

Early Banjo Rosetta Staff

These are the notes on the staff as they relate to tabulature. The Early Banjo was first tuned to the key of "D", as seen in the Briggs' Banjo Instructor of 1855. In the Rice Book of 1857, the tuning of the banjo was presented in the key of "E". It remained that way in most of the subsequent Tutors. Players of today most commonly leave their instruments in "D". This seems to work better for ensemble playing when a fiddle is present. One might read music in "E", but the sound will still remain in the "D" tuning. This becomes meaningless when reading tabulature because tab is a number system which gives the location of the note, but does not identify the pitch. Below are the most common notes used on the banjo, presented in both keys. Notice that the different pitches share the same tabulature number.

D Tuning

The D Tuning staff shows a sequence of notes on a five-line staff. The notes are: D, G, D, F#, A, G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G. Below the staff, the corresponding fret numbers are: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 2, 4, 5, 0, 2, 0, 1, 0, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10. The notes are grouped into pairs: (D, G), (D, F#), (A, G), (A, B), (C, D), (E, F#), (G, A), (B, C), (D, E), (F#, G).

Typically, banjo music in the "D" tuning will have the key signature of "G" and "D" (1 and 2 sharps). Banjo music in the "E" tuning will have the key signature of "A" and "E" (3 and 4 sharps).

E Tuning

The E Tuning staff shows a sequence of notes on a five-line staff. The notes are: E, A, E, G#, B, A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G#, A. Below the staff, the corresponding fret numbers are: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 2, 4, 5, 0, 2, 0, 1, 0, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10. The notes are grouped into pairs: (E, A), (E, G#), (B, A), (B, C#), (D, E), (F#, G#), (A, B), (C#, D), (E, F#), (G#, A).