the tonic pitch. Then write the key signature that matches the transposed tonic pitch.

1. Find the tonic pitch.      2. Transpose the tonic pitch.      3. Determine new key signature.

M3 down = ???      A major      M3 down      F major

**Transposing  
a melody**

To **transpose a melody**, transpose the key signature (if there is one). Then transpose the notes. Notice that:

1. Any note that has an accidental in the original melody will also have an accidental in the transposed melody, though the particular accidentals may change, and
2. The scale steps from the original melody map onto the transposed melody; sometimes this can save time.

Original melody in A major...

Scale steps: 1 4 3 2 1 #4 5 6 2 7 1

...transposed down a M3 to F major.

**Transposing  
instruments**

When performers of **transposing instruments** play, the notes that come out are actually higher or lower than the written notes. To compensate for this, parts for transposing instruments are always written higher or lower than the desired notes. Each instrument has a specific interval of transposition. Instruments with no transposition are “in C,” meaning that a written C produces the same sounding pitch: C. Similarly, horn “in F” reads C but an F comes out. The notes and key signature are transposed to compensate:

Written notes for horn in F:      Notes that come out (down a P5):

**Common  
Transpositions**

The summary below lists common transpositions for transposing instruments. For clefs and specific ranges of these instruments, see **Essential Dictionary of Orchestration** by Dave Black and Tom Gerou.

1. **In C** (no transposition): piano, guitar, flute, oboe, bassoon, trombone, tuba, violin, viola, cello. Piccolo is in C, but sounds an octave higher than written. Double bass sounds an octave lower than written.
2. **In B flat** (sounds a M2 lower than written): clarinet, soprano sax, and trumpet. Bass clarinet and tenor sax sound a M2 plus an octave lower than written.
3. **In F** (sounds P5 lower than written): horn (French horn), English horn.
4. **In Eb** (sounds a M6 lower than written): alto sax. Baritone sax sounds a M6 plus an octave lower than written.