

## READING 1

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# Introduction

Music has been a part of human culture for thousands of years, existing primarily as an oral tradition, where knowledge, technical skills, melodies and songs were passed down from generation to generation. The evolution of music notation in the Middle Ages and the invention of the printing press in the 15th century radically changed this. Music could now be preserved, and for the first time in history, it was possible for a musician to learn and play completely unknown music without having someone demonstrate the music first. This would completely change the evolution of both music and culture, and it is safe to say that the European art music of the last 600 years would not have evolved the way it did without written notation. It is also safe to say that contemporary music today would not sound the way it does were it not for European art music.

While the evolution of notated music was revolutionary in itself, it introduced a whole new set of challenges for the professional musician, as you now had to learn two completely different skill sets. First of all, you still had to be able to master all the technical challenges of your instrument and learn the music traditions of your culture. But, it became a requirement that the professional musician should possess solid music reading skills as well. These two aspects of musicianship, performance and reading, are still divided today, and are often treated like two unrelated disciplines. This is especially true among musicians in popular music genres; where music notation is neither an integral part of the creation nor the performance of the music. This will beg the question, if you are a musician in the 21st century, where audio and video files capturing the performance of any song or any composition are available at the click of a button, why bother learning how to read music in the first place?

Reading musical notation on guitar is a challenging endeavor, but it is an integral part of your education as a guitarist. Good reading skills will open up for a whole universe of music otherwise unavailable for you, regardless of genre or time period. It may also enable to you to find professional work in many situations not open to the non-reader. There will actually be numerous situations where solid music reading skills is a minimum requirement for the job. Examples of this may be if you are in a recording session and there is no time to learn the music ahead of time. You may be supplied with basic charts, where key elements you are responsible for such as rhythm parts, melody lines and fills are written out. Another example may be live performance situations you may get called for where there is little or no time for rehearsal. Good reading skills is also very beneficial for the process of understanding and analyzing music, since your visual senses are extremely powerful aiding the intellectual, analytical processes.

This book series focuses on these essential reading concepts:

1. Reading pitches
2. Reading rhythms
3. Reading charts
4. Understanding basic music concepts

The primary goal is to provide you with information that is relevant for real-world applications in the 21st century, and every unit will gradually expand on these basic concepts and tie them together to provide a solid foundation for your reading skills, regardless of which work situation you may find yourself in during your future professional life.

Los Angeles, 2014  
Stig Mathisen D.M.A.

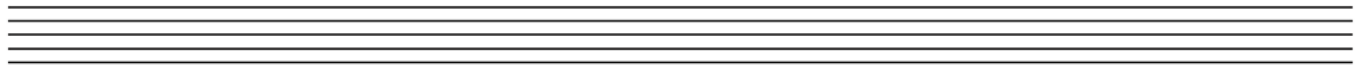
## Chapter 1

### The Basic Elements of Music Reading

Reading musical notation on guitar is a challenging endeavor, but it is an integral part of your education as a guitarist. Good reading skills will open up for a whole universe of music otherwise unavailable for you, and will also help you understand and analyze music. It will also enable to you to find professional work in many situations not open to the non-reader.

Music is notated on a five-line and four-space system commonly referred to as a staff. This is a set of five horizontal lines and four spaces, upon which are placed the various notes and symbols representing the musical pitches.

Ex. 1.1



The top line is higher in pitch than the bottom line, and you read the music from left to right, just as if you were reading a book.

We place a symbol at the beginning of the staff to determine which pitch a note placed on specific lines and spaces represent. This symbol is referred to as a clef, and there are several types of clefs commonly used. Guitar music is written using the treble clef, or G clef as it is also known. It evolved from a stylized letter G.

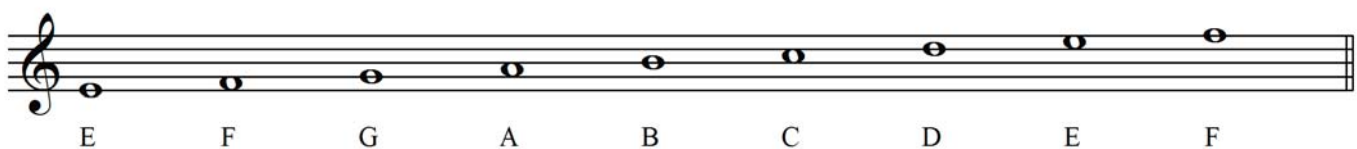
Ex. 1.2

Treble, or 'G' clef



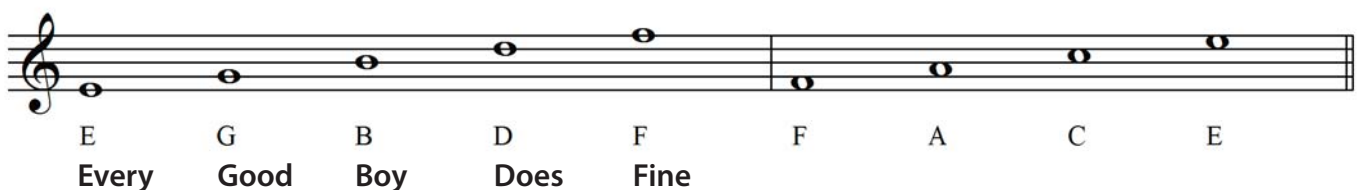
Using the first seven letters of the alphabet A - G, and repeating in sequence, we can work out the names of the remaining lines and spaces on the staff (Ex. 1.3).

Ex. 1.3



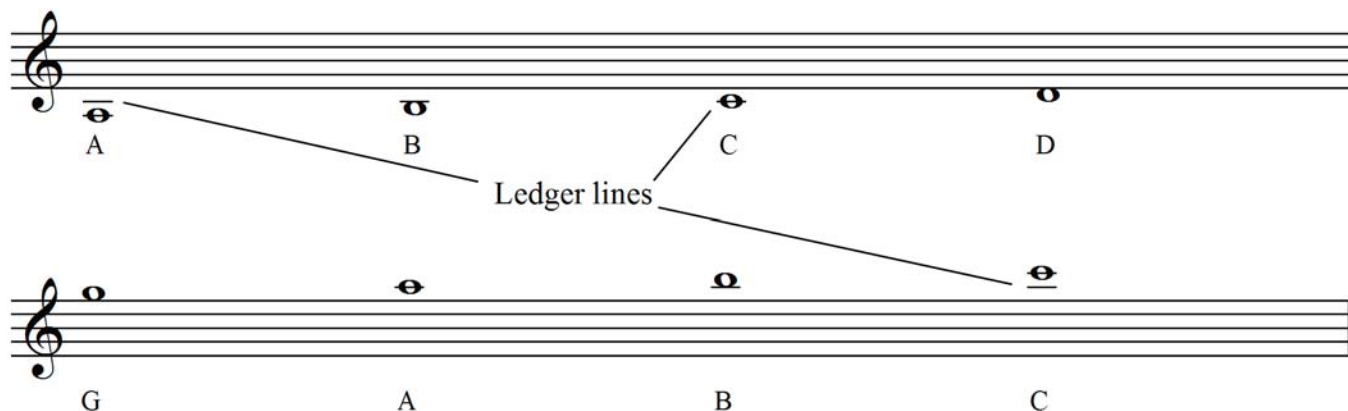
The five lines are called E G B D F. A good way to remember that is to use the acronym "Every Good Boy Does Fine." The four spaces spell the word F A C E (Ex. 1.4).

Ex. 1.4



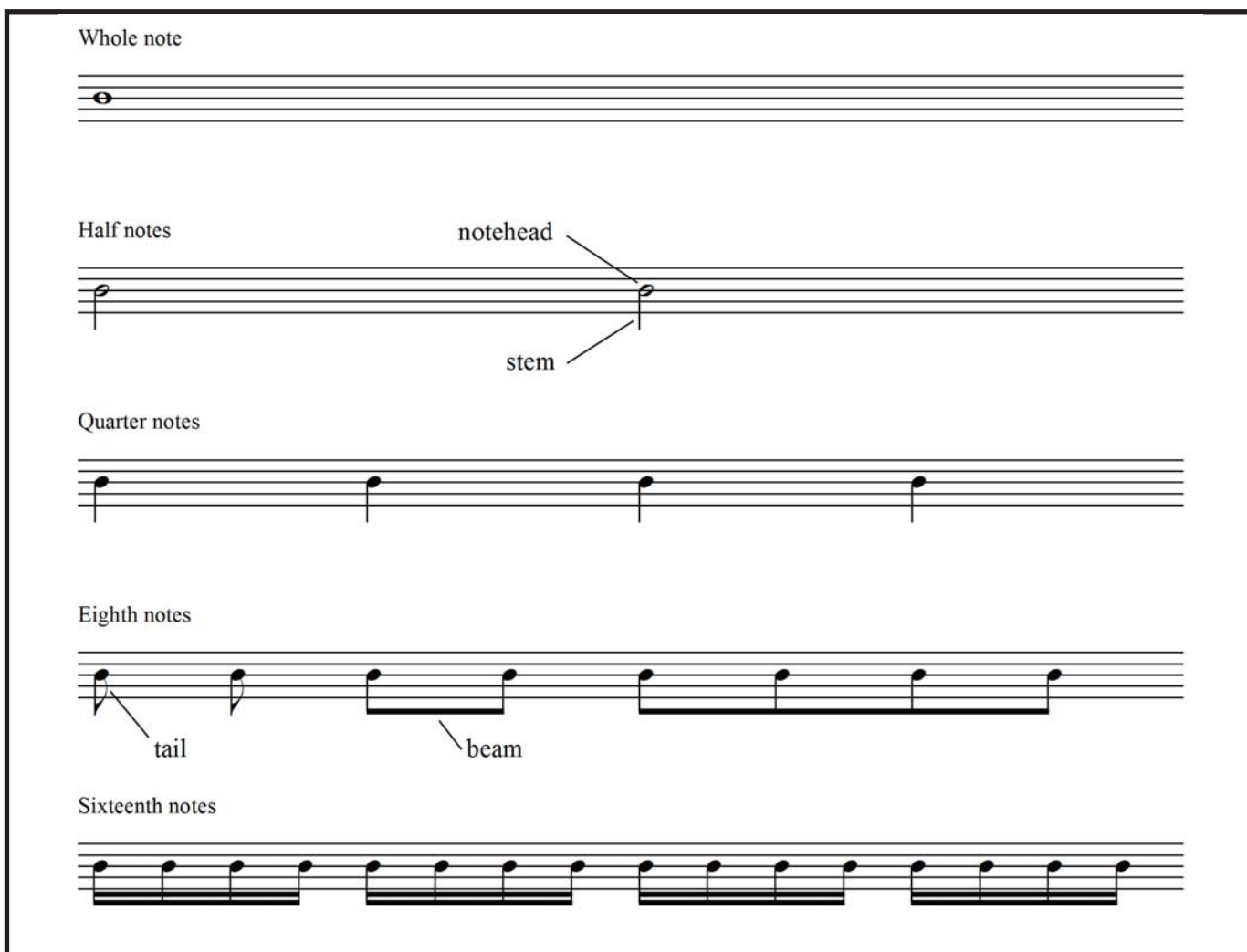
In order to notate and perform notes above or below what the staff system initially allows for, we use free-standing, short lines, which we refer to as *ledger lines*.

Ex. 1.5



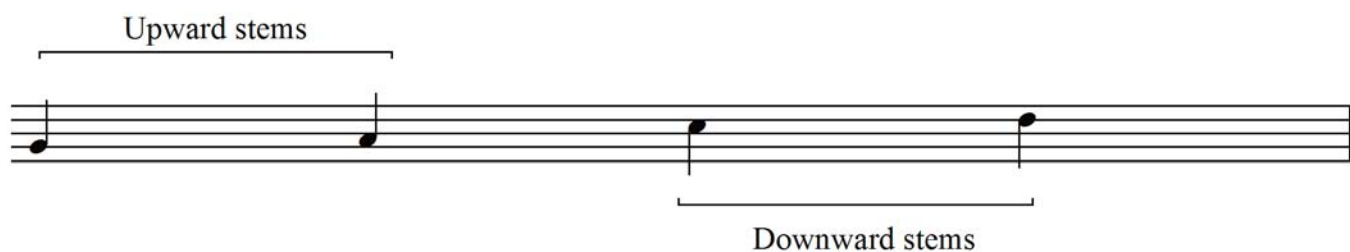
The relative vertical/height placement of notes within the staff system determines the pitch of each note, but the shape of the note determines the duration of each note, or *note value*. A whole note is equal to two half notes or four quarter notes. A half note is equal to two quarter notes. Two eighth notes are equal to one quarter note and two sixteenth notes are equal to one eighth note. So, how many sixteenth notes are in one quarter note? If you answered 16, you were correct. Eighth notes are beamed in groups of two or four.

Ex. 1.6



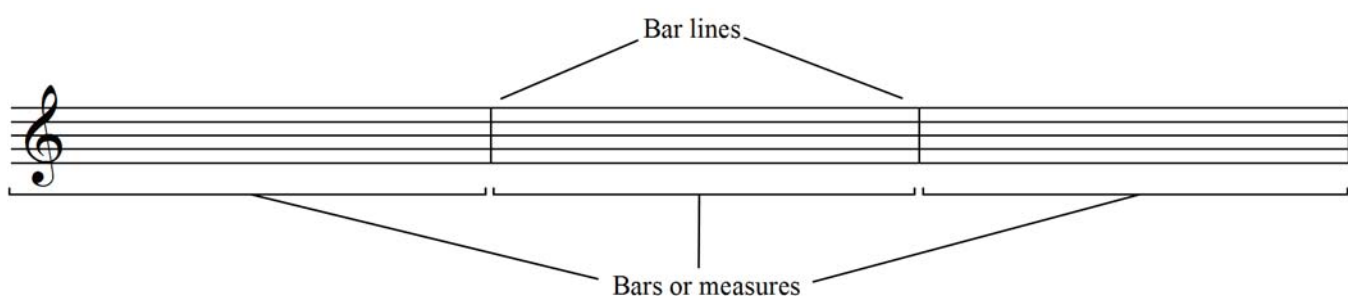
Notes on and above the middle line have downward pointing stems which attach to the left side of the notehead, and notes below the middle line have upward pointing stems which attach to the right side of the notehead.

Ex. 1.7



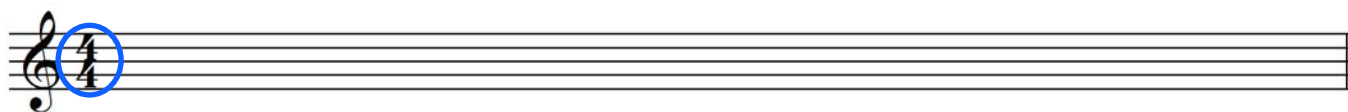
The staff system is divided into smaller parts using vertical lines referred to as *bar lines*. Each of the resulting smaller sections are in turn called a bar or a measure.

Ex. 1.8



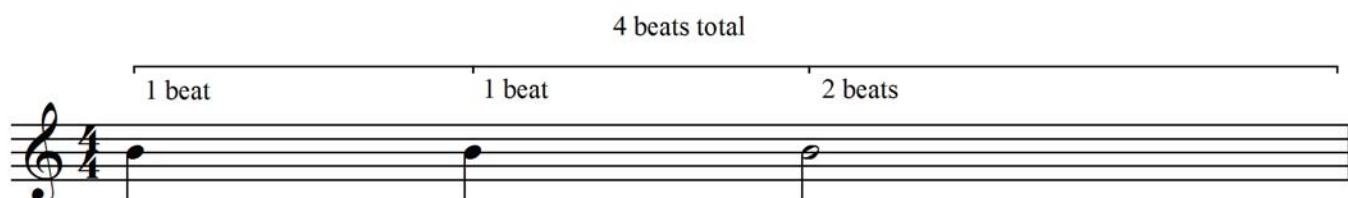
To determine how many beats each measure can contain, we insert a symbol at the beginning of the staff system called a *time signature*. Time signatures are written out as stacked numbers, where the top number represents the number of beats in a measure and the bottom number represents the value of each beat. This can be compared to fractions in math.

Ex. 1.9



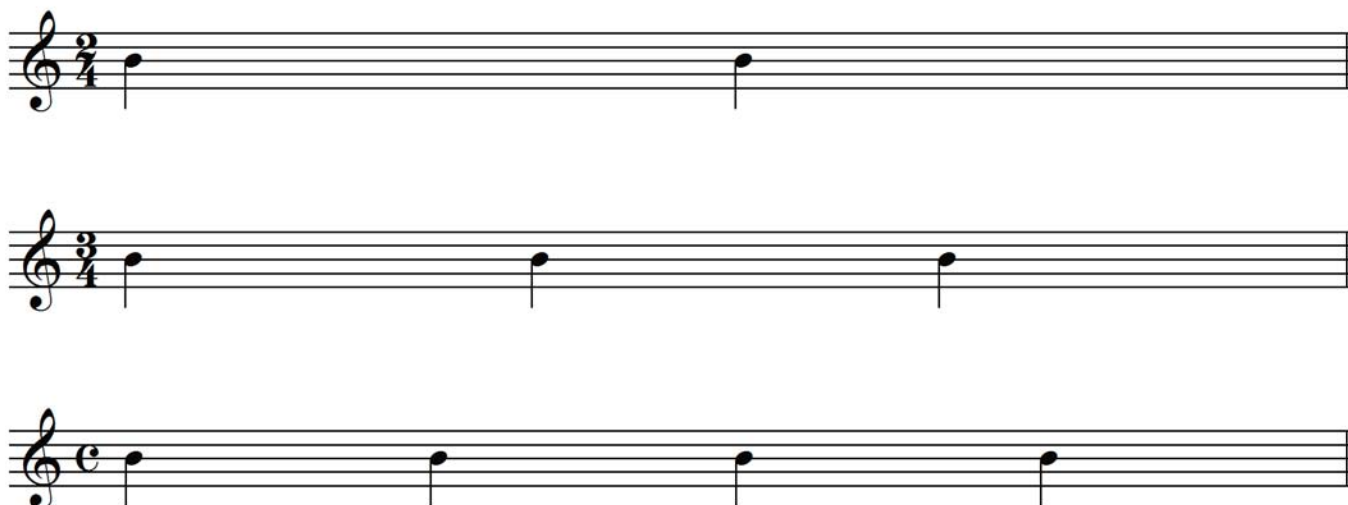
In Ex. 1.9, a 4/4 time signature (sometimes called “quadruple time”) tells us to count four quarter notes per bar. Within the bar itself, notes of different values can be placed as long as they do not exceed the total value of the time signature (in this case, four quarter notes).

Ex. 1.10



Other simple time signatures you will see are 2/4 (duple time) and 3/4 (triple time). Often you will see a letter C at the beginning of a score. This stands for “common time” and is the same as 4/4.

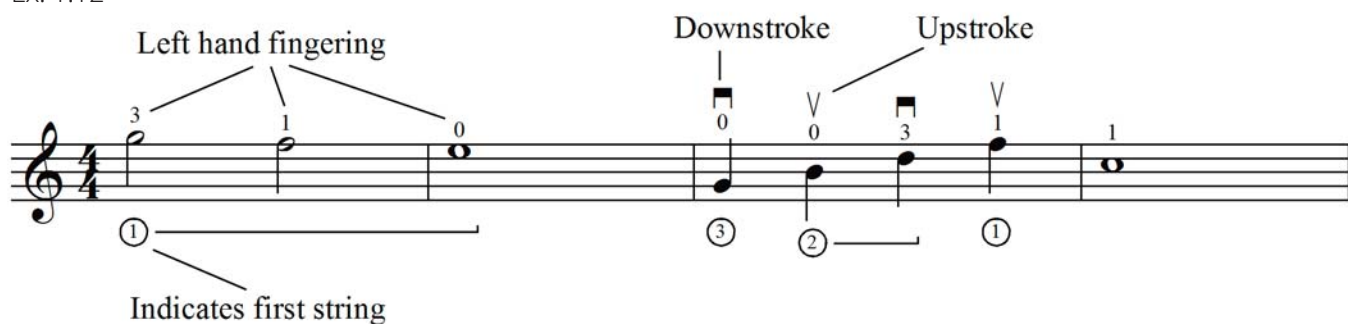
Ex. 1.11



2/4 means there are two quarter note beats per bar. 3/4 means there are three quarter note beats per bar. Remember, we are counting beats and not notes. You can place any note value in a bar so long as they add up to the total value of the bar.

Guitar notation will often contain several notational elements that are unique to string instruments. The staff below shows some guitar-related notations you should be familiar with. Small number above the noteheads indicate the fretting-hand fingering suggestions. An encircled number suggests which specific string that note is to be played on. Note also the symbols for playing with both downstroke and upstroke.

Ex. 1.12



**Chord and fretboard diagrams are also notational elements that are unique to string instruments, and are most commonly used with guitar and bass notation.**

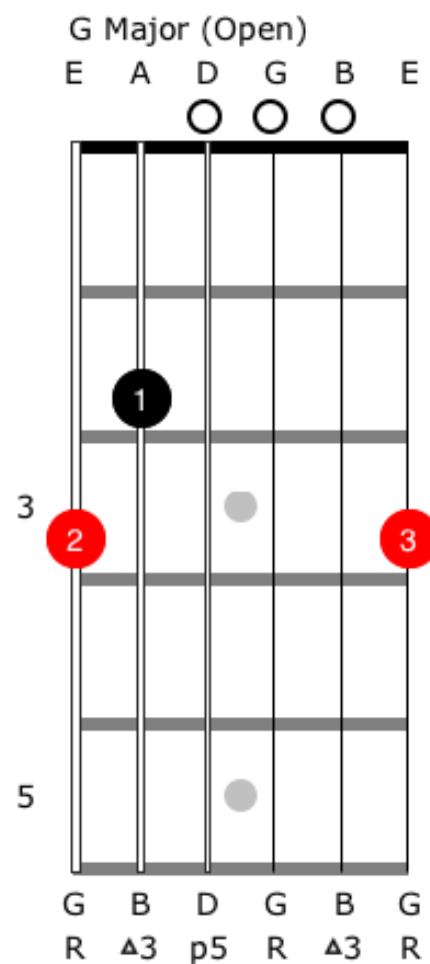
Chord and fretboard diagrams are boxes consisting of horizontal and vertical lines which graphically represent the strings and the frets on the guitar. These diagrams will allow a string player to access valuable information outside of the traditional notational system, and are used primarily to demonstrate chord shapes and scale patterns.



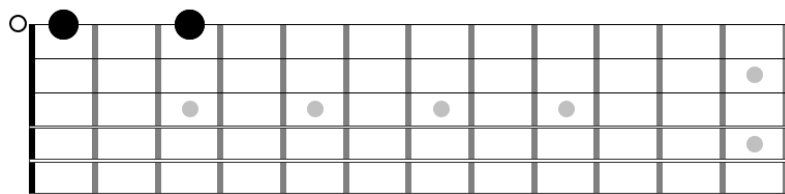
Most chord diagrams will be read with the strings being represented by vertical lines (top to bottom) and frets represented by horizontal lines (left to right). These diagrams will be read as if the guitar were placed in a standing position, with lower frets being higher up on the diagram and higher frets being at the bottom. The lowest string will be on the left side and the highest string will be on the right side of the diagram. Which strings and frets to play will be indicated by a dot placed directly on a vertical line (string), but in between the horizontal lines (frets). It is common to place a number directly inside these dots to indicate which finger you are supposed to use to fret each specific note. Open strings will be indicated using a circle above the vertical lines. Sometimes chord diagrams will be used to illustrate chord shapes that are to be played in higher positions of the neck. To know the exact position of the chord shape, a number will be placed directly to the left of one of the frets indicating the relative position of the shape.

**Here is a typical chord diagram showing the first five frets of a guitar.**

**Ex. 1.13**



Ex. 1.14



a much larger area of the neck, in the example above all the frets from first to twelfth are covered in the diagram. This will allow you to cover multiple positions within the same diagram. The method used to read this diagram is otherwise identical to chord diagrams.

*Fretboard diagrams* are usually used to demonstrate scale patterns, but unlike chord diagrams, fretboard diagrams are read with short vertical lines representing frets and long horizontal lines representing strings. These diagrams will usually include

Tablature was one of the first notational methods developed for fretted string instruments, originating in the Renaissance period in the early 14 century. Tablature is similar in design to fretboard diagrams, as it displays music within a system that is a graphical representation of the fretboard. Each horizontal line represents a string on the instrument, with the lowest line in the system representing the string lowest in pitch on the instrument, and the highest line representing the string highest in pitch. Which pitches/frets you are supposed to play will be indicated by a number placed directly on the horizontal lines, and these numbers represent the specific fret in which you are supposed to place your finger. Unlike fretboard diagrams, which are static indications of a collection of notes available for a guitarist, tablature is a dynamic system, and you read music from left to right as it occurs in time. Tablature is often used in combination with standard notation. In these cases, the two staves are joined by a bracket on the far left side, similar to how a grand staff is set up.

Ex. 1.15

The image shows a musical example with two staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff in 4/4 time. It contains four measures of music. The first measure has a whole note on the G4 line, with a circled '2' below it. The second measure has a quarter note on G4, a quarter note on A4, a quarter note on B4, and a quarter note on C5, with a circled '1' and a slur below the notes. The third measure has a chord of G4, B4, and D5. The fourth measure has a chord of G4, B4, and D5. The bottom staff is a guitar tablature staff with three strings labeled T, A, and B. The fret numbers for each string are: Measure 1: T=1, A=0, B=0; Measure 2: T=3, A=0, B=1; Measure 3: T=3, A=0, B=3; Measure 4: T=1, A=0, B=3.

With its graphical representation of the guitar neck, tablature is a system that is very easy to learn, so it is convenient for beginners and intermediate players. It also shows specifically where every note is supposed to be played, thus, unique and specific fingerings are easy to grasp, no matter how complex the music may be. The main disadvantage to using tablature is that it does not specify pitch, only string and fret. This obviously makes the notation hard to read for other instrumentalists, but it also makes it very hard to both analyze and understand the harmonic and theoretical aspects of the music. Tablature has severe limitations in terms of dynamic and performance-oriented elements, but is also limited in terms of details for rhythmic notation, which requires the performer to have previous knowledge of the music to be able to successfully perform the parts.