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.

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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.

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\[ \text{\textcopyright} \]

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

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

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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. )

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

![Image](image1.png)  ![Image](image2.png)  ![Image](image3.png)

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

5. Pick form 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. You hand should eventually “float” on the surface of the strings and not anchor at any point. (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 beat. Under every exercise is a link to a MIDI file that you can use as a background to play along with.

```plaintext
getting started

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

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.
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.

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{\begin{music} & \text{1} \quad \text{2} \quad \text{3} \\
\end{music}}
\end{align*} \]

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)
time rhythm exercise

the waltz

4 tune
G 3rd String, Open

A 3rd String, 2nd Fret

open

second finger

Under every exercise is a link to a MIDI file that you can use as a background to play along with.
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 that 4 beats in a measure in 4/4 time, so you have to split the 3 beats between 2 measures.
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 4th String**

- D 4th String, Open
- E 4th String, 2nd Fret
- F 4th String, 3rd Fret

- open
- second finger
- third finger
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 it is still touching the string but not pressing down against the fret.
Rest Exercise 1

Rest Exercise 2

12 bar blues in G

A 1st String, 5th fret

3rd or 4th finger

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

The House of the Rising Sun

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

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
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 your 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.

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first position sharps
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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 notes relate to the root.

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Key of C Major
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A **key signature** is used when certain notes are consistently sharp of flat in a piece of music. For example rather than placing an 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)

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

In this scale sharp the following (F)
A flat (b) is a sign placed in front of a natural note which lowers the pitch a half step (1 fret). A lower case B (b) is used to indicate a flat sign in text documents. There is a half
step between E-F and B-C naturally, so that Fb is the same note as E, and Cb is the same as B. For now think of these notes by their natural names only (E and B).

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

Flats, sharps 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 flat of the same letter name is used. This is not necessary but is often done to avoid confusion.

Q. Hey cyberfret dude... how do I go down 1 fret from an open string (e.g. E down to Eb)?

A. First you have to have a basic understanding of how the guitar is tuned (see basic tuning) You can't go down 1 fret from and open string, but you can go down 1 fret from the same note played on a different string. For example when you tune the 1st string on the guitar, you will play the 5th fret on the 2nd string. The first string open and the 5th fret on the second string are both E. If you want to play and E flat, just move down 1 fret from the E on the 2nd string.

In the following exercise play the first 2 notes (A and Ab) with your 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.

Part II- Rhythm

Even if you plan to only read tablature, or just playing by ear for that matter, you will still need to have a basic understanding of rhythms.
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.

\[ \text{Quarter Note} + \cdot = \text{Dotted Quarter Note} \]
\[ 2 + 1 = 3 \]

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

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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 its value by half the original.

2 + 1 = 3

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

**Eighth Notes** receive a $\frac{1}{2}$ beat

\[ \text{--- 2 or more 8th notes are beamed together} \]

\[ \text{--- single 8th notes use a flag} \]

\[ \text{☰ = the symbol for picking down} \]

\[ \text{♀ = the symbol for picking up} \]

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

\[ 1 \quad & \quad 2 \quad \& \]

\[ \& \text{ is the half way point between beat 1 and 2} \]

When picking 8th notes pick down on the beat (1 2 3 4) and up on the "&".
Dotted Quarter Notes receive 1 1/2 beats

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

\[ \text{whole note} + \text{dot} = \text{dotted whole note} \]
\[ 1 + \frac{1}{2} = 1 \frac{1}{2} \]

The easiest way to get a grasp on rhythms is to start to recognize patterns 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