

## Meter

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### A Good Beat!

What does it mean when people say that song has a "good beat?" Is it a strong pulsation, a variety of patterns, a fast tempo or some other description that defines this musical sensation? A "good beat" is actually a combination of a steady musical pulse (or beat) with added rhythmic interest. In general, rhythm involves divisions and multiples of note durations related to the musical pulse and stresses or accents on and off the beat. This is an intellectual description of rhythm. However, good musicians must also "feel" the rhythm or "the beat" to achieve an expressive performance.

### Elements Of Rhythm

Rhythm has three elements. They are macrobeats, microbeats, and melodic rhythm. All three of those elements must be audiated at the same time in order to establish rhythm syntax. Macrobeats are those beats that one arbitrarily feels to be the longest. In most cases, macrobeats are paired: one macrobeat naturally "goes with" a succeeding macrobeat of equal or unequal duration. In dancing to music, persons normally step naturally to each pair of macrobeats with one foot followed by the other.

#### 1. Macrobeats



#### 2. Microbeats

are shorter (and lighter) than macrobeats and are derived from the equal temporal division of macrobeats. In most cases, macrobeats are divided into either two or three microbeats of equal duration.



## 3. Melodic rhythm

is the ongoing series of rhythm patterns in a piece of music. The rhythm patterns may coincide with the rhythm of the melody or the text of a piece of music.



## Meters

The meter is the arrangement of rhythms in a repetitive pattern of strong and weak beats. This does not necessarily mean that the rhythms themselves are repetitive, but they do strongly suggest a repeated pattern of pulses. It is on these pulses, the beat of the music, that you tap your foot, clap your hands, dance, etc.

Meters are defined according to the ways in which macrobeats are divided and paired. Notational examples of each meter are provided. In usual meter macrobeats are of equal temporal length and are paired. In the examples below, the same rhythm patterns are written in different measure signatures.

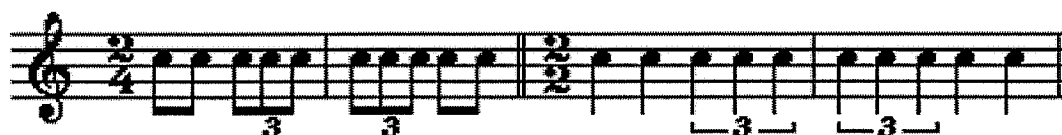
4. In usual duple meter, all macrobeats are evenly divided into two microbeats.



5. In usual triple meter, all macrobeats are evenly divided into three microbeats.



6. Usual compound meter results when both duple and triple divisions of temporally equal macrobeats are employed.



## Recognizing Meters

To learn to recognize meter, remember that (in most Western music) the beats and the subdivisions of beats are all equal and even. So you are basically listening for a running, even pulse underlying the rhythms of the music. For example, if it makes sense to count along with the music "ONE-and-Two-and-ONE-and-Two-and" (with all the syllables very evenly spaced) then you probably have a simple duple meter. But if it's more comfortable to count "ONE-and-a-Two-and-a-ONE-and-a-Two-and-a", it's probably compound duple meter. (Make sure numbers always come on a pulse, and "one" always on the strongest pulse.)

The figure below sums up the most-used meters. To help give you an idea of what each meter should feel like, here are some animations.

Meter	Count	Example Time Signature
Duple Simple	1 & 2 &	2/4
Triple Simple	1 & 2 & 3 &	3/4
Quadruple Simple	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	4/4
Duple Compound	1 & a 2 & a	6/8
Triple Compound	1 & a 2 & a 3 & a	9/8
Quadruple Compound	1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a	12/8

Weight in meter is best manifest physically through body weight. Rehearsing a song in any meter with singers moving both macro and micro beats, with appropriate distribution of weight, sustains momentum, secures tempo, and propels musicality. Swaying or moving only macro beats will rush the tempo, as weighted micro beats in relation to more heavily weighted macro beats are essential for singers to sustain tempo. Moving only micro beats will not define the meter, as without stronger, weighted macro beats, all beats sound alike. Both macro and micro beats are necessary, with appropriate weight distribution, in order for singers to perform rhythm precisely and musically.