

About Major and Minor Scales

Major and minor scales. The major scale is shown first, followed by its relative harmonic and melodic minor scales. "Relative minor" refers to the minor scale, or minor "key", that has the same key signature. "A minor" is the "relative minor" to C major because they both have a natural key signature. "Relative major" is just the opposite—the major key that shares the same key signature.

C Major



A minor (melodic)



A minor (harmonic)



D-flat Major



B-flat minor (melodic)



B-flat minor (harmonic)



D Major



B minor (melodic)



B minor (harmonic)



E-flat Major



C minor (melodic)



C minor (harmonic)



E Major



C-sharp minor (melodic)



C-sharp minor (harmonic)



F Major



D minor (melodic)



D minor (harmonic)



F-sharp Major



D-sharp minor (melodic)



D-sharp minor (harmonic)



G-flat Major



E-flat minor (melodic)



E-flat minor (harmonic)



G major



E minor (melodic)



E minor (harmonic)



A-flat Major



F minor (melodic)



F minor (harmonic)



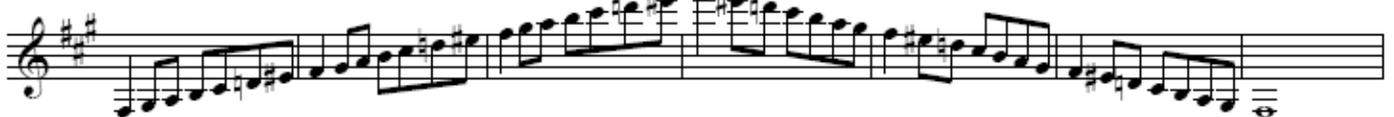
A Major



F-sharp minor (melodic)



F-sharp minor (harmonic)



B-flat Major

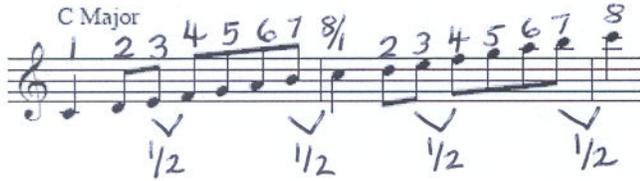


G minor (melodic)



Scale Structure

Major Scales: Major scales have half-steps between the third and fourth, and the seventh and eighth notes, like this:



Don't forget the natural half steps. B-C and E-F are half-steps; no sharps or flats are needed.

Harmonic Minor Scales: Harmonic minor scales have half-steps between 2-3, 5-6 and 7-8. This reduces the distance (the "interval") between the first and third notes of the scale by one half-step. Also, the interval between 6 and 7 is larger ("augmented") by one half-step, compared to the major scale.



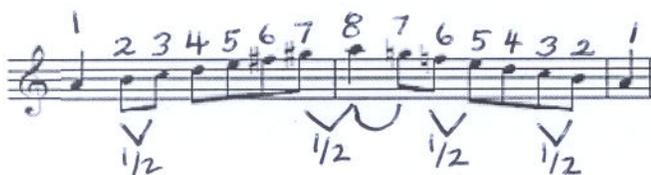
U = augmented 2nd

Melodic Minor Scales: Melodic minor scales are special because they use one pattern of half-steps going up, and a different one coming back down. Going up, we have half-steps between 2-3 and 7-8. Going up is the same as the major scale, except the third step is lowered by one half-step. Going down, we have half steps (in reverse order) between 6-5 and 3-2, resulting in a whole step 8-7.

The formula is:

Going up (ascending) Use the key signature of the major scale for the same key, except lower the third step by a half-step. The example below is for A minor-melodic, so we use the key signature for the A major scale, which has #F, #C and #G.

Going down (descending) Use the key signature of the relative major scale. The "relative major" is the key signature of the major scale having the same key signature as this minor scale. The example below for A minor-melodic uses the key signature for C major when descending.



U = whole step between 8 and 7, descending only.

An experiment you can try: Play The **C major** scale and listen to how it sounds. Then play the **C minor-harmonic** scale and listen to how different it sounds. Next, play the **C minor-melodic** scale, both ascending and descending, and hear the differences again. Very interesting! All three scales start and end of C, but they sound quite different. All this was done by shifting the positions of half-steps.

Related topics to look up . . .

- Mode
- Interval
- Solfège
- Circle of Fifths
- Tonality