MUSIC THEORY COURSE – Module 1

Accidentals and Music Intervals

You have learned to name the notes, to represent them on the staff and even the duration of each rhythm symbol. What is missing here? The relation between the notes regarding their pitch. Music notes have a certain distance between each other, not in inches, not in centimeters but in intervals.

Music intervals are not relevant to learn how to play notes but they will help you to understand the structure of the tonal system (topic of the first lesson) and bring you a step further towards harmony and chords, a subject we will soon talk about.

Music intervals

I will number the notes to help understanding how music intervals work. The music interval between two given notes is named after the position of the arrival note in relation to a certain note (in English, please?) Sure.

If you would like to find the interval between A and B then it works this way:

- B is the second note counting from A, so the interval between A and B is called a second.

- C is the third note starting in A, thus the interval between both of them is a third.

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

Let's change the starting note:

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

- The interval between D and F is called a third, because F is the third note counting from D.

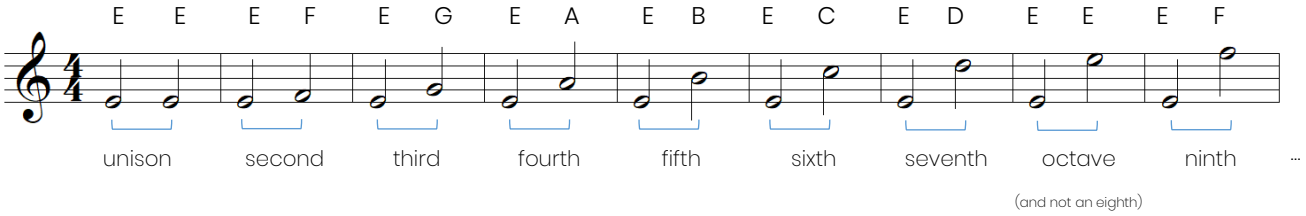
- B is the sixth note of the sequence above, so D to B is an interval of a sixth.

Tricky parallelism

G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
4	3	2	1	2	3	4	5

C is now the starting point, note number 1. If you move forward (to the right) on the scale, G is the fifth note therefore the interval is called a fifth. When you move backward the interval between C and G becomes a fourth. Tricky, right?

The music intervals on the score



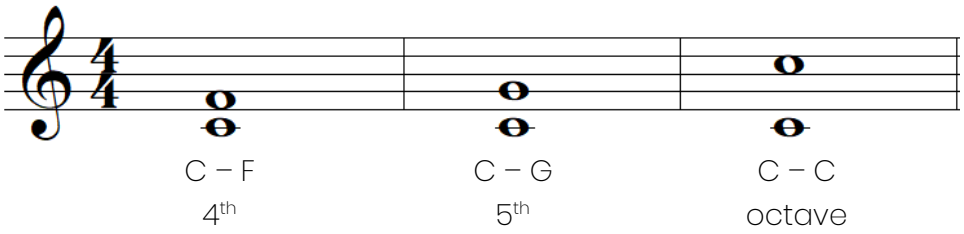
Types of Music Intervals

Music intervals are also classified according to their quality or type. There are 5 kinds of intervals:

Perfect Major Minor Augmented Diminished

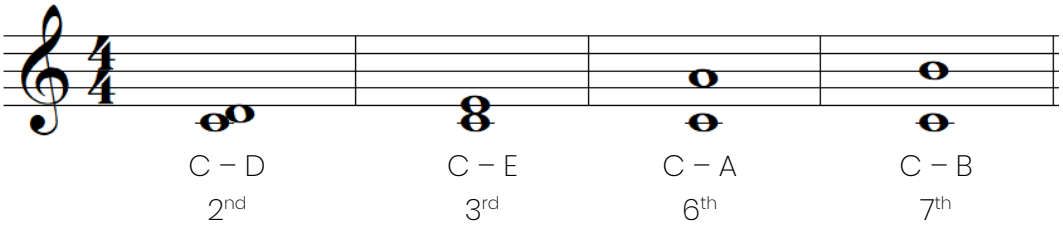
Intervals may be grouped in two types:

Perfect intervals



The fourth, fifth and octave are very consonant intervals, their tuning sounds crisp and clear. The frequencies of both notes fit perfectly together according to our ears. On the video of this lesson you can experience it.

Major and minor

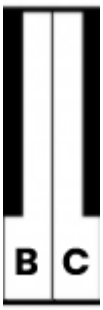


The intervals mentioned above are classified as major intervals. They can be transformed into minor intervals as well, whereas perfect intervals cannot.

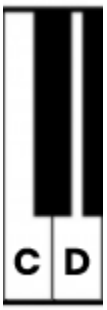
“When does a major interval become minor?” Good question. Let’s move onto the next topic.

Alteration of Intervals Using Accidentals

As you learned during the first lesson of this course, the distances between the music notes are not always the same.

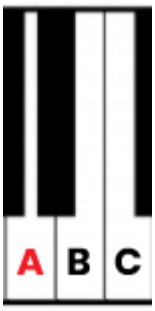


- The interval between B and C is called a second.
- The absence of a black key makes it a half-step distance between them. Therefore we call a minor second to this interval.

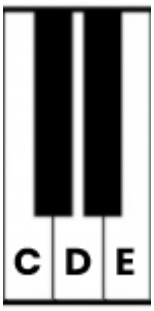


- The interval between C and D is also called a second.
- If we see a black key between the notes then the distance them is a whole step. In this case this interval is called major second.

Another example:



- A to C is an interval of a third.
- A third that includes one black key between the three notes involved is called minor third.



- C to E is also a third.
- Two black keys in this interval means we have 2 whole steps, therefore we call it major third.

The quality of an interval can change according the semitones or halfsteps in which a given interval consists, as you could see on the example above.

What if we would like to change the type of a certain interval?

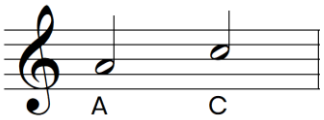
Accidentals

♯ - the symbol called "*sharp*" raises any note by half step or semitone

♭ - the symbol called "*flat*" decreases any note by half step or semitone

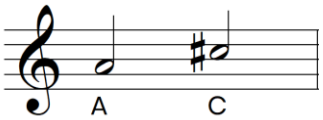
Using accidentals to stretch or shrink a music interval is very common in music theory and it created an infinity of possibilities to compose music. Below you can see the result of using accidentals (sharp and flat) to adjust music intervals.

Increasing the distance between A and C by using a ♯



C
A

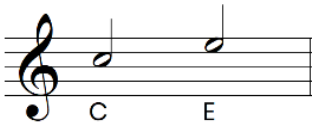
Minor third (one and half step)



C#
A

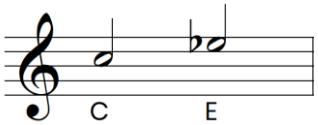
Major third (two whole steps)

Reducing the distance between C and E by using a ♭



E
C

Major third (two whole steps)



Eb
C

Minor third (one and half step)

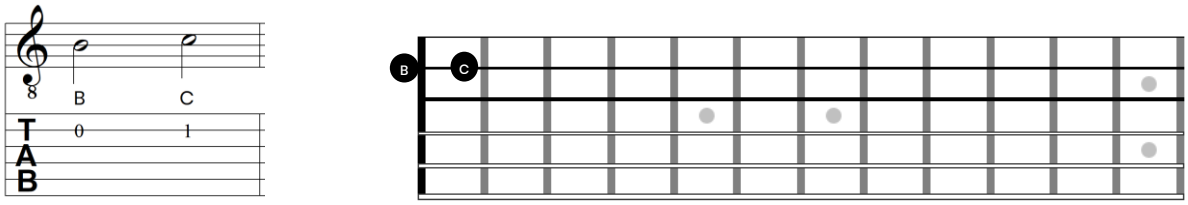
Summary

Here is a diagram with everything you need to know about the basics of music intervals and accidentals.

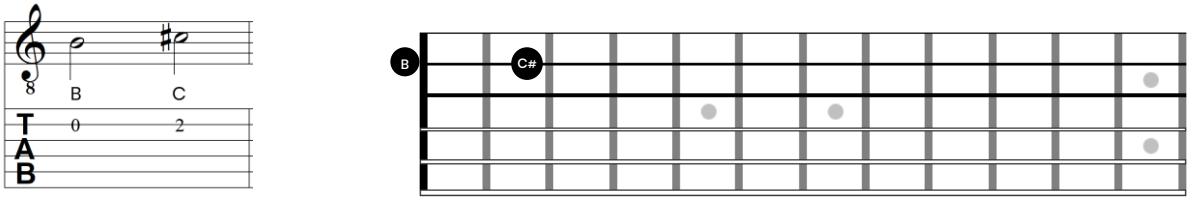
Music Intervals

Examples applied to the guitar:

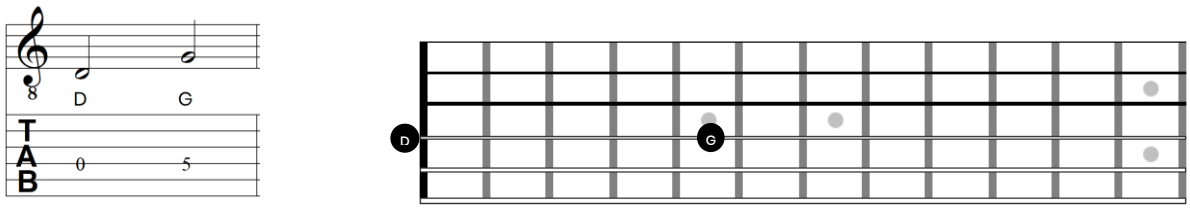
1. minor 2nd – half step or semitone distance



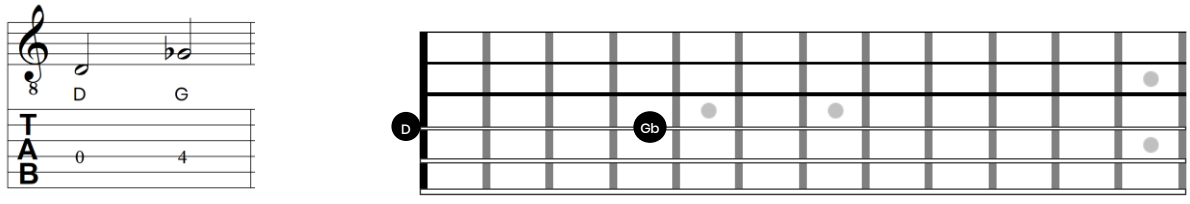
2. major 2nd – whole step distance



3. perfect 4th – 5 half steps



4. diminished 4th – 4 half steps



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