



Music **FUNDAMENTALS**

for **Song Leaders**

Including:
Functions and Preparation
“Dos” and “Don’ts”
Some Music Fundamentals
Appropriate Direction and Pitch
Glossary of Terms and Symbols

Developed by
Dub McClish

Foreword

My interest in singing and song leading in the church proceeds from the following: I was privileged to grow up among two family generations of singers. My paternal grandfather was an excellent singer/song leader, serving as such far and wide in Gospel meetings in the 1930s – 1950s. He taught his several children, my father among them, to read music and to sing. Our family gatherings sometimes rang with a double quartet singing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” My earliest memories include wonderful singing. It was only natural for me to be musically inclined and greatly interested in singing. I attended my first singing school at the age of 9 and a second one when I was 12 – at which age I also lead the singing for a Gospel meeting; I continued doing so perhaps scores of times through the years. I began playing in my school band in the fifth grade and continued this into my college years. Music was my minor field of study for my B.A. degree.

Congregational “singing schools” (as mentioned above) provided training for song leaders for several generations. These had already begun to disappear by the 1960s. Observing that void prompted me in 1965 to prepare a booklet for those who lead singing in our worship assemblies. My aim in that early effort was to produce a brief and simplified practical “manual” for these men. The booklet in your hands is a new edition of said manual, which I self-published and “printed” on a mimeograph machine (an early forerunner of computerized desktop publishing). I produced only a few dozen of them, most of which I gave away.

I was recently prompted to pull my old, age-yellowed copy from its file when a young, inexperienced song leader indicated that he would welcome such help. My copy was so unattractive and inadequate in many ways that I was too embarrassed to give it to anyone. Rather, I decided to produce a “new and improved” version, thus taking advantage of attractive printing, type, and graphics, as well as improving its content. This version will enable me to do “printing on demand” very economically on our existing equipment. Moreover, through our website (www.thescripturecache.com), this booklet will be available to anyone who wishes to download and print it. Whether by requests for copies or by downloading them from *The Scripture Cache*, as with its predecessor, I offer them **free of any charge**.

My aim in this new edition is the same as that stated for its precursor. While avoiding any abundance of music “theory” that might scare off some readers, I’ve sought to include enough of such (especially that related to the contents of our hymn books) as to be easily grasped and applied. I have also suggested some behavioral and spiritual traits for song leaders, which seemingly are all too often overlooked by them and by those who select them.

I could not have prepared or produced this upgraded *Music Fundamentals for Song Leaders* without excellent and unselfish assistance. Diane, my dear wife, keyed the original booklet into her iMac, thus providing an editable digital version from which to work for revision. Andy, my son, and Diane were of great help in improving the text. Laurie, my daughter-in-law, spent many hours applying her artistic, graphics, and lay-out skills to produce its very attractive design. I thank them all for their invaluable contributions. I send this work forth with the prayer that it will enable its users to better lead others in the worship of Him Who died that we may live.

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Functions of the Song Leader

- The song leader usually begins the service and has a leading role. Therefore he can and should set the proper spiritual “tone.”
- It is his job to lead several people to join their voices to glorify God in song.
- He should lead the congregation rather than be led by it.
- Since his behavior can exert a powerful influence over the congregation and the worship, he must avoid doing, wearing, or saying anything that detracts therefrom. He must remember that his function is not to entertain.

Preparations for Being a Good Songleader

In Heart and Life

The song leader must be one who has proved his loyalty to Christ by service and stability. Just as we would not want a lukewarm, careless Christian for a preacher, neither should such a brother be given the responsibility of leading others in worship, regardless of talent or ability. To do so implies approval of spiritual indifference.

In Music Fundamentals

A teacher must know his subject, and a leader cannot lead where he is not equipped to go. Thus, a song leader should master the basic language, signs, mechanics, etc., of music to truly lead a congregation. As L. O. Sanderson, author of several well-known hymns, stated, “An audience cannot follow a puzzled head, a bewildered voice, or a distraught hand.”

In Repertoire

Many congregations have a rather limited collection of songs they can sing, a situation for which song leaders are often largely to blame. Leaders should make it a point to learn **new** songs and then help the members to learn them at appropriate times. A conscientious leader will not let good songs remain unused because he is not inclined to learn them.

The songleader’s responsibility includes carefully reading through each verse of the selected songs for scriptural accuracy. The mere inclusion of a song in a songbook does not guarantee such.

In Leadership

Song **leading** is far more than merely standing up and singing loudly or being a “song starter.” Leadership involves such things as the right song, the right pitch, the right volume, the right tempo, proper enunciation, quality of tone, meaningful gestures, and fitting demeanor. Fortunately, these are all skills that most men can develop through training and experience.

Dos and Don’ts

Do:

- Ask God’s providential help as part of your preparation each time you lead.
- Select appropriate songs for the various services (in keeping with the acts of worship and sermon topics, if known).
- Sing familiar songs in Sunday worship, especially for the invitation and the Lord’s Supper.
- Sing through each song before you lead it to ensure that you know it well enough to lead it.
- Dress neatly and appropriately, avoiding any attire that could be distracting.
- Arrive at least fifteen minutes before time for the service to begin.
- Vary the spacing of songs, prayers, scripture readings, times to stand, etc. (avoid getting in a rut).
- Stand erect and maintain good posture.
- Distinctly announce each selection (twice is usually sufficient), using the term **Song number X...** rather than **Page number X...**
- Plan ahead: Choose the verses you plan to lead and so indicate verbally or by appropriate finger signals.
- Begin leading the invitation song immediately after the preacher has extended the invitation (don’t leave anyone wondering what’s coming next).

Don’t:

- Forget—you are leading in a **spiritual** act of worship as well as the **physical** act of singing.
- Select songs more for their rhythm/tune/harmony than for thought or teaching.
- Apologize if you are unprepared or have a cold, etc.
- Leave the audience guessing about standing, sitting, which verses, what comes next, etc.
- Announce the song after prayer until after the prayer.
- Allow the audience to “drag” the tempo down to their speed; begin the song at an appropriate tempo and maintain it.
- Be a slave to the *please stand on the third song* or the *first, second, and last verses* pattern.
- Usurp other leadership roles by leading unscheduled prayers, reading Scripture, or making extraneous comments; just lead the songs.
- Preach to the church about poor singing; let the preacher do this and/or start a singing class.
- Ignore your songbook, but keep eye contact with the people as much as possible.

Music Fundamentals

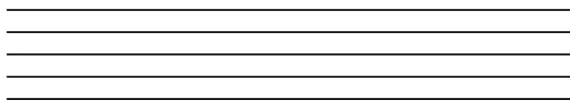
Every Song Leader Should Know

- Names and shapes of the notes:

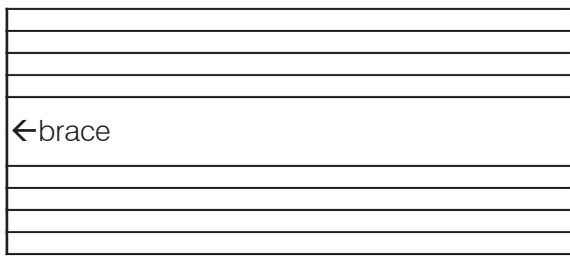


This naming system for the notes is referred to as the “sol-fa” syllables, with each note pronounced as follows: *Do*—Doe, *Re*—Ray, *Mi*—Mee, *Fa*—Fah, *Sol*—Sole, *La*—Lah, *Ti*—Tee.

- Melody and harmony are made possible by proper placement of these notes on a series of five horizontal lines and the four spaces between them. This structure is called a **staff**.

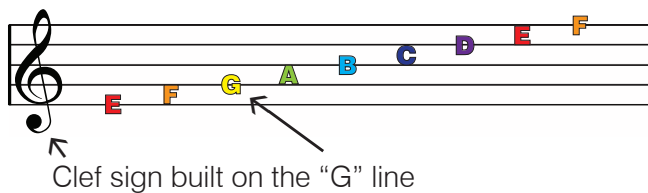


- Two staves connected by a vertical line (known as a **brace**), form a **score**.

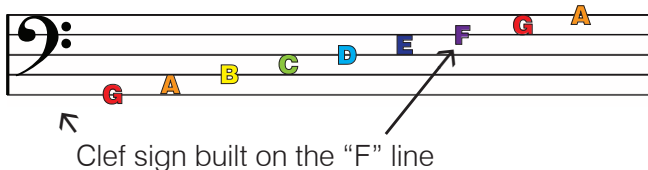


- The names of the lines and spaces follow the first seven letters of the alphabet and are determined by the **clef**. Two clefs are commonly used in our hymn books:

- The “G” or treble clef:



- The “F” or bass clef:

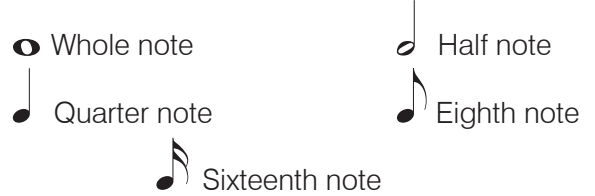


- The position of a given note on the staff corresponds to its pitch. In other words, the higher (vertically) the note appears on the staff, the higher its pitch will be.

- Hymn music is normally written in **four** voice parts, corresponding to the four natural levels of the human voice.
 - The **soprano** part corresponds to the higher range of female voices and appears as the highest notes written in the treble clef. Since this part is almost always the **tune** or **melody** of the song, it is the part the song leader normally sings.
 - The **alto** part corresponds to the lower range of female voices and its notes appear just below the soprano notes on the treble clef.
 - The **tenor** part corresponds to the higher range of male voices and its notes appear just above the bass notes in the bass clef.
 - The **bass** part corresponds to the lower range of male voices and appears as the lowest notes on the staff in the bass clef.

- Notes and rests:

- The songs in our hymn books contain **notes** with their respective shapes and “time values”:

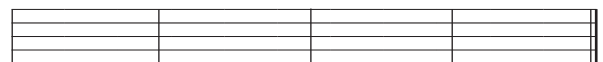


- Periods of silence, called **rests**, correspond to the note designations:



- A dot or dots placed to the right of a note or rest increases its time value (length) as follows:
 - one dot increases by $\frac{1}{2}$ the original value.
 - two dots increases by $\frac{3}{4}$ the original value.

- Music is measured on the staff by vertical lines called **measure bars**. The distance from one measure bar to the next is a **measure** of music. The broad, double bar indicates the end of a song.



- The time value and number of notes that fill a measure of music is determined by the **time signature**. This appears at the beginning of each song (after the clef sign) and is composed of two numbers arranged one above the other. The most commonly used time signatures are:



- The lower number in the time signature always indicates **what kind of note** (quarter, half, eighth, etc.) **gets one beat or count**.
- The upper number always indicates **how many** of the specified kind of notes it takes to fill a measure.
- Some examples:



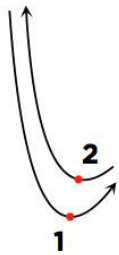
Any other combination of notes that equals the same number of beats in the time signature will likewise fill one measure.



- **Counting** time is done by counting each beat or pulse of a measure. **Beating** time is making a motion of the hand and arm for each beat or pulse of a measure. One's ability to count and beat time depends upon a feeling for **rhythm** which is simply a regularity of beat or pulse. There are three basic **beat patterns**, corresponding to the respective time signatures indicated below (shown from the songleader's perspective):

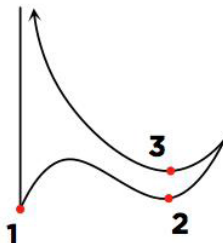
2 Beats

$\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{2}{2}$



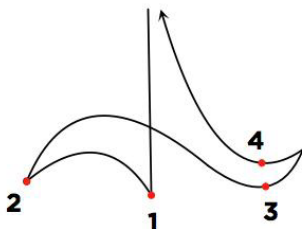
3 Beats

$\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{3}{2}$ $\frac{9}{8}$



4 Beats

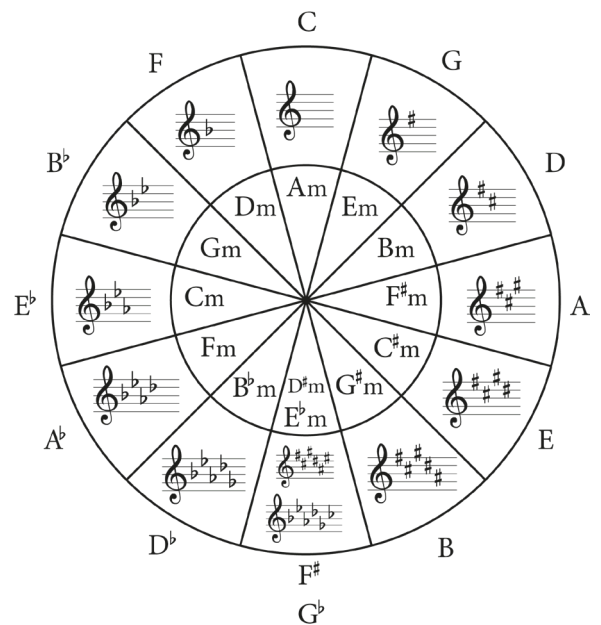
$\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{4}{2}$ $\frac{12}{8}$



The first note after the measure bar is always the first beat and thus the **down beat** (number 1 in the illustrations above). The down beat should always be the "heaviest" beat of the measure.

- The **key signature** appears at the beginning of each song right after the clef sign. It also appears at the beginning of each score of the song. A key signature is composed of one or more **sharps (#)** or **flats (b)** arranged in a given order on the various lines or spaces (degrees) of the staff.

- When **no** sharps or flats appear in the key signature, the key is **C**.
- A **sharp (#)** **raises** the pitch of a note $\frac{1}{2}$ **step**. When appearing in the key signature, it has the effect of raising every note on the same degree of the staff by $\frac{1}{2}$ step.
- A **flat (b)** **lowers** the pitch of a note in the same way that a sharp raises it.
- The key signatures depicted below represent all those that will be found in our hymn books.



- A **natural (n)** is used to cancel the effect of either a sharp or a flat. Thus, when it appears before a sharp note, it lowers it $\frac{1}{2}$ step; before a flat note, it raises it $\frac{1}{2}$ step.
- Occasionally a **double sharp (x)** or a **double flat (bb)** will appear before a note, raising it or lowering it a **whole step**.
- When the seven different tones of a given key are taken in regular order, beginning with *Do* (▲) they constitute a **scale**.

All song leaders would do well to master the use of a pitching instrument.

- Generally speaking, a song can and should be sung in the key in which it was written.
- Few people have **perfect pitch** (i.e., the ability to pitch a song correctly without mechanical aid).
- The song leader will have added confidence knowing he is not pitching a song too high or too low, but just right.
- A pitch pipe has long been “standard equipment” for serious songleaders. This small instrument, available at any music store, is relatively inexpensive, durable, and easy to use.
- Pitch pipe basics:
 - Determine the key in which the song is written.
 - This may be done by checking the key signature (assuming one has this ability).
 - This may also be done on nearly every song by simply finding a **Do** (▲). The name of the line or space where *Do* is situated will always be the name of the key. For example, if *Do* is on the “A” line or space, the key is “A” (if sharps appear in the key signature) or *A*b (if flats appear).
 - If the key is “A”, blow an “A” on the pipe, and this tone will be *Do* in the song. Since the soprano of virtually all our hymns begins either on *Do*, *Mi*, or *Sol*, all that remains is to sing/hum up the scale to the proper pitch from *Do*, and this will give one the beginning pitch of the soprano (lead). With some practice, this procedure will become simple and natural.
 - Note: many modern hymn books identify *Do* and the beginning note for each song.
- There are also a number of free pitchpipe apps (e.g., *Pocket Pitch*) available for smartphones.

Glossary of Musical Terms and Symbols

- **A cappella**—*in chapel style*. vocal music with no instrumental accompaniment.
- **Accent** (≻)—appears above notes indicating special emphasis.
- **Accidental**—a sign (#, b, ♯) that occurs somewhere in the song other than in the key signature.
- **Adagio**—slow and sustained.
- **Ad lib**—*ad libitum*, at will. In passages thus marked, the tempo may be altered at the discretion of the leader.
- **Andante**—in moderate time or tempo.
- **Allarg. Molto**—*allargando molto*. Grow very slow.
- **Allegro**—rapid, quick
- **A tempo**—*in time*. Return to the regular or previous tempo.
- **Crescendo** (◀)—gradually increase volume.

- **D.C.**—*da capo*, from the beginning. Go back to the beginning and sing till the *fine* (Latin for *finish*, pronounced “fee-nay”) sign.
- **D.S.**—*dal segno*, from the sign or to the sign (♯). Go back to the sign and sing to *fine*.
- **Decrescendo** (▶)—gradually decrease volume.
- **Dim.**—*diminuendo*, equivalent to decrescendo.
- **Duet**—*two*; to be sung by two voices or parts (e.g., soprano and alto).
- **Fermata** (⤿)—*hold*; pause or hold sign for the length of time indicated by the leader (at his discretion). Also commonly called a “bird’s eye.”
- **Fine**—*finish*, the end (pronounced *FEE-nay*).
- **First and second ending**—Four dots before a heavy measure bar means go back to the section which has four dots at its beginning and repeat. Then skip ending number 1 and finish the song with ending number 2.



- **Forte** (*f*)—loud
- **Fortissimo** (*ff*)—very loud
- **Mezzo forte** (*mf*)—half loud or medium loud.
- **Mezzo piano** (*mp*)—half soft or medium soft.
- **Obligato**—obligatory, required (the term originally meant a part thus marked was necessary to the full performance of the song. It has come to mean a part that will enhance the song but is not indispensable).
- **Piano** (*p*)—soft.
- **Pianissimo** (*pp*)—very soft.
- **Rall.**—*rallentando*. Gradually slower.
- **Repeat**—(four dots before heavy measure bar) go back to the section which has four dots at its beginning and repeat. (See “First and second ending” above.)
- **Rit.**—*ritardando*; gradually slower, similar to *Rall.* above.
- **Solo**—alone; to be sung by only one voice or part (e.g., alto, tenor, or bass lead).
- **Tempo**—time. The rate of speed at which a song is sung.
- **Trio**—three. To be sung by three voices or parts.
- **Triplet** (♩³)—three notes sung in the normal time of two notes of the same value.
- **Unison**—all voices singing the same part/tones.
- **Vigorouso**—with vigor or life.

The above list should cover all the terms and symbols found in most hymn books.