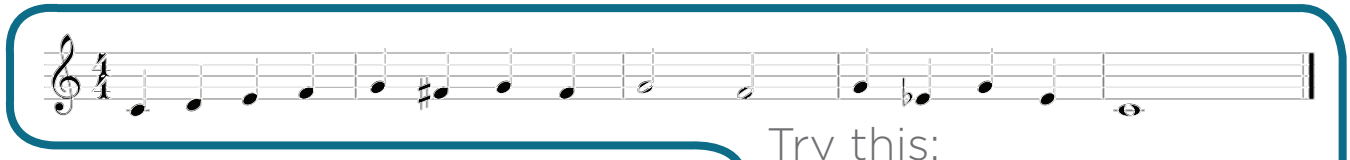
Keyboard Kids' Companion

Created by teachers & approved by kids

Helen Smith Tarchalski, Editor



Try this:

1. Circle all the notes that should be played *F*-sharp.
2. How many *F*-sharps? ___
3. Circle all the *E*-flats.
4. How many *E*-flats? ___
5. Play the exercise, being sure to perform the correct number of sharps and flats.
6. Copy the exercise on a blank staff. Be sure to draw each accidental *before* you draw the note. We *say* the note name followed by the accidental, but we *draw* the accidental first.

Accidentals Review

The term "***accidentals***" refers to symbols instructing us to play notes that are not supposed to be played in a composition (based on the composition's key signature*).

For example, although a piece in the key of C Major does not have any sharps or flats, the composer may include unexpected sharps or flats in specific places. These *accidentals* add exciting sounds while keeping most of the piece in C Major. Or, a piece may be in the key of G Major. The G Major key signature tells us that all *F*s in the piece are sharp. The composer will use natural signs if he wants *F* played without a sharp in certain places.

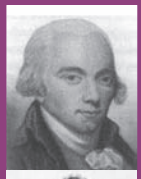
Remember these points about accidentals:

- A **sharp (♯) sign** tells us to play the **very next note to the right**, *black or white.*
- A **flat (♭) sign** tells us to play the **very next note to the left**, black or white.
- A **natural (♮) sign** is used to cancel an extra sharp or flat that has been *added* earlier in that measure (not instructed by the key signature).
- If a composition has **a sharp or flat in the key signature** and the composer wants to **cancel it only in certain places, a natural sign** is used. The regular sharp or flat returns in the next measure.
- **Once a note has an accidental added, it works every time** that note appears ***for the rest of the measure.***

Every note has more than one name! For example, *F*-natural and *E*-sharp are played the same. *When two notes sound the same but are spelled differently, they are called* ***enharmonic*** *to each other.* Composers choose which one to use based on the key signature. This helps us think in the key of the piece and play more accurately.

* **Key signature review:** A *key signature* identifies on which scale a piece is based, just as *your* signature identifies who *you* are when you sign your name. The key signature tells us which sharp(s) or flat(s) to play in the piece, except where changed by accidentals. It is found at the beginning of the piece, right after the clef sign and time signature.

Composer Birthdays



January

23 Muzio Clementi (1752)
Italian composer/pianist

31 Franz Peter Schubert (1797)
Austrian composer

February

8 John Williams (1932)
American composer/conductor

21 Carl Czerny (1791)
Austrian pianist/composer

Scherzo
A Musical Joke

Q Why are we called "Accidentals?"

A Because we are so prone to accidents!

Ask the Teachers

Q: I have trouble keeping track of sharps and flats in my pieces, which causes me to play a lot of wrong notes. How can I improve?

A: Students who are good sight readers have a much better chance of avoiding this very common problem. Excellent sight-reading skills help you to learn your pieces faster, and with fewer mistakes. In order to build good sight-reading skills, follow these tips:

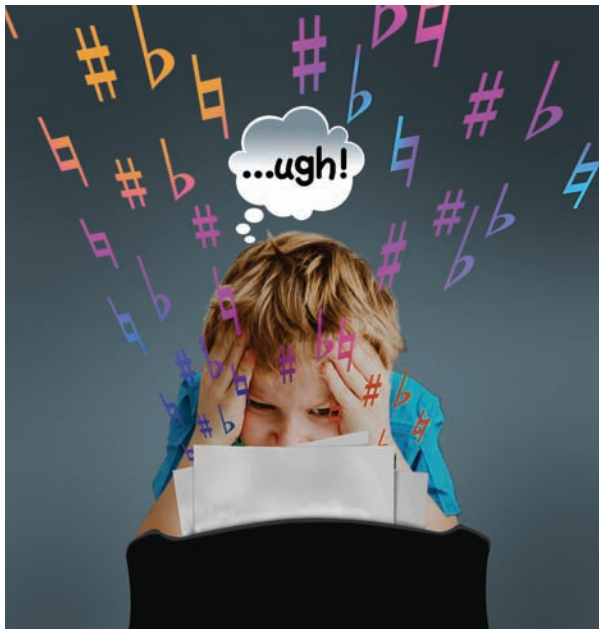
1. Practice single-note-reading skills. There are many online note-reading sites, downloads, and phone apps that can help you practice your accuracy and speed. Paper note-reading flashcard packs are handy as well. Practice identifying and finding each note on the piano. Time your results, and work to improve your time.
2. Learn and memorize key signatures.
3. Practice a composition *after* you can easily play and write the scale for the piece's key signature. When we practice playing and writing scales (and chords), we begin to remember what patterns look, feel, and sound like. Playing patterns and quickly noticing changes becomes easier. When you know your scales and chords—*really* know them—a lot about learning music falls into place. Scales and chords are the building blocks for all music.
4. Keep the key signature in mind when you are playing.
5. Be sure to use the **HATT** trick when practicing a new piece (**H**ands **A**lone, **T**hen **T**ogether).
6. Practice sight reading every day. Work in sight-reading books, which are often coordinated with your favorite piano method book series by level. Explore other music a level or two lower than your current level. You might want to try the *Four Star* Sight Reading Series. *When you sight read, preview the patterns and accidentals, read ahead, and don't stop!*

Wordfind

Find these hidden words from this issue of *Keyboard Kids' Companion*. Words can be found going up, down, backward, and on the diagonal.

Accidental, Czerny, Flat, Handel, Jazz, Key, Schubert, Sharp, Signature

L	N	F	L	A	T	N	E	D	I	C	C	A
E	R	U	T	A	N	G	I	S	Y	H	F	R
D	E	V	D	I	G	L	F	N	X	E	W	C
N	Z	Z	A	J	Q	S	R	G	K	B	K	P
A	C	A	G	Q	U	E	D	K	O	E	K	A
H	Y	K	X	R	Z	H	S	H	A	R	P	S
T	W	H	U	C	S	C	H	U	B	E	R	T



Jazz or Classical brain?

According to a study by scientists in Germany, the brains of professional jazz and classical pianists are indeed different—at least, in the way they approach playing the piano! The scientists worked with thirty professional pianists. Half were jazz musicians, the other half were classical. Using special machines to watch what was happening in the musicians' brains, the scientists recorded how each group thinks when playing the piano.

Of course, much more research is needed, but this exciting discovery may start to explain why some people may be good at one kind of music, but not other styles. Blame it on their brains!

Editor's note: *And...did their brains change in certain ways based on the kinds of music they usually play?* We have known for many years that studying and practicing the piano is good for our brains. Based on the results of this study, it seems like a good idea to explore different kinds of music. It just may help our brains grow even stronger!

(Note to teachers and parents: Report on this study found at www.cbs.mpg.de/brains-of-jazz-and-classical-pianists-work-differently)