

Bass Fundamentals

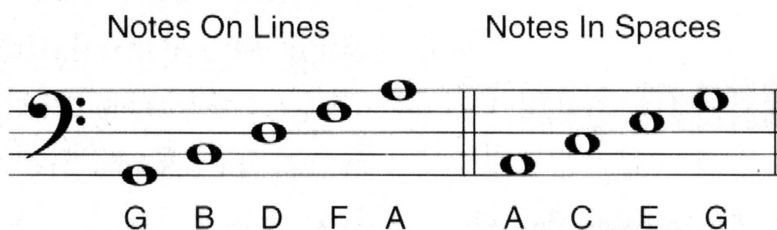
Column #7 – Learning To Read Notation, Pt. 2

Let's start breaking down the elements of notation that you will need to know and get you started on the path to liberation and freedom from the tyranny of the nemesis called tablature. But, before you do, download the bass fret board chart from the www.fretboard.com website. You'll need it.

The first thing is the music staff. Below we have both the Bass and Treble clef (staff).

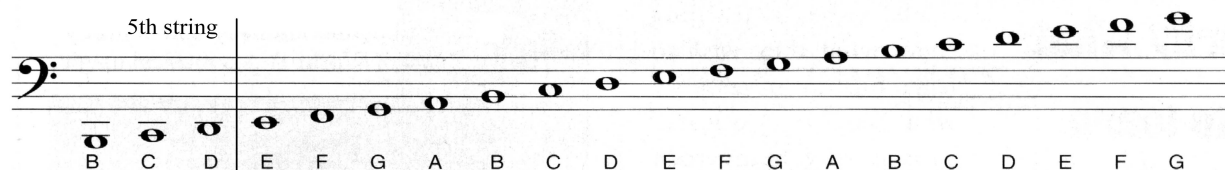


Okay, now let's show the notes on the clef.

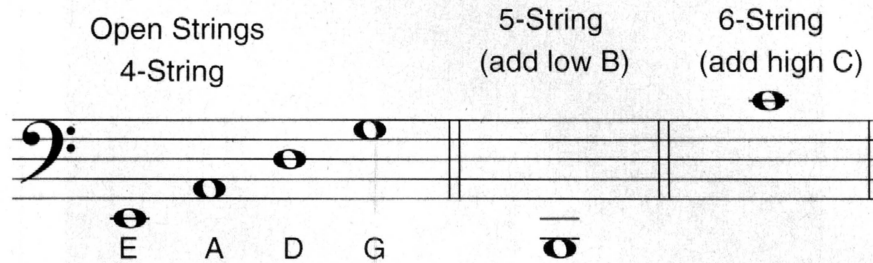


Still with me? Good. Seriously, you need to learn this stuff. If you didn't read the previous installment, go back and learn why.

Now we'll lay out the whole staff and the notes all the way up, and beyond. When notes fall below or occur above the staff, "ledger lines" are used to help you know what the note is. You'll learn more about that over time. It's actually very logical and pragmatic. Note, too, the divider for those of you who do not play a 5 string instrument, for if/when you eventually add that to your arsenal.

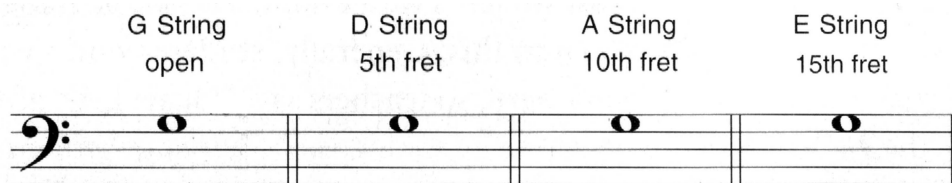


Next you need to identify the open string notes. This will help you to have a sense of the "in between" notes until you get to know where they are, where they fall in relation to the open strings.



Don't worry if this is all beginning to look like Greek. It is a written form of the language of music. It will take a little time before you begin to really get the hang of it. But you will. Just be patient with yourself, be persistent in your desire to learn this. It will be worth it, trust me.

The next graphic shows you the very same G tone as it occurs on all four strings of the standard bass guitar. This is important to know because you have to know where all the notes are on the fret board, and which octave they occupy. If you don't have a clue, it will hurt you in the long run the longer you resist learning every note everywhere on the neck.



Now let's play the C Major scale. Remember: Scales are not key dependent, they can be moved everywhere - and so should be practiced everywhere. So, this should properly be said to be the Major scale, in the key of C. It starts at the 3rd fret on the third string or on the 8th fret of the fourth string. Use a metronome set at around 60-72 beats per minute and play one note per beat, four beats to a measure.



Take your time and just allow yourself the time to absorb all this stuff. It is a language, which you already can speak, but which you just can't read. Remember how long it took you to learn to read in grade school? Yeah, but this time it should be easier, at least in the sense that you will learn quicker!

Okay, now let's do something easy, something you already know, a Blues progression, though maybe not this particular progression. This one is in G, and starts on the 4th string at the third fret. That's the only hint I'll give you. You have all the information you need in this lesson. It will take a little while, but once you figure it out, you'll see how this reading stuff can work. Once you have it figured out, play it smooth and easy, one note per beat.

The image shows two lines of musical notation for an electric bass. The first line starts at measure 1 and ends at measure 6. The second line starts at measure 7 and ends at measure 12. The notation is in bass clef with a common time signature (C). The first line has a G7 chord above measures 1-4 and a C7 chord above measures 5-6. The second line has a G7 chord above measure 7, a D7 chord above measure 8, a C7 chord above measure 9, a G7 chord above measure 10, and a D7 chord above measure 11. The notes are quarter notes, and the piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

For a real workout on reading, I recommend to all students and aspiring readers the following book:

Reading Contemporary Electric Bass by Rich Appleman
Berkeley Press – ISBN: 0-634-01338-6

I do not get compensation for this recommendation. It is freely given because it is worthwhile. Just remember, when you're sight reading, **do not memorize anything**; play each exercise a couple times and move on. Don't worry about perfection. Just learn, play and move on.

If you invest the time, the attention, and the focus, you will find yourself reading at a pretty good level after a few weeks. The one thing you really need to understand about reading music, though, is that you have to do it every day if possible. It is not like reading a book. Reading music is a skill that has to be maintained, just like your facility and technique on the instrument. Lay off, and you will lose a little bit; and the longer you lay off, the worse you will become when you decide to get back to playing/reading. The good news is, though, it will return pretty quickly, perhaps within a few days to a week. The benefit being that you know the notes now, and don't need to relearn from the beginning.

I don't recommend letting that happen. I play piano, so I am reading both treble and bass clefs at the same time. When I switch to the bass guitar, my reading is still good, but playing the bass is different, so while I may know all the notes easily enough, playing them on the bass, if I haven't practiced, will be a little tedious until I reorient myself, which can take a day or two in extreme

cases. But I don't let that happen. Neither should you, if you're taking the time to learn. Make sure you maintain your skills and you'll be fine!

In the next column: Note values.