

HOW TO PRACTICE

There once was a speedy hare who bragged about how fast he could run. Tired of hearing him boast, Slow and Steady, the tortoise, challenged him to a race. All the animals in the forest gathered to watch. Hare ran down the road for a while and then paused to rest. He looked back at Slow and Steady and cried out, "How do you expect to win this race when you are walking along at your slow, slow pace?" Hare stretched himself out alongside the road and fell asleep, thinking, "There is plenty of time to relax." Slow and Steady walked and walked. He never, ever stopped until he came to the finish line. The animals who were watching cheered so loudly for Tortoise, they woke up Hare. Hare stretched and yawned and began to run again, but it was too late. Tortoise was over the line. After that, Hare always reminded himself, "Don't brag about your lightning pace, for Slow and Steady won the race!"
(The Tortoise and the Hare - Aesop's Fable)

The tale of the tortoise and the hare has an obvious moral to the story as it relates to hard work and practice. The obvious application to guitar is that consistent methodical practice and perseverance pays off in the big scope of things. Those that persevere are rewarded for their hard work and dedication.

However, there is a second lesson to be learned that is not so obvious. That lesson applies to how we should practice. Something I've observed in teaching students for 30 years is they always want to play things fast now. The student will stumble 20 times over a few notes attempting to play fast and continue attempting to play fast until I convince them to slow down. Even after I tell them to slow down several times, they still insist on attempting to play fast. It is in our nature to be impatient. Also, we tend to rush when we are excited. Most people talk faster and body language moves faster when we are excited. It is a natural thing. However, when practicing guitar we need to be very aware of our tendency to rush, and strive to practice slowly.

When we practice slowly, several things occur. First, we are certain to play things correctly and pay more attention to fine details. For example, when playing eighth notes we should be using alternating pick strokes. Students that insist on playing fast almost always struggle with picking technique. Second, the time you spend stumbling and starting over is more time you would spend if you had practiced it slowly in the beginning. Third, by playing slowly you learn to be patient and not rush or get ahead of the downbeat.

To achieve this goal, the best investment you'll make will be on a metronome. Keep the metronome handy all the time. Put it on an extremely slow tempo when you practice. This will force you to wait for the beat. As you become comfortable at an extremely slow tempo, you can increase it but not until you are able to play it perfectly at a slow tempo. The ability to run comes after learning to walk. The ability to drive a car fast comes after learning to drive it slowly. The ability to play guitar fast comes after learning to play it slowly.

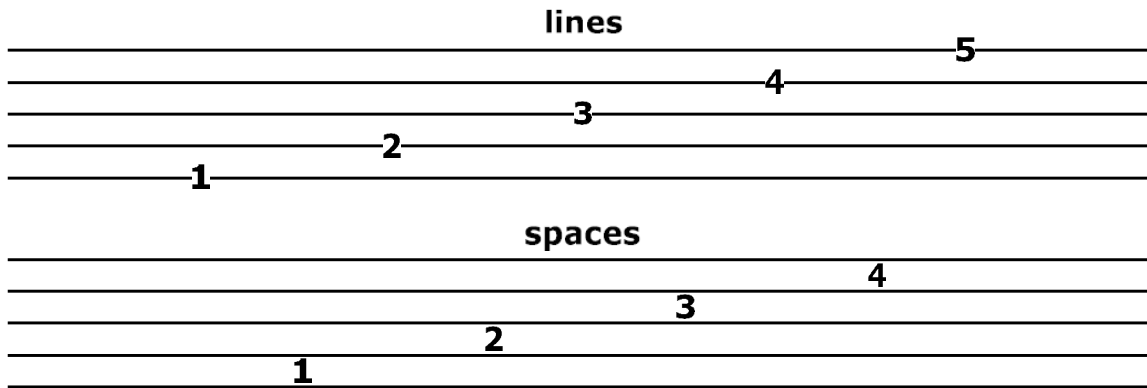
RUDIMENTS OF MUSIC

STANDARD NOTATION

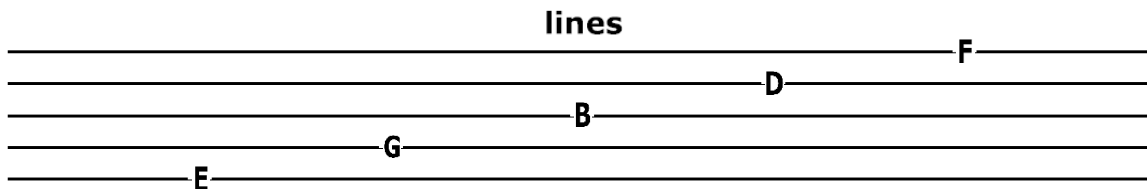
Music can be written using notation. Notation is a system which represents the sounds of music through the use of written symbols, such as notes. It is extremely important for the guitar student to learn to read *standard notation*. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you study sight-reading standard notation along with the topics covered in this book. In this section, we will only briefly mention some very basic concepts about standard notation.

THE STAFF

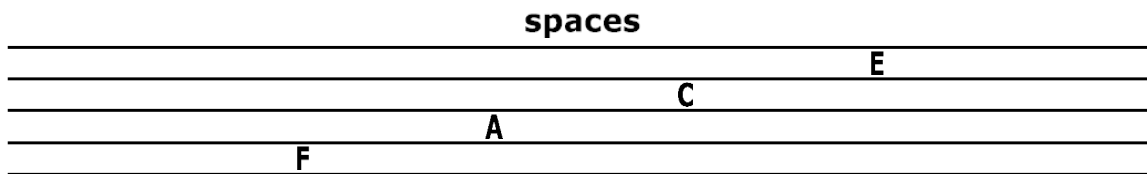
Standard notation is written on a staff. The staff is composed of five lines and four spaces. The lines and spaces are numbered as shown below:



The lines and spaces also have letter names:



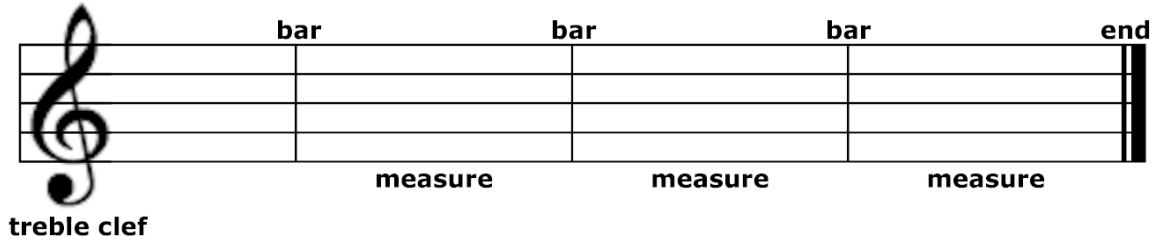
An easy way to remember the names of the lines is using a mnemonic aid such as: **Every Good Boy Does Fine**.



The letters in the spaces spell the word **FACE**.

There are seven letters in the musical alphabet: **A B C D E F G**.
 The staff is divided by vertical lines called *bars*. Bars separate *measures*.
 A double bar marks the end of a piece of music.

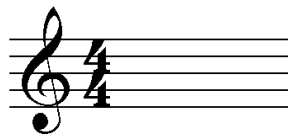
The *treble clef* is at the beginning of the staff, when written for guitar.



TIME SIGNATURE

At the beginning of a piece of music you will see a time signature. The top number tells you how many beats are in a measure. The bottom number tells you what type of note receives one beat.

The time signature shown bellow is called $\frac{4}{4}$ time (four-four time).



4 → beats per measure.

4 → refers to quarter note.

Common time is the same as $\frac{4}{4}$ time.



C is the symbol for common time.

NOTES

There are four types of notes illustrated bellow. Each note has a different *time value*. Their time value in common time is as follows:

whole note



4 beats

half note



2 beats

quarter note



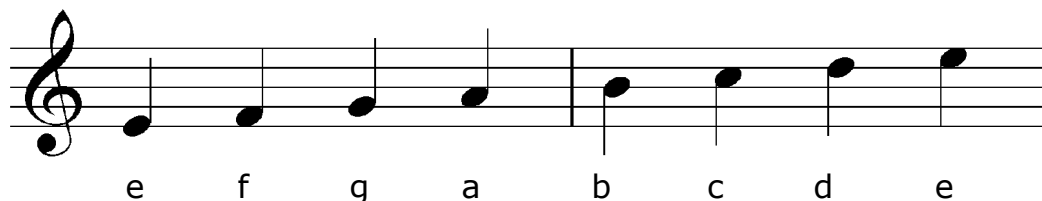
1 beat

eighth note



$\frac{1}{2}$ beat

Each note is placed with the head on a line or a space and shares the same name as the line or space it occupies:



HOW TO READ TABLATURE

Tablature, also referred to as *Tab*, is a form of musical notation (written music) which is common for guitar. The picture below shows a comparison between standard notation and tablature.

The image illustrates the relationship between standard musical notation and guitar tablature. It features two staves. The upper staff is a standard musical staff with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a C chord symbol above it. The lower staff is a guitar tablature with six horizontal lines representing strings. The strings are labeled 'T' (top), 'A', and 'B' (bottom) on the left. The time signature is 4/4. The first measure contains a single note '3' on the fifth line, with an arrow pointing to it and the text 'note (3rd fret, 3rd finger, on 5th string)'. The second measure contains a chord '1 0 2 3' on the strings, with an arrow pointing to it and the text 'chord'. Above the second measure is a chord diagram for a C chord, with an arrow pointing to it and the text 'chord diagram'. On the right side, arrows point to the top and bottom lines of the tablature with the labels 'little string (1st)' and 'big string (6th)' respectively.

Notice that in standard notation there are five horizontal lines on the staff. However, in tablature there are six horizontal lines, which correspond to a totally different thing than those in standard notation. Each horizontal line in tablature represents a string of the guitar. The top line is the little (1st) string, and the bottom line is the big (6th) string. The numbers represent the frets. They also represent the finger when playing in the 1st position. If the number is zero, it represents an open string (no fingering).

In the tablature shown, there are two measures. When we start reading the first measure, we find the word TAB written vertically and then the four-four time signature. The first note we find is a number 3 on the fifth line. This means you place your third finger on the third fret on the fifth string and play that string. The notes are played one at a time in the sequence shown.

In the second measure, the notes are played all at the same time as a chord (simultaneously). The chord diagram on top has been added to help you visualize the fingering. Chords will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

It is very important that you use the finger that corresponds to the fret. The first finger goes on the first fret, the second finger on the second fret, the third finger on the third fret, and the fourth finger on the fourth fret. This is called playing in the *first position*.

STANDARD NOTATION VERSUS TABLATURE

There are two types of music notation typically used by guitarists to learn music: standard notation and tablature (tab). Standard notation is the traditional notation used by most musicians. When we speak about reading music or *sight-reading*, we are usually referring to standard notation. It is a comprehensive system that allows you to read and write music. Tablature, on the other hand, is a simplified system of reading and writing music, which applies only to string instruments.

ABOUT STANDARD NOTATION

- 1) Standard notation is the language of all musical instruments. If you play together with musicians that are using standard notation, you can understand each other's concepts and communicate using the same terminology.
- 2) By learning the alphabetical names of the notes, you are also learning where the notes are on the fretboard of the guitar.
- 3) While you are learning to read music, you are also learning how music theory works, through concepts such as rhythm, keys, harmony and scales. So in essence, you get a bigger picture of music.
- 4) Since standard notation is such a comprehensive notation system, it expresses details that can not be expressed using tablature.
- 5) If you intend to study music in school and college, or do research about music, you will need to read and write standard notation.

ABOUT TABLATURE

- 1) Tablature is easy to read, so beginners see progress faster and they get excited and encouraged.
- 2) Tabs show you exactly where to play the notes on the fretboard.
- 3) Tabs for pop songs are easy to find.
- 4) You can use tablature for playing other string instruments.
- 5) When playing altered tunings, tablature does not change, so it is less complicated.

A WORD OF WARNING ABOUT TABLATURE

Tablature presents a risk that should be considered. Since tablature is easier to read, and beginners are able to play songs using only tab, many times they are tempted to procrastinate learning standard notation. It is important to keep in mind that doing so will represent several disadvantages for the student.

If you don't learn standard notation, you will not be able to communicate appropriately with other musicians that play other instruments. Also, since tabs do not teach you the alphabetical notes on the fretboard of the guitar, you are not learning music theory as it applies to the fretboard.

Given that tablature usually doesn't give you the details of the music, it presents some limitations. The fact that you will not find tabs in school or higher learning institutions will present limitations also. Standard notation is essential to study classical music and jazz. Tabs are more prevalent in pop and folk music.

So, knowing standard notation will make you a well-rounded musician. It will save you from awkward moments, when you sit down with other musicians, and you realize you are unable to participate. Although it is true that learning to read standard notation is more challenging than learning to read tab, it is also true that, when you learn it, you experience a greater feeling of success. I encourage you to make learning standard notation a daily regimen. Tabs are fine and fun, but don't neglect sight-reading standard notation.

A WORD OF WARNING ABOUT STANDARD NOTATION

On the other hand, some musicians become excellent sight-readers but they neglect the art of improvising. They are not comfortable unless they are sight-reading. When they are attempting to participate in folk jam sessions they struggle. So, try to create a balance between sight-reading, and improvising using your ears without sheet music.