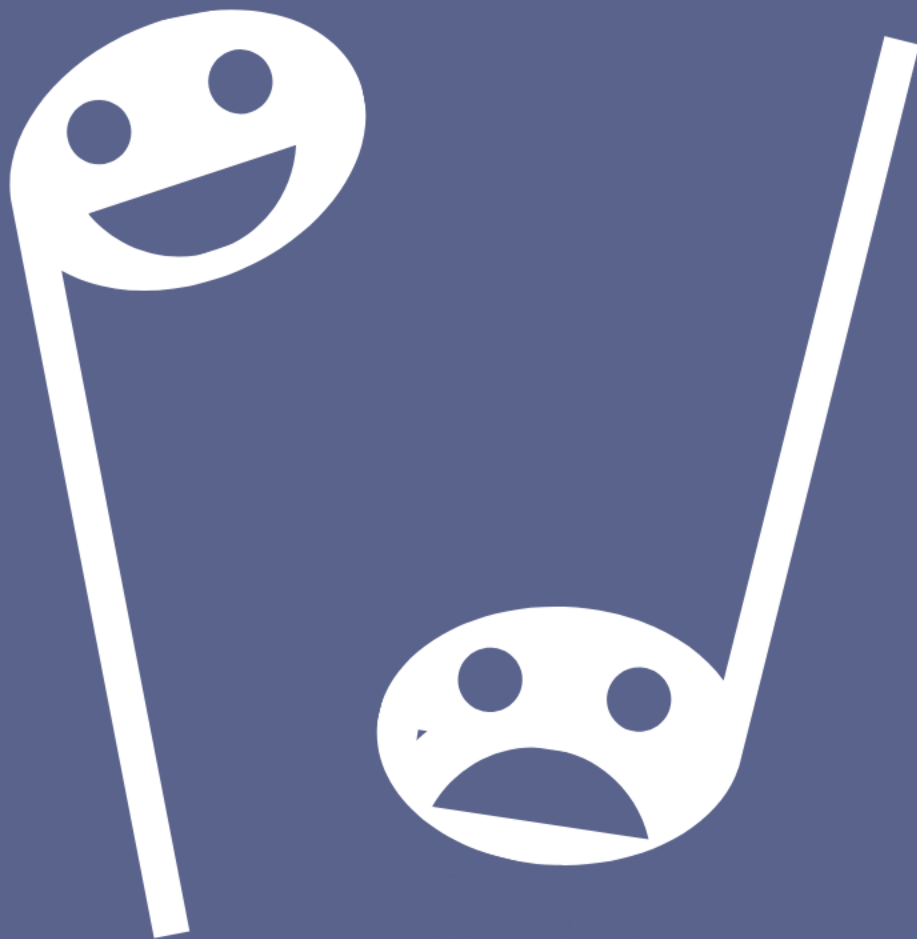


*Hear the Difference:*

# Major and Minor Keys





**Understanding major and minor keys is a fundamental musical skill, yet it's one that is often neglected by many aspiring musicians. To truly create original music, though, a musician needs to hone the ability to distinguish between these two.**

There are endless resources available that can explain every nook and cranny that separate a major key from a minor one. Going into detailed analysis can get very complicated, especially if you have zero or limited knowledge about music theory. To make the experience less intimidating for you, here are two simple ways to tell the difference between major and minor keys.

## **1. Identify Happy vs. Sad Sounds**

The easiest way to recognise the difference between major and minor keys is to consider the emotion their sounds evoke – major keys have a bright, happy, and cheerful melody; while minor keys sound more melancholy and sad. Here's a couple of examples:

["Happy Birthday" in A Major](#)<sup>1</sup>

["Nocturne" by Chopin in C# Minor](#)<sup>2</sup>

The "Happy Birthday" tune is bright and lighthearted. The "Nocturne" melody is heavy and does not share the bright and airy sound of the "Happy Birthday" melody.

## **2. Identify Major vs. Minor Scales**

Major and minor keys are defined by their tonic note (their starting or base note) and their *scale* being major or minor. A major key uses a major scale, and a minor key uses a minor scale.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAgresBrfcc>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxibkvfXWIo>



Reminder: A scale is simply a specific arrangement of 8 consecutive notes going up or down that begin from and return to the same note (their tonic note). For example, the C major scale would go **C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C**.

So to determine a major vs. a minor key, you will need to determine the difference between a major and minor scale. How do you do that? It comes down to the pattern of whole and half steps within each scale.

On the piano keyboard the distance between a white key and a black key is a **half step**; the distance between a white key and a white key is a **whole step** (except for **B** and **C**, and **E** and **F** which are just half steps); the distance between a black key and another black key is a whole step. With these whole and half steps, we can make major and minor scales.

All major scales share the same pattern:

**Whole-Whole-Half-Whole-Whole-Half**. For example, an A major scale would be **A-B-C#-D-E-F#-G#-A**. Minor scales follow a similar structure: **Whole-Half-Whole-Whole-Half-Whole-Whole**. Here, an A minor scale would be **A-B-C-D-E-F-G-A**.

The different pattern of whole and half steps from the tonic note gives major and minor scales quite different musical moods, and this carries over to the major and minor keys which use them.

This might sound overwhelming at first, so take your time. It's a good idea to try out different scales with your instrument. Listen to the difference in sound when you play major and minor scales slowly so you can really internalise the differences in their tones and "feelings".

***In future, when you hear music in a major or minor key, your brain will recognise whether the scale being used is a major one or minor one, and so reveal whether the key is major or minor.***