The basic unit for note values is the quarter note. Much of the music in the Western tradition is written with this as an elemental part of the time element of the music. In this basic form the quarter note receives one beat. Below is a table based on this that will show the relationships between these notes.

Quarter Note - ♩ = 1 beat

Half Note - 𝅗𝅥 = ♩ + ♩ = 2 beats

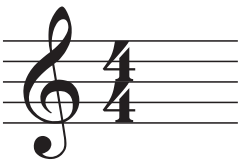
Whole Note - 𝅝 = ♩ + ♩ + ♩ + ♩ = 4 beats

The quarter note itself may be subdivided. Eighth notes divide the quarter note in half and sixteenth notes divide the quarter note into four equal parts.

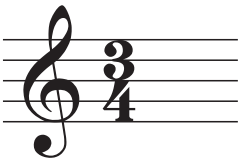
Eighth notes - ♪ + ♪ = ♩ =1 beat

Sixteenth notes - 𝅘𝅥𝅯 + 𝅘𝅥𝅯 + 𝅘𝅥𝅯 + 𝅘𝅥𝅯 = ♪ + ♪ = ♩ = 1 beat

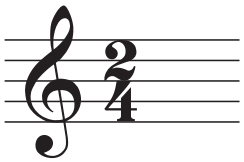
On the musical staff how time is to be managed in the music is notated with a device called the time signature.



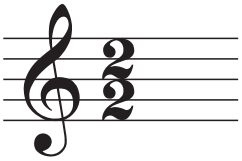
This first time signature is known as four-four time, or common time. The top number, 4, represents the number of beats per measure. The lower number (similar to the denominator) represents the type of note that gets the beat. In this instance it is the quarter note. So in each measure there are four beats, or alternatively, four quarter notes.



In this second example there are three beats per measure, or three quarter notes.



In this third example the denominator is still the quarter note. There are then two beats (quarter notes) per measure.



In this last example the denominator is a 2, which represents the half note. There are then two beats per measure and the half note gets the beat. This is similar to the two-four time in the example above, but the half note represents the beat rather than the quarter note.