

Simple Time Signatures

Music Theory Foundations — Quick Reference

A time signature is two numbers stacked at the start of a piece. The top number tells you how many beats are in each bar; the bottom number tells you what kind of note counts as one beat.

2/4 — Two Beats Per Bar



Two crotchet beats per bar. Often felt as a marching or "oom-pah" feel.

3/4 — Three Beats Per Bar



Three crotchet beats per bar. The classic waltz time signature.

4/4 — Four Beats Per Bar



Four crotchet beats per bar — the most common time signature in Western music, sometimes written as a large "C" for "common time."

Key Rules to Remember

- The bottom number 4 means "the crotchet gets one beat" in all three time signatures above.
- The top number tells you how many of those beats fit in each bar.
- Bar lines divide the music into equal groups of beats, making rhythm easier to read.
- A time signature is called "simple" when its main beat divides naturally into two (e.g. one crotchet beat splits into two quavers).