THE YOUNG COMPOSER

Grade 1

Theory Pack

Beginner

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Mozart was composing at just five years old - but even he began with the very same building blocks you are about to learn.

Welcome, young composer! This pack is yours to print, write on and keep. Work through it at your own pace, try every worksheet, and remember - there are no wrong notes, only surprising ones. Happy composing.

- The Young Composer

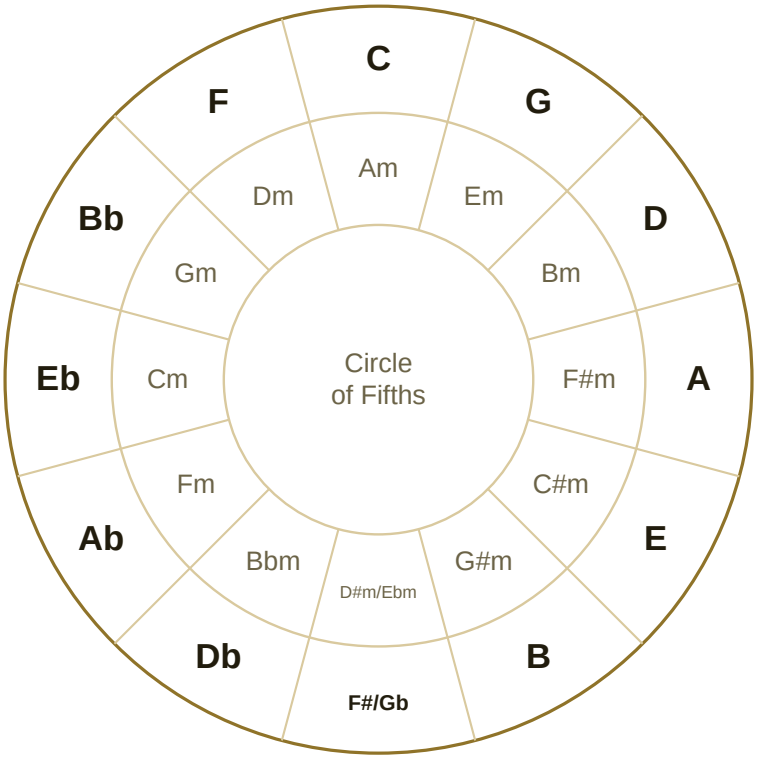
What to expect

Grade 1 covers the rudiments that everything else is built on: how music is written on the stave, how long notes and rests last, simple time signatures, your first key signatures, counting intervals, and building the tonic triad. Take one chapter at a time.

In this pack

How to use this pack: read each reference sheet, then try its worksheet on paper. Tick off chapters as you go, and keep the Circle of Fifths beside you whenever you compose.

The Circle of Fifths



How it works

Clockwise from C, each key adds one sharp: C, G, D, A, E, B, F#.

Anticlockwise from C, each key adds one flat: C, F, Bb, Eb, Ab, Db.

The inner ring is each key's relative minor - it shares the very same key signature.

Keys next to each other share nearly all their notes, so moving between them sounds smooth.

Using it while composing

- Find a key signature fast - count the steps around the circle from C.
- Change key smoothly - modulate to a neighbouring key, which shares the most notes.
- Pick a relative minor (inner ring) for a darker version of a major-key idea.
- Build chord progressions (like I - IV - V) from chords that sit close together.

GRADE 1 — BEGINNER

Staves, Clefs & Note Naming

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

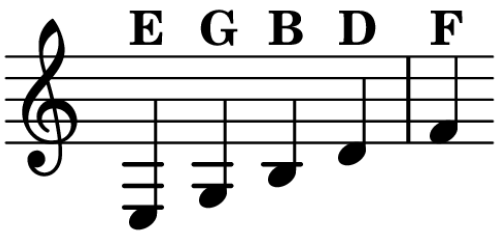
The Staff

Music is written on a staff (or stave): five horizontal lines with four spaces between them. Notes are placed on a line or in a space to show their pitch — higher on the staff means a higher-sounding note.

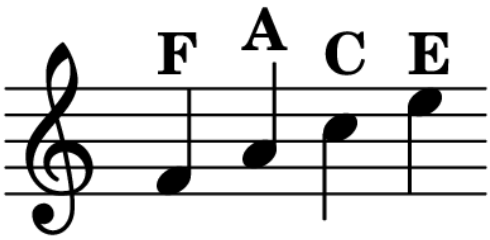
The Treble Clef

The treble clef (also called the G clef) is used for higher-pitched instruments and the right hand on piano. Its spiral curls around the second line from the bottom, marking that line as G.

Lines (bottom to top): E G B D F



Spaces (bottom to top): F A C E

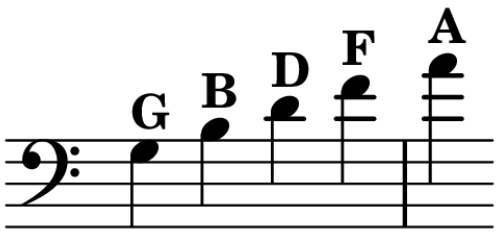


Memory tip — Lines: "Every Good Boy Deserves Football." Spaces simply spell "FACE."

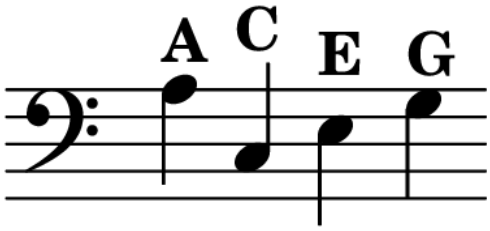
The Bass Clef

The bass clef (also called the F clef) is used for lower-pitched instruments and the left hand on piano. Its two dots sit either side of the second line from the top, marking that line as F.

Lines (bottom to top): G B D F A



Spaces (bottom to top): A C E G



Memory tip — Lines: "Good Boys Deserve Fudge Always." Spaces: "All Cows Eat Grass."

Key Rules to Remember

- The staff has 5 lines and 4 spaces, counted from the bottom up.
- The treble clef's spiral centre marks the G line; the bass clef's two dots sit around the F line.
- Notes move up the musical alphabet (A–G) as they move up the staff, then repeat: after G comes A again.
- Ledger lines extend the staff for notes too high or too low to fit on the 5 lines — middle C sits on the first ledger line below the treble staff, and the first ledger line above the bass staff.

Staves, Clefs & Note Naming

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. Name each note written on the treble stave (write the letter under each).
2. Draw a treble clef, then write the notes C, E, G and B.
3. Circle the note that sits on the middle line of the treble stave.
4. Copy a short line of notes from any piece you like onto the staves below.

Your working:

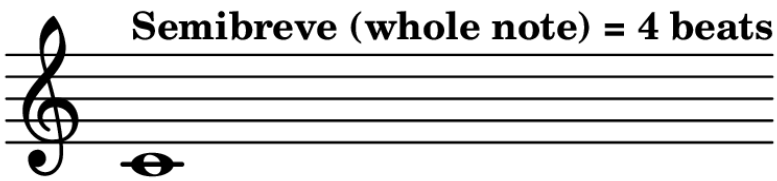
GRADE 1 — BEGINNER

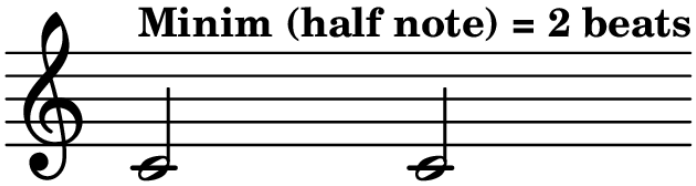
Note & Rest Values

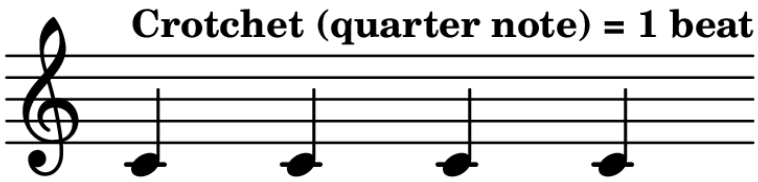
Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

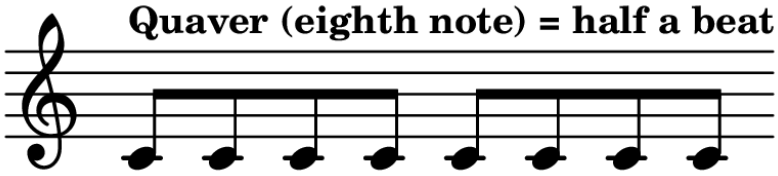
Note Values

A note's shape tells you how long to hold it, counted in beats. Here are the four note values you need for Grade 1, from longest to shortest:



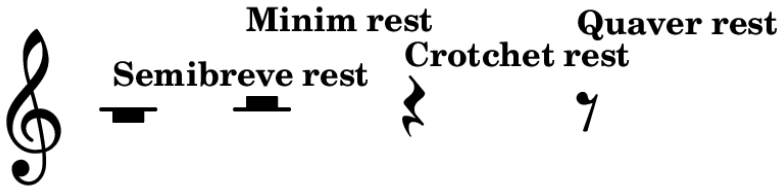






Rest Values

A rest is a silence — it uses the same beat values as notes, but means "don't play" instead of "play."



How They Relate

Each note value is worth exactly twice its neighbour: one semibreve = two minims = four crotchets = eight quavers. This doubling relationship is the key to counting rhythms accurately.

Key Rules to Remember

- Semibreve (whole note) = 4 beats — an open notehead with no stem.
- Minim (half note) = 2 beats — an open notehead with a stem.

- Crotchet (quarter note) = 1 beat — a filled notehead with a stem.
- Quaver (eighth note) = half a beat — a filled notehead with a stem and one flag (or beam, when joined to another quaver).
- Every note value has a matching rest of the same length.

Note & Rest Values

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. Write how many beats each note lasts in 4/4: semibreve, minim, crotchet, quaver.
2. Next to each note above, name the rest that matches it.
3. Add one note to complete each bar to four beats.
4. Write a two-bar rhythm of your own in 4/4, then clap it.

Your working:

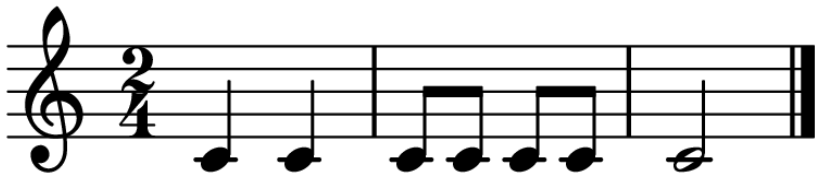
GRADE 1 — BEGINNER

Simple Time Signatures

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

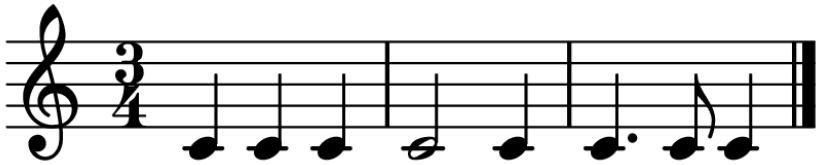
A time signature is two numbers stacked at the start of a piece. The top number tells you how many beats are in each bar; the bottom number tells you what kind of note counts as one beat.

2/4 — Two Beats Per Bar



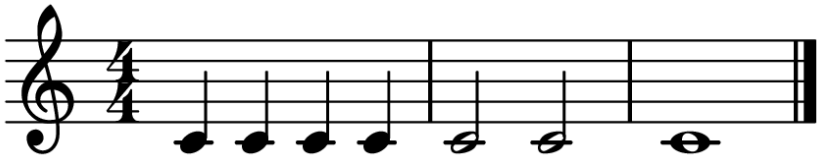
Two crotchet beats per bar. Often felt as a marching or "oom-pah" feel.

3/4 — Three Beats Per Bar



Three crotchet beats per bar. The classic waltz time signature.

4/4 — Four Beats Per Bar



Four crotchet beats per bar — the most common time signature in Western music, sometimes written as a large "C" for "common time."

Key Rules to Remember

- The bottom number 4 means "the crotchet gets one beat" in all three time signatures above.
- The top number tells you how many of those beats fit in each bar.
- Bar lines divide the music into equal groups of beats, making rhythm easier to read.
- A time signature is called "simple" when its main beat divides naturally into two (e.g. one crotchet beat splits into two quavers).

Simple Time Signatures

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. How many crotchet beats are in a bar of 3/4? Of 2/4? Of 4/4?
2. Which time signature gives three crotchet beats per bar?
3. Add barlines to a rhythm so each bar adds up to four beats.
4. Compose a two-bar rhythm in 4/4 on the staves below.

Your working:

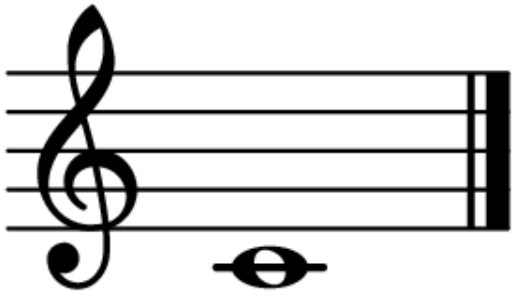
GRADE 1 — BEGINNER

Key Signatures: Up to One Sharp or Flat

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

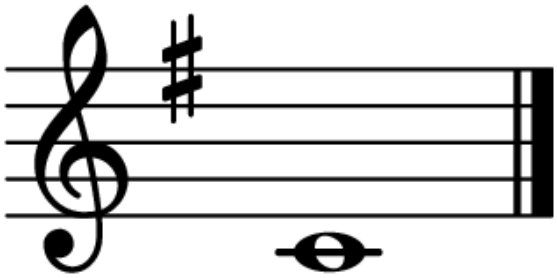
A key signature is a set of sharps or flats placed right after the clef, telling you which notes to raise or lower for the whole piece — so you don't need to write an accidental every time.

C Major — No Sharps or Flats



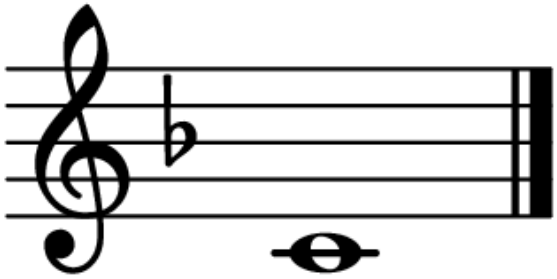
The simplest key — every note is played exactly as written on the staff, with no sharps or flats.

G Major — One Sharp (F#)



Every F in the piece is played as F#, unless cancelled by a natural sign.

F Major — One Flat (Bb)



Every B in the piece is played as Bb, unless cancelled by a natural sign.

Key Rules to Remember

- A key signature applies to every octave of that note, not just the one it's drawn on.
- Sharps and flats in a key signature are always written in a fixed order and position — they're not random.

- An accidental (a sharp, flat, or natural written next to a note) overrides the key signature, but only for the rest of that bar.
- You can identify G major vs F major at a glance: one sharp means G major, one flat means F major, and no sharps or flats means C major.

Key Signatures (up to 1 sharp/flat)

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. Which major key has one sharp? Which major key has one flat?
2. Name the sharp used in G major, and the flat used in F major.
3. Draw the key signature for G major, then for F major.
4. Write a C major scale (no sharps or flats) on the stave below.

Your working:

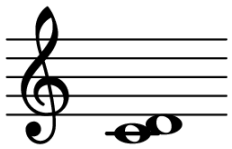
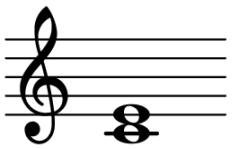
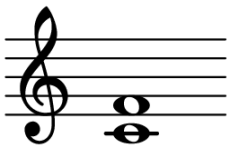
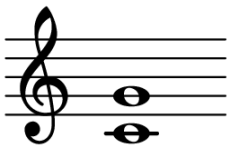
GRADE 1 — BEGINNER

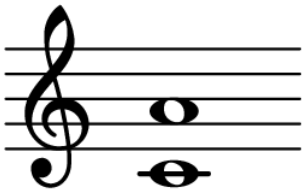
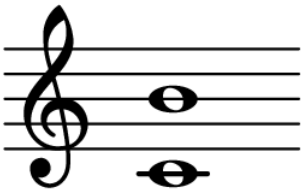
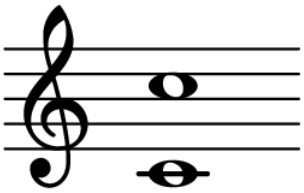
Intervals by Number

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

An interval is the distance between two notes. At Grade 1, you just need to count the distance by number — ignore any sharps or flats, and count every letter name from the bottom note to the top note, including both the first and last note.

For example, C to E: count C (1), D (2), E (3) — so C to E is a 3rd.

2nd	3rd	4th	5th
			

6th	7th	8ve (octave)
		

Key Rules to Remember

- Always count both notes — the starting note counts as 1, not 0.
- Ignore sharps and flats when counting the number — C to E and C to Eb are both still a 3rd by number.
- An interval from a note back to itself is called a unison (not a "1st").
- An interval spanning a full 8 letter names (e.g. C to the next C) is called an octave, not an "8th."

Intervals by Number

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. Count the interval by number: C to E, D to G, F to C.
2. Write a note a 3rd above C, and a note a 5th above G.
3. Name each interval marked on the stave.
4. Write your own pair of notes a 4th apart.

Your working:

GRADE 1 — BEGINNER

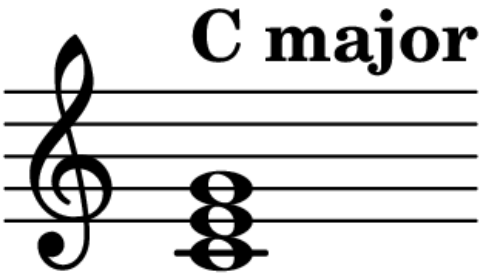
Tonic Triads in Root Position

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

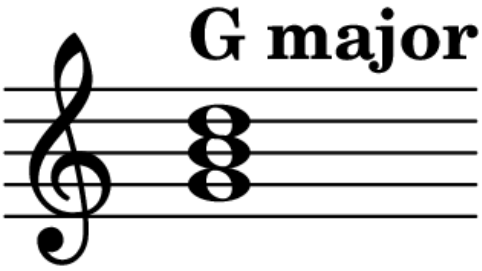
A triad is a three-note chord built by stacking two 3rds on top of each other. The tonic triad is built on the first note (the tonic) of a scale, and is the "home" chord of a key.

In root position, the tonic note sits at the bottom, with the 3rd and 5th of the scale stacked above it.

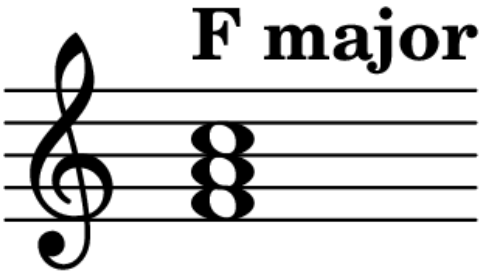
C Major Triad (C – E – G)



G Major Triad (G – B – D)



F Major Triad (F – A – C)



Key Rules to Remember

- A triad = the 1st, 3rd, and 5th notes of a scale, played together.
- "Root position" means the tonic note (the 1st) is the lowest note of the chord — if a different chord note were on the bottom, it would be called an inversion instead.
- Each note is a 3rd apart from the next — that stacked-3rds pattern is what makes a triad a triad.
- The tonic triad is the chord that a piece in that key will usually start and end on — it's the chord that feels most "at rest."

Tonic Triads

Try these on paper. Use the staves where you need them.

1. Build the tonic triad of C major - write its three notes.
2. Write the tonic triad of G major, and of F major.
3. Name the three notes of the C major tonic triad.
4. Draw a tonic triad in root position on the stave below.

Your working: