**How to Tell What Key You’re In**

**(and you should always know what key you’re in!)**

It’s not too hard – here are some basic guidelines:

1. FIND THE MAJOR KEY

Look at the key signature. To find the Major key associated with that key signature, do this:

* if it’s flats, then the second-to-last flat (reading left to right) is the Major key (For example, if there are 4 flats, then they are B E A D. The second-to-last flat is A, so the Major key associated with 4 flats is *A-flat Major*).
* if it’s sharps, then go up a half-step from the last sharp for the Major key (For example, if there are 3 sharps, then they are F C G. Go up a half-step from G, and you get A. You are in *A Major*).

2. DECIDE IF IT’S MAJOR OR MINOR

You’re not done. It could be in either Major or minor. The relative minor for each Major is 3 half-steps below the Major. For example, *C Major* has the relative minor of *a minor*; *A Major* has the relative minor of *f# minor*. You can double check that you’ve got the right relative this way: they are in each others’ scale: that is, there is a A in an *f# minor* scale, and an f# in the *A Major* scale. It can’t be *A Major* and *f minor*, because there isn’t an A in the *f# minor* scale (there’s an A-flat), and there isn’t an f in the *A Major* scale (there’s an f#).

How do you tell which one it is?

1. The last note of the piece usually is the name of the key

2. Minor keys usually have more accidentals

3. Listen to what it sounds like – generally Major=happy, minor=sad

3. SUBSECTIONS OF THE PIECE CAN BE IN DIFFERENT KEYS

In most pieces, subsections of the piece are in different keys. Sometimes it is just one measure, and sometimes can be almost half of the piece! How can you tell what key you’ve switched into if the key signature hasn’t officially changed?

1. Look for a consistent accidental. Have all of the F-naturals turned into F- sharps? Did all of the B-flats become B-naturals? Probably you’ve shifted into another key.

2. Adjust your key signature to include this change. For example, if your official key signature is 2 sharps (F and C), but all of the G-naturals have been changed to G- sharp, then you now have 3 sharps. Using the rules above, this puts you into either A Major or f-sharp minor.

4. HAVE A CIRCLE OF 5THS HANDY

If you look at your circle of 5ths, you’ll see that it shows you the relative Major for every minor (and vice versa). You’ll also see that the neighboring keys are the most likely key changes that will happen in a piece. Usually, a composer will change to a key right next door (adding or subtracting one sharp or flat), or will go to the relative Major or minor.