

However, if you don't read music, don't worry — you can still make good use of this book, as each tune is also notated in tin whistle and Irish flute **tablature**. Tablature is an instrument-specific system that graphically illustrates a fingering for each note. Tablature systems exist for many instruments and have been in use at least since the 1300s. Below I explain how tin whistle and Irish flute tablature works. (This tablature system does not work for the modern Boehm-system flute and piccolo, or for soprano and tenor recorders, because their fingerings differ from those of the Irish flute and tin whistle.)

Tin Whistle and Irish Flute Tablature

This form of tin whistle and Irish flute tablature uses a **staff** — a set of parallel horizontal lines. You may encounter others which do not, such as those that use a picture of a whistle for each note.

Have a look at the tablature, below, for the beginning of “The First Noel.” The tablature staff appears above the music notation staff.

The tablature staff consists of six horizontal lines. On the left, there is a clef icon with six small circles representing finger holes. The tablature shows fingerings for each note: the first note has two dots on the top two lines; the second has two dots on the top two lines; the third has three dots on the top three lines; the fourth has three dots on the top three lines; the fifth has three dots on the top three lines and a special symbol (an open circle with a descending line) on the bottom line; the sixth has three dots on the top three lines; the seventh has three dots on the top three lines; the eighth has three dots on the top three lines; the ninth has three dots on the top three lines; the tenth has three dots on the top three lines and the special symbol on the bottom line. The musical staff below shows the corresponding notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3.

This tablature system features five elements:

1. **A tin whistle icon, or clef**, at the left edge of the tablature staff. Its six small circles represent the six finger holes of the whistle or Irish flute. The presence of this clef identifies the staff as a whistle or Irish flute tablature staff.

2. **Six horizontal, parallel staff lines** extending through and to the right of the clef. Notice that each staff line goes through a finger hole circle on the clef. Each staff line therefore represents one of the six finger holes of the whistle or Irish flute. The top group of three staff lines corresponds to the top-hand finger holes while the bottom group of three lines corresponds to the bottom-hand finger holes.

3. **Solid black dots**. For each note (with the exception of C#) you'll see one or more solid black circles, or dots, centered upon the staff lines and vertically aligned with each other. (These dots are never placed between, above or below the staff lines.) Each dot indicates a closed finger hole. For example, the tune's sixth note, low G, has dots upon each of the top three staff lines. This shows that you finger low G by closing the top three finger holes and leaving the bottom three holes open.

4. **A special fingering symbol — φ — for the note C#**. Since we finger C# by opening all six finger holes, I use this special symbol for that note, and that note only. You can see this symbol above, in measures 3, 4 and 5. Its open circle indicates an open finger hole, while its small descending line suggests that open holes extend all the way down the whistle.

5. **Barlines**. These are vertical lines that cut through the six-line staff and divide the music, as it flows from left to right, into time segments which are typically of equal duration. These segments of time are referred to as **measures** or **bars**. (The pickup measure that begins this tune, however, is a partial measure; it has fewer beats than do the other measures, even though they all share the same time signature.)

Tablature does not tell you much about the rhythm of the music. If you don't read music and are unfamiliar with the rhythms of a tune, you'll need to learn those rhythms by listening to its recording.