

Saxophone Transposition Guide



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Transposition Guide

The saxophone is a **transposing** instrument.

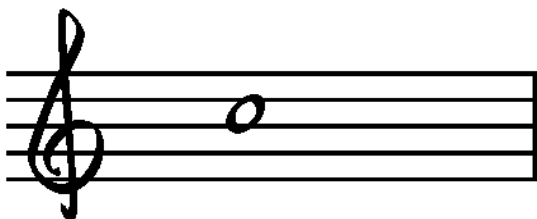
This means that notes played on a saxophone will sound different from a note of the same name played on another instrument such as the piano or guitar.

We refer to those instruments that don't transpose as being in “**Concert**” key or the key of C.

B-flat instruments

**Tenor and soprano saxophones are in the key of B-flat.*

This means that when you play the note C on a tenor or soprano saxophone, the note that is heard is actually a B-flat.



Played Note
(on your B-flat saxophone)



Heard Note
(Concert Key)

*tenor saxophones sound an octave lower than shown in the examples. The examples reflect how saxophone players typically visualize and think about transposing.

So if you are playing along with other musicians or a backing track, and they are in the key of B-flat, you will want to play in the key of C on your tenor or soprano saxophone.

The interval between the note or key that you play in (on a transposing instrument) and the actual note or key being heard (concert key) is constant.

Important

For any **B-flat instrument**, you want to be playing notes that are **1 whole step (or 2 half steps) above** the concert or "heard" note.

In the following example, the music is in the key of G.

Concert Key of G Major



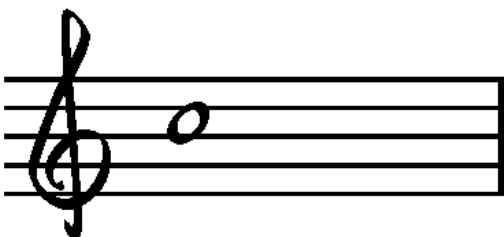
So on our **B-flat** saxophone we need to transpose up a whole step putting us in the key of **A** on our instrument.

Transposed Key of A Major

**E-flat Instruments**

**Alto and baritone saxophones are in the key of E-flat*

This means that when you play a C on your alto or baritone saxophone the note that is heard is actually an E-flat.



Played Note
(on your **E-flat** saxophone)



Heard Note
(Concert Key)

*alto saxophones sound an octave lower than shown in the examples. Baritone saxophones sound 2 octaves lower. The examples reflect how saxophone players typically visualize and think about transposing.

Important

For any **E-flat instrument**, you want to be playing notes that are a *minor 3rd (or 3 half steps)* below the concert or “heard” note.

In this example the music is in the key of G.

Concert Key of G Major



So on our saxophone which is in the key of E-flat we need to transpose down a minor third which would put us in the key of E on our instrument.

Transposed Key of E Major



Essential for all saxophone players

As saxophone players, we need to be able to calculate this transposition instantly so that we can play with other instruments that are in concert key like piano and guitar.

For example, if you are playing with a group and they tell you the next song is *Stand By Me* in the key of A, you will need to transpose.

Can you do it in your head right now?

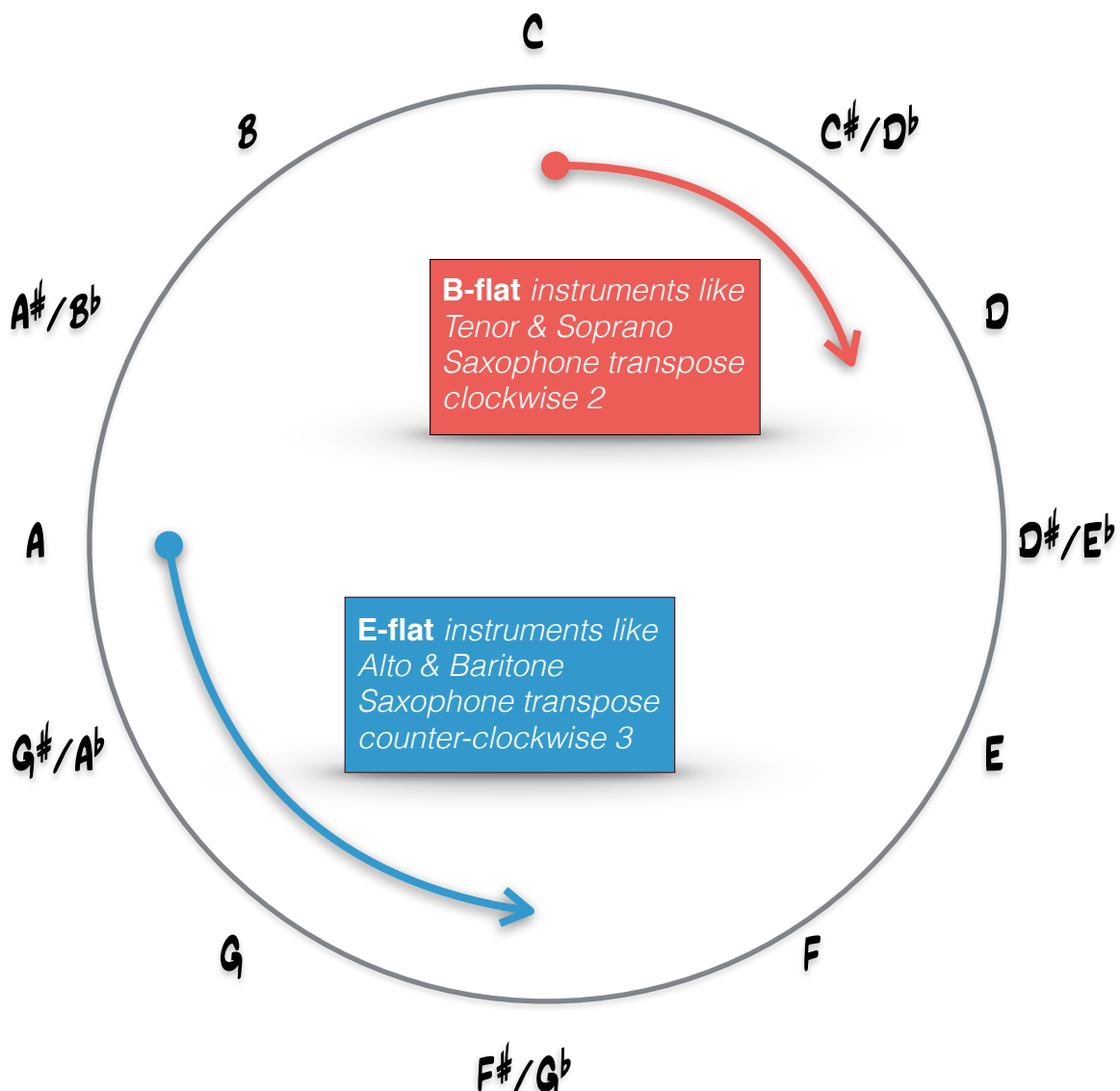
-For tenor and soprano saxophones your key will be B
-For alto and baritone saxophones your key will be F-sharp

Saxophone Transposing Chart

The chart below represents each of the 12 notes or keys. They are arranged chromatically in a circle like a clock. Each hour position ascends a half-step as we progress clockwise and descends a half step in the counter-clockwise direction.

Use this chart as a guide to transposing on your saxophone. If you play a B-flat instrument like tenor or soprano saxophone, you will need to go up clockwise 2 positions from the "Concert" key or note.

E-flat instruments like alto and baritone saxophone will need to transpose counter-clockwise 3 positions from the "Concert" key or note.



Quiz:

1. If the Concert key is F, what key will you be in if you play tenor saxophone? alto saxophone?
2. If the Concert key is Ab, what key will you be in if you play the baritone saxophone? soprano saxophone?