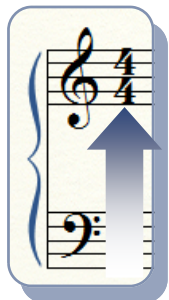


Setting Up a Groove (Time Signatures)

The most significant part of the way a song “feels” is the time signature. It tells every musician how they are supposed to count.



The time signature is found at the beginning of the song. It always has two numbers, one on top of the other.



How many

The top number is what you’re supposed to count to before starting over (or how many beats are in each measure). When it’s a 4, you count “1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1...”

What kind

The bottom number tells what kind of note you’re counting (or what kind of note gets 1 beat). When it’s a 4, a 1/4 (quarter) note gets one beat; when it’s a 2, a 1/2 (half) note gets one beat, etc.

It always makes more sense with more examples:



This is “4, 4 time” and we can fit 4 (*top number*) quarter notes (*bottom number*) in each measure.

4-4 time is the most common time signature. In fact, it’s so common that sometimes, instead of writing two 4’s, they just put a big “C” that stands for “common time.”



This is “3, 4 time” and we can fit 3 (*top number*) quarter notes (*bottom number*) in each measure.

3-4 time is the time signature for all waltzes. It always feels like “oom-pah-pah, oom-pah-pah”, where beat one is very ‘heavy’, and beats 2 and 3 just feel like light ‘decorations’.



This is “6, 8 time” and we can fit 6 (*top number*) eighth notes (*bottom number*) in each measure.

6-8 time can fit the same types of notes as 3-4 time, but 6-8 has a strong emphasis half way through the measure (on beat 4), so the measure feels like it definitely has two distinct halves.



This is “2, 2 time” and we can fit 2 (*top number*) half notes (*bottom number*) in each measure.

2-2 time, also called “cut time”, is usually pretty fast (not because of the time signature, it’s just most people’s preference). This is frequently used in marches (like a marching band would play).