

Time Signatures and Beats

Simple and Compound Meter

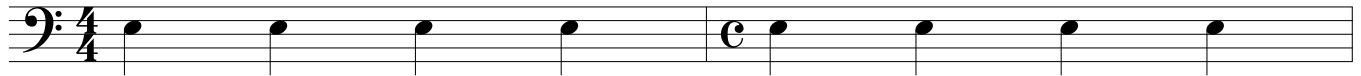
T. Burke

Top Number - Beats per measure

Bottom Number - Type of note that is a beat

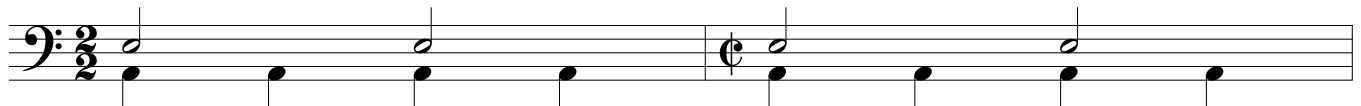
*usually is 2, 4, or 8 for half note, quarter note, and eighth note

Simple Meter - beats are divided into 2



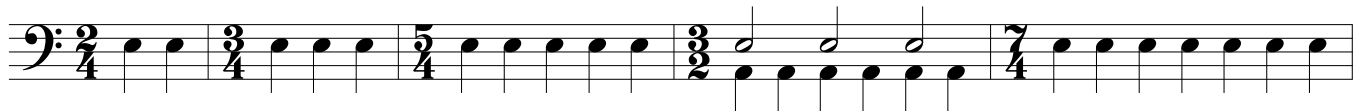
4/4 time has 4 quarter notes per measure.

It is also called "common time" and can be written as C.



2/2 time also has 4 quarter notes but the metronome or conductor will beat half notes.

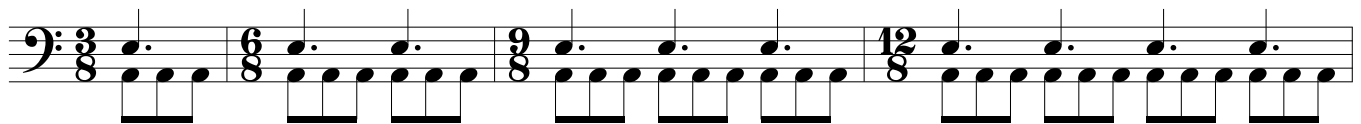
It is usually called "cut time" and almost always written as C with a line through it.



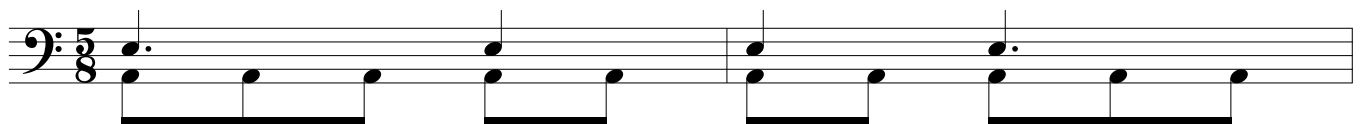
Other common simple meter time signatures are 2/4, 3/4, 5/4, 3/2, and 7/4. The conductor or metronome almost always beats the note value of the bottom number.

Compound Meter - Beats are divided into 3 eighth notes or triplets

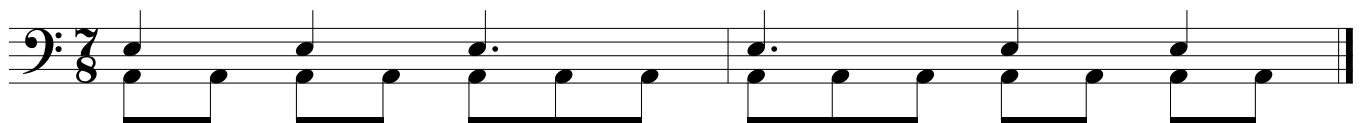
Top number often divides by 3, bottom number is usually 8



3/8, 6/8, 9/8, and 12/8 time divides beats into 3 eighth notes. The conductor or metronome will beat dotted quarter notes. Divide the top number by 3 to get the number of beats per measure.



5/8 and 7/8 do not divide evenly so the beats are shown in the beam of the eighth note.



The conductor will usually beat one of these combinations of quarter and dotted quarter notes. Most metronomes will have to be set to beat eighth notes.