

## How to Read Choral Music

Compiled by Tim Korthuis

Sheet music is a road map to help you create beautiful music. Please note that it is only there as a guide. Follow the director for cues on dynamics (volume) and phrasing (cues and cuts). **DO NOT RELY ENTIRELY ON YOUR MUSIC!!!** Only glance at it for words and notes.

This 'manual' is a very condensed version, and is here as a reference. It does not include everything to do with reading music, only the basics to help you on your way. There may be many markings that you wonder about. If you have questions, don't be afraid to ask.

### 1. Where is **YOUR** part?

- You need to determine whether you are Soprano or Alto (high or low ladies), or Tenor (hi men/low ladies) or Bass (low men)
- Soprano is the highest note, followed by Alto, Tenor, (Baritone) & Bass

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Bracket

Brace

Piano

13

*mf*

Sent by heav-en's grace to grow,—

*mf*



Cm A(maj7) B $\flat$ /D E $\flat$ /D

NOTE:

If there is another staff













above the choir bracket, it is usually for a solo or 'descant' (high soprano).

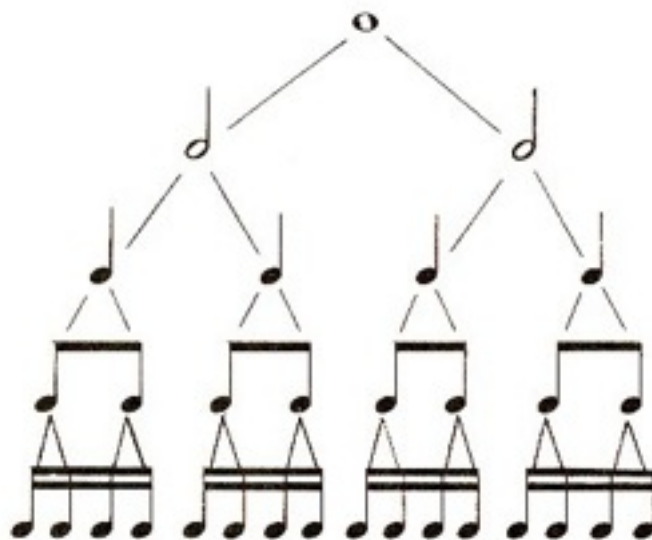
- The Treble Clef  usually indicates **Soprano** and **Alto** parts
  - If there are three notes in the Treble Clef, ask the director which section will be 'split' (eg. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Soprano).
  - Music written solely for women will usually have two Treble Clefs.
- The Bass Clef  indicates **Tenor**, **Baritone** and **Bass** parts
  - If there are three parts in the Bass Clef, the usual configuration is: Top - **Tenor**, Middle - **Baritone**, Bottom - **Bass**, though this too may be 'split' (eg. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tenor)
  - Music written solely for men will often have two Bass Clefs, though Treble Clef is used for men as well (written 1 octave higher).
- NOTE: The direction of the note stems can guide you in reading your music (eg. stem up for soprano/tenor, stem down for alto/bass). However, it may vary depending on publisher. Ask your director if you have questions.

## 2. Notes & Rests

- For basic conducting purposes, one (1) beat is defined as one conducting motion, in one direction.
  - Hand comes down – 1 beat.
  - Hand moves left – 1 beat.
  - Hand moves right – 1 beat.
  - Hand comes up – 1 beat.
- Make sure to watch the director. The choice might be made to extend the note beyond its defined limit, or cut it off early, if the mood of the music indicates such. Note length is defined primarily by director cue, not written music.

Whole Note		Whole Rest		= 4 beats
Half Note		Half Rest		= 2 beats
Quarter Note		Quarter Rest		= 1 beat
Eighth Note		Eighth Rest		= ½ beat
Sixteenth Note		Sixteenth Rest		= ¼ beat

- Note relationships:



- **Beams:** Notes may be 'beamed' to clear up clutter on the page.

- Example:



- **Dotted notes:** A dot placed after a note or rest increases the length by ½ of its original value.

- Example:



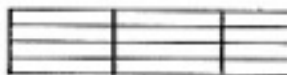
- **Ties:** Notes of the same pitch (non-moving) may be 'tied' together. The first note is to be held for the combined duration, without sounding the subsequent notes.

o Example:



- **Bars:** Notes are separated into measure (or bars). These are indicated by bar lines.

o Example:



o In most music, these bars will be numbered every 3-8 bars, to assist in quick reference.

- **Time Signature:** The amount of beats (notes/rests) per bar is indicated by the time signature.

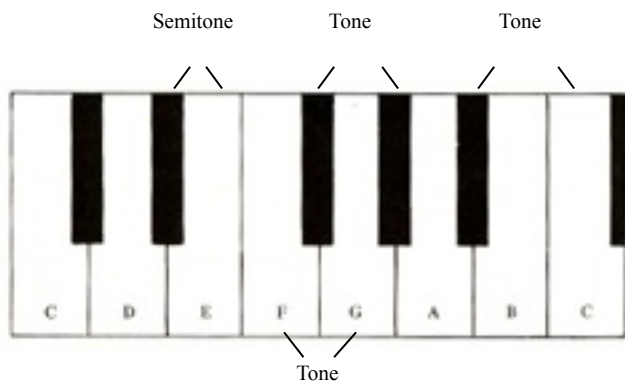
o Example: **4** - how many beats per bar.

**4** - type of note that equals one beat.

4 – quarter, 8 – eighth, etc.

#### 4. Playing your part

- If you have access to a piano (or other instrument), playing your part will give you a more solid hold on the notes.



**Semitone** – move from one note to the next immediate note

**Tone** – move two semitones

#### 3. Sight-reading Note Movement

- Basic instruction for sight-reading the movement of notes:
  - o 'If the note goes up (vertically), so does your voice. If the note goes down, your voice does likewise.'
  - o The greater the distance between notes (interval) the greater the difference in the pitch of your voice.
- Try going over the different intervals (ascending and descending), and start associating songs you know (the first 2 notes) with their different sounds (see next page).

*This is one of the best ways to begin learning to sight-read music.*

size: 3 5 2 6 4 8 1 or Unison

E.g. Michael, Row Star Wars Jaws My Bonny lies Amazing Somewhere over  
The Boat Ashore over the ocean Grace the rainbow

- **NOTE:** The size of the interval is measured by the number of letter-names contained in the interval, including both the bottom and the top notes, and each space and line in-between.
- This technique is not designed to make you a perfect sight-reader in one week, but to give you the tools to start making educated guesses as to where the note is supposed to be.
- **It's better to make a guess, than not try it at all. Guesses can always be fine-tuned. Silence can not.**

## 5. Symbols & Terms

repeat the previous section from or from the beginning

The passage is to be repeated, but the ending will be changed the second

- Crescendo (gradually increasing volume) ***f*** - Forte (loud)  
 - Diminuendo (gradually decreasing volume) ***p*** - Piano (quiet)  
 - Fermate (pause)

**D.S. al Coda** – Go back to the sign . Continue until you see '2<sup>nd</sup> time to Coda.' Turn pages until you see the large . Sing to the end.

**D.C. al Coda** – Go back to the beginning, continue as above (ie. 2<sup>nd</sup> time to Coda, etc.)

**D.C. al Fine** – Go back to the beginning, continue until you see 'Fine', which is the end.

**D.S. al Fine** – Go back to the sign , continue and end at the 'Fine'.

Ledger Lines – Used to write notes higher and lower than the staff.

**#** - Sharp (raise note one semitone) **b** - Flat (lower note one S.T.)

**NOTE:** Sharps and flats stay changed for the entire bar, ending at the bar line.

Key Signature – Tells you which notes are permanently sharp or flat throughout the piece.

- Natural (cancels any sharp or flat)