The Header

The header contains the various information fields (index, title, rhythm, key, meter, etc.).
- The first field of a tune is always the X: field
- Each field in the header occurs on a new line
- The last field in the header, immediately before the notation of the melody itself, is always the K: field
- The X: index, T: title, M: meter, and K: key field are required: the others are optional.

The header fields occur in the following order:

X:1	
T:Finnish Schottische	Title of Tune
T:Jack in the Green	Alternate Tune Title
M: 4/4	Meter 3/4, 6/8, 2/4, 9/8, C, C|, etc
L:1/8	Default Note Length
[other optional fields]	composer, source, rhythm etc.
K:G	Key D, Cm, Amix

X: Index field

This is the first part of the notation of an abc tune, and enables more than one tune to be stored in a file.

T: Title

T:Main Title
T:Alternate Title

M: Time signatures

Time signatures, or meters, like default note lengths, are shown as fractions in the M: field,

M:6/8
M:4/4
M:3/4
M:C   (Common Time)
M:C\| (Cut Time)

Q: Tempo

Q:120 indicates the tempo as 120 notes of the default note length per minute.
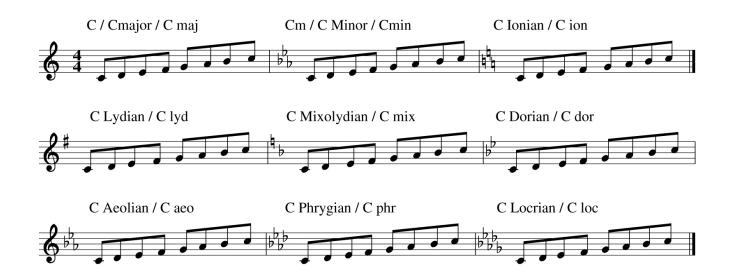
Q:1/8 = 120 can also be used, to specify in this example that the tune goes at the rate of 120 1/8 notes per minute, regardless of the default note length.

L: Note Lengths

Abc allows you to set the 'default note length' for each tune. This is usually the most frequently occurring note length in a tune and is set in the tune header in the L: field.
L:1/4, L:1/8 L:1/16

K: Key signatures

The key signature is specified by the K: field   K:C   K:Am   K:Bb   K:Gmix

C / Cmajor / C maj   Cm / C Minor / Cmin   C Ionian / C ion

C Lydian / C lyd   C Mixolydian / C mix   C Dorian / C dor

C Aeolian / C aeo   C Phrygian / C phr   C Locrian / C loc

Key Sig	Major Ion	Minor Aeo	Mix	Dor	Phr	Lyd	Loc
7 sharps:	C#	A#m	G#Mix	D#Dor	E#Phr	F#Lyd	B#Loc
6 sharps:	F#	D#m	C#Mix	G#Dor	A#Phr	BLyd	E#Loc
5 sharps:	B	G#m	F#Mix	C#Dor	D#Phr	ELyd	A#Loc
4 sharps:	E	C#m	BMix	F#Dor	G#Phr	ALyd	D#Loc
3 sharps:	A	F#m	EMix	BDor	C#Phr	DLyd	G#Loc
2 sharps:	D	Bm	AMix	EDor	F#Phr	GLyd	C#Loc
1 sharp :	G	Em	Dmix	ADor	BPhr	CLyd	F#Loc
0 sharps:	C	Am	Gmix	DDor	EPhr	FLyd	BLoc
1 flat :	F	Dm	Cmix	GDor	APhr	BbLyd	ELoc
2 flats :	Bb	Gm	Fmix	CDor	DPhr	EbLyd	ALoc
3 flats :	Eb	Cm	BbMix	FDor	GPhr	AbLyd	DLoc
4 flats :	Ab	Fm	EbMix	BbDor	CPhr	DbLyd	GLoc
5 flats :	Db	Bbm	AbMix	EbDor	FPhr	GbLyd	CLoc
6 flats :	Gb	Ebm	DbMix	AbDor	BbPhr	CbLyd	FLoc
7 flats :	Cb	Abm	GbMix	DbDor	EbPhr	FbLyd	BbLoc

The Body

Right after the K: field on the next line is the **body** of the tune.

The Notes

C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C   D E F G   A B c d   e f g a   b c' d' e'   f' g' a' b'

Writing Note Lengths

Default note length 1/16 note (L:1/16)

A/ A A2   A3   A4   A6   A8   A12   A16

Default note length 1/8 note (L:1/8)

A/2 A/ A   A2   A3   A4   A6   A8

Default note length 1/4 note (L:1/4)

A/8 A/4 A/2 A/   A   A2   A3   A4

Rests

Rests are indicated by the (lower case) letter z. The length of rest is set exactly the same way as the length of note is,   z4 z/

Accidentals: Sharps, flats and naturals

__A2 _A2 =A2   ^A2 ^^A2

Accents and Ornaments

~A ~c   .A .c uc vA uA vc

Grace notes

{g}A3   A{g}AA   {g}A{d}A{e}A   {gAGAG}A3

The notes within curly brackets have no fixed time value, so their length cannot be modified.

Slurs

(AA)   (A(B)c)   ((cc)d)   (c2|e4)

Ties

A-A   A-A-A   A2-|A4

The minus sign - should be used to tie two notes of equal pitch. The round brackets ( ) join two or more notes which are to be slurred, or played legato.

Tuplets

(2AB   (3ABA   (4ABAB   (5ABABA   (6ABABAB

Chords and Unisons

[CEGc]   [C2G2]   [CE][DF]   [D2F2][EG][FA]   [A4d4]

L:1/16

Guitar Chords

A   Bb F#   Gsus4   G/B   'Illegal' use of Chord Command

"A"A2   "Bb"F"F#"A   "Gsus4"Gc   "G/B"GB | "'Illegal' use of Chord Command"cdefgfedc

Order of Symbols
The order of symbols for one note is
<guitar chords>, <accents>(e.g. roll, staccato marker or up/downbow), <accidental>, <note>, ,octave>, <note length>,
i.e. ~^c'3 or even "Gm7"v.=G,2

Barlines
Barlines are denoted by the pipe symbol | .
A double bar is shown by ||, and by using the square bracket symbol as |] (thin-thick) and [| (thick-thin).

Repeats
Start of repeated section |:
End of repeated section :|
Numbered Repeats |1 abc def:| 2 abc cbd||

Line ends and line breaks
The general rule is that one line of abc will generate one line music. Most packages will however 'wrap' the staff of music onto the next line if your printed page width isn't big enough.

To make two lines of abc notation make one line of music, put a back slash \
at the end of the first line. (This may be over-ridden by the software if you run out of space.)

An exclamation mark ! placed at the end of a line of abc, sometimes will force the start of a new line.

Parts
In the Body to indicated what part follows
P:A
P:B
Parts can also be indicated in the P: field in the tune header to indicate what order the parts of the tune are played in for both human and computer players, eg   P:AABCBD or P:2(2A2B)

ABC Quick Reference

Header

Field name	Required	header	body	Examples and notes
C:composer		yes		C:Robert Jones, C:Trad.
D:discography		yes		D:Chieftains IV
F:file url		yes		F:http://a.b.c/file.abc
K:key	yes	**last**	yes	K:G, K:Dm, K:AMix
L:unit note length		yes	yes	Default note length L:1/4, L:1/8
M:meter	yes	**third**	yes	M:3/4, M:4/4 M:C M:6/8
N:notes (annotation)		yes	yes	N:see also O'Neills - 234
O:origin		yes		O:UK, Yorkshire, Bradford
P:parts		yes	yes	P:A, P:ABAC, P:(A2B)3
Q:tempo		yes	yes	Q:"allegro" 1/4=120
R:rhythm		yes	yes	R:R, R:reel
S:source		yes		S:collected in Brittany
T:title	yes	**second**	yes	T:Paddy O'Rafferty
W:words		yes	yes	lyrics after tune
w:words			yes	lyrics aligned with tune
X:reference number	yes	**first**		X:1, X:2
Z:transcriber		yes		Z:John Smith, j.s@aol.com

Body

Symbol	Example	How it's used
|	Aced | fe	Bar line
||	Ge B2 ||	Thin double bar line
|:		Start of repeated section
:|		End of repeated section
[1 [2	gfe|[1 dfe dBA:|[2 d2e dcB|]	First and second repeats
|]		Thin/Thick end of tune
/	C/ d/	Half the time of the default note length
2 3 4	A2 b3 C4	Multiplier of the default note length
>	A>e	Dotted rhythm - the previous note is dotted, the next note halved
<	C<d	Dotted rhythm - the previous note is halved, the next note dotted
z	z2	rest
x	x	Invisible rest - won't show in printed music
^	^c ^B	Accidental - sharp
_	_B _e	Accidental - flat
=	=G =c	Accidental - natural
-	A2-A4	Tie notes of the same pitch
(2 (3 (4	(3Ace g2f2e2	Tuplets, triplets, quadruplets, etc
( )	(Abcd) (c (def) ga)	Slur (they can also be nested)
{ }	{aba}	Grace notes
" "	"Gm"	Guitar Chord
[ ]	[a2C2E2]	chord
~	~A2	General ornamentation - player's choice
.	.G2 .b.c.e	Staccato
u	uBcA	upbow
v	VGBd vAuBvA	downbow
!	Abcd efga|!	Forces the next measure to a new line in print
\	Abcd efga|\	Keeps the next measure on the same line
%		Causes the remainder of the input line to be ignored

Links to get you started:

These links and more at: **SPUDS**
https://spuds.thursdaycontra.com/TuneLinks.html

The abc Homepage - https://abcnotation.com/

How to interpret abc music notation a **tutorial by Steve Mansfield**
http://www.lesession.co.uk/abc/abc_notation.htm

An abc Primer by John Chambers:
http://trillian.mit.edu/~jc/music/abc/doc/ABCprimer.html

The **abc standard V2.1** Contains great information for the advanced user.
http://abcnotation.com/wiki/abc:standard:v2.1

Mandolin Tab: Our favorite online tool for translating abc files into sheet music pdfs, graphic images and midi files.
http://www.mandolintab.net/abcconverter.php

Colin Hume's Online Converter https://colinhume.com/music.aspx

Easyabc The fabulous abc notation software
https://www.nilsliberg.se/ksp/easyabc/

iabc a Windows graphical application for editing music using the ABC music notation language. Not as developed as Barfly, but still useful.
http://abc.sourceforge.net/iabc/index.html

John Chamber's ABC Tune Finder is an index of all abc tunes on the web - my second home. http://john-chambers.us/~jc/cgi/abc/tunefind

ABC Format Music Sites page of links to tune collections
http://www.freesheetmusic.net/abc.html

Tune collections on the Internet Mickey Koth's massive list of links to collections of tunes in all formats   http://www.biteyourownelbow.com/webtunes.htm

Can't find what you're looking for? **Email me :** **ssgowan@gmail.com**

```
X: 1
T:Mairi's Wedding
R:Reel
M:4/4
L:1/8
K:G
"G"D3E D2E2|G2A2 B4|"Am"A2G2 E2G2|B2A2 "D"Bd3|
"G"D3E D2E2|G2A2 B2>cB/|"C"A2G2 "Am"E2C2|"D"D8:|
|:"G"d4 d2>e2|d2c2 B4|"C"A2G2 E2G2|"D"B2A2 Bd3|
"G(F#m)"d3B d2>e2|"Em"d2c2 B2>cB/|"C"A2G2 "Am"E2C2|"D"D8:|
```

```
X:1
T:La Maison de Glace
C:Rejean Brunet
M:6/8
K:D
"D"D3 DEF | "F#m"A3 AFA |"G"B3 Bcd |"A"cBA "G"GFE |"D"D3 DEF|
"F#m"A3 AFA |1"G"B3 BAG | "D/A"F3 "A"E3:|2"G"B3 Bcd | "A"c3
"F#"[^A3F3]||
|:"Bm"B3 Bcd | "G"B3 Bcd| "D"fed "Em"edc| "F#m" dcA "G"dcA|
"Bm"B3 Bcd | "G"B3 Bcd| "D"fed "Em"edc|1"A"Adc "G"d2 c:|2"A"Adc "D"d3|]
```

```
X:1
T:Trollspolska
T:Hambo in Dm
O:Sweden
L:1/8
M:3/4
K:Dm
A,2|:"Dm"D2 D>E F>G|"Dm"A2 A>^c d>e|"Dm"f>g f>e d2|"F"c>d c<AF2|
"Gm"B>c B>A G>B|"Dm" A>B A>G F2|"A7" E>F E>D ^C>E|1"Dm"D2D3A, :|2"Dm"D2
D4||
|:"Dm"a>g f>e f>a|"C"g>a g<e c2|"Dm"f>e d>^c d<f |"A"e>f e<^c A2|
"Bb"d>c B>A B>d|"F" c>d c<A F2| "A"E>F E>D ^C>E|"Dm"D2 D4:|
```