

Ledger Lines & Octave Marks

Music

Reading beyond the five lines, and the shorthand that avoids it.

Short lines added above or below the staff extend it for notes that will not fit. Beyond about three, octave signs are used instead, because the ledger lines become unreadable.

8VA
+1 octave

15MA
+2 octaves

LOCO
as written

- Middle C sits on one ledger line below treble, or one above bass.
- 8va above the staff: play one octave HIGHER than written.
- 8vb below the staff: play one octave LOWER.
- 15ma / 15mb: two octaves — the number counts notes, not octaves.
- The dashed line shows how long the transposition lasts; loco means back to normal.
- Piano music uses a brace and two staves precisely to avoid heavy ledger use.

LOOK FOR IT

A passage marked 8va with notes on the treble staff sounds an octave above where it looks.

15ma is not fifteen of anything: counting inclusively, two octaves spans fifteen scale degrees.