One Written Note, Many Single Strokes

A long note on the marimba needs repeated mallet strikes to keep sounding. The **written duration** tells you when to start and stop — not how many strokes to use.

1 · ONE STRIKE VERSUS A ROLL

Single strike: one mallet hits, the bar rings and fades.



C5, MIDI 72. Strike once; the bar resonates then fades.

To sustain a written half note or whole note, alternate the two mallets in a continuous stream of single strokes. The notation uses a **three-stroke tremolo** (three slashes on the stem) to mark an unmeasured roll:

≡ = unmeasured roll
Alternate R and L freely within the written duration. The written note value sets the window; stroke density is not fixed.

Note: a marimba bar may keep ringing after the final stroke. The window marks *stroke activity*, not guaranteed acoustic silence.

2 · COUNTED PREPARATION ON C5

Practice the alternating motion first with counted sixteenth notes. **One bar of 4/4 holds exactly 16 sixteenth-note strokes** (4 beats × 4 sixteenths = 16):



Counted preparation: 16 strokes on C5, alternating R–L–R–L. The count tells you when each stroke falls, not the density you must use in the roll section below.

When you move to a written roll, you choose the density — the counts above are preparation only.

3 · FOUR-BAR ROLL STUDY

Roll each notated pitch through its written window. Start each roll on the downbeat; lift on the rest or at the barline where marked.



Bars 1–4 at ♩ = 60. C5 (MIDI 72) active beats 1–2; D5 (MIDI 74) active beats 5–6; C5 active beats 9–12; silent beats 13–16. Roll density is your choice at each bar.

Beat map (quarter beats 1–16):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Bar 1 — C5 roll				Bar 2 — D5 roll				Bar 3 — C5 roll				Bar 4 — rest			

C5 active · D5 active · rest / silent

Try it **Mini-quiz:** How many beats does a whole note last? **4 beats** — regardless of how many strokes you choose. The written duration sets the window; stroke density is the player's choice.

Listen: scan or visit **tissimo.co/worksheets/marimba-roll-duration-map** · In-house MIDI examples · ♩ = 60

Mini-quiz answer: a whole note lasts 4 beats. Counted-prep strokes = 16. C5 = MIDI 72, D5 = MIDI 74. Sounding windows (quarter beats): C5 bar 1: [1–2], D5 bar 2: [5–6], C5 bar 3: [9–12], silent bar 4: [13–16].

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