

Chromatic Scale Test Guide

Fairly close to the beginning of the year, you will be asked to record yourself playing a two octave chromatic scale, beginning on any note of your choosing, saying the names of the notes up in sharps and down in flats.

What is two octaves mean?

An octave refers to the distance between your starting note and the end note in the musical alphabet. So if you were to begin on C and end on the C above your starting pitch you have played one octave. If you were to continue to the next C above that one you would be covering two octaves.

Like this:

CDEFGAB /C/ DEFGABC

← one octave → † ← 2nd octave →

So, what is a chromatic scale?

A chromatic scale covers all of the pitches within an octave and is composed entirely of semi-tones or 1/2 steps. These semi-tones or 1/2 steps can be expressed as sharps or flats.

The odd thing about this scale is that some of the notes sound the same, but are spelled differently; kind of like a musical homonym. (Homonyms are words that are spelled differently but sound the same. An example would be - Or, Oar and Ore)

In the BIG picture the Chromatic scale looks like this if you were to start on “C”

C (C# or Db) D (D# or Eb) E F (F# or Gb) G (G# or Ab) A (A# or Bb) B C

Notice that there exists a natural semitone between E and F and B and C

So when we refer to “up” in sharps (if you were to start on “C”), we mean

C C# D D# E F F# G G# A A# B C

When we refer to down in “flats” (if you were to start on “C”) we mean:

C B Bb A Ab G Gb F E Eb D Db C

In your example, there is no sharp or flat between E and F or B and C. Why is that?

As mentioned above, the reason for this is that there already exists a natural semitone between these notes so there is no need for a sharp or flat.

Okay, but I have seen in my music weird notes that are not in your chromatic scale example like Cb and Fb or B# or E#..... what's with that?

Well it is actually not confusing at all when you remember the function of flats and sharps. A flat lowers a note one semitone and a sharp raises the note one semitone. Thus, B# would be a “B” up a semi-tone sounding the same and fingered the same and the note we know as “C.” Another example would be Fb.... so, F down a semitone would be the note we know as “E”

Where can I find a sheet that has this on it?

The easiest way is to get a fingering chart and follow along for two octaves.

What note should I start on?

Start on a low note that you can comfortably play and work your way up to two octaves. The problems we see are students that do not start low enough and they end up with a scale that exceeds their range.