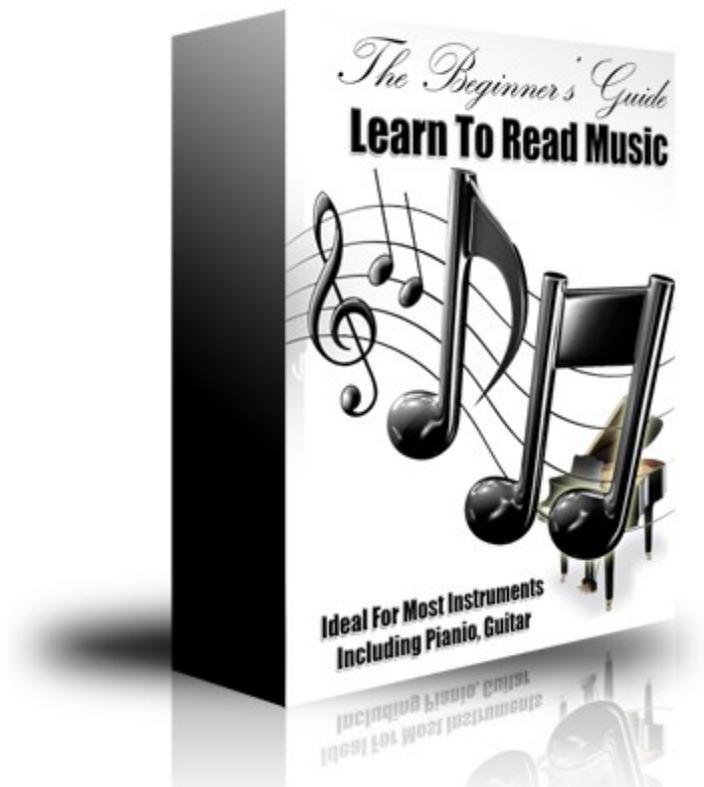


The Beginner's Guide

Learn To Read Music



Thank You For Your Purchase!

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Music To Your Eyes

A lot of people think music is difficult to read but it's not. It's actually the simplest written language there is. And once you get the basics down, the rewards will last a lifetime.

Whether it's classical, rock, hip hop, techno, reggae, ambient, country, folk, jazz or anything else, music is written and recognized in the same way throughout most of the world.

Learning how to read music is a significant step toward eventually being able to play, sing or even write any song you want. And while this tutorial won't turn you into the next Duke Ellington overnight, it will provide the skills you need for a basic read.

Before you tackle these steps, get your hands on some beginner-level sheet music to use as a reference as you're going along. See if you can find a copy of a song you like. This will be a tremendous help in familiarizing yourself with the basic fundamentals we'll present.

Another big help will be to find yourself an instrument. Even though you don't need one to read music in general, an instrument can be invaluable when it comes to understanding how a note's sound relates to what appears on paper. We'll focus on music for keyboard instruments, such as the piano or organ. However, music theory is generally universal, regardless of what instrument you're playing (including your voice).

If you don't have access to an instrument of your own, try renting or borrowing one from a friend. Sometimes community centres or religious organizations have instruments (especially pianos or organs) that are available for public use. Even if you're planning to sing the music you learn to read, it's important to know how it should sound and where to start.

Names Of Notes And Clefs

In modern, standardized music, there are seven note names which correspond with the first seven letters of the alphabet: A, B, C, D, E, F and G.

If you play or sing the notes in order, beginning with A, you would restart with "A" after "G," only at a higher pitch. For example: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C and so on. Eight notes in a row (in this case, from "A" to "A") are called an octave.

Since notes can range in tone from a deep bass (very low) to a high soprano, they're separated in written music by two different clefs: treble and bass.

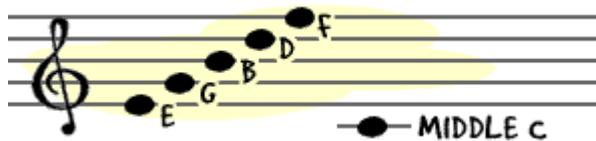


As a general rule, notes that follow a treble clef range from mid-level up to very high in tone. Notes that follow a bass clef range from mid-level down to the lowest of tones.

NOTE: There is also a "C" clef, which is sometimes used for cello, tenor trombone, bassoon and viola. However, we'll only be discussing the treble and bass clefs.

The Notes On Staves

Each clef has a staff. Staves are made up of five lines and four spaces. Each line and space represents where a particular note will fall. Starting from bottom to top, the lines on the treble staff read: E, G, B, D, F (one note for each line). A well-known way of remembering this is to say "Every Good Boy Does Fine" or "Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge," depending on if you're into chocolate or not. The spaces in between the lines follow the same order, and the notes are F, A, C, E, respectively.



Note how the treble clef, also called a G clef, encircles the G line. This is a good way to remember where notes fall, too.

The bass staff. Starting from bottom to top, the bass staff is: A, C, E, G (one note for each space rather than each line). A popular way to remember this is to say "All Cars Eat Gas" or "All Cows Eat Grass." The corresponding lines from bottom to top are G, B, D, F, A, respectively.



Note that the bass clef, also called the F clef, has dots surrounding the F line. In most written music, the treble and bass staves appear concurrently on the page, with the treble staff above the bass staff, separated by an open space. This is because the treble and bass lines are played simultaneously but written separately. On a keyboard, for example, the bass line is played with the left hand and the treble is played with the right.

Short lines that appear with notes written above or below a staff are called ledger lines. For example, middle C (the key that falls approximately in the center of a piano) appears on the first ledger line below a treble staff, or the first ledger line above a bass staff (see the two diagrams above). Ledger lines correspond with the main staff lines. The higher a note falls on a staff (or above), the higher its pitch will be. When two or more notes are written and played as a single unit, they're called chords.

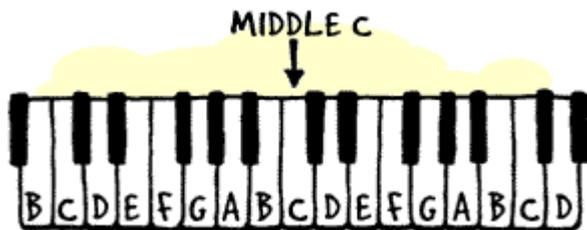


Where The Notes Fall On A Keyboard

On a keyboard, the white keys are the "natural" notes, and the black keys are the "sharp" and "flat" notes.

Middle C, is a natural (white) key, and is approximately the center key of a piano, which has 88 keys. Some keyboards and organs have less than 88 keys, but the same basic rule applies.

As you'll notice (especially if you're looking at a keyboard), not all notes have sharps or flats (there's no C or F flat, nor is there B or E sharp).



Understand Note Length

There are various types of notes, each of which is held for a different length of time. The way a note appears indicates how many beats it should last.

In most music:



Whole notes last four beats.



Half notes last two beats.



Quarter notes last one beat.

Any note shorter than a quarter note has one or more "hooks" to indicate its length. Each hook cuts the note's length in half.



Eighth notes (one hook) last one-half beat.



Sixteenth notes (two hooks) last one-quarter beat.

These continue on to thirty-second and sixty-fourth notes (with three and four hooks, respectively). If two or more notes requiring hooks appear in a row, they're often connected with "beams." The number of horizontal lines in a beam indicates note length.



Two eighth notes connected by a beam

Music also has rests, which indicate silent beats. They're counted in the same way as notes, and correspond to the notes they represent.



Whole note rest



Half note rest



Quarter note rest



Eighth note rest



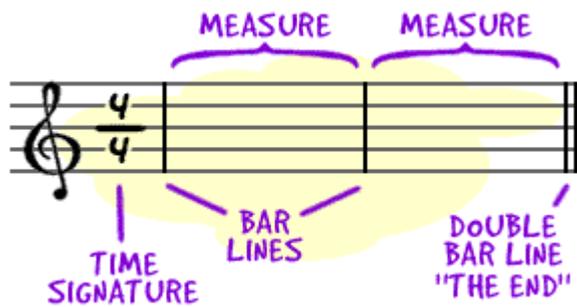
Sixteenth note rest

and so on...

Understand Time Signatures

Music usually has two numbers at the beginning, one on top of the other. This is called a time signature. The time signature indicates how many beats there are in a measure (the space between bar lines), as well as what the general pace (rhythm) of a song will be.

Bar lines are vertical lines that intersect the entire staff at regular intervals. The end of a piece of music is indicated by a double bar line.



The top number of a time signature indicates how many beats are in a measure. The bottom number indicates the type of note that makes up each beat.

The most common time signature in popular music is 4/4 (four beats in each measure, and each beat is made up of a quarter note). Sometimes 4/4 time is indicated with a large "C" centered vertically on the staff at its beginning (which stands for "common time").

Understand Key Signatures

Natural notes appear by themselves in written music. But sharps and flats have their own symbols:

Sharp

b Flat

On a keyboard, a sharp note is the black key that's one note higher than its natural counterpart (the white key). A flat is a black key that's one note lower than its natural counterpart.

When sharps and flats are written into music as needed (next to the notes), they're called accidentals. But sometimes they are shown at the beginning of a staff, right after the clef. In this case, they indicate a key signature.

Key signatures show which notes are to be played or sung as sharps or flats throughout the song. So if there's a sharp sign on "F" and one on "C", every "F" and "C" note throughout the song should be played as a sharp. There will be no "F" or "C" natural unless specifically indicated by a natural symbol:

♮ Natural



Key signatures (in this case, D Major) indicate the general tone of a song, as well as where its basic scale begins and ends. For example, a song in the key of D is based on the D Major scale, which begins and ends with "D" -- with "F" and "C" played sharp throughout. However, the same song can be written and played in different keys.

Interpretation Of Expressions

Tempo and volume also play an important role in music. A song's tempo (how fast or slow it should be played) is often written at the beginning in English or Italian. Here are the common terms in both languages:

| English | Italian Term |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Very slow | Lento; Largo |
| Slow | Adagio |
| Walking pace | Andante |
| Medium | Moderato |
| Fast | Allegro |
| Lively | Vivace |
| Very fast | Presto; Molto Allegro |

Common symbols indicating volume (how loud or soft a song should be played) are as follows:

| Symbol | Italian Term | English |
|---------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| ppp | Pianississimo | As soft as possible |
| pp | Pianissimo | Very soft |
| P | Piano | Soft |
| mp | Mezzo-piano | Moderately soft |
| m | Mezzo | Medium |
| mf | Mezzo-forte | Moderately loud |
| f | Forte | Loud |
| ff | Fortissimo | Very loud |
| fff | Fortississimo | As loud as possible |
| Pf | Piu forte | Louder |
| fp | Fortepiano | Quickly move from loud to soft |



Crescendo Gradually louder (this symbol will appear over several notes at once)
Diminuendo Gradually softer (this symbol will appear over several notes at once)

Additional symbols are used to give music more personality and variety:



A dot below or above the note indicates it should be played or sung staccato -- shortly with a silent space between it and the next note



A dot after a note or rest means you should add half its original length (so a half note followed by a dot would count as three beats, a whole rest followed by a dot would count for six beats, and so on)



Play or sing strongly



Notes should blend together smoothly



Hold the note



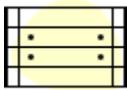
Repeat note once



Repeat the previous bar



Repeat previous two bars



Repeat section before going on

Once you've perfected these basic steps, you'll be well on your way toward trying something more complex. In the meantime, be patient with yourself. (In other words, put that Rachmaninoff down and stick with something simple for a while.) With enough practice, you'll have taken a significant step toward eventually being able to play, sing or even write any song you want.