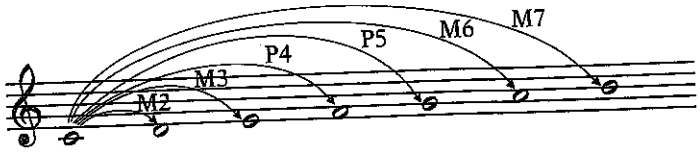
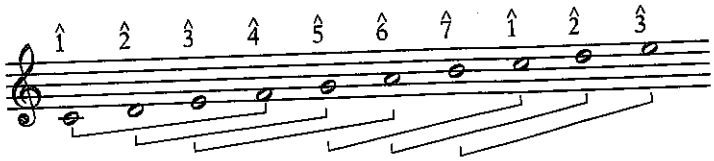
# Lesson 25: Intervals in a major key

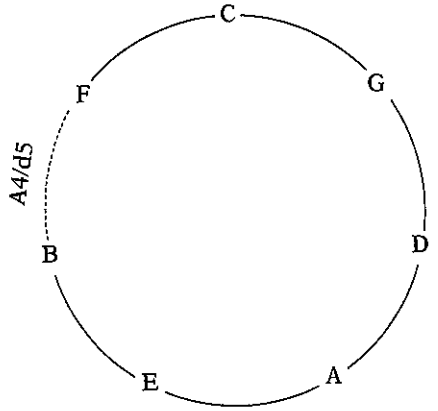
Within a *major* scale, the intervals formed between the tonic and the other scale degrees are all *major* or *perfect*: major second, major third, perfect fourth, perfect fifth, major sixth, and major seventh.




It is also interesting to think about the intervals that can be formed with all of the degrees of a major scale, not just the tonic. The most common interval in the major scale is the perfect fourth (or, if the interval is inverted, the perfect fifth)—there are six of them.

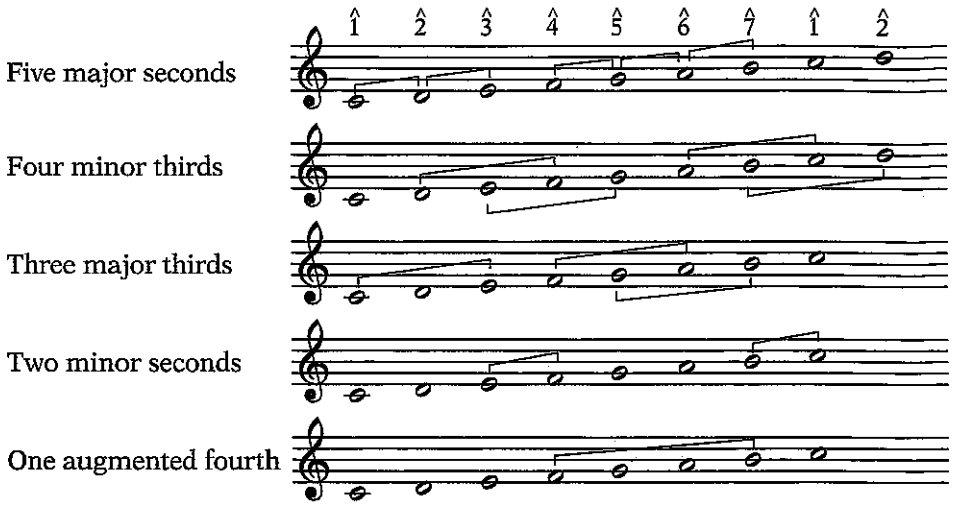



Indeed, the entire major scale can be described as a chain of perfect fourths or perfect fifths. (You read the fifths going clockwise and the fourths going counterclockwise.)




In addition to its six perfect fourths (or fifths), the major scale contains five major tones (or minor sevenths), four minor thirds (or major sixths), three major thirds (or minor sixths), two minor seconds (or major sevenths), and a single, unique augmented fourth (or diminished fifth).

Other intervals




Every kind of interval occurs a different number of times, ranging from a maximum of six (perfect fourths/fifths) to a minimum of one (augmented fourth/diminished fifth). Because there is only one of them, the augmented fourth/diminished fifth plays an important key-defining role: it uniquely identifies the major scale to which it belongs. For example, the augmented fourth F–B and its inversion, the diminished fifth B–F occur only in C major. Enharmonically equivalent intervals like F–C♭ and E♯–B point with equal force to other major keys (G♭ major and F♯ major).

Harmonic intervals are classified as either *consonant* or *dissonant*. Consonant intervals are those that sound relatively harmonious, whose notes blend well together, and are relatively stable. Composers use consonant intervals at points of arrival or conclusion. Dissonant intervals are those that sound relatively tense and unstable, with the notes rubbing against each other rather than blending together. Composers use dissonant intervals to propel music forward, because dissonances require some kind of continuation—they cannot be used at points of arrival or conclusion.

Major and minor thirds and sixths are consonant. So are all perfect intervals, with one partial exception: the perfect fourth, which is only consonant when a major or minor third or perfect fifth is sounding below it. When the lower note of the perfect fourth is also the lowest sounding note, the perfect fourth is usually treated as a dissonance. Major and minor seconds and sevenths are dissonant, as are all augmented and diminished intervals.

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| **Consonance** | **Major and minor thirds and sixths**<br>**Perfect fifths, octaves, and unisons**<br>**Perfect fourths (sometimes)** |
| **Dissonance** | **Seconds and sevenths**<br>**Augmented or diminished intervals**<br>**Perfect fourths (sometimes)** |