

Quick Reference Guide to Music Notation

Notes: notes are markings on the staff that tell you the pitch and length of the music

Pitch: pitch is the specific tone of the note. Pitch can be natural, flat or sharp.

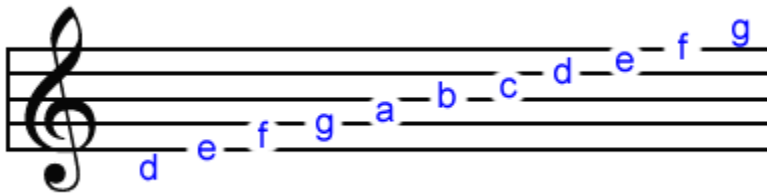
- Natural: the normal pitch of the note.
- Flat: $\frac{1}{2}$ a tone below the normal pitch of the note.
- Sharp: $\frac{1}{2}$ a tone above the normal pitch of the note.

Staff: a group of 5 lines on which notes are placed based on their pitch.

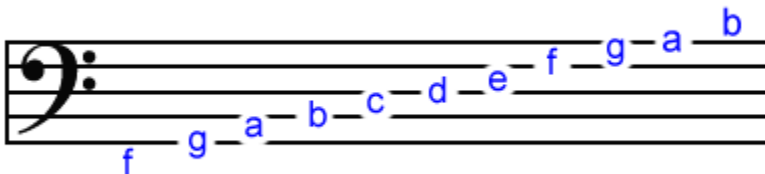
Clef: the clef is the key to where the pitches are on the staff. In general, sopranos and altos sing on the treble clef, and tenors and basses sing on the bass clef.

Notes are named using the letters A through G, based on their pitch and their placement on the staff, on a line, between lines, or above or below the staff on ledger lines.

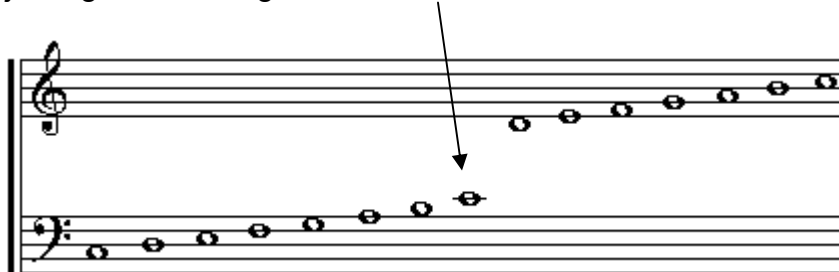
Treble clef staff and the location of pitches:



Bass clef staff and location of pitches:










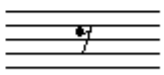

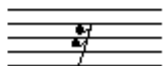
Here are the treble and bass clef together in a staff. Notice the lines on the left side joining the staff together, and the 'middle C' between the staves on a ledger line.



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Metre: In addition to pitch, notes have length. The duration of notes is measured in beats. Similarly, rests have duration. Rests indicate space in the music where there is no note being sung or played. All this counting and measuring is called the metre of the music. Music is very mathematical in nature.

Here are the durations of notes and rests. Whenever you see a dot (·) after a note or a rest, the note is 1.5 times the normal duration. For example, a dotted half note would be 3 beats. When two notes of the same pitch are tied together with a curved line, they are sung together as one note.

Name	Note	Rest	Beats
Whole Note			4
Half Note			2
Quarter Note			1
Eighth Note			1/2
Sixteenth Note			1/4

Time signature: the time signature tells you how to count the music. The top number in the time signature tells you how many beats there are in a bar. The bottom number tells you the kind of note that has a value of one beat.

Here are some examples. In each bar (the space between vertical lines), there are 2, 3 or 4 beats in total (the top number). In all examples, the bottom number is 4, meaning that the quarter note counts as one beat.



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Key Signatures: The key signature is a guide to which notes in the music are always sharp or always flat. Music always has a 'key', the base note from which the music is written. Each base note requires that other notes be sharp or flat to make the notes fit together properly.

Accidentals: When the composer wants to vary from the key signature for a particular note, they mark that note with a sharp, flat or natural sign. This is an accidental, and it applies only to the bar in which it appears.

There are major and minor keys. Major keys sound bright. O Canada is written in a major key. Minor keys tend to sound darker.

The image displays musical notation for major and minor keys. The top row shows major keys: C Major, G Major, D Major, A Major, E Major, B Major, F# Major, and C# Major. The bottom row shows minor keys: F Major, Bb Major, Eb Major, Ab Major, Db Major, Gb Major, and Cb Major. Each key is accompanied by its corresponding scale notes and a musical staff showing the key signature.

Expression: In addition to pitch and length, music has expression markings that tell us how loud, soft, fast, slow, etc. the music should be. Expression markings are based in Italian, the language of music. Here are some common expression markings:

Volume: mF = mezzo Forte or somewhat loud F = Forte or loud FF = Fortissimo or very loud
 mP = mezzo Piano or somewhat soft P = Piano or soft PP = Pianissimo or very soft

Get louder  Get softer 

rit. short for retard, means to gradually slow down

a tempo back to the original tempo

cresc. short for crescendo, means to get gradually louder

dim. short for diminuendo, means to get gradually softer


poco means 'a bit', and is used in combination. For example, poco rit. means a slight ritard.

> this symbol above or below a note means to accent or 'hit' it

• a dot above or below a note means staccato, or very short

unis. short for unison, or all together

// means a break or cutoff according to the conductor's direction

 means to pause and hold the note according to the conductor's direction