

# Guitar for the Absolute Beginner <sup>1</sup>

This booklet will help prepare you to get the most out of your video. It will introduce the guitar fingerboard, the basics of reading standard music notation, guitar tablature, chord diagrams and guitar neck diagrams. All of us at the National Guitar Workshop and Alfred wish you lots of fun and fulfillment as you learn to play guitar.

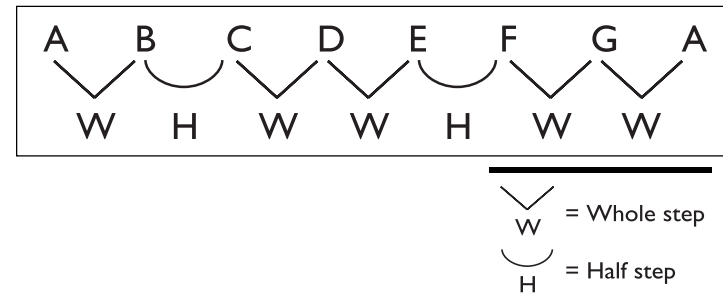
## The Guitar Fingerboard

### Half Steps and Whole Steps

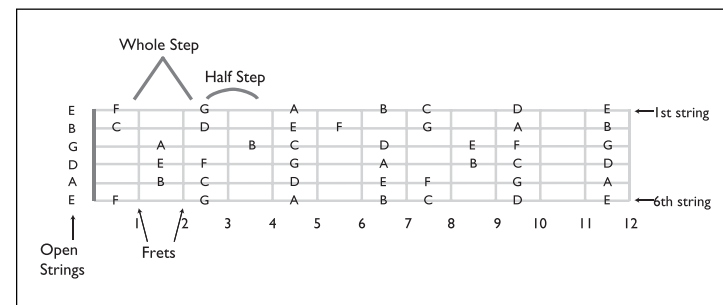
Our first order of business is to understand how the guitar fingerboard works and to learn how to find or name all of these notes on the neck. This is easy if we know about *half steps* and *whole steps*.

A half step is the distance from one fret to the next on the guitar. For instance, the distance from the 1st fret to the 2nd is one half step. This is the smallest *interval* (distance between two notes). Two half steps equal one whole step, which is a distance of two frets on the guitar. For example, the distance from the 1st fret to the 3rd fret is a whole step.

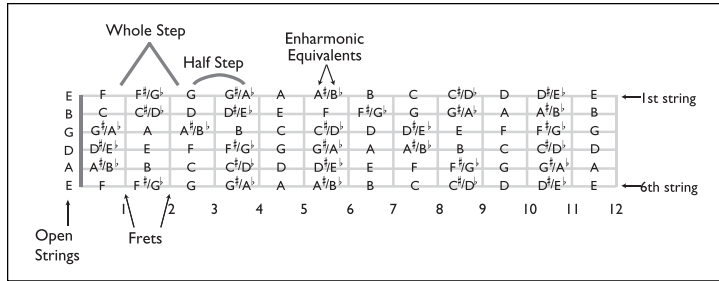
The arrangement of whole steps and half steps in the musical alphabet is as follows:



Here is where all of the notes in the musical alphabet—the *natural notes*—are found on the guitar.



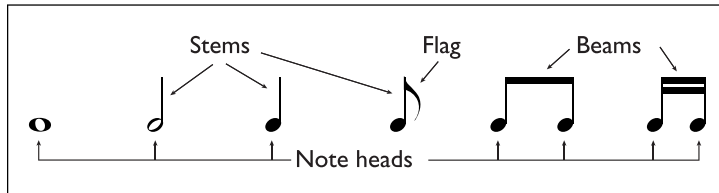
You have probably noticed the blank, unnamed frets on the fingerboard in the diagram on page 1. These are filled with *sharp* and *flat* notes, also called *accidentals* or *chromatic tones*. When a sharp # is placed in front of a note, the note is raised one half step (one fret). For example, F# is one fret higher than F. When a flat b is placed in front of a note, the note is lowered one half step (one fret). For example, Gb is one fret lower than G. Notice that F# and Gb fall on the same fret. Two notes which sound the same (played on the same fret) but have different letter names are termed *enharmonic equivalents*. Every sharpened or flatted note has an enharmonic equivalent.



**Music Notation: Pitch**

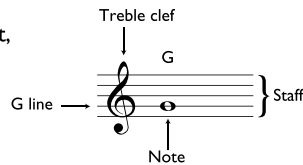
**Notes**

Music is written by placing notes on a *staff*. Notes appear in various ways.

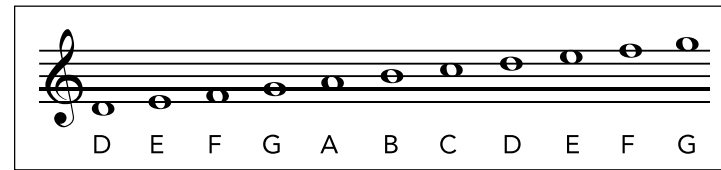


**The Staff and Clef**

The staff, which is read from left to right, has five lines and four spaces. At the beginning of the staff is a *clef*. The clef dictates what *pitch* (exact degree of highness or lowness) corresponds to a particular line or space on the staff. Guitar music is written in *treble clef*, which is sometimes called the *G clef*. The ending curl of the clef circles the G line on the staff.

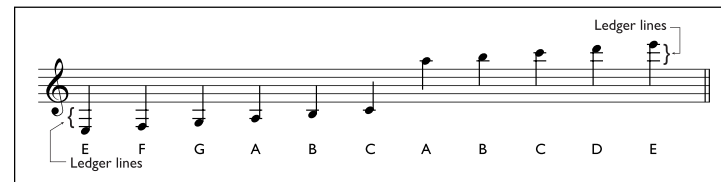


Here are the notes on the staff using the G clef:



**Ledger Lines**

The higher a note appears on the staff, the higher it sounds. When a note is too high or too low to be written on the staff, *ledger lines* are used.

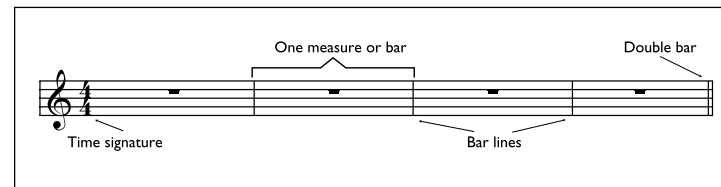


Guitar music actually sounds one octave lower than it is written. We write music an *octave* (12 half steps) higher than it sounds strictly for reasons of convenience and easy reading.

**Music Notation: Time**

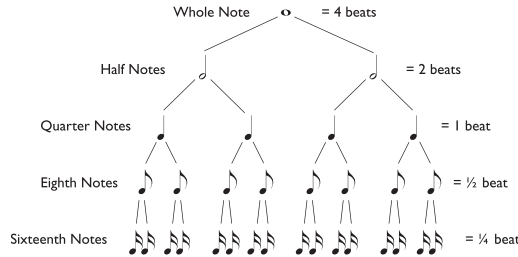
**Measures and Bar Lines**

The staff is divided by vertical lines called *bar lines*. The space between two bar lines is called a *measure*. Measures divide music into groups of *beats*. A beat is an equal division of time. Beats are the basic pulse behind music. A *double bar* marks the end of a section or example.



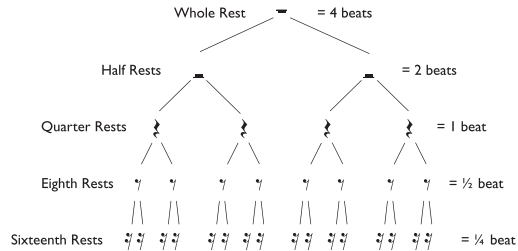
**Note Values**

As you know, the location of a note relative to the staff tells us its pitch (how high or how low it is). The duration, or value, is indicated by its shape.



**Rest Values**

Every note value has a corresponding rest. A rest indicates silence. A whole rest indicates four beats of silence, a half rest is two beats of silence, etc.



**Time Signatures**

Every piece of music has a pair of numbers at the beginning, called *time signatures*, that tell us how to count time. The top number represents the number of beats per measure. The bottom number represents the type of note receiving one count.

- $\frac{4}{4}$  = Four beats per measure
- $\frac{4}{4}$  = A quarter note ♩ equals one beat

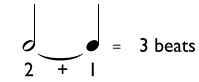
Sometimes a **C** is written in place of  $\frac{4}{4}$  time.  $\frac{4}{4}$  is often called *common time*.

- $\frac{3}{4}$  = Three beats per measure
- $\frac{4}{4}$  = A quarter note ♩ equals one beat

- $\frac{6}{8}$  = Six beats per measure
- $\frac{8}{8}$  = An eighth note ♪ equals one beat

**Ties**

When notes are *tied*, the second note is not struck. Rather, its value is added to that of the first note. So, a half note tied to a quarter note equals three beats.



Notice the numbers under the staff in these examples. They indicate how to count. Both of these examples are in  $\frac{4}{4}$  time, so we count four beats in each measure.



In some cases, consecutive eighth notes are beamed together.

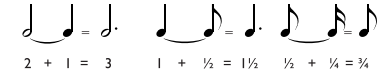


When there are eighth notes, which are only half a beat, we count “&” (“and”) to show the division of the beats into two parts. When a counting number is in parentheses, a note is being held rather than struck.

Ties are a convenient way to notate notes that begin off the beat (on an “&”).

**Dots**

A dot increases the length of a note by one half of its original value. For instance, a half note equals two beats.



Half of its value is one beat (a quarter note). So, a dotted half note equals three beats (2 + 1 = 3). A dotted half note is equal to a half note tied to a quarter note.

Dotted notes are especially important when the time signature is  $\frac{3}{4}$ , because the longest note value that will fit in a measure is a dotted half note.



Also, dotted notes are very important in  $\frac{6}{8}$  time, because not only is a dotted half note the longest possible note value, but a dotted quarter note is exactly half of a measure (counted 1 & a 2 & a).

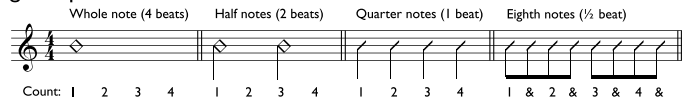
**Beaming**

Notes that are less than one beat in duration are often *beamed* together. Notice the counting numbers: since there are four sixteenth notes in a beat, they are counted “1 e & a, 2 e & a,” etc.



**Rhythmic Notation**

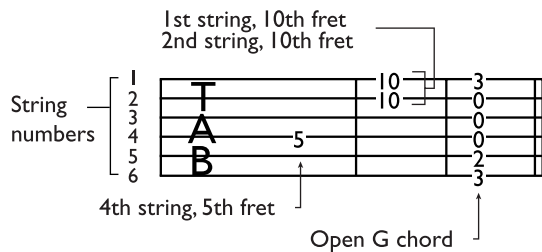
Rhythmic notation is common in guitar music. It is a system of slash marks with stems and beams that notate specific rhythms without specific pitches. Rhythmic notation is usually used to show a rhythm guitar part.



**Reading TAB, Scale and Chord Diagrams**

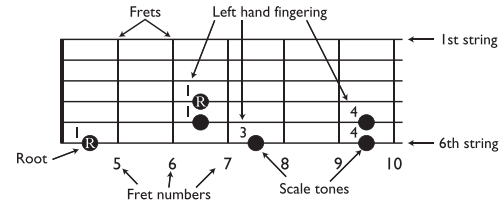
**TAB**

*Tablature* is a system of notation that graphically represents the strings and frets of the guitar fingerboard. Each note is indicated by placing a number, which indicates the fret to play, on the appropriate string.



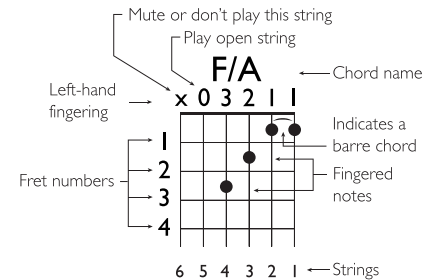
**Scale Diagrams**

The top line of a scale diagram represents the 1st (highest) string of the guitar, and the bottom line the 6th. The vertical lines represent frets, which are numbered.



**Chord Diagrams**

Chord diagrams are similar to scale diagrams, except they are oriented vertically instead of horizontally. Vertical lines represent strings, and horizontal lines represent frets.

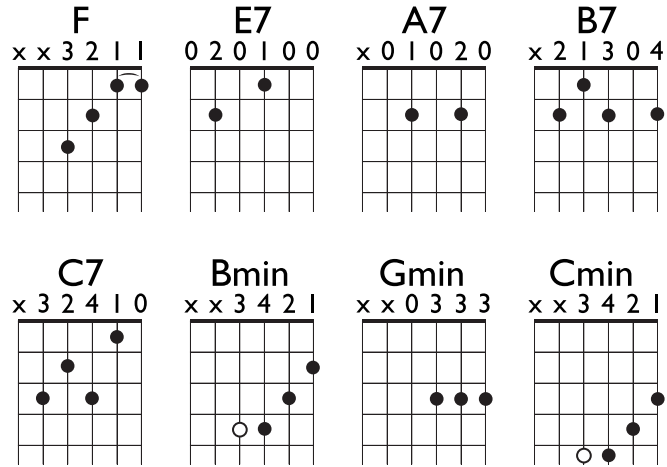


**Roman Numerals**

Here is a review of Roman numerals and their Arabic equivalents.

I or i.....1	IV or iv.....4	VII or vii.....7
II or ii.....2	V or v.....5	VIII or viii.....8
III or iii.....3	VI or vi.....6	IX or ix.....9
X or x.....10	XIII or xiii....13	XVI or xvi....16
XI or xi.....11	XIV or xiv....14	XVII or xvii..17
XII or xii.....12	XV or xv.....15	XVIII or xviii..18

### More Basic Chords to Try



○ = in chord diagram indicates optional fingering.

### Some Terms and Signs

**Repeat.** Return to the beginning or the nearest **||:** and play again.

**H Half Step.** A distance of one fret on the guitar.

**W Whole Step.** Equals two half steps, distance of two frets on the guitar.

**b Flat.** Lower the note one half step (one fret).

**# Sharp.** Raise the note one half step (one fret).

**♮ Natural.** Cancels a sharp or flat.