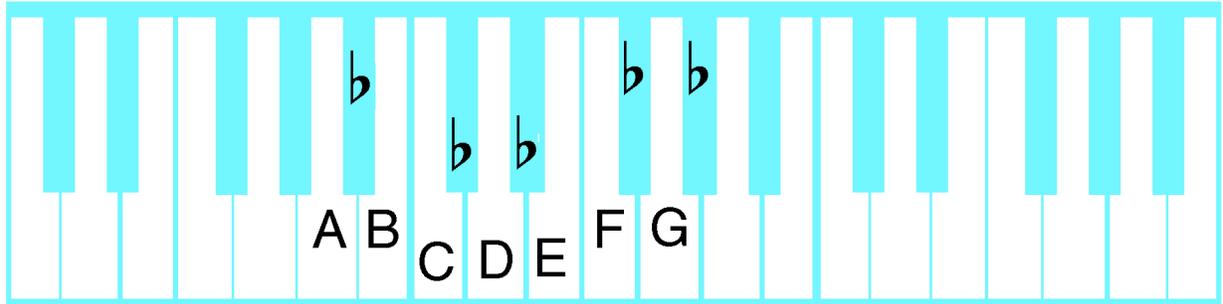


Read Music Now



A common sense approach to **learning to read music**



for adults or young people
self-taught beginners or classroom instruction

by Ken Davies



If you can READ WORDS and TYPE,
you already have the SKILLS you need
to begin learning to read sheet music and
play a piano or digital synthesizer keyboard !

Just as we put letters together to make words and sentences, 
we put notes and rests together to make rhythms and melodies.

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Preface

This book is for all who wanted to learn to read music but thought they couldn't
and
for all who still want to learn to read music but don't yet know they CAN!

This book is a common sense approach to **learning to READ keyboard music** and reading it **FLUENTLY**. It is for kids, eight years old and up; for adults; for parents teaching their children; for self-taught beginners, young or old. It is for private or classroom keyboard instruction.

It is not “another piano method.” It does not focus on keyboard technique and performance styles. Rather, it **focuses on the basic fundamentals of**

- 1) clearly explaining how music notation works and**
- 2) guiding the student through the methods of thinking (mind-sets) that help bring about habits that lead to fluent music reading.**

Many of the traditional complexities, a source of many a beginner's confusions, have been reduced and simplified. While some traditional music teachers may question the “rightness” of such simplification, this approach does, however, enable a near beginner to read and play music using any of all twelve notes very quickly, indeed almost immediately.

Teachers' note:

Much of the verbal material in this book was developed and tested in 1975-76 through working with students who exhibited inadequate sight-reading skills. The approach also draws on research from the fields of learning styles and of remedial language reading.

The earlier units eliminate many “traditional” elements and sequences generally thought of as “beginner material,” reserving them for later in the book. In doing so, the approach lays the foundation for reading fluency by the common sense approach of focusing on a limited number of key elements presented in logical order. The music used in the earlier units is thus edited with the following in mind:

1. Rhythm first and in basic meter signatures — 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4. Fluent music reading *begins* with fluent rhythm reading. Common time and cut time, 6/8 and 2/2 are introduced later.

2. Only flats are used — no sharp or natural symbols. This eliminates early confusions about enharmonics yet allows the notation of all twelve notes to work as a tablature. Students can read and play in any transposition or key early on. Every single flatted note has a flat preceding it. The “accidental through the measure” rule is reserved for later. Flats, rather than sharps, were chosen to allow for a better “flat key diatonic” look where applicable. Sharps are covered later.

3. No key signatures. By using only accidentals, tonal as well as non-tonal music are introduced early at several transposition levels. This reinforces aural development and assists in keyboard familiarity. Interval recognition and identification, at a later time, becomes a more natural outgrowth. Key signatures and the concepts of tonal music are introduced later.

4. Two-handed unison. Czerny and Hanon knew that few things beat unison playing for developing both coordination and independence of hands and fingers. In this book, it also contributes to visual reinforcement of pitch (note) memorization at different octaves.

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March 20, 2002
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READ MUSIC NOW

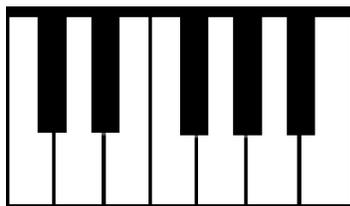
Getting Started

If you can READ WORDS and TYPE, then you already have the SKILLS you need begin to learn to read sheet music notation and play a piano or synthesizer.

- Just as we put alphabet letters together to make words, sentences and paragraphs, we put notes and rests together to make rhythms, phrases and melodies.
- Very simply, music notation LOOKS like it SOUNDS.
- Your eyes see, your mind thinks, your fingers respond, and your ears hear the result. With practice, these four "thought-actions" begin to occur as nearly ONE thought-action.

Learning to read music is really very easy. There are only a few symbols to learn and understand. So here we go!

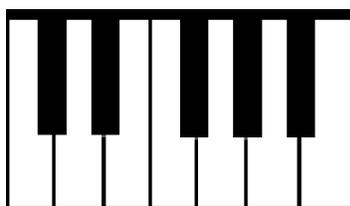
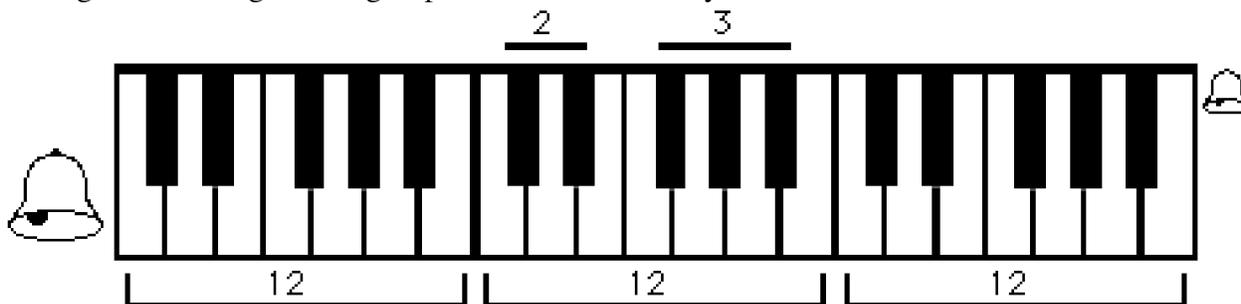
But first, you MUST have a piano or synthesizer to go with this book, so...go get one. Portable digital pianos or MIDI keyboards can be purchased from many music stores quite inexpensively. Got one? OK, let us begin.



As you look at a piano, organ or synthesizer keyboard, you see a lot of **white keys** and **black keys**. There are really **only 12 — 5 black keys and 7 white keys**. The rest are just repeated like the group of 12 keys in the picture at left.

Look at the **black keys**. Notice the **group of 2 (left)** and the **group of 3 (right)**. All of the 12 keys have names. But you will learn those later.

As you look at the keyboard below, you can see that each 12-key group is identical. Each has 5 black keys and 7 white keys. The lower sounds are toward the left; the higher sounds are toward the right. Notice, again, the groups of 2 and 3 black keys.



Did you notice that the white keys do not all look alike? There are three different white key shapes. Can you find them?

This keyboard layout helps you see where your fingers go while you are learning to know the keys "by feel."

- **Play up and down (higher and lower) several time on the 5 black keys.** Get to know what they sound like.
- **Play up and down the 7 white keys.** Listen carefully. Does the pattern have a different sound?
- **Play up and down all 12 keys in the order they appear.** Notice how that sounds different from either the black keys by themselves or the white keys by themselves. You are learning to really listen and hear.

* * * * *

Music is written to LOOK like it SOUNDS. So written sheet music notation also shows you which keys to play, when, how long or short, and how high or low.

The notation symbols in music show you **two** things:

1. How **LONG or SHORT** the **sounds** and **silences** should be.

Sounds are shown by **notes** 

Silences are shown by **rests** 

2. How **HIGH or LOW** the **sounds** should be.

The highness or lowness of **sounds** is shown by placing the **note HEADS** (round part) on a **line** or **space** of a five-line **staff**.



Silences, of course, are not high or low, so we need not show that part.

Quarter-NOTES (♩) and Quarter-RESTS (♪)

Now get ready to play something on your piano or synth keyboard. Pick a key. Any key, black or white, will work for this.

4-Beat Groups (like in rock). This next piece has four beats in each measure.

In the example below:

- each **quarter-NOTE** is a **SOUND** and
- each **quarter-REST** is a **SILENCE**.

Count and tap as before. But where you see a **note**, press a key to make a sound. Where you see a **rest**, remain silent — but **feel** the silence just as if it were a sound. Silences are important, too. So you play the sounds, but you also “play” the silences. Here, you will be *really* reading written music as you play it.

		silence	sound	silence	sound											
Play		♪	♩	♪	♩		♪	♩	♩	♩		♩	♪	♩	♪	
Tap		↓	↓	↓	↓		↓	↓	↓	↓		↓	↓	↓	↓	
Count		1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4	

We say that a **quarter-rest** (silence) and a **quarter-note** (sound) each “get ONE beat.”

That means that the sound or silence **BEGINS** on a beat and lasts until the **BEGINNING** of the next beat.

So, if the **tempo** (speed of the beats) is slow, the notes/rests will each seem long. But if the tempo is fast, then each sound/silence will be shorter.

Now, go back to that last example and **practice it**. **PRACTICE** means that you **repeat** many times **until it is easy, automatic, and always correct**.

That may seem sort of “mechanical” rather than musical—and it *is*, at first. But that combination of notes and rests (played in time to the beats) is actually a **rhythm**, or rhythmic figure. A **rhythmic figure** is sort of like a word. It has a meaning—a “musical” meaning that you hear, sense and feel. In the same way that you say a new word (by syllables) over and over until it “sounds like a word,” likewise you play a rhythmic figure over and over until it makes musical sense and “sounds like a rhythm.” In this way, you begin growing a vocabulary of familiar rhythm patterns that you can recognize by both sight and sound.

PITCH and MELODY

The High and Low of Music

This unit will explain how we read the **pitches** shown by **note heads** as they appear on the **5 lines** and **4 spaces** of a **staff**.

- You will see how **note heads** are placed at different high or low levels to show the **pitches** of a **melody**.
- You will discover that **each line or space on a staff has a letter name** that never changes (there are 12 names for 12 pitches).
- You will learn how a **clef sign** (♪ or ♫) identifies the line/space staff set.
- You will see how we show **chords** where two or more notes are played at once.

Pitch refers to how **high or low a sound is**.

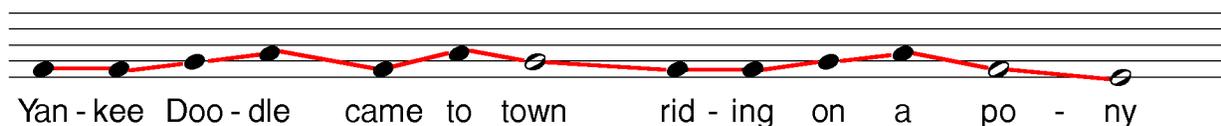
We show pitches by placing **note heads** on a **staff** of **5 lines** and **4 spaces**. In the example below, **notice how each note head appears either on a line or “on” (in) a space** (between two lines) in the staff.

The **note heads** show you which **white or black keys to play**.

Actually, it’s the lines and spaces that identify the keys (actually the highness or lowness of the sounds). But it’s easier to think about the **notes** that are **on** those lines and spaces. For that reason, we simply say that the notes tell you which keys to play.

A **melody** is a sequence of pitches that makes a **tune**.

See how the note heads go HIGHER and LOWER on the STAFF.



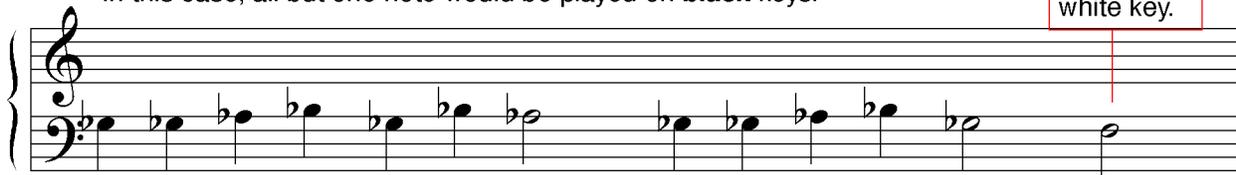
Some are on a **LINE** and some are on a **SPACE** (between lines). These notes would be played on the white keys of your piano or synthesizer keyboard.

See how the notes suggest a **melody line** — as if you connected the dots (note heads). If you know the tune to *Yankee Doodle*, you can already SEE how the layout of the notes makes the written music actually LOOK like it SOUNDS.

You can play or write the same tune starting on ANY white key or black key and make the melody sound right. You will see how as we go along. Each note to be played with a black key has a little odd-shaped “b” in front of it. We call that a **FLAT**. You will see how it works soon.

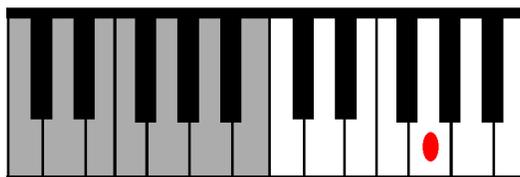
Here is the same tune but on different lines and spaces.
In this case, all but one note would be played on **black** keys.

This note is played on a white key.

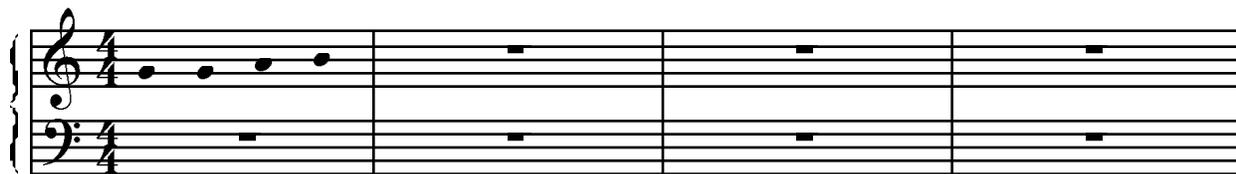


Now try playing the keys that make the Yankee Doodle tune sound like *Yankee Doodle*.

Look at your keyboard and **find the white key** that is almost in the middle of the three black keys. It's the one in the diagram with a red dot. That will be your starting note for the music written on the staff below the diagram.



Now that you found the white key to start on, here's a description of which keys to play to match the notes on the staff below.



- Start with the white key you found and play it twice (see the two notes on the same staff line?)
- The the next note tells you to play the white key just to the right of the one you just played.
- Then the NEXT note is the one to the right of THAT one.
- Then...

Now, THAT's complicated, isn't it? Surely there must be an easier way. Well, there is! **NOW YOU SEE WHY EACH NOTE HAS A LETTER NAME.** It is much easier to say "start on G" than to say "start on the white key between the first and second black key of the group of three black keys." So, now you just memorize the note names -- both written AND on your piano keyboard -- and you're all set. But we'll do that a few at a time as we go along.

COMBINE RHYTHMS AND PITCHES

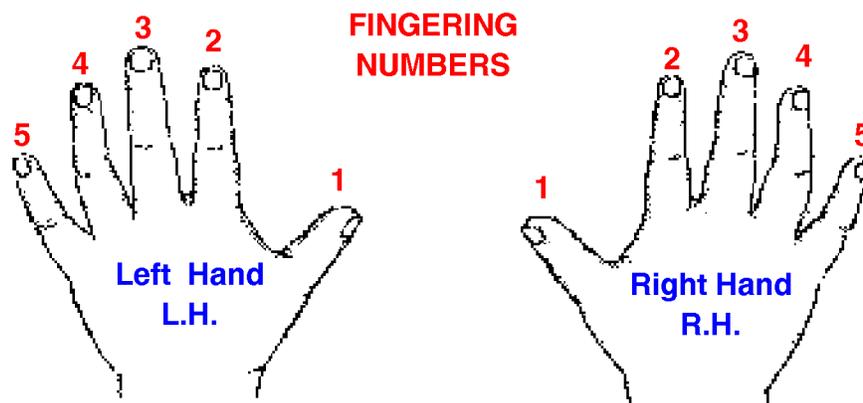
Putting It All Together

Be sure you know and can play the material from **Beats & Rhythm** and **Pitch & Melody BEFORE beginning this unit.**

This unit will show you how to read “real music,” that is, both the rhythm notation AND the pitch notation at the same time.

- You'll learn **fingering**—how to choose which fingers to use for playing various note patterns.
- This unit will have important **HINTS on how to practice** so you repeat good habits that help you progress and avoid bad habits that hinder your progress.
- There are some **tunes** to read and play with both hands and also some **exercises** for getting your eyes, hands and fingers coordinated so they work together well.

Fingering Numbers are often (but not always) written above, below or next to notes to suggest the best fingering that works for a musical passage. See the illustration below and memorize which numbers are for which fingers.



An important part of playing keyboard is getting your hands and fingers to respond well, both together and independently.

Just as with typing words at your computer, you are training your hands and fingers to respond correctly and automatically to what you read in written music and/or hear in your mind's ear. It is also like reading sentences out loud. Familiar words are easy. But new words are pronounced, repeated, understood, used, and then made familiar.

A lot of repetitive practicing is for the purpose of training your fingers to work right.

Just because you can read the music and know how the tune goes does not automatically mean that your fingers will “do as they're told.” You can remain patient and avoid some frustration by humorously remembering that **fingers are stupid—they have to be trained.**

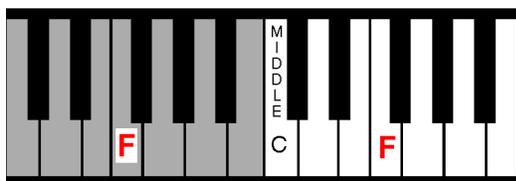
Throughout this unit, try to **keep your eyes on the written music while you find the piano keys by feel.**

After all, you probably type words on your computer keyboard that way, so this will be the same process, only a newer set of skills to learn. When you read through a piece for the second time or even the tenth time, **use the same fingering every time.** That's how you train your fingers to respond well. After all, you can't "really read music" if your fingers won't do as you want them to, can you?

The piece below, *Count the Sounds and Silences*, has the same melody in both hands. Playing music **in unison at the octave** (unison = the same thing—at the octave = 8 white notes apart) is good practice for getting hands and fingers to work together.

Playing hands separately is one of the best practice methods for learning a new piece. **The first most important element is the rhythm.** So, first, practice playing just the rhythm of this piece a few times with first one hand (and clef), then the other. Count the beats to help you keep moving and playing fluently.

Find the two "F" keys on your keyboard. **When you start playing the melody, play it hands separately a few times until you can play the right keys with the right fingers every time.**



THEN start practicing the melody with both hands together (slowly, at first). After a while, you'll be able to play pieces like this one with both hands right away. Remember to count the beats and keep them steady. Notice the four-four meter signature (four beats in each measure).

This tune uses the pitches **F — G — A — B-flat — C** (Review pages 18 and 20 if needed.)

Count the Sounds and Silences

RH fingering 1 1 1 G 2 A 3

count 1 2 3 4 1 & 2 & 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 & 2 & 3

LH fingering 5 5 5 4 3

B-flat 4 C 5 B-flat 4 A 3 G 2 F 1 A 3 F 1

1 2 3 4 1 2 & 3 1 & 2 3 4 & 1 2 3 4

2 1 2 3 4 5 3 5

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When you can play the piece fluently with both hands while also counting the beats, then sing along with the pitches in the tune to help you hear what you see. This will also help you memorize the pitch names.