

Reading Music part 4: The Road Map

Check the music stands of an orchestra. Some players will have what looks like an encyclopedia, while others will have maybe a couple pages. Yet they're all playing the same half-hour composition. Why is that? It's because music almost always includes **repeated segments**. Some instruments get a lot of repeats, and some instruments never get repeats. Ask a cello player about Pachelbel's Canon in D: the same 8 measures over and over and over. Meanwhile the rest of the orchestra is flipping page after page.

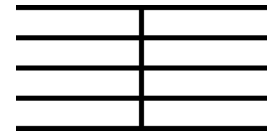
Vocal music almost always has repeated segments, called **verses**. But sometimes it's not that simple: you have to stick in bridges, transitions, and other bits and bobs that aren't part of every verse. This can be a real nightmare, if you don't understand how to read the road map.

Finding out where the repeats, bridges, and add-ons go is usually called the **Road Map**.

Bar Lines:

No, this does not refer to queuing up for Happy Hour in the pub. We learned about measures in Part 2, but of course there's more to the story.

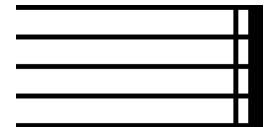
Measures normally begin and end with a simple vertical **bar**.



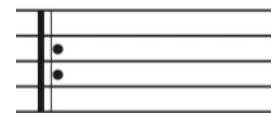
The end of a section might be indicated with a double bar line. This is just for reference. You usually just sing right through it.



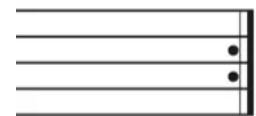
The end of the piece is usually shown with a thick bar and a thin bar. When you get to it, you stop singing. It is not uncommon to see the word "fine" over this bar. "Fine" of course is Italian for "stop here," which is usually fine with you.



A thick bar with a thin bar and two dots means "this is the start of a section that you will be repeating". Put your finger in the music here because you'll be coming back to it in the next verse.



And of course here is the other end of the repeat. When you get to this, you skip back to the section start. Note how the dots tell you what direction to move.



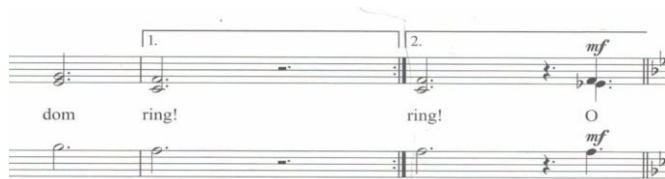
The repeat dots are usually used to identify short sections that get repeated. **D.C.** and **D.S.** are used to identify longer sections that get repeated.

Repeats:

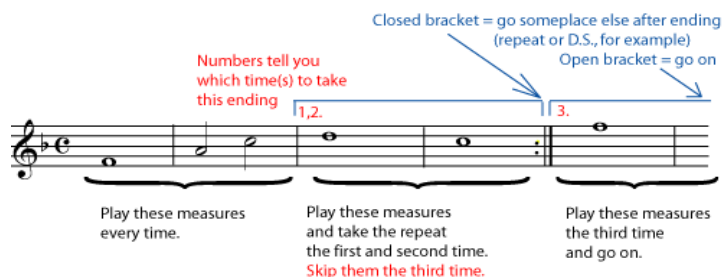
Some repeats are more complicated than others. Here's an example from "America the beautiful". Obviously, this is the start of a repeated section. Put your finger in the score.



And here's the end of the section. Wait, what? You repeat but you also keep on going? What this means is the first time you come to this point you go back to the start, but the second time you keep going.



Here's a much more complicated example. Here, you go back to the beginning on the first and second verse, but on the third verse you keep going. The technical term for this type of repeat marks lines is **Time bars** or if you're pretentious, **Volta Brackets**



Coda, Segno, DS, DC, and Fine

And finally, there's the infamous "DS", "DS al fine", "Segno", and "Coda". These signs are enough to give Mozart a headache.

Sometimes the song won't simply repeat itself over and over for every verse. Instead, the music for one verse will lead back to the beginning of the next verse. Then when you get to the end of the last verse, the music will jump ahead to a few measures that bring the song to an end. The **Coda** and the **Segno** are used to tell you where to jump back or forward to. They are signaled with "D.S." (Del Segno) or "D.C." (Del Coda).



Coda

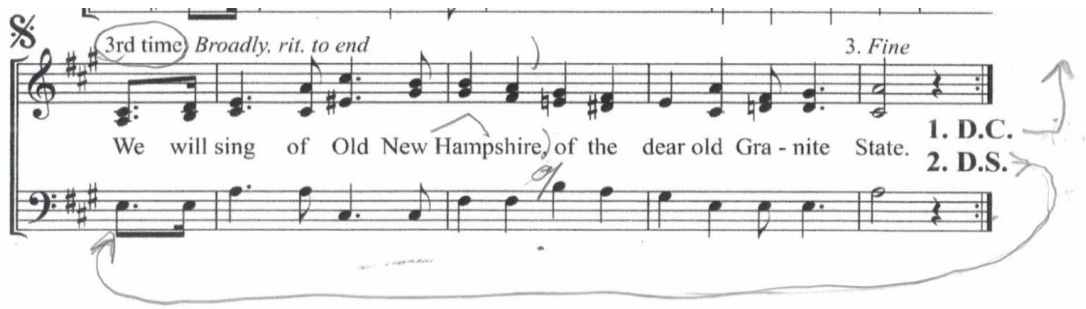


Segno

This is where D.C., D.S., etc. come in .

- **D.C.** means "Go back to the beginning"
- **D.S.** means "when you get here, **jump** to where you see the **Segno** sign."
- The **Coda** sign means "jump forward when you get here".
- **Al Fine** means "until you get to the end:"
- **Fine** means "this is the end." For once, the Italian and English meanings both work. When you get here, it's just fine.
- Some music publishers are a little foggy about codas and segnos. Be prepared to take them with a grain of salt. When you see the lyrics it usually makes sense.

Here's a very simple example. The markings are my own because I didn't understand it:



What this means is:

- Notice the repeat dots at the end of the last measure. This means you are going back to take a whack at another verse. The "1. D.C." means "at the end of the first verse go back to the beginning of the song."
- The "2.D.S." means after you sing the second verse, you jump back to the Segno which is at the beginning of this line.
- After you sing this line for the third time, you sing it slowly until you get to the end, which is where "3. fine" is.

Fine and D.C. al Fine

This is confusing, but makes sense when you hear it. You sing both lines, but when you get to "D.C. al Fine" you go back to the beginning, and then stop when you reach the bar marked "Fine" at the end of the first line.



And here's a textbook example that is apparently meant to be confusing. What it means is "sing the first two lines, then when you get to the "D.S. al Coda" you jump back to the **Segno**, until you get to the **Coda**, then jump ahead to the word "CODA" and sing the last two measures.



Take two aspirins and have somebody play it for you. It actually makes perfect sense when you hear it.

Partial measures and pickup notes:

The very **first and last measures** in the score often have fewer notes. In fact, church hymns almost always do this. This is to tie the end of one verse to the beginning of the next verse. Notes in a partial measure are called "**pickup notes**".



In this example, it's 6 beats per measure and every 1/8th note gets one beat. But the first note is just an eighth note. Where are the other seven beats?

Why, they're at the end of course. The word "known" is seven eighth notes long. So the first measure and the last measure put together equal the full 8 beats of the 6/8 score.



This is the end of the Most Basic bit. What follows are the answers to the questions you are going to ask after you've been singing for a year or so.