

# How to Sight Read

There are 4 main areas you can work on that will have you able to sight read effectively:

1. Rhythm
2. Key recognition
3. Starting note
4. Intervals

If you work on these in turn you will give yourself tools you can use.

## 1. Rhythm

"...the most necessary, most difficult and principal thing in music, that is time," - Wolfgang Mozart

We begin with time.

Find a piece of music and clap along to the rhythm of one staff. When you can do it in time, practice another. You will find that with practice you can do these rhythms without hesitation. Now you have learned rhythm well.

Crotchets are counted      1            2            3            4

Quavers are counted        1    &    2    &    3    &    4    &

Semiquavers are counted    1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

(In time signatures such as 6/8, the quavers are counted as 1 2 3 4 and the semiquavers as 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & , because the beat is measured in quavers)

## 2. Key recognition

Every piece of music is written for a specific scale, or key. Each key has a certain number of sharps or flats. C major has none, which is why it is all white keys on the piano.



If you count **up** 5 notes from C - C D E F **G** - we find G major has 1 sharp. Count up 5 notes from G major, we find D major has 2 sharps etc.

C  
G        #  
D        ##  
A        ###  
E        ####  
B        #####  
F#      #####



Count **down** 5 notes from C - **F** G A B C - F major has one flat. Then count down 5 from the F major scale to find B $\flat$  etc.

C  
F        b  
B $\flat$       b b  
E $\flat$       b b b  
A $\flat$       b b b b  
D $\flat$       b b b b b

## How to Sight Read

### Key Recognition continued -

#### Relative minor

Each major key has a relative minor key. It uses the same 7 different notes (the same sharps or flats) but starts from a different note from the collection.

Count **down** 2 notes to find the note that begins the relative minor - **A B C** ←  
e.g. C major - 2 = A minor.

To distinguish if a piece is in the major or minor key look at the first and last notes for clues. The minor scale often has an accidental #7 taken from the harmonic scale/ dominant chord. If you see a sharp within the piece it is likely to be in the relative minor key. Check if the accidental sharp is the 7th note of the minor scale. E.g. look for a G# if the key signature indicates the piece is in C major or A minor.

### 3. Starting note

Once you identify the starting note of a phrase of music, you can then follow step 4 to play the rest of the phrase up to tempo.

To find the starting note of the treble clef, use the word FACE to help you remember the notes in the spaces of the stave.

To find the note if it's on a line, add or subtract from FACE. E.g. the note of the line above the F from FACE is G.

To find the starting note of the bass clef, use the acronym All Cows Eat Grass to find the notes in the spaces.

As with the treble clef, the notes on the lines can be found by adding or subtracting a note from the ones in the spaces. E.g. the note on the bottom line of the stave is A (for All) minus one, which is G.

### 4. Intervals

Once you have your starting note, you can then follow the intervals. Use my worksheets *Intervals* and *Intervals 2* to learn to do this effectively.

The idea is to see the note you are on (e.g. C), then see that the next note is higher by a 5th. Then you can reach up a 5th (hopefully with an automatic response from practice) to play your new note (G).

Example: After G, your music may have a new note which is a 3rd below it. You can use your fingers to find this new note much quicker than if you were to give it a name, (i.e. E), then find that E on your keyboard.

If your current note (G) is being played by your finger 5, you simply play the note that your finger 3 should be already touching, assuming good finger position (each fingertip on each adjacent note of the scale)