

The Black Keys

Double agents that hold the key to other keys

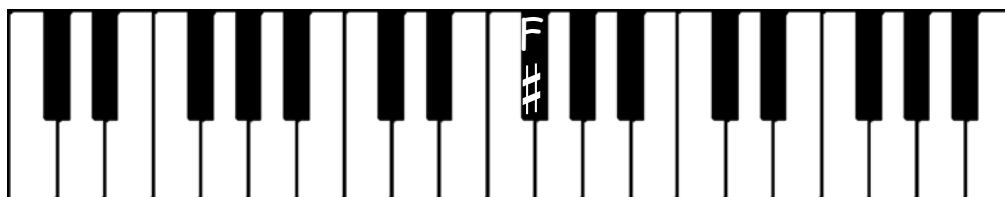
Except for B flat, we've not discussed the black keys. Now let's focus on them and get to know them. Black keys each have two names, depending on the key you're in, or how they're being used.

The name of the black key can either be a sharp name, or a flat name.

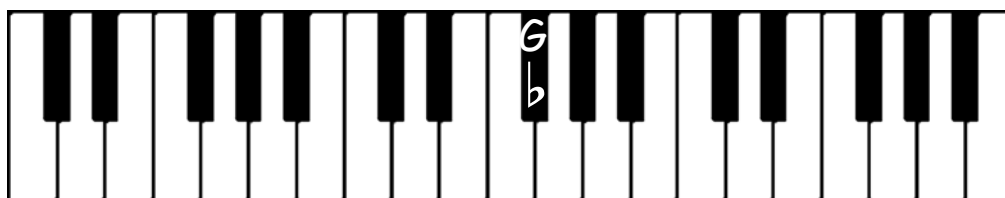
The sharp symbol looks like the pound sign on your phone, except it's cursive and it's skewed slightly. Here's the note F sharp:



Here's the note F sharp on the keyboard:



But this note could also be spelled G flat:

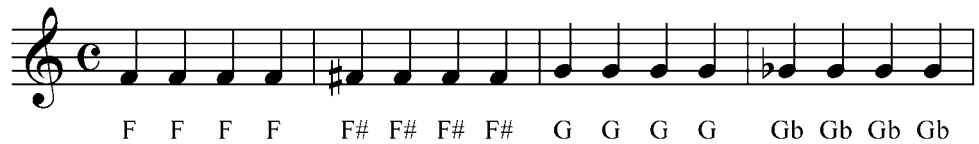


On the staff, it looks like the note G, but with the flat symbol before it.

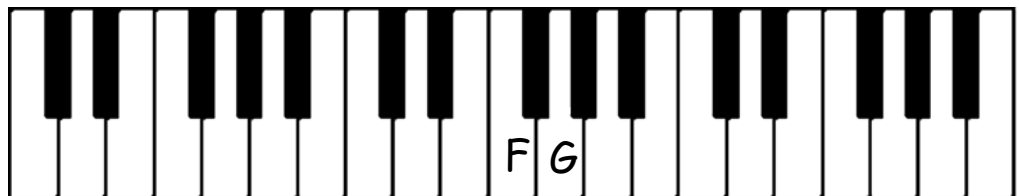


Notes can either be flatted in the key signature, which we discussed briefly in Chapter 2, or they can be altered at any time using either an **accidental**. Accidentals are not, as they sound, accidents, but they bring the note outside of its original key. Usually this means replacing a white key with a black key that's either just below or just above the original white key.

One of the rules that usually confusing people when they first start to read music is that an accidental is good throughout an entire measure. So it only needs to be written once to count:



F# or Gb



If you want to change a note back from being altered in a measure, you have to use the **natural** symbol, which looks like this:

Natural symbol cancels accidentals



Keeping the accidentals straight is one of the most difficult aspects of music reading.

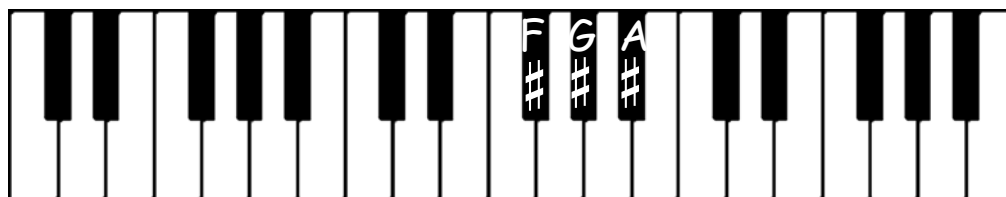
Let's first look at the group of three black keys.

These can alternately be named:

- F sharp
- G sharp

and

- A sharp

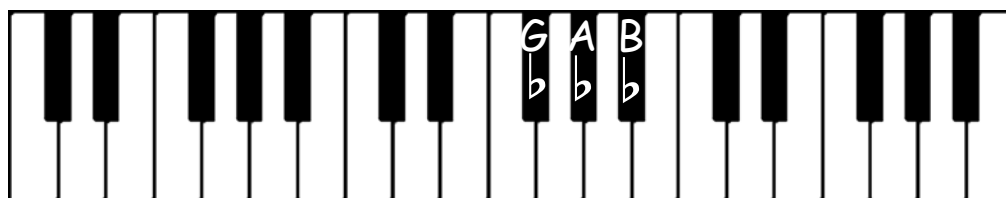


or

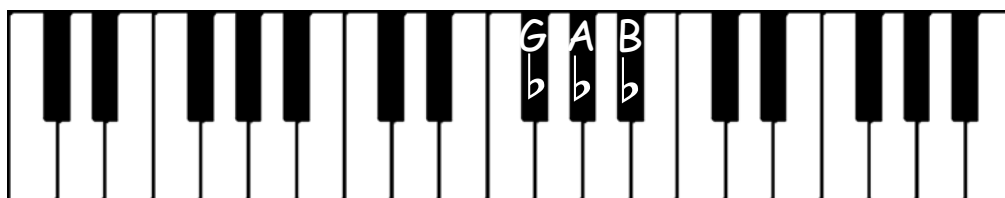
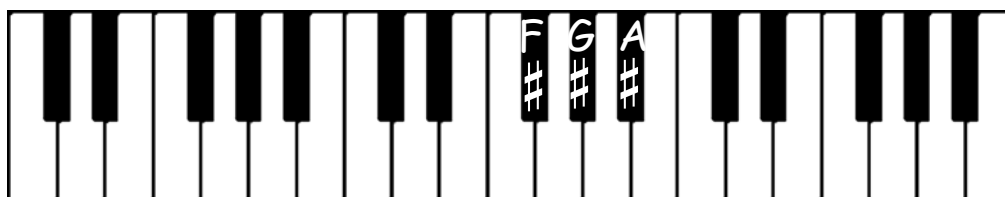
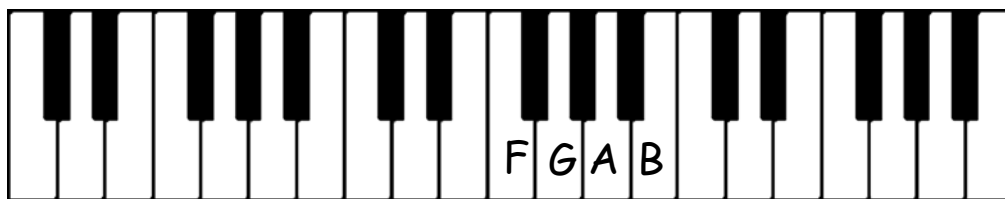
- G flat
- A flat

and

- B flat



Use these three charts to read the music below:



Musical notation (treble clef, common time) for the first five notes of the scale. The notes are: B, G, B, A, G. The notes B, A#, B, A# are also present in the sequence.

B G B A G B A# B A# B G Bb G

Musical notation (treble clef, common time) for the next five notes of the scale, starting at measure 6. The notes are: Bb, Bb, G, A, G#, A, G#, A, Ab, G, G, F#, G, G#, A, Ab, A, A#.

6 Bb Bb G A G# A G# A Ab G G F# G G# A Ab A A#

Musical notation (treble clef, common time) for the final five notes of the scale, starting at measure 11. The notes are: B, Bb, A, Ab, G, F#, G, G, F#, F, F#, G.

11 B Bb A Ab G F# G G F# F F# G

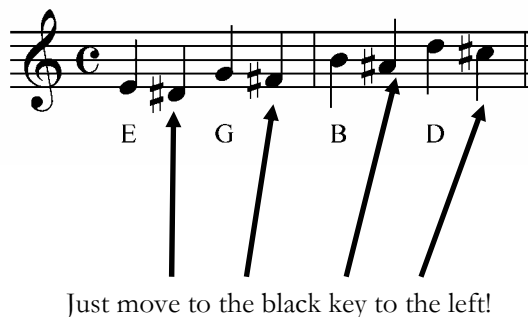
Now after you've practiced using the last page, do this exercise without referring to any of the helpers on the last page. Ideally, you want to get to the point where you can play this without looking at your fingers!



Often times, you can use context to help you find a note without knowing exactly what it is. For example, here's one trick for the first four lines of the staff:



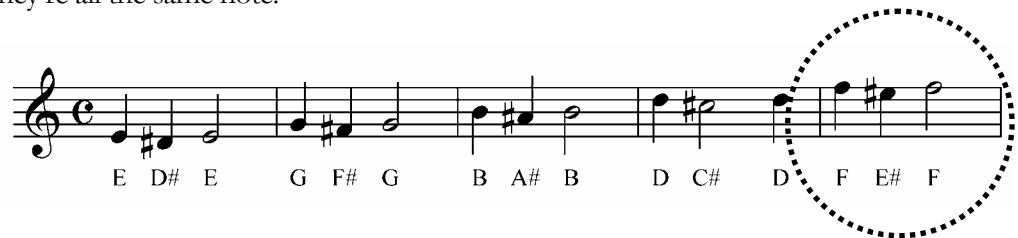
If the note just below these notes is a sharp, it will be the black key just to the left.



Here are the names of these black keys from the previous example. The last three you should recognize because they are the first three spaces of the staff.



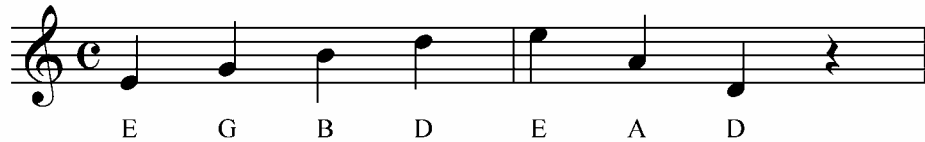
This trick of moving to the black key to the left doesn't work for the top line, because the top line is the note F, and there is no black key to the left of the key F. In fact, you will probably never see these three notes together because of one interesting fact: they're all the same note!



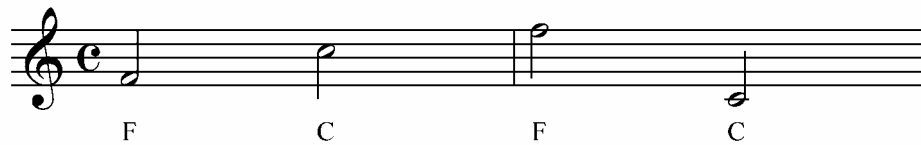
ALL THE SAME NOTE!

E# is very rarely used – it's the same note as F!

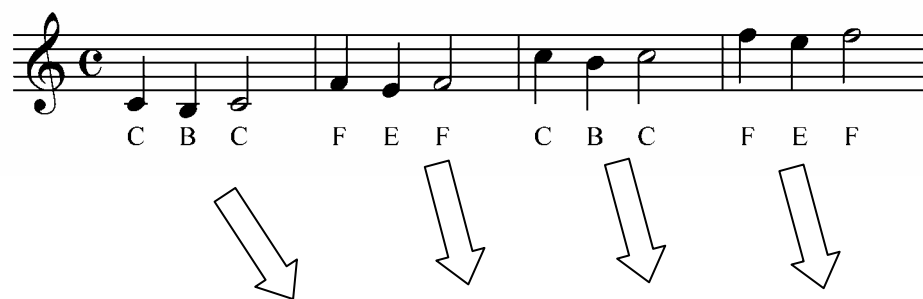
Here are notes that have a black key to the left:



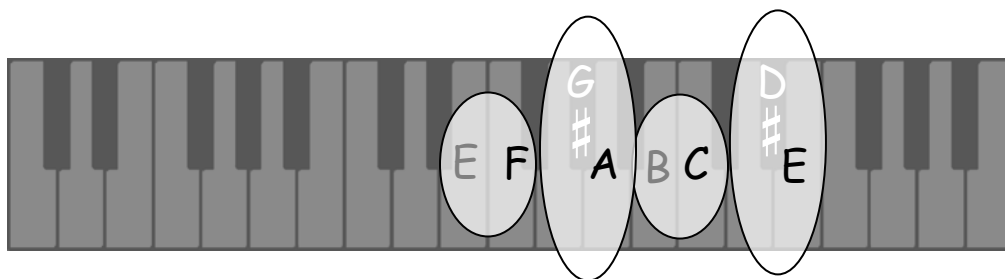
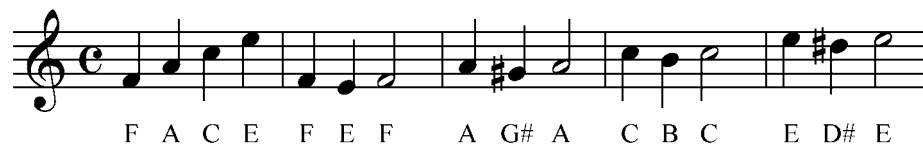
Here are notes that don't have a black key to the left, and must be watched out for!



These are the places on the piano where there no black keys. So the key just to the left of each of these keys is another white key.



Notice that among the spaces on the staff, it's a 50/50 split. The A and E each have black keys to the left, and the F and C do not.



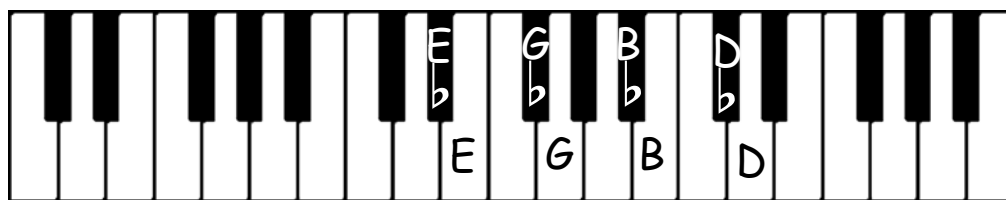
Sometimes you'll see notes that are right next to each other in a chord. For example:

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

Here are the same elements we've gone over only with flats:

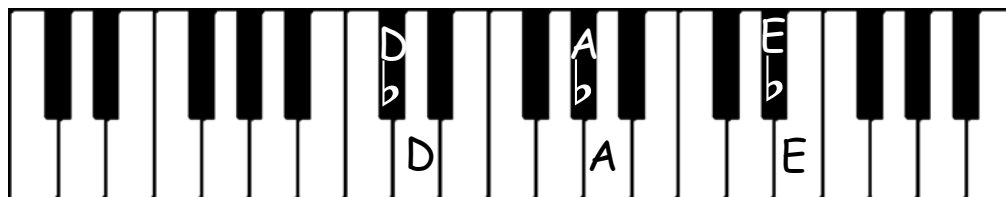
The lines and their "just-to-left" black key neighbors:

E Eb E G Gb G B Bb B D Db D



The spaces with "just-to-left" black key neighbors:

D Db D A Ab A E Eb E



And of course, the other two spaces, C and F, have white keys to their left.

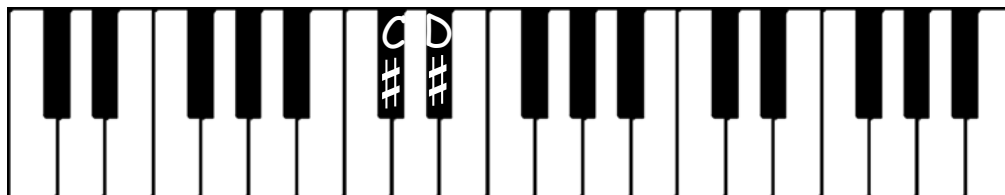
OK, now let's look at the group of two black keys:

These can alternately be named:

- C sharp

and

- D sharp



or

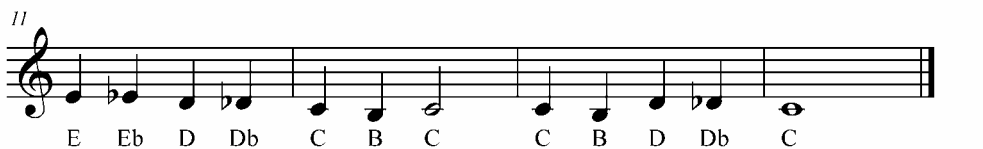
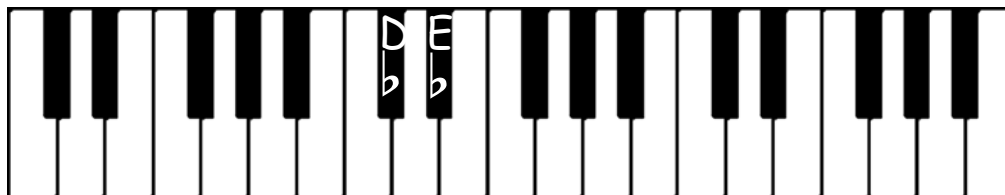
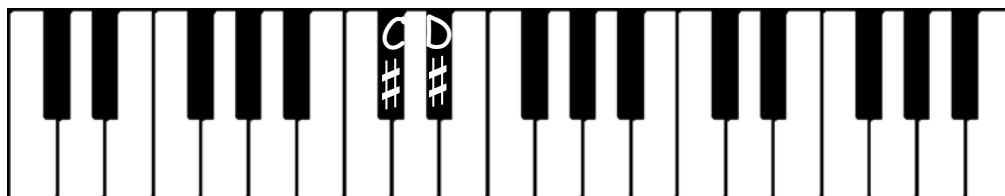
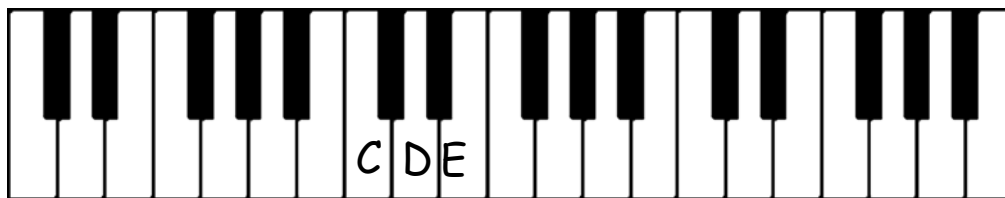
- D flat

and

- E flat



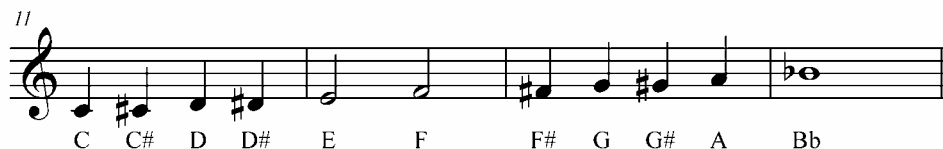
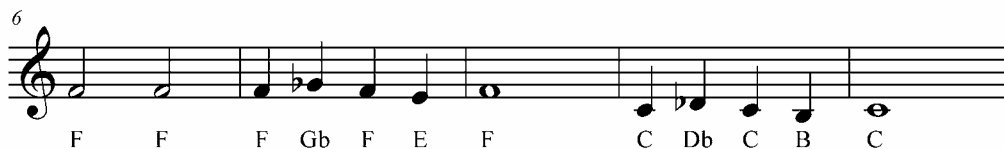
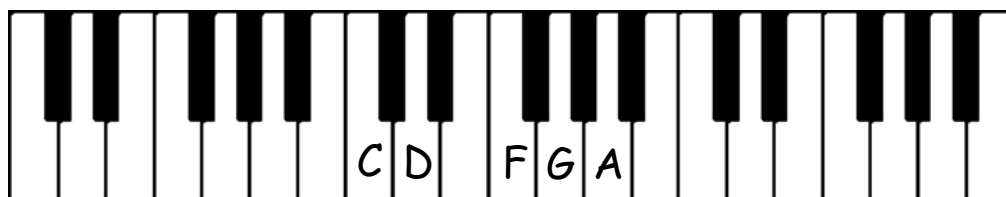
Use these three charts to read the music below:



Now after you've practiced using the last page, do this exercise without referring to any of the helpers on the last page. Ideally, you want to get to the point where you can play this without looking at your fingers!



Now let's look at black key neighbors on the *right* side of white keys. Here are the five keys that have black keys on their right:



My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean

C# A# G# F# G# F# D# C# A#

Db Bb Ab Gb Ab Gb Eb Db Bb

White keys:

C A C F G F D C A

Ledger Lines Below The Staff

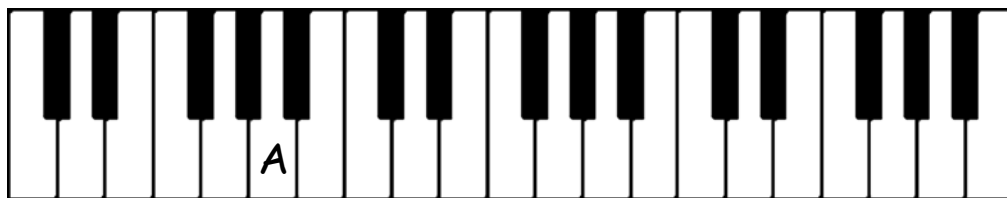
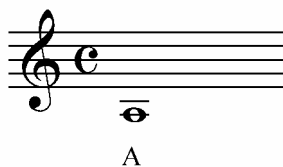
In the last few pages, you've seen a few notes we haven't discussed yet. These notes go down below the staff. First let's talk about the note "middle C". Middle C is on the first ledger line below the staff.



On the piano, this note will be close to the middle of the piano. It sits just to the left of the group of two white keys.



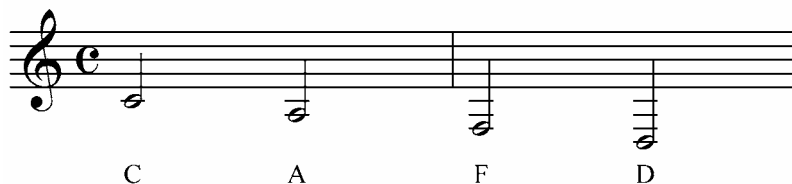
The next ledger line is the note A, which is down an octave from the A we've already learned:



Go back to the previous page and play through "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" on the white keys and notice these two notes.

Change Any Funky Diapers

The next two ledger lines below the staff are less common. The 3rd ledger line is F and the fourth ledger line is D. To remember the ledger lines below the staff, you can remember the mnemonic “change any funky diapers”.



This gives us quite a stretch now between the lowest line we’ve learned and the highest!

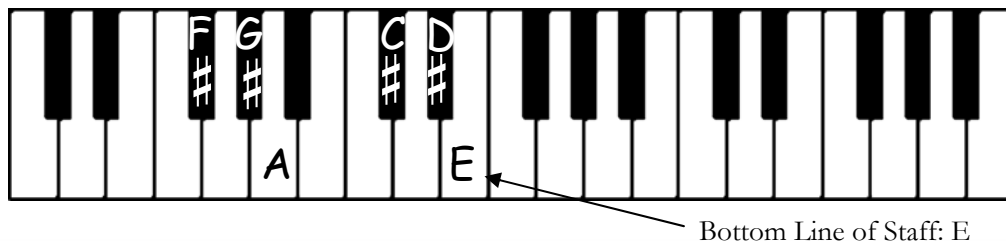
A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It shows a sequence of nine notes: D, F, A, C, E, G, B, D, F. The first four notes (D, F, A, C) are grouped by a bracket underneath, and the last five notes (E, G, B, D, F) are grouped by another bracket underneath.

Change Any
Funky Diapers

Every Good Boy
Does Fine

“Moonlight Sonata”

Here are the first nine measures of Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata”. Beethoven uses these notes below the staff frequently:



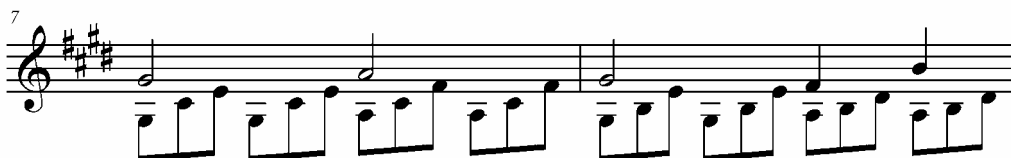
G# C# E (etc.)



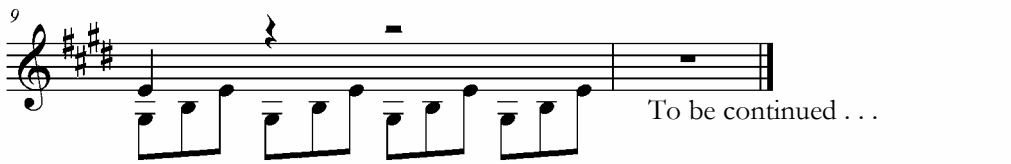
A C# E A C# E A D F# A D F# G# C F# G# C# E G# C# D# F# C D#



E G# C# G# C# E G# C# E G# G# G# G# G# G# G# G#
G# C# E G# D# F# (etc.) G# D# F#



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



E G# B E (etc.)

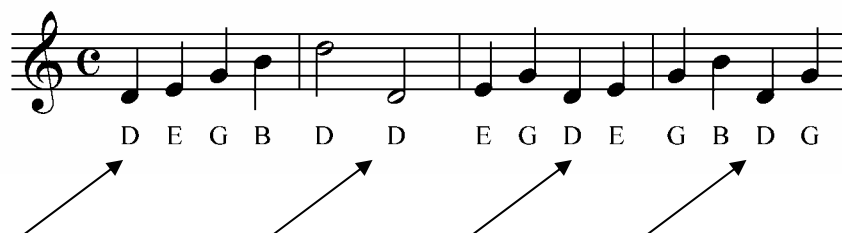
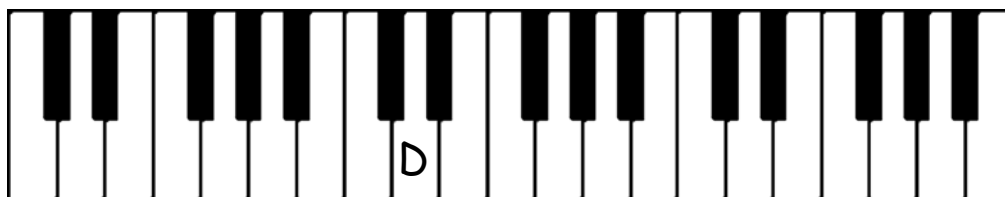
To be continued . . .

Now let's focus on the note D. This note is just above middle C, but below the first line of the staff, so it will sit

A) just below the staff

and

B) without a ledger line – it's above the first note with a ledger line.

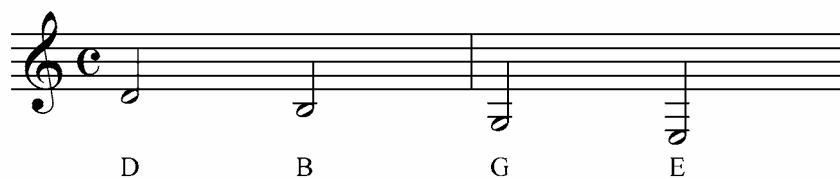


Here's the same selection, but without the notes written in.

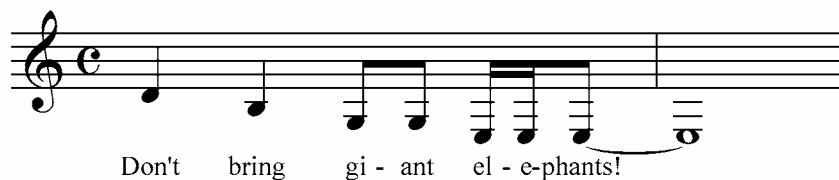


Don't Bring Giant Elephants

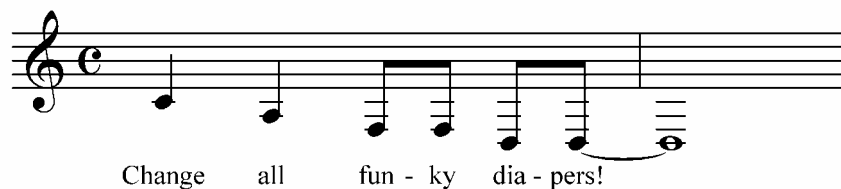
The spaces below the staff are a little trickier than the lines because they just under a line (unless they are part of a chord that goes below them).



- D sits just below the first bottom line of the staff, E
- B sits just below the first ledger line below, C
- G sits just below the second ledger line below the staff, A
- E sits just below the third ledger line below the staff, F



Compare with the notes that sit on the ledger lines below the staff:



And to review:



Ev - 'ry good box - er drops Fi - nance!

A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The melody consists of the following notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), and F4 (half note with a fermata).

And to review the sharp black notes:

Clams drop from God a - bove.

A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The melody consists of the following notes: F#4 (quarter), G#4 (quarter), A#4 (quarter), B#4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B#4 (quarter), A#4 (quarter), and G#4 (half note with a fermata).

And to review the flat black notes:

Drown ev - ry goat and buf - fa - lo.

A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The melody consists of the following notes: F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter), B3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), G3 (quarter), and F3 (half note with a fermata).