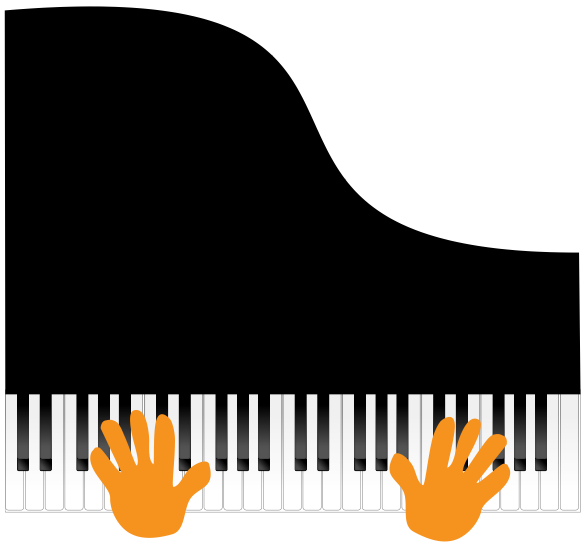
Teach Yourself How to Play

KEYBOARD OR PIANO

A Comprehensive Self Tuition Guide for Adult & Senior Absolute Beginners



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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.

To the other members of *'Aquila'* - Ralph Denyer (singer / songwriter); Phil Childs (bassist); Jim Smith (drums); George Lee (saxophonist).

To my early mentors: Alan Simonds (guitarist / vocalist); big bruv Steve (guitarist) and Mr. Henley (my inspirational music teacher at Warlingham School 1960 - 65).

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

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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Contents

Introduction

This book is an improved and updated version of my previous popular book entitled *'Learn How to Play Electronic Keyboard or Piano In a week!'*

There is an enormous amount of information herein which should take the reader from absolute beginner with no previous musical knowledge to high intermediate without the need for buying more books. *No Book 1, 2 and 3 etc. It's all in here!*

The methods included herein will show you the fastest and easiest way to learn finger dexterity and *genuine* music notation. And furthermore, are geared towards all styles of music and applicable to both piano and electronic keyboard.

As well as showing you how to play both *with* and *without* auto accompaniment features, this book explains:

- Choosing the right keyboard for your needs
- Initial finger exercises that don't even require a keyboard
- How to read music from scratch - timing and pitch etc.
- Every major / minor scale and arpeggio in every key
- Pentatonic & Blues Scales in the most used keys
- Chord construction in a way that can be understood
- Chord charts for every chord in every key in keyboard view - including 9ths, 13ths, diminisheds etc.
- The best proven finger exercises available
- How to make boring scales & arpeggios interesting and fun to practice
- Numerous practice pieces (including 2 additional downloadable tune books in pdf format)
- How to play from a fake book with and without auto-accompaniment
- Plus More!

The key points to learning quickly and effectively are as follows:

- The right type of regular practice, spaced according to your ability
- A high level of motivation
- Being assured that it has nothing to do with age, talent or being gifted even to a professional level

Let's look at the above in a little more detail.

The Right Practice

To be effective your practice should be short (initially) but regular. Three 20-minute sessions a day is ideal to begin with, which could be and should be extended as you gain more ability and finger strength. Having no practice for several days and then trying to make up for what you've missed by having a blitz, simply won't work, in fact this would more likely be a backward step. If you can't manage three sessions, then one 20 / 30-minute session per day is the absolute minimum to begin with, any less and you'd be basically wasting your time.

With the right practice, good progress will occur but it's normal for this to be in fits and jerks - good days and bad days - so don't get disappointed when it appears to be going wrong. In order to experience the peaks, you must also have the troughs! Keep doing it *every day* and it will happen!

Apparently, Chopin used to insist that his students practiced just 2 hours a day but other greats suggested much, much more!

Included herein are some superb 5 finger exercises, plus all the scales and arpeggios that you need to know. In order to be successful these *must* be practiced, but they can be fun as shown later.

Motivation

There's absolutely no doubt about it that your willingness to practice regularly is in a direct ratio to your degree of motivation. Clearly if you're not motivated, you'll not bother. If you look at all really successful players, the one thing that they have in common is a high level of motivation - the greater the motivation - the greater the success! Jazz pianist Jamie Cullum has a keyboard in every room of his house - even the kitchen - so that he can *'have a twiddle'* any time he feels like it - even when he's boiling his eggs or pickling his onions!

Talent / Gift

Successful keyboard playing has nothing to do with age, talent or being gifted. Most of the so called *'talented / gifted'* musicians were simply born into the right environment where they were encouraged and taught from a very early age. So sure, maybe they were privileged - but not gifted. And this is the same with everything from being a *'gifted'* artist to a *'gifted'* motor mechanic! - Think about it! Do you think Mozart would have achieved what he did if his parents were Inuit?

And look at Michael Jackson, perhaps you think he was born talented, yet it's widely known that he was *groomed* virtually from birth to be what he turned into at the expense of any form of normal childhood. And clearly this is the fate of many child *'prodigies'* - they're simply *forced* to accomplish what their parents couldn't!

Anyone who is motivated, and practices as instructed can be a superb player in a direct proportion to the amount of effort put in. But don't get hung up on wanting to be *'better'*

than someone else. Music is not a competition, it's *creative.* Just compete with *yourself* and you will achieve the greatest fulfilment.

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.

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

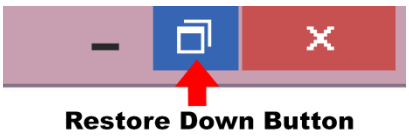
- by using the free external links at: http://learn-keyboard.co.uk/keyboard_links.html which gives access to all the links in the order in which they appear in each chapter or
- by using the links throughout the book as they appear in the digital pdf version (internet connection required)

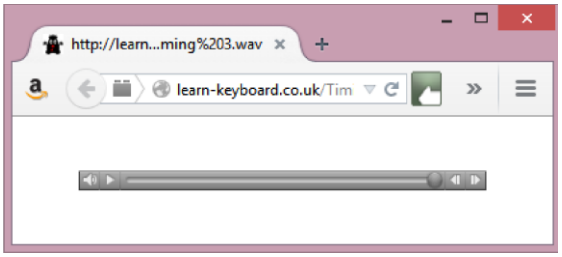
If you have purchased the paperback version, the digital version is *freely* available to you (for your own use only). This can be found under the download link heading towards the end of the book. Be sure to copy the link exactly as written including the hyphen and the underscore between the words. If you have any trouble with this, I will be happy to help.

Using the *in-Book* Links

Quite probably you may only need to listen to some of the audio links, but several 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).





Then click on the link which should then appear in front of the document enabling you to move it out of the way of anything that you may wish to see at the same time.

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 below).

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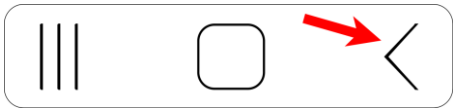
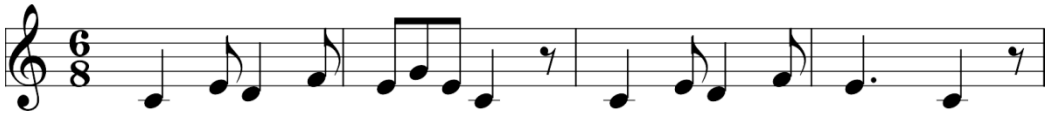


If you want to you can have a trial run now by clicking on the following graphic which actually is 'Pop Goes the Weasel'! Note that this is simply an example to hear the links and not an attempt to teach you *'Pop Goes the Weasel'* as has been suggested on a previous review.



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/learn_in_a_week.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 one will take you instantly to the next chapter and the red left-hand arrow to the beginning of the last chapter. There are also links to and from the coinciding chapters in Parts 1 & 2.

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!*

Also, throughout the book I have included a few of my favourite keyboards. These are not *'adverts' per se,* they are basically just to fill space. Links for *all* the major manufacturers as well as my *'keyboard review'* section can be found on my website so that you can get all the up-to-date relevant information to make up your own mind as to what suits your needs either now or in the future!

Choosing Your First Keyboard

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

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 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
b) Acoustic Pianos
c) Arranger Keyboards
d) Harpsichords
e) Organs
f) Workstations
g) Synthesizers
h) Controller Keyboards

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

But here we are only going to discuss the first three which are the ones most suitable for beginners, but details of all the others and up to date information can be seen on my website at: https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/keyboard_reviews.html .

Digital Pianos - Home Use

Home use digital pianos in general tend to be less feature filled than the stage alternatives. Most 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 S1100 and PX S3100 are hard to beat. Both have quality piano sounds, built-in speakers, quality hammer action keybeds and many other useful functions.

Casio PX S1100 - 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-909GP - 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. See my website for details of external amplification.

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 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, Kawai, 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.

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 fair 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.

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. 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). If you are wanting to learn classical or jazz piano, one of these would not be a good choice, with the exception of the Korg Pa5X 88.

Korg Pa5X Arranger Keyboard - 88 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 Pa700 - 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 Pa5X / 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 Pa700 onwards!*

Arranger keyboards are available from as little as £50 up to more than £4,000. A good entry model is the Yamaha PSR E473 and the current top professional model (in my opinion) is the Korg Pa5X - *some 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, Rolands and Yamahas.

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 remember 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 great 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, details of 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 - see *'Using Auto-Accompaniment'* in the final chapter.

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 herein teach 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!

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 (Digital Audio Workstation) such as Cakewalk or Cubase etc., which 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 which is becoming more the norm.

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. There are numerous possible combinations. For instance, a fully weighted digital piano on the bottom with a Korg PA1000 arranger on top would give you just about everything.

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 may soon become inadequate. So, the larger the *polyphony* the better!

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

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 - many new keyboards have both midi *and* audio interfaces but do check before buying if this is your intention.

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!

All of these are widely available from many physical and online outlets, but more details of these can again be seen on the reviews page of my website.

Now we'll begin learning to play - after a little bit of essential theory!

Roland RD 88 Stage Piano - 88 Keys

Mid-range stage piano. Great sounds - good value!

Your First Exercises

Now before I start explaining the basic rudiments of music theory, these first few exercises can be practiced effectively even without an instrument, so don't worry if you haven't got one yet, these exercises will still be beneficial.

But assuming you have got a keyboard, you need to get yourself correctly prepared as follows.

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.

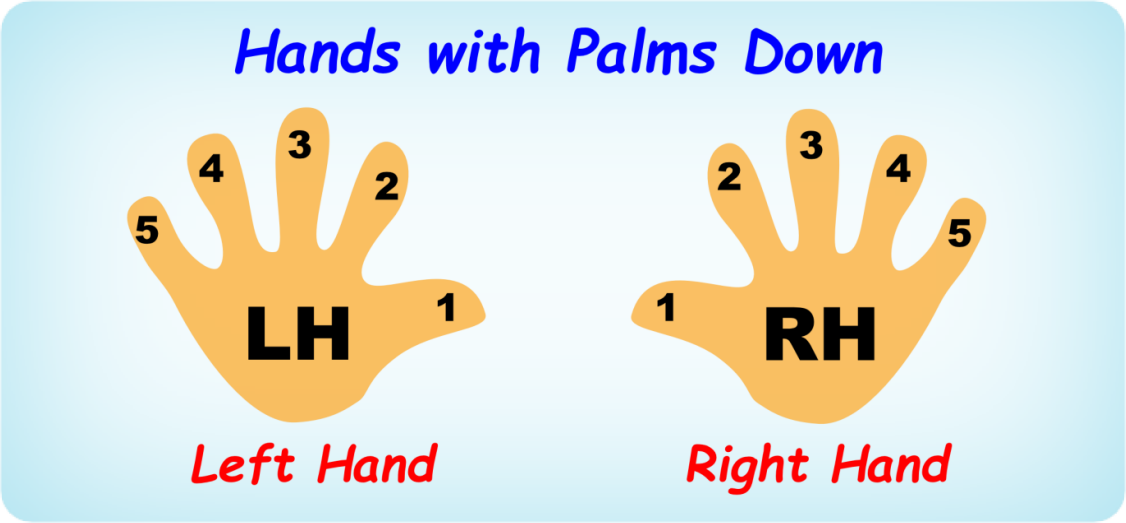
Do also take into account the fact that you may need to use the pedals, or at least the sustain pedal, so both feet should be comfortably flat on the floor to begin with.

Your stool should be positioned so that you are seated more or less in the centre of the keyboard - belly button opposite **middle C**, with your back fairly straight but relaxed.

The next pictures illustrate the correct and incorrect hand positions.

Fingering

As far as the piano is concerned what some people will call their *'first'* finger is their *'second'* finger as in piano / keyboard music the *'first'* finger is always your *'thumb'* (on both hands).



Here We Go

What I'm going to get you to do now will drive your partner, kids, parents, friends and probably even your cat *nuts* - so be prepared! You are going to become a *'perpetual tapper'!* These exercises can be done anywhere, anytime on virtually any*thing* from a table to a steering wheel to your head or even your girlfriend's / boyfriend's leg! But I absolutely guarantee that they will increase your finger strength, independence and flexibility quicker than any other method. Obviously, whenever you can, use a keyboard. But because you can do these anywhere, I will call these the *'tapping'* exercises.

To prepare for your first exercise, proceed as follows:

1. If using a piano or keyboard, adjust your seating position as described previously
2. Rest the fingers of your right hand (you can do the same with your left hand later) on the keyboard (or surface) in a claw like position with your first finger (thumb) on the white key to the left of two black keys more or less in the middle of the keyboard - **middle C**
3. Keeping your hand / fingers in this position raise your hand only very slightly so that it's no longer touching the keyboard (or surface). If this is uncomfortable, adjust your seating position
4. Now begin counting either out loud or in your head: **1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &** etc.;

5. With each count (but not the *'ands'*) tap your left foot and try and keep a steady rhythm. Now you're ready for exercise 1, but pay attention to the hand / finger position at all times

Exercise 1

With each tap of your foot, press the keys (or tap the surface) with each finger of your right hand one at a time in a piston type fashion starting and finishing with your thumb as shown in the right-hand diagram below. Speed is of no importance but rhythm is. Take it as slow as you like but keep in time. It's likely that you have started counting far faster than you are able to do this, so simply slow down the tempo.

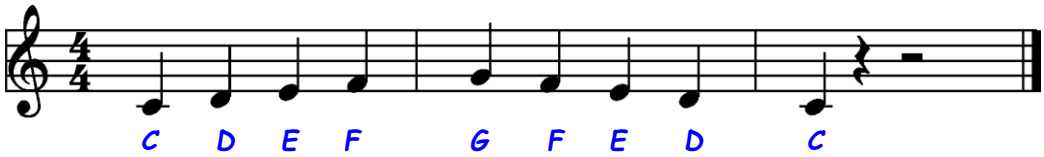
5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 (5)
Left Hand x 7

1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 (1)
Right Hand x 7

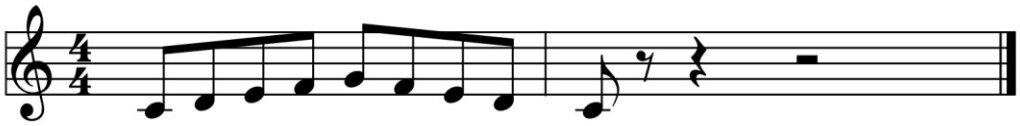
When using the left hand, start with the 5th finger, again on a key to the left of two black keys, but the next one down from the one used with the right hand and follow the pattern as in the left-hand diagram above.

Practice this exercise with both hands separately doing each one seven times making the last beat of each segment the first of the next. You will see the significance of *'seven'* later. Gradually increase the speed according to your ability, but remember speed is not important, but accuracy and rhythm is.

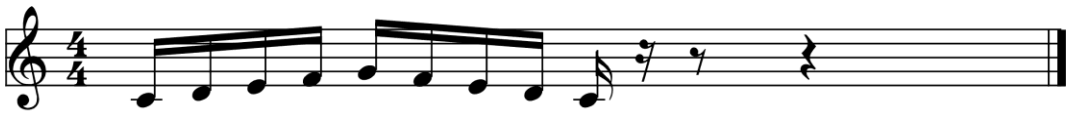
I don't want you to worry about this right now, but in music notation if you play just one segment of the above, you would in fact be playing 9 crotchets - *quarter notes US,* the last of which being the first of the continuum. This is shown in music notation for the right hand in the next diagram.



Now as you get a little more proficient, you could double the speed by tapping / playing the notes on the *'and'* beats as well - this would be 9 quavers - *eight notes US,* as below.



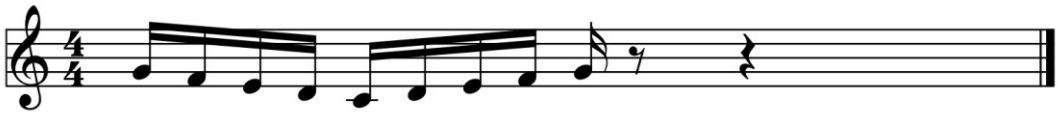
Double it again and it's 9 semi quavers - *sixteenth notes US,* as shown next, which is what you should eventually aim for, but you can always alter the tempo to suit yourself.



Each of the exercises has a *'mirror'* version thus enabling every finger in both hands to benefit equally. The mirror version for this first exercise is as follows with the right hand starting with the 5th finger and the left hand starting with the 1st.

1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 (1)
Left Hand x 7

5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 (5)
Right Hand x 7



Try these exercises two different ways:

a) Tapping and releasing each finger fairly abruptly - this is known as *'staccato'* and

b) Holding each finger down until the next one comes into play - this is known as *'legato'*

c) Practice with both hands individually and then both hands together

I'll explain the music notation in detail later, but for the time being just try and get your fingers working which right now is most important and will be for quite some time.

So, when you're ready, move onto the next four exercises which will get your fingers moving in a different order.

Exercise 2

5 1 2 1 3 2 4 3 (5)
Left Hand x 7

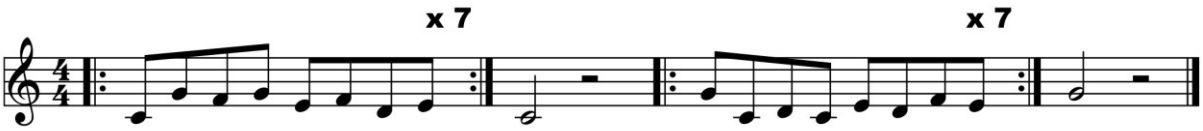
1 5 4 5 3 4 2 3 (1)
Right Hand x 7

Mirror Version Below

1 5 4 5 3 4 2 3 (1)
Left Hand x 7

5 1 2 1 3 2 4 3 (5)
Right Hand x 7

Right hand Music Notation for Normal and mirror version below



Exercise 3

5 1 2 1 3 1 4 1(5)
Left Hand x 7

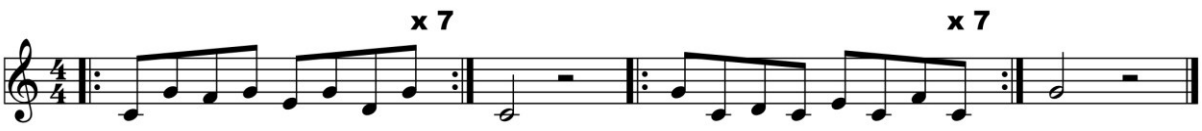
1 5 4 5 3 5 2 5 (1)
Right Hand x 7

Mirror Version Below

1 5 4 5 3 5 2 5 (1)
Left Hand x 7

5 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 (5)
Right Hand x 7

Right hand Music Notation for Normal and mirror version below



Exercise 4

5 4 3 4 2 3 1 2 (5)
Left Hand x 7

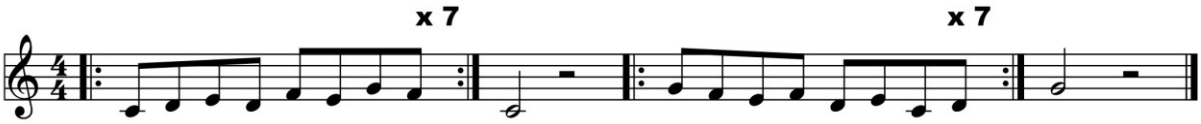
1 2 3 2 4 3 5 4 (1)
Right Hand x 7

Mirror Version Below

1 2 3 2 4 3 5 4 (1)
Left Hand x 7

5 4 3 4 2 3 1 2 (5)
Right Hand x 7

Right hand Music Notation for Normal and mirror version below



Exercise 5

5 3 4 2 3 1 2 3 (5)
Left Hand x 7

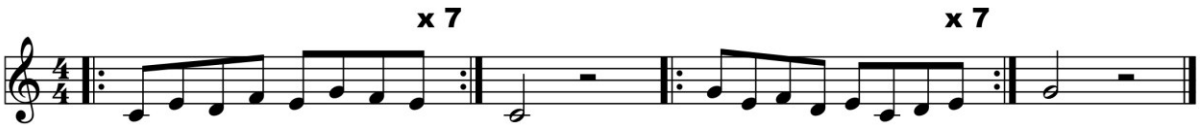
1 3 2 4 3 5 4 3 (1)
Right Hand x 7

Mirror Version Below

1 3 2 4 3 5 4 3 (1)
Left Hand x 7

5 3 4 2 3 1 2 3 (5)
Right Hand x 7

Right hand Music Notation for Normal and mirror version below



Right now, you may understand the fingering charts better than the music notation, but you must admit that it's getting a bit confusing and remember we are only dealing with five white notes here. But hopefully this has got you tapping and exercising your fingers in order to gain some initial dexterity and flexibility required to progress further.

I appreciate that if you've never done this before, these initial exercises are difficult, particularly between the 4th and 5th fingers, but believe me they work - there are no better!

Later I'll show you more but remember do them slowly and keep in time.

Even though their greatest importance is to give the initial flexibility and strength to each finger, even when you progress to learn all the scales and arpeggios shown later, never dismiss the importance of the 5 finger exercises. I still do them now after well over 60 years of playing.

Please continue with these exercises while you are reading the following chapters, I guarantee that you will see the benefits in a very short while. But don't strain your finger muscles too much - *do a bit - rest a bit!*

The audio link for the tapping exercises is: http://learn-keyboard.co.uk/tapping.html or click on the notation graphics.

Alto Truesonic TS 408 Active PA Speaker

A great alternative to a dedicated keyboard combo amp is powered speakers like these. Although used primarily for PA, these are are great for keyboards and can be used singly or in pairs (for stereo).
These are ideal for home studio and small - average sized gigs.
I have used these!

The Notes of the Keyboard

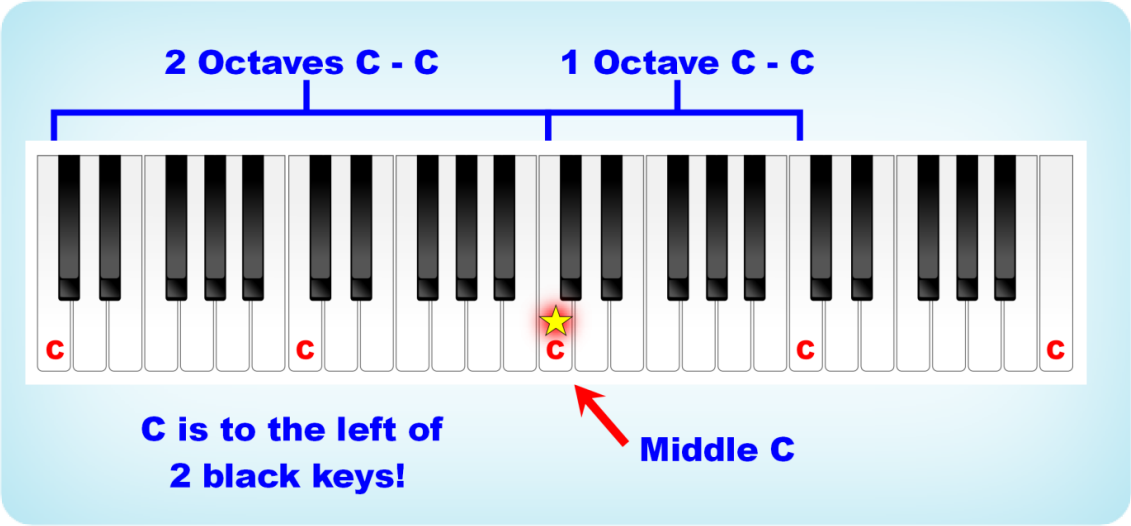
Now we'll look at the notes of the keyboard and how to identify them.

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 - 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.

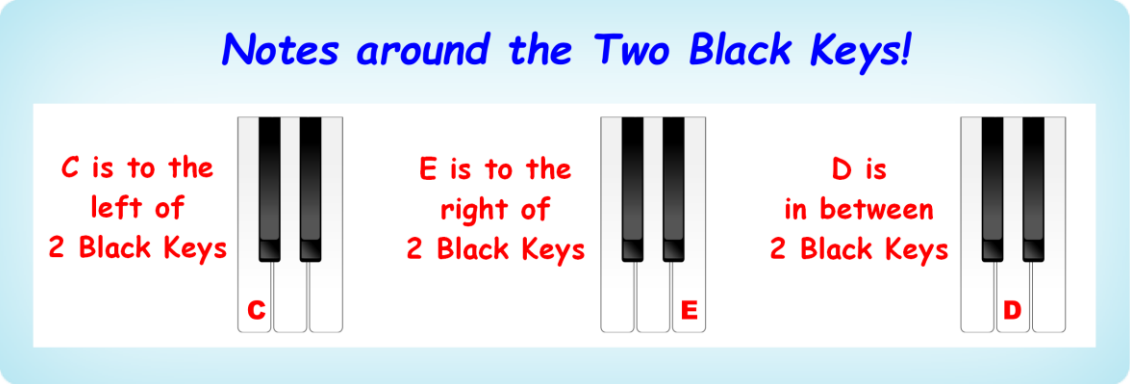
*So which hand plays **middle C**?*

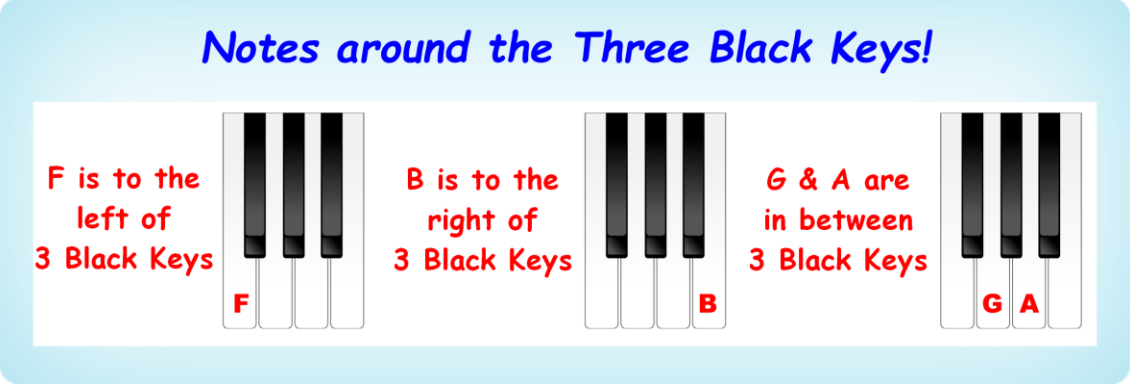
That's a good question and the answer is that it could be either, but I will explain more shortly.

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!!

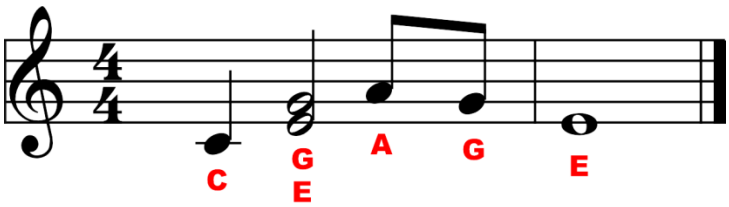
What about the black ones, what are they called?

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.

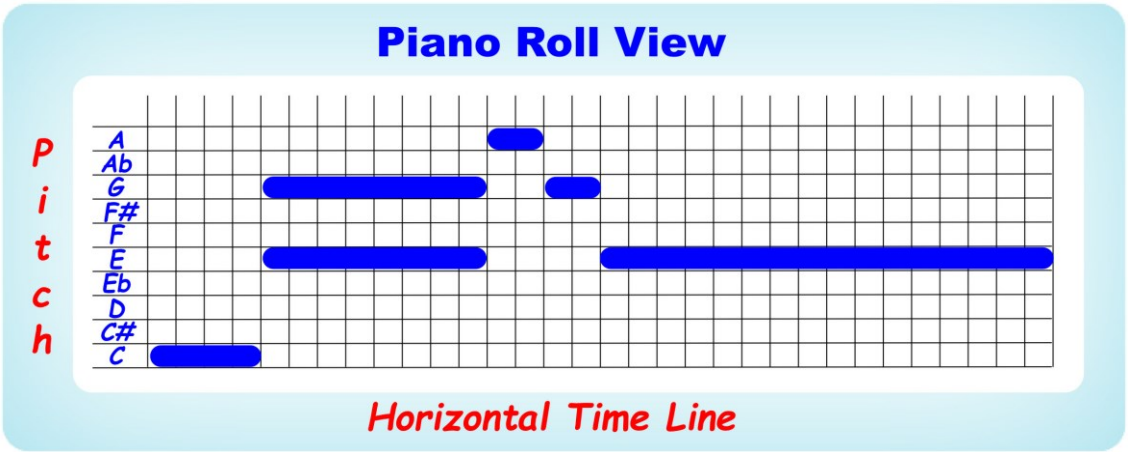
Music Notation

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 timeine 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'* 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 form 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!

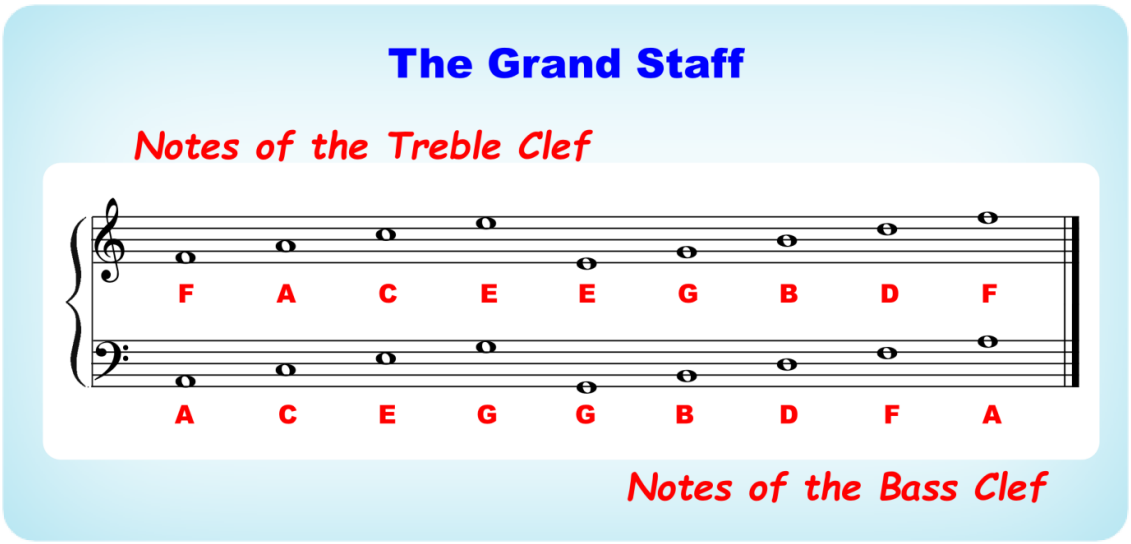
Roland FP90x - 88 Keys

One of Roland's flagship portable pianos - Stunning!

Perfect for home, studio, or stage!

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.

"I started out with nothing and I've still got most of it left!"

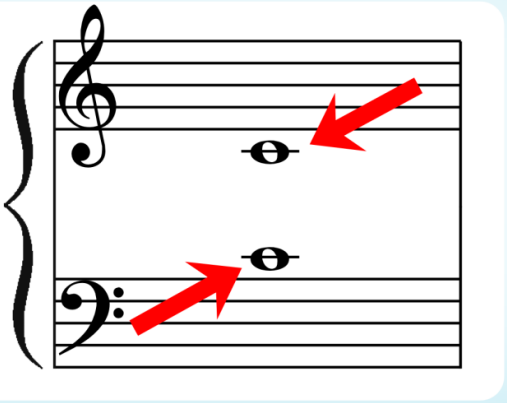
Seasick Steve

Comment: Rock on Steve, we all love you!

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

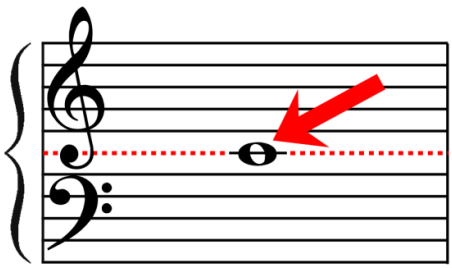
Middle C is below the lines of the Treble Clef and above the lines of the Bass Clef



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.

"I have never thought of writing for reputation and honour. What I have in my heart must come out; that is the reason why I compose."

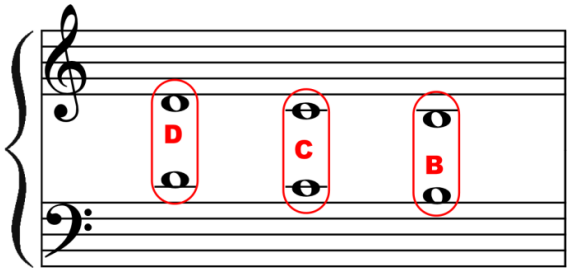
Beethoven

Comment: Wisdom from the greatest!

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.

Notes Between the Clefs

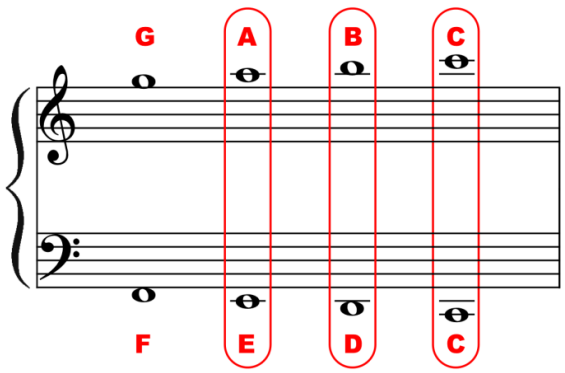
The notes shown here are the same notes written in different clefs



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!

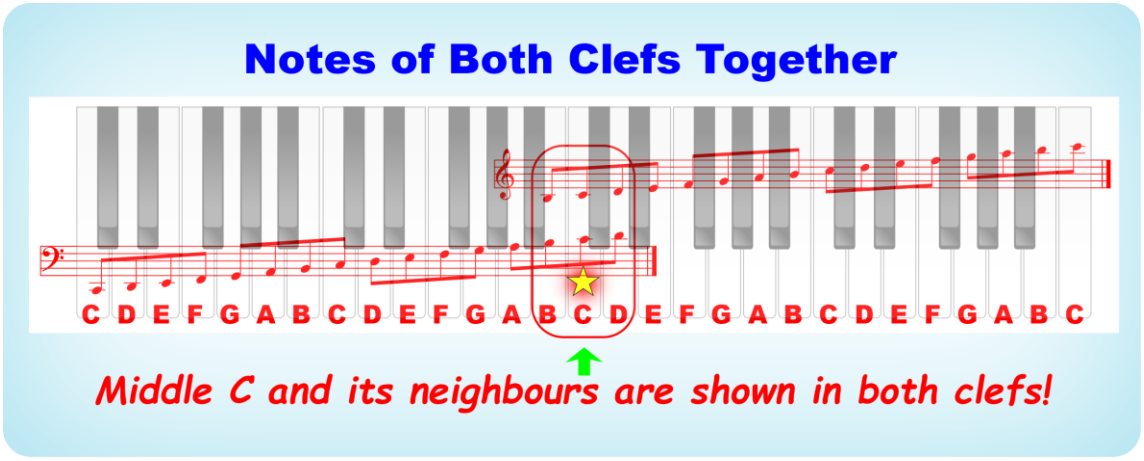
Wow this is getting heavy; I don't think I'll ever understand all this!

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.

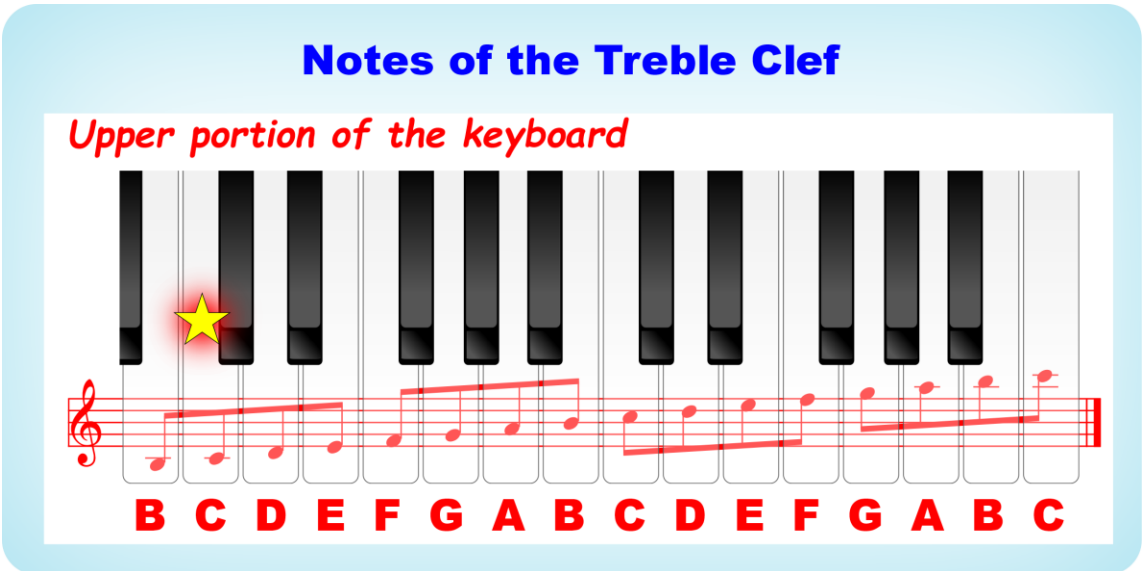
This next diagram may at first look a little confusing and difficult to read; and if you are reading this on a tablet, it may not be clear. If you haven't already done so, please go to the rear of the book to get the pdf download link and you will be able to see this much more clearly, even more so by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

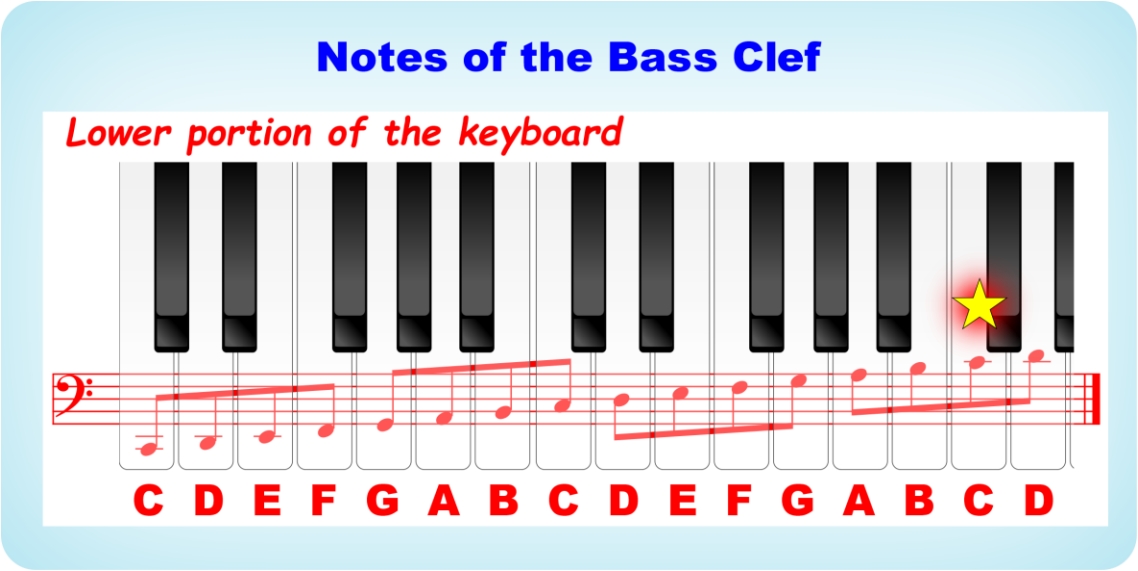


To make this easier to see, below I have split the keyboard into two 2 octave sections, one for each clef, but remember that we have put a star on ***Middle C*** so that you can always find it!

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.

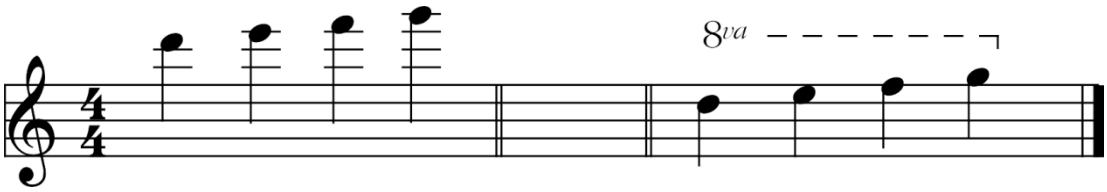




Ok so this shows a four-octave spread, but what happens when the notes are higher or lower than these as on larger keyboards?

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, 8vb, 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.

"The beautiful thing about learning is that nobody can take it away from you."

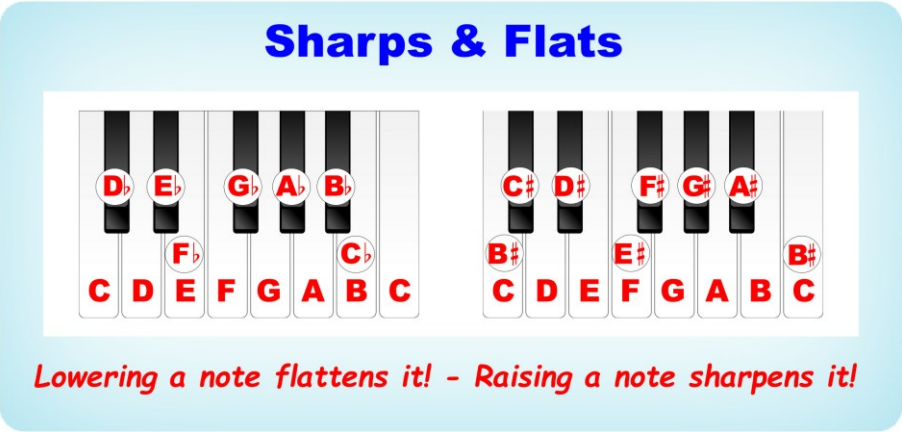
BB King - (King of the Blues)

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.

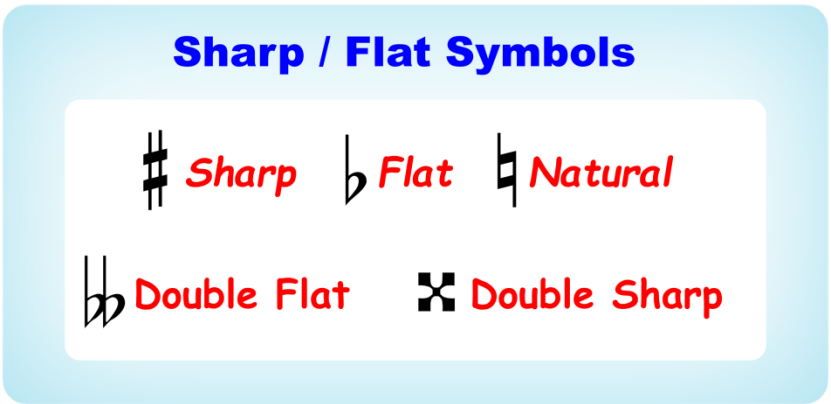
Now the smallest interval in Western music is a *'semitone'* or *'half step US'* which is the interval from any note on the keyboard to its nearest neighbour be it black or white.

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 semitones). But these only occur occasionally in keys heavily endowed in sharps or flats. There are only two in this book - in the **G# minor** scales and the **D♭ 7♭5** chord in the chord substitution section. It may be years before you come across anymore.

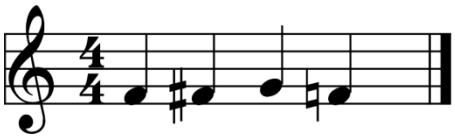


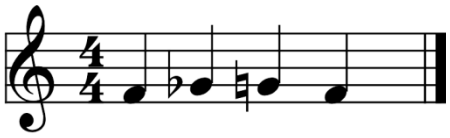
Whether a particular note is known as a sharp or a flat depends on the key signature which will be dealt with later.

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 *'timeline',* which consists of time signatures, bars and note values.

Time Signatures and Bars

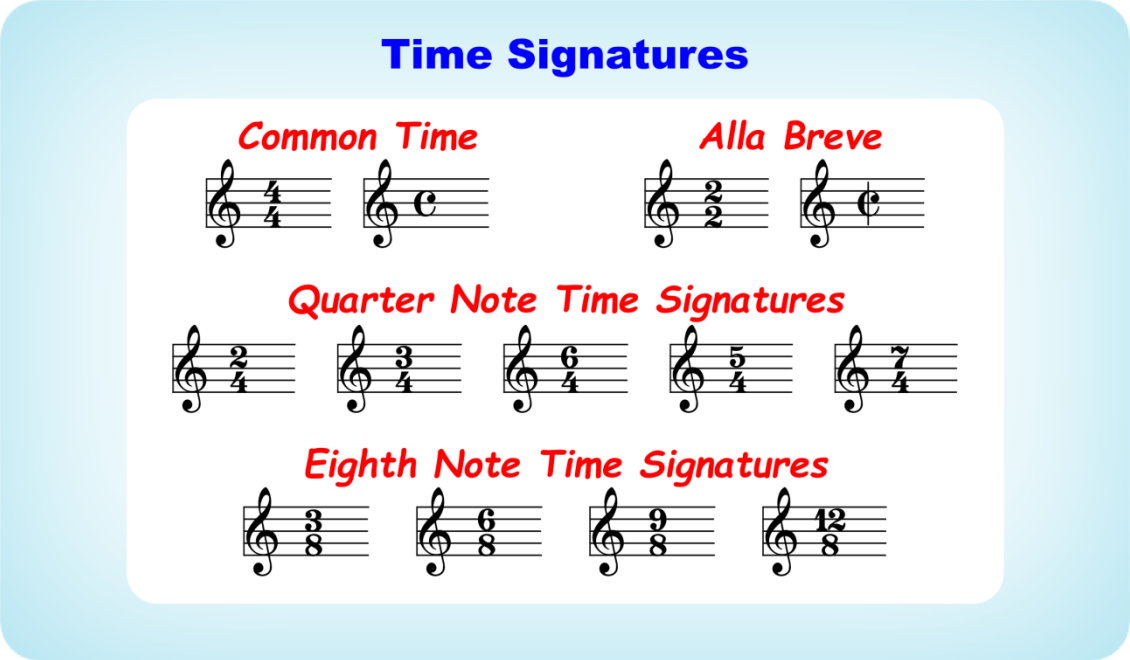
Each group of notes is separated into *'bars'* or *'measures',* which are the vertical lines separating the various notes or groups of notes. The time signature determines how many notes of what length are to be played to each bar, the first beat of which is often slightly or heavily accented.

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'*.



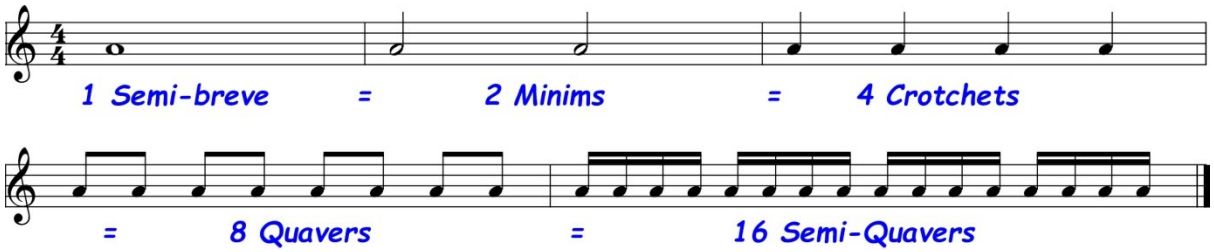
There are more - **5/4**, **7/4**, **9/8**, **11/8** etc., but we don´t need any of these for our purpose right now and by the time you come to need them you will understand them perfectly.

Korg Pa5X Arranger - 76 Keys

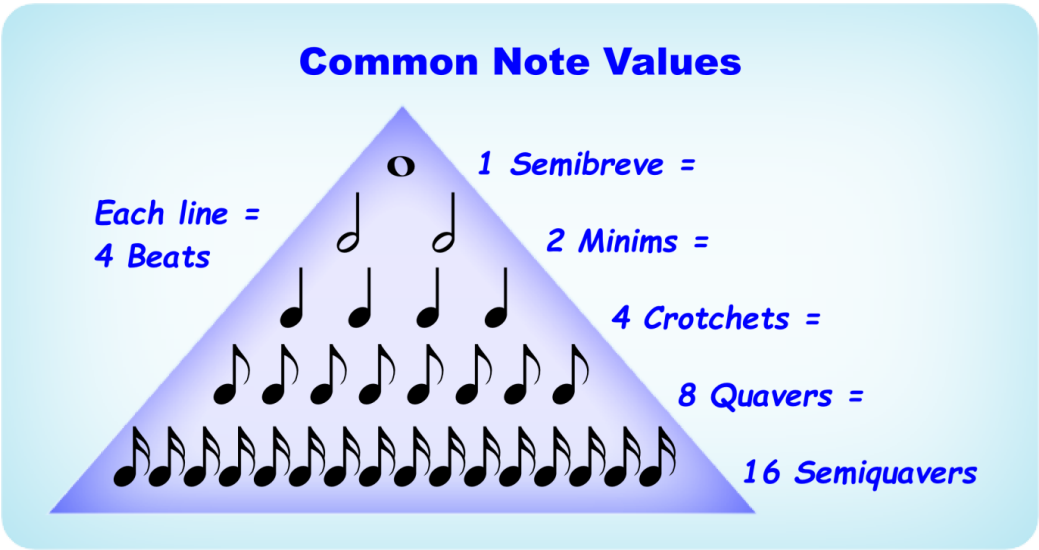
In my opinion this is the very best arranger keyboard on the market available with 61 or 76 semi-weighted keys, or 88 fully weighted. Not cheap, but superb for solo professionals!

Note Values

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



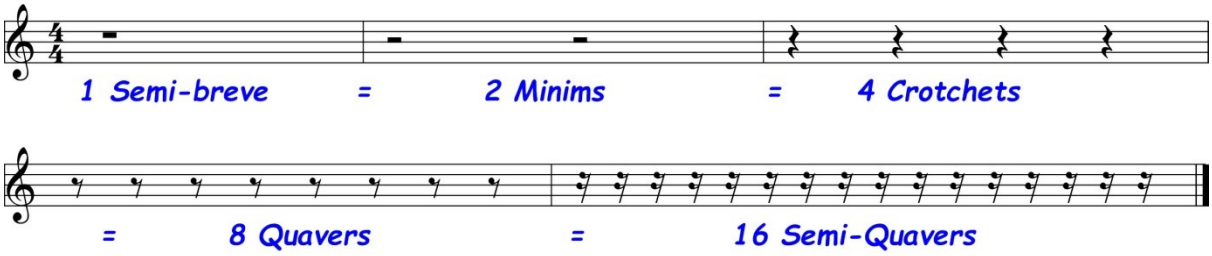
- The *'semibreve'* also known as a *'whole note'* counts as 4 beats (therefore taking up the whole of a **4/4** bar)
- The *'minim'* also known as a *'half note'* counts as 2 beats (therefore taking up half of a **4/4** bar)
- The *'crotchet'* also known as a *'quarter note'* counts as 1 beat (therefore 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



There are longer and shorter notes (and the corresponding rests), but these will do for now.

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.

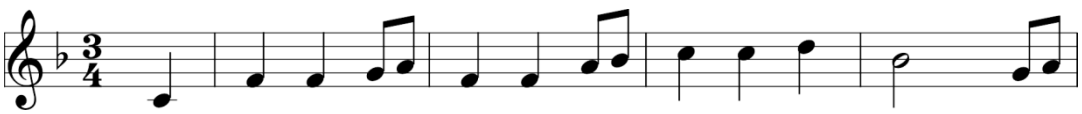
In the case of **3/4** this means that there are three *'quarter'* notes (crotchets) to a bar and **2/4**, two quarter notes to a bar.

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'***.



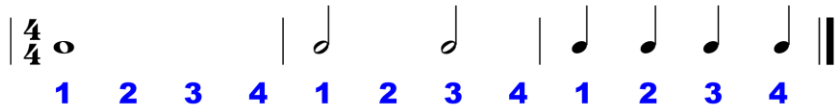
4/4 Timing

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!



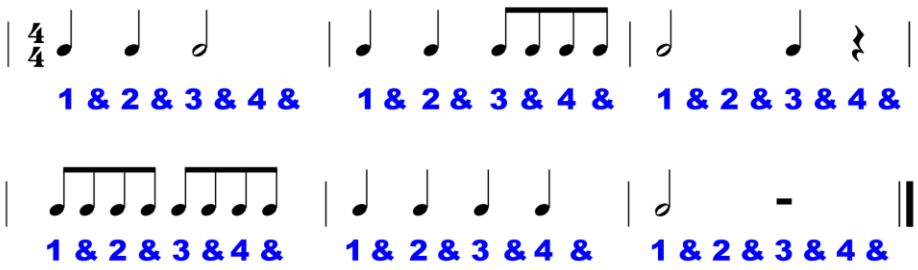
That should have been fairly simple.

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!



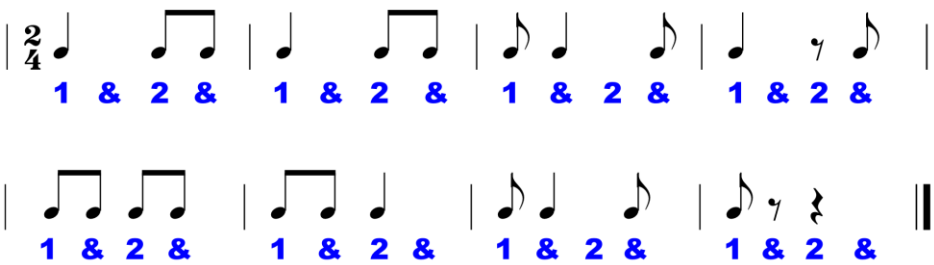
2/4 Timing

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!



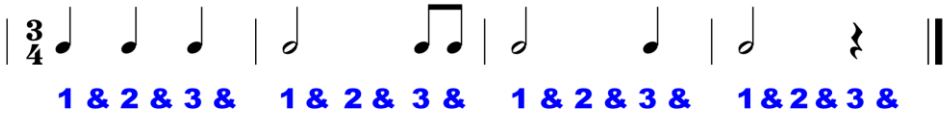
Just about all military music is written in **2/4** timing. If you've ever seen our glorious U.K. monarchy's - ***'Trooping the Colour'***, you will have heard many! But **2/4** timing is also extensively used in all types of music, including folk and classical.

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'!*

Korg EK 50 - 61 Keys

Ideal, low-cost starter arranger keyboard. Also look at the Yamaha PSR E473

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 the 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 shortly, as this requires the need for dotted notes which we haven't dealt with yet.

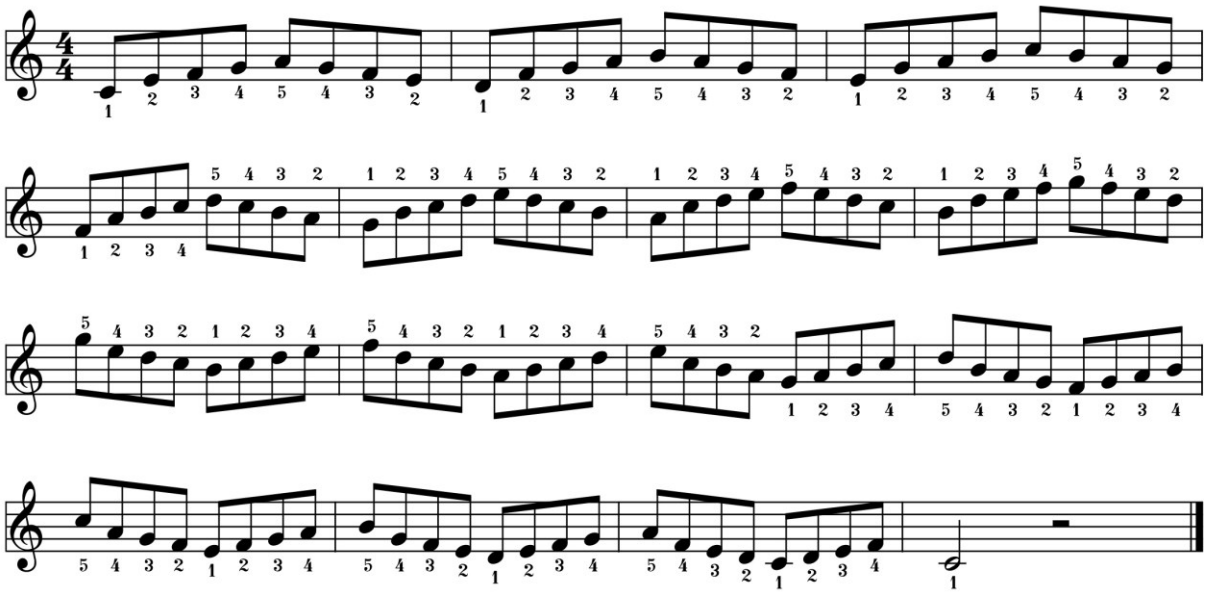
The audio link for this section is: http://learn-keyboard.co.uk/timing.html *or click on the graphics!*

5 Finger Exercises in Brief

Ok, so hopefully now you understand a little bit of timing and pitch in relation to music notation. But please remember that the practical finger exercises are of the upmost importance. And one good reason for learning to read basic music notation, is so that you can be taught these practical exercises. If you happen to learn to be able to sight read music somewhere on the way, then so much the better, but do remember that some of the best keyboard players are unable to sight read or even read music at all, Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder to mention two!

I hope you did the *'tapping'* exercises that we started with as the 5 finger exercises are an extension of these and are positively the best exercises that there are. I understand that right now your music reading ability may be very limited. Fortunately, these exercises require only a very limited reading ability, are played on the white notes only and don't require any finger crossovers (which you'll learn later).

The first exercise written here in the treble clef only (right hand) follows the same pattern as the first tapping exercise. But notice that there is a gap between the first and second notes of each section which enables the exercise to ascend progressively up the scale for 7 segments. And notice that this occurs again on the descent starting in bar 8 but between the fourth and fifth fingers (of the right hand).



1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 (1)
Right Hand Ascending x 7

5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 (5)
Right Hand Descending x 7

In part 2 there are several more of these exercises that should be practiced with each hand individually and both hands together both legato and staccato, but only at speeds that you can handle. Gradually increase the speed according to your ability but remember that speed is not important - *accuracy and timing is!*

Please begin practicing the exercises in part 2 in between studying the remaining chapters.

Audio link: http://learn-keyboard.co.uk/5_finger_exercises.html or click on the graphic.

Quick link to Part 2

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END OF
PREVIEW

To Buy Now got to:

https://learn-keyboard.co.uk/learn_in_a_week.html

Note the underscores between the words!