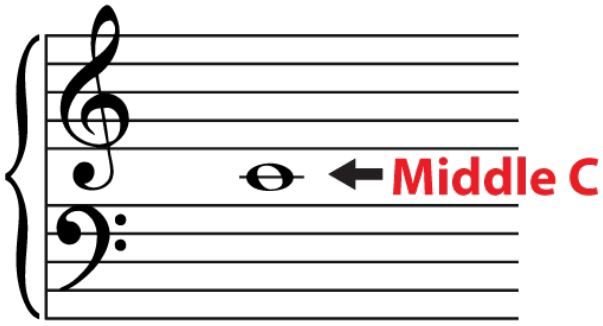
A Guide to Music for Non-Musical Parents

Last time, we spoke about having a plan for practice time, but how do we learn all those dang notes? How can you help your students? Don't be scared! Music is just like any other language, it requires practice, but anyone can speak it. We're here to help! Just think, after reading this, you'll be an expert.

So, let's start!

In the beginning … there was middle C (see image). It's called this because it's in the middle, very creative, we know! Music basically all revolves around this note, if you have any experience with the piano, you might remember that this is where your thumbs meet around the middle of the keys.



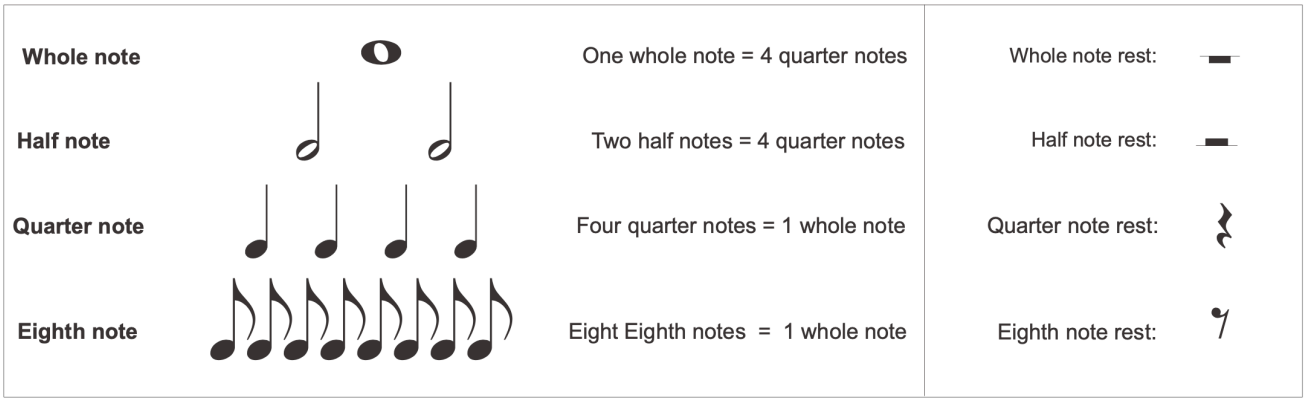
Once you are familiar with where this is in your student's respective clef (treble & bass are shown, but there are others), then all the notes go up and down in order on the *music staff* (the five lines across). But remember, in music, we only use the first seven letters of the alphabet: ABCDEFG. Many of our teachers might use catchy phrases to remember the names of lines and spaces, but at the end of the day, it's really this simple. We have compiled some worksheets and websites to help with this so check the resources section.

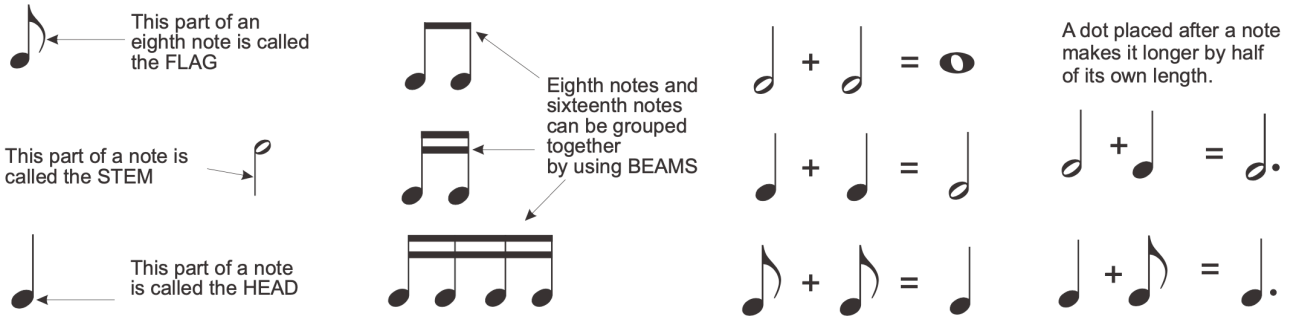
Rhythm

Moving on! Music can be defined as the organization of sound, right? So now that you have notes, we need to put them to a beat, and this is called *rhythm*. You already know more about this than you think! If you can tap your feet or clap your hands to a song, then you're already familiar with *tempo:* this is how fast or slow a song is. Once you know the tempo of a song, you can fit the different rhythms at the right speed.

Don't let the names confuse you! Like middle C, our home for rhythm is called the whole note. Students normally don't start with this, and that's where it can get

confusing. However, the whole note is worth four beats (four taps of your foot counts as one whole note). All other notes are divisions of this. Yes, this means fractions. Yay math! If you're a visual learner, we've got you covered:



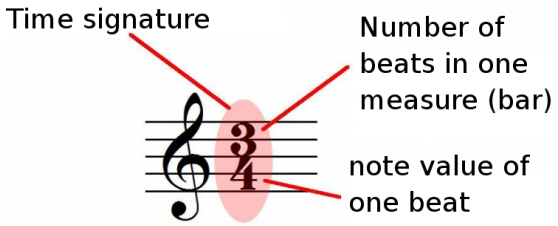


So if you're thinking each quarter note gets one beat, you're right! Now, the quarter note is usually where we start students with rhythm because it's easier to count 1,2,3,4 than hold notes in their heads.

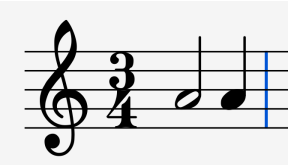
Doing okay so far?

Time Signature

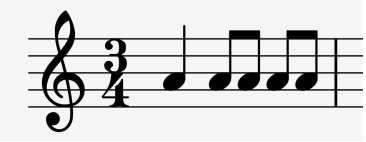
Now to put this all together! The time signature helps us do just that. This is a sneaky little fraction at the beginning of every piece of music, but it gives us so much information:



Looking at the time signature pictured above, we know that there will be *equal to* three beats in each measure and we know that the quarter note (1/4) gets one beat. This does not mean that each measure will only have three quarter notes. As you already know, the *half note* is equal to two beats (because two half notes = four quarter notes). This means that, in the time signature above, one completed measure might look like this:

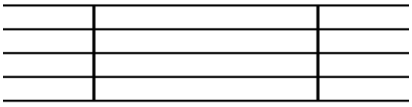


or even,



This is why it is important to know the *value* of each type of note. Then you can create different combinations to fulfill the requirement for each measure by the top number in the time signature. A *measure* is a segment of time in a piece of music divided by a *barline* on either side:

One Measure



So…

Everything you've learned so far are things you can practice with or without an instrument. But your child is here to learn to play, right? Whether you play flute or violin, what you need to know are the fingerings. If you place a finger on a string at a certain place, you will create a new note. For other instruments, you might press down on a key. Remember the how the notes go up and down on the music staff? By adding another finger, or a new combination of keys, you might notice that the sound or *pitch* goes higher. For example, if you place one finger on the D string, you might be playing some version of E, etc. It might be a good idea to keep a fingering chart on your child's music stand, or visible in their room for a quick refresher if they ever get stuck. These usually can be found in your student's method book or online. If you ever have a doubt, reach out to your music teacher to make sure you've got the right one.

And now you know the basics

There's so much more to learn, but much of that is specific to the instrument. The information covered is general theory that all young musicians (and now you) must know and understand. To help put some of this into practice, we've collected the following resources.

Resources

the Greater Miami Youth Symphony is not affiliated with any of the following websites or applications

You can find these resources online, but why do that when you're already so busy—we've done it for you! We've complied a list for all your musical needs (we hope!)

For learning note names:

https://www.musictheory.net/exercises

- There are many exercises on this site, but 'Note Identification' is our favorite. You can change the rage of pitches or clef by clicking the settings cog-wheel in the upper right hand corner.
- Teachers may also use the 'Exercise Customizer' feature to create specific links which students can submit for correction.
- Music Theory also has an application format available for download for on-the-go learning!

Music Tutor

https://musictutorapp.com/

- This is an application that can be used to learn notes (should be available in the Apple and Google Play Store)

Worksheets

http://www.musicfun.net.au/worksheets.htm

- This website might look a little dated, but there are many good resources available for download including:
  - Trace and Copy — great for younger students
  - Let's Learn About Notes 2 — this is where you can find lots of worksheets on note values
  - Note Names in the Treble — perfect for leaning notes in treble clef (used for violins, flute, etc)
  - Alto Clef Notes Names — perfect for learning notes in alto clef (used by viola, etc)
  - Bass Clef Note Names — perfect for learning notes in bass clef (used for cello, bass, trombone, etc)
  - Note: some of these worksheets have an answer key!

Need help tuning a string instrument?

Our amazing Young Mozarts Conductor, Nerissa Manela, has put together a tuning tutorial to help with all of your needs! Check it out HERE.

Easy, right?