

Level Up!

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



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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 most start with a very low level of difficulty and gradually increase from there. As you graduate from level to level your skill 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 basic 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.

The 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*. You can get a public domain version (in French) by searching on the internet, and I've seen new print editions for sale for about \$25. But why bother? 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, called the exercises “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

middle

C G C G

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

C B C C D C G F G G A G et cetera...

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

LEVEL THREE - INCOMPLETE NEIGHBORS + HIGH C

A musical staff in G clef with seven notes. The notes are grouped into pairs: G (two notes), F (two notes), G (one note), A (two notes), F (one note), G (two notes), A (one note), and G (two notes). The notes are black with stems pointing to the right.

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.

A musical staff in G clef. It has four notes: a quarter note on the first line, a eighth note on the second line, a quarter note on the third line, and a eighth note on the fourth line. Below the staff, the notes are labeled 'C' and 'B' under the first two notes, and 'C' and 'D' under the last two notes.

A musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in common time. The soprano part features sustained notes and eighth-note patterns, often with grace notes. The alto, tenor, and bass parts provide harmonic support, with the bass part providing the harmonic foundation. The score is written on four staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F# major). The vocal parts are separated by vertical bar lines, and the harmonic parts are grouped by vertical bar lines.

LEVEL FOUR - THIRD-RELATED NEIGHBOR FIGURES

A musical staff in G major, starting with a treble clef. It contains seven notes: a quarter note on C, an eighth note on A, a quarter note on C, a quarter note on E, a quarter note on G, a quarter note on B, and a quarter note on G. The notes are separated by vertical bar lines.

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 FIVE - THIRD-RELATED INCOMPLETE NEIGHBORS



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

Four staves of music in G clef, each consisting of four measures. The notes are primarily quarter notes, with some eighth and sixteenth notes, forming a continuous melody.

LEVEL SIX - FULLY RANDOM NOTES, ONE OCTAVE



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

Four staves of music in G clef, each consisting of four measures. The notes are fully random, covering the entire range from C4 to C5.

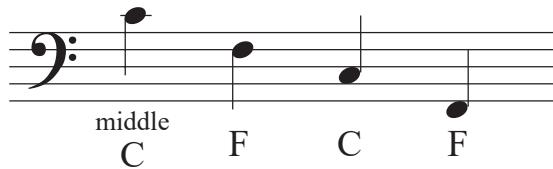
LEVEL SEVEN - FULLY RANDOM NOTES, HIGHER OCTAVE



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

LEVEL EIGHT - FULLY RANDOM, TWO OCTAVES

Bass Clef



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

LEVEL TWO - NEIGHBOR FIGURES

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

LEVEL THREE - INCOMPLETE NEIGHBORS + LOW C

F E F G E F G F

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

PLUS we'll add another C, two ledger lines below the staff.

C B C D

LEVEL FOUR - THIRD-RELATED NEIGHBOR FIGURES

F A F F D F C E C C A C

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

LEVEL FIVE - THIRD-RELATED INCOMPLETE NEIGHBORS

F A F D D F A F

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

LEVEL SIX - FULLY RANDOM NOTES, ONE OCTAVE

All white notes between the C in the staff (also known as the “small c” or C3) and the middle C (aka C4, c').

LEVEL SEVEN - FULLY RANDOM NOTES, LOWER OCTAVE



All white notes between the great C (C2) and the small C (C3).

LEVEL EIGHT - FULLY RANDOM, TWO OCTAVES