A Short Guide to Key Transposition on French Horn

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Welcome!

My name is Katie Berglof. I originally wrote this guide in 2007 and published it through Knol. However, they discontinued Knol years ago. Finally! Here in 2020 I have updated my transposition guide and posted it on my website and social platforms for all to have.

I hope that this short guide will help you along your journey with horn playing. Learning how to transpose requires great mental preparation. Take time once a day to sit down and quiz yourself. Start with the most common downward transposition - Horn in Eb. Focus on mastering one horn key at a time. I also cannot emphasize enough how knowing your *circle of fifths* and practicing scales is vital to mastering transposition.

Although I do not rely on the *Major-minor Interval Transposition Method,* it is the standard way taught. Therefore, I listed the intervals in parenthesis for reference. Ex. (M2) is a Major 2nd. I also don't use *Clef Transposition Method* very often unless playing bass clef music or difficult opera basso parts where the interval distance is extremely far. I've placed a few examples on the last page.

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Key Transposition

In order to master this method of transposition, you only need to know two things; how many notes up or down you need to go on the staff, and the number of sharps or flats to apply. Then combine the two. It's as simple as that.

Step 1: How Many Notes Up or Down?

Downward Transposition:
Horn in E - 1 note down (m2)
Horn in Eb - 1 note down (M2)
Horn in D - 3 notes down (m3)
Horn in Db - 3 notes down (M3)
Horn in C (Ut) - 4 notes down (P4)
Horn in B (H/si/si basso) - 5 notes down (d5th)
Horn in Bb (B/si bemol) - 5 notes down (P5)

Upward Transposition:
Horn in F# - very rare - 1 note up (m2)
Horn in G - 1 note up (M2)
Horn in Ab - 3 notes up (m3)
Horn in A - 3 notes up (M3)

Step 2: How Many Flats or Sharps to Apply (The Key Signature)? P5 up from horn key!

Key Signatures for Downward Transposition:
Horn in E - 5 Sharps/B major (or flat everything)
Horn in Eb - 2 flats/Bb Major
Horn in D - 3 sharps/A Major
Horn in Db - 4 flats/Ab Major
Horn in C (Ut) - 1 sharp/G Major
Horn in B (H/si/si basso) - 6 sharps/F# Major
Horn in Bb (B/si bemol) - 1 flat/F Major

Key Signatures for Upward Transposition:
Horn in F# - 6 sharps/C# Major (or sharp everything)
Horn in G - 2 sharps/D Major
Horn in Ab - 3 flats/Eb Major
Horn in A - 4 sharps/E Major

Step 3: Combine the Two!

Downward Transposition Combined:
Horn in E - 1 note down/5 sharps; or flat everything - If a flat sign appears in front of a note then its double flatted, and if a natural sign appears, then it is sharped.
Horn in Eb - 1 note down/2 flats
Horn in D - 3 notes down/3 sharps
Horn in Db - 3 notes down/4 flats
Horn in C (Ut) - 4 notes down/1 sharp
Horn in B (H/si/si basso) - 5 notes down/6 sharps (or 4 notes down/6 flats)
Horn in Bb (B/si bemol) -5 notes down/1 flat

Upward Transposition Combined:
Horn in F# -1 note up/6 sharps; or sharp everything - if a sharp appears in front of a note then it is double sharp, and if a flat appears, then do not sharp the note.
Horn in G -1 note up/2 sharps
Horn in Ab - 3 notes up/3 flats
Horn in A - 3 notes up/4 sharps

Anything listed in red is rare

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Example 1

Horn in A

Transposed

Example 2

Horn in H

Transposed

Example 3

Horn in D

Transposed

Example 4

Horn in Eb

Transposed

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What about music that already has a key signature with flats or sharps. (e.g. transposing Kopprasch etudes)? Simply apply the following rules below.

Flat transposition applied to a written flat key signature:

The flats are added onto the written flat key signature

Flat transposition applied to a written sharp key signature:

The number of flats cancel out the same number of sharps in the written key signature

Sharp transposition applied to a written sharp key signature:

The sharps are added onto the written sharp key signature

Sharp transposition applied to a written flat key signature:

The number of sharps cancel out the same number of flats in the written key signature

Example 1

Transpose this into Horn in C

* Look at the key signature of the music - it has 3 flats
* Find the Horn in C key signature - it has 1 sharp
* This 1 sharp cancels out 1 flat in the staff's key signature. This leaves you with only 2 flats total
* Now all you have to think about when transposing the music into Horn in C is:
  4 notes down/2 flats

This is what is should look like mentally as you transpose:

Example 2

Transpose this into Horn in Eb

Transposed

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Clef Transposition Tricks

Transposing Bass Clef (ex. trombone part) to Horn in F: Switch the bass clef to treble clef, then transpose down 1 step, just like Horn in Eb, but keep the "Horn in F" key signature. If using interval transposition, it would be read a Perfect 5th up and then up an octave.

Bass Clef Music

Switched to Treble Clef

Transpose 1 step down to Horn in F (1 Flat = F Major)

Transposing Horn in A basso/a/la/la basso (m6): Switch to old notation bass clef. Find key signature (it's up a P5 from the Horn in A, which is E Major/4 sharps). Add the 4 sharps. Play up an octave.

Horn in A basso

Transposed

Transposing Horn in Ab basso/as/la bemol (M6): Switch to old notation bass clef. Find key signature (it's up a P5 from the Horn in Ab, which is Eb Major/3 flats). Add the 3 flats. Play up an octave.

Horn in Ab basso

Transposed

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