

Circle of Fifths

What is it?

The **Circle (or Cycle) of Fifths** is a visual way of representing keys and key signatures and seeing their relationship to each other.

As you move clockwise round the circle you go up in intervals of a **fifth**.
If you follow the circle in a clockwise direction, you will go through “sharp” keys.

“Flat” keys go anti-clockwise - rather confusingly, in a **cycle of fourths**.
The circle works in this way because a 4th is the opposite of a 5th – ie C to G is a 5th, G to C is a 4th (refer to the circle to see this).

What's it for?

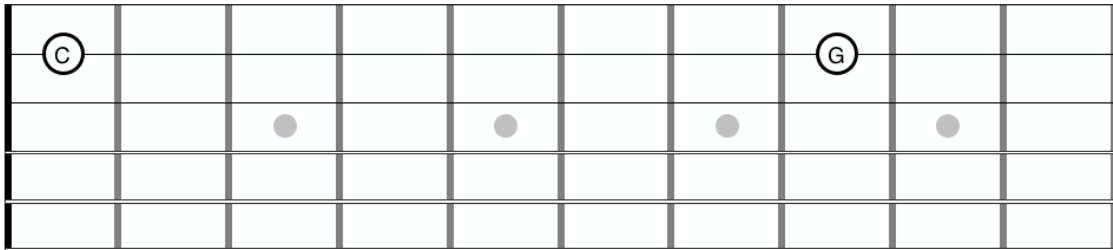
Much of Western harmony/theory can be derived from the circle, and amongst many other uses, we can use the circle to

- find key signatures
- build scales
- build chords
- find common chord progressions
- help with songwriting

Fifths

A **perfect fifth** is a distance of 7 semitones on the guitar. (5 letter names in the musical alphabet).

Perfect fifth (7 semitones/frets)



You can also find this distance by counting up 5 notes in the major scale

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

Assignment (part 1)

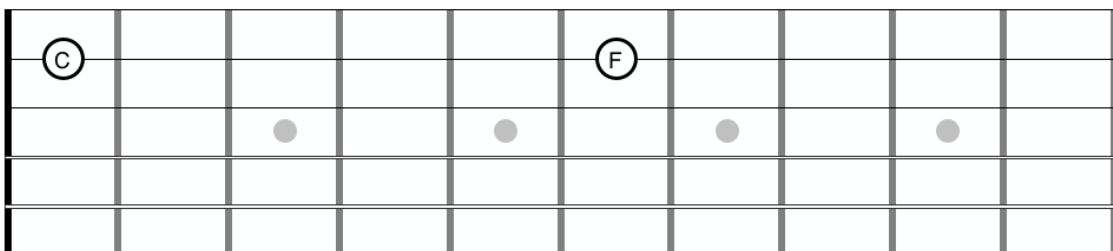
The sharp keys are represented in 5ths, going clockwise.

Using your guitar and/or your major scales, work out the next 5 steps (going clockwise) in the Circle of Fifths and write them on the circle (in pencil first!).

Fourths

A **perfect fourth** is a distance of 5 semitones on the guitar. (4 letter names in the musical alphabet). You can also find this distance by counting up 5 notes in the major scale.

Perfect fourth (5 semitones/frets)



Assignment (part 2)

The flat keys are represented in 4ths, going anti-clockwise.

Using your guitar and/or your major scales, work out the next 5 steps (going anti-clockwise) and write them on the circle (in pencil first!).

C

