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Whoever wants to know and understand music probably dreams of learning sheet music, after all this is the most complete musical writing in existence. Furthermore, when a musician confesses not knowing sheet music, he usually ends up losing his reputation, and this is very inconvenient. The problem is that learning sheet music through books is very complicated, because the explanations are difficult to comprehend. Our goal here is to end this problem. It is possible to learn sheet music, and it is not difficult! We will explain everything now and show how much you will benefit from this knowledge. Sheet music records harmonic, rhythmic and melodic ideas. So, as you read this chapter, you will possibly remember the moment when you learned the alphabet. Just as you have memorized the sound of each letter, you will also need to memorize the way each note is represented on paper. In the end, you will be mastering a new language. Let's start: Staff and Treble Clef The Staff is the region where we write the musical notes. This region is formed by lines and spaces. Each line and space is used to represent a different musical note. In the figure below, you can see the lines (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th): Notice how there are 5 lines on the staff. It is also possible to create more lines to reach other octaves (the first C note in this example, as well as the last A note, are on extra lines, also called "ledger lines"). We will talk about these extra lines shortly, for now just note that each line and space are used to represent a different note in sequence. Treble Clef Musicians, throughout history, have chosen different positions for notes in the lines of the staves. That is why the clefs, symbols that would serve to signal the note and the reference line that were adopted, were invented. The most widely used clef for guitar, piano and voice is the treble clef (or G-clef). It received this name because it says that the note on the second line will be called G. Notice how the drawing of the clef itself begins on the 2nd line (indicated in red in the figure below). Very well, now that you already know where G is, you can register all the other notes following the same logic that we saw above: Note: You may have realized that the first thing you need to know to read sheet music is the sequence of notes, all memorized, backwards and forwards! Now let's clarify what is the relationship of these dots on paper with the instrument. The figure below shows the octaves of an ordinary piano. Notice how each C has a different position on the staff, depending on the octave it is on. We will use a number next to the letter C (for example: C3) to say which octave it is in: Note: This central C (C4) is the C that is located right in the middle of the keyboard or piano. For you to locate yourself even further, we are going to enlarge the octave highlighted in red (central C) and show the matching instrument notes registered on the staff: On the guitar, the central C is located in the third fret, fifth string: Note: The sheet music for the guitar is shifted in one octave in relation to the piano. In reality, the central C of the piano corresponds to the pitch of the C note on the second string of the guitar. This displaced definition was chosen to facilitate writing, because if it were not so, writing on the guitar would need many additional lines (ledger lines) to represent the simpler and more common chords. The correct way to represent sheet music on the guitar is to place the symbol "8" on the treble clef, indicating that the representation is shifted by one octave in relation to the central C of the piano: But not all writers use this symbol, so pay attention to the instrument in question to locate yourself correctly. 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Post a comment about this lesson, ask a question, or even upload a video of your progress. All skill levels welcome! To access the community forum, upgrade to premium or log in. In Western music, the musical tones that are played (on an instrument) or sung (with a voice) are given a name. Written in a line, the order of the 12 notes looks like this: And importantly, when we reach the "end" of the 12 note sequence, you can keep going — and the cycle of notes repeats! This is true in both directions: It may be more helpful to view the notes in this circular format. Similar to an analog clock, these notes "go around" in a cycle. That is, when you reach the end, you start again from the beginning (e.g. if you go up in pitch one note from G#, you arrive on A). Sharps, Flats, and the Musical Alphabet The 12 notes use the first seven alphabet letters (A-G). Some of the notes include sharps (#) and flats (♭) as part of their name. Notes with sharps & flats can go by two different names. For example, the note between C and D can be called either C-sharp or D-flat — both of these names are valid, and they refer to the same note. In future lessons, when we get to the major scale, we'll learn about when to use sharps vs. flats (but don't sweat that now). Spoken out loud, the 12 notes are as follows (starting in alphabetical order): A A-sharp (or B-flat) B C C-sharp (or D-flat) D D-sharp (or E-flat) E F F-sharp (or G-flat) G G-sharp (or A-flat) Notice how there are no notes with sharps or flats found between B & C, and likewise for E & F. This may seem like a weird quirk when first learning things, but it's one of those things you'll simply need to remember. Key Takeaways Here's a handful of important concepts that I think are committing to memory. Getting a grasp on these will make everything that follows (on your music theory journey) a bit easier to understand. The notes go "up" and "down" - In music, the notes are tied to the concept of pitch. Rather than saying "forward" and "backwards", we'll use the terms up and down. "Up" means higher in pitch (like a singing chipmunk), and "down" means lower in pitch (like a ship's horn). The notes repeat — The sequence of notes repeats, in both directions (up and down), like numbers on a clock. There's no first or last note. When we reach the end, the cycle simply repeats itself and starts again. This means there are multiple "pitches" where you can play any note on the guitar (or, sing a note with your voice) — e.g. the open 6th string is a "low" E, and the open 1st string makes a "high" E. The order of notes is fixed — the specific order of the notes is set in stone. For example, if you go one note higher in pitch from C, you will always arrive at C#. Again, this is similar to the hours on a clock (e.g. 5 o'clock is always one hour after 4 o'clock). All notes are created equal - importantly, no note is special or stands above any of the others. We can construct any scale, chord, or musical key using any note as our starting point. Specifically, the note A is not in any way unique because it's named after the first letter in the alphabet. Similarly, G isn't inferior because it's the final letter in the musical alphabet. Likewise, notes with sharps & flats aren't in any way better or worse than their counterparts. Must-Know Terms Similarly, here's a few terms you'll hear over-and-over when learning music or playing along with others. I suggest memorizing these as well: Pitch - How "high" or "low" a note's sound is Sharp (#) - Higher in pitch by one note (ex: A to A#) Flat (♭) - Lower in pitch by one note (ex: A to A♭) Octave - Higher or lower in pitch by 12 notes (ex: A up to the next A) The following are common terms for referring to neighboring notes — that is, one or two notes away from any starting point. You'll notice these are two different ways of referring to the same thing (semitone & tone vs. half step and whole step)… I think it's good to be aware of both. These are to essential to understanding for the next lesson, when we start looking at the major scale. Half Step - Higher or lower in pitch by 1 note (ex: G to G#) Whole Step - Higher or lower in pitch by 2 notes (ex: G to A) Semitone - Higher or lower in pitch by 1 note (ex: G to G#) Tone - Higher or lower in pitch by 2 notes (ex: G to A) The 12 Notes on a Piano When learning the names of each note, a piano's black & white keys make it amazingly helpful. All white keys are the letters A-G, while the black keys are used exclusively for sharps & flats. The 12 notes appear as follows. Note, C is typically the arbitrary "starting note" when first learning piano note names — hence me using it to start the sequence here. When you look at the entirely of a keyboard, it's easy to observe how the pattern of notes repeats. This is a good way to get a handle on the concept of an octave — that is, the distance from one note up (or down) to it's next occurrence. If someone ever says "go up an octave" with a note or melody, they mean play those same notes, but one next octave up (in pitch). The 12 Notes on a Guitar On a guitar, it's a bit less visually intuitive to "see" the notes (compared to a piano). But just the same, here's a mapping of things up through the 9th fret. For a print-friendly version of this image, get my instructional PDF cheat sheet — linked at the top of this page! You don't need to memorize the previous image, in my opinion. Rather, start with memorizing the notes that each open string is tuned to (E-A-D-G-B-E, from thickest to thinnest). If you know these 6 string names, and likewise know the sequence of 12 notes — you can use logic to deduce any individual note. Non-Musical Analogs Before wrapping up this lesson, here's a few non-musical examples to help reinforce the idea of the repeating cycle of notes. That being: (1) an analog clock face, and (2) a color wheel. In both cases, note how you can "keep going around" in the set order, and things eventually repeat from the beginning. With the clock in particular, I find it helpful comparison because of how often we do mental math when it comes to things like If it's 11am now, what time will it be 3 hours from now? As simple as this may seem, this exact concept is used in music all the time — e.g. If this is a G, what note will I get if I move three notes "up" in pitch? And of course — occasionally when doing this sort of calculation, we need to cross the G# → A chasm (just like you may need to cross the 12 → 1 chasm with a clock). Ideally, with the 12 notes, you'll know them well enough to do this without hesitation. Suggested Exercises for Self-Practice Here's a few ways you can practice your mastery of knowing the 12 notes. I honestly suggest you go through the process of trying these out! It's easy to say "yeah, I pretty much understand this" after reading all this information — but it's another thing to force your brain to recall all of this information on-demand. Here's what I suggest: List the 12 notes in a line or circle - get a piece of paper and pen/pencil, and write out the 12 notes. Initially, you might start with A, but it's actually helpful to try this starting with any arbitrary note — and make your way through the full sequence. Fill the 12 notes in an empty fretboard map - for guitar playing especially, it can be helpful to label each note on the guitar. Start with a single string (using that string's "open" tuning as the starting point). As a helpful hint, remember that the 12th fret of each string matches the open tuning note of that same string. A helpful modifier that may be a bit less daunting: try this, but only map the first 5-7 frets of each string. Try the "3 Notes Away" Quiz - in practical guitar playing, a common situation is moving from a specific starting note (e.g. 5th fret on the thickest string = A) and then moving up, or down, 3 notes. What note do you end up on? Being able to do this from any arbitrary starting point is incredibly helpful. I demonstrate it in my video lesson. Practice Listing the Notes Backwards - even if you skip sharps & flats, it's an incredibly helpful musical skill to be able to effortlessly move backwards through the musical alphabet. For example, pick any letter (from A-G) and move backwards until you get to that letter again. e.g. D-C-B-A-G-F-E-D. Remember, saying things out loud is a great way to really get a handle on this! ← Back to course homepage One of the first places to start when studying music is to learn about all the types of musical notes there are. Knowing the names of all these notes, as well as their time values, how to draw them, and what the parts of the notes are called, is key to being able to read music well.In this post, we'll cover all these types of notes in music to help you on your way to learning how to read music. Let's get started.When playing music, a musician needs to know how long to play each sound for.Composers tell them by using different symbols called notes.Let's take a look at some of the music note types you definitely need to know about when learning to read music.The first note is called a whole note or, in British terminology, it's called a semibreve.It's like a small oval-shaped zero or letter O, which is a good way to think of it when you first begin writing music. We call this oval-shaped oval-shaped part of a note the notehead.A whole note has a value of four beats. That means when we play a whole note, we count to four whilst holding the note.The second note we'll look at is called a half note or minim.It's similar to a whole note but has a line coming out of the right-hand side of its note head. This line is called a stem.The stem halves the value of the note, and so a half note has a value of two beats. That means we count to two when playing a half note, half as long as a whole note.Next, we have a quarter note or crotchet.It's like a half note, but it has its notehead filled in black.This halves the value of the note again, and so a quarter note has a value of one beat, half as long as a half note.This note is an eighth note or quaver.It's like a quarter note, but it also has a tail coming out of the side of its stem.The note tail is also referred to as a flag or a hook.The tail halves the value of the note again, and so an eighth note has a value of half a beat, half as long as a quarter note.Up next, we have a sixteenth note or semiquaver.It's like a quaver but has two tails coming out of its stem.This means that it's half the value of an eighth note and so is worth one-quarter of a beat. Here, we have a thirty-second note or demisemiquaver.You can see it has three tails (one more than a sixteenth note).A thirty-second note is worth half the value of a sixteenth note and so is worth one-eighth of a quarter note beat.Those are the main notes you'll come across and use in musical notation, but you can get shorter and longer notes, too.A sixty-fourth note, or hemidemisemiquaver (I know it's a bit of a mouthful), is just like a thirty-second note but with an additional tail.It's very uncommon, though, so don't worry about it too much!You can get even shorter notes than this, such as the 128th note or semihemidemisemiquaver, and the 256th note or demisemihemidemisemiquaver, but I'm not going to cover those as they're extremely rare.You can also have a note called a double whole note or breve, which is worth eight beats – twice as long as a whole note.It's quite uncommon, and you'll only see it in certain time signatures.Sometimes, you'll see the note values represented as a tree or pyramid.This is called the music note tree and is a great way to visualize the relationship between all the note values.The music note tree (UK terminology)As well as the stems of notes being able to point upwards, they can also point downwards.When a note's stem points upwards, it comes out of the right-hand side of the note head. But, when a note's stem points downwards, it comes out of the left-hand side of the note head.There are some rules to know about to determine which way the stems should point, though. I cover some of the basics in this post about notes on the staff.The most important thing, however, is to always have the stem on the correct side of the notehead.Note tails work a little differently from notes that have tails like quavers and semiquavers.Note's tails always come out of the right-hand side of the stem, no matter whether or not they're pointing up or down.The way to remember this is that tails always follow the direction of the music.In other words, we read music from left to right. So, the note tails always point in the direction of the music…To the right.When we have two or more notes with a tail (like eighth notes and sixteenth notes) next to each other, we join their tails together with a beam between the tops of their stems.This is to help make it easier for musicians to read the notes.Let's look at how to beam eighth notes.When we beam eighth notes together, we join the stems together using their note tails. For example, two eighth notes on their own become:There are lots of rules and conventions about how many quavers we can beam together.But I'll cover those in another post on grouping notes in different time signatures.It works the same with sixteenth notes, but instead of having one beam between their stems, we use two beams.This is because they have two tails.For thirty-second notes and sixty-fourth notes, we would just add an additional beam or two depending on how many tails the note has.We can also have different combinations of eighth notes and sixteenth notes beamed together.For example:There are some rules about how to beam and group notes in different time signatures that we'll cover in another lesson, too. Sometimes, when writing music, a composer might want to make a note last longer than a note's value. When this is the case, we can use a Dotted Note to extend the duration of the note.This dot after the note head makes the note longer by half its value. For example, a dotted half note has the same time value as a half note plus a quarter note:Or a dotted eighth note is equal to an eighth note plus a sixteenth note.We can't have a dotted note go across a bar line, though.If we want a note to go over a bar line, then we use a tied note, which we're going to have a look at next.A tie is a sloped line that joins together two notes that are next to each other and have the same pitch. It looks like this line below.When you see a tie, it means that the time values of the notes are added together to create a longer note.For example, two half notes tied together have the same value as a whole note:Two quarter notes tied together have the same value as a half note:They don't have to be the same time value either; you could have a quarter note tied to an eighth note, or a half note tied to a quarter note, etc…Rests in musicMusic isn't all about sound. Sometimes, not playing a note is just as important as playing one.All the different types of musical notes we've looked at above have a corresponding symbol telling the musician not to play and to be silent.We call these symbols rests.You can read more about the different music rest symbols here.Musical ornamentsMusical ornaments are a shorthand way of writing more complicated musical devices but with a simple symbol.They're used to embellish music and make it more interesting with decoration and character.There are lots of different types, like turns, trills, and acciaccaturas, plus a few others.I cover a lot of the common ones in this post here if you want to read more about them.TripletsAnother type of musical note that you might see is a group of notes with a number three over the top.These notes with a number three over them are a type of tuplet called triplets.We use triplets to subdivide notes into three equal parts.To read more about them, check out my in-depth guide to triplets, where I go into more detail about how to draw them with loads of examples.A dupletYou can also get another type of tuplet (irregular time division) called a duplet.A dulpet works like a triplet, but it's a way of playing two notes in the time of three.To read more about them, check out our post on how to play musical duplets here.That's it for now. Hopefully, this post has helped you to understand how to read and write music a little better.Most people will focus on memorizing all the notes and think that they have to know them all before starting to play music. That couldn't be further from the truth.I find the best way to really learn how to read music and learn all the notes is to do it as much as possible. The more you practice reading notes, the more natural recognizing them will become.If you have any questions about anything that I've covered in this post, just get in touch, and I'll get back to you. Naomi: Oh, OK, I think it was probably four.B-air-air-air.1234.Mrs Thomas: That's right.Next up, the minim.Naomi: The minimum looks like the semi brief, but it's got a line sticking out of it.Mrs Thomas: Yeah, Good observation.Minim sounds like this c- ow, c-owNaomi: C-ow, c-ow. Ah, the minimum cow sound half as long as the semibreve bear.Mrs Thomas: How many beats does that make a minimum?Naomi: OK, I think it's two beats for each note.C-ow, c-ow, 1212.Mrs Thomas: Oh, Well done. Moo-ving on.We have the Crotchet and another new animal.Cat. Cat, Cat, Cat.Naomi: Cat, Cat, Cat, Cat! They're one beat each.Mrs Thomas: Fantastic. And finally we have the quaver.Naomi: Oh, they've all got fun little tails.Mrs Thomas: Yeah, they do.When you have two quavers next to each other, they are paired and their tails join together to form a beam.And the animal I use for a pair of quavers is the monkey.mon-key, mon-key, mon-key, mon-keyNaomi: Mon-key, mon-key, mon-key, mon-key So each quaver is half a beat mon and key.But when grouped together, a pair of quavers is a whole beat monkey.Mrs Thomas: Exactly. Let's see if you can remember the duration of all the notes.Can you make your way down our rhythm tree all by yourself?Naomi: I think so. You can join in as well. I'll count us in ready?1234B- air -air - airc-ow, c-owCat, cat, cat, cat.Monkey, monkey, monkey, monkey!Mrs Thomas: Well done. The last thing you'll need to know is how to do a rest.Naomi: Ooh yes, don't mind if I do. Night night, Mrs Thomas.Mrs Thomas: Oh, no, no, no, not that kind of rest. A rest is a gap or silence in the music where you don't play and this is the symbol for a one beat rest and to show a rest we're going to do this sssh.Naomi: OK? Sssh.Mrs Thomas: Brilliant. Now we know the different notes.We can mix them up to make rhythms. Try and read this.Naomi: All right, join in as well.1234.Cat, cat, sssh, cat.Mrs Thomas: Well done.Naomi: I did it! I read rhythm notation. Thanks, Mrs Thomas. I'm gonna go and tell Clogs he is gonna be so proud.Back to topIn Western notation, the different rhythm notes are drawn on a staveWhen music is written down on five horizontal lines and four spaces that represent different pitch or instruments. which is a set of five lines.The notes can sit on the line, or in the spaces between the lines.All Western musical instruments and the players in a Western orchestra, will use this type of notation to read which note to play and how long for.Katie: What on earth are all these lines Clogs?Clogs: Oh, I am glad you asked Katie.Now that you are learning the skills and knowledge to be a musician, it is important to understand musical notation.Katie: Notation?Clogs: Notation is simply writing music down. We can show different pitches in music by drawing them on a stave.Katie: A stave?Clogs: A stave like the one on the screen is five parallel lines onto which we put musical notes.Katie: Oh, OK, So what happens if we put a note low down on the stave?Clogs: That means it is a lower pitched note.Katie: So I guess if we put a note higher up on the stave, it means it's a higher pitched note.Clogs: Exactly. And when we put notes of different pitches together, we create a melody, which is the tune it looks and sounds like this.[Twinkle twinkle little star melody]Katie: OK, that makes sense. How else is a stave helpful to musicians?Clogs: Putting the notes on a stave not only helps musicians know the pitch of a note, it also tells them the duration of each note, which is how long or short the note is played for.Katie: Well, I like the sound of the this clogs and when you have notes one after another on different durations, that creates a rhythm.So the stave is essential then if you want to play the music without having to remember it all or have other musicians play it.Thanks, Clogs.It's all starting to make sense now.Remember, the pitch of the note is how high or low it is.Most instruments (like the violin, flute or trumpet) read notes from what is called the treble clefA symbol that is used when writing music to show the pitch of the notes on a stave..Simple rhymes can help you remember the name of the note pitches. For the notes on the lines, some people say:EveryGreenBusDrivesFastThe notes that sit in the spaces between the lines, spell out the word FACE.If you need to write the notes above or below the stave, you can add additional lines (called ledger lines).Back to topBack to topBack to top Have you ever heard a song on the radio and thought, "Hey, it'd be really cool to know how to play that, I wonder what the music notes are?" Do you have friends who play musical instruments, and you want to join in on the fun? Do you want to expand your general artistic knowledge? Well, learning the basics of how to read sheet music can help you achieve all of these, and in a shorter amount of time than you might think! At its very simplest, music is a language just like you'd read aloud from a book. The symbols you see on pages of sheet music have been used for hundreds of years. They represent the pitch, speed, and rhythm of the song they convey, as well as expression and techniques used by a musician to play the piece. Think of the notes as the letters, the measures as the words, the phrases as the sentences, and so on. Learning how to read music really does open up a whole new world to explore! Follow our step-by-step introduction to reading music and, with a little practice, you'll be playing along in no time. Keep reading to the end for some free tools and sheet music arrangements to help you learn. How to Read MusicStep 1: Learn the Basic Symbols of Musical NotationMusic is made up of a variety of symbols, the most basic of which are the staff, the clefs, and the notes. All music contains these fundamental components, and to learn how to read music, you must first familiarize yourself with these basics. The StaffThe staff consists of five lines and four spaces. Each of those lines and each of those spaces represents a different letter, which in turn represents a note. Sheet music notes, represented by lines and spaces, are named A-G, and the note sequence moves alphabetically up the staff.Treble ClefThere are two main clefs with which to familiarize yourself; the first is a treble clef. The treble clef has the ornamental letter G on the far left side. The G's inner swoop encircles the "G" line on the staff. The treble clef notates the higher registers of music, so if your instrument has a higher pitch, such as a flute, violin, or saxophone, your sheet music is written in the treble clef. Higher notes on a keyboard also are notated on the treble clef.We use common mnemonics to remember the note names for the lines and spaces of the treble clef. For lines, we remember EGBDF by the word cue "Every Good Boy Does Fine." Similarly, for the spaces, FACE is just like the word "face."Bass ClefThe line between the two bass clef dots is the "F" line on the bass clef staff, and it's also referred to as the F clef. The bass clef notates the lower registers of music, so if your instrument has a lower pitch, such as a bassoon, tuba, or cello, your sheet music is written in the bass clef. Lower notes on your keyboard also are notated in the bass clef.A common mnemonic to remember note names for the lines of the bass clef is: GBDFA "Good Boys Do Fine Always." And for the spaces: ACEG, "All Cows Eat Grass."Sheet Music Symbols and Notes on a StaffNotes placed on the staff tell us which note letter to play on our instrument and how long to play it. There are three parts of each note, the note head, the stem, and the flag.All music notes have a note head, either filled (black) or open (white). Where the note head sits on the staff (either on a line or space) determines which note you will play. Sometimes, note heads will sit above or below the five lines and four spaces of a staff. In that case, a line (known as a ledger line) is drawn through the note, above the note or below the note head, to indicate the note letter to play, as in the B and C notes above.The note stem is a thin line that extends either up or down from the note head. The line extends from the right if pointing upward or from the left if pointing downward. The direction of the line doesn't affect how you play the note but serves to make the notes easier to read while allowing them to fit neatly on the staff. As a rule, any notes at or above the "B" line on the staff have downward pointing stems, those notes below the "B" line have upward pointing stems.The note flag is a curvy mark to the right of the note stem. Its purpose is to tell you how long to hold a note. We'll see below how a single flag shortens the note's duration, while multiple flags can make it shorter still. Now that you know the parts to each note, we'll take a closer look at those filled and open note heads discussed above. Whether a note head is filled or open shows us the note's value, or how long that note should be held. Start with a closed note head with a stem. That's our quarter note, and it gets one beat. An open note head with a stem is a half note, and it gets two beats. An open note that looks like an "o" without a stem is a whole note, and it gets held for four beats.There are other ways to extend the length of a note. A dot after the note head, for example, adds another half of that note's duration to it. So, a half note with a dot would equal a half note and a quarter note; a quarter note with a dot equals a quarter plus an eighth note. A tie may also be used to extend a note. Two notes tied together should be held as long as the value of both of those notes together, and ties are commonly used to signify held notes that cross measures or bars.The opposite may also happen. We can shorten the amount of time a note should be held, relative to the quarter note. Faster notes are signified with either flags, like the ones discussed above, or with beams between the notes. Each flag halves the value of a note, so a single flag signifies 1/2 of a quarter note, a double flag halves that to 1/4 of a quarter note, et cetera. Beams do the same while allowing us to read the music more clearly and keep the notation less cluttered. As you can see, there's no difference in how you count the eighth and 16th notes above. Follow along with the sheet music for "Alouette" to see how beams organize notes!But what happens when there isn't a note taking up each beat? It's easy, we take a rest! A rest, just like a note, shows us how long it should be held based on its shape. See how whole and quarter rests are used in the song "Here We Go Looby-Loo."Step 2: Pick Up the BeatTo play music, you need to know its meter, the beat you use when dancing, clapping, or tapping your foot along with a song. When reading music, the meter is presented similar to a fraction, with a top number and a bottom number. We call this the song's time signature. The top number tells you how many beats are in a measure, the space between each vertical line (called a bar). The bottom number tells you the note value (the length) of each beat.In the example above, the time signature is 4/4, meaning there are four beats per bar and that every quarter note gets one beat. Click here to listen to sheet music written in 4/4 time, and try counting along 1,2,3,4 – 1,2,3,4 with the beat numbers above.In the example below, the time signature is 3/4, meaning there are three beats per bar and that every quarter note gets one beat. Click here to listen to sheet music written in 3/4 time, try counting the beats, 1,2,3 – 1,2,3.Let's look again at the above examples. Notice that even though the 4/4 time signature in "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" calls for four beats per bar, there aren't four notes in the second bar. That's because you have two quarter notes and one half note, which added together equal four beats.In addition to your note values and time signature, the last piece to feeling the rhythm is knowing your tempo, defined by the beats per minute. Tempo tells you how fast or slow a piece is intended to be played, and often is shown at the top of a piece of sheet music. For example, a tempo of 60 BPM (beats per minute) means you play 60 of the signified notes every minute or a single note every second. Likewise, a tempo of 120 doubles the speed to two notes every second. You may also see Italian words like "Largo," "Allegro," or "Presto" at the top of your sheet music, which signifies common tempos. Musicians use a tool called a metronome to help them keep tempo while practicing a new piece. Click here to see an online metronome tool and click on the circles next to the BPM values to see how a tempo can speed up and slow down.Step 3: Play a MelodyCongratulations, you're almost on your way to reading sheet music! Next, let's look at scales. A scale is made of eight consecutive notes. For example, the C major scale is composed of C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The interval between the first note of the C major scale and the last is an example of an octave. We recommend practicing the C major scale as much as possible, since knowing it makes it easier to learn the other major scales. Each of the notes of the C major scale corresponds with a white key on your keyboard. Here's how the C major scale looks on a staff and how that corresponds to the keys on your keyboard:Notice that as the notes ascend the staff, and move to the right on your keyboard, the pitch of the notes become higher. But what about the black keys? Musically, whole tones, or whole steps between the note letters, would limit the sounds we're able to produce on our instruments. Let's consider the C major scale you just learned to play. The distance between the C and the D keys in the C scale is a whole step. However, the distance between the E and the F keys in the C scale is a half-step. Do you see the difference? The E and the F keys don't have a black key in between them, thus they're just a half step away from one another. Every major scale has the same pattern: whole-whole-half-whole-whole-whole-half. There are many other types of scales, each with unique sounds, like minor scales, modal scales, and more that you'll come across later. For now, let's focus only on major scales and the major scale pattern. Look at the C major scale again on the keyboard below.Semitones, or half-steps on the keyboard, allow us to write an infinite variety of sounds into music. A sharp, denoted by the ♯ symbol, means that note is a semitone (or half step) higher than the note head to its right on sheet music. Conversely, a flat, denoted by a ♭ symbol, means the note is a semitone lower than the note head to its right. Notice on the keyboard picture and notated staff below, showing each half step between the C and the E notes, that whether you use the sharp or the flat of a note depends on whether you're moving up or down the keyboard.There's one more symbol to learn regarding semitones, and that's the natural, denoted by a ♮. If a note is sharp or flat, that sharp or flat extends throughout the measure, unless there's a natural symbol. A natural cancels a sharp or flat within a measure or a song. Here's what playing C to E would look like with natural symbols.The last key to learning how to read music is understanding key signatures. As an example, the C major scale you learned above was in the key of C. Scales are named after their tonic, the preeminent note within the scale, and the tonic determines what key you play in. You can start a major scale on any note, so long as you follow the whole-whole-half-whole-whole-whole-half pattern. Following that pattern in keys other than the key of C will require you to use sharps and flats. Since that's the case, we place the sharps or flats for your song's key signature right before the meter, after the clef, on your sheet music. That tells you to maintain those sharps or flats throughout the music unless there's a natural symbol to override it. You will begin to recognize the key signatures of pieces based on which sharps or flats are shown. Here's a quick glimpse at some key signatures using sharps and flats:The steps above are a great place to start as you learn to read music. To help you along on your musical journey, we've also created a few free tools to begin practicing with.First, download a free arrangement of "Mary Had a Little Lamb." Just add the song to your cart and proceed through checkout. For more variety, check out the rest of our sheet music for beginners, all of which you'll be able to play using the steps above. Play popular hits like the Star Wars Theme, "Let It Go" from 'Frozen', "Hallelujah" by Leonard Cohen, and more. We're adding new Beginner Notes daily, so be sure to check back often and learn to play all your favorite songs!We've also created a helpful guide for lettering the keys on your keyboard or piano. Download your Keyboard Note Guide here to print, fold, and place on your keyboard. Once you become familiar with the keys, you can easily remove it and continue to strengthen your note-reading skills.Finally, don't forget to download the free Musicnotes app! Enjoy instant access to all your Musicnotes sheet music files, plus tools and features created by musicians, for musicians. As you progress and learn how to read sheet music, your collection of arrangements will grow. Our app makes it easy to keep everything organized on the go. If you have any additional questions or need help finding songs to practice, reach out to our team of experts and we'll be happy to help. Good luck and, most importantly, have fun! In music, a note is a symbol that signifies a musical tone. In English, the note is also the sound itself. Notes can represent the pitch and length of a sound in musical notation. A note may also be a pitch class. Notes are the building blocks of most written music: the discretization of musical phenomena that promote performance, interpretation, and examination. Its usage is triggered by one of two motives: memory aid or as a contact aid. Extending the former tends to mold the composition to a degree of complexity that is unlikely in a solely oral culture. Extending the latter acts as a way of storing (though imperfectly) music over a long period, encourages production by others, and introduces music in a manner appropriate for study and examination. The key components of musical sound are pitch, or the position of musical sound on a scale (i.e. length of time between notes); length (i.e. rhythm, meter, tempo); timbre or tone color; and volume. No notation can treat all these components with accuracy. Some only handle a particular pattern—e.g. a melody, a rhythm. Others handle various simultaneous patterns. What are Written Notes? A written note can also have a note value, a code that specifies the note's relative length. The length of the half note is a double note (breve); full note (semibreve); half note (minim); quarter note (crotchet); eighth note (quaver); sixteenth note (semiquaver); thirty-second note (demisemiquaver); sixty-fourth note (hemidemisemiquaver) and one hundred and twenty-eighth note. Each note is allocated a particular vertical location on the staff position (line or space) as decided by the key in a score. A noted name is allocated to each line or space. These names are memorized by the musicians and help them to know, at a glance, the correct pitch to play on their instruments. Various Types of Notes One of the first ways to start learning music is to read about all the kinds of musical notes there are. Knowing the names of all of these notes and their time values, how to draw them, and what the pieces of the notes are called is the secret to being able to read music well. Names of Music Notes and their Time Values When writing music, a composer wants to know how long it takes to play each sound. Semibreve (Whole Note) The semibreve, or in the US called a 'whole note,' has a notehead in the shape of a hollow oval—like a half note—but without a note stem. It is the whole duration of the calculation in the time signature. The semibreve has a value of four beats. This means that when we play the semibreve, we count to four when holding the note. The whole rest is a connected mark, or semibreve rest. It typically refers to a whole measure, but can sometimes imply a rest for a whole note's length in longer time signatures. Whole rests are drawn as filled-in rectangles usually hung under the second line from the musical staff's top. Still, they can sometimes be positioned under a separate line (or ledger line) in more complex polyphonic passages, or where two instruments or vocalists are written on one staff and one is momentarily silent. The entire note symbol is first used in the music notation of the late 13th-century. It is derived from the circular, stemless semibreves of mensural notation, hence the British name's root. Minim (Half Note) In music, a half note (American) or a minim note (British) is played for half the length of a full note (or a half note) and double a quarter note (or crotchet). It was called Latin because it was the shortest of the five-note values used in early medieval music notation. It's similar to a semibreve, except it has a line running out of the note head's right-hand side. This line is referred to as a stem. The American expression half note is a 19th-century loan translation of the German halbe note. The Catalan, French, and Spanish names stem from the fact that the minima were the shortest unfilled note in mensural white notation, which is also true in modern style. The shape of the earlier black notation resembles that of the current quarter note. Greek, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean names mean "half," and in Greek, new and older words are used. Crotchet (Quarter Note) A quarter note (American) or a crotchet note (British) is a note played for a quarter of the length of the entire note. Sometimes, musicians would say that a crotchet is a single rhythm, although this is not necessarily true, since the time signature of the music indicates the beat; a quarter note may or may not be a beat. Quarter notes are labeled with a filled-in oval note head and a simple, flagless stem. The stem normally points upwards if it is below the middle line of the stave or down if it is on or over the middle line. However, the orientation of the stem may vary in more than one portion. Quaver (Eighth Note) The eighth note (American) or quaver is a musical note that has been played for one-eighth of the length of the entire note, hence the term. This is double the value of the 16th note. It is half the length of a quarter note, one quarter the duration of a half note, one eighth the duration of a full note, one-sixteenth the duration of a double whole note, and one thirty-second the duration of a long note. It is similar to fusa in mensural notation. Eighth notes are labeled with an oval note head and a straight note stem with a flag note. The stem is set to the right of the notepad. It continues upwards if the notepad is situated below the staff's middle line. The notepad's left is extended downwards if the notepad is located on or above the middle line of the staff instrumental notation. In vocal songs, the middle-line note head stretches upwards instead of downwards. A similar symbol is the eighth rest (or quaver rest) which signifies silence for the same duration. A single eighth note is often flagged, whereas two or three are usually beamed in clusters. Semiquaver (16th Note) In music, the 16th note (American) or the semiquaver (British) is a note struck for half the length of the 8th note (quaver), hence the terms. It is the equivalent of semifusa in mensural notation, first found in the notation of the 15th-century. The sixteenth notes are labeled with an oval note head and a straight note stem with two flags. A single 16th note is often flagged, whereas two or more are typically beamed in clusters. The corresponding symbol is the 16th pause, which signifies silence for the same duration. As for all the notes with the stems, the sixteenth notes are drawn to the note head's right, facing upward while below the musical staff's middle line. If they are on or above the middle line, the stems are drawn to the note head's left, facing down. Flags are always on the right side of the stem, which bends to the right. The flags start at the top and curve down. On the stems facing down, the flags start at the stem's bottom and curve up. If several sixteenth or eighth notes (or thirty-second notes, etc.) are adjacent to each other, flags can be attached to a beam. Note the similarity in the notes of the sixteenth notes and the eighth notes. Different laws refer to smaller divisions such as thirty-second notes (demi-quavers) and sixty-fourth notes (hemidemisemiquavers). The note is extracted from the semifusa in mensural notation. However, semifusa also refers to the modern sixty-fourth tone in Spanish, Catalan, and Portuguese. Demisemiquaver (32nd Note) In a song, a thirty-second note (American) or demisemiquaver (British) is a note that has been played for 1⁄32 of the length of the entire note (or semibreve). It lasts half as long as the sixteenth note (or semiquaver) and twice as long as the sixty-fourth note (or hemidemisemiquaver). Thirty-second notes are labeled with an oval filled-in note head and a straight note stem with three flags or beams. A single thirty-second note is often flagged, while two or three are usually beamed in clusters. As for all the notes with the stems, the thirty-second notes are drawn with the stems to the note's right, extending to where they are below the musical staff's middle line. If they are on or above the middle line, the stems are drawn to the note head's left, extending down. Flags are always on the right side of the stem, which bends to the right. The flags begin at the top and curve down. For the stems extending downwards, the flags start at the stem's bottom and curve upwards. When several thirty-second notes or eighth notes are adjacent to each other, the flags can be attached to the beam. Similar laws shall refer to smaller divisions, such as sixty-fourth notes. A similar symbol is a thirty-second pause or demisemiquaver rest that signifies silence for the same length as a thirty-second note. Various Other Notes These are the key notes that you can come across and use in musical notation, but you will also get shorter and longer notes. Hemidemisemiquaver (64th note) In music notation, a sixty-fourth note, or hemidemisemiquaver or semi-demi quaver, referred to as a half-thirty-second note, is a note played for half the length of a thirty-second note. It first appears at the end of the 17th-century and, aside from the occasional case of a hundred and twenty-eighth notes and two hundred and fifty-sixth notes, it is the shortest value used in musical notation. Sixty-fourth notes are labeled with an oval note head and a straight note stem with four flags. The stem is drawn to the left of the note head heading down while the note is above or in the staff's middle row. If the note head is below the middle line, the stem is drawn to the note head's right. A single 64th note is often flagged, whereas two or three are typically beamed in groups. A similar, but rarely encountered, symbol is the sixty-fourth rest which denotes silence for the same length as the sixty-fourth note. Notes shorter than a sixty-fourth note are seldom used, although a hundred and twenty-eighth note—otherwise known as a semi hemidemisemiquaver—and even shorter notes are sometimes used. Breve (double whole note) In a song, a double whole note (American), a short note (British), or a double note is a note that lasts two times as long as the whole note (or semibreve). It is the second-longest note value still in use in popular music notation. In modern notation, a brevium is usually represented in either two ways: as a hollow oval note head, like a whole note, with one or two vertical lines on each side, as on the left of the picture, or as a rectangular shape often used in an older notation, seen in the center of the image. Since it lasts longer than a bar in most typical time signatures in general usage, the brief is seldom found except in English music, where the half-note is often used as a beat unit. A similar symbol is a double stop, which typically signifies silence for the same length. Double rests are

before B. In music, we use the term ??enharmonic equivalents?? (or ??enharmonics??) to refer to different note names that apply to the same sound. The notes A sharp and B flat are enharmonics because both sound the same but have different names. Sharps and flats are known as accidentals because they alter the sound of the base note. Don't forget that sharp means higher and flat means lower in pitch. NOTE: Sharps are written with the number sign or pound sign. A sharp is written like this: A#. The flats are written with a letter b. B flat is written like this: Bb. Let's continue learning the black keys. It's easy: we just keep using accidentals. When you look at the piano keyboard, you??ll notice that there??s no black key between B and C. This means B sharp has the same pitch as C because C is the note that follows B. Also, C flat has the same sound as B. Some people may tell you that B sharp and C flat don't exist because there is no black key between them on the keyboard. That is just wrong, believe me??B sharp and C flat do exist, and they are used in music. The first black key after C is C sharp or D flat. The following black key is D sharp or E flat. Notice that between E and F, there is no black key. This means E sharp sounds the same as F, and F flat sounds the same as E. Therefore, E sharp and F are enharmonics, and F flat and E are enharmonics. After F we have F sharp or G flat. Finally, the next black key is G sharp or A flat.After this, we reach A again. Musical notes using syllables: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La and Ti The names of musical notes can also be represented using syllables, as Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La and Ti. Some languages use Si instead of Ti. These musical note names match the C major scale, the one we sang before. That means that: Do is C Re is D Mi is E Fa is F Sol is G La is A Ti is B If you??re having trouble learning these names, listen to the Do-Re-Mi song from The Sound of Music. You may be wondering why we use so many names for the same sounds. If you think we should only use one name per sound, congratulations, because that would be a great idea. The problem is that the whole history of modern Western music has been written using these note names. It would be too difficult to change the way they have been named for hundreds of years. If you want to know exactly why there are many names for the same pitches, search for the history of musical notes and you'll find the answer. Quick review of the music notes names Well done! You??ve learned the musical notes, and now you know how to find them on a piano. Let's do a quick review: the note A is the white key just before the last black key in the group of three black keys. The notes of the subsequent white keys are B, C, D, E, F, G and then A again,although the second A is higher in pitch than the first A. The notes on the black keys are named using accidentals, that is sharps and flats. Sharp means the closest higher note, and flat means the closest lower note. Using sharps, the notes of the black keys areA#, C#, D#, F# and G#. We can also name them with flats: Bb, Db, Eb, Gb and Ab. B sharp sounds the same as C, and C flat sound the same as B. Similarly, E sharp sounds the same as F, and F flat sounds the same as E. Don??t ever forget that between B and C, and between E and F, there is no black key. Finally, I just want to clarify that these musical notes are the most popular in the world and are used in almost all the popular music we hear today. However, some other cultures use different tuning methods and ways to organize sounds. All the music theory we discuss in this course is based on the musical notes learned in this lesson. I recommend playing the virtual piano or online keyboard available from Session Town. Try to compare the sounds of the notes that have the same names in different pitches. Have fun making music with this keyboard, and memorize all the musical note names on the piano. Next lesson: 3. The staff, the musical notes and the clefs.