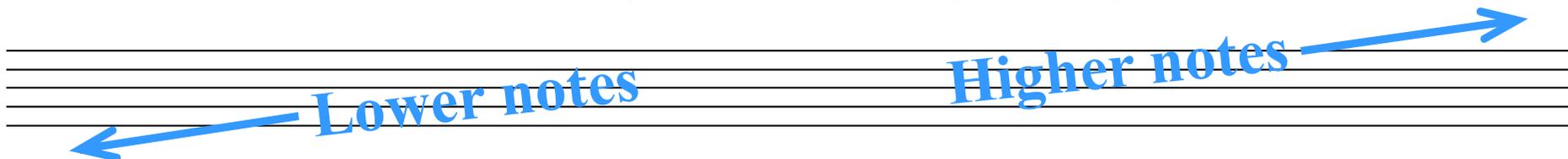


I need help to read the notes!

Sometimes when learning to read music, remembering the names of the notes can be difficult. There are so many of them! This section will explain the logic behind how pitch is notated in Western Music and will give you ideas to help you understand and remember them.

Symbols to indicate both *pitch* (how high or low a note is) and *rhythm* (how long or short the given value of a note or rest is) are put on a **stave**. This consists of five parallel horizontal lines with the spaces in between. The higher the note is on a staff, the higher it's sounding pitch will be.



Each line and space represents a different note, so with the five lines and four spaces above you can pinpoint nine different notes. Go up from a line to the space above you would go one note higher, go from a space to the space below, you would go down two notes.

Western Music uses the first seven letters of the alphabet to describe which notes are which: A, B, C, D, E, F and G. This sequence of letters is repeated as necessary. The distance from any note to the next one with the same letter (e.g. D - D, F - F etc) is an **octave** (Latin *octavus*: eighth) - seven letters and then the eighth being the repeat of the first letter.

Dozens of different types of instruments can be played by using this notation system. Of course a piccolo, violin or trumpet make much higher sounds than a bassoon, 'cello or tuba and most modern pianos have eighty eight notes. This would be a problem if only five lines and their corresponding four spaces were available, as there would not be enough 'segments' to fit all the possible notes in. Fortunately **clefs**, **ledger lines** and **accidentals** are placed on the staff to help a performer understand precisely which note needs to be played.

Clefs

There are *four* different clefs to remember. Many people if asked to name or play the following three notes would find the exercise easy. They might say:



"Yes, all the notes are prefixed by the *Treble Clef*, so the first note is B, then E and finally F."

The middle line of the Treble Clef is B, the note one higher (in the space) is C, the one higher than that (on the 4th line) is D and so the note in the top space is E. Similarly as the middle line is B, the space below that would be A, the line below that would be G and so the bottom space is F. [Note that the stem of a note goes up when that note is *below* the middle line; goes down when the note is *above* the middle line and can go up or down (depending on the other notes around it) when it is *on* the middle line.]

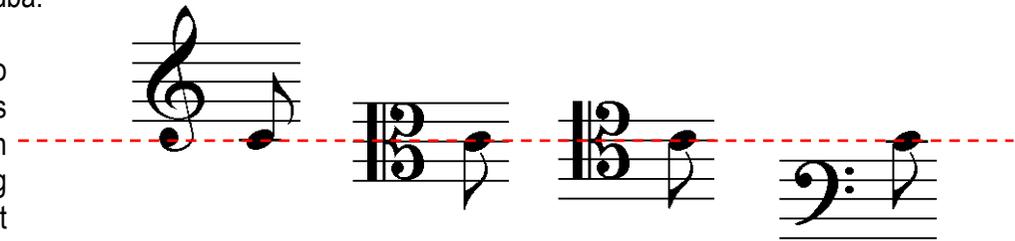
What about these three notes though?



Here we have the other clefs: *Bass* (an A), *Alto* (a G) and *Tenor* (a D). You need to be able to draw all of these clefs accurately - both in shape and position. It will be useful to practise them so that you can draw them easily and confidently. Let's consider these other clefs in more detail.

The use of different clefs for diverse instruments and voices allows each part to generally be written within the staff. This allows the score to be read quickly without mistakes caused by ambiguity. The Treble Clef is used for high parts, the Alto and Tenor for middle parts, and the Bass for low parts. The Treble then can be used by such instruments as the flute, oboe, violin and trumpet, the Alto by the viola (Treble Clef too), the Tenor by the 'cello, bassoon and tenor trombone (Bass Clef for all three too) and the Bass by the double bass and tuba.

It's useful to be able to fix one note in our minds in every clef and then to be able to work out other notes from that. The note we shall consider is *Middle C*, which is shown with the red dashed line. You will notice that in the Treble Clef it is below the staff with a small horizontal line going through it (a *ledger line* - more on this later) and in the Bass Clef it is at the top with a ledger line going through it. For the Alto it is on the middle line and the Tenor has it on the fourth line. You will probably notice for these two latter clefs that Middle C is on the same line as the centre of the number 3-type shape that forms part of the clef. This is important, as it is *that* indentation that actually fixes the third or fourth line as Middle C.



In the exam you will often find a short passage in one clef and you are told to move it to another clef whilst keeping the actual pitch of the notes the same. Here is an example from a short 'cello piece.



You will notice that it starts in the Bass Clef and uses some ledger lines before moving into the Treble Clef. It would probably be easier to read in one clef and as it is written for 'cello, the Tenor Clef will prove very useful. Which is the best way to do this? Remember to look at each note in the passage you have been given in relation to Middle C. Is the given note higher or lower than Middle C? How much by? This is *very* important, as some people know what the note is called, but forget to consider it in relation to being above or below Middle C. This may mean they spend a lot of time in the exam writing a neat answer that is an octave too high or too low. Result: zero marks and a waste of time and effort! Another method that can cause mistakes is to decide where the first note goes and then relate all succeeding notes to that, i.e. that is two notes higher and now that is five notes lower. Don't do it this way, as if you make a mistake somewhere then all the notes that follow will tend to be incorrect too. Remember to *always* relate the note you are looking at to where Middle C is.

Looking again at the above extract, the first note is the D below Middle C, in the Tenor Clef that would go on the bottom line. The second note is an A, it is the one below Middle C. This needs to go on the middle line of the Tenor Clef. Between the seventh and eighth notes there is a Treble Clef. This means that all of the notes from that point are read in the Treble. Thus the eighth note is an F - the one above Middle C. This would sit above the top line in the Tenor. Once you have carried out the process for all fourteen notes, you should have the two bars that are shown below.



This is certainly easier to read than the first extract, as there are no changes of clef nor ledger lines. Let's consider those lines now!

Ledger Lines

At their simplest, ledger lines are short horizontal lines that can extend the staff for high or low notes. They are always the same distance apart as the staff lines and are always parallel to it. If ledger lines were not used it would be a matter of guess work as to which notes were intended by a composer if they went way above or below a staff. At Grade 5 level you need to be able to read up to and including three ledger lines. The two diagrams on this page show all of the notes on ledger lines that are affixed to the Treble and Bass Clefs that you will need to know. There are twelve notes lower and twenty notes higher than these on most pianos.

D E F G A B C D E F G A B C D E

A B C D E F G A B C D E F G A B C

Middle C

The above diagram shows a *Great Staff* or *Grand Staff*. The Treble and Bass Staves have combined with an extra (red) staff line which is where Middle C is. This is the reason we have a note called Middle C - it is in the middle of the Treble and Bass Clefs. It is not the middle note on a piano as that distinction belongs jointly to the E and F above Middle C. The diagram has been set out this way so that it is easy to see that the names of the notes in the Bass Clef are purely a continuation of the names of the notes in the Treble Clef. It might help you to think of the two Clefs as one eleven-line staff. In order to make the Grand Staff easier to read, the line between the two staves was removed and the two staves were spaced further apart. This is exactly like the diagram below:

F G A B Middle C D E F G

These nine notes are shown as being in both the treble and bass clefs. The notes correspond with the note they are above or below in the other clef. Sometimes a composer might change clef to make a series of low or high notes easier to read (like in the extract on the previous page) and sometimes he/she might use ledger lines. There is one further method.



This top example looks a little tricky to play at first! Working out all of those ledger lines looks daunting. There is not a clef that shows higher pitched notes than the Treble Clef, so composers and arrangers can use **octave higher** *8va* (*ottava* is Italian for octave) or **octave lower** signs: *8vb* (*ottava bassa*). You can see how the second example is so much easier to read. The word *loco* can be used to cancel an octave higher/lower sign if no dashed or dotted lines have been printed. If a section of a piece needs to be played two octaves higher or lower than actually written, then *15ma* or *15mb* is utilised. These latter terms are not part of the Grade 5 Theory syllabus though.

Here are some famous mnemonics with pictures that you might have heard of. They could help you to memorise the names of notes more easily.



Every	Good	Boy	Deserves	Friends	F	A	C	E
Green	Buses	Drive	Fast	Always	All	Cows	Eat	Grass



Accidentals

There are *five* different accidentals.

#	sharp	raises a note by one semitone
b	flat	lowers a note by one semitone
𝄌	double sharp	raises a note by two semitones
𝄍	double flat	lowers a note by two semitones
♮	natural	Restores a note to normal pitch that has been either sharpened or flattened previously

Remember:

- ⇒ Accidentals are written to the left of the note to which they belong.
- ⇒ They are written in the same space/line as the note to which they belong.
- ⇒ Once an accidental has appeared in a bar, it remains in force until the end of that bar unless it is cancelled.
- ⇒ An accidental applies only to the line or space on which it is written.
- ⇒ To cancel a 𝄌 or 𝄍 use a # or b.
- ⇒ On a piano, not all #s and bs are black notes, e.g. consider E# and Cb.
- ⇒ Accidentals exist in conjunction with the key signature.

Depending on who I talk to, people call me by different names: “Mr Stephenson” in a school, “John” to pupils at home and my family and “Dad” to my son. The names of notes can be like that too. Depending on the context, I might play a C sharp or a D flat, a G flat or a F sharp, a B sharp or a C natural, an F double sharp or a G natural. On a piano I would practically speaking be playing the same note (though string, woodwind and brass players would make subtle changes), but theoretically they are definitely different notes. This is termed **enharmonic equivalents**.

When you need to find one in an exam, you should decide on what the given note is called first of all. Write down on the rough paper the letter immediately above and below the given note. Often there may be two alternative ‘spellings’ for the given note. One would have a single accidental and the other would have a double one. Look at the examples on the right.

A sharp
 B flat
 C sharp
 D flat
 B natural
 C flat
 A double sharp
 F
 G double flat
 E sharp

Make sure that you write your new note at the correct pitch - often people can write the correct letter and accidental, but at an octave too high or too low. Remember to take the key signature into consideration too.

Degrees of the Scale

Each of the eight notes (or degrees) of a scale has a technical term associated with it. You will need to remember all of them.

8th	Tonic
7th	Leading note
6th	Submediant
5th	Dominant
4th	Subdominant
3rd	Mediant
2nd	Supertonic
1st	Tonic

You may know that the prefix *sub* means *beneath* or *under*. The subdominant is not described like that due to it being under the dominant. It is described as *sub* due to its relationship with the Tonic. It is five notes beneath the tonic just as the dominant is five notes above the tonic. Similarly the submediant is three notes beneath the tonic just as the mediant is three notes above the tonic.

Let me know if there is anything you don't understand on these five pages.