

Lesson 13: The Relative Minor

Basic Music Theory for Guitar

What you will learn: how every major key has a minor "partner", and 2 easy ways to find it.

Two keys, the same notes

In Lesson 9, you saw that **C major** and **A minor** use the **same 7 notes**: C D E F G A B. They also have the **same key signature** (no sharps, no flats). The only difference is the **home note**:

- Home on **C**: it sounds **happy** (C major)
- Home on **A**: it sounds **sad** (A minor)

A minor is the **relative minor** of C major. And C major is the **relative major** of A minor. Every major key has one relative minor.

Way 1: the 6th note

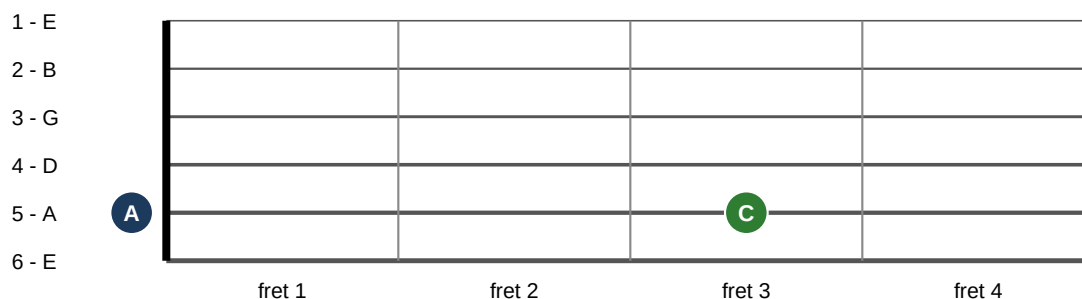
The relative minor starts on the **6th note** of the major scale:

Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C major	C	D	E	F	G	A	B

The 6th note of C major is **A**, so the relative minor is **A minor**. The 6th note of G major is **E**, so it is **E minor**.

Way 2: 3 frets down (the guitar way)

This is the fastest way on guitar. From the major key note, go **3 frets down** on the same string. That note is the relative minor.



C is on string 5, fret 3. Go 3 frets down: fret 0 = **A**. So A minor is the relative minor of C major. To go back from minor to major, go **3 frets up**.

All 12 pairs

Major key	C	G	D	A	E	B
Relative minor	Am	Em	Bm	F#m	C#m	G#m
Major key	F# - Gb	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F
Relative minor	D#m - Ebm	Bbm	Fm	Cm	Gm	Dm

These are the same pairs as the outer and middle rings of the Circle of Fifths (Lesson 12).

Do not mix up: relative minor and parallel minor

A **parallel minor** has the same home note as the major key, but different notes. Look at the difference:

	Relative minor	Parallel minor
Example	C major and A minor	C major and C minor
Home note	Different (C and A)	The same (C)
Notes	The same notes	Different notes
Key signature	The same	Different

Why it is useful for guitar players

- If a song is in A minor, you can use all your **C major** scale shapes, because the notes are the same.
- Songs often move between the two keys. For example, the chords **C** and **Am** sound great together, and so do **G** and **Em**, **D** and **Bm**, **F** and **Dm**.

Practice

1. Play C major on string 5 (frets 3 to 15), then A minor on string 5 (frets 0 to 12). Same notes, different home.
2. Find the relative minor of G major: string 6, fret 3 (G), go 3 frets down to fret 0 (E). E minor!
3. Find the relative minor of D major (string 5, fret 5). Go 3 frets down. What note is it? (B minor)
4. Play the chords C, Am, C, Am. Then G, Em, G, Em. Listen to the happy and sad sound.

Next lesson: Intervals