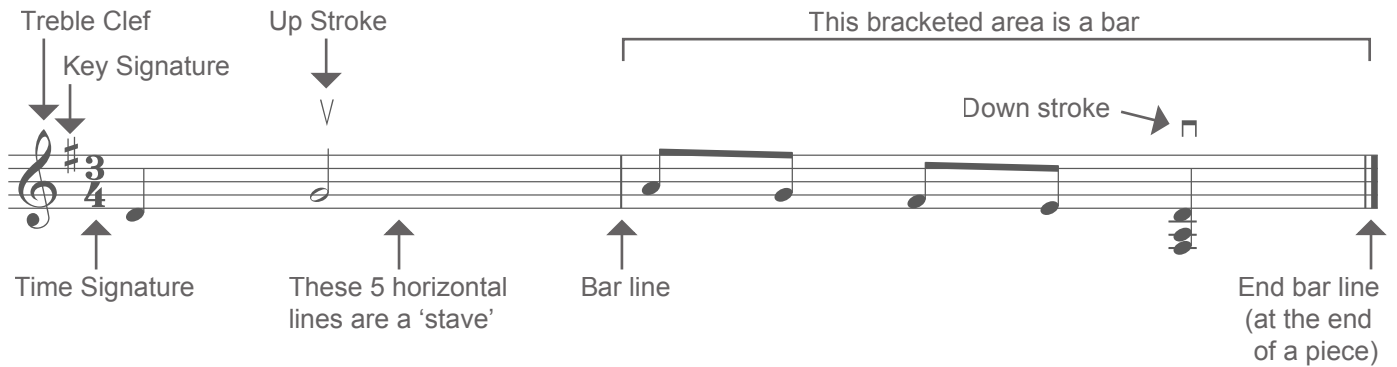


How to Read Sheet Music (notation) for Guitar

This guide will give you a good introduction to reading music notation - a guide for students learning a 6-string guitar (electric, acoustic & classical).

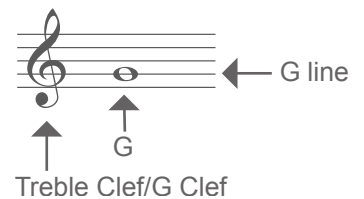
Labelled diagram of music notation:

The diagram below is an example of music notation using the treble clef staff that 6-string guitarists use:



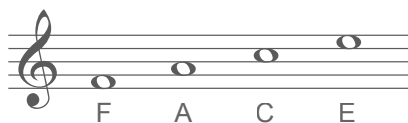
Notes on the staff

The diagram on the right is a Treble Clef or G Clef - it is called this as it surrounds the 'G' line. Now you know where the note G is you can count up (G, A, B, C etc) and down (G, F, E, D etc) the spaces and lines to find out where the other notes are. It is also important to mention that the musical alphabet goes from notes A to G.



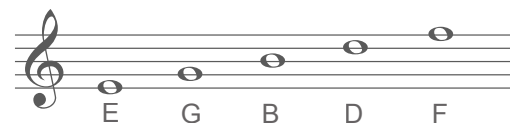
Here are some easy ways to help you remember where the notes on the staff are:

Spaces



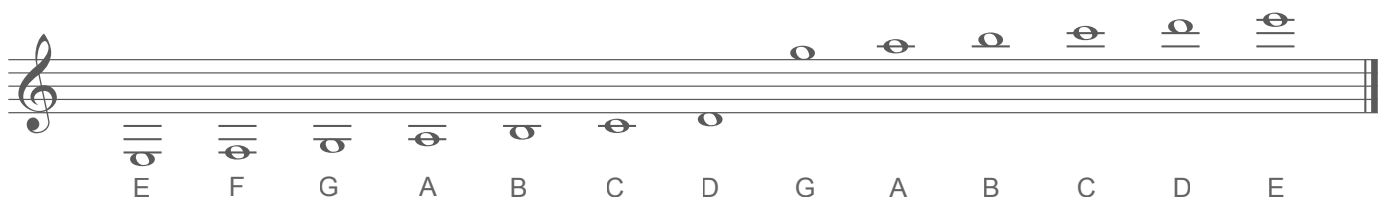
This spells 'FACE'

Lines



Rhyme: Every Green Bus Drives Fast

You will also see notes that go above and below the staff. For these notes we use ledger lines to show us the pitch of the note. For example:



Guitar Fingerboard (Standard Notation) Note Finder

String Numbers: 6 5 4 3 2 1

Open Strings: E A D G B E

1st Fret: F A# D# G# C F

2nd Fret: F# B E A C# F#

3rd Fret: G C F A# D G

4th Fret: G# C# F# B D# G#

5th Fret: A D G C E A

6th Fret: A# D# G# C# F A#

7th Fret: B E A D F# B

8th Fret: C F A# D# G C

9th Fret: C# F# B E G# C#


10th Fret: D G C F A D


11th Fret: D# G# C# F# A# D#


12th Fret: E A D G B E


Rhythms - Note Values

Here are the most common note lengths:

 This is a Semibreve (or whole note) - it lasts for 4 beats


 This is a Minim (or half note) - it lasts for 2 beats

 This is a Crotchet (or quarter note) - it lasts for 1 beat

 This is a Quaver (or eighth note) - it lasts for half a beat.

You will also see quavers grouped as follows:



 This is a Semiquaver (or sixteenth note) - it lasts for a quarter of a beat

You will also see semiquavers grouped as follows:



Here is a handy chart which explains the breakdown of note lengths:

Semibreve (whole note)

4 beats

Minim (1/2 note)

You can fit 2 of these in a semibreve

2 beats each

Crotchet (1/4 note)

You can fit 4 of these in a semibreve

1 beat each

Quaver (1/8 note)

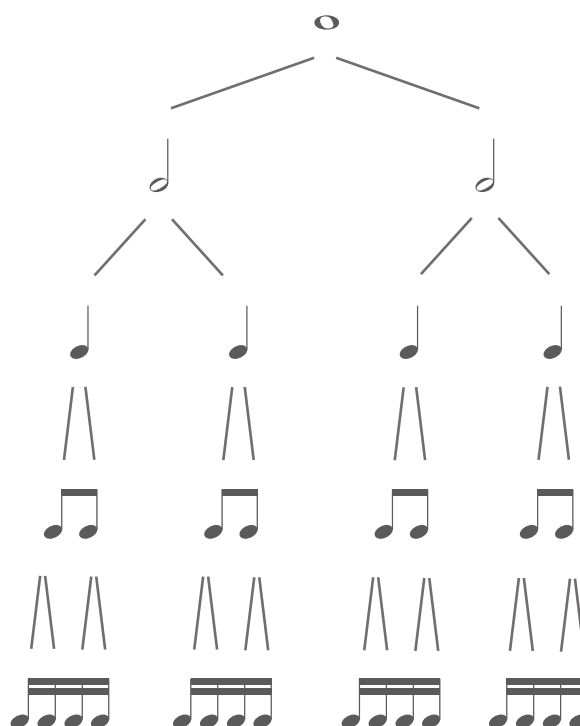
You can fit 8 of these in a semibreve

1/2 a beat each

Semiquaver (1/16 note)

You can fit 16 of these in a semibreve

1/4 of a beat each



Rhythms - Dotted Notes

If you see a dot after a note this extends the length of the note by half of its value. For example:

♩. A dotted semibreve (dotted whole note) is worth 6 beats (4 beats, plus the dot which is 2 beats = 6 beats)

♩. A dotted crotchet (dotted 1/4 note) is worth 1 and a 1/2 beats (1 beat, plus the dot which is 1/2 a beat = 1 and a 1/2 beats)

♪. A dotted minim (dotted 1/2 note) is worth 3 beats (2 beats, plus the dot which is 1 beat = 3 beats)

♩. A dotted quaver (dotted 1/8 note) is worth 3/4 of a beat (1/2 a beat, plus the dot which is 1/4 of a beat = 3/4 of a beat)

Here is an example of music with dotted notes in:



Rhythms - Rests


Where there is a gap in a piece of music you will see symbols called 'rests' which tell you how long to stop playing for. Here's a chart to show rests and their time values:

Note	Beats	Equivalent Rest	Name of Rest
♩	4		Semibreve rest (suspended from the 4th line) Note: the semibreve rest also acts as a 'whole bar rest'
♪	2		Minim rest (mounted on the 3rd line)
♩	1		Crotchet rest
♩	1/2		Quaver rest
♩	1/4		Semiquaver rest
♩.	6		Dotted semibreve rest
♪.	3		Dotted minim rest
♩.	1 1/2		Dotted crotchet rest
♩.	3/4		Dotted quaver rest
♩.	3/8		Dotted semiquaver rest

Note: A semibreve rest is also used as a 'whole bar rest' in any time signature (time signatures are explained on page 6)

Rhythms - Ties & Tempo Markings

A tie joins two notes of exactly the same pitch together to extend the length of the note. You will see ties over bar lines or sometimes within the bar to keep the grouping of the notes correct making the music easier to read. You play the first note and hold it on for the full duration of the two tied notes. For example:




The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of ♩ = 60. The staff contains several measures of music. In the second measure, two eighth notes are tied together with a horizontal line above them. In the third measure, a single eighth note is tied to the first eighth note of the fourth measure. Above the staff, the marking 'rit.' is followed by a dashed line. Above the final note of the piece, there is a fermata symbol.

The 2nd and 3rd notes are tied across the half bar (middle of the bar), so instead of playing two crotchets you would add these together therefore making the note 2 beats long.

The last note (crotchet) in bar 3 is tied to the first note (mimim) in bar 4 so this would last for 3 beats.

Pauses

The symbol above the last note in the above example is a 'pause'  - this means that you sustain this note - the length of the pause is at the performers discretion. You often see pauses at the ends of phrases and/or at the end of a piece of music.

Rit. Rall. & Riten.

The marking above bar 3 is a ritardando (rit.) which means to gradually slow down in tempo (speed). You will also notice that there is either a line or dots after a rit. which indicates how long the gradual tempo change should last. For example: **rit.** You will sometimes see rallentando (rall.) which is an alternative marking for for the same tempo change. There is also Ritenuto (Riten.) which is fairly similar apart from it means to slow down the tempo immediately rather than gradually.

Accelerando

You may also see accel. (accelerando) marked above the staff which requires you to gradually speed up. This too usually has a line or dots after the marking to specify the length of this tempo change. For example: **accel.**

Tempo Markings

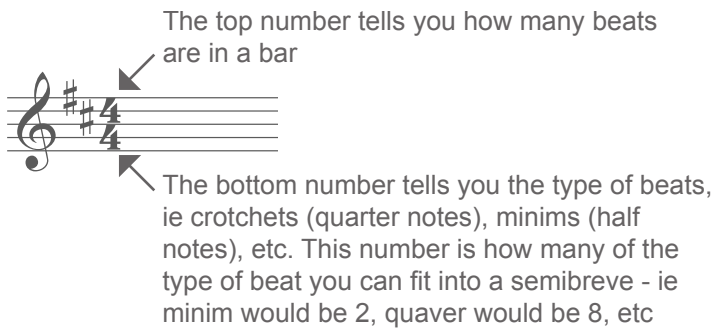
At the beginning of a piece of music the tempo is normally stated - please see our example above where the tempo is ♩ = 60 . The composer/arranger marks this tempo so that the performer knows how fast to play the piece. The number states how many 'beats per minute' and the note value states the type of beat - i.e in our example above there are '60 crotchet beats per minute'. Most performers will use a metronome where you can simply select the beats per minute and then it will sound a pluse at this tempo for you to play along with (note: metronomes are only used whilst preparing pieces of music and not during performances).

A Tempo

'A Tempo' usually appears after a tempo (speed) change, such as a Rit. or Accel. 'A Tempo' means return to the original tempo which is usually stated at the beginning of a piece of music. Here is an example of the 'A Tempo' sign: **A tempo**

Rhythms - Time Signatures

At the start of a piece of music you will see a set of two numbers, one on top of the other. This is called the time signature and this tells you how to count within that piece of music.



The top number tells you how many beats are in a bar

The bottom number tells you the type of beats, ie crotchets (quarter notes), minims (half notes), etc. This number is how many of the type of beat you can fit into a semibreve - ie minim would be 2, quaver would be 8, etc

Here is our handy chart from earlier to help you understand how many of each type of beat fits into a semibreve:

Semibreve (whole note)

Minim (1/2 note)

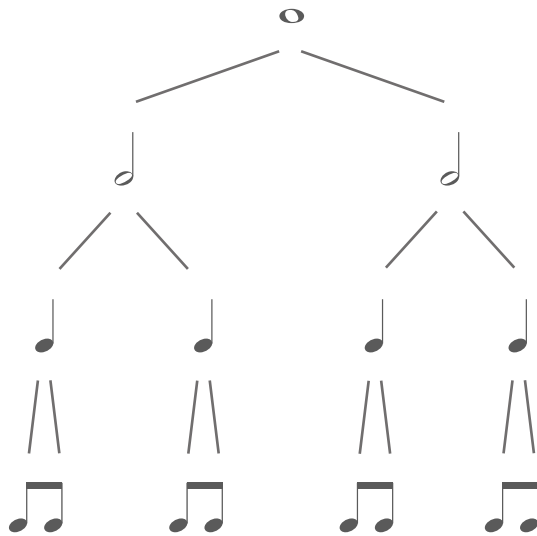
You can fit 2 of these in a semibreve

Crotchet (1/4 note)

You can fit 4 of these in a semibreve

Quaver (1/8 note)

You can fit 8 of these in a semibreve



Here are some time signatures explained:

2 - There are 2 beats in a bar
1 - Semibreve (whole note) beats = 2 Semibreve (whole note) beats per bar



2 - There are 2 beats in a bar
2 - Minim (1/2 note) beats = 2 minim (1/2 note) beats per bar
 ('2' refers to minim beats as this is how many of that type of beat you can fit into a semibreve)



2/2 is also known as 'cut-common time', and can be written as either $\frac{2}{2}$ or C

2 - There are 2 beats in a bar
4 - Crotchet (1/4 note) beats = 2 crotchet (1/4 note) beats per bar
 ('4' refers to crotchet beats as this is how many of that type of beat you can fit into a semibreve)



3 - There are 3 beats in a bar
4 - Crotchet (1/4 note) beats = 3 crotchet (1/4 note) beats per bar

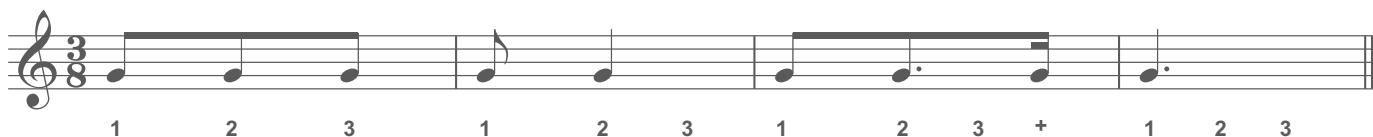


- 4** - There are 4 beats in a bar = 4 crotchet (1/4 note) beats per bar
4 - Crotchet (1/4 note) beats



4/4 is also known as 'common time', and can be written as either $\frac{4}{4}$ or **C**

- 3** - There are 3 beats in a bar = 3 quaver (1/8 note) beats per bar
8 - Quaver (1/8 note) beats
 ('8' refers to quaver beats as this is how many of that type of beat you can fit into a semibreve)



- 6** - There are 6 beats in a bar = 6 quaver (1/8 note) beats per bar
8 - Quaver (1/8 note) beats



Note: It is important to mention that the above 6/8 time signature is grouped in 2 dotted crotchet (2 dotted 1/4 notes) beats per bar which helps you to play more lyrically - this is counted 123, 456 with beats 1 and 4 being emphasised. This also applies to 3/8 which is grouped as 1 dotted crotchet (dotted 1/4 note) beat per bar for the same reason - this is counted 123 with beat 1 emphasised.

Accidentals

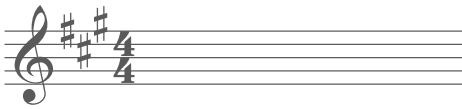
If you play all the notes we have mentioned in the 'Notes on the Stave' section on page 1, you will notice that you haven't used all of the frets on your guitar, so what are the rest for? Well, these are the in-between notes (the same as the black notes on a piano) - the sharps \sharp and flats \flat

\sharp Sharps - If you see these either in a key signature or before a note in a piece of music this means to raise that note by half a step (semitone) - move up one fret.

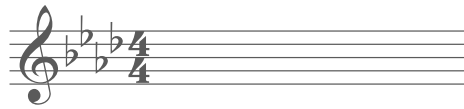
\flat Flats - If you see these either in a key signature or before a note in a piece of music this means to lower that note by half a step (semitone) - move down one fret.

\natural Naturals - You may see a natural sign to cancel out a previous accidental (sharp or flat), or if it is altering an accidental from the key signature. A natural could be raising or lowering depending on whether the note was sharp or flat before. If it was sharp then the natural will lower the note by half a step (semitone) - down one fret, or if the note was flat then the natural will raise the note by half a step (semitone) - up one fret.

When sharps or flats are seen in the key signature (you will not see both at once) then those sharp/flat signs apply throughout the whole piece of music (unless otherwise altered within the music score). For example:



This key signature means that all F's, C's & G's in this piece are sharp (raise by half a step)



This key signature means that all B's, E's, A's & D's in this piece are flat (lower by half a step)

If you see sharps, flats or naturals directly before a note then they effect that particular note and last from their marking for the duration of that bar only and for just that particular note (unless they are cancelled out by another accidental). For example:

This G is also sharp due to the G# accidental 2 notes previous

This G# is cancelled out by the natural

etc.

For a list of all the notes on the guitar shown on the stave and on the guitar fretboard please see our 'guitar fingering chart' on page 2.

Key Signatures

A key signature is a combination of sharps or flats found at the start of a piece of music (after the clef) which indicates the key to play in. A key signature tells you which notes (by their placement on the staff) are consistently played 'sharp' or 'flat' (this applies to the note at any octave). For example:



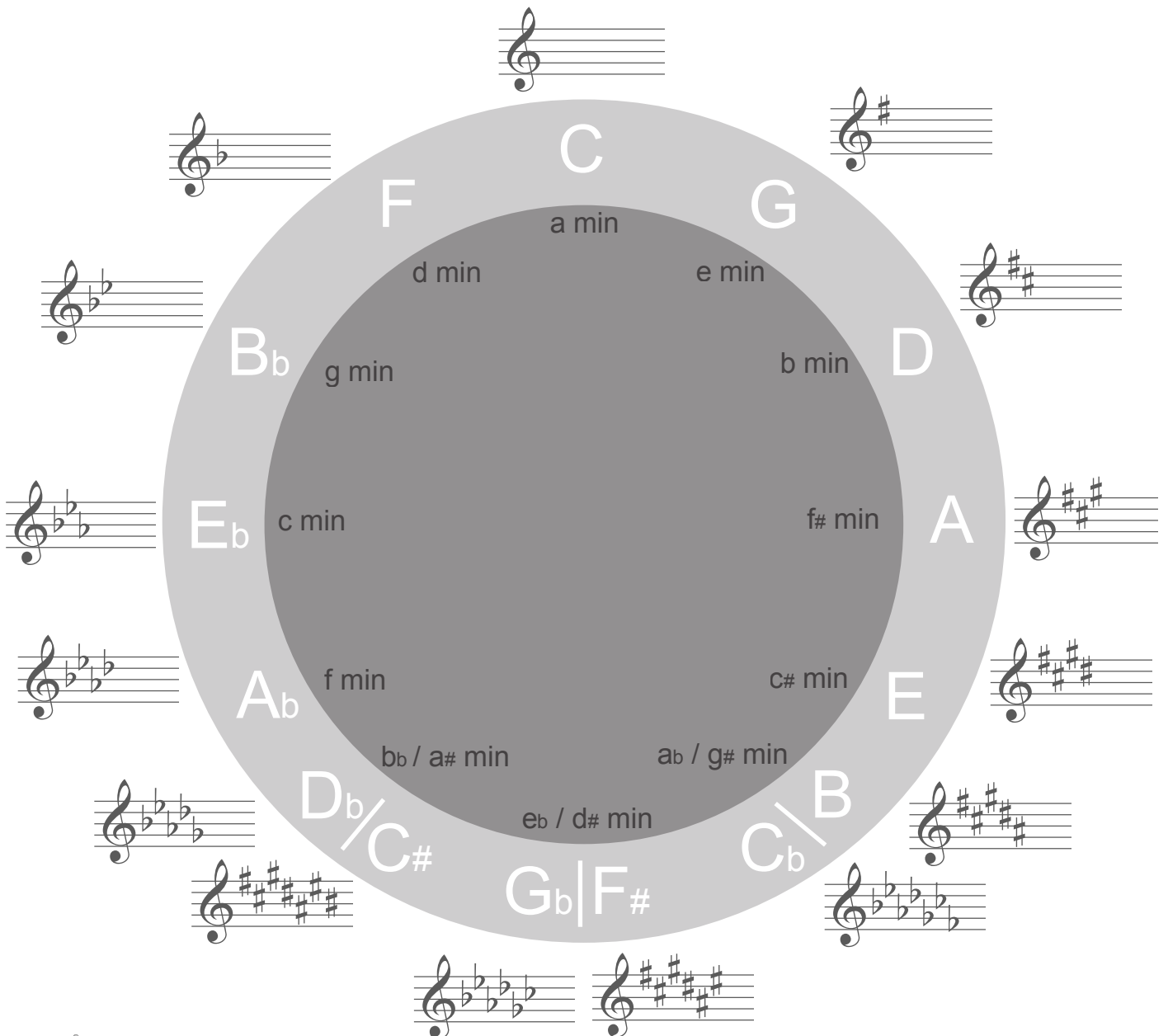
This is the key signature for D Major. It has 2 sharps - F# & C#. This means that any F's & C's in this piece of music will be sharpened (raised by half a step (semitone))




This is the key signature for Bb Major. It has 2 flats - Bb & Eb. This means that any B's & E's in this piece of music will be flattened (lowered by half a step (semitone))

Apart from telling you what key the music is in, a key signature cuts down on the amount of written accidentals within the music. You may see the key signature change part way through a piece of music, this is because as a piece of music progresses it is common for the composer to change key to create a new mood.


Each major and minor key has an allocated key signature. Here is a diagram of the major keys with their key signature and their relative minor keys (the minor key with the same key signature). In the outer ring of the circle you will find the major keys with the relative minor keys in the inner circle:



The sharps or flats in a key signature are always written in the same order:



Sharps, will always go in this order:
F, C, G, D, A, E, B



Flats will always go in this order:
B, E, A, D, G, C, F

An easy way to remember the order of sharps is by using the following rhyme:

Father
Charles
Goes
Down
And
Ends
Battle

You may spot that this is simply the reverse of the order of sharps, so to remember this we can just reverse the rhyme:

Battle
Ends
And
Down
Goes
Charles's
Father

How to work out what key you are in...

Major Keys:

If the key signature has sharps, then go to the last sharp and go up half a step (semitone) to find the major key. For example if you have the following key signature:



Go to the last sharp which is A#, then go up half a step (semitone) to B and this is your major key - B major.

If the key signature has flats, go to the penultimate flat and that is your major key. For example if you have the following key signature:



Go to the penultimate flat which is Eb and this is your major key - Eb major.

Minor Keys:

Find out the name of the major key and then go down 3 half steps (3 semitones) to get to your relative minor key.

For example if you have the following key signature:



This key signature has sharps so if we look at the last sharp which is G#, then go up half a step (semitone) to get to the major key - A major. Then we simply go down 3 half steps (semitones) to get to the relative minor - $\text{f}\sharp$ minor.



An example of this using a flat key signature:



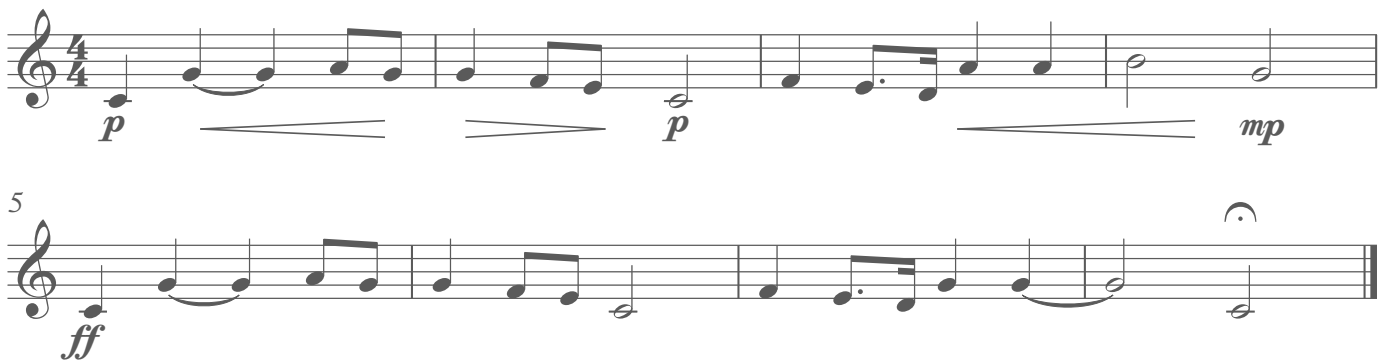
This key signature has flats so go to the penultimate flat which is Eb, that is your major key - Eb major. Then we simply go down 3 half steps (semitones) to get to the relative minor - c minor.

Dynamics

Dynamics tell you how loud or soft to play a section of music. Here is a table of dynamics from quietest to loudest:

Symbol	Italian	English Definition
<i>pp</i>	pianissimo	Very quiet
<i>p</i>	piano	Quiet
<i>mp</i>	mezzo piano	Moderately quiet
<i>mf</i>	mezzo forte	Moderately loud
<i>f</i>	forte	Loud
<i>ff</i>	fortissimo	Very Loud
	crescendo	Gradually becoming louder
	diminuendo / decrescendo	Gradually becoming quieter

You will see dynamic markings underneath the staff and they may change throughout the piece of music as seen in the below example:



Navigation - Repeats, Da Capo, Dal Segno & Codas

To save writing out lots of repeated music within a piece you will see various symbols to tell you where to navigate to within the music - Repeats, Da Capo, Dal Segno & Codas being the most common ways.

Repeat Marks 

If you need to go back to the beginning of the music you will see one repeat mark at the end of the section they want you to repeat up to. For example:



So in the above example you would play bars 1-4, then go back to the beginning and repeat bars 1-4, then continue past the repeat mark on to bar 5 and onwards.

If you need to go back to a specific point within the music then you will see two sets of repeat marks to show you the exact section:



In this example you would play bars 1-13, then you would jump back to the start repeat mark at bar 9 and repeat bars 9-12, then continue past the repeat mark on to bar 13 and onwards.

1st & 2nd Time Endings

Another way to cut down on writing out excess music is to have a 1st time ending and a 2nd time ending. When you reach the end of the 1st time ending you will see a repeat mark which will either send you back to the beginning, or another repeat mark:

The image shows two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4. Measures 1 and 2 are the first time ending, and measures 3 and 4 are the first time ending. A bracket labeled '1.' spans measures 3 and 4. A repeat sign is at the end of measure 4. The second staff contains measures 5 through 8. Measures 5 and 6 are the second time ending, and measures 7 and 8 are the second time ending. A bracket labeled '2.' spans measures 7 and 8. A repeat sign is at the end of measure 8, followed by the text 'etc.'.

In this example the first time you play you would play bars 1-4, then follow the repeat marks back to bar 1. Then you would play bars 1-2, but then instead of playing the 1st time ending (bars 3-4) you would play the 2nd time ending (bars 5-6), then continue on through the music.

Da Capo, Dal Segno & Codas

Da Capo al Fine means 'from the beginning to the end' ('Fine' means end). In this case you would play from bar 1 to 16 then where you see 'Da Capo al Fine' you go back to the beginning and then when you come across the the word 'Fine' this is where you would finish playing. For example:

The image shows three staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff contains measures 1 through 6. The second staff contains measures 7 through 11. The word 'Fine' is written above measure 11. The third staff contains measures 12 through 16. The words 'Da Capo al Fine' are written above measure 16. A repeat sign is at the end of measure 16.

Da Capo al Coda means 'from the beginning to the coda'. Here you would go back to the beginning as stated and then where you see the words 'to coda' or the following symbol \ominus then you would jump to the Coda which will be a separate section at the end of the music and will have the coda symbol at the start of it. For example:

Dal Segno means 'from the sign' and is often abbreviated to D.S. The 'sign' looks like this $\text{\textcircled{S}}$. When you see the words 'Dal Segno' or D.S. then you need to go back and find this sign and repeat from there. If there are no other instructions then you would play this straight through to the end. For example:

Dal Segno al Fine means 'from the sign to the end'. In this case when you see D.S. go back to the sign and then when you come across the word 'Fine' finish playing. For example:

A musical score in 4/4 time, consisting of five staves. The first staff starts with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The second staff begins with a measure number '7' and a 'D.S.' (Da Segno) symbol. The third staff begins with a measure number '12' and the word 'Fine' at the end of the staff. The fourth staff begins with a measure number '18'. The fifth staff begins with a measure number '22' and the words 'Dal Segno al Fine' at the end of the staff.

Dal Segno al Coda means 'from the sign to the coda'. When you see D.S. go back to the sign and then when you see the words 'to coda' or the following symbol \oplus jump to the Coda. The Coda is a separate section at the end of the music and will have the coda symbol at the start of it. For example:

A musical score in 4/4 time, consisting of four staves. The first staff starts with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The second staff begins with a measure number '7' and a 'D.S.' (Da Segno) symbol. The third staff begins with a measure number '12', a 'To Coda' symbol (\oplus), and the words 'Dal Segno al Coda' at the end of the staff. The fourth staff begins with a measure number '17', a Coda symbol (\oplus), and the word 'Coda' at the end of the staff.