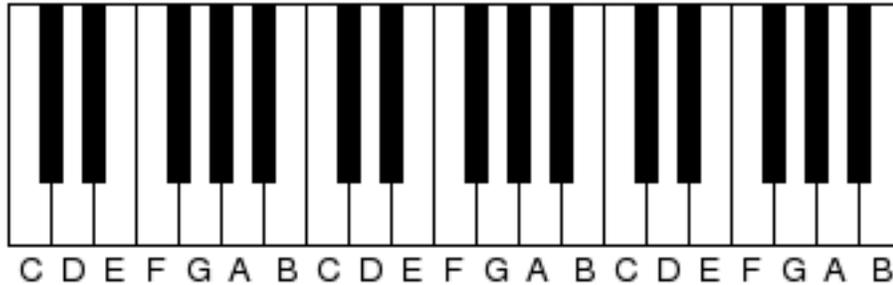


Unit 3 ~ Accidentals

Here is an illustration of the piano keyboard, showing the names of the notes:

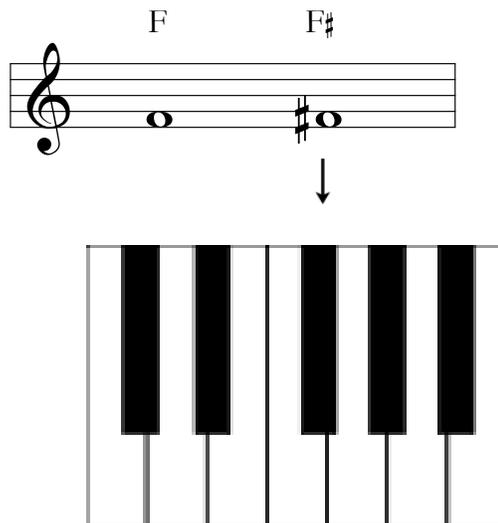


Now, notice that these note names refer to the white keys on the piano. What about all those black keys?

Well, to write the black key notes, we need ACCIDENTALS.

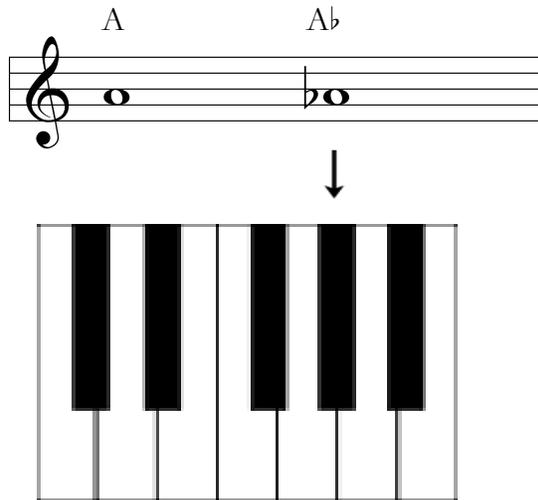
Accidentals are used to raise or lower notes. The most commonly used accidentals are SHARPS, FLATS, and NATURALS.

A sharp sign looks like a pound or hash sign and raises a note to the next note up. In this example, we put a sharp before the F, and this raises it to the black note between F and G, which is F sharp:

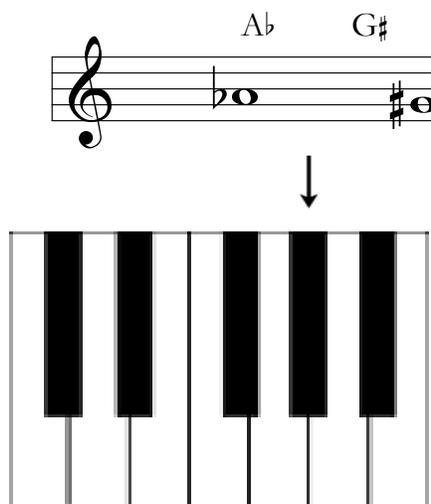


A flat sign looks a bit like a letter "b" and lowers a note to the next note down.

In this example we put a flat before the A, and this lowers it to the note between A and G, which is A flat:



I said just now that the note between A and G is called A flat. It is, but it can also be called G sharp, if we write it as a G with a sharp next to it. So, G sharp is the same note as A flat:



Pairs like A flat and G sharp are said to be ENHARMONICALLY EQUIVALENT

Another example is the pair F sharp and G flat. These are two different ways to name the black note between F and G

Now, suppose we want to cancel the accidental. For example, say we have raised F to F sharp but would now like to lower it back to F again. For this we use a natural sign.

In the following example, the first F is the white key. The second note is the black key right above it, F sharp. The third note is the white key F again.

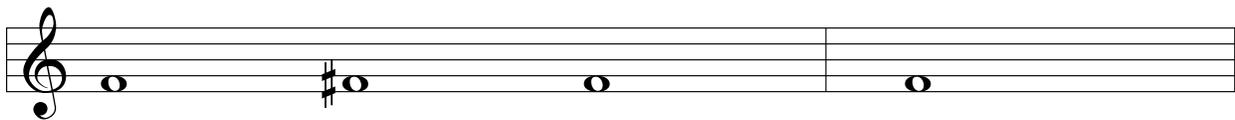


To fully understand accidentals we need to know a bit about BAR LINES. These are vertical lines that appear in the staff at regular intervals and divide the music up into sections called BARS or MEASURES. They make music easier to read and serve other purposes you will learn about later.

When we add an accidental to a note, that accidental stays in effect for the rest of the bar, and then is cancelled by the barline.

Let's look at an example. In the following,

- The first note is the white key F.
- The second note is raised, so it's F sharp, the black key above F.
- The third note is still F sharp because that sharp is still in effect
- The last note is the white key F because the sharp only lasts till the barline and this last F is in the new bar.



This illustration shows the most common names for the notes (there are other possibilities which you will learn about later):

