

First Steps to Reading Music

From The Beginner's Guide to Reading Music



Easy-to-Use • Easy-to-Learn
A Simple Introduction For All Ages

Jake Jackson

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Jake Jackson is a musician and writer of practical music books.
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Rhyming Dictionary.

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This digital extract provides you with the **first two steps**
of a 12 step process. These introductory sections will give
you good understanding of the basic concepts needed to
read music.

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Introducing the 12 steps

Organized into **12 easy steps**, this complete book begins with the **basic concepts** and finishes with a compendium of symbols.

The first section introduces you the **stave**, **notes** and **rests** before moving on to **key signatures** and **time signatures**. The large sections on **scales** and **chords** will expand your knowledge and help you to explore further.

This **beginner's guide** can also be used as a reminder of **basic musical terms**.



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The Basics

Step One

Music is created by people singing and playing a wide variety of instruments. Writing down and reading the music is an important part of **music-making**.

The following pages will introduce you to the very basic concepts: what is a **stave**? what are **lines** and **spaces**? what are **ledger lines** and **clefs**?

This section closes with the note called **middle C**, the understanding of which will give you a solid foundation for the rest of the book.



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Stave or Staff

These five lines make up the stave (sometimes called staff).

The stave is the backbone to the body of the music, it holds the **notes** and the **rests** and the various **symbols** that tell you how to play loudly or softly, when to repeat and when to stop.

The stave allows us to indicate **pitch**, whether a sound is high or low.



The **highest** sounds appear at the top of a stave.



The **lowest** sounds appear at the bottom of a stave.



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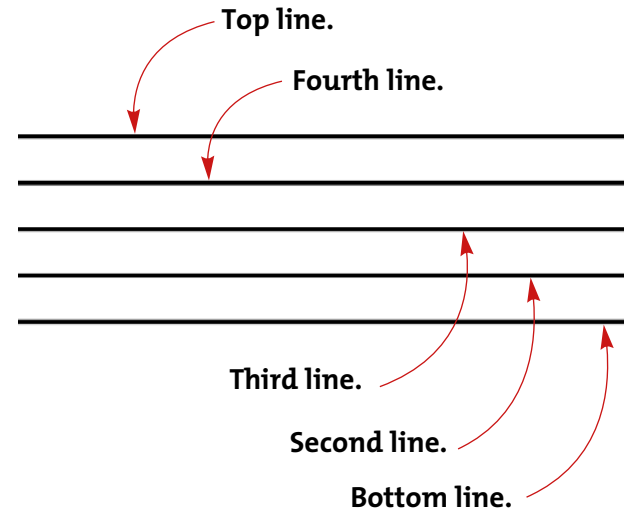
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Lines

The staff is always made up of **five** lines. Notes can be written on the lines or the spaces.

Each line on a staff represents a particular musical note, although which note depends on which **clef** is shown at the beginning of the music (clefs are covered on pages 20-25).

It is worth noting that the lines also show the music **moving** in time from **start** to **finish**, and should always be read from **left** to **right**.



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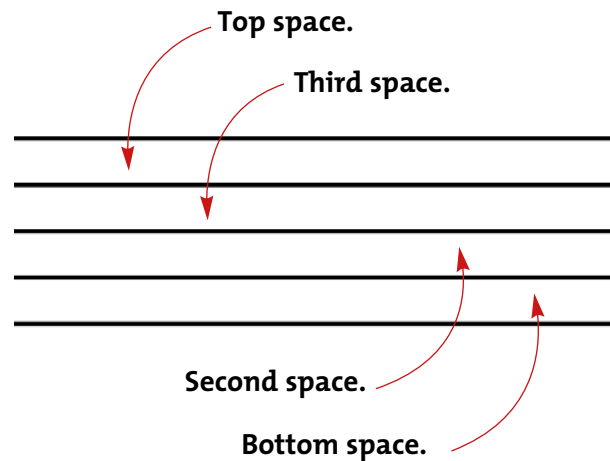
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Spaces

Between the five lines there are four spaces. Notes can be placed in these spaces. The **higher** the **space** in the stave, the **higher** the **note**.

Notes can be placed on **both** the lines and the spaces.

There are spaces **above** and **below** the stave. These can also hold notes.



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Ledger Lines

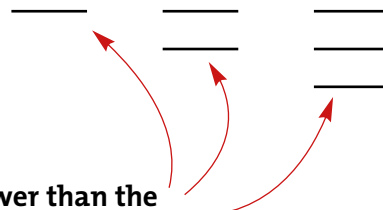
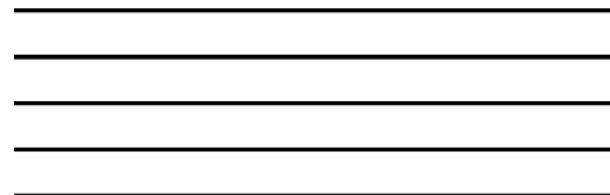
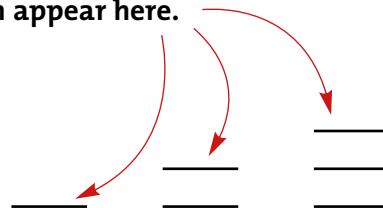
Often you will see music with small lines written above or below the main part of the stave. These are called **ledger lines**.

Ledger lines are only used when a note is written in a **space** or on a **line** where the note is higher or lower than those on the main part of the stave.

Ledger lines are written at equal distances from the main lines.



Notes higher than the stave can appear here.



Notes lower than the stave can appear here.

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The Bars

When you look at music you will normally see a series of **vertical lines** placed at intervals along the stave. These are called **bar lines**.

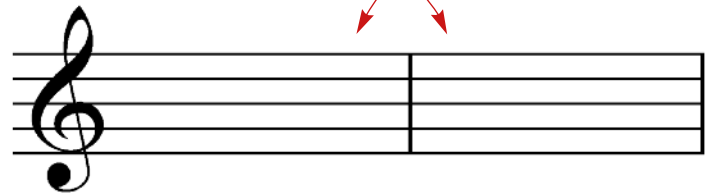
The area between each barline is called a **bar**. Sometimes these are called **measures**.

Written music, called **notation**, is grouped into bars to provide structure to the notes, to make it easier to follow, and to show the **beat** of the music.

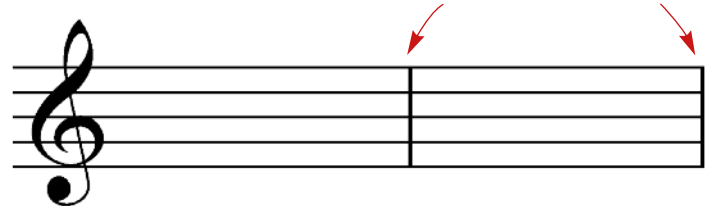
The **first bar** on each stave on a page of music always carries a **clef** symbol in place of the first bar line.



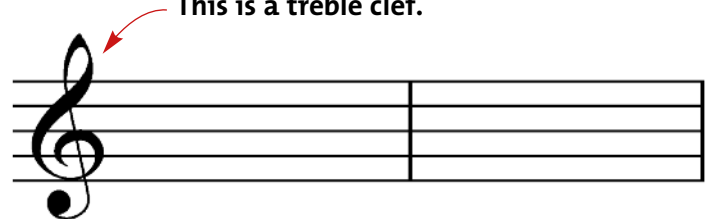
These are bars.



These are bar lines.



This is a treble clef.



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Introducing the Treble Clef

A clef symbol is written at the beginning of a piece of music, and at the beginning, on the left side, of every stave.

The **treble clef** is used for instruments that sound higher, usually above **middle C**.

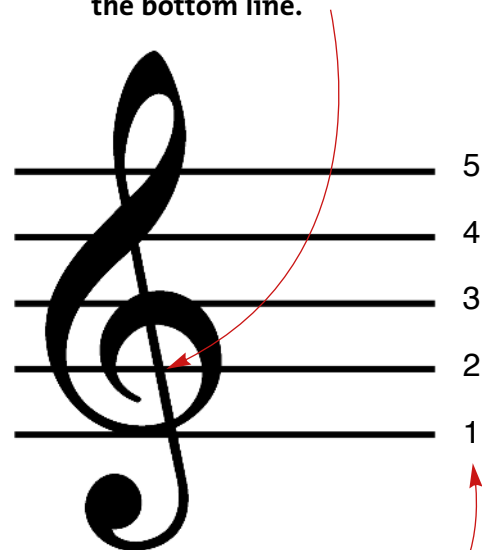
The treble clef always **curls** around the **second line** from the bottom of the stave.

Instruments that commonly use the treble clef are the violin, guitar, treble recorder, saxophone, trumpet and the right hand on a piano.

Children's and female **voices** use the treble clef.



The curl of the treble clef wraps around the second line up from the bottom line.



Numbered from the bottom line upwards.

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Introducing the Bass Clef

The bass clef is used for instruments and voices which sound **lower**, especially those that provide the bass sounds in a piece of music.

The bass clef is always written so that the two dots sit either side of the fourth line up from the bottom of the stave.

Instruments that commonly use the bass clef are the cello, bassoon, tuba, bass guitar and the left hand on a piano or any other keyboard instrument, such as an organ.

Male baritone, tenor and bass **voices** use the bass clef.



The two dots of the bass clef sit either side of fourth line up from the bottom line.



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The C Clef

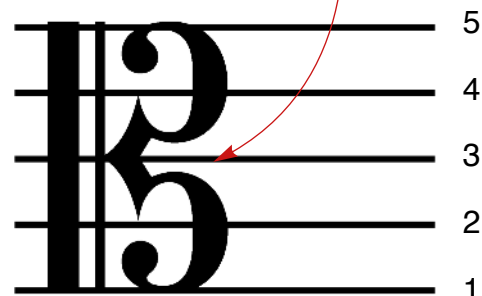
Other clefs are occasionally used for different instruments to make the reading of them easier. These include the **alto clef** and the **tenor clef** (also called C clefs).

The **alto clef** can be used by the viola. The middle of this clef sits on the line that normally holds the middle C.

The **tenor clef** can be used by the cello, bassoon and trombone. It also sits on the line of the middle C but the five bar lines shift down to provide a space and line below the bottom edge of the clef.



The middle of the **alto clef** sits on the line that normally shows middle C.



Numbered from the bottom line upwards.

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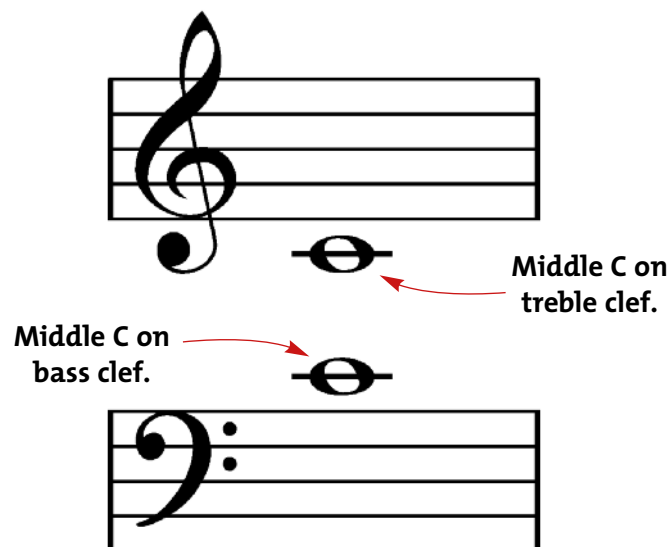
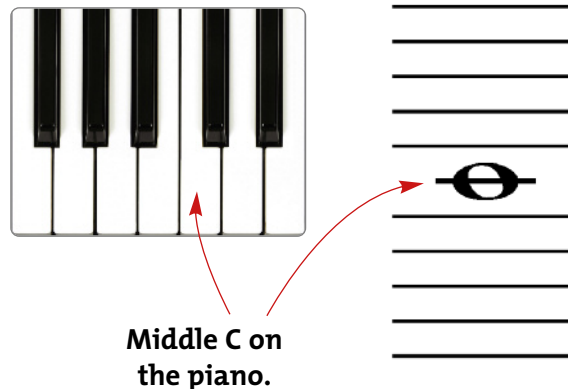


Middle C

The note called middle C appears in the **middle** of the **piano**. It is usually the **lowest note** that an instrument using a **treble clef** can play.

Middle C appears on the first ledger line **below** the **treble clef** and the first ledger line **above** the **bass clef**. Middle C sits exactly between the treble and bass clef staves.

To make the reading and writing of notation easier, the gap between the staves of the treble and bass clef is usually stretched out to allow a middle C on **both** staves.



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Treble Clef

Step Two

The treble clef is used for notes above **middle C**.
On the **piano** this applies generally to the music played with the **right hand**.

Instruments such as the trumpet, violin and the clarinet also use the treble clef, along with higher voices such as the soprano (or treble) sounds of children and female singers.

This chapter offers more detailed information on the treble clef and provides ways to remember the notes of the lines and spaces.



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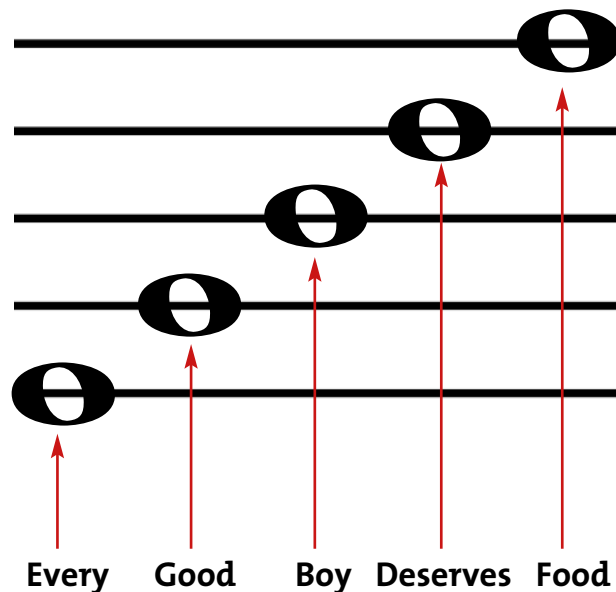
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Treble Clef Line Notes

A good way to remember the names for those notes that appear on the lines of the **treble clef** is to use a mnemonic to remind you:

Food
Deserves
Boy
Good
Every

Read from the bottom up.



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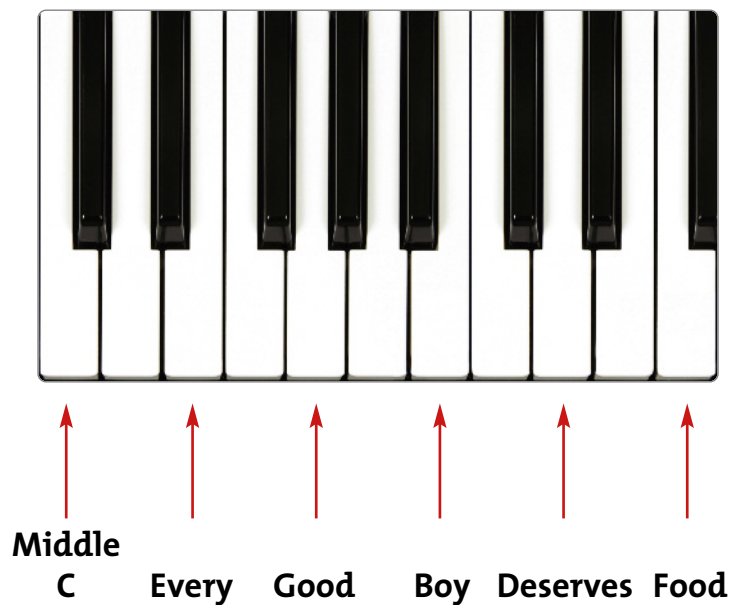
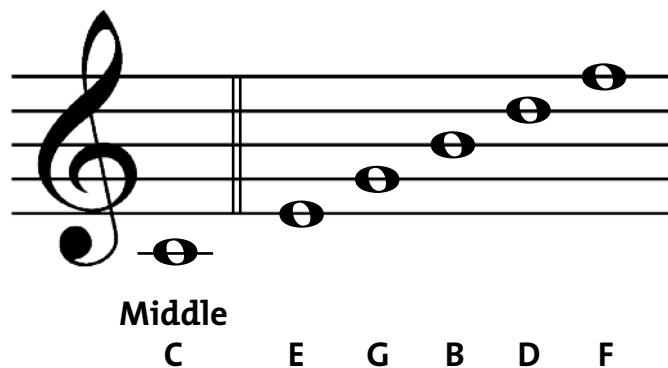
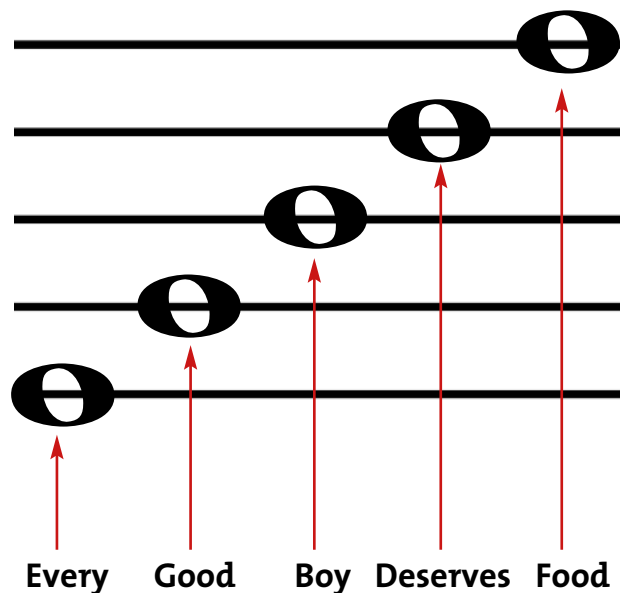
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Treble Clef Line Notes on Keyboard



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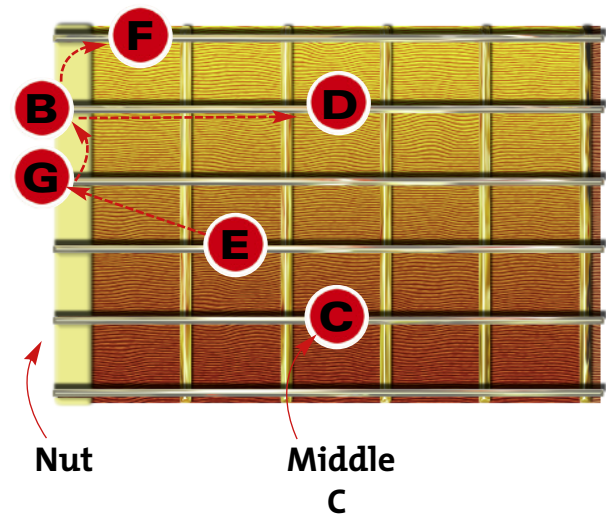
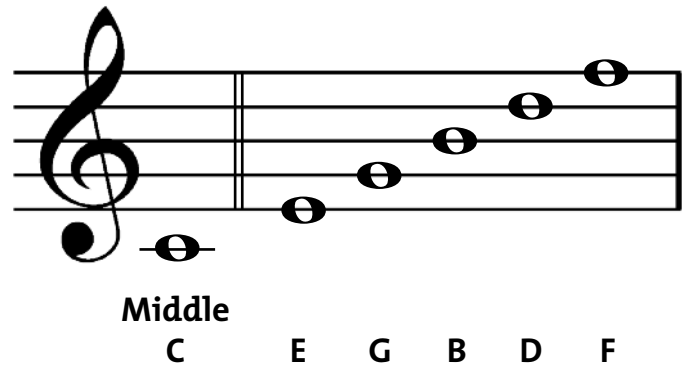
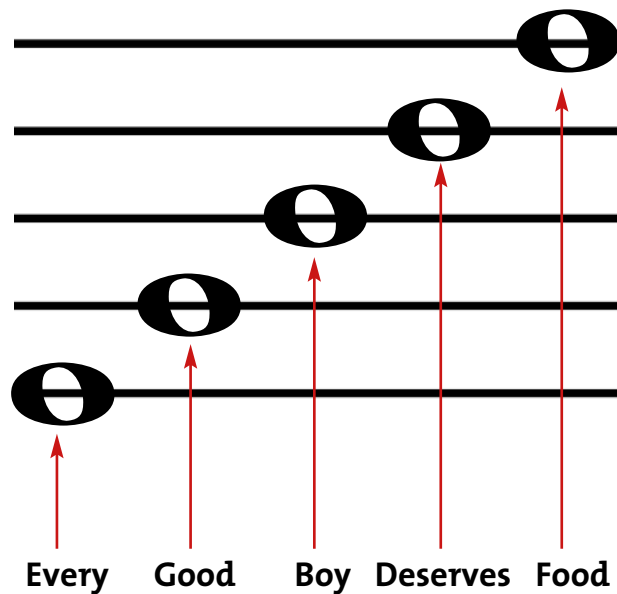
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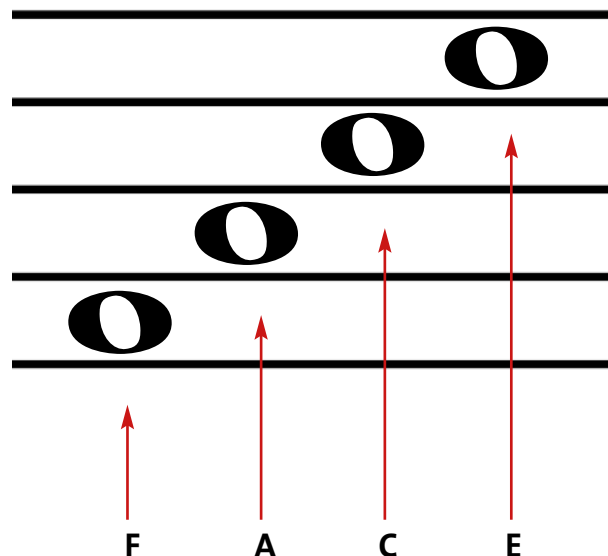
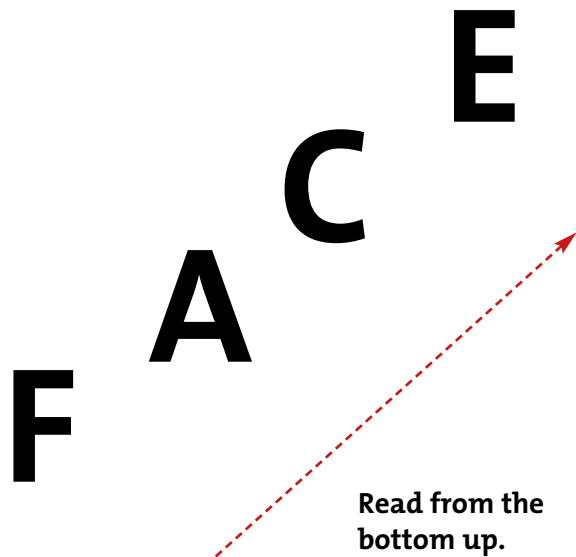
Treble Clef Line Notes on Guitar



The diagram here is from the player's view. Treble clef line notes on a guitar are spread across the strings. The notes G and B are shown here on the open strings.

Treble Clef Space Notes

You can use a similar method to remember those notes that appear in the spaces of the **treble clef**. They spell out a simple word:



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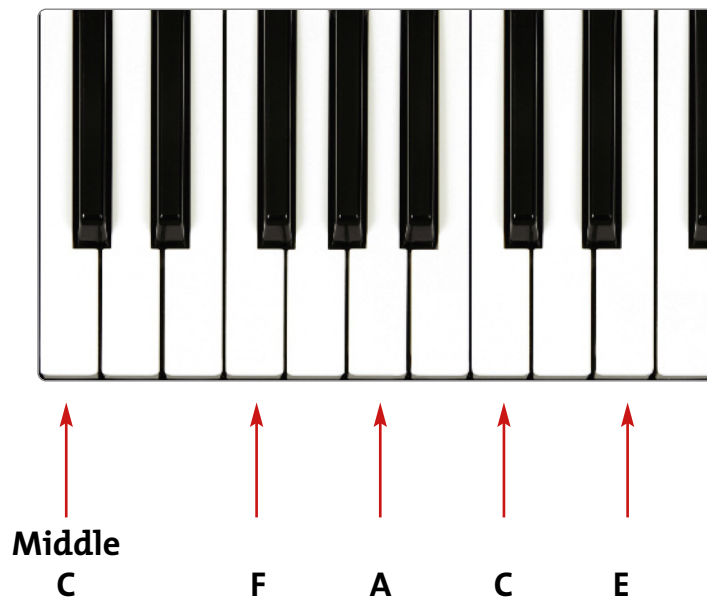
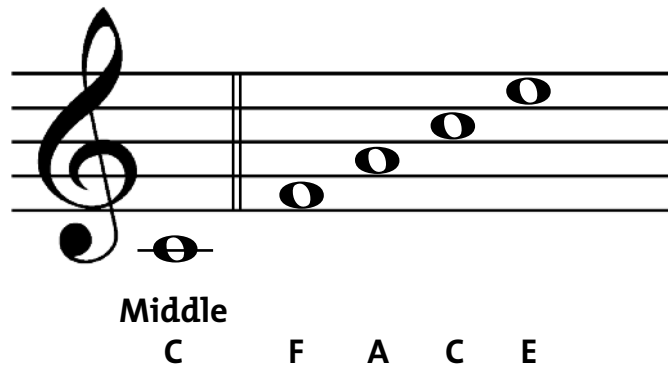
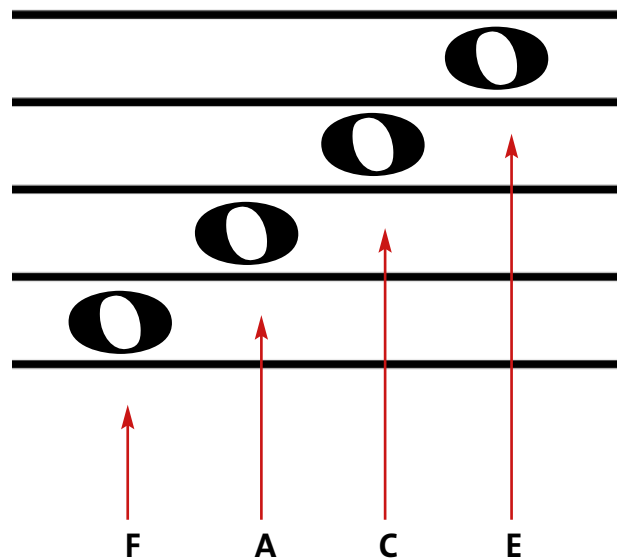
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Treble Clef Space Notes on Keyboard



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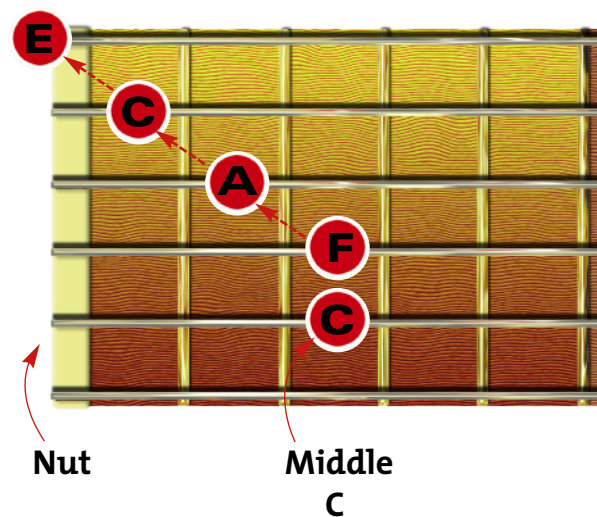
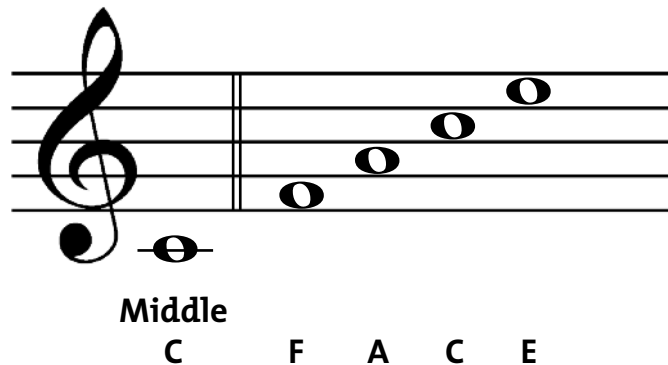
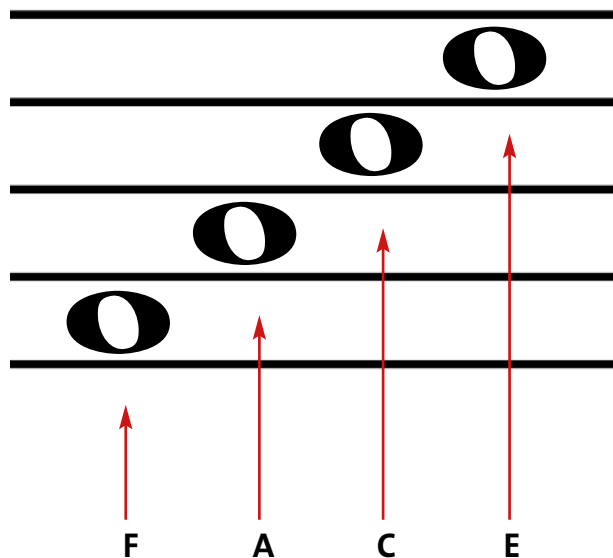
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Treble Clef Space Notes on Guitar



Again, the diagram here is from the player's view with the treble clef open notes played across the strings. The top note E is shown here on the open string.

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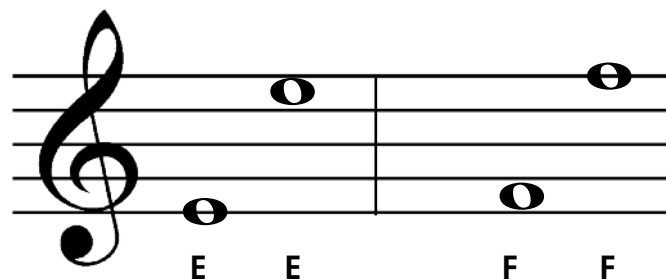
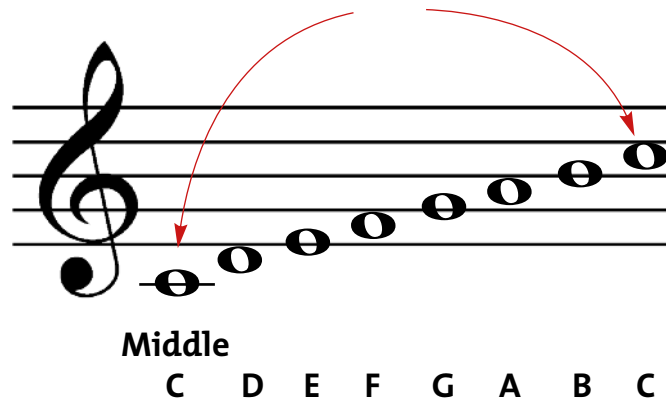
Octaves

From the previous pages you might have noticed that the note names appear more than once on a staff. For instance, in the treble clef, in the spaces between the lines, the **C** of **F A C E** is **above middle C**, which sits **below** the staff.

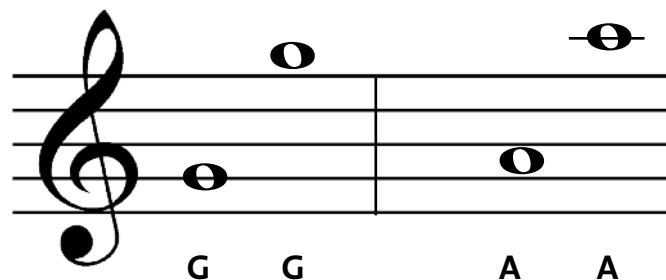
This occurs because, in standard western music, there are **7** whole **note names**, from **A** to **G**, which are then repeated.

If you listen to the sound of middle C and the sound of the C above, you will hear that they have the same quality. The **interval** between notes of the same name is called an **octave**. When notes of the same name are played together they create a rich, enhanced sound.

The interval between the two **C** notes is an **octave**.



Examples of other **octaves**.



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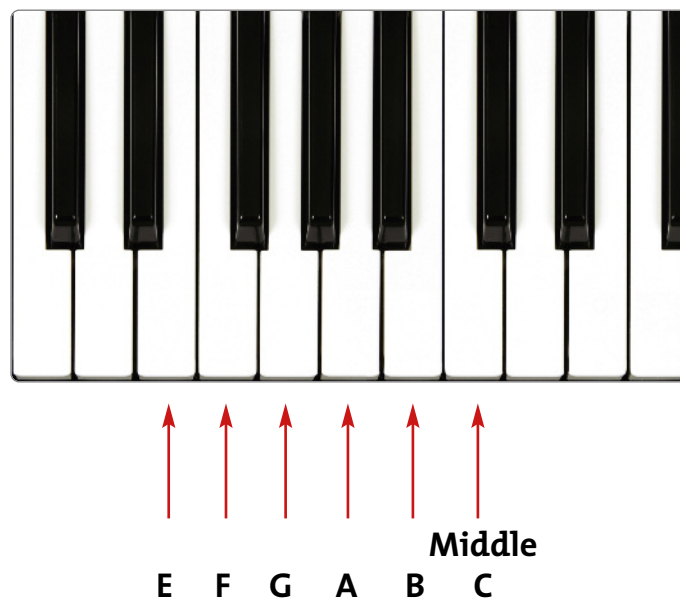
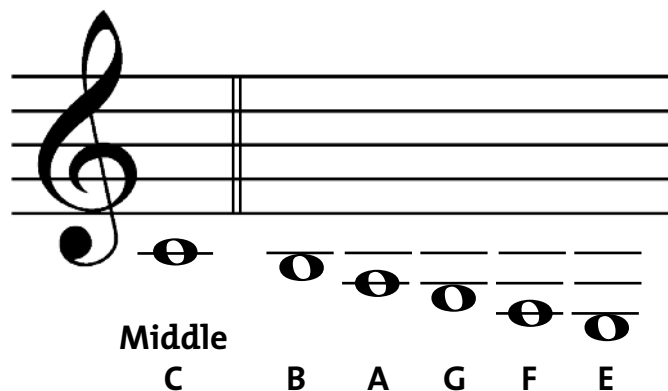
Notes Below the Treble Clef Stave

It is very useful to know how to work out the names of the notes **below** middle C.

Remember that the notes start at the bottom, so the **higher** the **position** of the note on the stave, the **higher** the **note**.

Remember also that these notes usually **only** appear on the ledger lines **if** there is **no bass clef**.

However, in piano music, **ledger lines** are sometimes used to signify that the notes should be played by the **right hand**, with the **bass clef** being reserved for the **left hand**.



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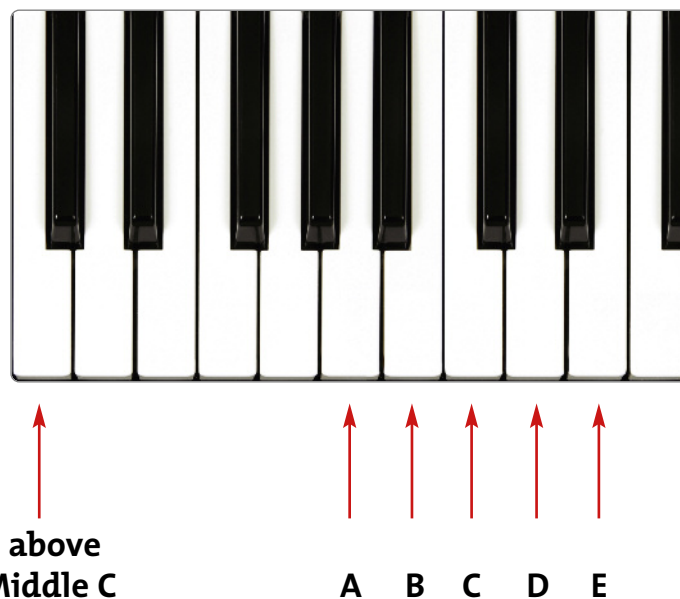
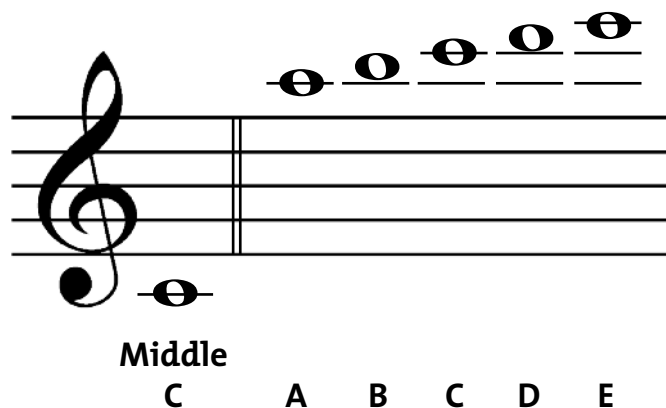
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Notes Above the Treble Clef Stave

It is also useful to know how to work out the names of the notes above the stave.

Remember that the notes start at the bottom, so the **higher** the **position** of the note on the stave, the **higher** the **note**.

The notes **above** the stave can be worked out in relation to middle C. For instance the **A above** the stave can be called the **second A above** middle C.



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Further Reading and other useful internet resources for this book are available on **www.flametreeemusic.com**

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