Time Signatures I: Simple Time

the two stacked numbers — how many beats, and which note gets one

Every piece opens with a fraction-like pair of numbers. The **top number tells you how many beats** live in each measure; the **bottom number tells you which note value gets one beat** (4 = quarter, 2 = half, 8 = eighth). In *simple* time each beat splits naturally in two. Read each card, then clap each example counting aloud.

4/4 — common time

four quarter-note beats · also shown as a big C



Top number: 4 beats per measure. **Bottom: the quarter note** gets one beat. The king of meters — marches, pop, almost everything. Count **1**-2-3-4 with a strong ONE.

3/4 — waltz time

three quarter-note beats



Three beats to a measure: **ONE**-two-three, **ONE**-two-three — the spin of every waltz. One dotted half fills the whole measure.

2/2 — cut time

two half-note beats · the C with a slash



The **half note** gets the beat — so music with many quarter notes feels **twice as flowing**: count 2 big beats, not 4 small ones. Fast marches and show tunes live here. 2/4 and cut time up close: Handout 359.

Try it Clap all three examples, then play detective with real music: open any piece you own, read its two numbers, and predict how it will feel before you hear it — sturdy (4/4), spinning (3/4), or striding (2/2). The numbers never lie. Compound time — where beats split in **threes** — is on the next sheet. Sort and spot them all: Exercise 83.

LISTEN
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