Music Reading Basics

This is a reference you can use as you work through the *Godfrey Guitar System*. Here you'll find useful charts and information about key signatures, the Circle of Fifths, building major and minor scales, rhythm basics, and more. You won't suddenly be able to read music after looking over this information, but you should find it useful as you work through the *Godfrey Guitar System*, where all of these concepts are explained in greater detail.

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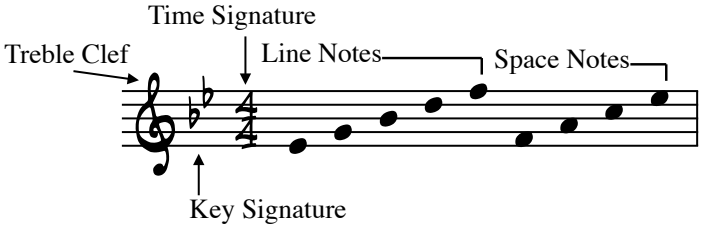
Music Reading Basics

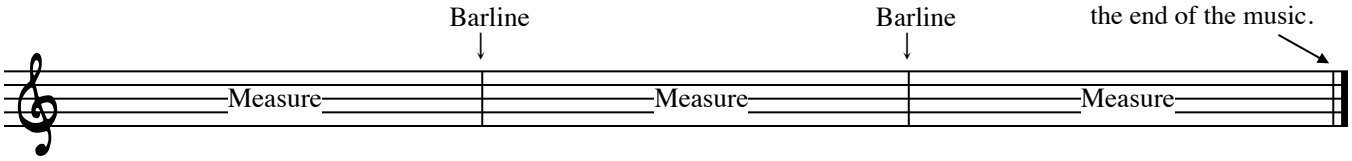
Music Basics

Staff

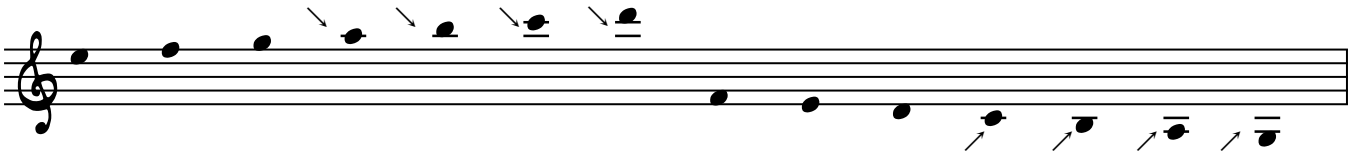
The music staff has five lines and four spaces. The lines and spaces are counted from bottom to top.



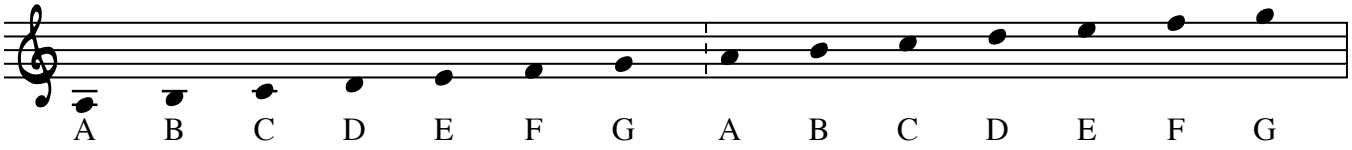
Barlines divide the staff into measures.



Ledger lines extend the range of the staff.

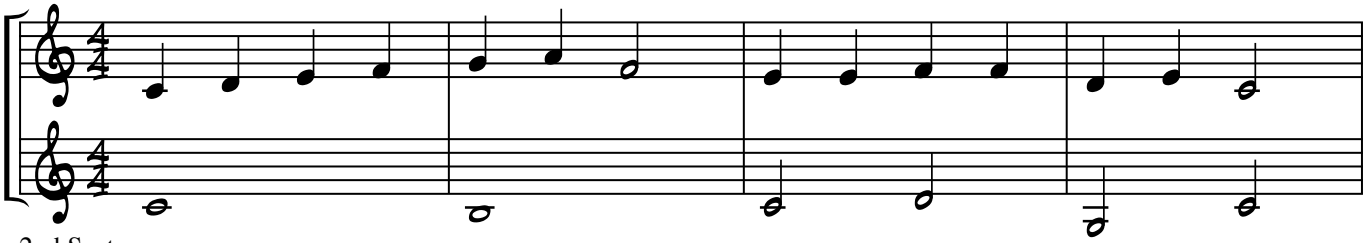


The musical alphabet is made of the notes A through G.
The notes are named in order from low to high.
Note names start over again every eight notes (every octave).

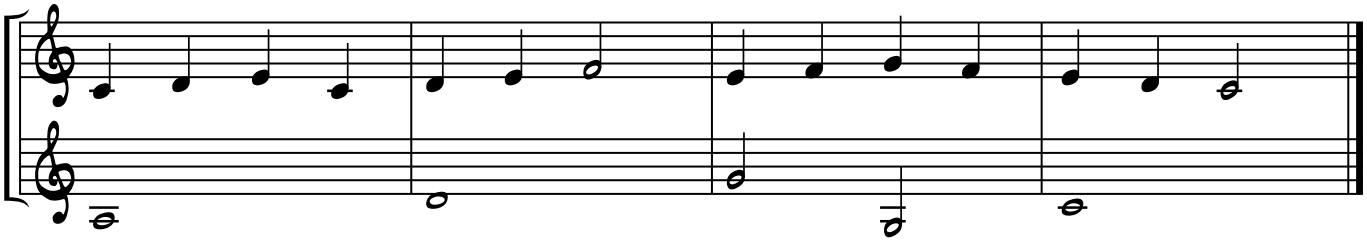


If more than one instrument or voice performs at the same time, the individual staves are combined into systems connected on the left side by a line and a bracket.

1st System



2nd System



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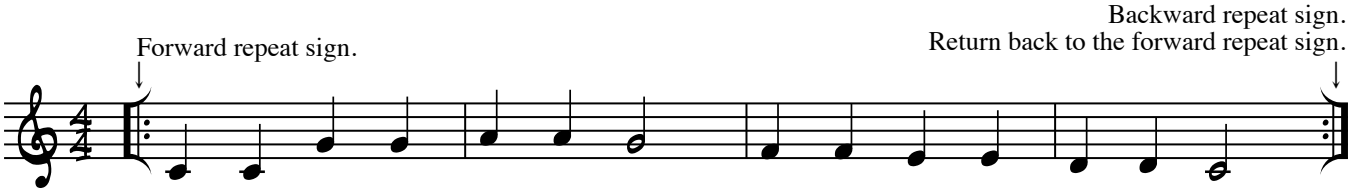
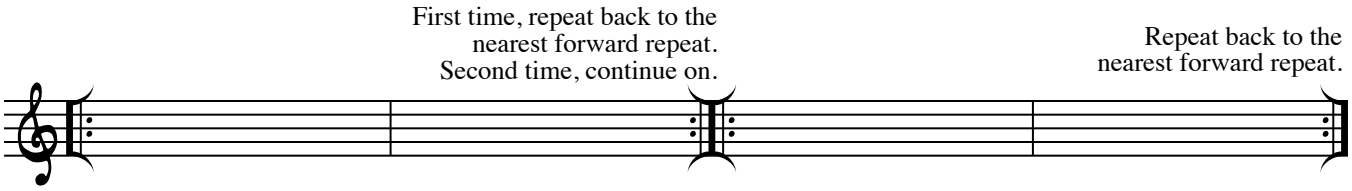
Repeats and Roadmaps

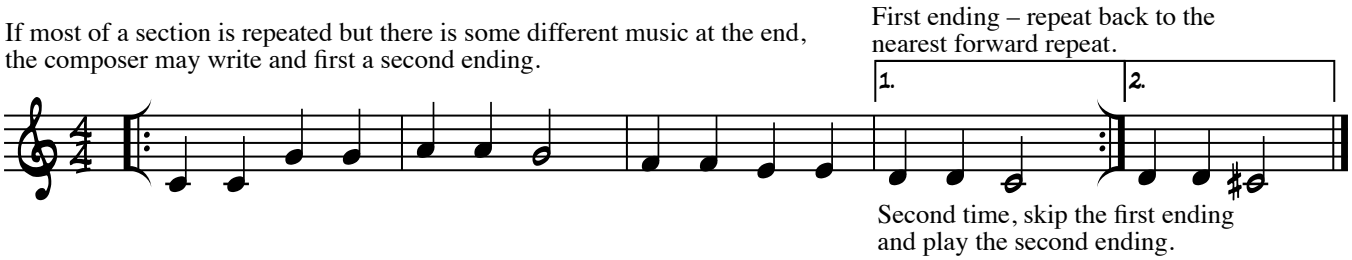
If a section of music is to be played again, a composer may use repeat signs, a D.S., or a D.C.



This example has two repeated sections.



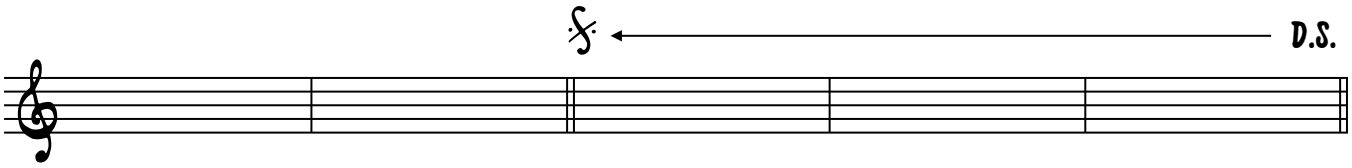
If most of a section is repeated but there is some different music at the end, the composer may write and first a second ending.



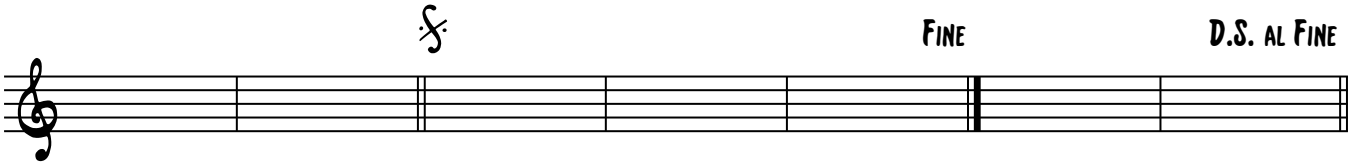
D.S. – D.C. – Fine – Coda

These "roadmap" signs can be used if the music from a much earlier section is repeated.

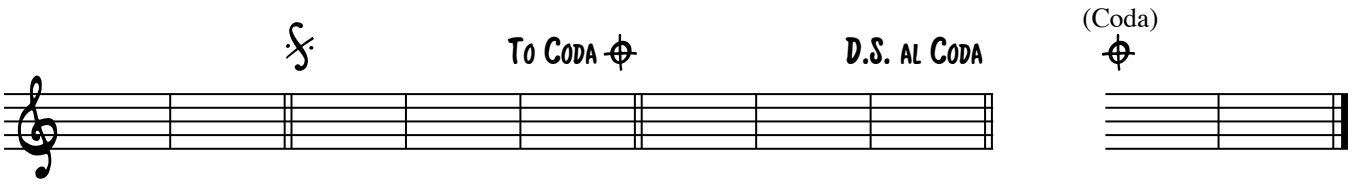
D.S. (Dal Segno): repeat back to the sign.



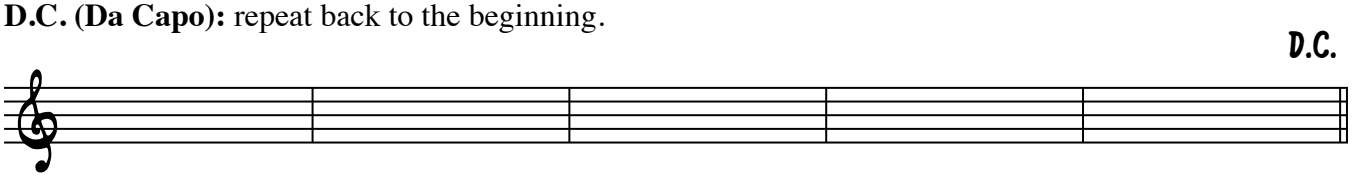
D.S. al Fine: repeat back to the sign and stop at the **"Fine"** marking.



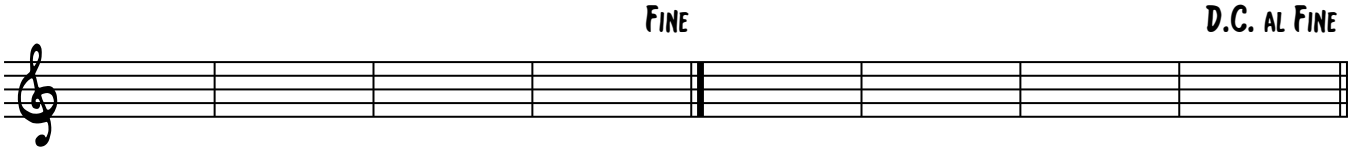
D.S. al Coda: repeat back to the sign and then skip to the **Coda** after reaching the **"To Coda"** marking.



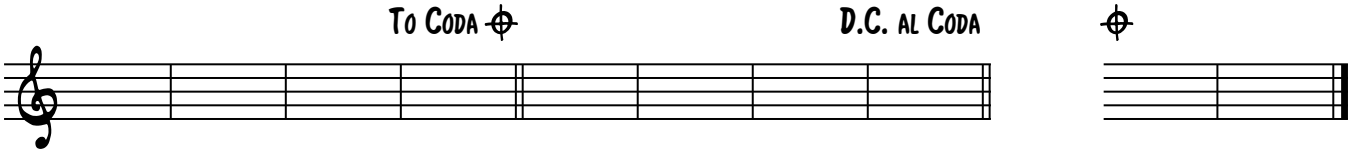
D.C. (Da Capo): repeat back to the beginning.



D.C. al Fine: repeat back to the beginning and stop at the **"Fine"** marking.



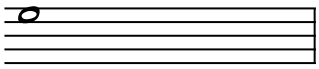
D.C. al Coda: repeat to the beginning, then skip to the **Coda** after reaching the **"To Coda"** marking.



Rhythm

Notes and Rests

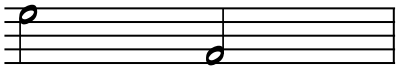
Whole Note:
lasts 4 beats



1 - 2 - 3 - 4

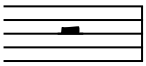
Whole Rest:
4 beats silence

Half Note:
lasts 2 beats

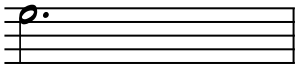


1 - 2 3 - 4

Half Rest:
2 beats silence

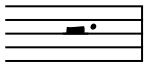


Dotted Half Note:
lasts 3 beats

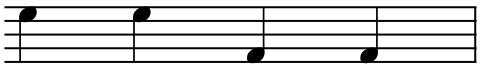


1 - 2 - 3

Dotted Half Rest:
3 beats silence

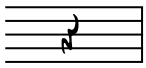


Quarter Note:
lasts 1 beat

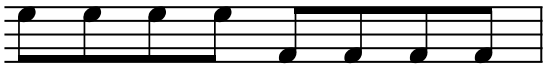


1 2 3 4

Quarter Rest:
1 beat silence

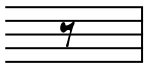


Eighth Note:
1/2 beat



1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +
(and)

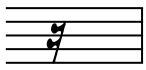
Eighth Rest:
1/2 beat silence



Sixteenth Note:
1/4 beat

1 e + a 2 e + a 3 e + a 4 e + a
(ee) (and) (uh)

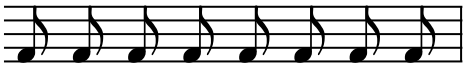
Sixteenth Rest:
1/4 beat silence



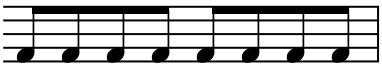
Flags and Beams

Flags are used to notate single eighth or sixteenth notes. Groups of eighths or sixteenths are usually beamed together.

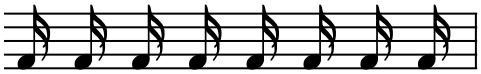
Single eighth notes have single flags.



Eighth note groups share a single beam.



Single sixteenth notes have double flags.

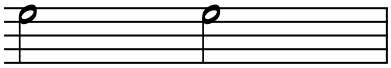


Sixteenth note groups share double beams.

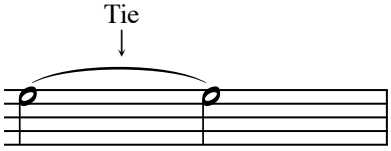
Eighth and sixteenth note combinations can be beamed together.

Ties

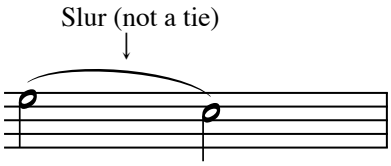
A tie is a curved line that connects two or more notes of the same pitch to create one longer note.



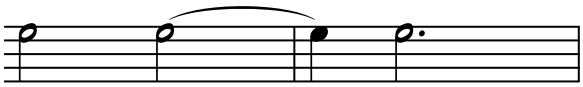
Without a tie, these two half notes are played separately.



With a tie added, the same two half notes combine to create a single note lasting four beats.



A tie can only combine two or more notes that are the same pitch. When a curved line connects two or more notes that are different pitches, it is called a slur, indicating that the notes are to be played smoothly.

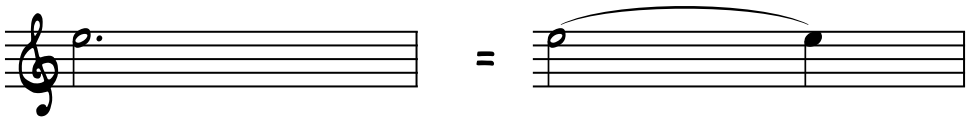


A tie can connect notes across barlines.

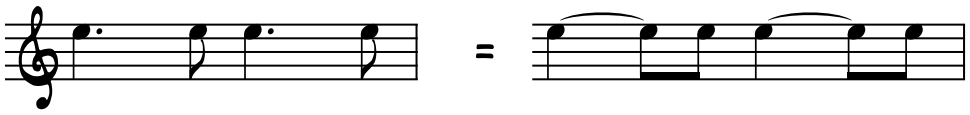
Dotted Rhythms

A dot after a note means that the note lasts for the value of that note, plus half its value. For example, a half note lasts two beats. If you add a dot after the half note, it's the same as tying that half note to a quarter note (which lasts half the length of a half note).

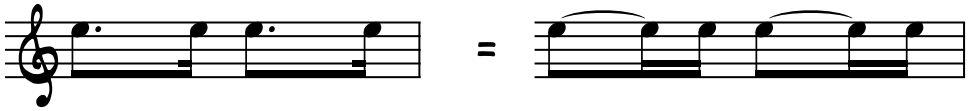
Dotted Half Note



Dotted Quarter Note

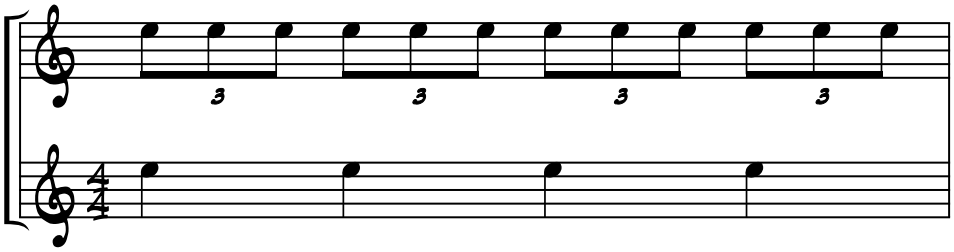


Dotted Eighth Note

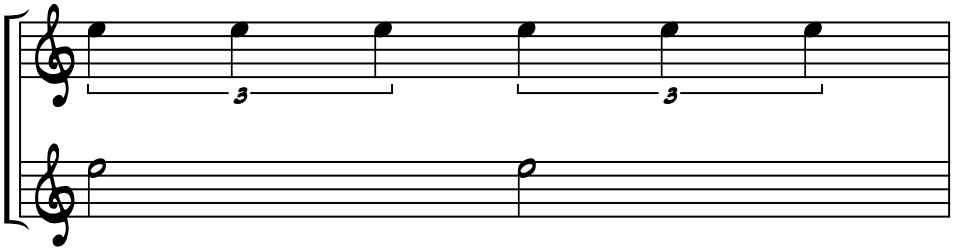


Triplets

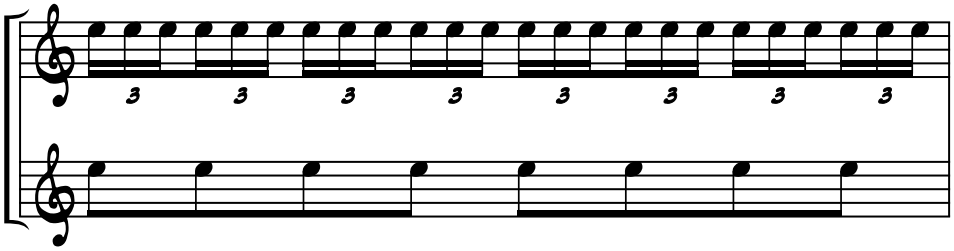
A triplet divides a note into three parts.



Eighth note triplets divide a quarter note into three notes. This is the most common triplet.



Quarter note triplets divide a half note into three notes.



Sixteenth note triplets divide an eighth note into three notes.

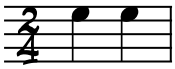
Time Signature

The time signature appears at the beginning of the music.

The top number of the time signature tells you how many beats are in each measure.

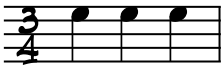
The bottom number of the time signature tells you what kind of note gets the beat.

2 beats per measure



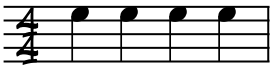
Quarter note gets the beat.

3 beats per measure



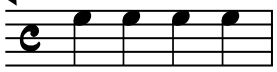
Quarter note gets the beat.

4 beats per measure

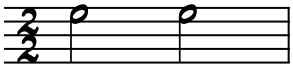


Quarter note gets the beat.

The "C" stands for Common Time, which is the same as 4/4.

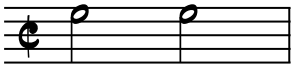


2 beats per measure

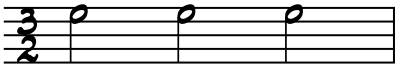


Half note gets the beat.

A "C" with a slash stands for Cut Time, which is the same as 2/2.

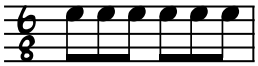


3 beats per measure



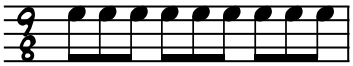
Half note gets the beat.

6 beats per measure



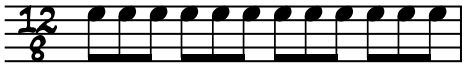
Eighth note gets the beat.

9 beats per measure



Eighth note gets the beat.

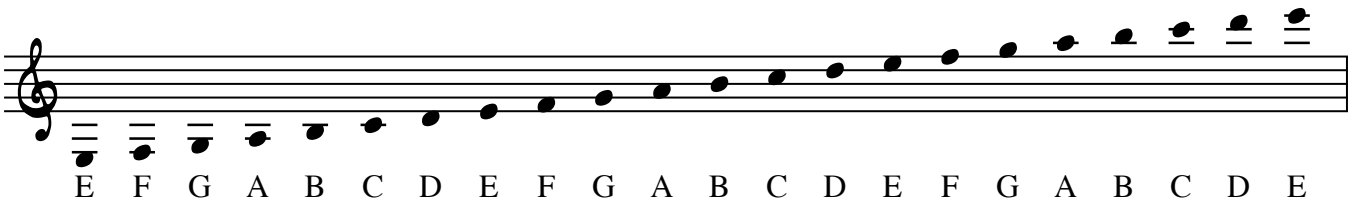
12 beats per measure



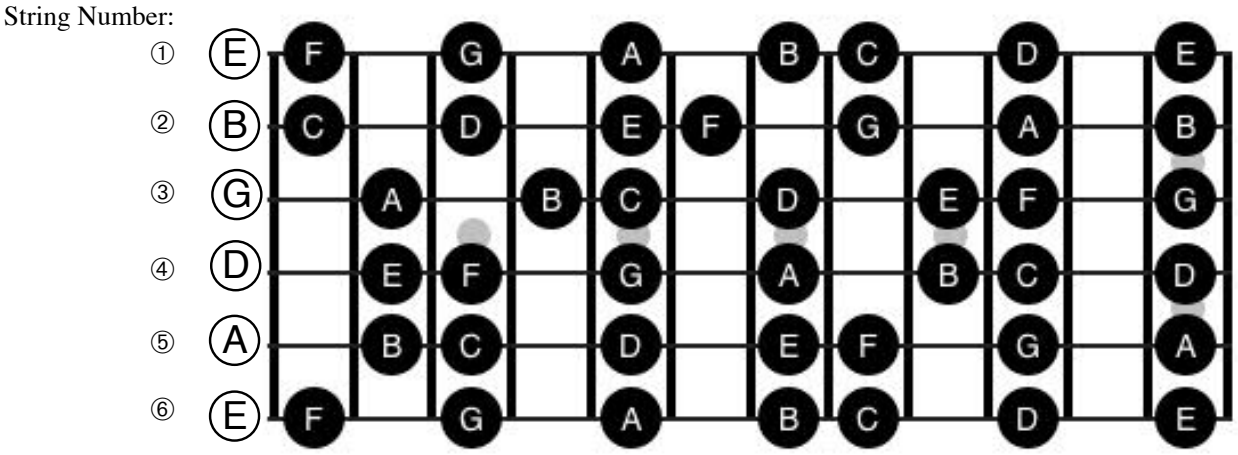
Eighth note gets the beat.

Natural Notes

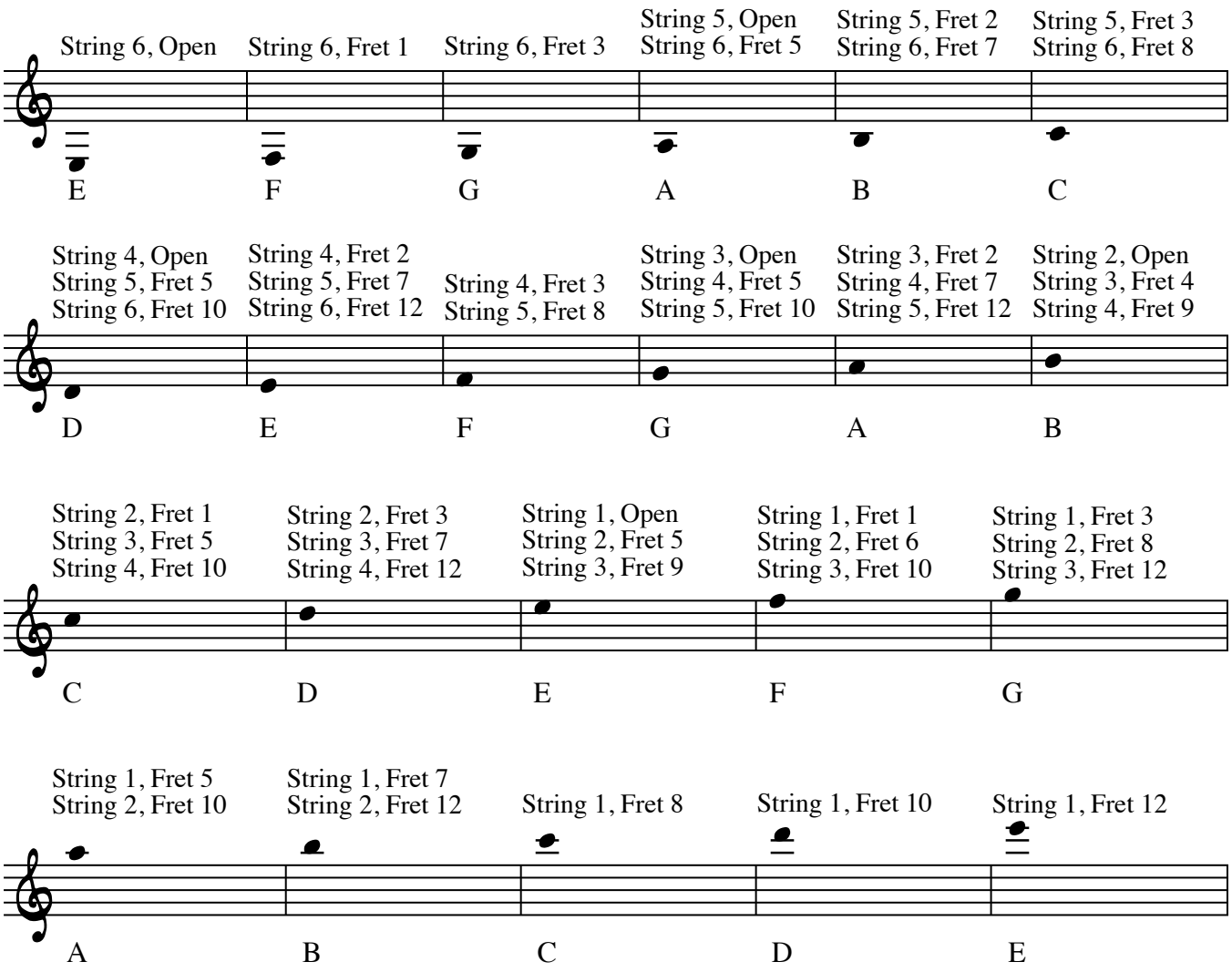
The natural notes are the white notes on the piano. These are the natural notes you can play on the guitar up to the 12th fret.



Natural Notes on the Fretboard



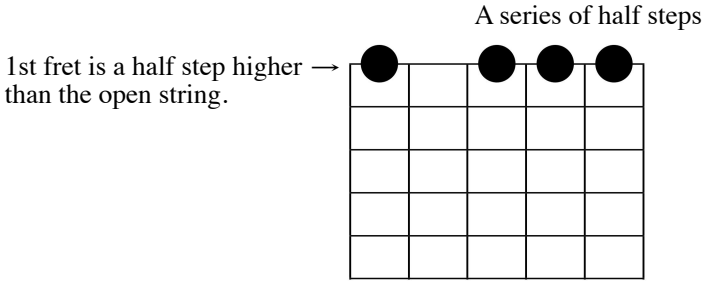
On the guitar, you can play most notes on more than one string. Here are the natural notes again, along with their string and fret positions.



Half Steps and Whole Steps

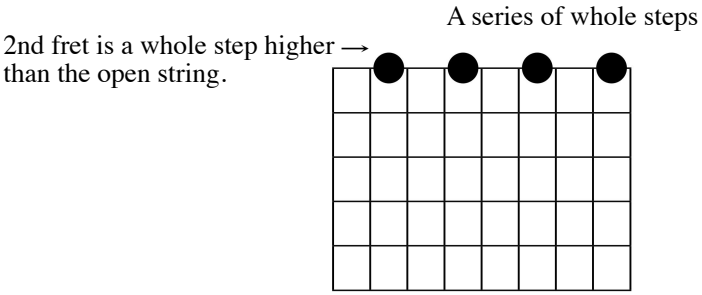
Half Step

A half step is the smallest interval between two notes. On the guitar, a half step is the distance from one fret to the next. To raise an open string by a half step, play the 1st fret on the same string.



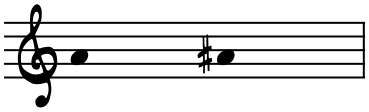
Whole Step

A whole step is two half steps added to each other. On the guitar, a whole step is two frets away from the original note. To raise an open string by a whole step, play the 2nd fret on the same string.

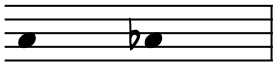


Accidentals: Sharp (♯), Flat (♭), and Natural (♮)

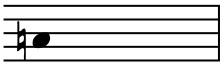
A sharp (♯) placed in front of a note raises it by a half step.



A flat (♭) placed in front of a note lowers it by a half step.

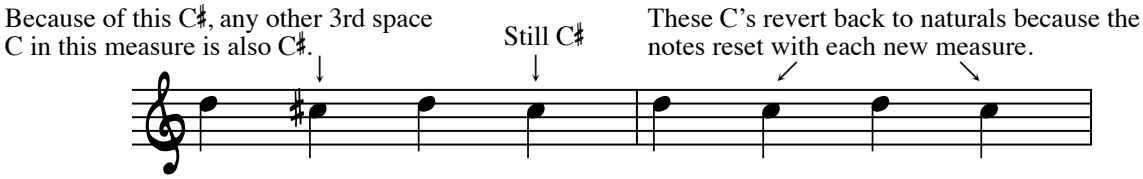


A natural (♮) placed in front of a note indicates it is natural – neither sharp nor flat. You usually don't need to add a natural sign unless you have to cancel out a flat or sharp.



Rule of Accidentals

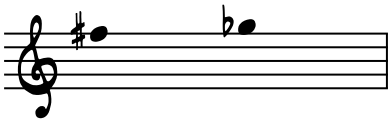
If an accidental (sharp, flat, or natural) is added to a note, the accidental applies to that same note if it appears again in the same measure. The accidental does **not** apply to that note in any of the measures that follow. The notes reset with each new measure.



Enharmonics

When two notes sound the same but are spelled differently, they are called *enharmonic equivalents*, or usually just *enharmonics*. For example, 5th line F♯ is played on the 1st string, 2nd fret. The G♭ on top of the staff is alo played on the 1st string, 2nd fret. They sound the same but are spelled differently.

F♯ and G♭ are enharmonic equivalents.
They sound the same but are spelled differently.



Scales: Major and Minor

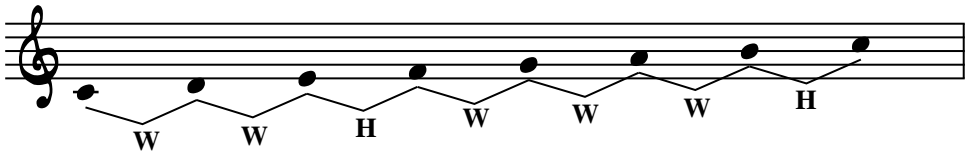
A scale is a set of notes arranged in order from low to high that can repeat every octave. There are several different types of scales, but most of them derive from the major scale. A major scale is built on a sequence of whole and half steps.

Major Scale Pattern

W = Whole Step
H = Half Step

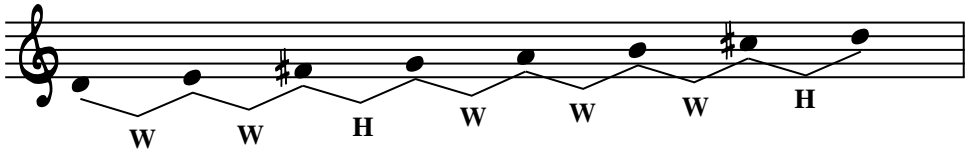
W-W-H-W-W-W-H

C Major Scale

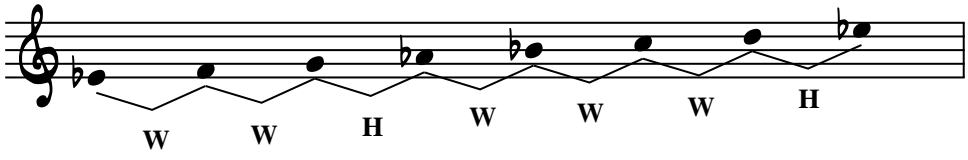


In a major scale, the letter names are always in sequence. You never skip or repeat a letter name. Depending on the starting note, the accidentals will be all sharps or all flats. There is no major scale that contains both sharps and flats.

D Major Scale

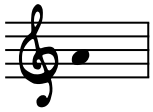


E♭ Major Scale

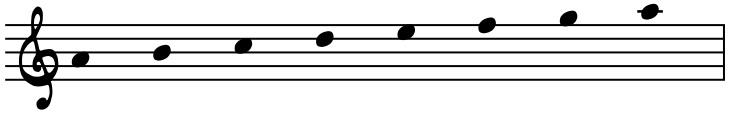


Constructing a Major Scale

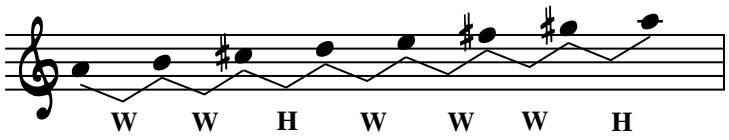
Step 1: Write the first note.



Step 2: Construct the "skeleton" by writing the next 7 notes, ending an octave higher than the starting note. This example goes from A to A.

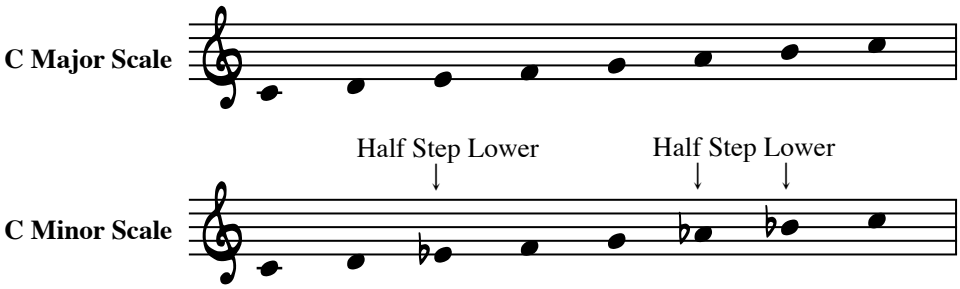


Step 3: Use the W-W-H-W-W-W-H pattern to fill in the correct accidentals.



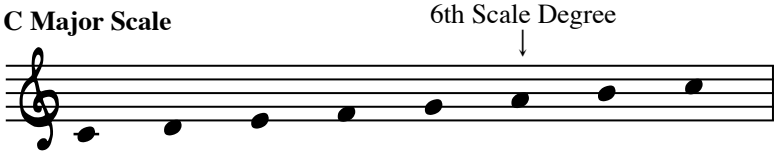
Minor Scale

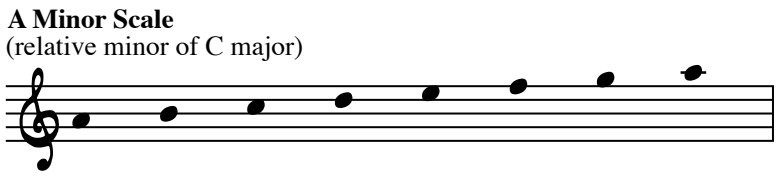
If you lower the 3rd, 6th, and 7th notes of a major scale by a half step, you get a minor scale.



Relative Major and Minor

Each major scale has a relative minor and vice versa. Relative major and minor scales share the same notes. The relative minor is based on the sixth scale degree (sixth note) of its relative major scale. For example, the note "A" is the sixth note of the C major scale. If you play the from A to A, using the same notes as the C major scale (no sharps or flats), you are playing an A minor scale, which is the relative minor of C major.





The A minor scale is the relative minor of C major. It starts from the 6th note of the C major scale and shares the same notes (no sharps or flats).

Key Signatures

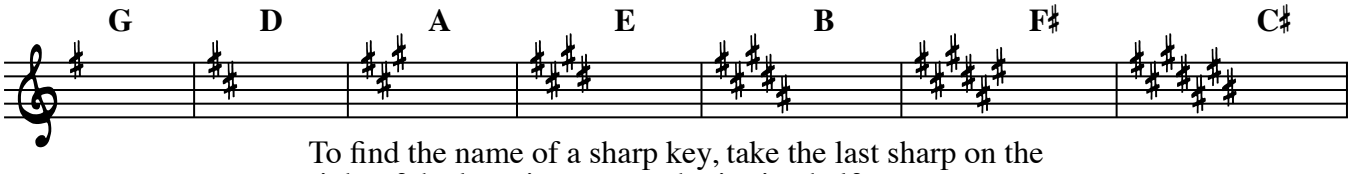
A key signature appears at the beginning of each line of music and shows which notes should be played as sharps or flats. The key signature is also an indication of what "key" the music is in – or which scale the music is based on.

The order of flats and sharps – read from left to right – is always the same.

Order of Sharps

F♯ C♯ G♯ D♯ A♯ E♯ B♯

Sharp Keys (Major):

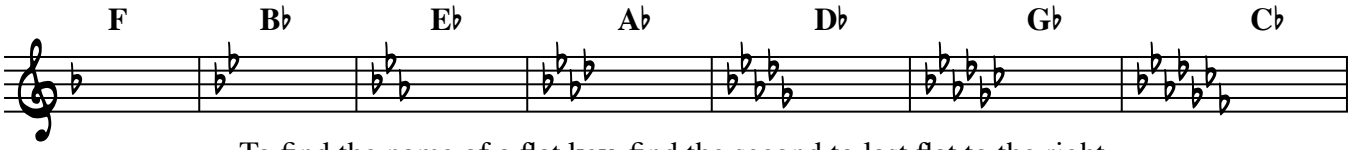


To find the name of a sharp key, take the last sharp on the right of the key signature and raise it a half step.

Order of Flats

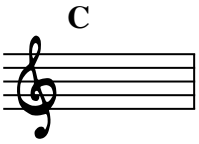
B♭ E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭ C♭ F♭

Flat Keys (Major):



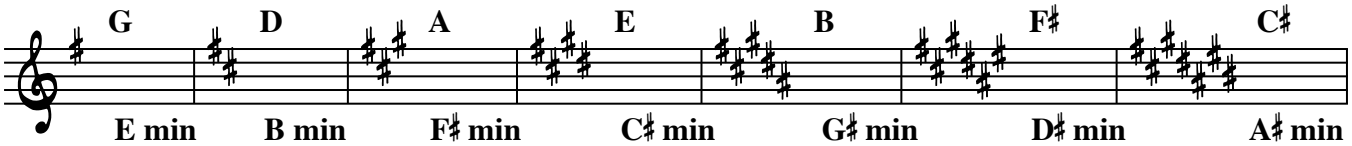
To find the name of a flat key, find the second to last flat to the right. The exception to this rule is the key of F, which has only one flat.

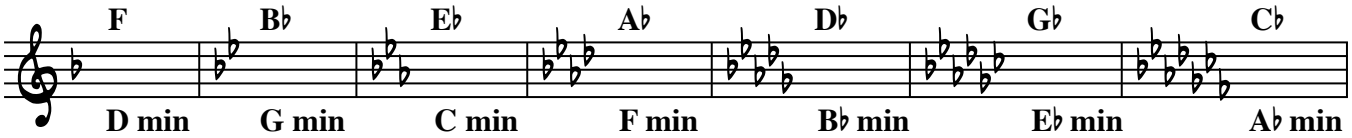
If you are in a major key and there are no sharps or flats in the key signature, you are in the key of C major.

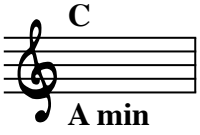


Minor Keys

As described on the previous page, the relative minor is based on the sixth scale degree of its relative major key. Here, the major keys appear above the staff with their relative minors appearing below.



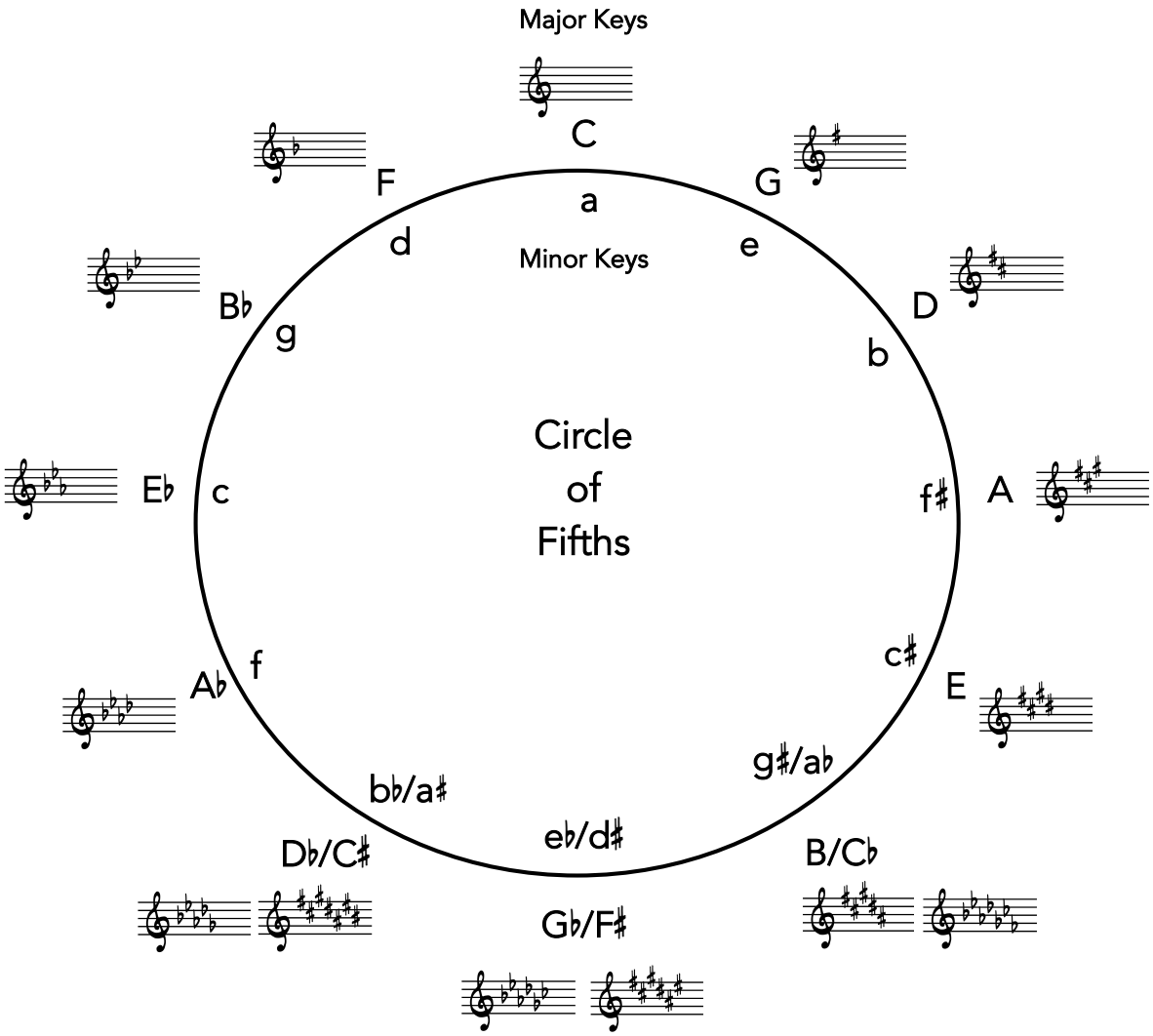




Circle of Fifths

The Circle of Fifths is a chart of the twelve major keys and their relative minors. It's called the Circle of Fifths because of the way the keys are organized. If you start at the top, in the key of C major, and move clockwise, the next key is G, which is the fifth note of the C major scale. Continuing clockwise, the next key after G is D – the fifth note of the G major scale. This pattern continues throughout the circle and loops back to C, which is the fifth note of the F major scale.

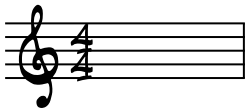
- The major keys appear on the outside the circle in upper case letters.
- The relative minor keys appear inside the circle in lower case letters, near their relative majors.
- Some keys at the bottom appear in both sharps and flats because they are enharmonically equivalent.
- The key signature for each key appears outside the circle.
- The closer the keys are to each other in the circle, the more notes they have in common.
- This is traditionally called the Circle of Fifths, but it could also be called the Circle of Fourths if you went through the keys counterclockwise.



Tempo Markings

Tempo refers to how fast or slow you play. You will often see a tempo marking above the time signature, indicating the exact speed of the music.

Tempo Marking→ ♩=120



This tempo marking indicates that the speed of a quarter note is 120 beats per minute (BPM). Use a metronome to hear precisely how fast this is.

The markings below indicate general tempos rather than a specific BPM.

Largo	very slow
Larghetto	a little faster than *largo*
Grave	slow, solemn
Lento	slow
Adagio	moderately slow
Andante	moderate, "walking" tempo
Andantino	a little faster than *andante*
Moderato	moderately
Allegretto	moderately fast
Allegro	fast
Vivace	lively, bright
Presto	very fast
Prestissimo	very, very fast

The markings below indicate a change in tempo.

A Tempo	return to previous tempo
accelerando (accel.)	gradually faster
animato	animated, lively
con moto	with motion
meno mosso	less motion
poco meno mosso	a little less motion
più mosso	more motion
poco più mosso	a little more motion
rallentando (rall.)	gradually slower
ritardando (ritard., rit.)	gradually slower
ritenuto	suddenly slower
rubato	fluctuating tempo
stringendo	gradually faster
Tempo Primo (Tempo I°)	return to first tempo of the piece

Dynamics

Dynamics refers to how loudly or quietly you play.

Dynamics from soft to loud:

ppp	*pianississimo*: very, very soft
pp	*pianissimo*: very soft
p	*piano*: soft
mp	*mezzo-piano*: medium soft
mf	*mezzo-forte*: medium loud
f	*forte*: loud
ff	*fortissimo*: very loud
fff	*fortississimo*: very, very loud

Other common dynamic markings:

fp	*forte-piano*: loud, then immediately soft
sfz	*sforzando*: sudden strong accent
n	*niente*: nothing

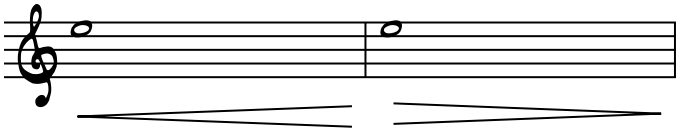
Modifiers:

più	more, or "very"
sempre	always
subito	suddenly

Gradual Dynamic Changes:

crescendo (cresc.)	gradually louder
crescendo poco a poco	louder, little by little
decrescendo (decresc.)	gradually softer
decrescendo poco a poco	softer, little by little
diminuendo (dim.)	gradually softer
morendo	dying away

Graphic Dynamic Markings:



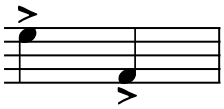
crescendo (gradually louder)

decrescendo (gradually softer)

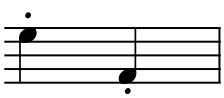
Articulations, Slurs, and Pauses

An articulation is a marking placed above or below a note indicating that the note should be played in a certain way – louder, shorter, longer, etc.

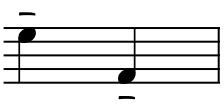
Accent: Play each note a little louder than the surrounding notes.



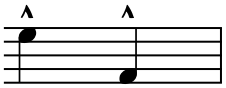
Staccato: Detached, short



Tenuto: Very slight accent. Play notes full value.

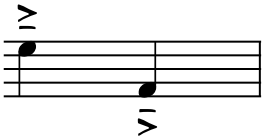


Marcato Accent: Louder, detached

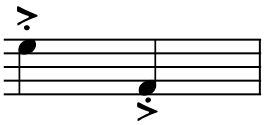


Combination Articulations:

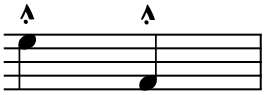
Accent/Tenuto: louder, play full value



Accent/Staccato: louder, shorter



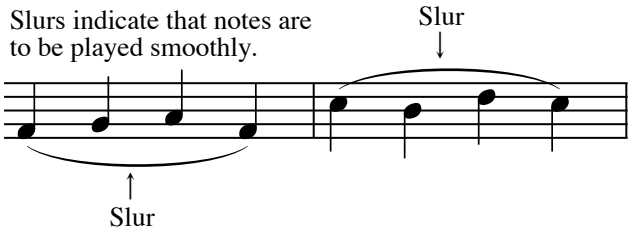
Marcato/Staccato: louder, and shorter than accent/staccato



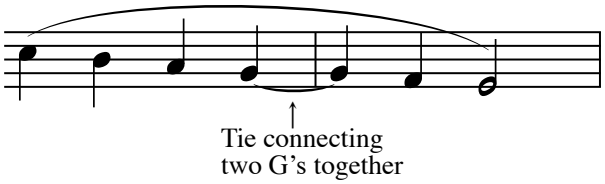
Slurs

A slur is a curved line that looks very much like a tie. The difference between a slur and a tie is that a tie connects two or more of the same note to create one longer note, while a slur usually connects two or more different notes. When two or more notes are connected by a slur, they are to be played smoothly.

Slurs indicate that notes are to be played smoothly.



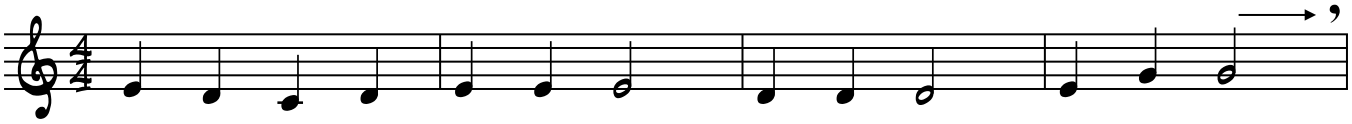
These two measures are slurred.
The two G's in the measure are tied.



Pauses

Here are some markings indicating that either a note is to be held out or the music is paused.

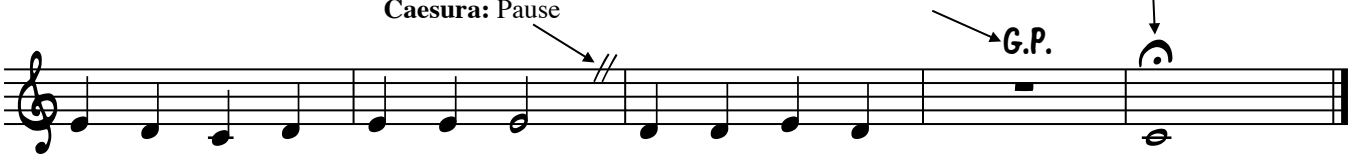
Breath Mark:
Take a breath. Depending on context, could mean to end a phrase or to add a very slight pause.



Grand Pause:
Everyone in the group is silent for the duration of the rest.

Fermata:
Hold the note longer than usual.

Caesura: Pause



Musical Terms

This is a short list of common musical terms. If you run across a musical term that isn't listed here, consult a music dictionary or look it up online.

Expressions

Cantabile	in a singing style
Delicato	delicately
Divisi (div.)	one part being divided into two parts
Dolce	sweetly
Dolcissimo	very sweetly
Doloroso	sadly
Espressivo (espr.)	expressively
Giocoso	playfully
Glissando (gliss.)	sliding from one note to the next
Legato	smoothly
Leggiero	lightly, gracefully
Maestoso	majestically
Marcato	accented and separated
Moto	motion (con moto = with motion)
Pesante	heavily
Ritmico	rhythmically
Semplice	simply
Soave	sweetly, mildly
Sostenuto (sost.)	sustained
Staccato (stacc.)	short, detached
Tenuto (ten.)	hold note to full value
Tranquillo	calmly, tranquilly
Trill (tr.)	rapidly alternate between two notes (whole or half step)
Tutti	all, everyone
Unison (unis.)	all musicians playing/singing the same thing
Vibrato (vib.)	repeated fluctuation of pitch

Modifiers

con	with
meno	less
mit	with
molto	very
non	no, not
non troppo	not too much
più	more
poco	little
poco a poco	little by little
poco più	a little more
quasi	almost
sans	without
sempre	always
subito (sub.)	suddenly
un poco	a little