

Playing instrumentals using Tablature

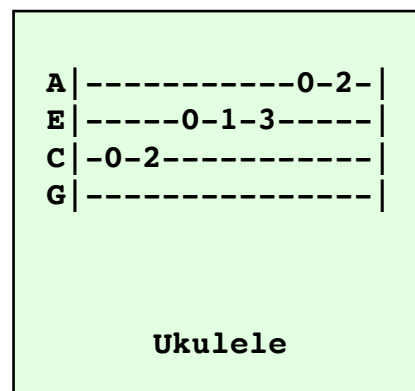
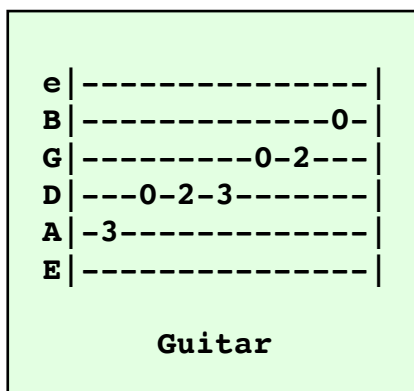
A tablature, or tab, is a way of writing down music for a fretted stringed instrument. It is used when the piece that is being played requires a melody to be plucked rather than a rhythm that requires strumming.

Traditionally music is written on a staff:



On a staff, each horizontal line represents the pitch of a note (as do the spaces between the lines), and the notes on the staff show the duration of that note.

Tablature is much simpler. Each horizontal line represents a string of the instrument with the highest pitched string placed at the top and the lowest at the bottom. The numbers on each 'string' indicate the fret number that the string is to be pressed against to give the required note.



The examples shown here in tablature is the same sequence of notes as shown above on the staff.

The tab on the left is a for a six string guitar (hence the six lines), whilst the other is for a four string ukulele. The letters on the left of the lines are the notes played with open strings (ie without pressing a string against a fret).

On the guitar tab, the first note to be played is on the **A** string, fret **3**. On the ukulele tab, it's the **C** string that is played first, and the **0** on the line means that the string is played open.

Tabs are used to show instrumentals that are picked (one note at a time) rather than strummed.

The problem with tabs is that there is no indication of the duration of a note or the time interval between the notes. So you really need to know what the piece is supposed to sound like before you begin playing. Therefore a tab is more of an 'aide-memoire' rather than a piece of music which can be read to understand its meaning.

Tabs can be used for short riffs (a few notes that add a little jingle to the music) or for an instrumental solo that is played within a song, or for a full instrumental piece.

	C	G7	C C+	F G7 C
A	-----	-----	-----	-----
E	-0-3-0-	-0-3-0-	-0-3-0-	-0-
C	-----2-0-	-2-----2-	-----2-0-	-2--2-2-0-
G	-----	-----	-----	-----

This is the first line of Dvorak's New World Symphony tabbed out for a ukulele. Note the chords shown in red which would be strummed by those playing rhythm, whilst the numbers on the lines which represent frets and strings, and is the melody to be played by another person.

I have made a couple of standardisations for the tabs that I produce for Roydon Strings.

String notes. To differentiate between the high E string and the low E string on a guitar, the high E is written in lower case.

Chords. If there is a letter in red above a tab, that is the chord that needs to be played (strummed) over the instrumental. The chord is placed, where possible, exactly above the note on the tab where it is to be played.

	D	A	D
e	-----	-----	-----
B	-----	-----	-----
G	-----0-2-2-	-0-----	-----
D	-0-2-4-----	---4-2-0-----	-0-----0-
A	-----	-----4-4-	---4-2-4-
E	-----	-----	-----

On the left is the introduction to a song shown on a guitar tab. At least two people would be required to play this piece. The person picking the melody would begin by playing 3 notes on the D string: (0, 2 and 4) and 1 note on the G string: (0). These would be played solo.

On the 5th note (G string, 2nd fret) the person(s) playing the rhythm would join in by playing the chord of **D** major.

The piece on the right is the same piece from the same song but is tabbed out for a ukulele.

The person picking out the melody of the introduction would play the first 4 notes before the rhythm section comes in with **D** major on the 5th note.

	D	A	D
A	-----0-0-	-----	-----
E	-----2-3-----	-3-2-----	-----
C	-2-4-----	-----4-2-1-1-	-2-1---1-2-
G	-----	-----	-----4-----

Courses. When a piece has been specifically written for a multi-course instrument (two strings where there are usually only one eg a 12 string guitar, mandolin, etc) the tabs are written to represent the pairs of strings.

		C	F	G7
e	=====	=====	=====	=====
B	=====	=====	=====	=====
G	=====0=====	=====0=====	=====	=====
D	===2===3=2=0===	=====2===3=2=0===	=====	=====
A	=3=====	=====0=2=3=====	=====	=====
E	=====3=	=3=3=====	=====	=====3=