

What is it?

This is about the various ways we can name the degrees of the scale.

This isn't a detailed look at Tonic Solfa, it's just touching the surface and doesn't deal with accidentals.

Ever listen to someone whistling a well-known tune?

Did they know what key the original was in, and what key they're whistling in? No!

Does it matter? No!

All that matters is whether the next note of the tune goes up or down, and by how much. As long as you move around the piece by the correct amount relative to the previous note it doesn't matter what the starting note is.

Naming notes relative to other notes

There are two issues in describing a tune's next note relative to the previous note.

- How to name a jump up or down the scale in relative terms - see my Intervals sheet
- How to name the note we've landed on in relative terms - that's this sheet.

Three ways to name a note without using its name!

I'll give you some examples further down the page, but here are the three ways...

1. Numeric names... I for the first note in a scale, II for the second, and so on
2. Formal Names... Tonic, Supertonic, Mediant, Subdominant, Dominant, Submediant, Leading Note, Tonic
3. Tonic Solfa... Doh, Re, Me, Fa, Sol, La, Ti, Doh (note different languages spell these differently!)

To complicate matters a little, there are two sorts of Tonic Solfa -

- Moveable Doh (where the first note of a scale is Doh)
- Fixed Doh (Doh = C)

Here are two worked examples

Key C

Scale note	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Numeric names	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Formal names	Tonic	Supertonic	Mediant	Subdominant	Dominant	Submediant	Leading Note	Tonic
Fixed Doh	Doh	Re	Me	Fa	Sol	La	Ti	Doh
Moveable Doh	Doh	Re	Me	Fa	Sol	La	Ti	Doh

Key G

Scale note	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
Numeric names	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Formal names	Tonic	Supertonic	Mediant	Subdominant	Dominant	Submediant	Leading Note	Tonic
Fixed Doh	Sol	La	Ti	Doh	Re	Me	Fi (*)	Sol
Moveable Doh	Doh	Re	Me	Fa	Sol	La	Ti	Doh

(*) *Fi is one of many spellings that are applied to indicate that the note is sharpened compared to Fa.*

An aside - why is the submediant above the mediant when the subdominant is below the dominant?

The prefix "sub" denotes below. Why is the submediant above the mediant then?

The Dominant is the name of the key that is one sharper than the current key. It is five to the right of the Tonic.

The Mediant is halfway between the Tonic and the Dominant.

The Subdominant is the name of the key that is one flatter than the current key. It is properly regarded as being five to the left of the Tonic (as you can see if you start at the right hand edge of the table and move left).

The Subdominant isn't "one under the Dominant", it's "as far below the Tonic as the Dominant is above".

If you start at the right hand Tonic and move left, the Submediant is halfway between the Tonic and the Subdominant.