

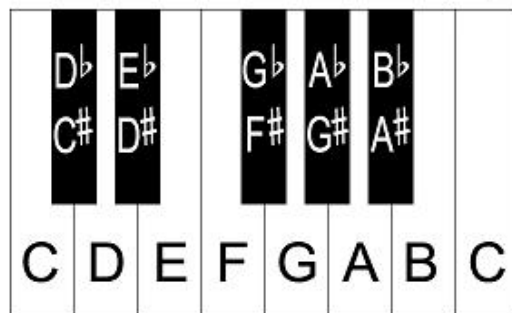
## Why Learn to Transpose?

by Dennis Winge

There are plenty of scenarios in which learning to transpose will be highly useful to you. We will explore each scenario and how you would transpose in each case.

### 1. Use of capo

Let's say your friend is using a capo on guitar and you are either a guitarist playing barre chords, or any other "C" instrument (to be explained later) like a piano, ukulele, etc. Your friend has written a song in what she thinks of as the key of C but her capo is at the first fret. She is in the key of Db because the note *db* is a *half-step* (or one fret on the guitar) above c.



The capo has transposed the music to a new key. The term for the end-result key that is heard by the audience is called the "concert" key. So we would say she is playing in "Db concert." If her chords are C, Am, F; you would have to play Db, Bbm, and Gb.

### 2. playing with a non-"C" instrument

Let's say you are a pianist playing with a tenor saxophonist, who, when he plays his "C" scale (i.e. the one that has no sharps or flats to him), it comes out as "Bb concert." If you write a song in the key of G, you better give him the music in the key of A, a whole step above G, in order to compensate for the fact that his instrument is a whole step below yours.

### 3. vocal transposition

In this scenario, a female ukulele player is accompanying a male singer. When they get together for a rehearsal, he asks her to lower the key from D to Bb. Her progression was:

| G | A | Bm | Bm | G | A | D | D |

In order to transpose this, she would have either transpose each chord down two whole steps (which is the distance between the current key of D and the desired key of Bb), or, if she knows her music theory, recognize that the progression is:

| IV | V | VI | VI | IV | V | I | I | and then simply translate that formula into Bb. (For more on this latter process, see my article, "How to Harmonize a Scale".) Either way she would get:

| Eb | F | Gm | Gm | Eb | F | Bb | Bb |

#### **4. guitar solo key**

Now you're the guitarist who wants to play chords and melody of a pop song you love. The song is F#m and the melody has notes that are too low to grab very many supporting notes to. You realize that if you took the song up a significant amount, you could play the melody on the highest 3 strings instead of strings 2, 3, and 4, and the best key is Bm.

#### **5. songwriting**

Suppose you have two ideas that are similar in style, tempo and feel, and you think you might be able to use them in the same song but you can't seem to make them fit together. In the same that we transposed chords above, we can transpose a melody. If, for simplicity, we take the tune "Camptown Races," the intervallic analysis of the melody is 5 5 3 5 6 5 3, 3 2, 3 2. We are deliberately not presenting the melody in standard notation to illustrate that you do not need to know how to transpose in order to read music. In the key of C, the notes are g g e g a g e, e d, e d, and in the key of E they are b b g# b c# b g#, g# f#, g# f#.

There are many more scenarios in which knowing how to transpose is beneficial to musicians of all styles and genres. I, for one, can almost never rock/pop songs in their original key since my voice is often so much lower than the original vocalist. Because some bassists were not comfortable with transposing to a new key songs they had been playing for a long time, even though a new lead sheet was provided for them, they did not pass the audition for my band.

All the best with transposing!