

## Lesson 5: White Keys

There are 52 white keys and 36 black keys on a standard keyboard – for a total of 88 keys.

The terms “down” and “below” are relative terms associated with keys situated towards the left end of the keyboard. These keys have a lower or "deeper" sound (similar to a man's singing voice).

The terms “up” and “above” are relative terms associated with the keys situated towards the right end of the keyboard. These keys have a "higher" sound (similar to a woman's singing voice).

Only seven letters are used to identify the white keys on the piano: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. The left-most white key is assigned the letter "A". The adjacent white key (to the right) is assigned the letter "B". The next white key is assigned the letter "C". This continues until we reach the letter "G", then we start over again with "A". Each repetition of these letters is known as an **octave**.

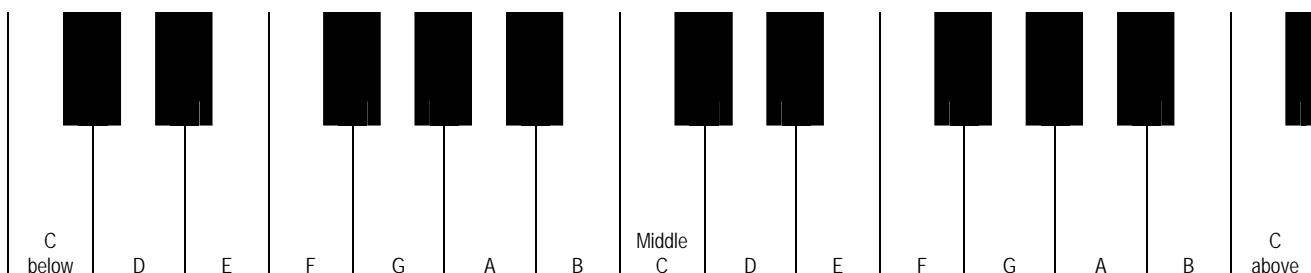
The black keys are arranged in sets of two's and three's – don't worry about the names of the black keys yet.

The white keys known as “D” are always located in the middle of a set of two black keys:

- notice that there are many sets of two black keys – a “D” is associated with each set
- the white key situated directly below and adjacent to any “D” is “C”
- the white key situated directly above and adjacent to any “D” is “E”

Therefore, there are three white keys surrounding each set of two black keys: C, D and E. There are many sets of two black keys and the white keys surrounding each of those sets are all named C, D and E.

There are four white keys surrounding each set of three black keys. Those white keys are named, from left to right: F, G, A and B. There are many sets of three black keys and the white keys surrounding each of those sets are all named F, G, A and B.



Let's recap: the F-G-A-B keys are associated with the sets of three black keys; the C-D-E keys are associated with the sets of two black keys – which means you now know the names for all the white keys on the keyboard.

Congratulations!

The most important key on the keyboard is **Middle C**

- it is the “C” nearest the middle of the keyboard, directly under the piano manufacturer's name
- it is very important that you know how to find this key – it is the cornerstone of all music and music theory – everything expands out from Middle C

The “C” that is one octave below Middle C is called “the C below Middle C”.

The “C” that is one octave above Middle C is called “the C above Middle C”.

## For the Younger Student

New vocabulary: white keys, black keys, Middle C, octave

"The black keys are grouped into sets of two and three"

- 1) Have your child find and play all the sets of two black keys – count them, play all of them going up, play all of them going down, etc.
- 2) Have him/her find and play all the sets of three black keys - count them, play all of them going up, play all of them going down, etc.

"White keys are named with letters from the music alphabet"

- 1) Have your child find all the white keys associated with the sets of two black keys (C-D-E) - for each letter, count them, play all of them going up, play all of them going down, etc.
- 2) Have him/her find all the white keys associated with the sets of three black keys (F-G-A-B) - for each letter, count them, play all of them going up, play all of them going down, etc.
- 3) Play a random key and have him/her call out the name of that key – continue until he/she can quickly respond correctly for keys all over the keyboard.

"Keys at the bottom of the keyboard make low sounds, keys at the top of the keyboard make high sounds"

- 1) Ask your child to find an "A at the lower end of the keyboard" or a "G at the higher end of the keyboard" or a "D in the middle of the keyboard" – repeat with different combinations.
- 2) Have him/her close his/her eyes (or move to someplace away from the piano) while you play a low key then, a few seconds later, play a high key – make sure they are at least an octave apart. Ask him/her which one was higher or which one was lower.

"The most important key is Middle C"

- 1) Have your child practice finding Middle C through a variety of games – for example, you can set at the piano, close your eyes and try to find Middle C based upon your child telling you that you are getting "hotter" or "colder" as you get closer or farther from the key.
- 2) Have him/her determine if Middle C is in the exact middle of the keyboard (or not) by counting the number of keys on either side (it is not in the exact middle).

"Each time the letters start over, it is called an octave"

- 1) Have your child find the "C" that is "one octave above Middle C" and the "C" that is "one octave below Middle C".
- 2) Have him/her practice finding keys (for example, all the "F's") that are one octave apart, two octaves apart, etc.