

PIANO KEYS AND NOTES: The Definitive Guide

<https://sublimelodyblog.wordpress.com/2018/09/05/piano-keys-and-notes-the-definitive-guide/>

This guide will show you the most essential and easiest steps you need to know about reading sheet music, piano keys, and piano notes.

First, you'll learn to know how to read musical notes on a sheet music with right-brained or left-brained approach.

Then, you'll know how to identify the exact notes on your piano keyboard.

Moreover, there are some helpful quizzes at the end to make sure you get the most out of this guide.

Sound good? Let's get started.





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To Identify Notes On A Piano



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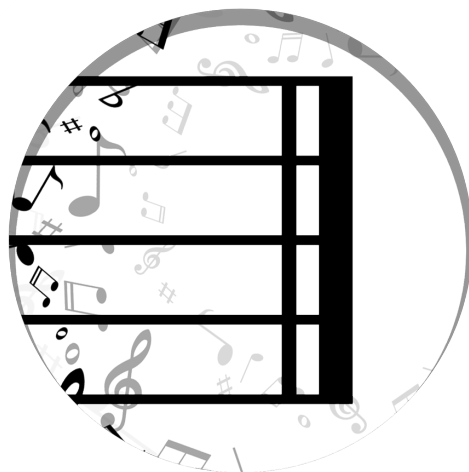


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THE INFOGRAPHIC

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PIANO KEYS AND NOTES

The Definitive Guide

How To Read Music Note And Its Correspondence



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ABCEDEFG and Solfege Approaches To Identify Notes On A Piano

If you're eager to read notes on a piano keyboard right now, you'll love this chapter.

Just by reading this chapter alone, you will be able to read piano notes in no time.

However...

If you're serious about learning piano (and to be good at it), I suggest you go through this guide to the end.

It would help you lay a firm foundation, not just only for learning piano but every instrument you may learn in the future.

I will further explain the reason in chapter 2.

Now, let's begin to read notes on a piano keyboard.



7 Musical Notes And

Their Letters

When it comes to music learning, we all have to learn the pitch names of notes first. In the simplest form, the pitch is the quality that makes it possible to determine sounds as “low” and “high” in the musical melodies.

There are 2 most popular approaches to read pitch names of notes.

ABCEDEFG Approach: In English-speaking, and Dutch-speaking countries (such as US and German), the pitch names of notes are represented by the first 7 letters of the alphabet: **A, B, C, D, E, F, G.**

Solfege Approach: For almost the rest of the world, the 7 pitch names of notes are: **Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Si.**

So, you should choose the approach which is common in your country.

For example: If you come from the US, you should follow the ABCDEFG approach. Otherwise, if you're a Chinese, you probably follow the Solfege.

If you're familiar with **Solfège** order: **Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Si**, here is the table show their corresponding letters:

Do
C
Re
D
Mi
E
Fa
F
Sol
G
La
A
Si
B

And here is the order of notes by the alphabet order:

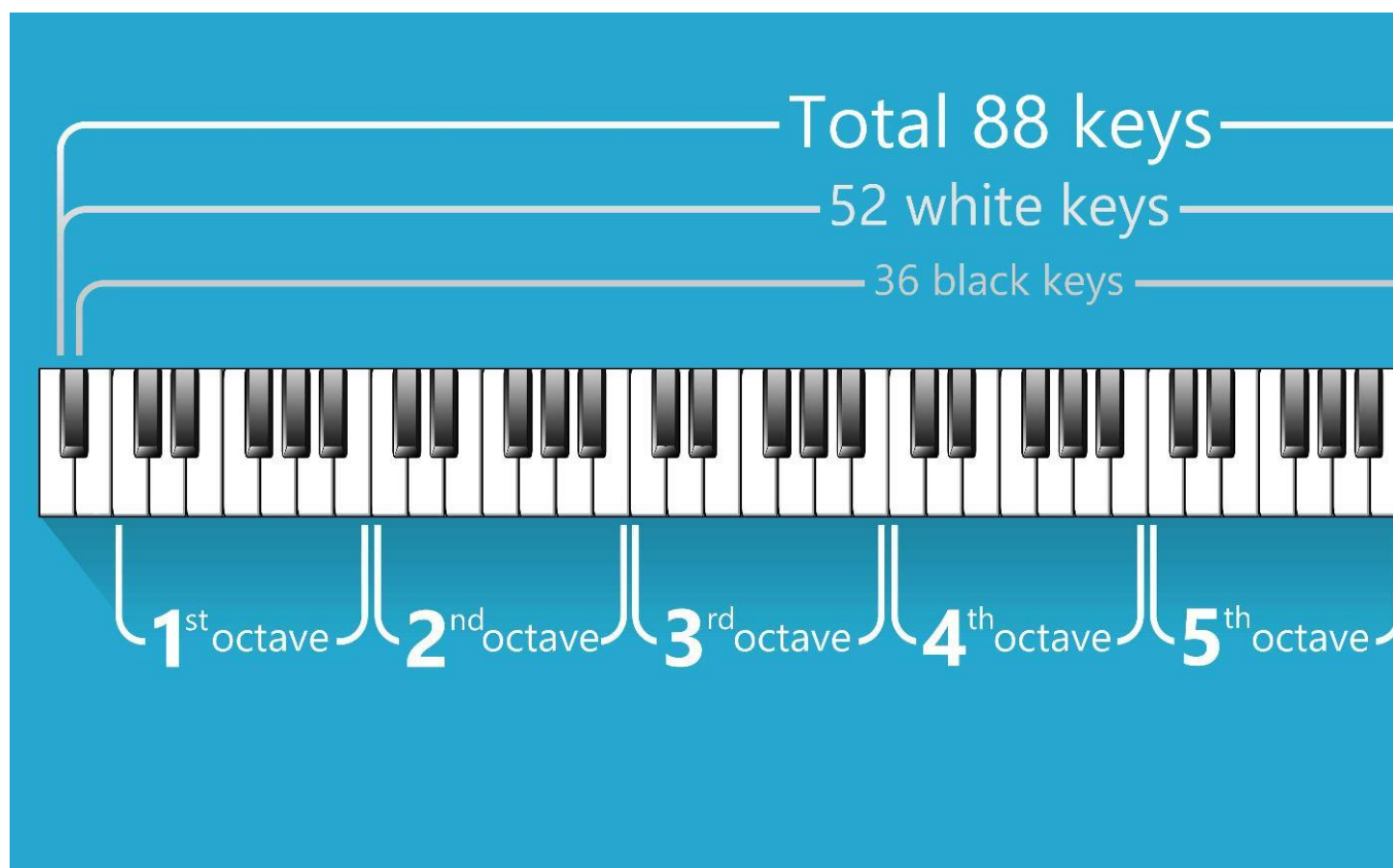
La
A
Si
B
Do
C
Re
D
Mi
E
Fa
F
Sol
G

So, where are they on a piano keyboard?

Let's dive into the patterns on the piano keyboard first!

Number Of Keys And Octaves On A Piano

Both digital and acoustic piano has **52 white keys** and **36 blacks keys**, **88 keys in total**. These 88 keys are divided into **7 octaves**.



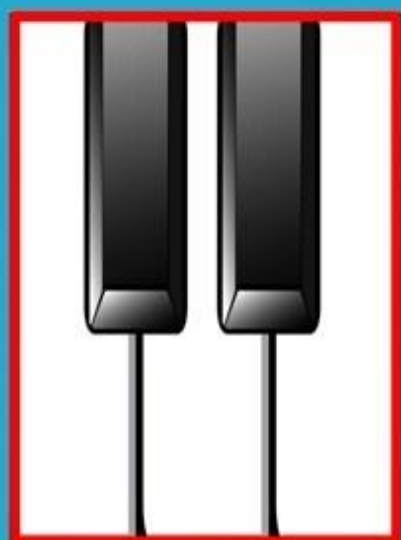
You can recognize that a piano keyboard consists of white and black keys.

These white and black keys make up a pattern:

- A group of 2 and then 3 black keys keep consecutively repeating
- 3 white keys and 2 black keys form a small group – I call it “**small house**”
- 4 white keys and 3 black keys form a big group – aka “**big house**”

So, we have the definition of an **octave**: It consists of a “**small house**” on the left and a “**big house**” on the right. They have total 12 keys: 7 white keys and 5 black keys.

And to easily memorize, imagine the **2 black keys** in the “**small house**” is a pair of “**chopsticks**”. The **3 black keys** in the “**big house**” is a “**fork**”.



Small
house

Big
house

Chopsticks and fork in an octave

So, each octave will contain a pair of “**chopsticks**” on the **left** side and a “**fork**” on the **right** side.

(The original concepts of chopsticks and fork come from dummies.com. I just made a better illustration to help you get the concepts with ease)

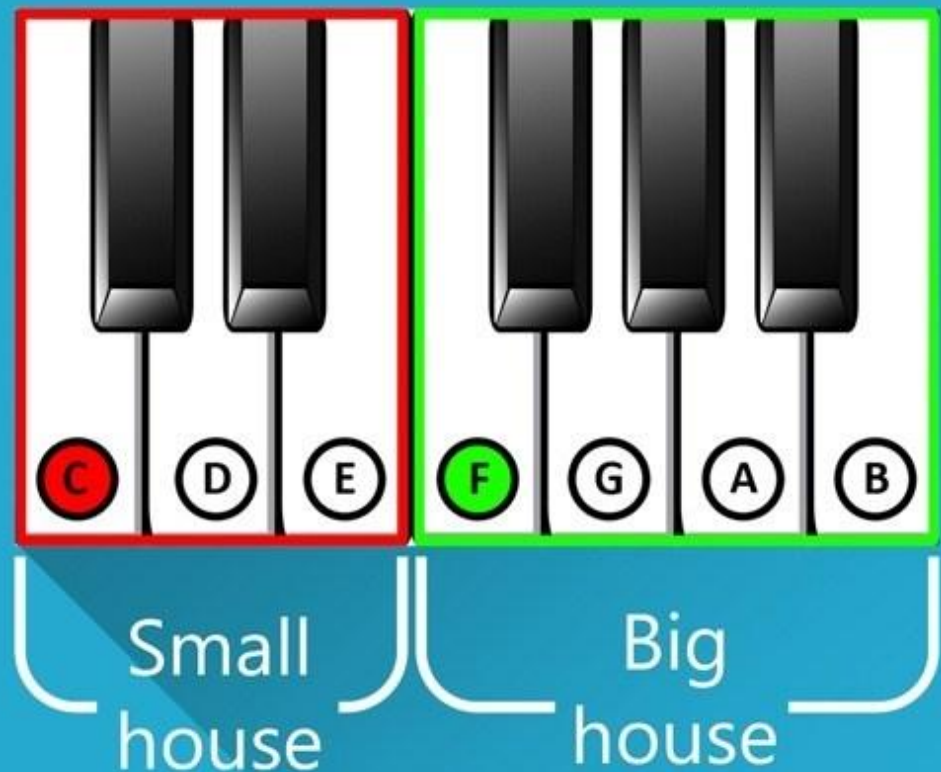
How To Read The White Keys With ABCDEFG Approach

To keep it simple, I won't include the notes of black keys in this chapter. We will learn how to read them in chapter 4.

Just understand that with the white notes alone, you can play hundreds of melodies.

The first letter of “**Chopsticks**” is **C**, so the first white note in the “**small house**” is **C (Do)**.

Similarly, the first letter of “**Fork**” is **F** so the first white note in the “**big house**” is **F (Fa)**.

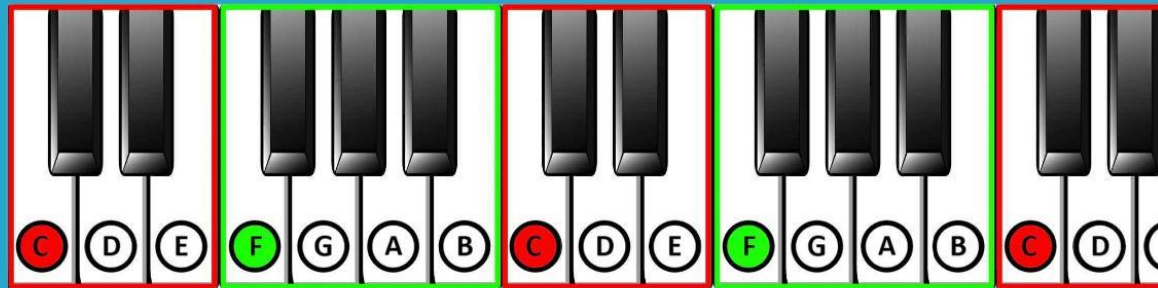


Musical notes in an octave

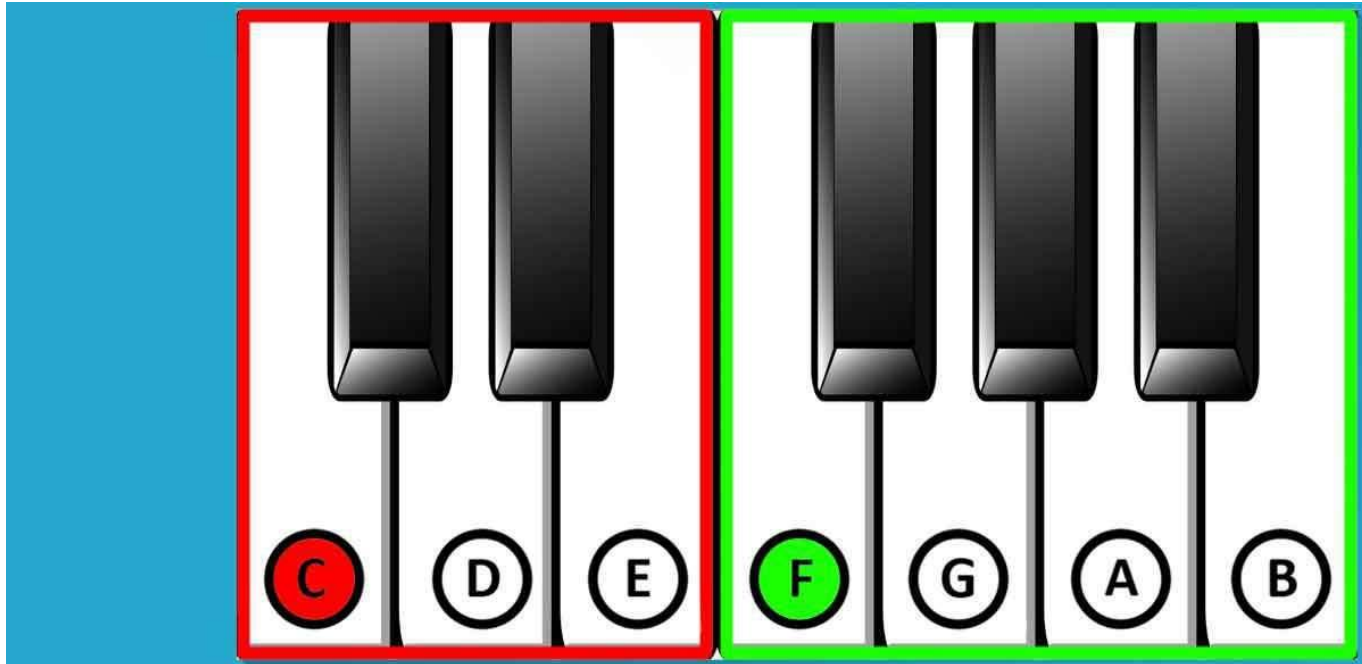
You can see from left to right, the order is: **C D E F G A B**

These 7 notes are all white keys.

Repeat the same pattern, we have the diagram below:



Musical notes on a piano keyboard (ABCDEFG approach)
Important Keys

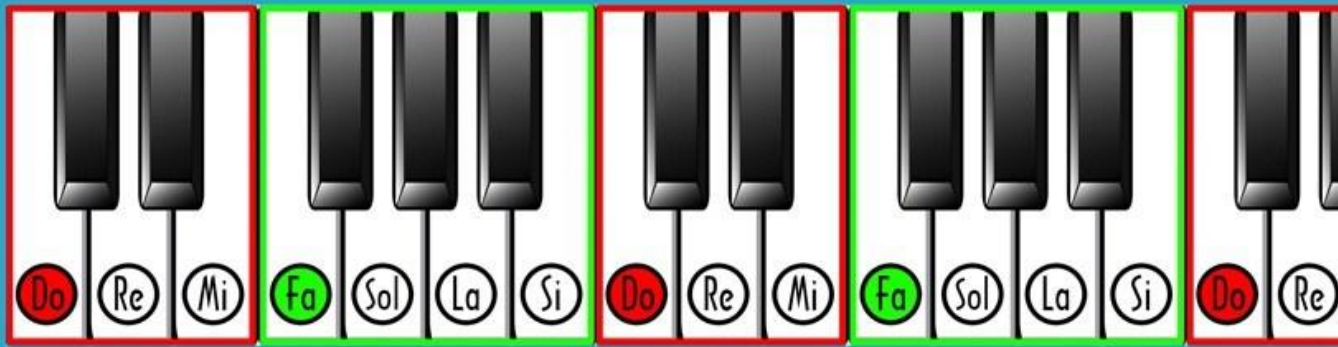


- The first white key in the “Chopsticks” is **C**
- The first white key in the “Fork” is **F**
- To identify other notes, just **count from C or F** by the following order from **left to right**: **C, D, E, F, G, A, B**

How To Read The White Keys With Solfege Approach

The **first white key** of the **small group** is **Do**. The **first white key** of the **big group** is **Fa**.

You can see the order of these 7 note in the diagram below:



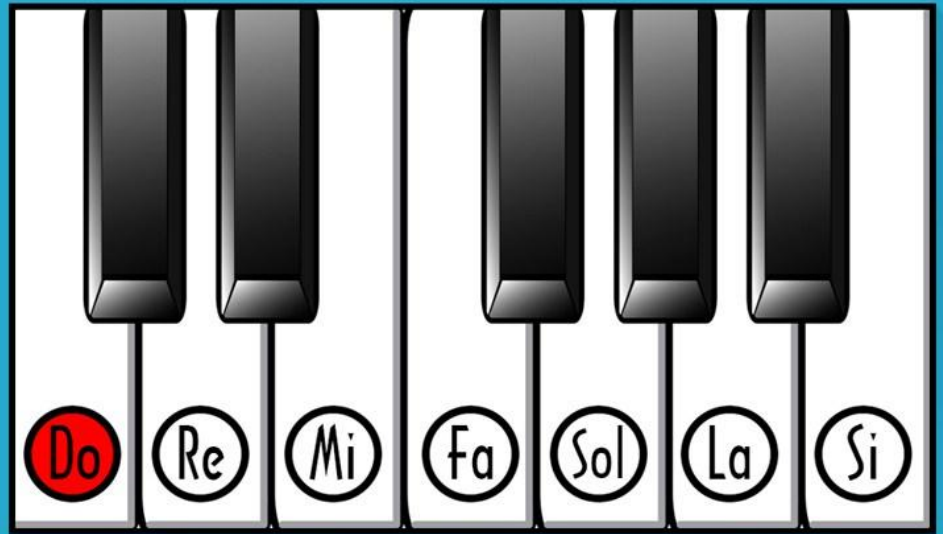
Musical notes on a piano keyboard (solfege approach)

You can recognize that this pattern repeats itself.

That's it. You can see, it's no complex thing.

So, no matter how many keys your piano has, now you can identify all the white notes by the pattern above.

Important Keys



- The **first white key** in the **small group** is **Do**
- To identify other notes, just **count from Do** and read in your mind by the following order from **left to right: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Si**

The method described above is the fastest way to help you read the piano notes. With that method, you'll be able to play some easy songs in just 1 day.

And from now, I will use the ABCDEFG approach to call the pitch names of notes to make things less complicated.



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[YES, GIVE ME MY PDF](#) CHAPTER 2:

The Right-Brained Approach To Read Sheet Music



There is no single method that can effectively

apply to everybody.

The traditional approach of learning to read sheet music requires much effort and labor.

Many people get discouraged by following the old way of instrument learning, not just piano alone.

That's why I bring you **two approaches**: The **right-brained** and the **left-brained** methods.

So, in this chapter, I will show you:

- What are right-brained and left-brained methods?
- Why learning basic music theory is a must?
- The right-brained method to learn basic music theory with ease

Let's get started.

What Are Right-Brained And Left-Brained Methods?

According to [Healthline](#):

The **left side of your brain** controls the **right side** of your body. It performs tasks that have to do with logic and analysis. (i.e. mathematics or science).

The **right** side of your brain coordinates the **left side** of your body. It performs tasks that have to do with creativity, imagination, and arts.



Hemispheres of the brain

The traditional method of learning piano and most subjects in the education system require thinking logically and memorizing lots of information.

It's the left-brained method.

It's also why people who are "left-brained" often learn piano faster than "right-brained" people. So, if you find learning piano is difficult, it's mostly because of the method, and not because of you.

Now, It's time to turn the tables.

Shortly, I will show you the approach to learn how to read sheet music with the right-brained approach.

It still helps you read sheet music like the traditional method, but involved imagination and creativity.

For most beginners, the right-brained approach would be more interesting, fun, and thus easier.

Why Learning Basic Music Theory Is A Must?

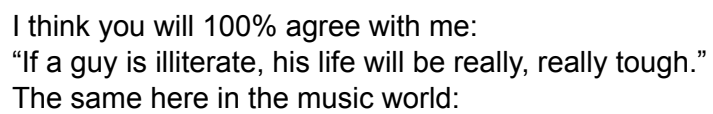
This is a sad truth:

To be able to play the piano well, you must know how to read sheet music.

If you want to read sheet music, you must learn the basic [music theory](#).

Learning basic music theory is quite the same as learning how to read.

In other words, It is studying the "alphabet" and "letter" in the music world.



If you know nothing about the basic music theory, 99% chances that you won't be able to perform well on any instrument.

Also, sheet music is the "text" of the music world. Without text, there will be no book, no knowledge, and no modern world like we're living.

You might think I'm trying to scare you or I'm just too serious, but it's true.

Believe me, If you just try as fast as possible to play some easy songs on the piano, you'll hardly play these songs well. Even if you did, it's just the simple versions and the sound will be bland and boring.

Moreover, it would be almost impossible for you to learn new difficult songs and put your feeling in the melody.

Eventually, to become better at the piano, you will have to learn music theory anyway.

So, I'm just trying to **save time for you**.

Avoiding learning music theory will make it harder for you to progress as music gets more difficult.

In short, let me recap some points:

If you don't learn music theory

- You'll limit yourself to only simple songs, also limit your potential
- You'll soon find that music is hard, complicated. That experience leads to a limiting belief: I'm not good at music
- You'll get bored quickly, that leads to losing interest in playing the piano. And soon, you'll quit.

If you do learn music theory:

- You'll be able to improve your piano skills so much faster
- You'll be able to learn other instruments much quicker than normal (just like you know how to read, you can read any book you like)
- Soon, you'll be comfortable with music theory just as much as you are reading a children book or playing a piano song by heart with feeling.
- More importantly, your world will broaden by expanding your languages.

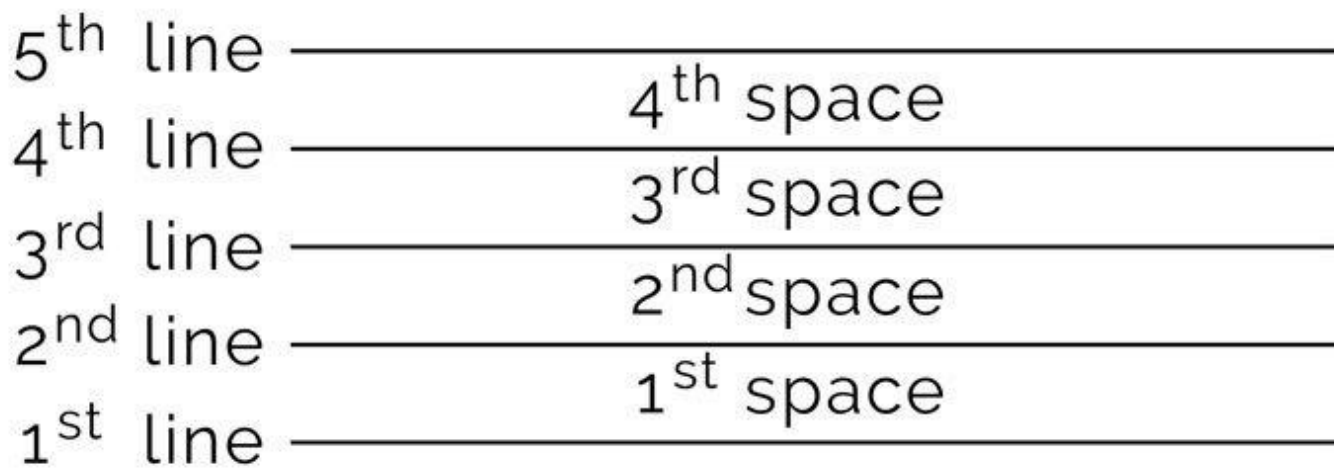
Now, you got the points [why we should learn basic music theory](#). Let's dive into some essential elements.

The Staff

[The staff](#) is where the notes lie on.

There are **5 lines and 4 spaces** between these lines. We count the order of the lines and the spaces **from the bottom to the top**.

Each line and space are named after a note. We will talk more about it in the clef section.

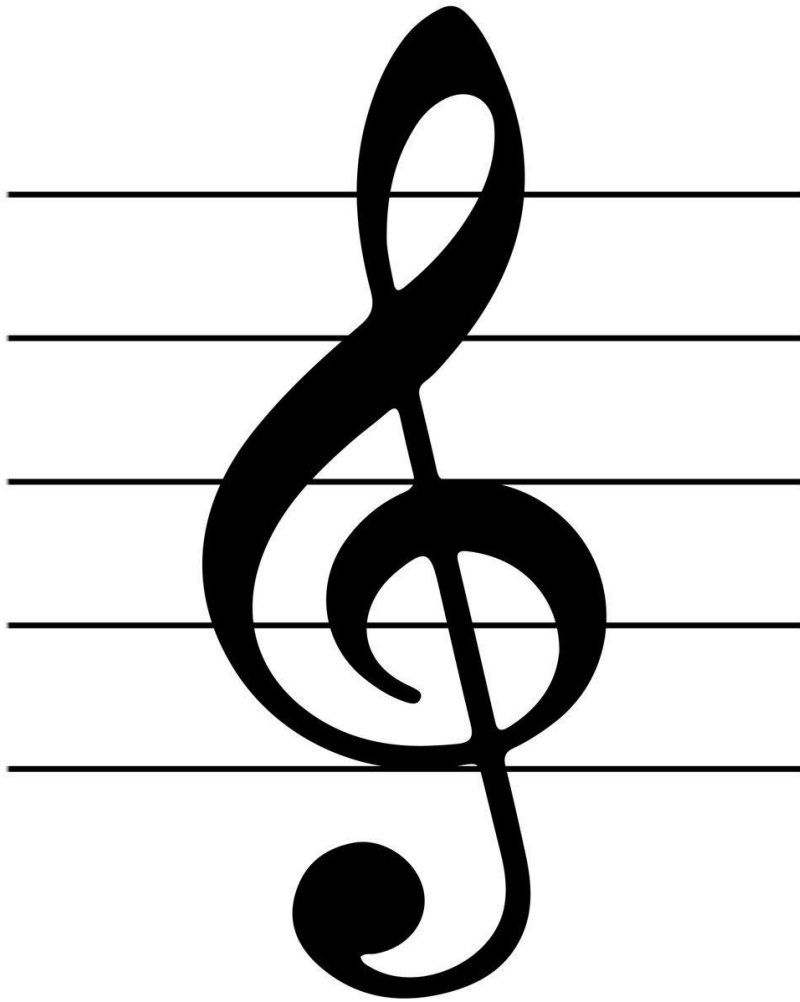


The Staff

The Treble Clef And The Bass Clef

What is a clef?

A [clef](#) is a symbol, placed at every beginning of a staff. Different clefs indicate different notes. In piano, we will use the treble clef and the bass clef.



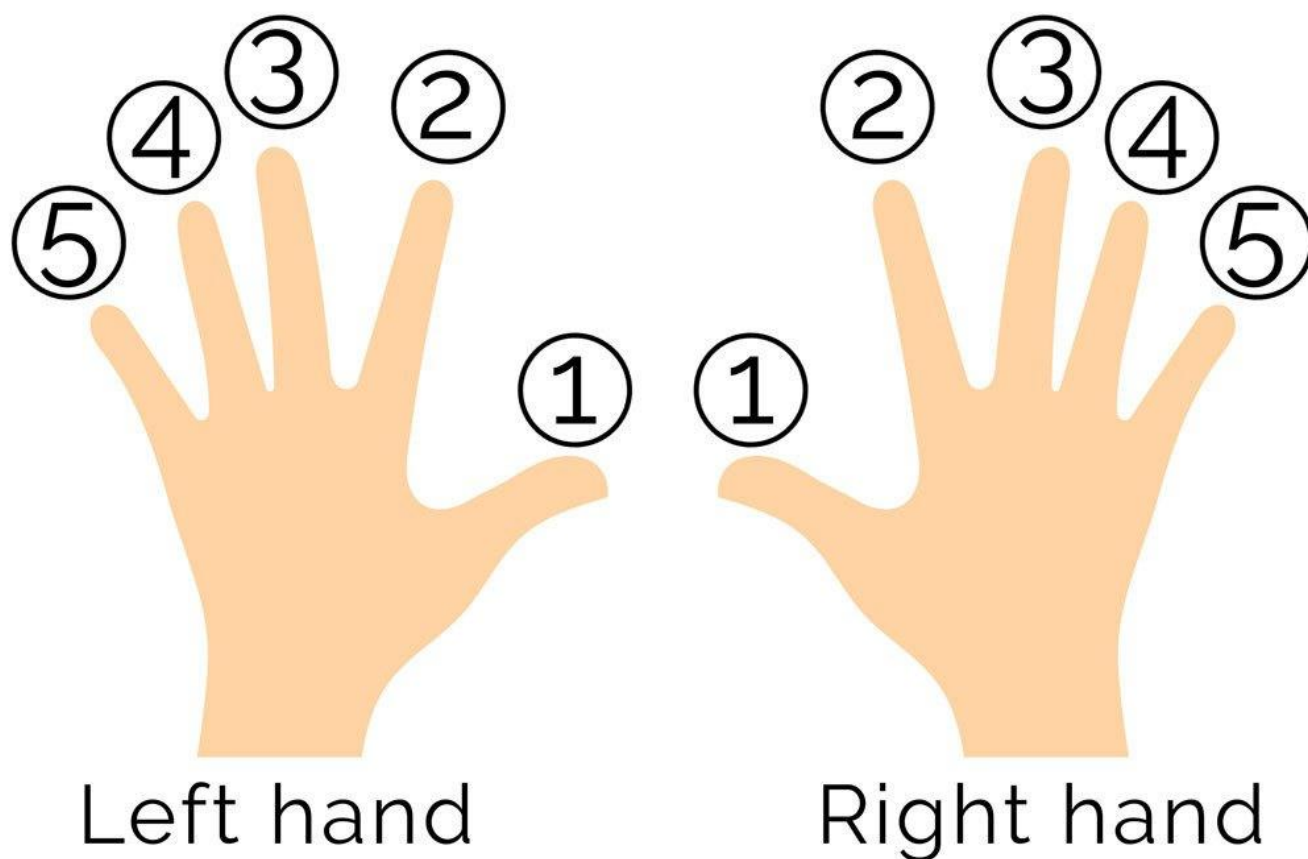
The Treble Clef



The Bass Clef

In most cases, the right hand will play notes on the treble clef and the left hand will play notes on the bass clef.

Here is a hands diagram, which shows you how each finger is labeled.



Each piano sheet will have finger-labels on the notes. In the beginning, you have to play the notes exactly by specific fingers, according to the sheet music. We will discuss it in more detail later. (thoughtco.com)

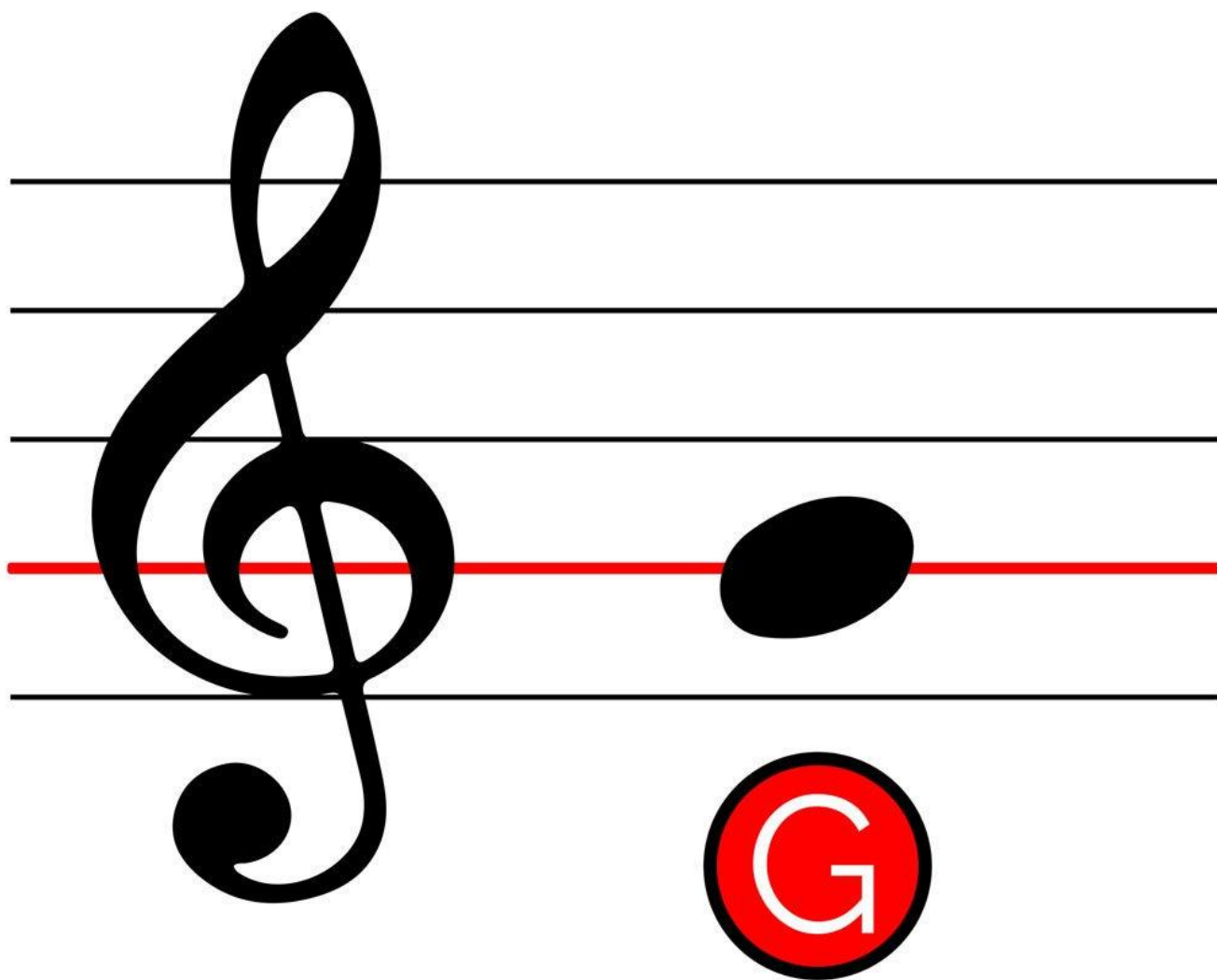
Now, Let's move on to the treble clef!

The Treble Clef

The [treble clef](#) is probably the most popular clef. Since almost all main melodies are written on the treble clef.

[IMPORTANT] The second line is where the note G lies on, so we call it the G-line.

Here is the sign of the treble clef with G-line is highlighted:



It is also known as the **G-clef**. The reason people call it G-clef because it circles the G-line.

In piano, generally, **the right-hand plays the notes on the treble clef.**

And below are the notes on the treble clef.

Order

Name/Note

5th line

F

4th line

D

3rd line

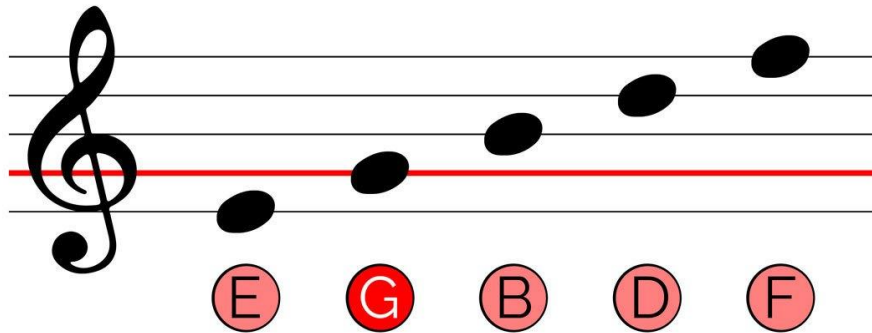
B

2nd line

G

1st line

E



The names of 5

lines in the treble clef

Order

Name/Note

4th space

E

3rd space

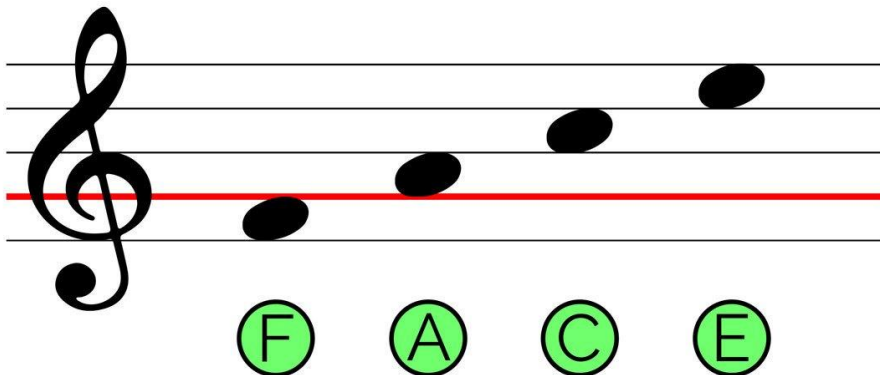
C

2nd space

A

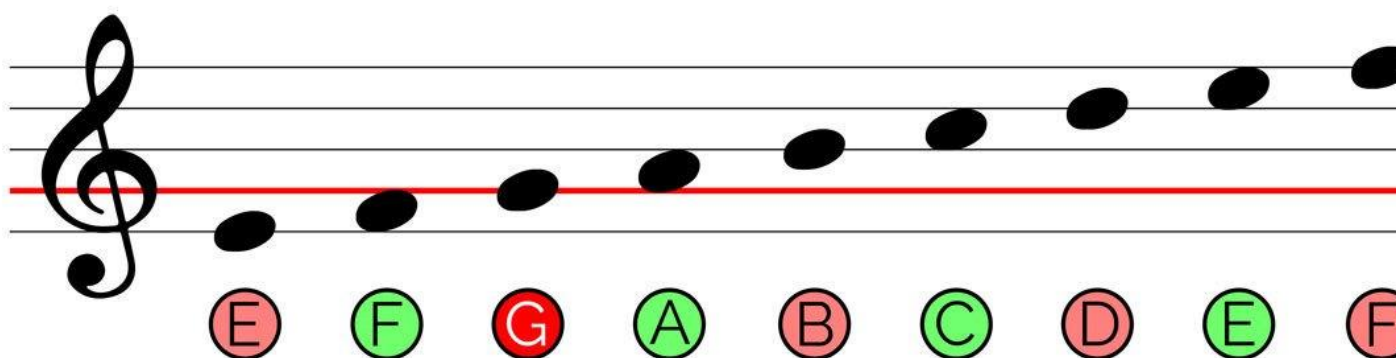
1st space

F



The names of 4

spaces in the treble clef



Order
Name/Note
5th line
F
4th space
E
4th line
D
3rd space
C
3rd line
B
2nd space
A
2nd line
G
1st space
F
1st line
E

The name of lines and spaces in the treble clef

With the right-brained approach, we will use acronyms to remember these lines and spaces with ease:

- Lines: **E G B D F** = Every **G**ood **B**oy **D**eserves **F**udge (thefreedictionary.com)
- Spaces: **F A C E**

The **treble clef** is about “**people**”: Boy, Fudge, and Face! And the 7 musical notes are represented by the first 7 letters of the alphabet.

Important Keys On The Treble Clef

- It's also called G-clef
- The second line (count from the bottom) is G-line

The Bass Clef

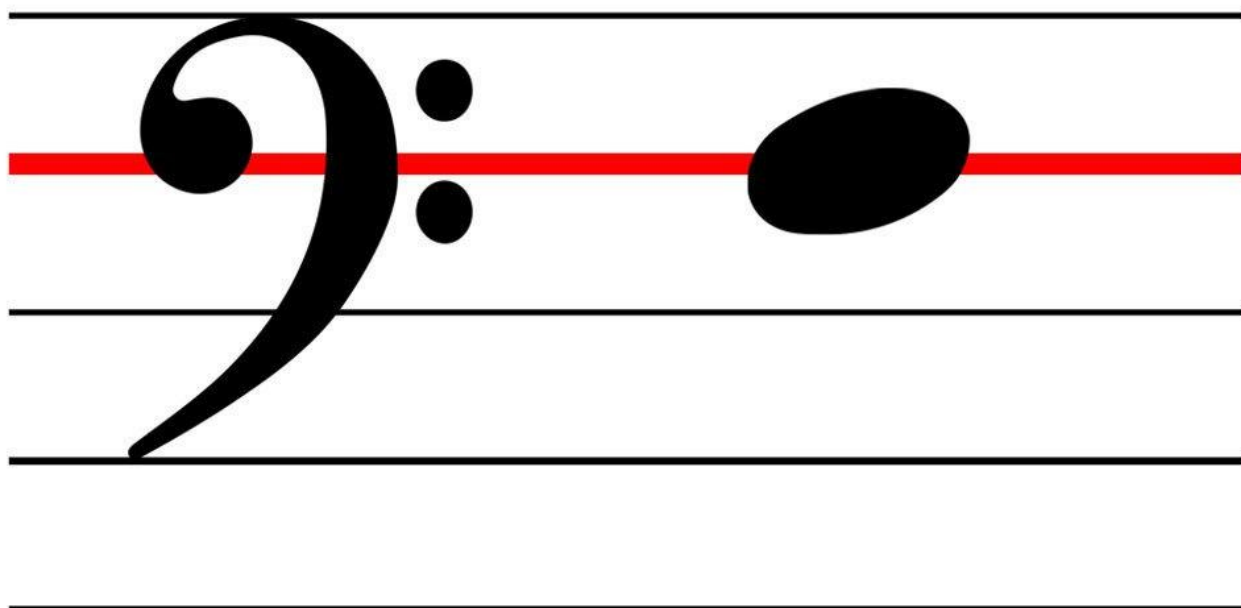
The second clef we will learn is the [bass clef](#). It looks like an ear, circles around the fourth line.

The fourth line is between two dots.

The sounds of notes on bass are usually lower than the treble clef.

In piano, generally, **the left-hand plays the notes on the bass clef.**

[IMPORTANT] The fourth line is where the note F lies on, so we call it the F-line.



People also called it **F-clef**. The reason is quite similar to G clef: It circles around F-line
The name of lines and spaces in the bass clef is slightly different from the treble clef:

Order

Name/Note

5th line

A

4th line

F

3rd line

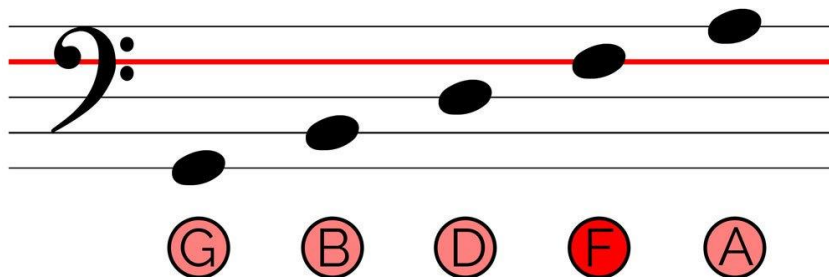
D

2nd line

B

1st line

G



The names of 5

lines in the bass clef

Order

Name/Note

4th space

G

3rd space

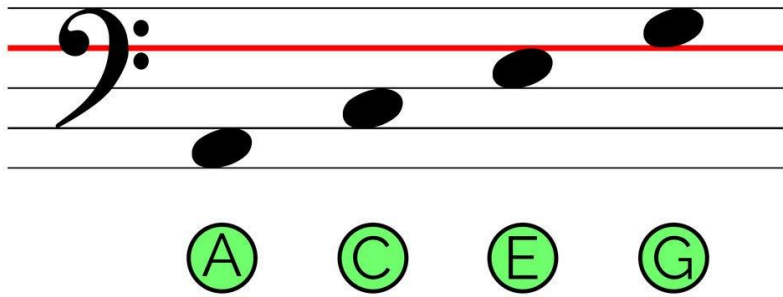
E

2nd space

C

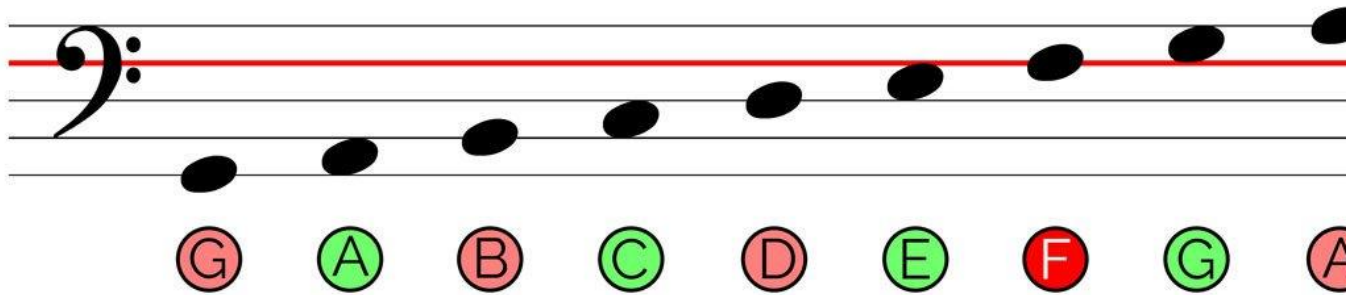
1st space

A



spaces in the bass clef

The name of 4



Order
Name/Note
5th line
A
4th space
G
4th line
F
3rd space
E
3rd line
D
2nd space
C
2nd line
B
1st space
A
1st line
G

The names of lines and spaces in the bass clef

We also have mnemonic devices for remembering the names of these lines and spaces:

- **G B D F A** = Great **B**ig **D**ogs **F**ight **A**nimals (thefreedictionary.com)
- **A C E G** = All Cows **E**at **G**rass (thefreedictionary.com)

So, the **bass clef** is about “**animal**”: Big Dogs, Cows, and Grass.

Important Keys On The Bass Clef

- It's also called F-clef
- The second line (count from the top) is F-line

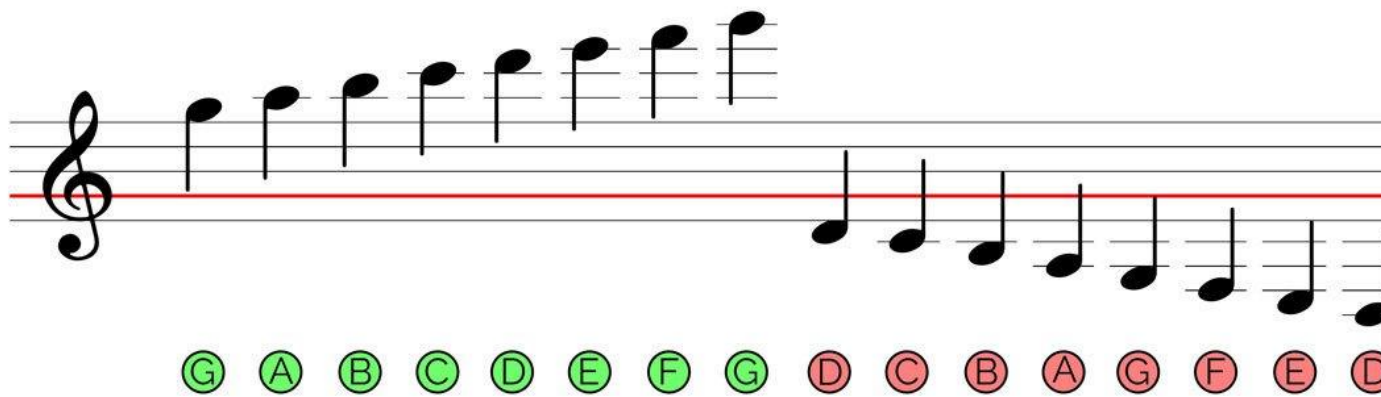
Ledger Lines

Now, we know all the notes on 5 lines and 4 spaces in the treble clef and the bass clef.

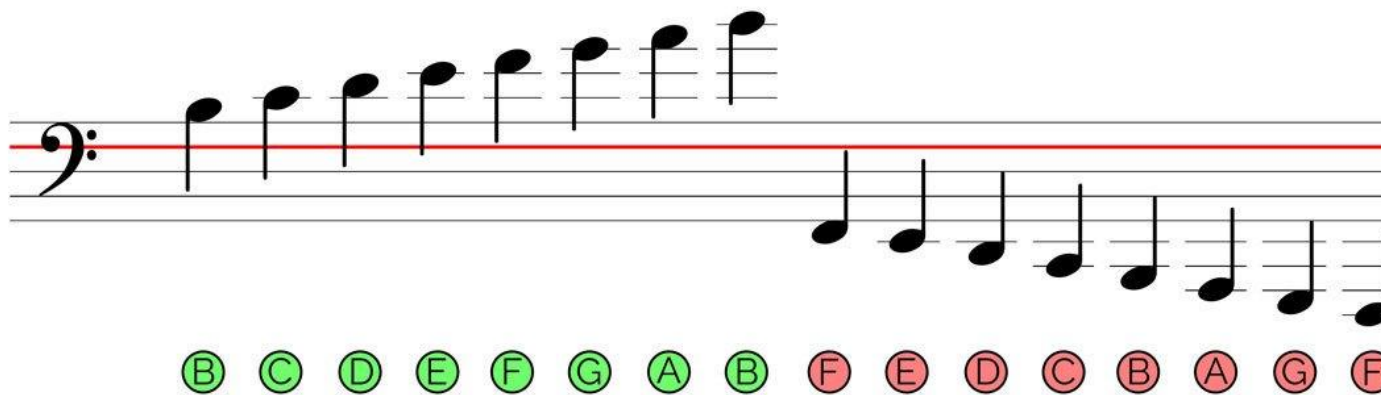
However, there are so many notes in music. If we just use 5 lines and 4 spaces of each clef, there are **only 18 notes**. That's why ledger lines come in.

[Ledger lines](#) are short lines placed below and above the staff.

You can see the examples of ledger lines in the pictures below:



Notes on the ledger lines in the treble clef



Notes on the ledger lines in the bass clef

The Grand Staff

[The grand staff](#) is just the combination of 2 staves.

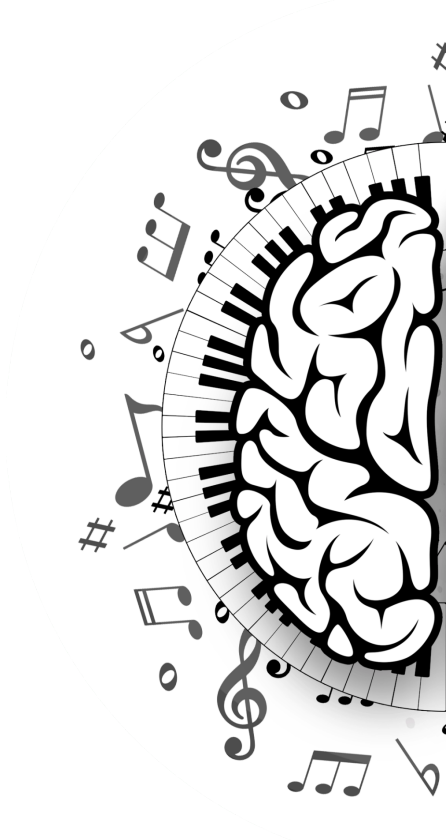
In piano, more often, the upper staff (treble staff) is for right-hand and the lower (bass staff) is for left-hand.

The notes shown on grand staff represent how 2 hands will play on the piano.



The grand staff

CHAPTER 3:
The Left-Brained Approach To Read Sheet Music



Although the mnemonic devices above are interesting and helpful for right-brained people, left-brained ones will find it difficult to imagine the pictures in their mind.

Left-brained people usually prefer to learning the basic principles: imagine less, save more headspace, and make use of the principles for every situation.

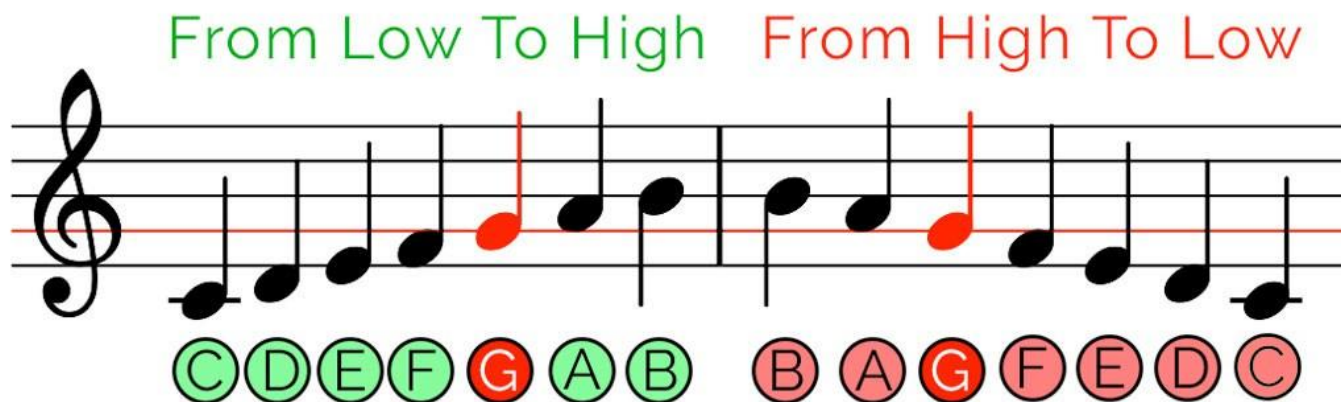
Let's get started with the left-brained approach.

3 Principles

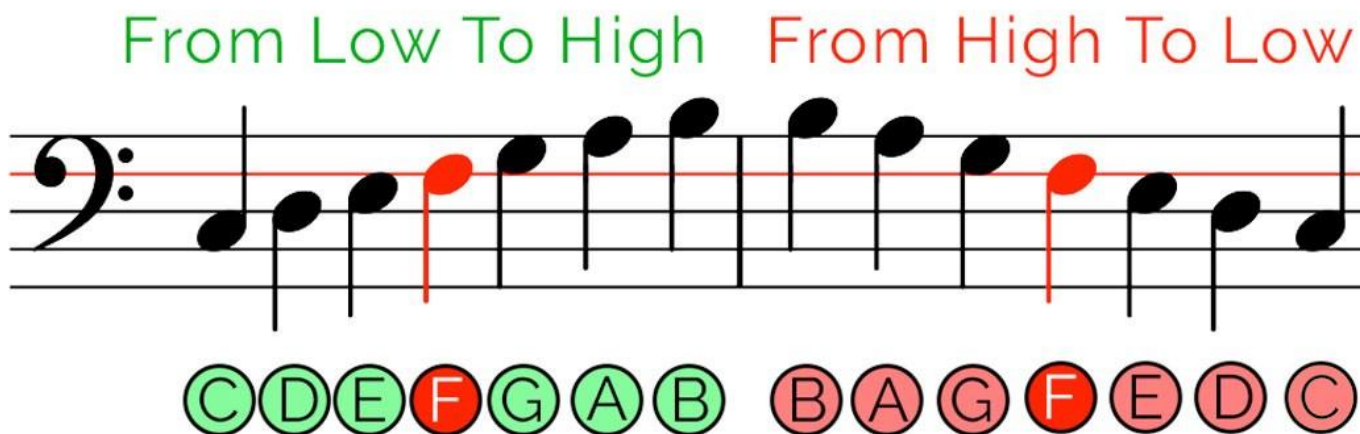
1. A note lies either on a space or on a line

2. Order of 7 notes

- The order of the notes **from low to high**: C (do) – D (re) – E (mi) – F (fa) – G (sol) – A (la) – B (si): **C – D – E – F – G – A – B**
- The order of the notes **from high to low**: B (si) – A (la) – G (sol) – F (fa) – E (mi) – D (re) – C (do): **B – A – G – F – E – D – C**



Order of notes in the treble clef



Order of notes in the bass clef

3. **Cornerstone-line** of each clef

- On the treble clef (G-clef), the 2nd line (count from the **bottom**) indicates **G**. **G-line is the 1st cornerstone-line.**
- On the bass clef (F-clef), the 2nd line (count from the **top**) indicates **F**. **F-line is the 2nd cornerstone-line.**

Okay, let's move to the 4-step to read notes on a sheet music.

How To Read Notes On The Treble Clef (G-clef)

1. Recognize that we're reading notes on the treble clef.
2. Remember the second line (count from the bottom) indicates G-line – **G-line is our 1st cornerstone-line.**
3. Identify the note's position: **is it higher or lower than G-line?**
4. Count and read the note's name
 - If the note is **higher** than G-line, count from G up to the note by the following order: **G – A – B – C – D – E – F...**
 - If the note is **lower** than G-line, count from G down to the note by the following order: **G – F – E – D – C – B – A...**

How To Read The Notes On The Bass Clef (F-clef)

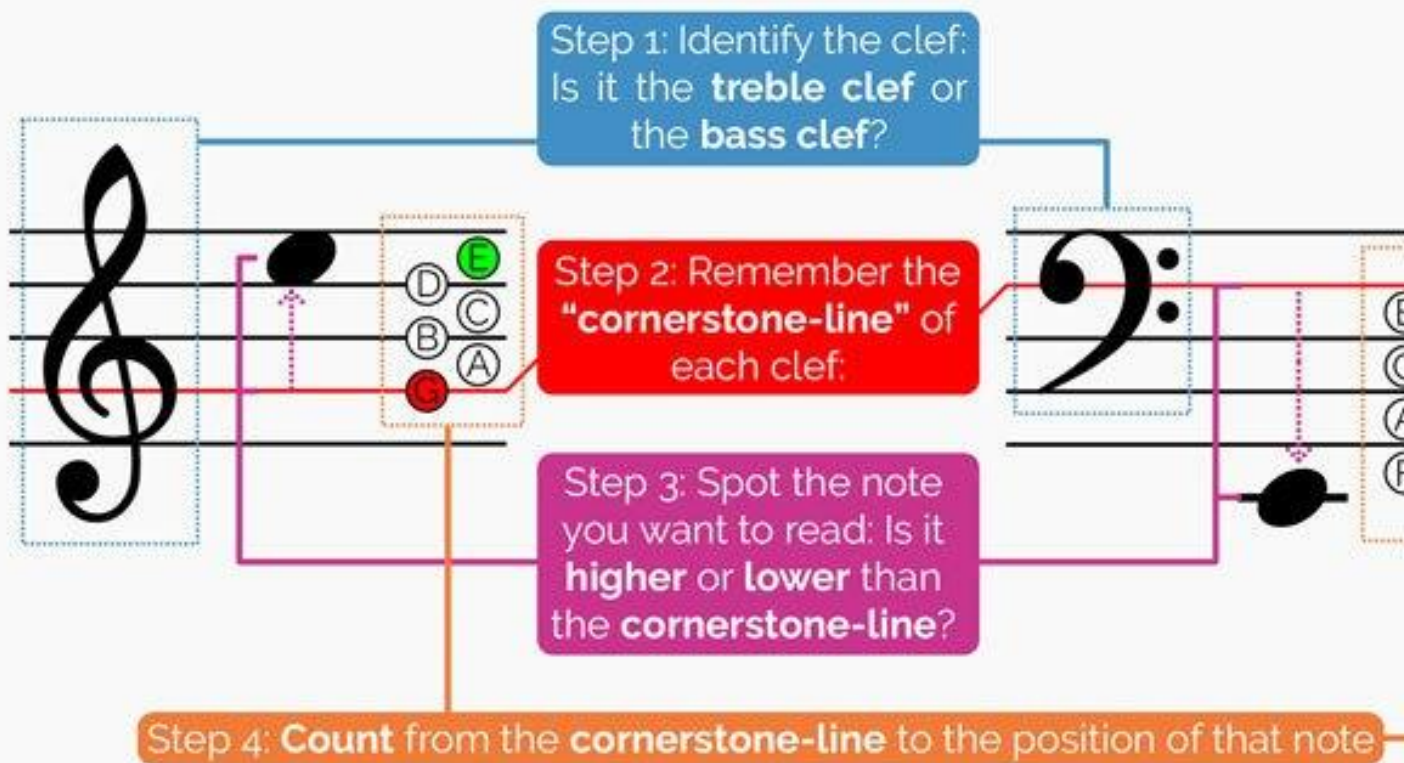
It is quite the same:

1. Recognize that we're reading notes on the bass clef.
2. Remember the second line (count from the top) indicates F-line – again, **F-line is our 2nd cornerstone-line.**
3. Identify the note's position: **is it higher or lower than F-line?**
4. Count and read the note's name
 - If it is **higher** than F-line, count from F up to the note by the following order: **F – G – A – B – C – D – E...**
 - If it is **lower** than F-line, count from F down to the note by the following order: **F – E – D – C – B – A – G...**

Below is a diagram, which shows you how to read music notes:

5

4 Steps to READ MUSIC NOTES on a SHEET MUSIC



Congratulation! By reading to this so far, you're well-educated on reading music notes than 90% of the population!

In the beginning, reading notes with this left-brained approach will quite slow. It's completely normal.

Keep practicing and you will soon be able to read notes like your favorite magazine or comic.

Now, let's move to the most exciting section!

CHAPTER 4:

Connection Between Musical Notes And Piano Keys

This chapter is the most exciting part where the magic happens.

In the previous chapter, you've learned how to read notes on sheet music.

Shortly, I will show you exactly where are these notes on a piano.

Now, let's learn how to read the black keys first!



How To Read The Black Keys

(ABCDEF Approach)

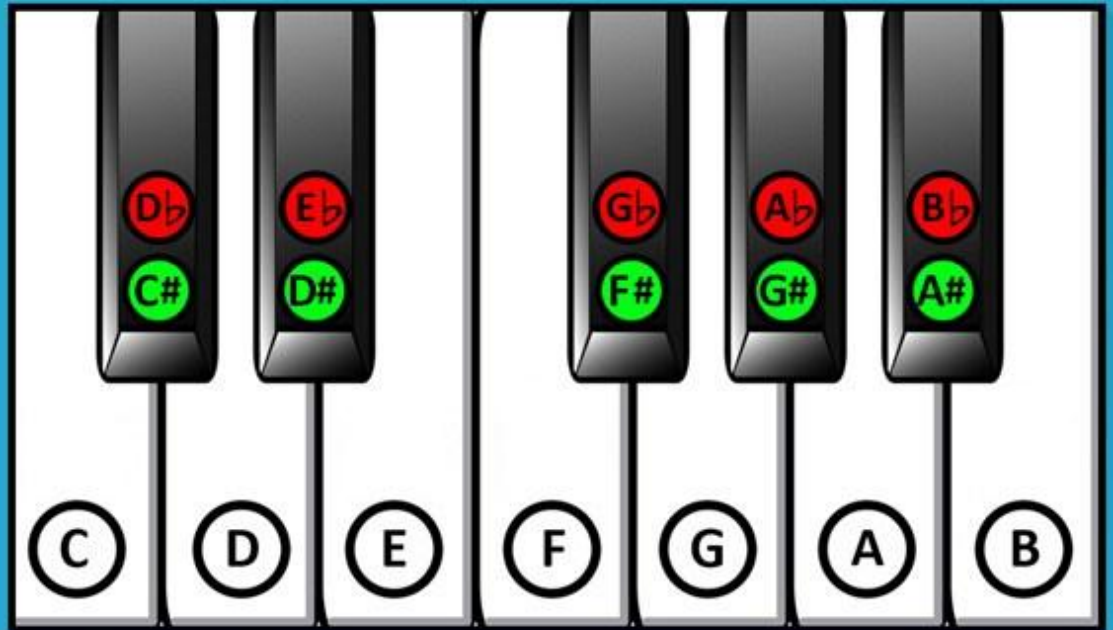
Black keys are called either **SHARP (#)** or **FLAT (♭)**

They are named by the closest white key to them on their left or right.

The suffixes are added by:

- **Sharp** if the black key is on the **right (higher)** of the nearest white key
- **Flat** if the black key is on the **left (lower)** of the nearest white key.

Look at the picture below:



The notes of black keys

We also have mnemonic devices to remember the notes on these black keys:

Try to imagine:

- A **white key** is a **plate**
- A **knife** is **sharp** and laid **on the right** of the **plate**
- A **napkin** is **flat** and laid **on the left** of the **plate**.

Now, you can see that C# is also D $\flat$; D# is E $\flat$; F# is G $\flat$; G# is A $\flat$; A# is B $\flat$.

So, each black key represents 2 notes at the same time, and their sounds are the same.

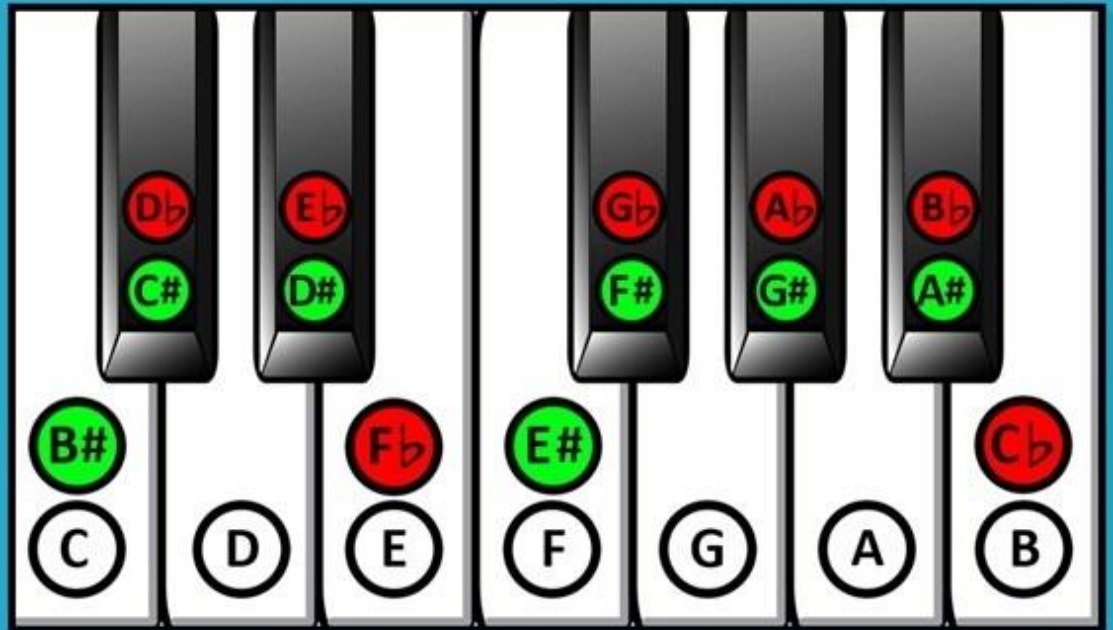
In fact, **each piano key represents more than a note**. This leads us to a new definition: **enharmonic**.

Enharmonic

Notes are called [enharmonic equivalents](#) if they all come from one piano key.

Example: D-sharp (D#) and E-flat (E $\flat$) are enharmonic equivalents. You can call that key is either D-sharp or E-flat. The note's name depends on the key signature of the sheet music.

And here is a diagram showing you the enharmonic equivalents:



Enharmonic equivalents

You can see that even the white keys also have enharmonic equivalents.

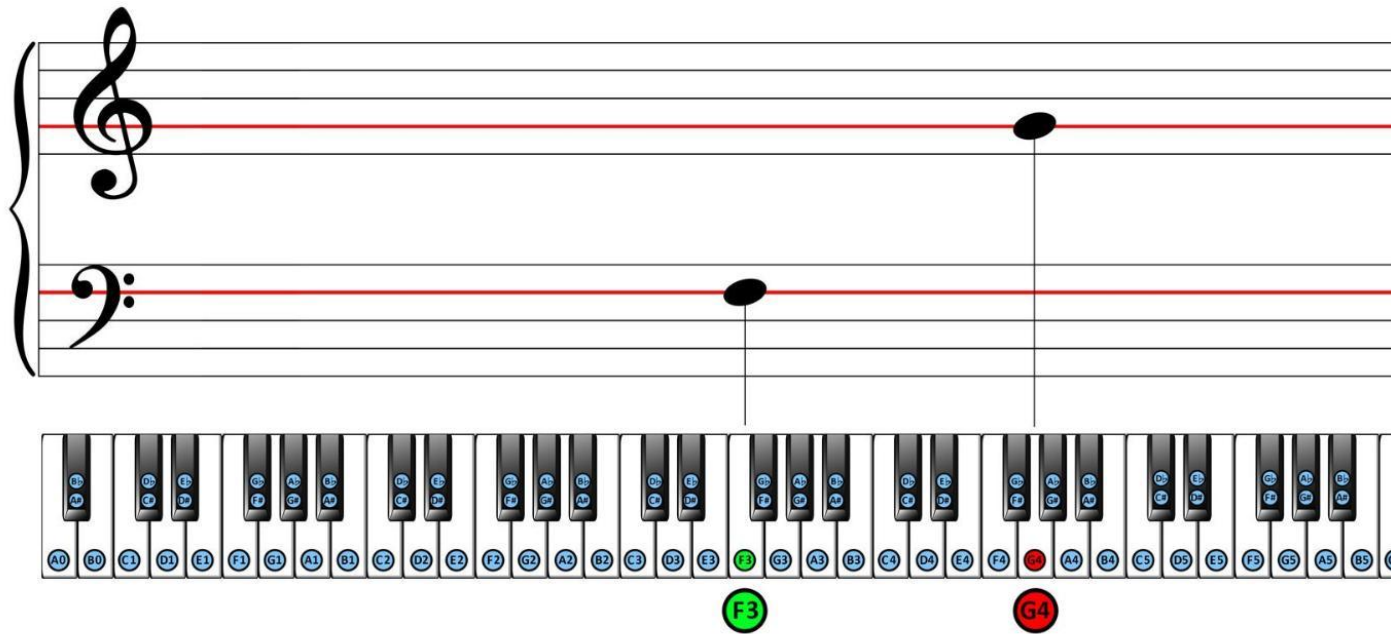
We will learn more about enharmonic in another lesson. Because it would be complicated at the beginning.

For now, just acknowledge that:

- **A piano key is different from a piano note**
- **A piano key represents more than a note**

Connection Between Musical Notes And Keys On A Piano The Left-Brained Method

You still remember G-line in the treble clef (G-clef) and F-line in the bass clef (F-clef), don't you? Now, where are these 2 notes on the piano keyboard?



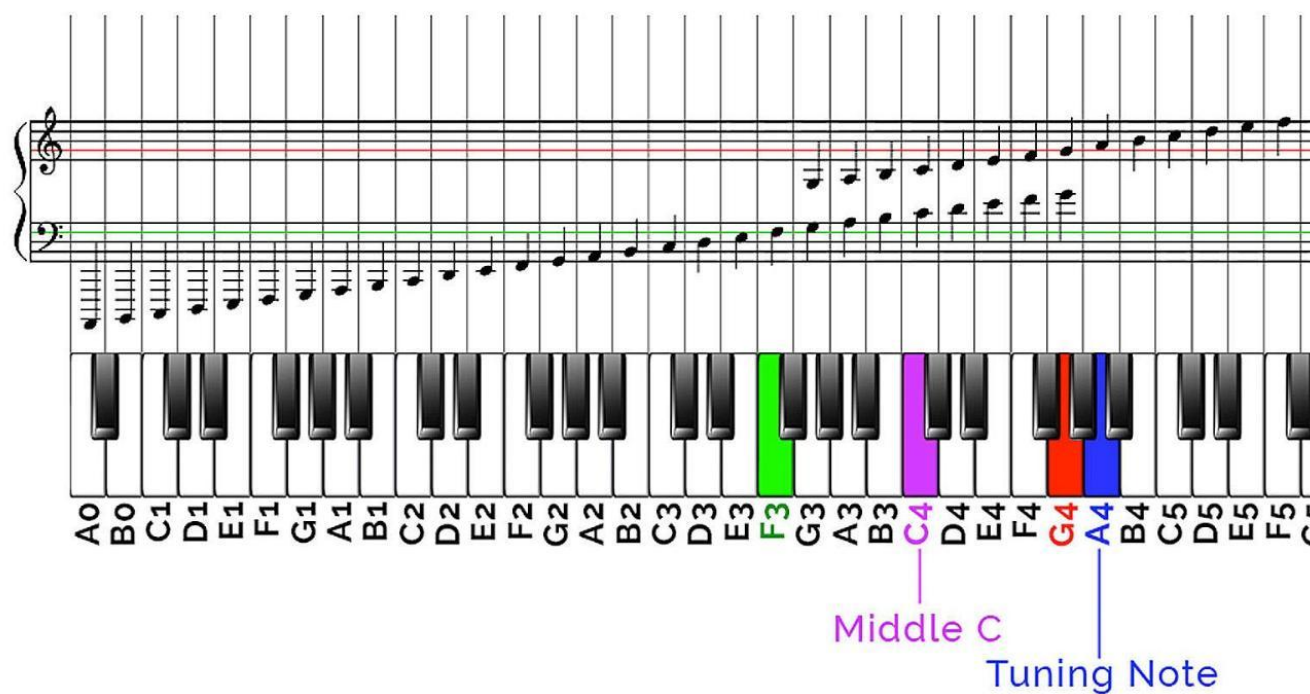
Connection between G4, F3 and the piano keys

As you can see:

- The **G-line** in the **treble clef** represents **G4**. **G4** is located in the **4th octave**.
- The **F-line** in the **bass clef** represents **F3**. **F3** is located in the **3rd octave**.

These are the 2 most important positions, I also call them cornerstone-lines. From it, we will be able to read and find other notes on the piano. ([wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_keyboard))

And below is the complete diagram of the piano keys and their corresponding musical notes:



Facts:

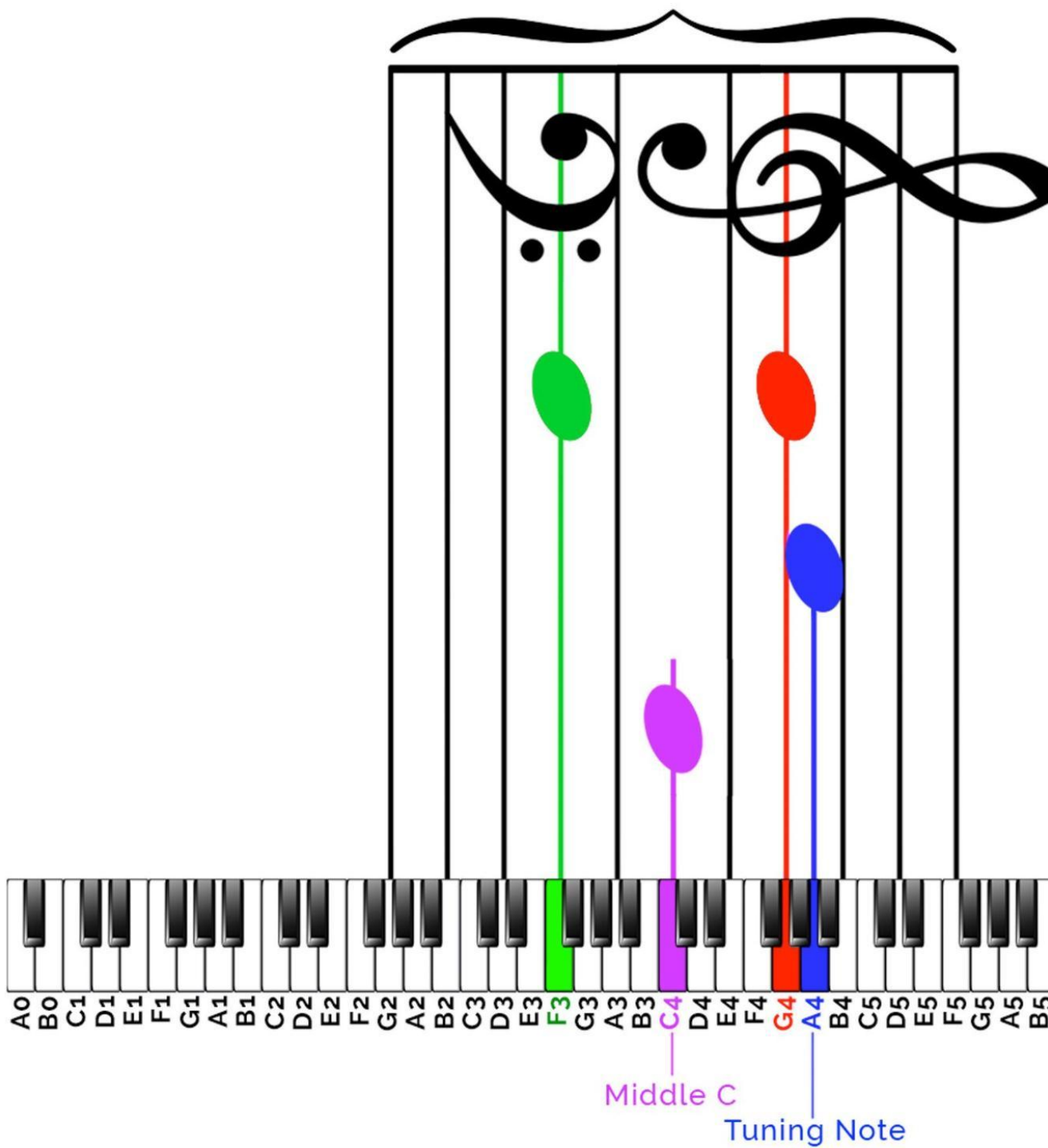
- C4 is also known as the middle C
- A4 is also known as the tuning note

The right-brained method: Metal flip strategy

Here is another approach that many right-brained people found useful when it comes to reading notes on a piano keyboard:

1. Flip your original sheet music by 90 degrees clockwise
2. Read the notes by matching them with their corresponding keys

Now the flow of the sheet is from top to bottom. And the positions of the notes are really reflected with the piano keys!



(The original idea is from takelessons.com. I just made a better illustration to help you get the idea with ease)

CHAPTER 5:

Last Thoughts And Important Points

When it comes to reading musical notes and piano notes in the beginning stage, you'll find that there are so many approaches to help you get hang of it.

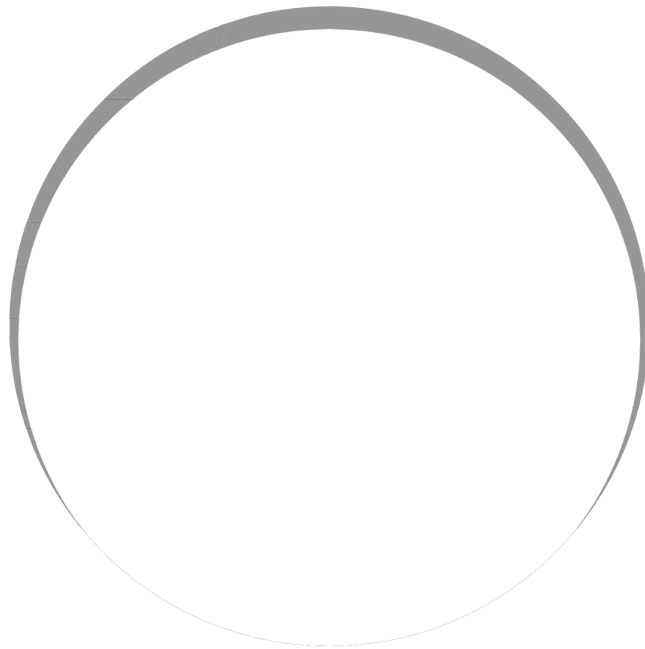
If you're a right-brained person, you probably like the mnemonic devices and the mental flip strategy.

Otherwise, you're a left-brained, learning the basic principles to recognize the patterns and orders of the notes.

Just pick up the ones that you feel most comfortable with. For now, our goal is just to learn the basic music theory and lay a firm foundation for future improvement in playing the piano.

Gradually, you'll be so familiar with notes and it'll be like reading the alphabet.

And below are the most important points you should remember.



For Right-Brained

- Approach Reading notes on sheet music (ABCDEFGF approach)
- Names of **5 lines** in the **treble clef** (from bottom to top): **E G B D F**: Every **G**ood **B**oy **D**eserves **F**udge
- Names of **4 spaces** in the **treble clef** (from bottom to top): **F A C E**
- Names of **5 lines** in the **bass clef** (from bottom to top): **G B D F A**: Great **B**ig **D**ogs **F**ight **A**nimals
- Names of **4 spaces** in the **bass clef** (from bottom to top): **A C E G**: All **C**ows **E**at **G**rass
- Reading Piano Keys (ABCDEFGF approach)
- An octave contains a pair of chopsticks on the left side and a fork on the right side
- Chopsticks: 2 black keys and 3 white keys; the first white key is C

- Fork: 3 black keys and 4 white keys; the first white key is F
- Black keys: Sharp knife on the right, Flat napkin on the left, white key plate in the middle
- Correlation Between Music notes and Piano Keys
- The metal flip strategy diagram
- For Left-Brained Approach Reading notes on sheet music (ABCDEFG approach)
- The order of notes from low to high (**C D E F G A B**) and the reverse (**B A G F E D C**)
- The treble clef: G-line is the second line from the bottom
- The bass clef: F-line is the second line from the top
- Connection Between Music notes and Piano Keys
- The complete diagram of the correlation between musical notes and piano keys

Now It's Your Turn

So, that's it for my guide on how to read piano keys and notes.

I hoped you enjoyed it.

Now, it's time to test what you've learned so far.

Also, if you have a question about anything from this guide, let me know by leaving a quick comment below.

Source: <https://sublimelody.com/piano-keys-and-notes/>

via Sublimelody <https://ift.tt/2NiYI42>

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