

Memorizing Key Signatures Using the Guitar Fretboard.

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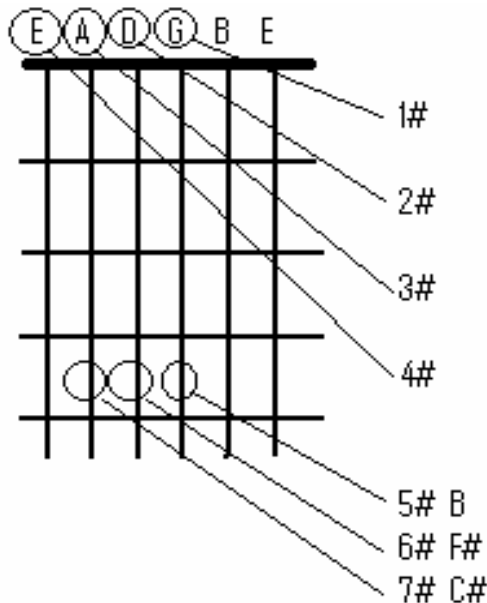
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If you know the lower guitar fretboard, there is a simple way to visualize the number of sharps or flats in a particular key. Here's how:

Relating Fretboard Notes to the Number of Sharps in a Major Key

If you are familiar with the circle of fifths, the circle has 12 positions like a clock with notes going around clockwise in perfect 5th increments. Each position represents a key signature. Starting at C with no accidentals (sharps or flats), the next 5th on the circle G has one sharp. Following this is D with two sharps. Next is A with three sharps, then E with four sharps.

Have you noticed that the guitar has four strings tuned to four of the keys just mentioned? Actually if you have a 7-string guitar with the 7th string tuned to B (also, a 5 string bass), you have five strings representing keys from one sharp to five sharps. This means that starting on the open third string G represents the G major key with 1-sharp, then the fourth string D has 2-sharps, fifth string A 3-sharps, sixth string E 4-sharps, seventh string B 5 sharps.



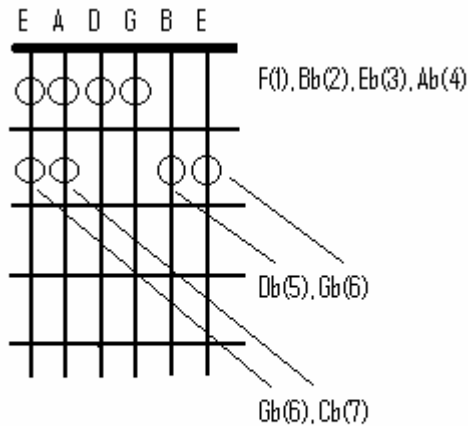
Now for the rest. Play, or imagine playing using a barre across the fourth fret. Then starting on the third string, the fretted note B is represented by 5-sharps. Below that on the fourth string is F# the key with 6-sharps, then on the fifth string is C# the key with 7 sharps.

Why does this work? Well, the guitar is tuned, with the exception of G to B strings, in fourths. As you may know, if you go around the circle of fifths counter-clockwise and treat the notes as if they are

ascending, you have fourth intervals. Think about this and you will understand why the descending string notes of a guitar are the same notes as ascending fifths.

Relating Fretboard Notes to the Number of Flats in a Major Key

The first part was not so bad because all you have to remember is, start on G string and call out string names descending. Then locate B on the third string with a barre and call out the notes on descending strings.



To find names of the flats we need to reverse our direction starting with a barre at the first fret 6th string. This is F represented by 1 flat. The 5th string is Bb with 2-flats. Next, the 4th string is Eb represented by 3 flats, 3rd string Ab represented by 4 flats.

For the next key, remember that the interval between the G and B string is not a perfect fourth. For a perfect fourth from Ab, move up to the 2nd fret on the 2nd string. This note is Db which has 5 flats. For the next keynote go to the top E string on the 2nd fret giving us a Gb.

Since we ran out of strings before getting the final 7 sharps, let's move our Gb to the 6th string. Then on the 5th string above, 2nd fret, we have the final Cb represented by 7 flats.

The Order of Sharps and Flats on the Staff

Just for reference so that we have everything in one document, the order of the Sharps and flats on the staff can be remembered by the following sentences.

Sharps:

Father **C**harles **G**oes **D**own **A**nd **E**nds **B**attle

Flats:

Battle **E**nds **A**nd **D**own **G**oes **C**harles **F**ather

Questions:

If you have any questions or comments about this text, contact jchamley@guitar-lessons.us.

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