Order of sharps and flats

Let's write out the notes in the circle of fifths in order, going clockwise - sharps, then counter clockwise – flats and insert them into a table. As illustrated in the two tables below you can clearly see the sequential order when we go up or down if fifths as we add sharps or flats. The sharps or flats **always appear in the same order in all key signatures**. This is the same order in which they are added, as keys get sharper or flatter.

The first table illustrated below is the table of sharps. The order of fifths is listed going down column one starting with C and going clockwise around the circle of fifths. Row one states the key of C major has zero sharps. Row two displays that G major has one sharp, F#. D major has two sharps – the F#, and then add the next sharp in the order C#. And so on down the list of fifths adding sharps in order. If a key has only one sharp, then you know it must be an F#, as F# is the first sharp in the order of sharps. You also then know that the key must be G major, (Eminor), as G major is the only key with one sharp. D major is the only key with two sharps. A major has three sharps, F#, C#, and the third sharp, G#, and so on. The order of sharps is: F sharp, C sharp, G sharp, D sharp, A sharp, E sharp, B sharp as displayed in the table below.

C	0#							
G	1#	**F#**						
D	2#	F#	**C#**					
A	3#	F#	C#	**G#**				
E	4#	F#	C#	G#	**D#**			
B	5#	F#	C#	G#	D#	**A#**		
F#	6#	F#	C#	G#	D#	A#	**E#**	
C#	7#	F#	C#	G#	D#	A#	E#	**B#**

Order of sharps
F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#, B#

The table below illustrates the order of flats. Like the table above the order of fifths is listed going down column one starting with C and going counterclockwise around the circle of fifths. The order of flats is the reverse order of sharps: Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Cb, Fb. So the key with only one flat, F major, (D minor) has a B flat; the keys with two flats, B flat major (G minor) have the B flat and next note in the order, E flat; and so on. F is the only major key with one flat, Bb – and so on down the table.

C	0b							
F	1b	**Bb**						
Bb	2b	Bb	**Eb**					
Eb	3b	Bb	Eb	**Ab**				
Ab	4b	Bb	Eb	Ab	**Db**			
Db	5b	Bb	Eb	Ab	Db	**Gb**		
Gb	6b	Bb	Eb	Ab	Db	Gb	**Cb**	
Cb	7b	Bb	Eb	Ab	Db	Gb	Cb	**Fb**

Order of flats
Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Cb, Fb

To remember the order:
Fast **C**ars **G**et **D**riven
Around **E**very **B**oulevard

Order of sharps →
F, C, G, D, A, E, B
← Order of flats

These tables are very useful when determining how many, and which sharps or flats are in a given key. If you know the order of sharps and flats and know your circle of fifths, then you don't even need to look at your instrument to figure out all the notes in any given major key or relative minor key. For example, E major is at the four o'clock position on the circle of fifths. Therefore it has 4 sharps. Knowing the order of sharps they must be F#, C#, G#, and D#. Fill in the rest of the notes from the E and you have E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, and D# - all the notes in an E major scale. Apply these formulas to all keys.