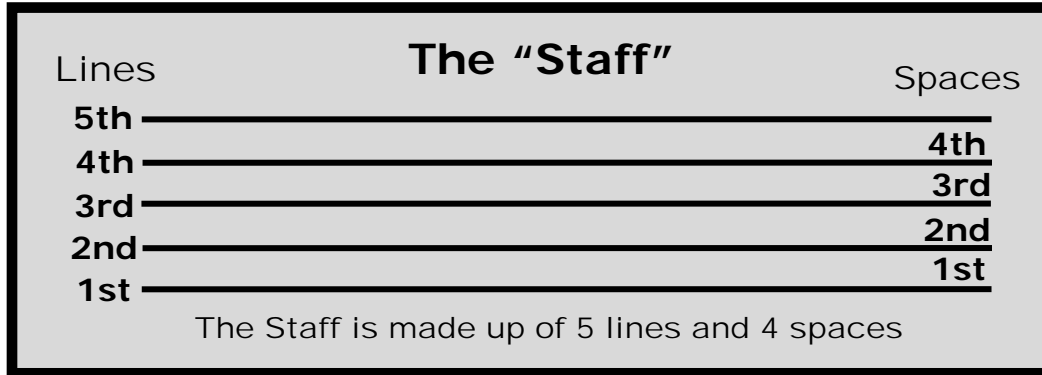


Basic Music Theory – Bass

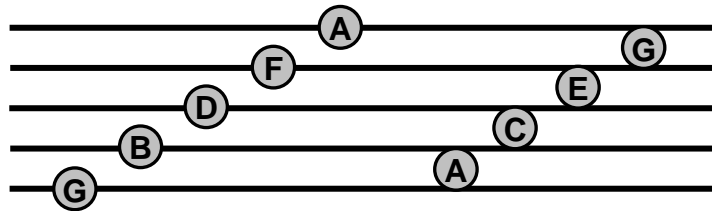
Although tablature is the most popular way to read music these days, the ability to at least understand basic music theory and how to read music (the old fashioned way) is not a bad idea for any Bass Guitar player. The very basics (relating mostly to Bass playing) will be covered here. Let's get started...

Music is written on lines (and spaces) called the "Staff"



There are seven letters used in the musical alphabet: A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. These seven letters keep repeating over and over ABCDEFGABCDEFG...

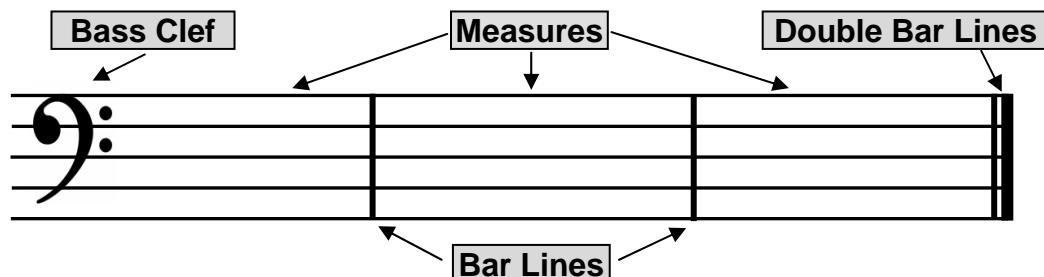
The lines and spaces are named in the diagram below:



* To remember the names of the notes on the lines: Good Boys Do Fine Always

* The letters on the spaces are A C E G

The symbol at the starting point of the staff is called a "Bass Clef" (or "F" clef because the "F" note line is between the two dots). The staff is divided into "measures" by "bar lines." The double bar lines at the end of a measure marks the end of a section of music.



There are different types of notes that are used. The most common notes are shown in the diagram below (we will not cover Thirty Second Notes or Sixty Fourth Notes).

Here are some different types of notes:



WHOLE NOTE:
Receives 4 Beats.



HALF NOTE:
Receives 2 Beats



QUARTER NOTE:
Receives 1 Beat

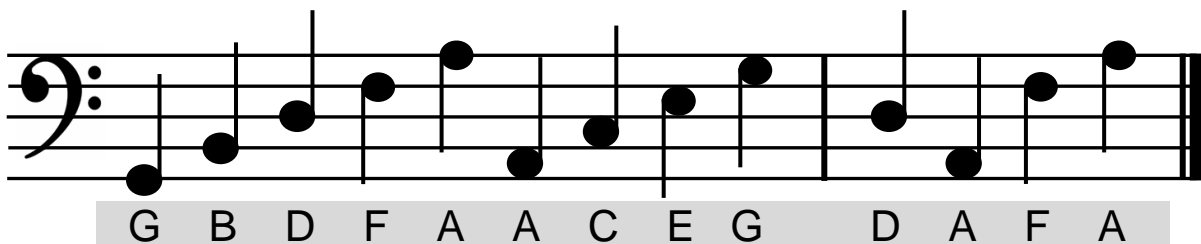


EIGHTH NOTE:
Receives 1/2 of a Beat

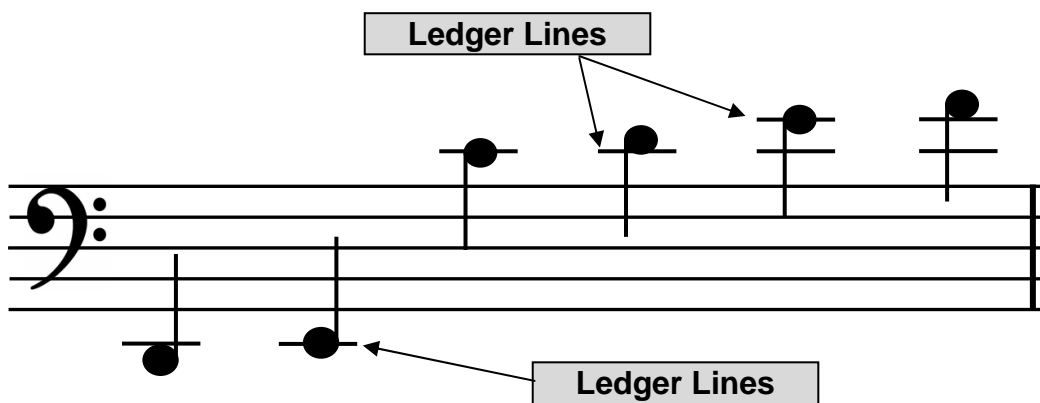


SIXTEENTH NOTE:
Receives 1/4 of a Beat

Notes can be placed on any of the lines or spaces (and take the name of the line or space it is on). Below is a small example of notes on the staff and the note names (below the notes).



Notes can be placed above or below the staff on lines called Ledger Lines. Below is a small example of notes above and below the staff and the note names (below the notes).



Note names: D E C D E F

The "REST"

A REST (when placed on the staff) is used to designate a period of silence. This period of silence corresponds to the note for which the symbol indicates. See diagram below:

The Whole rest and Half rest will look the same but be placed differently on the staff. The Whole rest will hang down from the line, and the Half rest will lay on the line.

Whole Rest



Half Rest



The Quarter rest and the Eighth rests will have their own "distinct" symbols. Both of these rests will be placed on the staff (somewhere in the middle of the lines).

Quarter Rest



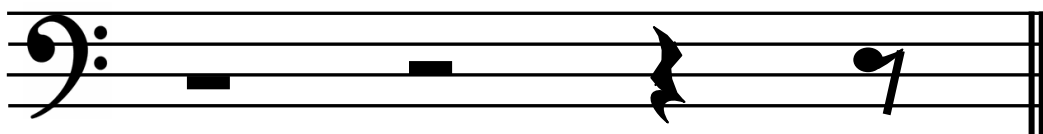
Eighth Rest



This Staff shows the notes



This Staff shows the RESTs



Rests have the same count as the note it represents, but they are not played (they are silent counts).

The Whole REST receives the same "count" as the Whole Note (4 silent beats).

The Half REST receives the same "count" as the Half Note (2 silent beats).

The Quarter REST receives the same "count" as the Quarter Note (1 silent beat).

The Eighth REST receives the same "count" as the Eighth Note (1/2 silent beat).

The "Time Signature"

Time signatures are the numbers that are placed at the beginning of a piece of music (right after the Clef) that indicate beats per measure and which note gets one beat.

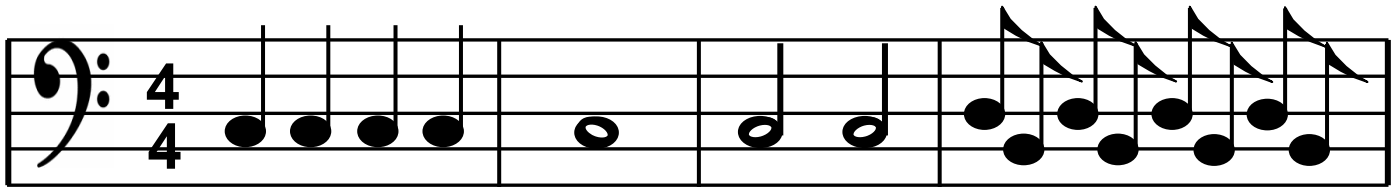
The Time Signature



$\frac{4}{4}$ The Top number indicates the number of Beats per Measure

$\frac{4}{4}$ The bottom number indicates the type of note receiving one beat.

The 4/4 time signature is the most common for Rock, Country, Metal, and Popular music. The next diagram will show different types of notes and how they would fit in measures (using the 4/4 time signature).



Examples
using 4/4
Time
Signature

Quarter notes
receive one
beat so 4
quarter notes
can fit into one
measure.

Whole notes
receive four
beats so 1
whole note can
fit into one
measure.

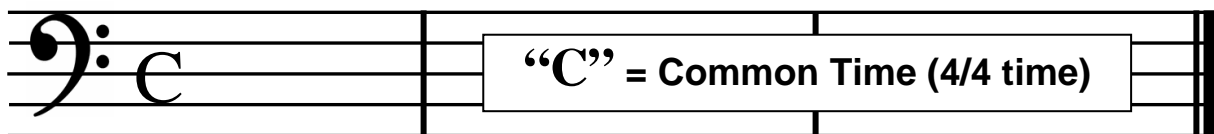
Half notes
receive two
beats so 2 half
notes can fit
into one
measure.

Eighth notes receive
1/2 of a beat, so 8 –
eighth notes can fit
into one measure.
(8 – Eighth notes
added up = 4)

There are other time signatures other than the 4/4. Below are few additional time signatures that you should be aware of (especially at the beginning stages of playing an instrument).

- $\frac{3}{4}$ There will be “3” Beats per Measure
The quarter note will receive one beat.
- $\frac{2}{4}$ There will be “2” Beats per Measure
The quarter note will receive one beat.

The 4/4 time signature is so common that it has its own symbol (the capital letter “C” is used to designate the 4/4 time signature). See diagram below:



C equals $\frac{4}{4}$ Top number indicates the number of Beats per Measure
Bottom number indicates the type of note receiving one beat.

Time signatures are not limited to what has been described in this basic lesson – once you move on to more advanced Music Theory studies you will find 3/2 and 6/8 time signatures (just to name a few).

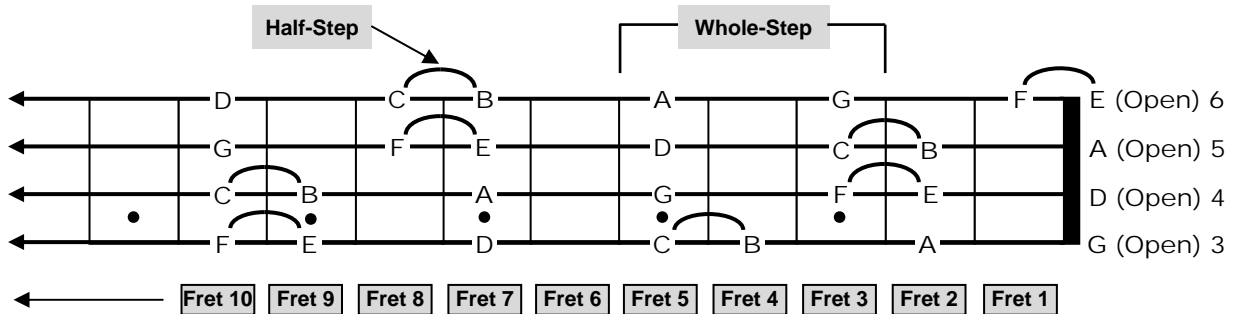
Names of the Notes

There are seven letters used in naming the notes on the staff (and on the bass guitar), they are A-BC-D-EF-G. These are the only letters used to name the notes. These letters just keep repeating themselves over and over (see the example).

Example: **A-BC-D-EF-G-A-BC-D-EF-G-A-BC-D-EF-G** and so on...

As you will notice from the example above – that the B and C, E and F notes are always placed right next to each other, all other notes have a space between them.

Let's look at how half steps and whole steps relate to the bass guitar fret board (see diagram below). When 2 notes are right next to each other (side by side) it is called a "half" step. If there is one whole fret between two notes, this is called a "whole" step.



Chromatics "Sharps and Flats"

Chromatics: Sharps and Flats

A Sharp: (#) Raises a note one half-step or fret, and a Flat: (b) Lowers a note one half-step or fret. Sharps and Flats are placed at the beginning of a piece of music (between the clef and time signature) can define the "Key" of the song (called Key Signatures). Sharps and Flats can be placed anywhere in a piece of music as needed (to raise or lower notes one half step).

The diagram below has a "sharp" sign on the top line of the staff (which is an "F" note). This piece of music could be in the Key of "G" (the Key of G has only one sharp in it - F#). The notes in the Key of G are as follows: G-A-BC-D-F#-G (See more on Key Signatures in our Music Theory section).

The sharp sign on the "F" note means that all "F" notes should be changed to "F#" (play an F# each time you come to an F note). The sharp sign will only appear in the beginning of a piece of music and not on each of the notes (if needed - other sharps and flats may be placed on notes throughout the piece of music also).

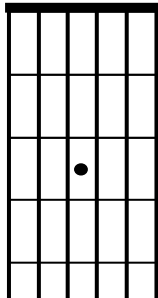
* This is what the measure will look like.

*This is how you would play the notes.

The musical notation shows a bass clef, a sharp sign (#) on the top line (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The notes are: F# (quarter), A (quarter), F# (quarter), A (quarter), F# (quarter), A (quarter), F# (quarter), A (quarter). Below the staff, the notes are labeled: F#, A, F#, A, F#, A, F#, A.

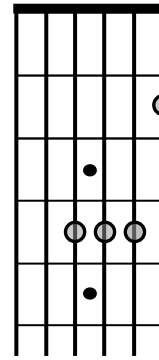
Here is an example of sharps and flats using a chord:

A sharp would raise a note or chord one fret or half-step in the direction of the arrow.



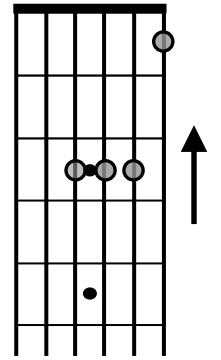
A flat would lower a note or chord one fret or half-step in the direction of the arrow.

"B" Chord



See how the "flat" sign lowers a "B" chord one fret (half step).

"Bb" Chord



The "Natural" Symbol (♮)

When the Natural symbol is placed next to a note it means to "cancel" any sharps or flats within that bar of music. In the example below the natural sign cancels out both "F#" notes in the first measure only (they return back to F# notes in the second measure). Also a sharp is added to the "A" note in the first measure (and the natural sign on the next "A" note cancels out this sharp).

The natural sign on the first "F" note cancels all "F" notes in that measure.

F A# F A F# A F# A

Other – Basic Music Theory

Here is some additional basic music theory that you should be familiar with. The "dotted half-note" / the "tie" / and the "repeat" sign are covered here.

A dot placed next to a half note adds 1 beat to it – the dotted half note is equal to 3 beats. (half note = 2 beats, dot = 1 beat).

The "Tie" – a curved line between two notes of the same pitch – play and hold the first note for the length of both notes.

Count = 1 2-3-4 1-2-3 4 1 2 3 4

Ex: In measure 1 – pick the quarter note for one beat, then pick the dotted half note (and hold) for 3 beats. In measure 2 – pick the the dotted half (and hold) for 3 beats, then pick the quarter note for one beat.

Pick the first note and let it sustain (hold) for the duration of both notes.

"Repeat" – the dots placed at the end of a measure means to repeat this piece of music (or measures).

Common “Music Theory” Terms”

Chord – is defined as a combination of notes sounded together.

Chromatics – sharps and flats raise or lower notes on the staff one half step. The natural symbol cancels out any sharps or flats within a bar of music.

Harmony – is defined as two or more notes sounded simultaneously.

Half Step – is the distance from one note to the next (higher or lower). On the guitar, a half step is “one fret” higher or lower from the note you start at.

Melody – is a series of single notes sounding in succession.

Pitch – is determined by the “frequency” of vibration (how “high” or “low” it sounds).

Rhythm – is defined as the arrangement of sounds in time (using time signatures).

Tone – is produced from regular vibrations. **Tone has the characteristics of Pitch, Dynamics, Duration, and Timbre.**

- Pitch is the frequency of the tone
- Dynamics is the loudness or softness of the tone
- Duration is the length of the tone
- Timbre is the “quality” of the tone

Tempo – is the speed of the piece of music (slow, medium, fast, etc).

Whole Step – is defined as two half steps (higher or lower). On the guitar, a whole step is “two frets” higher or lower from the note you start at.

Final thoughts / Suggestions / Notes

We’ve only touched on the basics of Music Theory for bass guitar players in this lesson. I strongly suggest that “any and all” beginning Bass guitar players learn to read music! Think about it – Bass players will be playing “notes” 95% of the time so it makes perfect sense that they learn to read music. Once you get started on reading music – it will take a lot of time, effort, and practice. If you want to become a good Bassist, you will have to “pay your dues” and put a lot of time into your practice. Bass guitar teachers at local music stores always start their students off with reading music so you may want to check around your area to see who teaches, and mostly what they are teaching (start by taking a couple of lessons to make sure the teacher knows what they are doing). Good luck – Practice hard and consistently and you will get faster results...