

Clefs

Clefs define the pitch range, or tessitura, of the staff on which it is placed. A clef is usually the *leftmost* symbol on a staff. Additional clefs may appear in the middle of a staff to indicate a change in register for instruments with a wide range. In early music, clefs could be placed on any of several lines on a staff.



G clef (Treble clef)

The center of the spiral defines the line or space upon which it rests as the pitch *G above middle C*. Positioned here, it assigns G above middle C to the *second line from the bottom* of the staff, and is referred to as the "treble clef." This is the most commonly encountered clef in modern notation, and is used for most modern vocal music. Middle C is the first ledger line below the staff here. The shape of the clef comes from a stylized upper-case-G.



C clef (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass clefs)

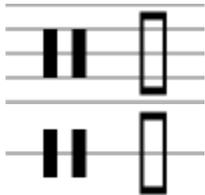
These clefs point to the line (or space, rarely) representing middle C. As illustrated here, it makes the *center line on the staff* middle C, and is referred to as the "alto clef." This clef is used in modern notation for the viola. While all clefs can be placed anywhere on the staff to indicate various tessitura, the C clef is most often considered a "movable" clef: it is frequently seen pointing instead to the fourth line and called a "tenor clef".

C clefs were used in vocal music of the classical era and earlier; however, their usage in vocal music has been supplanted by the universal use of the treble and bass clefs. Modern editions of music from such periods generally transpose the original C clef parts to Treble (Soprano and Alto), Octave Treble (Tenor), or Bass Clef (Tenor, Baritone, and Basses).



F clef (Bass clef)

The line or space between the dots in this clef denotes F below middle C. Positioned here, it makes the *second line from the top* of the staff F below middle C, and is called a "bass clef." This clef appears nearly as often as the treble clef, especially in choral music, where it represents the bass and baritone voices. Middle C is the first ledger line above the staff here. In old music, particularly vocal scores, this clef is sometimes encountered centered on the third staff line, in which position it is referred to as a *baritone clef*; this usage has essentially become obsolete. The shape of the clef comes from a stylized upper-case-F (which used to be written the reverse of the modern F)



Neutral or Rhythm clef

Used for non-pitched instruments, such as some of those used for percussion. Each line can represent a specific percussion instrument within a set, such as in a drum set. Two different styles of neutral clefs are pictured here. It may also be drawn with a separate single-line staff for each untuned percussion instrument.



Octave clef

Treble and bass clefs can also be modified by octave numbers. An eight or fifteen above a clef raises the intended pitch range by one or two octaves respectively. Similarly, an eight or fifteen below a clef lowers the pitch range by one or two octaves respectively. A treble clef with an eight below is the most commonly used, typically used for guitar and similar instruments.