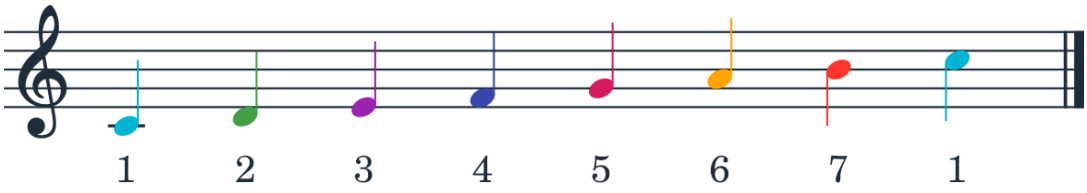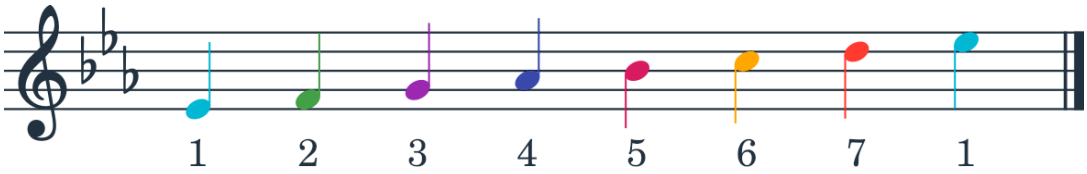
What the colors mean

On every Tissimo worksheet, a colored note is telling you **what that note is doing** — its job in the key you are playing in. It is not telling you the letter name; you can already read that off the staff. Learn seven colors and you can see the harmony of a piece at a glance.

THE SEVEN NOTES OF THE KEY, IN ORDER



C major. The number under each note is its **degree** — how far up the scale it sits — and the color goes with the number, always.



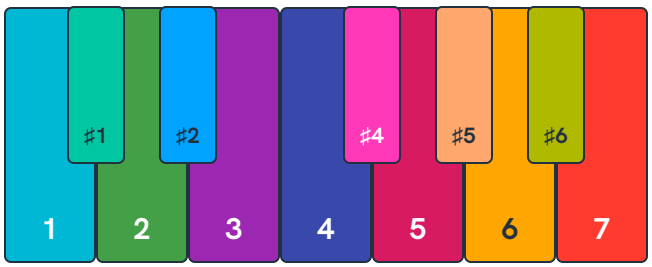
E♭ major. Different notes, same seven jobs, same seven colors.

This is the whole idea. In C major the cyan note is C; in E♭ major the cyan note is E♭. Cyan never means "C" — it means **home**. When you change key, the colors move with the degrees, so a shape you learned in one key looks identical in the next.

WHAT EACH DEGREE DOES

1	**Tonic**	**Home.** Everything eventually comes back here, and almost every piece ends here. Play it and the music sounds finished.
2	**Supertonic**	**One step above home.** Restless in a mild way; it usually leans on toward the 5th rather than standing still.
3	**Mediant**	**The mood note.** Sitting halfway between 1 and 5, it is the note that decides whether a chord sounds major or minor.
4	**Subdominant**	**The gentle step away.** It opens the music up without much tension — the sound of the "A-men" at the end of a hymn.
5	**Dominant**	**The pull.** The most impatient note in the key. Chords built here want to fall back home, which is how endings get their sense of arrival.
6	**Submediant**	**The wistful one.** It is home for the relative minor, so music leaning on it turns thoughtful without actually changing key.
7	**Leading tone**	**Half a step under home.** The strongest lean in the key — play it on its own and your ear finishes the job for you.
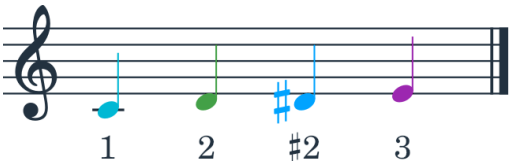
THE SAME SEVEN COLORS ON THE KEYS



The white keys hold the seven degrees of the key you are in — shown here in C major, so 1 lands on C. Move to another key and the colors slide along with it. The black keys are the notes from **outside** the key; page 2 is about those.

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VISITORS — NOTES FROM OUTSIDE THE KEY



Sooner or later a note appears that belongs to none of the seven. Composers use them constantly: to slide between two notes of the key, to borrow a darker color from the parallel minor, or to lean into the next chord from a half step away. Because these notes have no degree of their own, they get **colors of their own** — six hues the seven degrees do not use — so you can spot a visitor the moment you look at the page.

- **♯1 / ♭2** between home and the 2nd
- **♯2 / ♭3** the minor 3rd, borrowed
- **♯3 / ♭4** a spelling of a white key
- **♯4 / ♭5** the restless tritone
- **♯5 / ♭6** borrowed from minor
- **♯6 / ♭7** blues and 7th chords

You do not need to memorize these six. What matters is the habit: **a color you do not recognize is a note from outside the key**, and it is almost always the most interesting note in the bar. Slow down there and listen to what it leans toward.

TWO WAYS A CHORD GETS COLORED

One color for the whole chord



The chord wears the color of the degree it is **built on**. This G7 sits on the 5th degree of C major, so the whole chord is magenta. Use this view to follow the harmony — which chord, and where it sits in the key.

A color for each note's job



The same chord, colored by what each note does **inside** it: root, 3rd, 5th, 7th. Use this view when you are learning the shape of a chord under your hand.

Both appear across the worksheets, and they never mix inside one picture. If you are ever unsure which one you are looking at, **check the small legend** at the top of that sheet — it always says.

HEARING WHAT THE COLORS SHOW

Colors are only a shortcut to something your ear can learn to do on its own. Try this at the piano, in any key you like:

Try it **1** · Play the scale slowly and say the numbers out loud, 1 up to 7. Notice that 7 feels unfinished until you play 1. **2** · Hold the bottom note down with your left hand and play each degree above it — each one has a different flavor against home. **3** · Play 1, then 4, then 5, then 1 again: the three chords most songs are made of, and the reason 5 gets the brightest color in the set. **4** · Now do the whole thing in a different key. The notes changed; the feelings, and the colors, did not.

CHECK YOURSELF

1. You are playing in **G major**. Which note wears cyan?	G — cyan is always degree 1, whatever the key.
2. A **red** note turns up in a piece in **F major**. Which note is it, and where does it want to go?	E, and it wants to go up to F — red is the leading tone.
3. You meet a color you do not recognize. What do you already know about that note?	It comes from outside the key — a visitor.
4. In **D major**, what chord is built on the **magenta** degree?	A (or A7) — the chord that pulls you home to D.

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