

Learn How To Read Music



by
GuitarPlayerWorld

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Introduction to Reading Music

Reading music is one of the most fundamental requirements that enable a musician to be able to write and pen down songs, learn songs from sheet music and as a means of communication with other musicians.

Furthermore, being able to read music is essential in understanding music theory. However, the most important reason of being able to read music is that the melody and rhythm of a song can be accurately derived from sheet music.

Learning to read music is not a difficult or complex process. This short course will enable you learn the basics of reading standard music notation in just a couple of minutes.

Let's begin your journey of unlocking a whole new musical world.

Cheers,

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1. Music Staves

If you have some sheet music, a hymnal, or a songbook, take it out and look at the music. If you do not already have some written music, find some free sheet music on the Internet or borrow a songbook from the library. Browse through the sheet music and you probably see something like this:



In standard music notation, there are 7 note names within the range of letters A – G. These notes can be represented on a grid of five horizontal lines called staves.



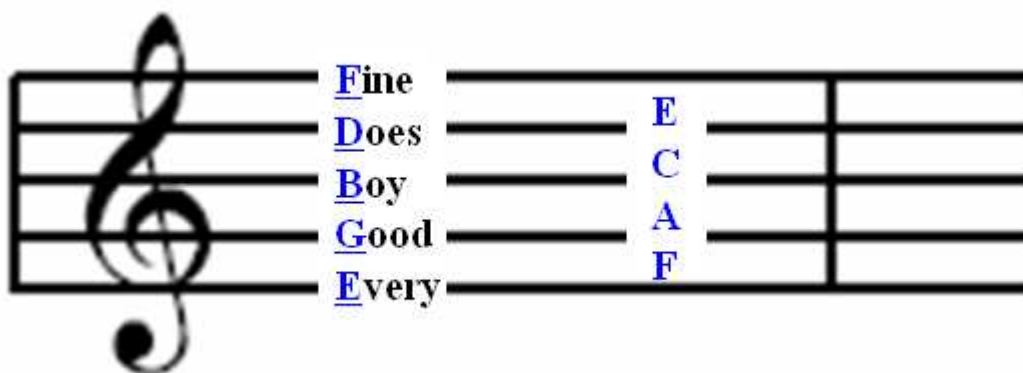
At the far left side of the staves you will see the clef marking. The type of clef would determine the name and pitch of the notes on the staves. In music, there are some other clefs such as the C-clef used typically for instruments such as viola, viola da gamba and the alto trombone. We are only going to focus on learning the treble and bass clef.

2. Naming the Lines and Spaces

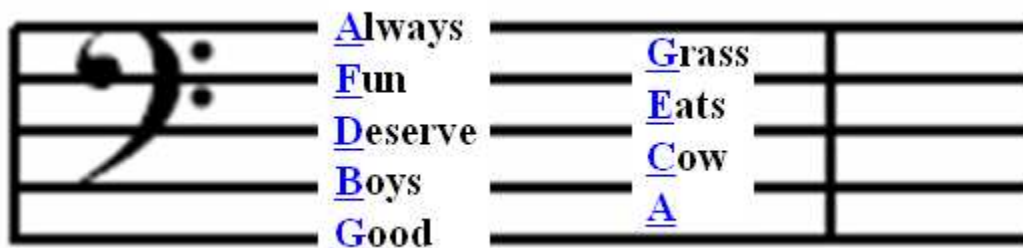
Your first experience with playing music from written notations will come as soon as you learn the notes. The first thing you have to do is to learn about the lines and the spaces of the staves. The diagram below shows you the notes as they are positioned on the staff.



If you look just at the actual lines of the staff, you will see that they are, going up, E-G-B-D-F. Some people remember this with little sayings, like “Every Good Boy Does Fine.” There are memory tricks for all the lines and spaces on both staves. For the spaces of the treble clef, you will notice that the letters of the notes spell F-A-C-E.



There are more notes to learn on the bass clef. A diagram of the bass clef with the notes on the lines and spaces is shown below.



The lines of the bass clef are G-B-D-F-A. Many people turn the treble clef saying around and use the saying “Good Boys Deserve Fun Always.” The spaces are A-C-E-G. One

popular mnemonic device for this is, “A Cows Eat Grass.” Feel free to make up anything that will help you to remember. Write your sayings down and memorize them. As you can see, the staff can only represent a limited range of pitches. In order to extend the range of the pitches, additional lines known as ledger lines can be added to the staff.



Chords are notes that are played simultaneously. You will recognize chords on the sheet music because they are written in a vertical line. If they are quarter notes (as seen in the example below), they will share the line that goes along the side of the note.



3. Sharps and Flats

Another thing to learn is the notation for sharps and flats.

The symbol that indicates a sharped note looks like this: # (raises pitch by semitone)













The symbol that indicates a flatted note looks like this: *b* (lowers pitch by semitone)

These symbols are placed to the left of the notes.



4. Timing and Rhythm

Have you listen to a piece of music and found yourself tapping naturally to the beat of the music? This is because the rhythm of the music has a pulsing effect. In standard music notation, the duration of the notes are shown below.

	Notes	Rests
Whole		
Half		
Quarter		
Eighth		
Sixteenth		
Thirty-Secondth		

Very frequently, you will see a note depicted with a dot. Basically, the dot lengthens the duration of the note by half of its value. We can use a bit of simple Maths to calculate the note duration as seen in the example below.

$$\text{Dotted Half Note} = \text{Half Note} + \text{Quarter Note}$$

$$\text{Dotted Quarter Note} = \text{Quarter Note} + \text{Eighth Note}$$

$$\text{Dotted Eighth Note} = \text{Eighth Note} + \text{Sixteenth Note}$$

6. Key Signatures

The key signature is a grouping of sharps or flats on the staff at the beginning of a piece of music. There might be no sharps or flats, and if it is a major key, then it is the key of C major.

One thing to remember is that the sharps or flats in the key signature are carried throughout the piece. That means that, for the key of F, every time you see a B on the staff, you play a B flat, for example. The flat or sharp signs will not be written beside those notes as long as the key signature is in place.



The key signature can change during the piece at any point. If it does, there will be a new clef sign and a new key signature marked on the staff at that point. Another time you might play something different is if you have an accidental. An accidental is a note that is not ordinarily in the key. A sharp or flat sign will be written by it to tell you what to do.

As a beginning player, the key signature is really quite simple. Just use it to tell you what notes to play sharp or flat throughout the piece. You can learn more about keys when you have advanced further in your studies of theory.



A staccato (displayed by a dot on top of note) indicates that the note duration should be shortened. The note should be played in a detached manner.



A vibrato is an effect created by a slight and consistent variation in pitch. This is a technique employed by musicians with string instruments.



A trill means that the next note above in the key played and alternated at a very rapid speed.



A tremolo indicates that the note should be repeatedly played as fast as possible.



A crescendo indicates that the music must be gradually played louder. The opposite of this is a diminuendo.



Repeat section of music.

– End –

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