



HOW TO READ MUSIC

A guide for the
beginner to learn
how to read music



By LEON HARRELL

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Introduction

Let me begin by saying thank you for downloading my free e-book *How to Read Music*. As a professor and music instructor I have helped hundreds of students during my career and hope to teach many more. As a general practice I like to get to know my students. Since we aren't meeting face to face, feel free to say hello to me via my [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) pages for the One Minute Music Lesson or directly on my website <http://www.OneMinuteMusicLesson.com>.

Since we do not know each other yet, allow me to introduce myself, and tell you a little bit about why I wrote this book.

My name is Leon Harrell and I am a composer, pianist and music educator. I have played piano since I was a small child and began composing as a teenager. I have taught music theory courses as well as aural skills classes in several colleges and have been involved in music making for over 25 years. To learn more about my professional background, see my personal website at <http://www.LeonHarrell.com>.

When I began teaching music theory and piano lessons it dawned on me how poorly some students understand music and how it really works from the inside out. Many could play their instrument but they blindly stumbled through learning new pieces and had trouble with counting even simple rhythms when faced with musical excerpts that were not in the most basic of meters.

I decided that I would tackle this problem by creating my website the One Minute Music Lesson as a method of teaching the basic elements of music in small understandable bites so that my students could grasp the concepts at their own pace and refer to them as often as necessary until they fully mastered the material.

In this book it is my goal to teach you how to read musical notation from the very beginning. I will take a slightly unconventional approach because it is my philosophy that every music student should fully understand the guiding principles of musical notation, not just the easiest and most essential concepts.

As a teacher my aim is to make sure that every student that enters my class leaves with a full understanding of the course material, and I will not be satisfied until any student who wants to learn this material does so.

With that said, I invite you to contact me personally if at any point you have a question about this book or are confused about something. I am always looking to improve my teaching materials and will continue to update this book with new editions in the future.

I have tried my best to make this book fool proof, but if you get stumped along the way feel free to email me at OneMinuteMusicLesson@gmail.com and I will try to answer your question as fast as possible. Also I may answer your question in the next One Minute Music Lesson episode.

Again, I thank you for download this e-book and look forward to seeing and hearing about your musical progress. Good luck as you embark on your journey to learning to read music. If you enjoy the material in this book you may also enjoy my larger more comprehensive e-book entitled [*How to Read Music Easily In 30 Days*](#).

Wishing you the best in your musical development,

Leon Harrell

How to Use this Book

In this 10-day course I will explain every concept of how to read music, one concept at a time, as necessary to read the musical examples in each chapter. This method of learning to read music eliminates many of the frustrations of the traditional rhythm teaching methods.

For the sake of understanding, concepts are broken down to the basic elements to teach you music theory concepts simultaneously as you are learning to read musical notation. This will give you a firm foundation for understanding the larger, more important structure of the music you are reading.

As you read this book I encourage you to have a pencil handy to complete any small assignments and exercises as well as a set of three highlighters, preferably in red, blue and green, however any three distinct colors will work.

Also, this book is designed to be read one chapter per day. However, you may need more than one day to master any given concept. It may only take a day to grasp most of the ideas, but some topics such as chords and advanced rhythm will take longer to become second nature to you. This is common in almost all music students; so do not feel the need to rush through the book if you are not comfortable with the pace of one chapter per day.

Day 1 – Rhythm

In today's lesson we will learn about ...

- Rhythm: An Introduction
- Counting: Quarter Notes & Rests
- Counting: Writing in the Counting on the Score

Rhythm: An Introduction

There are two main components to any piece of music. One is the **rhythm**; the timing of the sounds and the patterns those sounds make in time. The other is the **pitch**; how high or low the sounds are in the music.

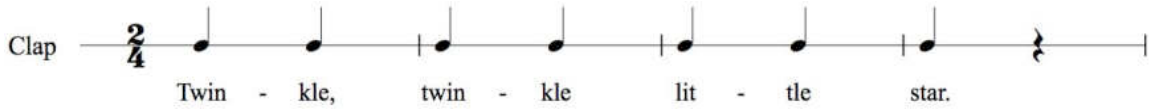
Counting: Quarter Notes & Rests

We will begin learning to read music by starting with just the rhythm. The first rhythmic value we will learn is the **quarter note**.



The quarter note equals 1 beat. When we count quarter notes each quarter note gets 1 beat.

Take a look at the rhythm from the beginning of the song *Twinkle, twinkle little star*.



Also in music there are times when we need silence, or a space of time between the sounds. This silence is called a **rest**. There are many kinds of rests but the first we will discuss is the **quarter rest**. Just like the quarter note the quarter rest gets 1 beat of time.



In the first example from *Twinkle, twinkle little star*, the musical **phrase** ended with a quarter rest.

Let's look at the remaining phrases, or groupings of music, of the rhythm from *Twinkle* on the next page.

Musical Example: Twinkle, twinkle little star (Traditional)

1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2
Twinkle, twinkle little star.
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high,
like a diamond in the sky.
Twinkle, twinkle little star.
How I wonder what you are.

Counting: Writing in the counting on the score

In this musical **score**, or **sheet music**, you will see all the counting of each individual note and rest written below the notes and the counting of the rhythmic beats in the **measures** above the music.

When we count music we normally count along with the **meter**, or the **time signature**, instead of each note and rest individually.

In the *Twinkle* example the time signature is 2/4. That means that in each measure, the amount of space between each **barline** is equal to 2 beats.

Now that you have seen *Twinkle, twinkle little star's* rhythm. Take a look at the following exercise.

Counting: Exercise #1

Look at this example and write in the individual counts of the quarter notes and rests below each note. Notice that the counting for the meter is already written in for you. Clap the example as you count the beats of the meter out loud. Remember quarter notes and quarter rests get one beat each.

The exercise consists of four staves of music in 2/4 time. The first staff begins with a 2/4 time signature. Each staff contains a sequence of quarter notes and quarter rests. Above each note or rest, the beat number (1 or 2) is written. The sequence of notes and rests across the four staves is as follows:

- Staff 1: Quarter note (1), Quarter note (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter note (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter note (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter rest (2).
- Staff 2: Quarter note (1), Quarter note (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter note (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter rest (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter rest (2).
- Staff 3: Quarter note (1), Quarter note (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter note (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter note (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter rest (2).
- Staff 4: Quarter note (1), Quarter note (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter note (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter rest (2), Quarter rest (1), Quarter rest (2).

Further Practice

Here are a few things you can do to further practice the skills from Day 1

- Write out a series of quarter notes and rests to create new rhythms and clap them.
- Try to find more songs that only use quarter notes. *Hint: Think of children's songs, folk songs or traditional religious music.*
- Generate your own practice material with a tool called PracticeSightReading.com from [this post on my blog](#).

Day 2 – Pitch and the 1-line Staff

In today's lesson we will learn about ...

- Pitch: An Introduction
- The 1-Line Staff
- Pitch Reading

Pitch: An Introduction

The second most essential element of music is **pitch**. Music is comprised of many individual sounds, many of which contain pitch. Pitch is the **frequency** of the air vibrations in the sounds that form musical tones. If a sound has a regular repeating vibration it has a **frequency**, or a certain speed that the sound waves vibrate the air molecules.

In notation, or the written language of music, we show frequency with notes placed on a staff.

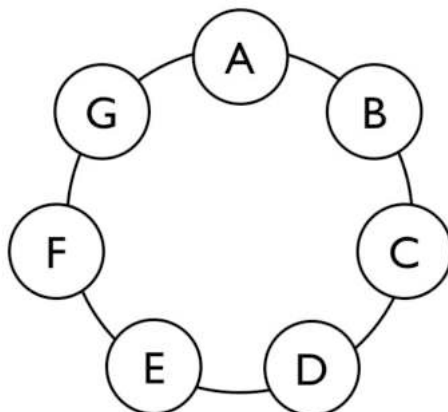
There are over **20,000 individual frequencies** we can hear, so in music we have a very simplified system of showing each approximate frequency with a pitch letter name.

Every frequency can be approximately shown with one of seven letters of the alphabet, from **A** to **G**.

Pitch: The 7 Pitch Letters

The 7 letters represent all the possible notes on the staff and musical instruments. Since we can play more than 7 pitches there is a method of using these 7 letters by using

locations on a staff to label every pitch. Since these letters are used over and over, up and down the staff, it helps to think of them in a circular or recurring pattern.



Beginning with the letter **A**, as the pitch rises, or the frequency goes higher, the letters move forward through the alphabet and cycle back to **A** after the letter **G**.

So a scale of notes moving up would ascend the lines and spaces of the staff and cycle forward through the 7 letters. Lines and spaces are a method of showing the notes so you are not confused of the exact location. A note is always located on a **line** or in a **space**.

Here are the notes of the **treble** and **bass** clefs at a glance:



When the notes come back down the staff the movement of the letters is the exact opposite. The letters cycle through backwards from **G** to **A**, and repeat the cycle beginning on **G**.

Learning the notes of both the treble and bass can be easy, if you learn them in stages. To do this I will use the next few chapters to slowly teach you to recognize the location of each line by sight, instead of attempting to memorize all 18 line and space locations at once.

The 1-line Staff

To begin you on the journey of memorizing and internalizing the notes of the staff we will begin with only a 1-line staff that presents only one note instead of the traditional 5-line staff.



A traditional 5-line staff versus a 1-line staff

Since this is not a traditional five line staff and we are beginning with only 1 note, we can define it anyway we want to. I will place a treble clef on the 1-line staff and that will make the line equal the pitch G.



The treble clef is also called the G clef. This is because it crosses the G line at 4 points, thus making it point to the location of the G line.



The Treble Clef resting on the G line

Now let's change to the bass clef. We will place a bass clef on the 1-line staff and that will make the line equal to the pitch F. For the bass clef, its pointer locates the F line, therefore it is also known as the F clef.



The F clef also has two little dots that sit on either side of the F line.



The Bass Clef resting on the F line

Pitch Reading: Exercise #1

Let's take a look at a simple rhythm with quarter notes and eighth notes on the 1-line treble and bass clef staves (*"Staves" is the plural form of the word "staff"*).

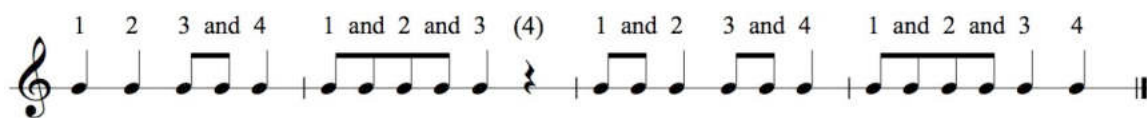
The first example is on the treble clef, so it will be the pitch G for all the notes. In the last lesson we learned quarter notes equal 1 beat, here we will also see eighth notes, they only get half of a beat, so we count them depending on their location in the measure by saying the beat number or the word "and" if they are in the middle of a beat.



Eighth note with an unbeamed flag and an eighth rest

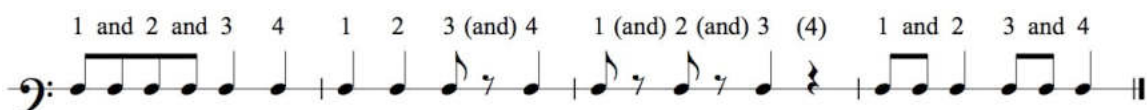
Clap and count the example below slowly to be able to count and perform the rhythm accurately.

Musical Example: 1-line Treble Clef (G Clef)



The second example is on the F clef and incorporates eighth rests as well. An eighth rest is a silence that last for only half of a beat. It is counted the same way as an eighth note, with the word “and”.

Musical Example: 1-line Bass Clef (F Clef)



Further Practice

Here are a few things you can do to further practice the skills from Day 2

- Write out a series of quarter notes and pairs of eighth notes and rests to create new rhythms and clap them.
- Look through simple sheet music you may already have and try counting the rhythms that contain only quarter and eighth notes and rests.
- Try some simple beginner level sheet music from [SheetMusicPlus](http://www.sheetmusicplus.com) or <http://www.8notes.com>.

Day 3 – The 2-Line Staff

In today's lesson we will learn about ...

- The 2-line Staff
- Sharps
- Accidentals
- Beams and Beaming Eighth Notes

The 2-line Staff

Now that we have practiced the 1-line staff let's take a look at the 2-line staff. Now that we have 2 lines we also have a space between the two lines.



The 2-line Treble Staff

On the treble staff the G line will still go through the origin point and the line below will be E. The space between E and G will be F.

Take a look at the example below and speak the letter names in rhythm. The beginning pitches have been marked for you. You may want to write in the counting above the music to help with performing the rhythm correctly.

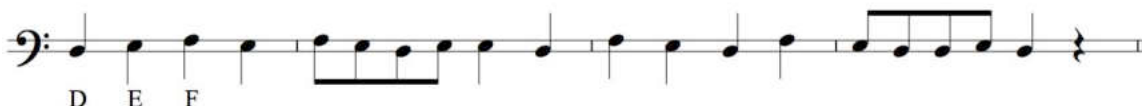


On the bass clef we will explore the 2-line staff with the F line going through the origin point for the bass. This will make the line below F the D line. The space between the two lines will be the pitch E.

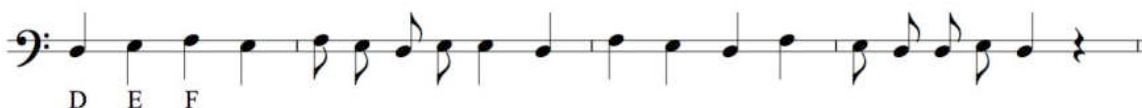


The 2-line Bass Staff

Again take a look at the example below and speak the letter names in rhythm for the bass clef. The music looks similar to the example above but the notes will be in different locations because the clef defines the location of the pitches on a staff.



Now let's look at the eight notes in these examples more closely. Most of the time composers will show eighth notes that are in pairs grouped together within a beat by using beams to connect them, instead of just flags. Here is the same example without beams in the bass 2-line staff. In general it is easier to read music when the notes smaller than a quarter note are beamed into groups. But there are exceptions that we will encounter throughout the book to this practice.

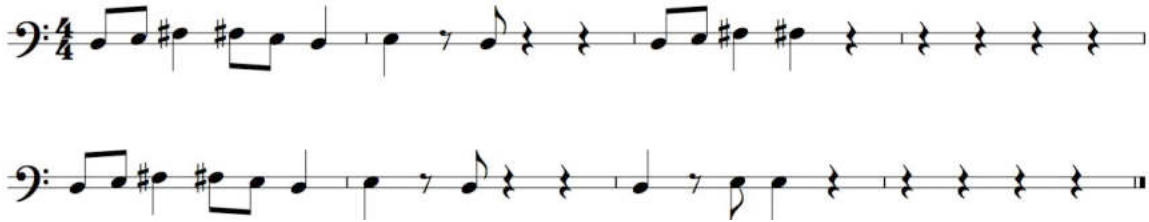


The previous example with flags on eighth notes instead of beams

Now, let's add in a new symbol, the sharp. The **sharp** means that the note on the staff will now be modified to be a half step higher than its normal position. A **half step** is the smallest possible distance between two notes in traditional music. The half step on a piano is the distance between two keys that are side by side when you compare the tops of the keys (the end nearest to the body of the piano). On a guitar a half step is the distance between each fret on the fret board.

In the example below there are sharps in front of the F's. This will change the sound of the song. Without the sharps the song would be different, and you may not recognize it.

Write in your rhythm counting above and note names below before you play the example. Also, to let you know this example is written using only the concepts we have learned so far. This music may look different if written in a standard notation.



Day 4 – The 3-Line Staff

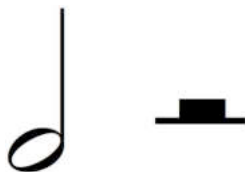
In today's lesson we will learn about ...

- The 3-line Staff
- Half Notes and Half rests

The 3-line Staff

Let's add a new line above the treble 2-line staff. This line will be the B line. That makes the space between the G and the B line A. This is because as we learned in Day 1 that when you loop around the pitch circle you return to A after the pitch letter G.

Let's also add a new rhythm, the half note. The half note is twice as long as a quarter note. It equals two beats. It also has a counterpart rest that is also two beats.



Half note and half rest

In the example below clap the rhythm first for the notes, then come back and say the letter names in rhythm, then try to play it on your instrument. Take care to notice that the F and G notes have sharps, making them F and G sharp.



On the bass clef staff let's add a new line above the F line. This is the A line. The space between F and A will be G.

Here is the same melody in treble **transposed** to a different musical key in the bass clef. In music, the idea of **transposition** takes a melody and moves it up or down by a constant number of half steps in each note. Here we have a melody that is two half steps lower than the previous example all the way throughout the new example.



Further Practice

Here are a few things you can do to further practice the skills from Day 4

- Write out a series of half, quarter and eighth notes and rests to create new rhythms and clap them.
- Look through simple sheet music you may already have and try counting the rhythms that contain only half, quarter and eighth notes and rests.
- Try some simple beginner level sheet music from [SheetMusicPlus](http://www.sheetmusicplus.com) or <http://www.8notes.com>.

The 4-line Staff

Let's go ahead and add the fourth line to the treble and bass staves.

The fourth line on the treble will be the D line. And that gives us a new space between B and D, which is C.

And let's add the fourth line in the bass clef. The fourth line we will add is B, giving us a C between B and D.

Here is an example that includes whole notes in bass and treble. The treble example is in the key of E major and the bass example is in B flat major, but they are the same melody.

Play each staff separately. When playing music written with more than one staff, follow your line all the way through. For example when you play the treble clef staff, only play the music on that staff. When you go back and play the bass clef staff only play the music written on the bass clef.

Also write in the counting above the staves for the rhythm and the note names below each note as necessary.

The image shows musical notation for a 4-line staff exercise. It consists of two systems of two staves each. The first system has a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff, both in 4/4 time. The treble staff contains a melody of whole notes: E4, F#4, G#4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5. The bass staff contains the same melody: B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3. The second system continues the melody on both staves, with the treble staff ending on a whole note E5 and the bass staff ending on a whole note B3.

Further Practice

Here is something you can do to further practice the skills from Day 5

1. Read through some simple piano sheet music. It will almost always have a treble and bass clef staff.

Day 6 – The 5-Line Staff

In today's lesson we will learn about ...

- The 5-line staff
- Naturals
- Sixteenth notes and rests

Thus far we have learned the 4 basic rhythmic values that can be used to play many easy songs. They are in order from longest to shortest:

- **Whole note**, which gets 4 beats
- **Half note**, which gets 2 beats
- **Quarter note**, which gets 1 beat
- And the **Eighth note**, which gets 1/2 of a beat.

Each note is exactly half the value of the preceding note. Also each of these notes has an equivalent rest that has the same relationship of being half of the length of the previous rest value.

Now lets go down one more level to the note that is half the value of an eighth, a sixteenth note.



Sixteenth Note and Rest

The sixteenth note is half the value of an eighth and 1/4 the value of the quarter note. We count it by dividing the quarter note's beat into four smaller parts, "1", "e,", "and", "a".

Here is an example with the counting written in that includes groups of four sixteenth notes. In this example both melodies in both clefs are in E minor. You should read the

same pitches in both clefs because this melody is written in unison, meaning both voices are the same melody.

1 2 and 3 e and a 4 1 e and a 2 3 e and a 4

1 2 and 3 e and a 4 and 1 e and a 2 and 3 4 and 1 (2) (3) (4)

For now we will not look any closer at sixteenth note rhythms, but we will discuss them through out Days 12-18 of this book.

The 5-line Staff

Now you are ready for the big time. We will introduce the fifth and final line of each staff.

The treble's fifth line is F. This will add the space E, between the D and F lines.

Play through this example in treble. Write in all the note names below each note.

1 2 (e and) a 3 (4) and 1 2 3 (4) and 1 (2) and 3 (4) and 1

The fifth line of the bass is the G line. The space between G and B will be the pitch A.

Play through this example in bass. It is the same melody but written in bass clef in a different musical key. Write in all the note names below each note.



Naturals

When using sharps and flats in music, we will sometimes need to go back to using the natural position of the note, the pitch letter without a sharp or flat. When we need this to happen in the music there will be a natural symbol to cancel out any sharps or flats on a pitch.

Here is an example in the key of C minor with 3 flats in its key signature, which we will fully investigate on Day 21. You will notice that we have a natural symbol on some notes. This natural tells us that the notes, which were previously flatted in the key signature, are now naturals.

Play through this example after you have written in the counting above the staff and the note names below the staff.



Further Practice

Here is something you can do to further practice the skills from Day 6.

- Visit <http://www.BlankSheetMusic.net> and print out some blank manuscript paper, also known as staff paper. Rewrite this chapter's melody in the treble clef by using the same pitches, which will be on different lines and spaces. You may need to use ledgers lines above the treble staff, which we will learn about on Day 7.

Day 7 – 1 Ledger Line Above

In today's lesson we will learn about ...

- Ledger Lines
- Extreme Pitch Registers
- 1 Ledger Line Above
- The Dot
- Rhythms With Dots In Simple Meter

Ledger Lines

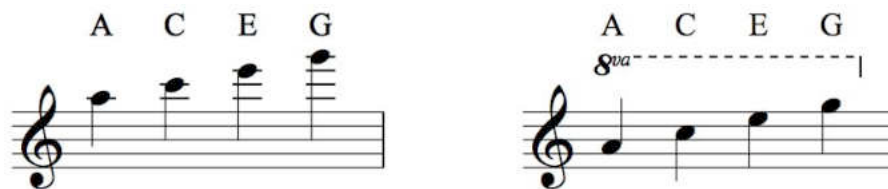
The highness or lowness of sound is called pitch, as we learned about earlier on Day 2. Most of the time the pitch of an instrument remains notated within the five line staff. But on occasion you will need to read and play notes that are higher or lower than the staff. Today we will focus on the first ledger line above the staff of the treble and bass clef.

The first ledger line, the small line outside the normal 5-line staff, above the treble clef staff extends the range of the treble up to the pitch A. This makes the space between the top line F and the first ledger line A, the pitch G. This new ledger line is **not needed** for showing the space G above the treble. We only use ledger lines for showing the next pitch up that rests on the ledger line.



The Pitch A on the first ledger line above the Treble

Below are some examples of more ledger lines up to four lines. If for any reason printed music needs more than four additional ledger lines it is usually best to notate the music with an 8va line above, meaning to read the music up an octave, to avoid excess ledger lines. We will learn more about the 8va line on Day 28.



Notes with ledger lines versus using the 8va notation

Here is an example to practice with one ledger line above. Notice the G's at the top of the staff do not require a ledger line.

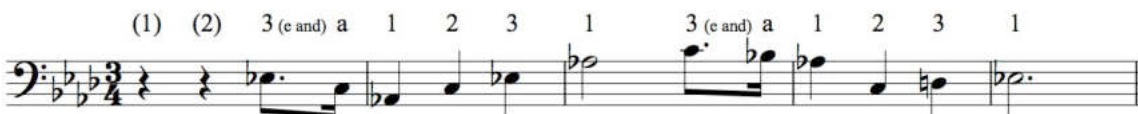


The first ledger line of the bass is the pitch C, middle C to be exact. This C is the midpoint between the treble and bass staves. We will explore this more on Day 8 when we discuss the Grand Staff.



Middle C on the first ledger line of the bass clef

Below is an example of the first ledger line in the bass clef. This example will use rhythms with dotted note values. The dot is a useful notational symbol for modifying rhythmic values.



The dot means to take the note value it is attached to, and add half of its value to the note.

For example if the value is a quarter note, or one beat, then a dotted quarter note will receive one and a half beats. The dot can be used on any note value. The dot always means to take the original note value and add half of its own value to the note. Here is a chart to show you the dotted values of the notes and rests we have learned so far.

- The Dotted Whole note equals 6 beats (4 plus 2)
- The Dotted Half note equals 3 beats (2 plus 1)
- The Dotted Quarter note equals 1 ½ beats (1 plus ½)
- The Dotted Eighth note equals ¾ of a beat (½ plus ¼)

There is more to know about dots when counting music, but we will save further explanation for Day 13, when we learn about compound meters.

Further Practice

Here are a few things you can do to further practice the skills from Day 7

- View a video explanation of the dot on [One Minute Music Lesson - Lesson #11](#).

Day 8 – 1 Ledger Line Below

In today's lesson we will learn about ...

- 1 Ledger Line Below
- Ties

1 Ledger Line Below

Now lets look at the ledger lines as they extend below the treble and bass staves.

Here are the notes of the first four lower ledger lines in the treble. Anything beyond 3 ledger lines is fairly rare because we tend to use the bass clef if pitches get lower than F on the third line below the treble.



Ledger lines below treble

And here are the notes of the first four lines below the bass. This area is seldom used as well because we often use An 8vb line to show the pitches an octave lower than the bass staff range. The 8vb line will be discussed on Day 28.



Ledger lines below bass

Here is an example for you to sight read that uses low bass notes leaping around. Look across the whole example and see if you notice any pattern in the bass line? Reading horizontally across the page at a glance is a good way to take in any patterns that may be emerging as you scan over your music before you play anything.

This example is in the key of E-flat major. Label only the E flat notes before you play this example. Notice that there are E flats in two locations on the staff with the addition of the first lower ledger line.



Ties

Tied rhythms, are notes that have been added together by the use of a tie. A **tie** is a curved line that connects two notes of the **exact same pitch** that adds the time value of the two notes together. So for example a quarter note tied to an eighth note will equal one and a half beats, just like a dotted quarter that is one and a half beats.

Play through this example with the tied note values. Write in the counting like measures 1 and 2 throughout the example before you play it.



Further Practice

Here are a few things you can do to further practice the skills from Day 8

- Go back through some of the example you have learned so far and add ties between repeating pitches to hear how that changes the music.
- Create your own rhythmic patterns with ties and try to clap them or create melodies with them.

Day 9 – Simple Meter in the Eastman Counting System

In today's lesson we will learn about ...

- Meter
- Simple meter
- Practicing 2 ledger lines

Meter

Let's take a closer look at a rhythmic idea called meter. **Meter** is a recurring pattern of pulses or underlying structure for rhythmic accents. Meters are defined by **time signatures**. There are many kinds of meters and an unlimited number of ways of using them with different rhythms. This is the reason it may seem so confusing to count musical rhythms to a beginner. But with a little practice you can understand any rhythm if you have a good method of counting and an understanding of meter.

Like many elements of music, meter and rhythm can be learned in a number of ways that are all "right" but in my experience as a teacher, one of the most efficient ways of teaching and learning rhythm is the **Eastman Counting System**.

The example below has a time signature of 2/4. This is an example of simple meter. A **simple meter** is any meter, or regular grouping of notes that has a beat that divides into two equal parts.

The image displays musical notation for a 2/4 time signature across three staves. The first staff shows quarter notes with fingerings 1 and 2. The second staff shows eighth notes with 'and' accents. The third staff shows sixteenth notes with 'e' and 'a' accents. The notation is repeated in a second system below.

In this case the beat as defined by the time signature is a quarter note, which is divided equally into two eighth notes. In this example I have shown the beat of the meter in the first staff of the score. It shows the two quarter notes in each measure and how they line up with the music in the third staff. The second level, or the second staff, shows how that quarter note beat divides into two equal pieces, two eighth notes per beat, for a total of four eighth notes in each measure. Again these beat divisions line up with the music in the third staff. Finally look at the sixteenth notes in the third staff. They are sub-divisions of the beat. They also get labeled a certain way in the Eastman Counting System.

Simple Meter

How did we know what the beat, or beat unit, was and how it was divided?

The answer is found in the **top number** of the time signature. All simple meters have the numbers 2, 3 or 4 as the top number of the time signature. This is something you should memorize. We will learn about other types of meter in the coming chapters, but for now let's focus on simple meters.

To find out what note gets the beat, or is the beat unit, we look at the **bottom number** of the time signature. The bottom number is 4, this means the beat is equal to a quarter note.

Take a look at the chart below to see how the various possible bottom numbers relate to the possible beat unit choices.

If the Bottom number is:	Then the beat unit is a:
1	Whole Note
2	Half Note
4	Quarter Note
8	Eighth Note
16	Sixteenth Note

Meter Beat Unit Chart

When counting a simple meter we want to count the beat unit, its beat divisions and its sub-divisions just as we have already learned in previous chapters.

Through out this book I will consistently label rhythms using the Eastman Counting System method which consists of three basic rules.

1. For simple meters in the Eastman system we count the number of the beat on the beat unit. The beat unit, is the large pulse that the time signature defines. Often people will just call this the beat, but for clarity I will refer to this as the beat unit, or the rhythmic value that equals one beat. As we will learn throughout this book the quarter note is not always the beat unit as defined by the meter, so a quarter note is not always equal to one beat. It all depends on what type of meter your music is notated in.

2. On the beat division, the next rhythmic level down, we will count the word "and" between the beat units. This will fall on its equal division of the beat, which is in two parts in all simple meters.

3. If the sub-divisions of the beat unit are present, we will count the word "e" (pronounced as ee) on the second subdivision and the word "a" (pronounced as ah) on the fourth.

We will practice more as we go along in the remainder of this book. But for now look at how the counting is marked in the following examples. Notice the counting relates to the beat unit as defined by the time signature, not just the length of notes based on the commonly misunderstood quarter note equals one beat counting method.

Example 1 – Simple Meter counting in 3/16

In this example the meter is 3/16. This means the meter is a simple meter because the top number of the meter is a 3. We have already learned that a meter with a 2, 3 or 4 as the top number will be a simple meter.

The bottom number of the time signature is 16, so the beat unit is a sixteenth note, as defined in the Meter Beat Unit chart previously.

In this example below, compare how the beat unit aligns in each level of this score. The top line, staff 1, is the beat unit notated out into its three sixteenth notes per measure. The next level is the beat division level, showing the beat unit number and its division on the "and". Finally the music itself is in the third level, showing the counting as it lines up with each note and any unseen beat units (the numbers in parenthesis).

1. $\frac{3}{16}$ 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3
 1 and 2 and 3 and 1 and 2 and 3 and 1 and 2 and 3 and 1 and 2 and 3 and
 2. $\frac{3}{16}$
 3. $\frac{3}{16}$ 1 2 3 1 (2) and 3 1 2 3 1 (2) and 3

1. 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3
 1 and 2 and 3 and 1 and 2 and 3 and 1 and 2 and 3 and 1 and 2 and 3 and
 3. 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 (2) and 3 and 1 (2) (3)

More Ledger Line Practice

When reading ledger lines it may be a good idea to label them in your score before you read and play through the music. Unless you practice playing music on ledger lines often it is easy to forget which notes belong to each line and space outside the staff.

Here is an example to read that uses ledger lines above the treble and then switching to the bass within the same staff. Try reading the pitch names out loud by saying or singing the letter names and then play it on your instrument. Additionally write in the counting for the music above the notes. This music is in 2/8. The beat unit is an eighth note, so an eighth note equals one beat, and the beat division is a sixteenth, so the sixteenth notes fall on the beat or the “and” between the beat.

1 2 1 and 2 and
 G C

Further Practice

Here are a few things you can do to further practice the skills from Day 9

- Rewrite some bass clef music in the treble clef using ledger lines. This may be a tedious exercise but will teach you the concepts of many ledger lines quickly.
- Rewrite a short melody up or down an octave from the original on the same clef. This will force the notes out of the range of the staff and cause you to need ledger lines. Then try playing the new melody.

Day 10 – The Grand Staff

In today's lesson we will learn about ...

- The Grand Staff
- Common Time Versus Cut Time

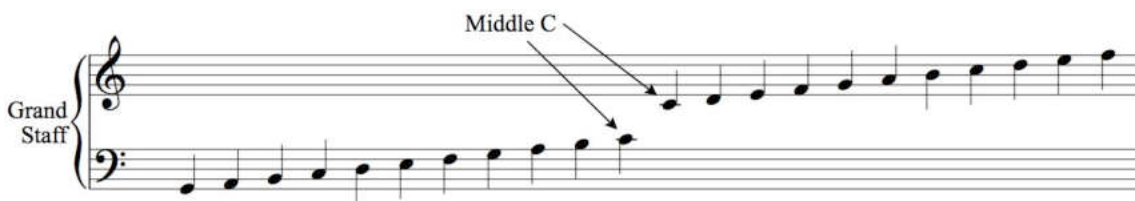
The Grand Staff

Now that we have learned the treble and bass clefs, let's look at how they work together to form the grand staff. The **grand staff** is used for piano music and instruments that have a wide range of pitch such as the marimba, harp and in orchestral reduction scores.

The grand staff is made of a treble staff on top and bass staff on the bottom with a brace that connects the two. The staves of the grand staff are usually spaced apart so that you can squeeze in a few ledger lines between the staff when necessary.

When starting to read the grand staff it can feel overwhelming, but hopefully our slow build up to the staff has given you some insight as to how it functions. However there is one key common link that bridges the two staves together that makes it easier to read when you understand the link.

The pitch middle C is the connector between these staves. Look at the example below to see how the first ledger line below the treble is the same as the first ledger line above the bass clef. This is middle C, which is **always** on a ledger line in treble or bass clef staff.



Common Time Versus Cut Time

Most teachers of music will teach students to count music using only quarter note equals one beat counting techniques. This method of counting will work *most of the time*, but you will have trouble when you encounter cut time meter, a meter that is meant to be played in a quick tempo requiring you to read through the music quickly.

Let's compare common time, or music written in 4/4, to the same music written in cut time, 2/2. Music in these meters will look exactly the same. However you will want to read them differently.

In the Eastman Counting System we must first establish what note value is the pulse of the music, or the beat unit. In 4/4 the quarter note is the beat unit because the bottom number of the time signature is 4 which means the beat unit is equal to 1, so a quarter note equals one beat. But in the meter of 2/2, a commonly used meter for faster tempo songs called cut time, the beat unit is not the quarter note, even though it may look like it at a quick glance.

In 2/2 or cut time the beat unit is a half note because the bottom number of the time signature is 2. So in this meter we have 2 beats of two half notes.

2/2 and 4/4 look identical, except they are felt and thought of differently. You can count them the same but this will make your counting harder in 2/2 than it needs to be. If you count them with the Eastman Counting System you will be able to read the rhythms more easily and thus more accurately.

Here is an example of a melody in 2/2. Try counting it with the Eastman counts above. You will most likely be inclined to read it faster because cut time meters are used for faster music.

Compare the same music below it written in 4/4. The 2/2 example is easier to read at the proper tempo, which is a fast march.

The image displays four systems of musical notation. The first system is in 2/2 time, labeled 'Grand Staff' on the left. It consists of a treble and bass clef staff. Above the treble staff, Eastman counts are written: '1', '2 (e and) a', '1 and (2) and', '1 and 2 and', and '1 2'. The second system is in 4/4 time, also labeled 'Grand Staff' on the left. Its Eastman counts are: '1 (e and) a 2 and', '1 (e and) a 2 and', '1 e and a 2 and', and '1 and 2'. The third system is in 4/4 time, labeled 'Grand Staff' on the left. Its Eastman counts are: '1 (2) 3 (4) and', '1 2 (3) 4', '1 2 3 4', and '1 (2) 3 (4)'. The fourth system is in 4/4 time, labeled 'Grand Staff' on the left. Its Eastman counts are: '1 (2) and 3 4', '1 (2) and 3 4', '1 and 2 and 3 4', and '1 2 3 (4)'. Each system shows a melody in the treble staff and a bass line in the bass staff.

Further Practice

Here is something you can do to further practice the skills from Day 10

- Find some scores of [John Philip Sousa](#) on the [International Music Library Score Project](#) to see many examples of cut time.

Your Musical Journey

Congratulations! You have completed your 10 day journey into beginning to learn how to read music. You have begun a path of musical literacy that can sustain you throughout your musical career with just the information you have learned in this book.

I encourage you to continue on your path of growing as a musician. If you haven't already done so, please visit my website OneMinuteMusicLesson.com and browse through my free video lessons to reinforce the concepts in this book and find many other resources to help you gain knowledge about music and music theory.

Additionally, I have a free newsletter that you may subscribe to stay updated on new material added to my site and other developments of the One Minute Music Lesson.

Also, I highly encourage you to email me with any questions you may have after reading through this book. Music is a complicated language that you may need a little help with to master every step. If you found anything confusing in this book let me know and I will try my best to clarify any concepts to get you through the difficult subtleties in learning to read music fluently.

Finally, if you have enjoyed this book and want to learn even more you may enjoy my larger more comprehensive book entitled ***How to Read Music Easily In 30 Days***. You can [click here](http://www.oneminutemusiclesson.com/book) to learn more or visit <http://www.oneminutemusiclesson.com/book>

Thank you

Thank you for reading my book *How to Read Music*. I am very appreciative for my fans and students and hope you have enjoyed learning more about reading and understanding music. It is my hope that you will continue on your musical journey and keep me posted on your progress.

Until next time, Keep up the good work!

With gratitude,

Leon Harrell



For more great information on learning music visit:

<http://www.OneMinuteMusicLesson.com>