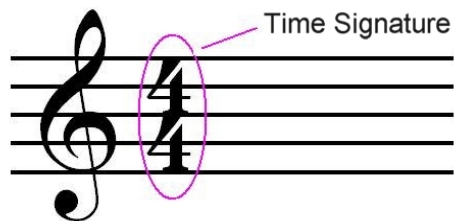


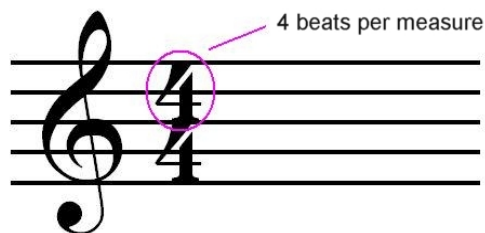
Time Signatures

The numbers found at the beginning of a written piece of music are called a time signature. Understanding time signatures is an important skill every musician should master.

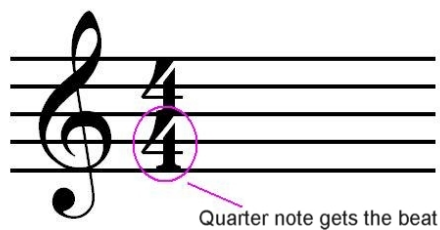
As a guitarist, the most common time signature that you will encounter is 4/4. Most modern rock and popular music is written in 4/4.



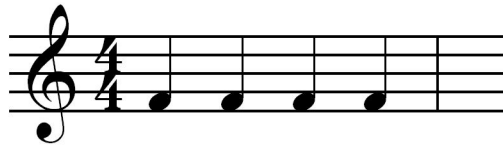
The top number of the time signature tells you how many beats are in a measure. With a 4/4 time signature, there are there are 4 beats per measure.



The bottom number tells you that the quarter note (1/4) is equal to 1 beat or the quarter note "gets the beat."



Thus in a measure of 4/4 time you can only have 4 quarter notes
(or their equivalent).



There are many different times signatures besides 4/4.
To learn about these please see -- [more about time signatures](#)

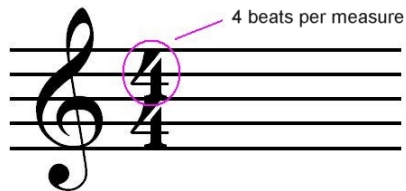
More About Time Signatures

Time signatures can either be in simple or compound meter.

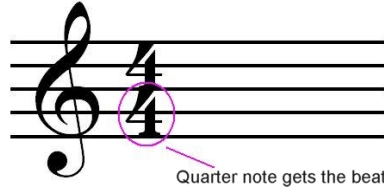
Almost all popular music is written in simple meter.

Simple Meter

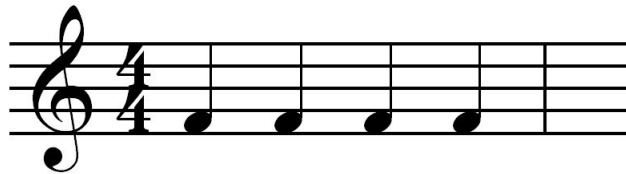
In simple meter,
the top number of the time signature tells you how many beats are in a measure.



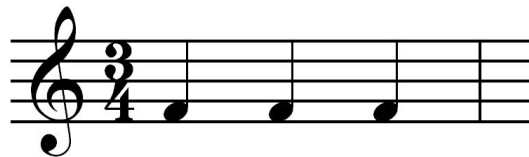
The bottom number tells you what note gets "the beat."



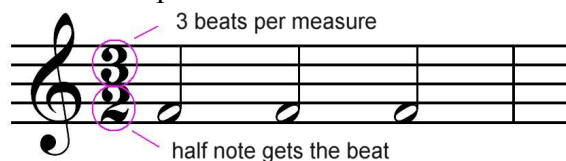
For example in a measure of 4/4, there are 4 beats per measure and the quarternote gets the beat.



Likewise, in a measure of 3/4 there are 3 beats per measure and the quarternote gets the beat. This means that there will only be 3 quarternotes (or their equivalent) per measure of 3/4 time.



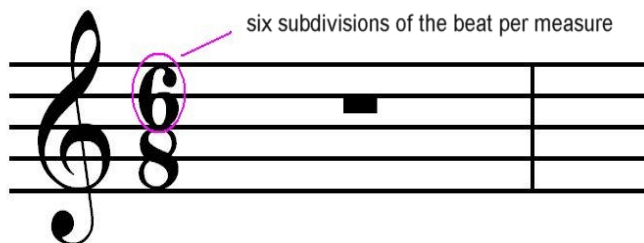
Now, if we examine a 3/2 time signature we find that there will be 3 beats per measure, but the half note (1/2) gets the beat. Thus, there will be 3 half notes (or their equivalent) per measure of 3/2.



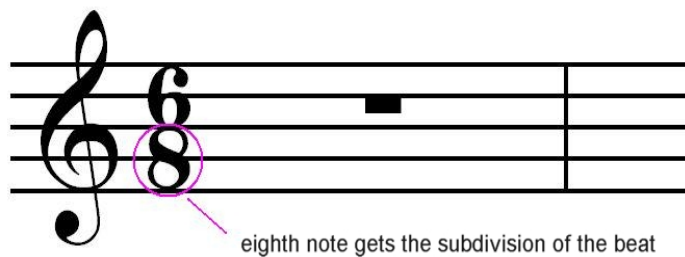
Compound Meter

Time signatures can also be in compound meter.

In compound meter, the top note tells you how many subdivisions of the beat there are per measure.



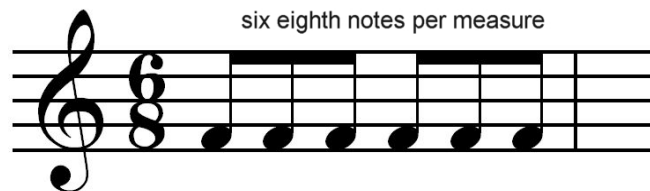
The bottom number tells you the subdivision of the beat.



The subdivision of the beat is what results from breaking "the beat" into smaller note values.

For example,

If we looked at a measure of 6/8, there would be six subdivisions per measure and the eighth note (1/8) would get the subdivision.



For practical purposes, this functions in the same manner as simple meter. The top number tells you "how many" of a particular note to put in a measure, and the bottom number tells you "what type of note" is used.

However, the actual "beat" in compound time is what you get when you group the subdivisions in groups of two or groups of 3 -- see duple and triple meter.

Duple and Triple Meter

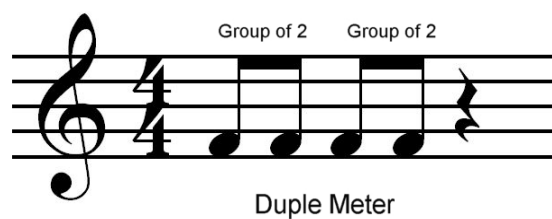
Time signatures fall into two major types triple meter and duple meter.

In triple meter, the subdivision of the beat is grouped in 3.

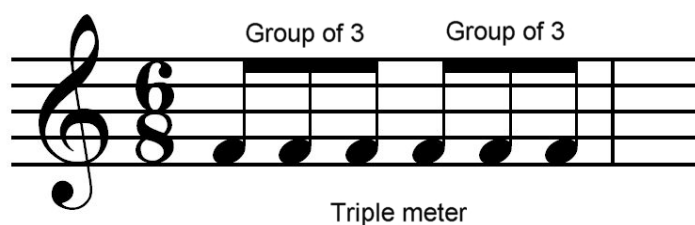
In duple meter, the subdivision of the beat is grouped in 2.

The subdivision of the beat is what results from breaking "the beat" into smaller note values.

For example, if you were to take a measure of 4/4 time and divide "the beat" (quarternotes) into smaller note values (eighth notes) they would be written in groups of 2



Whereas if you were to take a measure of 6/8 time and divide "the beat" (dotted quarter notes) into smaller note values (eighth notes) they would be written in groups of 3.



(Notice that because 6/8 is a compound meter, "the beat" is a dotted quarter note rather than an eighth note -- which is the subdivision of the beat)



So in reality a measure of 6/8 has only 2 beats in it, where the dotted quarter note gets the beat. However, this is equivalent to six eighth notes.