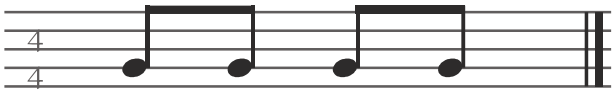
Note grouping, rests & the upbeat

A time signature tells you how many beats are in a bar. Grouping is what you do next — arranging the notes and rests inside that bar so a player can see the beat at a glance. And one special case: the phrase that starts before beat one.

BEAM QUAVERS IN TWOS — ONE BEAM PER BEAT

AVOID — one long beam across all four. The bar is correct, but the two beats have disappeared.



DO THIS — two groups of two. Each beam is exactly one crotchet beat, so the pulse reads instantly.

WHAT EACH BAR GROUPS INTO

TIME	BEATS IN A BAR	BEAM QUAVERS AS	THE RULE UNDERNEATH
2/4	Two crotchets	Two groups of two	One beam per crotchet beat.
3/4	Three crotchets	Three groups of two	Never beam all six together — the three beats would vanish.
4/4	Four crotchets	Four groups of two	Show the halfway point of the bar: nothing beams across beat 3.
3/8	Three quavers	One group of three	The whole bar is a single beat, so one beam covers it.

RESTS KEEP THE BEAT VISIBLE TOO

AVOID — one minim rest for beats 2 and 3. It straddles the middle of the bar and hides beat 3.

DO THIS — two crotchet rests, one per silent beat. A whole silent bar is the exception: that is always one semibreve rest.

THE UPBEAT, AND THE BAR IT BORROWS FROM

½ beat — bar 1 — four full beats … final bar — three and a half beats

An upbeat — an *anacrusis* — is one or more notes played before the first full bar. Those notes are borrowed from the end of the piece, so the final bar is shortened by exactly the same amount: a half-beat upbeat leaves a three-and-a-half-beat final bar. Count the two together and they make one whole bar.