

Section 2.5

KEY SIGNATURES SELF-STUDY TIPS

Order of flats in key signatures

The order of flats on the staff for key signatures is B, E, A, D, G, C, F, which spells **BEAD-Greatest-Common-Factor**. The visual line/space pattern is up four, down five, counting the start as one each time.

Order of sharps in key signatures

The order of sharps on the staff for key signatures is F, C, G, D, A, E, B. You can remember this with **Fat Cats Go Down Alleys Eating Birds**. The visual line/space pattern is **down four, up five**, except A sharp.

Finding the key given a key signature

For flat keys, the key is the **second-to-last flat** in the key signature (except F major). For sharp keys, the key is always a **half step higher** than the **last sharp** in the key signature.

D \flat is second to last. One half step above G \sharp is A.

Exceptions:



D \flat major F major C major

Tricky keys:



A major F \sharp major C \sharp major

Frank/Metz key signature tool

Ken Metz and Robert Frank's excellent book **Fundamentals for the Aspiring Musician** (published by Routledge and available everywhere) includes this tool for major keys:

STEP 1: Write down the order of sharps: F, C, G, D, A, E, B.

STEP 2: Starting with C as 0, write the number of **sharps** above each note, **left to right**. G major has one sharp, D major has two sharps, A has 3, E has 4, and B has 5. When you get to 6, go back to F and write 6 for F sharp major and 7 for C sharp major.

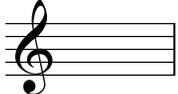
STEP 3: Starting with C as 0, write the number **flats** below each note, **right to left**. So F has 1, B flat has 2, E flat has 3, etc. Each column adds to 7; see **2.3 Learning Major Key Signatures**.

(F \sharp)	(C \sharp)					
6	7	1	2	3	4	5
F	C (0)	G	D	A	E	B
1	7	6	5	4	3	2
	(C \flat)	(G \flat)	(D \flat)	(A \flat)	(E \flat)	(B \flat)

The ultimate shortcut

The ultimate shortcut, and ultimate goal, is to **memorize all the keys**. Cover up the answers below to quiz yourself. Work on small groups at a time, practice major and minor keys separately, and learn both directions (say the key for a given number of sharps or flats **AND** say the number of sharps or flats for a given key).

Flat Keys

	C/a
	F/d
	B^b/g
	E^b/c
	A^b/f
	D^b/b^b
	G^b/e^b
	C^b/a^b

Sharp Keys

	C[#]/a[#]
	F[#]/d[#]
	B/g[#]
	E/c[#]
	A/f[#]
	D/b
	G/e
	C/a