

Introduction To Time Signatures

Time signatures tell you how many and what kind of notes per measure there are. The number on top (or on the left) is the number of notes per measure, and the bottom number, or the number on the right, is what kind of note. Let us explain further.

Let us take for example the most popular time signature, 4/4.

This means there is 4 quarter notes per measure. How is this so?

Looking at 4/4, you saw the 4 on top or on the left. You already knew that meant there were 4 'somethings' per measure. Then looking at the bottom number, or the number on the right, probably confused you. The bottom number can be 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, etc.

Look at this chart.

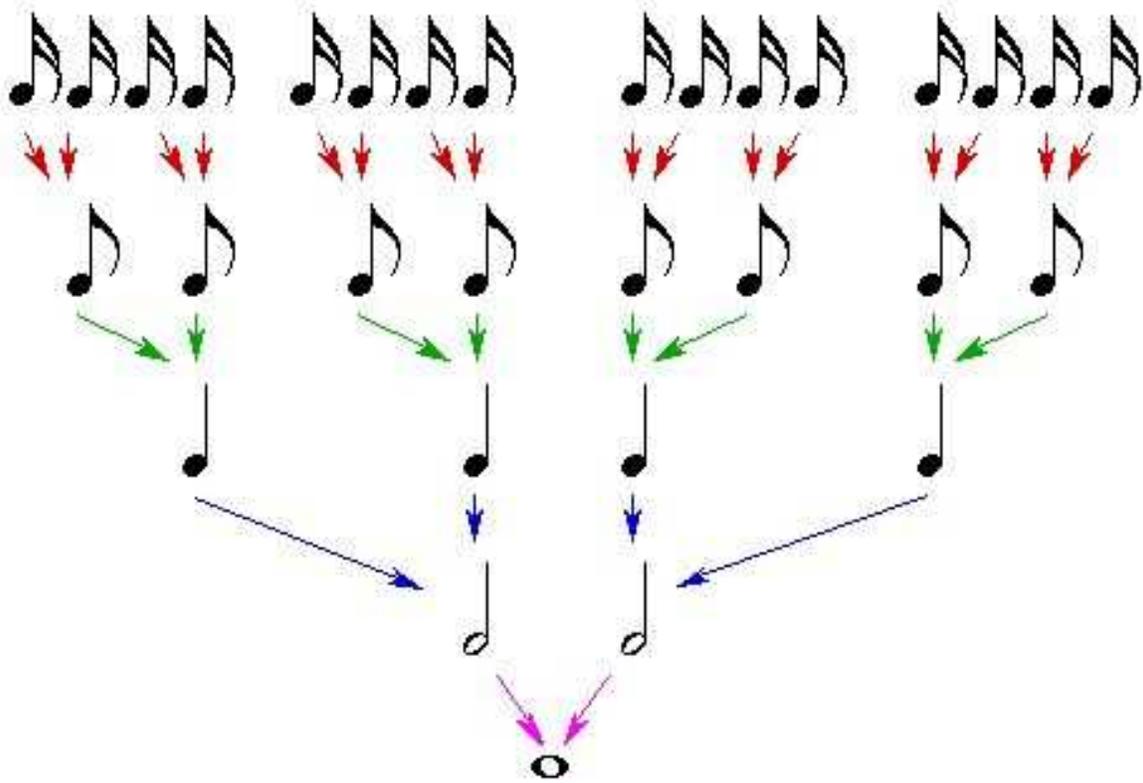
Bottom/Right Number	Value
1	Whole note
2	Half note
4	Quarter note
8	Eighth note
16	Sixteenth note

For example:

3/4 is 3 quarter notes per measure.

5/2 is 5 half notes per measure.

6/8 is 6 eighth notes per measure.



The top line shows all sixteenth notes. Though it is clearly displayed, I want to touch base on what is happening here.

- Two sixteenth notes equal 1 eighth note
- Two eighth notes equal 1 quarter note
- Two quarter notes equal 1 half note
- Two half notes equal 1 whole note

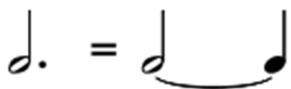
Vice versa....

- One whole note is equal to two half notes
- One half note is equal to two quarter notes
- One quarter note is equal to two eighth notes
- One eighth note is equal to two sixteenth notes

What about dotted notes and dotted rests?

A dotted note is a note with a small dot written after it. The dot increases the duration of the basic note by half of its original value. If the basic note lasts 2 beats, the corresponding dotted note lasts 3 beats. A dotted note is equivalent to writing the basic note tied to a note of half the value, or with more than one dots, tied to notes of progressively halved value. Any number of dots may be added to a note.

In other words:



- A dotted half note is equal to a half note and a quarter note
- A double dotted half note is equal to a half note, a quarter note, and an eighth note
- A triple dotted half note is equal to a half note, quarter, eighth, and sixteenth note

Dotted Notes and Rests		
Dotted Note	Dotted Rest	Duration
whole note	whole rest	6
half note	half rest	3
quarter note	quarter rest	1 1/2
eighth note	eighth rest	3/4
sixteenth note	sixteenth rest	3/8

Before we begin practicing different time signatures using songs, we now need to understand what each time signature is that we are working on:

- **Simple Time Signatures:** 4/4, 2/2, 2/4, 3/4, 3/8
- **Compound Time Signatures:** 6/8, 9/8, 12/8
- **Complex:** 5/4, 5/8, 7/4, 11/4

Simple Time Signatures:

Simple time signatures consist of two numerals, one stacked above the other:

- the left (upper) numeral indicates the note value which represents one beat (the "beat unit");
- the right (lower) numeral indicates how many such beats there are in a bar.

For instance, $\frac{2}{4}$ means two quarter-note (crotchet) beats; $\frac{3}{8}$ means three eighth-note (quaver) beats.

The most common simple time signatures are $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, and $\frac{4}{4}$.

Compound Time Signatures:

In compound meter, subdivisions of the main beat (the upper number or left number) are split into three, not two, equal parts, so that a dotted note (half again longer than a regular note) becomes the beat unit. Compound time signatures are named as if they were simple time signatures in which the one-third part of the beat unit is the beat, so the top number, or left number is commonly 6, 9 or 12 (multiples of 3). The lower number, or the right number is most commonly an 8 (an eighth-note): as in 9/8 or 12/8.

An example

3/4: A simple signature, comprising three quarter notes. It has a basic feel of:

one *two three* (as in a waltz)

Each quarter note might comprise two eighth-notes (quavers) giving a total of six such notes, but it still retains that three-in-a-bar "feel":

one and *two* and *three* and

6/8: Theoretically, this can be thought of as the same as the six-quaver form of 3/4 above with the only difference being that the eighth note is selected as the one-beat unit. But whereas the six quavers in 3/4 had been in three groups of two, 6/8 is practically understood to mean that they are in two groups of three, with a two-in-a-bar feel:

one and a, *two* and a

Complex Time Signatures:

Signatures that do not fit into the usual duple or triple categories are known as "complex", "asymmetric", "irregular", "unusual", or "odd" although these are broad terms, and usually a more specific description is appropriate. These need to be addressed individually.

The Process

The first thing we'll be doing is getting a feel for all of the time signatures. Then we'll be playing songs that feature a given time signature.