

Simple and Compound Time Signatures

Reference Sheet 1

In **Simple Times**, the beats are **plain, un-dotted beats** : crotchets (quarter notes), minims (half notes) , quavers (eighth notes) and can be subdivided into groups of 2

In **Compound Times**, the beats are **dotted beats**: dotted crotchet (dotted quarter notes), dotted minim (dotted half notes), dotted quavers (dotted eighth notes) and can be subdivided into groups of 3. The top number in Compound Time is a multiple of 3.

The correct terminology for Simple Times: (2/4, 3/4 and 4/4)

2/4 time is called **Simple Duple Time**, there are 2 crotchet (quarter note) beats to the bar.

3/4 time is called **Simple Triple Time**, there are 3 crotchet (quarter note) beats to the bar.

4/4 time is called **Simple Quadruple Time**, there are 4 crotchet (quarter note) beats to the bar.

C also called Common Time stands for 4/4 time.

♩ also called Alla Breve or Cut Time stands for 2/2 time (Simple Duple Time)

The correct terminology for Compound Times: (6/8, 9/8 and 12/8)

6/8 is called **Compound Duple Time**, there are 2 **dotted crotchet** (quarter note) beats to the bar.

9/8 is called **Compound Triple Time**, there are 3 **dotted crotchet** (quarter note) beats to a bar.

12/8 time is called **Compound Quadruple Time**, there are 4 **dotted crotchet** (quarter note) beats to a bar.

Simple and Compound Time Signatures

Reference Sheet 2

Understanding the correct terminology and most importantly **how the notes are grouped**, are necessary to be able to identify the time signature of a bar of music or a whole piece.

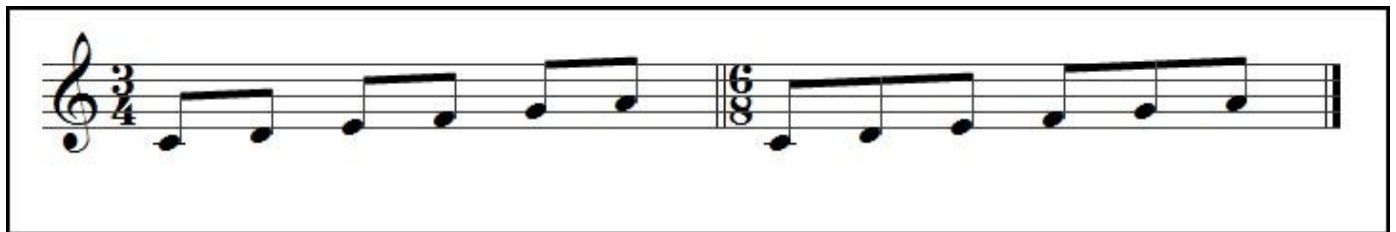
Often theory exams have bars of notes with no Time Signatures and students are asked to add the correct time signatures. The students need to know how the notes are grouped to be able to work out the time.

In the following example, each bar has 6 quavers (eighth notes) but notice the grouping.

In the first bar the notes are grouped into 3 lots of 2. This indicates 3/4 time. Simple Triple Time.

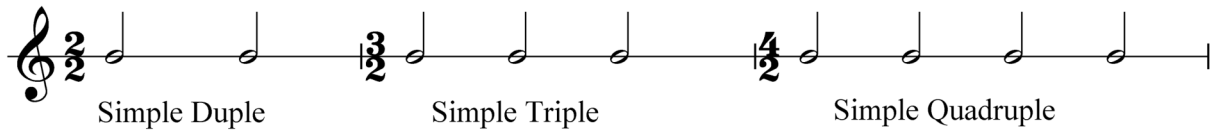
In the second bar the notes are grouped into 2 lots of 3. This indicates 6/8 time. Compound Duple Time.

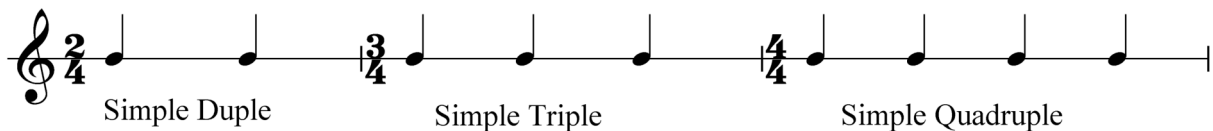
PREVIEW

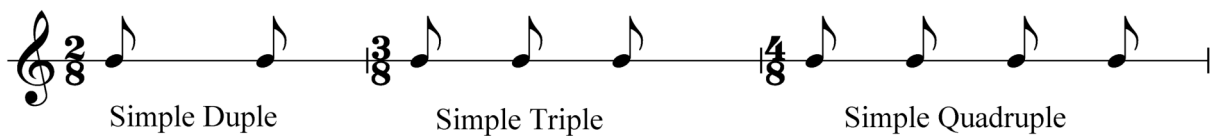


The following reference page lists the most common Time Signatures and their terminology.

Simple Times - The Beats Are Un-Dotted

 This row shows three musical staves. The first staff is in 2/2 time, labeled 'Simple Duple', with two half notes. The second staff is in 3/2 time, labeled 'Simple Triple', with three half notes. The third staff is in 4/2 time, labeled 'Simple Quadruple', with four half notes.

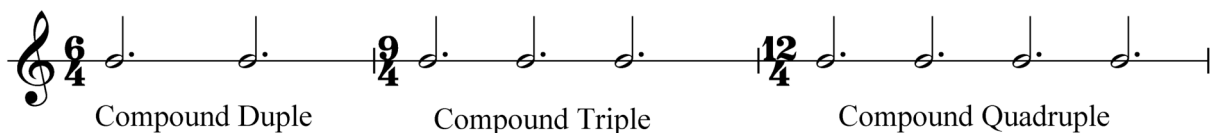
 This row shows three musical staves. The first staff is in 2/4 time, labeled 'Simple Duple', with two quarter notes. The second staff is in 3/4 time, labeled 'Simple Triple', with three quarter notes. The third staff is in 4/4 time, labeled 'Simple Quadruple', with four quarter notes.

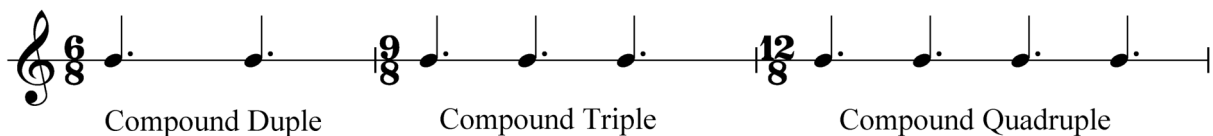
 This row shows three musical staves. The first staff is in 2/8 time, labeled 'Simple Duple', with two eighth notes. The second staff is in 3/8 time, labeled 'Simple Triple', with three eighth notes. The third staff is in 4/8 time, labeled 'Simple Quadruple', with four eighth notes.

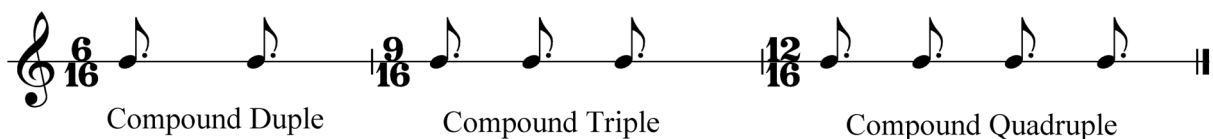
PREVIEW

Compound Times - The Beats Are Dotted

(Top number is a multiple of 3)

 This row shows three musical staves. The first staff is in 6/4 time, labeled 'Compound Duple', with two dotted half notes. The second staff is in 9/4 time, labeled 'Compound Triple', with three dotted half notes. The third staff is in 12/4 time, labeled 'Compound Quadruple', with four dotted half notes.

 This row shows three musical staves. The first staff is in 6/8 time, labeled 'Compound Duple', with two dotted quarter notes. The second staff is in 9/8 time, labeled 'Compound Triple', with three dotted quarter notes. The third staff is in 12/8 time, labeled 'Compound Quadruple', with four dotted quarter notes.

 This row shows three musical staves. The first staff is in 6/16 time, labeled 'Compound Duple', with two dotted eighth notes. The second staff is in 9/16 time, labeled 'Compound Triple', with three dotted eighth notes. The third staff is in 12/16 time, labeled 'Compound Quadruple', with four dotted eighth notes.

Simple and Compound Times

Reference Sheet 4 - Teachers' Notes

We are all taught that the top number tells us how many beats are in the bar and the bottom number tells us what type of note gets 1 count.

This is fine for Simple Time but not for Compound Time.

When I first introduce a piece in $6/8$ time to a student and ask them what time do they think it is in, I know they are going to say "6 quaver (eighth note) beats to a bar".

They are always puzzled when I say no and go to say...there are 2 dotted crotchet (quarter note) beats to a bar.

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I then explain that this is a Compound Time, that there are 6 **pulses** in the bar, (thus the 6 on the top) but the 6 pulses are grouped into 2 dotted beats, each dotted beat having 3 pulses each.

I often use the analogy of 2 paddocks with 3 cows in each paddock, then tap the Duple rhythm counting 123 while left hand taps once only, and 456 while the right taps once only.

The emphasis must be that while there are **6 pulses** there are only **2 beats**.

(Sometimes it's easier for younger students to count 123,123 or 1&u, 2&u or even something like but-ter-fly, but-ter-fly. Any other words with a triplet feel could be used but making sure there are only 2 beats.

When dealing with $12/8$ times, it is also much easier to count 1&u, 2&u, 3&u,4&u than 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12 every bar. Counting 1&u, 2&u, 3&u, 4&u helps clarify the 4 beats to a bar and gives a better rhythmic flow)