Reading the Drum Kit: The Rock Beat

One five-line staff holds the whole kit. Read the legend, read one layer at a time, then read the layers together.

1 · READ THE LEGEND FIRST

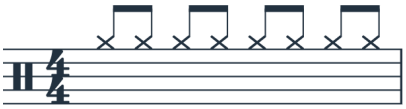


VOICE	WHERE	HEAD	STEM
Crash (crash cymbal)	ledger line above the staff	×	up (hand)
Hi-hat (closed hi-hat)	space above the staff	×	up (hand)
Snare	space 3	round	up (hand)
Kick (bass drum)	space 1	round	down (foot)

On this staff, round heads are drums and × heads are cymbals; stems up = hands, stems down = feet. Other charts differ: always read the legend before you play.

2 · ONE LAYER AT A TIME, THEN TOGETHER

Hi-hat alone · 8 eighths



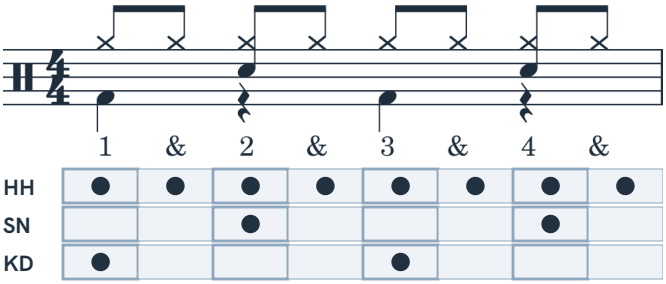
Kick alone · beats 1 and 3



Snare alone · beats 2 and 4



The rock beat · all three layers



Read each beat from top to bottom. Notes on one stem, or straight above each other, sound **together**.

1 hi-hat + kick · **2** hi-hat + snare · **3** hi-hat + kick · **4** hi-hat + snare. On every **&** the hi-hat plays alone.

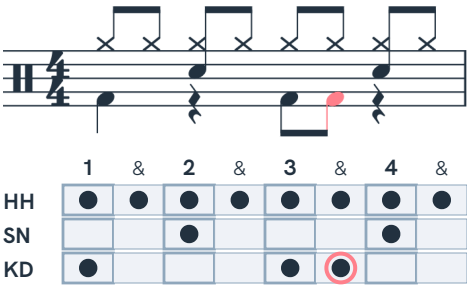
Say the counts with the hi-hat. Tap the kick with a foot and the snare with a hand, then put all three together, slowly.

The grid shows the same bar: one box per eighth note, a dot = a stroke. HH = hi-hat, SN = snare, KD = kick drum.

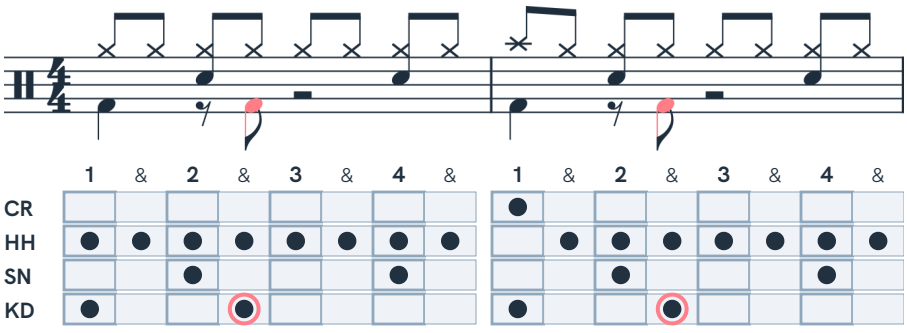
3 · CHANGE THE KICK

The snare stays on 2 and 4 and the hi-hat keeps its eighth notes; the kick changes (the coral note and ringed dot). **A** adds a kick on the **& of 3** (written 3&). **B** moves the kick from **3** to the **& of 2**. In B, bar 2 also starts with a **crash**: the crash takes the hi-hat's place on beat 1, so that bar has 7 hi-hat notes + 1 crash.

Variation A · kick on 1, 3, 3&



Variation B · kick on 1, 2& · crash on beat 1 of bar 2



Try it

Write the kick counts in variation B: _____ Which drum (round head) plays on 2 and 4 in the rock beat and in both variations? _____

Listen: scan or visit **tissimo.co/worksheets/drum-kit-rock-beat-notation** · tracks 1–6 = the three layers, the rock beat and variations A and B, each played twice at quarter = 80 after a one-bar woodblock count-in. A rhythm model with General MIDI drum sounds, not a drum-tone demonstration.

Answer: kick on 1 and 2& (in both bars); the snare drum plays on 2 and 4 in all three.

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