

READING 1

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Objective

Reading music is a vital skill. It will enrich every aspect of musical life. With musical literacy comes access to employment opportunities, recording sessions, and live performances with less rehearsal time. Learning only “by ear” requires an existing recording or performance to memorize. The ability to read makes it possible to learn music from otherwise inaccessible sources. Additionally, it is then possible to communicate musically with other literate musicians even if there is no common spoken language. Reading is a powerful skill.

With reading comes the ability to enter musical situations that are closed to the non-reader: recording sessions, film and TV dates, symphonies, last-minute fill-in gigs, etc. Musical literacy also means the ability to *write* music. It then becomes possible to transmit ideas directly to other reading musicians who can make previously unheard compositions come to life instantly.

This course teaches the basic elements of notated music. It will cover fundamental notation, understanding chart symbols, song forms, and composition sections, all introduced through performance examples.

This course concentrates on three main topics: **Pitch**, **Rhythm**, and **Chart Reading**. Reading music is the combination of being able to recognize pitch names on the staff with identifying rhythms indicated by written note types. It is helpful to isolate these two separate disciplines. Strengthening each of these makes for stronger reading overall.

The chart reading sections of this course will examine overall approaches to reading music as it is presented in real-world situation. Structures of song form, chord symbols, and general music writing conventions will all be discussed.

Chapter 1

The Basic Elements of Music Reading.

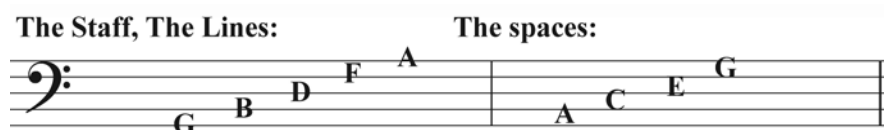
It is necessary to start with some basic definitions. Even if some of these seem simple or familiar, they are all fundamental and necessary building blocks of music notation.

Pitch: Pitch is the quality of a tone in relation to other tones, perceived as higher or lower.

Staff: A staff is composed of five horizontal parallel lines that indicate musical pitches. When reading in bass clef, the lines on the staff indicate the pitches G, B, D, F, and A. It is important to memorize this information. A good mnemonic technique for this sequence is **“Good Boys Do Fine Always.”**

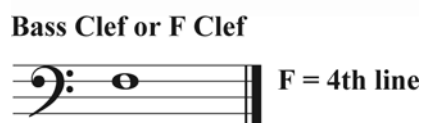
The spaces between the lines indicate the pitches A, C, E, and G. An effective mnemonic technique for this is **“All Cows Eat Grass.”**

Ex. 1.1



Bass Clef: The bass clef is also called the *F clef* because its two dots are on either side of the pitch F on the fourth line of the staff. By framing the pitch F, the bass clef then defines what pitches are represented on the staff. This is the main clef used to write music for bass guitar as well as cello, trombone, tuba, and other low-pitched instruments.

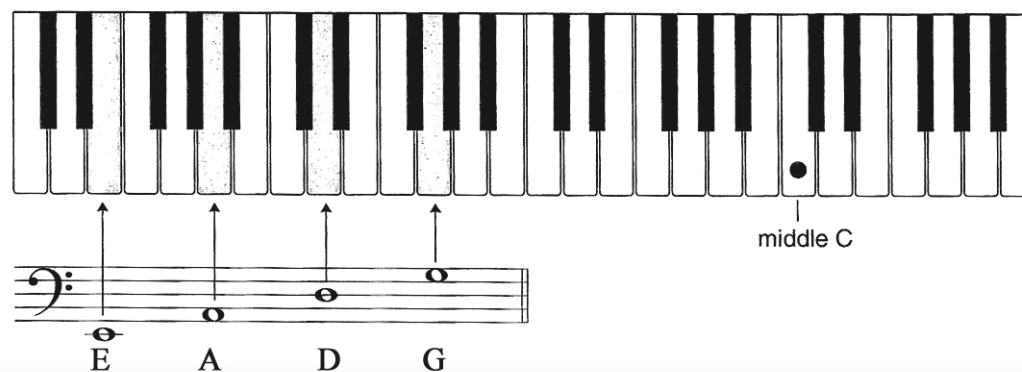
Ex. 1.2



Musical Alphabet: The musical alphabet is made up of pitches named A through G in twelve equal half-steps within an octave. These notes correspond to the twelve keys per octave on a piano or twelve frets per octave on the bass guitar. One octave of half-step pitches is: A, A#, B, C, C#, D, D#, E, F, F#, G and G#. The open string pitches on the four-string bass guitar from low to high are E, A, D and G. These pitches correspond to the following keys on the piano:

Ex. 1.3

Bass Open Sting Pitches on the Staff and the Piano.

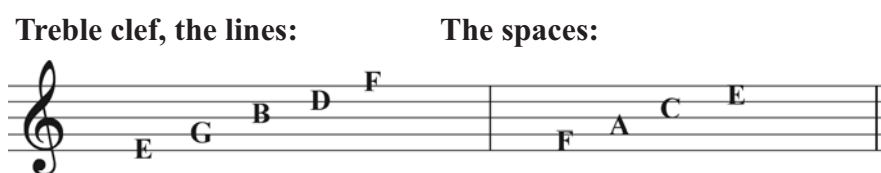


Note that a five-string bass has a B below the low E on the four-string bass. A six-string bass has the same low B string and an additional high C string above the G on the four-string bass.

Treble Clef: The Treble Clef is also called the *G clef* because the bottom loop circles the G line on the staff, thereby defining which pitches are represented. Treble clef is used when writing for higher-pitched instruments like trumpet, flute, or saxophone. When reading in treble clef, the lines on the staff indicate the following pitches: E, G, B, D, and F. An effective mnemonic technique for remembering this sequence is: **“Every Good Boy Does Fine.”**

The spaces on the staff represent the pitches F, A, C, and E. The easy mnemonic technique here is that these pitches spell the word **“FACE.”**

Ex. 1.4

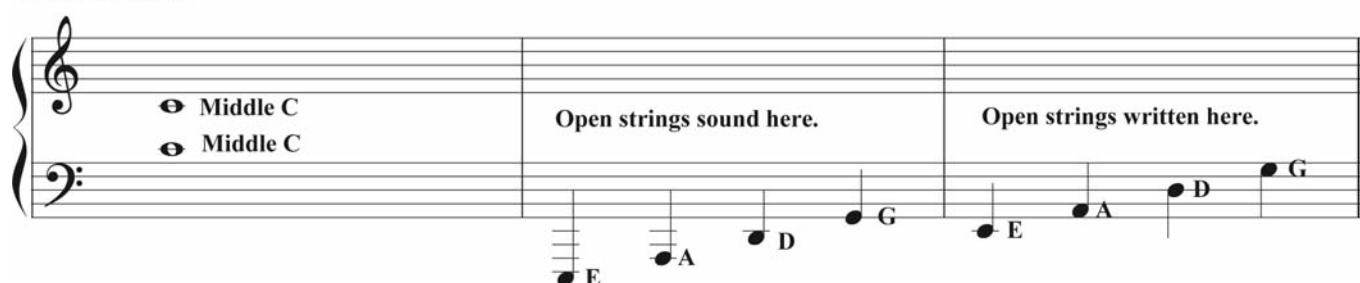


Grand Staff: A grand staff, also sometimes called the great staff, is a bracketed combination of the bass and treble clefs. The grand staff is commonly used in piano music notation. Note the location of middle C in the grand staff. It is one ledger line above the bass clef, and it is one ledger line below the treble clef.

Also note that music for bass guitar is written an octave above where it actually sounds. This is done for ease of reading, to keep the written notes in the staff. Otherwise too many lower ledger lines would be necessary to write the notes exactly where they sound on the bass guitar.

Ex. 1.5

The Grand Staff




Intervals: An interval is the distance between two pitches. One fret on the bass guitar is equal to one half step, the same interval represented by two adjacent keys on a piano keyboard. Two frets is equal to a whole step. Other intervals within an octave are named in relation to counting degrees of the major scale and are called a third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and octave. Any of these scale degrees may be raised (sharped) or lowered (flatted) by a half step.


Ledger Lines: Ledger lines are short, horizontal lines added above or below the regular staff to extend the staff for writing notes higher or lower than the main staff.


Ex.1.6

Ledger Lines:

Accidentals: An accidental is a mark placed before a written note to alter it by one or two half steps.

A “sharp”  raises the pitch by one half step or one fret on the bass neck.

A “flat”  lowers the pitch by one half step or one fret on the bass neck.

A “natural”  cancels a previously written sharp or flat.

In certain instances there are also “double sharps”  and “double flats” . These raise or lower a pitch by two half steps.

Melody: Melody is a tune or succession of tones made up of scales, pitches and rhythms. Melody is the part of a song that is usually sung or played instrumentally.

Harmony: Harmony is the combination of notes sounded simultaneously to produce chords. Though the actual playing of chords is unusual on bass guitar, knowing the proper harmony allows the player to select correct notes for bass lines and solos.

Chromatic Notes: Chromatic notes are tones that proceed in half steps, one fret apart on the neck of the bass.

Tablature: Tablature is a graphic shorthand often placed beneath a staff of traditional notation. It is designed to give fingering information about a musical passage. It contains little or no rhythmic information, however. The tablature staff will be marked with a “TAB” indication at the beginning and will contain four lines that represent the four strings of the bass. A number is placed on a string line to indicate which fret is to be pressed on that particular string to produce the desired note.

Below is an example of tablature on the bottom staff illustrating the fingering for a simple melody which is written on the top staff in traditional notation.

Ex. 1.7

T								
A	2			2	2	2		
B		5	3	5			5	5
B				2	5	5	2	5
B							2	2
B							2	2
B							5	5
B							2	5
B								3

Here is how to read the tablature: In the first measure above, the third string (or D string) is fingered at the second fret, indicated by the number 2. Then the A string is played at the fifth fret, indicated by the number 5. Then the A string is played again at the third fret and again at the fifth fret, following the numbers indicated.

When used in conjunction with traditional notation, Tablature can offer helpful fingerings. However, tablature on its own is insufficient to fully annotate music. Without an existing reference recording of a piece of music, for instance, tablature is almost useless. It is nearly impossible to notate an original un-recorded piece using only tablature. It is therefore suggested to be used as a supplemental rather than a principal music reading skill.

Rhythm: Rhythm is the controlled movement of music through time and its subdivisions. Rhythm is most clearly illustrated by a drum beat or simply tapping the foot in a regular pattern.

Measures (also called “bars”): Measures are the smallest unit of a written composition or song. They contain a specific number of beats and are separated by vertical lines on the staff called bar lines. There are a few types of bar lines.

Commonly between song sections, a **double bar line** is used. This consists of two thin lines of equal thickness.

At the end of a composition, the **final bar line** is used. This consists of two lines, the second of which is thicker.


Repeat bar lines indicate to repeat the passage contained within them. A beginning repeat bar line is a thick line first, a thin line, then a double dot. An ending repeat bar line is the mirror image of the beginning bar line.


Ex. 1.8

Four Measures divided by Bar Lines:

Time Signature: A time signature is a symbol with two stacked numbers placed on the top left of a composition that defines its meter. Sometimes the time signature can also change within a piece. The top number indicates how many beats are in each measure. The bottom number indicates which note gets counted as the primary pulse. Ex. 1.9

Time Signatures

Note also that 4/4 time often gets indicated by this symbol . This means “common time” because it is the most common time signature in all of music.

2/2 time often gets indicated by this symbol , which means “cut time.”

Note Types and Durations: Here are the different types of notes in written music and their durations. Note the syllables indicated that are used to count them verbally.

As illustrated below, a **whole note** is a hollow circle with no stem.

A **half note** is a hollow circle with a stem. Note that stems go down from on the left side of the note head or up on the right side, depending on where the note is in the staff. For notes above the middle line, stems go down on the left. For notes below the middle line, stems go up on the right. Notes on the middle line can go either way.

A **quarter note** is a solid circle with a stem.

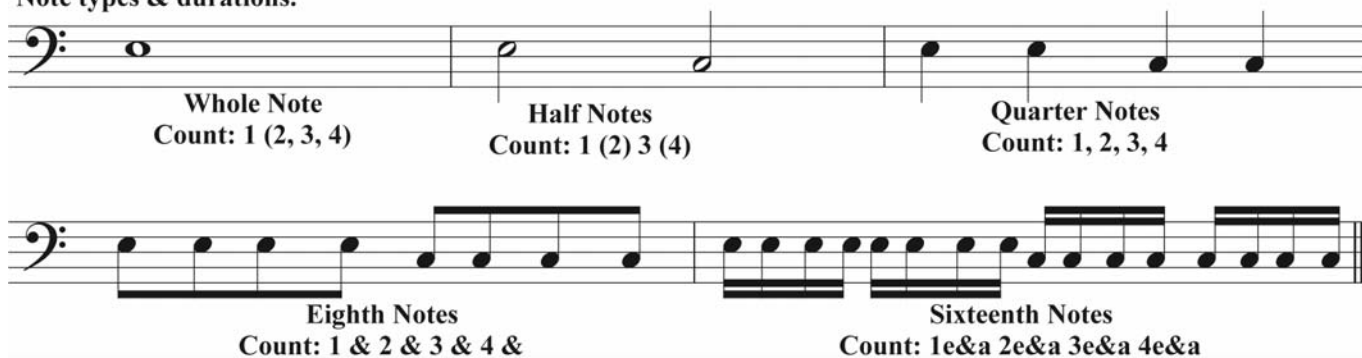
An **eighth note** is a solid circle with a stem and a single flag.

A **sixteenth note** is a solid circle with a double-flagged stem.

The count that each of these notes receive is outlined below.

Ex. 1.10

Note types & durations.



The image shows two musical staves in bass clef. The first staff illustrates four note types: a whole note (hollow circle, no stem), two half notes (hollow circles with stems), and four quarter notes (solid circles with stems). The second staff illustrates eighth notes (solid circles with single flags) and sixteenth notes (solid circles with double flags).

Whole Note
Count: 1 (2, 3, 4)

Half Notes
Count: 1 (2) 3 (4)

Quarter Notes
Count: 1, 2, 3, 4

Eighth Notes
Count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Sixteenth Notes
Count: 1e&a 2e&a 3e&a 4e&a

Here are the names and types of different rests in written music and the duration of silence that they indicate.

A **whole rest** is a solid block suspended below the fourth line of the staff.

A **half rest** is a solid block written above the third line.

A **quarter rest** looks something like a stylized number three (see figure below).

An **eighth rest** looks like a small number seven, though it graphically represents a note stem with a single flag on it like the eighth note.

A **sixteenth rest** looks like a note stem with a double flag on it.

Ex. 1.11

Rest types & durations.

Whole Rest
Count: (1, 2, 3, 4)

Half Rests
Count: (1 2) (3 4)

Quarter Rests
Count: (1) (2) (3) (4)

Eighth Rests
Count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Sixteenth Rests
Count: 1e&a 2e&a 3e&a 4e&a

In 4/4 time (also called “common time”), it is recommended to tap your foot four times for every bar, which is equal to once every quarter note. While tapping your foot, say the rhythms out loud or clap on the beats they occur.

For these examples, start at a slower tempo. Tap your foot on the quarter note. Clap your hands and say out loud every number that is not in parentheses.

Ex. 1.12

Note types, clapping & counting.

Whole Note
Count: 1 (2) 3 4

Half Notes
Count: 1 (2) 3 (4)

Quarter Notes
Count: 1 2 3 4

Eighth Notes
Count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Sixteenth Notes
Count: 1e&a 2e&a 3e&a 4e&a

Ex. 1.13

More clapping & counting.

Count: 1 (2) 3 (4) 1 2 3 4 1 (2 3 4) 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

1 (2) 3 4 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1e&a 2e&a 3e&a 4e&a 1 (2 3 4)

Fingering Numbers: Occasionally, a piece of music will have an indication as to which finger to use to play a certain note or passage. This is indicated by a small number in a circle above the note in question. The fingers on the fretting hand are numbered like this: the index finger is number one, the middle finger is two, the ring finger is three, and the pinkie is four.

In this example, it is indicated to play the first G note with the fourth finger. The next note is an E played with the first finger. The next is another G with the fourth finger, etc. This fingering pattern keeps to the one-finger-per-fret idea. The entire passage will lay out nicely under the hand as a result.

Ex. 1.14

Fingering indication numbers.

Very often when learning a new piece of music, it is helpful and even advantageous to write in some of your own fingering numbers to help you remember the best way to execute a certain passage.