

# Music Notation 4

## Music Fundamentals

14-119-T

In the previous lectures, I tried to present material to you in a concise and easy to understand way. Hopefully, this has given you the necessary tools to begin developing your proficiency in reading music. The goal of this lecture is to answer many of the questions you may have about notation. In other words, we can now begin to refine your skills.

### Accidentals:

You may have noticed a couple of odd-looking symbols in Lecture 2 during our discussion of *accidentals*. Additionally, you may even be confused about what is meant by *accidental*. I assure you that it has nothing to do with a mistake or “accident.” Simply, accidentals are symbols placed before notes that alter the pitch [see figure1]. They are always placed just left of the note they apply to as in figure 3. The third note in this example is a **B-flat**. Do you see the accidental to the left of this note? Without this accidental, the note would simply be a **B-natural**, a pitch entirely different.

As mentioned earlier, sharps raise the pitch 1/2 step and flats lower the pitch 1/2 step. New to our discussion is the double-sharp and double-flat. The double-sharp simply raises the pitch 2 X 1/2 steps (or a whole step), and the double-flat lowers the note a whole step. For example, the *enharmonic* of a **B-double-flat** is **A**. Does this make sense? If not, review the keyboard. Start at **B**, and move down two keys [see figure 2].

figure 1

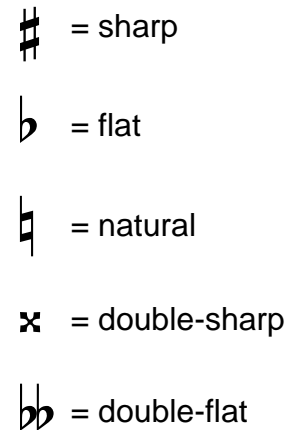
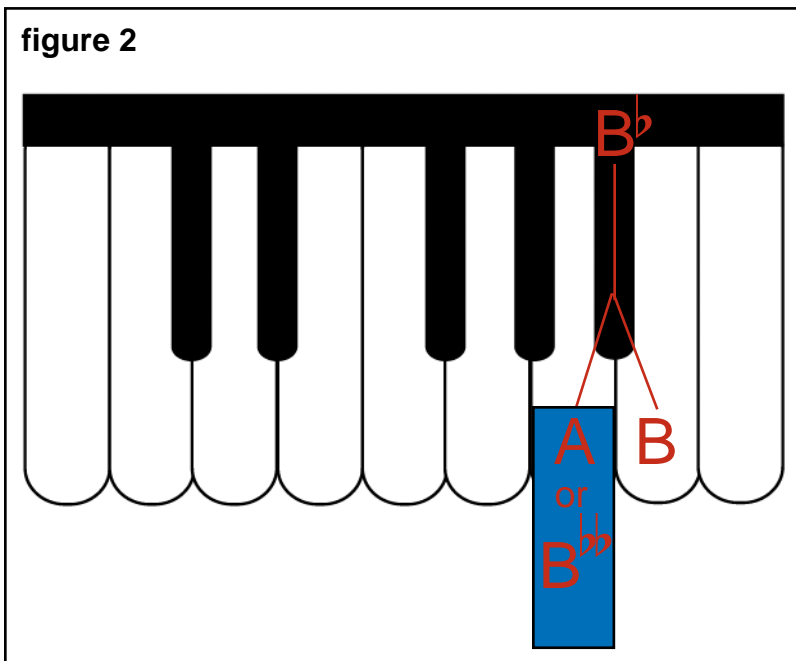


figure 2



In notation, accidentals carry throughout the *measure* for the note, but it does not alter notes with the same name in other octaves. Therefore, as in figure 3, the second **C** in the measure is a **C-sharp** because the first **C** is a **C-sharp**. A *natural* accidental is simply placed for courtesy. Although the third **C** in figure 3 is in another octave, most scores will place a natural accidental to simply clarify that the note should be played without any *chromatic* alteration. *Chromatic* is a term we will discuss later, but for now, think of this term as any change in a note from its natural state. For example, a **C-sharp** is a chromatic alteration of **C**. Also, we find a natural attached to the fourth note (**B**). This removes the chromatic alteration (the flat

on the third note). Any **B** that may follow this one within the *measure* will remain natural unless another accidental is placed in front of it to chromatically alter the note.

**figure 3**

This note is still “c-sharp” because of the first c-sharp in the measure

“c-sharp”  
(c-sharp 5, or one octave above middle C)

“b-flat”

I have introduced a few new terms and tried to further explain some old terms in the first part of this lecture. The new terms will be discussed further in a later lecture. For review and discovery, here are some brief term definitions that you may find helpful.

Accidentals: Symbols placed before notes that alter the pitch.

Sharp: An accidental that raises the pitch 1/2 step.

Flat: An accidental that lowers the pitch 1/2 step.

Natural: 1)An accidental that removes any chromatic alteration to a pitch. 2)Whenever there is no chromatic alteration to a pitch, the note is said to be natural. 3)Natural notes are any of the white keys on the keyboard.

Double-sharp: An accidental that raises the pitch two-1/2 steps.

Double-flat: An accidental that lowers the pitch two-1/2 steps.

Whole Step: Two-1/2 steps.

Chromatic alteration: Changing a natural note by applying an accidental. For example, **A-sharp** is a chromatic alteration of **A**.

Measure: A linear division of the staff. Lines, called barlines, indicate the start and end of a measure.

### The C-clefs:

You may remember from the first notation lecture that there are four standard clefs used today. By now, you should be becoming more proficient at reading music using the treble and bass clefs. Just

as these two clefs have their roots based in letters from our alphabet (G and F respectively), the alto and tenor clefs are also based on letters. From the heading of this section, you can probably guess that the alto and tenor clef is based on the letter C. Sometimes known as C-clefs, these clefs identify the location of **middle C (C4)** in the staff. C-clefs are probably the oldest clef in music notation. First used in Gregorian chant, they could be placed anywhere in the staff to indicate the placement of **middle C**. Consider yourself lucky! Instead of learning only four clefs, you would have had to learn over twice that number of clefs during the middle ages. In Gregorian chant notation, in addition to c-clefs on any line, we also find f-clefs on any line. How confusing! During the renaissance (ca. 1400-1600) and baroque eras (ca. 1600-1750), c-clefs were still being used, although they were somewhat more standardized. Most notable was the soprano clef. Today, if you have an opportunity to perform music from these eras, it is possible (although unlikely due to editor editions) that you may have to read clefs other than the four used today. Don't worry if you're thrust into that situation because the formula for reading all C-clefs is the same. If you know where **middle C** is, you can find any other note. **Middle C** is always the line that runs through the middle of the clef [see figure 4]!

You may be asking why we still use alto and tenor clefs. After our discussion of the grand staff, why would we need any other clefs? The answer is simple. Remember that clefs were implemented to keep as much music within the staff as possible. The viola, a string instrument similar to a violin but pitched lower, is the only instrument in the orchestra today that utilizes the alto clef. You may be wondering why then you should have to learn this clef if there is only one instrument that uses the clef, and since you probably are not a viola player. One response to this is that during your journey to gain a better understanding of music and music theory, you will inevitably hear a string quartet (there are thousands of compositions for string quartet). The viola is one of the instruments in a string quartet. Additionally, the viola plays a vital role in the orchestra.

The tenor clef is read by bassoon, cello, and trombone players. These musicians are unique, because not only do they have to read the tenor clef, but they may also be called to read the bass clef and treble clef within a single piece of music, or even a musical phrase! At this point, you are equipped to practice the entire notation module and work on your proficiency at note identification.

