

3. Reading the Pitch

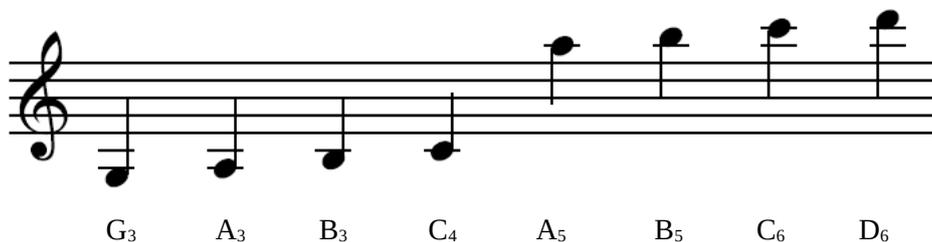
The pitch or note name is taken from the position of the note on the staff. The way this works depends on the choice of clef, for this introduction we will assume the staff is always marked with the treble clef, which is by far the most common in folk music (it is sometimes called the G clef and you can see how it incorporates a bit a spiral centred on the second-to-bottom staff line, indicating that this is the line signifying the note G).

Here are the note names for all the staff lines, and the spaces between them. To distinguish notes one or more octaves apart, which share the same note name (for example C) the names are followed by a number to denote which octave they fall in, C₄ is also known as middle C.



To memorise the positions, remember the acronym FACE (the note names for the spaces) and EGBDF (using the mnemonic Every Good Boy Deserves [something nice beginning with F]). It was fireworks when I learnt it but I think health and safety has probably changed that. As you can see, the notes usually have a tail which can go up or down. This is not important for interpreting the pitch, just look at the head part.

Notes above and below continue using short stave extensions called leger lines. They can be tricky to read at first but are completely logical. Here are the notes you will see most in folk tunes.



4. Sharps and Flats, and the Key Signature

The above is fine for music in the key of C major, no sharp or flat notes. To represent these you can use the sharp and flat symbols just before the note to be modified.

If a tune is in a key other than C major or A minor it is likely that all, or most, notes of a given pitch will need to be marked sharp or flat. For example, a G major tune would need to have every F marked as F sharp. Instead of individually marking each F, it is conventional to put a sharp symbol at the F position on the staff at the beginning of each line, this is called the key signature.

Sample key Signatures:



G major
All Fs sharpened



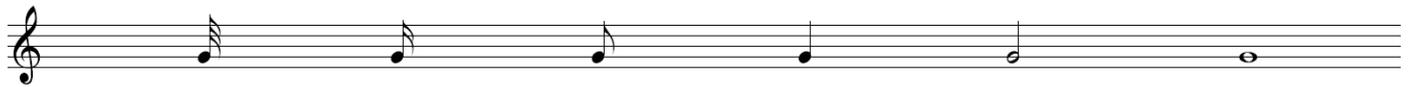
F Major
All Bs flattened

It is so named because it can give you an indication of the key of the piece, which can be useful in other ways, such as making it quicker to find chords to accompany it. My advice is not to take this key indication too literally, a tune can modulate from one key to another in the middle or may be written in a mode or scale which is not easily denoted by a key signature alone. I would view the key signature as a shorthand, e.g. the key signature of G major

above means “all F’s are sharpened unless marked otherwise”. If it is necessary to play an F natural when the key signature shows F sharp, the natural sign can be used.

5. Duration

The length is taken from choice of symbol used to draw the note. This is a relative length... if the you play the tune faster or slower all notes will get shorter or longer but should keep their lengths in the same relationship to each other. To keep this guide simple, I will use the note most commonly used in folk music to denote the main beat, or pulse, which in UK English called a crotchet, as our reference. Longer notes are multiples of this, and shorter notes are fractions of this. The most common notes, their UK English names, and relative lengths are shown below.



Name:	demisemi- quaver	semi-quaver	quaver	crotchet	minim	semibreve
Length:	8 th crotchet	¼ crotchet	½ crotchet		2 crotchets	4 crotchets

The American English names are different, the semibreve is called a whole note, the minim a half note, crotchet is a quarter note, quaver = eighth-note etc.

The shorter notes are usually grouped together by connecting their stems, but keeping the same number of tail lines. This doesn't change what they mean, but it is neater, and when done carefully it can help you see quickly how they relate to the main beats, each group in the following example refers to a crotchet beat.



If a dot as added after a note, its length is increased by half as much again. A dotted crotchet is the same length as three quavers. Often extending one note will be accompanied by shortening the next, (to get the jerky rhythm typical of a hornpipe or strathspey for an example). This is called a dotted rhythm.



1½ crotchet

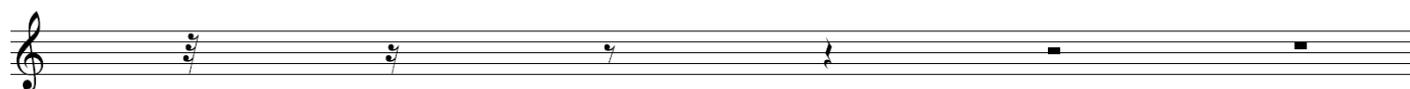
¾ crotchet

Longer notes can also be shown by use of the **tie**, which connects two or more notes of the same value, you should play just one note with the combined length. This example should sound the same as the previous one



6. Rests

Rests denote periods of silence, the length is indicated by the symbol, really you just have to learn the symbols. Dots can be used to lengthen rests (by a half) just as for notes.



demisemi-
quaver rest

semiquaver
rest

quaver rest

crotchet rest

minim rest

semibreve
rest

7. Some Simple Rhythms

To illustrate I have drawn some simple patterns of these note lengths, and some words which when spoken in a natural way approximate the rhythms.



one two three four



one and two and three and four



mash po - ta - to



car - rots and cab - ba - ges, car - rots and cab - ba - ges (Jig rhythm)



dou-ble deck-er, dou-ble deck-er dou-ble deck-er, dou-ble deck-er (Reel Rhythm)

Another example is 3/8, commonly used for the three time bourrées from central France, although will also find these tunes written in 3/4.

9. Repeat Marks

Often a section of music will be played more than once and to save space on the page, and make the structure of the tune easier to spot, it is conventional to write it just once but to indicate that it should be repeated. The following four bar phrase would be played twice. You can see repeat marks (pairs of dots) at the beginning and end, the position relative to the bar lines shows whether it is the music before or after the line that has the repeat. Sometimes (as in this example) the beginning repeat marks are missing if they would be right at the start of the tune. This tune has both A and B sections repeated.



If the section has a different ending on the second time through, it is possible to show the two endings like this:



The variable ending section can be more than one bar long, look at how many bars are spanned by the marking above.

It is also possible to provide endings for more than 2 repeats, in the following example the section is played four times, the 1st and 3rd times use the first ending and the 2nd and 4th the second one.



10. Speed Indications

Sometimes the tune will have an indication as to how fast it should be played, it will look like this



The instruction means play 180 crotchets per minute, but it is not always given in terms of crotchets. The following indication would be equivalent



Still Missing: slurs and ties, chords, ornaments, further reading