



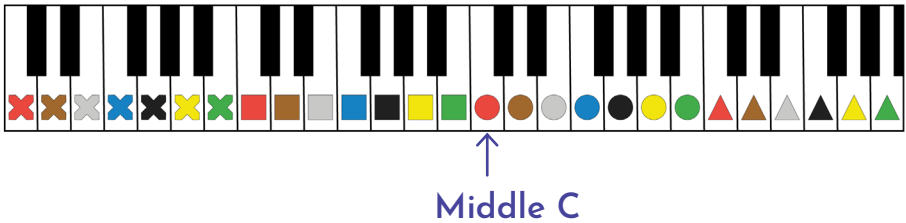
Figurenotes Explained



Figurenotes.org

Pitch

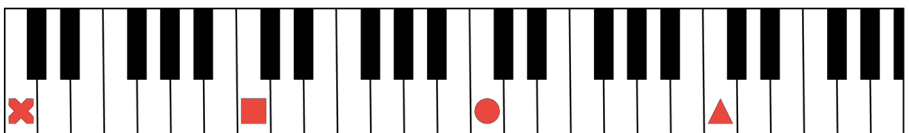
Figurenotes is a way of notating music.
It uses colour and shape to show pitch and rhythm.

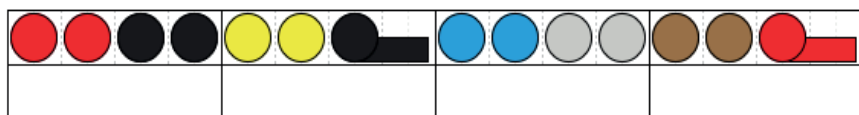


Each note has a colour.



Each octave has a shape.



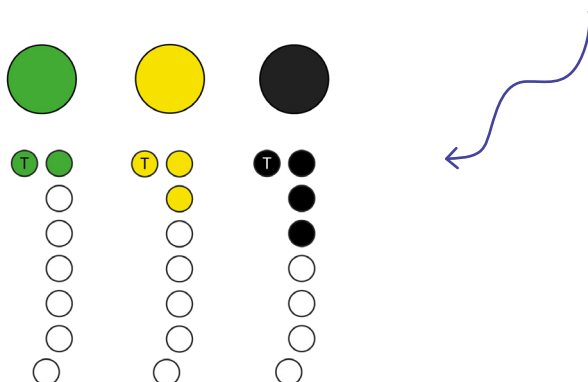


Some instruments use stickers to show you where the notes are, such as

- Piano
- Strings
- Tuned percussion

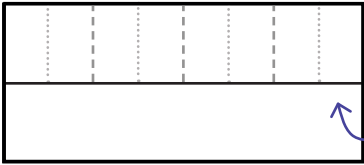


For instruments without stickers, such as woodwind and brass, we can learn by linking finger patterns with the colour/shape.



Rhythm

Music is divided into bars

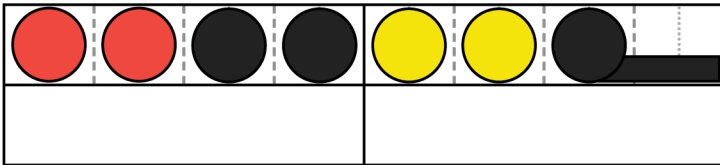


= 1 bar of 4

Each bar is the same size.

The notes take up a portion of the bar

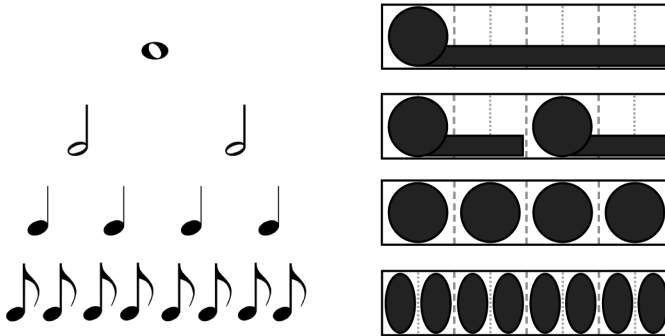
Can you see the subdivisions?



Rests are shown by empty spaces.
No note = no sound.

Some people prefer to use white notes for rests.
You can write these in your music using a pencil
or create your own parts in the Figurenotes Software.

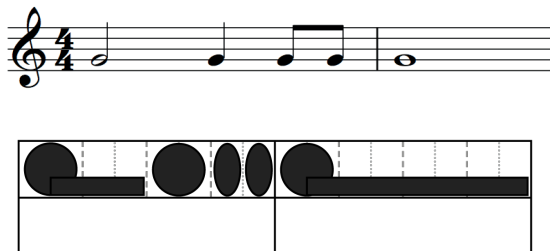
The note is as long as it looks.



Each Figure notes shape is one beat long.

We add a tail to show longer notes.

For shorter notes we squash the shape.

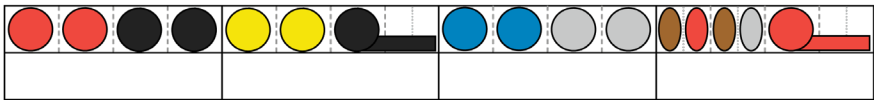


Progression

Work through 3 simple stages to reach standard notation.

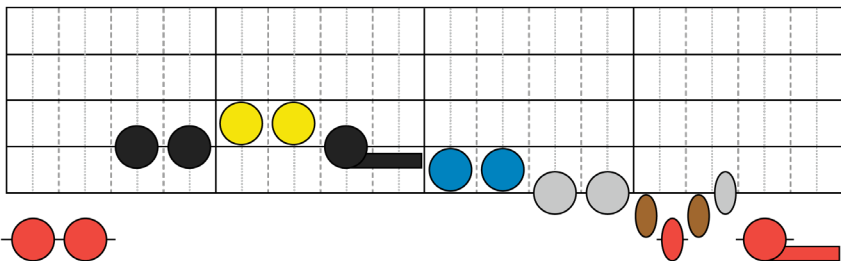
Each stage introduces a new element of music reading.

Stage 1



Standard notation readers may find this stage strange, but you'll soon get used to it. It is ideal for beginners. They are learning about rhythm, scanning left to right, and playing in time.

Stage 2



Now we start to see the shape of the melody.
Notes are either on a line or in a space, just like standard notation.
All the rhythm information stays the same as in stage 1.

Stage 3



Here we move to conventional notation with coloured noteheads. We recommend using flashcards to prepare musicians for the change in the way rhythm is notated.

The final step is to take the colours away

Now you're reading
standard notation!

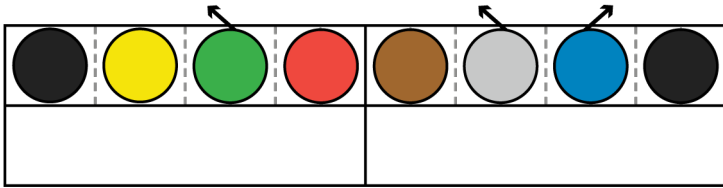


This step-by-step approach makes reading less of a barrier.

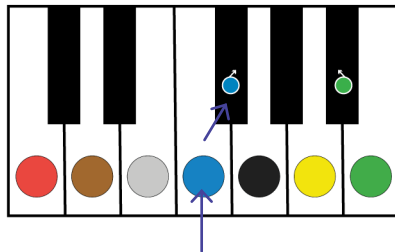
By using recognisable shapes and colours
Figurenotes demystifies note reading and removes the stress

Sharps and Flats

Sharps and flats are represented by arrows on top of the notes.



To play sharps and flats on stickered instruments, move your hand in the direction of the arrow.

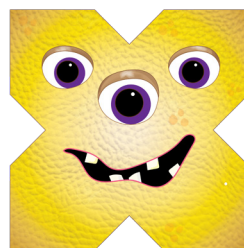


Find the Figurenotes symbol and move your hand in the direction of the arrow. Sharps and flats become less abstract and more concrete, making music theory easier to understand.

For instruments without stickers, such as brass or woodwind, we learn how to play each note using finger patterns and link them to the Figurenotes symbols.

This is the same for notes with sharps and flats.

This scale is G harmonic minor.
You can see Bb, Eb, and F#

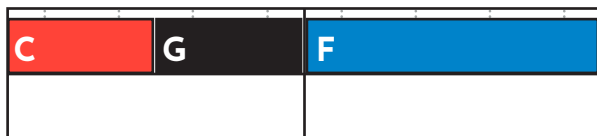


Did you know?

Figurenotes was invented in Finland in the '90s.
It has helped people all over the world
learn music in an accessible way.

Chords

Chords are shown by coloured boxes.



The length of the box depends on the duration of the chord.
You can play rhythmic patterns within this time,
or just hold the chord.

The colour is the same as the root note of the chord.
The chord name is also written within the chord box,
along with any sharps or flats needed.

Let's use C major as an example. It looks like this:



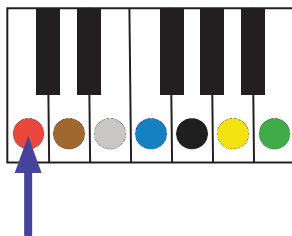
This chord contains the notes
C, E, and G;
Red, Grey, and Black.
We can play it at any octave.



Step 1

Find a note that matches the colour of the chord box.

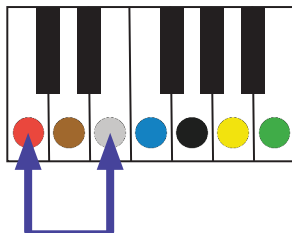
In this case, red.



Step 2

If you're ready to play a 2 note chord, add a 'friend', not a 'neighbour'.

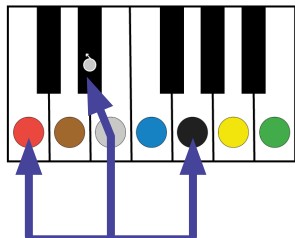
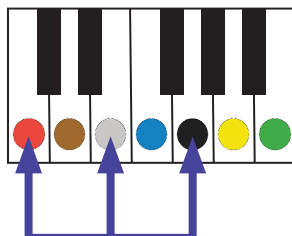
e.g. Red and Grey



Step 3

When you're ready to play the full triad (3 notes) you add another 'friend' not a 'neighbour'.

e.g. Red, Grey, and Black



C minor looks like this. Instead of an E (grey) you need to play Eb. This is shown in the box.

Any Questions?

Where should I start?

Take things back to basics. All musicians should start with pulse. Build from there with rhythm games, which are a breeze in Figurenotes. Then you can start bringing in pitch using colour and shape. Don't worry too much about verbal instruction, as Figurenotes is incredibly literal. We can learn by doing.

Can I use letter names for the notes?



Yes. This will depend on who you are teaching. It might be best to start with the colour names before moving onto letters, but some learners can cope with both at once.. The software allows you to add the letter names within the shapes at the click of a mouse.

What about clefs and time signatures?



We don't need to show clefs because the shapes show exactly which note we need. The same can be said of time signatures. The beats are clearly displayed, including subdivisions in their correct groupings. Our software allows you to show the time signature if needed, which can be a useful teaching tool for progression.



Can I adapt Figurenotes?

Figurenotes is incredibly adaptable, in that elements of the system can be used in lots of different ways. If a pupil that can already read standard notation is struggling with a particular rhythm, try presenting that rhythm using black and white Figurenotes shapes. Try using just the colours for a composition project. The world is your oyster.

The shapes and colours must remain consistent. This makes it easier for musicians to move teacher or school, join ensembles, and access Figurenotes resources. There are many options for adaptation in the Figurenotes Software.

How should I prepare my pupil for the next reading stage?

If you and your pupil feel ready to progress to the next stage of Figurenotes, make sure you use easier pieces while the reading becomes more of a challenge. You can use the different notation side-by-side on the stand for a while, so they can compare. Play lots of games focusing on the stave and pitch when moving from stage 1 to 2. Prepare using rhythm flashcards and games for stage 2 to 3.



Resources



Scan for
useful links

Digital Resources

Notation Software

Create your own Figurenotes tunes -
transcribe, arrange, compose, import/export
- all from your web browser. Ideal for use by
teachers and students.

Our accessible software is available via subscription.
Plugins for MuseScore and Sibelius can create stage 3 parts.

Figurenotes Accessible Music Hub (FAMHub)

- Get access to a library of digital resources - tunes, worksheets, lesson plans, videos, and so much more.
- Contribute to community resources
- Create private classroom areas for your pupils. Set assignments, receive submissions, and give feedback.

Stickers, Magnets, and Tune Books

Available through our online shop (Figurenotes.org/shop)

- Stickers for your instruments
- Magnets for rhythm games, composition, improvisation, and more
- An array of tune books - Folk, Festive, Classical
- First Figurenotes is our Early Years pack, full of songs, games, and musical development activities.

Training

Figurenotes: Developing Your Practice

This training is ideal for music educators who want to make their work more accessible. We meet online for 3 group sessions, followed by an individual session. Interactive, fun, and inspiring.

Bespoke Training

We can tailor our training to your organisation. Just get in touch to discuss your needs.



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