

EncycloMedia Man *by Mike Overly*

Introduction To Staff Notes for Bass Part 1

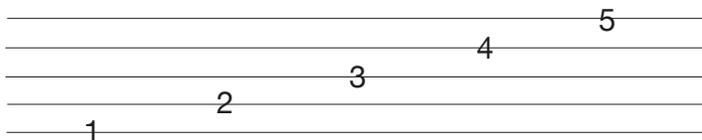
You have been led to believe that if you want to be “serious” about learning bass, you must first learn to read the “notes.” This isn’t true. Unless you are a drummer, you must learn the **letters** of the **staff** before you read the notes.

When you first started to play bass, you did the same thing we all do: you bought a bass and a bass method book 1. This seemed logical, however, this is where your problems began.

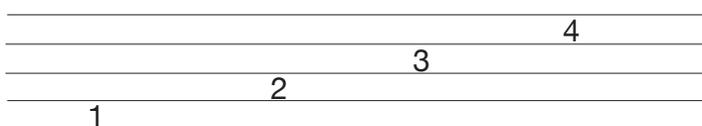
Let’s say you buy the **Hal Leonard Bass Method Book 1** and are all set to play some bass. After a few pages of stuff that you skip over, like: what a bass looks like, how to tune it, how to hold it and which fingers to use; you encounter a page that has a whole bunch of music symbols on it. You know this must be important and that you probably should memorize it, but, you’re so overwhelmed that you just end up turning the page.

So, let’s slow down and discover a different way to make sense of all those music symbols. We’ll begin with the **staff** because this is the first idea of **traditional music theory**, and for a beginning musician playing bass, it’s the start of many unfolding problems.

Music theory teaches that the staff has **5 lines** and **4 spaces** between the lines. The following illustrates the 5 lines of the staff.

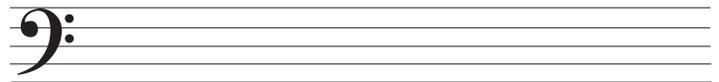


Here are the 4 spaces **between** the lines.



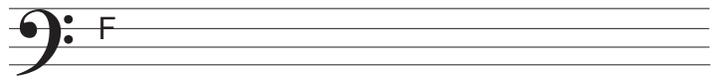
The **Clef** is the next idea presented on the music symbols page and it isn’t even a symbol, it’s a sign! Good thing we learned in the **Tone Note® Music Method for Bass Book 1** that a **symbol** represents something and a **sign** tells you **to do** or **not to do** something.

The purpose of the **clef sign** is to tell you where to place the **letters of pitch** on the lines and spaces of the staff. Although there are many different clef signs, the **F Clef** , also known as the **Bass Clef**, is used for bass staff-note music. The following diagram places the F Clef at the beginning of the staff.



The name of the F Clef is very helpful because it tells you with certainty that the letter **F** is placed on **line four** of the staff. The name Bass Clef isn’t as helpful because the definition of **bass** is “low sounds” and that’s a bit ambiguous.

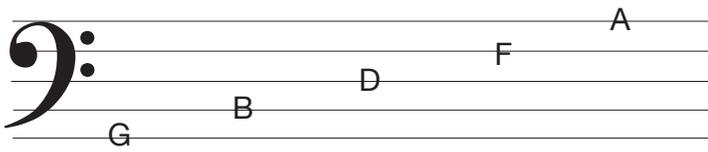
The following example illustrates the **staff**, the **F Clef** and the pitch letter **F** on line four of the staff. Notice that the “two dots” of the F Clef embraces line four.



Since you now know where the letter F is located on the staff, you can easily find the other letter’s locations on the lines of the staff by simply skipping a letter in the 7 letter musical alphabet order. Think of it this way: **A B C D E F G A B C D E F G A...**

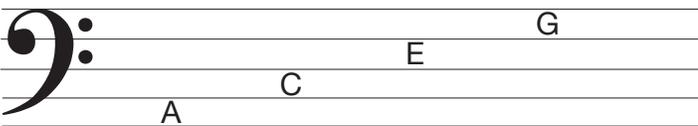
This letter skipping order for the 5 lines of the

staff is easily remembered by this **sentence**: **Good Beginners Do Fine Always**. The following example illustrates the **five letters** of pitch on the **5 lines** of the staff.



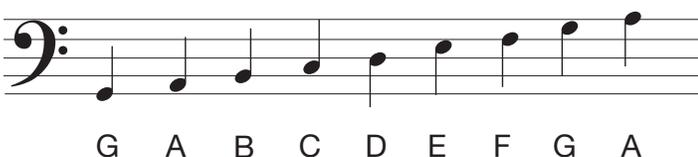
You can easily understand where the 4 space letters are located on the staff by again skipping a letter in the 7 letter musical alphabet. Again, think of it this way: **A B C D E F G**.

This letter skipping order for the 4 spaces of the staff is easily remembered by this **sentence**: **All Cows Eat Grass**. The following diagram illustrates the **four letters** on the **4 spaces** of the staff.



For the remainder of this lesson, a **quarter note** ♩ will be placed on a line or space of the staff to **imply** the **letter of pitch** that is to be thought. Notice that the **stem** that is attached to the head of the quarter note may be **up** or **down**. This is done to keep the stem on the staff. In our next lesson, **Introduction to Staff Notes for Bass Part 2**, we'll go into much greater detail about **rhythm**.

The following diagram illustrates the nine pitch letters on the staff.



Here's something interesting. Most instruments are **monophonic** and **isotonic**. The definition of **mono** is **one** and **phonic** is **sound**. A monophonic instrument can play only **one sound at a time**. In other words, monophonic instruments **cannot** play **harmony**. The majority of instruments are monophonic.

The definition of **iso** is **one** and **tonic** is **sound**. An isotonic instrument has only **one location** for each individual sound on that instrument. In other words, there is only one place to play a single staff-note pitch. Think of it this way, when a piano player reads a staff note there is no question where to play it because there is only one key on the piano that will make that pitch. Said a different way, no two keys on the piano play the same sound!

The definition of **poly** is **more than one** and **phonic** is **sound**. A polyphonic instrument can play more than **one sound at a time**. In other words, polyphonic instruments **can** play **harmony**. The piano is polyphonic and isotonic. In contrast, the bass is polyphonic and **unison**.

The definition of **uni** is **one** and **son (sonus)** is **sound**. A unison instrument has **more than one location** for an individual sound on that instrument. In other words, there is more than one location to play a single staff-note pitch. Think of it this way, when a bass player reads a staff note, a decision must be made as to where that staff note is to be played. This decision making process is made even more difficult when harmony is involved. As you can see, the **polyphonic** and **unison** bass has a steep learning curve. So, don't underestimate the importance of **Bass Fretboard Flashcards**, available in 4, 5 and 6 string editions. <www.12tonemusic.com/bass/flashcards/>

'til next time, have some **Polyphonic** and **Unison Staff-Note** fun... I'll be listening!

Grammy® nominated Music Educator **Mike Overly** clarifies the bass learning process with his path-breaking **Tone Note® Music Method for Bass**, **Bass EncycloMedia**, **Bass Fretboard Facts** and **Fretboard Flashcards for 4, 5 and 6 String Bass**. Be sure to follow Mike at his new blog: **12tonemusic.wordpress.com** to stay up to date with the latest thoughts and ideas about **Music Education for Guitar and Bass!**