

# ABCs Explained

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## INTRODUCTION

ABC notation is a simple keyboard based way of notating music. Originally designed for folk tunes, it can do anything up to and including symphonies, but I will keep this simple, just for our needs.

For more info go to this site: [http://www.lesession.co.uk/abc/abc\\_notation.htm](http://www.lesession.co.uk/abc/abc_notation.htm)  
But for our purposes here is a summary.

ABC tunes are usually in .txt or .abc files and can be edited using Notepad or Word or whatever.

## USING ABC FILES

If you search the web for , for example, “Castle Kelly ABC” you will find a variety of sites with ABC files either as files or just “in stream text” (as in the lower half of this document).

You can copy the text in the file and save it into a file on your computer, in whatever type of file you want. I use .txt (for example, castlekelly.txt) and use Notepad to edit it but you can use Word, Excel, or whatever.

I have a complete set of all the ABCs in our playlist (almost all anyway) on our website and you can use those. They generated the tune book.

Copy and paste the contents into the box at this website: <http://www.folkinfo.org/songs/abcconvert.php>  
There are other sites out there, but I like this one the best for various reasons.

On that site, hit the Submit button and it will convert what you pasted into sheet music. You can also use it to transpose music from one key to another, including the option of transposing the abc or just the sheet music.

Once the sheet music comes up, you can save it as a PDF file (how I made the book) OR you can play it as a midi file, so you can hear what it sounds like, play along etc. With the midi option, it will play whatever chords you put into the music as guitar chords (see below), which is pretty dang cool.

See the section about Q lines at the bottom of the section below for how to adjust how fast it plays.

## UNDERSTANDING ABC NOTATION (not required reading)

ABC tunes look like this:

```
X: 1
T: Castle Kelly
T: Anogh bu Claroch
M: 4/4
L: 1/8
R: reel
K: Amin
|:A2 cA ABcA|GcEG G2 EG|A2 cA ABcd|ecdB cA A2:|
|agec dfed|cAGE G2 eg|agec d2cd|eaag a2ba|
gedc dfed|cAGE|G2 EG|A2 cA ABcd|ecdB cA A2|
```

and

```
X:1
T:Angeline the Baker
R:reel
M:C|
L:1/8
K:D
dB |: "D"A2B2 d3A | B2 d4 dB | A2B2 dBA2 | "G"B6 dB |
"D"A2B2 d3e | f2e2 d3e | f2e2 "G"d2B2 |\
[1 "D"A3B A2dB :|[2 "D"A3B A2fg ||
|: "D"a2f2 e2de | f2e2 d2fg | a2f2 e2d2 | "G"B3B B2fg |
"D"a2f2 e2de | f2e2 d2de | f2e2 "G"d2B2 |\
[1 "D"A3B A2fg :|[2 "D"A3B A2z2 |]
```

The X line is just a number, usually 1 unless you are making medleys, in which case you put the tunes in order and the first one is X:1, the next is X:2, etc.

T: line is the title. The first T line will show up as the main title, and any subsequent will show up as smaller sub-titles

M line is for the time signature

L line is the default duration of any note in the tune!!!

R is type of tune and you don't really need it unless you play this on a midi system

K is key (A would be A, A minor is Amin, and so forth)

There are ways of showing Composer and keys like B Mixolydian and all sorts of other things, so go to the website above for that stuff.

Now starts the notes. For four octaves from low to high the notes are C,D,E,F,G,A,B,CDEFGABcdefgabc'd'e'f'g'a'b'

So C, is a really low C and C is not as low and c is higher and c' is the highest you will ever play.

Measures are notated in the notes section with | (key over your Enter key) and repeats are shown as : and if the repeats have a different first and second ending, that is done as shown on the last line of Angeline the Baker above, with the 1 and the 2 and the brackets

Look at Castle Kelly, Within each measure you simply write the note as a letter, using the scale above. If the note is the duration you defined on the L line (eighth note in this case) you just write the note, like A. If you want the note twice as long you write it as A2 (which in this case would be a quarter note). If you want the note half as long you would write it as A/2 (like "divided by 2"). If you need two A eighth notes in a row, you write it as AA.

Triplets are written like this: (3ecA where the (3 tells you it is a triplet of the notes e,c, and A.

Spacing within the measure lines is important for how the notes are tied together. So if you write the first measure of Castle Kelly as |:A2 cA AbcA| then you get the long A, unconnected to the next two notes which are a connected c and A, unconnected to the next four notes which are all connected as AbcA. So you get:



Spacing of lines in the abc file is how they will space on the page, within reason. So if you write Castle Kelly as shown above (first page) it will come out on three lines of music.

Guitar chords are shown in the example above of Angeline the Baker. The “D” at the start of the first measure puts a D over the first note. These should be normal chords like D, D7, Dmin etc and if you keep to the normal stuff, if you play back the music on midi, the midi software will apply the appropriate chord to the music.

OK, that is a quick and dirty look. See that website for more. You can do virtually ANYTHING with ABCs.

OH! You can also add a Q line like this:

X: 1  
T: Castle Kelly  
T: Anogh bu Claroch  
M: 4/4  
L: 1/8  
**Q: 100**  
R: reel  
K: Amin

That will set it to play at the tempo where a quarter note (hence the Q) is 100 beats per minute. It will show up on the printed music and is also used to affect how fast the midi plays the tune.