

MU 009 (Feurzeig) Minor Scales

The **parallel minor scale** shares the same **tonic** as its parallel major scale, but has **lowered** versions of the 3rd, 6th, and 7th scale degrees.

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is labeled "C major" and contains the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The bottom staff is labeled "C minor" and contains the notes C, D, E^b, F, G, A^b, B^b, C. Above the notes E^b, A^b, and B^b in the C minor scale are the labels [^]b3, [^]b6, and [^]b7 respectively.

Because of this, the minor-scale forms of these scale degrees are often labeled $b3$, $b6$, and $b7$. In verbal communication they may be referred to as the “lowered” or “flatted” 3rd, 6th, and 7th degrees. **Note that this remains true even if the notes in question are not actually flats, but naturals.**

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is labeled "A major" and contains the notes A, B, C[#], D, E, F[#], G[#], A. The bottom staff is labeled "A minor" and contains the notes A, B, C^b, D, E, F^b, G^b, A. Above the notes C^b, F^b, and G^b in the A minor scale are the labels [^]b3, [^]b6, and [^]b7 respectively.

Each minor scale has three variants or “forms”. The one above is called the “natural minor” form because starting on the note A, it can be built using only the white notes (this is the A minor scale immediately above).

Note on nomenclature

The term **natural** in reference to a scale degree can mean different things depending on **context**. In the context of music in (say) C minor, people might refer to E^b, A^b, and B^b as the **natural** 3rd, 6th, and 7th scale degrees because they are in the **natural minor** scale (even though, compared to the parallel C major scale, these degrees are **flatted**). Likewise, in this context, people might refer to E[♮], A[♮], and B[♮] as the **raised** 3rd/6th/7th scale degrees.

The **relative minor scale** shares the same **itches** as its relative major scale but has a different tonic. The A minor scale can be played on the white notes only, the same notes as C major. A minor is thus the **relative minor** of C major, as C major is the relative major of A minor.

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is labeled "C major" and contains the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The bottom staff is labeled "A minor" and contains the notes A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A. A "do" label is placed below the C note in the C major scale and the A note in the A minor scale.

Every major key has a relative minor. The relative minor begins on “la” of the major key (the 6th degree), which in the minor scale is now “do”.

The image shows two pairs of musical staves. The first pair shows E major (top staff) and C# minor (bottom staff). The E major scale starts on 'do' (E) and goes up to 'la' (B). The C# minor scale starts on 'do' (C#) and goes up to 'me' (E). A red arrow points from the 'la' (B) in the E major scale to the 'do' (C#) in the C# minor scale. The second pair shows Ab major (top staff) and F minor (bottom staff). The Ab major scale starts on 'do' (Ab) and goes up to 'la' (G). The F minor scale starts on 'do' (F) and goes up to 'me' (Ab). A red arrow points from the 'la' (G) in the Ab major scale to the 'do' (F) in the F minor scale.

When there are no accidentals involved besides the key signature, the resulting minor scale is the natural minor scale form. For example, the first minor scale above would be called “C-sharp minor, natural minor form”, or “C-sharp natural minor” for short.

In solfege, the lowered forms of the 3rd, 6th, and 7th scale degrees take the vowel “e” (pronounced “ay” as in “may”). The lowered 7th scale degree is called the **subtonic** (as opposed to the leading tone) and is a **whole step** below the tonic.

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff is in C major (one sharp) and shows the natural minor scale: do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do. The 7th degree is labeled 'ti (leading tone)'. The bottom staff is in F major (two flats) and shows the natural minor scale: do, re, me, fa, so, le, te, do. The 7th degree is labeled 'te (subtonic)'.

Harmonic minor. The harmonic minor scale form takes the natural minor and raises the 7th degree, making it the same as the 7th degree in the parallel major.

The image shows a musical staff in F major (two flats) for the harmonic minor scale: do, re, me, fa, so, le, ti, do. The 7th degree is raised to a natural 'ti'.

Melodic minor. The melodic minor scale form takes the natural minor and raises both the 6th and 7th degrees when ascending. Descending, both degrees are lowered. The descending form of the melodic minor is identical to the natural minor scale.

The image shows a musical staff in F major (two flats) for the melodic minor scale. The ascending form is: do, re, me, fa, so, la, ti, do. The descending form is: do, te, le, so, fa, me, re, do. The 6th and 7th degrees are lowered in the descending form.