

Music Theory for Beginning Guitar

A supplemental Guide to Beginning Guitar Lessons

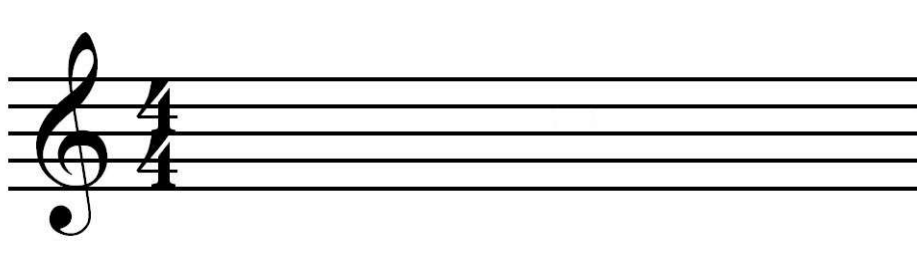
The following resource is designed with the beginning guitarist in mind. It covers a variety of musical topics and touches on the basics of music theory. Learning to play guitar is both a challenging and rewarding experience. These pages have been designed to give guitarists a solid foundation in the fundamentals of music theory.

Reading Standard Notation

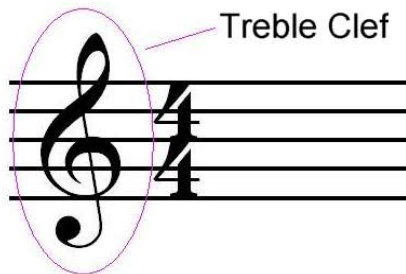
As a guitarist, you will have to deal with a variety of different types of music. Sometimes you will see music written in tablature, sometimes you will be reading chords, and others you will have music written in standard notation.

In standard notation, you deal with the musical staff which has five lines and four spaces.

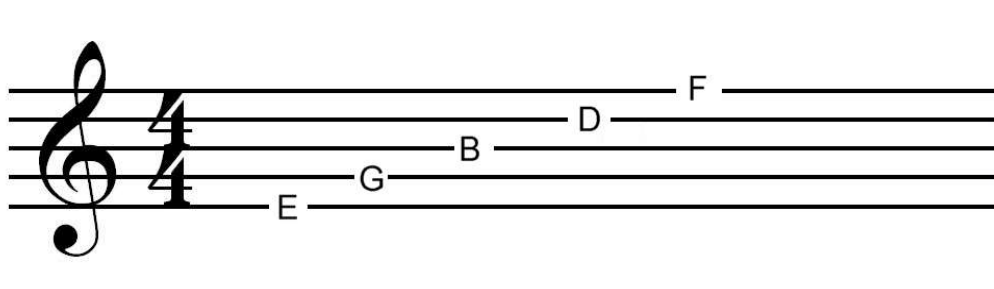
MUSICAL STAFF



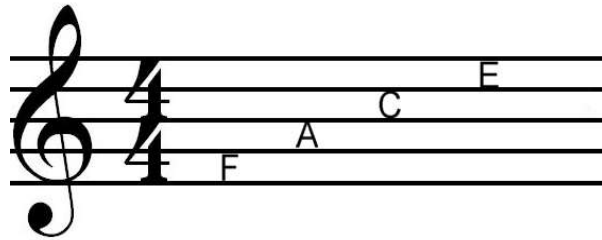
The symbol found at the beginning of a piece of music in standard notation is known as a clef. Music written for a guitar is written in the treble clef.



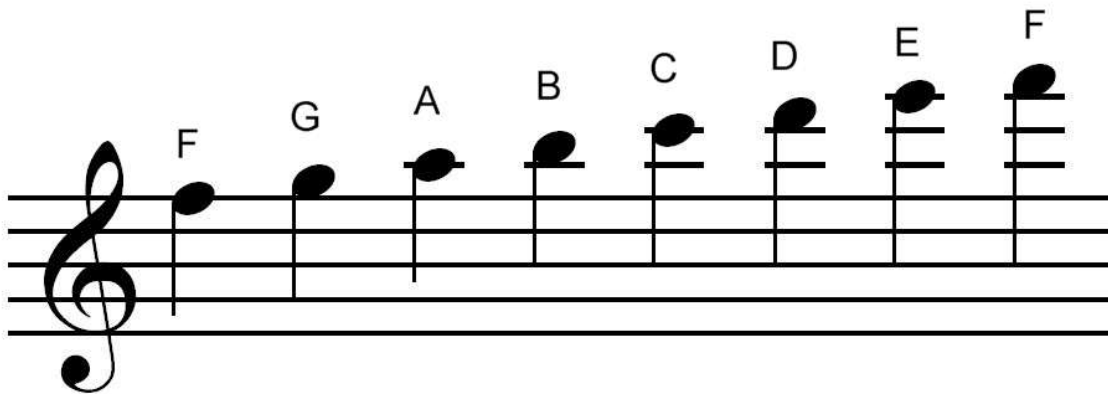
The lines on the staff correspond to the letters E G B D F, and can be remembered with the saying Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge.



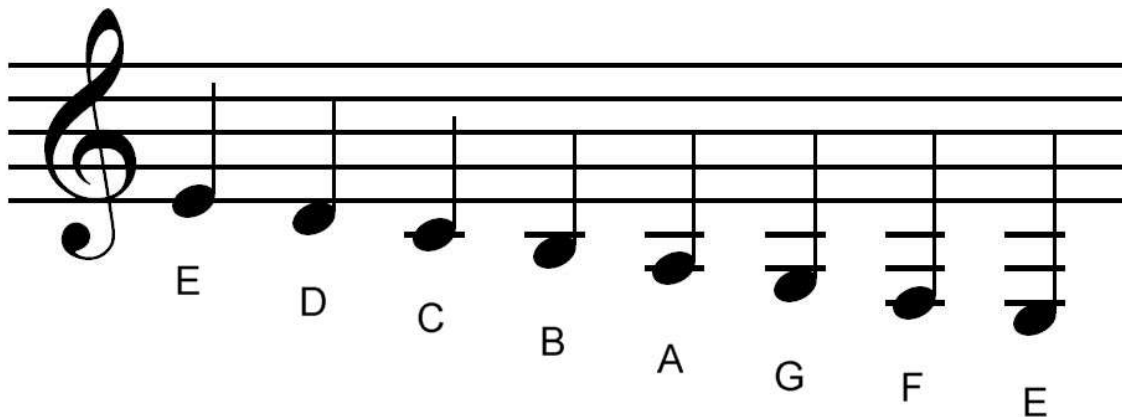
The spaces on the staff correspond to the letters F A C E and can be easily remembered as spelling the word face from bottom to top.



To find a note above the staff, simply move in alphabetical order counting lines and spaces.



The same processes applies for notes below the staff, just move backwards alphabetically counting lines and spaces.



You will want to practice reading these notes and memorizing where they are on your guitar. This will help to maximize your potential as a guitarist and a musician.

Note Types and Values

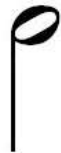
Basic Notes

Whole Note



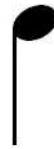
4 Beats

Half Note



2 Beats

Quarter Note



1 Beat

Eighth Note



1/2 Beat

Other Notes

Dotted Half Note



3 Beats

Dotted Quarter Note



1 1/2 Beats (1.5)

Dotted Eighth Note



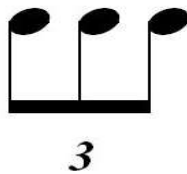
3/4 beats

Sixteenth Notes



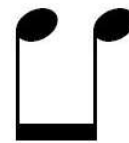
1/4 Beat

Eighth Note Triplets



1 Beat (1/3 each)

2 Eighth Notes



1 Beat (1/2 each)

Rests

Half Rest



2 Beats

Whole Rest



4 Beats
(or a full measure)

Quarter Rest



1 Beat

Eighth Rest



1/2 Beat

Sixteenth Rest

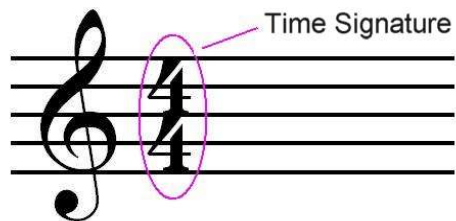


1/4 Beat

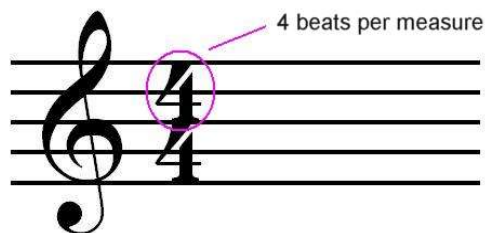
Time Signatures

The numbers found at the beginning of a written piece of music are called a time signature. Understanding time signatures is an important skill every musician should master.

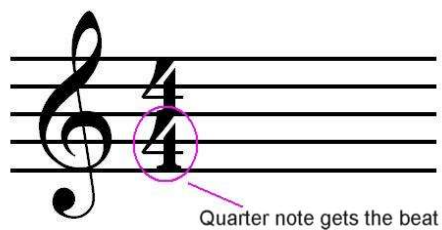
As a guitarist, the most common time signature that you will encounter is 4/4. Most modern rock and popular music is written in 4/4.



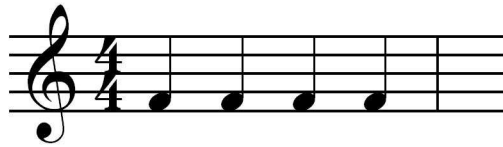
The top number of the time signature tells you how many beats are in a measure. With a 4/4 time signature, there are 4 beats per measure.



The bottom number tells you that the quarter note (1/4) is equal to 1 beat or the quarter note "gets the beat."



Thus in a measure of 4/4 time you can only have 4 quarter notes (or their equivalent).

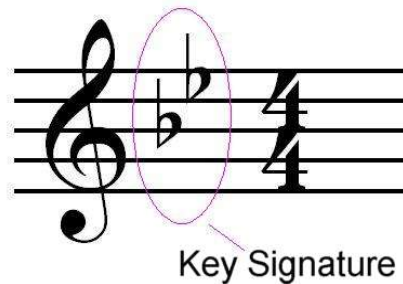


There are many different times signatures besides 4/4.
To learn about these please see -- [more about time signatures](#)

Key signatures

The ability to determine what key a written piece of music is in is a useful skill for the aspiring guitarist. This will tell you what chords are used in the song, what scales should be used for solos, and more...

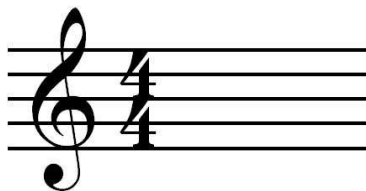
One of the easiest ways to figure out what key a song is in is by looking at the key signature. The key signature is found between the treble clef (for guitarists) and the time signature.



The key signature tells you if there are any sharps or flats in the song. In the above picture there are 2 sharps, located on the lines of F and C. Thus, for the entire song, all F's are played as F# and all C's as C#.

There are 12 different key signatures. Each key signature corresponds to both a major and a minor key.

The Key of C Major (A minor) has no sharps or flats in it. The other keys are listed below.



C Major (A Minor)

The Sharp Keys

G Major (E minor)



D Major (B minor)



A Major (F# minor)



E Major (C# minor)



B Major (G# Minor)



F# Minor (D# minor)



The Flat Keys

F Major (D minor)



Bb Major (G minor)



Eb Major (C minor)



Ab Major (F minor)



Db Major (Bb Minor)



Gb Major (Eb minor)



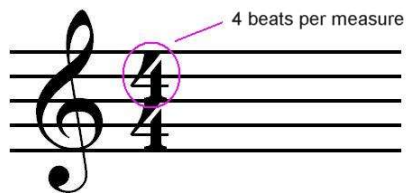
More About Time Signatures

Time signatures can either be in **simple** or **compound** meter.

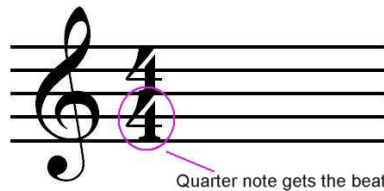
Almost all popular music is written in simple meter.

Simple Meter

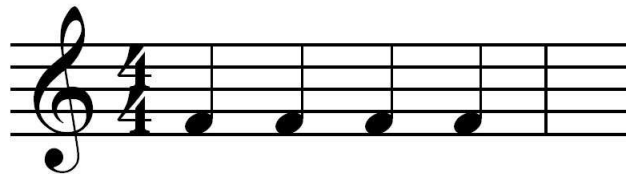
In simple meter,
the top number of the time signature tells you how many beats are in a measure.



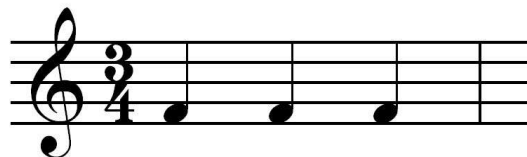
The bottom number tells you what note gets "the beat."



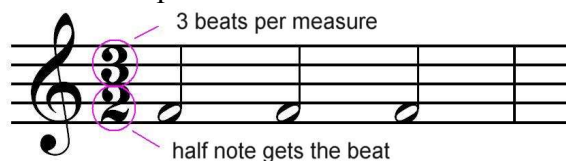
For example in a measure of 4/4, there are 4 beats per measure and the quarternote gets the beat.



Likewise, in a measure of 3/4 there are 3 beats per measure and the quarternote gets the beat. This means that there will only be 3 quarternotes (or their equivalent) per measure of 3/4 time.



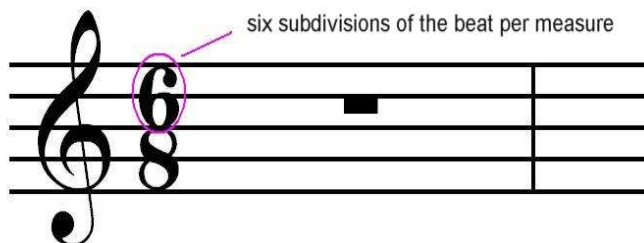
Now, if we examine a 3/2 time signature we find that there will be 3 beats per measure, but the half note (1/2) gets the beat. Thus, there will be 3 half notes (or their equivalent) per measure of 3/2.



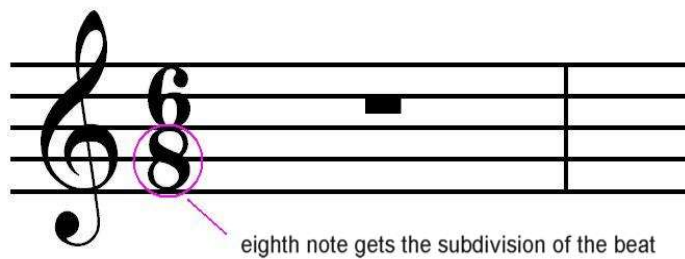
Compound Meter

Time signatures can also be in compound meter.

In compound meter, the top note tells you how many subdivisions of the beat there are per measure.



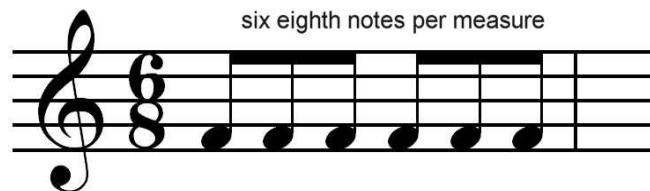
The bottom number tells you the subdivision of the beat.



The subdivision of the beat is what results from breaking "the beat" into smaller note values.

For example,

If we looked at a measure of 6/8, there would be six subdivisions per measure and the eighth note (1/8) would get the subdivision.



For practical purposes, this functions in the same manner as simple meter. The top number tells you "how many" of a particular note to put in a measure, and the bottom number tells you "what type of note" is used.

However, the actual "beat" in compound time is what you get when you group the subdivisions in groups of two or groups of 3 -- see duple and triple meter.

Duple and Triple Meter

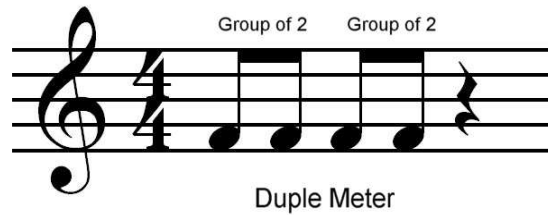
Time signatures fall into two major types triple meter and duple meter.

In triple meter, the subdivision of the beat is grouped in 3.

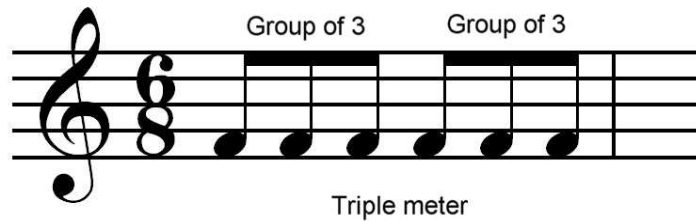
In duple meter, the subdivision of the beat is grouped in 2.

The subdivision of the beat is what results from breaking "the beat" into smaller note values.

For example, if you were to take a measure of 4/4 time and divide "the beat" (quarternotes) into smaller note values (eighth notes) they would be written in groups of 2



Whereas if you were to take a measure of 6/8 time and divide "the beat" (dotted quarternotes) into smaller note values (eighth notes) they would be written in groups of 3.



(Notice that because 6/8 is a compound meter, "the beat" is a dotted quarter note rather than an eighth note -- which is the subdivision of the beat)



So in reality a measure of 6/8 has only 2 beats in it, where the dotted quarter note gets the beat. However, this is equivalent to six eighth notes.