Learn How to Play

PIANO / KEYBOARD

For

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

A Self Tuition Book For Adults & Teenagers!

Martin Woodward

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Enquiries: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk

Acknowledgements

To all the fantastic musicians who I've had the privilege of working with back in the 1960s / 70s including: Pip Williams (guitarist / record producer); Tex Marsh (drums); Roger Flavell (bassist / singer / songwriter); Kevan Fogarty (guitarist); Tommy Hunt (singer); Ron Thomas (bassist); Martin Johnstone (bassist / vocals); Geno Washington (singer); UK No. 1 singer / songwriter Emile Ford; U.K. top 10 artists: *'The Fantastics'* - John Cheatdom, Jerome Ramos, Donald Haywoode and Richard Pitts.

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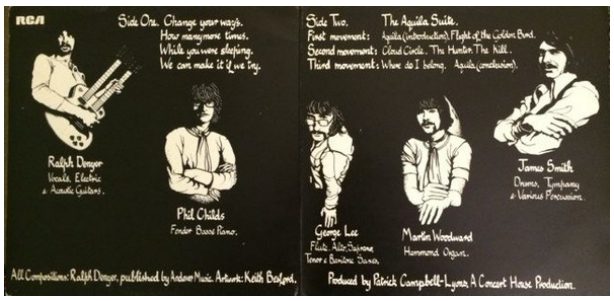
And to Myriad Software: http://www.myriad-online.com for the Harmony Assistant music notation software which was used to produce this book.



Aquila album cover design by Keith Besford - *Thanks Keith, I still Love it!*

A Couple of my many memorable 'Aquila' gigs in 1970

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Introduction

As the name suggests, this book has been written for the absolute beginner and assumes no prior musical knowledge - *just the desire to do it!*

The contents are suitable for piano and / or electronic keyboard.

Items covered include:

- Buying your first keyboard or piano;
- Reading music from scratch;
- Easy, effective finger exercises which require minimal reading ability;
- Important musical symbols;
- Your first tunes;
- Audio links for all tunes and exercises;
- Key signatures and transposition;
- Pre-scale exercises;
- Major and minor scales in keyboard *and* notation view;
- Chord construction;
- Chord fingering;
- Chord charts in keyboard view;
- Arpeggios in keyboard *and* notation view;
- Arpeggio exercises;
- Playing from a *Fake Book* with and without auto-accompaniment;
- Plus, more!

After completing this book, you will have a good basic understanding of music theory as well as a good basic playing technique, paving the way for more advanced study in your chosen field - *jazz, blues, pop, classical etc.*

Get the Best from this Book

This book has been written to be read as a paperback and / or a digital eBook. If you have the paperback version - *great,* - without doubt this is the best version for flipping backwards and forwards to where you want to be. However, if you wish to hear the audio examples included, you may find it convenient to also have the digital version in pdf format which can be read on any PC, laptop or tablet. You may also find it useful to print out certain pages, perhaps to make notes on, or maybe because of inconvenient page turns etc. This you can do easily with the digital version.

If you have purchased the paperback version, the digital version is *freely* available to you *for your own use only*. The download link can be found herein on page 183. Be sure to copy the link exactly as written including the hyphen and the underscore between the words. If you have any trouble with this, I will be happy to help.

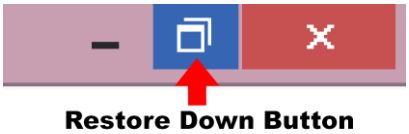
The audio links throughout the book can be accessed two ways:

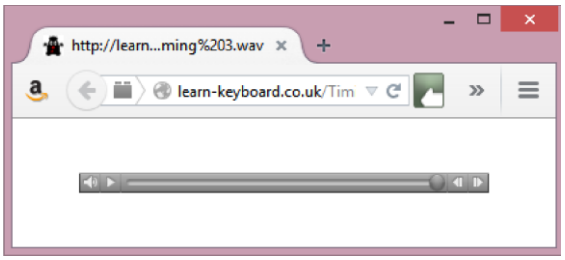
- by using the free external links at: http://learn-keyboard.co.uk/book_links.html which gives access to all the links in the order in which they appear in each chapter; or
- by using the links throughout the book as they appear in the digital pdf version - *internet connection required.*

Using the *in-Book* Links

Quite probably you may only need to listen to some of the audio links, but all are included for your convenience.

To access the links easily, if you are viewing this on a laptop or PC first of all go to your browser and click the restore down button in order to reduce the view size to something like the image below to the right (by dragging the bottom and sides).





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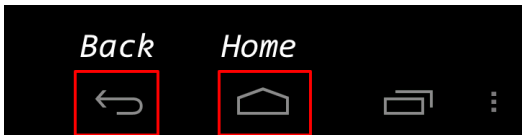
If you are viewing this on an Android tablet as soon as you click on the link you will lose the book view until you push the *'Back'* button (shown next).



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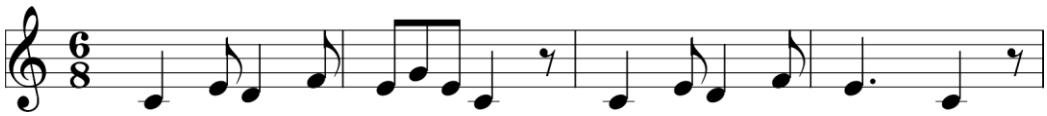


Note that the links may not work if you are viewing this in a Google or Amazon sample. Please go to http://learn-keyboard.co.uk/absolute_beginners.html for a free *working* pdf sample.

Note also that each link will open a new page in your browser, so you will eventually need to cancel them - *or just close the browser!*

In addition to the external links, there are also numerous internal links to help you navigate to certain reference points in the book and return, including the arrows either side of the chapter headings. Clicking the green right-hand arrow will take you instantly to the next chapter and the red left-hand arrow to the beginning of the last chapter.

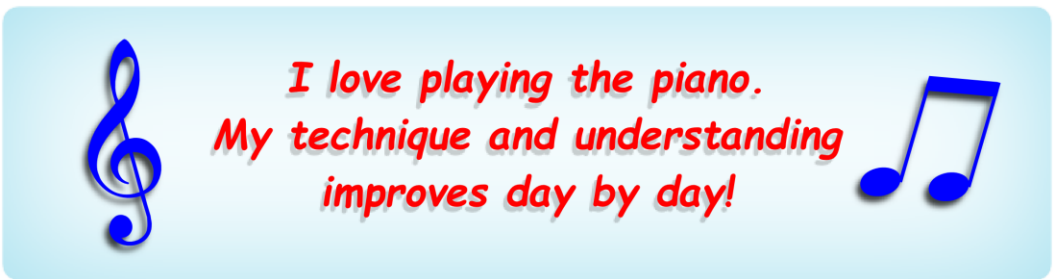
If you want to navigate to another chapter quickly, simply click on the '≤' icon which is in the footer of every page (including this one). This will take you instantly to the *'Contents'* page where you can then click and go to any section you wish - *so you can basically whizz through the document at lightning speed!*

Trust Your Self

As you progress you will no doubt have good days and bad days, but whatever happens never doubt your ability to succeed, however old you may be.

Now, what I'm going to say next you may think is absolute *'BS'*, but please hear me out - humour me if you like, as I happen to *know* that it is of tremendous value.

Throughout the book you will periodically come across the following message:



All I ask you to do is *pause* and *read* this every time you see it, out loud would be great, but silently is ok too. The more you can do this the better. Actually, it has to be a true statement as presumably you wouldn't be reading this if you didn't want to play the piano or keyboard and if you follow the advice herein your technique and understanding *must* improve day by day!

Over the years I've met and known many individuals who have become extremely successful musicians, some are multi-millionaires and worldwide household names and some I knew when they were down and out and penniless (like I was). They all used similar techniques to the above. At the time I thought they were raving bonkers; now I know they weren't!

If you want to know more about similar success building techniques, please see my website at http://deep-relaxation.co.uk where you will find lots of freebies to prove their worth.

⬅ Buying Your First Piano / Keyboard ➡

If you haven't already bought a keyboard or if you are perhaps thinking of changing, you may find the following information useful.

Firstly, just in case you're wondering, there is no such thing as a *'left-handed'* keyboard and if you ever come across one, it will have been created by an idiot just for a laugh! It makes no difference whether you are right or left-handed for playing the keyboard as both are equally important - *more or less!* On all keyboards of every type, the high-pitched notes are to the right and generally played with the right hand and the low notes are to the left and generally played with the left hand.

There are many different types of keyboards - all have black and white keys and to the uninitiated all look the same. But they can be vastly different, and which one will be right for you will be determined by:

- Your present needs;
- Your ultimate needs; and of course
- Your budget.

Prices can vary from as little as £50 to many thousands of pounds. The chance of buying one that is absolutely right for your initial and ultimate needs is about nil, *but you can at least try!*

Keyboards basically fall into the following categories:

a) Digital Pianos (hi-tech / low-tech);

b) Acoustic Pianos (low-tech);

c) Harpsichords (low-tech);

d) Organs (hi-tech / low-tech);

e) Arranger Keyboards (hi-tech / low-tech);

f) Workstations (hi-tech);

g) Synthesizers (hi-tech);

h) Controller Keyboards (hi-tech).

And of course, all of the above could be purchased either new or second-hand.

Now, you may have noticed that I've put in brackets *'hi-tech'* - *'low-tech'* or both. This is because there are two very different types of markets - *'hi-tech'* and *'low-tech'*. Some music retailers may only deal in one or the other. By *'low-tech'*, please don't

think that I mean cheap or low quality or low price - quite the contrary - *they are just different markets!*

The typical *low-tech* instruments are aimed mainly at the home users and include:

- Pianos (acoustic and digital);
- Organs for home use;
- Arranger Keyboards.

The typical *hi-tech* instruments are primarily aimed at professional or semi-professional working musicians and include:

- Portable Electronic / Digital Pianos;
- Synthesizers and Workstations;
- Modules and Controller Keyboards;
- Hi-tech (and expensive) Arranger Keyboards.

Low-tech instruments are generally easier to operate, so perhaps these make a better choice for the absolute beginner.

Ok, so let's look at what all these keyboards do. But please also see my web page at https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/keyboard_reviews.html for the latest *unbiased* up to date information.

Digital Pianos - Home Use

Home use digital pianos in general tend to be less feature filled than the stage alternatives. All up-to-date models will have 88 weighted hammer action keys - varying in quality. Many are also incorporated in a wooden frame with pedals included or at least have the option of a wooden stand making them fitting for a home environment. Most will also have built-in speakers making the need for external amplification unnecessary.

Some will simply be pianos with few other features (although most do have a variety of tones). Others will have additional features such as auto-accompaniment and recording functions.

For a comparatively low-cost starter piano the Casio PX S1000 and PX S3000 are hard to beat. Both have quality piano sounds, built-in speakers, quality hammer action keybeds and many other useful functions.

Casio PX S1000 (88 Keys)

If you want the convenience of all the gadgetry on an electronic digital piano and also a nice bit of furniture, then there are many *low-tech* but generally expensive instruments available such as the Yamaha Clavinovas.

Yamaha Clavinova CVP-609GP (88 Keys)

But there are many, many more to choose from in all price ranges.

Digital Pianos - Stage / Studio

In contrast digital pianos for stage or studio use tend to be more feature filled in relation to sounds, effects and other functions. These will have either 73 / 76 or 88 hammer action keys. Built-in speakers and auto-accompaniment are less likely to be found on these and an external stand and pedals would be required. Therefore, in all cases for stage use external amplification suitable for the venue would be required. Recording functions are not the norm on stage pianos, but some may have them.

Both home and stage digital pianos will have earphone sockets enabling personal practice.

Korg SV-2S Stage Piano (88 Keys)

There are some digital pianos that are suitable for both home and stage - the New (2020) Korg SV2S is available with or without built-in speakers and is about the coolest looking keyboard on the planet as well as having top notch piano sounds and the top Korg RH3 graduated keybed.

The main manufacturers for digital pianos are: Korg, Roland, Casio, Yamaha, Nord, Dexibell and Kurzweil so there's plenty of great models to choose from. There are good and possibly not so good features with most manufacturers. You may prefer the sounds on one and the key action on another, so it's worth doing some in depth study.

Nord Piano 4 (88 Keys)

The great thing about Nord keyboards is that you have free access to their ever-expanding sound library, whereas with other makes additional sounds are often charged for.

If it is your intention to play classical or jazz seriously, I would suggest that a digital piano could be a good choice for you. But if you are an absolute beginner then consider one which also has auto-accompaniment which in *no way* prevents the instrument from being used as a normal complete piano.

Acoustic Pianos

I would never discourage anyone from getting an acoustic piano if this is what they want, but the clear disadvantages are:

- They need periodic tuning;
- They are space greedy;
- They can be very expensive;
- They're not suitable for gigging;
- You will drive your family and neighbours nuts when you practice, as these of course don't work too good with headphones.

On the plus side, when the world eventually forgets how to generate electricity, everyone will want one!

I don't think that anyone could deny that the Bosendorfer Beethoven Grand is a beautiful instrument, but at £83,000 I wouldn't really recommend this for a beginner - *especially if they live in a bedsit!*

But the sounds of this instrument and others have been faithfully reproduced by Clavia and available on all their Nord electronic keyboards. Ok, it's not the real thing, but only a *'purist'* could tell the difference and you'd save a massive £80,000 *and have a bit more room to walk around!*

Bosendorfer Grand Piano

So please also look at the digital piano alternatives - they are far better than they've been in the past and you might just be surprised.

Harpsichords

The harpsichord is the forerunner of the piano but has a completely different sound and feel. The main difference is that the strings are plucked rather than hammered. And similar to an organ there is far less velocity control than there is on a piano (acoustic or digital). But having said this, they are superb instruments with a very distinctive and unique sound. Most are incredibly *ornate;* most have reversed coloured keys, and some have two manuals.

Two manual Harpsichord

Some of the best-known Harpsichord pieces are the Domenico Scarlatti sonatas and also works by J.S Bach, or more recently - *'The Adams Family'* music.

Very few harpsichords are commercially available today and they're now generally only used for classical concerts and operas such as Purcell's *'Dido and Aeneas'* which features the harpsichord extensively.

Another great advantage of the digital electronic keyboard is that the sounds of the harpsichord can be reproduced on most of them - *some better than others!*

Organs

I suppose you could put organs into three categories:

- Church organs
- Home entertainment organs
- Rock / Jazz stage organs

Here we are not going to consider church organs which is highly specialized.

Up until few years ago home entertainment organs were very popular and were jam packed with *'bells and whistles'*. Although still available, the demand for these is somewhat waning, probably due to the fact that many of the home entertainment *'arranger keyboards'* have just as many *'bells and whistles'* but are also much smaller, lighter and cheaper.

The Legendary Hammond B3

That leaves rock / jazz organs which are all *'hi tech'* and have no unnecessary novelty features - just great sounds. But in all cases, these will require external amplification.

Historically the classic organs were the Hammond B3 and the *original* Vox Continental - both of which I had the great pleasure of owning in the 60's / 70's. Just about all of the present-day organs are emulations of these. In fact many of the best keyboards such as the Korg Kronos and the Nords emulate these pretty well and

unless you were actually around in *'the day'* I doubt that you could tell the difference *from the best ones!*

But if you want the actual real sound of the Hammond - *buy a Hammond,* - they are still available and are far more transportable than they were when I was humping them around. Similarly, the Vox Continental has had a re-birth by Korg and is a wicked little board.

New Vox Continental (73 Keys)

Beyond these there are several dedicated emulations available.

All organs will have semi-weighted *'waterfall'* key actions making them highly suitable for fast organ / synth runs etc. Due to this they are not a good choice for learning classical or jazz piano where a graduated hammer action will be preferred.

So who are they good for?

Gigging or recording musicians. Possibly 60's tribute bands or jazz.

I still love them!

Arranger Keyboards

Arranger keyboards generally come with 61 or 73 / 76 un-weighted or semi-weighted keys. The quality of the keybeds will vary tremendously from model to model. If you are wanting to learn classical or jazz piano, one of these would not be a good choice. Although piano pieces can be played on them, weighted keys give more control for this type of music. But for just about any type of *piano* playing I would advise at least 73 keys (6 octaves).

Korg PA4X Arranger Keyboard (76 Keys)

All arranger keyboards will have a fairly large selection of pre-installed sampled sounds which may or may not be editable. The quality and polyphony of these sounds

will vary very much, although there are some surprisingly good sounds on some of the less expensive models.

Additionally, arranger keyboards have the facility to split the keyboard at certain (variable) points enabling different sounds to be played in each part of the board, (i.e. bass on the lower half / piano on the top half), and / or to use the lower half of the keyboard to trigger auto-accompaniment enabling the player to effectively be a one-man-band. Indeed, many of the better-quality arrangers are used for live gigging by solo players.

Korg PA 700 (61 Keys)

Many arranger keyboards have built-in speakers, which are suitable for home use, but most also have the facility for adding external speakers for better quality and more volume. The more expensive models (Korg PA 4X / Yamaha Genos) tend not to have built in speakers as is the norm for professional equipment.

Most also have recording features, in some cases with as many as 16 fully editable tracks enabling a fair degree of quality music production *on the better models - Korg PA 700 onwards!*

Arranger keyboards are available from as little as £50 up to more than £4,000. A good entry model is the Yamaha PSR E363 and the current top professional model (in my opinion) is the Korg PA 4X - *many would argue that the Yamaha Genos is better!*

Casio CT-X5000 (61 Keys)

So, who are they good for?

The lower priced models are ideal for anyone who wants to learn music in a fairly casual way and just have fun - *for classical or jazz go for a digital piano*. The more expensive models are ideal for solo gigging, or music production by more experienced musicians. At the entry level of the market, the Casios are excellent value and hard to beat, but do also look at the Korgs and Yamahas.

Workstations Keyboards

There is often a fair bit of confusion about the definition of a *'workstation'* as against an *'arranger'*. This isn't helped by some of the manufacturers using conflicting definitions.

Korg Kronos 2 Workstation (73 Keys) - very Hi-Tech

Both *'workstations'* and *'arrangers'* can be used for music production, but *my* understanding of the difference between the two is as follows:

- An *'arranger'* primarily uses auto-accompaniment with pre-recorded styles which can be recorded along with additional parts if required to create a finished product. While this can be an extremely quick and easy way to create music, the results can often sound very *'manufactured'* which is actually what they are!
- By contrast a *'workstation'* will *not* have auto-accompaniment but is more likely to have better quality sounds and effects and better, more advanced recording and editing features which make them capable of high quality *totally original* music production.

Many new *'workstations'* now seem to rely on doing half the job on a computer which I personally find annoying, as I don't want to be messing with computer connections and additional DAW complications. I like to do everything on the keyboard. With this in mind the only true *'workstations'* left on the market are the Korgs, particularly the Kronos and the Nautilus which are light years ahead of everything else and as far as I know are the only instruments available capable of producing a professional end product entirely on the keyboard *without* hooking up to a computer.

New Roland Fantom Workstation (88 Keys)

'Arrangers' tend to only be available with 61 or 76 semi-weighted keys, whereas *'workstations'* tend to also be available with an 88 weighted keyboard option.

In short *'arrangers'* are more suitable for solo stage work and *'workstations'* are more suitable for studio music production, but both could be used for either. I wouldn't recommend a workstation for beginners, mainly due to the huge learning curve - *learn to play first!*

Sorry if all this sounds confusing!

Synthesizers

Synthesizers are basically used for sound creation and can be capable of producing some truly remarkable original sounds which are used for all types of music.

Yamaha MODX (76 Keys) - very Hi-Tech

No doubt these instruments would be used primarily for stage and studio. However, many other types of keyboards can also have synthesizer functions. For instance the Yamaha MODX and the MX-88 are both very much a synthesizers but could also be used as stage pianos (88 key version MODX), as can the Casio PX-560 which is also a stage piano and arranger. But the mightiest synthesizer of them all is the Korg Kronos which has *nine synth engines* and is also a stage piano and workstation.

But there are others that are *just* synthesizers like the Korg KingKorg, Korg Wavesate and the Roland Jupiter-X - great for sound creation, but these are not a good choice of instrument if you want to learn classical or jazz, particularly as many only have very short keyboards.

Korg Wavestate Synthesizer (37 Keys)

Controller Keyboards

A basic controller keyboard will make no sounds of its own but can be connected via *'midi'* to other keyboards and use the sounds from the connected board. Or could be connected to a PC via midi cables or USB (if supported).

Well what's the point of this?

There could be various reasons:

- If your main keyboard has great sounds but a crap keybed, you could acquire a controller board with a much better keybed (weighted or semi-weighted);
- Or perhaps your main board is weighted, and you also want a semi-weighted option as a second tier;
- You may want to create music via a DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) on your PC. This will then use any VST's (sounds) that you have installed on your PC.

Controller keyboards are available with 25, 37, 49, 61, 76 or 88 keys, weighted or semi-weighted in various qualities.

Aka MPK 261 Controller Keyboard (61 keys)

Many other keyboards that have their own sounds are also capable of additionally being *'controllers'* via midi. Some have better controlling facilities than others - the Casio PX-5S is particularly good. But this is probably not something that a beginner would want to get into!

Very often Controller keyboards come bundled with free DAW software.

Auto-Accompaniment

All arranger keyboards and some pianos / organs have the facility to either use the instrument as a full keyboard (in piano mode) or to split the keyboard at a chosen point and use the upper half for the right-hand melody work and the lower portion with an alternative sound / instrument for bass etc., or auto-accompaniment. But note that you'd be struggling in full piano mode with less than 73 keys.

In the auto-accompaniment mode, a particular rhythm and style can be selected which will play bass, drums and other instrumentation as soon as a chord is played below the split point. As the chord is changed, the instrumentation will follow automatically.

In most cases there will be:

- An intro - one or more;
- Variations - usually four different ones;
- Fills which can be triggered to activate automatically between variations;
- Endings - one or more.

This results in the player being in control of a complete multi instrument band / orchestra. Clearly using this option enables even a novice to produce professional sounding work easily.

The quality of the styles varies between instruments, but at the high end they are quite stunning. This feature can allow a good player to make truly professional performances solo, something that I have done personally in the not so distant past - using a Korg SP500 digital piano.

There are thousands of styles available (downloadable) for all genres of music and it can take hours (months) to wade through them. On the advanced keyboards, you can even create your own styles, but this involves a fair learning curve.

To use this feature, ideally you will need to understand chords and inversions which are included herein, but in most cases, there are also features for beginners whereby the chords can be triggered with only one or two fingers.

Auto-accompaniment can be used live or incorporated into recordings where plenty of manipulation is possible.

BUT ….. I would strongly recommend that you learn to play both with *and* without the auto-accompaniment then you will get the best of both worlds. The exercises and information herein teaches exactly this - for your greatest fulfilment. Don't make the mistake of spending hours pushing buttons, *'having fun'* and learning nothing - it's an easy trap to fall into!

Yamaha, Korg, Casio and Roland all produce keyboards with this feature.

Note that if you are playing with a band, auto-accompaniment would never be used.

Sequencers

Most arranger keyboards, workstations and some digital pianos have one or more built in sequencer(s). This enables you to record and playback chord sequences, styles, fills and variations or even complete songs easily *once you've got your head around it!*

Out of the sequencers that I've used, I've found the Korgs to be most user friendly - or maybe it's just because I've had a few of them and I understand the Korg way of thinking best. Some incidentally are far more editable than others, which is another reason I prefer Korgs.

Another recording option is to use an external sequencer via your PC and a DAW such as Cakewalk or Cubase etc., which actually allows far more control, editing and mixing possibilities. To do this, in most cases you would also need an audio interface unless your keyboard has one built in. See my website for more details about DAWs.

Hammer Action or Semi Weighted?

If you conclude that you want a digital keyboard as against an acoustic instrument, then your next dilemma will be whether to buy one with fully weighted *'hammer action'* keys or to go for *'semi weighted'*.

Without doubt *hammer action* keys are far better for piano playing, while *semi weighted* are better for organ, electric piano and synthesizer. Both types of keyboards incidentally tend to be *'velocity sensitive',* which means the harder you play the louder the sound - as on an acoustic piano. But there are times when you wouldn't necessarily want this (organs and harpsichords), in which case this feature can be turned off.

For my time on the road I only ever played the Hammond organ (which was *semi weighted*). The type of playing I did at that time would have been impossible on a weighted board. But now that I've calmed down somewhat, I'm finding that I play more piano type music. So, I have a conundrum - *I want both!* And not only that, I want top quality piano / organ sounds and I want to be able to move it easily without the risk of a heart attack. Clearly such an instrument has not yet been invented, but it can be done!

How?

By using a *two-tier combination* set-up, with a weighted action board at the bottom and a lightweight action at the top.

Keyboard Combinations

Here's a few examples of possible combinations.

Combi 1:

- Nord Piano 4 with hammer action keys (on the bottom);
- Korg Kronos 61 with semi weighted keys (on the top).

Combi 2:

- Korg Kronos 88 or 73 with hammer action keys (on the bottom);
- Yamaha MODX7 with semi weighted keys (on the top).

Combi 3:

- Casio PX-560 with hammer action keys (on the bottom);
- Casio CT-X5000 61 with semi weighted keys (on the top).

Combi 4:

- Korg SV-2S 88 or 73 with hammer action keys (on the bottom);
- Korg PA 1000 61 with semi weighted keys (on the top).

Combi 5:

- Roland RD 2000 with hammer action keys (on the bottom);
- Hammond SK1 organ with semi weighted keys (on the top).

All of the above offer something different. Clearly there are numerous possible combinations to suit all tastes for home, studio or live band situations. But if you can find a single board which satisfies your needs, so much the better, and this would almost certainly be a wise choice initially.

Casio PX560 with Roland FA 07 on top

The above picture shows one of my previous set-ups, which is a Casio Privia PX 560 88 Hammer action keyboard below with a Roland FA 07 workstation with a 76 semi-weighted keyboard on top - *an excellent combination!*

For your convenience I've listed most of the major manufacturers in the links page of my website at http://learn-keyboard.co.uk/links.html .

Polyphony

When considering various keyboards, you will come across the words *'polyphonic'* and *'monophonic'*.

A *monophonic* keyboard will only allow you to play one note at a time as in the very early synths - if you play two notes together only one will sound. A keyboard which is say *polyphonic* to 32 notes, will allow 32 notes to be played / sounded at once.

As you only have ten fingers (presumably) you may think that this is fine, but when you consider that using the sustain pedal and / or auto-accompaniment can drastically

increase the need for *polyphony*, 32 notes soon becomes inadequate. So the larger the *polyphony* the better!

Most quality keyboards have a *polyphony* of 120 notes or more.

Advantages / Disadvantages of Internal Amplification

Most of the lower priced portable keyboards and most home digital pianos have internal speakers / amplification. If you intend using the instrument for *home use* only, then this can be ideal. The only possible disadvantage of this is that it may make the instrument physically heavier than it might have been without them, but if you don't intend moving it around too much then this should not cause a problem.

Peavey KB2 Keyboard Amp / Roland KC150 Keyboard Amp

The more expensive portable keyboards tend not to have internal amplification. You may think this odd as it appears that you are paying more and getting less. But as these instruments are primarily produced for the professional *gigging* musician keeping the weight down to the minimum is useful (something that was unheard of when I was gigging); and also, this leaves the way clear to purchase the right amplification for the musician's individual needs which could vary considerably, governed by the type and size of venue.

KRK Rokit 5 G4 Studio Monitor Speakers

If using one of these instruments for home use, there are many suitable small amps on the market. In this instance I would advise purchasing dedicated keyboard equipment as against a guitar amp *which would work, but not as well*. A pair of *studio monitors* or a single or pair of *powered PA speakers* could also be ideal.

But whatever speakers you end up with external or internal, you will also almost certainly need a pair of reasonable quality headphones.

Please see my website for *unbiased* up to date recommendations.

Midi

What is 'Midi'?

'Midi' - Musical Instrument Digital Interface is basically a way of transferring musical information from one keyboard or recording device to another via a standard midi cable or via a USB cable (if supported). A single Midi link can carry up to sixteen channels of information.

The information that *midi* carries is basically everything except *audio*. For instance a *midi* recording could consist of:

- The notes played and how long they are held on for;
- How hard they are played (velocity);
- Timing;
- Pedal on / off etc.

But it won't record the *audio.* So if you made a *midi* recording on a particular keyboard, saved it to a *midi 'smf'* file and then played it back on another keyboard or PC, it would use the sounds from the second keyboard or computer software for playback - which of course may be better or worse than the original.

A great advantage of recording in *midi* is the ability to correct mistakes (assuming the editing facilities are available in the keyboard or DAW). For instance:

- Timing mistake can be corrected by quantizing either at the time of recording or afterwards;
- Bum notes can be corrected with the *'edit event'* feature;
- Velocity and pedal errors can be corrected with the *'edit event'* feature;
- Part of a recording can be corrected using the *'punch in'* feature;
- Plus much more!

Another use for *midi* is to connect two keyboards which would enable you to play one board and use the sounds from the other.

So what if I want to record in audio?

Many keyboards will have audio recording features which will record exactly what you play using the sounds of your instrument. But if you make an error, or something is not quite right you will need to record it again from the beginning.

But if your keyboard or DAW has *midi and audio* recording features, you could first record in *midi,* make your corrections, then playback the corrected file *as* you record it in *audio* and *Bingo* - you will have an *audio* recording with the sounds and effects from your keyboard.

If recording *audio* into a DAW, you will need an external *audio interface* if the facility is not in your keyboard.

Please see my website for more information on DAWs and what is available free!

Buying Second-hand or New?

Like just about anything, if you buy *second-hand* you will save a huge amount on the *new* purchase price and lose a great deal less when you come to sell *which is inevitable!*

Over the years I've bought several new instruments, and inevitably have lost money on all of them whereas many of the *second-hand* instruments I've bought, I've used for a few years and sometimes even sold for a profit - something I've never got anywhere near doing with a car! And as against cars, musical instruments tend to be very reliable. In fact, I have to say that since 1966 when I bought my Vox Continental organ, I have ***never*** had an instrument fail on me - *I'm hanging onto a tree as I'm writing this!* The only parts that I've ever needed were a few keys that got physically broken on my Hammond due to a slightly *'over enthusiastic'* playing technique and some valves which were consumables on the Hammonds. But in those days, I always kept a supply of what I knew I was going to destroy.

Common sense dictates that you should use caution if buying on eBay etc., although I have bought and sold this way successfully numerous times. But my advice would be to always view before bidding and check out the seller's ratings in detail.

But also you need to know exactly what you are looking for and have a good idea of what is a fair price. This of course can be difficult for a beginner unless you have a knowledgeable friend to guide you.

Due to the massive increase of internet selling, it's a sad fact that many of the local music stores have closed down. In Sheffield where I live, there isn't a single keyboard shop left, whereas there used to be several. I consider myself fortunate in the fact that I am within a fairly easy drive of York where the large online seller https://www.gear4music.com have their main UK showroom, so at least I can get there to try out new instruments, but I would much rather have a local establishment!

But make no mistake, the internet is here to stay, and our shopping habits have to adapt to these modern times.

The two main *plus* points of purchasing on the internet are:

1. In most countries you have the legal right to return goods for a full refund if you decide that you're not happy for any reason - *or no reason!* I'll be honest,

I've done this a couple of times myself for keyboards that seemed perfect for me after watching all the online videos, but when I've got *'hands on'* I've hated them. In both cases I received no hassle from the dealers, so full credit to them! Of course, you need to make sure that any returned goods are sent back in pristine condition with all the original packaging. I always take photos of the goods before and during packing in case of damage during transit;

2. It's not difficult to search out the best prices which do tend to change up or down *almost daily!*

Finally, if you're not sure what to buy, my advice is to buy the best second-hand instrument that you can afford (preferably 6 octaves or more). Some of the older top name keyboards are excellent. But always check new prices first, and then at least you will minimize your losses if you get it wrong - *which you probably will!*

It can also be a good idea to download the pdf user manuals from the manufacturers' websites. These are generally freely available from the *'support'* section even for older models.

Korg SP-500 Stage Piano (88 keys) - with auto-accompaniment

While editing this book in 2020, I noticed a couple of great *second-hand* deals on the *'Cash Converters'* website. One was a Korg SP-500 for £250 and the other was a Korg PA2X for £499 - both very good deals assuming they are working ok. I've owned both of these and can confirm that they are great keyboards - *even by today's standards!* A few scratches would make no difference to the value of an older board!

Other items that you will need include:

- A stool - preferably height adjustable;
- A stand strong enough to accommodate the keyboard;
- A good quality sustain pedal - preferably with a reverse polarity switch;
- A music stand - included with some keyboards;
- A dust cover for the keyboard - eBay;
- Amplification and leads if not included;
- A keyboard carrying bag or case if you intend gigging or moving it around;
- Headphones - if you want your family to retain their sanity!

Keyboard Stands

If your chosen keyboard doesn't come with a dedicated stand included which most don't, then it's most important that you buy one which is suitable for you needs, i.e. strong enough to accommodate the weight of the keyboard and also height adjustable.

The three main types are shown below and are:

- Table frame
- Z frame
- X frame

In most cases there will be an option to add a further *tier* if required but do check this out before buying if you think you might need this.

I personally prefer the *'table frames'* as they are more stable, but if you intend gigging, you may find one of the others quicker and easier - *or buy two!*

Some manufacturers make tailor made stands for their keyboards, which tend to be excellent quality but also very expensive.

Keyboard Stands - 'Table', 'Z' & 'X'



Keyboard Benches / Stools

Back in in my gigging days I used a drum stool which suited me fine and of course packed away quickly into almost nothing. But now that the rear end has expanded somewhat, this option for me is a complete *no-no!* So now I use a fixed piano bench which just happens to be the correct height for me and also stores music.

If I was buying one again now, I would go for the height adjustable option as shown in the first picture below. The second option shown, would no doubt be ideal for gigging. But I would strongly advise against buying a cheap nasty one. Expect to pay around £50 minimum - *your comfort is worth it!*

Piano / Keyboard Bench Stools


Piano / Keyboard Pedals

Most upright pianos *acoustic and digital* have two pedals. The right hand one is the *'damper'* pedal also called the *'sustain'* pedal and the left one is the *'una corda'* pedal also called the *'soft'* pedal. More recently many grand pianos and even uprights are now fitted with a third pedal in the middle called the *'sostenuto'* pedal.

Pedals on a modern Grand

Very simply the *'damper'* pedal sustains all keys played for the time the pedal is depressed. The *'una corda'* pedal basically mutes the sound to a degree and also modifies the tones somewhat. The *'sostenuto'* pedal enables the pianist to sustain selected keys, while other keys remain unaffected. On digital pianos the middle *sostenuto* pedal can often be assignable.

When purchasing most portable keyboards, pedals are rarely included, but at the very least you would need a *'sustain'* pedal. Single, double and triple pedals as shown below are widely available, but if you want the twin or triple unit, do check that your keyboard will support these - *many don't!*

Add on Pedals for Digital Instruments

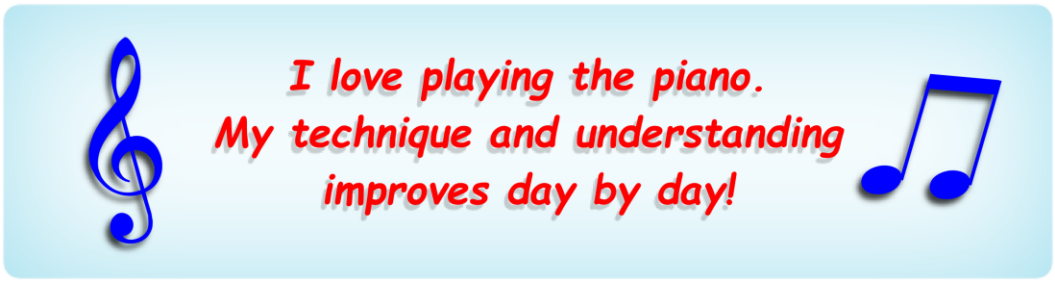
In addition to the *'sustain'* pedal you may also find a *'swell'* pedal useful if you want to use organ sounds. This just simply increases and decreases the volume and is a fixture on all organs.

Swell Pedal for Organ Sounds

If you want to play bass with your feet, you may want to add a *'pedal board'* (with swell pedal included). These are primarily used for organ music.

Nord Pedal (27 keys)

Beyond all of the above the only other *'pedals'* you may need could be *'assignable switches'* to perhaps alter the speed of a rotary tone cabinet (Leslie), which could be physical or electronic. Or maybe to trigger drum fills or style variations etc. in auto-accompaniment - but again, make sure that these are supported by your keyboard, which will normally be connected through an *auxiliary* pedal input.



Now we'll begin learning to play!

The Notes of the Keyboard

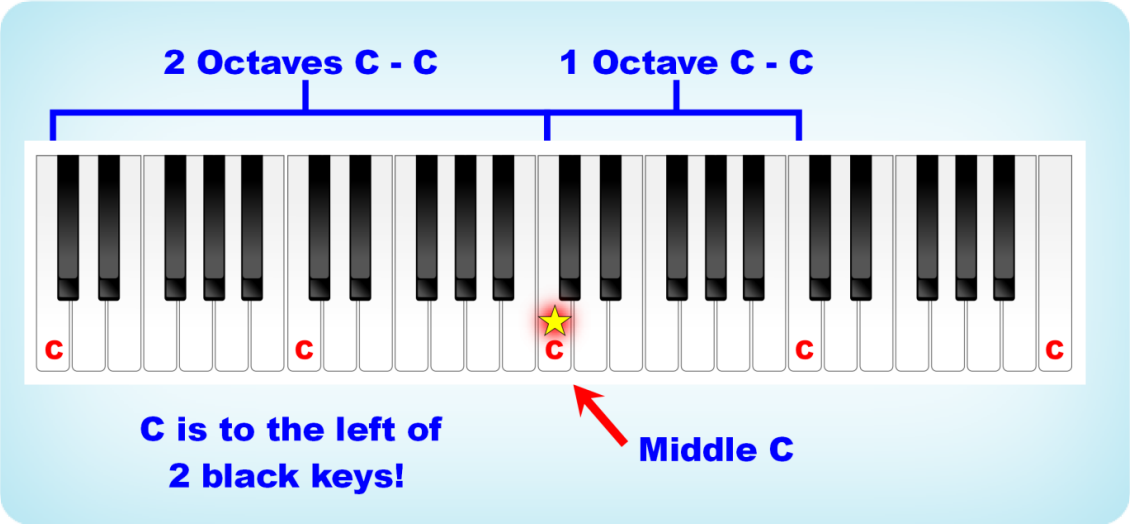
Firstly, we'll look at the notes of the keyboard and how to identify them.

As already stated, some keyboards / pianos have more keys than others, but this makes no difference in relation to understanding how to play them, as they all have the same basic arrangement of black and white keys.

If you look closely you will see that the black keys are in groups of two then three.

This enables us to find every single note easily. And the first one that you must learn is **'C'** which can be found just to the left of two black keys.

The diagram below shows a four-octave span revealing five **C's** each of which are eight notes apart - hence octave - as in octagon and octopus - *eight!*



Probably the most important note on the keyboard is **middle C** which is the **'C'** that is more or less in the middle of the keyboard and because it is so important, we are going to put a star on ours as shown.

Now all the notes to the left of **middle C** get gradually lower in pitch and all the notes to the right gradually get higher. And usually you will use your right hand for the higher notes and your left hand for the lower notes.

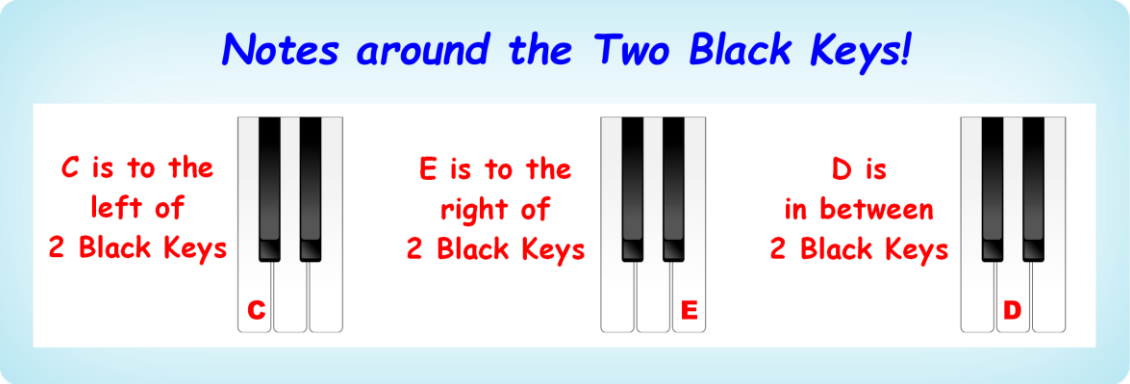
*So which hand plays **middle C**?*

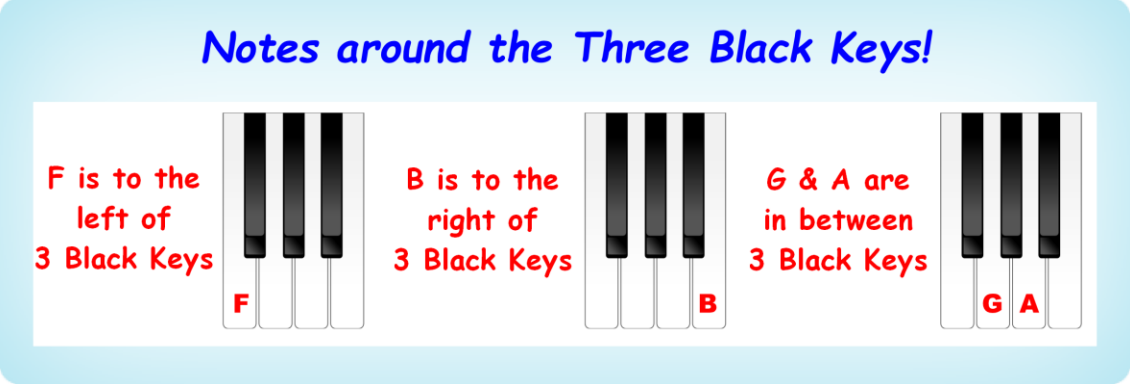
That's a good question and the answer is that it could be either, but I will explain more shortly.

Now I'll show you what all the other notes are called, but I don't want you to get too confused about all this at the moment. We will be taking it all slowly step by step.

This is mind boggling, how am I going to remember this lot?

Easy, if you split them up into two main groups according to the number of black notes as shown below:





And if you can't remember which comes first **G** or **A,** you're probably going Gaga - get it? - GA - GA!!

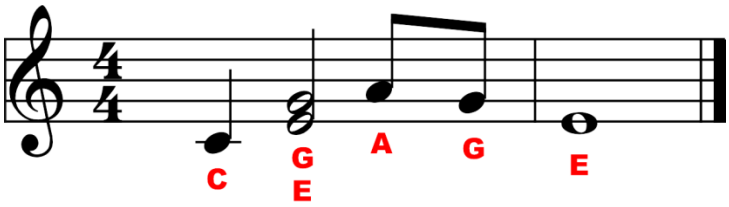
What about the black ones, what are they called?

Don't worry I've not forgotten them, we'll be dealing with them shortly, but first we'll look at how the keys of the keyboard relate to music notation.

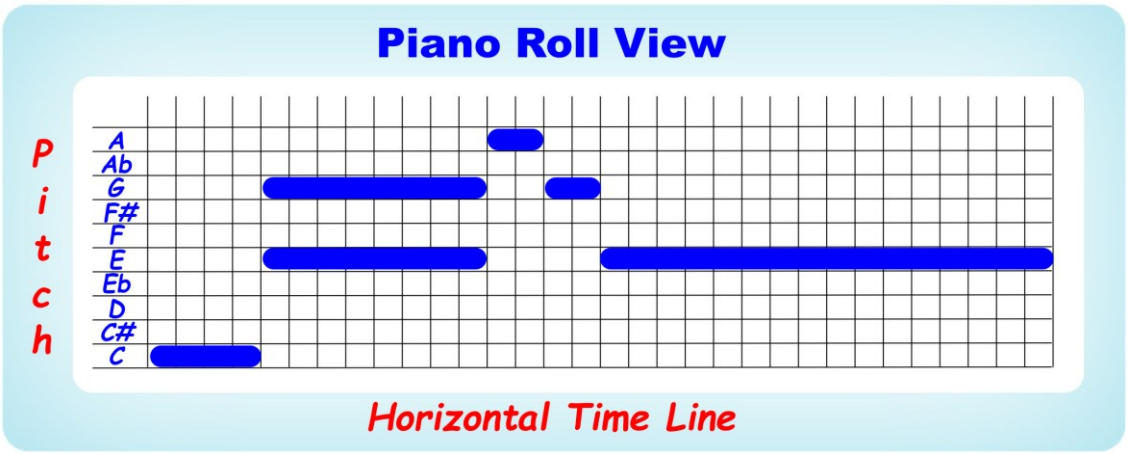
Music Notation

Music notation is basically a glorified *graph* using groups of lines called *'staves'* or *'staffs'*, with the *'time-line'* being the horizontal axis from left to right and the *'pitch'* being the vertical axis. How long a note is played for is determined by the time element of the note i.e. crotchet, quaver, minim etc. When it is played is determined by how far along the timeline it's placed. The pitch of the note is determined by how high or low it's placed on the vertical axis (the stave). Simple - easy peasy - *in theory!*

As an example, in the diagram below, the first note to be played is **C** which is the lowest pitched note of the phrase and is a *'crotchet'* (don't worry I'll explain all this shortly), followed by **E** and **G** which are higher pitched and played together. They are both *'minims'* which are sustained for twice as long as a *'crotchet'*. Then we have **A** which is the highest note of the phrase followed by **G** again both of which are *'quavers'* being timed half the value of a crotchet. And finally, the last note of the phrase is **E** which is a *'semibreve'* (notice that it has no stem) which is four times the time value of a crotchet.



The next diagram shows exactly the same phrase in graph form or *Piano Roll* form as used in music recording software. Click on either to hear the phrase if you want to.



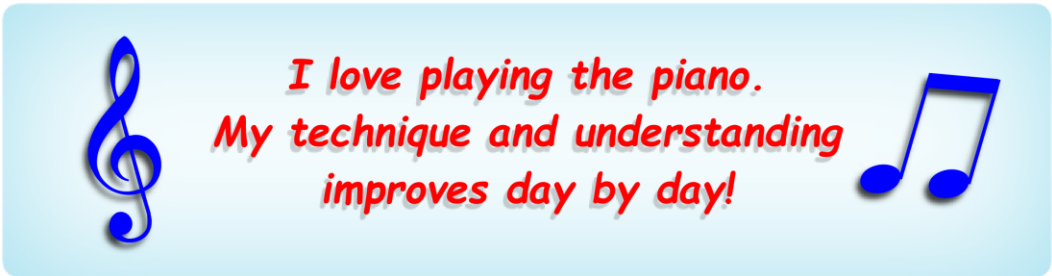
Can you recognise the similarities between the two diagrams?

Undoubtedly any untrained musician would find the piano roll view simpler to understand, and it certainly has its uses when editing recorded music. But look at how much space it takes up compared to the first diagram. And remember this is a very short, one hand phrase. So clearly, learning conventional music notation has to be to every musician's advantage.

In order to extend the vertical axis (in conventional notation) and potentially accommodate more notes, this is split into *'clefs'*. The two clefs used in piano music are the *'treble'* and *'bass'* clefs as shown next and these forms the *'grand staff'* (or *'stave'*).

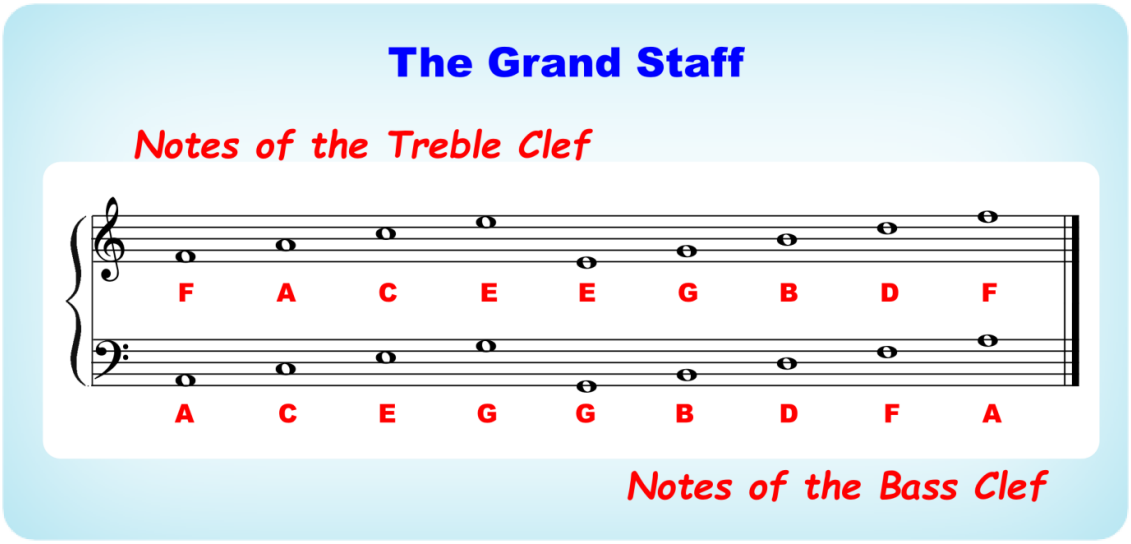
Saying: "the two clefs used in Piano music" implies that there are other clefs.

Yes, there are several other clefs used by other instruments and singers, the most common being the *'alto'* and *'tenor'* clefs, but from the piano / keyboard point of view, you can completely put them out of mind, just simply know that they exist and forget about them!



The Grand Staff

The *'Grand staff'* is made up of two *'staves'* or *'staffs'* of five lines each, the top one being the *'treble clef'* which is mainly used for the higher notes by the right hand and the *'bass clef'* mainly used for the lower notes by the left hand.



What's the difference between a staff and a stave?

Actually, no-one seems to know for sure - *not even Google or Wikipedia!* But clearly a *staff* is a *stave* and a *stave* is a *staff,* although generally the plural for both is *'staves'* not *'staffs'* - *but don't worry about it, it's just a word - well two words!*

The important thing that you need to learn is that the *'staves'* or *'staffs'* are split into the two *'clefs'* (for piano music) - these are what you need to learn and remember.

An easy way to remember the notes of each clef is to think of them in sections like:

- Treble Clef *space* notes **F A C E** - the word *FACE!*
- Treble Clef *line* notes **E G B D F** - *Every Good Boy Deserves Favours!*
- Bass Clef *space* notes **A C E G** - *All Cows Eat Grass!*
- Bass Clef *line* notes **G B D F A** - *Giant Bears Don't Fly Aeroplanes!*

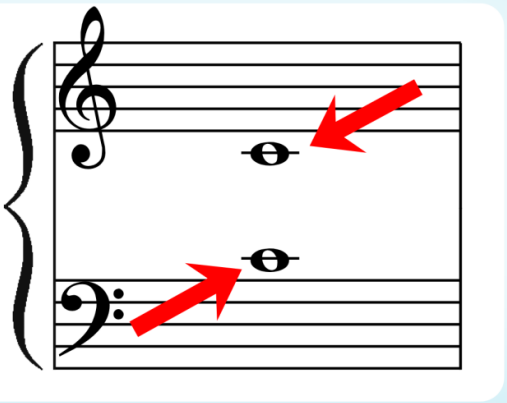
So, which one is 'middle C'?

Well actually ***'middle C'*** is not in the above illustration, because it falls below the lines of the treble clef and above the lines of the bass clef. In fact, it's exactly mid-way between both clefs.

The next illustration will show you where it is! Although it is shown in both the treble and bass clefs it is the same note.

Middle C

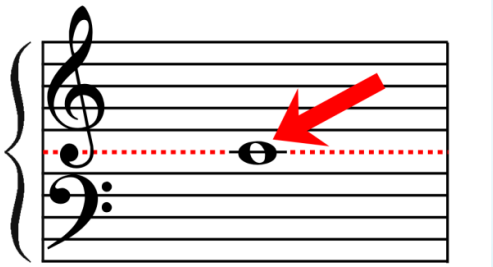
Middle C is below the lines of the Treble Clef and above the lines of the Bass Clef



If we bring the two clefs closer together, you will see that there is an imaginary line exactly midway between the two clefs and this is where ***'middle C'*** lives.

Middle C

If we bring the two clefs closer together and draw an imaginary line between them, this is where we find Middle C



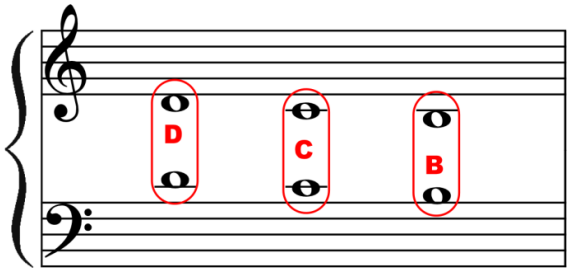
And this is why ***'middle C'*** has a line drawn through the middle of it. This is called a *'ledger line'* and happens with some other notes as well, in fact any time a note goes above or below the clef staff lines.

Now the notes both sides of middle **C** (**B** and **D**) also fall either above or below the clef staff lines which can be seen next.

I love playing the piano.
My technique and understanding improves day by day!

Notes Between the Clefs

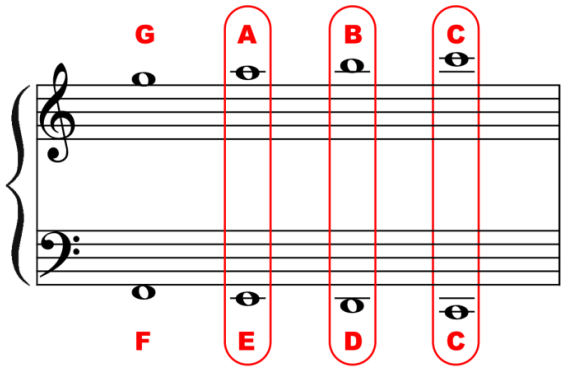
The notes shown here are the same notes written in different clefs



Now there are also notes that fall both above the treble clef and below the bass clef and these in fact would be the top four and the bottom four white notes of a four-octave spread.

Notes Above or Below the Clefs

Some notes fall above or below the clef staff lines as shown here!



The two C's shown here are 4 octaves apart!

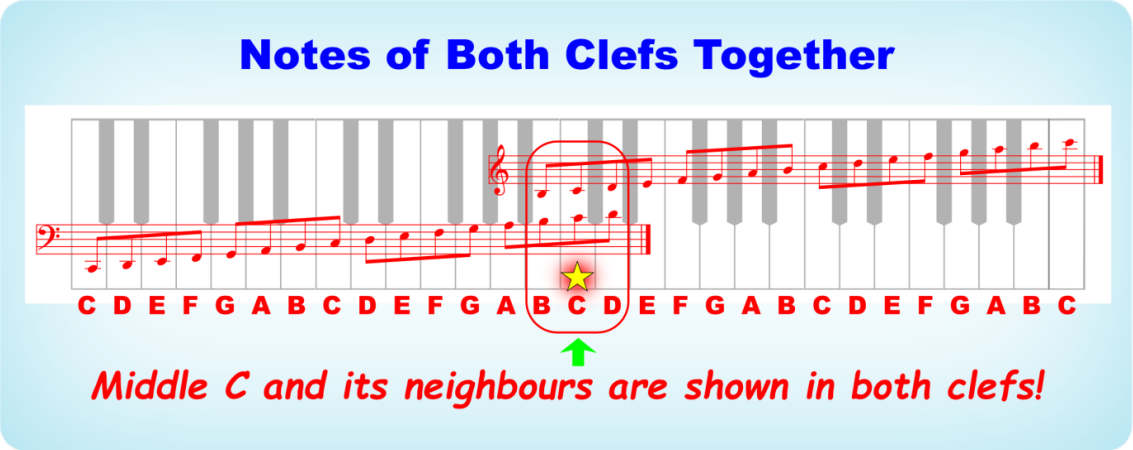
Wow this is getting heavy; I don't think I'll ever understand all this!

Please don't distress yourself, we will be dealing with everything one step at a time and it will all become clear as you progress. But you may occasionally need to review various sections to gain a complete understanding. - *Just read on!*

How the Notes Relate to the Keyboard

Now we'll look at how the musical notes relate to the keyboard.

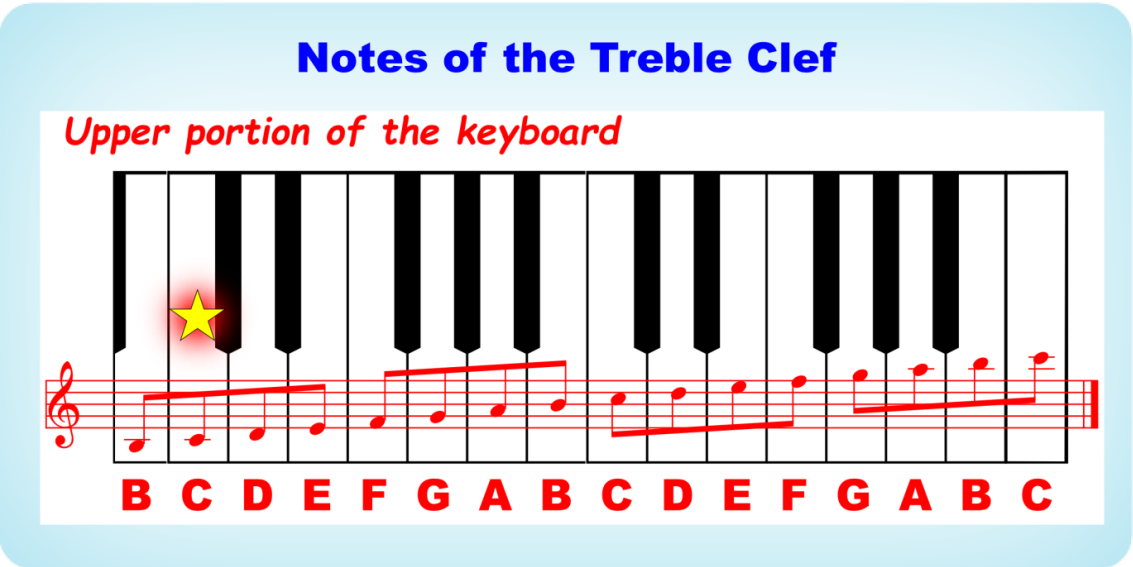
This next diagram may at first look a little confusing and difficult to read; and if you are reading this on a tablet, it may not be clear. If you haven't already done so, please go to the rear of the book to get the pdf download link and you will be able to see this much more clearly, even more so in landscape view!

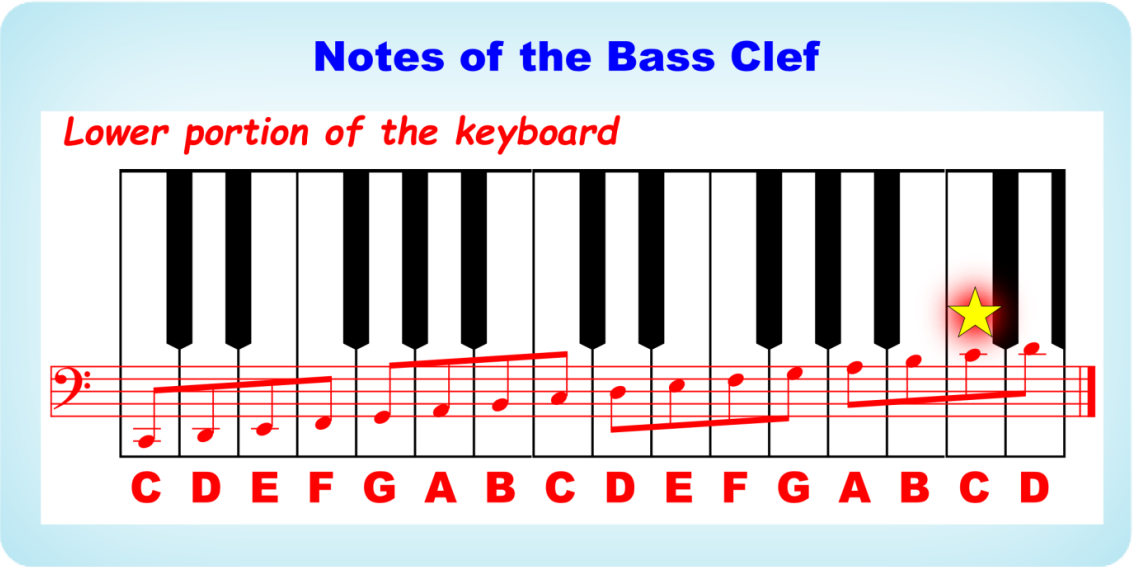


To make this easier to see, below I have split the keyboard into two 2-octave sections, one for each clef, but remember that we have put a star on ***'middle C'*** so that you can always find it!

So, notice that the next two diagrams are actually the same as the above diagram split into two.

It may be useful for you to print out these three diagrams and look at them in detail.

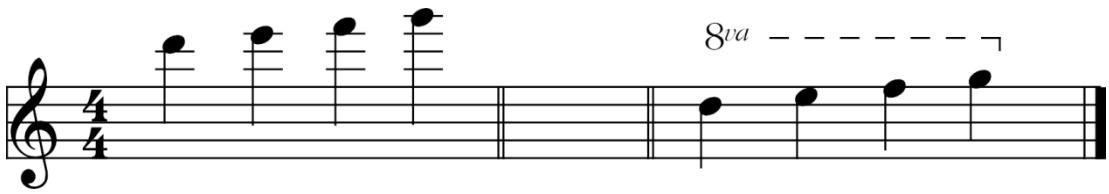




Ok so this shows a four-octave spread, but what happens when the notes are higher or lower than these as on larger keyboards?

Good question! And the answer is that up to a certain point more ledger lines are added, but when there are too many they become impossible to read quickly, so instead the music is written an octave (or more) lower or higher to keep within the clefs and then the ***8va, 8v*b, *15ma*** or ***15mb*** symbols are used.

As an example, the following two phrases are exactly the same, but on the second one the ***8va*** symbol is used indicating that the notes should be played an octave higher than written.



- ***8va*** = play the bracketed notes one octave higher;
- ***8vb*** = play the bracketed notes one octave lower;
- ***15ma*** = play the bracketed notes two octaves higher;
- ***15mb*** = play the bracketed notes two octaves lower.

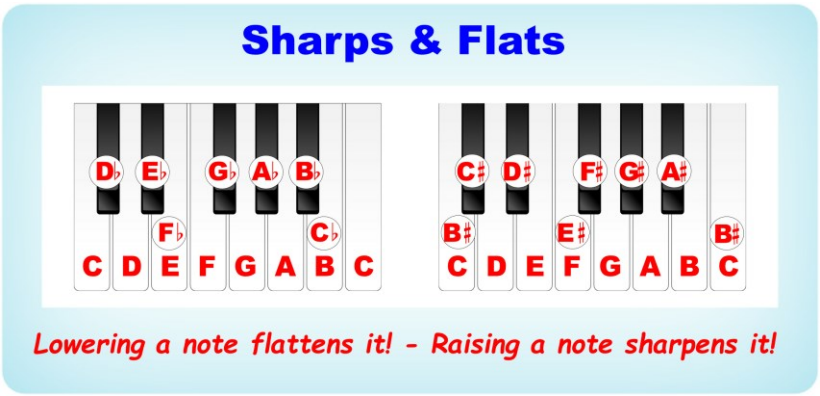
To be honest it will probably be a while before you'll need these.

Sharps & Flats

We've already learnt that the interval from one **C** to the next is an *'octave'*. And indeed, this is the same interval from **B - B** or **G - G** etc.

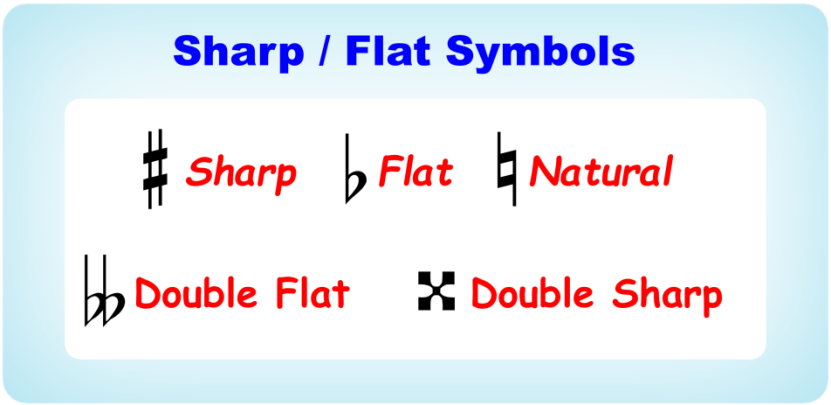
Now the smallest interval in Western music is a *'semitone'* which is the interval from any note on the keyboard to its nearest neighbour be it black or white.

So, the interval between **C** and **B** is a semitone, and also the interval between **E** and **F** as in both cases there are no black notes in-between. In all the other cases there *are* black notes in-between, so the semitone interval will be to the black note above or below. And as you can see by the diagram below the first black note after **C** is called **C sharp** *or* **D flat**. Note that in some circumstances **B** could also be known as ***C flat*** (as there are no black notes in between) and **C** could also be known as ***B sharp*** - but actually this is very rare.



To *'sharpen'* a note is to raise the pitch and to *'flatten'* one is to lower the pitch.

There are also *'double sharps'* and *'double flats'* where the pitch of a note is raised or lowered twice as much (2 semi-tones). But as these only occur occasionally in keys heavily endowed in sharps or flats, we're not going to get involved with these here; and it may be years before you come across any.

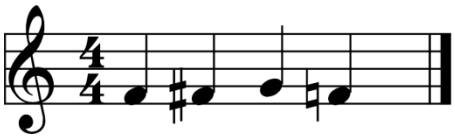


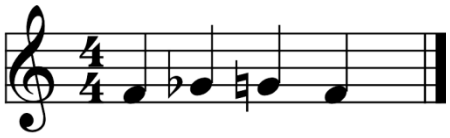
Whether a particular note is known as a sharp or a flat depends on the key signature which will be dealt with later.

Sharps and flats occur in music in two different ways:

- as 'accidentals'; or
- within key signatures (which could also include accidentals).

When they are *accidentals,* they are simply added to the music as and where they occur as shown below.





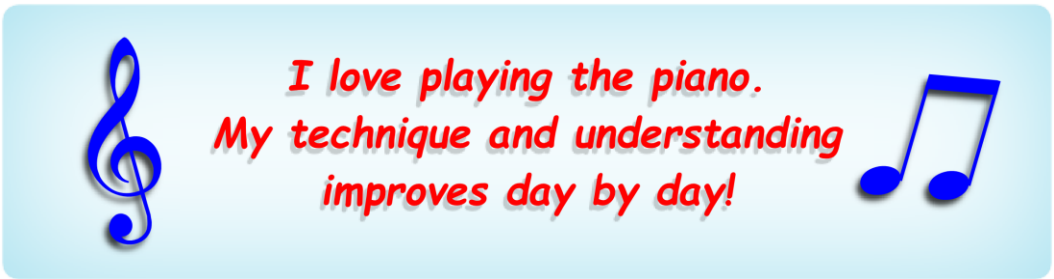
In this case any repeats of notes that are *'sharpened'* or *'flattened'* this way remains so for the duration of the bar unless *'naturalised'* using the *'natural'* symbol.

If you look carefully at the last diagrams you will see that both examples are identical. The first one uses **F sharp** and the second uses **G flat** (same notes) to produce the same result.

Why do the black notes have two names? Why not just call them 'flats' or 'sharps' but not both?

Yes, I can see the confusion, but this is because there are *'flat keys'* and *'sharp keys'* which we'll be learning about later, along with *'key signatures'*.

But first we'll deal with the timing.



Timing and Rhythm Part 1

Hopefully you've understood a little about the vertical axis of the musical graph (stave). Now we'll start looking at the horizontal axis - the *'time-line'*, which consists of time signatures, bars and note values.

Time Signatures and Bars

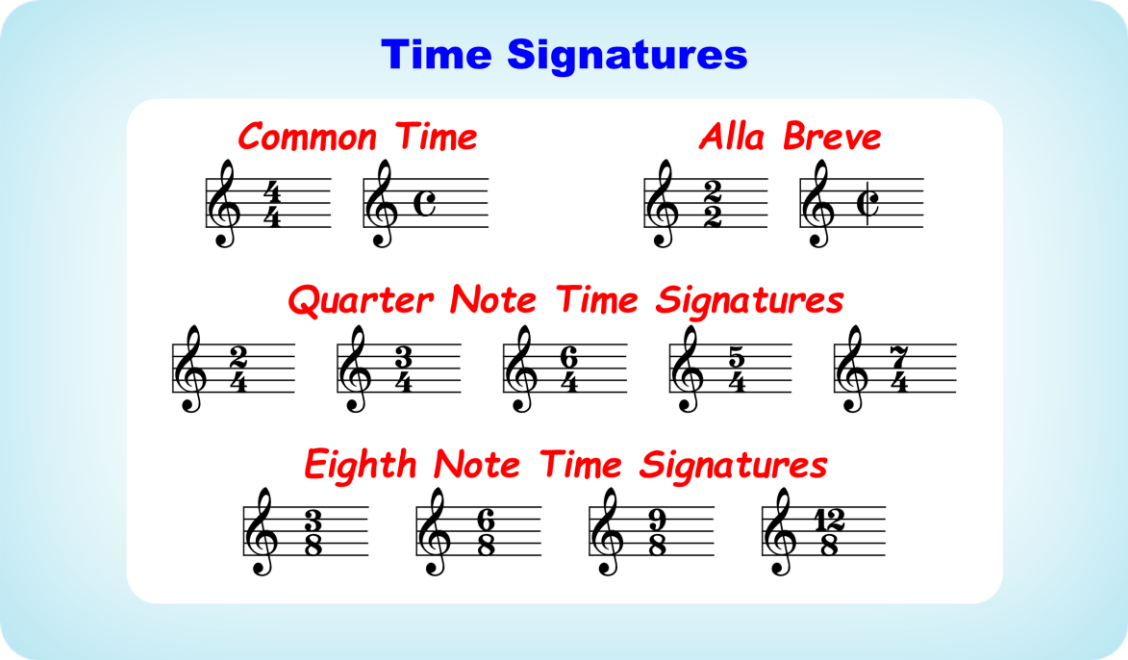
Each group of notes is separated into *'bars'* or *'measures'*, identified by the vertical *'bar lines'* separating the various notes or groups of notes. The time signature determines how many notes of what length are to be played to each bar, the first beat of which is often slightly or heavily accented.

The most common time signatures are:

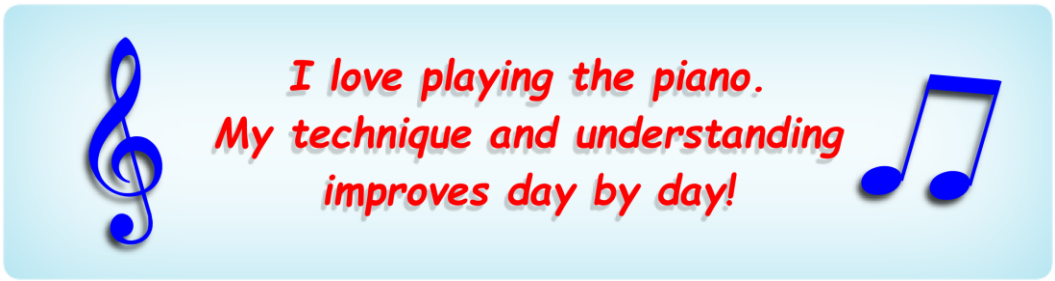
- **4/4** - four quarter notes to each bar. Think or repeat '**1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4**' etc., and with your right-hand tap with the '**1 2 3 4**' beats but not the *'ands'*. With your left-hand tap on the '**1** and **3**' beats;
- **3/4** - three quarter notes to each bar (Waltz time). Think or repeat '**1 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 2 & 3**' etc., and with your left-hand tap on the '**1**' beats and with your right hand on the '**2 / 3**' beats;
- **2/4** - two quarter notes to each bar (March time). Think or repeat '**1 & 2 & 1 & 2**' etc., and with your left-hand tap on the '**1**' beats and with your right hand on the '**2**' beats;
- **6/8** - six eighth notes to each bar (two set of three - Jazz Waltz). Think or repeat '**1 2 3, 2 2 3 - 1 2 3, 2 2 3**' etc., (no *'ands'* this time) and tap all the beats with your right hand and the '**1**' and '**2**' beats with your left hand but giving more emphasis on the first '**1**' beat of each pattern. This may seem similar to **3/4** time, but it's generally much faster.

The time signature is always given at the beginning of each piece and will remain the same throughout unless information is given to the contrary.

The most common time signature without doubt is **4/4** which is also known as *'common time'* and this also has an alternative symbol as shown below as does the **2/2** time signature which is known as *'cut common time'* or *'alla breve'*.

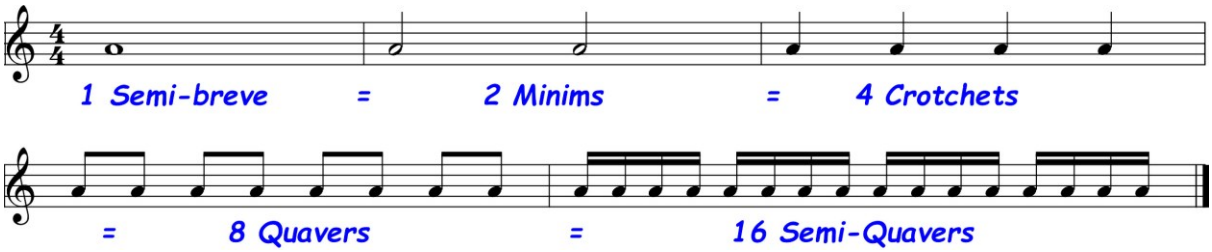


There are other time signatures which we're not going to deal with here, but by the time you come to need them you will understand them perfectly.

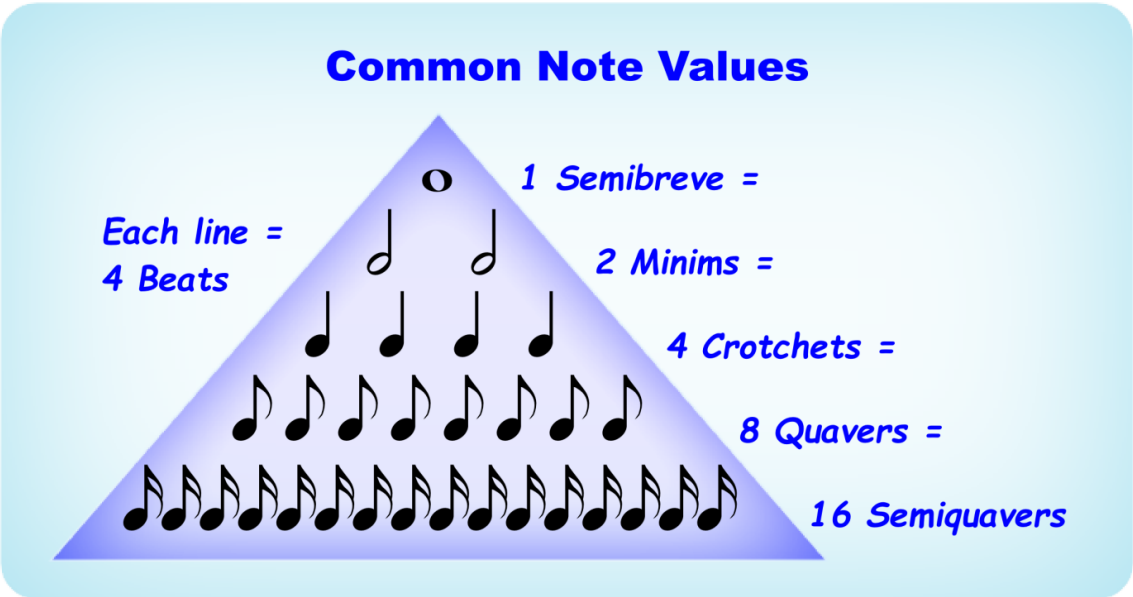


Note Values

The most important note values that you are likely to come across for a while are as follows:

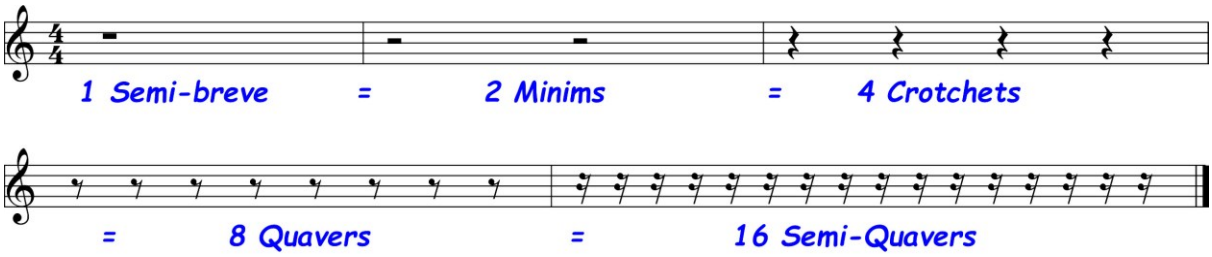


- The *'semibreve'* also known as a *'whole note'* counts as 4 beats (therefore taking up the whole of a **4/4** bar);
- The *'minim'* also known as a *'half note'* counts as 2 beats (therefore taking up half of a **4/4** bar);
- The *'crotchet'* also known as a *'quarter note'* counts as 1 beat (therefore taking up a quarter of a **4/4** bar);
- The *'quaver'* also known as an *'eighth note'* counts as half a beat (therefore taking up an eighth of a **4/4** bar);
- The *'semiquaver'* also known as a *'sixteenth note'* counts as a quarter of a beat (therefore taking up a sixteenth of a **4/4** bar). As more *'tails'* are added to the quaver family the note values halve. So, four tails will create a 64th note, but we are not going to go into these here.



Rests

Each bar must always compute to the correct value except when *'lead in'* notes are used in the first bar (shown shortly). Therefore, any space where no note is sounded is taken up by a *'rest(s)'* which have similar values to the notes.



Note the similarity between the minim and semibreve rests. Although they look similar, they are rarely confused as the semibreve takes up the whole bar. I always remember these as a minim *'rests'* and a semibreve *'hangs'!*

*Sorry, I don't get any of this. Could you just explain again exactly what **4/4** timing means?*

Ok, the top '**4**' of the '**4/4**' symbol means that there are four beats to the bar and the bottom '**4**' tells us the value of the beats, and as a crotchet is a quarter of a semibreve, this means that there are four *'quarter'* notes (crotchets) to each bar.

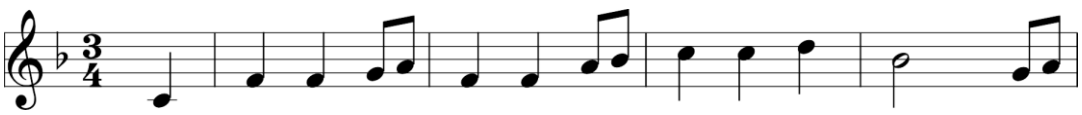
In the case of **3/4** this means that there are three *'quarter'* notes (crotchets) to a bar and **2/4**, two quarter notes to a bar.

In the case of **6/8** the there are six *'eighth'* notes (quavers) to a bar.

Being totally ridiculous, if the time signature was **19/16** there would be nineteen *'sixteenth'* notes (semiquavers) to a bar, but such a time signature does not exist in practice - *maybe on another planet!* However, time signatures such as **11/8** and **7/4** etc., although a little unusual *do* exist! - I love both of them and use them frequently!

Lead in Notes

Some tunes don't start on the first beat of a bar, in which case *'lead in note(s)'* are used which will make the first bar shorter than the normal bar time. Sometimes (but not always) this is adjusted by also making the last bar a different length to make up the difference. An example of this is shown below which is in fact the first few bars of ***'Away in a Manger'***.



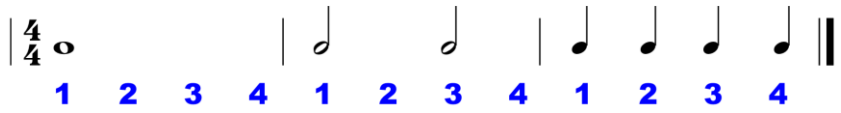
4/4 Timing

Now, looking at the example below, I want you to count out loud or in your head: **1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4** and clap your hands on the beats with the notes. Then you'll be clapping the rhythm.

Notice the **4/4** sign at the beginning and also the *'bar lines'* between each four beats.

4/4 Timing Example

Count evenly and clap on the notes!



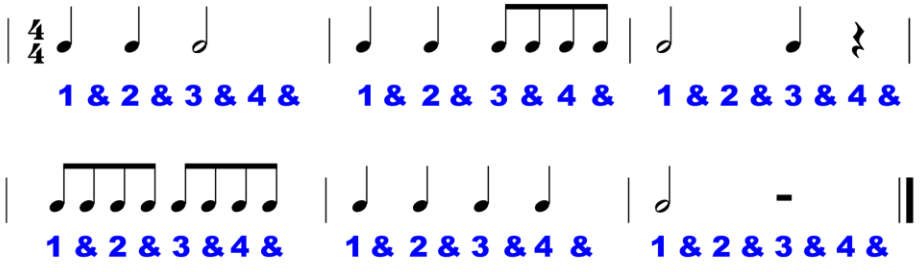
That should have been fairly simple.

Now I'd like you to count **1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &** etc., as in the next example we're going to include some quavers and also a couple of rests.

If you like, instead of clapping you can tap a steady four beats with your left hand and tap on the notes with your right hand, but don't forget to think the ***'&s'*** in your head!

4/4 Timing Example 2

Count evenly and clap on the notes!



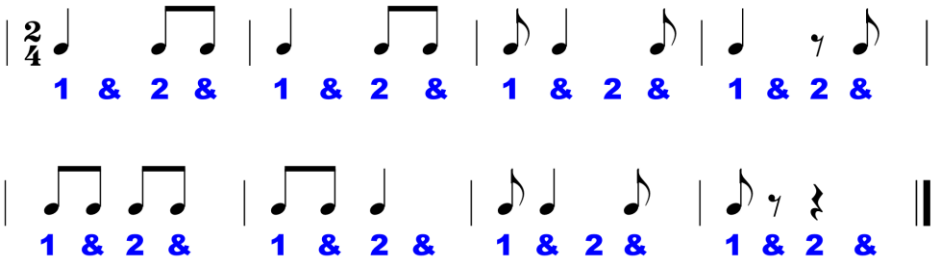
2/4 Timing

2/4, as I mentioned only a short while ago, means that there are two quarter notes (crotchets) to each bar. And this is just like *'marching'* time. So, when counting as we have done previously, you need to count **1 - 2 - 1 - 2** etc., or **1 & 2 & 1 & 2 &** etc. if there are quavers involved (which there are).

And accent should be given to both first and second beats.

2/4 Timing Example

Count evenly and clap on the notes!



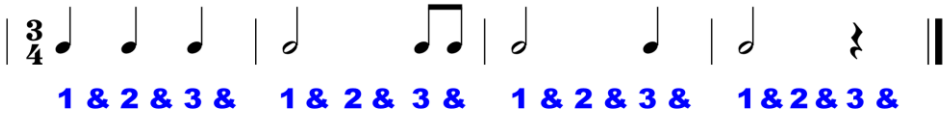
Just about all military music is written in **2/4** timing. If you've ever seen our glorious U.K. monarchy's - ***'Trooping the Colour'***, you will have heard many! But **2/4** timing is also extensively used in all types of music, including folk and classical.

3/4 Timing

3/4 timing is *'waltz'* timing and should be counted: **1 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3** etc., or if there are quavers involved: **1 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 2 & 3 &** etc., with accent on the first beat only.

3/4 Timing Example

Count evenly and clap on the notes!



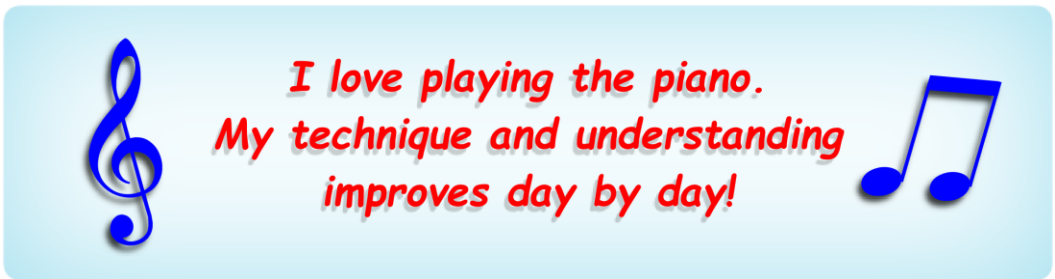
So exactly how long in time is a crotchet?

There is no set time, but they are always equal unless the tempo changes during the piece. The tempo for every piece of music is generally indicated at the beginning by showing how many crotchets there are per minute or in classical music the following *Italian* terms are used:

Italian		Translation		Beats per Minute
Grave	-	*Very Slow / Solemn*	-	*40 - 44*
Largo	-	*Slow*	-	*46 - 48*
Lento	-	*Slow*	-	*50 -52*
Adagio	-	*Leisurely*	-	*54 - 56*
Andante	-	*Easily*	-	*58 - 63*
Andantino	-	*Slightly Faster*	-	*64 - 72*
Moderato	-	*Moderately*	-	*74 -92*
Allegretto	-	*Fairly Quick*	-	*96 - 108*
Allegro	-	*Quick / Lively*	-	*112 - 116*
Vivace	-	*Briskly*	-	*120 - 132*
Presto	-	*Fast*	-	*138 - 168*
Prestissimo	-	*Fast as Possible*	-	*176 - 208*

So why are all these terms in Italian?

Because many of the most important composers from the Renaissance to the Baroque period were *Italian. - That's just about all the composers who eat spaghetti and who's names end in 'i'!*

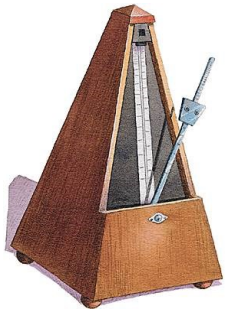


Using a Metronome

If you have a modern electronic piano or keyboard there will almost certainly be a built-in metronome which can be altered to any specific time value. Note that as well as setting the timing you will also need to set how many beats there are to a bar; the metronome will then *'ding'* on the first beat of every bar and *'tick'* on the others.

If you've listened to any of the links so far, you'll notice that I've added a metronome to them - with the *'ding'* at the first beat of each bar - *or measure.*

If you are using an acoustic instrument, you will need an external metronome. Electronic versions are widely available and are very inexpensive, but there's something really special about the old-fashioned traditional clockwork versions which unfortunately are more expensive. I love them - they come in the same category as cuckoo clocks for me - *a touch of nostalgia!* - But all they do is tick, tock and ding - *no cuckoos!*



What about when a piece slows down or speeds up?

In this event no metronome (electronic or mechanical) would be able to cope with the infinite possibilities, but in these events the following terms are used in the music notation:

Italian		Translations
Accelerando	-	*Increase speed*
Rallentando	-	*Slow down*
Ritardando	-	*Slow down*
a tempo	-	*Resume original tempo*

That's it for timing and rhythm for the time being. I'll show an example of **6/8** timing a little later, as this requires the need for dotted notes which we haven't dealt with yet.

Your First Test

Now it's time for your first test.

Oh please, is this really necessary?

Well yes, but the test is only so that you can find out what you understand (or not) of what we've covered so far. And if you get any of the questions wrong, it only means that you will need to go back and have another look at what we've done so far.

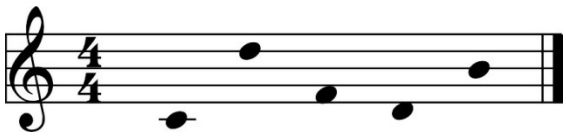
Question 1

Looking at the keyboard chart shown above what are the notes called that are numbered:

a) **25?** - b) **30?** - c) **22?** - d) **15?** - e) **29?**

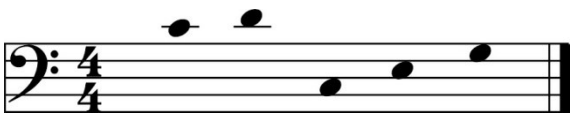
Question 2

Looking at the following diagram, which is in the *treble clef*, identify the names of each note in order and show where they can be found on the keyboard chart (above). For instance, the first note is **'C'** and is **No. 25** in the chart.



Question 3

Looking at the following diagram, which is in the *bass clef*, as before, identify the notes in order and where they can be found on the keyboard chart (above).



Question 4

How many crotchets equals a minim?

Question 5

How many crotchets equals a semibreve?

Question 6

Is the following note a semibreve, minim, crotchet or quaver?

Question 7

Is the following note a semibreve, minim, crotchet or quaver?

Question 8

Is the following rest a semibreve, minim, crotchet or quaver?

Question 9

How many minims could there be in a **4/4** bar?

Question 10

Is **F sharp** the same note as **G flat**, **A flat** or **B flat**?

The correct answers can be found towards the end of the book.

If you have answered any questions incorrectly, you should look again at the information shown previously. But do also remember that the most important aspect of playing the piano or keyboard is the actual physical practice, so please work hard at getting your fingers working well and pay attention to correct hand / seating position, timing, accuracy and smoothness in your playing. All of these items will be covered next.

⬅ Let's Begin ➡

Hopefully you now understand a little of the theory explained so far which obviously is important. But having understood this of course you also need the physical technical ability to hit the right notes with the correct velocity in the right order at the right time. This may take months of intense practice to become reasonably proficient and years to become superb. But make no mistake about it *anyone* can do it - at any age. Don't let anyone ever tell you that you are too old or too anything else to do this - I repeat - ***anyone can do it!*** And if you're knocking on a bit like me, it could give you a new lease of life!

Do also remember that the ability to read music is not necessarily related to how good a musician you could become. Some of the world's greatest musicians are unable to read music at all (Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder etc.), but a basic understanding will certainly help you get going. Even some great sighted musicians are lousy sight readers.

One thing that every great musician has in common is that they all have a good understanding of scales, chords, harmony and rhythm (which will be covered herein) and would have all spent many hours a day practicing finger techniques. *Clearly, they were motivated!*

In short, the more you put into it - *practice* - the more pleasure you will get out of it. The satisfaction achieved is totally immense. And there are some wonderful pieces of music available that are relatively easy to play. But it's never worth going beyond your capabilities as this will just cause anxiety. *Take it one step at a time!*

Correct Hand and Seating Positioning

Firstly, it's a good idea to make sure that your hands are clean and warm. You can achieve this by soaking them in warm water for a while, but then dry them thoroughly. Alternatively, sit on them to warm them up; but if you happen to be sitting on a cold marble slab, nestle your right hand under your left armpit and your left hand under your right armpit for a while which is a method that I used regularly whilst gigging around Europe during the cold winters of the 60's.

The next thing is to be sure that you adopt a correct seating position so that you can achieve the correct hand position. If your seating is incorrect (too low or too high) then your hand positioning will never be correct. I recommend using a height adjustable piano stool so that you can experiment in order to get comfortable. Or of course you may have an adjustable keyboard stand.

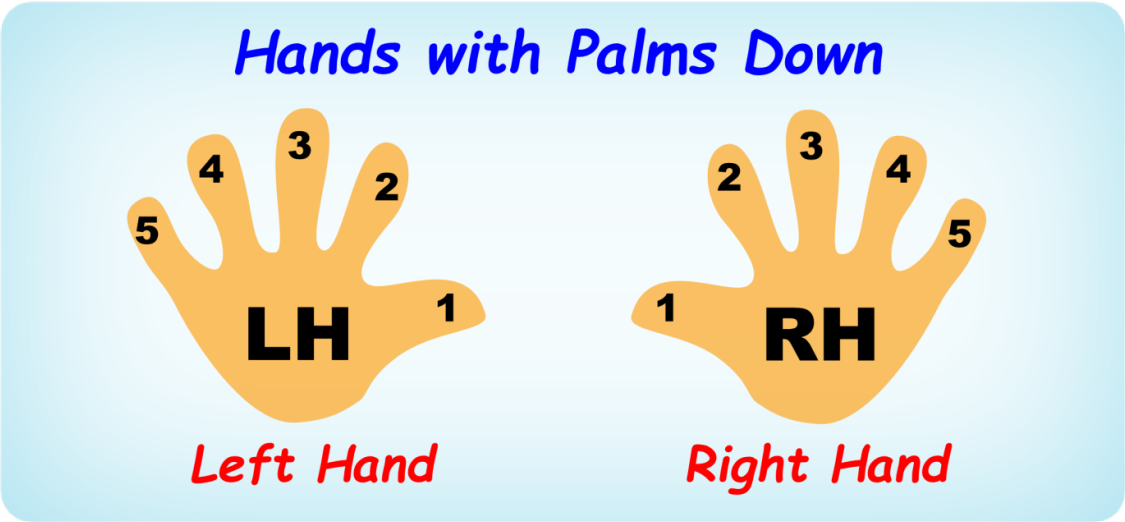
Do also consider the fact that you may need to use the pedals, or at least the sustain pedal. So, both feet should be comfortably flat on the floor to begin with.

And of course, your stool should be positioned so that you are seated more or less in the centre of the keyboard - *belly button opposite* ***middle C****!*

The next pictures illustrate the correct and incorrect hand positions.

Fingering

As far as music is concerned what most people will call their *'first'* finger is their *'second'* finger as in music the *'first'* finger is always your *'thumb'* - *on both hands!*



Your First Exercises

As your music reading ability is no doubt limited right now, for our first few exercises we're going to use five notes only (in each hand), all of which are consecutive to one another so that you don't get lost. Each finger will always play the same note, but not necessarily in the same order.

These initial exercises will enable you to utilise every finger in both hands thereby giving each finger equal practice. And we'll only be using time elements that we've already covered: crotchets, minims and semibreves - *and quavers a little later!*

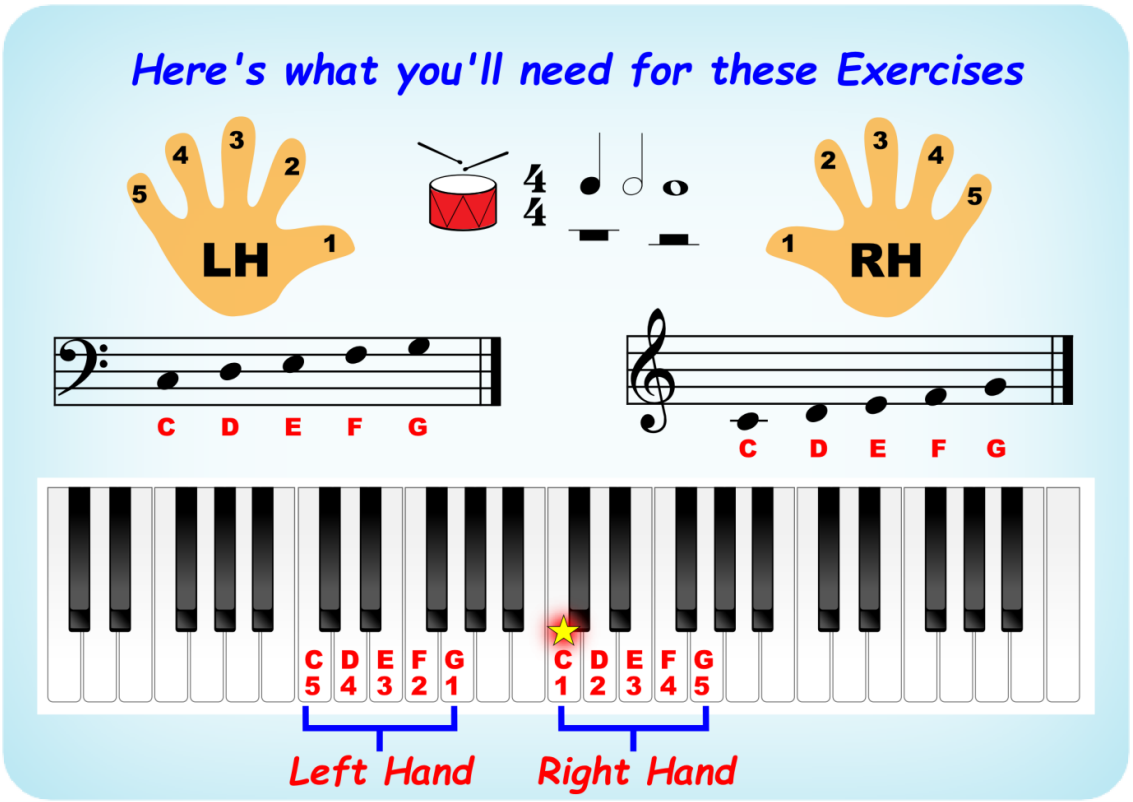
Begin by resting your hands lightly on these five notes in a relaxed claw like position; then when you are ready begin depressing the keys in the order shown in a piston type motion using the tips of your fingers and the sides of your thumbs. Make sure that you release each note before playing the next except for the minims and semibreves which should be sustained longer. And try to play each note with equal pressure, which I know is not easy at first.

Most importantly keep to a strict rhythm which can be as slow as you like, ideally use a metronome set to a comfortable speed.

Each exercise should be repeated several times and speed can be increased only when you are ready.

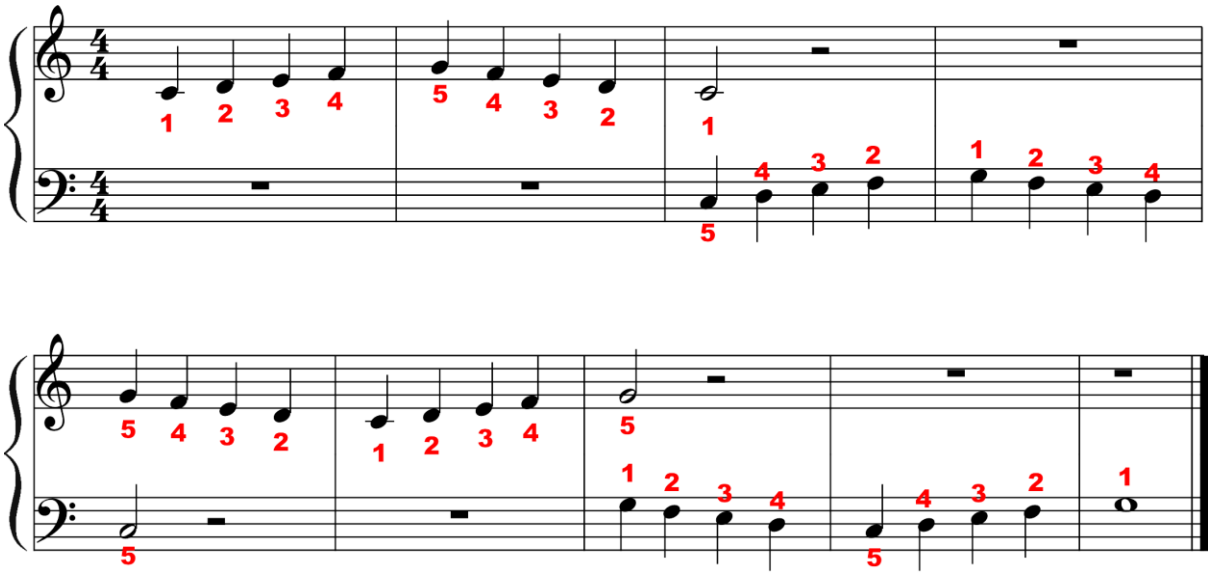
All of the exercises can be heard by clicking on the hyperlinks as they appear *as explained previously* or by downloading them from the website.

Each of these exercises uses the notes and fingering as shown in the next diagram. Note that the thumb of your right hand plays middle **C** and your left hand plays the same notes an octave below. Although both hands are used, they are not used together except for single sustained notes. In each case try and be aware of which notes you are playing. Perhaps sing along as you are doing it - *silently if you wish* - **C D E F G F** etc.



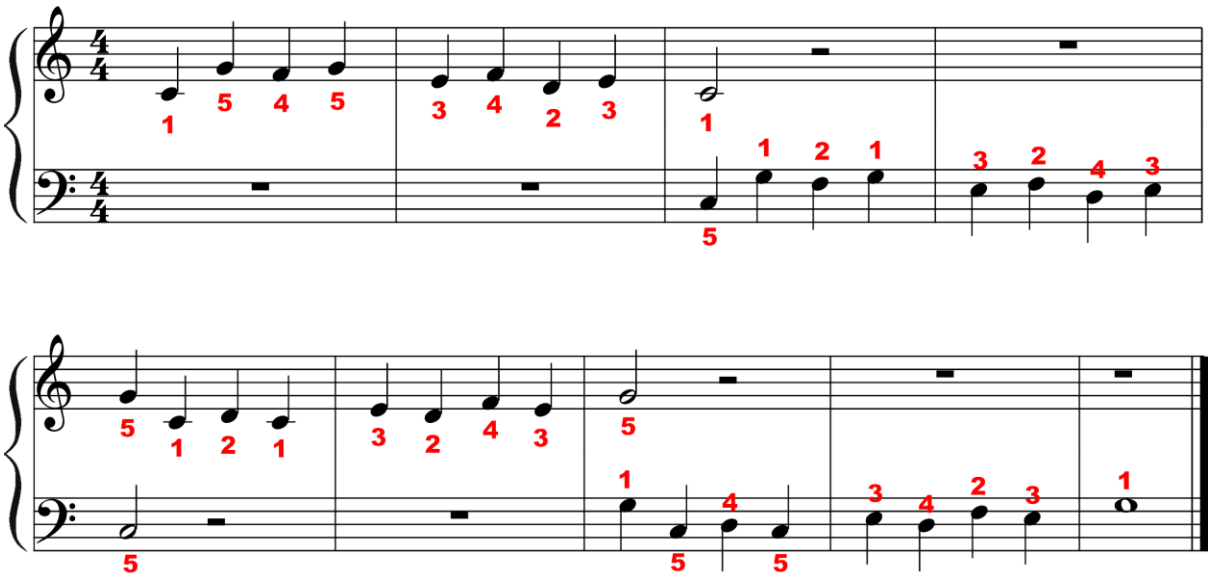
Exercise 1

This one is the simplest as it's just straight up and down, one finger after the other in order. Even though eventually you will find this very easy, I understand that if you're a complete beginner, even this will take some practice. But remember speed is not an issue.



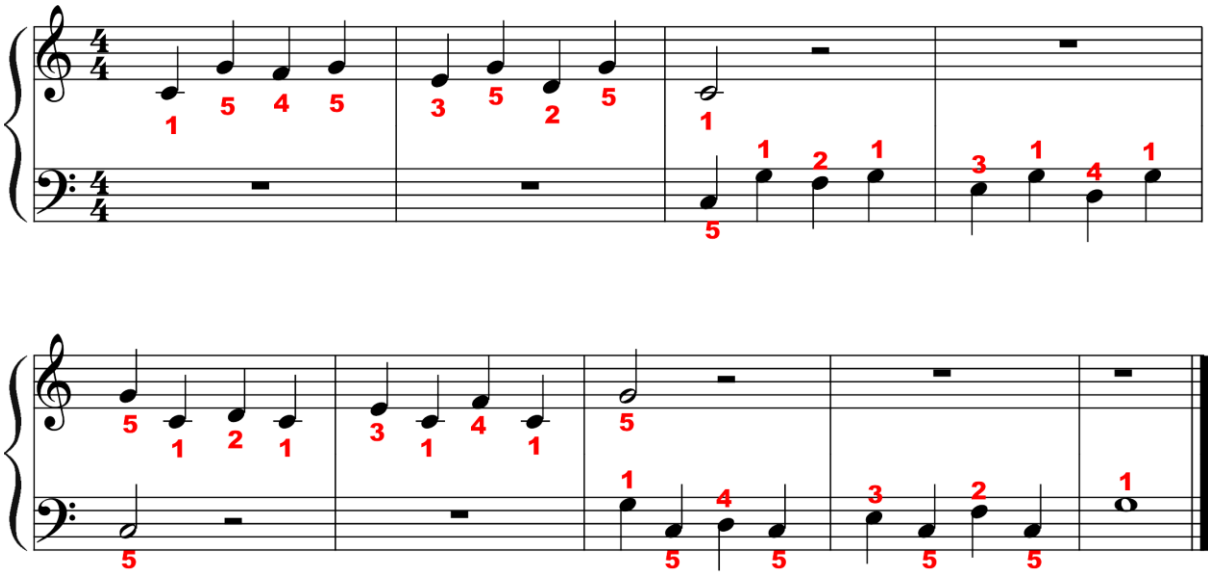
Exercise 2

This exercise uses the same five notes and fingers, but in a different order. If you hold your fingers over the notes, you can't fail to hit the correct ones, but remember, do try and be aware of which notes you are playing.



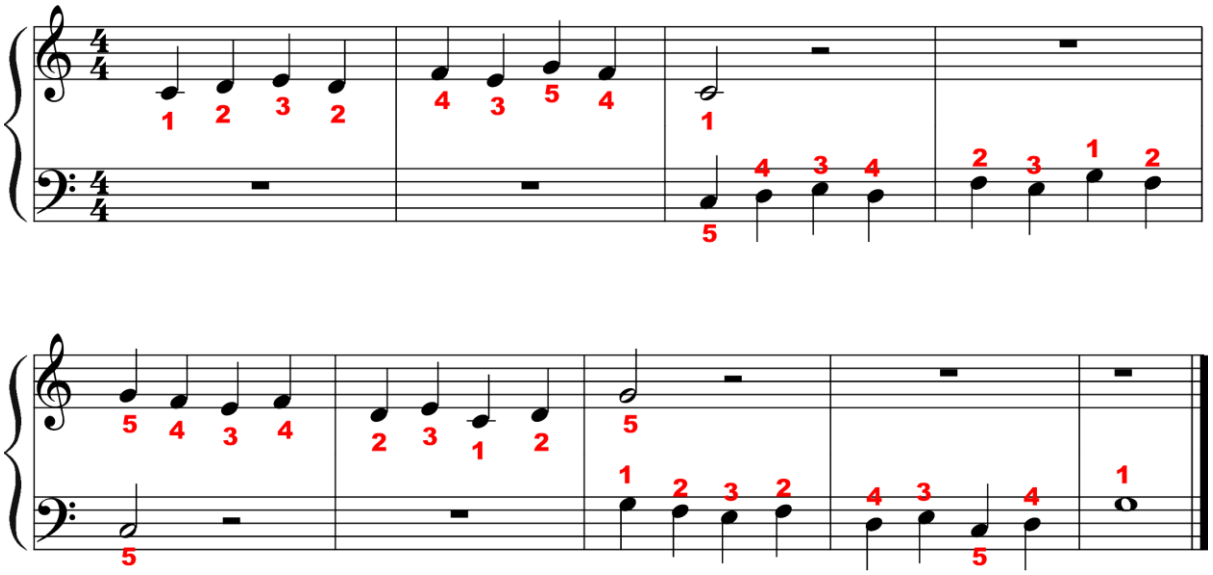
Exercise 3

This exercise looks very similar to the last one but look carefully to see the difference and notice how it gives more prominence to the first and fifth fingers.



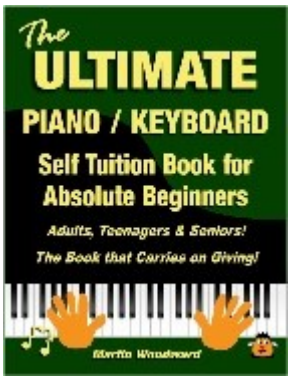
Exercise 4

And again, same notes, same fingering, different pattern.



End of Preview

Thank you for looking at this preview. This book is without doubt my most popular title, **but actually it's not my best book.** Please also take a look at the following books which offer more bang for buck. In all cases you can click on the graphics for further information and previews.

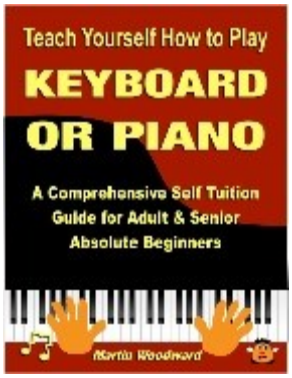


This book (to the right) undoubtedly offers the best bang for buck as it also includes several other eBooks in with the price as well as being one of my very latest books

If you are an absolute beginner (any age) and want a complete guide from scratch to learn mainly for home use then a great option is "The Ultimate Piano / Keyboard Self Tuition Book". This book assumes that you know nothing and will take you to a fairly advanced level and has replaced "Learn in a Week" as my flagship book.

Included with this book are several other digital titles including "Hanon", "Scales", "Chords" and more which makes this book the best 'bang for buck' without a doubt.

Available as paperback or printable eBook.



Similar to the above this will take absolute beginners to a fairly advanced level. This is very similar to the above (so you certainly wouldn't need both). The main difference is that the scales and chords are included in this book rather than relying on downloads. But taking into account the downloads, the 'Ultimate' book has slightly more information, but both are excellent.

Available as paperback or printable eBook.

Or why not go for the latest 'SPECIAL EDITION' which is more or less the same as the book you have previewed but also includes **6 other eBooks** (including Scales, Chords, Hanon, and Song books) - without doubt a great deal for beginners.

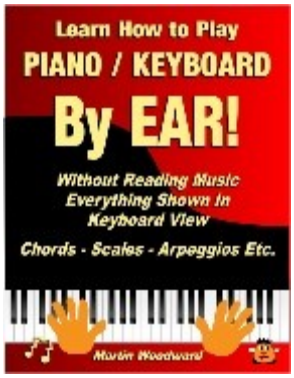
Excellent value for money!

Available as paperback or printable eBook.

If you are an absolute beginner (any age) and the thought of learning to read music is too daunting then "Learn How to Play to Play Piano Keyboard by Ear" could be your best bet.

This book has hundreds of graphics and will take you to a very advanced level, but without reading music, giving you a great finger technique as well as all the scales and chords that you need. You can always learn to read music later.

Available as paperback or printable eBook.

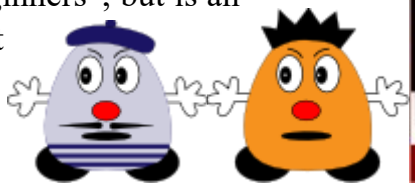


If you want to learn to improvise and maybe play in a band then my book 'Learn to Improvise One note at a Time' maybe just what you are looking for.

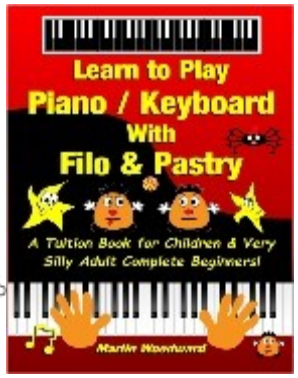
This new 'SPECIAL EDITION' has recently been revised 2022 and now includes 7 extra eBooks making this superb value for money. Click the picture for more information. A wicked book!

Available as paperback or printable eBook.

If you are an absolute beginner (any age) but would like the basics 'spoon fed' to you in a humorous way then "Learn to Play Piano / Keyboard with Filo & Pastry" is ideal. But note that this will only take you to a fairly basic level, not as far as "Piano / Keyboard for Absolute Beginners", but is an ideal prelude for either of the last three books. Great for kids!



Available as paperback (in colour) or printable eBook.



If you want to learn specifically for a keyboard with Auto-accompaniment then this could be the best book for you. This book also includes several tunes to play.

Available as paperback or printable eBook.

Or see: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/index.html for the full list including a free chord book, a free tune book and many keyboard reviews.