

It's No Accident

LEARN HOW TO PLAY PERFECT ACCIDENTALS

■ As you probably know, the key signature at the beginning of a piece of music tells you which notes, if any, should be played sharp or flat. So why do you sometimes see extra sharp, flat, and natural symbols pop up throughout a piece? They're not accidents—they're accidentals, and they indicate deviations from the key signature.

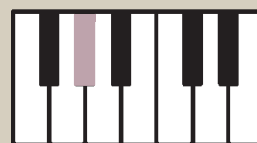
Accidentals are printed to the left of the note that they affect. A sharp symbol (#) raises the pitch of the note by a half-step, while a flat (b) lowers the pitch by a half-step. A natural sign (♮) cancels a flat or sharp that was in the key signature.

Double sharps (x) and double flats (bb) are less common; they raise or lower the pitch by a whole step. This will result in the sounding pitch being the same as another note altogether. For example, A-double sharp (A \times) is the same pitch as B.

An accidental remains in effect for the remainder of the measure. For example, if a C is marked "sharp" by an accidental, all other Cs that appear for the remainder of the measure will be played as C \sharp , unless otherwise indicated. When a new measure begins, the original key signature goes back into effect. (Sometimes you'll even be reminded to return to the key signature with a "courtesy accidental" in parentheses the next time the note appears.) The only exception to this rule is when a note is tied across the bar line—in this case, the accidental remains in effect for the entirety of the tie, regardless of the new measure.

Finally, it's important to point out that accidentals only affect the exact pitch that they mark. That is, they do not apply to the same note up or down an octave.

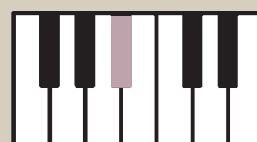
A-flat



A-natural



A-sharp



A-double flat



A-double sharp



Now that you have a few basic rules about accidentals under your belt, you're ready to play—no mistaking it! Also, be sure to check out more useful references at www.makingmusicmag.com/forte/clip/.

