Parallel vs Relative Minor

two different ways for a major key to have a minor cousin

Every major key has TWO minor relatives — and they are related in opposite ways. The **relative minor** (A minor, for C major) shares the same **key signature** but starts on a different home note — same DNA, different house. The **parallel minor** (C minor) shares the same **home note** but changes the signature — same house, moodier furniture: 3, 6 and 7 all lower by a half step.

C MAJOR — THE REFERENCE



A MINOR — THE RELATIVE (SAME SIGNATURE, NEW HOME)



C MINOR — THE PARALLEL (SAME HOME, THREE FLATS)



Coral notes = the three that lowered (E♭, A♭, B♭). Same C to C — utterly different weather.

Try it Hear both relationships: play C major, then A minor — different mood, but no new notes (relative). Now play C major, then C minor — same starting note, instant rain cloud (parallel). Composers love the parallel switch for drama: play Mary Had a Little Lamb, then again with E♭ and A♭ — congratulations, you wrote the sad movie version. Borrow just one chord from C minor: Handout 384. In real pieces: relative keys in Handout 381, parallel keys in Handout 382. Practice: Exercise 82.

© 2026 Tissimo. All rights reserved.