

FIRST THINGS FIRST

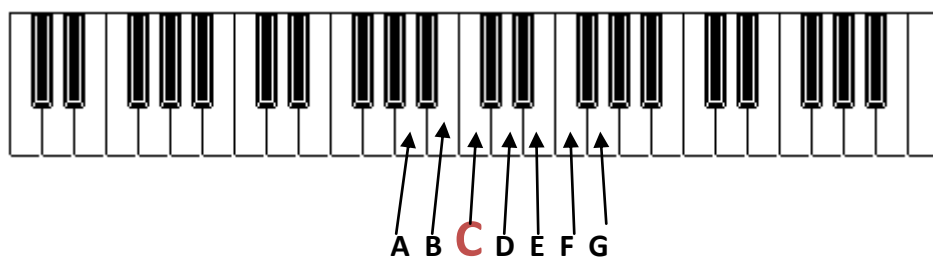
Learning music is a bit like learning a foreign language. Whilst it is not as complicated as Chinese or Welsh, music still requires practice and dedication. For those of you in the choir who do not read music, I have put this simple guide together to help you with the absolute basics. It is in no way a definitive guide, but it will help you get started and with a bit of perseverance, you should be able to recognise some of the notes you are asked to sing.

The great thing about a choir is that we work together, learn from each other and gain confidence from those around us whose experience of the choral environment is more defined. A good example is pitch. Recognising a note does not mean you can instantly call it to mind and sing it. Experience and confidence will however, allow you to find subsequent notes once you know the pitch of the starting point. We will learn some exercises exercises to help you with that.

THE NOTES

Ok, let's start with some basics; Do you know your alphabet A to G and can you count to eight? If you can answer yes to those two questions, you are over half way to understanding the basics (and we are only a third of the way down the page!).

I will use a piano keyboard, as this is the most visual way to show the notes. Additionally, many of you may have access to a keyboard (even a child's toy piano will be laid out the same).



The red note is Middle C and it is on the white key (we will come to the black keys later, so for now just concentrate on the white keys).. You will find this note on the piano in roughly the middle of the keyboard. In older piano's, before Casio came along, this key was found opposite the lock in the keyboard lid. Ok, so that's Middle C, so going back to our alphabet, the note after it must be D and the note before it must be B. Taking this in logical fashion, I said you only need to know your alphabet A to G. So in musical terms, when you reach G the next note is A and so on. Easy? Why not write the names of the other white notes onto the drawing. I have given you the first seven and so using your knowledge of the alphabet you should be able to write the rest in.

You should now have all the notes written and you will see that they repeat along the length of the keyboard. Each repeat is an Octave either up or down. You will also see that they group against the black

notes the same the whole length of the keyboard. Logically, this means that the black notes will have the same octave values for the same note across the length of the keyboard.

So you should now have all the white notes named on your keyboard drawing. It may help if you write them onto the relevant keys on the drawing shown below:



Right. This may be the best time to cover the black notes on you keyboard (above). These keys represent the 'sharps' and 'flats' we use in music. To understand the principle of sharps and flats is fairly easy. The value between each note (represented by the white keys) is 'One Whole Tone'. Thus: C to D = 1. E to F +1 and so on. If you look at the black keys on the piano drawing above, we can see they are grouped together in a block of three and then a pair. This goes right across the keyboard. You will notice that there is a black note next to each white note with the exception of just two (**B to C and E to F**). These black keys represent $\frac{1}{2}$ a tone. So keep that thought. If you remember that we sharpen up and we flatten down, you can now get the following notation: **C C# D D# E F F# G G# A A# B**. I am sure you will have gathered by now that C sharp and D flat are the same note. D sharp is E flat and so on. **So that's the 12 notes used in all music**

THE STAVE & CLEFS

Music is written on a Stave. This consists of five horizontal lines evenly spaced apart. A note is placed either on one of the lines or in a space between them. The vertical position of the note tells the musician what note to sing or play. Staves can be used alone or in pairs, one on top of the other, if, like our choir, we are using a wide range of notes.

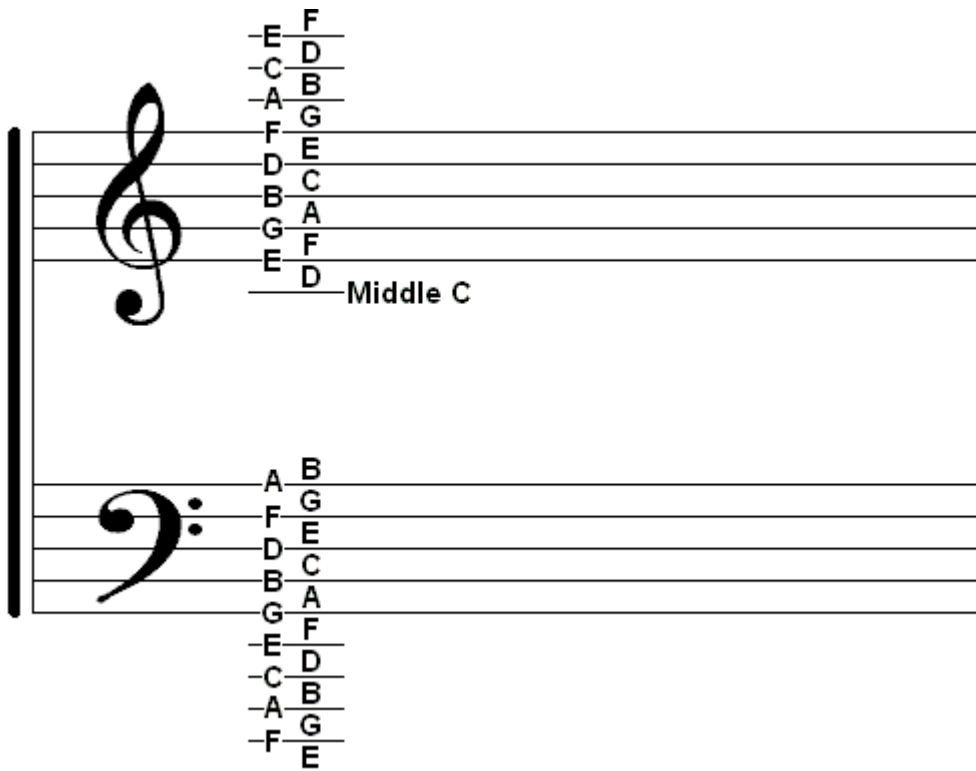
You can buy a book of music paper in WH Smiths and it is called – Manuscript Paper. It may be handy to have some available if you want to practice writing music notes.

If a voice or an instrument needs to sing or play notes that are higher or lower than the five lines each stave can show, then ledger lines are drawn to extend the stave.

There are three clefs, the G clef and the F clef are used most often. There is also the C clef. The G clef is sometimes called the 'Treble clef' because it indicates the higher notes, and the F clef is called the 'Bass clef' because it indicates the lower notes.

When both Treble and Bass clef are shown together (as they are in piano music and a lot of the music we will use) it is known as The Grand Staff. One is shown below. The top clef is the Treble Clef (or Treble Staff) and the bottom portion is known as the Bass Clef (or Bass Staff).

Treble Clef - You can clearly see the notes in the spaces on the treble clef: **F A C E** and the notes on the lines are: **E G B D F**. You can see the notes written above the top line of the Treble Clef and how ledger lines are used to indicate which note is which. You can also see one note (D) shown below the bottom line of the Treble Clef and below that is a ledger line where we will find Middle C. If you look at your piano keyboard diagram you can now see how the notes fit onto the keyboard. In short, the notes on the Treble Clef go upwards from Middle C. In piano terms, these notes are played with the right hand.



Bass Clef – Again, you can clearly see the notes written between the lines: **A C E G** and of course, the notes on the lines: **G B D F A**. One note appears above the top line of the Bass Staff and this note is B which we know comes before Middle C. The notes below the bottom line of the Bass Staff have their own ledger lines. You can see therefore, that going down the keyboard from Middle C are the notes on the Bass Clef. These notes are played by the pianist’s left hand.

To help you remember the notes on both staves, we commonly use variations of the following mnemonics:

Treble Clef notes in the spaces – **FACE**

Notes on the lines - **Every Good Boy Deserve Favour** - EGBDF

On the Bass Clef; notes in the spaces – **All Cows Eat Grass** - ACEG

Notes on the lines – **Giant Bears Don’t Fly Aeroplanes** - GBDF A

Sopranos and Altos will always read our music on the Treble Clef

Tenors may find music written on Treble or Bass Clef

Basses will always have their music written on the Bass Clef

Sorry tenors, you drew the short straw on this one....


NOTE VALUES & TIMING

When reading music, the first element we will encounter at the beginning of the staff is the time signature. Measures are qualified by two numbers used in the time signature. The number on top indicates the amount of beats existing in each measure (we will later explain the function of the number on the bottom):

$\frac{2}{4}$	2 beats per measure
$\frac{3}{4}$	3 beats per measure
$\frac{4}{4}$	4 beats per measure


It is often the case that you will see the C symbol as a time signature to define a $\frac{4}{4}$ time

The longest note length in common use today is called a *semibreve* or *whole note* and looks like this: 


The note half the length of a semibreve or whole note is called a *minim* or *half note* and looks like this: 

When reading music notation any note with a stem can be with its stem or down from the left-hand side of the note head. The note-lengths are the same whether the stems are up or down.

The note a quarter the length of a semibreve or whole note is called a *crotchet* or *quarter note*

and looks like this: 

The note an eighth the length of a semibreve or whole note is called a *quaver* or *eighth note*

and looks like this:  In musical notation, when there is a group of 2 or more quavers, sometimes their tails become a linking straight line between the ends of their stems.

So; Semibreve = whole note

Minim = half note

Crotchet = quarter note

Quaver = eighth of a note.

This means that if you have 4 beats in a bar the values are as follows:

Semibreve = 4 beats

Minim = 2 beats

Crotchet – one beat

Quaver = $\frac{1}{2}$ a beat

I think we should leave it at that. I hope you find this enough to start to understand the music we are using. Remember; only by experience will this information start to gel in your mind. Never worry if you forget things, it will eventually flow and become second nature.

I will do further notes on music theory, but let's see if these help at all first

Dorian Edwards

June 2009