

Level Up!

A Graduated Approach to Clef Reading
inspired by George Dandelot's *Manuel pratique*



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Level Up! - A Graduated Approach to Clef Reading

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“Level Up” refers to a familiar aspect of video game design. No one wants to play a game that is impossible to learn, so they tend to be organized in levels that increase in difficulty. The first level is very easy - it helps you learn the most basic concepts of a particular imaginary world, how to move around, how to score points, etc. Later levels introduce new characters, new challenges, or just faster speed and higher density of objects. As you graduate from level to level your skill level increases until you are eventually performing in ways that would have seemed unthinkable on your very first try.

Reading the notes on the clef is a kind of low-level skill similar to moving around obstacles in a video game. At first it might be tedious and awkward, but if you keep at it it will become automatic. Ideally, you want to be able to read notes as quickly and effortlessly as you are reading the words in this sentence. A graduated approach organized in levels can help you achieve this.

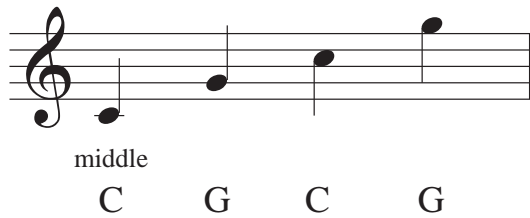
This idea isn't really from the video game era at all. I learned it from a very handy textbook published in 1928, George Dandelot's *Manuel pratique pour l'étude des clés*. From what I understand, Dandelot's work is still under copyright - you can buy a newly edited French version on Amazon for \$15, and I once saw an English translation in the store for about \$35. But why bother? Dandelot's idea was so simple (and so brilliant) that we can easily make a new version that will serve the same purpose. What follows is roughly the same as Dandelot's technique. I've changed a few details, introduced the newfangled term “levels,” and generated all of my own notes.

How to use this book

I don't think you want to play or sing these exercises - they aren't very musical and aren't going to sound like much of anything. But you do want to practice recognizing the notes. Thus, I think you should “chant” the note names in a steady rhythm - just say what they are, out loud, like “A”, “B”, “C” and so on.

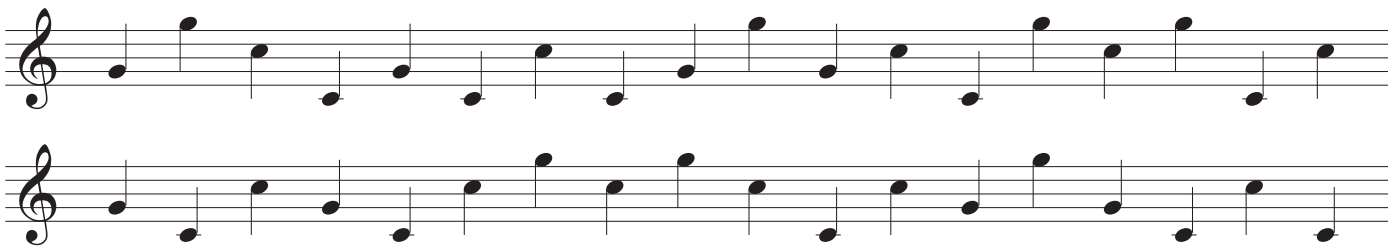
You can also write the letter names below the notes, but that only works once and then the exercise is useless. So if you are going to do that be ready to print a fresh, unmarked copy later.

Treble Clef



Treble Clef is also referred to as “G clef,” because its curlicue shape makes circles around two different G’s. To get started we are going to practice only C’s and G’s as our “anchor pitches.”

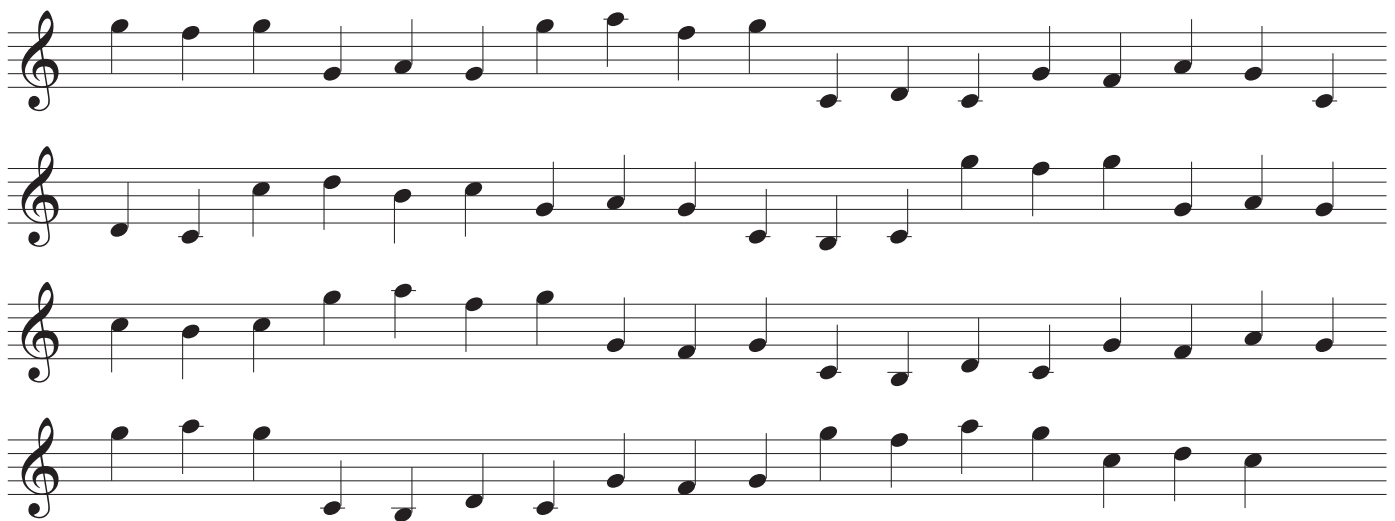
LEVEL ONE - THE ANCHOR PITCHES



LEVEL TWO - NEIGHBOR FIGURES



Our neighbor figures start on an anchor pitch, move away to a neighbor note, and then return.

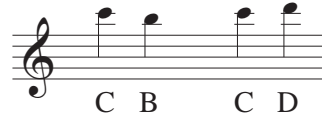


LEVEL THREE - INCOMPLETE NEIGHBORS + HIGH C



Now our neighbor notes merely precede or follow an anchor note.

PLUS we'll add a new high C, two ledger lines above the staff.



LEVEL FOUR - JUST THE NEIGHBOR NOTES, FULLY RANDOM

So all the notes in this level are B's, D's, F's or A's.

LEVEL FIVE - THIRD-RELATED NEIGHBOR FIGURES

C A C C E C G E G G B G

Now we make the same pattern as level two, with an anchor note, nearby note, and return, but we skip by thirds instead of steps.

LEVEL SIX - THIRD-RELATED INCOMPLETE NEIGHBORS

C A C E A C E C

Third-related notes either follow or precede an anchor note.

LEVEL SEVEN - FULLY RANDOM NOTES, ONE OCTAVE



All white notes between middle C (aka C4, c') and the octave above (= C5, c'').

Four staves of musical notation, each containing 12 random white notes within the one-octave range from C4 to C5. The notes are scattered across the four-line staff, representing a fully random selection of the octave.

LEVEL EIGHT - FULLY RANDOM NOTES, HIGHER OCTAVE



All white notes between C5 (or c'') and C6 (c''').

Four staves of musical notation, each containing 12 random white notes within the higher octave range from C5 to C6. The notes are scattered across the four-line staff, representing a fully random selection of the octave.

LEVEL NINE - FULLY RANDOM, TWO OCTAVES

Four staves of musical notation, each in treble clef. The notes are scattered across two octaves, representing a fully random sequence. The notes are quarter notes, and the rhythm is consistent across all staves.

Bass Clef

A diagram showing a bass clef on a staff. The staff has four notes: a middle C (C), an F, a C, and an F. The notes are placed on the lines and spaces of the staff to illustrate the positions of F and C relative to the clef's dots.

Bass clef places its two dots around F, so we are going to use F and C as our anchor pitches.

LEVEL ONE - THE ANCHOR PITCHES

Two staves of musical notation, each in bass clef. The notes are arranged in a sequence that highlights the anchor pitches F and C. The notes are quarter notes, and the rhythm is consistent across both staves.