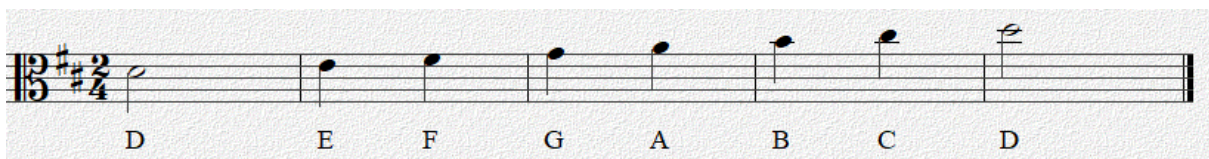


Tones and Semi-tones, and why they force us to muck around with our 2nd finger position... (Part 1)

We learnt – ages ago – that music is written on a staff (= the 5 lines / 4 spaces); that the staff works like a ladder, and that as the notes go up the ladder we simply add one additional finger (and vice versa)

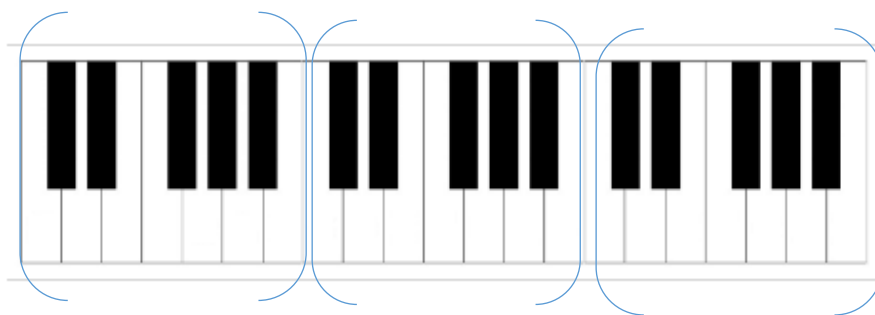


We also learnt – ages ago – that the notes are named after the first 7 letters of the alphabet



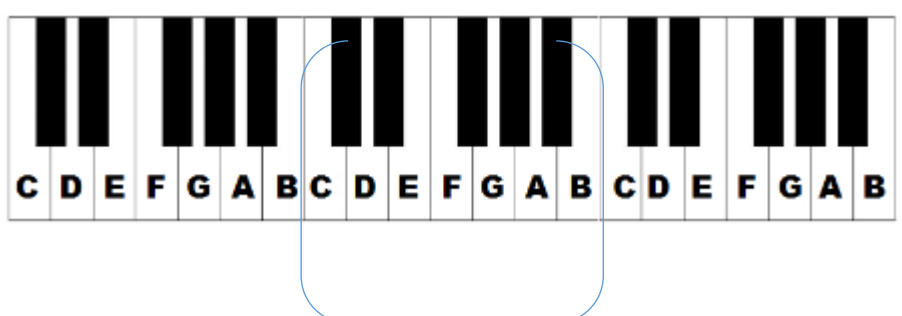
More recently, we learnt that there are things called Tones, and Semi-tones; these are the names given to the gaps between the notes; [and obviously, a **Semi-tone** gap is **half** the size of a Whole Tone]. All tunes are made of a mixture of Tones and Semi-tones, but when we play any stringed instrument, this isn't immediately obvious. After all, when you look at the notes on the staff, they're all the same vertical distance apart, right?

Sorry. They are, but they aren't. It's a lot easier to picture this if we look at a keyboard. We don't have to be able to PLAY it, fortunately. We can see that the keyboard has got a definite repeating pattern to it...

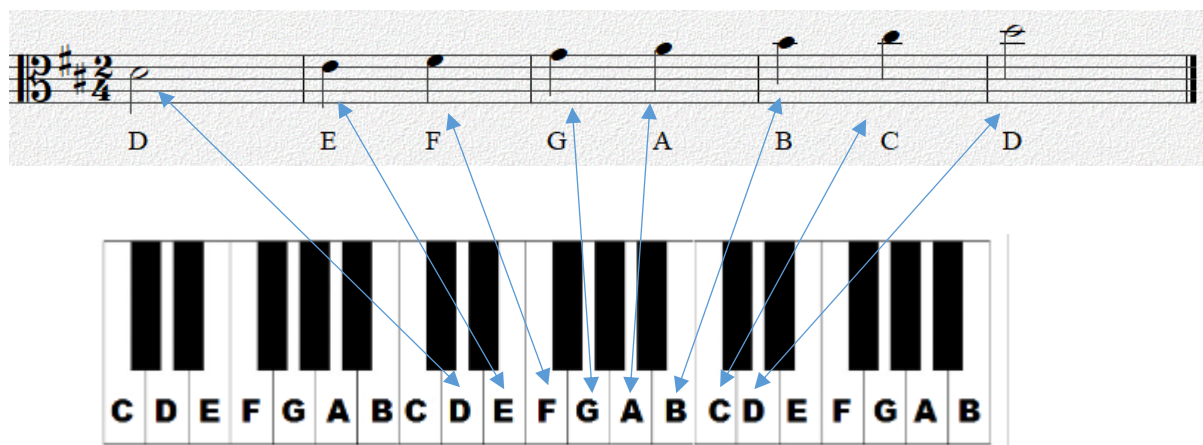


If we look closely we can see that each of the brackets has got 7 white notes within it.

This 7 note repeating pattern corresponds to the 7 letters of the alphabet.



But here's the thing...

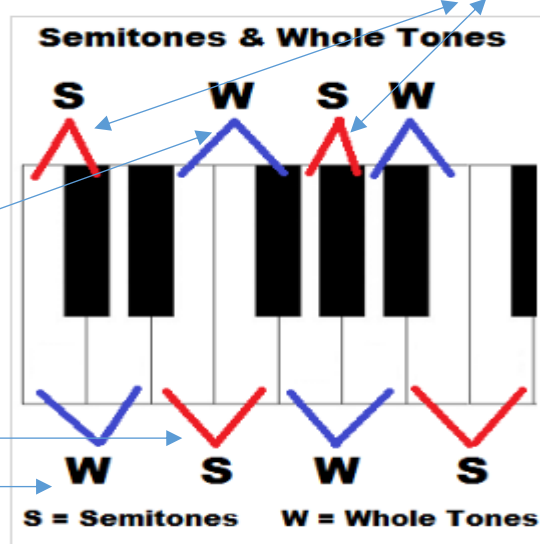


Although the equally spaced notes on the staff map neatly onto the [evenly spaced] white keys on the keyboard, we can see that whilst most of the white notes are separated by a black note, at two places on the keyboard, [E & F, and B & C] white notes sit right next each-other.

A **Semi-tone** is the gap between any two ADJACENT notes on the keyboard. A **Whole tone** is 2 semitones. So, a **Semi-tone** could either be a gap between a black note and a white note. But it can also be the gap between 2 white notes.

A Whole Tone can be a gap between a black note and a white note.

But it can also be the gap between 2 white notes.

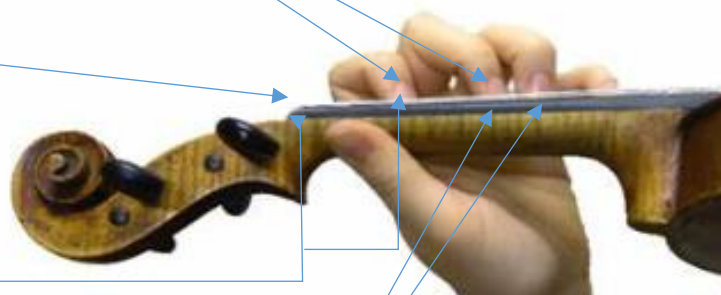


When playing a stringed instrument we use our left-hand fingers to stop a string vibrating over its full length. On the Viola or Violin, our fingers are placed either with a wide gap or a narrow gap. When we start playing, our 1st and 2nd fingers are typically wide apart

We may not have realised though, that the gap between 1st & 2nd is the same size as the one between the end of the string, and our first finger

The wide gap between both the end of the string & 1st finger, & our 1st & 2nd finger raises or

lowers the note by a whole tone. The narrow gap between 2nd & 3rd is exactly half the width, and so raises or lowers the note by a semi-tone.

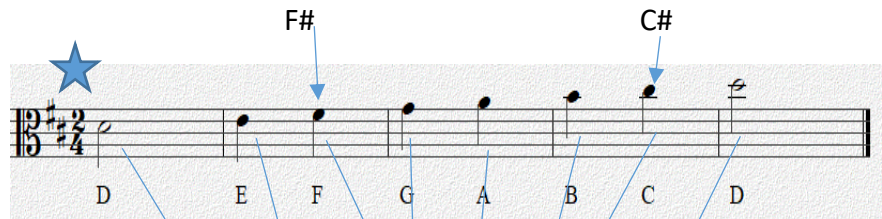


When we use our 2nd finger in a narrow position, we've reduced the gap between 1st and 2nd from a tone to a semi-tone, but at the same time we've increased the gap between 2nd and 3rd to a whole tone.

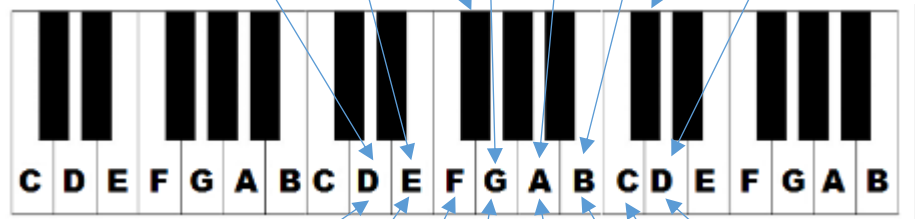


NOW – play “Spot the difference” between the 2 set of notes, below...

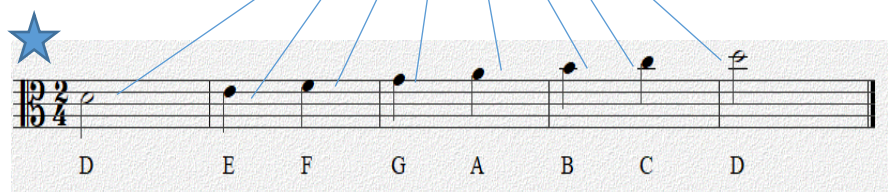
Easy! The top one has two Sharps, F# & C#.



The gap between E & F# is a Whole Tone – you can see that F# isn't a white note, but a black one. It's the same gap for B & C#, so we'll use a wide 2nd finger.



However, where there are **no** sharps, the gap between the “E” and the “F” is only a semi-tone. As we saw on the picture above, to play a semi-tone higher than our 1st finger, we need to use our 2nd finger in the narrow position. Once again, the same holds true for “B” & “C”; there's only a semi-tone gap.



You will [of course] notice that the gaps between both “F” & “G”, and “C” & “D” are now Whole tones, so the gap between 2nd and 3rd fingers is wide

“So” (you may well be thinking) “All very interesting, but it doesn't really explain how the heck we're supposed to quickly figure out when we should have a wide or narrow 2nd finger”.

If that WAS your thinking, award yourself a treat, 'cos you're dead right.

That essential chunk of knowledge is in part 2....