# Reading Music: An Introduction

So, you are looking to begin your journey into the world of music? Using this comprehensive guide, you will be playing, singing, and jamming with the best of them in no time! Whether you want to become a Master of Theory or just want to get a basic understanding under your belt, reading music can be a great aid to reaching your maximum potential as a musician. To start we will split up your learning into easily manageable pieces starting with the notes, then to common symbols, time signatures, and finally the notes on the staff.

## The Notes

Use this chart (**Figure 1**) to help get yourself started. Notes are symbols which tell you to play, rests are symbols which tell you to stay quiet. The types of notes and rests have different beats which tell you how long they last.

*Figure 1: Chart of notes and rests with their names and values*

Sometimes you will have two eighth notes or two sixteenth notes beside each other. When that happens, instead of drawing them individually, connect them with a bar as so ♫ ♬.

# A screenshot of a cell phone Description automatically generatedCommon Symbols

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*Figure 2: This is a standard staff.*

*Figure 3: (left) Sharp symbol, (right) Flat symbol*

In **Figure 3** you will see a sharp and a flat. Their usage is simple, but incredibly important. A sharp is used for slightly making the pitch of a note higher, while a flat is used for slightly lowering the pitch of a note.

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Description automatically generatedWhen reading music, you need a way of breaking it up so you can understand the flow of the music, as well as helping us read it more easily. To do this, split the music into “measures”, you can see what this looks like in **Figure 4**. The vertical lines denote the beginning and end of each measure. You can think of this kind of like a period in a sentence, except without the pause. There’s another important kind of vertical line in music that isn’t measure bars. These are called “the double bar line” (**Figure 5**) and their usage is very simple. The double bar line is put at the end of a piece of music to let you know that it is over.

*Figure 5: Double bar line*

*Figure 4: A staff with measure bars*

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Time signatures are incredibly versatile elements which tell you how long each measure should be. In **Figure 6** you’ll a staff with a treble clef and some numbers next to it, these numbers are the “time signature”. This specific time signature is referred to as “four-four time” (commonly written as 4/4), and each number represents a different thing. The bottom number tells you which note is equal to one beat, in the example that would be the quarter note. The top number tells you how many beats are in each measure. To help explain this, look at the example below.

*Figure 6: Treble clef and 4/4-time signature*

It will be helpful to reference your chart (**Figure 1**) which is written for 4/4 time. Notice how in the example in the first measure we have four quarter notes. Each quarter note gets one beat, and there are four beats in each measure. If you add up the number of beats, it will come out to four. In the second measure you have two half notes, this is because, if you refer to your chart, the half note is equivalent to two beats. So, if you have two half notes, you will have four beats for the measure. You can use the chart to see how it works out for the eighth notes and sixteenth notes.

# Reading the Staff

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Description automatically generatedUsing **Figure 7** and **Figure 8** you can see how the notes are laid out on the staff. The notes range from A – G and then loop again (ex. A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B…). To remember the bass clef spaces, use “**A**ll **C**ows **E**at **G**rass”, and from there it’s easy to fill in the lines, however you can create your own acronym for the spaces and lines if you want to. For the treble clef, the spaces spell “face” going upwards.A picture containing clock

Description automatically generated Sometimes you’ll see a note with a sharp next to it, for instance and F with a sharp next to it is called “F sharp” (F#), where as an F with a flat next it is called “F flat” (F♭). This follows for all other notes. With that knowledge you’re now ready to begin reading music! Below you can find some practice with their key at the end. Have fun reading music and growing in your newfound interest!

*Figure 7: Bass clef notes*

*Figure 8: Treble clef notes*

# Practice

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# Key

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