

Time Signatures

A **time signature** is written once at the beginning of a piece of music. It may also be written later in the music if the composer has deemed it necessary.

The time signature shows how many beats there are in each bar, and what type of note represents a beat. The top number shows the number of beats per bar, whilst the bottom number shows the type of note which represents a beat.

For example, this 4/4 time signature tells you that there are four quarter (crotchet) beats in each bar.

The '4' at the top tells you that there are four beats in the bar.

The '4' at the bottom tells you that each beat is a quarter/crotchet note.



4/4 time can also be indicated by a C sign:



2/2 time can also be indicated by a C sign with a line through it:



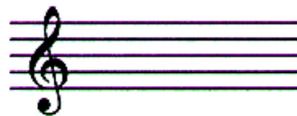
When writing a time signature, the top of the top number should touch the top line of the staff, and the base of the bottom number should touch the bottom line of the staff. The time signature should always be written after the clef and the key signature.

The time signature should only be written in the first bar of a piece of music, or where the number or type of beat has been changed – it does not need to be repeated on each line or staff.

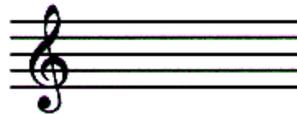
Exercise 1:

Try writing in the time signatures for the following:

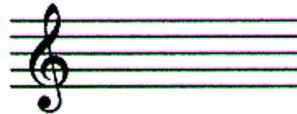
1. Four quarter/ crotchet beats per bar



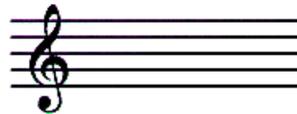
2. Six eighth/ quaver beats per bar



3. Twelve eighth/ quaver beats per bar



4. Five quarter/ crotchet beats per bar



5. Two half/ minim beats per bar.



Exercise 2:

Try writing the meanings of these time signatures:

- 1.



- 2.

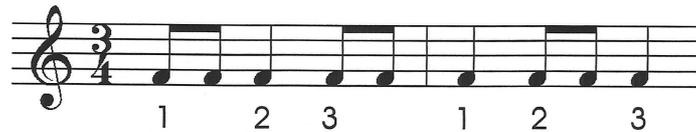


- 3.

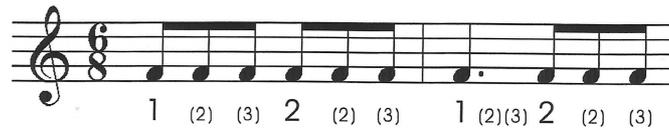


Simple and Compound Time Signatures

2/2, 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4 are all known as *simple time*. In these time signatures each beat is represented by a crotchet, which can be divided into two. For example, in 3/4 time any of the three beats can be divided in two as follows:



6/8 is a compound time signature. Although in 6/8 time there is an equivalent of six eighth notes in a bar, there are only two main beats – two dotted quarter notes, each comprising three eighth note pulses. So in 6/8, each of its two beats can be divided into three:



Notice that in simple time signatures the upper figure represents the number of beats per bar, whereas in 6/8 time the upper number represents the number of pulses (which is three times the number of beats in the bar).

Answers

Ex1.

1. Four quarter/ crotchet beats per bar



or



2. Six eighth/ quaver beats per bar



3. Twelve eighth/ quaver beats per bar



4. Five quarter/ crotchet beats per bar



5. Two half/ minim beats per bar.



Ex2.

1. Seven eighth/ quaver beats per bar
2. Three quarter/ crotchet beats per bar
3. Three half/ minim beats per bar.