

## Lesson 22: Seconds and thirds

In this lesson you will learn about interval quality, natural intervals, major and minor intervals, diminished and augmented intervals, and enharmonically equivalent intervals.

Intervals of the same numerical *size* may vary in *quality* depending on the number of semitones they contain. If a second contains only one semitone, it is a *minor second* (familiar already as a semitone or a half step). If a second contains two semitones, it is a *major second* (familiar already as a whole tone or whole step). A *natural interval* is formed without any accidentals. There are seven *natural seconds*, all either major or minor.

Natural seconds



If both notes of a natural second are raised or lowered by the same amount, the size and quality of the interval remain the same.

Natural seconds transposed



If a minor second, or any minor interval, is compressed by lowering the upper note or raising the bottom note by a semitone, it becomes *diminished*. But diminished seconds—intervals made up of adjacent letter names that are enharmonically the same pitch—are rare and we will not consider them further here. If a major second, or any major interval, is expanded by lowering the bottom note or raising the upper note by a semitone, it becomes *augmented*.

Major, minor, and  
augmented seconds

Seven musical staves, each containing four intervals. The intervals are labeled M (Major), m (minor), and A (augmented). The staves show the following sequences of intervals:

- Staff 1: M, m, m, A
- Staff 2: M, m, m, A
- Staff 3: m, M, M, A
- Staff 4: M, m, m, A
- Staff 5: M, m, m, A
- Staff 6: M, m, m, A
- Staff 7: m, M, M, A

Like seconds, thirds can be *diminished*, *minor*, *major*, or *augmented*. The seven *natural thirds*, formed without any accidental, are all either major (contain four semitones or two whole tones) or minor (contain three semitones or one whole tone and one semitone).

Natural thirds

A musical staff showing seven natural thirds. The intervals are labeled M (Major) and m (minor). The sequence of intervals is: M, m, m, M, M, m, m.

Raising or lowering both notes by the same amount preserves the size and quality of the interval.

Natural thirds transposed

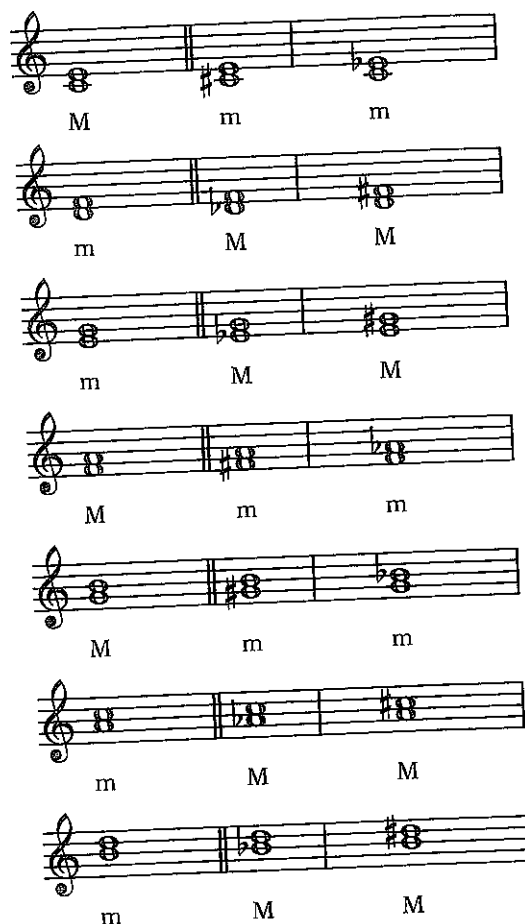
Four musical staves showing natural thirds transposed to different positions on the scale. The intervals are labeled M (Major) and m (minor). The staves show the following sequences of intervals:

- Staff 1: M
- Staff 2: m
- Staff 3: m
- Staff 4: M

N:  
(c)



When a minor third is compressed by a semitone, it becomes *diminished*; when a major third is expanded by semitone, it becomes *augmented*. But these are relatively rare in music and will not concern us further here; instead, we will concentrate on major and minor thirds.



In sum, there are four kinds of seconds and thirds (diminished, minor, major, and augmented), but only minor, major, and augmented seconds and minor and major thirds are in common use.

	Diminished	Minor	Major	Augmented
<b>Seconds</b> (number of semitones)	C#-D $\flat$ 0	C-D $\flat$ 1	C-D 2	C-D# 3
<b>Thirds</b> (number of semitones)	C#-E $\flat$ 2	C-E $\flat$ 3	C-E 4	C-E# 5

Intervals that span the same number of semitones but are spelled with different note names are *enharmonically equivalent*. C-D# and C-Eb, for example, both span three semitones. But one is a second and the other is a third and they have correspondingly different musical roles to play.

Enharmonically  
equivalent intervals.



Augmented second  
(3 semitones)

Minor third  
(3 semitones)

## Lesson 22: In-class activities

1. **Singing.** Sing the following melodies. The lyrics identify the qualities of the natural seconds and thirds.



Ma-jor sec-ond, ma-jor sec-ond, mi-nor sec-ond, ma-jor sec-ond, ma-jor



sec-ond, ma-jor sec-ond, mi-nor sec-ond. Mi-nor sec-ond, ma-jor sec-ond, ma-jor



sec-ond, ma-jor sec-ond, mi-nor sec-ond, ma-jor sec-ond, ma-jor sec-ond.



Ma-jor third, mi-nor third, mi-nor third, ma-jor third, ma-jor third, mi-nor third,



mi-nor third, yes! Mi-nor third, ma-jor third, ma-jor third, mi-nor third,



mi-nor third, ma-jor third, mi-nor third, yes!