

Grade One Theory of Music

Course



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Lesson 1: The Staff and Notes



Staff Notation

Music is written down in a number of different ways around the world. In the West, most instruments use a method called **staff notation**.

The staff (or **stave**, as it's sometimes called) is made up of 5 horizontal lines:



Notes are placed on the lines:



and in the spaces:



Notes can have black or white heads. (See Lesson 4 - Time Names of Notes for more on this.)

The Treble Clef

We always put a **clef** at the beginning of the staff. A clef is a symbol which identifies one note by name. We can work out all the other notes from this one.



The most common clef is the **treble clef**, which looks like this:

The treble clef tells us where the we should write the note G. We draw the treble clef so that the curly bit in the middle forms a sort of circle around one line on the staff- a note written on this line is a G.



Sometimes it's called the **G** clef because of this.

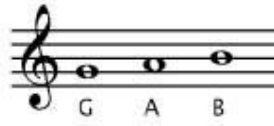
Now we know where the note G is, we can work out all the other notes.

Letter Names

We use the letter names A-G (always written in **capital** letters) to identify notes. After G, the next note is A, (because we start the sequence again).

G is on line, so the next note up, A, is in a space:

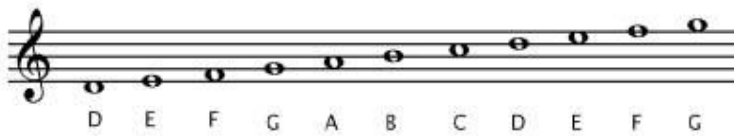




The next note up is B:

B is on a line.

Here are all the lines and spaces filled up:



You can try to remember the letter names of the notes on lines by learning

Every Good Boy Deserves Football



And you can learn the notes in the spaces by memorising

D - FACE - G



or you can make up your own silly sentences to help you remember!



The note which comes before the first D in this series is called **middle C**.

On a piano keyboard, it's the C nearest the keyhole.

Lesson 2: Clefs



Bass Clef

We have already learned about our first clef, the treble clef.

For most low-pitched music, (where most of it is lower than middle C), we use the **bass clef**.



The bass clef looks like this:

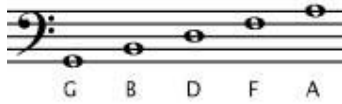
The two dots of the bass clef are placed either side of the line where we can find the note **F**, so it's also known as the **F clef**.



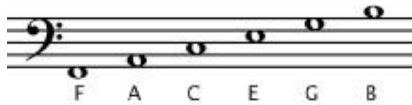
This is the first F below middle C.

Note Names

We can work out the other notes just like we did with the treble clef. Here are the notes on the lines:



And here are the notes in the spaces:



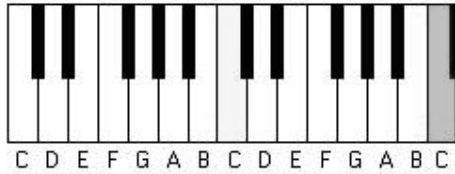
The note above B is middle C. It's useful to be able to write middle C in both clefs. We use a small line for it to sit on, just like we did in the treble clef:



Remember that in the treble clef, middle C is at the bottom of the staff:



Lesson 3: Accidentals



The Octave

Let's look at a piano keyboard again.

The light grey note is middle C, and the dark grey note is the next C above it. How many different notes are there between these two Cs?

If we count all the black and white notes, we'll find there are 12 different notes. (Don't count the C twice!) This span of notes is called an "octave".

This isn't only true for the piano - every instrument uses the same series of notes.

Sharps and Flats

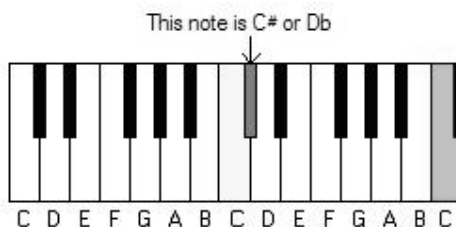
So, we have 12 different notes, but we only use 7 letters of the alphabet. We use the words "sharp" (=higher) and "flat" (=lower) with a letter name, to cover all those "in-between" notes.

We can use symbols instead of the words sharp and flat.

Sharp

b Flat

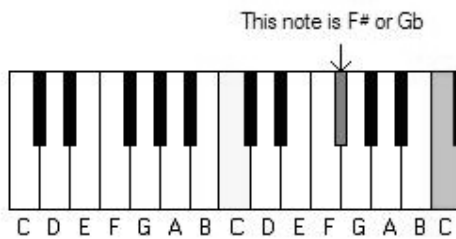
Find the notes C and D on this keyboard:



They are both white notes (but we've coloured the C in yellow to help you find it!). In between them, you'll see a black note.

We can say that this note is a bit higher than C, so it is “C sharp” (C#), or we can say it is a bit lower than D, so it is also “D flat” (Db).

Here's another example.



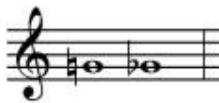
Find the notes F and G. The black note in between F and G can be called F sharp (F#) or G flat (Gb).

Naturals

We use the word “natural” (or the symbol ) to say that a note is neither sharp nor flat.

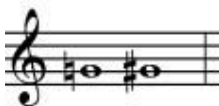
In Grade 1 Theory, you are sometimes asked to identify the higher or lower note of a pair. Remember that flats are **low** and sharps are **high**, while naturals are in the **middle**.

Which of these two notes is lower ?



The first note is G natural, and the second note is G flat. Flats are lower, so the second note is lower.

Which of these two notes is lower?



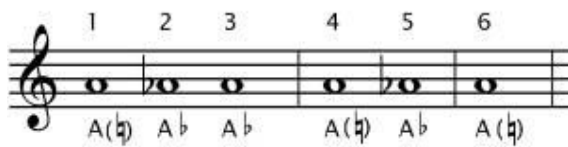
The first note is G natural, and the second note is G sharp. Sharps are higher, so the first note is lower.

Together, sharps, flats and naturals are called “accidentals”.

Barlines and Accidentals

When an accidental has been written, all the other notes which are the same pitch, (or position on the staff), are also affected by the accidental, but *only until a barline is drawn*.

Here's an example:



1 is natural, because we haven't put any accidentals.

2 is flattened by the flat symbol.

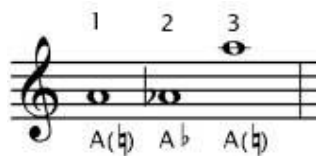
3 is also flattened by the symbol from number 2.

4 is natural, because the barline cancels the effect of the flat.

5 is flattened by the symbol.

6 is naturalised by the barline.

Notes of the same letter name, but which occupy different positions on the staff, are not affected by each other's accidentals.



3 is an A natural. The flat on number 2 doesn't affect it, because it's not the same pitch - it's an octave higher.

Lesson 4: Times Names of Notes

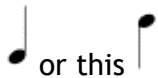


Note Shapes

To show how long notes should be held for, we draw them with different shapes.

Crotchets

The most basic and most common length of note is the **crotchet**, which looks like this:



It's a black note-head on a basic stem, (or stick).

A crotchet usually represents one **beat**.

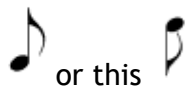
As musicians, we can decide for ourselves exactly how long a beat should be, but a common duration for a crotchet is about one second.

Here are 4 crotchet Ds.



Quavers

Notes which are twice as fast as crotchets are called **quavers**. They look like this:



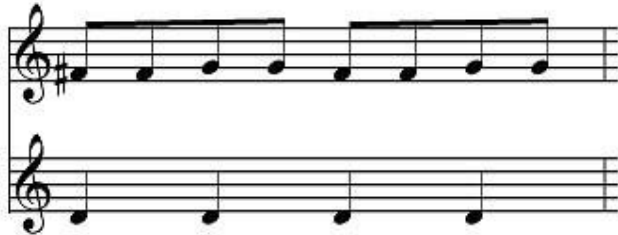
Notice that although the quaver has a black note-head like the crotchet, it also has a small tail on the **right** side of its stem.

Here are 8 quavers, F sharps and Gs.



(To find out why there is only one sharp symbol, read Lesson 3 - Accidentals, and to find out how to group these notes with beams, read Lesson 7 - Beaming)

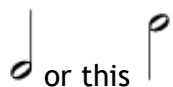
A quaver represents half a beat.



Minims

Minims are twice as long as crotchets, or if you prefer, minims last for 2 beats.

Minims look like this:



Notice that minims look like crotchets, but their heads are white, not black.

Here is a minim B and a minim A, in the bass clef:



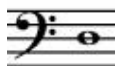
Semibreves

Semibreves are twice as long as minims, or if you prefer, semibreves last for 4 beats. Semibreves look like this:



Because semibreves don't have stems, there's only one way to draw them.

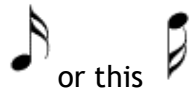
Here is a semibreve D in the bass clef:



Semiquavers

Semiquavers are twice as fast as quavers, or 4 times faster than crotchets. Four semiquavers take up the same amount of time as 1 crotchet. So, a semiquaver is equal to a quarter (fourth) of a beat.

A semiquaver looks like this:



We can join together two or more semiquavers like this:



Semiquavers look like quavers, but they have *two* tails where quavers have one.

Here are some semiquavers in action:



And here is the finished product!



Lesson 5: Time Names of the Rests



Rest Shapes

Rests are symbols which tell you to stop playing, and how long to stop for. Rests come in different shapes depending on how long they last for, just like notes do. Rests take the same names as the notes of the same length.

Crotchets

1 beat = crotchet rest.



The crotchet rest is a kind of squiggle which isn't easy to draw nicely. If you find it difficult, you might prefer to use another version, which looks like this.



Quavers

$\frac{1}{2}$ beat = quaver rest.



The quaver rest looks a bit like a number 7, with a circle at its tip. If you look again at the “easy” crotchet rest, you’ll notice that it is, in fact, a back-to-front quaver rest.

Semiquavers

$\frac{1}{4}$ beat = semiquaver rest.



The semiquaver rest looks a lot like the quaver rest, but it's got **2** tails, just like the semiquaver note has.

Minims

2 beats = minim rest.



The minim rest is a small, coloured-in block. The minim rest sits on the middle line of the staff.

Semibreves

4 beats = semibreve rest.



The semibreve rest is the same size block as the minim rest, but its position is different - it hangs off the second line from the top.

If you find it hard to remember the positions of the 2 and 4 beat rests, remember that that **4** is a **higher** number than 2, so a **4-beat** rest is **higher** up the staff than a 2 beat rest.

Semibreve rests are also used as “whole bar” rests. This means that the whole bar should be silent, even if the bar doesn't contain exactly 4 beats.

Lesson 6: Dotted Notes



What Do Dots Do?

All notes and rests can have their lengths **increased** if we add one or more dots. For Grade 1 theory, you only need to understand what happens when we add **one** dot.

Dots are always placed on the right side of the note head.

A dot makes a note (or rest) longer by 50%. Or, in other words, a dotted note is equal to itself plus half of itself.

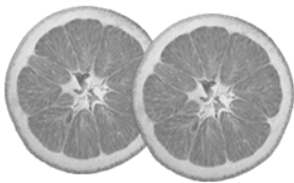
	Crotchet/Quarter note= 1 beat
	Dotted crotchet/quarter note= $1 + 1/2 \text{ beat} = 1 \text{ and a half beats}$
	Minim/Half note= 2 beats
	Dotted minim/half note= $2 + 1 = 3 \text{ beats}$
	Quaver/Eighth note= $1/2 \text{ beat}$
	Dotted quaver/eighth note= $1/2 + 1/4 = \text{three quarters of a beat}$

If you find it difficult to think in numbers, try something more refreshing, like an orange!



One whole orange is like one whole beat, or a crotchet/quarter note.

It's the same size as ...



...two half oranges (quavers/eighth notes)

or even



four quarter oranges (semiquavers/sixteenth notes).

If you add a dot to a note, it's like adding a smaller bit of orange to the bit you've already got. One whole orange plus half an orange would be called a "dotted whole orange"! One half orange plus one quarter orange would be a "dotted half orange"! 😊

Lesson 7: Beaming Notes



Beaming

We have already learnt that notes which are smaller than one beat - quavers and semiquavers - have tails. To make music easier to read, we normally group these small notes together in complete beats. To do this, we join the tails together, making them into a straight line. We call this line a "beam".

Making Beams

Notes with one tail (quavers and dotted quavers) have one beam. Semiquavers have two tails so they have two beams, which are drawn quite close together. Here are some examples.



Quavers can be joined to semiquavers like this:



We can also join dotted quavers to semiquavers with beams, like this:



Notice that the lower semiquaver beam is quite short. This is a cut-off beam.

Cut-off Beams

We find cut-off beams when a single semiquaver is joined to a quaver. Cut-off beams are quite short - they should be about as wide as the note-head. They can point in either direction, depending on which side of the quaver they are on. Here's another example:



Grouping Notes with Beams

We use beams to group notes together in whole beats. So, semiquavers are grouped together in fours:



We also usually group quavers in fours, making two beats:



Beaming and Rests

We can include rests inside a group of beamed notes. Rests themselves are never beamed - we simply insert them between the notes. We can change their horizontal position on the staff if we need to.



The semiquaver rest has been moved downwards a little bit so that it doesn't get mixed up with the beam.

Angling Beams

Sometimes we need to beam together notes which are quite far apart on the staff. How should we beam these two notes?



Keep in your mind the fact that beaming exists to **help us read music quickly**. Beaming should follow the general direction of the music, from left to right. If the music is getting higher, the beam should point upwards; if it's getting lower it should be downwards. If the pitch of the beamed notes is the same, the beam should not slant at all.

In our example, the music is getting higher, so the beam has to slant upwards.

Stem Direction - Beaming Two Notes

Now we have to choose whether to make the stems point up or down:

Which one looks better to you?



To work out which way to draw your stems when beaming two notes, first you need to work out which note is **furthest** from the middle line.

In our example above, the bottom D is further away from the centre line than the top D is.

The note which is furthest away from the middle line tells us which way we should draw our stems.

The bottom D has its stem pointing upwards, so that's the direction we should use with our beaming:



is the right answer!

If we had to beam the following -



we would draw our stems the same way round. Here, the bottom D is still further away, so we follow this D's stem direction:



However, if we change the notes to Fs, you will notice that we have to change to stems down, because the top F is further from the middle line than the bottom F:



Stem Direction - Three or More Notes

When beaming together groups of three or more notes, we need to look at all the notes in the group and see how many are above the middle line and how many are below it. If there are more notes above the middle line, stems will point downwards. If there are more notes below the middle line, stems will point upwards. Here's an example:



There are three notes above the middle line, so the stems point downwards.



Sometimes you might find that you have to break the rules in order for your music to look ok. Don't worry if that's the case - these are really guidelines rather than rules. Use them where you can but don't be afraid to try something different if it makes the music clearer!

Lesson 8: Tied Notes



Ties

In music, a tie is a small, curved line which connects two notes of the **same pitch**. The time values of tied notes are added together - you only play the note once.

A tie looks exactly like a slur - but a slur connects two notes of a **different pitch** and tells the player to play the two notes smoothly. Be careful not to confuse ties and slurs!



Some Examples



A minim (half note) and a quaver (eighth note) tied together, making a note of 2 and a half beats.



Two crotchets (quarter notes) tied together across a barline. We hold the note for 2 beats.

Positioning Ties

Ties are usually written on the opposite side of a note to its stem. In the examples that we just looked at, the A's have their stems up, so the tied is placed underneath the notes. The F's have stems down, so the tie is drawn above the notes.

Ties and Barlines

Ties can cross barlines. Sometimes a tie is needed at the end of a line or a page and at the beginning of the next. When this happens, we draw half the tie at the end of the first line, and the other half at the beginning of the next line, like this:



The C at the end of this line has the first half of the tie...



and the C at the beginning of the next line has the other half of the tie.

Ties and Accidentals

An accidental placed on the first of two tied notes also applies to the second tied note, even if the two notes are separated by a barline.



The second note is also F sharp.

Sometimes you might see an accidental in brackets on the second note. This is called a "courtesy" accidental - it's only there to make it clear what the note is supposed to be. This often happens when a tie is broken over two lines.

Ties and Beams

We don't normally put both ties and beams onto notes. We usually break the beam over two tied notes.

This is the wrong way to do it:



We need to break the beam over the two middle notes, like this:



Lesson 9: Time Signatures



Time Signatures

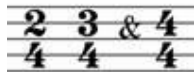
A time signature is a symbol which we write at the beginning of a piece of music to show how many beats there are in one bar.

Here's a time signature:



Grade One Requirements

In Grade 1 Theory of Music you need to know three time signatures:



The Bottom Number

The bottom number in a time signature tells you the type of beat we need to count in each bar. The number 4 represents a crotchet beat. So, in Grade One we only need to think about counting crotchets.

The Top Number

The top number tells us how many beats we need to count in each complete bar.

So,

$\frac{2}{4}$

means we should count two crotchet beats in each complete bar

$\frac{3}{4}$

means we should count three crotchet beats, and

$\frac{4}{4}$

means we should count four crotchet beats.

Barlines

We draw vertical barlines through the staff to divide the music up into complete bars. (Sometimes the first and last bars of a piece can be incomplete, but all the bars in between must be complete ones).

Here's an example in 2/4:



The values of the notes in each bar always add up to two crotchet beats.

Here's an example in 3/4. This time the first bar is incomplete:



The values of the notes in each bar add up to three crotchets, except in the first and last bars which are incomplete.

Working out the Time Signature

In Grade 1 Theory, you might have to work out the time signature of a short piece. How do we do that?

First, pencil the value (length) of each note underneath it, in the same way as you saw in the previous two examples. Then carefully add the values together. You should get the same total in each bar. If you didn't, then you've made a mistake so check your working out!

Don't forget that at Grade One, you only need to know 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4, so the right answer must be one of these three. You'll never be presented with a tune that changes time signature in the middle of the piece in Grade One (but you'll have to do that in later grades!)

Look at this practice question, with the working out.

Your last bar should also have the full number of beats (in the Grade One exam, but not always in real life!) Double check your answer - go back and count each bar again.

If one of your bars has a different number of beats to the others, you have made a mistake!

Make sure that your lines are totally vertical (not leaning to one side or the other), that they don't poke up higher or lower than the staff, and that they are placed about one note-head's width away from the note on the right.

Look at the first barline that you were given as an example, and use it as a guideline.

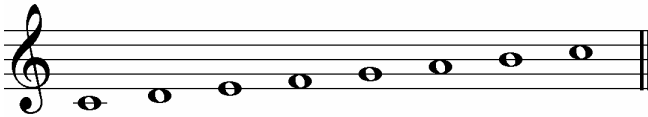
* It is maybe something of a mystery how the Associated Board awards points for this question. You might, for example, have to draw in 5 barlines in two extracts, but there are up to ten points awarded for the whole question. Either each correctly placed barline is worth 2 points, or points are also awarded for neatly drawing the lines. (I would guess that the latter is true.)

Lesson 10: Tones and Semitones



The C Major Scale

Look at this series of eight notes:



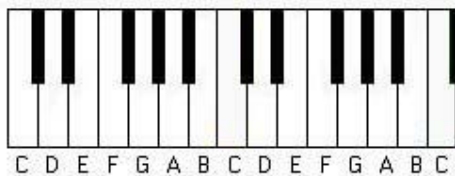
This is a scale of C major. (A "scale" is *any* defined series of notes.) In the "C major" scale, both the first and the last notes are Cs- but how do we know what the in-between notes are?

On the piano, a C major scale uses all the white notes (so it doesn't have any sharps or flats), but on other instruments, we don't have white notes, so how do we know which notes to use?

In fact, what we need to know is the distance between each of the notes in the scale. The distance between any two notes of the scale which are next to each other will be either a tone or a semitone; but what are tones and semitones?

Semitones

Let's use the piano keyboard to look at some examples.



If two notes are as close as possible on the piano keyboard, we call the distance between them a semitone.

Find E and F on the piano keyboard. The distance between E and F is a semitone; it's not possible to squeeze another note in between them, because there is nothing between them on the piano keyboard.



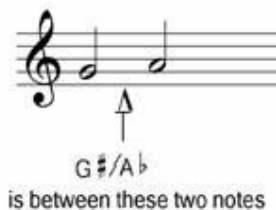
Now find A and B flat. The distance between A and B flat is also a semitone.



Tones

If there is **one** note between the two notes we are looking at, the distance between those two notes is called a tone.

Find G and A on the keyboard. G-A is a tone. We can squeeze a G sharp/A flat between them.

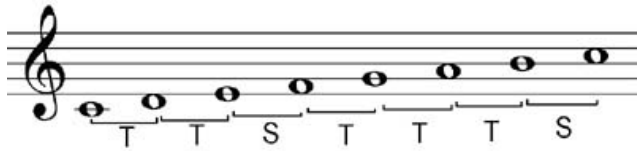


E-F sharp is a tone. F natural sits between them.



Tones and Semitones in the Major Scale

Let's look at that major scale again, and see what the pattern of tones and semitones is (T=tone and S=semitone):

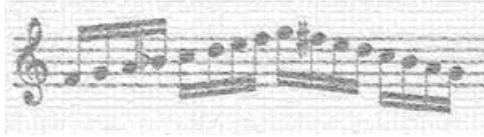


The pattern is T-T-S-T-T-T-S.

In fact, **all** major scales follow the same pattern, so try to remember it!

T - T - S - T - T - T - S

Lesson 11: Major Scales



The Major Scale

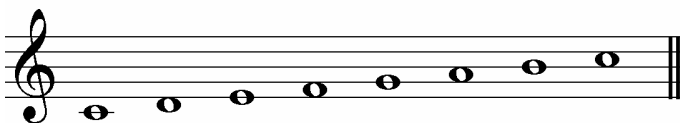
In Grade One Music Theory of Music, you need to know about four major scales: C, G, D and F major.

In music theory exams, scales are written using semibreves (whole notes).

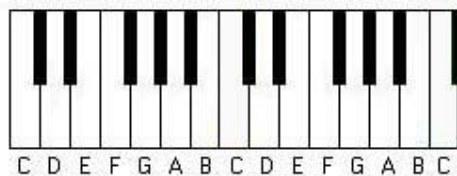
C Major

We've already learnt that C major doesn't have any sharps and flats (because it uses only the white notes on the piano keyboard). We've also learnt that **all** major scales are built with the same pattern: T-T-S-T-T-T-S (T=Tone and S=Semitone).

Here's the scale of C major again for you:



And here's a picture of the piano keyboard, to help you remember the the layout of notes:



G Major

Let's look at G major next. We'll construct the scale using the T-T-S-T-T-T-S pattern that we've just learnt.

We'll start by putting the first G on the stave. We're using the treble clef, but it works just the same way in the bass clef.



The next note we need, as you can see from the pattern above, is a tone higher than G. The note which is a tone higher than G is A, (because we can squeeze an A sharp/B flat between them). So A is our next note:



The third note is, again, a tone up. From A, the next tone up is B, (we can squeeze A sharp/B flat in between them).



Next we meet our first semitone - C. (There is nothing we can squeeze in between B and C).



Hopefully by now you've got the idea, so here are the rest of the notes of the G major scale:



G major has one sharp - F sharp. You might be wondering why we choose F sharp and not G flat, since they are the same note on the piano. When we write a scale, we use each letter of the alphabet **once only**, except for the first and last notes which must have the same letter. G major must start and end on **G**, so we've already used up that letter. We haven't used F though, so we can use that, and make F sharp.

D Major

Let's look at D major next:



D major has two sharps - F sharp and C sharp.

F major

The last scale we need to look at is F major:



F major doesn't have any sharps, but it has one flat - B flat.

Remember, we can't use A sharp instead of B flat, because we've already got an A in the scale.

Ascending and Descending

Scales can be written going up or going down. Scales which go up are called "ascending", and scales which go down are "descending". When we write a descending scale, the pattern of tones and semitones is reversed, so instead of being T-T-S-T-T-T-S, it is S-T-T-T-S-T-T.



Here's an example of F major descending, using the bass clef.

Degrees of the Scale

The first and last notes in any scale are called the "tonic". The other notes can be referred to by **number**.

In C major, the second note in the scale is D, so we can say that D is the **2nd degree of the scale of C major**.

We always use the **ascending** scale to work out the degrees of a scale.

Every scale has seven degrees, because there are seven different notes. The distance of eight notes, from low C to top C for example, is called an "octave".

Here's a summary of the degrees of the scales of C, D, G and F major:

	Tonic (1st)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	Tonic (Octave)
C Major	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
G Major	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
D Major	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
F Major	F	G	A	Bb	C	D	E	F

Lesson 12: Key Signatures



Key Signatures

When we write music which mostly uses notes from the scale of C major and sounds good finished with a C, we say that the music is "*in* C major".

Here's a short tune in C major:



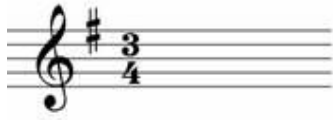
G Major

If a tune mostly uses the notes from the G major scale and sounds good finished with a G, then the music is "*in* G major". Here's the same tune as above, but now it's in G major:



As you know, in G major the Fs are sharp. Instead of writing all the Fs in the piece with sharp signs next to them, we write just one F sharp, right at the beginning of the line, after the clef and before the time signature. This is called the "key signature". (We don't use a key signature for music which is in C major, because we don't need one! - C major doesn't have any sharps or flats!)

In the treble clef, we always write the F sharp sign on the top line (we never use the lower F space). You should be able to just see the line of the stave between the two horizontal lines of the sharp sign.



In the bass clef, we write the sign for F sharp on the second line from the top.



The key signature is written at the beginning of every line of music, immediately after the clef, to remind us that all the Fs need to be F sharps.

D Major

Let's look at D major next:



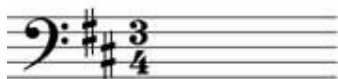
D major has two sharps - F sharp and C sharp.

The key signature of D major in the treble clef looks like this:



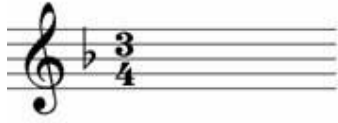
We add the C sharp to the F sharp that we've got already.

In the bass clef, the key signature of D major looks like this.



F major

Finally, let's look at the key signature for F major. Remember that in F major there aren't any sharps, but there is one flat - B flat.



In the treble clef, the flat is written on the middle line.



In the bass clef, the flat is written on the second line from the bottom.

For Grade One Music Theory, you only need to know about these three key signatures: G major, D major and F major (and you need to know that C major doesn't need one!)

Lesson 13: Intervals



Intervals

An interval is the distance between two notes, measured as a number. in Grade One Music Theory, sometimes you have to measure given intervals, and sometimes you have to write notes at a certain interval.

Melodic and Harmonic Intervals

We can measure the distance between two notes which are played *together* at the same time, like these:



The distance between these notes is called a "harmonic" interval.

Or we can measure two notes which are played *separately*, like these:



The distance between these notes is called a "melodic" interval.

We use the *same* method to measure both kinds of interval.

Measuring Intervals

When we measure an interval, we always start counting at the lower note. We then count upwards to the higher note.



Here, we start counting on the lower note, which is C. We count upwards to the higher note, E. This gives us C, D and E. We counted three notes, so this interval is called a **third**.

If we count four notes, the interval is a fourth, and so on, until we reach eight. If we count eight notes the interval is called an "octave".

In Grade One Music Theory, all the intervals you have to calculate will start on the tonic (1st note) of the scale.

Intervals in Different Keys

In Grade One Music Theory, you need to know about intervals in C major, G major, D major and F major. The method for working out intervals is always the same, no matter what the key is. However, don't forget that in G major you need F sharp, in D major you need F sharp and C sharp, and in F major you need B flat.

For example, in D major, an interval of a third will be this:



We start counting on the lower note, D. We count D, E and F sharp - three notes, so the interval is a third.

In F major, an interval of a fourth will have a B flat:



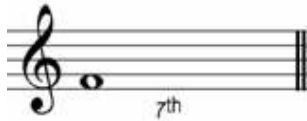
We count F, G, A and B flat - four notes, so it's a fourth.

Writing Intervals

There are two important steps to follow when you write intervals.

First, you need to work out which notes you have to write, and secondly you need to write the notes clearly and accurately.

If you have to write an interval, you will be given the first (lower) note of the two, and you will be told what interval to calculate; something like this:



You'll also be told if you have to write a **harmonic**, or **melodic** interval. This one is a melodic interval, so we'll write the second note **after** the given note.

Remember that we start counting on the **lower** note, which is F in our example. We've been told to write a **7th**, so we count **seven** notes upwards: F, G, A, B flat, C, D, E. The seventh note is E, so that's the note we need to write.

Don't forget that we were told to write a **melodic** interval, so in this case we will write the E after the F, and not directly above it:



Don't forget to look carefully at the **clefs** - you will normally have about 3 questions with the treble clef, and 3 with the bass.

One interval is a bit more awkward to write than the others, and that is the harmonic 2nd. Harmonic intervals are written directly **above** the given note, but the 2nd is too close to write directly, so we have to move it to the **side** a little. If you try to write it directly above, you will produce something unreadable like this:



We move the higher note to the right, but keep it close enough to the lower note that they are just touching:



Perfect!

Lesson 14: Tonic Triads



Tonic Triads

What does the term "tonic triad" mean? We've already learnt that the tonic is the first (and last) note in a scale. "Triad" means "chord built with thirds".

A "tonic triad" is a chord of three notes and the lowest of these notes is the *tonic* of the key we are in.

Here's a tonic triad in G major:



Building Tonic Triads

Tonic triads are simple to build. You don't need to build them yourself in Grade One Music Theory, but it's pretty easy so we'll show you how anyway!

First you need to know what key you are in. Remember that for Grade One, you only need to know the keys of C major, G major, D major and F major.

Let's build a D major tonic triad.

The tonic is the first note of the scale. We are in D major, so D is the tonic. That's the first note we need to write down. It's going to be the lowest note of the chord, so we'll write a low D, so that we have room to add notes above it:



The next note in the triad is the third note of the scale. The third note in the scale is F sharp, so we'll add that one now:



The last note of the chord is the fifth note of the scale, which for our triad is A:



Here is our finished tonic triad in the key of D major!

Tonic triads are always made up of the tonic, third and fifth notes of the scale.

We say that tonic triads are built out of *thirds*, because the interval between the lowest note and the middle note is a third, and the interval between the middle note and the highest note is also a third.

Naming the Key of Tonic Triads

In Grade One Music Theory, you might be asked to name the key of some tonic triads. This is very easy to do if you remember that the lowest note in the chord will give you the answer.

If the lowest note is C, then the key will be C major. You only need to know about major keys for Grade One Music Theory, so you won't have to identify any minor keys (in any part of the exam). So, you have four possible answers: C major, D major, G major or F major.

Make sure you pay attention to the clef.

Here's an example question.

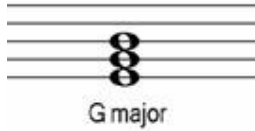
Name the key of this tonic triad:



Answer: F major

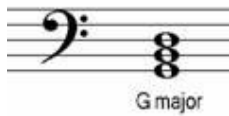
Adding Clefs and Key Signatures

You might be asked to add a clef and key signature to some tonic triads. You will be told the key of the triads. Here's an example:



Add the correct clef and key signature to this tonic triad.

Look at the lowest note of the triad, and think about what that note would be with a treble clef, and with a bass clef. In our example, if we had a treble clef, the lowest note would be E. If we had a bass clef, it would be G. We need a G, so it must be bass clef.



Here's the clef added. Make sure you draw your clefs carefully. Look at Lesson 19 - Handwriting Music for more on drawing clefs.

Next we need to add the correct key signature for G major in the bass clef:



Look at Lesson 12 - Key Signatures if you need help on how to write key signatures.

Lesson 15: Rhythm



Rhythms

In Grade One Music Theory, you might have to write two bars of rhythm as an answer to two given bars. The question could look something like this:

Write a two-bar rhythm as an answer to the given rhythm.



Check the Time Signature

The first thing you need to do is look at the time signature. This tells you how many beats you will need to write in each bar, so it's very important.

In the above question, the time signature is 2/4, so we will need to write note values which add up to two crotchet (quarter note) beats in each bar. Always double-check your finished rhythm to make sure you have the right number of beats.

Look at the Existing Rhythms

The next thing you should do is look at the kinds of rhythm which have *already* been used in the first two bars. What note values were used, and which values weren't used?

In our question, we've got crotchets (quarter notes), quavers (eighth notes) and semiquavers (sixteenth notes). We don't have any dotted notes, and we don't have any ties. You should use the *same* kinds of rhythms in your answering phrase as you have in the given phrase - don't invent some completely new rhythms!

Re-use Rhythms

To write an answering rhythm, you should re-use some parts of the given rhythm, but don't just copy it exactly, of course! Here are some ideas:

You could use the same blocks of rhythm but change their order:



Or you could keep a couple of the simpler blocks the same, but swap the the others:



Or, you could even invent something completely new, but only for one or two beats' worth:



But watch out! It's not a good idea to invent completely new rhythms for the whole of the answering phrase - you are being marked on your sense of balance, not on how wildly creative you can be!

Finishing correctly

You should end your phrase with a reasonable long note. Usually this means a *crotchet* (*quarter note*) or a *minim* (*half note*). Phrases which end on quavers (eighth notes) or semiquavers (sixteenth notes) sound too abrupt.

Don't write a melody!

Don't forget that you only need to write a rhythm in Grade One Music Theory! Use Bs on the centre line of the staff, like in the example. Don't start writing notes of other pitches!

Poor Answers

Here are some bad answers, with explanations as to why:



Reason: There isn't any connection between the given and the answering phrase.



Reason: This is just an exact copy of the given bars.



Reason: Not enough of the given phrase has been used, and it's not a good idea to write exactly the same rhythm in each bar.



Reason: The number of beats in the third bar is wrong.

Lesson 16: Dynamics



Dynamics - or "Volume Control"

"Dynamics" are all about the volume of music - is it quiet or loud, does it increase or decrease in volume?

Static or Changing?

Players need to understand quite a few different words (and abbreviations or "short forms") for dynamics. To make things easier, we can group these words/abbreviations into two categories - *Static* and *Changing*.

A *static* dynamic means that the *all* the music should be played at that volume, until another direction is given.

A *changing* dynamic means that the music should *gradually* begin to change in volume (up or down) and continue changing until the next direction.

Static Dynamics

We use Italian words or abbreviations to indicate static dynamics.

Piano means "quietly" or "softly", and ***Forte*** means "loudly".

Piano is shortened to ***p*** and *forte* is shortened to ***f***.

(Just in case you were wondering, the instrument which we call the "Piano" today, is really called a Pianoforte, and was given that name because it's capable of playing a wide range of dynamics, unlike other keyboard instruments at the time it was invented!)

Mezzo means "moderately", and it is shortened to ***m***.

The ending ***-issimo*** on a word means "very"- it's indicated by a double ***p*** or a double ***f***.

This gives us six possibilities: here they are in order from loudest to quietist:

ff = Fortissimo = very loud

f = Forte = loud

mf = Mezzo Forte = moderately loud

mp = Mezzo Piano = moderately quiet

p = Piano = quiet

pp = Pianissimo = very quiet

Changing Dynamics

Gradual increases in volume are indicated either with Italian words, or with symbols.

Crescendo (pronounced "kre-shen-do") means "gradually getting louder", and is shortened to *cresc.*

Diminuendo (pronounced "di-min-yu-en-do") means "gradually getting quieter", and is shortened to *dim.*

The same instructions can be given with "hairpin" symbols:



Lesson 17: Musical Symbols & Signs



Musical Symbols

Symbols in music have many different shapes and uses. They are useful because they give us information quickly, without us having to read words.

Symbols which are attached to notes are written on the opposite side to the stem.

These are the symbols you need to know for Grade One Music Theory. Make sure you know how to explain each one in words!

The Tie and the Slur

Ties and slurs look the same, but a tie always joins together two *identical* notes, and a slur always connects *non-identical* notes. For more on ties, see Lesson 8 - Tied Notes.



Tie. The two (or more) notes should be played as one note.



Slur (or "legato"). The two (or more) notes should be played as one phrase.

The Accent



Accent. Attack the note with a hard force.

Staccato



Staccato. Play the note short and detached.

Pause



Pause (or "fermata"). Hold on to the note for some time longer than real value of the note.

The Crescendo and Decrescendo

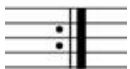


Crescendo. Gradually getting louder.



Decrescendo or Diminuendo. Gradually getting quieter.

Repeat



Single repeat bar. Go back to the beginning and repeat everything up to this bar.



Double repeat bars. Repeat everything between the two repeat bars.

Lesson 18: Foreign Musical Terms



Italian Terms

In Grade One Music Theory, you need to know what a handful of Italian terms mean in music.

People often wonder why most musical terms are in Italian and not another language, but actually lots of other languages have been used by composers, in particular German and French.

Italy was the birthplace of the Renaissance Era (from about 1350 onwards), and was the place where classical music really took off. Composers from many countries used Italian terms because they were associated with musical excellence, and were understood around the world. Today people think of Italian terms as the normal language in music.

From Grade 4 onwards you'll need to know foreign terms not only in Italian, but also in French and German!

List of Terms

Here is a complete list of all the Italian terms for Grade One Music Theory.

It's easier to learn foreign terms if you learn them in groups, and only try to learn a few each day.

The strongest syllable is in *italics*.

TEMPO			
A tempo	a <i>tempoh</i>		At the original speed /time
Accelerando	a-che-le-ran-doh	Accel.	Gradually getting faster
Adagio	a-dah-jioh		Slowly
Allegretto	a-le-gre-toh		Fairly quick
Allegro moderato	a-le-groh mo-de-ra-toh		Moderately quick
Andante	an-dan-te		At a walking pace
Lento	len-toh		Slow
Rallentando	ra-len-tan-doh	Rall.	Gradually getting slower
Ritardando	ri-tar-dan-doh	Rit.	Gradually getting slower
Ritenuto	ri-ten-oo-toh	Rit., Riten.	Held back
DYNAMICS			
Crescendo	cre-shen-doh	Cresc.	Gradually getting louder
Decrescendo	dee-cre-shen-doh	Decresc.	Gradually getting quieter
Diminuendo	di-mi-nyu-en-doh	Dim.	Gradually getting quieter
Forte	for-tay	F	Loud
Fortissimo	for-tis-i-moh	FF	Very loud
Mezzo forte	met-zoh for-tay	MF	Moderately loud
Mezzo piano	met-zoh pya-noh	MP	Moderately quiet
Pianissimo	pya-ni-si-moh	PP	Very quiet
Piano	pyah-noh	P	Quiet
PHRASING			
Cantabile	kan-tar-bi-lay		In a singing style
Legato	li-ga-toh		Smoothly
Staccato	sta-kar-toh		Short and detached
OTHER TERMS			
Da capo	da ka-poh	DC	From the beginning
Dal segno	dal sen-yoh	DS	✂ From the sign
Fine	fee-nay		The end
Mezzo	met-zo	M	Half
Moderato	mo-dur-ar-toh		Moderately
Poco	poh-koh	Poc.	A little

Lesson 19: Handwriting Music



Clearly and Neatly

In Grade One Music Theory, you need to be able to write music clearly and neatly. You will lose marks on any answer that the examiner finds difficult to read, has mistakes or is messy.

(Although we love Beethoven, we don't want to write our manuscript like he did (see the picture above!))

Every answer that you write has to be clear and neat, of course, but you will also have one question where you simply have to copy out about four bars of music. This question is worth ten points.

Three Tools

You will need: pencils (take plenty of spares to the exam!), a rubber and a ruler. Always write your answers in pencil. Make sure you've chosen a pencil which rubs out easily!

Clefs, Key Signatures and Time Signatures

Remember the order is always Clef - Key Signature - Time Signature.



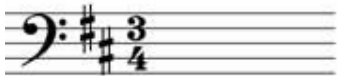
The treble clef should curl around the G line.



The bass clef begins on the f line. The two dots are placed on either side of the f line.



The order of sharps in key signatures is always F sharp then C sharp. Don't make sharp or flat signs too small or too big.



The top number of the time signature fills the top half of the staff; the bottom number fills the bottom half.

Writing Notes and Barlines

Note heads are not perfectly round - they are egg-shaped and tilt upwards slightly.

Here's an extra-large crotchet (quarter note) to make it clear!



Use your ruler to draw note stems. Make the stems the same length - about 1cm is fine.



Notes above the middle of the staff usually have stems down; notes below the middle have stems up. Notes on the middle line should follow the general direction of the music.

To draw beamed notes neatly, first draw the stems of the first and last notes in the group. You will usually need to draw them a bit longer than normal.



Then draw the top horizontal beam,



then fill in any other stems or beams as needed.



The first note in each bar should be about one note-head's width away from the barline. The other notes in a bar should be placed at relative distances.



This means that semiquavers (sixteenth notes) will be very close together, and semibreves (whole notes) will have a lot of space to the right of them. Point your mouse at the image to see how this should be written.

Ledger lines (the small lines on notes like middle C) should be the same distance as the other lines of the staff, and should not stick out too much to the left or right.



Make sure you use the correct note value when you write scales. Usually you will be told to use semibreves (whole notes).

Always draw barlines with a ruler. Make sure they don't stick out beyond the top or bottom lines of the stave.

Rests should be placed in the centre of the stave. Be very careful about the position of the minim (half) and semibreve (whole) rests.

Copying Music Out Exactly

When you copy out music, make sure you have copied absolutely every detail from the original.

Don't forget the dynamics, symbols like staccato or accents, any repeat bars, slurs, ties or bar numbers.

Use your ruler to make the distance between your notes as close as possible to the original.

It's a good idea to draw the barlines in first, to make sure you don't run out of space.

Read the question carefully - don't copy out the wrong bars!!!