

Here's your first piece of music!

Music reads from left to right and from top to bottom, as in a book. Note how this piece (filling the first page) is divided into 15 segments called *bars* (UK) or *measures* (US), and proceeds along two sets of five lines. The top set of lines is for the right hand and the bottom set is for the left hand. The large round dots or *notes* each represent a single sound: each one means 'play a piano key'.

This piece uses only two keys near the middle of the piano, marked 'down' and 'up' on the book. Go ahead and locate each key, and play it using the right hand middle finger for the 'up' key and the left hand middle finger for the 'down' key. Every time the right hand plays, you are going to say *Up*. Every time the left hand plays, you are going to say *Down*. Now note how in bars 9, 11 and 13 the right and left hand notes are vertically aligned, meaning that here the two keys are played together. Each time this happens you are going to say *Both*. Finally, look at all the plus (+) signs. At each + sign you are going to say *And*, while simply holding down whichever key/s you just played—whether the Up, the Down or the Both.

This page of music is constructed entirely from the four elements: *Up*, *Down*, *Both* and *And*. Check the first four bars:

Up-And-Down-And | Up-Up-Down-And | Up-Up-Down-Down | Up-Up-Down-And ...

Nearly there! Let's practice some *rhythm*. Look at the second hand of a clock, and clap along with the ticks. When you can do this, read out aloud *while clapping* the first four bars as written in words above. One clap, one word, with a sharp, 'military' staccato. The more precise this is, the more accurate your rhythm will be. Don't wait between the bars, but just keep a regular beat going.

Now play the piece! Say your Ups, Downs etc all the way through as you play them, using a short, sharp voice like a drill sergeant. The tempo suggested, one beat per second, is an easy starting point, which you can gradually increase as you gain confidence. But never sacrifice accuracy of notes and precision of rhythm to speed.

When you've practiced the first page to your satisfaction, you have done virtually all the work of this lesson. Despite its different appearance, *Up and Down* on the facing page is the same piece. Simply play through *Up and Down* again from the right-hand page, still saying rhythmically those Ups, Downs, And and Boths. What is different? Every note has been given a *stem*. To be strictly accurate, the dot itself is the *notehead*, whilst the notehead plus stem are a *note*. (The fact that some stems go up and others down is a matter of tidiness and has no musical significance. Look ahead in the book to see how the stems go in whatever direction keeps things neatest).

But the fact that some stems are joined by a *beam*, and others not, *is* significant. Can you see the pattern for this? The notes followed by an 'And'—the ones you hold for longer—are those that stand on their own: the 'And' is taking the place of another note so there is nothing to join to!

A note that stands on its own is called a *quarter note* (non-US: *crotchet*), whilst two notes joined by a beam are a pair of *eighth notes* (*quavers*). Eighth notes/crotchets clearly have half of the duration of quarter notes/quavers. For now you will encounter them only in pairs (if you'd like to see a single eighth note, your first one will be in Lesson 11, 'canon in A major', 6th note in the left hand).

Now for the rest of the terminology. The vertical lines between bars are called *barlines*, and at the end is a *double barline* to celebrate making it there. Each set of five music lines is called a *staff*, the plural of which is *staves*. The fancy curly music signs at the head of each staff are called *clefs*; the upper clef is a *treble clef* for the high sounds, and the lower clef is a *bass clef* for the low sounds. The staves are bound together at the beginning of each *system* (or more colloquially, *line of music*) by a *brace*. And finally, the word *keyboard* properly means, not an 'electronic piano', but simply the set of all the black and white keys of the piano.

And that's it. Though naturally on a reduced scale, you've read music exactly as a professional does. The mechanical aspect of learning to play piano from the notes is fairly analogous to doing a typing course. In Lessons 2 and 3 you stay in the same position on the keyboard but with more notes/keys for each hand. In Lesson 5 you move to ten fingers on ten keys, which produces more satisfying sounds.

The first two bars are plain old Ups and Downs with an 'And'. But in bars 3-4 something different happens. The left hand plays:

A A B B | C B A + |

See how the notes change position on the staff while this happens. The A is sitting on the top line of the staff: it's just a Down which we're now calling by its proper name. The B is one step higher, sitting above the top line. And the C is a step higher still, floating off the staff altogether and hence requiring a small extra line of its own (called a *leger line*).

The A is played by left hand (LH) middle finger.

The B is played by LH pointer finger.

The C is played by LH thumb.

Now play the first eight bars, singing the letter-names where they are written in, and otherwise saying Ups, Downs and Ands (no Boths here)! Keep each hand waiting in position while the other hand plays; you should not need to look at your hands at all. 'Walk' the fingers smoothly between keys, and keep them elegantly rounded.

Now for the right hand (RH).

RH middle finger plays the Up, which we will start calling by its proper name, E.

RH pointer finger plays the key D.

RH thumb plays the key C—the same key played by LH thumb, but not at the same time.

This C is generally known as *Middle C*.

Looking at the notes on the page, the three RH notes are a mirror image of the three LH ones. The E is on the bottom line of its staff, the D hangs below the bottom line, and the middle C has fallen off the staff, needing a leger line to hold it in place.

So play and sing (or say :) the whole piece! Remember: whenever there's an And you hold the key down: think '*And* more sound'.

As before, the piece *See-Saw* is simply the facing page written out fully, with stems and beams turning the noteheads into crotchets and quavers (I find these terms more familiar and convenient than quarter notes and eighth notes, so I'll be using them from now on).

While playing See-Saw, sing or say all the letter-names: goodbye to Ups and Downs! (**But never to Ands!! :-)**)

This lesson adds two notes in the right hand: F is played by RH ring finger and G by RH little finger/pinkie. Otherwise there is nothing conceptually new in *Walk, Fingers, Walk!*

The facing page has two small games:

(above): Practice identifying the 7 letter names A-G as marked on jumbled segments of keyboard;

(below): Practice identifying the 7 letter names A-G as notes on the musical staff (= set of 5 lines).

This lesson gives you a feel for how the piano functions as a whole.

The key D we have already used is the one labeled 'start'. Begin with the left-hand page, and the left hand. Number 1 on the 'start' key means 'thumb', as shown on the labelled diagram below. (Your fingers are numbered from 1 to 5, and the thumb is 'finger number 1'). So go ahead and play the start key with your left thumb. Next comes the black key immediately to the left, which you play with finger number 3 (middle finger). Go ahead and play it, doing your best to 'walk' smoothly from thumb (1) to middle finger (3). Aim to connect the sounds smoothly without overlapping, though the main thing is to get the correct fingers playing the correct keys in the correct order.

Next is the white key to the left, played by the thumb. While finger 3 holds down its black key, move your thumb smoothly underneath it as it heads for that white key. This way you can join the sounds together smoothly as you 'walk' your fingers from one key to the next. Then comes another white key, using here finger 2, your pointer finger. And so on all the way down to the final black key. Every time a black '3' is followed by a white '1', you will need to pass your thumb smoothly underneath the middle finger: this action is called 'the passage of the thumb'.

So altogether, 19 keys are to be played in strict order from right to left. Every black key is played by finger 3. Most white keys use finger 1 (thumb), whilst three of them use finger 2.

These sounds are progressively 'getting lower' in pitch. When you get to the 'bottom', put a sticker or marker on the final black key as illustrated. This will help with locating hand positions later on.

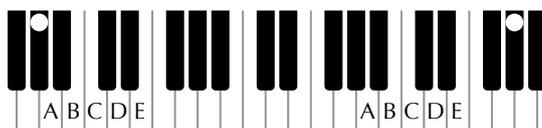
Now switch to the facing page, where you place your right thumb on the (same) start key, and play the exact mirror image of what your left hand just did, all the way 'up' to the 'sticker' key, on which you then place a sticker or marker.

You have just played a *chromatic scale*, or in other words a series of tiny musical 'steps'.

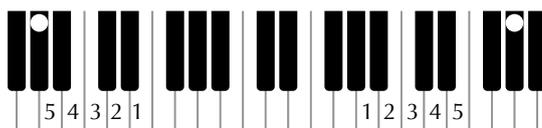
Once each hand can play from 'start to sticker', then teach each hand to play the chromatic scale in the opposite direction, from 'sticker to start.' Here you will find that you no longer pass the thumb under finger 3. Instead, you will frequently need to pass finger 3 *over* the thumb. Think about it: when playing in reverse, all the actions will naturally take place in reverse. But rather than getting confused thinking about it, try it out and it will become clear.

Each of these tiny musical steps (which together make up the chromatic scale) is called a *semitone*, which is the smallest musical 'distance'—or *interval*—used in Western music.

Locate these ten keys (ABCDE) on the diagram in the book:



And place your ten fingers on them:



Before starting, do a few simple 'warm-ups': everything in this lesson is constructed using the following simple patterns. Sing the letter-names as you play:

- RH plays A-B-C-D-E (use 1-2-3-4-5)
- Then in reverse: E-D-C-B-A (5-4-3-2-1)

- Then LH plays A-B-C-D-E (5-4-3-2-1)
- And in reverse: E-D-C-B-A (1-2-3-4-5)
- Both hands slowly together: A-B-C-D-E
- And carefully in reverse: E-D-C-B-A
- RH plays ‘Both’ A and E together (1,5)
- LH plays ‘Both’ A and E together (5,1)

Now for **a**. In the first two bars, RH plays

A B C D | E E E +

As before, there are four slow and regular ‘beats’ per bar, and one beat per second is a good rate at which to start. Play each key precisely with its beat. You need to have (1) the correct finger playing (2) the correct key at (3) the correct moment. Take things slowly and carefully at first.

(A metronome is a useful tool for keeping a steady beat; I use the ProMetronome app and the Matrix MR-500 as a standalone device - one click per second corresponds to metronome setting 60).

But not to worry if you don’t have a metronome yet. Go ahead and play those two bars with RH. Relax the shoulders and upper arms; these should be loose and ‘floppy’, whilst the fingers are ‘elegantly rounded’ but strong, carrying the arm-weight which you ‘drop’ into the key. As before, ‘walk’ your fingers smoothly from one key to the next—obviously not, though, when you repeat a key as in bar 2.

Bars 3 and 4 are played by LH, and they go:

A B C D | E E A +

Bars 5 and 6, for RH and LH respectively, are simply:

‘Both’ Both Both + | Both Both Both +

Be sure you’ve played **a** properly several times through before trying **b**, which goes:

A B C D | E D C B
 A’s B C D | E D C B
 A’s B’s C’s D’s | E’s E’s A’s +

Don’t play it until you’ve checked and understood it all. The first beat of bar 3 has both hands playing their A together—so we’ll say A’s here as shown above. And bars 5-6 have both hands playing together all the way, so say A’s, B’s, etc.

In **c**, you’re simply going to say the names of the RH keys. In this exercise, the LH only has ‘Boths’—A and E together—, which of course come exactly where written, in bars 2, 4, 5 and 6. Now look at RH, where there are ‘gaps’ after a note (bars 2, 4, 5, 6): treat each of the notes preceding the gap as a crotchet, ie you hold it for the length of an ‘And’.

On the facing page, “One and two and” means we start counting every bar as 1 + 2 + . So do this!

This piece is a preparation for *Fire Dance* below it—notice how the notes are the same, simply with the addition of stems and beams. As soon as you’ve got the hang of saying ‘one and two and’ as you play, start practicing *Fire Dance* proper.

It needs a precise beat, loud and strong. No great subtlety—it sounds best when you just bang it out to the beat!

If coordinating the hands becomes a problem, (1) *clap* through: RH & LH on right and left knees respectively; (2) practice the hands separately.

Note where RH has a crotchet while LH has quavers, and practise holding the crotchet through its ‘And’ while LH plays its two quavers. In my experience of teaching this piece, the two trickiest spots are the first beat of bar 11 and the first beat of the final bar. Each time LH has E/A (‘Both’) after a descending E-D-C-B sequence just before. LH is ‘expecting’ to play simply an A at the ‘bottom’, and instead gets a ‘Both’, which of course needs to be coordinated with RH too. Particular ‘tricky spots’ arise in every piece of music, and the quickest way to deal with one is to isolate it and repeat it till it’s right. So you might, for instance, repeat bar 10 plus the first beat of 11. First get it right, then set a little goal like getting it right ten times in a row. This can feel like a slow method, but it only take a couple of minutes, and is a much faster path to getting the whole piece right than simply repeatedly playing through and getting the trouble spots wrong every time. All that does is to train in the mistakes. (You don’t fix a leaky radiator by changing the tires).

There's nothing really new in this lesson. The three pieces, Drum Beat, Spinning Top and Spanish Dance simply reinforce ABCDE in both hands using simple patterns.

The term 'A minor' refers to the particular sound made by these five keys, ABCDE. At the end of the notes to Lesson 4 you encountered the term *semitone*, meaning the smallest musical 'distance' or 'interval' available on the piano, and in Western music generally. The term *tone* describes an interval of two semitones—twice the musical distance. We say that key A and key B are **one tone apart**: there is a black key in between, so the interval A-B contains two semitones.

Check to see how the series of keys A–B–C–D–E is made up of the intervals *tone-semitone-tone-tone*. This particular sequence of tones and semitones produces a characteristic type of sound called *minor*. Soon we will encounter the 'opposite' of minor—*major!*—where the sequence goes *tone-tone-semitone-tone*. If you're curious, you can experiment with five-key minor and major sequences anywhere on the piano; you can start on any key, black or white.

In most of Spanish Dance, RH plays two keys at once: A/C (1,3); B/D (2,4); and C/E (3,5). Obviously, right at the end you play A/C/E (1,3,5). The white uncolored keys are called minims, and are twice the length of crotchets: hold a minim for a full bar.

Take time to familiarise your fingers and mind with the various permutations and patterns you encounter in this lesson.

Note-games 2 gives you practice identifying the positions of the ten notes of lessons 5-6.

Here you will shift both hands *two keys to the right*, so that they play CDEFG. The sound made by these five keys is called 'C major'.

Start in the familiar ABCDE position for exercise 1 in A minor. The double dots at the end of bar 8 are called a 'repeat sign', telling you go back immediately to the beginning and keep playing. The second time through, skip bar 8 with the 1. sign and go straight to bar 9 with the 2. sign to end the exercise. This exercise is a finger drill, and you can progressively increase the speed as you become familiar with it.

Exercise 1 in C major (*typo alert - it's not 'exercise 2', which comes in the next lesson*) does exactly the same thing on the keys CDEFG. We say this position is 'higher'—see how the notes are written higher on the staves, and hear how the sound is higher pitched.

In 'song in A minor' / 'song in C major' the notes do not simply go up and down in order, but there are some jumps and some repetitions. Practice the hands separately at first while saying the letter-names aloud.

Round Dance 1 starts with eight bars in A minor position, then repeats them in C major position (check the notes to see this). So at the end of line 1 you move to the new position—practice doing this smoothly, without interruption to the rhythm. *Round Dance 2* uses the same RH tune as Round Dance 1, but there is a more complex LH accompaniment, which you should practice on its own before playing together with RH. Once you know Round Dances 1 and 2, you can join them together to form one piece.

Exercises 2 in A minor/C major are slightly more complex than exercises 1. Treat them as finger drill and increase the tempo with familiarity.

The word *Canon*, in piano music, refers to a piece where each hand plays the same tune, whilst the hands start at different times (as in a sung Round). Notice how *canon in A minor* is simply the tune of *song in A minor* from Lesson 7, played with RH and LH starting at different times.

Note-games 3 practice the seven position A-G in each hand.

Theme and Variations is entirely in C major—no shifting of positions. As the name suggests, the Variations are based on the Theme—similar but slightly altered. Always make sure that the separate hands are securely known as a preliminary step to putting them together. (You're making a model plane, and you want to get both wings right before you join them to the fuselage). LH of Variation 2 should be as smooth and joined as possible. In Variation 3, bars 2, 4 and 6: RH has C/D *together twice*, followed by the thumb 'poking' down to B. With children I say, 'squash, squash, poke'. And note how RH / bar 7 also finishes with a 'poke'.

March is in the key of C major, whilst *Lament* revises the key of A minor.

First, look at bars 5-6 of *March*. Here RH plays the 'squash, squash, poke' that you know from Variation 3: the thumb 'pokes' down, out of position, to play the key B. Right now, verify that this key B is sitting on the *middle line* of the staff. Now look at the RH in bar 4 of line 2 (ie bar 14 of the piece). Here thumb plays B along with finger 5 playing G. Verify that this happens also in bars 2 and 6 of line 3, and in bar 8 of line 4. What about line 4, bars 1-2? Here's the 'squash' (D/C) with an added G, followed by the thumb moving to B in the next bar. The combination CDG sounds dissonant, and indeed *dissonance* is its technical description. The BDG combination that follows is the 'resolution' of the dissonance.

In bars 9-10 of line 3 there are three signs looking like this: # . The name for the # sign is 'sharp', and *it makes the note it precedes one semitone higher (ie to the right)*. Note that in this case each of these sharp signs precedes an F. And also note that one semitone higher than F is the black key immediately to the right of F. This black key we call F-sharp, which we write as F# . Simply play the F-sharp with the same finger that would otherwise play the F (RH 4 / LH 2). Note that we say and write *F-sharp* or *F#*, although in musical notation the sharp sign comes *before* the note it alters.

Another further rule is that a sharp sign altering a particular note in a bar applies to *any further instances of that same note within that bar*. In our case, this rule means that the very first of those three sharp signs (RH) applies not only to the F it immediately precedes, but also to the two F's immediately following it—the sharp 'lasts' for the rest of the bar. So altogether, there are a total of five F#'s in those two bars.

Finally, the signs *f* and *p* stand for the Italian words *forte* (loud) and *piano* (soft) respectively. And the 'hairpins' in bars 4 of line 3 and bars 1-2 of line 4 are called respectively *diminuendo* (becoming softer) and *crescendo* (becoming louder).

Be sure to count 1 + 2 + correctly in each bar, regardless of the spacing of the notes.

In *Lament* the melody alternates between RH and LH, creating obvious subdivisions for practice. In bar 1 of line 3, and also in bar 5 of line 4: RH holds the E with finger 5 while changing B to C. Also note in line 3 how the LH thumb stretches out of position to F (four times).

Exercise 3, note-games 4 and canon in C major are self-explanatory.

With *Echoes*, note how the lines of music alternate between C major and A minor. Observing the *f* and *p* signs will create an echo effect. The curved line joining the final two RH A's in the piece is called a *tie*, and it means that you play the A only once, and simply continue holding it down for the duration of the second A. The *pp* sign at the end is short for *pianissimo*, or very soft.

This lesson takes the familiar A minor position and makes *one small change* to it which turns A minor into A major.

What is this 'one small change'? Look at exercise 1 in A minor and see how, both in RH and in LH, the third note in most bars has been altered by a *sharp sign* before it: the *white key C* becomes the *black key C-sharp, or C#*. Next, note that it will be the *middle finger (3)* in each hand that plays that black C#.

It's worth taking a moment to consider what's happening. You might look back in these notes to lesson 6, where you learned that *major keys go: tone-tone-semitone-tone*; whilst *minor keys go: tone-semitone-tone-tone*.

The middle fingers in each hand, by playing C# instead of C, have turned the *minor sequence tone-semitone-tone-tone* into the *major sequence tone-tone-semitone-tone*.

Remember that the terms *semitone* and *tone* refer to the *difference in pitch*—or the *interval*—between *two keys*. To create a *semitone*, first play any key, then play either of the two keys directly next to it: it's the smallest possible musical interval on the piano. A semitone can be between a black and a white key, or between two white keys (check), but never between two black keys—there's always at least one white key between two blacks. And a *tone* is between any two keys *where there's exactly one key in between*: this can be from black to white, or white to white, or black to black (check again).

So we convert A minor to A major by shifting the middle finger one semitone to the right. This changes both the sound and feel, and it takes a bit of practice to get used to both.

In *canon in A major*, the LH in bar two plays a *dotted crotchet*—also called a *dotted eighth note*—followed by a single quaver (eighth note). Follow the 1 + 2 + counting written in this bar to play it correctly. A dot after any note lengthens the note by half its value. As is clear, a single quaver is indicated by a curly 'tail' on its stem, replacing the beam that joins two quavers.

Lullaby should be played softly, slowly and smoothly. Note the LH 'pokes' to F# in bars 3, 5 and 7.

Bells contains numerous RH 'pokes' to G#, and also some LH 'jumps' down to key E in bars 9, 28, 29 and 30. Simply find the E that is eight white keys (= an *octave*) down—to the left—from the E you are used to playing with your thumb. This E is played with the little finger, after which LH finger 5 simply 'snaps' back into its A major position. Also note the six LH D#'s! (there are two in bar 17—remember that a sharp 'lasts' for the rest of the bar).

Here, middle finger 3 in each hand turns C major into C minor by playing the black key directly to the left of E, which is called E flat, or E^b. As with a sharp sign, the flat sign ^b comes *before* the note it alters, even though we say 'E flat' (if the sign came after the note we might not see it in time...). Check to see that the order of tones and semitones is now altered to the minor sequence: *tone-semitone-tone-tone*.

Notice on the keyboard diagram that there are two RH C minor positions here. In one, your RH thumb starts on middle C, whilst in the other, the RH is in the more familiar position of March, one octave higher.

In the piece *Lost*, the RH alternates between the two positions. At bar 4, there's a single RH quaver followed by a *quaver rest*: this gives your RH a moment to find the new, higher position. In LH bar 9, finger 2 passes *over* the thumb to play A^b, followed by thumb on G. Note LH 'poke' to A in bar 12, played together with the RH F[#].

Triads introduces three new things: (1) The dot under each 3-note chord (ie *triad*) in RH means play it *staccato*, or detached. These staccato triads sound best 'short and sharp'. (2) The LH notes with a double beam are called semi-quavers (or sixteenth notes), and go twice as fast. Bar 2 shows you exactly what to do. And (3): Bars 8 and 22 contain a 'natural' sign: [‡]. This simply cancels out any sharp or flat that would otherwise need to be played, and in both these cases it makes F[#] into a plain white F [‡] (F natural).

13

D minor

Time to move on from A and C positions altogether! Our new position of D minor is very close to C minor: simply shift both hands one key to the right, so that your fingers are sitting on the five white keys D-E-F-G-A. This is D minor position. Be sure to play exercises 1-3 in D minor position.

Folk Dance has a constant LH quaver beat, with the thumb regularly 'poking' up to B^b. Don't forget to make the flat sign 'last' for any subsequent B's in the bar: in practice this will entail pairs of LH B's throughout the piece. This piece falls into eight-bar sections, and I suggest you place a small asterisk over the first notes respectively of bars 9, 17 and 25, and practise each section on its own at first. The sections starting on bars 9 and 25 contain numerous RH 'jumps' from the D played by the thumb (the 'normal' D, in home position) to the D one octave higher, played by little finger 5. Ensure that LH keeps a constant beat throughout: 1 + 2 +, and make the RH fit in with this beat; go as slowly as you need to at first.

14

D major . D minor

We converted A minor into A major by replacing C with C sharp (C[#]). Similarly, we are going to turn D minor into D major in *Innocence* by replacing the F's with F sharps. Be sure to practice exercises 1-3 in D major to familiarize yourself with the feel and sound of D major.

Apart from that, there's little here that needs explanation. We're simply using semiquavers freely and 'randomly' in both hands. Note how RH thumb often 'pokes' to C[#] in the same way that it 'poked' to G[#] in *Bells*.

Tango is back in D minor. This piece has a distinctive rhythm, where the '2' of the '1 + 2 +' is often a quaver rest, creating an offbeat ('syncopated') effect. Practise slowly until the rhythm is secure, then speed up as confidence is gained. The last line of music starts with RH jumping to the same high D you met in *Folk Dance*. Now check the score to see that two of these high D's are followed in the same hand position by C, B^b, G, A, A. In the rest that follows (quaver rest of 3rd bar in line 4), shift the hand back down to its original position, to play G with finger 4 as indicated. And at the end of the piece, RH jumps back up to the high position. The four signs > are *accents*: play these final chords strongly and sharply (in addition to the indicated staccato).

The *exercise for scales and chords* needs careful attention to the fingering. If you have trouble finding any of the notes, go back to *note-games* 5, and 6 (also 7 in this lesson). This exercise gets expanded in the Intermediate book, lesson 22. (You can also leave it out and simply tackle lesson 22 when you get to it).

Each bar in *Blues Prelude* has two LH semiquavers followed by six RH semiquavers: a steady stream. The curved lines here indicate to hold down each of the two LH notes for the whole bar; this will make the piece sound more sonorous and harmonious (*simile* is Italian for 'do the same'). Note how LH 'pokes' first to B flat in bars 9-10, then further down to A in bar 11, before snapping back into the base C major position. Be careful to read the notes correctly in the last 4 bars: a couple of small surprises here. The Italian word *ritardando* means 'held back', ie slow down towards the end.