

What is a Time Signature?

The time signature (also known as *meter*) is used in conventional Western notation to help musicians understand *pulse* and *beat*.



The top number tells us how many beats are in the bar.

The bottom number tells us the note value of the beat.

1 = Whole Note

4 = Quarter Note

2 = Half Note

8 = Eighth Note

16 = Sixteenth Note

So in 4/4 time, the top number tells us that there is 4 of "something" in the bar. The bottom number tells us that the "something" is a quarter note. Therefore, there are 4 quarter notes in a 4/4 bar.

Practice!

3
4 Number of beats: _____
Note Value: _____

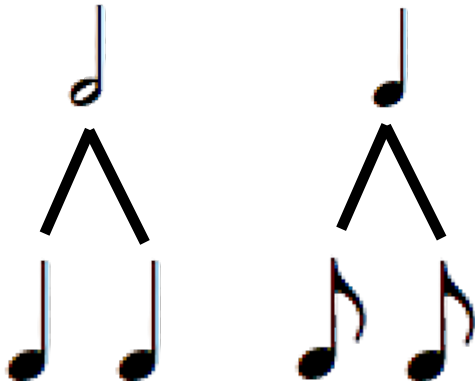
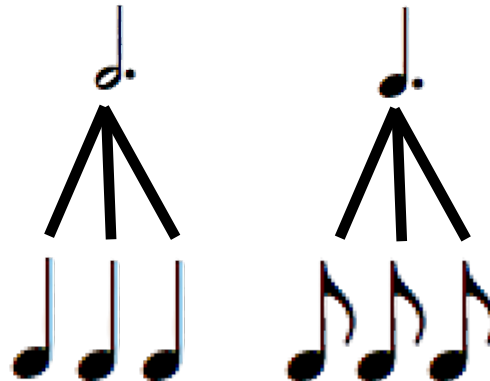
6
8 Number of beats: _____
Note Value: _____

4
2 Number of beats: _____
Note Value: _____




9
16 Number of beats: _____
Note Value: _____

Breaking Down Meter

The first step to identifying a time signature is to examine how the beats are divided. Either into 2 or 3 parts.

Simple	Compound
<p>Beat can be divided into 2 equal parts.</p> 	<p>Beat can be divided into 3 equal parts.</p> 

The second step to identifying a time signature is to examine the strong and weak beats. This is called pulse.

Type of time signature	Number of beats per measure	Pulse
Duple	2	<p>Ex: Strong - Weak</p> 
Triple	3	<p>Ex: Strong - Weak - Weak</p> 
Quadruple	4	<p>Ex: Strong - Weak - Medium - Weak</p> 

Use the chart below to help navigate how to name meters:

	Duple	Triple	Quadruple
Simple	$\frac{2}{2}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{2}{8}$	$\frac{3}{2}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{3}{8}$	$\frac{4}{2}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{4}{8}$
Compound	$\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{6}{8}$ $\frac{6}{16}$	$\frac{9}{4}$ $\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{9}{16}$	$\frac{12}{4}$ $\frac{12}{8}$ $\frac{12}{16}$

Practice!

4
8

Simple / Compound

Duple / Triple / Quadruple

- 4/8 time is "simple" because the eighth notes divides equally into 2 sixteenth notes.
- 4/8 time is also "quadruple" because there are 4 notes creating a Strong - Weak - Medium - Weak pattern.

2
4

Simple / Compound

Duple / Triple / Quadruple

9
8

Simple / Compound

Duple / Triple / Quadruple

3
4

Simple / Compound

Duple / Triple / Quadruple

6
8

Simple / Compound

Duple / Triple / Quadruple