How Notes are named

Musical sounds, or NOTES as they are known, are named after the first seven letters of the alphabet:

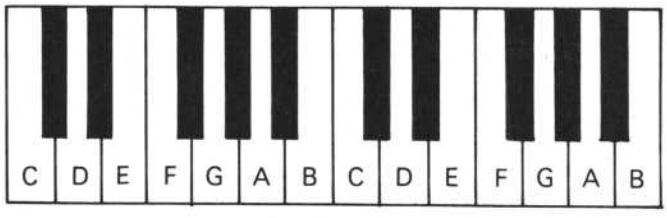
A — B — C — D — E — F — G

After G, the note names start again at A:

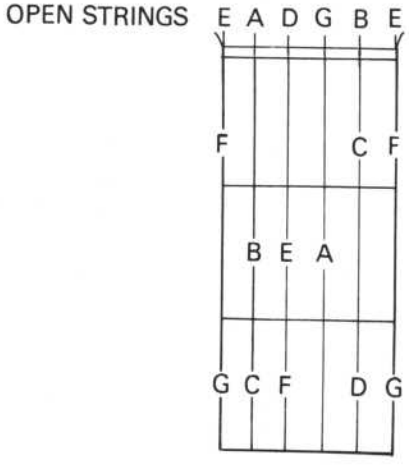
A — B — C — D — E — F — G — A — B — C and so on.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

As you can see, every eight notes there is another note with the same name. These notes are given the same names because they sound very much alike, in spite of being 'higher' or 'lower' than each other.

SOME NOTES ON THE KEYBOARD



SOME NOTES ON THE GUITAR



If you play an instrument, find out the names of the notes you play. (Look at a book about your instrument if necessary.) Then play two notes which have the same name and see how similar they sound.

How Notes are written

Written music is very versatile. It can show all the notes from the very highest sounds right down to the very lowest.

However, all notes are not needed for every instrument or voice. So, to simplify it, and make it easier to read, music is divided into two parts — one for higher voices and instruments, and one for lower.

Signs called CLEFS tell us whether a piece of music is for high or low instruments and voices. Two Clefs are normally used* and one or the other is shown at the beginning of every line of music.

THE TREBLE OR G CLEF (𝄞)

Music with this Clef is for the higher (Soprano and Alto) voices and instruments, the guitar and the right hand of the piano, organ and other keyboard instruments.

THE BASS OR F CLEF (𝄢)

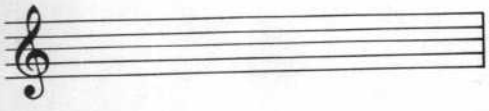
Music with this Clef is for the lower (Tenor and Bass) voices and instruments, and the left hand of the piano, organ and other keyboard instruments. It is also used for notes played on the pedals of an organ.

The piano, organ and other keyboard instruments use both Clefs together because they have such a wide range and number of notes.

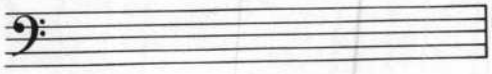
Notes are written on sets of lines called STAVES. There is one Stave for the voices and instruments which use the Treble or G Clef (𝄞) and another for the lower voices and instruments which use the Bass or F Clef (𝄢).

Each Stave has five lines and four spaces.

THE TREBLE CLEF AND STAVE



THE BASS CLEF AND STAVE

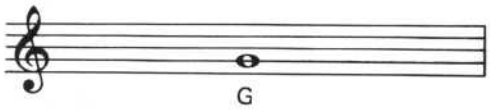


*There is also a third Clef, the C Clef (𝄡). It is not generally used today except for the viola and sometimes for the higher notes of the 'cello, bassoon and tenor trombone. If your music is written with this Clef, turn to page 83 after you have read this section.

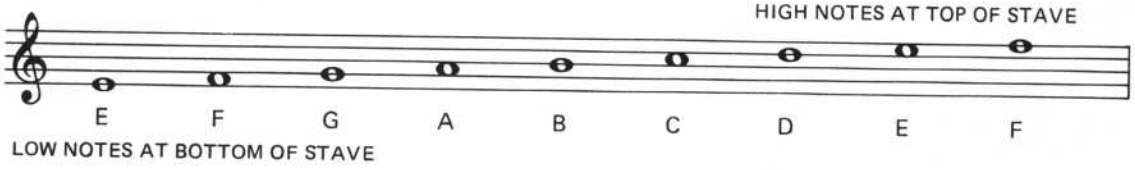
Each line and space on the Stave is like a step on a musical ladder — one note on the line, the next note higher in the space above, and so on. The higher the note sounds, the higher up it is on the Stave.

As long as you can remember the name of ONE note, you can work out all the others.

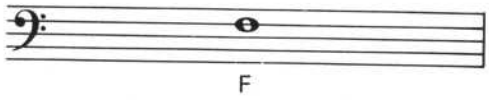
The Clefs help us by giving the position of one note. The Treble or G Clef gives us the position for the note G on the second line. The Clef draws a ring around the second line to show us.



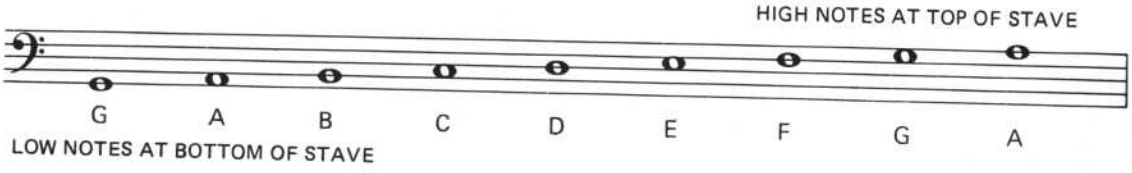
The other notes, higher and lower than G, run in order up and down the Stave. G is on the line, A is in the space above, B is on the next line, and so on.



The Bass or F Clef also gives the position of one note — this time F on the fourth line. The big 'dot' of the Clef marks the note.

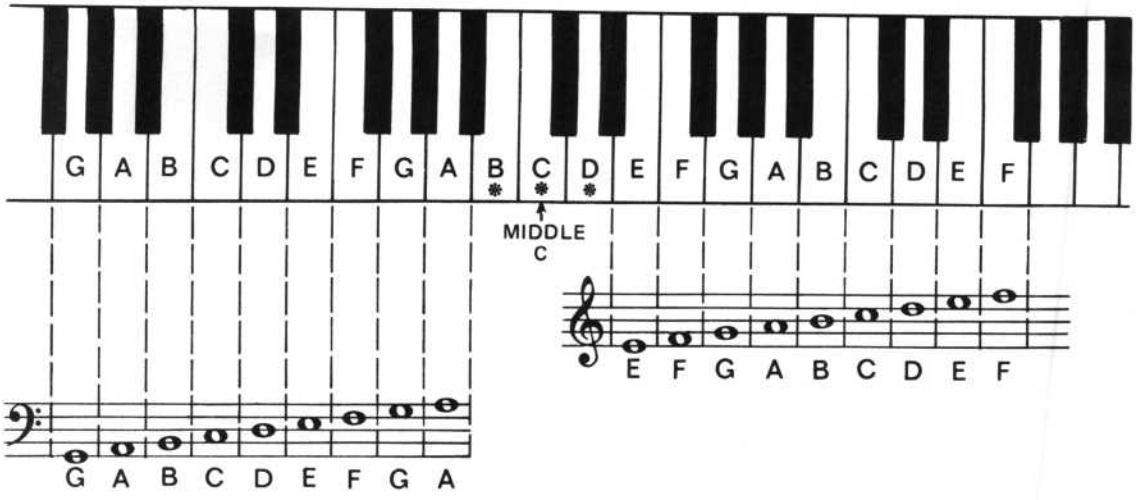


The other notes, higher and lower than F, run in order up and down the Stave. F on the line, G in the space above, and so on.



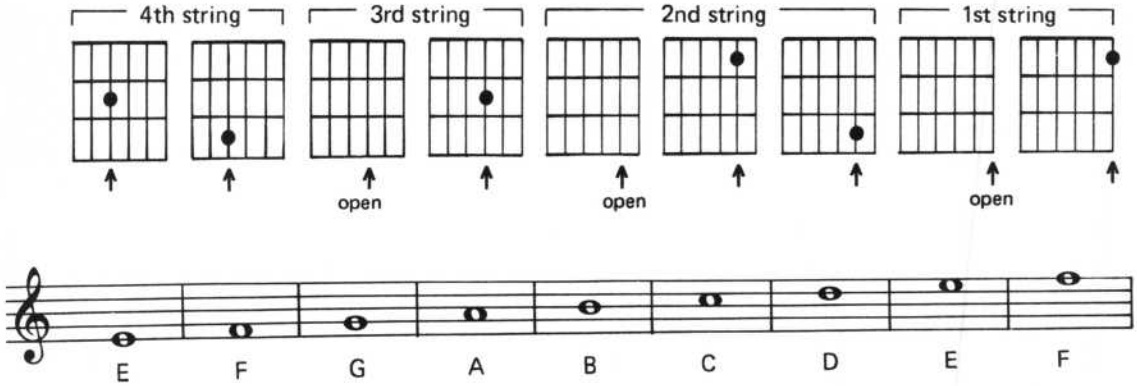
If you are a singer, or if the instrument you play only uses one Stave, it isn't essential to learn the notes on the other Stave. However, it is worthwhile to know how they both work.

WHERE THESE NOTES ARE ON THE KEYBOARD



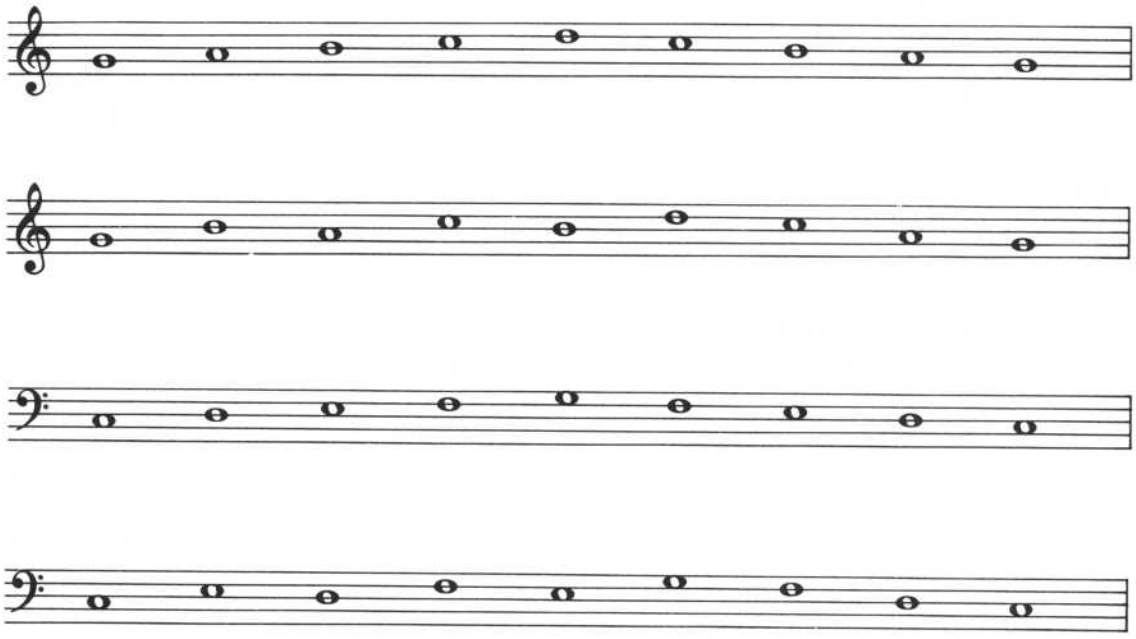
*THESE NOTES ARE EXPLAINED IN LATER PAGES.

. . . AND ON THE GUITAR



Here are some examples for you to practise reading notes. If you play an instrument, try playing the ones which are for your instrument. Treble and Alto instruments and the guitar should play the examples on the Treble or G Clef. Tenor and Bass instruments should play the examples on the Bass or F Clef. If you are not sure which you should use, look at a book about your instrument. The piano and organ should play both sets of examples — play the notes on the Bass Clef separately with the left hand.

Before you begin, make sure you know where the notes are on your instrument.



Note: Music for the guitar is written higher than it actually sounds so it can appear on the Treble Clef (𝄞) and be easier to read. In guitar music  is the same note as  on the piano, organ and other instruments.

Music for Tenor singers is sometimes written in this way on the Treble Clef. Some other instruments have their music written higher or lower than it sounds for similar reasons.

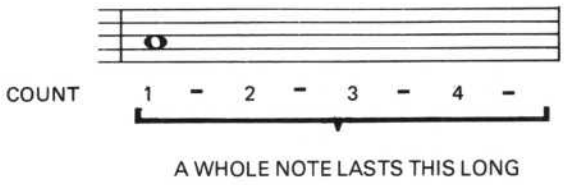
Notes with different shapes

As well as showing us which notes to play or sing, written music also tells us how long each note should sound — by giving notes different shapes.

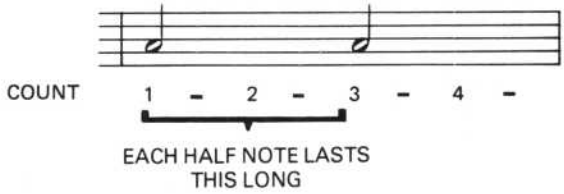
So, the *position* of the note tells us *which note* to play or sing, the *shape* of the note tells us *how long it should sound*.

Each different shape lasts for a certain number of 'beats' which we can count.

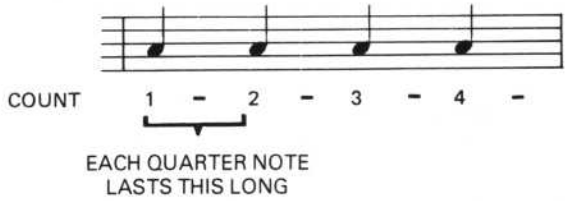
𝅝 is a WHOLE NOTE (or SEMIBREVE). In most music it lasts for four beats. For this note we count 1—2—3—4—, in time with the music.



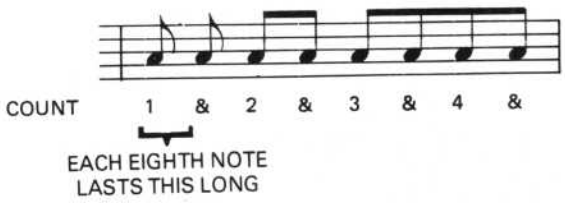
𝅗𝅥 is a HALF NOTE (or MINIM). It usually lasts for two beats — half as long as a Whole Note. Count Half Notes like this:



♩ is a QUARTER NOTE (or CROTCHET) — a quarter of a Whole Note. It usually lasts for one beat. Count Quarter Notes like this:



♪ is an EIGHTH NOTE (or QUAVER). An Eighth Note usually lasts for half a beat. Two or more Eighth Notes may be joined together – ♫. Count Eighth Notes one-and-two-and-



The 'stems' of notes can go up (♩) or down (𝅗𝅥) — it doesn't make *any* difference to the note. Normally, to keep music tidy and clear, notes above the middle line of the Stave have their 'stems' pointing down. On the middle line they can go either way:

To make reading and counting easier, music is divided with vertical lines called BAR-LINES. The beat does not stop at Bar-Lines. Count evenly as if they don't exist — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — and so on. It will probably help if you tap your foot in time with the beat when you are counting.

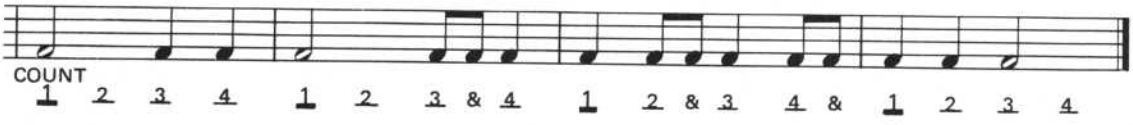
The space, or measure between two Bar-Lines is called a BAR.

Bar-Lines also help to show the rhythm — the first note after a Bar-Line is normally played or sung a little more strongly than the others.

The end of a piece of music is always marked with a DOUBLE BAR-LINE. Double Bar-Lines also can divide music into sections or Phrases.

Try playing or humming this example, counting evenly in your head at the same time. If you like, tap your foot in time with the beats which are underlined. As you can see, there are four beats to the Bar.

Notes of different lengths may be mixed together in a Bar. The beats carry on regardless of the number, or length of notes.

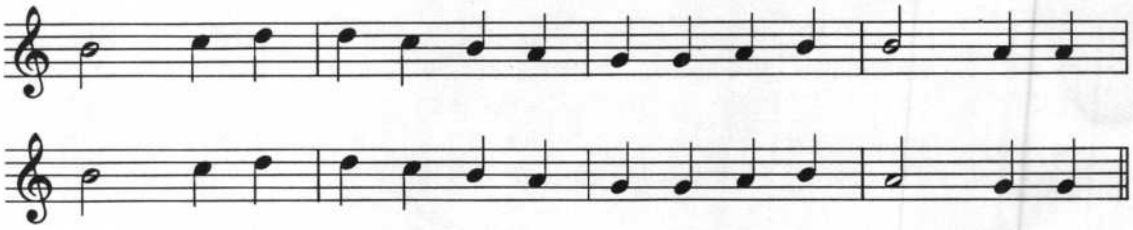


Try playing or humming this, counting at the same time.

Reading a Melody

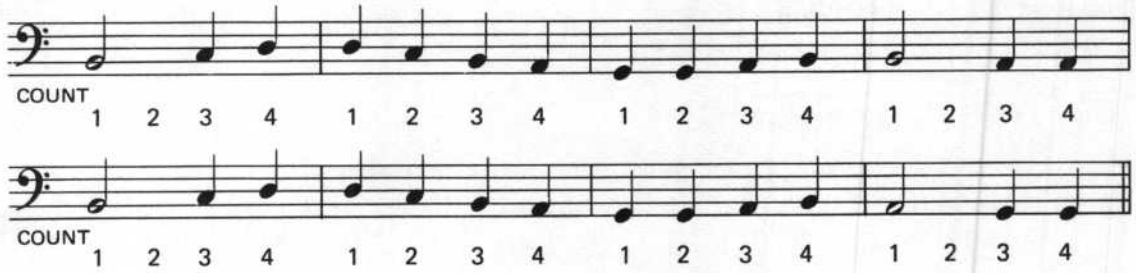
The first part of the theme of ODE TO JOY by Beethoven will give you some practice in reading and show you just how easy it is.

Read the notes first of all and make sure you know what they are. If necessary look them up. However, if I tell you that the first note is B, you should be able to work them out for yourself. Then work out the timing.



Notice how the first three bars of each line are exactly the same. Always look for phrases like these which repeat in music — it will make reading much easier.

Now, the same melody written on the Bass Clef. The timing is written in, so you can see if you worked it out correctly.



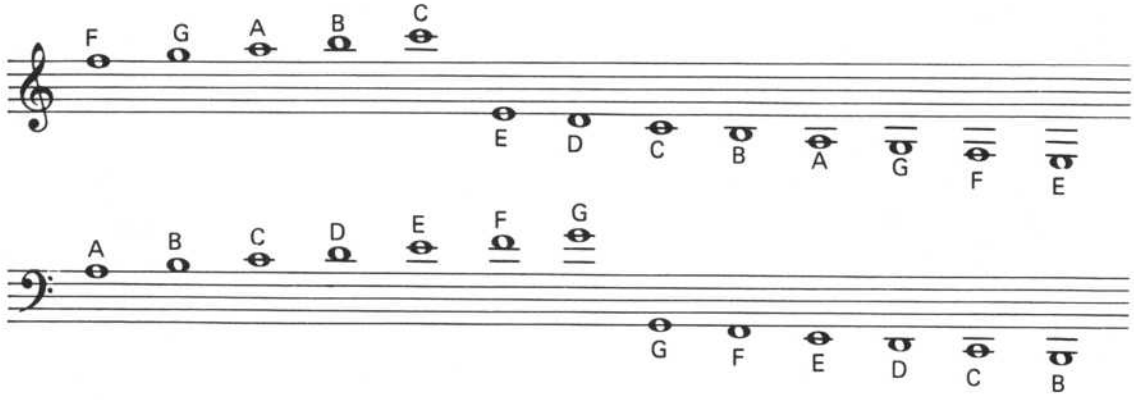
Music which is well written should give you an idea of the timing by the way the notes are spaced in each bar. However, the only way to get your timing completely right is to count out the notes in each bar until you know how they should sound. This is much easier, of course, when you already know a tune.

Sometimes it helps to write the timing underneath the notes. If you write on music, use a soft pencil and write lightly, so it can be rubbed out later.

Notes above and below the Staves

Most instruments and voices have more notes than can be shown on the five lines and four spaces of the Staves. These other notes are written in the spaces above and below each Stave, and on short lines called LEGER LINES.

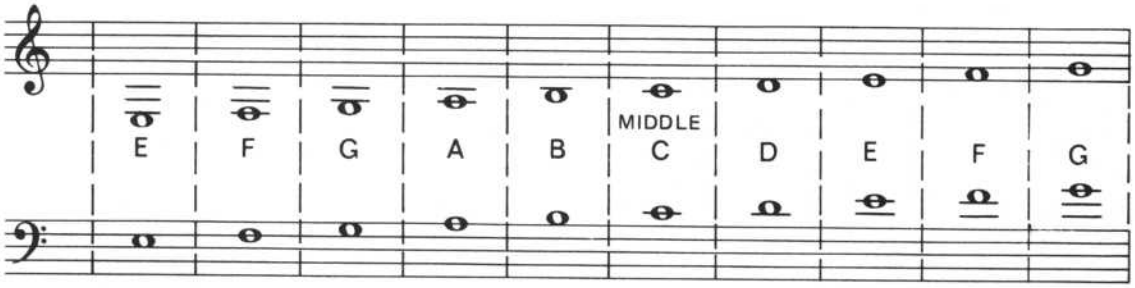
These notes can be worked out in exactly the same way as the notes you have already seen — if F is on the line, G will be in the space above, A is on the next line, and so on.



After a while you will come to recognise these notes. If you have any doubts, look them up or work them out for yourself.

Some notes overlap and appear on both Staves. This is particularly important for players of keyboard instruments which use both Staves. For most other people, these overlapping notes are of less interest. However, knowing how the Staves relate to one another will help you to understand music for other instruments and voices.

The note called 'Middle C' (roughly in the middle of the piano), is on the first Leger Line *below* the Treble Stave — *and* on the first Leger Line *above* the Bass Stave. It is shown here with some other notes which overlap:



Rests

In many pieces of music, one or more of the players or singers is silent for a few beats. These silent beats are known as RESTS.

Rests may be found at the beginning of music — or at the end. Rests sometimes occur between the different 'Phrases' of a melody. In songs, you may find Rests which allow the singer to take a breath.

Rests are counted in exactly the same way as the notes which they replace.

NOTE REST

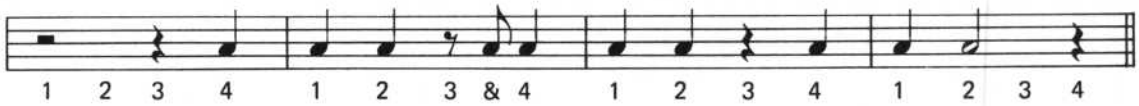
This is a WHOLE NOTE (or SEMIBREVE) REST.
It lasts as long as a Whole Note — usually four beats.
Count 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 —.
Notice how it hangs from the line on the Stave.
The Whole Note Rest can also show a whole bar of silence.

HALF NOTE (or MINIM) REST.
This one sits on the line. It lasts as long as a Half Note — usually two beats. Count 1 — 2 —.

QUARTER NOTE (or CROTCHET) REST.
It lasts as long as a Quarter Note — usually one beat.

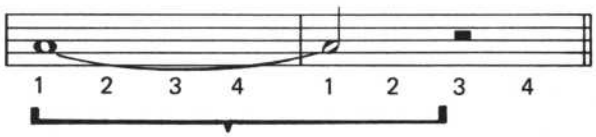
EIGHTH NOTE (or QUAVER) REST.
It lasts as long as an Eighth Note — usually half a beat.
(It looks a little like an Eighth Note which is lying down 'resting'.)

The timing of Rests is usually obvious from the way in which they, and the notes, are written — but you should count them to be sure. More than one Rest may appear in a bar, as you can see in the examples below. Try playing or humming these examples, counting to yourself at the same time. Count Rests as if they were notes.



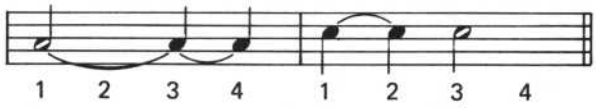
Curved Lines

Sometimes a note carries on into the next bar. When this is to happen, a curved line called a TIE is used. This makes the first note longer by joining it to the note at the beginning of the next bar:



THE NOTE LASTS THIS LONG

Ties can also join two or more notes together in the same bar. This makes the first note last for the combined number of beats of notes 'tied' together:



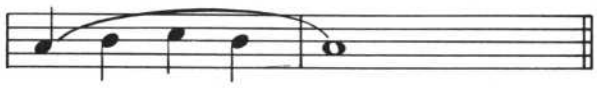
NOTE LASTS THIS LONG

NOTE LASTS THIS LONG

THIS NOTE IS NOT TIED. SO, IT SHOULD SOUND SEPARATELY.

Notice how a *separate* curved line links each note to the next.

Ties only work with notes which have the same name and same position on the Stave — and no different notes in between. The next example is NOT a Tie.



PLAY OR SING THESE NOTES SMOOTHLY

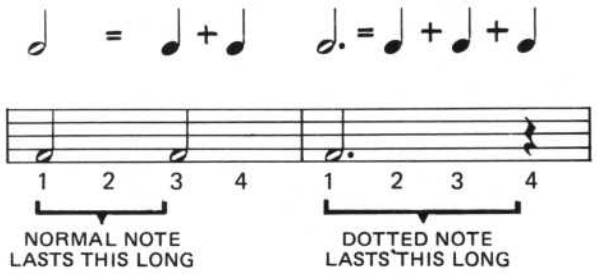
The curved line here has another meaning. Over or under several different notes, the curved line tells us that these notes should be played or sung smoothly. This curved line is called a SLUR.

Slurs also mark musical phrases, 'bowing' for stringed instruments like the violin, and the way words fit into songs. You will find 'Slurs' in most music.

Dotted Notes

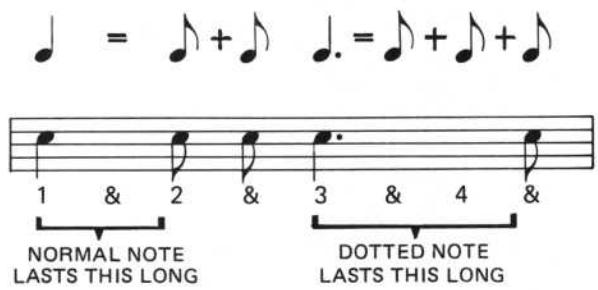
A small 'dot' after any note makes it last half as long again (one and a half times its normal length.)

A Half Note (𝅗𝅥) which usually lasts for two beats, lasts for three beats with a dot after it (𝅗𝅥.).



A Quarter Note (♩) which usually lasts for one beat, lasts for one and a half beats with a dot after it (♩.).

Dotted Quarter Notes are best counted with 'and' between each beat. You will often find them mixed with Eighth Notes (♪).

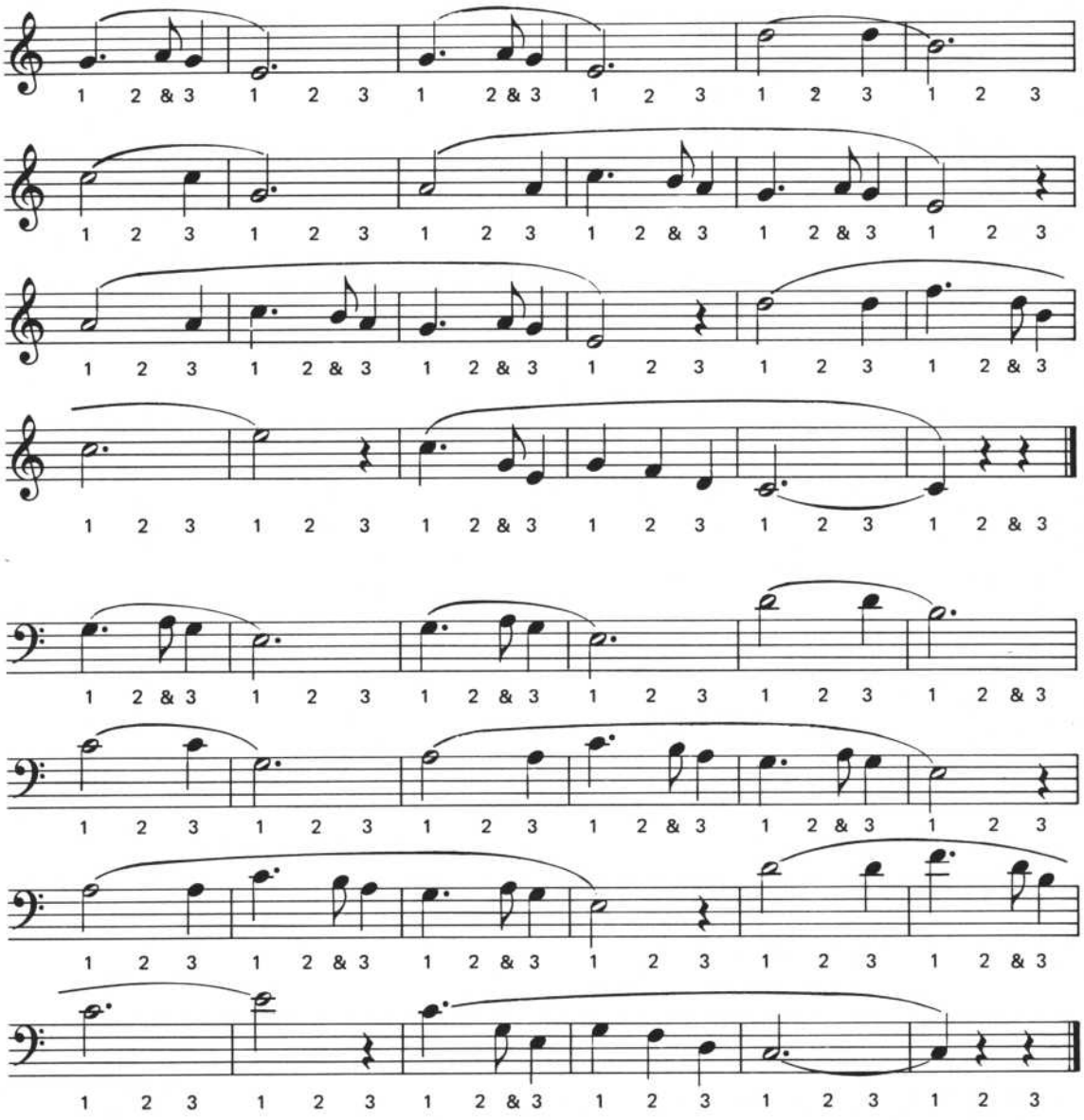


Dots work in the same way after Rests.

In a few pieces of Classical music, you may come across notes with more than one dot written after them. When this happens, each dot adds half as much again as the previous dot —

You have now covered quite a lot of musical ground and should already know how to read some music. Before continuing, go back and make sure you understand everything so far. Then try reading the next tune.

SILENT NIGHT, another tune for you to read, has some Dotted Notes, Rests and even a Tied Note at the end. Read and count these notes carefully.
The tune has three beats to the bar, count them 1—2—3 1—2—3. The timing of the notes and beats is written in to help you.



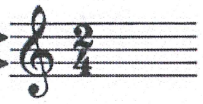
Time Signatures

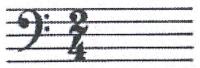
At the beginning of all music you will find two numbers or a sign like a large letter 'C'. These are TIME SIGNATURES. They tell us how many beats there are in each bar, and the type (or value) of the beats.

Most Time Signatures consist of two numbers.

The top number tells us how many beats there are in each bar.

NUMBER OF BEATS →
TYPE (VALUE) OF BEATS →





The bottom number gives the type of beat:

$\frac{2}{}$ for Half Notes (𝅗𝅥)

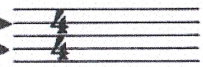
$\frac{4}{}$ for Quarter Notes (♩)

$\frac{8}{}$ for Eighth Notes (♪), and so on.

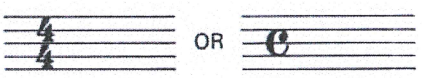
In the $\frac{2}{4}$ Time Signature shown above, the top number tells us there are two beats in the bar. The bottom number tells us that these beats are Quarter Notes. So, in $\frac{2}{4}$ music, there are two Quarter Note *beats* in each bar.

Except for 'Silent Night', all the music you have read up to this point in the book has been in $\frac{4}{4}$ Time. It has all had four Quarter Note *beats* in each bar.

NUMBER OF BEATS (4) →
TYPE OF BEATS →
($\frac{4}{}$ = QUARTER NOTES)



$\frac{4}{4}$ TIME is also often written with the sign '𝐂'

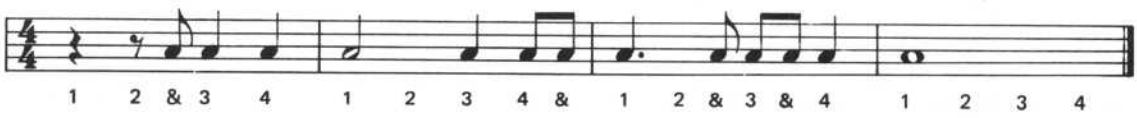


OR = 4 Quarter Note beats to the bar.

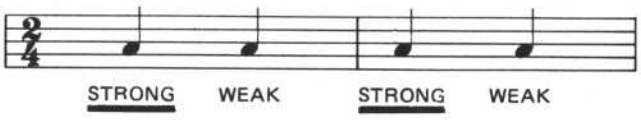
When speaking of Time Signatures, we usually say 'FOUR-FOUR' meaning $\frac{4}{4}$, 'TWO-FOUR' meaning $\frac{2}{4}$, and so on.

VERY IMPORTANT! The Time Signature refers to the number of BEATS — NOT the number of NOTES in each bar. Notes and rests of any lengths may be mixed together in a bar of music, as long as they add up to the number of beats shown by the Time Signature.

Here are some of the ways you may find notes and rests mixed together in bars of music in $\frac{4}{4}$ Time, and the way they are counted.



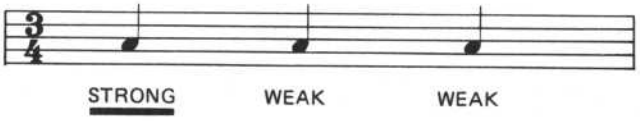
The Time Signature also tells us something else — the rhythm of the music. In all music, some beats are stronger than others. If this were not so, music would be very dull and uninteresting. The first beat in each bar is normally a little stronger than the others. In music with two beats to the bar, this gives a strong — weak, strong — weak, rhythm.



Try counting this out loud, tapping your foot at the same time, to get the feeling of two beats to the bar.

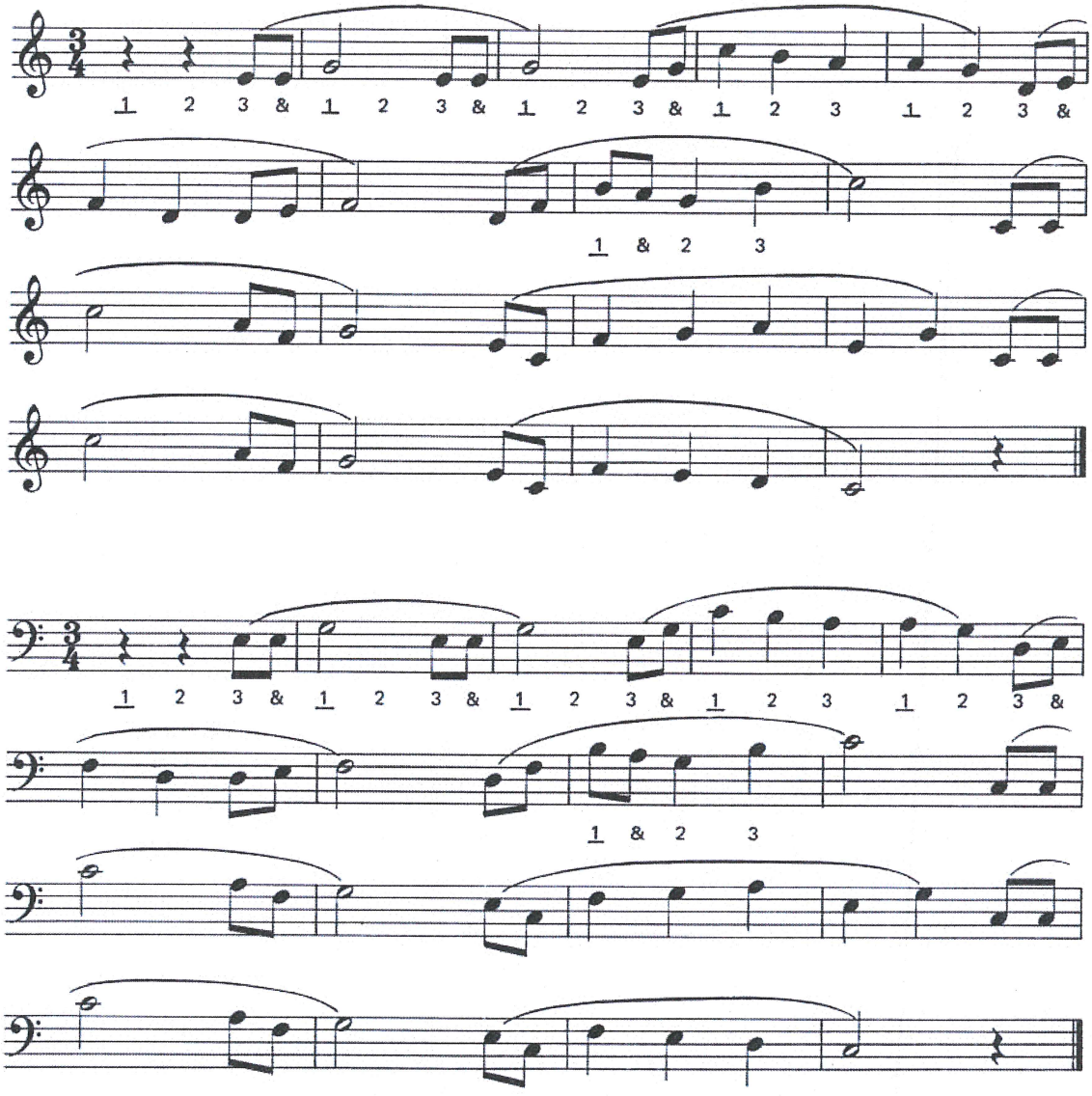
In music with four beats to the bar, the third beat is also stronger, but not as strong as the first beat. Try counting strong — weak — medium — weak, strong — weak — medium — weak.

$\frac{3}{4}$ or WALTZ TIME is the next most popular Time after $\frac{4}{4}$. As you can see from the Time Signature, there are three Quarter Note beats to the bar. The first beat in each bar should be stronger. The next two beats are weak. This gives a very distinctive rhythm — *One* — two — three, *Strong* — weak — weak. Try counting it.

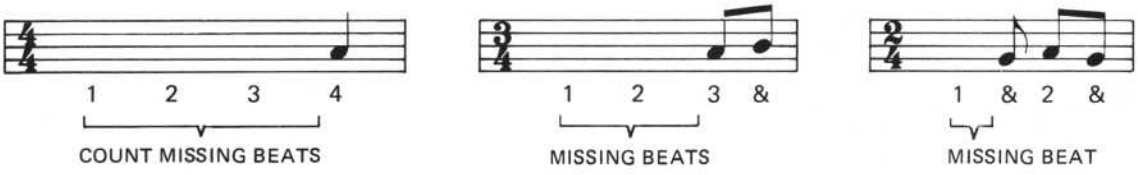


Listen to some music and see if you can hear the different strengths of beats. When you have done this, go back over the tunes in the book and try them again, this time giving extra strength to notes which fall on strong and medium beats. Before you start to read, count out the beats and tap your foot at the same time. This will help you to get into the feeling of the rhythm. The first two tunes are in $\frac{4}{4}$, 'Silent Night' is in $\frac{3}{4}$.

CRADLE SONG by Brahms, the next tune, is also in $\frac{3}{4}$ Time, as you can see.

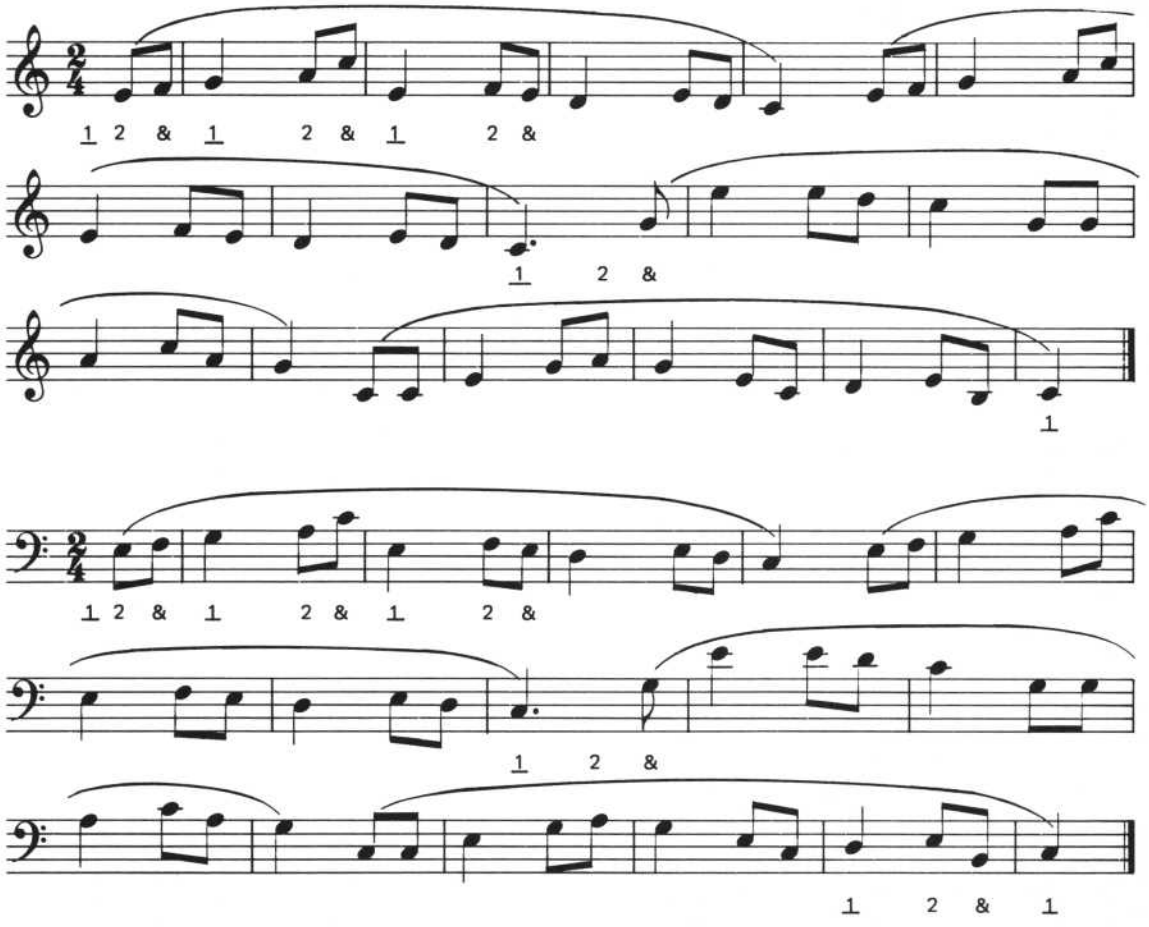


The first bar of a piece of music doesn't always have the number of beats you would expect from the Time Signature, The tune may start in the middle, or at the end of the first bar. When this happens, you should count the missing beats:



The beats which have been missed out are usually to be found in the last bar of the music — so everything finally adds up correctly.

WILDWOOD FLOWER is an American folk tune in $\frac{2}{4}$ time. It starts on the second beat of the first bar, as you can see.

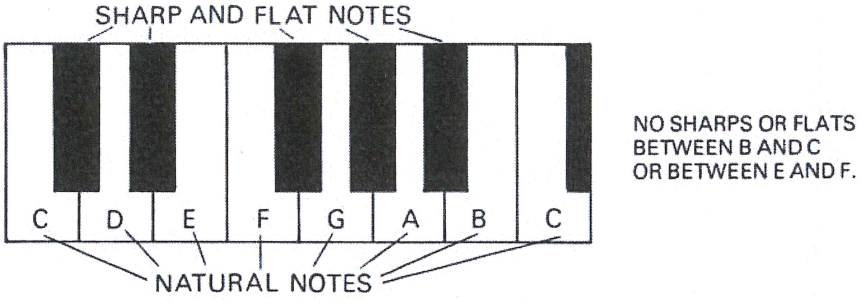


Sharps, Flats and Naturals

So far, the music in this book has been written with the 'Natural' notes — A, B, C, D, E, F and G.

There are also some other notes which can be sung and played on most instruments. These other notes are called SHARPS and FLATS, and they are to be found between most of the 'Natural' notes.

The Sharp and Flat notes really stand out on the keyboard of the piano and organ, so first of all we will look at them there.



As you can see, there are no Sharps or Flats between B and C or between E and F, but there are Sharps and Flats between all the other notes. This applies to written music for all voices and instruments.

SHARPS (♯)

Sharp notes are marked by a Sharp sign —♯

A Sharp note is higher than the Natural note with the same letter name —

The Sharp note above A is called 'A Sharp' — written A♯. This is the note between A and B.

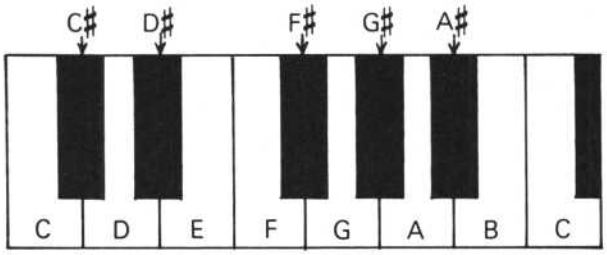
The Sharp note above C is called C Sharp — written C♯. This is the note between C and D.

The Sharp above F is F Sharp (F♯), the Sharp above G is G Sharp (G♯), and so on . . .

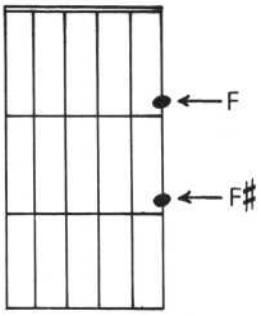
NO SHARP NOTE HERE NO SHARP NOTE HERE

A – A♯ – B – C – C♯ – D – D♯ – E – F – F♯ – G – G♯ – A

On the keyboard, a Sharp note is played on the black key above the Natural note with the same letter name:

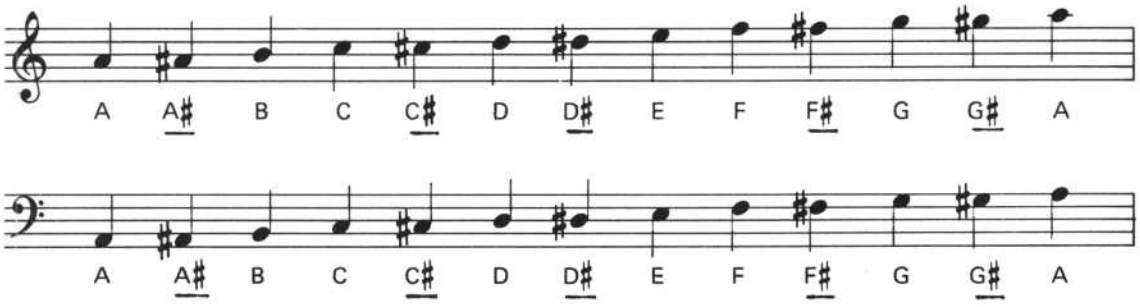


On the guitar and most 'fretted' instruments, a Sharp note is one fret higher than the Natural note with the same letter name:



If you play another instrument, find the positions of the Sharp notes on it. If necessary look them up in an instruction book.

On the Staves, Sharp notes are shown by a Sharp sign (♯) in front of the note which is to be 'sharpened'.



FLATS (♭)

Flat notes are marked by a Flat sign — ♭

A Flat note is *lower* than the Natural note with the same letter name —

The Flat note *below* A is called 'A Flat' — written A♭. This is the note between A and G.

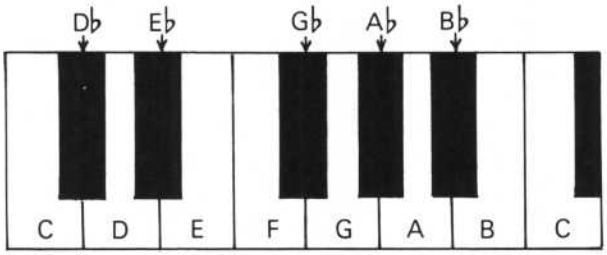
The Flat note below G is G Flat (G♭). This is the note between G and F.

The Flat below E is E Flat (E♭), the Flat below D is D Flat (D♭) and so on.

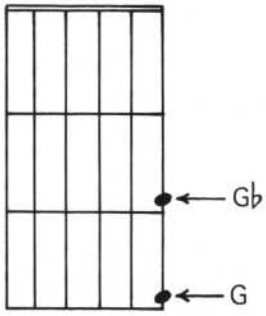
NO FLAT NOTE HERE NO FLAT NOTE HERE

A – A♭ – G – G♭ – F – E – E♭ – D – D♭ – C – B – B♭ – A

On the keyboard, a Flat note is played on the black key below the Natural note with the same letter name:

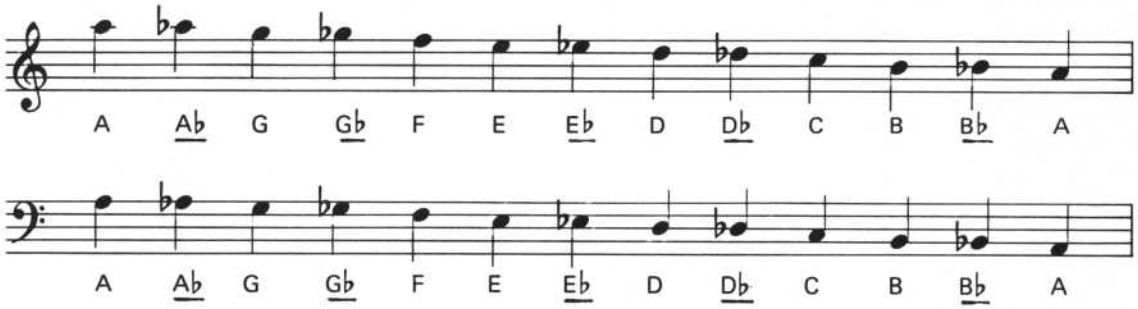


On the guitar and most fretted instruments, a Flat note is one fret lower than the Natural note with the same letter name:



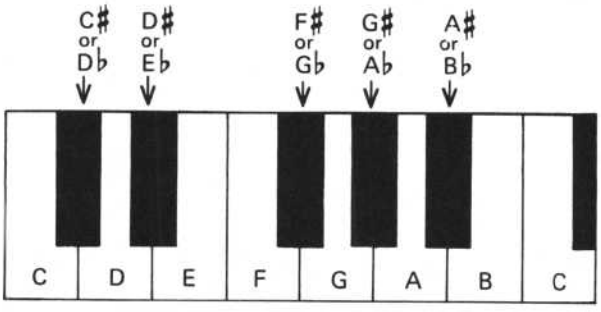
If you play another instrument, find the positions of the Flat notes on it. If necessary, look them up in an instruction book.

On the Staves, Flat notes are marked with a Flat sign (♭) in front of the note which is to be 'flattened'.

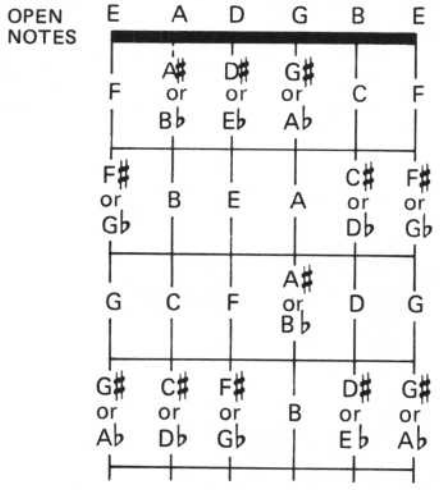


For most playing and singing, each of these notes can be thought of as having a Flat and a Sharp name. A♯ is the same note as B♭, and so on.

A♯=B♭ C♯=D♭ D♯=E♭ F♯=G♭ G♯=A♭



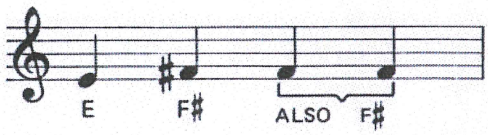
THESE NOTES ARE REPEATED UP AND DOWN THE KEYBOARD

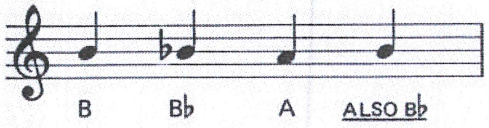


GUITAR

Notes are given different names for a good reason — sometimes it is easier to read and write music with Sharps, at other times it is easier with Flats.

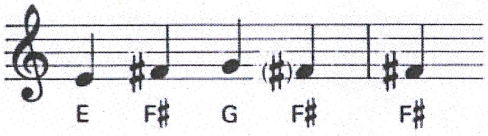
As well as changing the notes which are marked by them, Sharp and Flat signs also affect all notes in the same position on the Stave which follow in the bar:

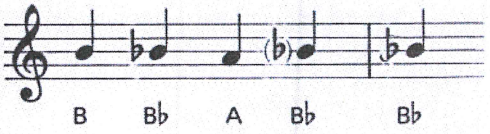




Sometimes the sign is repeated in brackets later in the bar as a reminder.

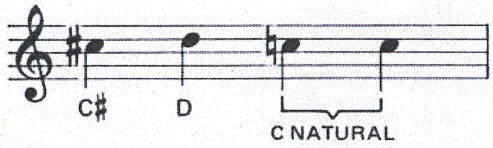
If the note is to be Sharp or Flat in the *next* bar, the sign is used again.

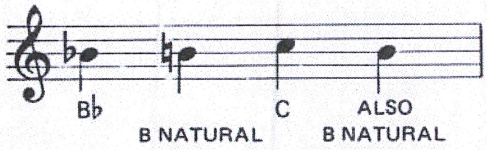




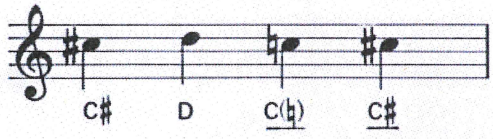
NATURAL SIGNS

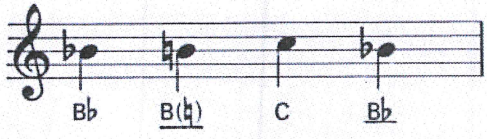
A Sharp or Flat sign can be cancelled by a NATURAL SIGN (♮). Written in front of a note, it tells us that the Natural note is needed instead of a Sharp or Flat which was marked earlier. This sign also affects notes in the same position which follow in the same bar.





Another Sharp or Flat sign is used if the note is to be 'sharpened' or 'flattened' again.





Take care to read Sharps, Flats and Naturals correctly — otherwise your music will not sound right. If you have any doubts about Sharps, Flats or Naturals now, or in the future, read these pages again.