Reading the Tablature

DISCLAIMER: There is no internationally recognized method for writing tablature. This is the system I have developed, because it suits the kind of music I play. For questions about the tabs, please contact me, using the Friendly Guitar Tabs, at

BASIC TAB
The horizontal, dashed lines (---------) indicate the guitar strings. Unless otherwise indicated, the tuning is EADGBe, with the high e string at the top, and the bass E string at the bottom. The vertical lines are measure bars. The time signature is shown at the beginning of the first line of tab, or at the beginning of a line where the tempo changes. Rarely, the tempo changes in the middle of a line. Where this occurs, I break the line of tab and write the new tempo between the two parts of the line, like this:

The numbers on the tab lines indicate where the strings are to be fretted. Strings that are to be played open (unfretted) are marked with a zero. Where no number is shown, do not play the string, even if it is normally played as part of a chord. Spaces between notes are changed for convenience, for clarity in reading the tab, or to allow for lyrics, and do not mean anything.

CHORDS
Chords are shown by two or more numbers, stacked vertically. Play only the notes of the chord that are shown. Chord names above the tab are to indicate fingering position, and may not be the name of the actual chord as played. For example, it is often more convenient to play a partial G chord as if it were a G7, leaving out the treble string. In that case, the chord name will be G7, but the notes of the chord as shown below will make a G major chord.

Roman numerals indicate barre chords (aka bar chords). They show where the barre goes. In the GIII chord above, the barring finger goes in the third space, and the other three fingers make an E-shape. The chord is a G. There are different ways to play G, and it often makes a difference which you use. Otherwise, the music may not follow the melody or the harmonies may be wrong. The Roman numerals distinguish which form is needed. All chords used in every tab are shown in chord diagrams at the end of the piece, in the order of their appearance in the music.

STRUMS
The wiggly, vertical line of slashes to the left of the chord indicates that it is to be strummed. The C chord in the second measure above is to be pinched (by plucking the strings simultaneously), so no wiggly line is shown. The next chord is also a C chord, and no hand position changes are needed, so no chord name is shown above the tab. Strums are DOWN unless shown otherwise. Where the direction of strumming changes, it will be shown by the letters u and d (for up and down) above the tab, or by arrows in place of the wiggly line. Up and Down refer to the direction of the actual, physical strum on the guitar, NOT on the tab! If many strums of the same chord are indicated, the numbers on the strings may only be shown the first time, and subsequent strums of the same chord in the same measure may be indicated just by wiggly strum lines, as shown in the third measure above.

OTHER SYMBOLS

Hammer-ons and pull-offs are shown by an underscore connecting the notes. The same symbol is used for both, as the direction is obvious. Where a note is hammered-on to a string that is not already sounding, I use a lowercase h to the left of the note, or a capital T (for Tap) above the tab.

Glissandos (slides) are shown by slashes between the notes— a forward slash for a slide up (in pitch) and a back slash for a slide down in pitch.

Counting numbers are placed below the tab, and indicate how long each note is to be played. An & (“and”) indicates half a count. Where a note is to be held, the word HOLD is written above the tab. Counting numbers below the tab may be above or below the lyrics.

Measure numbers, if shown, are placed in brackets below their measure.


LYRICS
Where legally possible, I include at least one verse of lyrics, to aid those who know the song, or where subsequent verses are played differently. They are NOT for singing. They are for instrumental solos; keys and tempos have been altered to sound good or be easier to play on the guitar. Lyrics are split by inserting a hyphen between syllables. Spaces between syllables or words are changed for convenience in writing the tab, and do not mean anything.