

The Basics of Reading Music

Week One: Let's Start at the Very Beginning

In this first lesson, you are going to learn to name the notes on the treble and bass clefs and to count the most common note values.

This is typical music notation for a choir.

Moderato, molto espressivo

mp dolce e legato

SOPRANO
1 2 5 6 7 8 9
May your hearts be lov - ing and hon - est, Where - ev - er you may roam. . . .

ALTO
mp dolce e legato
May your hearts be lov - ing, Where - ev - er you may roam. . . .

TENOR

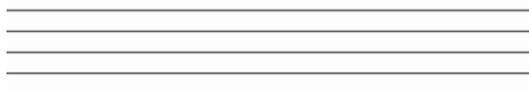
BASS

Piano
Moderato, molto espressivo

Music notation tells you two things: which pitch to play or sing and how long to hold it. Every note has both a pitch and a length. We're going to start with the note pitches.

PART 1: The Pitches

Music is written on a series of 5 parallel lines called a staff or staff. You can place a note on any line or in any space.



At the start of the staff there is a symbol called a clef and there are two kinds you'll see on your music:



If you have a high voice (mostly female singers) then you will usually follow music with a treble clef at the start because that means we're going to be using higher notes. If you have a low voice (mostly male singers) then you will usually follow music with a bass clef at the start because that means we're going to be using lower notes.

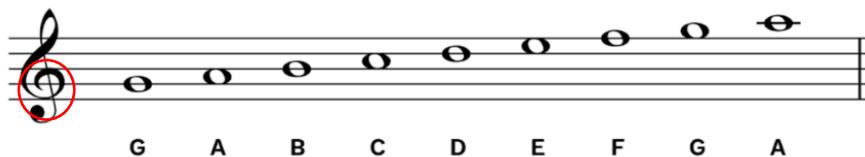
Naming Pitches

In music, we use the alphabet letters A-G to name the pitches and they repeat over and over.

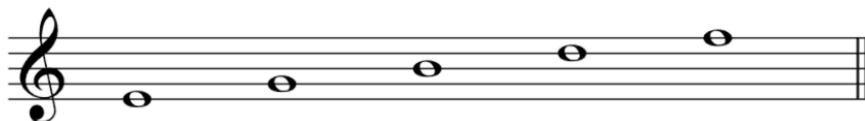
Luckily, there are a couple of little tricks we use to remember which pitch goes where. Firstly, let's look at the TREBLE CLEF.

1) The Treble Clef

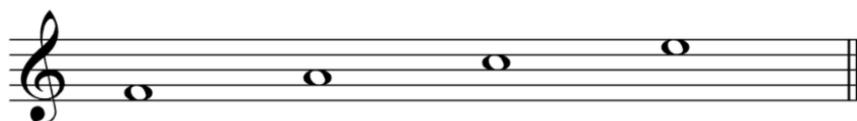
The TREBLE CLEF is also known as the G CLEF because the centre of its spiral wraps itself around the position of pitch G. Then, if you keep going through your alphabet one letter at a time (A-G repeating), you can fill in all the note names.



EXERCISE: To help us remember which line and space correspond to which pitch, we can also use fun rhymes. Let's make up some of our own:



E _____ G _____ B _____ D _____ F _____



F _____ A _____ C _____ E _____

2) The Bass Clef

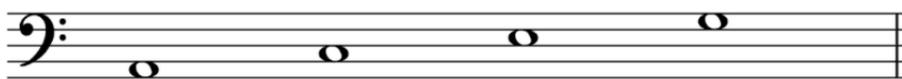
Now, let's look at the BASS CLEF. The bass clef is also known as the F CLEF because the dot at the top starts on the position of F.



EXERCISE: Here are the rhymes we need to create for the bass clef:



G _____ B _____ D _____ F _____ A _____

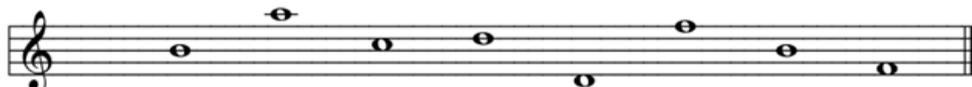


A _____ C _____ E _____ G _____

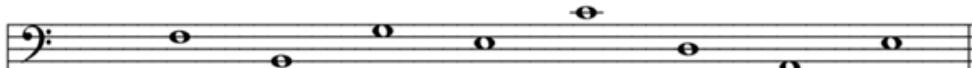
EXERCISE: Use the rhymes above to help you name these (treble) notes:

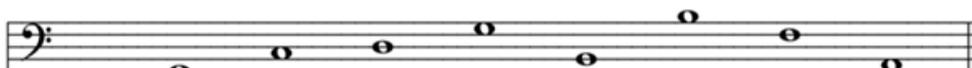


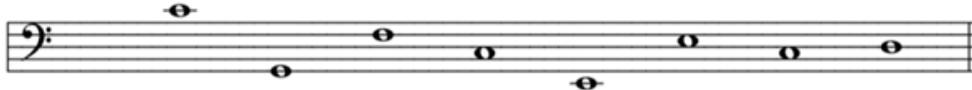




EXERCISE: Use the rhymes above to help you name these (bass) notes:





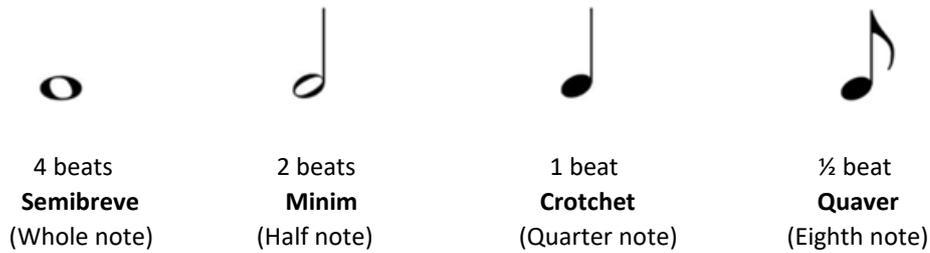


PART 2: The Note Lengths (Making Rhythms)

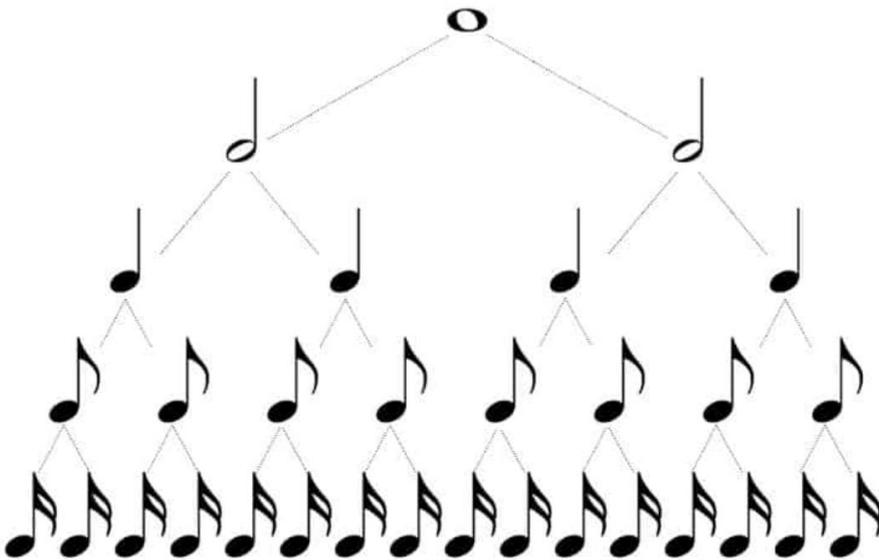
Now that you know which pitch to sing, you need to know how long to hold it! Songs would be very dull indeed if all the notes were the same length!

The Main Note Lengths (Values)

There are four main note lengths (values) that you will come across regularly in your music:



Here's a simple note tree showing how they're all related:

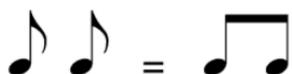


And there are a few more ways of writing notes that you will see on your choir music:

- 1) Notes can also be "upside down" with the tail going the other way



2) You can join two quavers together to make them easier to read on the page



3) You can add a dot after a note. This adds on HALF of WHAT IS ALREADY THERE



3 beats = 2 beats + 1 beat

Here's that original choir music again. Look at how there are quavers grouped together (1), how some notes seem to be "upside down" (2) and how there is a dot added to a note (3):

Moderato, molto espressivo

SOPRANO *mp dolce e legato* 1 2 5 6 7 8 9
 May your hearts be lov - ing and hon - est, Where - ev - er you may roam.____

ALTO *mp dolce e legato*
 May your hearts be lov 3. ing, Where - ev - er you may roam.____

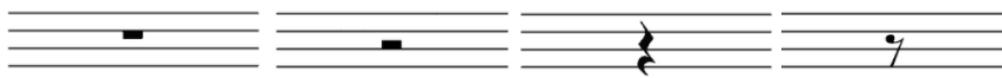
TENOR

BASS

Piano Moderato, molto espressivo 1
 May your hearts be lov ing, Where - ev - er you may roam.____

The Corresponding Rests

Of course, every note value has a corresponding rest. This means that the singer or instrumentalist should NOT play.



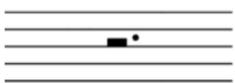
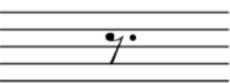
4 beats
Semibreve
 (Whole note)

2 beats
Minim
 (Half note)

1 beat
Crotchet
 (Quarter note)

1/2 beat
Quaver
 (Eighth note)

And, of course, you can add a dot after a rest to add on half its value – in the same way that we did with the note lengths.

			
6 beats Dotted Semibreve	3 beats Dotted Minim	1 ½ beats Dotted Crotchet	¾ beat Dotted Quaver

EXERCISE: Write down the note or rest VALUES (lengths) in the examples below:

Hint: it doesn't matter what the PITCH of the note is





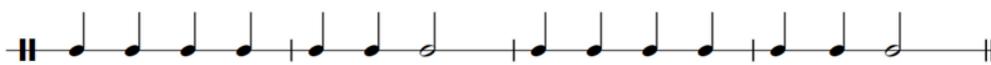
EXERCISE: This is the rhythm for the song “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”. It uses note values of just one and two beats. Let’s clap the rhythm together.



Twin- kle, twin- kle lit - tle star, how I won- der what you are.



Up a - bove the world so high, like a dia- mond in the sky.



Twin- kle, twin- kle lit - tle star, how I won- der what you are.

