

MUSIC THEORY COURSE – Module 1

How to Read Music

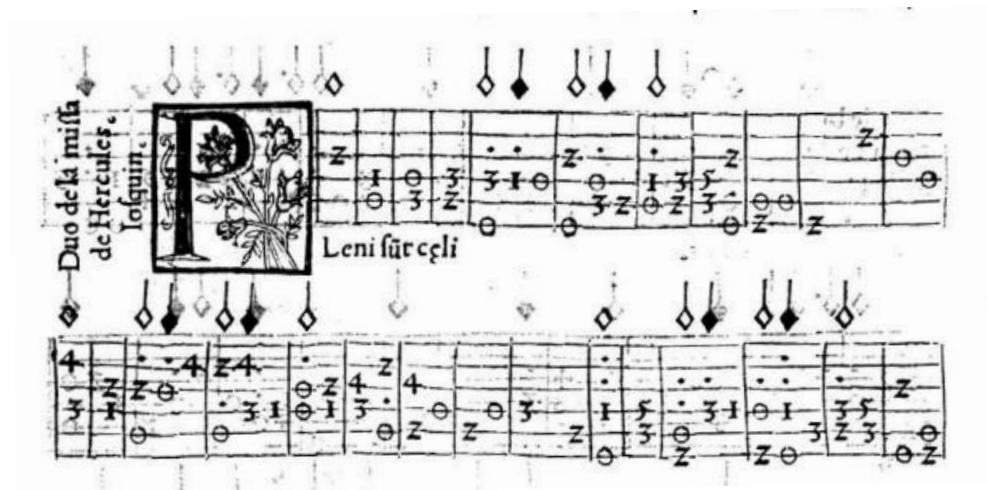
The easiest way of learning music is, without a doubt, by listening or watching someone else playing the instrument. You copy what you hear, repeat a few times and move on! That is actually the most traditional way of learning but, what if you would like to be independent and have access to more music without having someone telling you how to play a piece of music?

There comes in the music notation in the form of sheet music and tablature.

The Tablature (or TAB)

The tablature is a very old system, already used back in the 15th and 16th century. It was a common notation system for fretted instruments such as the lute, guitar and vihuela.

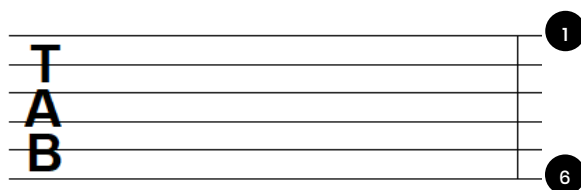
It used to look like this:



Extract of "Orphenica Lyra" by Miguel Fuenllana (1554)

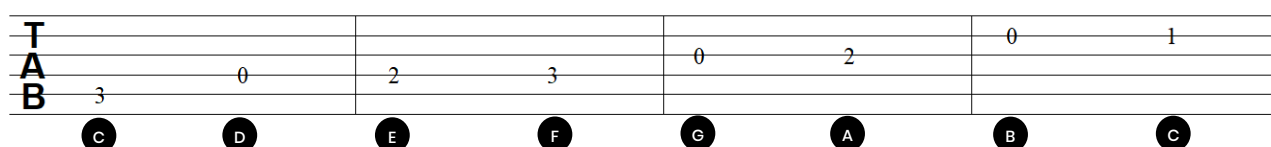
The modern tablature, also known as TAB, is mostly used for pop music and songs accompanied by strumming chords. Both work the same way, the numbers represent the fret on which you have to place your fingers in order to produce the desired tone or note.

Below you can see the modern tablature with six strings represented. The highest line corresponds to the first string E and the lowest line being the 6th string.



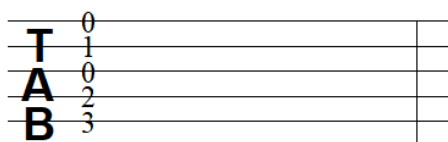
How does it work?

C Major Scale



The numbers you see are the frets on which you have to press. The first note C is placed on the line that corresponds to the 5th string represented with the number 3. The note D is represented with the number 0 on the 4th line. It is an open string in this case, therefore you don't need any fingers of the left hand to play it.

Representation of a Chord (group of notes played simultaneously)



If you see more than one note placed vertically, that means you play the indicated notes all at the same time.

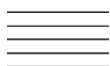
The Sheet Music (score)

Reading notes is probably the biggest challenge when you start learning music. It is a system that is not immediately connected with your playing, however it is a universal system that works for any modern instrument. When you learn this type of notation you will be able to play music notated to any instrument.

Despite of being complicated at first sight, it has a lot of advantages when compared with the tablature. On the score you can read the notes, the rhythm, the polyphony, the articulation, etc. It will provide more information than just where to place your fingers.



On the score you see various elements.



- Staff



- Time Signature



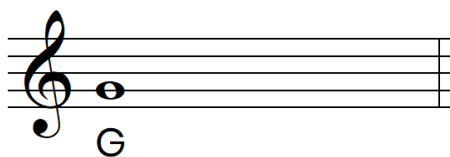
- G clef



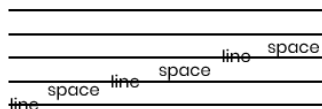
- Note

Reading Notes

As you may know, the notes are named with the letters of the alphabet – a, b, c, d, e, f, g, a, b, c and so on.



The G clef starts on the second line below which indicates the note G.



The notes can either be placed on a line or a space of the staff.



If the note is positioned on a line or space above, we name it with the next letter of the alphabet. Notice that after G comes the letter A and not H.



If the note goes down on the staff we use the previous letter of the alphabet to name that given note.



In order to utilize a wider range of notes, the staff can be extended by adding extra lines, also called *ledger lines*.