

LESSON 6

HOW THE BLACK NOTES ARE NAMED AND PRINTED

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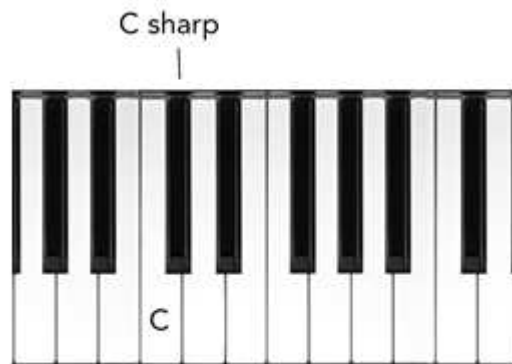
How sharps and flats are shown in text and printed music

A closer look at the sharp symbol

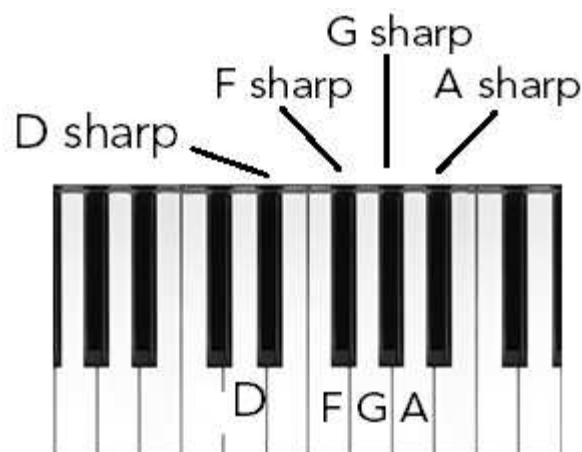
In lesson 1, you learned how to name each black note using the term 'sharp':

Reminder: a **sharp** is the note just to the right of a specific white note.

The black note to the right of the white note C is called C sharp:



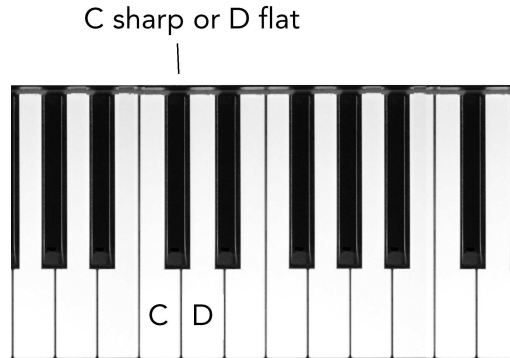
And similarly for D sharp, F sharp, G sharp and A sharp.



Sometimes, instead of saying a black note is 'just to the right of C' (C sharp), it is more appropriate to say that it is 'just to the left of D' (D flat). That is done using the term 'flat':

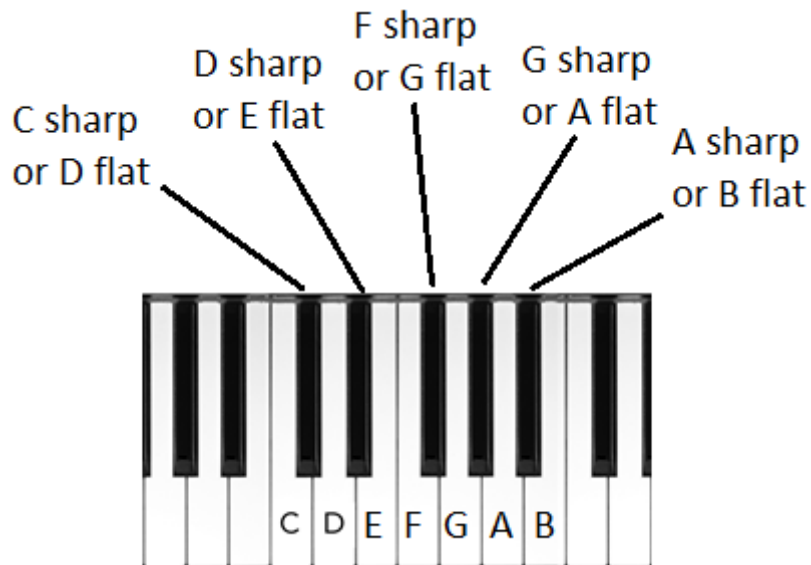
Definition: a **flat** is the note just to the left of a specific white note.

So we can see that 'C sharp' and 'D flat' are two names for the same black note.



Two names for the black note between C and D.

The same is true for the other black notes. Each of them can be named as a sharp or as a flat:



Here are the definitions of sharp and flat again, so you can see them together:

Reminder: a **sharp** is the note just to the right of a specific white note.

Reminder: a **flat** is the note just to the left of a specific white note.

Why we have two names for each black note

You may be wondering why we have two names for a note.

It is common in language to have more than one word for the same thing. Are you sitting in a chair or sitting in a seat? Did you eat your dinner or did you eat your chow?

Sometimes an object has two names that are used to convey different circumstances. When you are in a town, you walk along a street. When you are out in the country, you walk along a road.

And so it is with the black notes. Sometimes it is more appropriate to call the black note between G and A 'G sharp', and sometimes it's more appropriate to call it 'A flat'.

You'll learn more about that later in this book.

How sharps and flats are shown in text and printed music

We already learned the symbol for 'sharp' in Lesson 1:



The sharp symbol.

Here is the symbol for 'flat':



The Flat Symbol.

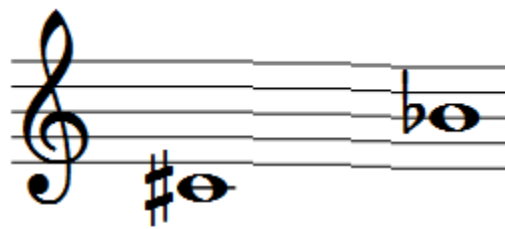
When referring to a black note in a sentence, we put the sharp or flat symbol *after* the name of the note, like this:

'He played a C# and then played a Bb'

which is spoken aloud like this:

'He played a C sharp and then played a B flat'

When indicating a black note in printed music, we put the sharp or flat symbol *before* the note. Here are the notes C sharp and B flat:



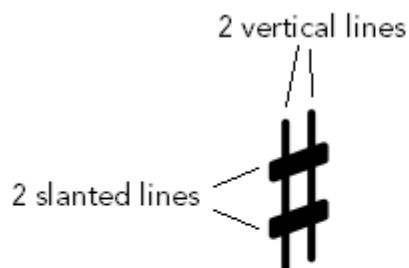
C sharp B flat

Look at the music above and play those two notes now: the black note just to the right of C, and then the black note just to the left of B.

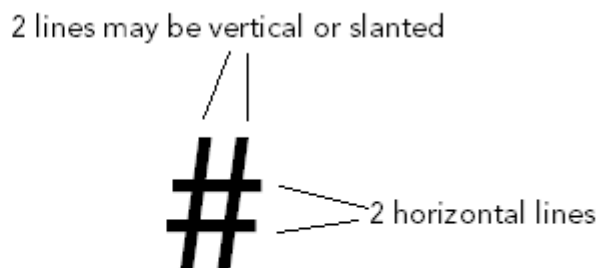
A closer look at the sharp symbol

At first glance, the sharp symbol looks rather like the symbol '#'. This symbol is known in America as the 'number sign' or 'pound sign', and elsewhere as 'hash'. It has become broadly used and known in recent years for 'hashtagging' in Twitter and other social media. A hashtag such as #beatles or #classical music helps people find information about a subject of interest.

But the sharp sign is printed differently from the hash symbol:

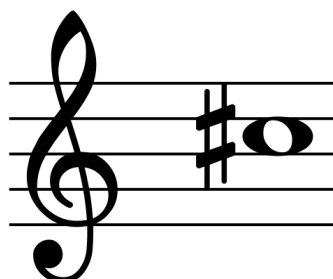


sharp symbol



hash symbol

The reason the sharp sign must have slanted lines instead of horizontal lines is so the lines are seen clearly against the lines of a staff:



The slanted lines of the sharp sign stand out clearly against the staff.