

Quick and Dirty ABC

For a thorough ABC tutorial, [explore this website](http://www.lesession.co.uk/abc/abc_notation.htm):

www.lesession.co.uk/abc/abc_notation.htm

Notes

Middle C is indicated as C

The octave below middle C is indicated using commas to separate the tones

The octave above middle C is indicated in all capital letters

The second octave above middle C is indicated by using lower case letters

The third octave above middle C is indicated by using apostrophes with the letters

A sharp is indicated by ^

A flat is indicated by _

Playing entirely on the bass bridge of a 15/16 dulcimer, the scale would be written

D, E, F#, G, A, B, C D E F G A B_ c d

Playing entirely on the RIGHT side of the treble bridge of a 15/16 dulcimer, the scale would be written

G^, A, B, C^ D E F^ G A B c d e f g a

Playing entirely on the LEFT side of the treble bridge of a 15/16 dulcimer, the scale would be written

D^ E F^ G^ A B c^ d e f^ g a b c' d' e'

Musical Key

At the head of each ABC document is a field with the symbol "K:". This line specifies the musical key of the piece. To designate the musical key, simply write in the key. For example, K: D or K: G

Modal keys can be indicated by typing the first three letters of the mode. For example, “K: Gmix” for the key of G mixolydian and K: “Ddor” for D dorian.

Length of Notes

At the head of each ABC document is a field with the symbol “L:”. This line specifies the default length of the notes. Here’s the code:

L: ½ means the default length of notes in the music is the half note

L: ¼ means the default length of notes in the music is the quarter note

L: 1/8 means the default length of notes in the music is the eighth note

L: 1/16 means the default length of notes in the music is the sixteenth note

Within the music, note lengths other than default lengths are shown as fractions. So if the head of the music shows that L: ¼, and the music calls for the tone of “D” just above middle C to be played as an eighth note, the ABC code would be written D/2. A half note would be written as D2

Rests

Rests are indicated by a lower case “z”. Treat them just like note lengths. So with L: ¼, a rest equivalent to an eighth note in duration would be written: z/2.

Meter

At the head of each ABC document is a field with the symbol “M:” For a reel enter: “M: 4/4. For a jig enter: “M: 6/8”. For a waltz enter: M: 3/4”

Barlines

Bar lines in the music are indicated by the pipe symbol “|”.

Other Symbols in the Head

X: Enter the version number of the tune. This line is always first in an ABC file. The computer uses it to identify the tune when duplicate names appear in the data base.

T: Enter the title of the tune

Q: Enter the tempo of the music. Q: 120 means play the piece at a temp of 120 beats per minute.

C: Enter the composer's name
O: Enter the origin of the tune.
S: Enter the source of the tune. That is from whom you got the tune

Z: Enter the name of the person who transcribed the tune.

Not all of these symbols appear in most ABC files.

An ABC Example

Here's the ABC Code for the round *Are You Sleeping Brother John?*

X:1T: Are Your Sleeping Brother John

M:4/4

L: 1/4

K: GG A B G |G A B G | B c d2 | B c d2 |d/2 e/2 d/2 c/2 B G |d/2 e/2 d/2 c/2 B G | G D
G2|G D G2|