

1907-25

Keyboard Pitch Notation Explained

KMA-00

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are the articles
available in
this series.

Key Map Articles (KMA) Series

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**From the Music
Innovator's Workshop**

About the Pitch Notation

Diagrams of the Keyboard. For this notation, notes are placed on diagrams of the keyboard. On these diagrams, notes progress down the diagram to the left and to the right in sync with movements of the fingers on the keys of the keyboard.

The Colored Octave Groups. Groups of notes on the diagrams reflect the C scales (from C to B) on the keyboard, where the white keys form 7 groups of C scales. We refer to these groups of C scales as "Octave Groups." These identical octave groups are distinguished from each other by the colors of the rainbow shown on the backgrounds of the diagrams, in the sequence of the color spectrum, with violet for the lowest sounds and red for the highest sounds.

The Shape of Each Octave Group. On the key diagrams and maps, each octave group consists of 5 vertical lines standing for the locations of the black keys included in the group on the keyboard. A note is placed on each line that matches a black key that is to be played. There is a space next to each line showing the location of each white key. A note is placed in each space that visually matches the location of each white key to be played. As with traditional sheet music, the diagram gives you all of the information that you need for playing a piece of music on the keyboard. But unlike the traditional sheet music's abstract coded information, the diagrams show you, visually, which keys to play.

About the Key Diagrams and Maps. The notation appears in two formats. The notation format for beginners music are the "Key Diagrams," which have large notes that physically match the widths of the white keys at the front of the keyboard. This helps beginners see how the notes match the keys to be played. The large notes have the additional advantage of having the texts of songs appear right inside of the notes to be played.

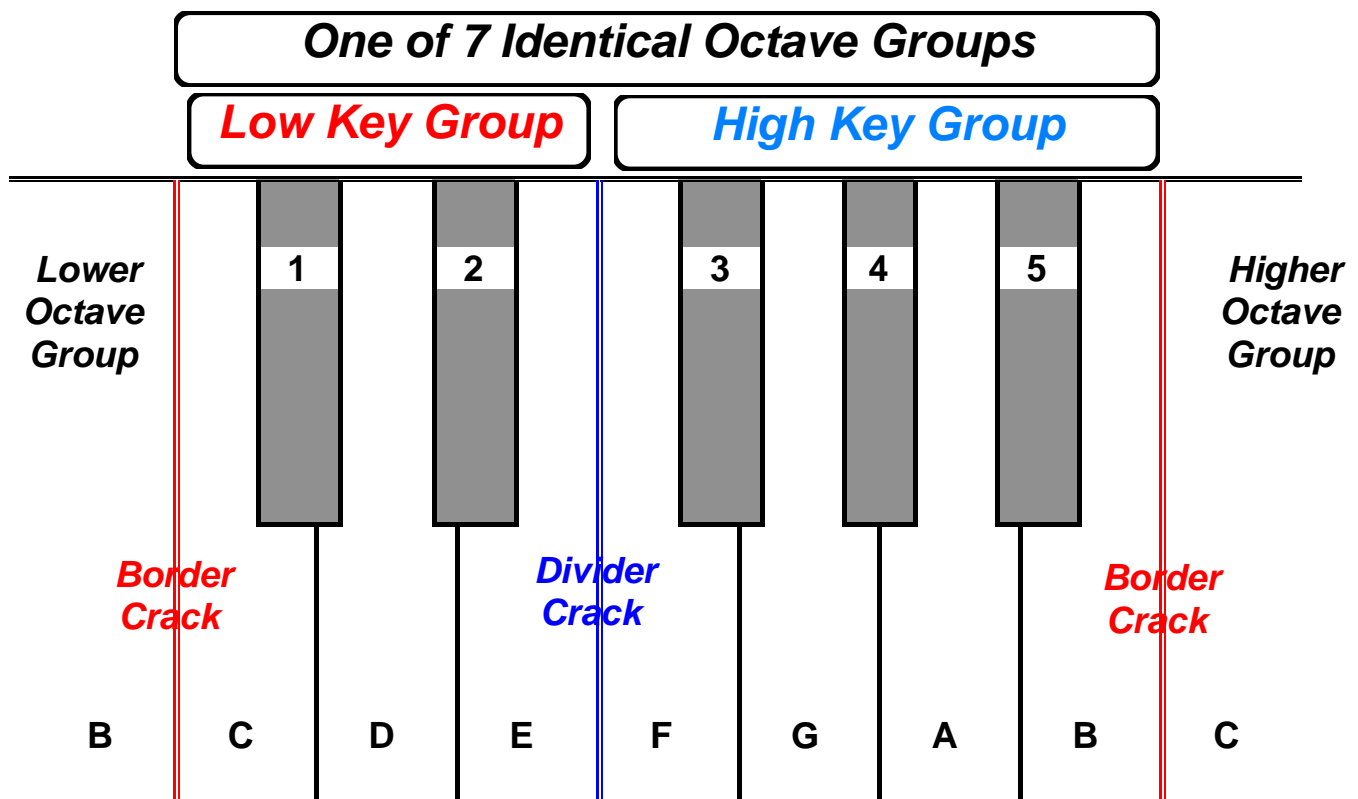
Our Key Maps are key diagrams, but they are also TruScaled - showing both the pitch and rhythm to scale on a timeline. These maps provide our main notational format and are used for the more advanced instruction and pieces.

The present unit takes you step by step through the process of seeing how the diagrams show you which keys to play. It provides you with a basis for further exploration of how key diagrams and maps work.

The Arrangement of the Keys on the Keyboard

Before key diagrams can help you find the keys to play a melody, you need to know about how keys are arranged on the keyboard: The group of 12 keys that you can see below is called an "Octave Group." The entire keyboard is made up of 7 of these octave groups arranged next to each other across the entire keyboard. (Also, there are 3 extra keys at the left end of the keyboard, and 1 extra key at the right end.)

These 7 octave group patterns of 12 keys each provide the main identifying information for the entire keyboard. Because these 12-key patterns are identical, we need only study one of them to understand how the whole keyboard is arranged. Also, because the groups are identical, each group is identified by a number from 1 to 7 and a color code.



The Low and High Key Groups. In each octave group, the main patterns are the "Low Key Group" (lower sounds) with 5 keys and the "High Key Group" (higher sounds) with 7 keys.

The Long Cracks in the Keyboard. The key groups are separated by the "Divider Cracks" (between keys E and F) and the "Border Cracks" (between keys B and C). These cracks, along with the fronts and backs of the keys, make boxes that you can see on the keyboard. (These "cracks" don't show up on the key maps because the vertical lines on the maps are reserved for identifying the black keys.)

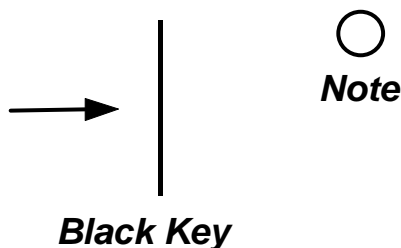
We'll go step by step through each of the parts of key diagrams so that you will be able to find the keys being pointed to by the notes. Actually, one good way of thinking about the notes on the diagrams is that they are pictures of the tips of your fingers touching the keys that you are supposed to play. As you follow the notes with your eyes, fingers move to the right and left on the keyboard, just as the notes move about on the diagram.

The following pages are marked as flash cards. The right hand page presents essential facts about how the notes work. The back side of the page presents additional information about what is presented on the front side. Now, study the information below. Then move on to the first flash card.

Step 1. The first thing we need is something on the diagram that stands for a black key. Because a black key looks long and black, we use a long black line to stand for the black key (see below).

We orient the line vertically (from top to bottom), which is the way that the black key looks from your playing position at the keyboard.

Then we need a marker that tells us to play the black key. For this we use a circle, or an oval, that we call a "note." With these ready, we can go to the next step.



What's a Note? A note is a marker that marks on the diagram the location of the key to play. These notes are circles or ovals. If a note is just showing what sound to play, it will normally be a circle.

(Key Maps only) If it's also showing how long to hold the note (rhythm), the circle is stretched vertically into an oval to show how long to hold the key down .

The Key Diagram Rules. The only way that you can really know what the diagram is telling you to do is for there to be rules on how the diagram works. You'll learn these rules as we go along.

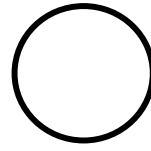
One rule is that a vertical black line on the diagram stands for a black key.

Another rule is that when you put a note on the black key line, the note tells the reader to play the key that the line stands for.

You will notice that this black line doesn't look much like a black key. So just use your imagination and keep in mind that this is a "diagram" of a black key.

**Flash Cards
Begin**

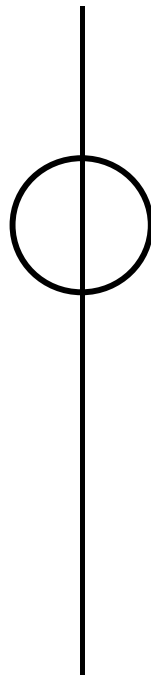
Card 1



Note



Any Black Key

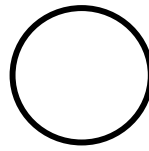


Note on the Black Key

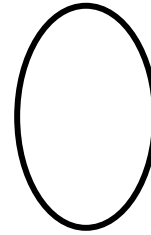
**Tells you to play any one of the 36
black keys of the full piano keyboard.**

Back Side 1

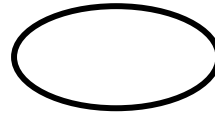
**Vertical black lines
in the notation
always stand for
the black keys on
the keyboard.**



Notes



**More
Information**

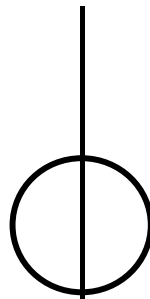


**Notes are circles or
ovals that vary in
size. A note is
simply a marker
that tells you to
play a key on the
keyboard.**

Any Black Key

**There are 36
black keys on the
full piano
keyboard.**

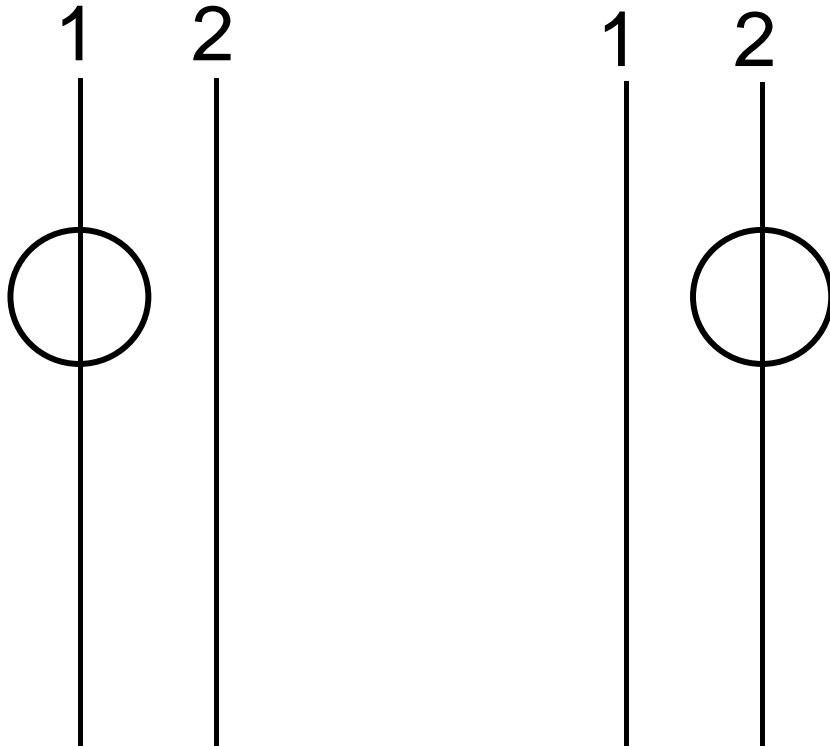
**The note at the
right tells you to
play any one of
these black keys.**



**You will need
more
information
before you will
know WHICH of
these black keys
to play.**

Note on the Black Key

Tells you to play any Black Key

Card 2**Locating the 2 Black Keys of the Low Group**

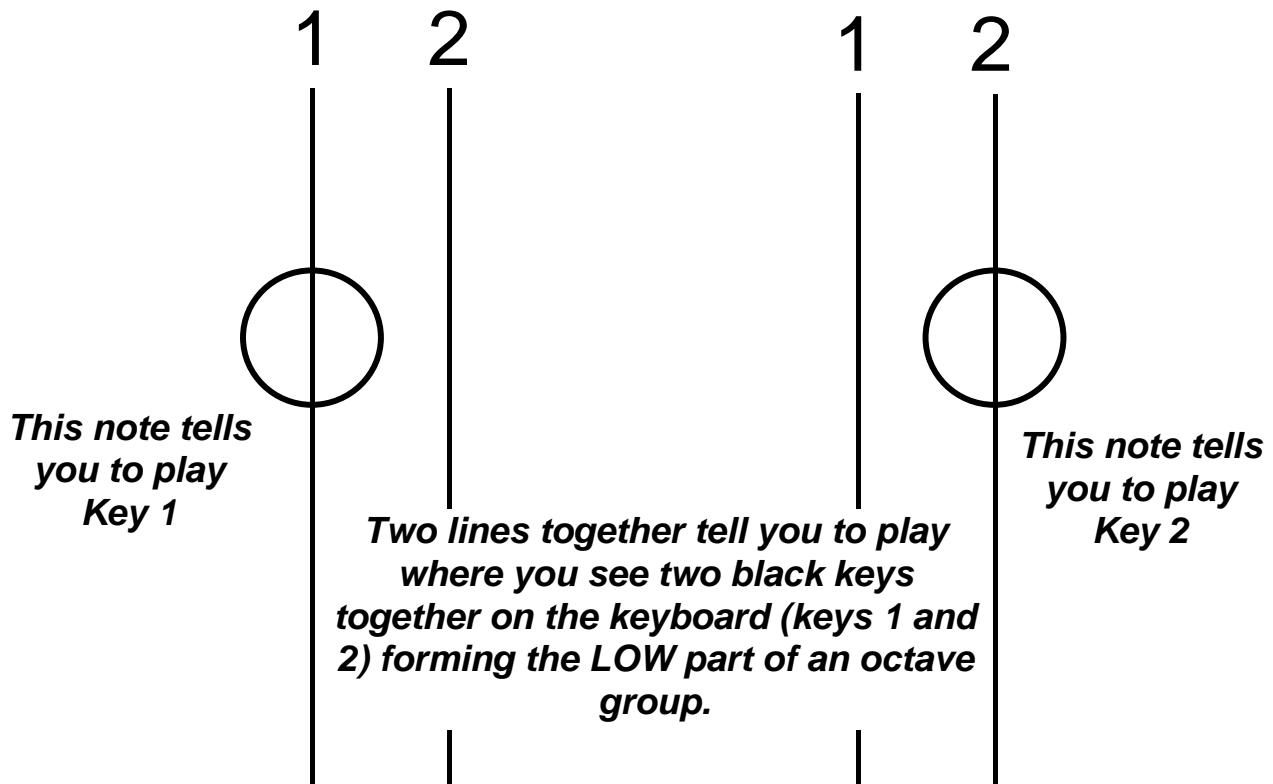
Remember - The Low Group has 2 black keys in it. There are 7 low groups on the piano, each group identified by a different number and rainbow color.

Back 2

Locating the 2 Black Keys of the Low Group

More
Information

Remember - The 5 black keys of each octave group are numbered left to right, from 1 thru 5 going from low to high.

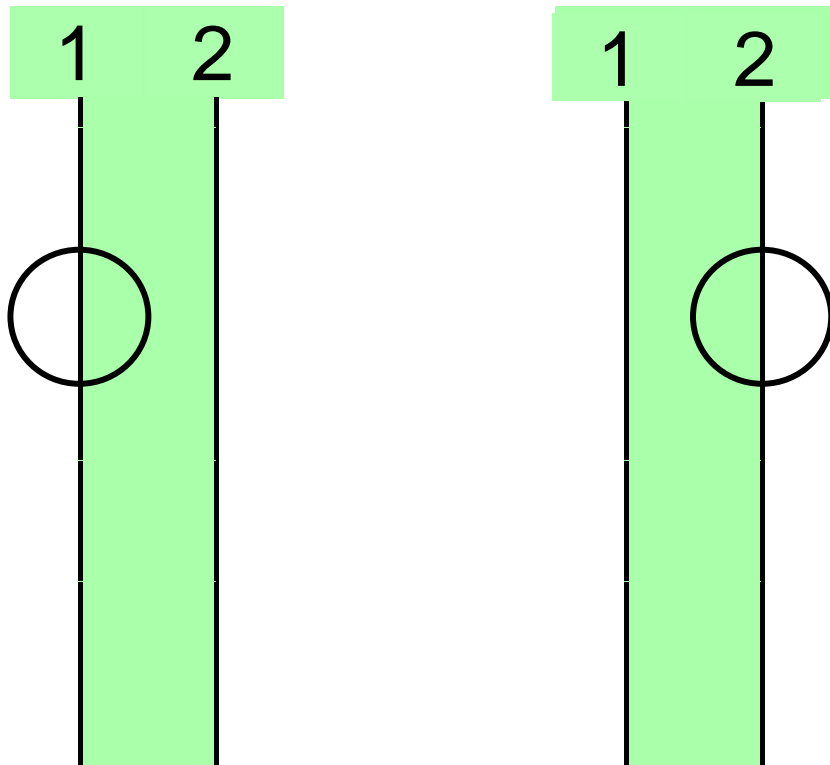


Remember - The Low Group has 2 black keys in it. There are 7 low groups on the piano, each group identified by a different number and rainbow color. Without these colors, you can't tell which octave group to play the above notes in.

Card 3

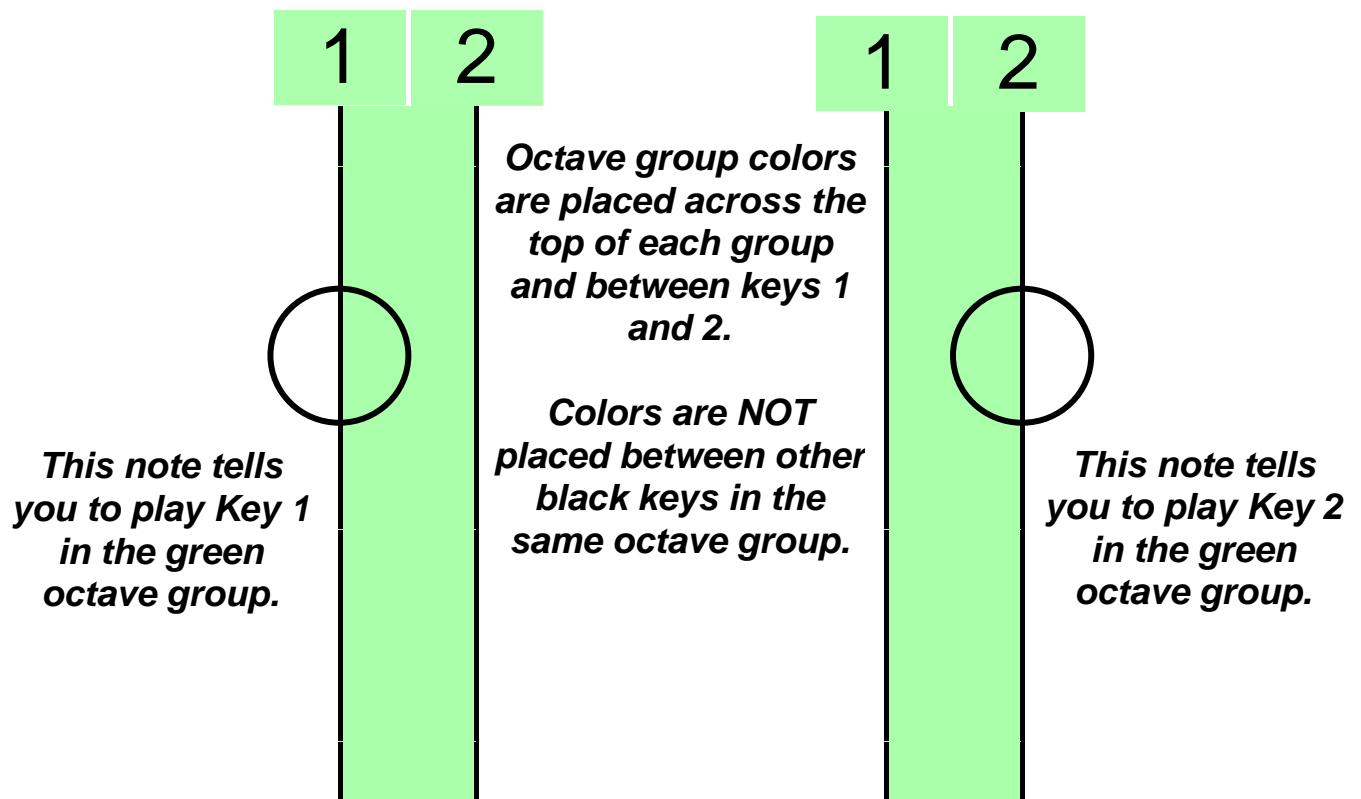
The 2 Black Keys of the Low Group

Adding the color green tells you to play these notes in the green octave group.

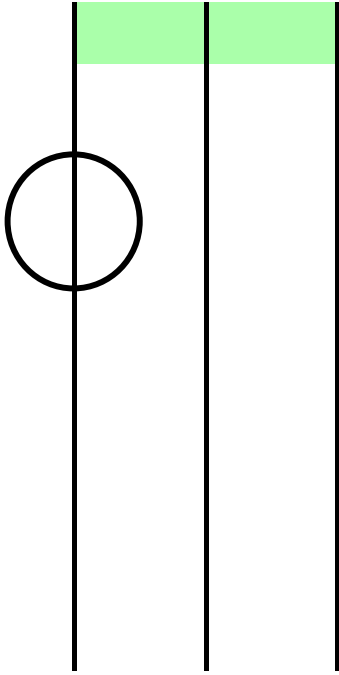


Back 3**Locating the 2 Black Keys of the Low Group***More
Information*

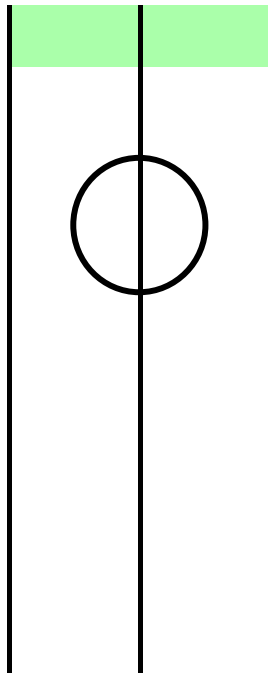
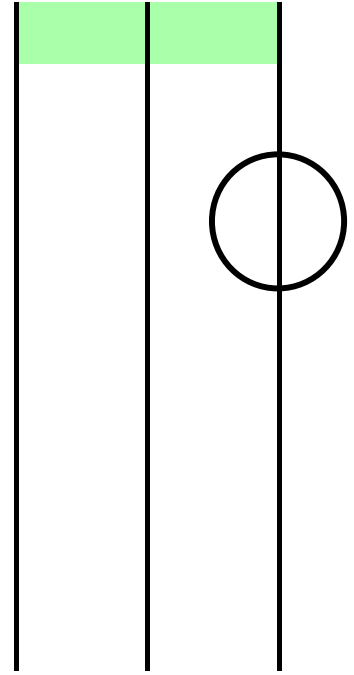
Adding the color green tells you to play these notes in the green octave group. (Octave Group 4 at the middle of the keyboard.)



Remember - The 5 black keys of each octave group are numbered left to right, from 1 thru 5 going from low to high. NEXT, we'll look at keys 3, 4, and 5 in the high group.

Card 4**Locating the 3 Black Keys of the High Group**

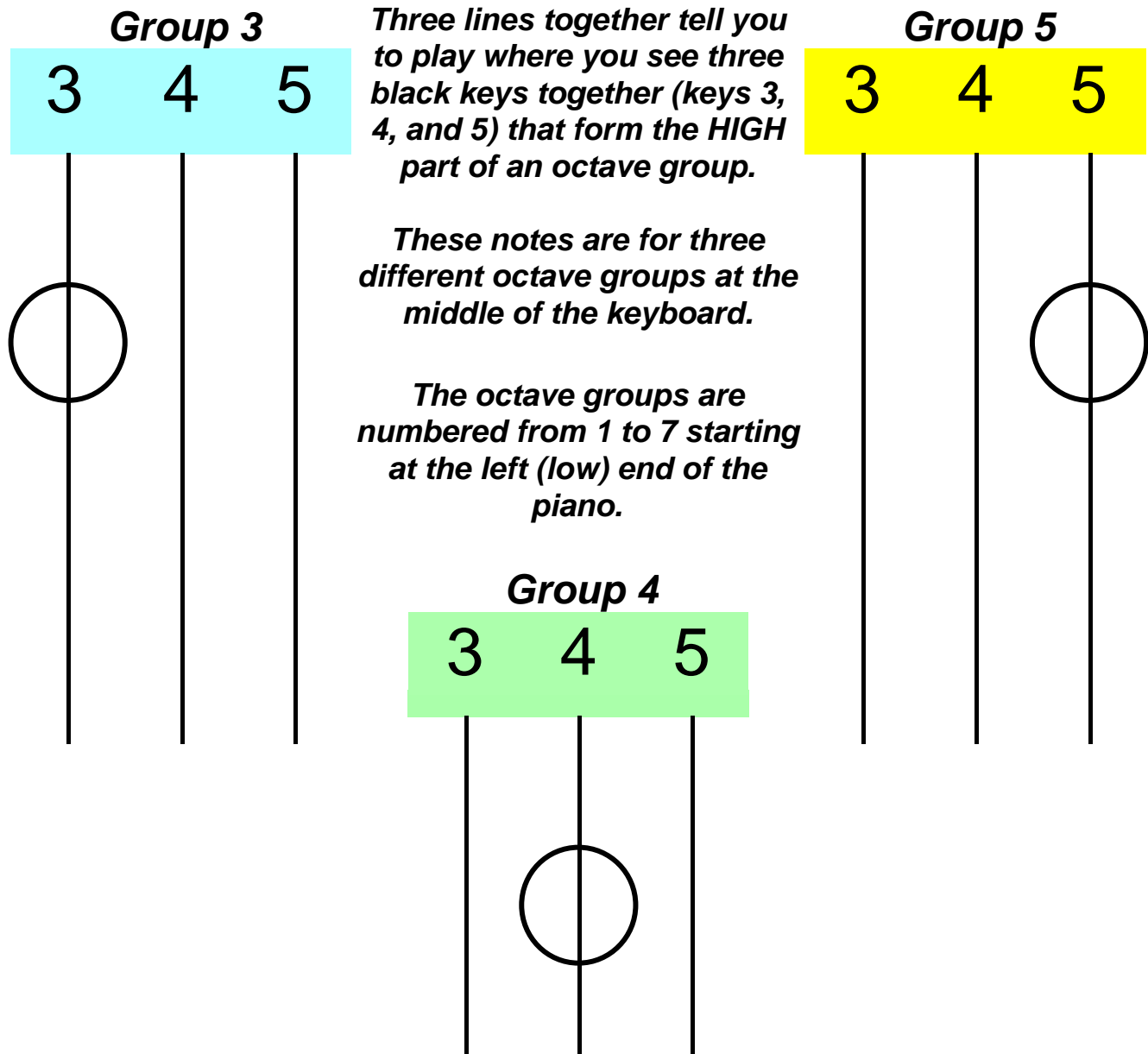
Three vertical lines together tell you to play where you see three black keys together on the keyboard (keys 3, 4, and 5) that form the HIGH part of a green octave group.



More
Information

Back 4

Locating the 3 Black Keys of the High Group

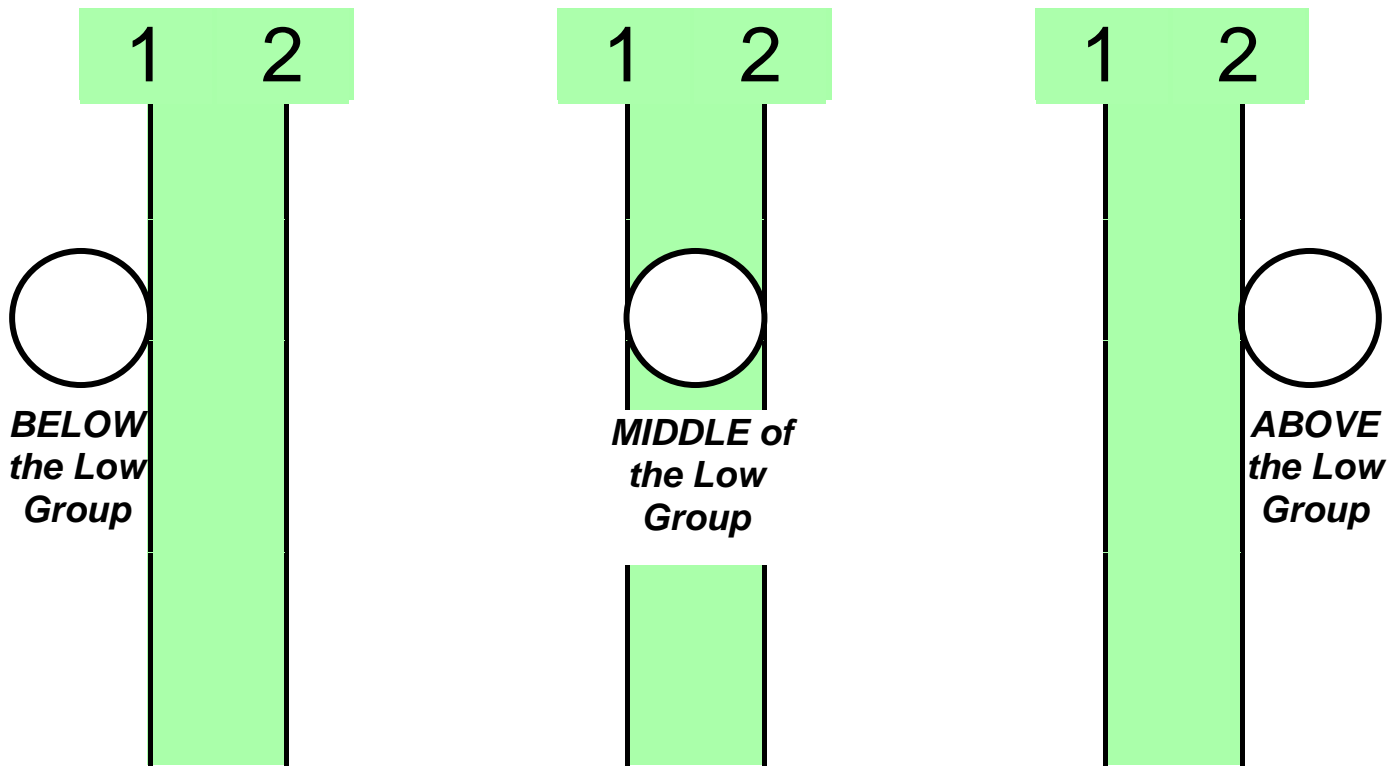


You have now seen how to read the notes and find the 5 BLACK keys of an octave group. You will read and find all of the other black keys on the keyboard in exactly the same way.

The next step is to learn to read and find the WHITE keys in the notes and on the keyboard. The white keys and their notes are all identified by looking at the black keys that they are next to. You will see this as we continue.

Card 5**Locating the 3 White Keys of the Low Group**

Notes for white keys are always "attached" to the vertical black lines that stand for the black keys - like leaves attached to their stems.



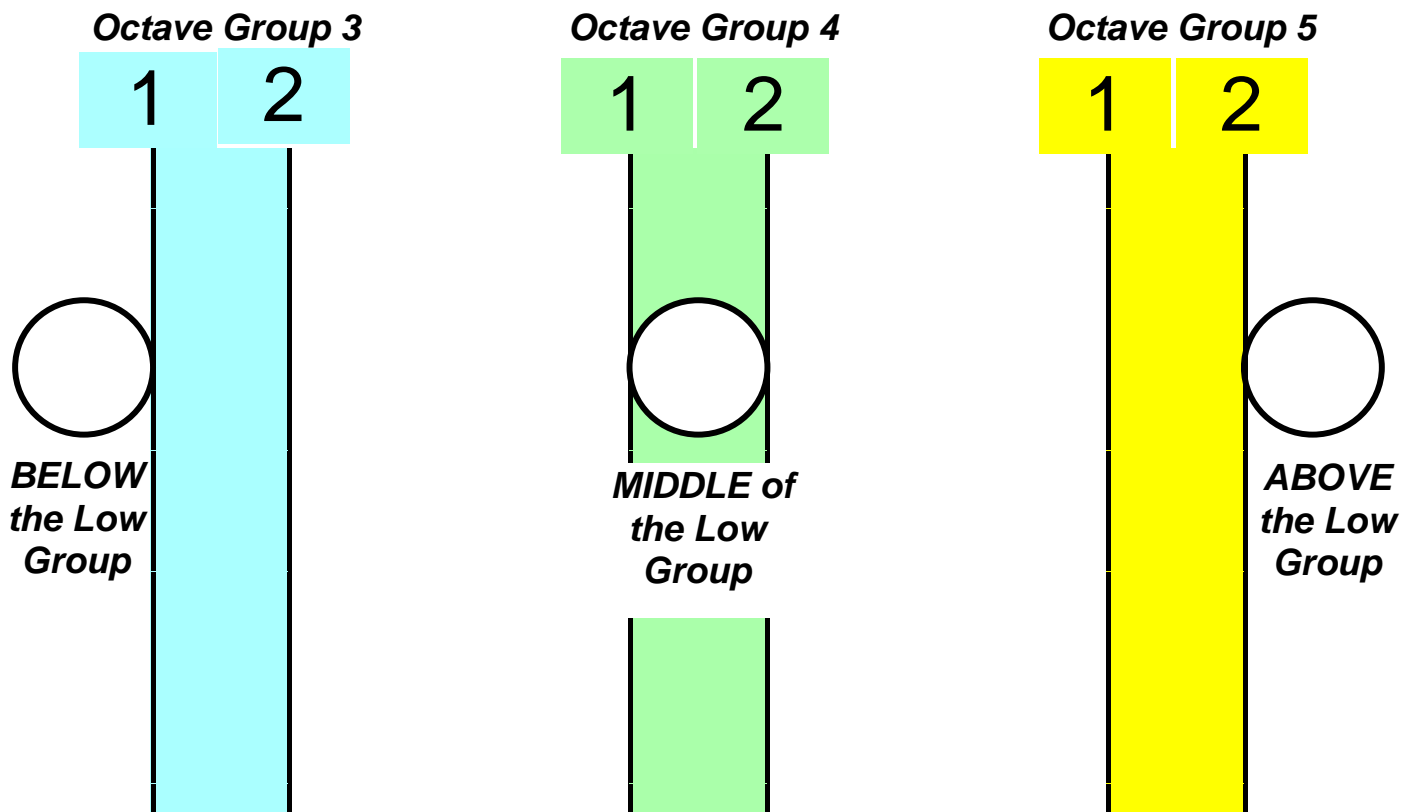
The white keys (C, D, and E) are easy to identify - Above, Below, or Between the black keys of the Low Group.

More
Information

Back 5

Locating the 3 White Keys of the Low Group

Three notes for white keys - C, D, and E - are in the low group - and are below, between, and above the 2 keys of the group. These notes are shown here in the three octave groups at the middle of the keyboard.

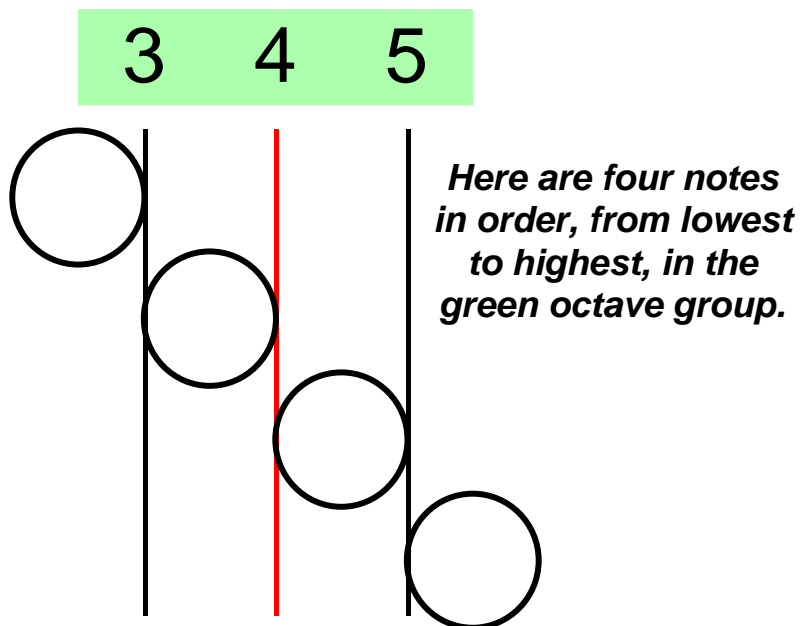
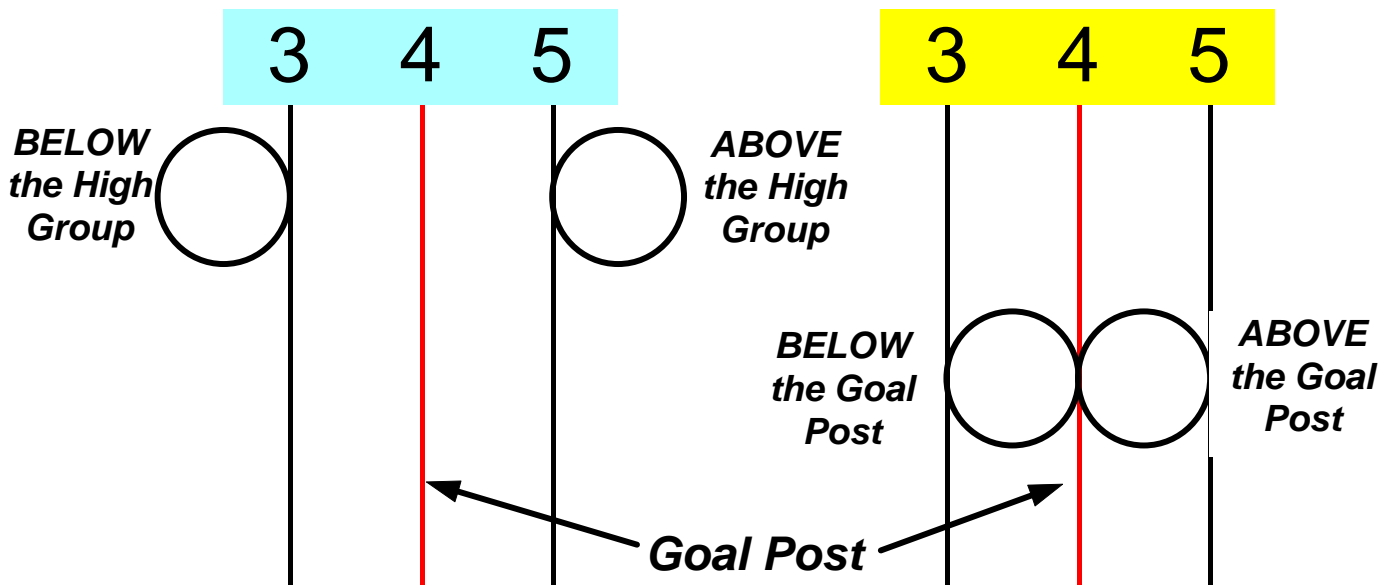


Notes for white keys are all "attached" to the vertical black lines that stand for the black keys - like leaves attached to their stems.

NOTICE - White notes never appear in empty space. They always are attached below, between, or above the lines for the black keys. THEY GET THEIR IDENTITIES FROM THE WAY THAT THE BLACK KEYS ARE GROUPED!

Locating the 4 White Keys of the High Group

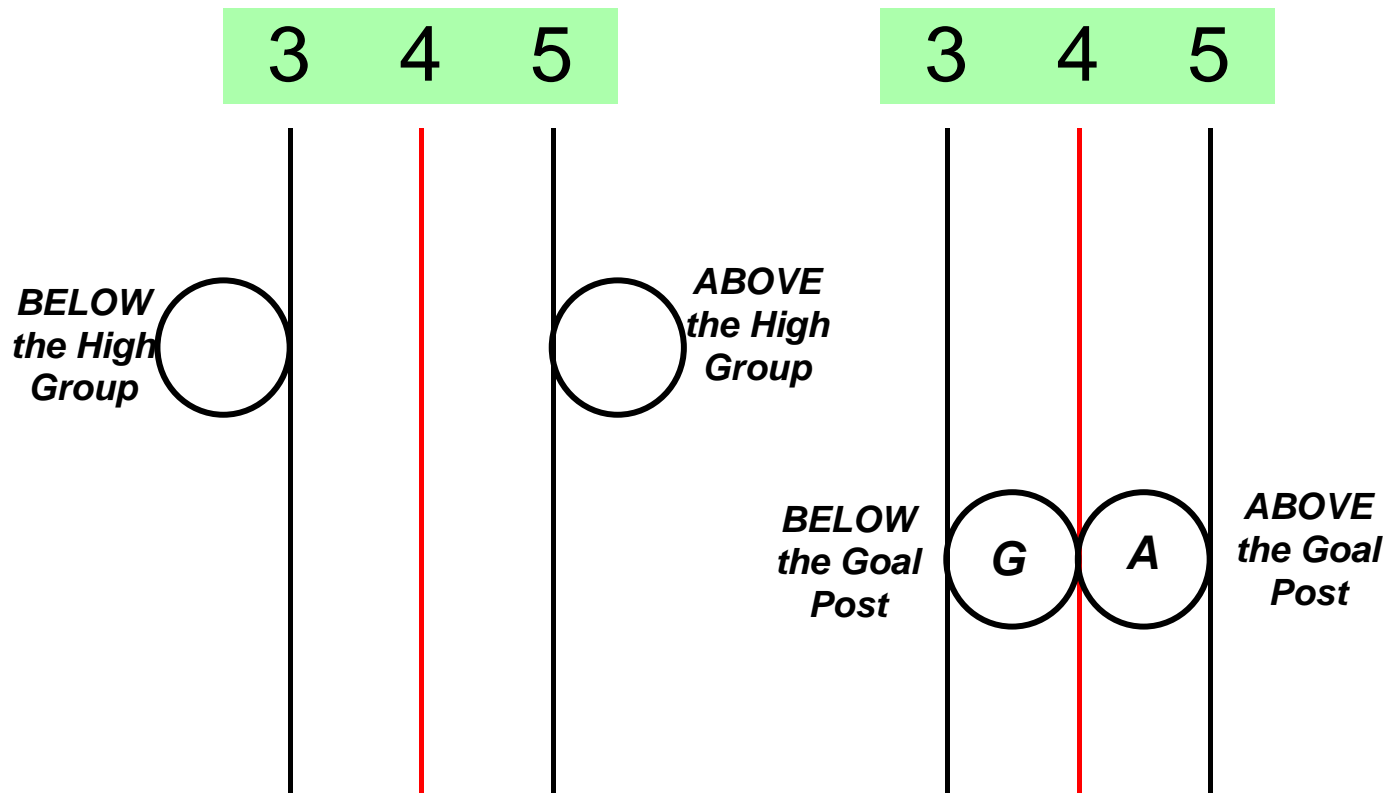
Notes for white keys are always "attached" to the vertical black lines that stand for the black keys - like leaves attached to their stems.



More
Information

Back 6

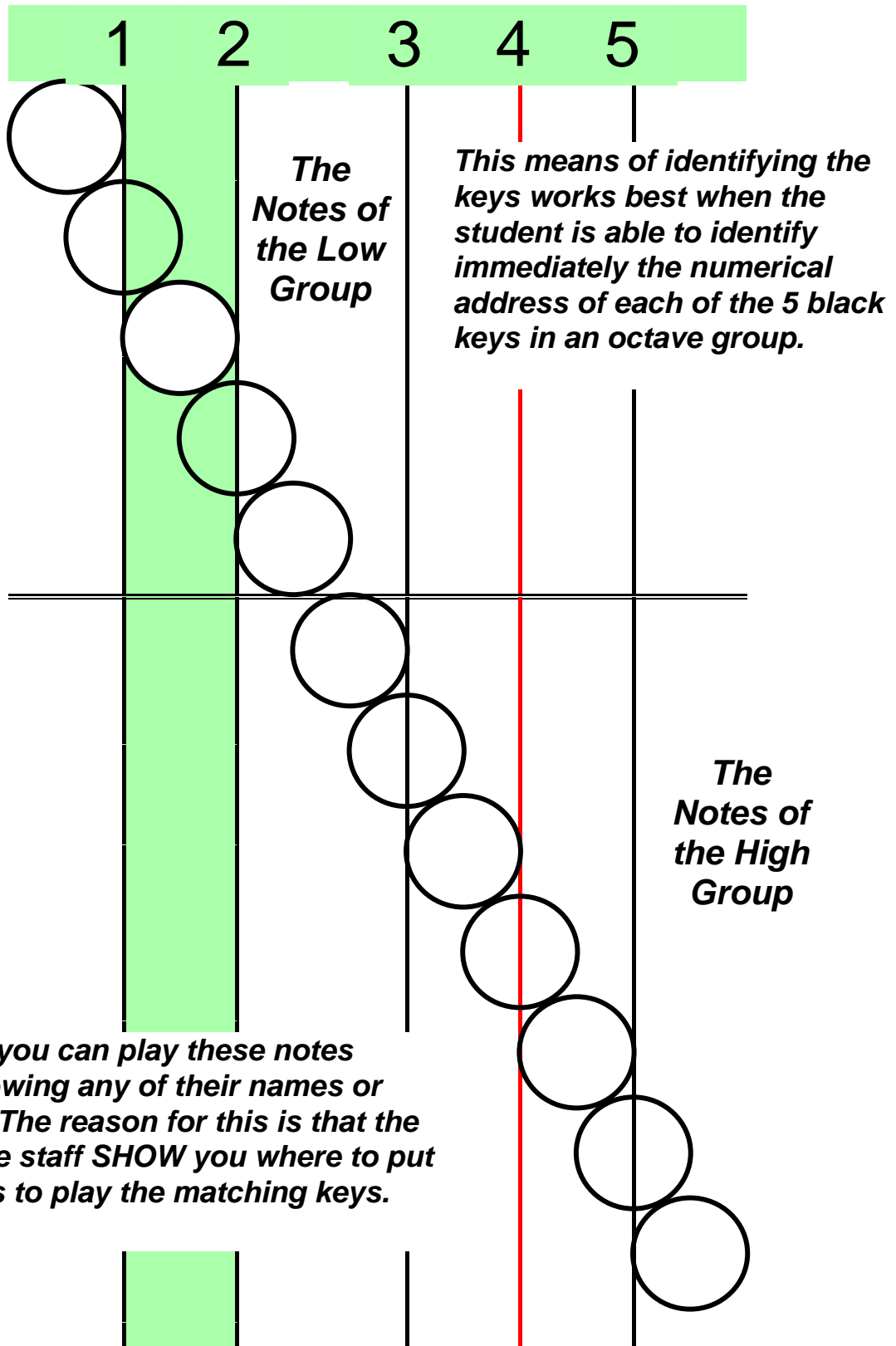
Locating the 4 White Keys of the High Group



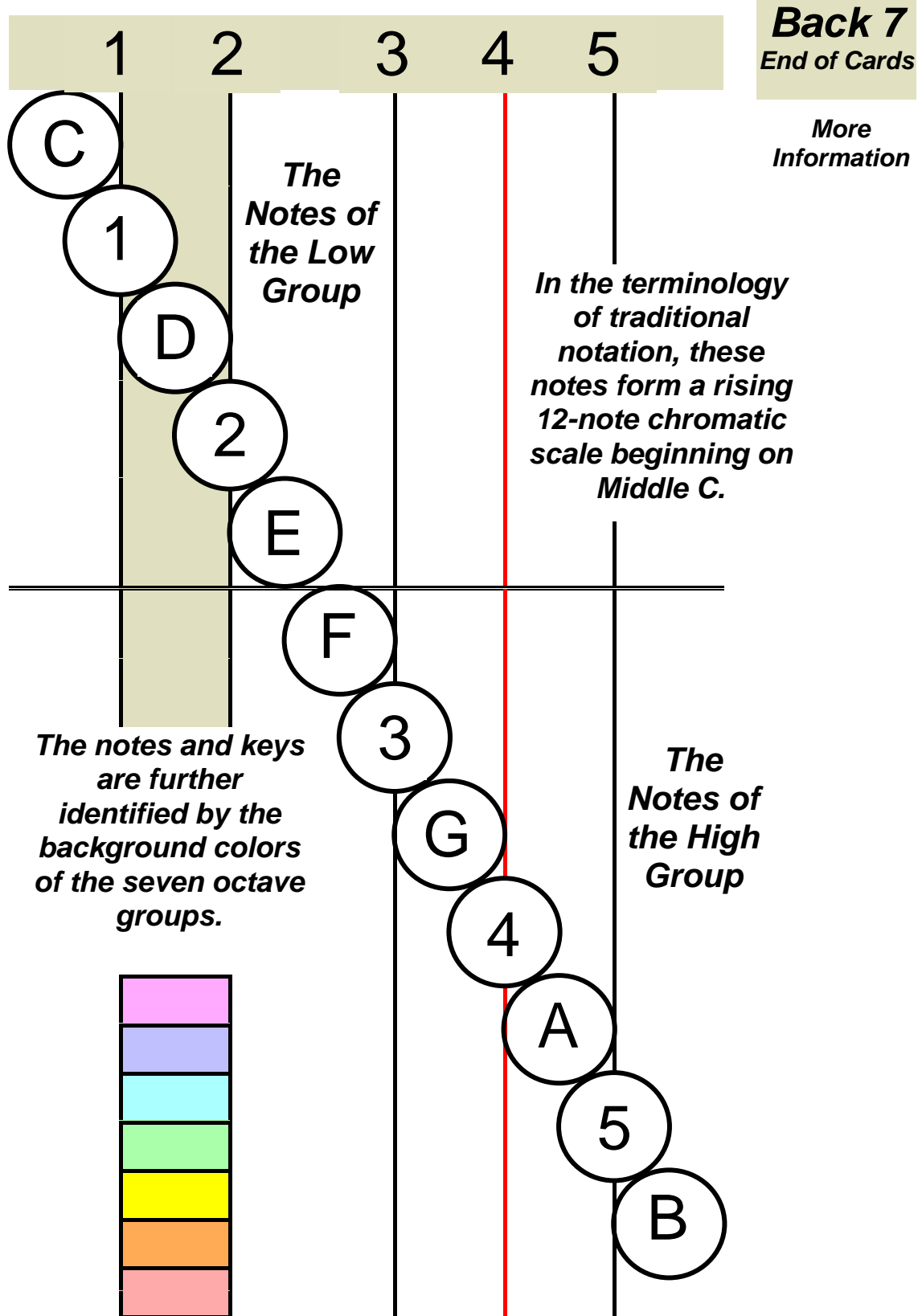
Key 4 has a very distinctive place on the keyboard. It is the location where the musical alphabet starts over again. Letter G is below the goal post and Letter A is above the goal post. This key is easy to find and remember as it is the only black key that is evenly spaced between two other black keys - the 2 black keys forming the outline of the HIGH GROUP. You will sometimes see this key line colored red on our key diagrams and maps because of its distinctive location and meaning.

Card 7

The 12 Keys of the Green Octave Group



Identities of the Notes and Keys of All Octave Groups



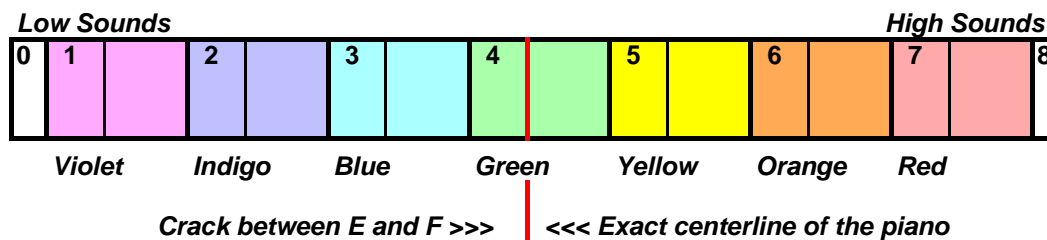
Locating the Seven Identical Octave Groups of the Piano

The octave groups are identical to each other in their physical appearance. Their sounds are similar but not identical, since each octave group (from left to right on the keyboard) is an octave higher in sound than the previous octave group.

The workshop uses numbers and colors to identify the 7 octave groups of the keyboard. The octave groups are numbered from one to seven (left to right), with the three keys at the left end belonging to Group 0 and the C at the right end belonging to Group 8.

Beginning students usually confine their playing to the middle three groups, and then, mainly the green octave group in the middle of the keyboard.

The Seven Octave Groups Colored With the Seven Colors of the Rainbow



The Seven Rainbow Colors Identify the Octave Groups

The colors are used on the keyboard in the same order that they appear in the rainbow. The cool colors are at the left for the lowest notes; the warm colors at the right for the higher notes. In a sense, they provide a contour map of the sounds, showing the elevations of the sounds from low to high. The lowlands are in the middle and are green. Sea level and below are at the left of the keyboard in blue, indigo, and violet. Highlands are at the right in yellow, orange, and red.

These colors are used on key diagrams and maps to show which octave groups the notes are in. The colors are used along with the octave group numbers mentioned above. To help beginning students find the octave groups on the keyboard, the students are given seven colored labels to place on their keyboards, showing where each octave group is located on the keyboard.

