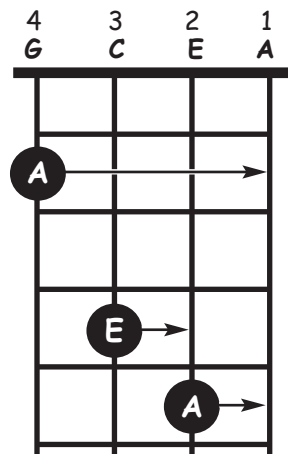


Ukulele info

and how to tune your Uke



YOUR UKULELE

Take a look at figure 1 on the right. This is a drawing of a standard "figure 8 shaped" ukulele. You may have gotten a slightly different model (a pineapple? or even a banjo uke?) but the important parts are going to be the same. I'll just take the labels on the illustration from top to bottom and see what we can make of them.

Head

The part of the ukulele that holds the tuners is called the head. I'm not sure why, but if I was forced to take a guess at it I'd say because it was at the opposite end of the neck from the body. It is also known as the "peg head" or the "headstock".

Tuners (aka Tuning Pegs)

These are the little knobs you turn to tighten or loosen the strings to get them in tune. Tuning pegs also refers to the little posts that the strings actually wrap around.

Nut

This is the little unit with slots in it that the strings run through before they get to the tuners. It acts to keep the strings spaced properly and is also one end of the scale length with the saddle being the other end. We'll get to the saddle in a minute.

Please note that some ukuleles have a zero fret? that acts as the one end of the scale length. On those ukes the nuts is there just to be a string spacer.

Neck

This is what you wrap your chording hand around (as opposed to your strumming hand) in order to both hold the ukulele and to put your fingers in place to make the chords.

Fingerboard

Also known as the "fretboard", this is the flat surface on the neck that holds the frets themselves. It is what you press against when making chords. It is often made out of a different wood than the neck itself, ebony and rosewood being two popular materials for fretboards. Some ukuleles even have cast plastic fretboards. Whatever material it's made of, it will be firmly attached, becoming part of the neck itself.

The fretboards on a soprano (or "standard") ukulele usually have 12 frets before the body. Other sizes may have 14 or even more.

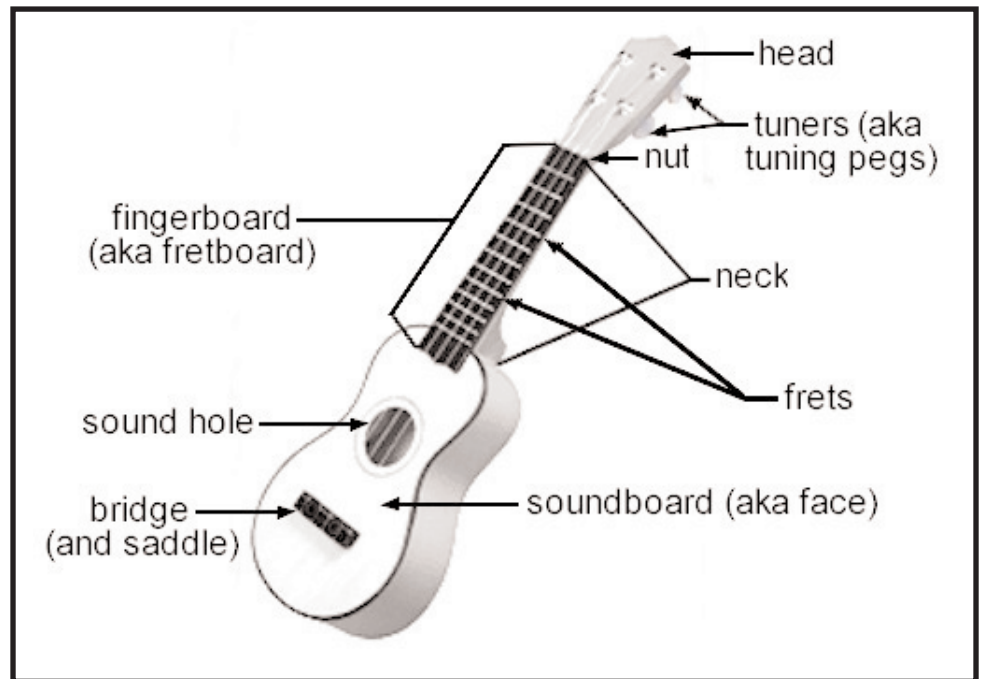


Fig. 1

Note that some ukuleles don't have a "separate" fretboard, the frets are pressed directly into the wood of the neck.

Frets

These are the pieces of wire mounted into the fingerboard. Pressing with your finger(s) on the fretboard just behind a given fret will shorten the length of the vibrating part of the string, thus raising the note it a higher pitch.

You folks with the cast plastic fretboards won't have pieces of wire pressed in, but you'll have the equivalent raised strip of molded plastic. They act just the same, don't worry!

Soundboard

The soundboard (or "face") of your ukulele is what vibrates to amplify the sound of your strings.

The strings' vibration is passed down through the bridge which sets the face vibrating.

If you have a banjo? uke the job of the soundboard is carried out by the skin head (confusing, I know... it too is called a "head"). It can be differentiated from the other head by using "peg head" for the one and just "head" for the other.

Or, of course, you can not worry overmuch about that and just strum happily.

Sound Hole

Pretty much where the sound comes out. Bear in mind that this is a gross oversimplification, but this article is intended to be a quick overview of the ukulele's parts, not an in-depth study of acoustics as it bears on musical instruments.

Bridge

This is the piece mounted on the face below the sound hole. It is where most ukuleles attach their strings.

The part of the bridge that the strings pass over before being attached is called the saddle. Mostly it is a separate piece that rests in a slot but plenty of ukuleles have the saddle carved out of the wood of the bridge itself.

The height of the saddle, as well as the height (off the fretboard) of the bottom of the nut slots determine the ukulele's action.

If you have a banjo uke, your strings are probably attached to a piece of metal at the bottom of your uke called a "tailpiece" or "endpiece". The piece of wood towards the bottom of your uke which rests on the skin head and on which the strings rest is called a bridge, and serves the same purpose that the bridge and the saddle together serve on a normal uke.

Extra credit

Many ukuleles have a ring of some material inlaid around the soundhole. This is called the rosette. Some rosettes (usually on the less expensive ukes) are just decals or painted on.

The piece of wood that's the same shape as the face of your uke -- the piece that you press against your body when playing -- is called (duh!) the back. The pieces of wood bent into the figure 8 shape that hold the face and back together are... you've guessed it already... the sides.

Face, back and sides all together make up the body of the uke.

Where the neck attaches to the body it swoops down so that it is the same "depth" as the body (you can see it in Figure 1, the bottom line coming from the "neck" label is touching it). That part of the neck is called the heel.

FRET BOARD

When you move your hand or fingers towards the soundboard or "face" of your Ukulele, to form chords or notes, we call this "Up" -- as the notes or chords become higher along the scale or move "Up" the scale.

For example.

Pluck or play the 3rd (C) string open -- no fingers on any frets. Listen to that note.

Place your finger on that same string, but on the second fret, that string is now a (D). Listen to this note. This is higher than when you played this string open (C). Actually a full tone higher.

Now place your finger at 3rd string, the fourth fret (E). Pluck the string again. This is even higher.

And conversely, if you move your hand or fingers towards the head, we call this "Down" -- as the notes or chords become lower or down the scale.

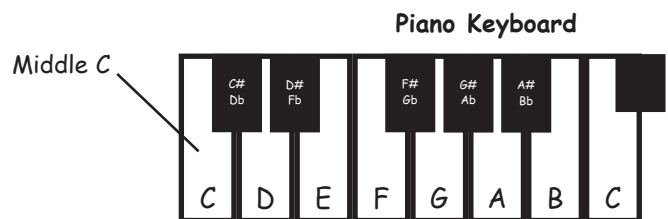
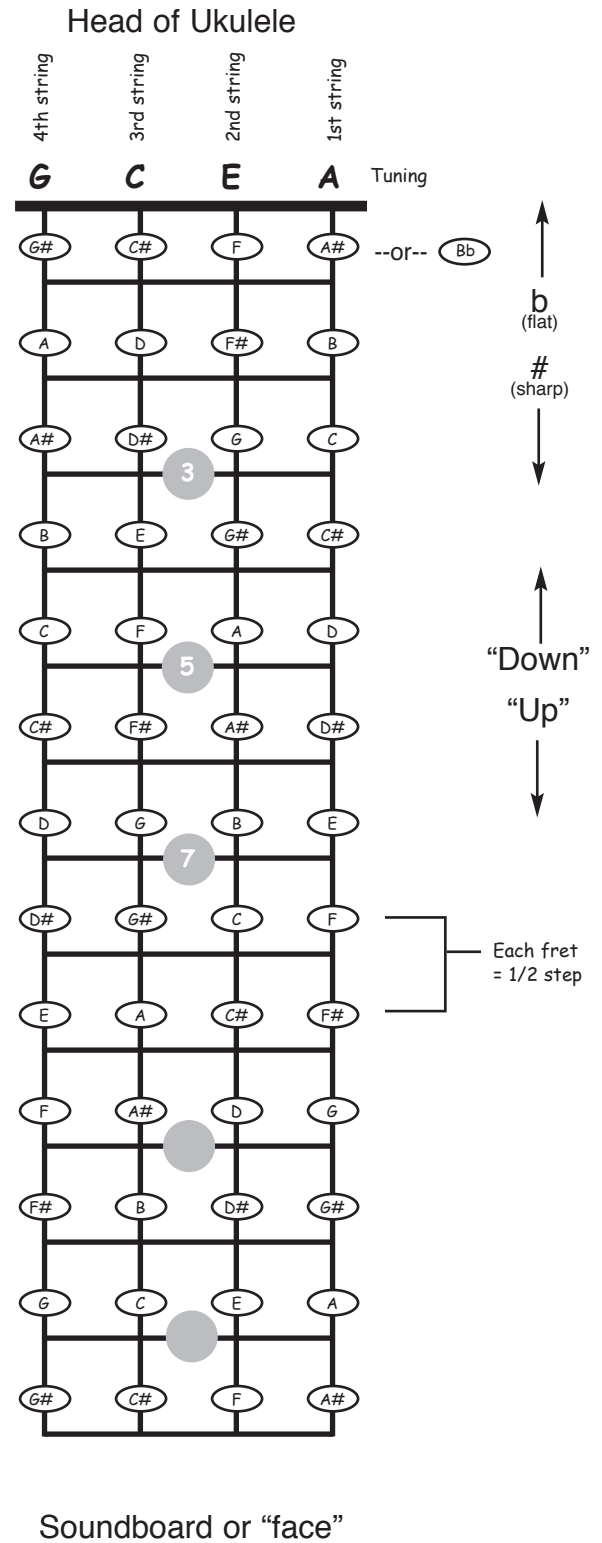
Put your finger on one string and move it "Up" and "Down" the fret board, causing the notes to become higher or lower.

Each string has all the corresponding notes of that scale, or chromatic scale, beginning with the open string to the 12th fret, which is the beginning of another, but higher octave of that scale. (i.e, the third string or "C" string is the chromatic scale of "C". Look at the piano keyboard illustration, to the right... that is the same "C" chromatic scale. The sharps (#) and flats (b) are the black keys.

Note: The chromatic scale is a scale which includes all 12 notes. Other scales are based on this and many other combinations derive from it as well. The definition of a chromatic movement means a movement from a tone to another tone which are a semitone, or half step apart (from A to Ab or E to F in layman's terms). If you understand this last sentence, you get extra credit.

To put it another way...

Because the chromatic scale has twelve notes and each fret on the ukulele moves up one half-step, every note appears on all six strings somewhere before the twelfth fret. In other words, there is an 'E' on every string, an 'A' on every string, a 'Gb' on every string, etc.



TUNING TO G C E A

Tuning your Ukulele

There are various tunings for a ukulele, the current common tuning is G C E A (Fig. 3). The 1st string (A) is the string closest to the floor as you hold your ukulele in the playing position.

Chromatic tuners

One of the easiest ways to tune your ukulele is with one of the many battery operated chromatic tuners that work with the vibration (440 Hz), or sound, from your ukulele when you pluck a string. I like the vibration models myself because you can tune your uke in a noisy room or while others are playing.

All you do is attach the tuner to your ukulele, pick one of the strings, and pluck it, then watch the meter. Using the tuning pegs, tighten or loosen the string depending if it is flat or sharp... low or high respectively in pitch. They all have instructions. Prices vary from around \$30 to near \$100, and at any price, they are well worth it.

Self tuning your ukulele by ear

The best way to tune your ukulele by ear, is with a piano, pitch pipe (for Ukulele) or with a tuning fork. Since it's not easy to carry a piano around in our pocket to tune to, I will only talk about the pitch pipe, the tuning fork and what's called "relative" tuning. Whatever your starting instrument or tool is, the procedure is the same.

Tuning with pitch pipe or tuning fork.

If you want to use a pitch pipe, make sure it is for the Ukulele (G, C, E, A) and not guitar. A tuning fork is more difficult but can be done. I would recommend using an "A" tuning fork.

We will first start off with tuning just one string, the 1st string (A string). Then we will tune the other strings by matching them to this 1st string, with one exception. (See Fig. 4).

If you're using a pitch pipe, pitch an "A", hear the sound. If you're using a tuning fork, strike the "A" tuning fork, then lay the handle end onto the face of the ukulele or other hard surface, so you can hear the sound, the vibration. Get this sound into your head.

Easy tuning method. (see Fig. 4)

Sound the "A" note one more time.

1. Leaving the 1st string open (no fingers on any fret positions), turn the tuning peg of the 1st string (A) and tune or "match" this "A" note -- got it? Does it sound the same?
2. Now press down on the 5th fret, second string. Pluck this 2nd string and using its tuning peg, tune or "match" the pitch to the open 1st string (A).

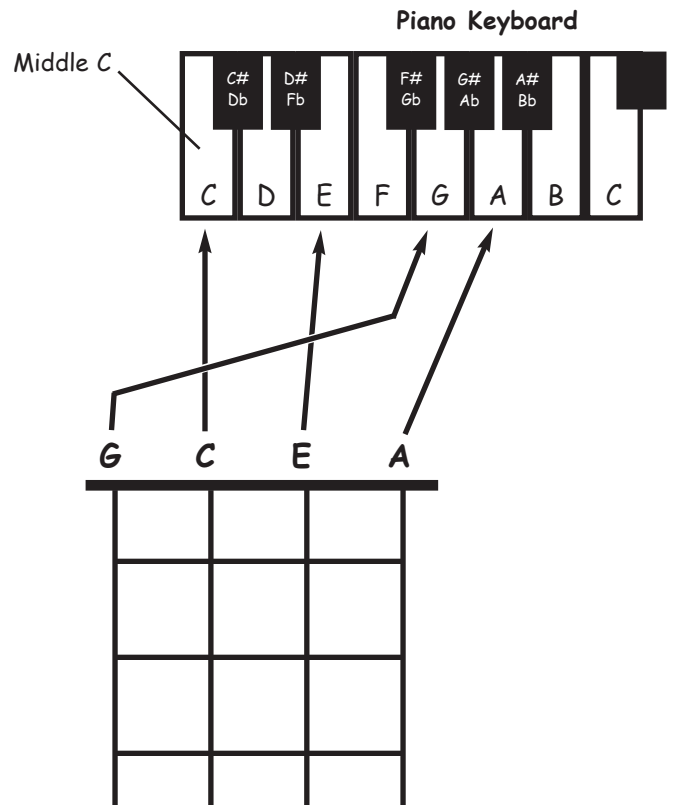


Fig. 3

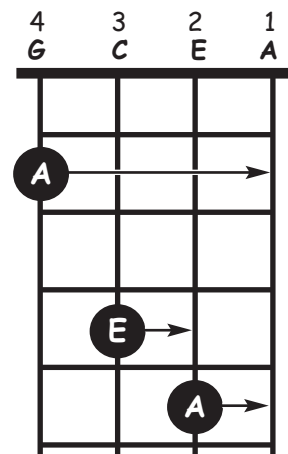


Fig. 4

Relative Tuning

Whenever a pitch pipe, piano or another ukulele is not available to you for tuning, the "Relative Tuning" method can be used. This method will allow the uke to be in tune with itself, but not necessarily in tune with any other instruments - this is OK for a solo act. If you want to play with others.. just say "Give me a C man".

Turn the tuning peg of the 1st string (A) until it is fairly tight and produces a high tone. Remember that "A" note in your head?

Then follow steps 2 thru 4 of the instructions below to tune the other strings.

3. Tuning the 3rd string (C). Press the 4th fret of the 3rd string and using its tuning peg, tune or "match" the pitch of the open 2nd string (E).
4. Tuning the 4th string (G). Press the 2nd fret of the 4th string and using its tuning peg, tune or "match" the pitch of the open 1st string.