

# HOW TO READ TABLATURE - BASS GUITAR

Reading Music vs. Tablature: Learning to “Read” music will be a very important decision for beginning Bass players, but Tablature is a standard now and should also be learned (Tablature is an easier way to read “Notes” and can be learned quickly).

Let’s take a look at the differences between Reading Music (Standard Music Notation), and Tablature (a Basic Grid representing Notes on the Bass Guitar)...

**Standard Notation Used for “Reading Music”**

**Grid Used for “Tablature”**

**Names of the Notes on the Staff**  
\*Notes can be on a line or in a space, or on lines above or below the staff (called ledger lines).

**Ledger lines extend notes above and below the staff**

**These lines (Called “Staff” lines) represent notes on the Bass Guitar**

**The “Grid” lines represent the Strings on a Guitar**

**The “0” means to play the string “open.” (no “fretting” needed).**

**When a number is placed on a line (String) on the tablature Grid it will represent a fret (Note). Example: The “4” means to place your finger on the “4th Fret” of the “4th String.” (It’s that simple)**

**When a number is placed below the “Grid” it will represent which finger to use to “fret” a note. Example: The “3” means to use your 3rd finger (of your left hand) to play the note on the “4th Fret” of the “4th String.”**

**Strings** 1 2 3 4

**The 4th string (Top string and fattest string) on the Bass Guitar.**

**Standard Notation:** Bass Clef, Time Signature (4/4), Notes (E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C), Ledger lines.

**Tablature:** T, A, B strings; Fret numbers (4, 3, 1, 1, 2, 0, 0); Fingerings (3, 2, 1, 0).

Now let’s take a look at the difference between “Reading a Note” on a music “Staff” and how these same notes will look on the Tablature Grid...

**Bar Lines divide the measures.**

**Quarter Notes**

**Chord**

**STAFF**

**GRID**

**String Numbers** 1 2 3 4

**Measures**

**Same Notes in Tablature**

**Chord in Tablature**

**Numbers on the tablature grid lines (strings) will indicate which frets are to be played.**

**Any number under the grid area will indicate which finger to use (left hand).**

**Chords are two or more notes played at the same time. Strike all notes indicated at the same time.**

**Staff:** Bass clef, 4/4 time signature, quarter notes, chord.

**Grid:** Strings T, A, B; fret numbers 2, 0, 3, 1, 0; fingerings 3, 2, 1, 0.

As you can see – it is much more difficult (and time consuming) to learn to read music than to read tablature. Tablature can be learned quickly. Even if you decide to take lessons to learn to read music (which is highly recommended for any bass guitarist) it is still very beneficial to learn tablature (since Tablature has become a world wide standard, and you will run into it a lot during your bass guitar studies).