Two Beats in a Bar: 2/4 & Cut Time

Some music moves in twos, **ONE**-two, **ONE**-two, like feet in a march: its time signature puts **two beats in every bar**. In **2/4** a quarter note gets the beat; in **cut time** a half note does. (Handout 44 explains the two numbers.)

1 · 2/4: TWO QUARTER-NOTE BEATS

The top number, **2**, means two beats in every bar; the bottom number, **4**, means a **quarter note** gets one beat. Beat 1 is strong, beat 2 is light: **ONE**-two. Eighths split a beat in two (**1 &**), sixteenths in four (**1 e & a**).





Musette in D (Handout 346), bars 1–4. In bars 1–2 the left hand goes BOOM-chick: low on each beat, an octave higher on its "&".

2 · CUT TIME: TWO HALF-NOTE BEATS

Common time, 4/4 · four quarter-note beats



Cut time, 2/2 · two half-note beats



The sign of **cut time** is the C of common time with a line through it. Its other names are **2/2** and **alla breve**.

A bar holds the same notes as a bar of 4/4, but the beat is a **half note**, so there are only two beats. Quarter notes are counted **1 & 2 &** and eighths **1 e & a**.

Fast music is often written this way: two big beats are easier to feel than four quick ones.



Clementi, Sonatina in C, Op. 36 No. 1 (Handout 239), bars 1–4, in cut time in the Schirmer edition: two big beats in every bar.

3 · SAME NOTES, A DIFFERENT BEAT

	THE BEAT	BEATS	ONE BAR, TO SCALE	QUARTERS	EIGHTHS
4/4 common time	quarter note	4	1 2 3 4	**1 2 3 4**	**1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &**
2/2 cut time	half note	2	1 2	**1 & 2 &**	**1 e & a 2 e & a**
2/4	quarter note	2	1 2	**1 2**	**1 & 2 &**

A bar of **4/4** and a bar of **cut time** hold the same notes, counted in four or in two. A bar of **2/4** is half as long. Music with two beats in a bar is in **duple meter**; 6/8 is one too, with two dotted-quarter beats that split in three (Handout 45).

Try it Set a metronome to 60, one click per **half note**, and clap the cut-time tune while you count it: the clicks fall on 1 and 2. At 120 each click is a quarter note: count the same tune in 4/4. Same notes, same speed. Scan the code to hear every example, then practice in Exercises 62 and 83.

LISTEN

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