A Quick Guide to Intervals

An *interval* is a way of describing the absolute distance (up or down) encompasing two notes where we count the first note as one and then add the number of notes we "count through" until we get to the other note.

An example of this is would be going from C up to G.
I would count C, D, E, F, G, or 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (it's a good idea to use your fingers to count).
This interval is called a "*fifth*" (5th).

Or C down to G: C, B, A, G, or 1, 2, 3, 4. This would be called a "*fourth*" (4th).

(notice that in these examples we used each letter name only once, so that we did not count both C and C#, or B and Bb–we do the same with scales).

While theoretically, intervals can be counted up to an infinite number, we will limit our discussion to intervals as large as an *octave* (as in eight).

Since intervals deal with distances, let's consider a fundamental distance that is very familiar: the *half step* (also called a *semi-tone*). A half step is the distance from one note to the next closest note (up or down). On the keyboard, it is the distance from a white note to the closest black note or a black note to the closest white note (with the exception of C-B and E-F because these two pairs of notes are not separated by a black note).

So we can consider the half step to be a *common denominator* by which we can calculate intervals.

In addition to having a numeric value, intervals are either *perfect*, *major* or *minor*, and each of these could be *augmented* or *diminished* (one half step bigger, or one half step smaller).

Unisons (the same note), Fourths, Fifths and Octaves will either be perfect, augmented or diminished.

Seconds, Thirds, Sixths and Sevenths will either be major, minor, (augmented or diminished--less often).

We often abbreviate these names: (M)ajor, (m)inor, (P)erfect, (A)ugemented, (d)iminished.

Here is a chart that relates intervals to the number of half steps that make up each one. Use a keyboard when looking at this at first to help you with the visualization and so that you can hear them!:

Notes (ascending)	**Number of Half Steps**	**Interval Name**
C up to C (same note)	0	Unison, Perfect Prime/PP
C up to Db	1	Minor Second/m2nd
C up to D	2	Major Second/M2nd
C up to Eb	3	Minor Third/m3rd
C up to E	4	Major Third/M3rd
C up to F	5	Perfect Fourth/P4th
C up to F#	6	Augmented Fourth/A4th
C up to Gb	6 (Yes, again-it sounds the same)	Diminished Fifth/d5th
C up to G	7	Perfect Fifth/P5th
C up to G#	8	Augmented Fifth/A5th
C up to Ab	8 (Yes, again-it sounds the same)	Minor Sixth/m6th
C up to A	9	Major Sixth/M6th
C up to Bb	10	Minor Seventh/m7th
C up to B	11	Major Seventh/M7th
C up to C (higher)	12	Octave/P8