



Get to Grips

with the Highland
Bagpipes



Ulster-Scots Agency
Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch





Instructions

- For each piece of music there will be a tutorial video available. These can be accessed by clicking on the YouTube logo.

- For additional help or if you're interested in online tuition via Zoom, you can message the Music Service for Pipes and Drums via Facebook or contact Andy on 07729346832.



Introduction

One of the most significant decisions of my life was made when I was just 8 years old and my Father decided that I would take up the Great Highland Bagpipes. This most majestic of instruments has moulded my life for almost 40 years and has seen me travel to many countries including Russia, USA and Dubai. During this period, I have met many friends and musicians which has encouraged me to learn other types of Bagpipes and Whistles.

Get to Grips is a tutor led introductory guide to take the learner through the scale and basic gracenotes then starts them on their journey of learning the Highland Bagpipes. The text is simple to read and as the student works through Get to Grips they will discover the basic signs and symbols that are needed to begin to read music.

This book includes links to tutorial videos to aid the student to develop the correct technique required to eventually perform at the highest level. Also included throughout the book are hints and tips which are extremely important to perfecting technique and therefore giving the student a strong foundation. The Highland Bagpipes is not a simple instrument and will take time and commitment to master but it is worth the effort.

I would now like to welcome you to the World of Piping and the opportunities that lie ahead.

Andy McGregor
Head Tutor for Music Service for Pipes and Drums

Before we Begin

Sound is represented on paper by signs and symbols. Here are the first few which you need to understand.

Clef Sign

The clef used in Bagpipe music is the **G clef**.

Crotchet

There are many different note shapes which show the **duration/length** of a sound. The first note we come across is a **crotchet**.

Leger Line

A small **horizontal line** placed above or below the stave to **extend its range**. In bagpipe music, we use **one leger line** for **High A**.

The Stave

A series of **5 lines and 4 spaces** placed in a ladder like arrangement to show the **height** and **depth** of a sound. This is also known as **pitch**.

Pitch

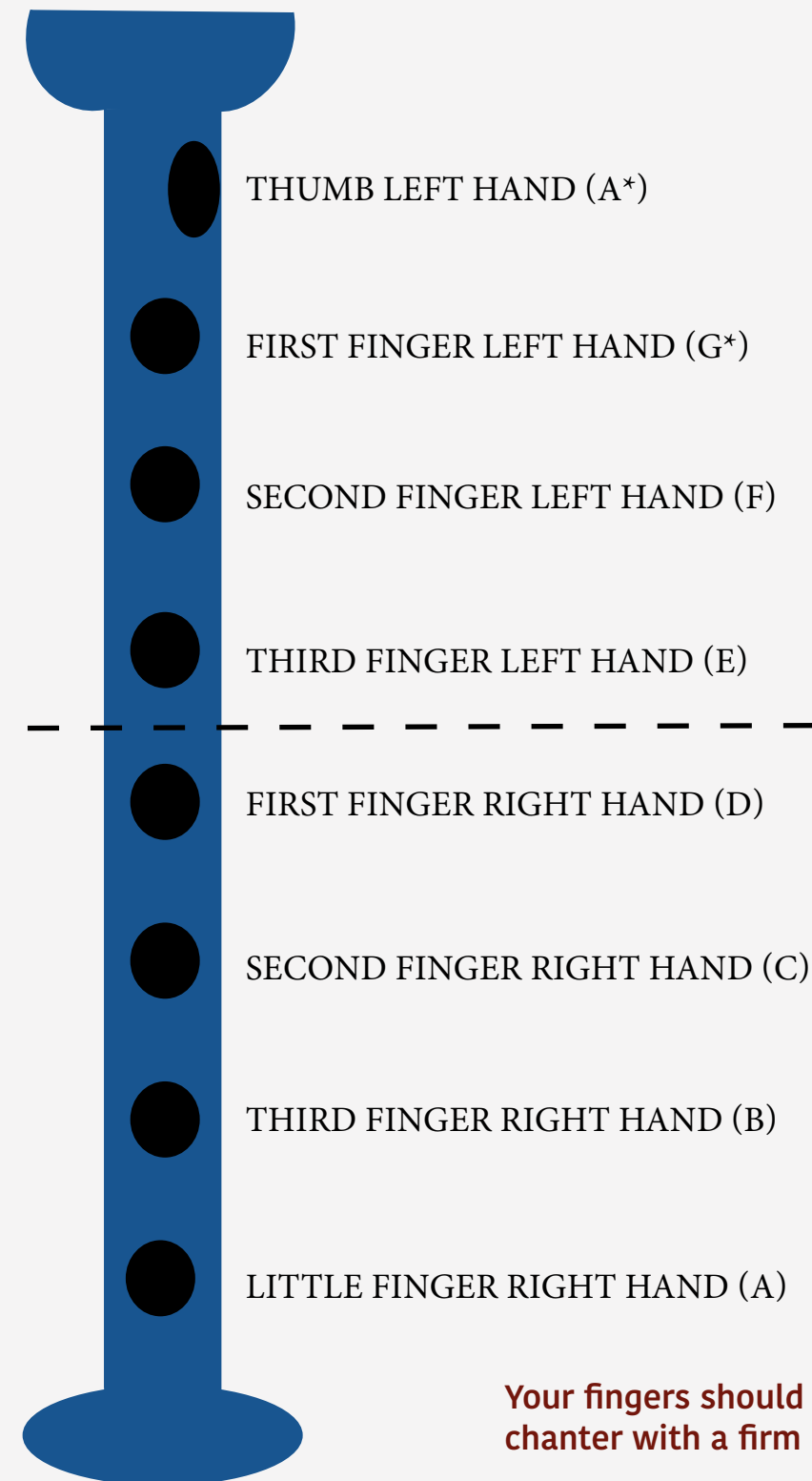
The **higher** up the **stave** a **note** is positioned, the **higher** the **pitch**. Likewise, the **lower** a **note** is placed on the **stave**, the **lower** the **pitch**.

Throughout this digital book you will see the YouTube logo which is a link for a tutorial video to aid your progress.

Finger Placement

On the Highland Bagpipes there are two **A**'s and two **G**'s. These are known as **Low G** and **High G** and **Low A** and **High A**.

This symbol - * shows High G and High A.



Your fingers should be placed straight on the chanter with a firm but not stressed grip.



Scale

Top Half ¹

Scale from **D** to **High A** using the left/top hand.

Musical notation for the Top Half scale (D to High A) is shown on a treble clef staff. Below the staff, five diagrams illustrate the fingerings for each note on a blue pipe, with a dashed line separating the LEFT HAND (top) and RIGHT HAND (bottom).

- D:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on D; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on D.
- E:** LEFT HAND: Finger 2 on E; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on E.
- F:** LEFT HAND: Finger 3 on F; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on F.
- G*:** LEFT HAND: Finger 4 on G; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on G.
- A*:** LEFT HAND: Finger 5 on A; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on A.

Musical notation for the Top Half scale (A* to D) is shown on a treble clef staff. Below the staff, five diagrams illustrate the fingerings for each note on a blue pipe, with a dashed line separating the LEFT HAND (top) and RIGHT HAND (bottom).

- A*:** LEFT HAND: Finger 5 on A; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on A.
- G*:** LEFT HAND: Finger 4 on G; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on G.
- F:** LEFT HAND: Finger 3 on F; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on F.
- E:** LEFT HAND: Finger 2 on E; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on E.
- D:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on D; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on D.

● = Finger on/down

○ = Finger off/up

Bottom Half ²

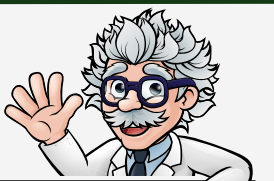
Scale from **Low G** to **D** using the right/bottom hand.

Musical notation for the Bottom Half scale (Low G to D) is shown on a treble clef staff. Below the staff, five diagrams illustrate the fingerings for each note on a blue pipe, with a dashed line separating the LEFT HAND (top) and RIGHT HAND (bottom).

- G:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on G; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on G.
- A:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on A; RIGHT HAND: Finger 2 on A.
- B:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on B; RIGHT HAND: Finger 3 on B.
- C:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on C; RIGHT HAND: Finger 4 on C.
- D:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on D; RIGHT HAND: Finger 5 on D.

Musical notation for the Bottom Half scale (D to Low G) is shown on a treble clef staff. Below the staff, five diagrams illustrate the fingerings for each note on a blue pipe, with a dashed line separating the LEFT HAND (top) and RIGHT HAND (bottom).

- D:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on D; RIGHT HAND: Finger 5 on D.
- C:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on C; RIGHT HAND: Finger 4 on C.
- B:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on B; RIGHT HAND: Finger 3 on B.
- A:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on A; RIGHT HAND: Finger 2 on A.
- G:** LEFT HAND: Finger 1 on G; RIGHT HAND: Finger 1 on G.



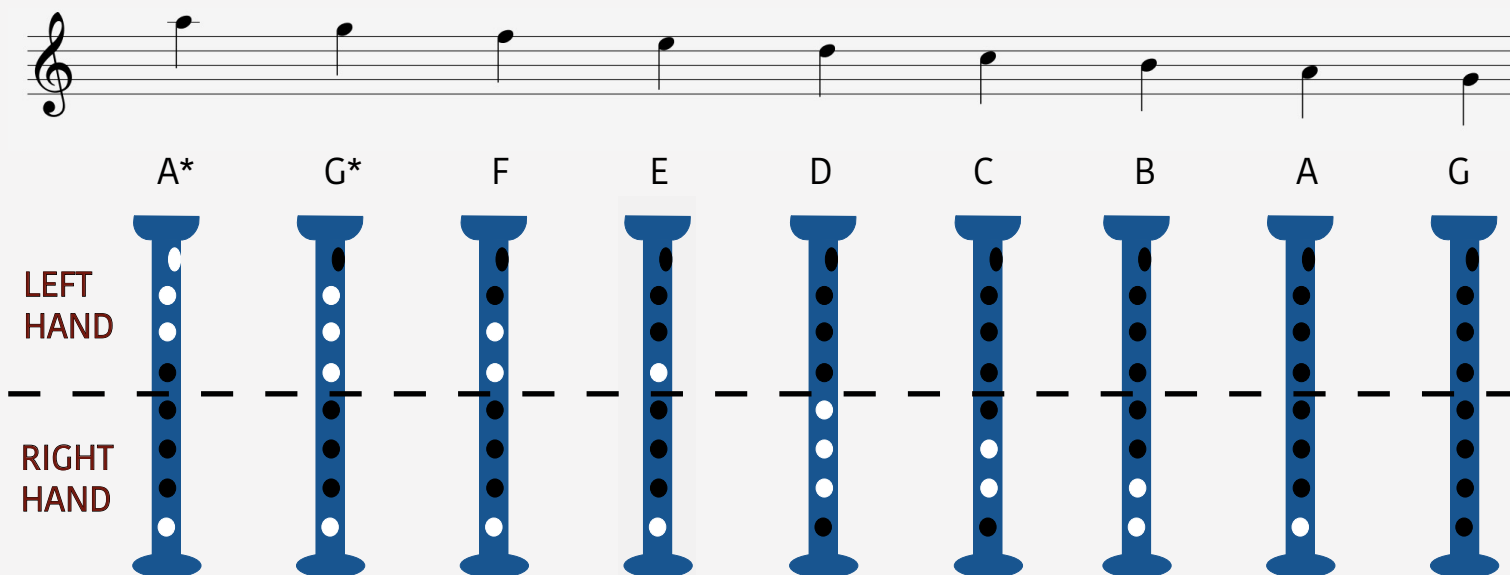
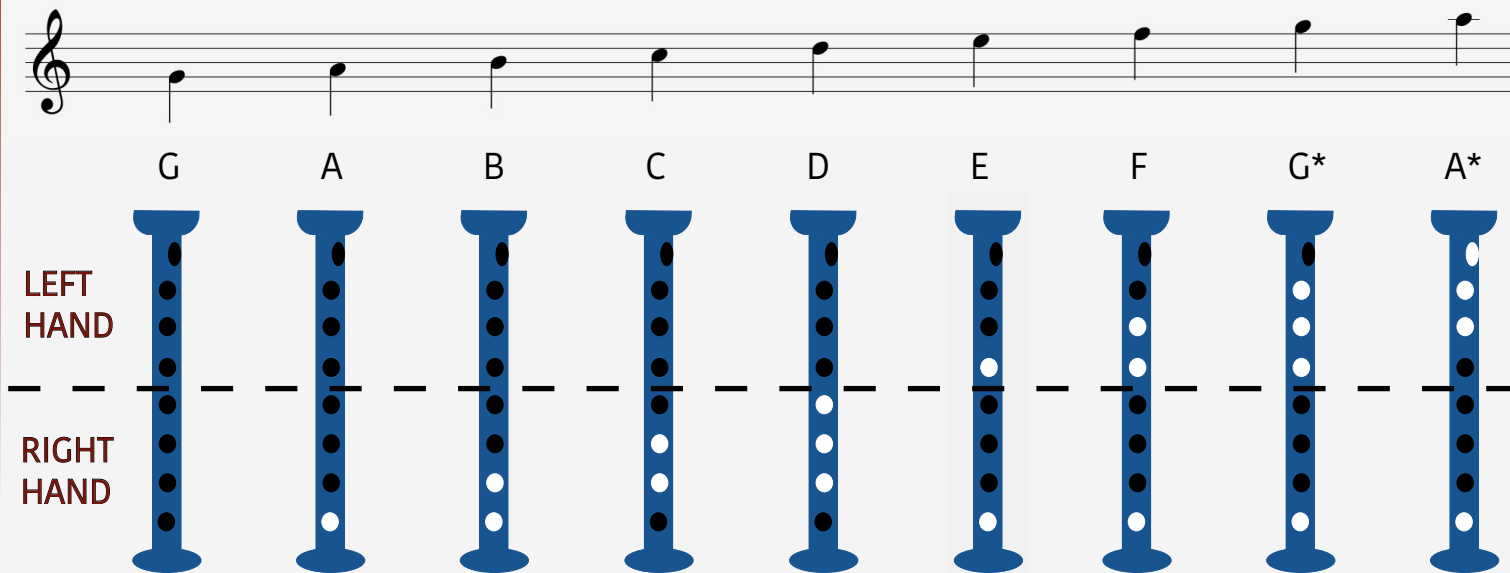
A Pipe Band
is louder than a
pneumatic drill.

Full Scale

3



The **full scale** of the Highland Bagpipes has **9 notes**.



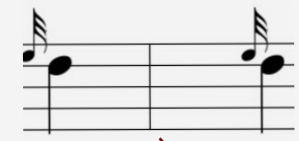
Make sure there are no crossing noises/catching notes between D and E.

Gracenotes

One of the properties of Bagpipe music that make it unique, is the amount of **embellishments** or **ornamentation** used to make the **music** sound **better**.

The first **embellishment** we will look at is the **Gracenote**. There are **3** main Gracenotes - **D**, **E** and **G**. The **G Gracenote** is the most commonly used but we will look at the **E Gracenote** first as they are the easiest to master.

Embellishments are written as **small notes** placed before the note with the **stem pointing upwards**.



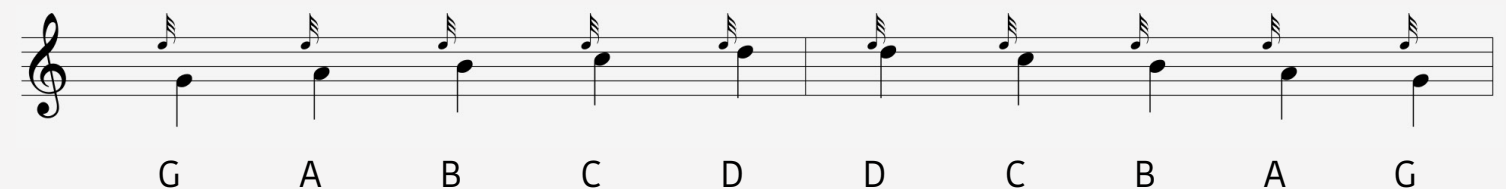
In the exercises that follow, you will now notice a **vertical line** appears across the staff. This is called a **Barline**. Barlines are used to **separate** the music into **equal** portions.

E Gracenotes

4

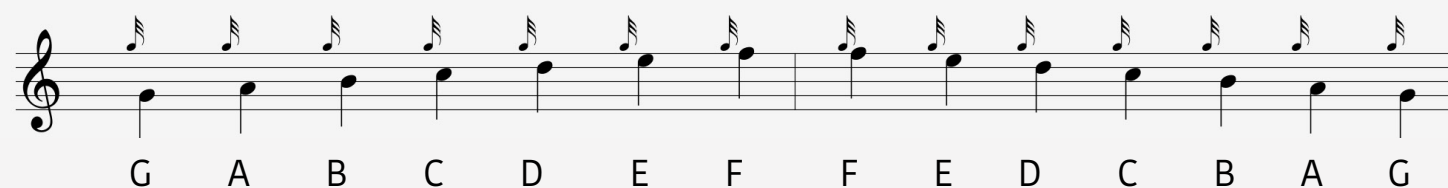


A **Gracenote** is played by raising and lowering a finger quickly. An **E Gracenote** is played by raising and lowering the **E/3rd finger** on the **left** hand.



G Gracenotes ⁵

The **G Gracenote** is played with the **G/1st finger** on the **left** hand.

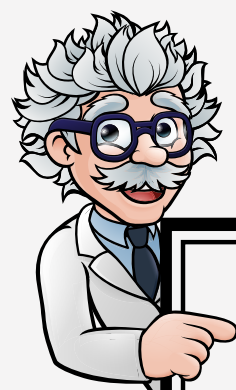
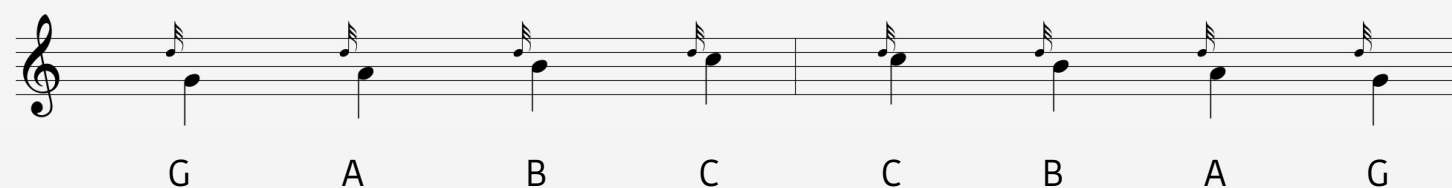


Make sure there are no crossing noises/catching notes between D and E.



D Gracenotes ⁶

The **D Gracenote** is played with the **D/1st finger** on the **right** hand. The D Gracenote is only played up to C.



We are unsure where the first bagpipes originates. Some historians say the oldest set was found in a Pyramid.

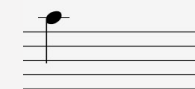
G Gracenotes from Low A

You will now notice **two numbers** appear at the **beginning** of the **stave**. This is known as the **time signature**.



The **top figure** tells us **how many Crotchets** are **in a bar** and the **bottom figure** tells us that each **Crotchet** note is **one beat** in **length**. We will cover this in more detail later.

The next sign we will see is the **Double Barline**. This is used to show the **end** of a **section** of music.



This Gracenote is called the **thumb/back Gracenote**. It is played when **going to/from High G**.



⁷



In the beginning, Gracenotes should be played slowly, lifting the Gracenote finger high off the chanter.



GDE's ⁸



When all **three Gracenotes** are **played** one after the other on the **same note**, we call it a GDE.

In the exercise below, the time signature is **3/4**. This means there are **3 beats** in a **bar** and each **beat** is equal to one **crotchet**.

G G G A A A B B B C C C

C C C B B B A A A G G G



The speed of music is called **Tempo**. This is measured in **Beats Per Minute (BPM)**. Play the GDE exercise where the BPM is 60. This means that each Crotchet note will be one second long.

There are 110 different types of Bagpipes listed on wikipedia. The majority being from Europe.

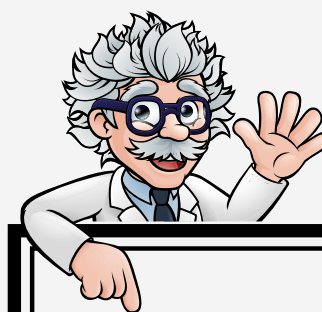


Duration Table

The length of sounds are shown on paper by using different shapes of note. The Semi-Breve is the longest note and each note is half the length of the note above.

For example, if a Semi-Breve is 4 seconds long, a Minim will only be 2 seconds long.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|------------|
| Semi-Breve | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Whole note |
| Minim | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1/2 note |
| Crotchet | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1/4 note |
| Quaver | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1/8 note |
| Semi Quaver | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1/16 note |
| Demi Semi-Quaver | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1/32 note |



The first mention of Bagpipes in Scotland was in 1547. The first mention of Bagpipes in Ireland was in 1544. We are unsure who had them first.

Gracenote Exercise ⁹



As you can see, the **time signature** is **4/4**. This means there are **4 beats** in each **bar** and each **beat** is equal to one **Crotchet**.

G A B G A B C A B C D B C D E C

D E F D E F G* E F G* A* F F G* A*

Green Glens of Antrim ¹¹



Now lets look at your first tune.

E F F E D D C B D B A F G* A* A* G* F E D D C D E A D

F F E D D C B D B A F G* A* A* G* F A D C D E D

Strikes ¹⁰



Strikes are played by **tapping/striking** the chanter with one or more raised fingers.

You will now notice the notes we are using are quavers. A Quaver is worth half a Crotchet, which means **2 Quavers** equal **1 beat**.

A B C D E F G* A*

Play your tune slowly and deliberately. Build up the tempo gradually.



There are Nine Glens of Antrim; Glenarm, Glencoy, Glenariff, Glenballyemon, Glencop, Glenaar, Glendun, Glenshesk and Glentaisie. There are located in North East Antrim.

Doublings

12



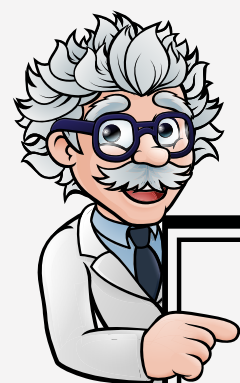
Now that you have mastered a simple tune and have started to read music, it is time to look at the remaining embellishments.

The next embellishment we will cover is the **Doubling**. Doublings are when **two gracenotes** are played **one after the other** on the **same note**.



Doublings from Low A

13



Pipe bags were traditionally made from animals which were commonly farmed. In the British Isles Sheep or Goat skin was used. In Egypt, Camel was used and in Australia, it was Kangaroo.

Throw on D

14



Make sure the Low G, D and C are played evenly within the Throw on D embellishment.



Grips/Leumluath

15



When playing the Grips make sure there are two Low Gs is separated by a D Gracenote before moving to the E.

Also, if you look closely, you will notice that when playing a Grip from D, the B finger is used instead of the D finger.

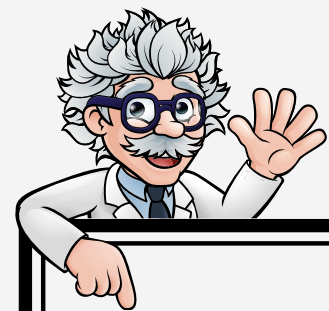


Taorluath

16



Again, you will notice that when playing a Taorluath from D, the B finger replaces the D finger.



African Blackwood is the most common wood used to make the Bagpipes, but Crocuswood, Ebony and Rosewood are also used.

Tachums

17



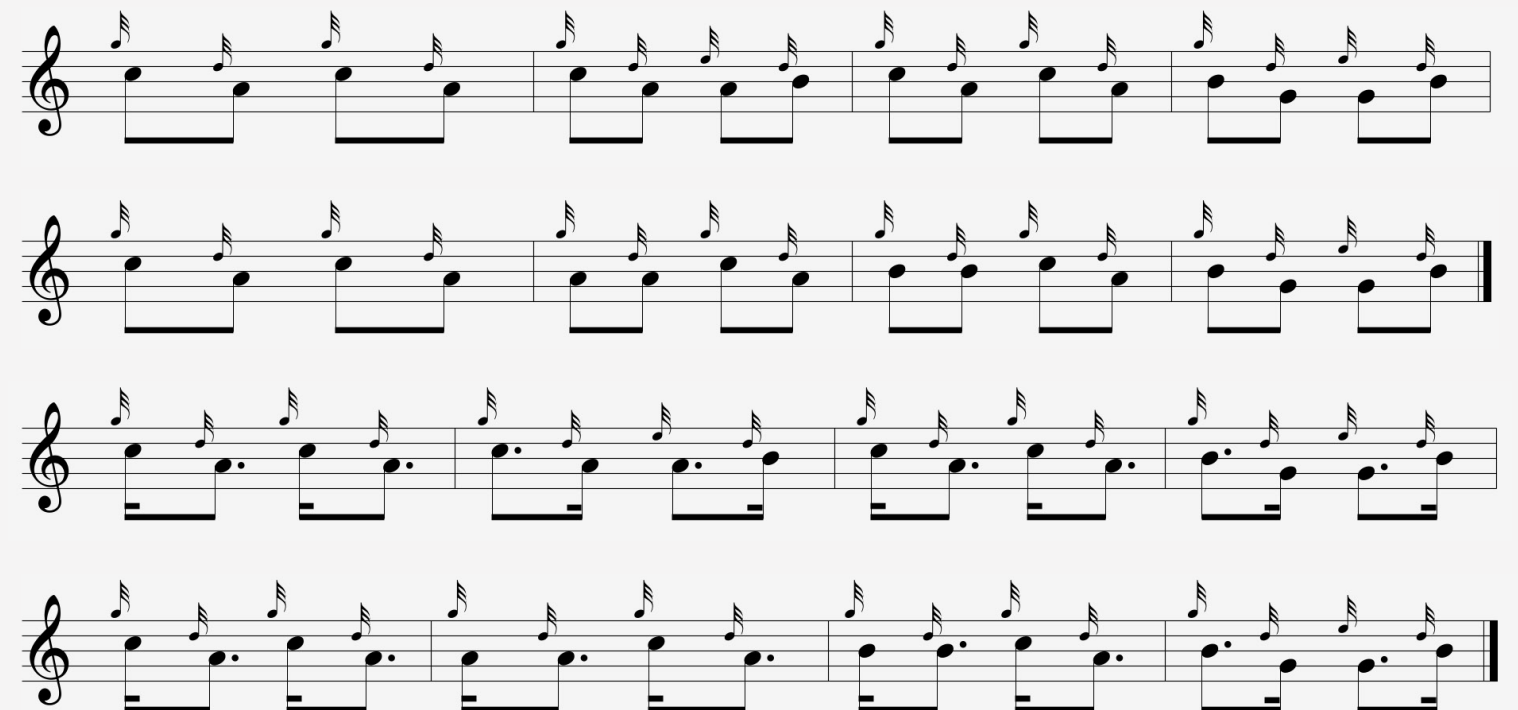
You will now notice a Dot and Cut placed on the notes. **Dots** lengthen a note and **Cuts** shorten it.

18



Tachum Exercise

19



To get you started on tunes here are a few that are suitable for beginners.

I See Mull

20



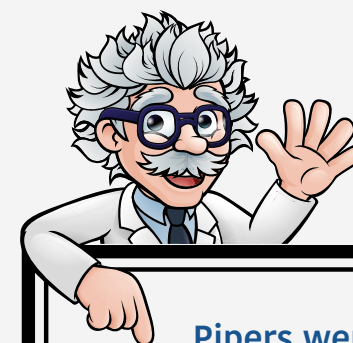
When you are learning a tune, learn one bar at a time, then try playing them as a group of two. Once you feel ready, play the full line.

Two Bars are known as a Phrase.



Colin's Cattle

21



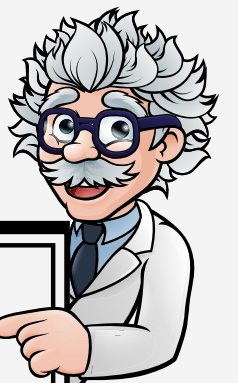
Pipers were used in the military to lead soldiers into battle. During World War I, it is estimated over 1000 Pipers were killed in battle.

Minstrel Boy²²



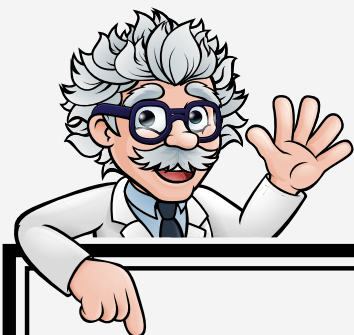
Practice a few times each day for a short period of time rather than a long time all at once.

Blue Bells of Scotland²³



Wikipedia lists 14 different types of Bagpipes in the British Isles.

I Love a Lassie ²⁴



If played outside, the sound of the Highland Bagpipes can travel over 3 miles.

Castle Dangerous ²⁵



As you increase the Tempo of your tunes, make sure your embellishments remain clear.



**You have now completed Get to Grips with the
Highland Bagpipes.**

**Thanks to the Ulster-Scots Agency for making
this project possible and a special thanks to
Ian Burrows, Alec Brown and Grahame Harris
for proofreading this book.**

**Follow us on social media ‘Music Service for
Pipes and Drums’ for regular updates and
events.**

