

Minor Scales

Minor scales/keys are used by composers when they wish to express a different mood than those characterized by major scales in music. Minor scales and keys conjure feelings of sorrow or tension.

Minor scales also have their own unique set of intervals found between the 8 pitches in the scale. The major scale which used all white notes on the piano is the C major scale (example #1).

Example #1




The minor scale which uses all white notes on the piano the scale with no sharps or flats is A minor. The C major scale and the A minor scale are related (they are cousins) because they share the same key signature, no sharps or flats.

Example #2 shows that relationship very clearly. All of notes in the A minor scale are found in the C major scale with the difference between the two just the starting note or tonic. The C major scale starts on C which is its tonic and the A minor scale starts on A which is its tonic.

Example #2

Major

A single staff of music in treble clef showing the C major scale. The notes are C, D, E, F, G, A, B, and C, all written as quarter notes. The scale ends with a double bar line.

Minor

A single staff of music in treble clef showing the A minor scale. The notes are A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and A, all written as quarter notes. The scale ends with a double bar line.

The unique **relationship** of major and minor makes the work of studying minor simpler. As we know from the information above each major scale/key has a relative (cousin) minor that uses the same notes and key signatures however each starts on a different note (tonic). The starting note (tonic) for the relative minor is the sixth note of its major cousin. Another way of finding a major scale's relative is to find the note a minor third below the major and that is the tonic of the relative minor.

The minor scale referred to above is a **natural** minor because it is unaltered. The spaces between the notes are W 1/2 W W 1/2 W W.

Natural Minor Practice

In the worksheet below the starting note or tonic of a natural minor scale is given. Write the remainder of the scale using the W 1/2 W W 1/2 W W pattern or if you know major scales well you will find that the 3rd note of each minor scale is the tonic of its relative major and you can finish the scale with the notes you know are in the major.

Eight musical staves are provided for practice, each starting with a treble clef and a single note. The notes are: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, and C5. The first two staves (C4 and D4) have a natural sign. The third staff (E4) has a sharp sign. The fourth staff (F4) has a natural sign. The fifth staff (G4) has a natural sign. The sixth staff (A4) has a sharp sign. The seventh staff (B4) has a sharp sign. The eighth staff (C5) has a natural sign.

Harmonic Minor

Natural minor is only one of the three types of minor scales. There are also harmonic minor and melodic minor scales. These additional types of minor scales are used when composers wish to utilize minor keys in a melody and in a harmony.

The harmonic minor scale has a raised 7th scale degree compared to the natural minor. To raise a note 1/2 step there are three different methods. If the note is flatted to raise it apply a natural, if the note is natural apply a sharp, if the note is sharped apply a double sharp which looks like an X and raises a note two 1/2 steps or another half step above a sharp.

Write out the following harmonic minor scales with a raised 7th scale degree.

The image displays five musical staves in treble clef. The first staff contains a scale starting on C4, with notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, and C5. The second, third, fourth, and fifth staves are blank, each starting with a single note on the first line (C4) for practice.

Melodic Minor

The melodic minor scale has a raised 6th & 7th scale degree compared to the natural minor ascending and then descending the notes are lowered back to their original pitches similar to the natural minor. This makes a very unique type of scale one that sounds different when it is played up and down.

Write out the following melodic minor scales with a raised 6th and 7th scale degrees going up and then lowered back going down.

The image shows five musical staves in treble clef. The first staff contains the melodic minor scale for the key of D minor, written as a single line of music. The notes are: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C#5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The second, third, fourth, and fifth staves are blank, each starting with a single quarter note on the D line (D4) in the first measure, followed by three empty measures, intended for the student to write out the ascending and descending scales for the keys of E minor, F minor, G minor, and A minor.