NOTATION, TIME SIGNATURES AND COUNTING METHOD

This unit reviews the fundamentals of music notation (grand staff, clefs, note values, rests and time signatures) and introduces a practical counting method for reading rhythms. Mastery of the counting method through diligent practice should help you to improve your music reading skills.

MUSIC NOTATION

Important facts:

- The musical alphabet uses just the first seven letters of the English alphabet. (A, B, C, D, E, F, G)
- The **Treble** or **G Clef** circles the line G on the staff:
  - Names of the lines: E, G, B, D, F (Every Good Boy Does Fine)
  - Names of the spaces: F, A, C, E (spells FACE)

- The two dots in the **Bass** or **F Clef** enclose the F line on the staff:
  - Names of the lines: G, B, D, F, A (Good Boys Do Fine Always)
  - Names of the spaces: F, A, C, E (spells FACE)

- When the bass and treble staffs are connected by a line and/or a brace, they combine to form the **Grand Staff.**

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• **Ledger lines** are used to extend the range of notes either above or below the staff.

![Ledger lines diagram]

More than one ledger line may be used to extend the range of the staff.

• The black keys on the piano are the sharps and flats in music, and they are arranged in groups of twos and threes. The note “C” on the piano is always the white key to the left of the lowest note in any pair of black keys. See the Piano Keyboard Illustration below.

**PIANO ILLUSTRATION:**

![Piano keyboard illustration]

**NOTE PLACEMENT**

Stems extend **downward** on the left side when a note appears on or **above the 3rd line** of the staff.

Stems extend **upward** on the right side when a note appears on or **below the 3rd line** of the staff.

The stem length should continue to the space or line with the same letter name above or below.
NOTE VALUES AND RESTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Rests</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole</td>
<td>−</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Half</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Quarter</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Sixteenth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thirty-second</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dotted Whole</td>
<td>−</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dotted Half</td>
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<td>Dotted Quarter</td>
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<td>Dotted Eighth</td>
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<td>Dotted Sixteenth</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dotted Thirty-second</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- A *dot* after a note or rest increases the time value of that note or rest by one-half of its original value.

\[
\text{P} \Rightarrow \text{P} + \text{P}  \\
\text{P} \Rightarrow \text{P} + \frac{1}{2}\text{P} 
\]

TIME SIGNATURES

A *time signature* consists of two numbers arranged vertically or by some other symbol. The top number tells how many counts or beats there are in each measure; any number may be used. The bottom number tells what kind of note value gets one count: only the following numbers may be used:

\[
1 \quad 2 \quad 4 \quad 8 \quad 16 \quad 32
\]

- In *simple time* the beat unit is divisible by two. For example, \(\frac{2}{4}\), \(\frac{3}{4}\), \(\frac{4}{4}\) and so on.
- The symbol for \(\frac{4}{4}\) time or *common time* is C. The symbol for \(\frac{2}{2}\) is C.

- In *compound time*, the beat is divisible by three. For example, when \(\frac{6}{8}\), \(\frac{9}{8}\) and \(\frac{12}{8}\) time signatures are used with fast tempos, the dotted quarter note gets one count. When these time signatures are used with slow tempos, the eighth note gets one count.
COUNTING METHOD

When the quarter note receives one count (\(\frac{2}{4}, \frac{3}{4}, \frac{4}{4}\) etc.), use the following measure-wise counting method: (pronounced one-and two-and three-and four-and)

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

For the four-fold division of the beat (sixteenth notes) and its variations, use 1 e + a. (pronounced one-ee-an-da)

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

The following examples illustrate how to count in time signatures that use the half note or eighth note as the beat unit:

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

A rhythm *triplet* occurs in music when *three* equal note values replace two equal note values.

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

We can count triplets as follows:

SLOW \(\frac{2}{4}\)

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

(Do not confuse \(\frac{3}{4}\) with \(\frac{3}{4}\) or \(\frac{3}{4}\) with \(\frac{3}{4}\))