

The 7 Markers of Musical Success

by JERALD SIMON

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2 Above Middle C — (C) — [2] (2nd marker)

The 2nd General — (G) — [5] (5th marker)

The 1st General — (G) — [4] (4th marker)

This is the same note (middle C) "Sea Level" (C) — (C) — [1] (1st marker)

— (C) — [1] (1st marker)

The FROWN — (F) — [6] (6th marker)

The Angle — (A) — [7] (7th marker)

2 Below Middle C — (C) — [3] (3rd marker)

Visit musicmotivation.com/learnreadmusic to download this **FREE PDF** and to watch the video of Jerald teaching these 7 markers of musical success in his Theory Tip Tuesday video. The story is simple and once you learn the story, you will never forget these notes. This is the fun and simple way to learn to read music.

Please feel free to make copies of this and share this handout with other piano students, piano teachers, and parents of piano students who are learning to read music. This is not available for sale since this is a FREE PDF. Piano teachers and parents are authorized to make copies of this handout to help piano students learn to read notes.

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What is this →

2 (2nd marker)

5 (5th marker)

4 (4th marker)

1 (1st marker)

1 (1st marker)

6 (6th marker)

7 (7th marker)

3 (3rd marker)

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The 7 Markers of Musical Success

by Music Mentor **Jerald Simon**

In this hand-out I explain how I teach what I refer to as “The 7 Markers of Musical Success” - an easy way to help students quickly identify notes on the staff and learn how to read music once and for all. You can download the FREE PDF packet, of which this is part, by visiting this link on my website: <http://musicmotivation.com/learnreadmusic>. You will also be able to watch the video I filmed of myself teaching and explaining these **7 Markers of Musical Success**.

Here is a brief explanation. I teach “**The 7 Markers of Musical Success**” to all of my students and share this explanation with all of my piano students on their very first lesson - even the young students. I do modify it a bit with the younger students and I will explain how I do that. Let me tell you the story. I introduce the students to 7 markers that they can quickly find on the staff and the piano because of the following story I tell. These are the 7 markers:

1. **Middle C (C4) = “C” Level (sea level) - This is Captain “Charlie” at “C” Level**
2. **C6 = 2 above “C” Level**
3. **C2 = 2 below “C” Level**
4. **G4 = the 1st General - This is Gary the General (Charlie’s brother)**
5. **G5 = the 2nd General**
6. **F3 = the FROWN**
7. **A3 = the Angle (the FROWN Angles down)**

First I begin by telling the student that we are going to memorize these seven notes, their names, and where they are on the staff and also where they are on the piano as it relates to the staff. I tell the students that everything goes up the staff alphabetically according to the music alphabet: **A B C D E F** and **G**. I show them that there are 88 piano keys on the piano and tell them that the lowest note on the piano, the first key on the left side of the piano, is A. I show them the notes while I play A, B, C, D, etc. up and down the piano. I tell the students that the last key on the piano all the way to the right is C. I then have the students play every key on the piano and say the letter name of the key they are playing as they play it. We also go over the pattern of the black keys versus the white keys and have them play two black keys with two fingers with their left hand then the three black keys with their right hand up and down the piano. After doing this, I show them how to find all of the Cs on the piano (the first white key to the left of the set of two black keys). I then show them how to find all of the individual keys and have them find all As, Bs, Cs, Ds, Es, Fs, and Gs on the piano. (It does take longer for little children).

Once the students know the keys I tell them the keys are numbered and explain that the very first key on the piano is A1. I then show them the next A on the piano and say this is A2. I tell them this applies to all of the notes from the musical alphabet. Then I begin to teach them “The 7 Markers of Musical Success.” This is what I say - you can say this word for word or put it into your own words. I use a “Wright-Way Note Finder” (you buy one online) or the PDF handout so I can show the students the note moving up and down the staff as I explain the words (you can watch me do this in the video on my website: <http://musicmotivation.com/learnreadmusic>).

I pull out a copy of the handout that I’ve included in the above mentioned link. On one side it has all of the markers listed and on the other side it shows the location of the markers but is intentionally blank so students can write in the names of the markers to help them learn and remember the names and where they are on the staff. This is what I then say to the students:

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Jerald (or Piano Teacher) - "Let's learn the **7 Markers of Musical Success**" so you will be able to read music or improve and get better at playing the piano. I want students to be able to play anything that is placed in front of them. To do this you need to know your notes, where they are on the staff and where those notes are found on the piano."

Piano Student - "Okay!"

Jerald (or Piano Teacher) - "This is the staff," I point to the wright-way note finder or the PDF handout. "A staff has five lines and four spaces. If we combine one staff with another staff it is known as a grand staff. Do you see this bracket on the left? It connects to the staves (plural of staff) together and is the grand staff. This is a Treble Clef and this is a Bass Clef." I point to each clef and say how the Treble clef is higher up on the piano and the Bass Clef is lower on the piano. I ask the student to tell me what a staff is (5 lines, 4 spaces) and be able to identify the Treble and Bass Clefs. "Does that all make sense?"

Piano Student - "Yes!" They may be telling the truth and they may be lying - it's sad but true! I continually ask them to teach me and keep pointing to everything and asking them what it is. I'm very good at not knowing things and asking them to help me. I truthfully need all the help I can get, but this does help piano students learn the notes!

Jerald (or Piano Teacher) - "This is Middle C." I point to Middle C on the Wright-Way Note Finder. "I call this 'C Level'. You've heard of sea level and above and below sea level, right?"

Piano Student - "Yes!"

Jerald (or Piano Teacher) - "This is the 4th C on the piano. It's known as C4. Let's count up to Middle C at sea level (C Level)." We find Middle C and I show it to them on the piano and the Wright-Way Note Finder of the PDF handout. I then say, "I refer to everything above Middle C as being above C Level (sea level). If a note is above C level (sea level) it is to the right of Middle C. If a note is below Middle C it is below C Level (sea level) and is to the left of Middle C. This is our first marker. **The First marker = C4 or Middle C.**"

Piano Student - Usually agrees and nods - you never know what a student is actually thinking!

Jerald (or Piano Teacher) - I then point to the the two ledger lines above the Treble Clef staff and say, "How many lines are there right here?" The student usually says "two" and I tell them these are called ledger lines because they are above the staff. I tell them since we have two ledger lines and we are above C level (sea level), then if we place a note on the second ledger line we are two above C level (sea level). This note is our second marker and is two above Middle C. Can you find the C that is two above Middle C?"

Piano Student - "Yes!"

Jerald (or Piano Teacher) - The student finds two above C level (sea level) on the piano and I say, "**This is the Second marker and is C6 or Two above C level (sea level).**" After showing the students the second marker I then point to the two ledger lines below Middle C in the Bass Clef and say, "If the second marker was two above C level (sea level), then what do you think this bottom ledger line is here?"

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Piano Student - "Two below C level."

Jerald (or Piano Teacher) - "That is right! This is the third marker. It is the second ledger line below the Bass Clef since we are below C level (sea level). **The Third Marker = C2 or Two below C level (sea level).** I then review the first three markers of musical success. This is a lot of writing, but this really only takes a few minutes to teach them these markers. I then go to the Treble Clef and say, "The Treble Clef and the Staff don't like each other. I don't know why, but they are always fighting. They are always at odds and ends with each other and just can't get along at all. The Treble Clef is really a Treble Maker and causes problems. The first thing he does is surround the Two Generals and then captures the Captain." At this point I move my finger along the Treble Clef and circle the first G above C level (Middle C) and then continue up the Treble Clef until my finger circles the second G above C level. I will move the note of the Wright-Way Note Finder up to the first G above C level or will show them the note on the PDF handout. "This is the **First General**," I say, pointing to the first G above C level (sea level). "The Treble Clef surrounds the First General and then goes up to surround the **Second General**." I then move my finger up and surround the Second General and say, "This is the Second General. This is the second G above C level." I explain that **the Fourth Marker = G4 or the First General and is the First G above C level (Middle C). The Fifth Marker = G5 and is the Second General or the Second G above C level (Middle C).** I show the students where the First and Second Generals are found on the piano and ask them to tell me what happened when the Treble Clef and the Staff fought each other. They do so and teach me and then show me where the notes are on the Staff and also on the piano. I ask if the students understand.

Piano Student - "Yes." I determine if they are telling the truth by having them explain it to me and teach me what they just learned.

Jerald (or Piano Teacher) - "Perfect! You know the first five markers. Let's move on to the last two." I move the piano note down to the first F below C level (Middle C). I tell the students this is the FROWN. The word FROWN begins with the letter F. I show the students the Bass Clef and turn it to the left on its side. It actually looks like a frown. I tell the students the frown is sad because it was hit between the eyes. The F line has two dots surrounding it - one on each side. They look like eyes and I tell students the frown was hit between the eyes. They instantly remember where the F is because it is a FROWN. I then tell the students the FROWN actually Angles down. I show them how the frown is going down and the tail of the frown ends in the A space where the A note belongs. I help piano students know **the Sixth Marker = F3 or the first F right below C level (Middle C) and the Seventh Marker = A3 or the second A below C level (Middle C).** I then tell students the music moves up and down on the staff alphabetically - A B C D E F and G from space to line or line to space. The first space in the Bass Clef is A3 (the Seventh Marker). As a helpful hint, I also let students know these simple musical rules:

1. On the staff, either the Treble or Bass Clef, the bottom space and the top line are the same notes - only an octave (8 notes) apart. I explain that octave means 8 and they can think of an octopus being called an octopus because it has 8 tentacles, arms, legs, or whatever you want to call it. In addition, an octagon is a shape with 8 sides so an octave is a distance of 8 notes - e.g. C-C.
2. On the staff, either the Treble or Bass Clef, the bottom line and top space are the same notes as well - only an octave (8 notes) apart.

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This entire example only takes a few minutes to teach and yet the students remember the stories. They need to have an example or marker to help them identify neighboring notes. If they know where the First General is - the first G above C level, then they can easily identify the notes directly above and below the First General because the notes move alphabetically. The note directly below the First General is F (F4) and the note directly above the First General is A (A5). The students can find the notes and see where they are and also know how to find the other notes as they relate to The 7 Markers of Musical Success.

When teaching younger students or beginning students who have no experience whatsoever, I usually only teach the first five markers. In addition, I also teach the C Major Pentascale (the first five notes of the C Major Scale). I do this by having them identify C level (C4) and the First General (G4). I tell them the Captain is at C level. His name is Charlie. The First General is named Gary. Charlie and Gary are brothers. The only problem is that **Charlie Does Everything For Gary**. Did you see what I did there. I said **Charlie Does Everything For Gary**. That is my pentascale. My C Major pentascale to be exact: C D E F G. The word pentascale means a scale that has five notes. In this case, it is the first five notes of the C Major Scale. The students quickly learn the first five notes on the Treble Clef starting with C4 (Middle C). This is perfect for having the students quickly begin playing pentascale pieces.

The video explains everything I have shared in this PDF but with visual aids and is a great way to see what I do and how I do it when I teach these markers. I recommend watching the video if you haven't already. You can watch it at this link: <http://musicmotivation.com/learntoreadmusic>.

Let me know if you have any questions or need help with anything. I have more resources available on my website at musicmotivation.com.

First and foremost, Jerald is a husband to his beautiful wife, Zanny, and a father to his wonderful children. Jerald Simon is the founder and president of Music Motivation®. He is a composer, author, poet, and Music Mentor/piano teacher (primarily focusing his piano teaching on music theory, improvisation, composition, and arranging). Jerald loves music, teaching, speaking, performing, playing sports, exercising, reading, writing poetry and self help books, gardening, and spending time with his wife, Zanny, and their children.

Jerald created musicmotivation.com as a resource for piano teachers, piano students, and parents of piano students. In 2014 he began creating his weekly "Cool Songs" to help teach music theory - the FUN way by putting FUN back into theory FUNdamentals. He is the author/poet of "The As If Principle" (motivational poetry), and the book "Perceptions, Parables, and Pointers." He is also the author of 21 music books from the Music Motivation® Series. He has also recorded and produced several albums and singles of original music.