

Accidentals, the basics

Accidentals are special musical symbols that tell you to change the pitch (how high or low the sound is) of a note, for a long or a short time.

The Five Main Accidentals

Symbol	Name	What it Does
#	Sharp	Raises the note by a semitone (half-step).
b	Flat	Lowers the note by a semitone (half-step).
♮	Natural	Cancels any previous sharp or flat.
×	Double Sharp	Raises the note by a whole tone.
bb	Double Flat	Lowers the note by a whole tone.

The Long-Term Rules

- **Where they are:** Placed right at the beginning of the music staff, next to the clef (like the Treble or Bass clef).
- **What they do:** They tell you which notes must be played as a sharp or flat throughout the entire piece (or until the key changes). They set the "key" or family of notes the music will use.
- **Example:** If the key signature has a **b flat**, every **b** you see will automatically be played as a b flat, unless told otherwise!

The Temporary Instructions

- **Where they are:** Placed right before a specific note anywhere in the music.
- **What they do:** They temporarily change the pitch of only that note and any other same-note played later in that same measure (the space between two bar lines).
- **How long they last:** As soon as the music crosses the next bar line, the accidental is canceled.