

Transposition for the B-flat trumpet

If you're writing for trumpet with anything other than percussion or voice (e.g., guitar or piano), and if you wish to specify pitch material in more than one part at a time, then you'll need to deal with the fact that the trumpet is a *transposing* instrument. That is, for historical reasons too complicated for me to describe here, notation for the trumpet is written a whole step (or, technically, a *major second*) above the desired sound.

For example, if you want the trumpet to match the note B \flat on a piano or guitar, then you must write a C for the trumpet. The trumpeter reads what s/he thinks of as C, and the sound that comes out of the trumpet is what the rest of us think of as B \flat .

For your convenience, the table below lists keys (or chords) and their corresponding transpositions for the trumpet. I've listed them in an order that reflects mutual intersection of elements: that is, in the leftmost column, "G major" is listed just below "C major" because the two keys share six out of seven notes. Thus, moving from one to the other creates a comparatively smooth and subtle change.

Likewise, the rows of the two tables also link related keys: "C major" and "a minor" appear in the same (top) row, because they share six out of seven notes, so moving from C major to a minor (or, for the trumpet playing along with this, from D major to b minor) also makes for a straightforward, incremental alteration in the sound.

Note that the first and last rows are identical; that is, ideally I would have created these two tables in circular form, as concentric rings.

Major = brighter, more cheerful or heroic affect

minor = darker, more plaintive or tragic affect

<i>C instruments</i>	<i>B\flat trumpet</i>
C major	D major
G major	A major
D major	E major
A major	B major
E major	F \sharp /G \flat major
B major	D \flat major
F \sharp /G \flat major	A \flat major
D \flat major	E \flat major
A \flat major	B \flat major
E \flat major	F major
B \flat major	C major
F major	G major
C major	D major

<i>C instruments</i>	<i>B\flat trumpet</i>
a minor	b minor
e minor	f \sharp minor
b minor	c \sharp minor
f \sharp minor	g \sharp minor
c \sharp minor	d \sharp /e \flat minor
g \sharp minor	b \flat minor
d \sharp /e \flat minor	f minor
b \flat minor	c minor
f minor	g minor
c minor	d minor
g minor	a minor
d minor	e minor
a minor	b minor

The shaded boxes indicate key signatures involving four or more accidentals (sharps or flats), which are more difficult to read and thus somewhat risky to use in your final project. However, if you want to create a drastic change in pitch content, then the way to do so is to travel from one key to another that lies four to eight rows below or above it (e.g., from D major to b \flat minor, or from e \flat minor to C major), in which case using these "distant" keys is almost necessary. Nonetheless, if you decide to use them, I recommend that you do so sparingly.