

# How to sight-read music

What your piano teacher (probably) did not teach you

## Background

You may be wondering why PianoMaestro is so keen to show you how to sight read music. After all, wasn't the PianoMaestro designed so that you do not need to learn to read music?

We believe that sight reading music is a very useful skill that we should all aspire to have. Unfortunately it is a difficult skill to acquire, and takes many years of practice. The principle goal of the PianoMaestro is to keep things fun and interesting, so you do not give up playing the piano. It is our genuine hope that someday you will reach a level where you no longer need the PianoMaestro.

## Summary

We start off reviewing how most of us probably learned to read music – using acronyms assigned to the spaces and lines on the music staff. This is how I learned, and I have come to realize that it has its limitations. It is not a fast way of reading music, and is not helpful when you start to play pieces that have notes above and below the staff.

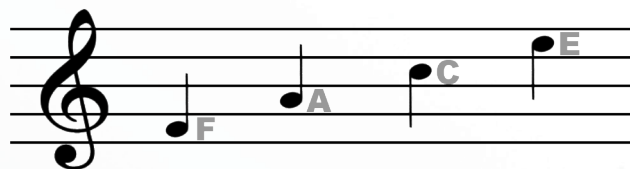
After our review, we will look at a new way to read music based on intervals and reference points.

So here we go!

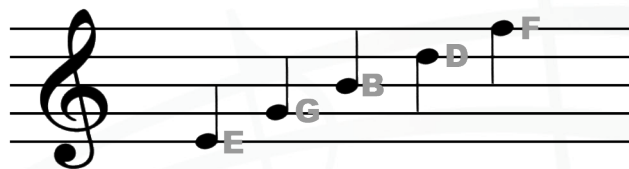
## QUICK REVIEW OF THE OLD WAY

Traditionally students are taught to read music by using acronyms to help remember which notes correspond to places on the music staff.

Treble clef

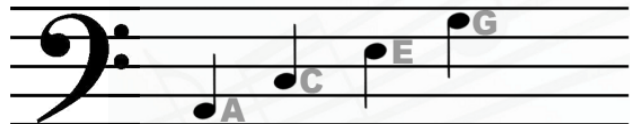


F - A - C - E



Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge

Bass clef



All Cows Eat Grass



Great Big Day For Australia



## THE NEW WAY OF READING MUSIC

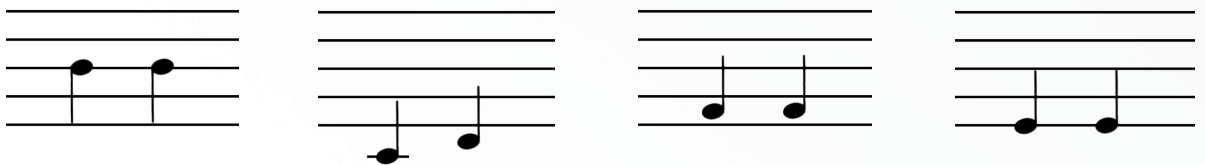
The new way to read music requires some initial investment, but trust me, it is well worth it. This method comprises of three steps:

1. learn the intervals
2. memorize reference points
3. combine 1 and 2

STEP 1: Learn the intervals

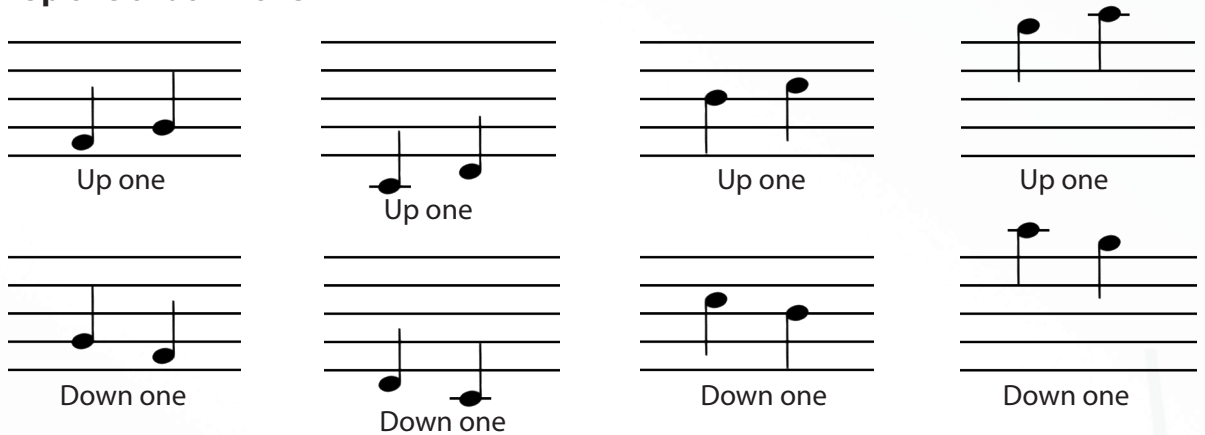
There are 5 intervals to learn.

### a. "Same"

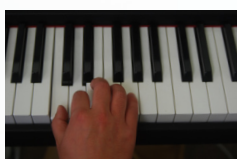


Notes that are on the same line or on the same space represent the same note. Therefore, you do not need to move your finger position to play it.

### b. "Up one or down one"



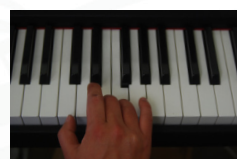
"Up or down one" is represented by two notes where one is on a line and the other is on a space. There are four finger combinations per hand.



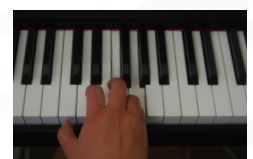
Up one



Up one



Up one



Up one

For "up one", play the lower note first (ie the one further to the left) followed by the higher note. For "down one", play the higher note first (ie the one further to the right)



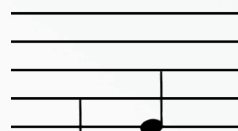
**c. "up or down a jump"**



Up a jump



Up a jump



Up a jump



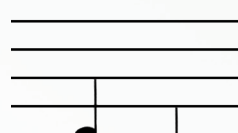
Up a jump



Down a jump



Down a jump

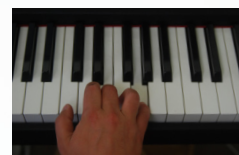
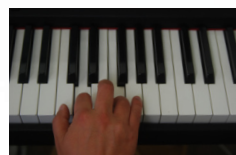
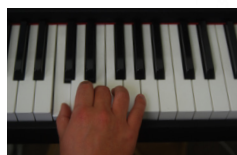


Down a jump



Down a jump

Up or down a jump represents two notes that are separated by a line or a space. There are three finger combinations per hand.



**d. "up or down a fourth"**



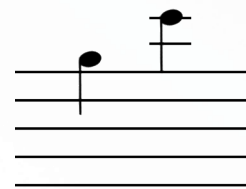
Up a fourth



Up a fourth



Up a fourth



Up a fourth



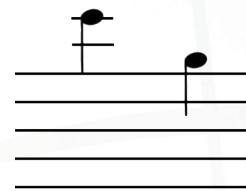
Down a fourth



Down a fourth



Down a fourth

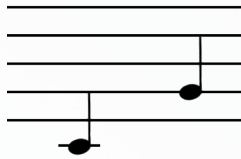


Down a fourth

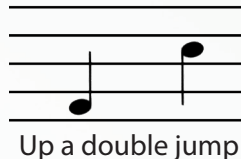
"Up or down a fourth" represents two notes that are separated by a line and a space. This is the strangest looking interval that you will encounter while reading sheet music. The note will start on a line and end on a space. Or the note will start on a space and end on a line. If you find yourself hesitating, we suggest that you play a fourth by default. More often than not, you will be right! There are two finger combinations per hand to play this interval.



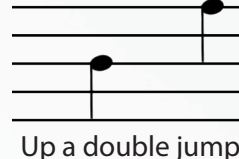
**e. "up or down a double jump"**



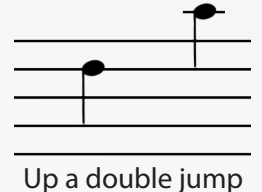
Up a double jump



Up a double jump



Up a double jump



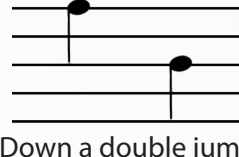
Up a double jump



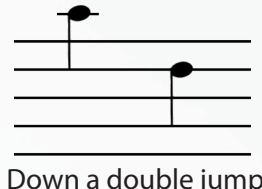
Down a double jump



Down a double jump



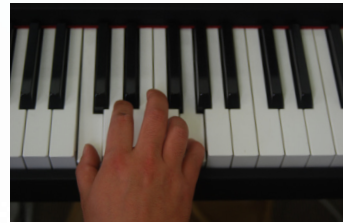
Down a double jump



Down a double jump

"Up or down a double jump" represents two notes that are separated by two lines and a space or two spaces and a line.

There is one way per hand to play this interval.

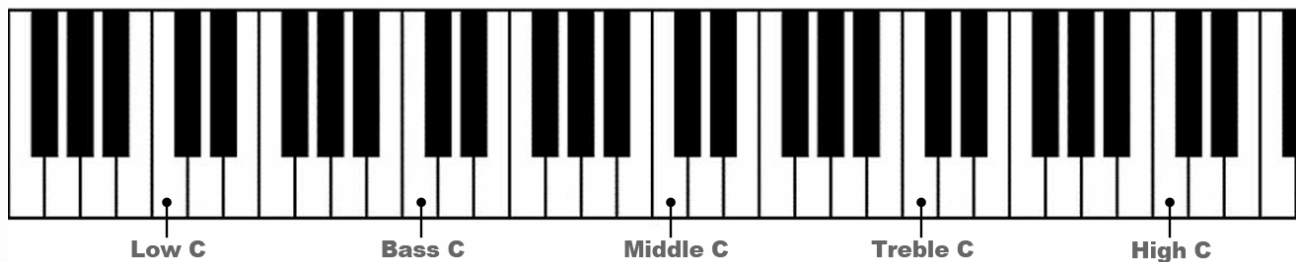
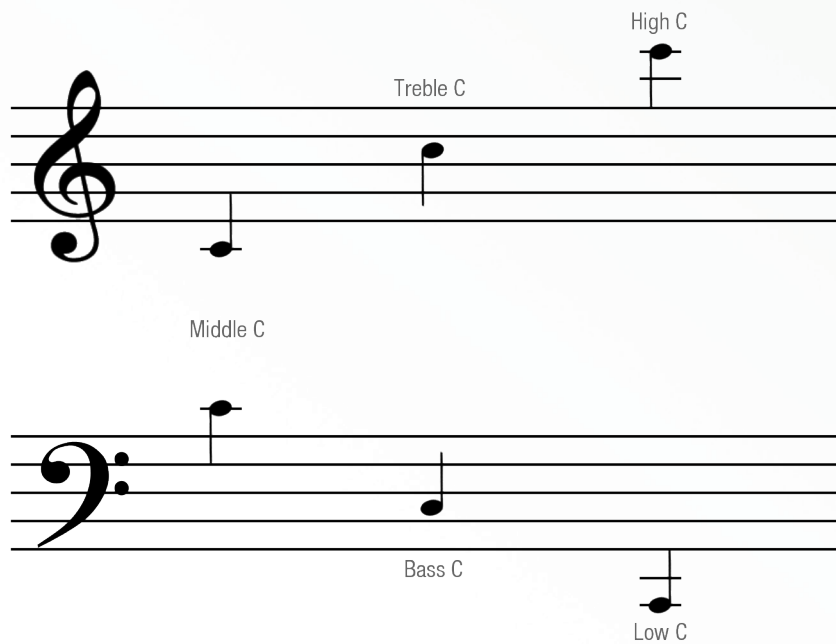


We have just finished covering the topic of intervals. Now we can move to step 2 : Reference points



## Step 2 : Reference Point

The second step is to memorize certain notes on each staff. We will cover the five C's, but they can be any notes. The key is that you should be able to identify and locate these notes automatically. This takes practice, but the rewards are huge



It is worth noting that "middle C" is not drawn in the middle of the two staves. Also, the high and low C's can take some time to remember. We were told to think of it as a "hamburger on a plate".

In these materials we suggest remembering the 5 C's. However, it is helpful if you can recognize other notes as well. For example, I can quickly identify the B in the treble clef and the D in the bass clef (they are easy to remember because they are in the middle of the staves). The more reference points you have, the easier it will be to sight read music.

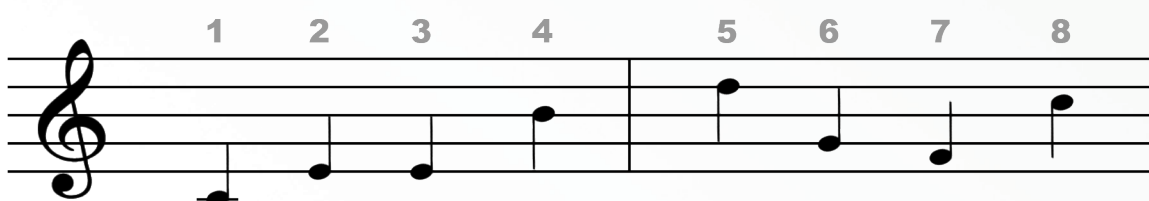


## Step 3 : Putting it all Together

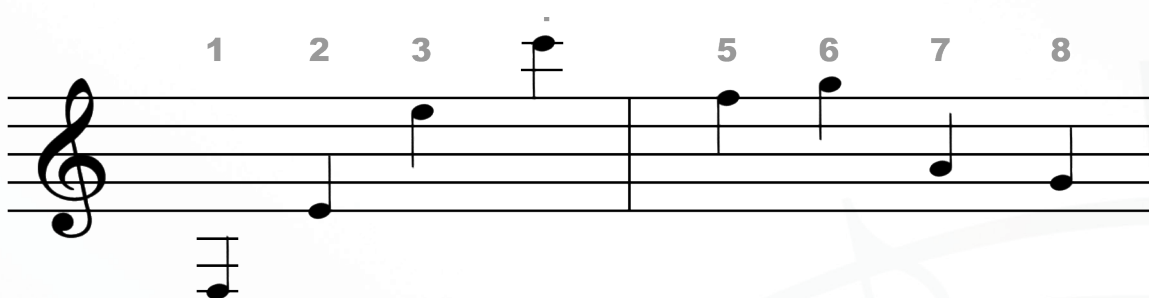
At this point you should be comfortable with the different intervals and the 5 C's. If you are not totally confident, go back and review to STEP 1 and STEP 2.

To figure out where a note is on a piece of sheet music, figure out where it is relative to one of the 5 C's or the note before it.

The following 8 examples illustrate how to systematically figure out the notes of an unfamiliar piece. Please note that we are not figuring out what each note is (ie first C, then B, then D). It is all relative to the reference notes.



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Middle C	Up a jump from Middle C	Same as previous note	Up a double jump from previous note or down one from treble C	Up a jump from previous note or up one from treble C	Down a double jump from previous note or down a fourth from treble C	Down one from previous note or up a fourth from middle C	Treble C

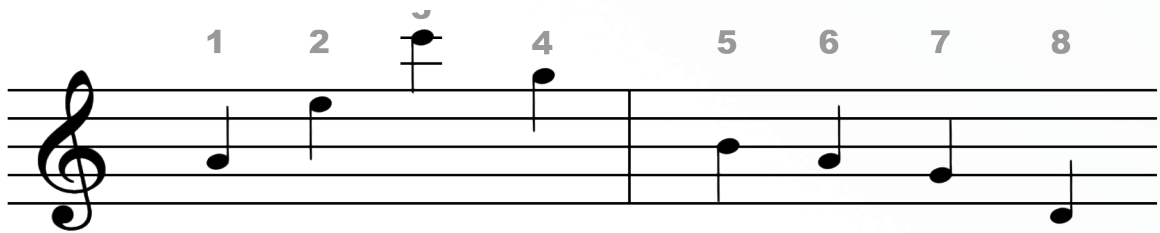


1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Double jump below Middle C	Up a jump from Middle C	Up a jump from treble C	High C	Down a double jump from high C or up a fourth from treble C	Up one from previous note	Down a jump from treble C	Down one from previous note or up a double jump from Middle C





1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Down one from treble C	Up a fourth from previous note or a jump up from treble C	Treble C	Double jump down from treble C or a fourth up from Middle C	Up one from previous note or a double jump up from Middle C	Jump up from treble C	Up a fourth from previous note or down a jump from high C	Treble C

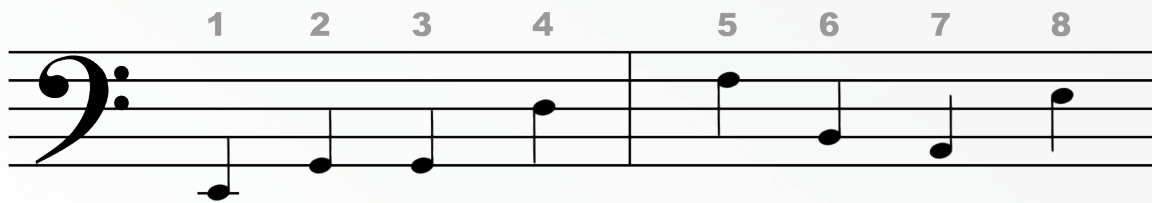


1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Down a jump from treble C	Up a double jump from previous note or up a jump from treble C	High C	Down a fourth from high C or up a double jump from Treble C	Up one from previous note or a double jump up from Middle C	Down one from treble C	Down one from previous note or down a jump from treble C	Down a double jump from previous note or up one from Middle C

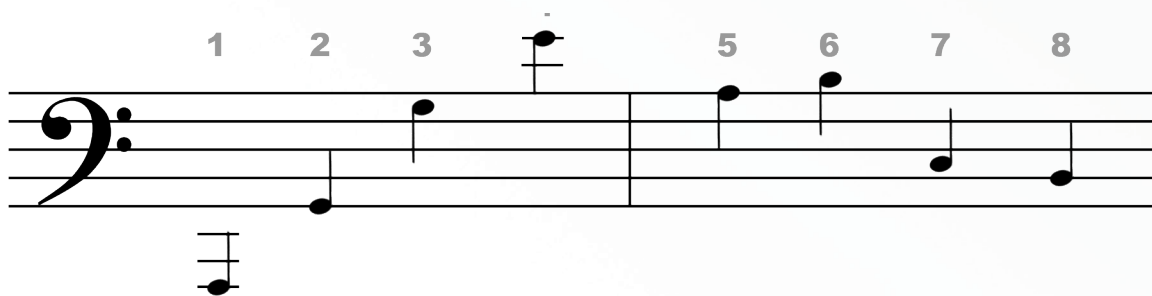
The same technique can be used for the bass clef.



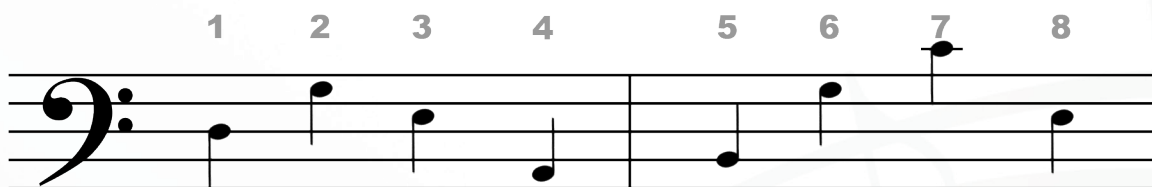




1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Jump above low C	Up a jump from Low C	Same as previous note	Up a double jump from previous note or up one from bass C	Up a jump from previous note or up a fourth from bass C	Down a double jump from previous note or down one from bass C	Down one from previous note or down a jump from bass C	Up a jump from bass C



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Down a jump from low C	Up a double jump from low C	Up a double jump from bass C	Up a jump from Middle C	Down a jump from Middle C	Up one from previous note or down one from Middle C	Bass C	Down one from bass C



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Up one from bass C	Up a fourth from previous note or down a fourth from Middle C	Up a jump from Bass C	Double jump down from previous note or down a jump from Bass C	Up one from previous note or a down one from Bass C	Down a fourth from Middle C	Middle C	Jump up from Bass C







1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Bass C	Up a double jump from Bass C or a fourth down from Middle C	Jump up from Middle C	Down a fourth from previous note or down one from Middle C	Up one from Bass C	Bass C	Down one from Bass C	Down a fourth from previous note or double jump below Bass C

## Conclusion

We hope that you find this new method of learning to read music as helpful as we did. By reading intervals (instead of mapping from an acronym), you will find yourself able to follow the shape of the music across the music score. Because you have solid reference points over 5 octaves (the 5 C's), you will never be lost – even the most difficult pieces. Keep practicing – the rewards are huge for those who endure. And if you need a little help, consider using the PianoMaestro.

