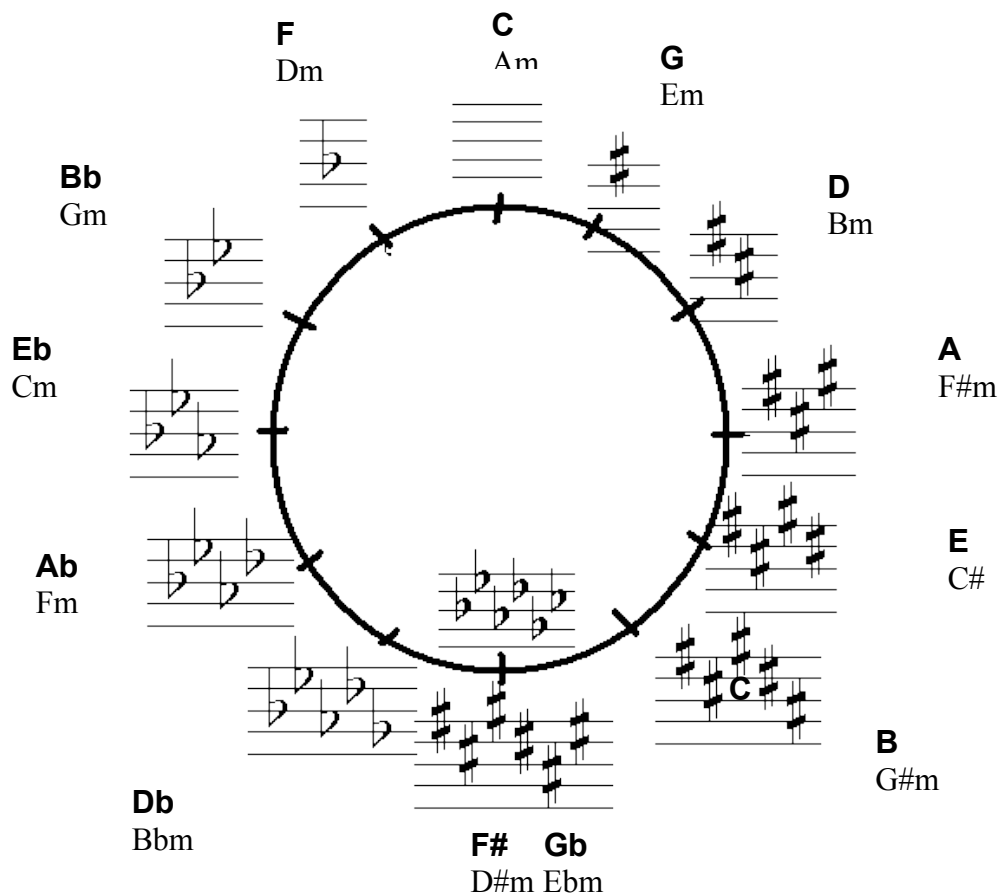


## CIRCLE OF KEYS

Understanding the Circle of Keys will help you work out which keys are closely related, and which chords will sound good together in a progression. You might want to compose your own song, or figure out the chords to a song you are listening to. First have a look at the diagram of keys and their sharps and flats.

### Key signatures



Key signatures make two keys "closely related". So the most closely related key to C major, for example, is A minor, since they have the same key signature (no sharps and no flats). This puts them in the same "slice" of the circle. The next most closely related keys to C major would be G major (or E minor), with one sharp, and F major (or D minor), with only one flat. The keys that are most distant from C major, with six sharps or six flats, are on the opposite side of the circle.

The circle of fifths gets its name from the fact that as you go around the "clock" from one step to the next, you are going up or down by an interval of a perfect fifth. If you go up a perfect fifth (clockwise in the circle), you get the key that has one more sharp or one less flat; if you go down a perfect fifth (counter-clockwise), you get the key that has one more flat or one less sharp. Since going down by a

perfect fifth is the same as going up by a perfect fourth, the counter-clockwise direction is sometimes referred to as a "circle of fourths".

Another way to look at the circle of fifths is the relations between keys, illustrated with sharps and flats. If we move one step with the clock, we add one sharp (#) or deduct one flat (b). If we go one step against the clock, we deduct one sharp or add one flat. This tells us that there is only one note that is different from one key to the key one fifth away from it. If we go from C-major with no sharps or flats, to G-major with one sharp, the only difference is that the note F is raised to F#. Six notes are the same, one is different. If we go the other way, from C to F, we add one flat. Now the B is flattened to Bb. Still six notes are the same, one is different.

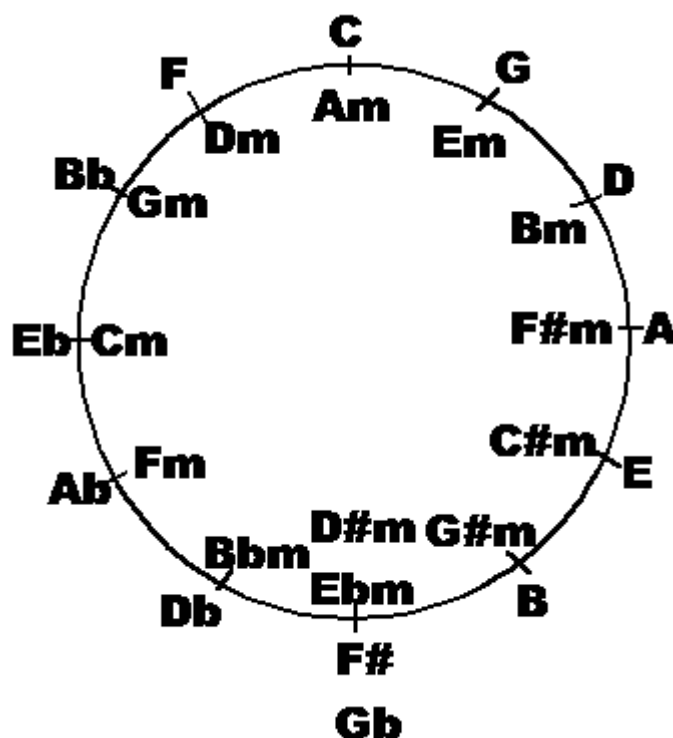
So... when we modulate to another key, it is easier to modulate to a neighbouring key with many notes in common, than to a remote key with only a few notes in common.

How do you use this in the composition context? Here are two examples:

If a song is in the key of C, then the chords most likely to sound good in a progression will be those closest to it (i.e. C, Am, F, G, Dm and Em).

For a song in E, a progression containing some or all of the chords E, C#m, A, B, F#m, G#m will work.

### Circle of Keys (Circle of Fifths)



Adapted from: Schmidt-Jones, Catherine. "The Circle of Fifths." Connexions. August 29, 2006. <http://cnx.org/content/m10865/2.9/>.