How to read a musical score

Time proceeds from left to right.

A staff contains music for a particular instrument, or group of instruments. Multiple staves are connected to form a system of music that plays simultaneously.

Time is divided into small segments called bars (or measures). They are separated by vertical lines, called bar lines. The left and right edge of each system are also bar lines.

A staff can be omitted if the corresponding instrument has nothing to do. As a consequence, it is sometimes possible to fit more than one system of music on a single page. The systems are then separated by divider symbols.

On the very first page, each staff is marked with the name of the corresponding instrument (or group of instruments). To identify the same staff on subsequent pages, look for the matching bracket and clef.