Interval Spelling

This cheat sheet contains tips, tricks, and reference tables for learning to "spell" intervals correctly in music.

If you don't know the basic theory of intervals you should read these free guides first:

The Ultimate Guide to Intervals

How to Spell Intervals

For full detail and explanation of all the tricks and techniques covered by this cheat sheet, see the following article:

How to Learn to Spell Intervals Fast

CONTENTS

Interval Sizes

To know which size of interval two notes correspond to, count through the letter names: A, B, C, D, E, F, G

Change in letter	Example	Interval size
Same	C to C	unison (or octave)
Next letter	C to D	second
2 letters on	C to E	third
3 letters on	C to F	fourth
4 letters on	C to G	fifth
5 letters on	C to A	sixth
6 letters on	C to B	seventh

Or you can just think in terms of numbering the notes of the ascending scale, e.g.

C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

gives you:

C = 1 = unison
D = 2 = second,
E = 3 = third,
F = 4 = fourth,
G = 5 = fifth,
A = 6 = sixth,
B = 7 = seventh

Number of Semitones

You can use the number of semitones in each interval type to match the right interval size and quality to the letter names and accidentals.

Interval	Semitones
Unison	0
Minor Second	1
Major Second	2
Minor Third	3
Major Third	4
Perfect Fourth	5
Tritone	6
Perfect Fifth	7
Minor Sixth	8
Major Sixth	9
Minor Seventh	10
Major Seventh	11
Perfect Octave	12

Table of Interval Spellings: Major Scale

Interval												
Octave	D ♭	A ♭	E ♭	B ♭	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F ♯
Maj. 7th	C	G	D	A	E	B	F ♯	C ♯	G ♯	D ♯	A ♯	E ♯
Maj. 6th	B ♭	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F ♯	C ♯	G ♯	D ♯
Perf. 5th	A ♭	E ♭	B ♭	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F ♯	C ♯
Perf. 4th	G ♭	D ♭	A ♭	E ♭	B ♭	F	C	G	D	A	E	B
Maj. 3rd	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F ♯	C ♯	G ♯	D ♯	A ♯
Maj. 2nd	E ♭	B ♭	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F ♯	C ♯	G ♯
Root:	**D ♭**	**A ♭**	**E ♭**	**B ♭**	**F**	**C**	**G**	**D**	**A**	**E**	**B**	**F ♯**

To use: simply find your root note at the bottom of the table, and then go up to the row for the interval type you wish to find.

For example, to find a perfect fifth above a D: find D in the bottom row, then go up to the "Perf. 5th" row to find the answer: A.
Or to find out the interval type between an E and the C ♯ above: find E in the bottom row and go up until you find C ♯ in the row for "Maj. 6th".

Table of Interval Spellings: All

Interval												
Octave	D♭	A♭	E♭	B♭	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F♯
Maj. 7th	C	G	D	A	E	B	F♯	C♯	G♯	D♯	A♯	E♯
Min. 7th	C♭	G♭	D♭	A♭	E♭	B♭	F	C	G	D	A	E
Maj. 6th	B♭	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F♯	C♯	G♯	D♯
Min. 6th	B♭♭	F♭	C♭	G♭	D♭	A♭	E♭	B♭	F	C	G	D
Perf. 5th	A♭	E♭	B♭	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F♯	C♯
Perf. 4th	G♭	D♭	A♭	E♭	B♭	F	C	G	D	A	E	B
Maj. 3rd	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F♯	C♯	G♯	D♯	A♯
Min. 3rd	F♭	C♭	G♭	D♭	A♭	E♭	B♭	F	C	G	D	A
Maj. 2nd	E♭	B♭	F	C	G	D	A	E	B	F♯	C♯	G♯
Min. 2nd	E♭♭	B♭♭	F♭	C♭	G♭	D♭	A♭	E♭	B♭	F	C	G
Root:	**D♭**	**A♭**	**E♭**	**B♭**	**F**	**C**	**G**	**D**	**A**	**E**	**B**	**F♯**

Shortcut: Interval Inversion Rules

Each interval type pairs up with a corresponding *inversion*, meaning that going up by one interval brings you to the same note as going down by the other (just in a different octave). For example, perfect fourths and perfect fifths are inversion pairs, so going up a perfect fourth from a C takes you to a G, just like going down by a perfect fifth from a C takes you to a G.

Learn the inversion pairs and you can immediately transform any descending interval task into a corresponding ascending one.

The size of interval changes like this:

Unisons ←→ Octaves
2nds ←→ 7ths
3rds ←→ 6ths
4th ←→ 5th
5th ←→ 4th
6th ←→ 3rd
7th ←→ 2nd

The quality of the interval in an inversion pair changes like this:

Perfect←→Perfect
Major←→Minor
Augmented←→Diminished

Shortcut: Rules of Thumb for Accidentals

There is a set of simple rules you can memorise to tell you the right accidental for each interval type.

By looking at the tables above, you can spot certain patterns in the relationship between the accidental of the root (bottom) note of the interval, and the accidental of the top note.

There is a set pattern for each interval type, so you can learn a simple rule for each interval type and immediately know how to spell that interval starting from any note.

Here are the rules, for the intervals of the major scale:

	Accidental of top note:	**Except for root...**
Major Second:	matches	E/B: raised one
Major Third:	raised one	F/C/G: matches
Perfect Fourth:	matches	F: lowered one
Perfect Fifth:	matches	B: raised one
Major Sixth:	matches	A/E/B: raised one
Major Seventh:	raised one	F/C: matches

Here are the rules for all interval types:

	Accidental of top note:	**Except for root...**
Minor Second:	lowered one	E/B: matches
Major Second:	matches	E/B: raised one
Minor Third:	matches	F/C/G: lowered one
Major Third:	raised one	F/C/G: matches
Perfect Fourth:	matches	F: lowered one
Perfect Fifth:	matches	B: raised one
Minor Sixth:	lowered one	A/E/B: matches
Major Sixth:	matches	A/E/B: raised one
Minor Seventh:	matches	F/C: lowered one
Major Seventh:	raised one	F/C: matches

Note: You can see that the minor interval rules are all just modifications of the perfect/major interval rules. This means it can be simpler to memorise only the smaller table above, and remember that to get the minor equivalents you lower the accidental by one.

Extra Tips

- ✓ **You can figure out minor intervals from the major/perfect, just by adjusting the accidental**
  e.g. If C up to E is a major third, then a minor third above C must be E ♭
- ✓ **You can use your knowledge of key signatures and scales to find the right spellings too**
  e.g. If F major's key signature only has B ♭ then a perfect fifth above F must be C natural.
- ✓ **Remember you can use enharmonic equivalents**
  e.g. the spellings for root C ♯ also reveals the spellings for root D ♭
- ✓ **It's fine to mix-and-match approaches**
  e.g. mix memorisation with the inversion trick
- ✓ **Learn them gradually**
  e.g. just a few keys or interval types at once

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