

Lesson #3: Reading Ukulele Tab and Sheet Music

The worksheets in this course are as essential as the video lessons. The worksheets not only provide additional instruction but also provide the song sheets for the music you learn and fingerpick throughout this course.

Everything you need to know to fingerpick a song is in these charts. Being able to understand and read these charts is essential to your success in this course.

Fortunately, the music charts in this course are designed to make things simple and not more complicated. So even if you're not familiar with how to read music charts, don't worry. This lesson covers everything you need to know to get up to speed on reading the song sheets in this course!

Note: There is a good amount of information packed into this lesson worksheet. Save or print it out to refer to later if you ever run into questions about how to read the song sheets and charts presented throughout this course.

In this lesson, learn:

- To easily digest and read ukulele tab and sheet music
- The key things to look for when examining a music chart
- How to understand note lengths, finger position indicators, time signatures and much more

Reading Ukulele Tab

Take a look at the beginning of a piece of music you learn later in this course:

Music staff

The image shows a musical staff and a corresponding ukulele tablature. The music staff is in 2/4 time and features a melody with lyrics 'p i m i'. Below the staff, rhythmic cues '1 ee & uh 2 ee & uh' are provided. The tablature consists of four lines representing the strings: T (top), A, C, and B (bottom). The numbers on the tablature indicate the frets to be played for each note.

Each piece of music in this course contains a top line of music notation called the *music staff* and bottom line of ukulele *tab*, as indicated above. For now, learn how to read and understand the bottom ukulele tab line.

Ukulele tablature (or “tab” for short), as shown on the bottom line of the sheet music, allows you to see the notes in a piece of music without having to actually be able to read sheet music (the top line). Ukulele tab is written on four lines, each line representing a string on the ukulele:

The diagram shows four horizontal lines representing the strings of a ukulele. From top to bottom, they are labeled: A-string, E-string, C-string, and g-string. The letters T, A, and B are placed at the beginning of the top, middle, and bottom lines respectively. Vertical lines represent frets. A fret labeled '5' is on the A-string. A fret labeled '2' is on the C-string. A fret labeled '0' is on the g-string.

Ukulele tab is oriented as if you were holding the ukulele in a normal playing position and looking down over the strings. So, in this way, the top line of the ukulele tab indicates the bottom A-string of the ukulele, and the bottom line of the ukulele tab indicates the top g-string of the ukulele.

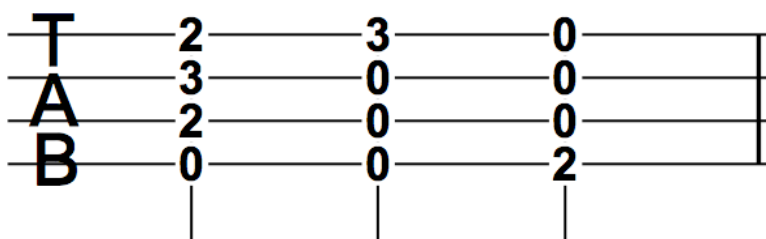
The numbers that appear on any of the four lines of the ukulele tab indicate frets on the ukulele. So in the example above, the first number that appears, the number “2”, is on the second to bottom line. This is an instruction to take a finger in your fretting hand and press it down on the 2nd fret of the C-string to

play that note. While pressing down on the 2nd fret of the C-string, take a finger in your picking hand and pluck that string to sound the note.

To continue, while reading the tab left to right, the note that follows is a number “5” that appears on the top line. This is an instruction to take a finger in your fretting hand and press it down on the 5th fret of the bottom A-string to play that note. While pressing down on this note, pluck the string to sound the note.

If you see a number “0” in the ukulele tab, that indicates an open string. So, in the example above, the number “0” appears on the bottom line. This means you pluck and sound the top g-string of the ukulele without fretting a note on that string.

In ukulele tab, sometimes the numbers are “stacked” vertically with each other as shown in the following example:



When you see the numbers stacked, as shown above, this indicates a chord. This means you fret, sound and pluck all the notes at once. In the above example, the first group of stacked notes is a G chord, the second stack is a C chord, and the third stack is an Am chord.

Ukulele tab gives you an easy, birds-eye view of what notes you press down on the ukulele fretboard. Please note that ukulele tab doesn't indicate which fingers you use to fret or press down on the notes of the strings. That will be discussed in the next section. Keep on reading!

Reading Sheet Music











The ukulele tab shows the notes represented in the music staff at their locations across the fretboard. In a lot of ways, when you have the ukulele tab, you don't need to have an extensive knowledge of how to read music notation.

However, there are a few key things worth paying attention to in the top music staff that will help you understand and play a piece of music.


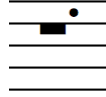

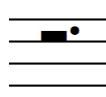



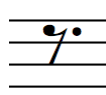


Note & Rest Lengths

A benefit of the music staff line is that it can give us an indication for how long certain notes are held or played. The shape of the note determines how long you allow a note to ring out.

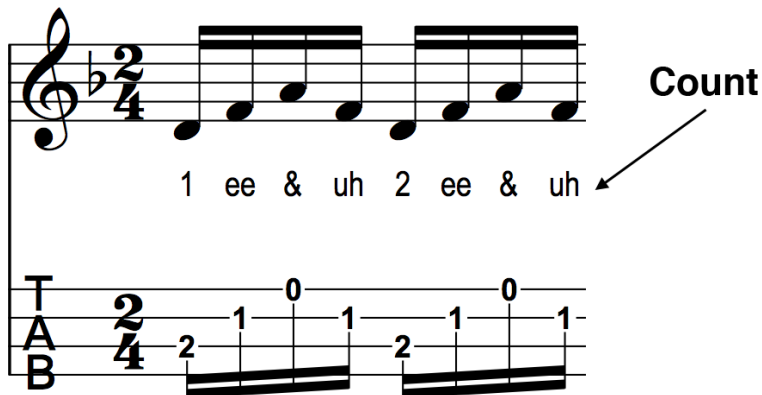
In addition, at times, in music notation there will be *rests* that indicate a period of time where you don't play anything in the piece of music. Each type of note has a corresponding rest as shown in the following chart:

Name	Note	Rest	Length
Whole			4 beats
Half			2 beats
Quarter			1 beat
Eighth			1/2 beat
Sixteenth			1/4 beat

Any of these notes or rests can have a dot next to them, which means you hold their length 1.5x their regular value, as shown in the following chart:

Name	Note	Rest	Length
Dotted Whole			6 beats
Dotted Half			3 beats
Dotted Quarter			1 1/2 beats
Dotted Eighth			3/4 beat
Dotted Sixteenth			3/8 beat

Throughout the course, I might have the count of a song written below the music staff, as shown in the following example:



The example shows a musical staff in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat. The melody consists of two measures: the first measure has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note Bb4; the second measure has a quarter note C5, a quarter note Bb4, and a quarter note A4. Below the staff is the count: "1 ee & uh 2 ee & uh". An arrow labeled "Count" points to this text. Below the count is a guitar chord diagram for a three-fingered pattern: the Treble Clef (T) has a 2 on the first string, a 1 on the second string, and a 0 on the third string; the Bass Clef (B) has a 2 on the fourth string, a 1 on the fifth string, and a 1 on the sixth string.

For now, it's not important to retain all this information. Use this section for reference. In songs where the count might be more trickier, I provide more in-depth instruction on how to count and play these parts.

Time Signature

The music staff (as well as the ukulele tab) indicates the *time signature* of the piece of music. The time signature dictates how a song is counted.

Time Signature

1 ee & uh

T
A
B 2/4 2 1 0 1

In this example, the time signature of the song is 2/4, which means there are two beats per measure and each beat gets a quarter note in length. In simple terms, this means you count the song in two: 1, 2, 1, 2, etc.

Measures, in a piece of music, are separated by vertical *bar lines*, as shown in the following example:

p i m i

Bar line Bar line

1 ee & uh 2 ee & uh 4 3

T
A
B 2/4 2 1 0 1 2 1 0 1 1 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 4 3 0 3 4 3 0 3

Measure Measure Measure

Other common time signatures include 4/4 and 3/4. In 4/4 time signature, there are four beats per measure and each beat gets a quarter note in length. Again, in simple terms, this means you count: 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. In 3/4 time signature, you count: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, etc.

Pickup Measure

At the beginning of certain pieces, there might be one or two notes that proceed the first measure in a smaller *pickup measure*, as seen in the following example:

Pickup Measure

The image shows a musical score for guitar. The top staff is in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a pickup measure containing a single quarter note. This is followed by four measures of music in bass clef, also in 3/4 time. The bottom staff shows guitar fretboard diagrams for the strings T (Treble), A (Acoustic), and B (Bass). The pickup measure is indicated by a single fret on the B string. The first measure of the main piece is a 3-fret barre on the A string. The second measure is a 7-fret barre on the A string. The third measure is a 7-fret barre on the A string. The fourth measure is a 5-fret barre on the A string.

A pickup measure is shorter in length and duration than a regular measure. In the example above, the 3/4 time signature indicates there are three beats per measure. The pickup measure, consisting of only a quarter note, contains only one beat. To play and count this pickup measure, count one beat and then continue to the next measure counting 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, etc.

Picking Hand Fingering

Above or below the music staff, there might be italicized letters *p*, *i*, *m* or *a*. These letters indicate the finger you use in your picking hand to pluck the note. The *p* indicates to pluck with your thumb, *i* indicates to pluck with your index finger, *m* indicates to pluck with your middle finger, and *a* indicates to pluck with your ring finger. The letters *p-i-m-a* are the initials for the Spanish words for each finger: *pulgar* (thumb), *indice* (index finger), *medio* (middle finger), and *anular* (ring finger). See the next figure for an example of the picking hand fingering written above the music staff:

Picking Hand Fingering

p i m i ←

1 ee & uh 2 ee & uh

Fretting Hand Fingering

In certain parts of the music staff, there might be small, tiny numbers 1-4 next to notes to suggest which finger you use to fret the note, such as in the following example:

Fretting Hand Fingering

The number 1 indicates to fret the note with the index finger, number 2 the middle finger, number 3 the ring finger, and number 4 the little finger.

When these numbers appear next to the notes, they are only suggested fingerings. You might find a different fingering to work better. Please note that not all notes in a song have a suggested fingering. The way notes are fingered are often up to your discretion as a player, as you discover in future lessons.

Conclusion to Reading Music Charts

Overall, the music staff gives you the most information on how to play notes in a piece of music, while the ukulele tab provides a quick, easy-to-read glance of the notes positioned on the ukulele fretboard.

This lesson is by no means intended to be an extensive discussion on how to read music. I've highlighted the most essential aspects of reading music that will benefit you in this course. If you're interested in learning more about music theory and how to read music, I can recommend this website [here](#).

All the information in this lesson becomes easier to understand as you start playing and learning the songs in this course. In this way, continue on to the next lesson and be sure to save this lesson in an easy-to-reach location, so it's nearby for reference in future lessons.