

SHARPS, FLATS, AND KEY SIGNATURES

Although there are no sharps (#) or flats (b) in any of the pieces in this book, you need to know what they are, and how to play them on your harp.

Most harps are equipped with sharpening levers right below the bridge pins. When a lever is engaged (usually by flipping it up), it shortens the sounding length of the string, thereby raising the pitch by one half-step (also called a semitone).



In music, a sharp sign (#) raises the pitch of a note by a half-step, such as from a white key on the piano up to the adjacent higher black key. For example, pluck an F string on your harp. This is called an F-natural (F \natural). Now engage the sharpening lever on that string, and pluck it again. You'll hear that the note is now higher in pitch. The sharpening lever has shortened the sounding length of the string and raised the pitch by a half-step, making an F-sharp (F#). A flat sign (b) lowers the pitch of a note by a half-step, such as from a white key on the piano down to the adjacent lower black key. In written music, the sharp or natural signs are written in front of the note, as shown here on the right.



 A key signature is the group of sharps or flats written at the beginning of a piece after the clef sign, and before the time signature. The key signature tells you what notes will be sharp or flat throughout the piece. In the example on the left, you would engage all of your F and C levers (making F#s and C#s) before you begin to play. You haven't noticed key signatures in the music in this book because the pieces have no sharps or flats, and therefore, the key signature area is left blank. (You can find more information on keys and key signatures in my [Music Theory and Arranging Techniques for Folk Harps](#) book.)

HARP TUNING METHODS

If your harp has a full set of sharpening levers, you have a variety of ways you can tune your harp.

If all of your sharpening levers are down (disengaged) and you tune every string to natural, like the white notes on the piano, you are tuned to the key of C. If you pluck a C string and play a scale up to the next C, you should hear a do-re-mi scale. When your harp is tuned like this, you can use your sharpening levers and play pieces that have sharps in the key signature or within the piece.

However, if you want to play pieces that have flats in them, you need to tune some of your strings to flats. Start with all of your sharpening levers down (disengaged). Then lower the pitch of the strings you want flat by one half-step by loosening the string with your tuning key. For example, tune all of your B strings to B \flat (on many electronic tuners, this will register as A#). Then, when you use a sharpening lever on a B string, the lever will raise the pitch up to a B \natural . The most common flat tuning is to tune to 3 flats (also called the key of E \flat) by tuning all of your B, E, and A strings to flats: (B \flat , E \flat and A \flat). In this tuning, with a full set of sharpening levers, you can play in any key from 3 flats up to 4 sharps. For more information on tuning, see the tuning video at www.harpcenter.com/stringing.

If your harp has no sharpening levers, you will need to re-tune your harp every time you change key signatures.