

# How to Read Ukulele Tabs

**Music tablature, or tab, is a simplified form of musical notation used for stringed instruments like the ukulele.**

Most people learn a new piece of music by using tab. Unlike a regular piece of music, tabs show you exactly where to play the notes on the fretboard.

Let's take a look at some examples of tablature.

## Music Tablature Basics

For the ukulele, in a piece of tablature, you will see four lines:

A -----  
E -----  
C -----  
g -----

Each line represents a string on the ukulele. The top line represents the bottom string of the ukulele where the bottom line represents the top string of the ukulele.

When you look at a piece of tab, you'll see numbers scattered across the different "strings" or lines:

-----3-----  
-----0-----0-----  
-----0-----0-----  
-----0-----

Each number refers to a fret number.

For example, in the piece of tab above, you would pluck the 3rd fret of the bottom string on the ukulele. As we read across the piece of tab, we see that we would then pluck the open E string, the second to bottom string. Then, we would pluck the open C string, the second to top string. Then, we would pluck the open G string, the top string. And so on...

## How to Write Chords in Music Tablature

In a piece of tab, you might see all the numbers line up vertically:

```

-----0-----2-----3-----0-----3-----2-----
-----1-----3-----0-----0-----2-----1-----
-----0-----2-----0-----0-----2-----2-----
-----2-----0-----0-----2-----2-----0-----

```

When you see this, this means you play a chord. In other words, you play all the notes vertically aligned together.

In the above example, we see the chords played from left to right: **F, G, C, Am, D7, and G7.**

## Other Important Music Tablature Symbols

At this point, you should be able to read tab like a pro, but there are a couple more symbols that we will see on occasion.

### Hammer-ons

Hammer-ons are designated by an “h” symbol that separates the two notes.

```

-----1-----
-----1-----
-----2h3-----
-----3-----

```

In this example, you would pluck the 2nd fret of the second to top string, and then “hammer-on” to the 3rd fret.

### Pull-offs

Pull-offs are designated by a “p” symbol that separates the two notes.

```

-----3p2-----
-----3-----
-----2-----
-----0-----

```

In this example, you would pluck the 3rd fret of the bottom string, and then “pull-off” to the 2nd fret.

## Alternative Symbol for Hammer-ons and Pull-offs

Hammer-ons and pull-offs can also be designated by using the “^” symbol.

```
-----0-----  
-----0^3^0-----  
-----0-----  
-----2-----
```

In this example, you would pluck the open E string, then hammer-on to the 3rd fret, and then pull-off back to the open E string.

## Slides

Ascending slides are represented by the “/” symbol, while descending slides are represented by the “\” symbol.

```
----2/5-----  
-----3\2-----  
-----4-----  
-----
```

In this example, you would pluck the 2nd fret of the bottom string and slide up to the 5th fret. Then, you would pluck the 3rd fret of the second to bottom string and slide down to the 2nd fret.

## Bends

Bends are represented by the “b” symbol. An “r” symbol will be used to indicate a bend that returns back to the original plucked note.

```
----5b6----3-----  
-----3----5b6r5----3----  
-----  
-----
```

In this example, you pluck the 5th fret of the bottom string and bend it to the 6th fret and hold the bend. Then, you would pluck the 3rd fret of the bottom string, and then, the 3rd fret of the second to bottom string.

Next, on the same string, you would pluck the 5th fret of the second, bend up to the 6th fret, and then, return the bend back to the 5th fret. Lastly, you would pluck the 3rd fret.

## **The Big Downside to Playing Tab**

As you can see, reading tab is a very intuitive way to learn a song.

However, the big problem is that with tab you don't get a sense of the rhythm. Meaning, you don't know when to play the notes written on a piece of tab or how long to hold them in relation to the other notes.

The best way to use tab is in combination with your ear. For example, you've heard a song you want to learn how to play on ukulele, and because you know how it sounds, you can use the tab as an aid.

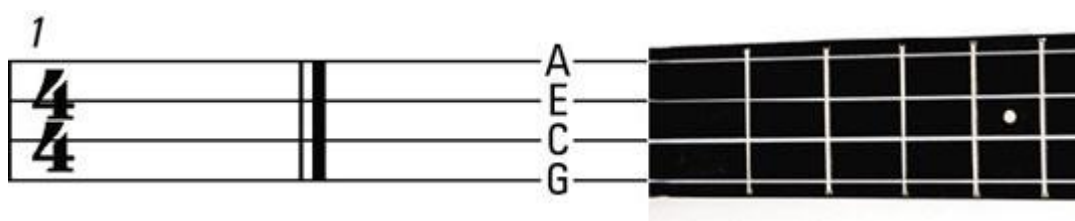
# HOW TO READ UKULELE TABLATURE

Standard musical notation is useful because it's universal and remains the same for every instrument, including the ukulele. However, musical notation is quite tricky to read, and for instruments where you can play the same note on different strings — such as the ukulele — it leaves out valuable information.

*Tablature* (or *tab*) was developed to overcome these problems. Tab is designed specifically for fretted instruments, and it shows — among other details — which string to play and which fret to use.

In the horizontal lines of tab, each line represents a string on the ukulele; **however, they're upside down from what you may expect, and may take some getting used to:**

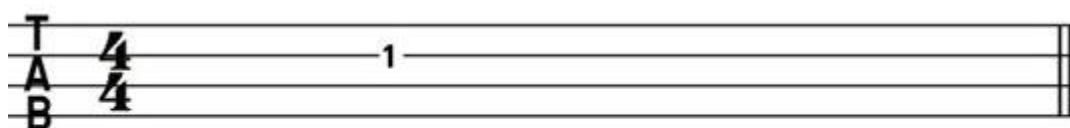
- The top line of the tab is the A-string (the one closest to the floor when you're playing).
- The line below that is the E-string.
- The line below that is the C-string.
- The bottom line of the tab is g-string.



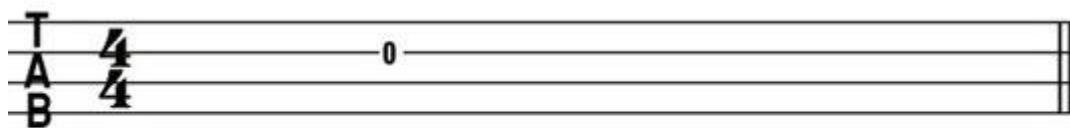
How tab refers to uke strings.

## FRETTING UKULELE NOTES IN TAB

The numbers that appear on the tab indicate which string to play and what fret to play it at (the stacked 4s indicate the time signature). In this figure, the note is on the second line down, representing the E-string. The number 1 indicates that you play the string at the first fret. Playing the E-string at the first fret gives an F note.

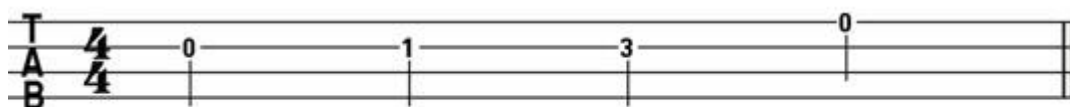


A 0 indicates an *open string* — one you play without fretting a note at all. This figure shows an open E-string.

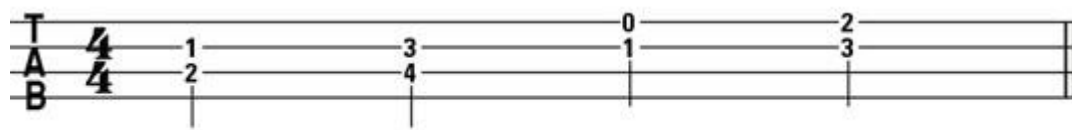


## SEQUENCING UKULELE NOTES IN TAB

When notes appear one after the other horizontally in the tab, you play them in sequence. You let the first note ring until you reach the next note. In this sequence, you play the E-string open, then the same string at the first fret, and then at the third fret and, for the final note, play the A-string open.

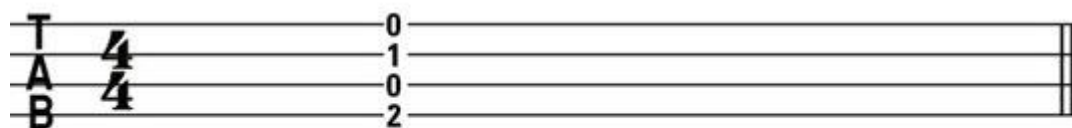


When notes appear stacked vertically in tab, you play the notes at the same time. In the sequence here, you play the C-string at the second fret while playing the E-string at the first fret. You then move the shape up two frets so you're playing the C-string at the fourth fret at the same time as playing the E-string at the third fret. The focus then shifts to a new pair of strings: E and A. Play the E-string at the first fret and then play the A-string open. Finally, you play the E-string at the third fret and the A-string at the second fret.



## SHOWING UKULELE CHORDS AND STRUMS IN TAB

In tab, whole chords are written in the same way as simultaneous notes, with fret numbers stacked on the lines that represent each string, like this F chord:



Tab for an F chord.

The tab shows that you play the g-string at the second fret, the E-string at the first fret, with the other notes ringing open.