

The Problem With TAB !

TAB, short for tablature is a form of musical notation using numbers and letters on a staff that corresponds to the number of strings of fretted string instruments. These numbers tell a player which fret to place their fingers on rather than which pitches to play.

TAB has a history with lute music from centuries ago and has found wide use in the music publishing industry catering to the guitarist who can't or doesn't want to learn to read.

Learning to read TAB can be accomplished in minutes. Learning to read standard music notation takes a little longer.

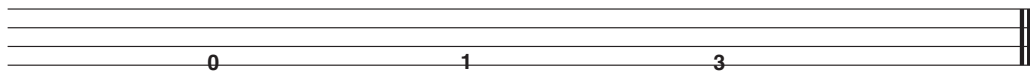
Although I first learned to read standard music notation as a ten year old guitar student. I quickly

lost the ability to read written music in my teen years and relied more on TAB..

In my early twenties, as a serious jazz guitar student, I relearned the valuable skill of reading standard music notation and the location of the notes on the guitar fingerboard. I will not kid you, it was hard and took a long time. But in retrospect it was well worth it.

My Take on TAB

I use several analogies when talking about the problems with TAB. My favorite is that TAB is like painting by numbers. You are told what and where to paint not how to paint. The analogy on guitar or ukulele is what string and fret to play.



A majority of notes played on the ukulele have alternate note locations. This is not addressed by TAB. And TAB typically does not show rhythm at all or very well. TAB can not show melodic contour or rhythmic density. TAB is typically not found in music written for other musical instruments.



One symbol you will not find on most guitar and ukulele books.

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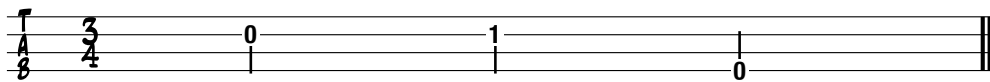
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Given the proper plan of attack learning to read standard music notation on a ukulele for single notes is quite easy to do in the open or first position.

Here are a few examples of a simple three note melody in standard music notation and its representation in TAB.

Example Using Standard Music Notation

Music for ukulele is written using the "G" or treble clef.



Standard music notation conveys pitch as well as the rhythm duration of the notes.

Example Using TAB Notation

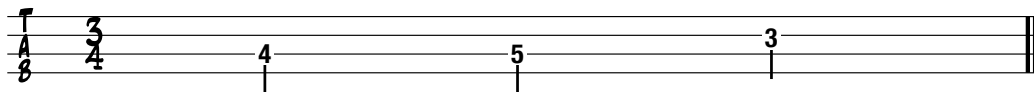
Notating the above example in TAB it is not as simple as standard notation.

With the ability of the ukulele to play the same pitch at alternate locations., there are several ways to notate the E, F and G using TAB.

Here is one way to notate E, F and G in TAB. For ukulele using "C" tuning, low or high "G".



It can also be notated as:

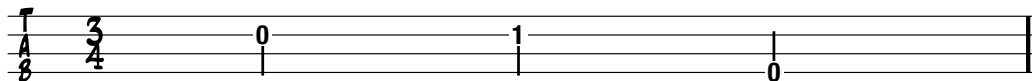


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Using the high “G” re-entrant C tuning this is one of the possibilities.



A B C Melody Example Using Standard Music Notation



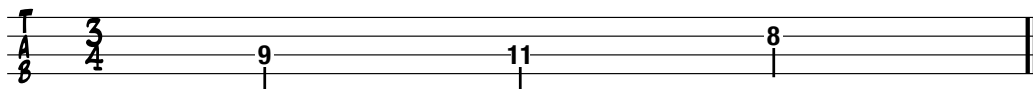
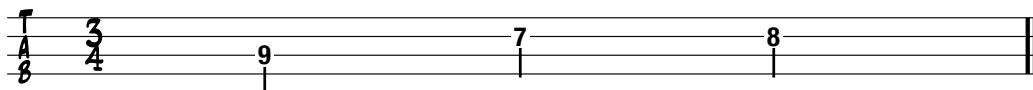
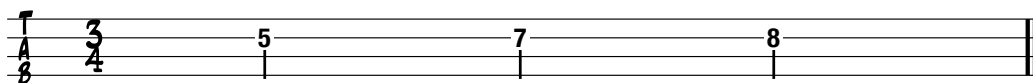
With notes that are on string one the options grow.

A B C Melody Examples Notated Using TAB

Here is one way to play A, B and C on a ukulele using “C” tuning, low or high “G”.



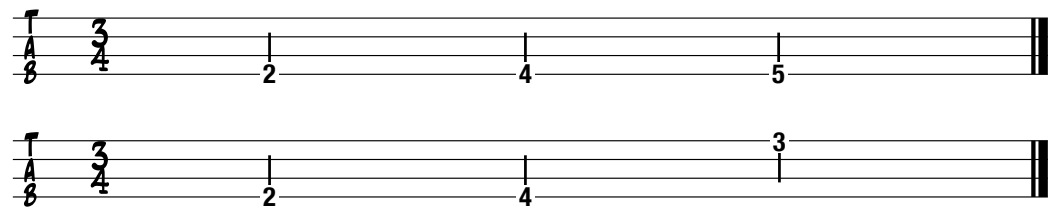
A few of the other possibilities using “C” tuning:



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These two variations use the high "G", C tuning.



As you can see there are many possibilities. All have valid musical possibilities.

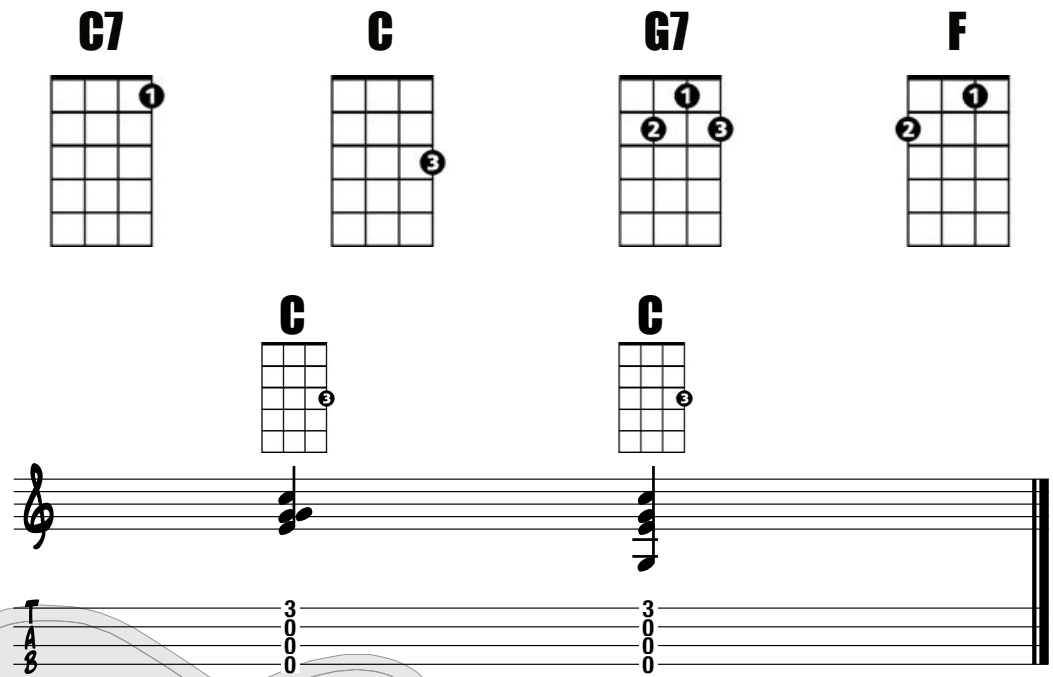
For someone who can only read TAB, there are no alternate possibilities – only the one dictated by the TAB. The choice is not up to the musician.

Music does not have to be performed the same way every time. An A note is an A note no matter what string it is on.

Multiple Notes - Interval and Chords

It stands to reason that reading more than one note at a time, or multiple tablature numbers at a time will be harder than reading single notes. But over time this too can be mastered.

Basic chords in sheet music are typically shown as chord grids. C is shown with TAB and standard music notation for both high G and low G, C Tuning.



Even chord grids can only show one possible voicing of the possible voicings available for a chord. Remember the alternate note locations?

Why Read Standard Music Notation?

Standard music notation has a long history and has evolved over the years. By learning to read music you open yourself to a world of printed music – from ANY instrument.

Is TAB easier?

YES? TAB IS easier to read vs. standard music notation? But traditional music reading is well worth the time and effort. And, once you learn it you only get better with time.

Does TAB Have A Place?

TAB is a shortcut to reading and fingering. It's limitation in the long runs out ways its short term advantage.

The language of music theory is standard notation, with note reading being a required skill. Without the ability to read music, a player is left to their own devices and shortcuts. And, pretty much stuck with the notation of that tuning and instrument.

Reading Music Leads to:

- An understating of *melody, harmony* and *rhythm*.
- Learning how notes relate to chords. This cuts down the hunt-and-peck method of soloing. If you know what the interval of a ninth or second would sound like ahead of time it's easy to add a B to an Am chord, no guessing.
- Reading music doesn't mean you have to be a great sight reader. Just learning what the notes are and where they are on your instrument might be enough. Your reading doesn't have to be at the level of a professional musician to get the benefits of learning to read.



Now Get to Work!!!

