

Finding the Beat

RHYTHM IS AS EASY AS ONE, TWO, THREE (FOUR, FIVE, SIX ...)

■ You may have thought you left math behind after high school calculus, but as a recreational musician, numbers are something that can't be ignored. Read on to brush up on your musical math.

First, you'll have to decode the numbers at the left edge of the staff, at the beginning of your music. These numbers make up what is called the time signature. The most common time signature you will come across is 4/4, meaning there are four quarter-note beats in each measure, but chances are you'll come across some less-common ones, as well.

The bottom number in the time signature tells you which type of note equals one beat (or "gets the beat"). If the number is a "2," then a half-note is worth one beat; if it is a "4," then a quarter-note is one beat; and if it is an "8," then

an eighth-note is one beat. Remember, all note values are affected by which type of note gets the beat. For example, if the half-note gets the beat (shown by a "2" on the bottom), then quarter-notes are worth half a beat. The top number in the time signature tells you how many beats are in each measure.

Dotted rhythms are about as tricky as it gets when it comes to musical math. Here's the formula: If you see a small dot after a note, take the note value without the dot, cut it in half, and then add that half to the original note value. For example, in 4/4 time, a dotted half-note gets three beats.

Having a good method for counting is important, especially for keeping track of fractions of beats, such as 16th notes. Try saying "one-and two-and," to count half beats (e.g., eighth notes in 4/4 time), and "one-e-and-a two-e-and-a," to count quarter beats (e.g., 16th notes in 4/4 time).

Here are some examples that you can clap and count out loud for practice:



PRACTICE TIPS

- » When you encounter a difficult rhythm, clap and count out loud before playing.
- » Don't be afraid to write in the counting on the music if you need to!
- » Use a metronome to make sure that your rhythms line up correctly.

