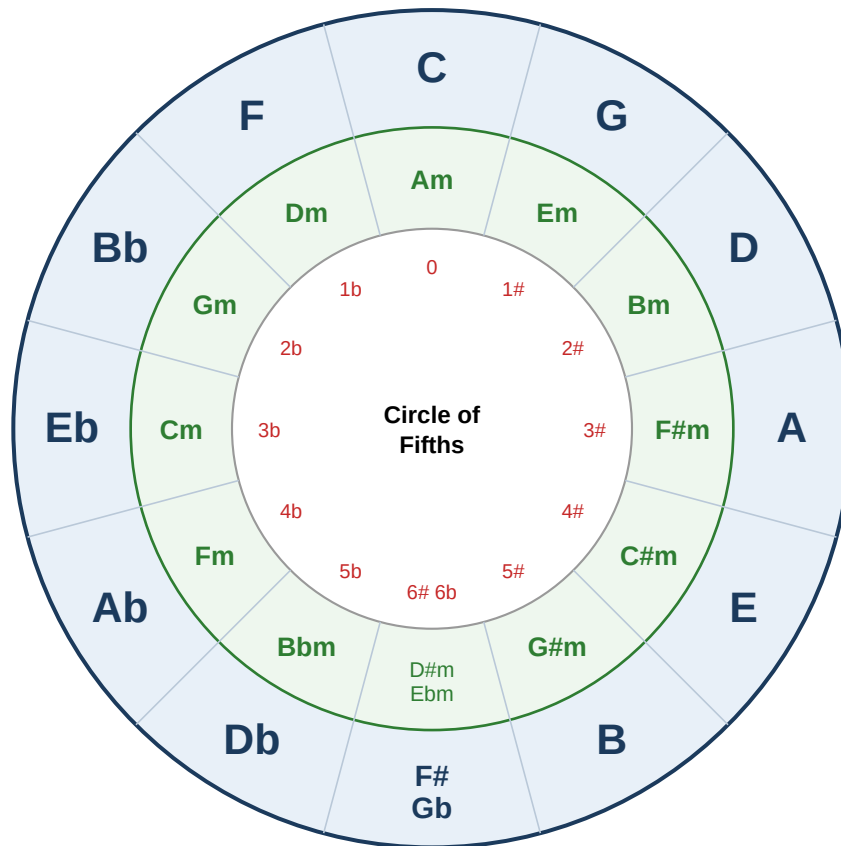


Lesson 12: The Circle of Fifths

Basic Music Theory for Guitar

What you will learn: one picture that shows all 12 keys, their sharps and flats, and how they connect.

The circle



Outer ring: major keys **Middle ring:** relative minor keys **Inner ring:** number of sharps (#) or flats (b)

What is a fifth?

A **fifth** is the distance from a note to the **5th note** of its major scale. From C, count C(1) D(2) E(3) F(4) **G(5)**. So G is a fifth above C. A fifth is always **7 frets** (7 half steps).

On guitar: a fifth is easy to find. Put your finger on string 6, fret 3 (G). The fifth is on string 5, **2 frets higher:** fret 5 (D). This is the shape of a **power chord**!

How the circle works

- **Go clockwise** (to the right): each key is a **fifth higher**, and has **one more sharp**. C (0) → G (1#) → D (2#) → A (3#)...
- **Go counter-clockwise** (to the left): each key has **one more flat**. C (0) → F (1b) → Bb (2b) → Eb (3b)...
- **At the bottom**, the two sides meet: **F# and Gb** are the same sound with two names (Lesson 2).
- **Inside**, each major key has its **relative minor** next to it (Lessons 9 and 11).

Why it is useful

1. **Key signatures**: you can see how many sharps or flats any key has.
2. **Chords that go together**: a key and its **two neighbors** make the 3 most important chords of that key. For G: **C, G and D**. Thousands of songs use just these 3 chords! (You will learn more in the chord lessons.)
3. **Changing key**: keys that are close on the circle sound good together.

Practice

1. Say the circle clockwise from C: C G D A E B F# Db Ab Eb Bb F.
2. Cover the circle. How many sharps does A major have? (3) How many flats does Eb major have? (3)
3. Play fifths on guitar: string 6 fret 3 (G) + string 5 fret 5 (D). Move the shape up 2 frets: A + E. Again: B + F#.
4. Find G on the circle. Play the chords of its neighbors: C, G, D. Play them in a row: G C D G.

Next lesson: The Relative Minor