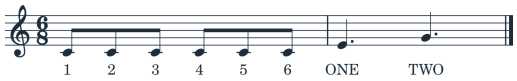Time Signatures II: Compound Time

when beats split in threes — 6/8, 9/8, 12/8 and 6/4

In compound time the beat is a DOTTED note, and it splits into three. The top number looks big (6, 9, 12), but you don't count every eighth for long — you group them in threes and **feel the big beats**. The rule of thumb: divide the top number by 3 to find how many big beats you feel. It works for 6, 9 and 12, not for 3: **3/8 is simple time** — three eighth-note beats, though a fast 3/8 can feel like one beat per bar. Each card shows the small count first, then the big felt beats.

6/8
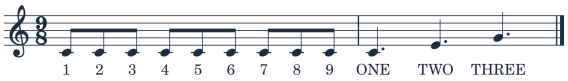
six eighths · felt in 2



Six little eighths, but you **feel two big beats**, each a dotted quarter: **ONE**-2-3-**FOUR**-5-6. The rocking of boats and lullabies. Beam its eighths in threes (Handout 393).

9/8

nine eighths · felt in 3



Three big dotted-quarter beats: **ONE**-2-3-**FOUR**-5-6-**SEVEN**-8-9. A waltz whose every beat rolls in three.

12/8
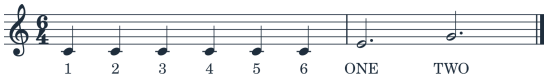
twelve eighths · felt in 4



Four big dotted-quarter beats, each split in three — the slow roll of blues and doo-wop.

6/4

six quarters · felt in 2



Like 6/8's bigger sibling: six **quarter** notes grouped as two broad dotted-half beats — spacious and stately.

Try it Say "**ap-ple-pie, ap-ple-pie**" — that is 6/8. Now say "**straw-ber-ry, straw-ber-ry, straw-ber-ry, straw-ber-ry**" — that is 12/8. Rock your weight left-right on the big beats while your mouth does the threes: body feels the beat, mouth fills the triple. That split-mind trick IS compound time. Practice: Exercises 83 and 84.

LISTEN
Scan to hear every example
tissimo.co/worksheets/time-signatures-compound

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