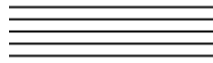


Reading Music on Guitar

Part I - Standard Notation Primer

Music is written on what is called a **staff**, which consists of five lines and the four spaces between those lines.



Music for the guitar is written in **treble clef**. Treble clef is also referred to as the G clef with the center of the clef circling the G note on the 2nd line up.



Music is divided into sections called **measures** by vertical lines called **bar lines**.



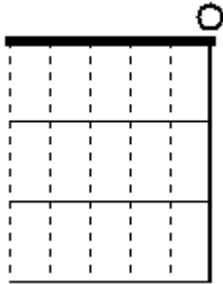
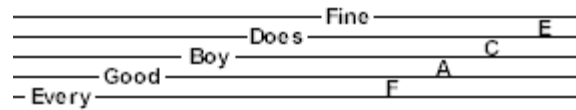
At the end of a song is a **final double bar line** which indicates the end of the piece.



A **repeat sign** is used to play a section of music again. (Looks the same as a final double bar line only with 2 dots.)



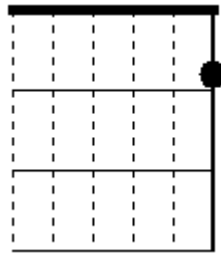
Here is the dumb little saying to remember the names of the notes on the staff. Avoid it as much as possible.



E 1st String, Open



open



F 1st String, 1st Fret



first finger



G 1st String, 3rd Fret



third finger

The following are some basics of both right and left hand position.

1. Hold your pick between your first finger and thumb.



2. Your left hand thumb should be flat in the middle of the neck behind the 1st fret bar. Do not put the palm of your left hand on the back of the guitar at any time. Your thumb will move for different techniques, but in the beginning this allows all of your fingers to reach the notes easily.



3. Use the tips of your fingers and play as close to the fret bar as possible. (fig. 1) If you are too far back in the fret you will not get a good sound. (fig. 2) If you are on top of the fret bar you will not get a good sound. (fig. 3)



4. When playing from F to G keep your 1st finger down on the F note and stretch up to G.

5. Pick from your wrist and lightly touch the palm of your right hand near your thumb lightly on the lower strings (5th and 6th). This helps you keep your place with your right hand, and also helps control noise that can occur from the vibration of the lower strings. Your hand should eventually "float" on the surface of the strings and not anchor at any one place. (Ten different guitar teachers will tell you ten different ways to hold your hands, so in the end find what is most comfortable for you.)

6. Tap your foot on the beat. This is a good habit to get into from the beginning. That way later on when you are playing more complex rhythms, you can keep your foot tapping on a [Under every exercise is a link to a MIDI file that you can use as a background to play along with.](#)

getting started



mixed up



Quarter Notes receive 1 beat

Half Notes receive 2 beats



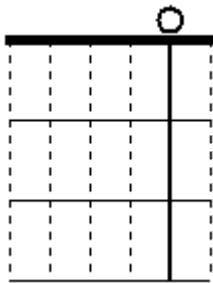
quarter and half note exercise



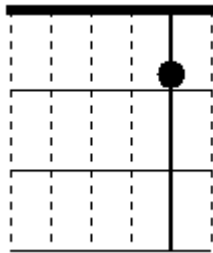
3 notes, 2 rhythms



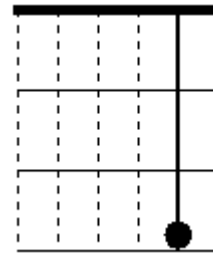
more 3 notes, 2 rhythms



B 2nd String, Open



C 2nd String, 1st Fret



D 2nd String, 3rd Fret



open



first finger



third finger

Under every exercise is a link to a MIDI file that you can use as a background to play along with.

Getting Started on the 2nd String



mixed-up 2nd string



2 rhythms on 2nd string



The lines and spaces of the staff are like stair steps. In the next exercise the first note is B. The next note moves up to the next space which is C. As you go up to the next line or space the names of the notes go up in the alphabet. As you go down, the letter names go down. One stupid but very important thing you should do right now is to learn you alphabet from A to G forward and backwards. Forwards hopefully is not a problem. Become as comfortable going backwards. This will help a great deal in you musical endeavors.

Be sure to learn the names of the notes both on the staff and on the guitar, not just where you put your fingers.

scale on strings 1 and 2



thirds on strings 1 and 2



first melody



Dotted Half Notes receive 3 beats

Whole Notes receive 4 beats



A **dot** placed after a note will increase its value by half the original.

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \text{♩} & + & \cdot & = & \text{♩} \cdot \\ 2 & + & 1 & = & 3 \end{array}$$



A **time signature** consists of two numbers placed at the beginning of a piece of music.

The top number tells you how many beats are in each measure.

The bottom number will tell you which rhythm gets one beat. (The 4 stands for the quarter note getting one beat)

In the beginning the only numbers you will see in the top are 3 or 4. In the bottom you will only see a 4 at this point. (more on time signature later)

$\frac{3}{4}$ time rhythm exercise

Two staves of musical notation for a 3/4 time rhythm exercise. The first staff contains a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, half, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The second staff contains a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, half, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter.

$\frac{4}{4}$ time rhythm exercise

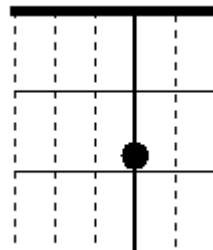
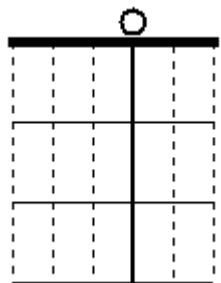
Two staves of musical notation for a 4/4 time rhythm exercise. The first staff contains a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, half, half, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The second staff contains a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, half, half, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter.

the waltz

Two staves of musical notation for 'the waltz' in 3/4 time. The first staff contains a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, half, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The second staff contains a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, half, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter.

$\frac{4}{4}$ tune

Two staves of musical notation for a 4/4 tune. The first staff contains a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, half, half, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The second staff contains a sequence of notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, half, half, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter.



3rd string etude



Pickup notes are notes that lead into the first full measure of a song. They are counted like the end of a normal measure. The other beats that are missing are sometimes found in the last measure of the piece. If you count the number of beats in the first and last measure, together they equal one complete measure.

A **Tie** is a curved line that connects two notes of the same pitch. The note is held for the value of both rhythms added together. (The second note is not played) In this example a half note is tied to a quarter note, equaling a value of 3 beats. The reason that a dotted half note is not used here is because you can't have more than 4 beats in a measure in 4/4 time, so you have to split the 3 beats between 2 measures.



When The Saints Go Marching In



Thirds on strings 1 thru 4

Two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff contains a sequence of eighth notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The second staff contains a sequence of eighth notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3.

Strings 2 thru 4

Two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff contains a sequence of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The second staff contains a sequence of quarter notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3.

4th String Etude

Two staves of musical notation in 3/4 time. The first staff contains a sequence of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The second staff contains a sequence of quarter notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3.

Symbols used to indicate silence in music are called **rests**. When a rest is used the string must be stopped from ringing for the indicated period of time. There are two ways that this can be achieved:

1. Place your right hand on the strings that need to be stopped.
2. Use your left hand fingers to stop the strings from ringing. If you are fretting a note lift your finger up so that is still touching the string but not pressing down against the fret.

Two staves of musical notation illustrating different types of rests. The first staff shows a quarter rest, a half rest, a dotted half rest, and a whole rest. The second staff shows a quarter rest, a half rest, a dotted half rest, and a whole rest.

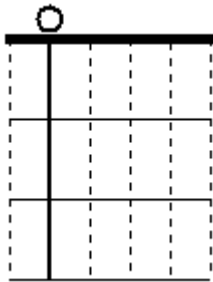
Quarter Rest Half Rest Dotted Half Rest Whole Rest

High A Note Exercise

Two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff contains a sequence of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The second staff contains a sequence of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.

The House of the Rising Sun

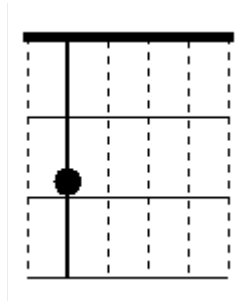
Five staves of musical notation in 3/4 time. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. Chords are indicated above the staff: Am, C, D, F. The second staff has chords Am, C, E7. The third staff has chords Am, C, D, F. The fourth staff has chords Am, E7, Am. The fifth staff is the final line of the piece.



A 5th String, Open



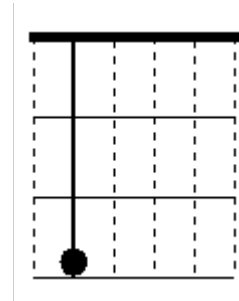
open



B 5th String, 2nd Fret



second finger



C 5th String, 3rd Fret



third finger

Under every exercise is a link to a MIDI file that you can use as a background to play along with.

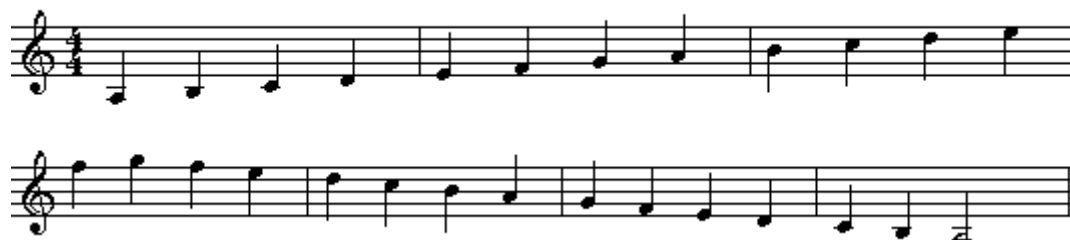
Getting Started on the 5th String



5th String Only



Scale on strings 1 thru 5



Strings 4 and 5





Strings 3 thru 5

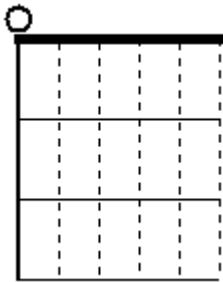
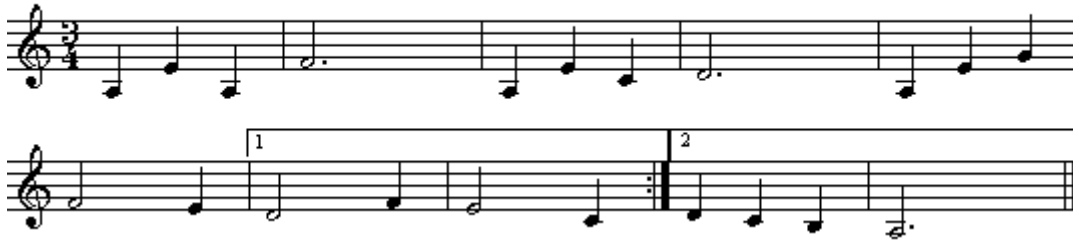


12 Bar Blues In A



First and Second Endings are used when part of the previous music is repeated but has a different ending. At the finish of the first ending (the measures under the bracket with a 1) there is a **repeat sign**  at which you will return to either the beginning of the piece or to a repeat sign that faces the other direction . The music is then played again, skipping the first ending and playing the second ending instead.

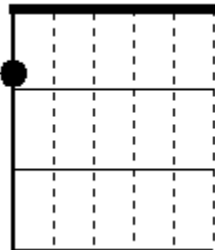
Melanchly Waltz



E 6th String, Open



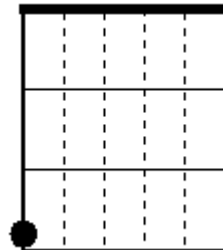
open



F 6th String, 1st Fret



first finger



G 6th String, 3rd Fret



third finger

Under every exercise is a link to a MIDI file that you can use as a background to play along with.

Getting Started on the 6th String



6th String Only



Scale on strings 1 thru 6



Strings 5 and 6



Strings 4 thru 6



A **sharp** (#) is a sign placed in front of a natural note which raises the pitch a half step (1 fret). There is a half step between **E-F** and **B-C** naturally, so that E# sounds the same as F, and B# sounds the same as C. For now think of these notes by their natural names only (F and C).

A sharp remains in effect for the entire measure, or until it is canceled by a **natural sign** (♮). Once you cross into the next measure the sharp is canceled out.

Sharps, flats and natural signs that temporarily change the pitch of a note are known as **accidentals**.



* Note that a **courtesy accidental** in parenthesis is often used in the next measure after a sharp of the same letter name is used. This is not necessary but is often done to avoid confusion.

In the following exercise play the last 2 notes (G# and A) with you 4th finger. For all other notes use 1 finger per fret (1st finger=1st fret, 2nd finger=2nd fret etc...) Be sure to name the notes to yourself as you play.

first position sharps



Below are the 5 most common major keys that guitar is played in. That does not mean that you should neglect the other keys, just make sure you know these first. As well as playing these as written, also try holding each root note (letter name C G D A E) of the scale for twice as long. This will help establish the root in your ear, and how all of the other note relate to the root.

Key of C Major



A **key signature** is used when certain notes are consistently sharp or flat in a piece of music. For example rather than placing a accidental in front of every occurrence of F# in the following scale the following is key signature that is placed just after the treble clef. This indicates that every F will be sharp (in all octaves)

G major



the F line goes right through the center of the sharp sign.

In this scale sharp the following (F)

Key of G Major



In this scale sharp the following (F, C)

Key of D Major



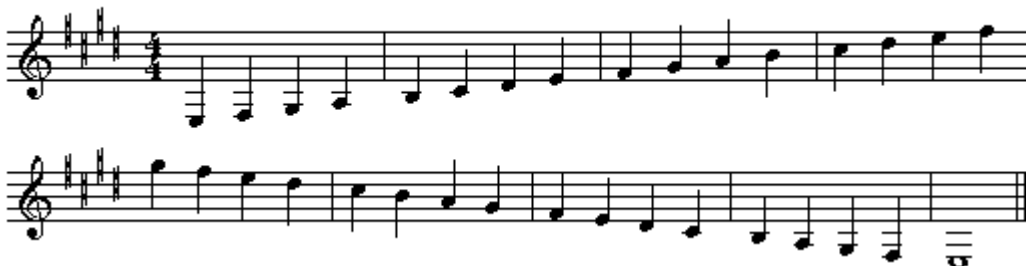
In this scale sharp the following (F, C, G)

Key of A Major



In this scale sharp the following (F, C, G, D)

Key of E Major



A flat (\flat) is a sign placed in front of a natural note which lowers the pitch a half step (1 fret). A lower case B (\flat) is used to indicate a flat sign in text documents. There is a half

Quarter Notes receive 1 beat



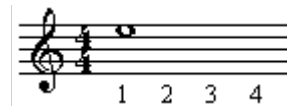
Half Notes receive 2 beats



Dotted Half Notes receive 3 beats

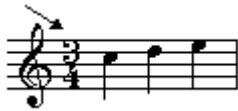


Whole Notes receive 4 beats



A **dot** placed after a note will increase it's value by half the original.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \text{p} + \cdot = \text{p}\cdot \\
 2 + 1 = 3
 \end{array}$$

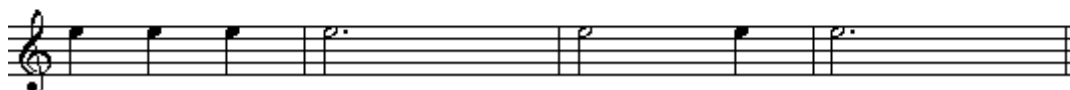


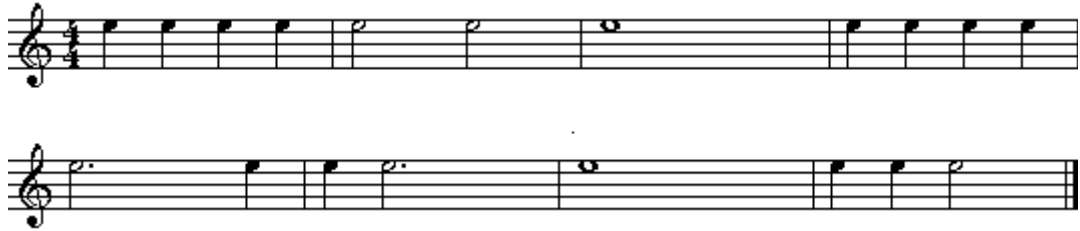
A **time signature** consists of two numbers placed at the beginning of a piece of music.

The top number tells you how many beats are in each measure.

The bottom number will tell you which rhythm gets one beat. (The 4 stands for the quarter note getting one beat)

In the beginning the only numbers you will see in the top are 3 or 4. In the bottom you will only see a 4 at this point. (more on time signature later)





Quarter Notes receive 1 beat

Half Notes receive 2 beats



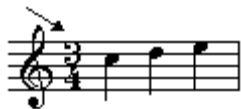
Dotted Half Notes receive 3 beats

Whole Notes receive 4 beats



A **dot** placed after a note will increase it's value by half the original.

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 \text{♩} & + & \text{·} & = & \text{♩} \\
 2 & + & 1 & = & 3
 \end{array}$$



A **time signature** consists of two numbers placed at the beginning of a piece of music.

The top number tells you how many beats are in each measure.


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In the beginning the only numbers you will see in the top are 3 or 4. In the bottom you will only see a 4 at this point. (more on time signature later)



All of the exercises are demonstrated along with a metronome click.

Eighth Notes receive a 1/2 beat

 --- 2 or more 8th notes are **beamed** together

 --- single 8th notes use a **flag**

▣ = the symbol for picking down

∨ = the symbol for picking up

8th notes are counted like below (1 & 2 & etc..)



& is the half way point between beat 1 and 2

When picking 8th notes pick down on the beat (1 2 3 4) and up on the "&".

8th note exercise



Dotted Quarter Notes receive 1 1/2 beats

A **dot** placed after a note will increase it's value by half the original.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \text{♩} + \text{·} = \text{♩·} \\
 1 + 1/2 = 1 1/2
 \end{array}$$

The easiest way to get a grasp on rhythms is to start to recognize pattern that reoccur. Below are 2 different 2 beat rhythmic patterns that use dotted quarter notes. If you can start to see these patterns instead of just a mess of different rhythms, then you are on your way.

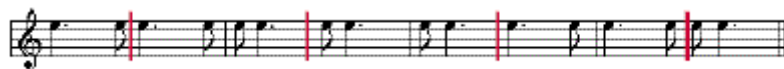
Pattern #1



Pattern #2



The following exercise uses these 2 patterns. In the top line, half the measure is one of the 2 patterns, and half is either a half note or 2 quarter notes. In the bottom line the are only the 2 patterns. It can look like a big mess until you are able to see the patterns.



dotted quarter note exercise

