Major & minor 2nds and 3rds

Two intervals can share a name but not a size. Counting letters gives the **name** — 2nd, 3rd. Counting half steps gives the **quality**: **major** for the wider one, **minor** for the narrower one.

FIRST, A SMALLER RULER: THE HALF STEP

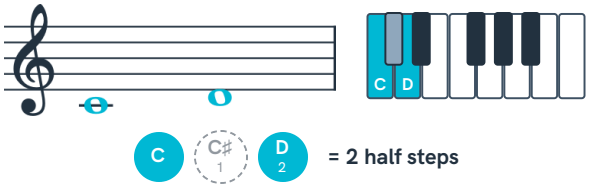
A **half step** is the smallest distance on the keyboard: from any key to its very nearest neighbor (Handout 353). Usually that neighbor is a black key — but **E–F and B–C are white-key neighbors with no black key between them**. That quirk is exactly where major and minor come from.

2NDS: WIDE AND NARROW

Major 2nd

2 half steps — a whole step

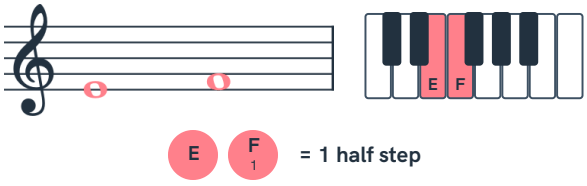
C to D looks like one little step, but a black key hides between them — the trip takes **two** half steps.



Minor 2nd

1 half step

E and F are true next-door neighbors — **nothing between them**. One half step: the narrowest interval there is.

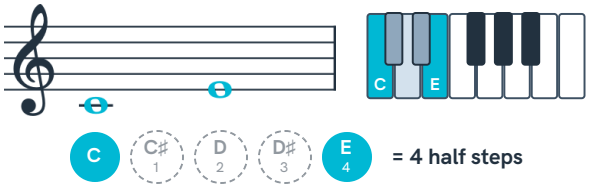


3RDS: BRIGHT AND DARK

Major 3rd

4 half steps — bright

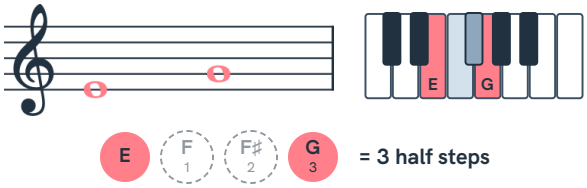
C to E spans **four** half steps — the wide, sunny 3rd. It's the third that makes a chord **major**.



Minor 3rd

3 half steps — darker

E to G spans only **three** — one half step narrower, and noticeably darker. The third that makes a chord **minor**.



Try it Each one has a famous sound. The **Jaws theme** creeps in minor 2nds. **"Hap-py birth-day"** rises a major 2nd. The **cuckoo's call** often falls a minor 3rd. **"Oh When the Saints"** opens with a major 3rd. Find each pair on your keyboard, count the half steps, and listen for wide-and-bright versus narrow-and-dark. Songs for every interval, up and down: Handout 375.

LISTEN
Scan to hear every example
tissimo.co/worksheets/major-minor-2nds-3rds

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