

Learn How to Read Sheet Music



Presented by Andy Watkins

Notes for Music

Sheet music, the written form of music notes, may appear very complex to the untrained eye. While reading notes for music is like learning a whole new language, it is actually much less complicated than you may think. We will discuss how to read music notes.



Aim

To give you a basic understanding of music notation

And help you to know what you are looking at when you have a piece of music in front of you

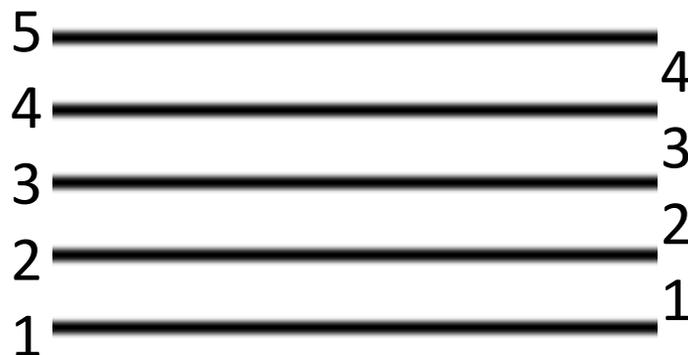
Today we will cover (some very briefly)

- **The Stave**
- **Treble Clef & Note positions**
- **Bass Clef & Note positions**
- **Leger Lines**
- **Accidentals**
- **Measures**
- **Key Signatures**
- **Piano Keyboard**
- **Scales**
- **Stems**
- **Circle of Fifths**
- **On-line exercises**

It may be beneficial & actually recommend you to take notes, but a copy of this presentation is available

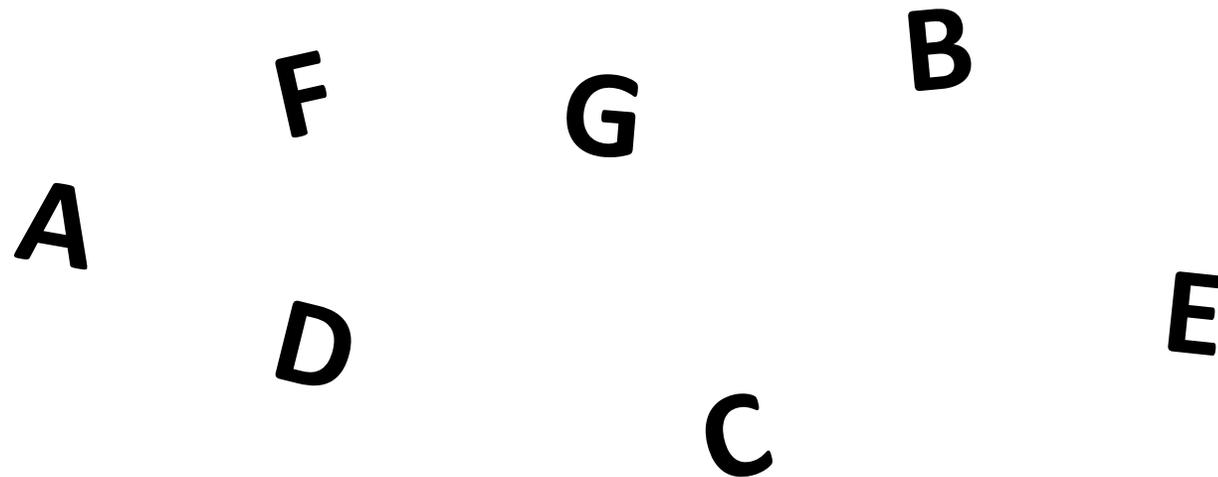
Stave (Staff in US)

The foundation of the written musical language is the stave. It is made up of five lines and four spaces. The lines are numbered 1-5 starting from the bottom line. The spaces are numbered 1-4 starting with the bottom space (in between lines 1 and 2).



Clefs and Note Names

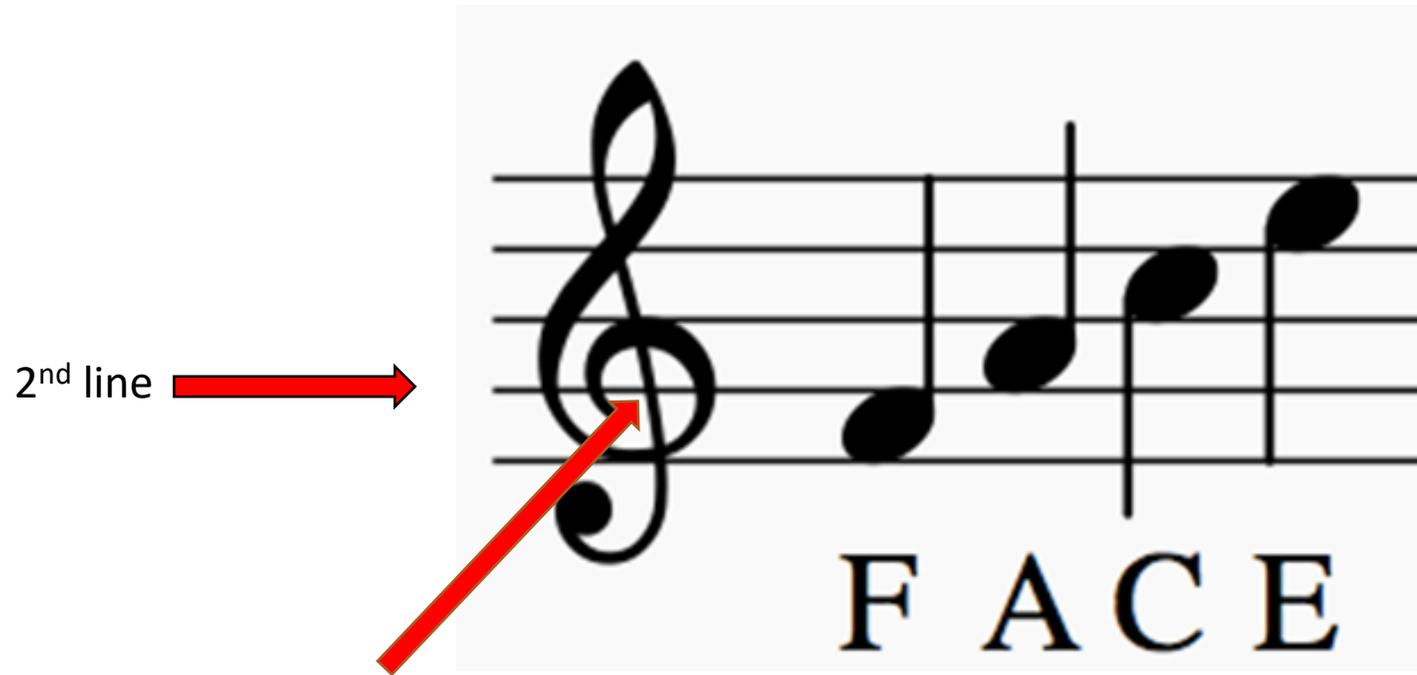
Each line and space of the staff correspond to a musical pitch, which is determined by the clef. Music notes are named after the first seven letters of the alphabet: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. The two clefs that are primarily used are the treble clef and bass clef.



Treble Clef

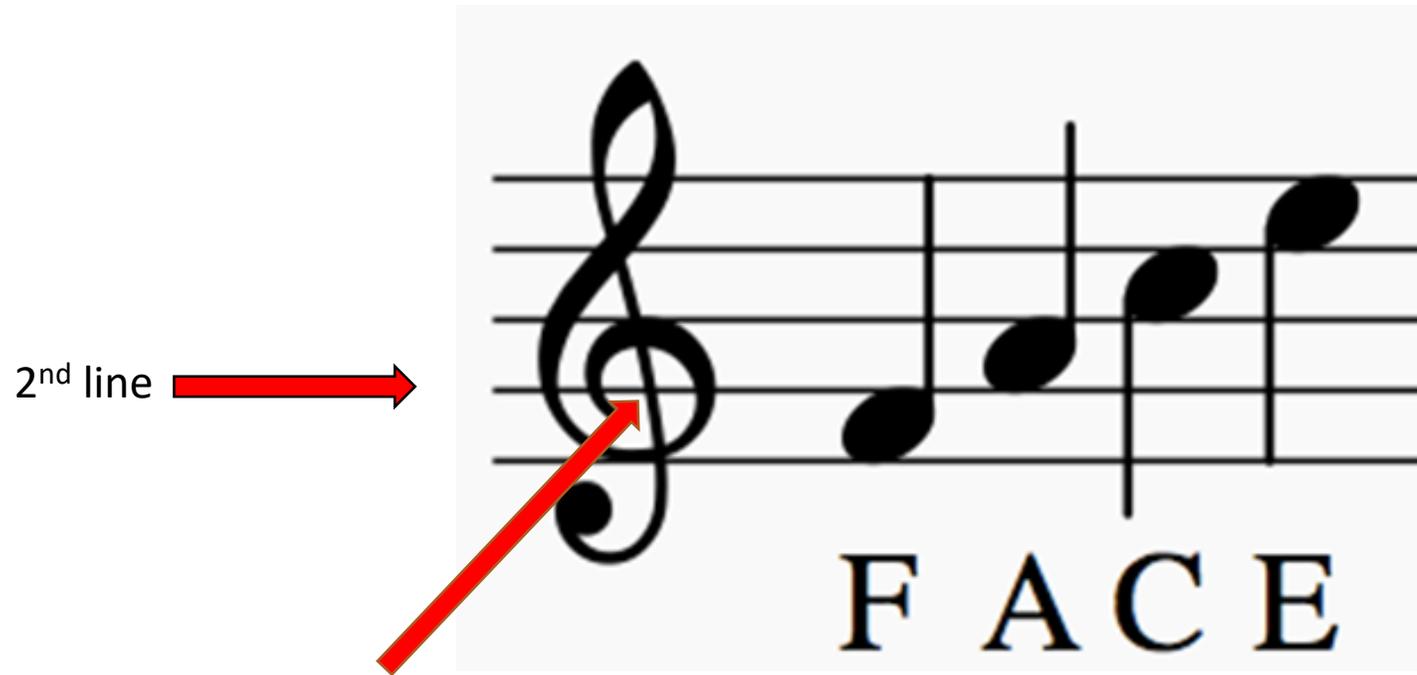
The treble clef is also known as the 'G-clef'. This is because the curve in the clef encircles the second line of the staff, which is called a 'G' on the treble clef staff. The treble clef is used by instruments that have higher registers, like the flute, violin and trumpet. The higher registers of the piano are notated in the treble clef as well. For beginning pianists, notes on the treble clef staff will be played with the right hand.

The note names on the spaces of the treble clef spell out F-A-C-E.



The curve in the clef encircles the 2nd line

The note names on the spaces of the treble clef spell out F-A-C-E.



2nd line

The curve in the clef encircles the 2nd line

The note names on the lines of the treble clef are E-G-B-D-F. Some mnemonics to help you remember this are “Every Good Boy Does Fine”, “Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge”, or “Elvis’s Guitar Broke Down Friday”.



Come up with your own mnemonics
To help you remember

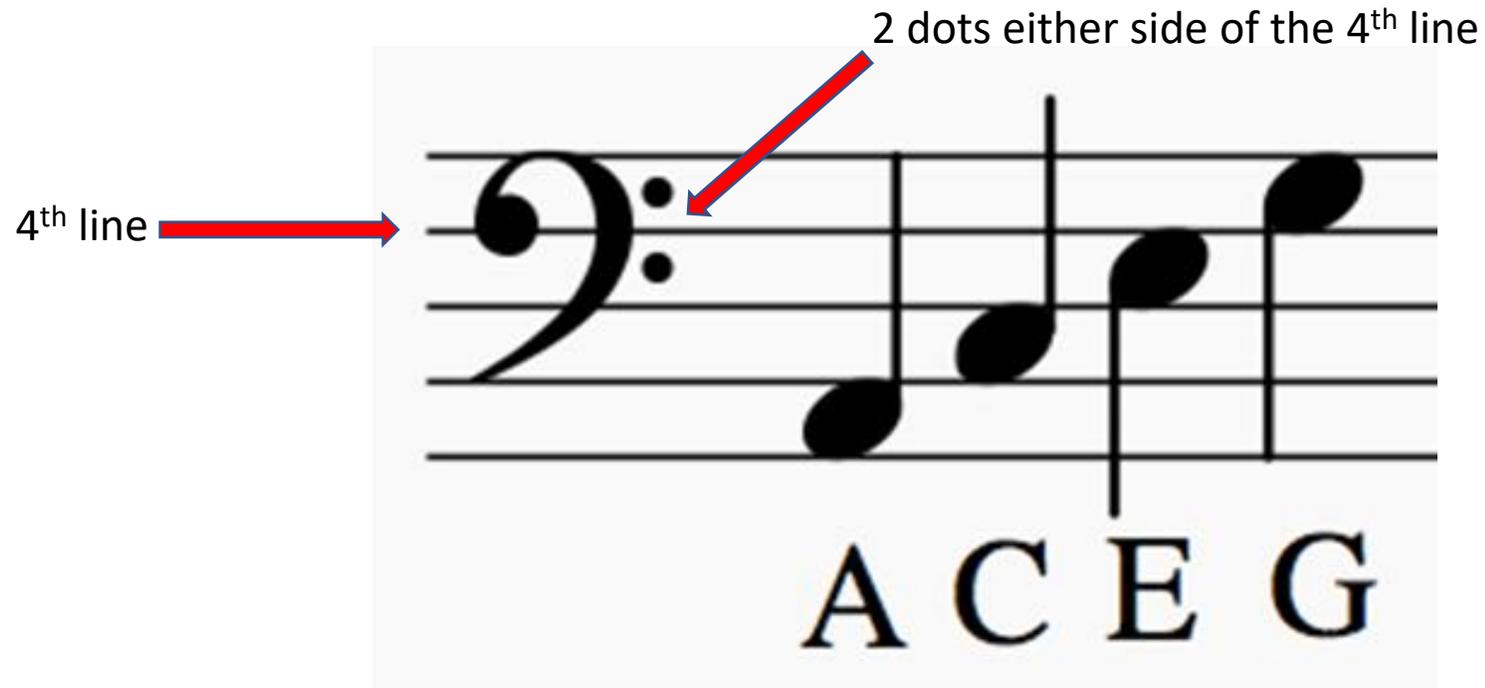


Bass Clef

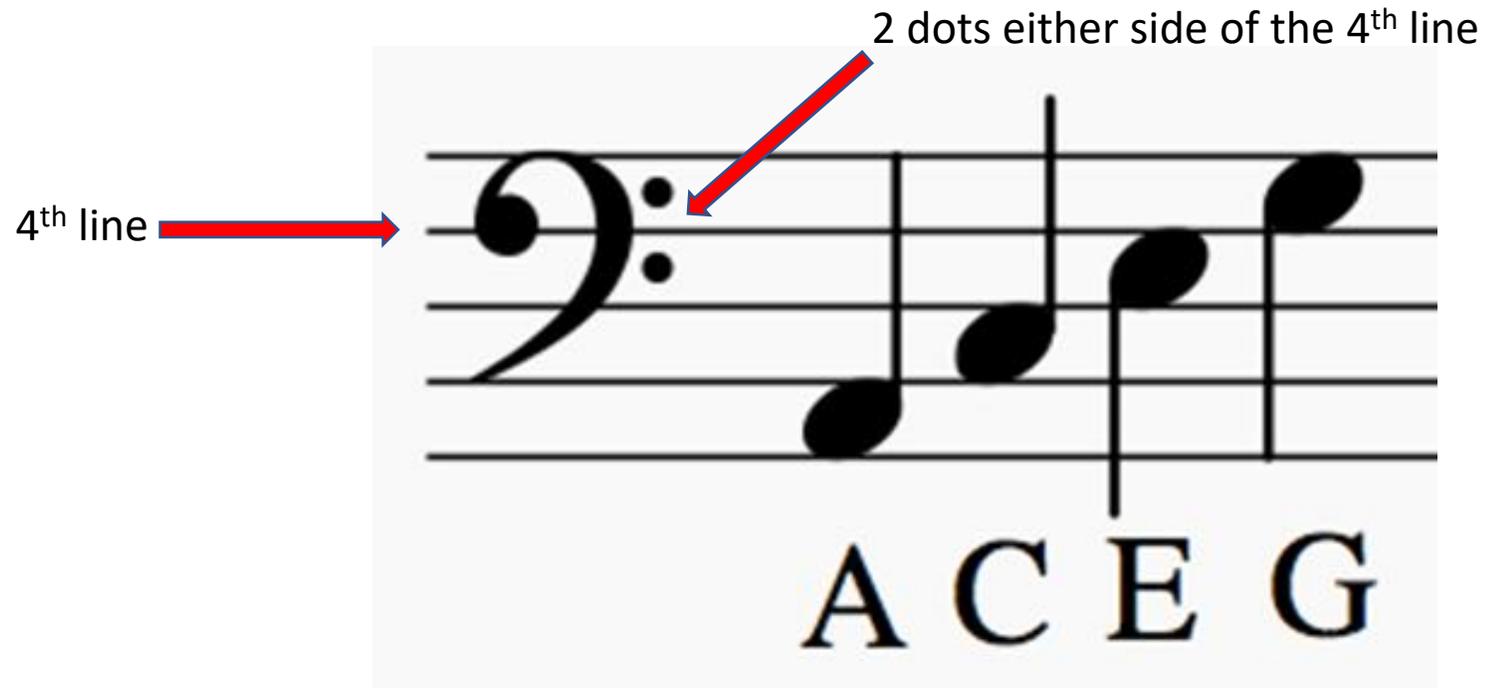
The bass clef is also known as the 'F-Clef' because the fourth line of the stave passes between the two dots. The note located on this line of the bass clef stave is an 'F'. In early music notation, hundreds of years ago, this clef sometimes moved around. The 'F' was located on whichever line passed between the two dots. In other words, the F might have been on the third line instead of the fourth line! Today, the 'F-Clef' does not move around and is known interchangeably as the bass clef.

As its name indicates, the bass clef is used by instruments with lower registers, like the cello, trombone or bassoon. The lower registers of the piano are notated in the bass clef. For beginning pianists, notes on the bass clef stave will be played with the left hand.

The note names on the spaces of the bass clef staff are A-C-E-G.
Some helpful mnemonics to remember this are “All Cows Eat Grass”
or “All Cars Eat Gas”.



The note names on the spaces of the bass clef staff are A-C-E-G. Some helpful mnemonics to remember this are “All Cows Eat Grass” or “All Cars Eat Gas”.



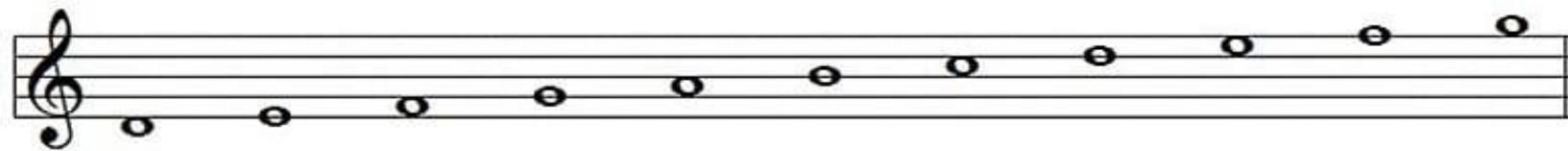
The note names on the lines of the bass clef staff are G-B-D-F-A.
Some helpful mnemonics to jog your memory are “Good Boys Do Fine Always” or “Good Boys Deserve Fudge Always



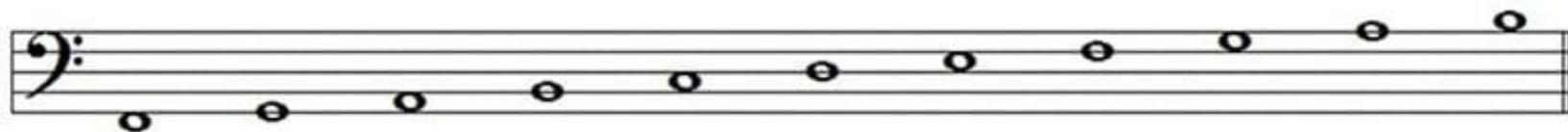
Come up with your own mnemonics
To help you remember



Recap of Notes



D E F G A B C D E F G

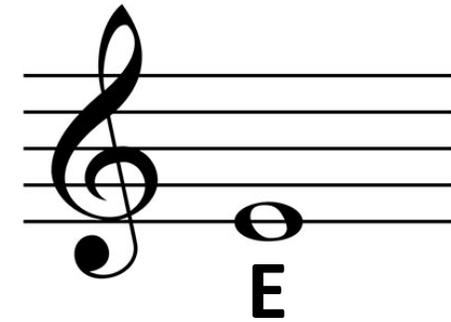
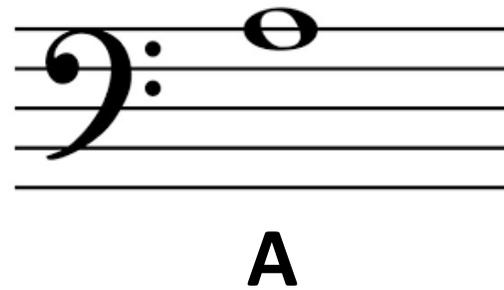
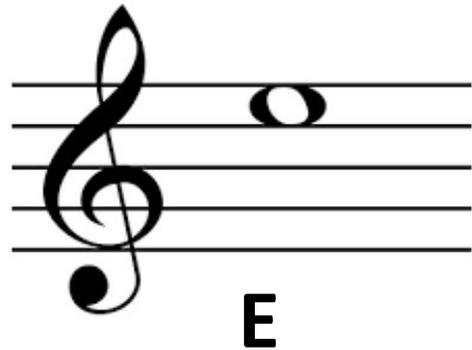
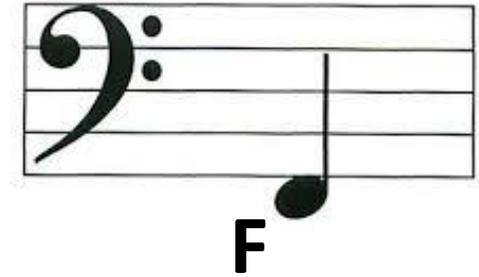
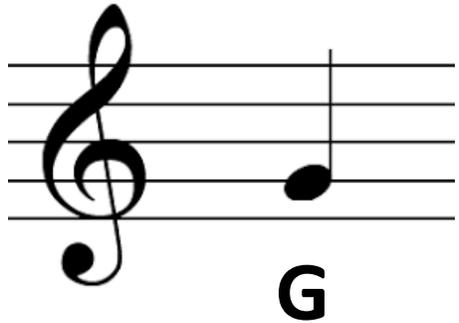


F G A B C D E F G A B

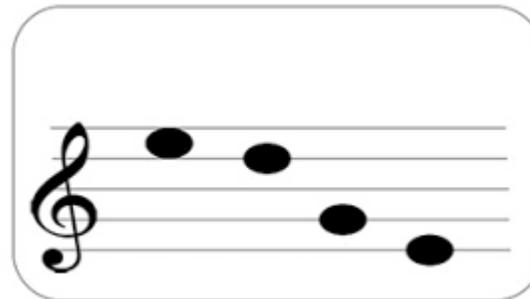
How well can you remember musical notes?



How well can you remember musical notes?



What word do these 4 notes spell?



E D G E

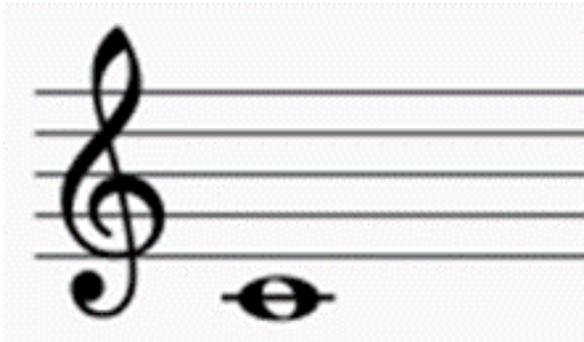


HOW DID YOU DO?

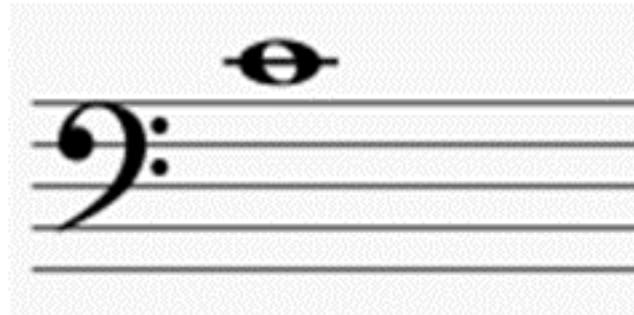


Ledger Lines

Ledger lines are used to notate pitches below or above the regular lines and spaces of the staff. 'Middle C', one of the first notes beginning music students learn, is located on a ledger line between the bass clef and treble clef staves. You can see how it is notated in both of these clefs in the examples below.



Middle C in treble clef

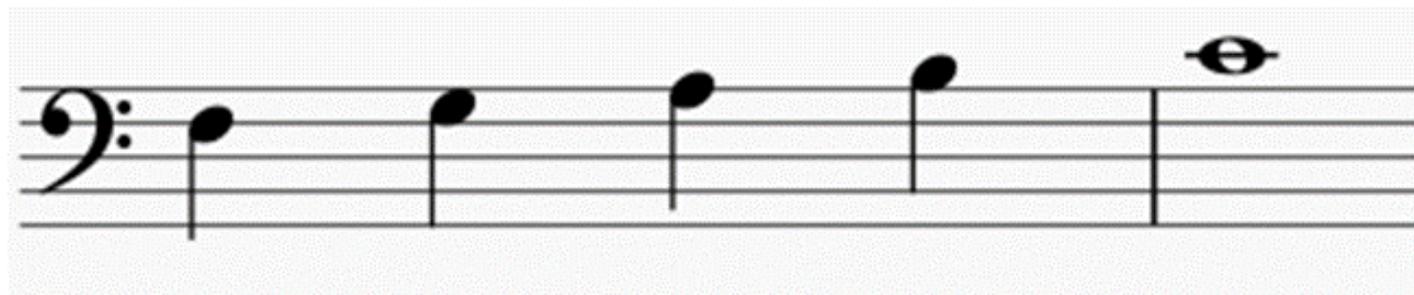


Middle C in bass clef

Ledger lines are used sometimes in music notation because it makes the notes easier to read than constantly changing between clefs. There can be an infinite number of ledger lines above or below any staff, but it can be difficult to read the music if there are more than three. At that point, it is usually wise to change clefs. For example, writing the following on the treble clef stave



is the same as writing



Accidentals

In Western music, an “accidental” may be added in front of the note to change the pitch by a semitone, or half-step.

The symbol pictured below is a flat sign. As its name suggests, this symbol is used to indicate that the pitch of the note should be lowered by a semitone.



Flat sign

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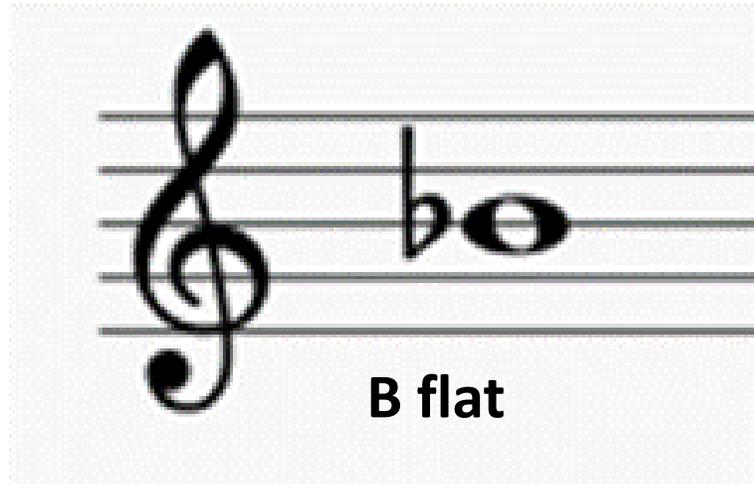
Flat sign

Accidentals

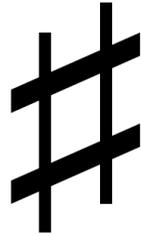
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The note pictured here is a B-flat.

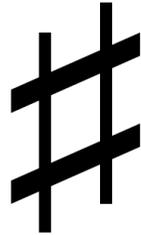


The symbol that looks like a pound sign or hashtag is a sharp sign. It indicates that the note it precedes should be raised by a semitone.



Sharp sign

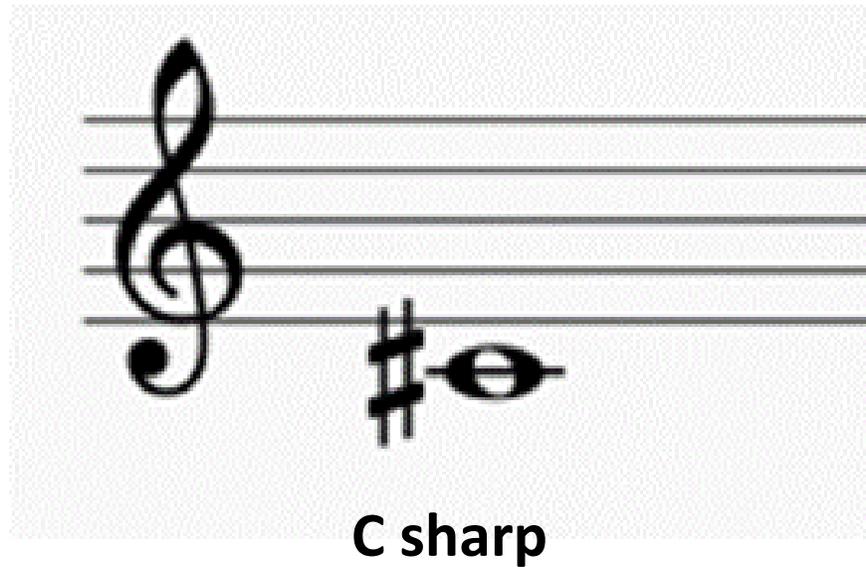
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Sharp sign

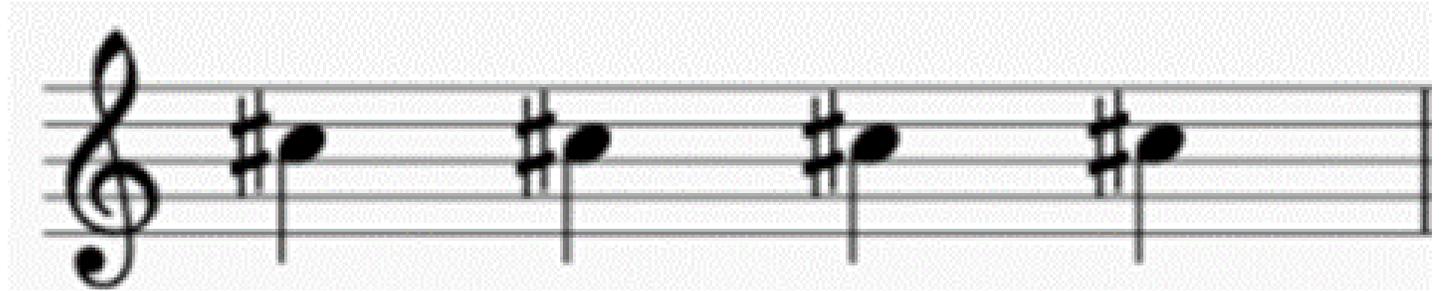
The symbol that looks like a pound sign or hashtag is a sharp sign. It indicates that the note it precedes should be raised by a semitone.

The note in the example is a C-sharp.

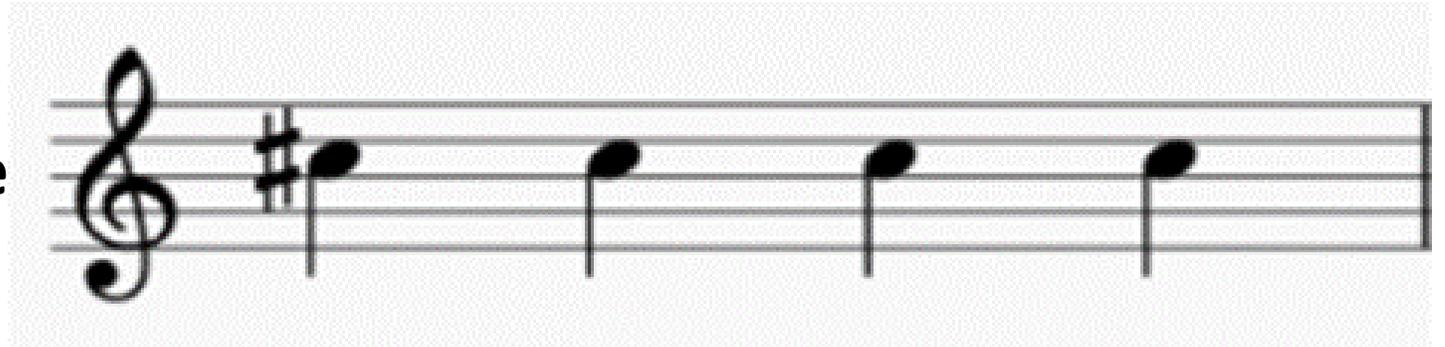


If a sharp or flat precedes a note at the beginning of a measure, that note remains sharp or flat for the entirety of the measure.

For example, instead of



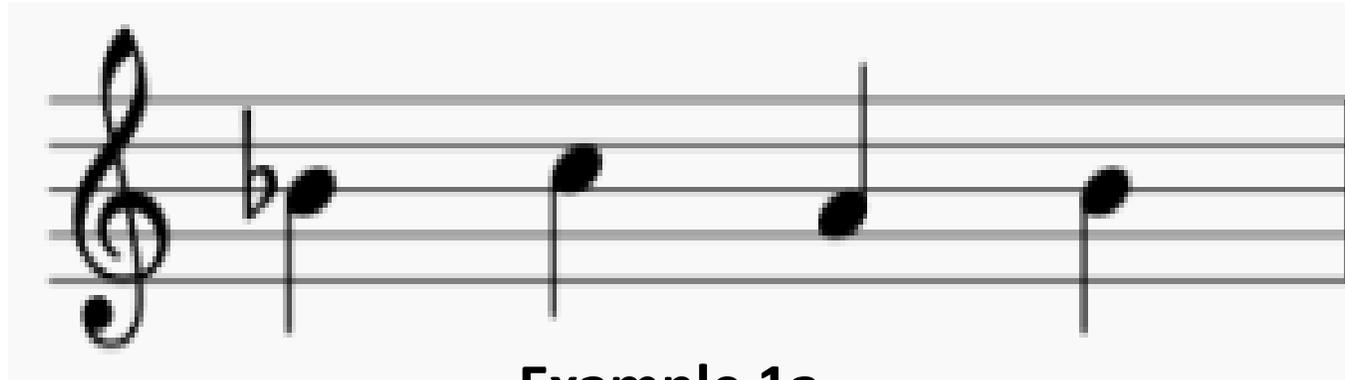
it is much easier to write



When played, these two measures would sound exactly the same.

Even if there are other notes in the measure, the note that is preceded by a sharp or flat remains sharp or flat in that measure.

The notes in example 1a below read B-flat, C, A, B-flat, even though the last note does not have the flat symbol before it.



Example 1a

If the note is no longer supposed to sound sharp or flat, it will be preceded by a natural sign.



Natural sign

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Natural sign

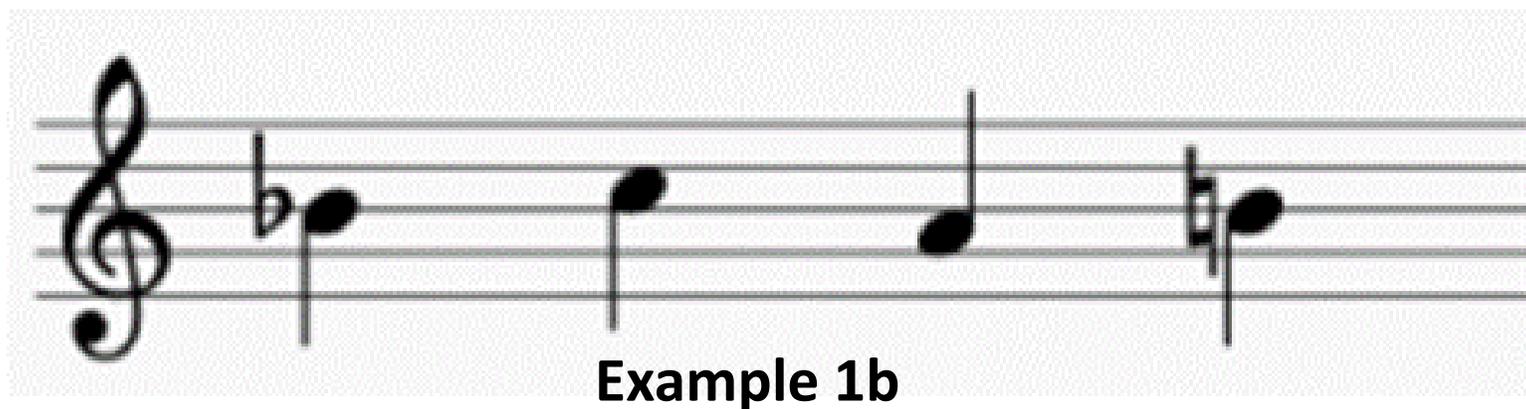
If the note is no longer supposed to sound sharp or flat, it will be preceded by a natural sign.

The note in the following example is an E-natural.

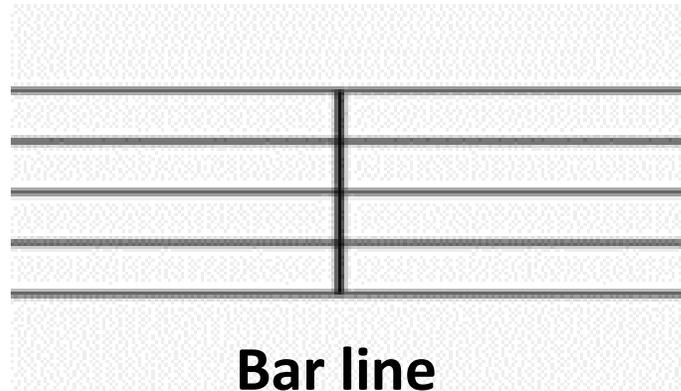


E natural

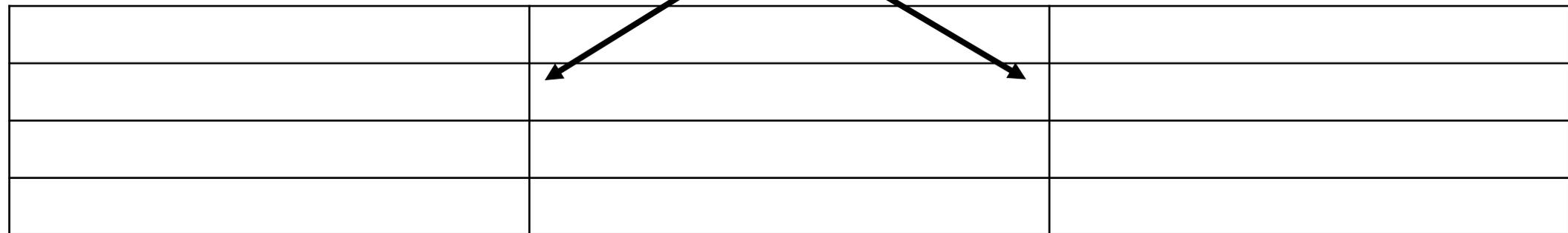
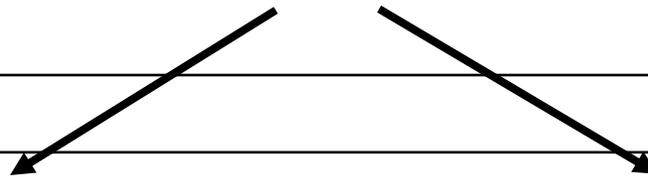
If we take Example 1a and wish to make the second B-flat a B-natural, it would look like Example 1b below, which reads B-flat, C, A, B-natural.



Remember, accidentals only apply within the given measure. Measures are separated by bar lines, a thin, vertical straight line that passes through the four spaces of the staff, as pictured below.



Bar line



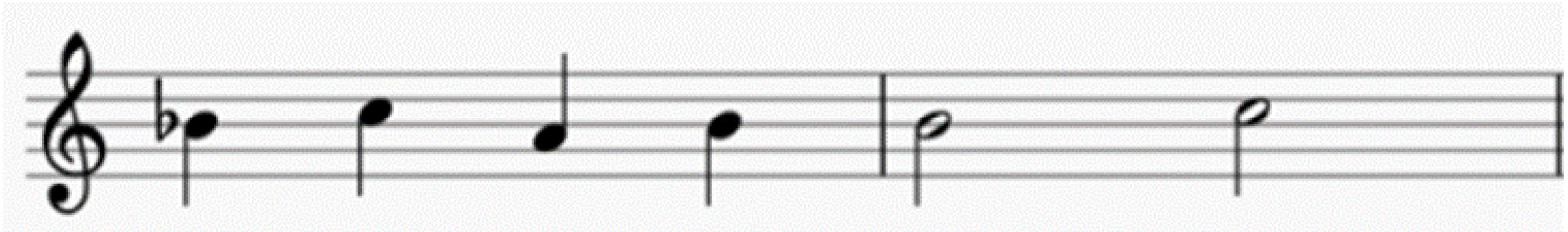
1 Measure

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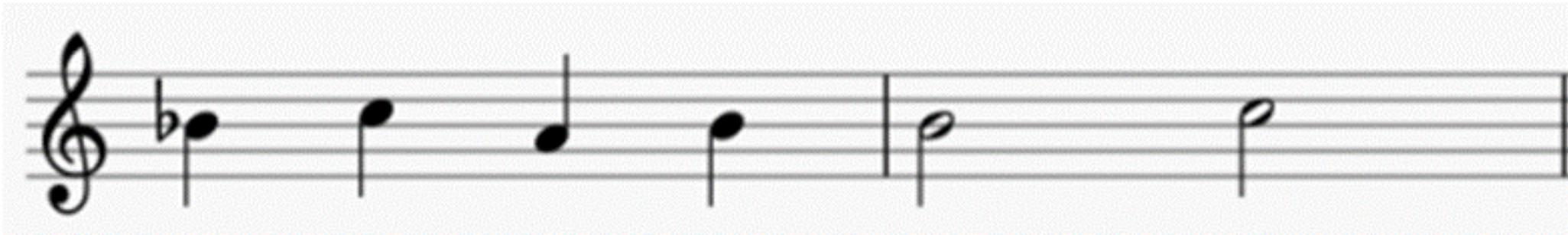


Take a look at Example 2a below. Because there is a bar line separating the fourth note from the fifth note, the fifth note is actually a B-natural, not a B-flat. The six notes below read B-flat, C, A, B-flat, B-natural, C.

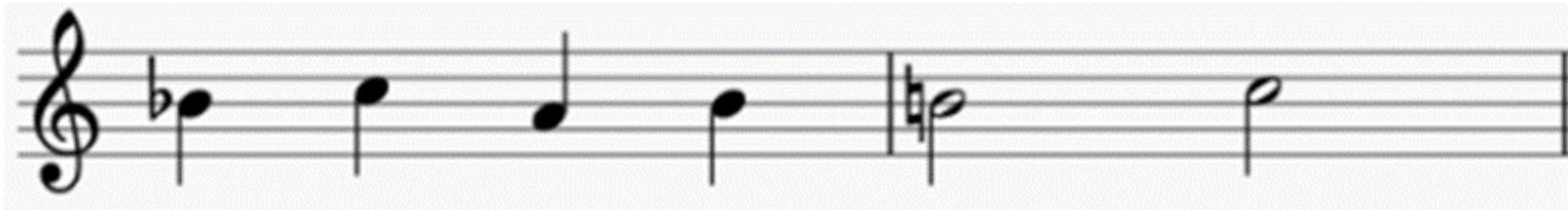


Example 2a

Sometimes a composer or arranger may put a “courtesy” natural (or sharp or flat) at the beginning of the measure, as in example 2b below. This is a friendly reminder that the previous accidental no longer applies. Both examples 2a and 2b would sound exactly the same when played.



Example 2a



Example 2b

Key Signatures

In many cases, a composer or arranger may wish for certain notes to be flat or sharp throughout a whole piece, unless otherwise indicated by a natural sign or other accidentals, of course! They will communicate this in sheet music by utilizing a key signature.

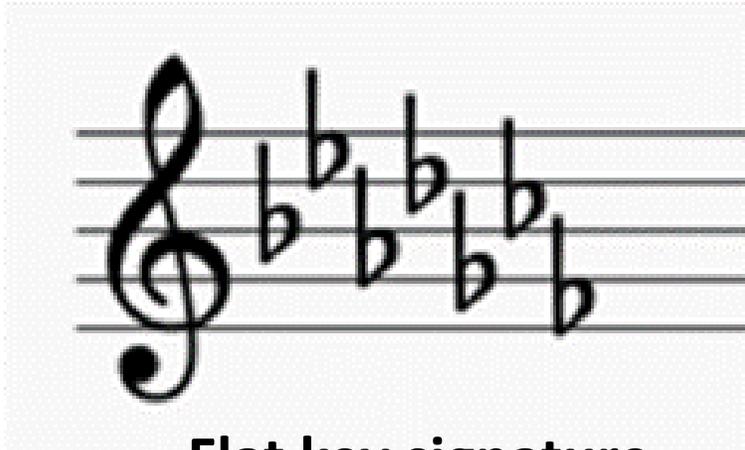
A key signature defines the key of the music and thus what flats or sharps are supposed to be played throughout the piece. This helps reduce the need for accidentals (i.e. placing a flat or sharp before a note in the music every time it occurs).

Now, there are some important rules to know about key signatures.

A key signature is made up of sharps or flats - not a combination of the two
Flats and sharps are added in a particular order

Flats in the key signature lower the pitch of notes on the corresponding line or space by a half-step (or semitone). This transfers to all octaves. Different keys are defined by the number of flats (or sharps) in the key signature, starting with the leftmost and moving to the right.

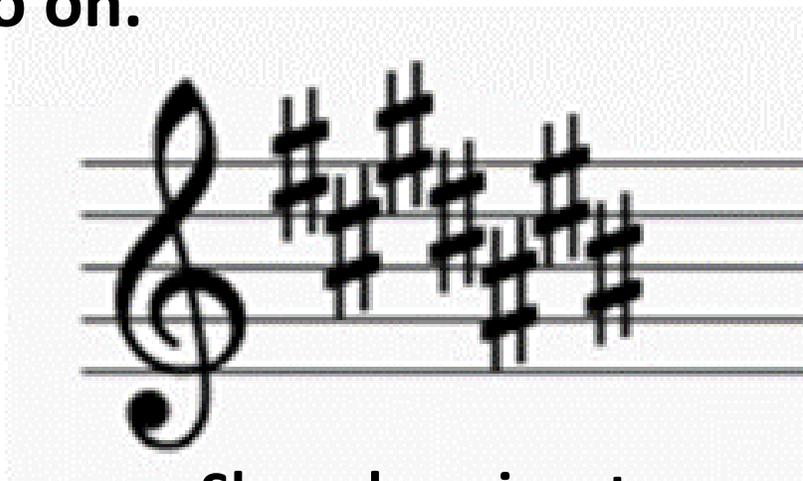
Flats are added to a key signature in the following order: BEADGCF. For example, if there is only one flat in the key signature, it will always be B-flat. If there are three flats, they will always be B-flat, E-flat and A-flat, and so on.



Flat key signature

Sharps in the key signature raise the pitch of notes on the corresponding line or space by a half-step. Different keys are defined by the number of sharps (or flats) in the key signature, also proceeding from left to right.

Sharps are added to a key signature in the following order: FCGDAEB. For example, if you have one sharp in the key signature, it will always be F-sharp. If you have four sharps, they will always be F-sharp, C-sharp, G-sharp and D-sharp, and so on.



Sharp key signature

A helpful way to remember the order in which flats and sharps are added to a key signature is to recognize that they are the reverse of each other. As you can see in the image below, flats are added to the notes from left to right and sharps are added to the notes from right to left.



Key Signature Questions



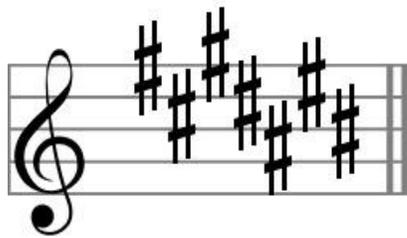
D sharp



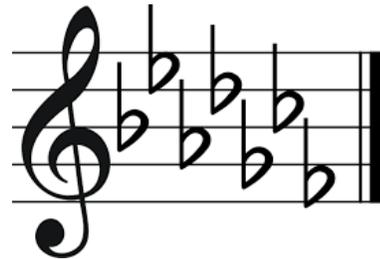
F sharp



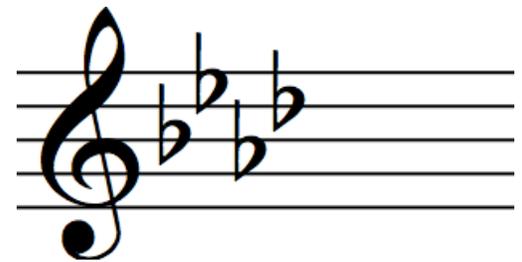
C sharp



B sharp



F minor



D minor

Remember!

Key Signature Questions



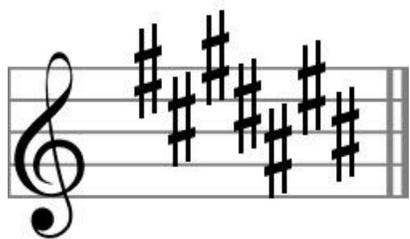
D sharp



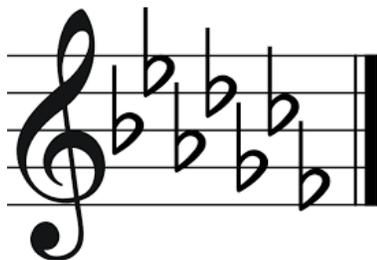
F sharp



C sharp



B sharp



F minor



D minor





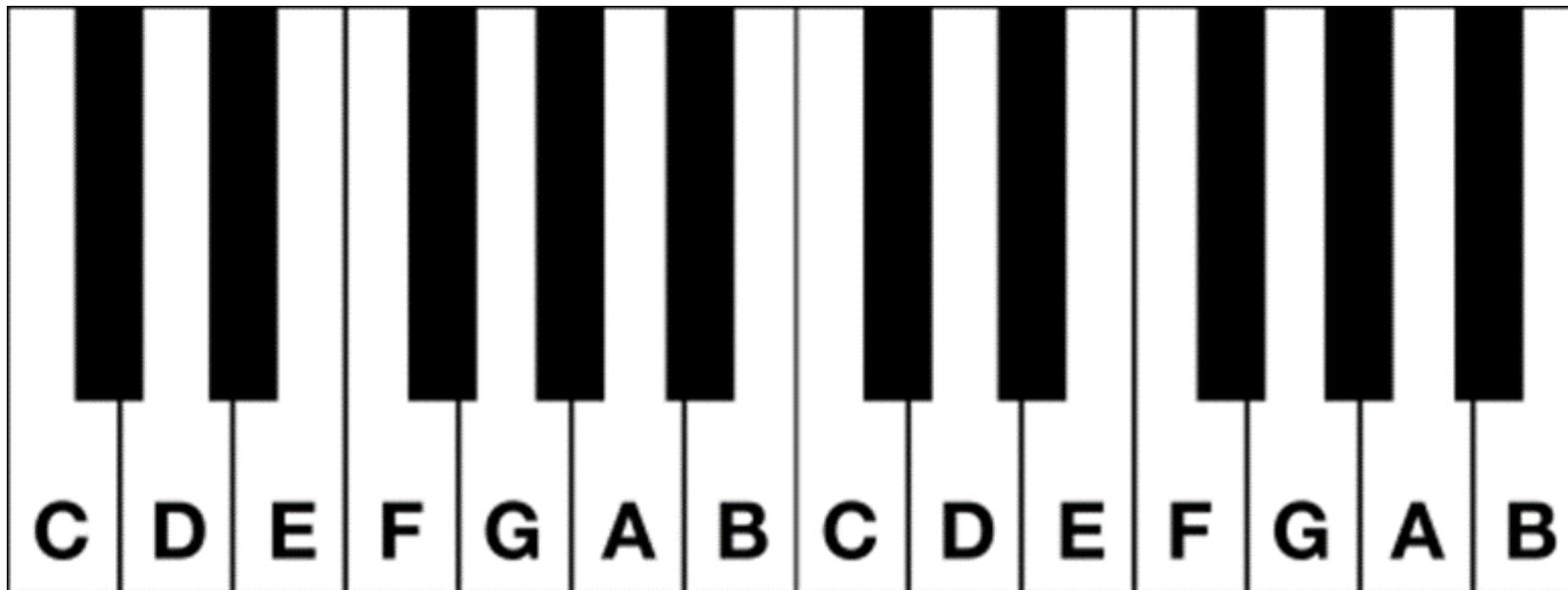
HOW DID YOU DO?



Piano Keyboard

Many musicians often get their start playing the piano or keyboard. In fact, students who go on to study music in college are required to take a piano proficiency course. It is helpful to have an understanding of the piano keyboard, especially when we discuss scales, in the next section.





This pattern repeats several times on a keyboard. There is a half-step between every key on the piano, whether you are moving from a white key to a black key or a white key to a white key. Even though there is no black key between E and F or between B and C, each pair is still only a half-step apart. Because there is a black between C and D, D and E, etc., we call the distance between those pairs of notes a whole-step.

Remember how we discussed earlier that a sharp raises the pitch of a note by a half-step and a flat lowers the pitch of a note by a half-step? The black keys perform this function on a piano..

For example, the black key you see between C and D sounds a C-sharp or a D-flat. Visually, it makes complete sense because the black key is positioned above the C and below the D. The note between D and E is a D-sharp or an E-flat, and so on

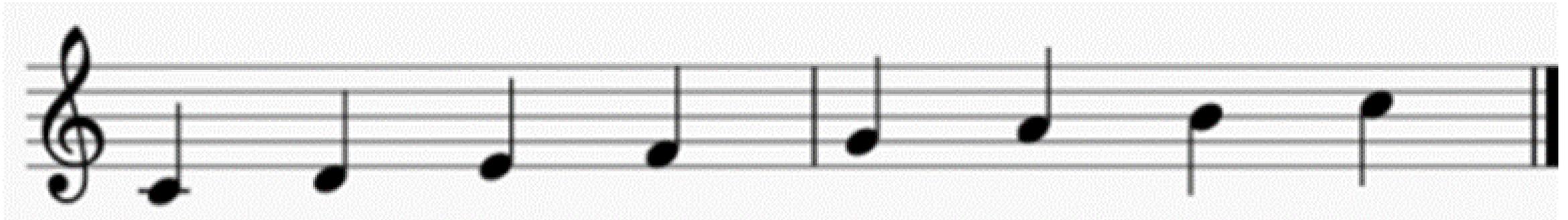
Now that you have a basic understanding of the piano keyboard and the distance between the notes, let's talk about scales!

Scales

The order in which flats or sharps are added to a key signature is so important because, in Western music, much of the melody and harmony of a piece is built using the notes of a single scale. Scales are a set of notes ordered by a combination of whole steps and half steps. There are several types of scales in the musical language; this article will focus on major and minor scales.

Major Scales

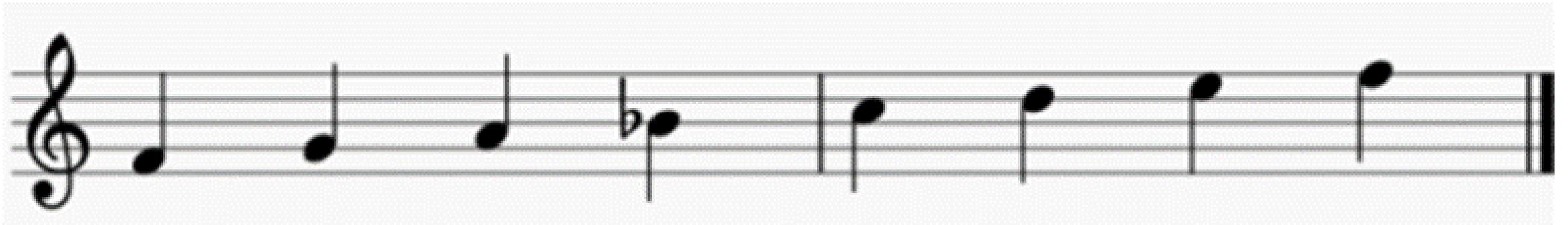
First, let's take a look at the written C-major scale. This particular scale has no sharps or flats. It would also be played solely on the white keys of a keyboard.



C-major scale

All major scales are comprised of the following pattern of tones: whole-step, whole-step, half-step, whole-step, whole-step, whole-step, half-step.

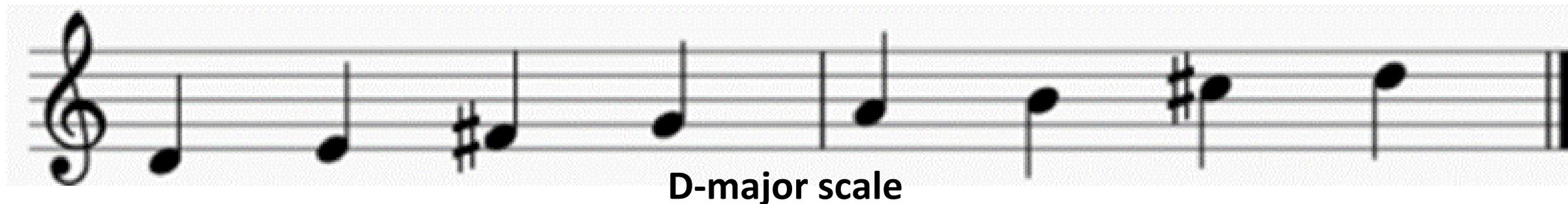
If you were to start the scale on a note other than C, you would need to add sharps or flats to maintain this pattern of tones. Let's take a look at the F-major scale.



F-major scale

As you now know, there is a whole-step between A and B, but in a major scale, that distance needs to be a half-step. Therefore, we lower the pitch of the B by a half-step to B-flat. (For the record, in a written scale, you never have two notes containing the same letter name. In the F-major scale, you would never see the B-flat written as an A-sharp.)

Now that we've looked at a scale with a flat, let's take a look at a sharp scale.

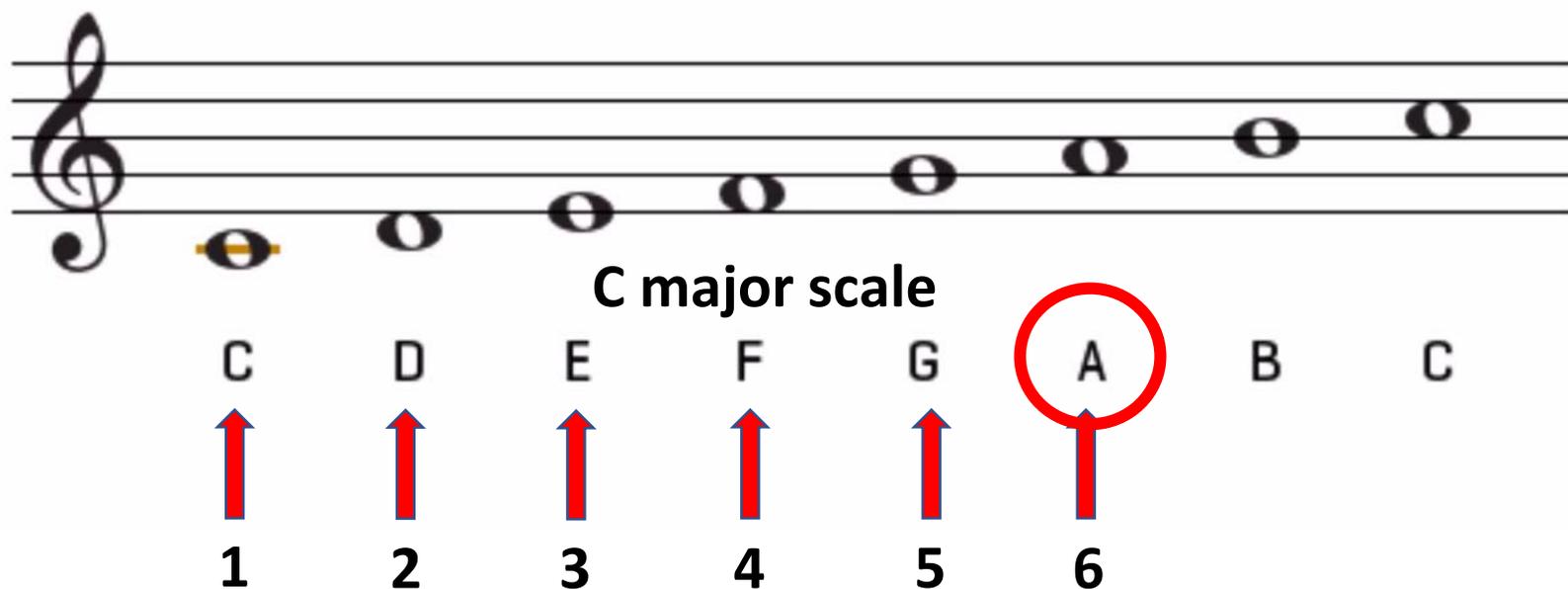


The distance between the second and third notes of a major scale is a whole-step. Since there is only a half-step between E and F, we need to raise the F by a half-step to an F-sharp. The same is true between the sixth and seventh notes of the scale, which is why there is a written C-sharp.

Minor Scales

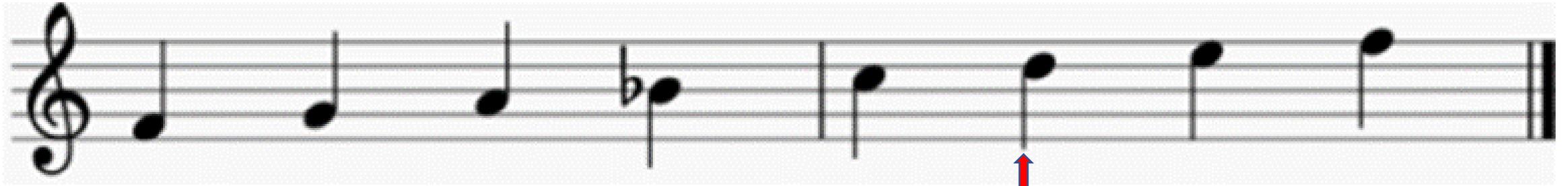
Every major scale has a relative minor scale. A relative minor scale shares the same key signature as its major scale, but it begins on the sixth note of the major scale.

For example, A is the sixth note of the C-major scale, which makes A-minor the relative minor scale of C-major.



Look at the F-major and D-major scales below

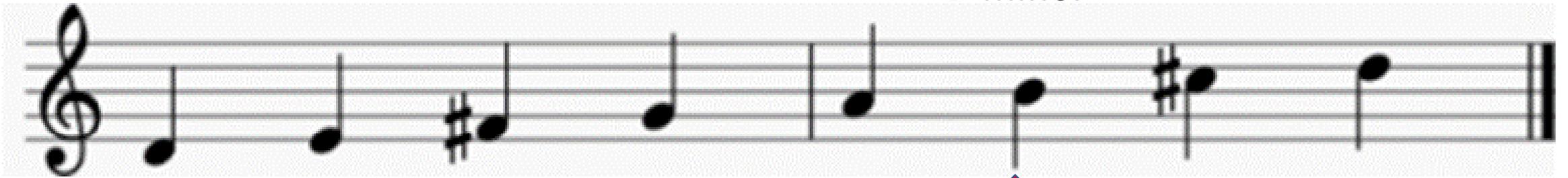
What is the relative minor scale for each of those major scales?



F-major scale

The image shows the F-major scale on a treble clef staff. The notes are F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, D5, E5, and F5. A red arrow points to the sixth note, Bb4.

D minor



D-major scale

The image shows the D-major scale on a treble clef staff. The notes are D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C#5, and D5. A red arrow points to the sixth note, B4.

B minor

Remember, find the sixth note of the scale.

Because you are using the same key signature as a major scale, but starting on the sixth note, there is a different pattern of whole-steps and half-steps. Take a look at the A-minor scale below.

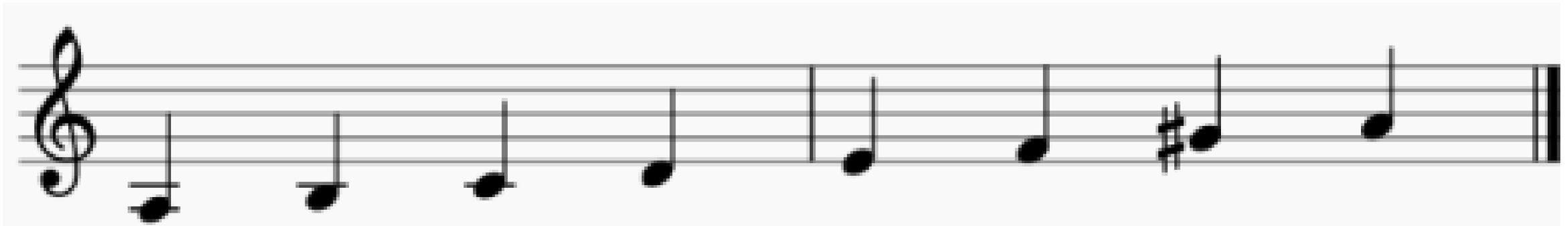


A-natural minor scale

All natural minor scales are comprised of the following pattern of tones: whole-step, half-step, whole-step, whole-step, half-step, whole-step, whole-step.

You may be wondering why this scale is called A-natural minor, and not simply A-minor. That is because there are three types of minor scale. The natural minor scale makes no alteration to the notes in the indicated key signature; in other words, there are no accidentals.

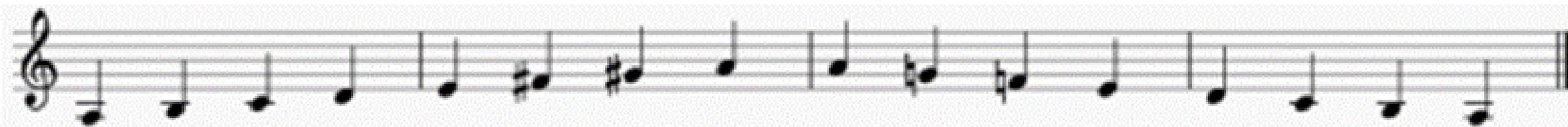
In the harmonic minor scale, the seventh note of the scale is raised by one half-step. In the A-harmonic minor scale, the G becomes a G-sharp.



A-harmonic minor scale

The third type of minor scale is the melodic minor scale. This one is a bit tricky, because it is different ascending than descending. (All scales discussed previously are the same ascending and descending.)

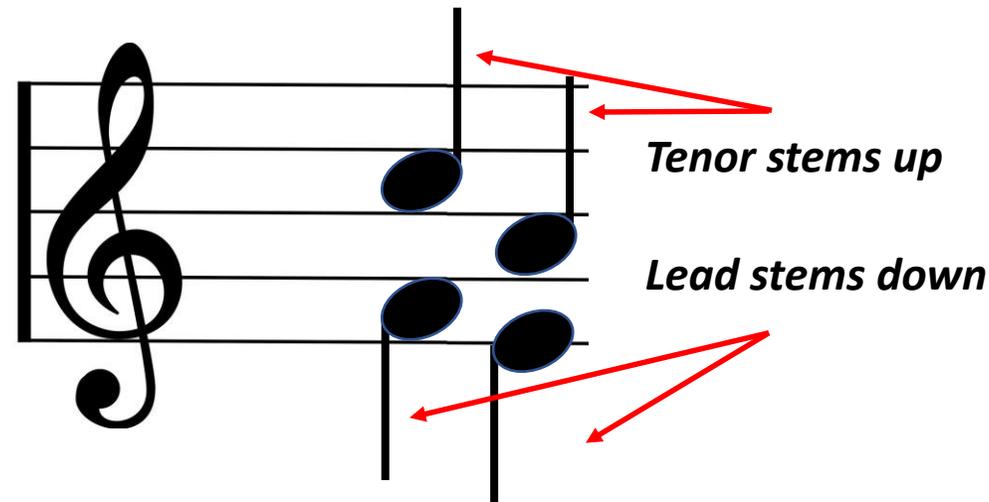
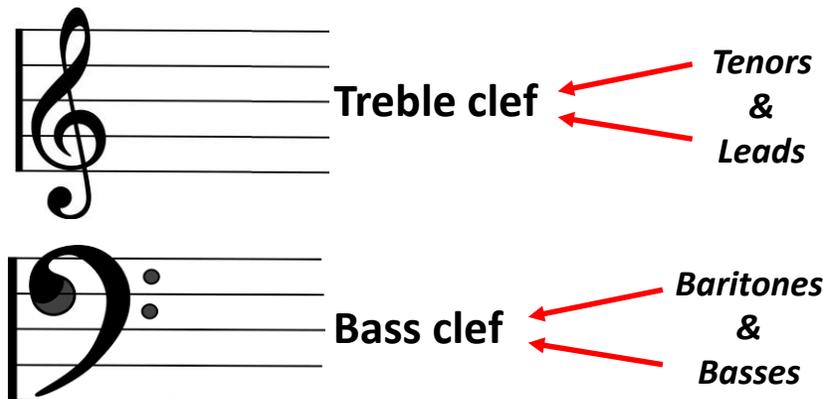
In the melodic minor scale, the sixth and seventh notes of the scale are raised by a half-step going up and return to their original pitch, as indicated by the key signature, on the way down.



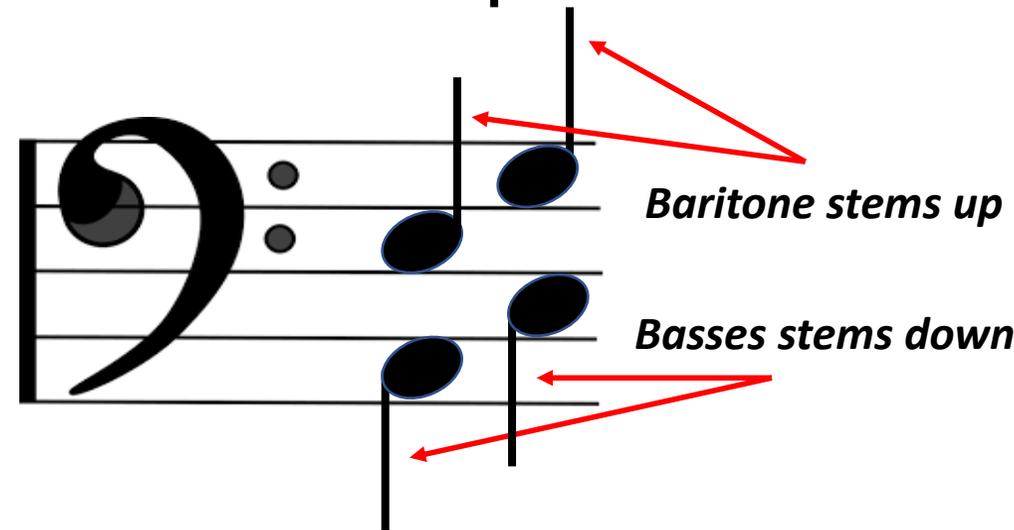
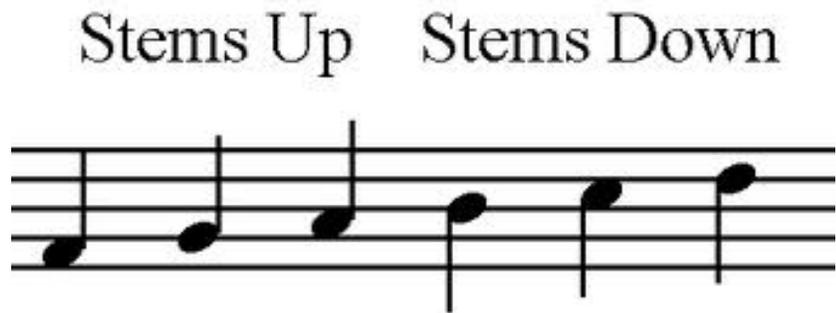
A-melodic minor scale

One more thing

Identifying the note for your voice part

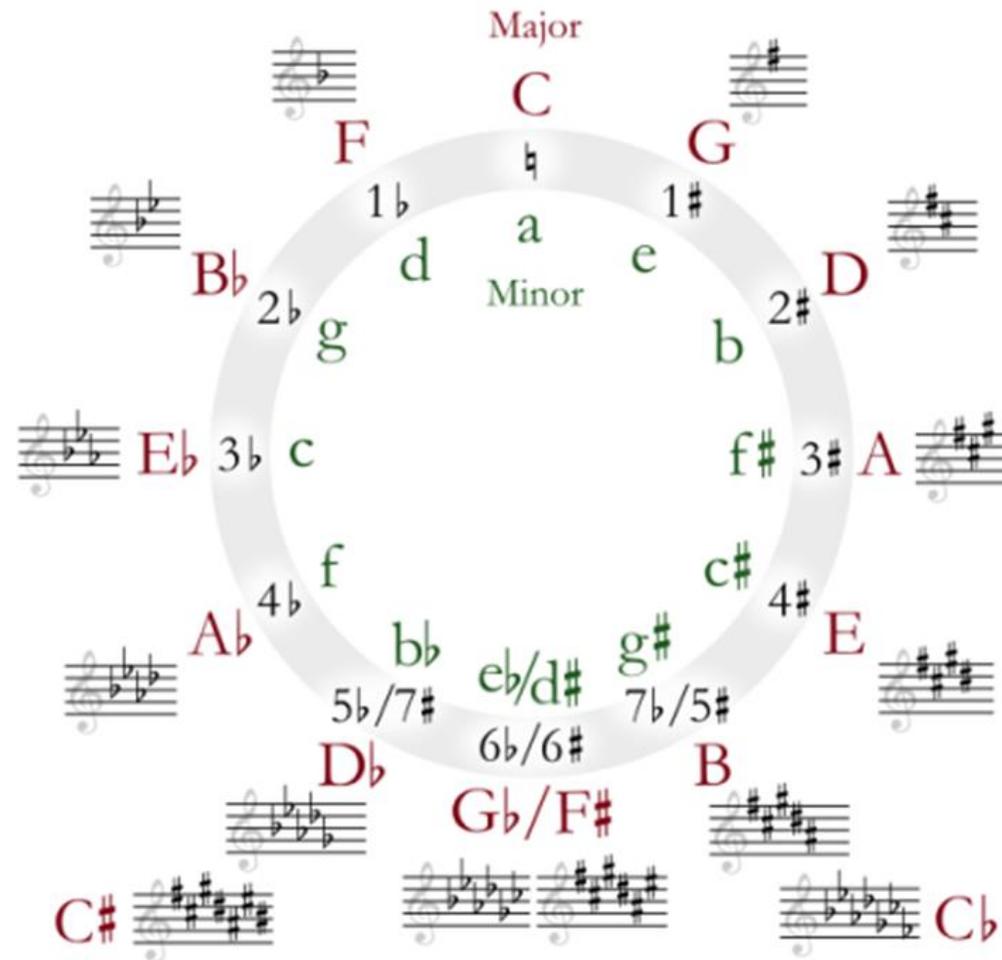


You can tell which ones are your notes by the stems



As you can see, at a glance you should be able to identify which set of notes are for your voice part

An extremely helpful device to remember all of the different major and minor scales and their flats or sharps is called the Circle of Fifths. This is the best friend of many students studying music theory.



Note Helper Exercises

Treble Clef

Level 1: Note helpers, no accidentals

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/bg1yryyynybyyy

Level 2: Note helpers, accidentals included

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/bg1yrybynybyyy

Level 3: No note helpers, no accidentals

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/bg1yryyynyyyyy

Level 4: No note helpers, accidentals included

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/bg1yrybynyyyyy

Bass Clef

Level 1: Note helpers, no accidentals

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/ng1yryyynybyyy

Level 2: Note helpers, accidentals included

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/ng1yrybynybyyy

Level 3: No note helpers, no accidentals

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/ng1yryyynyyyyy

Level 4: No note helpers, accidentals included

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/ng1yrybynyyyyy

Click on the links to go to a site where you will be tested on musical notes

Note Helper Exercises

Grand Staff

Level 1: Note helpers, no accidentals

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/oybayryyynybyyb

Level 2: Note helpers, accidentals included

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/oybayrybynybyyb

Level 3: No note helpers, no accidentals

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/oybayryyynyyyyb

Level 4: No note helpers, accidentals included

www.musictheory.net/exercises/note/oybayrybynyyyyb

Click on the links to go to a site where you will be tested on musical notes

Thank you for your attention during this presentation



We hope you learned something

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pdf will be every slide from this presentation,
PowerPoint will be as you've seen today*



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