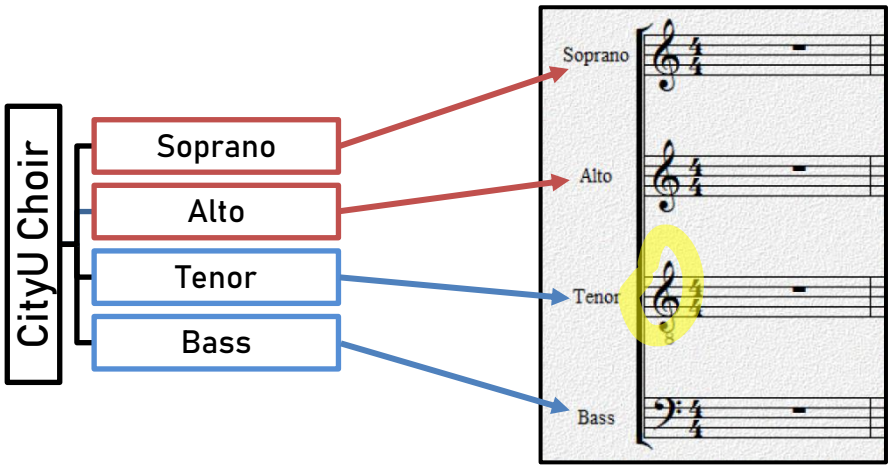
[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 1]

➢ Parts & Clefs

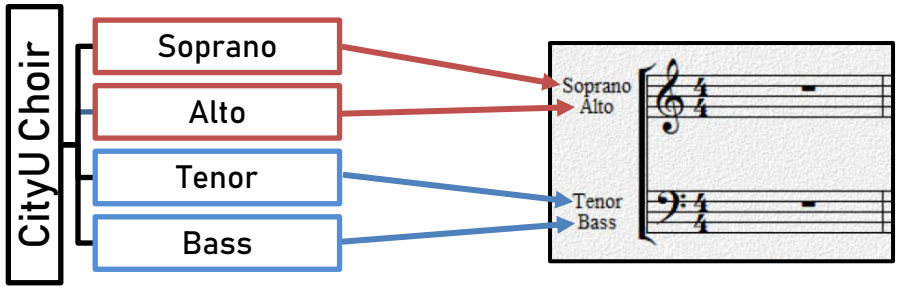
CityU Choir is divided into four **parts**: Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass. They are arranged according to voice pitch, from high to low.

On music scores, these parts could be indicated in two ways:

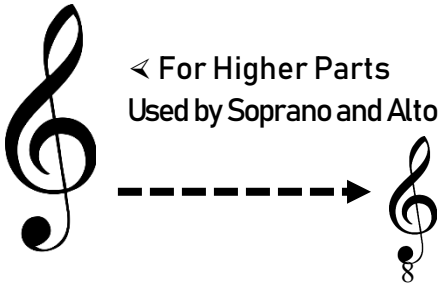
1 Open Score



2 Close Score



The symbol at the beginning of a row is called a **clef.** We usually use these following three clefs:



➢ For Higher Parts
Used by Soprano and Alto

➢ For Tenor
A similar one with a little "8" under it

➢ For Lower Parts
Used by Tenor and Bass

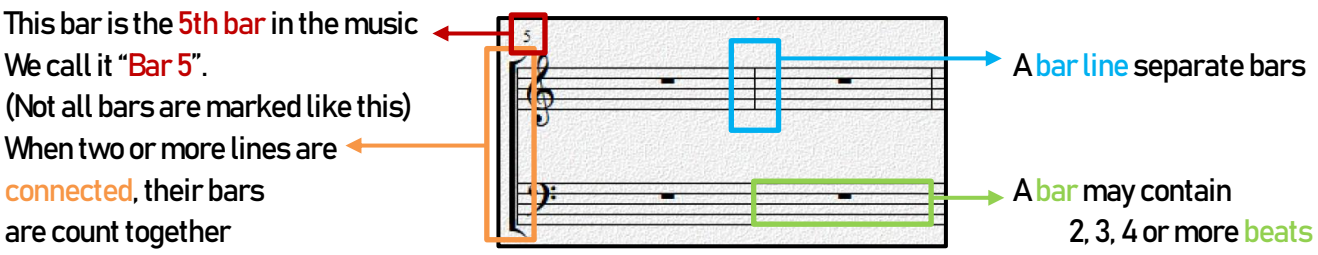
NOTICE

1. Tenor uses  in open scores, but uses  in close scores, instead. (Other parts remain unchanged)
2. There could be less than four parts singing. Always look for the part names and check whether your part need to sing or not!

[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 2]

➢ Beats, Bars & Time Signature

Music is tied with **beats**, the basic unit of time in music. A larger unit would be **bars**, which contain several beats. Bars are separated by **bar lines.**

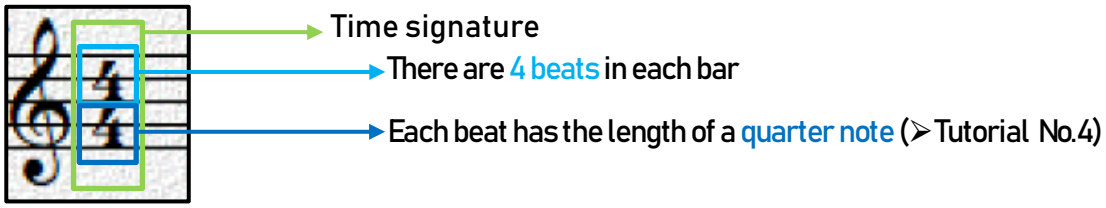


If we make "Da" (a clicking sound) as a beat, bars with four beats would be like this:

(Da, Da, Da, Da), (Da, Da, Da, Da), ...

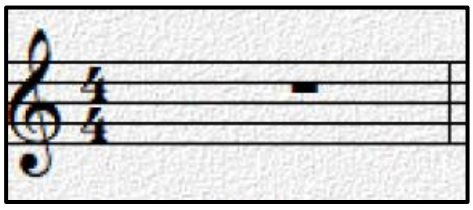
This is the first bar... And this is the second one... And more...

Musically, we use **time signatures** to mark how many beats there will be in each bar and how long each beat will be. It is the fraction-like notation at the beginning of a bar.



⮙ This is a $\frac{4}{4}$ (four-four time)

Thus, these two things are equal:



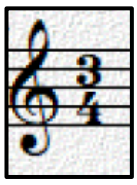
=

Da = quarter note

(Da, Da, Da, Da)

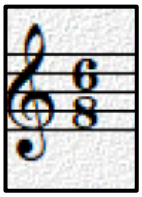
⮙ Both are one bar with four beats, with each beat having the length of a quarter note

Similarly, we have other time signatures like these:



Da = quarter note [$\frac{3}{4}$ (three-four time)]

(Da, Da, Da)

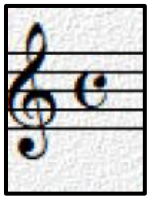


Da = 8th note (➢No.4) [$\frac{6}{8}$ (six-eight time)]

(Da, Da, Da, Da, Da, Da)

NOTICE

The four-four time could also be represented by a single "c":
(the "c" could be memorized as "common time", since four-four time is a common time measure we would meet in our scores.)



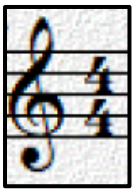
[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 3]

➢ Dynamic

A time signature actually not only suggests the length of bars in a piece of music, but also the **dynamic** pattern of this piece. We have three level to describe the dynamic of each beat: strong, less strong, and weak.

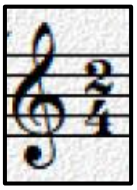
Here, 4 usual time signatures are used as examples to tell you the pattern:

= Strong; = Less Strong; = Weak



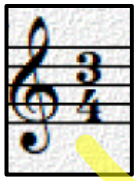
Da = quarter note

(Da, Da, Da, Da)



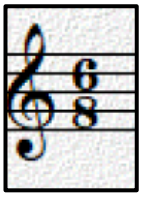
Da = quarter note

(Da, Da)



Da = quarter note

(Da, Da, Da)



Da = 8th note

(Da, Da, Da, Da, Da, Da)

➢ Dynamic Marks

When we are singing, other than paying attention to existing dynamics, we would also stress on some point or be quiet for some period to express our emotions. That's why we need the **dynamic marks** to indicate the changes of loudness of a piece of music.

p ◅ Piano
This means "soft" in Italian

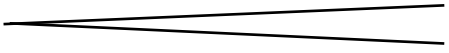
f ◅ Forte
This means "loud" in Italian

We could add an "m" before them to let "p" louder and to let "f" softer. Moreover, by increasing the number of "p" (or "f"), we are changing the music to be even softer (or louder).

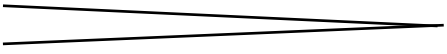
ppp ***pp*** ***p*** ***mp*** ***mf*** ***f*** ***ff*** ***fff***

Loudness increases (music should be sung louder)

We also have marks to show gradual changes in a piece:

 or ***cresc.***

◅ Increase the loudness gradually ("cresc." is the abbreviation of "crescendo", an Italian word means "increasing")

 or ***dim.*** or ***decresc.***

◅ Decrease the loudness gradually ("dim" is the abbreviation of "diminuendo", an Italian word means "diminishing"; "decresc." is the abbreviation of "decrescendo", another Italian word means "decreasing")

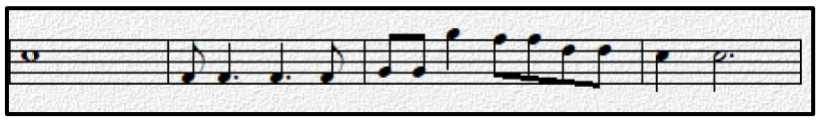
NOTICE

Dynamic is a relative concept: "louder" or "softer" doesn't need to be quantified.

[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 4]

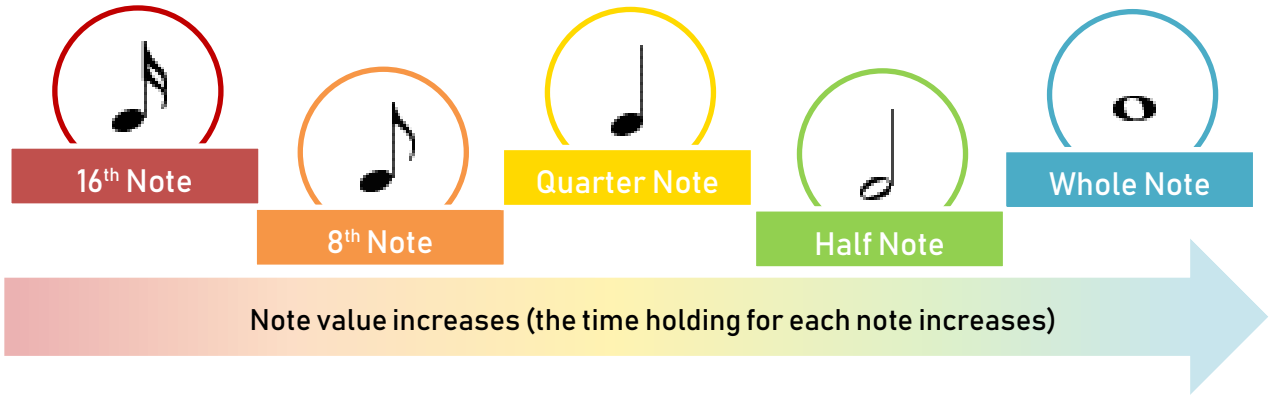
➢ Notes and Note Values

A **Musical Note** indicates a sound you would sing. It would look like a "dot", possibly with "tails" and/or smaller "dots", in your scores.

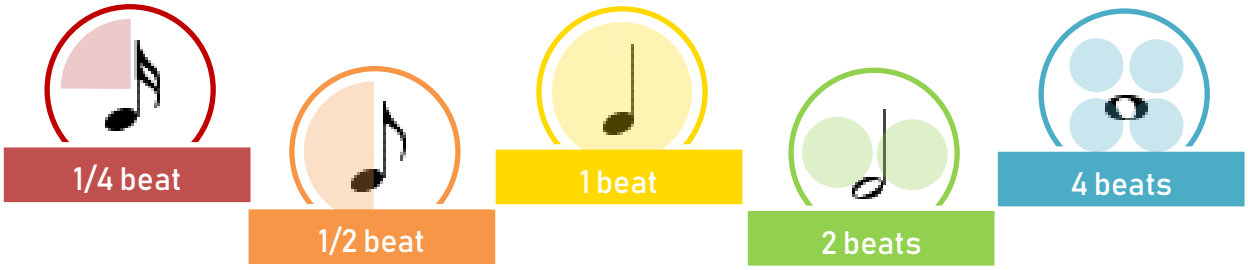


⩤Here are a few example notes

Note Value decides the length of each note. We could classify note values according to the length each note takes:

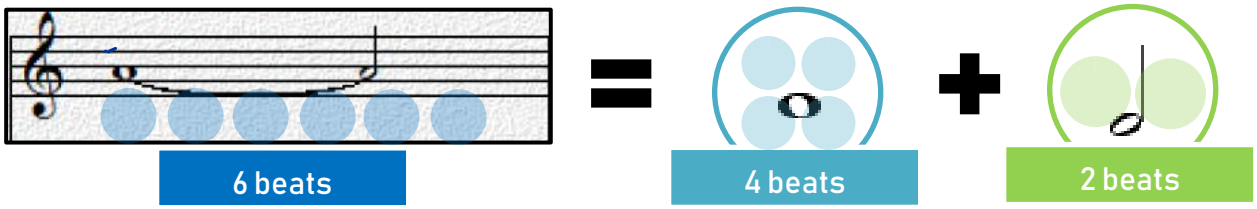


In a four-four time music (or other X-four time music), we could memorize these different notes by remembering the beats they take:

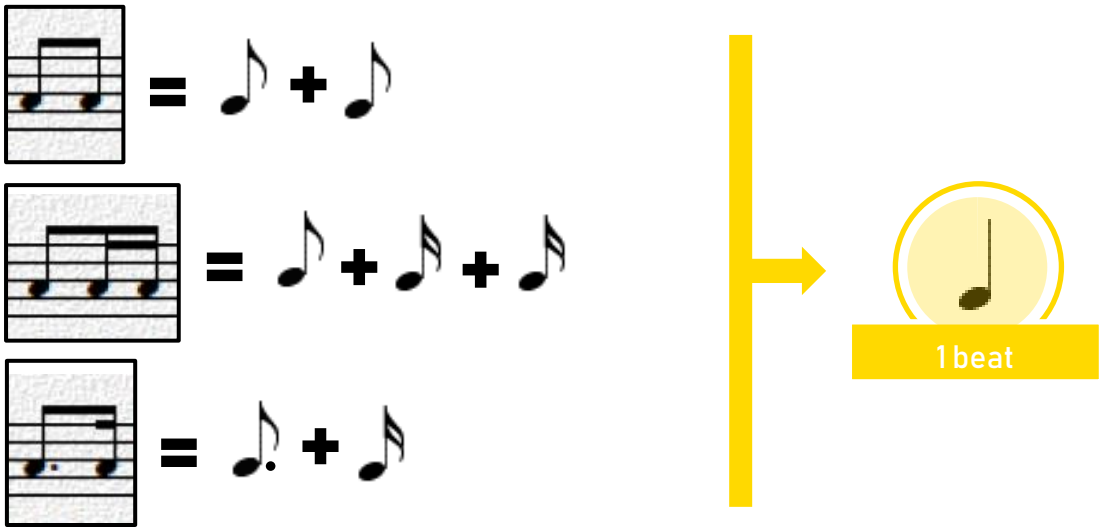


We could produce different note values by adding a small dot next to the note. In this way, the original note will increase its length to 3/2 times than itself.

Also, we could produce larger note values by connecting two notes (with the same pitch). The new length will be the sum of the original two.

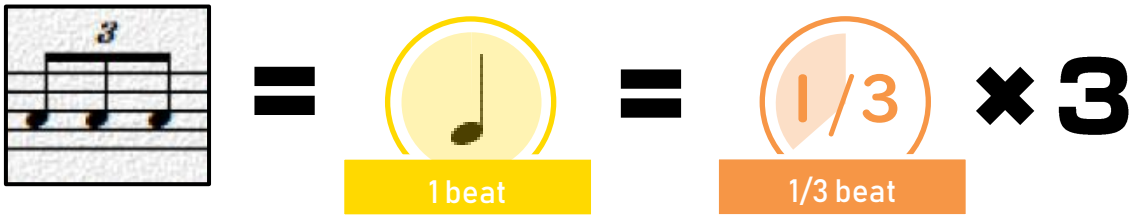


Don't be puzzled when 8th and 16th notes are connecting their "tails" together!



There are more examples, but it's easy to manage the pattern behind them.

Triplets is a unique type of notes. Here are three 8th notes:



Pay attention to the little "3" above the notes. If it isn't indicated like this, the notes should be treated as three normal 8th notes (which take 3/2 beats).

Quarter notes and 16th could have their triplets, too. For quarter triplet notes, increase the whole time value to a half note; for 16th triplet notes, decrease it to a 8th note.

NOTICE

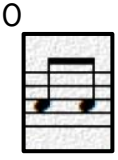
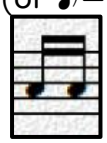
1. ➢ **Tempo & Metronome Marking**

   At the beginning of a song, you would see similar statements like this: ♩=60

   This statement, called **metronome marking**, indicates the **tempo** (speed) of this song, which is as fast as playing 60 beats (quarter notes) in a single minute. (This is quite slow as only one beat is played each second.)

2. A music could be fast or slow, and this would affect the length of its beat. Therefore, the length of a same type of notes, such as quarter notes, may have different lengths in songs with different speed.

   For example:

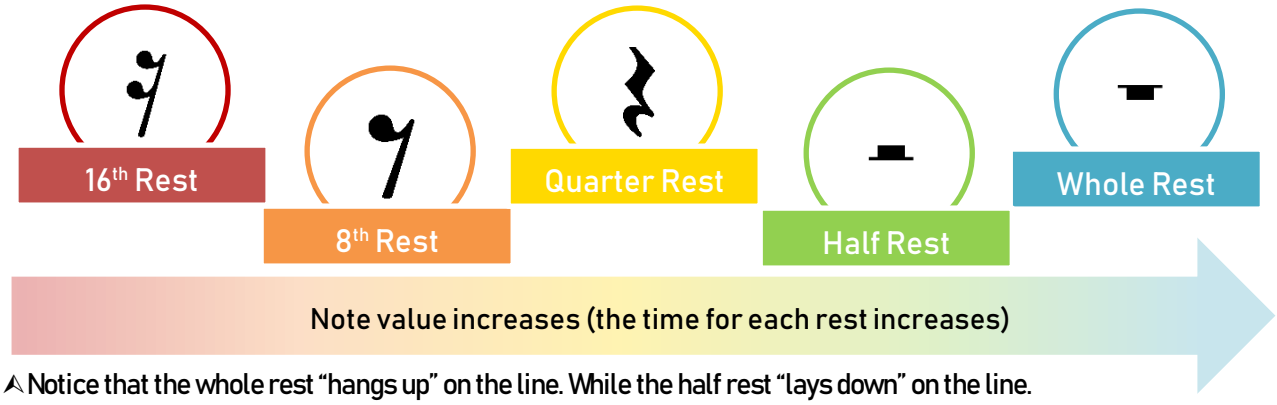
   ♩=120  is as fast as ♩=60 (or ♪=120) 

   (Although the second one seems faster because of the 16th notes)

[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 5]

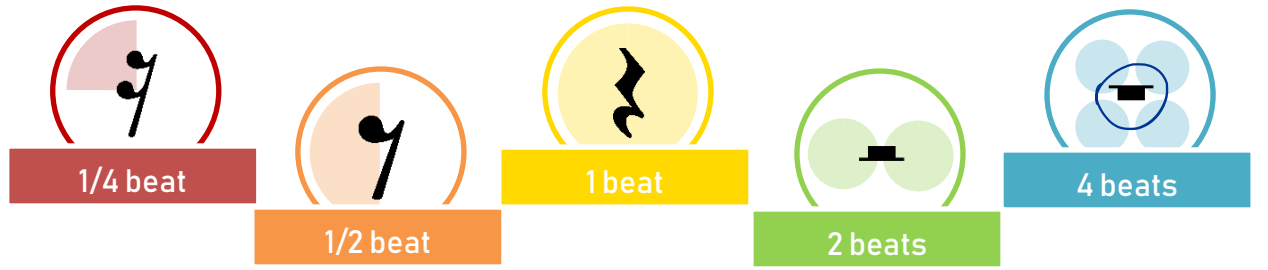
➢ Rests

Rests appear when there are no notes need to sing for a moment. Similar to notes, rests also have their time values:



⮜ Notice that the whole rest "hangs up" on the line. While the half rest "lays down" on the line.

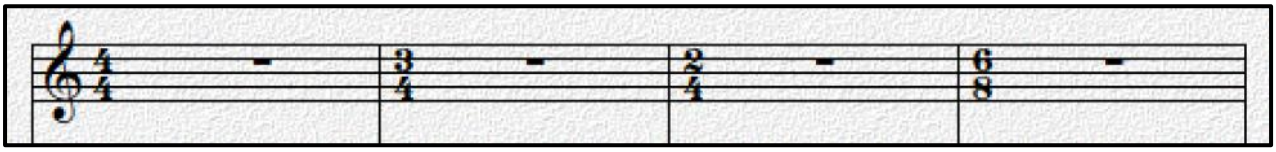
In a four-four time music (or other X-four time music), we could memorize these different notes by remembering the beats they take:



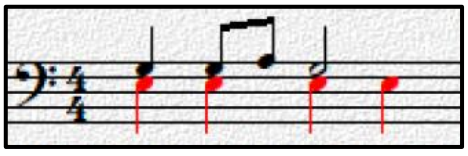
We could produce different note values by adding a small dot next to the rest. In this way, the original rest will increase its length to 3/2 times than itself.

⚠ NOTICE

1. For the whole rest, it could stand for the silence of a whole bar (even if the bar has more or less than 4 beats)



2. In a close score, since two parts are stuffed in a single line, the higher part should sing the notes with their "tails" pointing up, and vice versa.

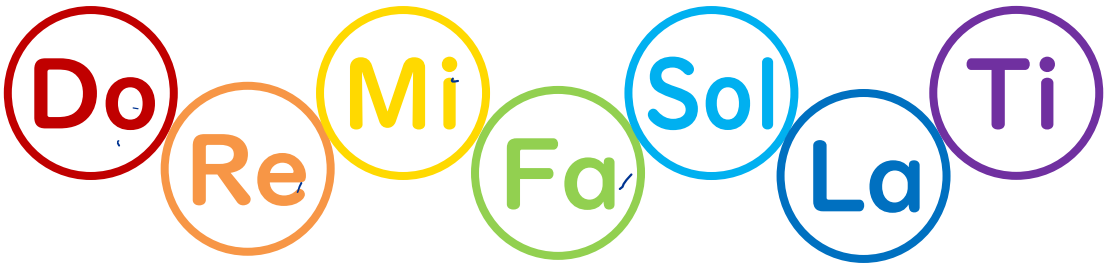


⮜ For example, Tenor should sing the notes here in black, while Bass should sing the notes in red.
(The same for Soprano & Alto) (Real scores won't be colored)

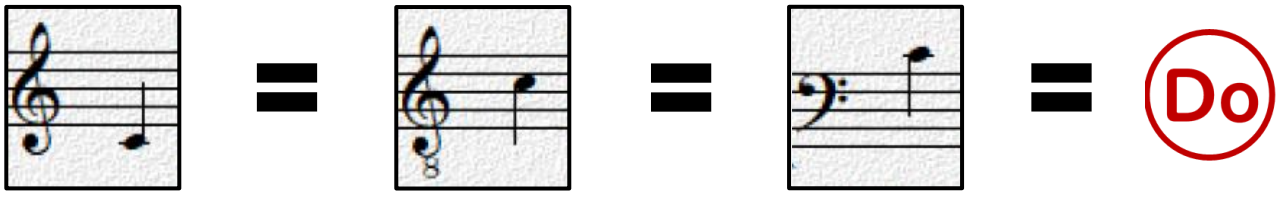
[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 6]

➢ Solfèges & Pitches

We give seven names (and their varieties), which are called **solfèges**, to all the musical notes. They are:



For example, below is an important "Do" with all three clefs. Listen to the piano to feel the pitch of this note:

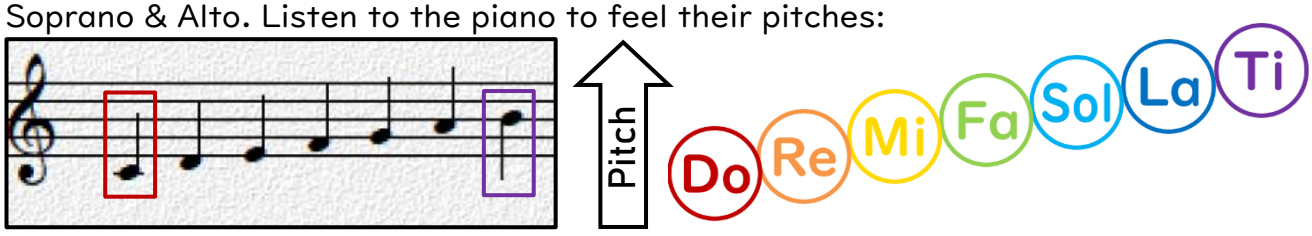


⮝ Soprano & Alto ⮝ Tenor (in open scores) ⮝ Tenor (in close scores) & Bass

Each note has a **pitch** which decides how high itself would be sung.

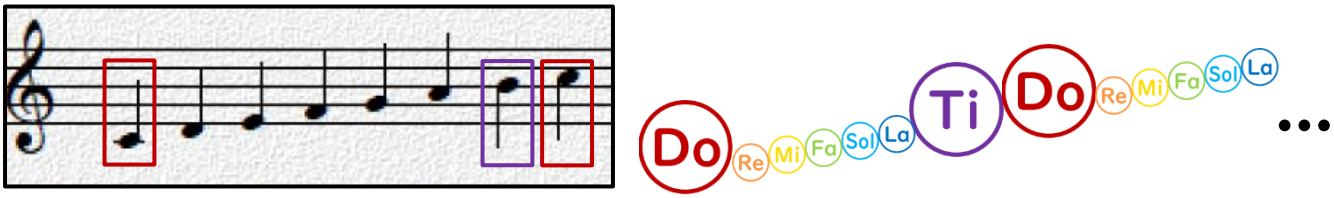
On a score with given clefs (𝄞, 𝄞₈ or 𝄢), when the notes are located higher, they usually have higher pitches.

Below are the following six notes from the above example "Do", with the clef for Soprano & Alto. Listen to the piano to feel their pitches:

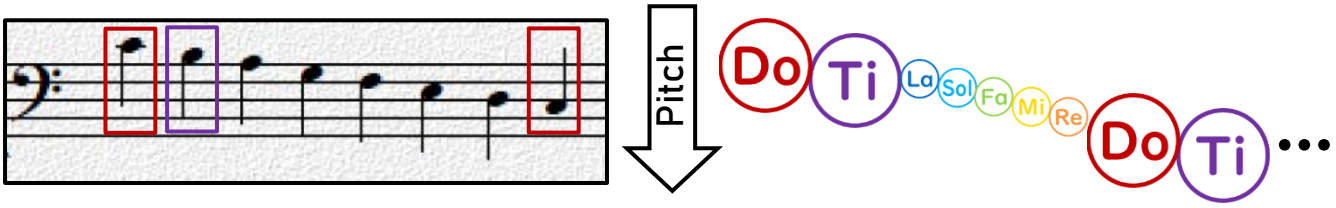


⮝ You can see that all notes are either on those lines or at the space between lines.

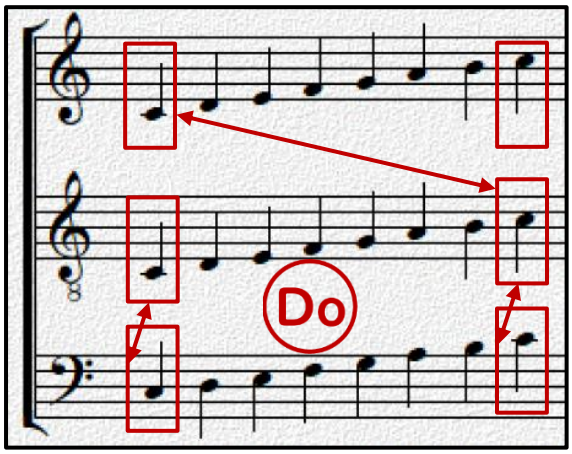
Notice that the solfèges change while pitch goes higher. When the pitch goes higher than the "Ti" above, the pitch would still go higher, the solfège for the new note, however, would go back to "Do" and start from there again.

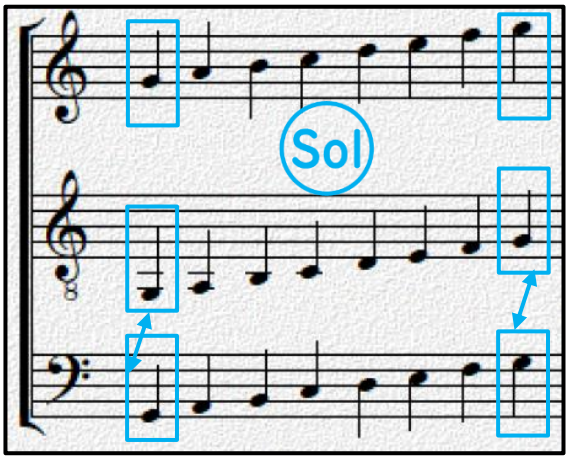


Also, when the pitch gets lower than the above "Do", the new note's solfège would be "Ti" again start from there. Let's take Bass' clef as an example:



Here lists all possible "Do" and "Sol" with all three clefs:



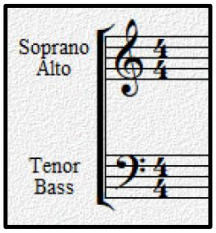


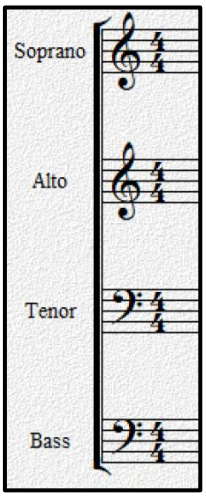
➢ Connected notes are at the same pitches

Small lines could be added when the pitch is very high or low. Notes would always be in a "on the line → between lines → on the line → …" pattern whenever increasing or decreasing the pitch.

NOTICE

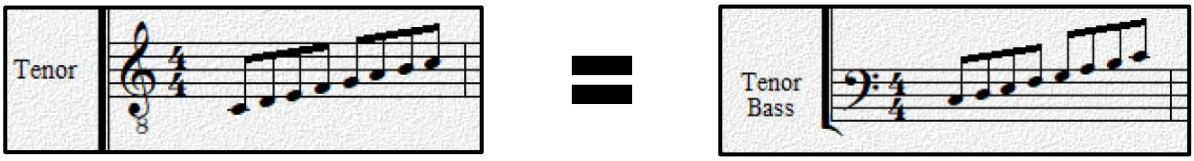
1. At this moment, you may feel that each position on your own scores (which means that the clef has been decided) represents a permanent pitch with a solfège.
   Actually, none of these two would remain unchanged when other factors change.
   Still, remember that **scores start with nothing but time signature after clefs, like the examples here, would follow all the rules taught in this section.**





➢ Adding other marks after the clef would affect the pitch & solfège

2. The following notes for tenor are playing the same piece of music:
   (This is just for your easy reference, as you should already be able to discover it by yourself)



[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 7]

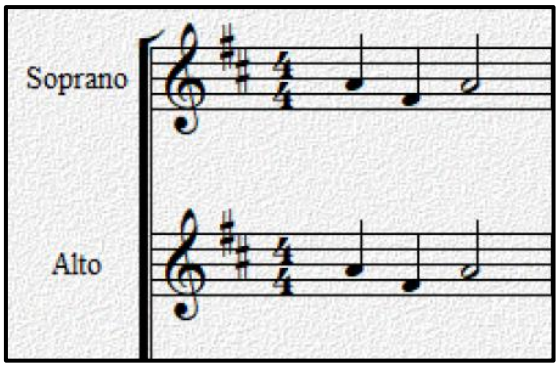
➢ Key Signatures

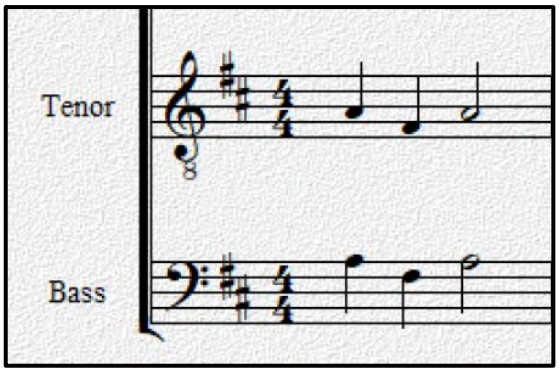
Remember that all solfèges tied with certain pitches we learned are applicable when there are no other marks between the clef and the time signature. More often, we would meet these two types of marks, called **key signatures**, appear after the clef.

⩤ Sharp
Looks like a "# (number sign)"

⩤ Flat
Looks like a lower case "b"

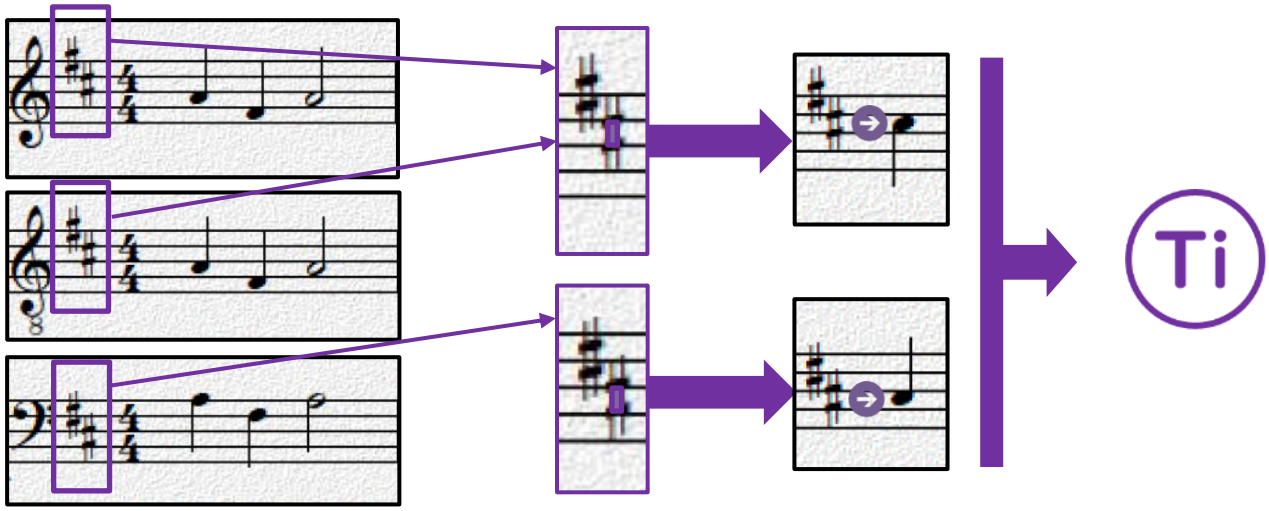
They play an important part on effecting the tone of a song, and give solfèges to new sets of notes. For example, take a look at the beginning of this music piece, where two "sharp" marks are added after each clef:





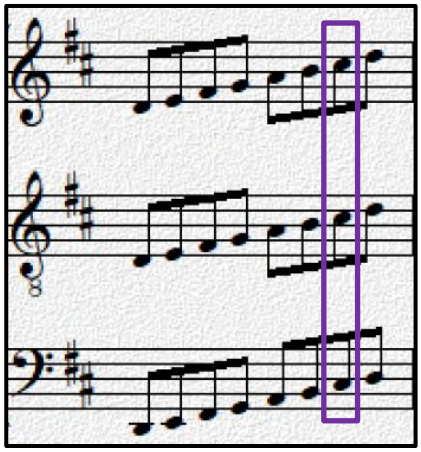
By applying the previous rules, this piece of music would be "La-Fa-La". However, this would no longer be correct as the key signatures have changed ("no special marks" is also a type of key signature). So, the solfèges need to be changed, too.

Here's the process of knowing how this music piece should be properly read:



1. Look for the sharp marks after your clef;
2. Locate the last sharp from left to right, and color the little area in the middle;
3. Imagine that the little colored area is a note;
4. This note now represent "Ti" in this piece of music.

What would other notes' solfèges be? This is the new notes with all solfèges when the key signature is made of two sharp marks. Of course, you could apply this rule to other notes, just like what we have done when the key signature is nothing.



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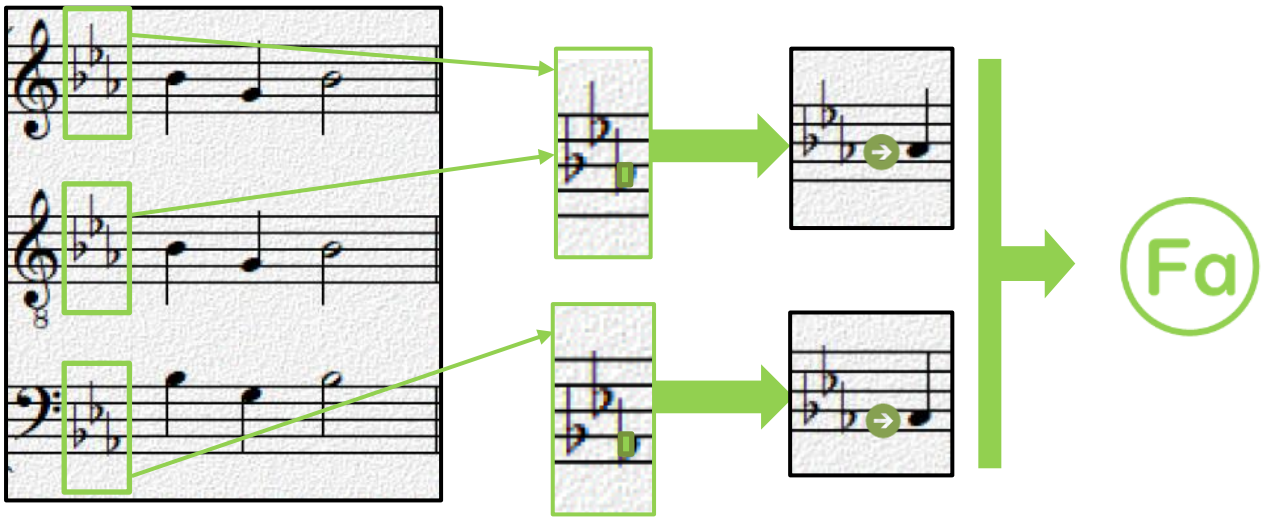
⮝ Notice that only the pitch related to each solfège changes. The order of all 7 solfèges remains.

Thus, the above music should be read as "Sol–Mi–Sol"

What about the key signature is made of "flat" marks? Here's the process of knowing how a music piece of this type should be properly read:



1. Look for the flat marks after your clef;
2. Locate the last flat from left to right, and color the little area in the middle;
3. Imagine that the little colored area is a note;
4. This note now represent "Fa" in this piece of music.

After we list out all the other solfèges like what we have done with sharp marks as the key signature, we would find that the above music is also "Sol–Mi–Sol".

NOTICE

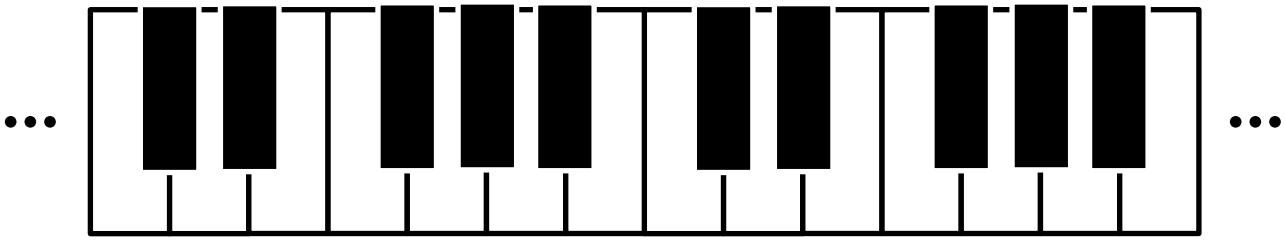
1. There would be only one type of mark as the key signature (or there is nothing). You won't find mixed types of marks at the beginning of our notes.
2. When there is only one sharp (or flat) mark, use that to decide which note should represent "Ti" (or "Fa"); when there is nothing, use the previous rule(➢Tutorial No.4).

[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 8]

➢ Keyboards

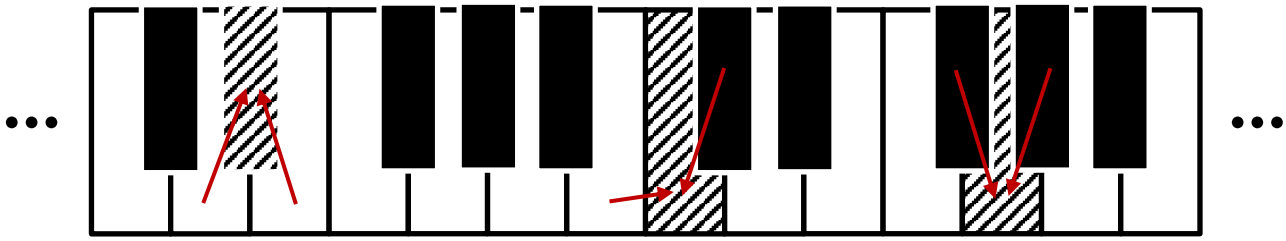
You may use a musical instrument with a **keyboard** (usually a piano) or a smartphone music App to help you find and learn the melody better.

Let's look at a part of the keyboard we usually meet:



⮙This keyboard seems having a certain pattern...

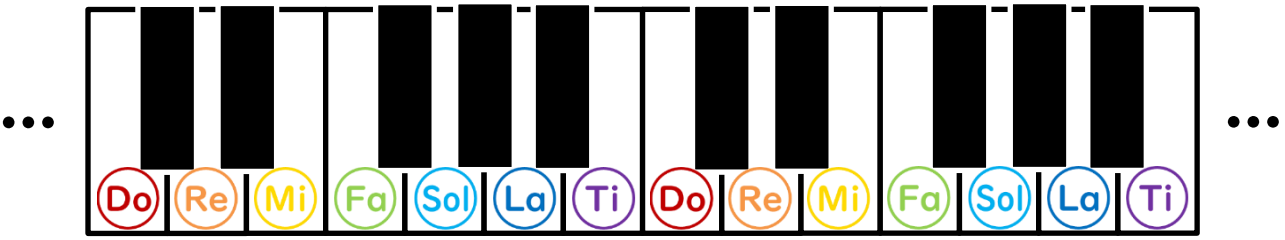
A keyboard has numerous white keys and less black keys.
When no black keys are there between two white keys, we say that these two white keys are <u>the nearest ones to each other</u>.
Otherwise, we say that the black key between these white keys are the nearest one to the white keys, and two white keys are the nearest ones to the black key.



⮙Red arrows connect the nearest key to its original key

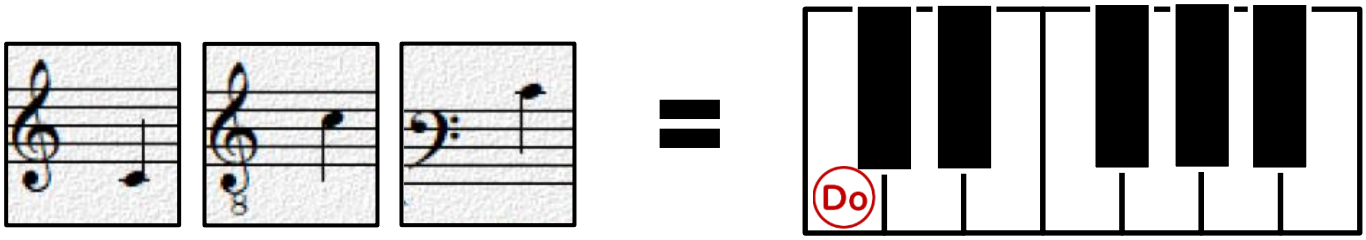
➢ Find Notes on A Keyboard

If the score has nothing in its key signature, keys on a keyboard play note with solfèges like this:



⮙We still have some keys without their corresponding solfèges.

How can we distinguish those notes with same solfèges? That's the time we want to find the important "Do" (➢Tutorial No.4) on the keyboard:



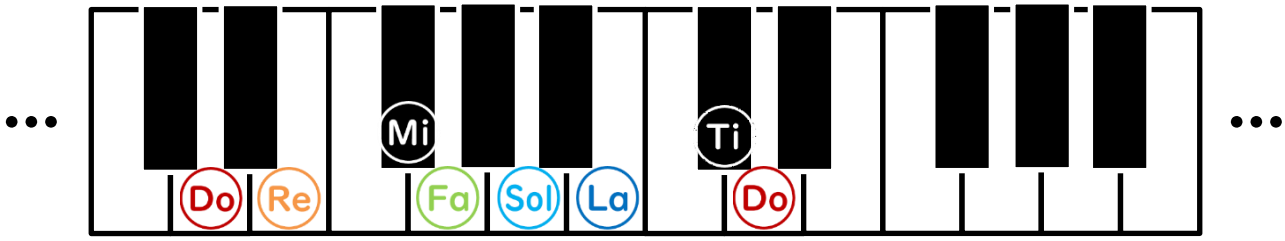
⮙You could locate "Do" (and other notes, too) by finding the special patterns of the black keys (two→three→two→...)

This key is located near the middle of the whole keyboard. Remember the pitch of this note would be helpful to find the melody by yourself.

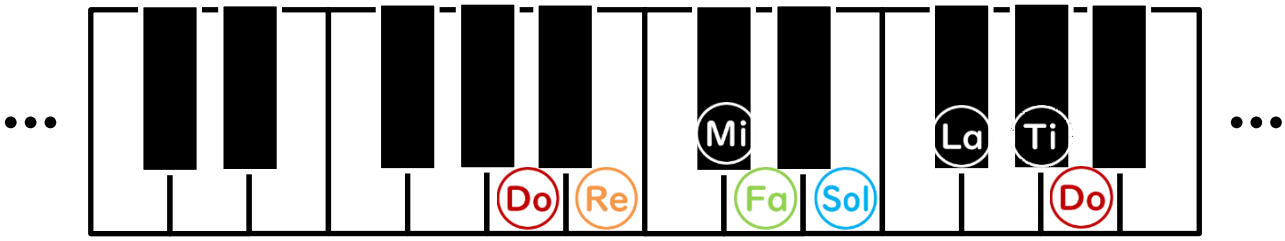
If the key signature is made of sharp or flat marks, things become more complicated. Here, we provide solfèges with their corresponding keys on a keyboard with all usual key signatures. (Only a full set of solfèges, from "Do" to another "Do", is given)

- **One Sharp (♯)**

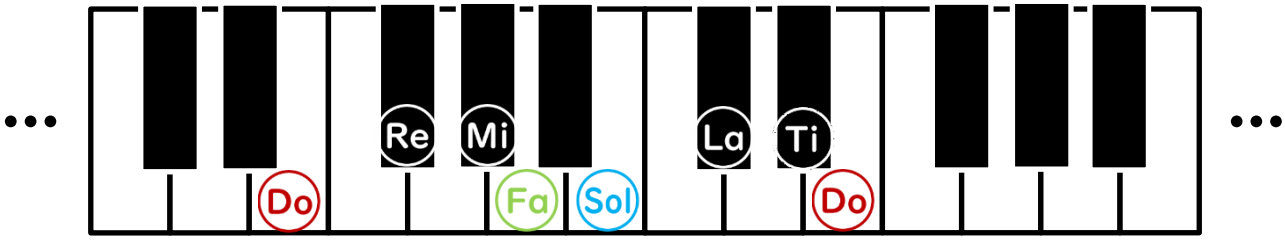
- **Two Sharps (♯♯)**



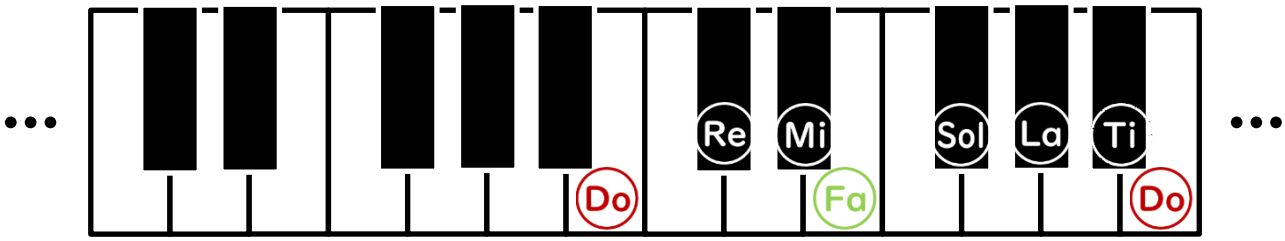
- **Three Sharps (♯♯♯)**



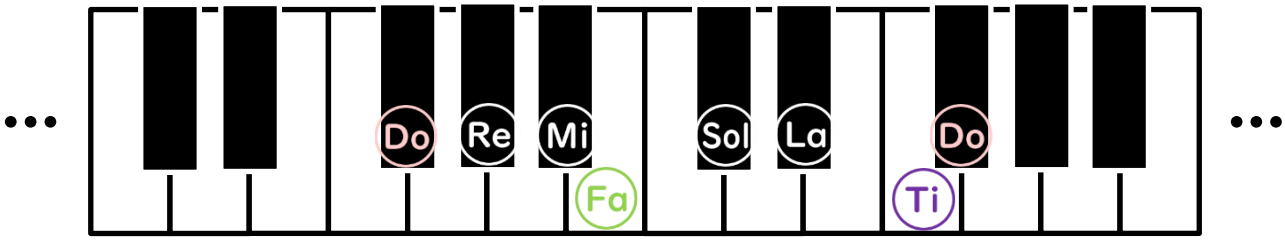
- **Four Sharps (♯♯♯♯)**



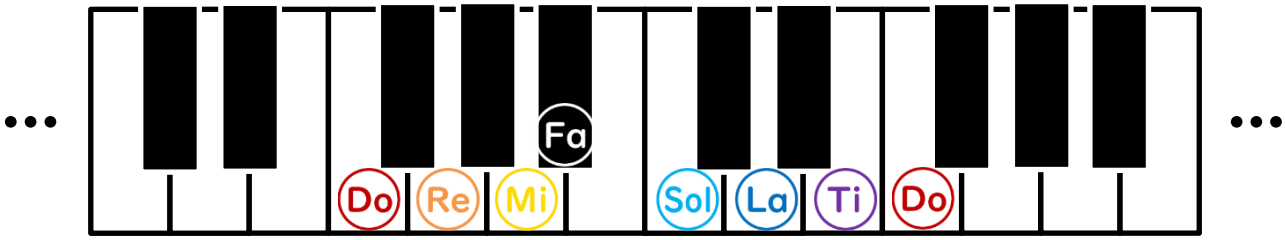
- **Five Sharps (♯♯♯♯♯)**



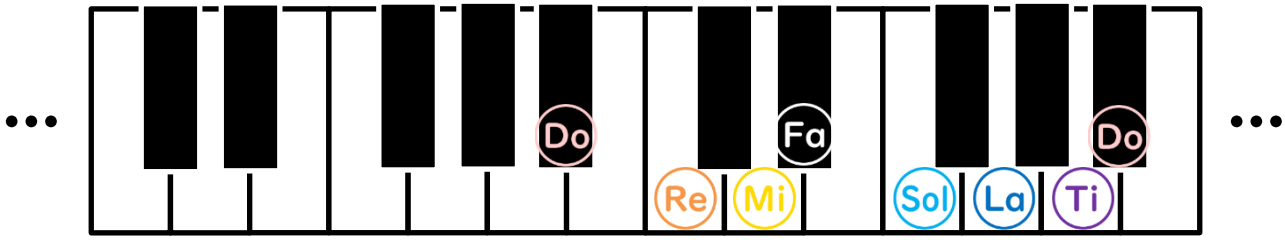
- **Six Sharps (♯♯♯♯♯♯)**



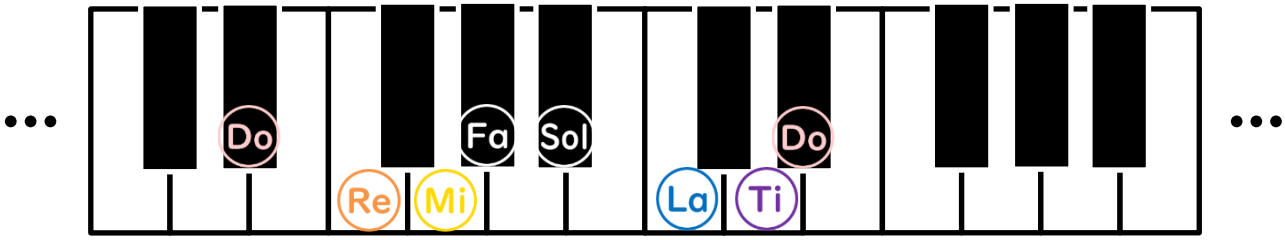
◆ One Flat (♭)



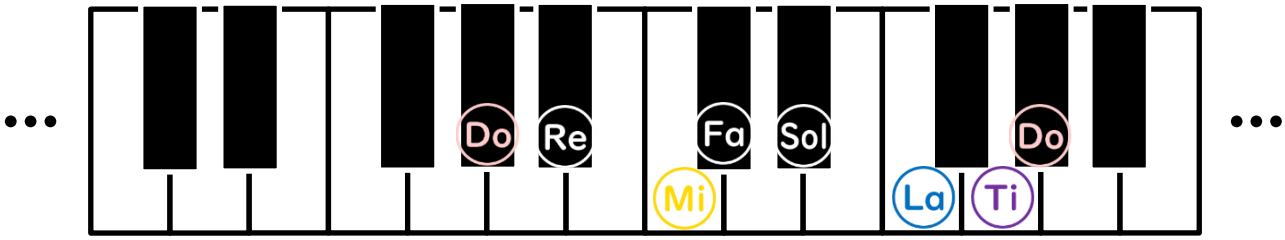
◆ Two Flats (♭♭)



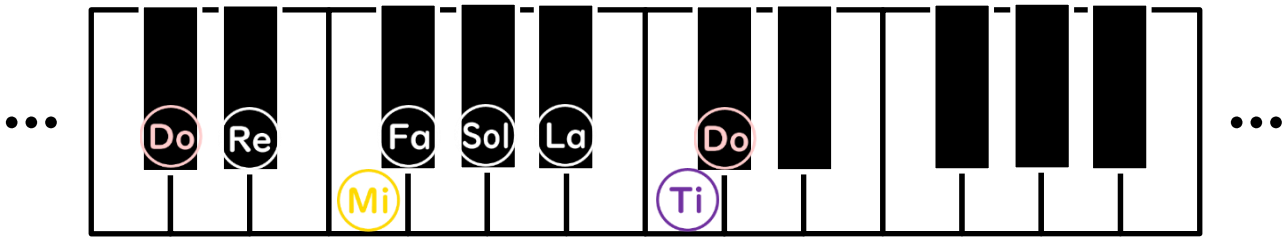
◆ Three Flats (♭♭♭)



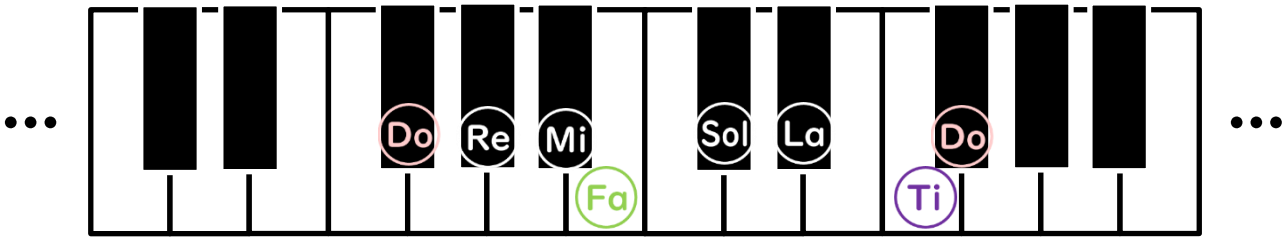
◆ Four Flats (♭♭♭♭)



◆ Five Flats (♭♭♭♭♭)



◆ Six Flats (♭♭♭♭♭♭)



⮝ Did you discover that six sharps would make a keyboard the same as six flats?

NOTICE

1. Every key signature corresponds to an important "Do".
2. The melody won't change much if you locate the important "Do" to another one. It would only sound higher or lower than normal.

[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 9]

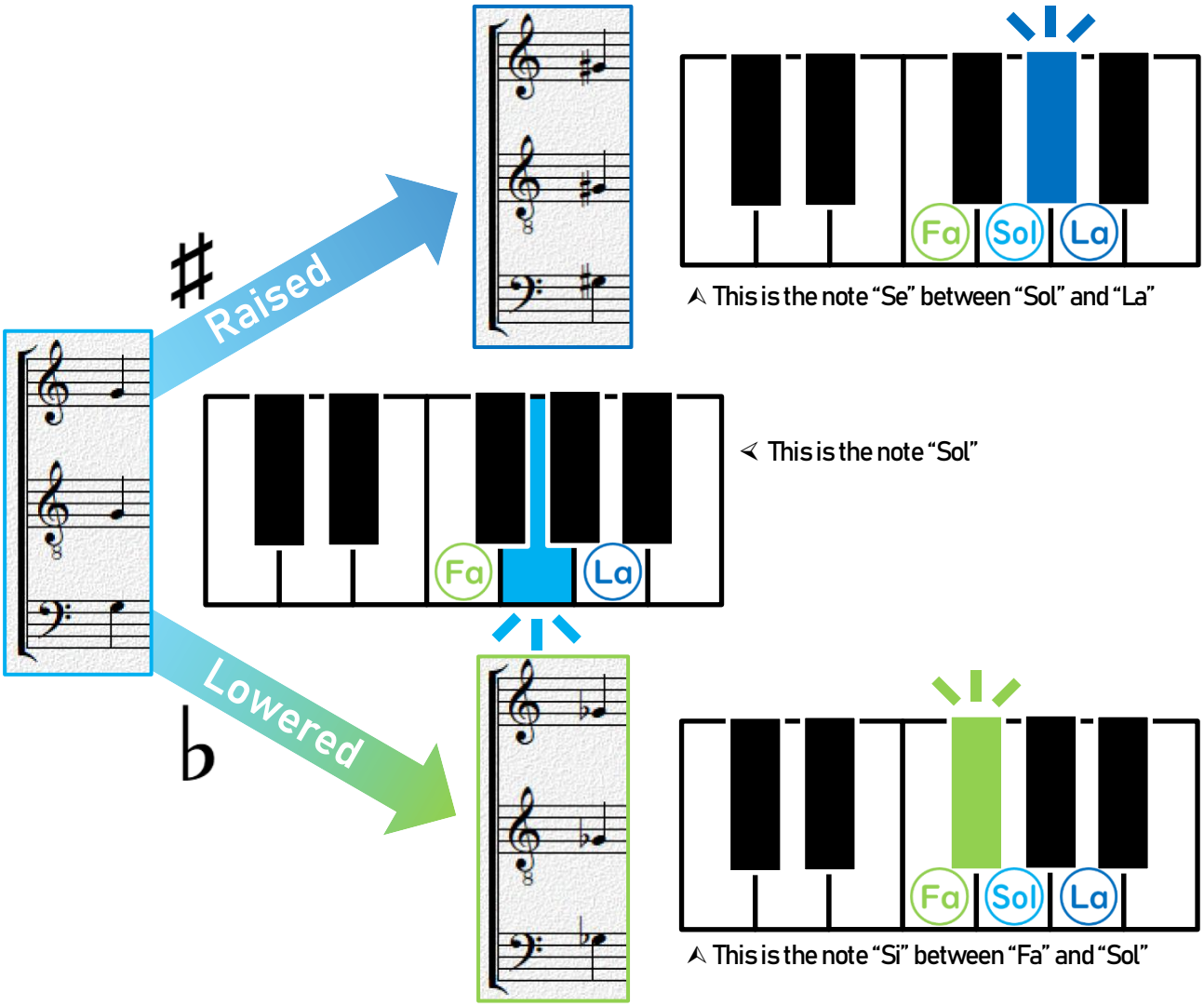
➢ Accidentals

New pitches could still be produced when **accidentals** are added to a note on scores. In this way, we could give all keys on a keyboard their corresponding solfèges. The two accidentals, which aren't new to us, could move a pitch up or down from its original key to its nearest key.

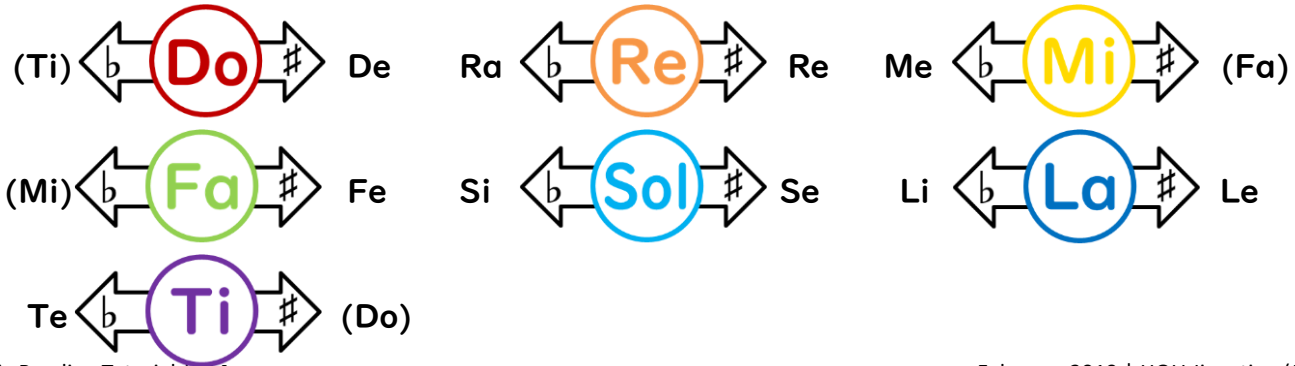
♯ ◅ Sharp
Raises the pitch of a note

♭ ◅ Flat
Lowers the pitch of a note

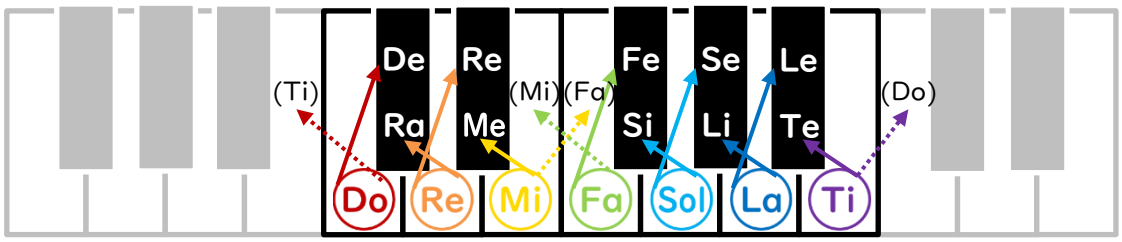
If we take "Sol" with nothing as the key signature as an original key, we would have:



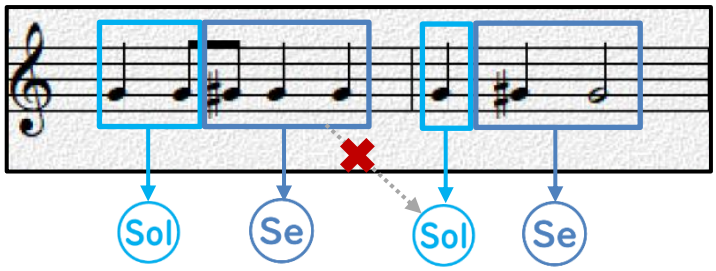
New names are given to these notes, according to which one the original note is:

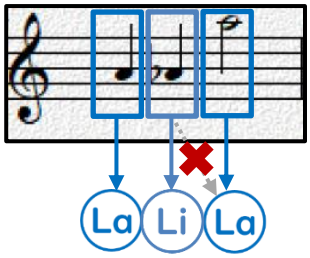


For example, notes would have the following solfèges if there's nothing as the key signature:



In a single bar, if a sharp (or flat) note appears, all the notes which has the same pitch behind it (including itself) would all be sharp (or flat) notes (although they won't be marked).
This rule, however, won't affect the notes in the following bars. Also, this rule won't be affective when two notes having the same solfèges but different pitches.



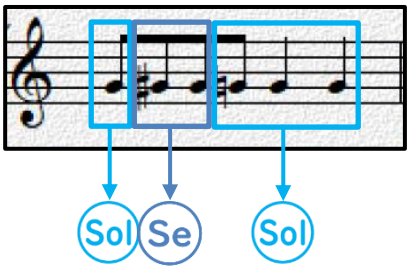


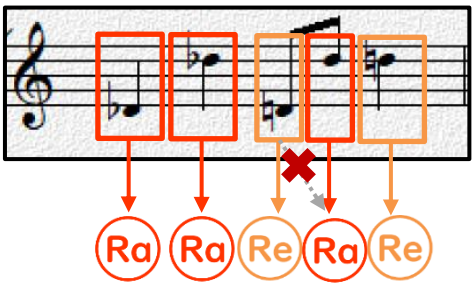
⮜ Notice that the "Se" and "Li" are the same note for this example

We have one more accidental to introduce:

⮜ Natural
Normalize the pitch of a note

In a single bar, if a natural note appears, all the notes which has the same pitch behind it (including itself) would not be affected by the previous sharp or flat note. This rule also won't affect the notes in the following bars, and won't be affective when two notes having the same solfèges but different pitches.





NOTICE

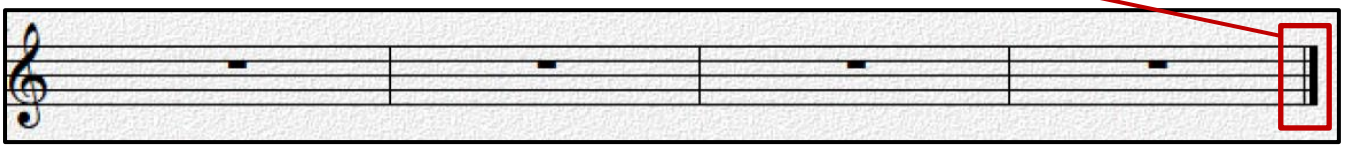
With the key signature remained, a single pitch could be corresponded to two different solfèges. However, the one with relation to its original note should be sung because this is more natural and straightforward.

[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 10]

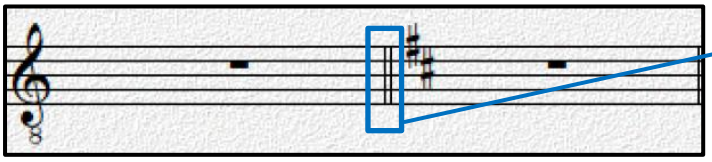
➢ More on Bar Lines & Repetitions

We have learned that a bar line separates two bars. Apart from this, there are other types of different bar lines.

At the end of a music score, you would see the **end bar lines** like below. It indicates that this piece of music is over.



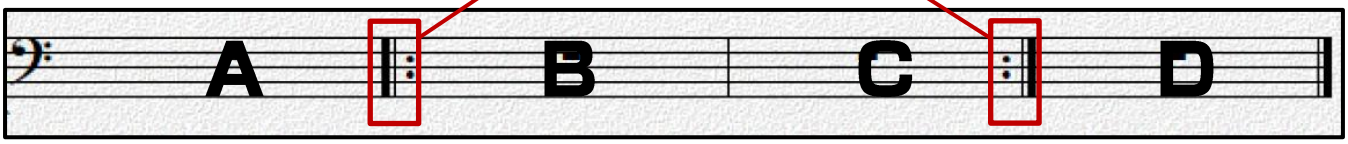
When the key signature changes in the middle of a piece, **double bar lines** will be drawn to separate two periods with different key signatures.



The key signature changes from nothing to 2 sharps, starting from the second bar

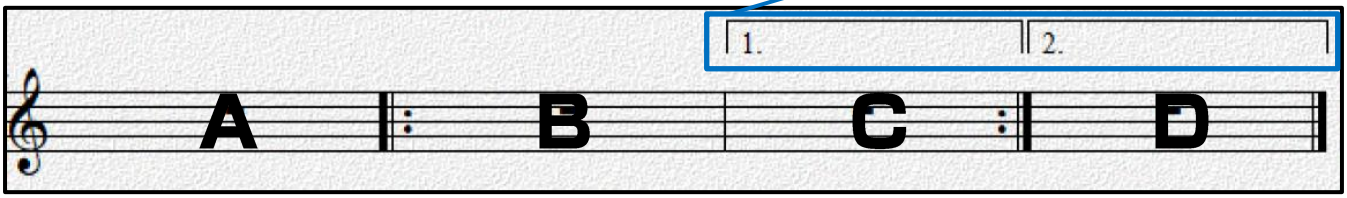
The double bar lines could also be used to separate different periods in a single piece of music.

The last one is a pair of bar lines, the **repeat sign.** They could appear at the beginning and the end of a period of music. When you see them, you have to sing the melody twice inside them, just like reading a sentence twice inside a pair of brackets.



The above piece of music has four bars: A, B, C and D. This piece should be sung as **"A-B-C-B-C-D"** because only the bar B and C are inside the repeat bar lines.

Sometimes we may have multiple endings (usually two) to a repeated piece of music. That's the time when you would meet brackets including the **first ending**, **second ending** and so on.

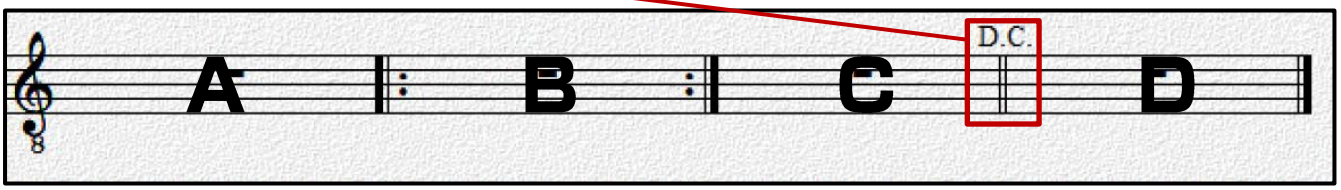


The above piece of music has four bars (A, B, C and D) and two endings. This piece should be sung as **"A-B-C-B-D"** because although the bar B and C are all inside the repeat bar lines, C is now the first ending and D is the second ending. D should be sung instead of C for the second time.

Remember that if D isn't the end of this piece, you should continue from there.

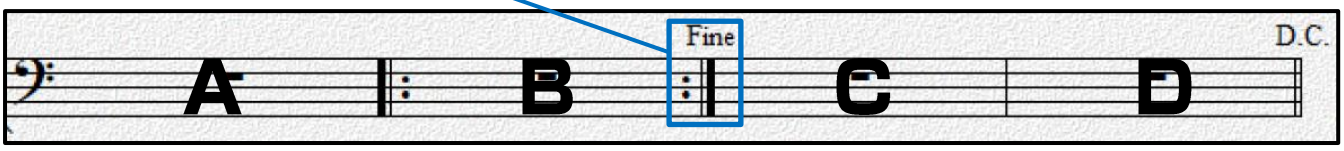
Sometimes music could be complex, and repetition marks need to be more precise.

Da Capo, or **D.C.**, is often used when a music needs to be repeated from the very beginning.



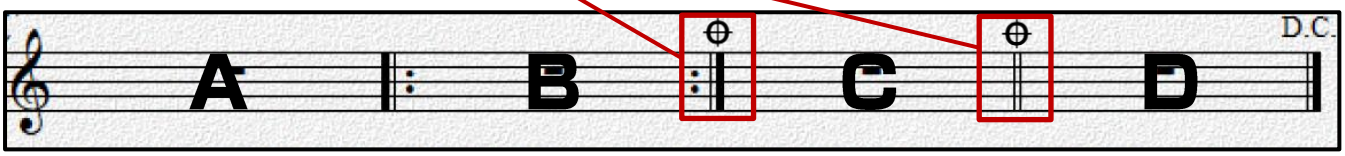
This piece should be sung as **"(A-B-B-C)-(A-B-C)-D"**. When "A-B-B-C" is finished, D.C. indicates that the singers should start from the beginning of this piece, which is "A". Notice that for the second time, repeat signs should be ignored, and that's why "B" is only sung once after repeating from the beginning.

If another word **"Fine** (means "end" in Italian)" appear before D.C., it should be regarded as the ending when singing for the second time from the beginning.



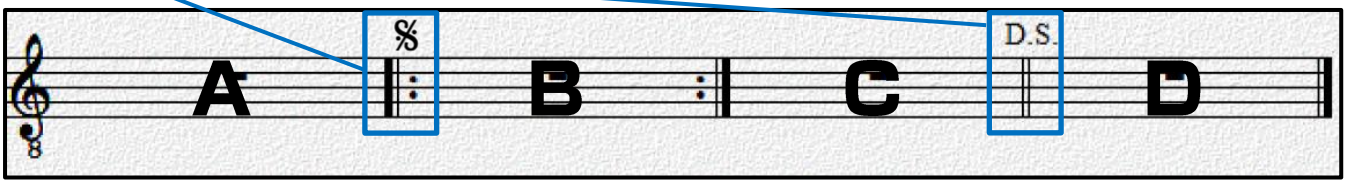
This piece should be sung as **"(A-B-B-C-D)-(A-B)"**. Notice that "Fine" is ignored for the first time, and the repeat signs are ignored for the second time.

Sometimes a pair of marks "$\oplus$" may appear before D.C. instead of "Fine". When repeating, music between these two marks would be ignored.



This piece should be sung as **"(A-B-B-C-D)-(A-B-D)"**. Singers sing from the first sign to the other one for the second time, thus C is skipped.

Dal Segno, or **D.S.**, is used when a music needs to be repeated from the sign "$\%$".



This piece should be sung as **"(A-B-B-C)-(B-C-D)"**. This suggests that the only difference between D.C. and D.S. is that the start of repeating is different.

NOTICE

1. Both D.C. and D.S. could be accompanied by "Fine".
2. When repeating by D.C. and D.S., repeat signs are ignored.

[Music Reading Tutorial – No. 11]

➢ Other Musical Symbols

After learning how to read the notes and sing the songs, we still have a few words in our notes which describe the speed, style or dynamic of the song or their changes. (Most of them are in Italian)

accel. ≺ Gradually get faster
Abbreviation of "accelerando"

e ≺ And

rall. or ***rit.*** ≺ Gradually get slower
Abbreviation of "rallentando" and "ritardando/ritenuto"

poco ≺ A little/Gradually

a tempo ≺ Return to the original speed
"Tempo" means "speed"

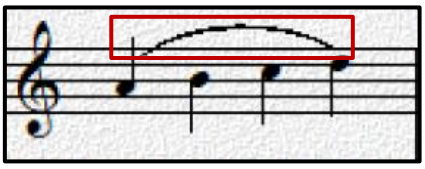
legato ≺ Continued/Connected
Notes should be sung connected smoothly

unis. ≺ Sing in unison (together)
Abbreviation of "unisono".
Two parts in a single line (in a close score) should sing the same notes

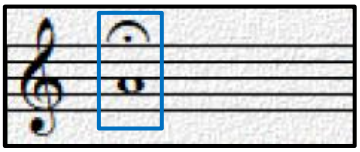
div. ≺ Sing in divisions (divided)
Abbreviation of "divisi".
Two parts in a single line (in a close score) should sing their own notes

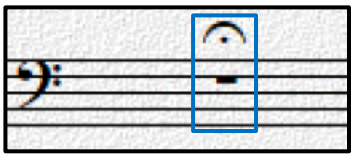
(Other statements are usually in English and should be easy to understand)

Also, there are a few more marks being used frequently:

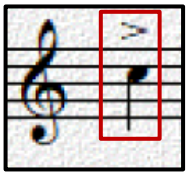


≺ These notes should sing continuously because of the connecting line.
(This plays a different role from the line in Tutorial No.4)





≺ The note (or rest) should be extended
(usually it appear at the end of a period of music)



≺ The note with the ">" mark should be stressed

NOTICE

If the statement you see isn't listed above, nor it's in English. Search it online or translate it from Italian (try French and German if it's still not understood).